

**The nature of spelling errors of Grade three isiXhosa background
learners in English First Additional Language**

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By

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Abstract

A central concern of education internationally and in South Africa is to develop children's literacy skill. However a literacy crisis exists in spite of efforts to counter this. Some researchers have explored the issue of literacy focusing on second language learners' spelling in English as Additional Language. There is, however, insufficient literature that looks into spelling experiences of isiXhosa background learners in English First Additional Language. Hence this study investigated the nature of spelling errors of Grade three isiXhosa background learners in English First Additional Language. In understanding the nature of spelling errors of Grade three isiXhosa background learners, the features of words that learners find difficult to spell and the features of words that learners find easy to spell were investigated. Moreover, learners' barriers in acquiring spelling skills in English First Additional Language and teacher practices for teaching spelling were examined.

In exploring these issues the study adopted a qualitative approach in order to ensure reliability and validity of the study. The data gathering process was in the form of semi-structured interviews, classroom observations and document analysis. One isiXhosa medium primary school in a Black Township in Buffalo City Municipality in the East London District was purposively selected to form the context of the study. In this school English is taught as a subject in grade three. Participants were eight grade three learners and one Grade three class teacher who teaches these learners.

The findings of the study revealed that learners with an isiXhosa background seemed to be struggling with understanding basic English words and terms. This is exacerbated by the fact that the learners seemed to struggle to understand the rules of the English language. The words that learners find difficulties in to spell in English Second Language were diagraphs. Barriers to spelling were influenced, among other issues, by learners' pronunciation and their heavy reliance on their mother tongue.

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Declaration

I hereby declare that the Nature of spelling errors of Grade three isiXhosa background learners in English First Additional language is my own work and that all the sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references. This research has not been previously submitted for any degree at this or any other university.

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Thandiswa Mpiti

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Date

Dedication

This study is dedicated to my very first role model and early life mentor, my late father, Milton Bonani Vuyelele, who has been my inspiration.

To you Ngconde, Togu, Tshiwo, Butsolo bentonga, Mdange...

Many thanks for your love, support, spiritual guidance and for showing me the way before you went to meet the Lord.

ACRONYMS

DoE – Department of Education

EFAL- English First Additional Language

F- Female

FAL- First Additional Language

FDE - Further Diploma in Education

JPTD - Junior Primary Teachers Diploma

L1 - First Language

L2 – Second Language

LiA - Literacy in Action

LOLT - Language of Learning and Teaching

MT – Mother Tongue

PIRLS - Progress in International Reading Literacy study

PS - Primary School

SGB – School Governing Body

THRASS – Teaching Handwriting Reading and Spelling Skills

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CHAPTER ONE

1.1 Introduction

The aim of this study is to investigate the nature of spelling errors of grade three isiXhosa background learners in English First Additional Language (EFAL). This chapter also presents the background to this study and it explores the issues of the language and literacy crisis both internationally and in South Africa. Moreover, it discusses the problem statement, the research questions, the purpose of the study, and the research objectives. The motivation and rationale of the study are also highlighted, and the delimitation of the study and the definition of key concepts are provided. The chapter concludes by providing an outline of the rest of the study.

1.2 Background to the study

Literary crisis

A central concern of the initial years of education is to ensure that children become competent readers and writers (Hannon, 1995). However literacy is unattainable for many. Studies carried out by Richmond, Robinson & Sachs-Israel (2008) indicate that one in five adults in today's world – seven hundred and seventy four million men and women – have no access to written communication through literacy. Seventy five million children remain out of school and millions more young people leave school without a level of literacy adequate for productive participation in their societies. The findings of this study further reveal that about 85 % of the world's illiterate population, or 650 million people, reside in thirty five countries. Each of the thirty five countries has a literacy rate of less than 50 % or a population of more than ten million people who cannot read or write (Richmond, *et al*, 2008).

In America, as much as English language learners may be growing in numbers, their proficiency in spoken and/or written English is not yet developed enough to permit them to succeed in an English-language classroom setting without extra support (Batalova, Fix, & Murray, 2007). Hence Gentry (2004:9) wrote that “Italy definitely had far fewer people with reading problems than the United States, Great Britain, and France.”

The world is making progress in literacy but the challenges remain huge. There is a growing awareness of the need for people in education constantly to be developing and reviewing curricula in accordance with changing circumstances (Richmond *et al*, 2008). The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) has established the Literacy Initiative for Empowerment (LIFE) framework which accelerates progress in making action on literacy more effective and taking it to scale to reach the large illiterate population (De Klerk, 2002).

In spite of these efforts the problem still exists. A study conducted by Moja (2000) revealed a decline in the quality of the education system in Nigeria, resulting in a negative effect on literacy development in primary school learners. The findings revealed that less than 1% of primary schools have access to textbooks and that in general textbook availability in schools is 10% of what it should be. The study further indicated that there are disparities in textbook availability, ranging from 80% in elite schools to virtually no textbooks in some rural schools. The problem is more serious at higher education levels. At the higher education level, most of the textbooks are imported at high cost and are unaffordable by the average learners (Moja, 2000). The findings also revealed that low morale of teachers, the poor quality of teachers,

and lack of adequate professional support for teachers in the system has a negative impact on literacy development. Moreover the teacher training programs have not really taken into consideration the changes that are needed to implement the innovative curriculum introduced in the schools, especially at the junior secondary education level (*ibid*).

Moreover, Okech (2005) conducted a case study of literacy education in Uganda. The case study included an evaluation of the level of literacy achieved in Primary education to which the proficiency test was equivalent. Findings revealed that third year learners performed very poorly. The evaluation also showed that there is a very poor performance in literacy even at the sixth year of primary education. Something, therefore, needs to be done to bring about improvement in literacy acquisition in primary schools as well as in adult literacy provision (Okech, 2005).

Another study conducted was by Pearce (2009) on the literacy challenge in eleven West African countries. The findings, drawn from recent statistics, indicated that in sixty five million young people and adults, more than 40% of the population are unable to read and write. Of these, forty million are women who are, on average, poorer and often from rural areas (Pearce, 2009). The findings also revealed that the low literacy level is determined by problems in the formal school system and a lack of learning opportunities. Moreover, the study revealed that there are not enough learners who are in school: fourteen million learners of primary school age are out of school in the eleven West African countries, more than half of them girls. The quality of education is also poor: the disastrous lack of trained teachers and literacy facilitators is a key factor (Pearce, 2009).

However the issue is more complex in South Africa as children are immersed in a second language (L2) literacy curriculum. South African children are under achieving in reading and writing which are aspects of literacy. Studies carried out by the Department of Education on learner literacy achievement in grades six and three; paint a picture of a deep and wide literacy crisis (DoE, 2003; 2005). According to the 2003 grade six evaluations comparing South Africa with other African countries, more than half of grade six learners were not reading and writing with meaning in English which is the language of teaching and learning. In the case of grade three, systemic evaluations showed that learners scored 39% for reading and writing in their home languages. In the Eastern Cape only 18, 5 % of grade six learners reached the minimum level of mastery in literacy and mathematics and only 6% reached the desired level of mastery (HSRC, 2005). In the grade three systemic evaluations for the Eastern Cape, learners obtained the lowest score for Literacy and Numeracy which was a mean of 34 % for both (HSRC, 2005).

There is an international study of reading literacy which is conducted every five years and forty countries participated, including South Africa (Nel & Müller, 2010), which is called Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS). The PIRLS study assesses the learners' ability to practise answering comprehension questions that require them to focus on and retrieve explicitly stated information from texts, make straightforward inferences, interpret and integrate ideas and information, and examine and evaluate content, language and textual elements (Howie, Venter, Van Staden, Zimmerman, Long, Sherman & Archer as cited in Condry, Chigona, Chetty & Thornhill, 2010). Alarming findings were reported in the PIRLS study, which indicated that South Africa faces a literacy crises with grade four and five learners performing

the worst, achieving the lowest mean scores compared with the other participating countries (PIRLS as cited in Govender, 2009). The same study found that almost 80% of South African children do not develop basic reading skills by the time they reach grade five and South Africa was rated last in the category for learners' attitude towards reading (Howie *et al.* as cited in Condry *et al.*, 2010; Govender, 2009; Nel and Müller, 2010).

Govender (2009) conducted a pilot study with regard to writing, in South Africa in primary education in the Foundation Phase on grade three. The findings reported on learners' achievement of three literacy components – listening comprehension, and reading and writing. The study revealed that many learners appear to have numerous problems with literacy skills. The average attainment for listening comprehension was 68%, while it was 39% for reading and writing. Asmal (as cited in Govender, 2009) stated that because South Africa is a multilingual country, literacy acquisition is problematic in formal schooling, particularly in communities and backgrounds where illiteracy is the norm.

In South Africa there is still a severe shortage of story books, written in all eleven official languages, and most South African children do not have access to the few books that are available - only 20% of our schools have libraries (Department of Library & Information Science, 2005). However, a study in seven South African high performing but low-income community primary schools noted that competent teachers offered their learners print-rich environments which, in return, developed a strong and central focus on language and literacy achievement across these schools (Sailors, Hoffman & Matthee, as cited in Condry *et al.*, 2010). Hence, Govender

(2009) points out that literacy is the key competence for schooling and in life skills. Moreover literacy teaching and learning is the master of the basic technical skills that control spelling, writing and how to write simple sentences (Tshotsho, 2006).

Writing as a component of literacy

Writing is one of the important components of literacy development. It involves composing, conducting research, developing ideas, analyzing ideas, writing the first draft, editing and writing the final draft (Omaggio as cited in Tshotsho, 2006). According to Gentry (2004) and DuBois, Erickson & Jacobs (2007) writing is important because it provides a method to communicate with others using a visual code and it is a tool for learning that allows us to document, collect, and widely circulate detailed information. Written language is considered to be one of the highest forms of language expression and it is the last skill learned in the Foundation Phase. Gentry (2004) further states that purposeful writing experiences are the key to cognitive growth in spelling. Teaching this skill simultaneously helps contribute to strong literacy development (Garza & Lira, 2008).

Therefore, it should be noted that the ability to write a text that is error free is not a naturally acquired skill but is formally learned or culturally transmitted as an asset of practices in formal instructional settings (Banda as cited in Tshotsho, 2006). Moreover writing leads to improved phonemic awareness and word recognition, since children need to focus on sound-to-symbol relationships. To accomplish both tasks learners must be engaged with writing to develop deeper insights about how ideas can be organized and expressed through written language (Gunning, as cited in Garza & Lira, 2008).

Research that focused on writing revealed that written text involves many aspects such as letter formation, word formation, sentence formation, phonics and spelling (DoE, 2002). Spelling, which is the focus of this study, is seen as one of the important aspects of writing proficiency. It is an act of written language, so the teaching and learning of spelling must take place as far as possible within the context of writing (Croft, 1983). Wolff as far back as 1952 claimed that “The more automatic spelling becomes, the greater will be the transfer to natural writing” (1952:462). Moreover the Department of Education (2001:25) states that spelling is a vital part of written communication and is seen as an important tool in writing. Richards (2001:1) further suggests that spelling, as one of the pillars of writing, should receive more attention.

However, literature on spelling does not only examine the importance of spelling but there is also in existence a body of literature that talks about second language learners’ experiences in spelling (Hee-Lee, 2010; Solati, Sazalie & Chelah, 2007). The picture is more worrying in South Africa. Research in tertiary institutions revealed that learners cannot spell nor can they write error free sentences (Gamaroff, 2000). Webb (2002) concluded that errors of spelling rank first among all different types of grammatical and lexical errors recognized from the language performance data for those to whom English is a second language.

Literature, international and national, that has explored second language learners’ spelling errors has identified them to consist of deviations from phonology, grammar and lexical system of the English language (Clark-Edmands as cited in DuBois, *et al.*, 2007; Medrano & Zych, 1998; Templeton, 2004). This phenomenon could be due to the fact that spelling and writing employ the same lexical representation which

provides insight into phonological, orthographic or morphological approach which learners are attending to or utilizing when engaged in writing and spelling (Templeton, 2004). With that in mind, some children have an inability to understand how to work with the sounds of the language system - examples of this include reversing beginnings of words, substituting similar letters, leaving off endings, and omitting letters (Clark-Edmands as cited in DuBois, *et al.*, 2007). With reference to the nature of spelling errors, Medrano & Zych (1998) state that a lack phonetic awareness contributes to poor spelling achievement.

Researchers have categorized spelling errors as follows:

- a) **Phonetic errors** include (i) *vowel omission*: when a learner writes *dside* for *decides* (Hee-Lee, 2010; Wasowicz, Masterson & Apel, 2007; Wolff, 1952), (ii) *consonant omission*: when a learner writes *produks* for *products*, (iii) *confusion of letter formation*: when a learner writes *Vnited* for *United* (Laminack & Wood, 1996), (iv) *doubling and non-doubling*: when a learner writes *alowed* for *allowed* and *disepoint* for *disappoint*. (Carter, 2006), (v) *phonetic errors* includes those in which their cause are in sound, e.g. *sence* for *since* and *eny* for *any* (DuBois, *et al*, 2007)
- b) **Mechanical errors** are errors in punctuation: includes omission of capital letters in proper nouns and adjectives (Medrano & Zych, 1998)
- c) **Non phonetic errors** are errors due to: (i) *inversion of letters*: when a learner writes *rion* for *iron* for *strom* for *storm* (Wolff 1952) and (ii) *vowel insertion*: when a learner writes *saecond* for *second* and *leater* for *later* (Wasowicz, *et al.*, 2007)

However these studies did not focus on isiXhosa background learners.

The literacy crisis resulting from use of a foreign Language or using an Additional Language as LOLT

Teachers are held responsible for a literacy crisis resulting from use of second language (L2) as Language of Teaching and Learning (LOLT) due to their own limited English proficiency (Govender, 2009). Where teacher's own L2 knowledge is not at an acceptable standard for the use of English as the LOLT, their poor usage and knowledge of the language are transferred to the learners (Stander, as cited in Nel and Müller, 2010). Nel (2007) supports this notion by stating that most teachers lack the training, knowledge, tools and time to support learners with limited English proficiency to ascertain that these learners achieve their full potential. Nel (2007) further argues that challenges to teaching EFAL are often huge classrooms, lack of parental support, and lack of proficiency in mother tongue among learners. Moreover many language teachers spend long hours correcting the written work of their learners because it is assumed that correction will improve students' competence in English second language (Tshotsho, 2006).

According to Ellis (as cited in Nel and Müller, 2010), social factors affect the L2 proficiency attained by different groups of learners. When writing or speaking the EFAL, L2 learners tend to rely on their native language (L1) structures to produce a response (Bhela, 1999). Al-Jarf (2008) states that when learners rely on their native language when they are writing, this may result in inter - lingual spelling errors in English. During submersion L2 learners are taught in a class where L1 speakers are dominant; during immersion L1 learners are taught through the medium of L2 by bilingual teachers in classes where there are only such learners (Nel and Müller, 2010). L2 learners have more than one language at their disposal while they are

composing as compared to native speakers; it brings more problems, because they tend to switch those languages interactively, causing some confusion in the structure and meaning (Al-Jarf, 2008).

1.3 Statement of the problem

There is literacy crisis in South Africa - learners struggle to read and write. Research has looked at the nature of spelling errors in a second language both in South Africa and internationally (ibid). However there is a dearth of literature in South Africa that studies the spelling experiences of isiXhosa-English bilingual learners, thus creating a knowledge gap.

It is against this background that the study poses the following main question:

1.4 Research Question

What is the nature of spelling errors committed by grade three isiXhosa background learners in English first additional language?

In addition to the above main question, there are four sub-questions:

1.4.1 Sub Questions

- What are the features of the words that grade three isiXhosa background learners experience difficulties in spelling in English First Language?
- What are the features of the words that grade three isiXhosa background learners find easy to spell in English first additional language?

- What are Grade three isiXhosa background learners' strategies for spelling in English first additional language?
- What are the barriers in acquiring spelling skills in English by isiXhosa speaking grade three learners?

1.5 Purpose of the study

The study aims at investigating the nature of spelling errors committed by grade three isiXhosa background learners in English as a first additional language.

1.6 Objectives of the study

- To provide a comprehensive description of spelling practices of isiXhosa background learners in English first additional language.
- To investigate the nature of spelling errors committed by isiXhosa background learners in English first additional language.
- To understand in-depth barriers in acquiring spelling skills in English by isiXhosa background learners.

1.7 Motivation for the study

There is insufficient literature that looks into the spelling experiences of isiXhosa background learners in English first additional language. These learners seem to be struggling with spelling and that appears to be a problem in our schools. It is hoped that the findings of this study will illuminate the nature of spelling errors and strategies that isiXhosa background learners are actually using or failing to use in their spelling in English first additional language. This study also aims at helping

teachers in reflecting on their practices of spelling development in the classroom. This is also going to make a contribution by sensitizing the Department of Education to take into consideration the nature of spelling errors that isiXhosa background learners struggles with when they are writing English first additional language so as to put more emphasis on this in the curriculum.

1.8 Rationale of the study

The researcher is a teacher who noticed that isiXhosa background learners in the Intermediate Phase seem to struggle with the spelling of commonly used words taught in the previous grades in English first additional language. The teachers as well seem uneasy about teaching spelling because they feel they have not been equipped with the necessary practical teaching to assist learners. Moreover, the researcher has heard from Senior Phase teachers that the situation exists there, too, and such learners write essays that are full of spelling errors which take the mind of the reader away from the meaning of the text. Having observed this problem the researcher felt that it was necessary to investigate the nature of spelling errors of isiXhosa background learners in English first additional language. The Department of Education states that by the end of grade three the learner is expected to spell common words correctly, to recognize vowel sounds spelled with two letters, and to recognize single consonants spelled with two consonants (DoE, 2005). The Department of Education further states that by the end of grade five the learner is expected to spell familiar words correctly, and use a wider range of punctuation for example inverted commas (DoE, 2005). In South Africa the literature accessed examined Afrikaans-English learners' spelling errors (De Sousa, Greenop & Fry,

2009); German-English errors (Wimmer & Hummer 1990); and English-Afrikaans spelling errors (Botha, Ponelis & Combrink, 1989). However, literature falls short in identifying isiXhosa background learners with spelling errors in English first additional language. It is, therefore, against this background that this study seeks to investigate the nature of these spelling errors of isiXhosa background learners in English first additional language.

1.9 Delimitation of the study

This study focused on a black township primary school in the Buffalo City Municipality in the Eastern Cape Province. The school is an isiXhosa medium school and English is taught as a subject in grade three. One grade three class teacher and eight learners participated in this study.

1.10 Definition of the key concepts

The following concepts defined below reflect the context in which they have been used in the study:

- **Literacy**

Literacy means the knowledge and skills necessary to communicate, including the reading, writing, basic skills, computation, speaking, and listening skills normally associated with the ability to function so that education, employment, citizenry and family life are enhanced (Edwards, 1990).

- **Spelling**

Spelling involves the integration of several skills including knowledge of phonological representations, grammatical and semantic knowledge, as well as the formulation of analogies with words in visual memory and the knowledge of orthographic rules and conventions (Kress as cited in Richards, 2001:14; Pijper, 2003; and Wagner & Torgesen, 1987). This concept “spelling” will be further unpacked in Chapter 2.

- **Spelling errors**

Any word that does not match the target word in part or in full is marked as a misspelling. Any faulty word, faulty grapheme (single vowel, single consonant, vowel digraphs, consonants digraphs, phonogram, suffix, or prefix) within a word is counted as error. It is a series of letters that represents no correctly spelled word of the same language at all (such as "liek" for "like") or a correct spelling of another word (Al-Jarf, 2008 & Mifflin, 2007).

- **IsiXhosa background learners**

These are learners to whom isiXhosa is both a home language and also used as a language of learning and teaching at school.

