



How Can I Improve the Spelling of Class Four Students?

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Author's contribution

The sole author designed, analysed, interpreted and prepared the manuscript.

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ABSTRACT

This research shows how the spelling of class four students, and students need to know the spellings so that their sentence structure is correct and in a way they can improve pronunciation. The need to study spelling from a communicative and functional approach arises from the interest of the researcher to perform a systematic analysis of this problem. In it, we realized the difficulty of writing correctly, and at the same time, the great link between writing correctly and developing in certain contexts in the classroom. For this reason, spelling acquires great importance in the educational context, it is necessary to promote in students the need for written communication, to promote the use of written language in different situations, and to support a progressive approach in learning spelling.

The researcher target is for class four students and the school has 10 students with six boys and four girls. Their age range is between 10 and 12. The research is conducted from 1st June to 15th August 2021. The data was collected using three methodologies namely observation of their notebooks, dictation, and the writing of articles. The research was made authentic by the data collected by the researcher and observation, a critical friend's observation, and the field notes maintained by the researcher. The researcher compiled the data by keeping a record of class four students' performance both pre-data and post-data. Towards the end, there was a remarkable

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improvement in the spellings of class four students. Thus, this research helped the researcher to explore ways to improve the spelling which would benefit the students of grade four at the workplace of the researcher. Refer local terminology in Appendix A.

Keywords: Spelling; students; reading; teacher.

1. INTRODUCTION

Action research, according to Maxwell [1] is a "systematic collection of data to answer to the question for improvement" (P.48). Research has got many definitions; Rinchen (2009) defines research as "a crucial element for any institution and lack of research activities can obstruct the improvement of education programs" (P.89). For Goldwasser (2004), action research is "an inquiry made to enhance professional development through systematic collection, analysis of data and reflection and developing practical plans for affecting positive change which leads to subsequent action research cycles" (P.185).

Gyeltshen (2009) Action research, thus, contributes a lot in bringing improvement in the education system of any country around the world. "For many people, the correct spelling of words in the English language poses a considerable challenge" (P.55).

Manser [2], "This challenge is faced all around the world and Bhutan also falls under one of those countries" (P.121). Thus, this research focuses on bringing changes and improvement in the spellings of the students of class four, *Baling Primary School* under *Trongsa Dzongkhag*. Students are usually found to be very poor in writing a word with correct spelling and hence, children tend to lose marks in the examination. Therefore, one of the major emphases should be given to the improvement of students' spelling skills as it is the main foundation for building up a proper English language.

2. METHODOLOGIES

In this action research, the researcher will collect the pre-data in three areas; spelling errors in the monthly test paper, random dictation of 20 words from the story taught, and observation of notes books. The researcher will keep the data as a baseline and conduct repeated dictation, writing short articles, and observation of notebooks. The researcher will analyze the pre-data and post-

data to analyze it. The sample for the research will be used class four students and to study the standard of spelling performance of a particular grade. The researcher has chosen the particular grade as the children of class four beginning to learn additional of two more subjects, Science and Social Studies. It is a crucial stage to start learning upper primary subjects and make the students difficult. The researcher intends to initiate the concept of Language across the curriculum, whereby all the subject teachers will collaborate to support in teaching towards improving spelling.

The researcher could not use more than 10 samples since the school has only 10 students in grade four. The researcher decided not to include other grades since it may create bias while analyzing data. The researcher tries to use mixed-method involving both qualitative and quantitative approaches. The main purpose of the study is to create more space for learners (child-centered) where students of class four will be encouraged to have dictation in peer at least 10 words in a day. For sometimes, students of grade four will be encouraged to write an article and to focus on spelling correction by peers. The study is aimed for greater benefits in a small way.

The researcher had informed all the parents in written that everything will be maintained confidential. The letter of consent was signed between the concerned parents and the researcher, and students of class four also informed that their performance will be maintained confidential throughout the study.

2.1 Reconnaissance

The term reconnaissance is derived from the French term 'reconnoiter' which denotes to look at. According to Maxwell [1], Reconnaissance consists of three parts:

1. Situational Analysis
2. Competences
3. Literature Review

2.2 Situational Analysis

Country

Bhutan, the Himalayan Kingdom is known to its people as the 'Druk Yul' (the Land of Thunder Dragon) and as the 'Last Shangrila' (Paradise or perhaps as Utopia) for the outsiders or foreigners. The natural barriers and beautiful snowcapped mountain ranges separate it from the two giant neighboring countries, India and China. Secluded from its neighbors by some of the highest mountain ranges in the world, Bhutan occupies a total area of 38,394 sq. km with forest coverage of 72.5%, and a population of 748,931 approximately. Since the 1960s, Bhutan has been enduring rapid developmental changes and in the year 2008, Bhutan marked another important event in its history, the formation of a new government, (Constitutional Democratic Monarchy), popularly recognized as the youngest Democratic country in the world.