- **English First Additional Language**

According to the revised national curriculum (DoE, 2002:124) English first additional language is the language learned in addition to one’s home language.

1.11 Conclusion

This chapter has introduced the research problem and literacy crisis. This study will look specifically at the nature of spelling errors of grade three isiXhosa background learners in English. In chapter two a report will be made on the literature study which forms the background to the development of this study.

1.12 Outline of the chapters

The outline of the study is as follows:

Chapter 1: Introduction and Background

It gives background to the topic being investigated and the nature of the problem. It presents the nature of spelling errors as well as the literacy crisis in South Africa and Internationally. It also outlines the general overview of the study, research problem, research questions, purpose, objectives, motivation, rationale, delimitations and definition of key concepts.

Chapter 2: Literature Review and Conceptual Framework

This chapter discusses the conceptualisation of the concept of spelling and related literature with regards to the nature of spelling errors in English second language. It further outlines the stages of spelling development, the types of spelling errors committed by learners in English as second language, and factors contributing to learners' spelling practices, as well as strategies for teaching and monitoring spelling development.

Chapter3: Research Methodology

This chapter discusses the research process, paradigm, design and methodology. It indicates why the researcher has chosen a qualitative approach and gives the advantages and disadvantages of the approach.

Chapter4: Analysis of Findings

This chapter deals with themes and sub-themes that emerged from field research. Analysis and interpretation of findings are also discussed in this chapter.

Chapter 5: Conclusion and Recommendation

This chapter is a summary of the research findings. In this chapter recommendations on how to overcome spelling errors of isiXhosa background learners in English first additional language are submitted.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

This chapter presents a review of literature that is relevant in investigating the nature of spelling errors of isiXhosa background learners in English second language (ESL). In understanding these spelling errors it is important to shed light on classroom practices when learners are dealing with spelling. A set of broad ideas and principles taken from relevant fields of enquiry is adopted to structure this chapter in understanding these phenomena (Smyth, 2004). Therefore theoretical roots contributing to learners' spelling errors, most commonly committed spelling errors and strategies for teaching spelling to ESL learners will be analyzed in detail.

2.2 Conceptualizing the concept 'Spelling'

In investigating the nature of spelling errors in isiXhosa background learners it is important to understand the concept of spelling. Various writers define spelling differently. Spelling is defined as the act of forming words correctly from individual letters (Hornby, 2000). Hanna *et al* (as cited in Odisho, 1994) define spelling as 'the process of encoding, or of rendering spoken words into written symbols.' This indicates that spelling requires matching the sounds of language with the appropriate letters in order to accurately and reliably convey a message (Wanzek, Vaughn, Wexler, Swanson, Edmonds & Kim, 2006). In supporting this, Hodges (1984) defines spelling as a process of converting oral language to visual form by placing graphic symbols on some writing surface. In agreeing with this Kallom (as cited in Wolff,

1952) states that spelling is an act of seeing or hearing accurately what may be written or spoken, and translating that visual or aural image into motor activity.

This notion is supported by the Department of Education in stating that spelling is the vital part of written communication and is seen as an important tool in writing (DoE, 2001:25). It is about rules of recording: either the recording in graphic form of remembered words as shapes or as letter sequences (Kress, as cited in Richards, 2001). According to Bryant & Bradely (as cited in Pijper, 2003) spelling involves integration of several skills including knowledge of phonological representation, grammatical and semantic knowledge, as well as formulation of analogies with words in visual memory. Therefore spelling is more than just a convention of writing; it is an indication of a child's word knowledge which involves the integration of phonological, orthographic, and morphological knowledge of language (Templeton, 2004). Hence Croft (1983) states that the teaching and learning of spelling must take place as far as possible within the context of writing.

Young (2000) gives a more comprehensive pedagogy of spelling:

- **Phonics** as related to the grouping of words for spelling
such as: *an, man, can*
- **Syllabication** learning to divide words and spell by syllabication
such as: mul-ti-pli-ca-tion; dic-ta-tion; re-la-tion
- **Prefixes**, what they mean and how to use them
- **Suffixes**, what they mean and how to use them

- **Rules for plurals and possessive and for adding suffixes**
such as: when the *y* is preceded by a consonant, change the *y* to *i* and add *es*
- **Learning to pronounce words correctly to spell correctly**
- **Learning the basic sight words.**

2.3 Essential skills necessary for spelling

In understanding the nature of spelling errors committed by isiXhosa background learners, it is important to discuss the significance of phonemes in spelling. In this section phonemic awareness is defined and its essential elements necessary for spelling are discussed. The role of visual memory in spelling is also discussed.

Phonemic Awareness

This term usually refers to the awareness of words as sequences of discrete phonemes but is often used in place of the term phonological awareness (Chapman, 2002). However, Lerkkanen, Puttonen, Aunola & Nurmi (2004) have challenged this view by arguing that phonemic awareness is distinct from phonological awareness. Many people do not understand the difference between phonological awareness, phonemic awareness, and phonics (Pijper, 2003). In order to understand the concept of phonological awareness, it is important to have a clear understanding of each of these terms, all of which have to do with sounds in spoken language (Chard & Dickson, 1999).

Phonological awareness is the ability to recognize that a spoken word consists of smaller components such as syllables and phonemes and that these units can be manipulated (Lambardino *et al.* as cited in Pijper, 2003). This notion is supported by

Chapman (2002) who states that phonological awareness is the awareness of various sound aspects of language (as distinct from its meaning). For this reason Lerkkanen, *et al.* (2004) therefore, state that phonological awareness is sensitivity to the phonological structure of spoken language and the ability to understand the connection between oral and written language.

Moreover phonological knowledge is knowledge about the sound structure of a language (Schuele & Bourdreau, 2008). More specifically, phonological knowledge deals with the rules that govern the sequencing and distribution of the speech sounds of a language (Bernthal & Bankson, 2004). These rules, which govern the permissible and impermissible sequencing of phonemes, as well as dialectal variations, are stored in the mental lexicon as phonological regularities (Masterson & Apel, 2000). According to Snowling & Scanlon (as cited in Joy, 2011) phonological awareness also plays an important role in spelling development.

On the other hand, Ehri *et al.* (2001) state that phonological awareness is a more general term for awareness of any size sound unit within words, whereas phonemic awareness consists of the ability to explicitly and accurately analyze, synthesize, manipulate and separate phoneme size sound units within words. A phoneme is the smallest speech sound that distinguishes words and it is the smallest unit of spoken language e.g. the word **cat** contains three phonemes, /c/ /a/ /t/. (Lehr & Osborn as cited in Pijper, 2003). According to Chapman (2002) phonemic awareness is more specific; it is the ability to detect each phoneme (the smallest unit of speech) in words. Hence Loren (2002) states that without phonemic awareness, phonics can make no sense and the spellings of words can be learned only by rote.

Visual imagery

Visual imagery plays an important role in the learners' spelling practices. It enables learners to spell unfamiliar words accurately for a variety of social and academic purposes (Department of Education and Training, 1998). It focuses on how words look and it includes teaching learners the following (ibid):

- To recall and compare the appearance of words, particularly those which they have seen or learnt before or those which are commonly used
- To recognise what letters look like and how to write them
- To recognise that letters can be grouped in particular ways, e.g. endings that frequently occur in words.

Hence Baron; Englert; Logan *et al.*; Olson *et al.* Roberts & Waters *et al.* (as cited in James, undated) state that good spellers apply visual memory strategies and follow the visual route to spelling.

2.4 Spelling in grade three - FAL in South Africa

The table below indicates the classified assessment standards of Foundation Phase spelling requirements for EFL learners in South Africa. These assessment standards are adopted from the national curriculum statement of South Africa.

Table 1: Classified Assessment Standards

Grade 1	Grade 2	Grade 3
○ Copies familiar words and short sentences (e.g. labels or titles for own drawings)	○ Uses phonic knowledge to begin to spell words correctly ○ Spells familiar words correctly from memory ○ Identifies and corrects spelling errors in familiar words	○ Spells common words correctly ○ Uses punctuation – commas, question marks and exclamation marks

The Department of Education states that when children begin to read and write in grade one in their additional language, they already know how to decode in their home language (DoE, 2008). They copy familiar words and short sentences (DoE, 2002). According to Gentry (1982), very young or beginning spellers may depend on an alphabetic or letter name strategy where the letter of the alphabet is used to directly represent the sound. At the end of grade one, they are expected to be able to copy familiar word and to have mastered the alphabet in their home language. In grade two they begin spelling with minimal knowledge of the alphabet and their mastery of the letters of the alphabet provides a strong foundation for learning to read and spell (Adams, as cited in Joy, 2011). They already understand concepts of print and have considerable prior knowledge of sound-spelling relationships (DoE, 2008). The Department of Education further states that grade two learners spell familiar words from memory and identify and correct spelling errors (DoE, 2002). In

grade three learners are expected to spell common words correctly and attempt to spell unfamiliar words using phonic knowledge by the end of the year (DoE, 2008).

2.5 Stages of Spelling Development

Over the years, researchers have studied the stages of spelling development and there seem to be similarities as to how learners develop. They all agree that to spell a word is not a once off case though the names of the stages are not the same. All stage theories, however, share common features, such as indicating qualitatively different skills and knowledge at the different stages as well as describing spelling development in terms of a transition from relying on phonological properties of words to recognizing and representing orthographic and morphemic regularities and rules (Treiman, Goswami, Tincoff & Leever, 1997). Besides generally describing learners' spelling development, stage theories have been used as a foundation for the construction of spelling activities and to guide the development of instructional materials for teaching spelling (Gentry, 1982; and Treiman *et al.*, 1997). This statement makes it clear that spelling is a subject area that must be taught to learners at their own developmental levels; spelling is a cognitive process, with much more depth than simply memorizing letter and sound relationships (DuBois *et al.*, 2007).

Learners' progress through stages on their way to spelling competency, and each stage indicates a different level of sophistication and cognitive awareness about how spelling works (Savage, 2001). As learners learn more about spelling, their invented spellings become more sophisticated to reflect their new knowledge, even if the

words are still spelled incorrectly, and increasingly learners spell more and more words correctly as they move through the stages of spelling development (Tompkins, 2007). Therefore stages of spelling development seem to provide guidance to teachers in adopting them as a foundation for the construction of spelling activities and for teaching spelling.

Gentry (1982) states that spelling is a developmental process that involves thinking, not just rote memorization. This suggests that the order in which words are introduced should parallel the sequence of stages learners naturally move through as they become increasingly proficient spellers (Nelson as cited in Medrano & Zych, 1998). In contrast, the experimental evidence indicates skills for conventional spelling are best developed by direct and systematic instruction of words carefully arranged as to how predictably they are spelt (Groff, 1996). Gentry (1982) flatly reject such evidence. He contends that the best strategy for a formal spelling lesson has not been discovered.

Researchers (Dorn & Soffos as cited in DuBois *et al.*, 2007; Gentry, 1982; Savage, 2001; and Treiman *et al.*, 1997) have identified the following stages of spelling development and, from their work; they seem to agree on the following:

Precommunicative Spelling Stage - learners at this stage literally spell what they hear, therefore, sometimes their letter choices do not conform to conventional English spelling. Their writing is not readable to others and there may be random strings of symbols (real or invented). Letters may be in their upper or lower case,

some letters are combined and letter symbols are in relatively haphazard fashion, with no apparent knowledge of letter-sound.

Semiphonetic Spelling Stage - their writing is simple, a collection of scribbles, circles and lines with a few random letters being thrown in, and they are writing formed letters of the alphabet and stringing the letters together so that they looked like printed language. Spelling is characterized by first attempts at letter-sound correspondence. It may be abbreviated, with only one or two letters to represent a word, e.g. *wk* (*walk*), *po* (*piano*), and *s* (*saw*). Learners spell very systematically, they spell, literally what they hear. They represent a portion of the phonetic information in the word and they recognize the left-to-right directionality of the English language.

Phonetic spelling stage - learners at this stage are not expected to spell conventionally most of the time because their spelling concepts are not yet fully developed. Spelling is not standard, but writing is meaningful and can be read and understood by others. There may be substitutions of incorrect letters with similar (or even the same) pronunciation. Actually, these substitutions often indicate that the speller is using a great deal of common sense. e.g. *jrink* (*drink*) and *chrain* (*train*). Nasal consonants may be omitted in English, e.g. *stap* (*stamp*) Past tense may be represented in different ways, e.g. *pild* (*peeled*), *lookt* (*looked*) and *tradid* (*traded*). At this stage learners are *six years three months*.

Transitional Spelling Stage- at this stage learners pay attention to what words look like, in addition to what they sound like. They begin to incorporate vowels and endings in their spelling and they demonstrate their growing knowledge of English orthography. Learners may operate within this *stage* of spelling for a long period of

time and during this stage, visual and morphemic strategies become more important. Vowels appear in every syllable e.g. *elefant* ; nasals appear before consonants e.g. *combo*. Common English letter sequences are used e.g. *younited*. Vowel digraphs often appear e.g. *miak* and *mayk*. Inflectional endings (*s, s, ing, ed, est*) are spelled conventionally. Correct letters may be used but in an incorrect sequence e.g. *because (because)* and *plain (plain)*. Learned (sight) words appear more often.

Standard or Conventional Spelling Stage – they should now be expected to spell at a higher frequency level. At this stage, most words are spelled appropriately. The speller can often recognize a word that doesn't look right and a large reservoir of words are spelled automatically.

However, Suit (as cited in Richards, 2007) described three stages of spelling development:

Stage 1: first graders tend initially to use mainly consonants to spell words.

Stage 2: second and third graders learn to spell words they read and write. They rely on phonetic and visual information.

Stage 3: Most learners have mastered a basic spelling vocabulary and most third graders have no difficulty with words such as *could, are, their, there, would* and *they*.

On the other hand Tompkins (2007) describes five stages of spelling development with different concepts which have some differences in terms of learners' level of development. They are as follows:

Stage 1: Emergent Spelling: Learners string scribbles, letters, and letter-like forms together, but they don't associate the marks they make with any specific phonemes. Spelling at this stage represents a natural, early expression of the alphabet and other written-language concepts. Learners may write from left to right, right to left, top to bottom, or randomly across the page, but by the end of the stage, they have an understanding of directionality. Some emergent spellers have a large repertoire of letter forms to use in writing, whereas others repeat a small number of letters over and over. Toward the end of the stage, children are beginning to discover how spelling works and that letters represent sounds in words. This stage is typical of three to five year olds. During the emergent stage, learners learn these concepts:

- The distinction between drawing and writing
- How to make letters
- The direction of writing on a page
- Some letter-sound matches

Stage 2: Letter Name-Alphabetic Spelling: Learners learn to represent phonemes in words with letters. They develop an understanding of the alphabetic principle that a link exists between letters and sounds. At first, the spellings are quite abbreviated and represent only the most prominent features in words. Learners use only several letters of the alphabet to represent an entire word. Examples of early Stage 2 spelling are *D* (*dog*) and *KE* (*cookie*), and children may still be writing mainly with capital letters. Learners slowly pronounce the word they want to spell, listening for familiar letter names and sounds.

In the middle of the letter name-alphabetic stage, Learners use most beginning and ending consonants and include a vowel in most syllables; they spell *like* as *lik* and *bed* as *bad*. By the end of the stage, they use consonant blends and digraphs and short-vowel patterns to spell *hat*, *get*, and *win*, but some still spell *ship* as *sep*. Spellers at this stage are usually five to seven year olds. During the letter-name stage, learners learn these concepts:

- The alphabetic principle
- Consonant sounds
- Short vowel sounds
- Consonant blends and digraphs

Stage 3: Within-Word Pattern Spelling: Learners begin the within-word pattern stage when they can spell most one-syllable short-vowel words, and, during this stage, they learn to spell long-vowel patterns and r-controlled vowels. They experiment with long-vowel patterns and learn that words such as *come* and *bread* are exceptions that don't fit the vowel patterns. Learners may confuse spelling patterns and spell *meet* as *mete*, and they reverse the order of letters, such as *form* for *from* and *gril* for *girl*. They also learn about complex consonant sounds, including -tch (*match*) and -dge (*judge*), and less frequent vowel patterns, such as *oi/oy* (*boy*), *au* (*caught*), *aw* (*saw*), *ew* (*sew*, *few*), *ou* (*house*), and *ow* (*cow*). Learners also become aware of homophones and compare long-and short-vowel combinations (*hope*–*hop*) as they experiment with vowel patterns. Learners at this stage are seven to nine year olds, and they learn these spelling concepts:

- Long-vowel spelling patterns

- r-controlled vowels
- More-complex consonant patterns
- Diphthongs and other less common vowel patterns

Stage 4: Syllables and Affixes Spelling: Learners focus on syllables in this stage and apply what they've learned about one-syllable words to longer, multisyllabic words. They learn about inflectional endings (-s, -es, -ed, and -ing) and rules about consonant doubling, changing the final y to i, or dropping the final e before adding an inflectional suffix. They also learn about homophones and compound words and are introduced to some of the more common prefixes and suffixes. Spellers in this stage are generally nine to eleven year olds. Learners learn these concepts during the syllables and affixes stage of spelling development:

- Inflectional endings (-s, -es, -ed, -ing)
- Rules for adding inflectional endings
- Syllabication
- Homophones

Stage 5: Derivational Relations Spelling: Learners explore the relationship between spelling and meaning during the derivational relations stage, and they learn that words with related meanings are often related in spelling despite changes in vowel and consonant sounds (e.g., *wise–wisdom*, *sign–signal*, *nation–national*). The focus in this stage is on morphemes, and learners learn about Greek and Latin root words and affixes. They also begin to examine etymologies and the role of history in

shaping how words are spelled. They learn about eponyms (words from people's names), such as *maverick* and *sandwich*. Spellers at this stage are eleven to fourteen year olds. Learners learn these concepts at this stage of spelling development:

- Consonant alternations (e.g., *soft–soften, magic–magician*)
- Vowel alternations (e.g., *please–pleasant, define–definition, explain–explanation*)
- Greek and Latin affixes and root words
- Etymologies

It is apparent from the above stage theorist (Tompkins) that grade three learners are likely to be in stage three. However, Tompkins mentioned that learners progress through stages on their way to spelling competency, therefore some grade three learners might reach stage four.

2.6 Spelling errors by EFAL

In understanding the nature of spelling errors of isiXhosa background learners one has to unpack spelling errors by EFAL learners. Literature reviewed in this section is three-fold namely:

- The types of spelling errors – characteristics of good spellers as opposed to struggling spellers
- It discusses the factors that seem to influence learners' spelling practices
- It suggests strategies that can be used to monitor spelling

2.6.1 Types of spelling errors

Studies over the years came up with different types of spelling errors. They revealed spelling errors committed by ESL learners. However, there is no literature that focuses on isiXhosa background learners. Literature reviewed spelling errors in Spanish – ESL, French – ESL, Persian – ESL, Indian – ESL and Kenyan – ESL learners.

These studies were on Spanish –ESL learners

The literature classifies errors into three categories namely (Hee-Lee, 2010; Wasowicz *et. al.*, and 2007; Wolff, 1952):

- Mechanical errors are, firstly, errors in punctuation, for example, where learners omit capital letters and hyphens. Secondly is *carelessness* in writing, for example, *aminals* for animals and *mations* for *nations*. Thirdly is *confusion of letter formation* in writing, for example, *vnited* for *united* and *evile* for *exile*.
- Phonetic errors indicate a need for emphasis on visual and auditory imagery. These errors result from failure to use phonetic rules and are *vowel omission*, *consonant omission* and *doubling or non-doubling*.
- Non-phonetic errors include lack of knowledge of words, for example, *inversion of letters* where the learner writes *rión* for *iron*, *strom* for *storm*.

These studies were on French-ESL learners

Joy (2011) has analyzed the following errors in English spelling tasks:

- Primitive errors: these include visual letter confusion (*b/p, q/p*) and multiple representation of the first phoneme or letter of a word (*ll/kk*).
- Consonant errors: learners encounter most difficulty with vowels and separating consonant blends into their constituents, for example, silent consonant omitted (*bas-ba*), related consonant substitution (*reash-reach*) and homophone letter confusion (*sa-ca*).
- Vowel errors: these includes silent vowel attempted (*maik-make*), silent part of vowel omitted (*mak-make*), vowel omission (*mk-make*) and related vowel substitution (*mok-make*).
- Transfer: in this category learners commit homophone transfer (*jupe-gupe, lui-lwe*).
- Others: these include over pronunciation (*hime-him*), intrusions (*make-manke*), incomplete orthographic presentation (*blanche-blance*) and reversals of phonemes in words (*bannae-banana, ni-in*).

These studies were on Persian-ESL learners

Solati *et al.* (2007) detected these errors in the written products of learners:

- Spelling errors of addition: where a learner writes *escholl* for *school* and *berown* for *brown*.
- Spelling errors of deletion: where a learner writes *ofen* for *often* and *acros* for *across*.
- Spelling errors of substitution: where a learner writes *dey* for *they* and *mosk* for *mosque*
- Spelling errors of transposition: where a learner writes *recieve* for *receive* and *feild* for *field*.

These studies were on Indian-ESL learners

Learner's errors are classified into three main types - adopted from Krishnalalitha (2010):

- Errors of competence are caused by the application of the rules of the target language wrongly.
- Errors of performance are the result of repeatedly committed mistakes while using a language. In addition to this, there is another problem for the learners of English which is the lack of correspondence between the spelling and the sound. This problem results in committing errors in pronunciation.
- Errors in pronunciation occur mainly due to the interference of the MT. This is also called negative transfer. This happens when the target language and the learners' MT are different from each other. Learners use the sounds of the mother tongue instead of those of the language they are learning. Internal analogy and over generalization will make learners commit errors. (e.g.: *childrens, equipments, etc.*)

These studies were on Kenyan-ESL learners

Nyamasyo (as cited in Naderi, 1997) studied the written English competence of native Kenyan learners who were learning English as a second language. The researcher reported four broad categories of spelling errors caused by the following:

- Substitution of one letter for another (e.g., as in *s* for *c* in *selebrate* or *i* for *e* as in *intertain*)
- Omission of letters in a word (e.g. as in *exess*, or *neglible*)
- Addition of letters in a word (e.g. as in *relligion*; *dairly*)

- Incorrect internal punctuation which includes commas, full stops, small letters for nouns

On the other hand Solati *et al* (2007) detected five patterns in the learners' word dictation:

- Written yet unpronounced letters in English orthography: these errors were found within this pattern: *wei* for *weigh*, *coud* for *could*, *clim* for *climb*, *leav* for *leave*, *ho* for *who*, *hi* for *high*, and *rong* for *wrong*.
- Homophone confusion is unawareness of lexicogrammatical category of the words which resulted in the following errors: *their* for *the*, *it* for *eat*, *wright* for *right*, *to* for *too*, *our* for *hour* and *see* for *sea*
- Letters in English conveying different sounds: the following errors were found within this pattern; *batl* for *bottle*, *enouf* for *enough*, *akros* for *across*, *aksident* for *accident* and *samer* for *summer*.
- Sounds present in L2 but absent in L1 in this case learners replaced L1 sounds in patterns for L2 sounds and patterns e.g. *tree* for *three*, *sing* for *thing*, *flover* for *flower* and *vak* for *walk*.
- Sound distinction present in L2 but not in L1: these sounds are absent in Kenyan language e.g. *it- eat*, *bit- beat*, *live-leave*, *fit-feat*, *sit-seat*.

The correction and analysis of these spelling errors provide an excellent opportunity for the learners to acquire new spelling skills and allow the teacher to monitor learners' spelling progress (Pressley and Woloshyn as cited in Medrano & Zych, 1998).

Orthographic Misspellings

Orthographic misspelling is another type of spelling error. It deals with the written symbols or grapheme representations of a language (Templeton, 2004). Common orthographic errors included consonant doubling errors, which typically occur when the learner does not understand that doubling typically occurs in the medial and final position of words following a short vowel in English (Treiman *et al.*, 1997). Another category of orthographic errors consists of single substitutions (i.e. capitalization errors) or the addition or omission of single space word boundary errors (Rimrott & Heift, 2005). Omission of silent e for marking long vowels, digraph errors, and letter sound errors are other often reported orthographic errors (Fawcett, 2006; Treiman, *et al.* 1997). These types of spelling errors reportedly become less common as exposure to print and spelling instruction increase a child's knowledge of orthographic patterns (Joy, 2011).

Studies that have been conducted suggest that orthographic depth and the similarities of the languages involved affect how easily and whether or not information is transferred from one language to another (Arab-Moghaddam & Senechal; Carlisle & Beeman; Liow & Lau as cited in Joy 2011). In supporting the above statement isiXhosa has some similarities with some English words which are borrowed. These borrowed English words are used to accommodate the language which results in learners making orthographic errors.

Characteristics of good spellers as opposed to struggling spellers

In examining types of spelling errors, researchers have noted characteristics common to good spellers as opposed to struggling spellers.

Good spellers:

- Operate under the assumption that the English system of spelling has regularity and that spelling problems can be solved.
- Are engaged in reading and writing tasks both in and out of school and view correct spelling and proofreading as their responsibility (Hughes & Searle 2000).
- Know and use a variety of strategies when solving spelling problems and are able to combine knowledge of all levels of orthography: sound, visual, and meaning (Hughes & Searle, 2000).
- Appear to access an extensive store of words and word specific knowledge from memory (Gentry, 1982; 2004).

Poor spellers

- View spelling as something completely arbitrary and beyond their control (Hughes & Searle, 2000).
- Demonstrate limited strategies for word solving which rely heavily on sound (Hughes & Searle, 2000).
- Take longer time to learn (Treiman *et al*, 1997), researchers acknowledged, “it takes a long time for [anyone] to become a good speller” (Hughes & Searle, 2000).

2.6.2 Factors that seem to influence learners’ spelling practices

With reference to the nature of spelling errors that grade three isiXhosa learners commit one has to understand the factors in acquiring spelling skills in English. The

table below, adopted from Richards (2001), indicates factors that influence the development of spelling skills of learners in the Foundation Phase:

Table2: Factors that influence spelling skill

Factors to spelling skills	Example
Deficits in phonological processing	'shop' as 'chop', 'boot' as 'but'
Complexity of the English orthographic code ○ Same sound for different letter combinations ○ Same letter combination with different sounds ○ Same letter with a different sound ○ Complexity of internal structure of a word resulting in omissions ○ Confusion of letter sounds and names	'oi' and 'oy', 'ou' and 'ow', 'ai' and 'ay' - Cough, dough, through 'a' as in cat and cake 'wen' for 'when' and 'lad' for 'land' 'party' as 'parti' 'tree' as 'tri'
Deficits in perception ○ Visual memory ○ Visual sequencing ○ Auditory discrimination ○ Reversals	'yor' for 'your', 'sun' for 'son' 'gril' for 'girl', 'thier' for 'their' 'fum' for 'thumb' 'hab' for 'had', 'lib' for 'lid'

Borrowing

The table below shows some of the words that have been borrowed from English into isiXhosa which can result in learners making orthographic errors. According to Joy (2011) these types of errors need remediation instruction from educators.

Table 3: Words borrowed from English

Target word	Borrowed word
Mug	Imagi
Bucket	Ibhakethi
Lead pencil	Ilidi
Ruler	Irula
Photo	Ifoto

Classification of factors that may influence learners' spelling practices

The following studies are from Spencer (as cited in Richards, 2001); Medrano & Zych (1998) and from the Department of Education and Training (1998). These studies classify factors that may influence learners' spelling practices. Spencer (as cited in Richards) came up with three negatively contributing factors, Medrano & Zych (1998) gave four possible factors and the Department of Education and Training (1998) noted five factors that can influence whether a learner produces correct spelling.

According to Spencer (as cited in Richards, 2001) factors that negatively contribute to spelling accuracy are namely:

- The frequency with which the word is used in the English language. The less the learner is exposed to a word, the less likely the learner will remember the spelling of that particular word.
- The length of the word
- The presence of “tricky” letters or letter combinations.

Medrano & Zych (1998) state four possible factors that contribute to learners' spelling practices:

- Many teachers don't know spelling strategies to use with their grade level
- They do not understand the stages of developmental spelling and writing
- Information on spelling research and strategies has not been provided to strengthen their knowledge
- It is easier to use a publisher's word list or workbook that is supported by the district.

The Department of Education and Training (1998) noted the following factors that can influence whether a learner produces correct spelling and it includes:

- The purpose for writing
- The context in which the writing is taking place
- The stage of development of the writer
- The stage of development of the written text itself
- The implied reader of the written text.

Complication of English as a language by itself

English has the largest vocabulary of any language, a vast and sophisticated literature, extensive borrowing of words from many other languages, a relatively simple grammar, a clear pronunciation, and an efficient script, but its spelling system is archaic and dysfunctional (Carter, 2006). There are about half a million words in English, even though it uses twenty six letters for about forty four sounds, and many of its words are not spelt as they sound (Department of Education and Training, 1998). Gentry (2004) states that its alphabetic principle is complex, with a plethora of

foreign spellings, myriad spelling combinations, a huge vocabulary, and sometimes arbitrary spelling patterns (and) this complex system of English spelling makes it more difficult to spell than any other alphabetic language. The Department of Education states that English vowels are particularly challenging for African language speakers, and this is made more difficult by the variety of ways in which these vowels are spelt (DoE, 2008).

Moreover Carter (2006) states that the English language has irregular orthography; sometimes words are not written as they are pronounced. This discrepancy between the spoken and written form contributes a lot to spelling errors of learners since many words having the same sound are spelt differently, many others have silent letters in their spelling, and many words are not spelt as they sound (Miressa & Dumessa, 2011). Nel (2007) states that most teachers lack the training, knowledge, tools and time to support learners. However, Cramer and Cipielewski (as cited in Groff, 1996) contest this view by arguing that the English language is not the chaotic beast of mythology it is often made out to be. On the contrary, it is systematic and reasonably predictable in the conventional way it is spelt (Cramer and Cipielewski as cited in Groff, 1996).

Standardized spelling tests

There are many probable factors for learners' inability to transfer spelling into written work. In the past, spelling research tended to focus on the effectiveness of particular study and test methods (Schlagal, as cited in Kernaghan, 2007). Doing well on a spelling test does not mean that competency in spelling is being developed (Gentry, 1982). DuBois *et al* (2007), believe that a primary factor of learners being poor

spellers is that teachers focus too much, or only, on a weekly spelling test and do not teach spelling explicitly or in relation to other subject areas, such as writing. A standardized test of spelling, whether it is of the dictated, multi-choice or proof reading type, will convey little information about the quality of a learner's spelling in his writing (Croft, 1983). This notion is supported by Loeffler (2005) in pointing out that the traditional spelling test does not provide insight into spelling cues that the learners are using. Neither is learning the rules for correct spelling effective as a way to become a good speller, Croft (1983) cautions teachers, learners learn more from "free writing."

Pronunciation

Pronunciation-based problems occur when learners do not know the English sound system and therefore use the wrong letters (Al-Jabri, 2006). Templeton (2004) and Wilde (1992) pointed out that pronunciation and word origin can affect spelling. Miressa & Dumesaa, (2011) believe that learning the spelling rules of English words is very difficult due to the discrepancy between the pronunciation of many words and its spelling system. They further state that getting a pronunciation out of alphabetic writing requires people to analyze the sound string down to the level of component sounds. English vowels are particularly challenging for African language speakers, and this is made more difficult by the variety of ways in which these vowels are spelt (DoE, 2008).

First Language Interference

Dulay, *et al* (as cited in Bhela, 1999) define 'interference' as the automatic transfer, due to habit, of the surface structure of the first language onto the surface of the

target language. Clark-Edmands (as cited in DuBois *et al*, 2007) points out that another probable factor for learners' inability to transfer correct spelling may be found within the child's own language area. This occurs when learners use a native language rule to spell in second language English (Al-Jarf: 2008:12). This view is also supported by Bailey, *et al* (as cited in DuBois *et al*, 2007) stating that the factor affecting the success of learner writers is the lack of experience with language. Ellis (as cited in Bhela, 1999) argues that language transfer is governed by learners' perceptions about what is transferable and by their stage of development in L2 learning. At this stage teachers need to follow learners' progress effectively and instruct them according to their needs and they must be able to analyze and interpret learners' writing and spelling development (Dorn, *et al* as cited in DuBois, *et al*, 2007).

Jarff (2008) categorizes factors due to language interference as follows:

Interlingual errors are those errors that result from language transfer caused by a learner's native language. Rimfott & Heift (2005) support this view by stating that interlingual errors are due to a transfer of patterns from the native language to the target language. Intralingual errors reflect incompetence at a particular stage of learning the L2 and illustrate some of the general characteristics of second language acquisition. Richards (as cited in Rimfott & Heift, 2005) states that intralingual errors reflect the general characteristics of rule learning, such as faulty generalization, incomplete application of rules, and failure to learn conditions under which rules apply.

Inability to understand sounds of the language system

With reference to the nature of spelling errors Medrano & Zych (1998) state that a lack of phonemic awareness contributes to poor spelling achievement. Some learners have an inability to understand how to work with the sounds of the language system. Examples of this include reversing beginnings of words, substituting similar letters, leaving off endings, and omitting letters (Clark-Edmands as cited in DuBois, *et al*, 2007). Bailey, *et al* (as cited in DuBois, *et al*, 2007) support this notion by stating that “The lack of phonics is one of the single biggest problems for elementary school learners.” If learners cannot hear and manipulate the sounds (phonemes) in spoken words, they will have a very difficult time in learning how to attach these sounds to letters and letter combinations. (Adams, as cited in Groff, 1996). Becoming phonologically aware prepares learners for later reading instruction, including instruction in phonics, word analysis, and spelling (Adams, as cited in Chard & Dickson, 1999). Ehri (1997) states that learning to read and spell will induce explicit phonemic awareness for words.

Early training in phonemic awareness

Studies have shown that early training in phonemic awareness enhances early word recognition and developmental spelling (Cain, 2009; Moats, 2006; and Pijper, 2003). There is no research that proves there is one best way to teach phonemic awareness and there is no evidence that any approach either traditional or whole language is superior in developing phonemic awareness (Ehri & Nunes, 2002). Hulme, *et al* (as cited in Pijper, 2003) used a portion of a test, e.g. rhyming syllable, syllable-tapping tasks, and onset-rhyme judgement tasks in developing learners’

phonological awareness skills. In isiXhosa, syllable tapping is probably a good strategy. For English speaking children, rhyming is a good strategy.

However there is still controversy regarding which of the phonological awareness skills is the most important in the development of spelling and reading. Some maintain that rhyming and syllable-tapping predict different areas of spelling skills (Muter & Diethelm, 2001). IsiXhosa background learners would develop phonemic and phonological awareness in isiXhosa. Others suggest that rhyming is definitely the most predictive (Bryant & Bradely as cited in Pijper, 2003). Ehri and Nunes (2002) suggest that segmenting appear to be a key and is central to spelling and can and should be addressed systematically within the context of children's writing and spelling.

On the other hand Moats (2006) points out that the best evidence on spelling indicated that phonological awareness instruction (which covers all levels of the speech sound system, including word boundaries, phonemes, syllables, etc.) improves spelling in first-graders, and that phonics instruction (which is more narrowly focused on the relationship between letters and the sounds) has a positive effect on spelling achievement in the primary grades.

In addition to this Moats (2006) suggest that phoneme awareness training helps learners in the early stages of learning to spell and helps remediate the problems of poor spellers at any age. Cain (2009) supports this view by emphasizing that phoneme awareness training is an obvious place to start, **but** what may not be so obvious is the importance of introducing young learners to higher level content, such

as some vowels, syllable types, and inflections (i.e. the suffixes, like *–s* and *–ing*, that alter the number, person, or tense of words). For example, first-graders should be introduced to the vowel-consonant *e* syllable type since it appears in so many words they are learning to read and write, but those learners may not master this syllable type until second or even third grade (Pijper, 2003). Likewise, older learners who are behind in spelling and/or reading may need to return to some lower level content they have not yet mastered (Moats, 2006).

Perhaps the most exciting finding emanating from research on phonological awareness is that critical levels of phonological awareness can be developed through carefully planned instruction, and this development has a significant influence on learners' reading and spelling achievement (Bryant & Bradely, as cited in Pijper, 2003). Despite the promising findings, however, many questions remain unanswered, and many misconceptions about phonological awareness persist (Chard & Dickson, 1999). For example, researchers are looking for ways to determine how much and what type of instruction is necessary and for whom (Chapman, 2002). Moreover, many people are uncertain about the relationship between phonological awareness and early reading and spelling (Chard & Dickson, 1999). However, despite the numerous correlation and cross-sectional studies, we still have little evidence on the prospective relationships between more specific phonemic awareness and reading and spelling development using unselected groups at school age (Lerkkanen, *et al*, 2004). However, phonological awareness appears to have a crucial influence on children's spelling development, more than for their reading acquisition, since to spell a word correctly the child must be more aware of its speech sounds than to read (Groff, 1996). Teaching phonics is important

because in order to sound out the spellings of words, learners need to know the sounds that individual letters make (DuBois, *et al*, 2007).

The bottom line is that teachers need to be explicitly trained in phonological analysis in order to increase their own phonemic awareness (Myers, *et al* as cited in DuBois, *et al*, 2007). With this knowledge, they would be able to assist learners in moving from sounding words out to being able to visualize the conventional spellings of words (Laminack & Wood, 1996).

Traditional view of spelling instruction

In the past, spelling was usually taught as a separate subject; memorization was thought to be the key to its mastery (Lutz, 1986). Moreover spelling was typically taught through drill and practice, memorization, workbook, repetition, word list and homework with emphasis on correctness (Brasacchio, Kuhn & Martin, 2001). Treiman, *et al* (1997) recommends formal instruction that impresses upon learners that they "must memorize the E of *her*". Treiman, *et al* (1997:46) state that learners who reverse letters in words when spelling them "... especially need drill on the correct order of the letters." In contrast Lutz (1986) points out that learning to spell is not a matter of memorizing words, but a developmental process that culminates in a much greater understanding of English spelling than simple relationships between speech sounds and their graphic representations. Wilde (1992) supports this view by stating that learning to spell is a complex cognitive activity whereby increased knowledge of the orthographic system is incorporated into a learner's current understandings. This statement makes it clear that spelling is a subject area that must be taught to learners at their own developmental levels; spelling is a cognitive

process, much more in depth than simply memorizing letter and sound relationships (Dubois, *et al*, 2007).

In addition Gentry (1982) states that spelling instruction should be embedded in writing instruction and learners need many experiences with purposeful writing. However, Smith (as cited in Laminack & Wood, 1996) contends this by arguing that there is only one way for anyone to become a good speller and that is to find out and remember correctly, using the conventional spelling.

Formal instruction

There is lack of agreement, however, concerning the degree and the nature of attention allocated to spelling instruction apart from ongoing reading and writing activities (Encyclopaedia of Education, 2002). A study done by Calaway, *et al* (as cited in Medrano & Zych, 1998) found that the worst spelling came from those who had received formal spelling instruction unrelated to reading and writing. Hence, Phenix and Scott-Dune (as cited in DuBois, *et al*, 2007) states that teachers need to strike a balance in teaching so that learners understand the place of spelling, and have enough confidence as spellers that they are not inhibited as writers. Perhaps learners need to be encouraged to explore a range of different spelling strategies within their classroom environment (Farrington-Flint, Stash & Stiller, 2008).