Baling Primary School

It is located in *Trongsa*. It is 60 km from Dzongkhag Headquarter, located *Trongsa-Gelephu* highway 6 km away from *Koshala* viewpoint towards *Zhemgang*. It was established on April 25, 2000, by Yadu Prasad, who was the founder Principal of this school.

The school is now 21 years old and the school was started with about 30 children in the present multi-purpose hall. The school was upgraded to primary school in the following years. Since its establishment, the school has not only admitted the children of the natives, but also the children of employees in and around the area, especially, the children of the Department of Road employees, *Pangzoor* and *Koshala*.

Class four

The researcher had chosen the particular class as a sample to conduct the action research. There are 10 students with six boys and four girls. Beginning of the research, the researcher went through class four monthly test papers and found out that poor spelling. The objective behind this is that students lack practice and no learning space created by the teacher to improve the spelling of class four students.

Problem

The students of grade four in the school were found very poor in spelling. It is evident from the

children's work such as observing notebooks, writing articles, and test papers. Many initiatives are taken by the government to improve the standard of English in various schools across the country, and one strategy can be improved by learning to spell. The root cause of this problem comes from various sources like lack of proper guidance from the elders, less support from parents, lack of interest in learning from the children's side, and most importantly it is because of less emphasis given on the English, considering it as a foreign language by students of class four.

Another important factor that leads to poor spelling is due to poor strategies of teaching to improve spelling. Another reason for being poor in spelling could be due to improper guidance from the elders, which includes the parents as well as the teachers, lack of exposure, lack of interest in learning, and poor learning space in the school. The other reason could be speaking of dialect and rarely speaks English and also no writing habits.

Some of the basic skills that are required to take up measures are dictation, writing an article, and correction of notebooks.

Competence

The researcher is a graduate from Samtse College of Education with the primary teacher in 1999 and undergone Bachelor degree in primary education from 2012 to 2015 through distance education. Currently, the researcher is undergoing Master in Leadership and Management at *Paro* college of Education. The researcher has a background knowledge of English grammar, English Communication, and Creative Writing. The researcher has been teaching English every year to maintain continuity in learning the language. Being the head of the school, a researcher-led a role to overcome the reading difficulties, especially regarding pronunciation and intonation through various literary activities.

The participants for the research are the students of class four. They are very good at reading, drawing, active in participating in the class. Since the researcher itself is an English teacher; the students find good interest in literary works like writing articles, learn to improve spelling through dictation, peer correction, and support from teachers.

3. LITERATURE REVIEW

Manser [2] stated that "for many people, the correct spelling of words in the English poses a considerable challenge" (P.121). This challenge is also seen in our country, Bhutan. Since English is the common language used worldwide and is a bridge of communication all around the world, the improvement in the use of language should be enhanced by improving spelling. To bring improvement in the use of the English language, firstly the basis of the language should be improved and these basic spelling words should be selected based on the various purposes of children's writing. Third, standard spelling is important – if language is to be shared, then it must follow the accepted standard pattern [3].

Educators' views on spelling have evolved – during the Colonial times, 'spelling was the core of the school curriculum...the spelling book was the sole textbook, and it also served as the major resource for all curricular areas [4]. Promoters of spelling pointed out that when children are encouraged to invent phonetic spellings for words that haven't yet been introduced to them, they are better encouraged to learn further, and would ultimately improve the inaccurate spellings [4].

One proposed solution for this dilemma is developing a systematic spelling action plan for the classroom, as developed by Rowe, [5]. This 'plan' for teachers includes conducting activities such as writing messages to students, learning concepts about the issue, and composing stories with groups of students, and afterward writing these stories on large sheets of paper. In other words, spelling should be made more interesting and used in context to make students grasp them better. A teacher can also post the new words on a notice board to help students preserve the word and its spelling visually.

The following observation has been discussed among the researchers:

There were two ways in how one can help children to overcome spelling difficulties, they are: First, the words should at least be those that a child uses in everyday language, and second, there must be ample usage of examples for each, so kids can fully understand what the word means, and at the same time, why it is spelled that way. A person has to develop an interest in

words if he or she wants to excel in academic performance [6].

Strommen & Mates [7] acknowledged that children's views of recreational as well as academic reading are tied to reading ability. This is no different from a child developing a strong love for a certain sport in which he or she excels.

To develop this 'love of reading' in students, they should be guided in their quest to spell better, as spelling is an important basis of reading and writing ability. Thus, spelling is an important factor in writing, as the reader wants to correctly interpret what's written by them.

According to Wernham & Lloyd [8], "Dictation gives the students regular practice in listening for sounds in the words they write and is a good way of monitoring their progress" (P.27).

According to Bryce [9], "Children often spell words correctly when they are dictated" (P.14). This statement provides another opportunity for the researcher to study and find out findings.

Shalaway [10] studied creativity is about the process of creating, not the product. Product-oriented activities limit their ability to exercise creativity (P. 200). Another study found similar data, showing that creating a learning space increases the creativity of the learners [11]. Both the studies have similar findings on creativity but indirectly contribute to improving spelling.

Cooper & Kiger [12] studied another way to help students learn to spell and make the connection between reading and writing is to have them write a summary of a text they have just read (P.341).

Morrow [13] Studied modeling independent word study activities, phonemic awareness and phonics improve word building skills (P.52).

Fei Long's [14] studies found that students were made listeners with scarce resources, least learning space, and creativity dominated by teacher center (P.32).

Action research question

"How can I improve the spelling of class four students?"

3.1 Monthly Test Paper

The researcher corrected the monthly test English paper for class four students and found out that all students were quite poor in spelling. The researcher corrected and recorded all the spelling mistakes students made in the test paper. The researcher kept a record of the common spelling mistakes that they made and also recorded the highest and lowest achieved mark of the students.

3.2 Observation of Class Notebooks

After the completion of every new topic, the researcher used to give them some questions to answer. Their class notes were checked after every activity and the misspelled words were recorded. Some of the misspelled words were: attitude, risk, destination, waste, survival, rescue, hunters, happily, etc.

3.3 Creative Writing Skills

The researcher organized an activity where students were made to write a short article, my favorite animal. Students were made to write during the English class. Use of dictionary is discouraged to find out class four students performance in spelling.

3.4 Class Spelling Test

The researcher conducted a spelling test by selecting 20 words from the taught lesson and recorded the top three achiever's scores; the bottom three scores and the scores of the average students.

3.5 Baseline Data

The data was collected using three different methods.

1. Dictation

The first data collected was based on the dictation/ spelling test of 20 words out of 20. The highest scored was 17, the lowest was 3 and the average scored was 12. This is shown in the Table given below in Fig. 1.

Table 1. Scores of pre-data

Scores	Pre-Data
Highest score	17
Average score	12
Lowest score	3

2. Writing of articles

The second method to collect data was the writing of articles. The researcher made students write an essay on the topic "I love a cow?" By correcting the articles, came to find out that the students were very poor in spelling and also poor in grammar too. Their sentence structures were very poorly framed with the usage of lots of fragments and slang. The reason behind such grammatical and spelling errors could be due to their carelessness, ignorance, lack of reading habits, and mainly because of illiterate family background. From the correction, the researcher concluded that out of 10 students, 3 of them misspelled about 14 words and 3 of them between 0 to 6 words. The most commonly made mistake by the students was 16 words. This can be seen in the Table and Fig. 2.