Cramer and Cipielewski (as cited in Groff, 1996) offer some controversial opinions as to why learners make spelling mistakes, and especially the same ones year after year. They further argue that researchers make the dubious assumption that one can look at a learner's misspelling of a word and tell whether it was caused:

- by misunderstanding how to spell words correctly, or
- by “inattention” on the speller's part.

The fact that misspellings of certain homophones persist as the most common misspellings made by learners, grade one through grade eight, is presented as "proof" of this "inattention" to the spelling task (Cramer and Cipielewski as cited in Groff, 1996).

2.6.3 Strategies that can be used to monitor spelling

Researchers have found that spelling instruction and practice should be provided in the classroom through different avenues. Learners must be given frequent opportunities to write and teachers need to provide a variety of purposeful writing experiences as well as help learners to develop spelling consciousness (Gentry, 1982). It does not seem important or necessary that one embrace any one particular approach to the teaching of spelling strategies; what is important is that learners are indeed taught spelling directly” (Degeneffe & Ward as cited in Dubois *et al.*, 2007). Spelling needs to involve many opportunities to develop higher order thinking skills to promote appropriate transfer (Medrano & Zych, 1998). Peha (as cited in DuBois, *et al*, 2007) offers many strategies for improving spelling instruction; these include creating spelling lists that are related to learners’ writing needs and teaching words based on meaning, spelling patterns or common sounds. However Gentry (1982) continues in arguing, that expert spellers are born, and cannot be developed in school.

Gentry (2004) lists six procedures that have received research support:

- Allot sixty to seventy-five minutes per week to formal spelling instruction.
- Present the words to be studied in list or column form.
- Give the learners a pre-test to determine which words in the lesson are unknown. Have them study the unknown words, and then administer a post-test.
- Have the learners correct their own spelling test under your direction.
- Teach a systematic technique for studying unknown words.
- Use spelling games to make spelling lessons more fun.

Moreover the Department of Education (1998) states that explicit and systematic teaching of spelling means that teachers need to provide a learning environment that:

- Links spelling with all other aspects of language learning, particularly reading and writing
- Teaches phonological, visual, morphemic and etymological spelling knowledge
- Gives regular opportunities for learners to demonstrate and reflect on their understandings about spelling
- Teaches dictionary skills and regular model of using dictionaries
- Monitors, analyses and gives feedback on spelling performance and progress
- Teaches learners to practise the spelling of words used frequently and those which are essential vocabulary in key learning areas

- Develops spelling skills and strategies throughout the stages of schooling
- Caters for the spelling needs of a diversity of learners and intervenes early to assist learners who are experiencing difficulties with spelling
- Promotes the importance of positive home–school partnerships in spelling
- Develops proof reading and editing skills

Observing and monitoring learners' spelling strategies

It is clear that learners have a wide repertoire of strategies that they can choose from in order to aid their spelling. They can rely on a single or multiple strategies depending on the way in which they were taught. For example, they can look at the prefixes or suffixes when spelling a word (Kernaghan, 2007). They can use a meta-linguistic spelling strategy that involves recourse to knowledge about the language (James & Garrett as cited in James, undated). According to Dixon-Krauss & Sabey (as cited in Kernaghan, 2007) learners can acquire this spelling strategy through instruction.

The National Literacy Secretariat of Human Resources Development (1998) categorised learners' spelling strategies as follows:

- Some spellings can be remembered by **learning a rule**, (e.g. "i" before "e" except after "c", etc.)
- Some spelling can be learned **phonetically**. If you pronounce the word correctly, you can often spell it correctly.
- Some spelling can be learned by breaking the word into **syllables** or smaller sections.

- Some words can be learned by using “tricks” that are appropriate to your **learning style**.
- Some spelling words must, unfortunately, be **memorized**.

Hence Laminack & Wood (1996) state that teachers must become habitual “kidwatchers” and observe learners as they write; that will help them plan later instruction and they may help a learner with a spelling “bug” as they see it occurring. Farrington-Flint, *et al* (2008) and Laminack & Wood (1996) state that the best instruction grows out of paying close attention to what learners are doing: looking at their spellings, noticing how they come up with spellings, and asking them about spelling. By observing a learner’s spelling strategies teachers will gain insight into how individual learners learn to control spelling as they grow into competent writers (Wilde, 1992). Dorn, *et al* (as cited in DuBois, *et al*, 2007) emphasize the importance of monitoring learners’ writing samples in order to see writing and spelling development over time. This will help teachers to provide plenty of opportunities for learners to read and write which will include modeling by adults and peers if spelling transfer is going to occur (Medrano & Zych, 1998). However, Laminack & Wood (1996) emphasize that teachers have to communicate regularly with parents to help them understand how their children are being helped to become better writers and spellers.

Encouraging learners to engage in self reflection

Encouraging learners to engage in self-reflection on the efficiency with which certain strategies can be used, and providing direct feedback in their spelling development, could allow learners to discover more efficient methods with which to improve their

spelling (Alibali as cited in Farrington-Flint, *et al*, 2008). The best way to correct the learners' errors is to let them correct their own errors with the teacher's help and the second best way is to let peers correct each others' errors (Krishnalalitha, 2010). This will encourage learners to attempt spelling independently before seeking assistance from an adult (Laminack & Wood, 1996). Pressley and Woloshyn (as cited in Medrano & Zych, 1998) supports this notion by stating that in self-correction, learners gain metacognitive skills that will apply to their spelling. Hence DuBois *et al*. (2007) state that teaching learners to reread their own writing and make corrections independently is an important part of teaching learners the importance of correct spelling. Loren (2002) states that increasingly across the school years; learners should be expected to attend to the correctness of their spellings in their writing.

Proof reading

Proofreading serves to "operationalize the connections between reading, writing, spelling and phonics development" (Turbill, 2000:209). Teaching learners to reread their own writing and make corrections independently is an important part of teaching learners the importance of correct spelling (Dubois, *et al*, 2007). Good teachers teach proofreading skills and stress the value of correct spelling as well, but usually only for the final draft of a composition being readied for publication (Gentry, 1982). These skills related to using references, proofreading and checking writing, should be developed from the earliest stages of learning to write (Croft 1983). This helps the learners to be aware of ways in which to edit and correct their own writing and the importance of spelling through proofreading (Dubois, *et al*, 2007).

According to the research, good spellers viewed proofreading as their responsibility (Hughes & Searle 2000). Gentry (1982:192) discussed the importance of having learners correct their own spelling, "One technique frequently cited as being most effective is this: have learners correct their own spelling errors immediately after taking a spelling test ... having learners correct their own errors immediately seems to aid their visual memory." Although both the act of reading and the act of proofreading one's own writing for spelling errors involve the learner in the application of spelling knowledge, neither of these appear to engage the learner in the types of explicit attention and thinking necessary for the abstraction of the logical patterns in the spelling system (Encyclopaedia of Education, 2002).

Integrating spelling across the curriculum

Literature reveals that spelling experiences should be meaningful to learners and should be integrated across the curriculum and should not be thought of in isolation (Hong and Stafford as cited in Medrano & Zych, 1998). Laminack & Wood (1996) add emphasis to this view by stating that curriculum and instruction in spelling must be connected to learners' writing if it is to be effective. Gentry (1982) points out that teaching spelling as part of the whole curriculum will help create an effective spelling program. This means that a spelling program should not involve meaningless word lists, but rather be a combination of direct instruction and authentic writing activities (Medrano & Zych, 1998). Moreover curriculum and instruction in spelling must be connected to learners' writing if it is to be effective (Laminack & Wood, 1996). Therefore an informed, attentive teacher can create a powerful, effective curriculum in which spelling grows out of learners' own exploration with spelling as they write (Laminack & Wood, 1996).

Spelling with reading

Researchers have found that there is a relationship between reading and spelling. (Ehri 1997, 2000; Hughes and Searle, 2000; and Templeton, 2004). Krashen (2002) tied spelling more closely to reading stating that learning to read and learning to spell are one and the same and there is increasing evidence that the relationship is, in fact, a reciprocal one. Reading is the starting point of spelling; words that learners can read provide the basis for word study (Bear, Invernizzi, Templeton, & Johnston, 2004). If learners are not being exposed at home to reading and writing at an early age, they may not be successful as spellers later in life (Cunningham as cited in Medrano & Zych, 1998). This notion is supported by Gentry (2004:11) in stating that “Learners learn to read by spelling” and it is the knowledge of the alphabetic principle in spelling that facilitates reading. This phenomenon could be due to the fact that spelling and reading/writing employ the same lexical representations (Templeton, 2004). Hence Gentry (1982) states that teachers do need to teach formal spelling lessons to supplement what learners learn about spelling through reading and writing.

In addition to this Templeton (2004) asserts that the majority of learners who struggle with reading and/or writing also struggle with spelling. Ehri (2000) supports this view. According to Kamhi and Hinton (2000), there are two basic views regarding the relationship between reading and spelling. The first focuses on dissociation between the two and the second focuses on similarities between the two. Kamhi and Hinton (2000) assert that if reading and spelling relied on different mechanisms, one would expect a weaker relationship between reading and spelling to be evident.

However, Frith (1980) contends that good and poor spellers read differently. Frith (1980) further states that good spellers read using full clues, which provide them with the full orthographic picture of words; they look at all of the letters and the order in which they are placed. Poor spellers, on the other hand, read with partial clues. In supporting this, Russek & Weinberg (1993) claim that there is no evidence here, that poor spelling is necessarily caused by deficiencies in reading or vocabulary. Clearly, we should not assume that progress in reading will necessarily result in progress in spelling (Moats, 2006). For older learners (as well as adults), the role of meaning in the spelling system does not become apparent simply through reading and writing (Encyclopaedia of Education, 2002). The reason for this is that learners can have spelling difficulties despite good reading skills (Kamhi & Hinton, 2000).

Wilde (1992) argues that learners can write more words than they can read: Learners' reading vocabulary is bigger than their correct spelling vocabulary but smaller than their writing vocabulary. Hughes and Searle (2000) caution, however, that reading alone is not sufficient to create good spellers; learners must also be involved in the process of generating their own spellings through writing. Writing allows for exploration of learners' understandings about how words work and "practice in the full orthographic retrieval process demanded by spelling" (Perfetti 1997:30). This statement affirms that spelling must be taught to learners; most learners cannot learn spelling solely from their experiences with reading and writing (DuBois, *et al*, 2007).

Encourage and model Invented spelling strategy

Invented spelling refers to young learners' attempts to use their best judgments about spelling; they "invent" spellings for words by arranging letters (Lutz, 1986). It relies on phonology and provides learners with the opportunity to reveal their phonetic knowledge (Brasacchio, *et al*, 2001). The words they spell correctly show which phonics concepts, spelling patterns, and other language features they've learned to apply, and the words they invent and misspell show what they're still learning to use and those features of spelling that they haven't noticed or learned about (Tompkins, 2007). It is evident from this that the act of inventing personalized spellings of words is sufficient to cause a learner to "... refine those spellings and progress developmentally toward correctness" (Groff, 1996:18).

The important point is that words to be learnt originate in each learner's writing, and that these words are sufficiently general in their use to have a reasonable likelihood of being used again (Croft, 1983). Hence Clarke (as cited in Chapman, 2002) found that learners in classrooms where invented spelling was modelled and encouraged developed superior spelling and phonic analysis skills in comparison to learners where it was not encouraged or allowed. The use of invented spelling allows the learners to convey a message through writing without concentrating heavily on correct spelling, which helps to open the door to a learner's creativity (Brasacchio, *et al*, 2001).

Moreover invented spelling is the first step toward mastering a difficult orthographic system and it is a worthy vehicle for teaching phonics as part of learning to write (Savage, 2001). Lutz (1986:1) supports this notion by pointing out those learners using invented spelling "... benefited from the practice of matching sound segments of words to letters as they wrote and from using their own sound sequence analysis." It indicates learners' emerging knowledge of conventional spelling patterns and enables them to focus first on the purpose of writing - communicating their thoughts - without the worry of having everything spelled exactly right (Savage, 2001). Hughes and Searle (2000) go so far as to say that through the use of invented spelling, learners are able to write before they know all the formal conventions of written English.

However this does not mean that learners are left to spell in a manner that they wish; there are still set expectations that are required to be met by the learners while completing a written task (Brasacchio, *et al*, 2001). Again, it must be emphasized that the claims that invented spelling develops more spelling ability than otherwise has not been verified empirically (Groff, 1996). Invented spelling is sometimes criticized because it appears that learners are learning bad habits by misspelling words, but researchers have confirmed that learners grow more quickly in phonemic awareness, phonics, and spelling when they use invented spelling as long as they are also receiving spelling instruction (Snow, Burns, & Griffin, as cited in Tompkins, 2007). Critics of invented spelling denounce it as a sign of instructional laziness and condemn it as a means of dumbing down the educational process (Savage, 2001). When learners are encouraged to "invent" the spellings of words (instead of writing them according to direct and systematic instruction), over time these pupils will spell

a word differently, depending on the particular "natural" stage of spelling development in which they happens to be (Groff, 1996).

This means that teachers need to be aware of these effective ways of teaching spelling so that learners transfer correct spelling into daily written work (DuBois, *et al*, 2007). They must make efforts within classrooms to have learners understand the significant relationship between the ability to spell words and understand their meaning and this will have a beneficial effect on their spelling (Croft, 1983).

Expected level of spelling performance: Evaluation of spelling

The Department of Education provided an interim policy for continuous assessment and evaluation in the interim syllabus (DoE, 1997). This approach evaluates and assesses achievements and progress of learners and it requires authentic and learner centred assessment (DoE, 1997). Croft (1983) stated that the key to dealing responsibly with spelling in any successful writing program is assessment of spelling in use. Tierney (as cited in Richards, 2001) agreed with the above statement by stating that assessment requires a holistic approach using authentic learner centred assessment, responsive evaluation, classroom based assessment or constructive assessment. Therefore when isiXhosa background learners are assessed in terms of spelling errors they commit, teachers need to consider the above criteria.

Wilde (1992) supports this view by stating that we should be guided by these four principles:

- We should observe children's spelling strategies on the basis of natural writing rather than a test

- Spelling is evaluated analytically rather than as merely right or wrong
- Spelling is looked at in terms of children's strategies rather than in isolation
- The teacher should evaluate spelling as an informed professional rather than as a mechanical test scorer.

Using Word families: Spelling words list strategy

Ideally teachers should make use of word families and spelling lists to meet the unique requirements of their own class. Teaching learners word families is a powerful strategy because it draws their attention to spelling patterns that they can use when they are writing (Medrano & Zych, 1998). According to Davies and Ritchie (as cited in Condry, *et al*, 2010) Teaching Handwriting, Reading and Spelling Skills (THRASS) is a synthetic and analytic phonics programme where young learners learn to spell, read and write by using pictures and keywords. Mead (as cited in Condry, *et al*, 2010:2) claims that "THRASS can more than double the normal rate of progress for learning reading and spelling for primary and secondary school learners and also for dyslexics and those for whom English is not their first language." Therefore, when investigating the nature of spelling errors committed by isiXhosa background learners, THRASS can be adopted to develop learners' spelling skills.

Pienaar (as cited in Richards, 2001) conducted a study on the efficacy of two spelling lists, one his own and one a published spelling list, on two different groups of learners. After the intervention of the standardized spelling test, the group utilizing Pienaar's list produced higher scores. This implies that spelling word lists should be created from a list of high frequency words and words that learners are already using in their writing and this spelling lists should be words that learners will use in their

own writing and reading (DuBois, *et al*, 2007). Therefore teachers can select spelling words from varied sources, for example, words can be selected for formal instruction from two sources: the learners' own writing and a list of high frequency words (Lutz, 1986).

However not all teachers are either experienced or confident enough to use this approach and would prefer to use a published spelling list (DuBois, *et al*, 2007). Teachers could also become familiar with this teaching approach while using a pre-formed list and then move on to their own functional spelling approach (Richards, 2001). This needs to be taken into account when compiling a spelling list and only words that have an appropriate level of difficulty should be included in the list.

The classroom environment: Creating a Print Rich environment

According to Scher (1999) this refers to a room or an environment that has a variety of print abundantly displayed, that encourages learners to read and write by virtue of the rich literacy environment that surrounds the learners. It includes:

- a variety of learner and adult generated books
- writing tools, labels, lists, poems and song charts
- samples of adult and learner writing
- helping tools for the creation of learner writing, signs, poems, student dictations and original stories.

One very important component of a print-rich environment is the word wall; a word wall is an interactive display of words on the classroom wall which can be used to aid in student spelling (DuBois, *et al*, 2007). A print-rich learning environment sets the tone for ways in which learners can discover the relationships between spoken and written language (Garza & Lira, 2008). Introducing learners to words commonly found in the environment, such as names of people, places and products, is often the best strategy for learners to adopt during spelling, and remains the most frequently used procedure compared to the other viable spelling strategies available (Farrington-Flint, *et al*, 2008; and Davies & Ritchie as cited in Condry, *et al*, 2010). Hence Cairney (2009) points out that the only way that learners will learn to be effective spellers is by being immersed in a rich language environment that supports them as readers, which offers them many varied opportunities to write and encourages an environment where it is natural to explore words and 'play' with them. Hence Medrano & Zych (1998) believed that an absence of the print-rich environment may be another factor contributing to the problem of poor spelling skills for learners.

2.7 Conclusion

In this chapter the researcher has given an introduction to spelling, the nature of spelling errors, spelling instruction and the stages of spelling development. This information assisted in understanding the factors contributing to spelling errors. In chapter three the researcher will outline the research methods used for this study.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This chapter justifies the research methodology which is the qualitative approach. The essence of using this qualitative approach was its naturalistic character - studying of real people in natural settings rather than in artificial isolation ((Marshall, 1996; Tellis, 1997). Data collecting strategies that were appropriate for this qualitative research are explained as well as the research design, research sample, and the plan for the analysis of data.

The chapter is structured as follows:

3.2 Research Paradigm: Interpretive

3.3 Research Approach: Qualitative

3.4 Research Design: Case Study

3.5 Sampling of research site and participants

3.6 Data Collection: Document Analysis

: Semi-structured Interview

: Direct Observation

3.7 Data Collection and Analysis Process

3.8 Ethical Issues

3.9 Phases of Data Collection / Research Path

3.10 Conclusion

3.2 Research paradigm

The notion of a research paradigm

The term paradigm is defined as a systematic set of beliefs and methods that provide a view of the nature of reality (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Birley & Moreland (1998) point out that a paradigm is a theoretical model within which the research is being conducted, and organizes the researcher's view of reality (though they may not be aware of it). This is in line with Bassey's (1999) claim that a research paradigm is a network of coherent ideas about the nature of the world and of the functions of researchers, which, adhered to by a group of researchers, conditions the patterns of their thinking and underpins their research actions.

Interpretive paradigm

The interpretive paradigm seemed relevant for this study. This framework is used to investigate the nature of spelling errors of grade three IsiXhosa-English bilingual learners. Cohen, Manion & Morrison (2007) define the interpretive paradigm as an attempt to understand individual interpretations of the world around them. They further claim that the interpretive paradigm works directly with experiences and understanding of the theories that emerge as more information becomes generated during the research process. In the light of the above definition, the researcher regarded herself as an interpretivist who interpreted and gave meaning to the data that was collected on the nature of spelling errors committed by grade three isiXhosa background learners in English as a second language.

The purpose of a study tries to understand the way in which people make meaning in their lives; the appropriate research paradigm was found to be the interpretive paradigm (Voce, 2004). Schwandt (as cited in Gephart, 1999) states that interpretive research is fundamentally concerned with meaning and it seek to understand social members' definition of a situation. This notion is also supported by Voce (2004). Through this paradigm the researcher was able to understand the learners' mental phenomena and endeavoured to understand the way they spelled English words.

Carson (as cited in Adam, 2010) supports what other researchers are saying by stating that the interpretive approach allows the focus of the researcher to be on the understanding of what is happening in a given context. Hence Mertens (2005) points out that the researcher and the participants are interlocked in an interactive process prescribing a more personal, interactive mode of data collection. The interpretive paradigm enabled the researcher to share the feelings and the interpretations of the people she/he studied and to see things through their eyes (Adam, 2010; Cohen, *et al*, 2007). Through the interpretive paradigm the researcher was able to discover the natural flow of events and processes as they happened, and how participants interpreted them. Moreover, the researcher interacted closely with the participants in gaining insight and formed a clear understanding as to how learners made meaning when they were spelling words.

3.3 Research Approach: Qualitative research

This study adopted the qualitative research stance. According to Creswell (1994) qualitative research is a research process whereby researchers build up a complex, holistic framework by analyzing narratives and observations, conducting the

research work in the natural habitat. However, Leedy & Omrod (2001) broadly define qualitative research as any kind of research that produces findings not arrived at by means of statistical procedures or other means of quantification. Hence De Vos, Strydom, Fouche, & Delport (2002); Mack, Woodsong, MacQueen, Guest, & Namey (2005) and Marshall (1996) state that qualitative research provides illumination and understanding of complex psychosocial issues and are most useful for answering humanistic 'why?' and 'how?' questions. This indicates that qualitative research is inherently multi-method in focus (Flick as cited in Denzin & Lincoln, 2000).

For these reasons qualitative research was fundamental in this study as it focused on the experiences of human behaviour (Babbie & Mouton, 2001; Strauss & Corbin, 1990; Denzin & Lincoln 2000 & Patton 2002). In this case human behaviour referred to learners' spelling practices where the focus was on the nature of their spelling errors. Therefore, the researcher adopted qualitative research which was used to better understand phenomenon and gain a new perspective on what was already known (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992; and Strauss and Corbin, 1990). The essence of using this qualitative approach is its naturalistic-studying of real people in natural settings rather than in artificial isolation (ibid).

However, one of the major disadvantages of qualitative research is that the subjectivity of the inquiry leads to difficulties in establishing the reliability and validity of the approaches and information (Adam, 2010). In order to ensure validity and avoid subjectivity Stenbacka (2001) suggests that the researcher must remain non-

judgemental throughout the study process and so that report may be constructed in a balanced way.

In responding to Stenbacka (2001) the researcher considered the following issues when the research was conducted in avoiding subjectivity, namely: reliability and validity.

Reliability

Reliability is the extent to which a researcher is using the same methods can obtain the same results as those of a prior study (LeCompte & Preissle, 1993). The researcher maintains reliability by asking the same type of questions as possible to individual respondents (Bryman & Burgess as cited in Maponya, 2010). To be specific with the term of reliability in qualitative research, Lincoln & Guba (1985) use “dependability”, which closely corresponds to the notion of “reliability” in quantitative research. Dependability is assessment of the quality of the integrated process of data collection, data analysis and theory generation (LeCompte & Preissle, 1993). Dependability can be used to examine both the process and the product of the research for consistency (Hoepfl, 1997). In the same vein, Seale (1999) endorses the concept of dependability with the concept of consistency or reliability in qualitative research. In contrast, Stenbacka (2001) argues that since the reliability issue concerns measurements then it has no relevance in qualitative research. Stenbacka (2001) adds the issue of reliability as an irrelevant matter in the judgement of quality of qualitative research - therefore, if it is used, then the consequence is rather that the study is no good.

In spite of the above argument, the researcher achieved reliability as consistency of data and the steps of the research were verified through examination of such items as raw data, data reduction products, and process notes (Campbell, 1996). On this issue Kumar (1991) points out that it is essential to stay at least two or three days on a site to gather valid, reliable data. Kumar (1991) further states that, if the observer stays for relatively longer periods, people become less self conscious and gradually start behaving naturally. For this reason the researcher collected data over a period of four months in the field and adopted the following instruments which were document analysis, direct observation and interviews in gathering necessary raw data to ensure reliability. The classroom visits took place three times; the first visit was for appointment, the second visit was for discussion of the lesson to be observed, the third visit was the observation of the lesson. Other cases for visitation were for learners' book collection which was done on two visits. The interview was conducted three times, the first time was the lengthy interview and other cases were for clarity and elaboration on data collected.

Validity

The concept of validity is described by a wide range of terms in qualitative studies. It is not a single, fixed or universal concept, but rather a contingent construct, inescapably grounded in the processes and intentions of particular research methodologies and projects (Winter, 2000). Validity refers to the appropriateness, meaningfulness and usefulness of the inference the researchers make based on the data they collect (Fraenkel & Wallen as cited in Maponya, 2010). Although some qualitative researchers have argued that the term validity is not applicable to qualitative research, they have realized the need for some kind of qualifying check or

measure for their research (Golafshani, 2003). For example, Creswell (1994) suggests that validity is affected by the researcher's perception of validity in the study and his/her choice of paradigm assumption. Stenbacka (2001) argues that the concept of validity should be redefined for qualitative research.

In order to minimize the threats to validity Cohen, *et al* (2007) stipulate the following:

- Choosing an appropriate time scale.
- Selecting an appropriate methodology for answering research questions.
- Selecting appropriate instrumentation for gathering the type of data required.

In this view, the researcher enhanced validity by drawing conclusions supported by data collected from a number of different instruments which were: document analysis, direct observation and interviews.

3.4 Research design: *Case study*

This study aimed at understanding the nature of spelling errors of isiXhosa-English bilingual learners. The researcher was interested in gaining an in-depth understanding of these experiences in spelling: **a case study** allowed the researcher to explore this understanding. It allowed the researcher to determine in advance what evidence to gather and what analysis techniques to use with the data to answer the research questions (Soy, 1997). Babbie & Mouton (2001); Cohen, *et al* (2007); Feagin, *et al* (as cited in Tellis, 1997) and Merriam (2001) state that a case study is an ideal methodology when a holistic, in-depth investigation is needed. It facilitates the exploration of a phenomenon within its context (Baxter & Jack, 2007).

In line with the above argument and protocol of case study design, in this study the researcher, therefore, collected data on the nature of spelling errors of isiXhosa background learners in ESL through the use of the following methods, namely:

- Semi structured interviews,
- Classroom observation, and
- Document analysis methods.

This ensures that the issue is not explored through one lens, but rather a variety of lenses which allows for multiple facets of the phenomenon to be revealed and understood (Baxter & Jack, 2007). The researcher also believes that the findings of this study will play a role in helping teachers in reflecting on their practices of developing learners' spelling in the classroom, as well as illuminating learners' spelling practices with regard to spelling errors that they are actually using or failing to use in their spelling in ESL.

In this study the case was eight grade three learners who were identified as good spellers and struggling spellers. A teacher teaching the selected learners also participated. The researcher used the case study design to get in-depth information on the nature of the spelling errors of isiXhosa-English bilingual learners.

Davies (2005) has, however, mentioned the following disadvantages in a case study method:

- It does not ensure reliability of findings or generality of findings
- Intense exposure to the study of the case biases the findings.

However these disadvantages did not contaminate this study because the researcher stayed for a relatively longer period of time; as a result of which the participants became less self conscious and gradually started behaving naturally; and this promoted the reliability of the data collected (Kumar, 1991).

3.5 Sampling of research sites and participants

Sampling techniques

Maxwell (1996) defines sampling as decisions about where to conduct the research and whom to involve, an essential part of the research process. De Vos, *et al* (2002); Fridah (undated); and Johnson & Christensen (2000) explain sampling as the act, process, or technique of selecting a suitable sample. It is clear that sampling usually involves people and settings, events and processes (Maxwell, 1996). Sampling is done whenever one gathers information from only a fraction of the population of a group or a phenomenon under study (Walliman, 2006). The sample size is directly related to the purpose of the study, the research problem, the major data collection technique and the availability of information-rich participants (McMillan & Schumacher, 2001).

There are basically two types of sampling procedures, namely random and non-random sampling. Random sampling techniques give the most reliable representation of the whole population, while non-random techniques, relying on the judgement of the researcher or an accident, cannot generally be used to make generalizations about the whole population (Walliman, 2006).

There are three most common sampling methods used in qualitative research: purposive sampling, quota sampling, and snowball sampling (Department of System Management, 2003; Mack, *et al*, 2005; and Marshall, 1996). The following section will discuss these methods of sampling and identify the relevant tool for this study.

Quota sampling

According to Mack, *et al* (2005) quota sampling focuses on how many people with which characteristics to include as participants. For example that might include age, place of residence, gender, class, profession, marital status, use of a particular contraceptive method, HIV status, etc (*ibid*). To be clearer, quota sampling is more specific with respect to sizes and proportions of subsamples, with subgroups chosen to reflect corresponding proportions in the population (Ross, undated). This means that quota sampling would disadvantage this study as the researcher did not focus strictly on the numbers of learners with spelling errors but on the nature of spelling errors, hence it was not used as a tool for collecting data.

Snowball sampling

Snowballing sampling is also known as chain referral sampling (Mack, *et al*, 2005). It is often used to find and recruit “hidden populations,” that is, groups not easily accessible to researchers through other sampling strategies (Patton, 2002). Once more snowball sampling was not suitable for this study because the participants were grade three isiXhosa background learners with spelling errors who were easy to reach (in their classroom).

Purposive sampling

Patton (2002) and Trochim & Donnelly (2006) define purposeful sampling as the process of selecting samples that are rich with information needed for the research and are fit for the study. Information-rich cases are those from which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the study (Cohen, *et al*, 2007). This process of purposive sampling is based on the assumption that the researcher is able to select elements which represent a 'typical sample' from the appropriate target population (Macmillan & Schumacher, 2001; and Ross, undated).

However it is critical to be certain of the knowledge and skill of the informant when doing purposive sampling, as inappropriate informants will render the data meaningless and invalid (Godambe as cited in Tongco). Hence Marshall (1996) and Morse (1991) state that when obtaining a purposeful sample, the researcher selects participants according to the needs of the study. The researcher ensured the success of the purposive sampling by reviewing and analysing the data in conjunction with data collection (Mack, *et al*, 2005). The study used purposive sampling which is a form of selecting purposefully to permit inquiry into and understanding of a phenomenon in depth (Patton, 2002).

In line with the above argument, purposive sampling seemed relevant for this study because it catered for the needs of this study. It allowed the researcher to select participants who would provide rich information. In this case grade three isiXhosa background learners in ESL were information rich participants of this study. The teacher teaching the selected learners also was an information-rich participant for this study. It also allowed the researcher to identify in advance the characteristics

needed from the participants, which were the learners that are experiencing difficulties in spelling in EFAL.

Sampling of the research site for this study

The sample of this study consisted of one primary school. The researcher used this particular primary school because it starts from grade one to grade seven and includes the grades focused on in this study. Moreover as has been indicated earlier that this study is a case study, this approach allowed the researcher to use in-depth investigation into a specific and relatively small area of interest. Hence the researcher focused on one primary school. This primary school was an isiXhosa medium school in a Black Township, in the East London District in the Buffalo City Municipality in the Eastern Cape Province. However, in this school English was taught as a subject in grade three. The researcher chose the isiXhosa medium primary school because literature reviewed in chapter two revealed that researchers have examined spelling errors of Afrikaans-English and German-English learners. There seems to be no literature on the nature of spelling errors of isiXhosa background learners. For this study the researcher worked with one grade three class in the school.

Sampling of participants

An appropriate sample size for a qualitative study is one that adequately answers the research question (Marshall, 1996). DePaulo (2000) states that, in qualitative research, the sample must be big enough to ensure that we are likely to hear most or all of the perceptions that might be important. Perhaps an N (the number in the

sample) of 30 respondents is a reasonable starting point for deciding the qualitative sample size that can reveal the full range (or nearly the full range) of potentially important perceptions (ibid). Hence Mack, *et al* (2005) state that sample sizes, which may or may not be fixed prior to data collection, depend on the resources and time available, as well as the study's objectives.

From a classroom of thirty three learners the sample of eight learners in a grade three classroom participated in the study. The following criterion was used by the teacher in the selection of the learners: four good spellers; four struggling spellers.

Access to participants and the research site

Gaining access to the participants and the research site was through the Department of Education and the principal of the school. The researcher used the provincial District Education Officer and principal of the school as *gatekeepers* (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2003). A letter requesting to conduct research in the school was written and given to the principal. (***See Appendix D***)

3.6 Data collection

Creswell (1994) describes data collection as the steps that involve setting boundaries for the study, collecting information through observation, interviews, documents and visual materials and establishing the protocol for recording the information. The researcher collected data in the form of words rather than numbers through recorded interviews, observations and document analysis. Data was

collected in several ways. This section discusses the theoretical aspect of the data collection instruments used. The types of interviews revealed by the literature are discussed as well and the relevant tool for this study is identified. Their implementation is dealt with in section 3.9.

3.6.1 Data collection methods

Classroom observation

Observation is way of gathering data by watching behaviour, events, or noting physical characteristics in their natural setting (Cohen, *et al*, 2007). On the other hand, observation is not to report on individuals' performance, but to find out what kinds of problems in general are being encountered (Powell & Steel, 1996). Hence Cohen, *et al* (2007) noted that observation involves gathering live data from live situations and this is what the researcher has done. The researcher, therefore, observed a lesson where learners were introduced to a new phonic *sh* (during the main study in March 2011- June 2011) in a grade three classroom from one primary school. This enabled the researcher to gather necessary in-depth information for the study. Kumar (1991) points out that if the observer stays for relatively longer periods, people become less self conscious and gradually start behaving naturally.

Moreover, the researcher compiled an observation record form that listed the items observed and provided spaces to record observations (Kumar, 1991). These forms were similar to survey questionnaires, but the researcher recorded the observed scenarios and respondents' answers (Powell & Steel, 1996). They helped the researcher in standardizing the observation process and ensuring that all important items were covered (Kumar, 1991). McClure (2002) states that direct observation

facilitates better aggregation of data gathered. (***See Appendix C for a copy of classroom observation form***).

However on the negative side Kumar (1991) identified direct observation as susceptible to observer bias. Thus the negative side of direct observation did not contaminate the study because the researcher was guided by the written observation form on what was observed. The researcher used the written observation sheet that limited personal perceptions and bias because the event was experienced firsthand (McClure, 2002).

Document analysis

LeCompte & Preissle (1993) define documents as artefacts, symbolic materials such as writing and signs, which tell the researchers about the inner meaning of everyday events and they may yield descriptions of rare and extraordinary events in human life. In other words, documents are pre-produced text that has not been generated by the researcher (Cohen, *et al*, 2007). They are easily accessible, free and contain information that would take an investigator enormous time and effort to gather (Merriam, 2001). Hence the researcher interpreted and analyzed grade three learners' books to gather data on the nature of spelling errors. From these documents the researcher was able to pick up features of words which were difficult or easier to spell. These documentary data are a particularly good source for qualitative case studies because they grounded an investigation in the context of the problem being investigated (Merriam, 2001).

Although documents were a good source of data for numerous reasons, one of the *disadvantages* was the difficulty in determining their authenticity and accuracy, as they contained some built-in biases that the researcher was not aware of (Merriam, 2001). It was difficult to trace themes that were guiding learners' writing because there were no particular word families in the learners' books. To counter this, the researcher asked many different questions of the documents related to the research problem in trying to determine their origin and the reasons for being written (Merriam, 2001). This means that the researcher used genres of writing in looking at words misspelled before the case study and the words that were written during the study. Moreover these documents validated the study as they were based on reality and were guided by research goals and questions (Cohen, *et al*, 2007).

Types of interviews

Literature identifies the following types of interviews: structured interviews, unstructured interviews and semi-structured interviews.

Structured interviews

They can be defined as a professional discussion between two persons or one person and a group of persons (Hitchcock & Hughes as cited in Adam, 2010). They may be conducted by following a script of questions, asking the same questions, and in the same order to all respondents, and the instrument is administered in the same way to all respondents (McClure, 2002; Murphy, Dingwall, Greatbatch, Parker & Watson, 1998; and Savenye & Robinson, undated). Moreover structured interviews often incorporate tools such as questionnaires or attitude scales to collect the

information needed; as a result, oral or written results from interviews are acceptable (Patton, 2002).

Hitchcock & Hughes (as cited in Adam, 2010) classified the *advantages of structured interviews* in this manner:

- a) The interactions and behaviour of the interviewee can be observed and results can be noted.
- b) It can be used to lessen tension between the individual and the researcher and even motivate the subject to participate in the research.

In contrast to these advantages critics of structured interviewing have argued that such interviews do not and cannot achieve the degree of control they aspire to and, therefore, cannot be treated as a gold standard against which qualitative interviews can be measured and found wanting (Murphy, *et al*, 1998). Mishler (as cited in Murphy, *et. al*, 1998) summed up this critique by stating that a structured interview is itself essentially faulty, it cannot therefore, serve as the ideal methodological model against which to assess other approaches.

From the above discussion it was clear that structured interviews were not suitable for this study because they did not permit the researcher to clarify questions and probe the answers of the respondent for in- depth information. Moreover, structured interviews often incorporate tools such as questionnaires which were inappropriate for this qualitative study (McClure, 2002).

Unstructured interviews

They allow the interviewer to introduce new material into the discussion which the researcher had not thought of before hand but only arose during the course of the interview (Hitchcock & Hughes as cited in Adam, 2010). In putting this differently, unstructured interviews are concerned to fix the meaning rather than the wording of questions and advocate the flexibility to rephrase questions to fit each individual's interpretation (Denzin as cited in Murphy, *et al*, 1998). This means that there is no specific set of questions employed and questions are not asked in any particular order (Murphy, *et al*, 1998).

Hitchcock & Hughes (as cited in Adam, 2010) categorized the *advantages of unstructured interviews* as follows:

- a) They provide a greater and freer flow of information between researcher and the subject.
- b) One can gain an insight into the character and intensity of a respondent's attitudes, motives, feelings and beliefs and can detect underlying motivations and unacknowledged attitudes.

However the unstructured interview was unable to accommodate the needs of this research as a specific set of predetermined questions was used to question the participants (Cohen, *et al*, 2007; and De Vos, *et al*, 2002). In finding out the nature of spelling errors committed by grade three isiXhosa background learners, the researcher had a general plan of investigation but allowed the conversation to progress in no specific order, although specific areas of interest were raised (Babbie

& Mouton, 2001). For this reason the interviews could not be described as completely unstructured.

Semi-structured interviews

Patton (2002) defines semi structured interviews as a flexible process that allows depth to be achieved by providing the opportunity on the part of the interviewer to probe and expand interviewee's responses. It involves conducting intensive individual interviews with a small number of respondents to explore their perspectives on a particular idea, programme or situation (Boyce & Neal, 2006). With semi-structured interviews, the researcher uses a set of predetermined questions on an interview schedule (De Vos, *et al*, 2002). Therefore the semi-structure interview was relevant in this study because: it allowed the researcher to use probes with a view to clearing up vague responses or asking for incomplete answers to be elaborated on (Hysamen, 1996). Transcriptions from semi-structured interviews were analysed according to emerging themes (Govender, 2009). Cohen, *et al*, (2007); Gummesson (as cited in Adam, 2010); and Yin (as cited in Tellis, 1997) recommend open-ended interviews to expand the depth of data gathering.

With reference to semi-structured interviews, Bless & Higson-Smith (as cited in Adam, 2010); Boyce & Neal (2006); and Cohen, *et al* (2007) have classified the *advantages of semi structured interviews* as follows:

- a) People are more easily engaged in an interview than in completing a questionnaire. Thus there are fewer problems in failing to respond (Cohen, *et al*, 2007).