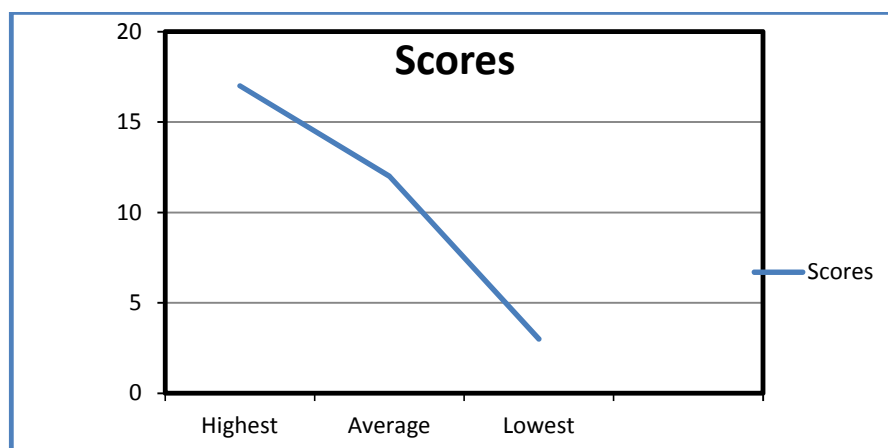


Fig. 1. Score plot

Table 2. Level of Errors

Level of Errors	Pre-data
Highest errors	16
Average errors	14
Lowest errors	6

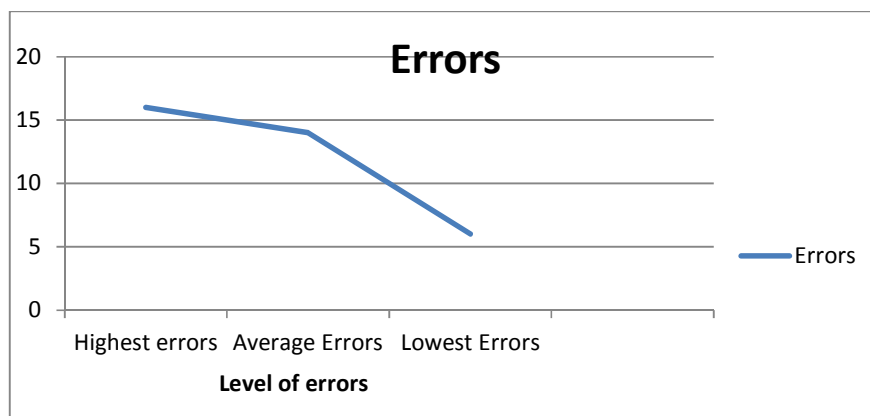


Fig. 2. Level of Errors

3. Observation of notebooks

The third was the observation of class notebooks. In this data collection, whenever the researcher come across spelling errors, circled the word with a red pen and wrote **SP** on top of it. The misspelled words were recorded in the diary. The commonly misspelled words were such as beautiful, helpful, domestic, jungle, mushroom, rescue, friendship, search, etc...On

an average students misspelled around 10 words. Out of 10 students, 6 of them misspelled these words and only 4 spelled these words correctly. The below Table and Fig. 3 represent the above statement.

Table 3. Pre data

	Pre-Data
No. of students	6

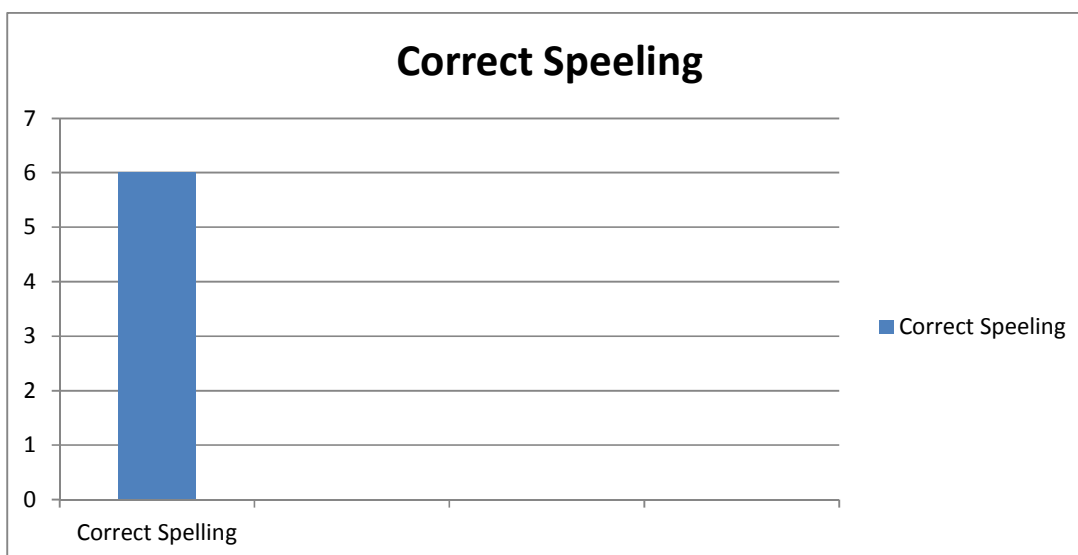


Fig. 3. Graph showing the correct spelling

4. DISCUSSION

From the above-gathered information of baseline data Figs. and Tables 1 to 3, the researcher has a vital role to sharpen the saw in the field of spelling improvement. It conveys the message that huge gaps between the high achievers and low achievers in terms of learning spelling. The researcher realized that spelling is one main key areas to focus learning English by class four students at the worked place.