- b) They help to clarify concepts and problems and they allow for the establishment of a list of possible answers or solutions which, in turn, facilitates the construction of multiple-choice questions (Bless & Higson-Smith as cited in Adam, 2010; Boyce & Neal, 2006; and Cohen, *et al*, 2007).
- c) The interviewer will be able to pick up non-verbal cues, including facial expressions, tones of voice and cues from the surroundings and context (Cohen, *et al*, 2007).
- d) They are very helpful in exploratory research, as well as when considering a pilot survey (Bless & Higson-Smith as cited in Adam, 2010).
- c) They provide much more detailed information than what is available through other data collection methods, such as surveys (Boyce & Neal, 2006).
- d) They may provide a more relaxed atmosphere in which to collect information (Boyce & Neal, 2006).

As much as semi-structured interviewed allowed the respondents to narrate on issues, they, however, do have some *disadvantages* namely:

- a) It is difficult to record responses, particularly if the interviewer is also responsible for writing them down (Adam, 2010).
- b) The quality of responses, that is, their reliability and validity is dependent on the interviewer (Cohen, *et al*, 2007).
- c) If the interviewers are not competent, they may introduce many biases and interviews are time consuming and thus expensive (Bless & Higson-Smith as cited in Adam, 2010).

To minimise the above disadvantages of semi-structured interviews the researcher maintained the notes taken in interviews containing the essentials of the interviewees' answers and information about the proceeding of the interview (Flick as cited in Maponya, 2010). The researcher refrained from inserting her own biases by paraphrasing what participants were saying or making evaluative comments like "good" or "that's interesting" (Mack, *et al*, 2005)." The researcher sat down immediately after an interview and jotted down an impression of the interview in maintaining the quality of the response. Moreover, the researcher made use of a tape recorder in capturing more data than relying on memory only. Tshotsho (2006) states that recording has an advantage of capturing information more faithfully than hurriedly written notes, and this can allow the interviewer to focus on the interview. The researcher transcribed the recordings. Therefore for this study the researcher used semi structured interviews. (***See Appendix B for interview schedule***).

3.7 Data Collection and Analysis Process

De Vos, *et al* (2002) define data analysis as the process of bringing order, structure and meaning to the mass of collected data. Bogdan & Biklen (1982); McMillan & Schumacher (2001); and Seliger & Shohamy (1989) maintain that qualitative analysis is a relatively systematic process of selecting, categorizing, comparing, synthesizing and interpreting to provide an explanation of the single phenomenon of interest.

Yin (as cited in Baxter & Jack, 2007) describes five techniques for analysis:

- Pattern matching

- Linking data to propositions
- Explanation building
- Time-series analysis

This means that data analysis is the process of making sense of the data by consolidating, reducing and interpreting what people have said and what the researcher has seen and read (Merriam, 2001; and Patton, 2002). Hence Merriam (2001) points out that data analysis is a complex process that involves moving back and forth between concrete bits of data and abstract concepts, between inductive and deductive reasoning, and between description and interpretation.

It is clear that data analysis involves 'breaking up' the texts into manageable themes, patterns, trends, and relationships (Babbie & Mouton, 2001; and Patton, 2002). These themes that were constructed were those that the researcher identified before, during and after data collection and came from reviewing literature (Maxwell, 1996; Strauss & Corbin, 1990; and Tshotsho, 2006). Themes were identified by sorting the examples into piles of similar meaning according to the speaker and context (Brown, 1996). Then the researcher analyzed the collected data concerning the nature of spelling errors so that it could be understandable.

Data was analyzed using these data collection instruments namely:

- Direct observation,
- Document analysis and

- Interviews

3.8 Ethical issues

Research ethics deals primarily with the interaction between researchers and the people they study (Mack, *et al*, 2005). Leedy & Omrod (2001) further state that, within the social sciences, human subjects are often used in research, and therefore ethical implications need to be considered. Hence Fowler (as cited in Adam, 2010) pointed out that the researcher should make sure that no individual suffers any adverse consequences as a result of the study. Therefore the researcher treated participants with respect and informed the participants in advance (a week before) about the day and time when the interview would be conducted including the duration of the interview.

Informed consent

Informed consent is a mechanism for ensuring that people understand what it means to participate in a particular research study so they can decide in a conscious, deliberate way whether or not they want to participate (McMillan & Schumacher, 2001). It is one of the most important tools for ensuring *respect for persons* during research (Mack, *et al*, 2005). The participants were told about the general nature of the study as well as its goal, procedures and its possible advantages and disadvantages. They were assured of confidentiality. In addition, they were offered the opportunity to receive a report about the results and conclusions of the research project should they wish to receive them. Consent forms were issued which briefly described the expectations of them as participants (***see Appendix D: consent form***)

Voluntary participation

The participants were not coerced into participating in research. They were assured that participation in the research was absolutely voluntary and that they were free to discontinue participation at any time (Mark, *et al*, 2005).

Anonymity and confidentiality

This study by no means identified information about individual subjects (e.g., name, address, Email address, etc.), and did not link individual responses with participants' identities (Marshall, *et al*, 1996). The respondents and the school were coded rather than being referred to by names (McMillan & Schumacher, 2001).

Trustworthiness

The basic issue in relation to trustworthiness is how an inquirer can persuade his or her audience (including self) that the findings of an inquiry are of value (Bryman & Burgess as cited in Maponya, 2010).

3.9 Conducting the main study

Phases of Data Collection/Research Path

Phase one: Piloting

Phase two: Semi-structured Interviews

Phase three: Document analysis

Phase four: Classroom observation

The following section will discuss theory and the reason for conducting a pilot study

Phase one: Piloting

Thabane, Ma, Chu, Cheng, Ismaila, Rios, Robson, Thabane, Giangregoria, and Goldsmith (2010) refer to pilot studies as “vanguard trials” (i.e. pre-studies) of research which is essential to the development of an extensive training programme. It is conducted in order to come to grips with some of the practical aspects of establishing access, making contact and conducting the interview so as to become alert of own’s own level of interviewing skills (De Vos, *et al*, 2002). Moreover Thabane, *et al* (2010) pointed out that a pilot study deals with assessing time and resource problems that can occur during the main study and also assessing the feasibility of the process. Thabane, *et al* (2010) further stated that conducting a pilot study prior to the main study can enhance the likelihood of success of the main study and potentially help to avoid doomed main studies.

McLean (1994) stated that piloting involves testing to check the following:

- The clarity of the interview questions.
- Eliminating or minimizing ambiguity and difficulties in wording.
- Gaining feedback on the type of questions asked.

The purpose for conducting piloting was to discover possible weaknesses and problems in all areas of the research so that they could be corrected before the actual data collection took place. It aimed at establishing whether the planned instrument for gathering data was well adjusted and whether any changes were needed. It was also aimed at discovering any possible challenges on the instrument

used and to determine the appropriateness of the instrument chosen for the study. On discovery of any challenge the researcher intended to make all necessary adjustments so that the aims of the main study were achieved. This also gave the researcher an orientation to the social environment where the investigation was to take place (Thabane, *et al*, 2010).

With the above view, the researcher conducted a pilot study which operated at one primary school, in one grade three class where isiXhosa is a medium of instruction. The primary school is located in Chalumna, in the East London area where the researcher is currently working and English is taught as a subject in grade three. The school was chosen because it has similar characteristics to the school wherein the study was to be conducted. Moreover, choosing this school reduced costs on the part of the researcher.

Instrument piloted: Document analysis

The primary documents analysed by the researcher were the learners' books which were used to gather data. Document analysis was also used for the purpose of discovering problems in all aspects of the research before the main study, so they could be corrected in time. In addition, in using this instrument it gave the researcher an indication as to whether to use the same format of the document analysis or adjust it. The aim of collecting the learners' books was to find out features of words that were commonly mis-spelt and features of the words that the learners seemed to find easy to spell. The piloting took a period of two weeks which started from 23 Feb 2011 – 09 Mar. 2011. (***See Appendix A for a copy of document analysis schedule***).

Lesson learnt from pilot study

The pilot study indicated some flaws in the compiled document analysis schedule. From the pilot it was clear that document analysis was going to be problematic as writing in the class seemed to be haphazard. The pilot study, therefore, sharpened the instrument used by the researcher and enabled the researcher to assess the feasibility of the steps that needed to take place as part of the main study.

Phase two: Semi-structured Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were used in response to the following research question of the main study, namely:

- What are the barriers in acquiring spelling skills in English by isiXhosa speaking grade three learners?

The researcher gathered data using interviews as the initial instrument because she wanted to determine the teachers' concepts and understanding or problems she encountered in spelling. The researcher had earlier negotiated the site for conducting the interview with the teacher. The interview was conducted, in a relaxed atmosphere, at school where the teacher was rendering her services. The researcher interviewed one grade three teacher in this study. The researcher selected the respondent for the semi-structured interview through purposive sampling. The researcher gave the teacher a brief explanation about the purpose of the research; she was then interested to participate in the study.

An individual interview was conducted with the respondent using an interview protocol. As topics came up, the researcher asked probing questions that were not on the protocol but were related. The questioning allowed room for the respondent to express her thoughts and feelings about the topic in question. The questions were designed to elicit the teachers' concepts and understandings about spelling. The teacher also reflected on her instructional practices with regard to spelling and learners' spelling practices. Where there was too brief a response, the researcher asked the respondent to explain a little more.

The researcher was attentive to the responses from the respondent so that she could identify new emerging lines of inquiry that are directly related to the phenomenon being studied. These new emerging lines of inquiry were then explored and probed. The interview session was recorded and transcribed. As the researcher transcribed the responses, she kept notes of ideas and questions that arose. Shortly after, the researcher returned to the teacher to ask for some additional information.

The interview enabled the researcher to gather information about the nature of spelling errors of isiXhosa background learners in ESL. It was from this phase of this semi-structured interview that the researcher was able to identify the features of words that learners find difficulty in spelling and learners' practices on the nature of spelling.

The flow of the interview rather than the order in a schedule, determined when and how a question was asked. The researcher noticed that the respondent often answered a question before it was asked. This happened during questioning and / or

probing. In such situations, the researcher skipped the already answered question. The scheduled time for the interviews didn't last according to the expected amount of time with the respondent. The time taken depended on how the interviewee expressed herself and how much the researcher used probing questions. The interview time length lasted between forty to forty seven minutes and the language used by the researcher was English although the respondent responded in mother tongue mostly with some English words here and there.

Phase three: Document Analysis

Document analysis was used in response to the following research questions of the main study, namely:

- What are the features of the words that grade three isiXhosa background learners experience difficulties in spelling in English First Language?
- What are the features of the words that grade three isiXhosa background learners find easy to spell in English first additional language?

This was the third phase and it dealt with document analysis. This usage of documentary analysis was negotiated by the researcher through the class teacher. The documents analysed by the researcher were eight grade three learners' books. The aim of collecting these books was to find out the nature of spelling errors committed by isiXhosa background learners in ESL. This assisted the researcher to see the features of words learners experience difficulties with in spelling as well as features of words they seem to find easy in spelling.

The researcher worked with the learners' books during the first term of the school holiday. So the books stayed a relatively longer period in the hands of the researcher. The second time the researcher asked for the learners' book was during the second term school holidays. The first term was one week and the second term was two weeks. The researcher was looking for features of spelling errors that learners commit when they are writing. This was done to see whether there was any development in the spelling practices of learners.

Some of the activities done by the learners were not assessed. Some spelling errors committed by the learners were underlined with the red pen. There were corrections after each activity done by the learners, but some of the learners' work was not assessed.

Phase four: Classroom Observation

Classroom observation was used to collect data in response to these research questions of the main study namely:

- What are Grade three isiXhosa background learners' strategies for spelling in English first additional language?
- What are the barriers in acquiring spelling skills in English by isiXhosa speaking grade three learners?

The researcher made an appointment with the teacher to come and observe. The researcher also gave clarity to the teacher on what was going to be observed. The aim of the observation was to observe the actual teaching and learning process of spelling in its natural setting in order to gain richer understanding. It also revealed

the nature of the spelling errors and spelling practices that the teacher was unaware of and unable to describe during the interview adequately. The focus of classroom observation was to view spelling practices from the perspective of the learners. The researcher was also looking at the teaching strategies of spelling. The researcher compiled a classroom observation schedule (**see Appendix C**). This schedule enabled the researcher not to be biased but to focus on the event that was being observed. It also helped the researcher to ensure that all aspects that needed to be observed were covered.

In the classroom where the study took place, learners sat in pairs at desks that were directed towards the teacher who stood by the table in the front. On the walls there were a few displays of posters and charts and there were no displays of learners' work. The classroom partition had openings at the top which created an external distraction for the learners. This distraction was coming from the noise of learners in adjoining classrooms and in the form of hearing the voice of the teacher in the other classroom.

Before the lesson took place the researcher showed the teacher the compiled observation schedule. The researcher spent time in the classroom observing the practices of teaching spelling and the learners' strategies when they were engaged in learning spelling as well as barriers in acquiring spelling skills. The activity observed was the first lesson for the day. The lesson introduced by the teacher was about the new diagraph *sh*.

As an observer, the researcher interacted casually with learners and the teacher (i.e. sometimes sitting in the back of the room, and sometimes moving around). The researcher collected narrative data and used the prepared observation schedule to observe the interaction between the learners and the teacher.

3.10 Conclusion

The focus of this chapter was to justify the research methodology that was used in the study. This study adopted a qualitative research approach, which is set within the interpretive paradigm. The next chapter presents the analyses of the data and findings of this study.

CHAPTER FOUR

DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

4.1 Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to present the analysis and interpretation of the data generated through semi-structured interviews, direct observation and document analysis. The study investigates the nature of spelling errors of grade three isiXhosa background learners in English First Additional Language. One grade three teacher and eight grade three learners participated in this study. The researcher used pseudonyms for the school, teacher and learners to ensure adherence to ethical issues such confidentiality, privacy and anonymity.

The structure of the chapter

4.2 Synopsis of the school

4.3 Biographical information of the participants

4.3.1 Grade three Teacher Profile

4.3.2 Learner Profile

4.4 Presentation and analysis of data gathered through semi structured interviews

4.4.1 Presentation of data gathered through semi structured interviews

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4.5 Presentation and analysis of data gathered through document analysis

4.5.1 Presentation of data gathered through document analysis

4.5.2 Analysis of data gathered through document analysis

4.6 Presentation and analysis of data gathered through classroom observation

4.7 Triangulation: Analysis of data gathered through *semi structured interviews, document analysis and classroom observations*

4.2 Synopsis of the school

The school where this study was conducted is located in a black township of East London. The medium of instruction in this school is isiXhosa; however, English is taught as a subject in grade three. The language of learning and teaching of the school is isiXhosa which is also a home language to the learners. IsiXhosa is a dominant language in the area where the school is located. However, there are people from other ethnic groups who speak other languages. The school caters for learners from low socio economic backgrounds. The community comprises largely lower income earners like domestic workers, factory workers and hawkers. However, there is now a gradual influx into the area of relatively higher income earners including some professionals.

In the classroom where the study took place, learners sit in pairs with their desks directed towards the teacher's table located at the front of the class. On the walls there were a few displays of posters and charts. Most of the posters and charts were for Mathematics and they were designed by the teacher. There was only one poster for English. It was a poster of English sight words. There were no displays of learners' work. Medrano and Zych (1998) stated that an absence of a print-rich environment may be the cause of the problem of poor spelling skills for students.

The classroom partition had openings on top which created avenues for external distraction, especially for learners sitting in the back rows. Distractions were

sometimes due to the noise from learners in adjoining classrooms because they were momentarily left unattended. Sometimes, the distraction was in the form of hearing the voice of the teacher in the next classroom.

4.3 Biographical information of the participants

4.3.1 Grade three teacher profile

Table 4: Profile of the teacher

School	Teacher	Sex	Language of the teacher	Qualifications	Overall teaching experience	Teaching experience
Elukhanyo PS Black Township	Lungi	F	IsiXhosa	JPTD, FDE, EDUCATION MANAGEMENT	20 years	15 years in grade one 5 years in grade three

Key to Acronyms

F- Female

FDE-Further Diploma in Education

JPTD-Junior Primary Teachers Diploma

PS- Primary School

The table reveals that the teacher is a female with twenty years of teaching experience in the Foundation Phase. Fifteen years has been spent in teaching grade one and the past five years in teaching grade three. Based on her teaching

experience, there is a possibility that she might be in a good position to provide data that could assist in answering the research questions. Her experience shows that she has been in the system for a long period of time and she is familiar with the syllabus and content of grade one and grade three. This suggests that she might have an understanding of the dynamics of teaching English first additional language. She is also a qualified teacher with a Further Diploma in Education, a Junior Primary Teacher's Diploma and an Education Management Diploma.

4.3.2 Learners' profile

Table 5: Profile of the learners

Name	Age	Gender	Home language	Spelling development in English FAL
Sinelitha	9 years	Female	IsiXhosa	Good
Yamnkela	10 years	Male	IsiXhosa	Good
Thabo	10 years	Male	IsiXhosa	Good
Buntu	9 years	Male	IsiXhosa	Good
Simamkele	10 years	Female	IsiXhosa	Struggling speller
Vusumzi	9 years	Male	IsiXhosa	Struggling speller
Iva	9 years	Female	IsiXhosa	Struggling speller
Hlumelo	10 years	Female	IsiXhosa	Struggling speller

It is apparent from the above table that all learners are isiXhosa speakers. They are comprised of 50 % males and 50% females. They are all in the age group between nine and ten which means that they are of an appropriate age for the grade. Trochim

(2006) stated that the goal of purposive sampling is to collect information rich data. The researcher worked with these learners to facilitate the collection of information rich data. The teacher categorized the learners who were participants as follows: four good spellers; four struggling spellers. The teachers' practice of grouping learners is in line with what researchers have suggested. They have noted different characteristics common to good spellers as opposed to struggling spellers to enable the teacher to try out spelling instructions that can benefit both characteristics of learners (Hughes & Searle, 1997, 2000; and Gentry, 1987; 2004).

4.4 Presentation and analysis of data gathered through semi structured interviews

Semi-structured interviews were used in response to the following research questions of the main study namely:

- What are the features of the words that grade three isiXhosa background learners experience difficulties with in spelling in English First Language?
- What are the features of the words that grade three isiXhosa background learners find easy to spell in English first additional language?
- What are the barriers to acquiring spelling skills in English by isiXhosa speaking grade three learners?

4.4.1 Presenting data gathered through semi structured interviews

Features of words that learners find difficult to spell

During the interview the teacher could not think of the features of words that her grade three learners find difficult to spell. She just came up with a list of words. Her word list was made up of different words which shared no similar features.

“Maninzi wethu amagama abangawaziyo. For example “Because, ambulance, grandmother, children. Namanye “ (Lungi)

Features of words that grade three learners find easy to spell in E-FAL

“Yhu zange khe ndiyicinge ngolu hlobo into ye spelling. Kodwa ke ndiyabazi bayakwazi ukupela iclassroom objects. Maybe yinto yoba pha kwa grade one and two soloko amagama azo edisplay (iwe) edongeni” (Lungi)

In responding to the question on words that grade three isiXhosa background learners find easy to spell in English FAL, the teacher interviewed reported that she has never thought of looking at the features of words that learners find difficulty or easier to spell. However she mentioned that in her class her learners are good in spelling classroom objects.