4.1 Intervention Programmes

After the collection and the compilation of the three baseline data, it indicated that the students were lacking behind in the field of spelling. As stated by Manser [2], "the correct spelling of words in the English poses a considerable challenge", the researcher observed from the pre-data collection that the students were suffering from serious spelling problems. To bring improvement of class four students in the spelling, organized many activities by executing different strategies including the three methodologies that mentioned earlier: 1. Dictation, 2. Writing of articles, and 3. Observation of class notebooks. Some of the strategies that adopted to promote the spelling of students were: as recommended by Strommen & Mates [7] that "I kept a week as a reading week where the students were asked to take a book from the school library and read during their leisure times and to look up for the meaning of the new words from the dictionary that they came across while reading heir piece. Children's views of recreational as well as academic reading are tied to reading ability. This is no different from a child developing a strong love for a certain sport in which he or she excels by Strommen & Mates [7].

Students were asked to read and to do the book review of whatever they have read during the reading week. The researcher also made some of them present 10 adjectives words to the class to improve spelling.

Model reading was another strategy that the researcher followed to promote students 'spelling. Students learn what their teachers teach; hence, it becomes the responsibility of the teachers to provide their students with correct pronunciation, to make the students pick up the correct spelling for the correct words. Pronunciations play a vital role in developing one's spelling background, for, if you know the

correct pronunciation of a word, naturally the correct spelling will also appear automatically. However, there are certain words with similar pronunciations where spelling errors can occur. As mentioned by Manser [2], the problem of spelling words chiefly stalks from their phonetic qualities (that is, how they sound to listen). In such a case what happens in the English language contains largely phonetic spellings, as a result, "the way a word sound is not necessarily obvious from the way it is spelled" [2].

4.2 Post Data and Observation Data Analysis

The researcher started with the collection of post data from the first week of June 2021 after the execution of the interventions; the researcher found drastic improvement in the spelling of class four students. It can be seen in detail in the following post data that have been collected after the implementation of interventions.

4.2.1 Dictation

Unlike the pre-data collection, this time researcher conducted a spelling test on the short story "**The Daksaan**" by Kusum Kapur. This time, the researcher selected 20 words for the dictation. Due to the implementation of the interventions, the researcher saw a drastic improvement in the students' performance. When compared to the earlier dictation held or the baseline data, this time students scored good marks with fewer spelling errors. The highest scored marks during the baseline data collection was 17 out of 20 but this time it was 19 out of 20, the average marks obtained by maximum earlier was 12 but this time improved to 16 and the lowest mark obtained, earlier was 3 but this time it improved to 8, which indicates a great improvement in the students learning field of spelling. The comparison is clearly shown in the Table and Fig. 4.

4.2.2 Writing of articles

The researcher made the students write an article on the topic 'My Favorite animal'. The researcher gave one period for the students to write the article. Students were asked to write the article without helping each other, to check their improvement, and to get authentic results. The researcher was happy to see positive results at the end. There was a great improvement in the spelling as they were able to produce good

articles when compared to the pre-data collection. In the baseline data, the average spelling error made was 16, and the average spelling error in post data improved by 9 that is, it decreased from 16 to only 7 on average. This improvement is shown in the pie chart and Table 5.

Table 4. Post-data

Scores	Pre- data (A)	Post- data (B)
Highest Score	16	19
Average score	12	16
Lowest Score	3	8