Barriers to acquiring spelling skills

When she was asked about barriers isiXhosa background learners encounter in acquiring spelling skills, the teacher mentioned the following:

- i. Learners’ pronunciation of words
- ii. Learners write words as they hear them

i. Learners’ Pronunciation of words

On this issue Templeton (2003); Wilde (1992); and Zutell (1998) pointed out that pronunciation can affect spelling and the word origin. The teacher interviewed came up with examples supporting the issue of pronunciation as a barrier to isiXhosa background learners in acquiring spelling skills in E-FAL. (1) *“Learners often*

pronounce words incorrectly. In other words they carry over isiXhosa letter pronunciation habits into English. For an example: they pronounce letter g in word giant as letter g as in word gate - which, however happens to equal the letter g in English. They don't know the rule – when g is followed by i or e it is soft. They don't have the word giant in their vocabulary. English speakers have the same challenge to distinguish hard and soft 'g' but they are assisted by that they have words 'giants' and 'gate' in their oral vocabulary. They do the same thing in diagraph th they pronounce it as t-h. This happen in words like 'thumb' pronounced as t of 'table'.

She further explained that “In isiXhosa diagraph th is pronounced as t for 'tea' and this understanding results in learners writing this diagraph as they pronounce it”. Moreover she reported that “the mispronunciation of these letters lead learners in writing words totally different from what was intended”.

(2) She reported that “learners have a difficulty in noticing the different qualities of vowels or when the word is having two vowels. In fact, my learners have a difficulty in noticing the difference between two vowels when they hear a word. Because of their knowledge of isiXhosa vowels, it is hard to listen and speak the words with two English vowels. As a result they tend to drop the consonant or add the vowel at the end to make it easier for them to pronounce a word. Thus road is pronounced as rodd.

(3) *She explained that “sometimes they tend to drop the final consonant or create more than what is needed in a word to facilitate their pronunciation. Words like marbles may be pronounced as ma-r-ble-s or test as tesit.”*

(2) Learners write words as they hear them

In writing words as they hear them the teacher mentioned that learners spell words as they sound. She gave a short list of the examples of words which are tabulated below.

Table 6: Learners’ spelling errors revealing that learners write words the way they hear them

Target word	Misspelled word
Bad	Bed
Sun	San
Run	Ran
Sad	Sed

As indicated in table 6, target word *bad* is written as *bed*. In this case the word *bed* in English has another meaning which might create confusion to the reader to interpret it in a wrong way. The same spelling error as mentioned by the teacher is repeated in word *sun*. The learner wrote the word as *san* which means a particular tribe in English. The word *run* is written in the past tense as *ran*. In this case the vowel u is pronounced as a showing that the learner transferred the vowel to isiXhosa. The

fourth word that was mentioned by the teacher is sad which is written as a non existing word *sed*.

Moreover on this issue she reported that learners write words as they hear them especially phonemes that sound the same as isiXhosa. Al-Jarf, (2008:12) says that, this occurs when learners apply a native language rule to the second language. Concerning this the teacher mentioned that instead of writing the letter o in a word some learners write a like *san* for *son* and she further stated that in English this word means a totally different thing from what was intended. Again she said instead of writing the letter u learners write a, example: in word like *bucket* they write *bhakethi*. After giving these examples she responded to the question of why do these learners commit such errors and her opinion concerning this was *“I think learners write words as they sound because they are unfamiliar with the sound system of English and so they use wrong vowels thus confusing English sound.”* She also claimed that, *“In my teaching experience I came to know that in understanding the correspondence between a vowel and sound is the most difficult part learners struggle with in acquiring spelling skills.”* However in this case of writing the word *bucket* as *bhakethi* seems to show that this word is one of the borrowed English words used in isiXhosa to accommodate the language hence the learner writes the word like that.

Another barrier she mentioned in acquiring spelling skill is that in isiXhosa the letter c is pronounced much more strongly so learners may not hear it in English and therefore not write it, for example words like *kick* and *check*. She reported that learners spell out the word by referring to the sound of the word. Also she admitted that lots of words in English have a similar sound but with different meanings such as

pen and pan and learners are not familiar with such sounds hence they make spelling errors. It is true that inadequate understanding of spelling rules in L2 may result in spelling errors (Al-Jarf, 2008).

4.4.2 Analysis of the data gathered through interviews

Two issues emerged from the analysis of data gathered through interviews

- a) There seems to be a discrepancy between learners' spoken and written language*
- b) Learners seem to struggle in understanding the rules of the English language*

There seems to be a discrepancy between learners' spoken and written language

The teacher reported that learners encounter difficulties in attempting to pronounce English vowels which then results in problems in acquiring spelling skills. For example, *They pronounce letter **g** in word 'giant' as letter **g** as in word 'gate'- which, however happens to equal the letter **g** in English. They do the same thing in digraph **th** they pronounce it as **t-h**. This happens in words like thumb pronounced as **t** of table. She further explained that "In isiXhosa digraph **th** is pronounced as **t** for tea and this understanding results to learners writing this digraph as they pronounce". On this issue, Miressa and Dumessa, (2011) highlight that the discrepancy between the spoken and written form contributes a lot to spelling errors of students since many words that have the same sound are spelt differently. Moreover, many others have silent letters in their spelling, and many words are not spelt as they sound. Al-Jarf (2008) found out that the discrepancy between the*

spoken and written language reveals learners' inability to separate native language L1 to second language L2 and it leads to spelling errors.

Learners seem to struggle in understanding the rules of the English language

One of the issues that the teacher interviewed mentioned was the fact that learners in spelling tasks write words the way they hear them. Moreover, she also reported that this happens most of the time with phonemes that sound the same as isiXhosa. In the data presented the teacher gave a list of words that learners simply spell the way they hear them (see *table 9*). The way the learners spelt the words reveals that they struggle in understanding the rules of English. This is supported by Al-Jarf (2008) who cites that inadequate understanding of spelling rules in L2 may result in spelling errors. Moreover Al-Jarf, (2008:12) cites that this occurs when learners apply a native language rule to the second language. The teacher interviewed also mentioned that lots of words in English have a similar sound but with different meanings such as *pen* and *pan* and learners are not familiar with such sounds hence they make spelling errors.

4.5 Presentation and analysis of data gathered through document analysis

Document analysis was used in response to the following research questions:

- What are the features of the words that grade three isiXhosa background learners experience difficulties with in spelling in English First Language?
- What are the features of the words that grade three isiXhosa background learners find easy to spell in English first additional language?

4.5.1 Presentation of data gathered through document analysis

It is worth noting that it was difficult to trace themes that were guiding learners writing. Writing in the learners' workbooks seemed to happen haphazardly. For example, the researcher could not identify the word families that were the focus of spelling tasks given to learners. Because of that the researcher decided to look at the genres of writing that learners were engaged with as reflected in their workbooks. The following genres of writing were identified: written essays, informational text and memoir writings as adopted from literature (Baker, 2007; Jasztal, 2010; Literacy in Action (LiA), 2003; Lutrin & Pincus, 2002; and Portland Public Schools, 2009).

Table 7: The tasks that learners had written for each genre

Genres of writing in grade three	The focus of learners' writing
Written essays	Sentence constructions-fill in the missing words
Informational text	Spelling test, phonics, revising of alphabets, fill in 'ing'
Memoir writing	Myself

Features of words that learners found difficult to spell in the written essays genre of writing

In written essays Abisamra (2001) states that grade three learners will organize information into short paragraphs that contain a main idea and related details, and begin to use compound sentences and sentences of varying length. However, in the grade three learners' workbooks analysed the learners did not present information in short paragraphs. They did sentence construction activities where the teacher would

orally give them a sentence and expect them to write it in their books. Moreover they were also expected to fill in missing words in sentences constructed by their teacher.

In the sentence construction activity most learners battled. Only two (25%) out eight learners could construct sentences and spell words correctly. 75% (six learners) struggled. The following table details how learners performed in the activities under the genre “written essays”

Table 8: Learners activities under the genre “written essays”

Type of activity	Target	How 75% of learners respond in the activity	Nature of spelling errors
Sentence construction	The girl walked to town	The gel/ gerl walk to town	Phonetical error
	The goat drank water	The gooat drank wota	Insertion and substitution of vowels
	The monkey is jumping	The manky is jamping	Word written as it sounds, vowel substitution
	The dog jumped the step	The dog jumpd the step	Vowel omission
Fill missing words	The snake moves slowly	<i>The snake moves silwul</i>	Non existing word
	I ate meat	<i>I ate mit at home</i>	Language transfer which led to vowel substitution
	Ayanda wore a clean shirt	<i>Ayanda wore a claen shirt</i>	Letter transposition

In the sentence construction activity from the six learners who struggled, two of them wrote the word *gerl* for *girl* and the other four learners wrote the word *gel*. This reveals that learners seem to be struggling with working with the sounds of the English language. In the second sentence four (50%) learners wrote the word *gooat*

for *goat* and *wota* for *water*. They inserted an extra vowel o in the word *goat* and substituted the letter a for the letter o in the word '*water*'. Moreover, in the word *jumping* six learners (75%) substituted vowel u for vowel a. Both of these words (monkey and jumping) were written as they sound in the learners' native language IsiXhosa. In the word *jumped* the learners omitted the vowel e.

As can be seen in table above the learners also struggled in the second activity on filling in the missing words. Most learners did not actually know the formation of the word *slowly*. The learners wrote non-existing words like *silwel*; *slowuli*; *sloly* which seems to indicate that the learners did not know how the word is spelt. In the word 'meat' three learners wrote the word as it sounds; as a result they substituted the vowels ea to i. Al-Jarf (2008) states that students sometimes construct their own L2 interim rules with the use of their L1 knowledge to help them in the writing tasks, resulting in L2 errors. Besides this, three learners also wrote the word *clean* as *claen* thus confusing the diagraphs in the word.

Features of words that learners found difficult to spell/easy to spell in the informational text genre of writing

According to LiA (2003) the informational text genre of writing is designed to engage third grade learners writing that results in a descriptive, illustrated report based on personal topic selection and mini-research, paragraphing, writing a report. In the grade three learners' books analysed, the learners did three spelling tests

For the spelling tests, the teacher seemed to have selected words randomly. There was not an identifiable word family that the spelling test focused on. The following table presents the words that learners spelt incorrectly.

Table 9: Words that learners' spelt incorrectly

Target words in the spelling tasks	Various ways in which learners spelt the word	Number of learners who committed the error	No. of learners who got the word correct
<i>Flowers</i>	Flawas	6	2
<i>Clothes</i>	Clouths	5	3
<i>White</i>	Whit	3	3
	Whate	2	
<i>Stone</i>	Siton	2	3
	Stoen	3	
<i>Sweets</i>	Swets	1	6
	Swiets	1	
<i>Star</i>	Sita	2	6
<i>Sheep</i>	Hseepi	1	3
	Ship	4	
<i>Scarf</i>	Sikhafu	4	0
	Sikhaarf	4	
<i>Stop</i>	Stopu	4	4
<i>Shop</i>	Shopu	3	5
<i>Spoon</i>	Spooon	1	1
	Spun	6	
<i>Bell</i>	Bel	6	2
<i>Horse</i>	Hose	5	3
<i>Rabbit</i>	Rebit	6	2
<i>Shirt</i>	Shrit	3	3
	Shert	2	

<i>Leg</i>	-	0	8
<i>Red</i>	-	0	8
<i>Milk</i>	-	0	8
<i>Table</i>	-	0	7
<i>Chair</i>	Chaire	2	6
<i>Book</i>	-	0	8
<i>Desk</i>	-	0	8
<i>Zip</i>	-	0	8
<i>Ruler</i>	Rula	2	6
<i>Toy</i>	-	0	8

The above table indicates that the learners committed a variety of spelling errors. These include vowel omissions and insertion, letter transposition, language transfer errors, and consonant blending. For example, in vowel omissions and insertion six (75%) learners wrote *bell* as *bel*, five learners wrote *horse* as *hose*, one learner wrote *spoon* as *spoon* and two (25%) learners wrote *chair* as *chaire*. In letter transposition three learners wrote *shirt* as *shrit*. In language transfer six learners wrote *flower* as *fawa*, four (50%) learners wrote *sheep* as *ship* and in consonant blending four learners wrote *scarf* as *sikhafu* or *sikhaarf*. Cook (as cited in Al-Jabri, undated) mentioned that the most common spelling errors relate to pronunciation and that this is shown through substituted vowels and phonological mistakes.

As the above table shows, it was difficult to identify the features of the words that learners find difficult to spell. As previously indicated, the task was made difficult by the fact that writing seems to happen haphazardly in the grade three class studied. However the table also shows that the learners found it easier to spell classroom

objects. This supports what the teacher had mentioned in section 4.4.1 under the sub heading ‘Features of words that grade three learners find easy to spell in E-FAL’.

Yhu zange khe ndiyicinge ngolu hlobo into ye spelling. Kodwa ke ndiyabazi bayakwazi uzupela iclassroom objects. Maybe yinto yoba pha kwa grade one and two soloko amagama azo edisplay (iwe) edongeni (Lungi).

Moreover, the table indicates that most words that were spelt without errors are words which are written as they sound. And another feature is that these are one vowel words or have short vowels. For example *leg, red, milk, desk, zip*, etc.

Features of words that learners found difficult/easy to spell in the genre ‘memoir writing’

According to Heather (2003) when a learner is engaged with memoir writing the learner describes an event from the past. The event has to be based on the truth and reveals the feelings of the writer. In this case the theme that guided the learners’ writing under ‘memoir writing’ that revealed the feelings of the writer is the topic ‘Myself’.

There were not many problems found in this theme. The table below indicates the errors that were found when learners were writing a theme about ‘Myself’:

Table10: Errors in learners’ writing on theme ‘Myself’

Errors committed	Natures of spelling errors	Number of learners who committed the error

Myself		
• I am a doy	Confusion of letter <i>b</i> to letter <i>d</i> Letter	02
• I like red appaes	transposition	02
• I live with my mathar	Letter transposition and non-existing word	01

In the above table two learners wrote *doy* for *boy* confusing the consonants. This seems to show that the learners are struggling to see the difference between the two consonants. There was also the word *apples* which was written as *appaes*. There seems to be carelessness when the learners were writing the word *apples* because all the letters were included but phonemes were mixed when the word was written. Moreover, one learner wrote word *mother* as *mathar*, writing the word as it sounds. In this case the spelling of the word seemingly has been influenced by the language of the learner which is isiXhosa.

4.5.2 Analysis of data gathered through document analysis

Two issues emerged from the analysis of data gathered through document analysis

(a) Learners seem to struggle in understanding the rules of the English language

(b) Learners seem to rely on their LI knowledge

(c) Learners' writing reflected that the learners' stages of spelling development were contrary to the teacher's grouping

Learners seem to struggle in understanding English phonology

This issue was picked up from the data collected through teacher interviews. The learners' books reflected how learners committed a range of errors. For example, six (75%) learners wrote '*flowers*' as '*flawas*' and five learners wrote '*clothes*' as '*clouths*'. These errors mostly reflected that most learners struggle with working with the sounds of the English language. This is supported by Clark-Edmands (as cited in DuBois, *et al*, 2007) and Medrano (1998) who state that a lack of phonetic awareness contributes to poor spelling achievement and when learners are unable to understand how to work with the sounds of the language system, they will reverse beginnings of words, substituting similar letters, leaving off endings, and omitting letters. Most words that were incorrectly spelt in the learners' book were written the way the learners heard or the way they sounded. On this issue, Miressa and Dumessa (2011) highlighted that many English Second Language learners do not give attention to whether they write a word with the correct spelling or not. They simply write the way they feel rather than the way it is supposed to be written.

Learners seem to rely heavily on their L1 knowledge

Some of the words that the learners spelt incorrectly were literal translations from isiXhosa. For example four (50%) learners wrote *stop* as *stopu* and three learners wrote *shop* as *shopu*. This is what Al-Jarf (2008:12) found "...learners sometimes construct their own L2 interim rules with the use of their L1 knowledge to help them in the writing tasks, resulting in L2 errors."

Learners' writing reflected that the learners' stages of spelling development were contrary to the teacher's grouping

The teacher had categorized the learners who participated in this study, in terms of their spelling development. They were categorized as good spellers and struggling spellers. However, from what the researcher saw in the learners' books, she noticed variance in their development hence she has classified them into different stages of spelling development. The analysis of their development is tabulated below.

Table 11: An analysis of learners' stages of spelling development

Stages of spelling development	Classification of learners
Preliminary spelling	Three learners
Phonetic spelling	Three learners
Transitional spelling	Two learners

In the above table the eight learners are categorized into different stages of spelling development. The ***preliminary*** spellers are learners that wrote non-existing words and from the eight learners three of them were identified to be in this stage. These spellers are learners who seem to show through their written work that they do not actually know how the word is formed. In the ***phonetic*** spelling stage are learners who have an understanding that letters represent sounds and spelling errors included letter transposition and three of the learners were identified to be in this category. The learners who are classified as ***transitional spellers*** are those who know how words appear visually and can spell most of the words. In this category there are two learners (**See Appendix B**).

4.6 Presentation and analysis of data gathered through classroom observation

The researcher spent time in the classroom observing practices of teaching spelling. The aim was to find out barriers encountered by isiXhosa background learners in acquiring spelling skills in English First Additional language. McClure (2002) states that observation is, in some part, an intuitive process that allows individuals to collect information about others by viewing their actions and behaviours in their natural surroundings. As an observer, the researcher interacted casually with learners (i.e. sometimes sitting at the back of the room, and sometimes informally chatting with learners while they were writing) to minimize the effect of my presence in the classroom and enhance observations in the natural setting.

The lesson was about the new diagraph *sh* that was introduced by the teacher to the learners.

Classroom observation was used in response to these research questions of the main study namely:

- What are Grade three isiXhosa background learners' strategies for spelling in English first additional language?
- What are the barriers to acquiring spelling skills in English by isiXhosa speaking grade three learners?

In response to the above research questions themes that emerged were teacher and learner related:

a) Teacher related themes

Barriers in acquiring spelling skills

- i. Teacher practices
- ii. Pronunciation

b) Learner related themes

Learners' strategies for spelling

- i. Word articulation
- ii. Editing
- iii. Visualizing

Barriers in acquiring spelling skills

- i. Phonemes that make phonetic words
- ii. Interference of first language
- iii. Word recognition skill

4.6.1 Teacher related themes

Teacher practices

When teaching this new diagraph there were no accompanying pictures at hand. Words were isolated and were not used in sentences. DuBois, *et al* (2007) pointed out that many probable causes for students' inability to transfer spelling into written work may lie within the spelling instruction that students receive. The teacher introduced the diagraph *sh* by singing three English songs with the learners. One of the songs they sang was about showers of rain. After finishing singing she wrote on the chalkboard the topic: *Phonics: sh*. She then asked learners to read each

grapheme in the diagraph (*s* and *h*) and then blend them together as phoneme *sh*. She posed a question to the learners asking them to think of words that are attached to this phonic. Hands were lifted up with excitement and the following tabulated lists of words were written on the chalkboard coming from learners, namely:

Table 12: Words listed by learners

List of words with the correct phonic <i>sh</i> given by learners	List of words that learners believed that had the phonic <i>sh</i>
Wash	Chair
Fish	Teacher
Shout	Check
Shirt	Chalk
Brush	Chips
Sheep	
Shake	
Dish	
Shop	
Push	
Shoes	
Shut	
Shout	

As indicated in the table, out of these words the teacher picked ten and wrote words with diagraph *ch* next to the words with phonic *sh*. As she wrote these words on the chalkboard, she read them aloud and learners repeated after her. After that she explained to the learners that the words with diagraph *ch* are not the same as the

diagraph *sh* but she said that they will be taught the *ch diagraph* the next time. She then rubbed off the words with diagraph *ch* and rubbed off diagraph *sh* from the remaining words.

She gave the learners an activity of filling in the diagraph *sh* to the remaining words in their workbook. While the learners were writing, she moved around to check and give assistance. She checked to see if all the learners had started with the correct letter, reminded learners about capitals and filling in of the new diagraph in the word, and helped learners to sound out words while writing. She occasionally sent some of the learners to the word wall to find a similar word and she sometimes explained to some learners who were struggling to write. As learners began to finish, she sat at her desk to mark the learners' work. Her marking involved underlining spelling errors made by the learners.

Pronunciation

When the teacher was pronouncing the written words to the learners she was very clear. She would stretch sounds for learners to hear. More especially, the words with the diagraph *sh*, she did this for the learner to hear the difference between these two diagraphs. For example, when pronouncing *brush* she sounded like *b-ru-sh...* and when pronouncing the word *teacher*, it sounded like *tea-ch-ch-cher*. She did this sounding in all the words with the diagraph *ch*. She repeated this pronunciation strategy three times with each of the words with diagraph *ch*. She did this when she was writing these words on the chalkboard and the learners were repeating after her all the time. However, words like *fish*, *dish* and *push* were pronounced as if there was suffix *i*.

4.6.2 Learner related themes

Learners' spelling strategies

Word articulation

During their writing task learners used different spelling strategies. When some were confronted with a challenging word, they articulated it by sounding the word out several times before writing it down. For example, words like *sheep*, *shake*, and *brush* were sounded out by learners. When sounding out words, some had difficulty representing the correct diagraph and the word sounded as if a vowel or consonant was added: for example, words like *wash* sounded as *wa-tshi* and words like *shout* sounded as *sha-wu-ti*. It seems as if some of the learners were still confusing the sounding of phonic *sh* for *tsh* of IsiXhosa. Miressa and Dumessa (2001) pointed out that spelling English words by itself is difficult, as we do not spell many words the way they sound and others have silent letters. This inconsistency in English spelling misleads learners to write words with the wrong spelling. This is made work more difficult when learners are spelling in their additional language.

Editing

There was evidence of an editing strategy that was adopted by some of the learners. After finishing writing a word, some read their work to make sure it was the same as what they had copied from the chalkboard. They also rubbed out a lot when they saw that there was a spelling error. However, not all of the learners adopted this strategy. Some learners made use of word wall words in finding familiar words with the same diagraph. They did this when they got stuck. They looked around the classroom to see whether the word was on the wall and when they found the word, they copied it. Teaching students to reread their own writing and make corrections independently is

an important part of teaching students the importance of correct spelling (Dubois, *et al*, 2007).

Visualizing

While they were writing, some of the learners closed their eyes, and others covered their work with one hand. This indicates a possibility that they were trying to visualise how the word was formed. As a result, one of the learners who used this strategy was able to fill in the correct diagraph in words. However, not all of the learners were visualizing; one of the learners put a pencil in his/her mouth before writing. The other learner paged the activity work book to the previous work done.

Barriers in acquiring spelling skills

Interference of first language

When learners were giving the list of words with diagraph *sh* while the teacher was writing on the chalkboard, some words sounded like diagraph *tsh* of isiXhosa. A word like *brush* was pronounced as *bratshi*. This seems to indicate language transfer because this word is borrowed from English but with isiXhosa spelling. On the other hand there may be a possibility that this made work more difficult when learners are spelling in their additional language. They are taught this diagraph *sh* in isiXhosa in the previous grades. Or the possibility might be the learners did not hear the sound clearly when it was introduced.

The following table presents spelling errors committed by learners and the possible barriers in acquiring spelling skills. The evidence was gathered from different

learners' books after the activity given by the teacher on the diagraph *sh* was completed.

Table 13: Errors made by learners

Words with phonic <i>sh</i>	Errors made by learners	Barriers
<i>Brush</i>	<i>brish/bratsh</i>	Carelessness, interference of first language
<i>Push</i>	<i>Pushi</i>	Insertion of extra vowel 'i'
<i>Shake</i>	<i>shak/shaik/shayik, shaiiki</i>	Omission of vowel 'e', addition of letter 'i' and language transference
<i>Shut</i>	<i>Suht</i>	Reversal of letters
<i>Shout</i>	<i>Shuot, shawuti</i>	Reversal of vowels, language transfer
<i>Shirt</i>	<i>sheti/ shrt/shrit</i>	Language transfer, omission and reversal of letters
<i>Shoes</i>	<i>shuz/ chuz, shuiz</i>	Language transfer, inadequate knowledge of English phonology, insertion of extra vowel
<i>Sheep</i>	<i>ship/shep</i>	Language transfer, carelessness

When one sees the written words in the table above, one can identify many problems. The first word *brush* is written as *brish* or as *bratsh* and the vowel *u* has been replaced by vowel *i* and vowel *a* while the diagraph *sh* has been written as *tsh*. The word *push* is written as *pushi*; in this case there was an insertion of an extra vowel *i* at the end of the word. It may be possible that the learners noted how the

teacher pronounced the word hence the learner made that spelling error. In the word *shake* learners omitted silent *e* and inserted vowel *i* and *y*. Besides this, one of the learners wrote a non-existing word *suht* to mean *shut* and another learner wrote *shuot* to mean *shout* reversing the vowels. There is also an indication that the learner does not know the spelling of the word *shoes* and therefore seemed to write the word as he/she felt it to be written. Also some learners wrote *ship* to mean *sheep*. These words have a different sound in English but it is difficult for isiXhosa speakers to hear this because they do not have the short *i*.

Word recognition skill

As the researcher has indicated in the above table, it seems as if some of the learners were still struggling to recognise and write vowel diagraphs words. The words that were written by learners were on the chalkboard. Only the diagraph was rubbed off but learners were still misspelling the words. Moreover, after the work was marked, the researcher asked some of the learners to read specifically words with errors. Some of the learners were unable to recognise that the words they had written were incorrect. They read the words correctly although they had spelt them incorrectly. For example, words like (*shirt*) *shrit* and *shout* were read correctly. However, some learners were unable to read their work.

4.7 Triangulation: Analysis of data gathered through semi structured interviews, document analysis and classroom observations

In this study a semi structured interview, classroom observation and document analysis were used sometimes to respond to the same research question. To ensure

validity of data gathered, the researcher, therefore, comparatively analysed the data gathered through the three methods. The following issues emerged from the data gathered through the three methods.

Learners are struggling with understanding the phonology of English

Learners write words as they hear them

In analysing the barriers of acquiring spelling skills in all of the instruments, the researcher noted that learners write words as they hear them. They use borrowed English words which accommodate their language isiXhosa when writing. For example, a word like *bucket* was written as *bhakethi*, *flowers* as *flawas* and *stop* as *stopu*. This occurred especially when the sound of the English word was pronounced similarly to their native language. This barrier seems to indicate that they struggle to understand the letters that form a word, hence they write what they hear. Also this may be an indication that learners struggle with the phonology of English hence they confuse the phonemes in words.

Learners rely heavily on their L1 knowledge

In all the instruments used to gather data, it is apparent that the influence of the learners' native language is significant when the learners are spelling words. Some of the words that the learners spelt incorrectly were literal translations from isiXhosa. For example, in the document analysis 75% of learners wrote words borrowed from their native language which resulted in spelling errors. During the interview the teacher also reported that learners often pronounce words incorrectly, in other words, they carry over isiXhosa letter pronunciation habits into English. In classroom observation learners also transferred their language, isiXhosa, into English using

borrowed words like *shout* as *shawuti*, *shirt* as *sheti* etc. This is what Al-Jarf (2008:12) found “...learners sometimes construct their own L2 interim rules with the use of their L1 knowledge to help them in the writing tasks, resulting in L2 errors.”

Learners commit a range of spelling errors

These include vowel omissions and insertion, letter transposition, language transfer errors, and consonant blending. For example, in the interviews the researcher was told that learners omit or add more letters in words with two vowels or two letters in between. The substitution of letters often produces words quite different from the ones intended. From what the teacher said and the researcher saw in the document analysis and during the classroom observation, when learners are writing vowel diagraphs, they write what they hear. Sometimes they substitute the vowels or write one letter in vowel diagraphs thus omitting the silent letters. Cook (as cited in Al-Jabri, undated) mentioned that the most common spelling errors relate to pronunciation and that this is shown through substituted vowels and phonological mistakes.

They seem to be careless and do not use visual cues

In document analysis and classroom observation the researcher saw that there seems to be carelessness when learners were writing. In other words learners wrote what they felt rather than in the way words should be spelled. This problem of learners was revealed, in which the misspelled words did not match the target words, because a consonant or a vowel or a prefix or a suffix was added or reversed or missed in a word that was copied from the chalkboard.

4.8 Conclusion

In this chapter the data collected for the purpose of research was analysed. The findings obtained from the semi-structured interviews, document analysis and direct observation were outlined, interpreted and presented to answer the research questions. In the next chapter conclusions and recommendations will be presented.

Chapter 5

Conclusion and Recommendations

5.1 Introduction

In this chapter the researcher discusses the data presented and analysed in the previous chapter and how they relate to the literature review with reference to the nature of spelling errors of isiXhosa background learners in EFAL. The research was guided by the following research questions:

Main research question:

What is the nature of spelling errors committed by grade three isiXhosa background learners in English first additional language?

Sub-research questions:

- What are the features of the words that grade three isiXhosa background learners experience difficulties with in spelling in English First Language?
- What are the features of the words that grade three isiXhosa background learners find easy to spell in English first additional language?
- What are Grade three isiXhosa background learners' strategies for spelling in English first additional language?
- What are the barriers to acquiring spelling skills in English by isiXhosa speaking grade three learners?

Data gathering instruments included document analysis, semi structured interviews and classroom observation. This chapter will discuss how the study responds to its objectives. The objectives of this study are:

- To provide a comprehensive description of spelling practices of isiXhosa background learners in English first additional language.
- To investigate the nature of spelling errors committed by isiXhosa background learners in English first additional language.
- To understand the in-depth barriers to acquiring spelling skills in English by isiXhosa background learners.

5.2 Discussion of findings

a) Learners spelling practices

Issue one: This study revealed that there seems to be a discrepancy between learners' spoken and written language

Learners' pronunciation was problematic and it fed into how they wrote English words. Because they pronounced words incorrectly, this was evident in their writing.

Learners also relied heavily on their home language, isiXhosa. This resulted in them using isiXhosa spelling rules when writing English words.

The issues of pronunciation and learners' reliance on their mother tongue seem to be a problem that second language learners experience. For example, the Department of Education states that English vowels are particularly challenging for

African language speakers and this is made more difficult by the variety of ways in which these vowels are spelt (DoE, 2008).

Recommendation: Teachers have to find ways of monitoring learners' pronunciation of words. The use of a dictionary to support learners to pronounce a word correctly is recommended. Monitoring learners' spelling development is an issue that Dorn, *et al* (as cited in DuBois, *et al*, 2007); Farrington-Flint, *et al* (2008); Laminack & Wood (1996) and Wilde (1992) raise.

Issue two: Lack of familiarity with English phonology

They write words as they hear them. This shows that the learners struggle with phonemic awareness. Phonemic awareness is the ability to notice, think about and work with individual sounds in a spoken word. Medrano & Zych (1998) and Bailey, *et al* (as cited in DuBois, *et al*, 2007) highlighted that learners whose phonemic awareness is underdeveloped struggle with spelling and with reading. This means that learners in this class might struggle with reading.

Recommendation: Teachers should find strategies for monitoring learners' phonemic awareness. Moreover, teachers should share their journey with each other so that they can help each other in the process of developing learners' literacy skills. In addition learners need to be taught the spelling rules of the English language and how English spelling rules differ from isiXhosa spelling rules. For example, isiXhosa has a transparent orthography and English does not. Hence a print rich classroom with visual aids is recommended by Cairney (2009); DuBois, *et al* (2007) and Garza & Lira, (2008) and it can be helpful.

Issue three: Learners were able to spell correctly words with short vowels

Recommendation: This is learners' current knowledge of spelling in English. Teachers should build on this knowledge and find ways of moving beyond their current level of development.

Issue four: Learners could spell easily those words that were presented to them in a print rich environment

Learners spelt classroom objects correctly. The teacher recalled that these were introduced to them in grade one and grade two and in those grades the objects were labelled so as to help learners in spelling.

Recommendation: Teachers should have word walls, visual cues to help learners in their spelling development. Moreover, a print rich classroom is important when learners are learning a new language whether they learn it in written or oral form.

Issue five: Although the learners struggled with spelling in EFAL, they seemed to have ways of monitoring their spelling

Learners seem to edit, visualize and articulate words, meaning these learners understand that they have to proof read their work before publishing it.

Recommendation: Engage the learners in the process of writing: drafting, editing and publishing.

b) Learners' barriers in acquiring spelling skills

Teacher related issues

Issue one: Teacher practices seemed to hinder learners' spelling development

Writing in the class studied happened haphazardly. For example, for spelling tests the teacher would randomly give learners words to write, regardless of whether they had been introduced to a particular word family or not. Moreover, the teacher seemed to have no plans as to how to develop emerging spellers. She did not have a process map that indicated which sound was to be introduced first and which sound would follow.

Recommendation: Without proper planning from the teacher, learners get confused. English has an opaque (or irregular or deep) orthography; it therefore needs a teacher who understands the rules of the language. For example, in English the phoneme sound is not necessarily the same as the name of the letters of the alphabet: the letter "a" does not make the same sound in all the words in which learners might find it. An English language teacher therefore has to find a strategy and have a process map so as not to confuse learners.

Issue two: Teacher's pronunciation practices influence learners' spelling practices

In the class observed the teacher's pronunciation led to learners' spelling mistakes.

Recommendation: Where possible English second language teachers should work with English FAL speakers so that they can learn how to correctly pronounce English words. Moreover ESL teachers have to monitor their pronunciation practices.

c) Learner related issues

Issue one: Learners' under developed phonemic awareness is a huge barrier to them acquiring spelling skills in EFAL

As discussed above learners lacked the ability to notice, think about and work with individual sounds in a spoken word in their additional language.

Recommendation: Monitor learners' phonemic awareness. This should not be done only when there are spelling tests to be written but also during reading sessions. Learners also need to be taught ways of monitoring their spelling.

Issue two: The interference of the first language

As discussed the learners rely heavily on the L1 knowledge

Recommendation: Teach them to understand the phonology of English.

d) The nature of spelling errors

Mostly the nature of spelling errors was phonetic. Some consist of mechanical errors, addition, omission and substitution of letters, reversing of beginnings of words, substituting similar letters, leaving off endings, and orthographic errors.

Recommendation: Learners should be taught to understand the phonology of the English language which is contrary to isiXhosa. This is not new. Degeneffe & Ward (as cited in DuBois, *et al* 2007); Gentry (2004) and Medrano and Zych (1998) emphasized that spelling instructions should be provided.

5.3 Recommendations for further research

This case study investigated the nature of spelling errors of grade three isiXhosa background learners in English First Additional Language in the East London District.

Further research could be conducted on the following:

- It has been acknowledged that participants in this study were eight grade three learners with one teacher who taught these learners. Replicating this study with a larger sample could substantiate the findings of this study.
- Extending this research design to incorporate the whole Foundation Phase and comparing the findings to this study would add a different perspective. Would similar factors emerge or a whole new set?
- Mostly errors committed by learners in this study were influenced by their mother tongue (isiXhosa). A longitudinal study of the nature of spelling errors of isiXhosa background learners in Afrikaans as Second Additional Language should be undertaken to find out the limitations and possibilities. Moreover, the scope of future research could be enlarged by investigating the nature of spelling errors in isiXhosa by isiXhosa speakers.

5.4 Conclusion

From this study one could conclude by raising the following issues. Emerging developing spellers need a teacher who has a plan or has a process map on how to introduce learners to English spelling rules. English FAL should be in classes where learners' spelling development is monitored. Moreover, for isiXhosa background learners their language has a transparent (or regular or shallow) orthography whereas English has an opaque (or irregular or deep) orthography. Learners bring this knowledge to learning to spell in English, but they have to learn that the sound-

spelling (or phoneme-grapheme) relationships are not exactly the same in English as in isiXhosa. This, therefore, needs to be socialized into the rules of an opaque orthography of the language. Writing should not happen haphazardly in a content where the sounds made by letters change in different words. This is similar to sport. If basket ball players are given a ball to play netball on a netball court without proper training or a set of netball rules, definitely they will play and apply the rules of basket ball. This is the same with English spelling; learners need to be taught the rules.

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APPENDIX A

DOCUMENT ANALYSIS SCHEDULE (piloting)

Document A: Learner's Book

Learner A: Gender (F/M):

Age:

Home language:

Languages used at home:

Genres of /Reasons for writing

Essay	Transactional writing	Narratives	Informational text	Memoir writing

Table designed as guided by: Baker (2007); Jasztal (2010); Literacy in Action (2003); Lutrin & Pincus (2002); Portland Public Schools (2009).

Types of written exercises

Learner controlled (learner initiated)	Teacher controlled	Themes guiding learners writing	Frequency

Features of Words that are “commonly mis -spelt”

Word features	Error committed by learners	Possible reasons for the error

Features of the words that learners seem to find easy to spell

Features of the words	Words easy to spell

Instructions given to learners' work

None	
Clear	
Not clear	

Feedback from the teacher

Types of feedback	Frequency
Complementary	
Monitoring	
Confirming	
Improving	

Table designed as guided by: Van Aswegen & Dreyer (2005);

Code

X: no evidence

Y: evidence

Instructions given to learners

None: no instructions given

Not clear: complicated, not understandable

Clear: short, focused, understandable

APPENDIX B

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

Biographical Information

Gender		Age			Home Language		
Male	female	31-40	41-50	51-60	IsiXhosa	English	Other

Teaching qualifications and teaching experience

Qualifications	Experience in teaching	Tick	Experience in teaching grade 3	tick

Teaching of spelling in English in grade 3

1. How do you introduce spelling?
2. What challenges do you experience in teaching spelling in English first additional language?
3. Do you have any programme you follow when teaching spelling?

Learners and Spelling

1. What kind of spelling errors do learners make?
2. What kind of words do they struggle to spell?
3. What do you think influences learners in spelling English words?
4. What kind of words do they find easy to spell?
5. Generally without giving me a list of words...What are the features of words that learners struggle to spell?

Supporting learners in spelling development in English first additional language

1. What support system is in place for learners' spelling development?
2. Who supports learners that struggle with spelling in English:
 - a) In the classroom?
 - b) Outside the classroom?

APPENDIX C

CLASSROOM OBSERVATION SCHEDULE

Number of learners _____

Type of lesson _____

Components of teaching spelling

Phonemic awareness

What strategies does the teacher use when introducing new sounds? _____

Does she pay attention to phonemic awareness?

What are the strategies the teacher uses to spell words correctly? _____

What is the new introduced sound? _____

Word recognition

Does the teacher use pictures when introducing words?

Fluency

Does the teacher speak clearly and distinctively when introducing new sounds?

When they struggle what is the teacher doing?

Components of learners' spelling strategies

Phonemic awareness

Do they understand sounds in words?

What are the learners' strategies for recognizing sounds in words?

Are learners able to pronounce the new sound?

Are they able to spell the mispronounced sound when they are writing?

Word recognition

Does the learner recognize the written word?

Fluency

How do they pronounce words when they are combined with the new sound?

APPENDIX D

Consent forms

I, **Thandiswa Mpiti**, a MEd candidate at the University of Fort Hare, School for Post Graduate Studies, as part of my academic programme, am conducting research on *Nature of spelling errors on isiXhosa background learners in English First Additional Language*. As part of this process, I am inviting you to participate in this interview.

Should you consent, I wish to guarantee you that any information that you may provide will be confidential. Your identity will not be divulged or made available to anybody other than the researcher.

Thank you

Signature.....

Date.....

I,, hereby give/not give consent to participate in the study on *Nature of spelling errors on isiXhosa background learners in English First Additional Language*.

I hereby confirm that I understand the contents of this document and the nature of the research project. I consent to participate in the research study. I understand that I am at liberty to withdraw from the project at any time, should I desire.

Signature.....

Date.....