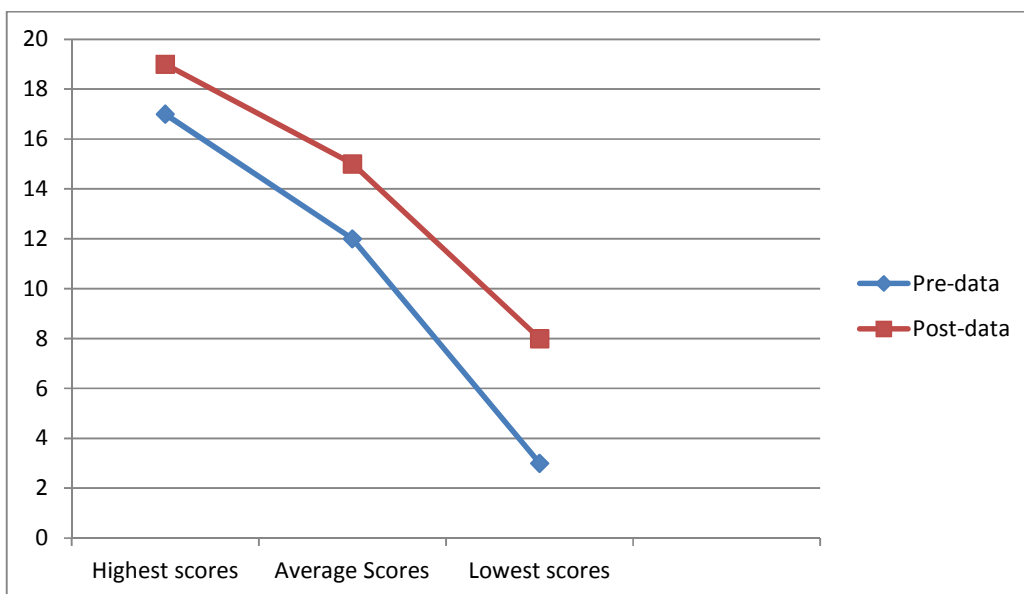


Fig. 4. Great improvement in the students learning field of spelling

Table 5. Writing of Articles

Writing of Articles	Pre-data (A)	Post Data (B)
Spelling errors	16	9

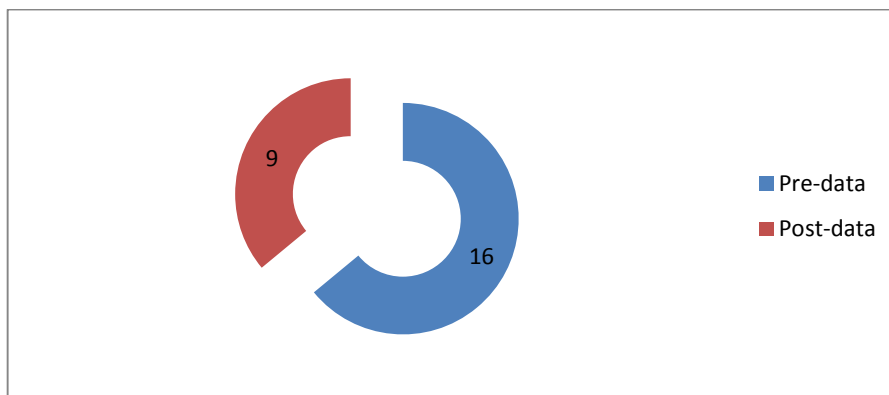


Fig. 5. Writing of Articles

4.2.3 Observation of the notebooks

The observation of notebooks was focused on one of the classwork activities, where the students were made to answer few questions from taught stories to correct the notebooks, It is observed that less spelling errors when compared to the baseline data.

Earlier only 6 out of 10 students were able to come up with correct spellings, however, this time almost all the students came up with correct spelling that is 8 out of 10 students. The Table and Fig. in 5 show the comparison information of pre-and post-data.

From the observation of the data analysis for the dictation Table and Fig. 6, the highest scores out of 20 increased from 16 to 19, average scores increased 12 to 16, and the lowest scores improved from 3 to 8. This indicates that dictation plays a vital role in the improvement of spelling. According to Wernham & Lloyd [8], "Dictation gives the students regular practice in listening for sounds in the words they write and is a good way of monitoring their progress" (P.27). The above two authors strongly recommend the study that dictation is an appropriate tool for the grade four students to practice and improve spelling. According to Bryce [9], "Children often spell words correctly when they are dictated" (P.14). The second author study also found that dictation helps to spell words correctly where indirectly improves spelling. Manser [2] stated that "for many people, the correct spelling of words in the English poses a considerable challenge" (P.121). This is true for students of grade four at the researcher workplace challenge in spelling. When the students write a word with an error spelling meaning of the context change or make meaningless to the readers.

Kolodziej & Columba [4] Promoters of spelling pointed out that when children are encouraged to invent phonetic spellings for words that haven't yet been introduced to them, they are better encouraged to learn further, and would ultimately improve the incorrect spellings (P.213). These findings do not support it very well as most of the learners may not be encouraged with an invent of phonetic spelling for words that are new to them to improve spelling. It may sound positive for about 5% to 10%.

Fig. and Table 4 represent the number of errors made in writing an article. The study found that in

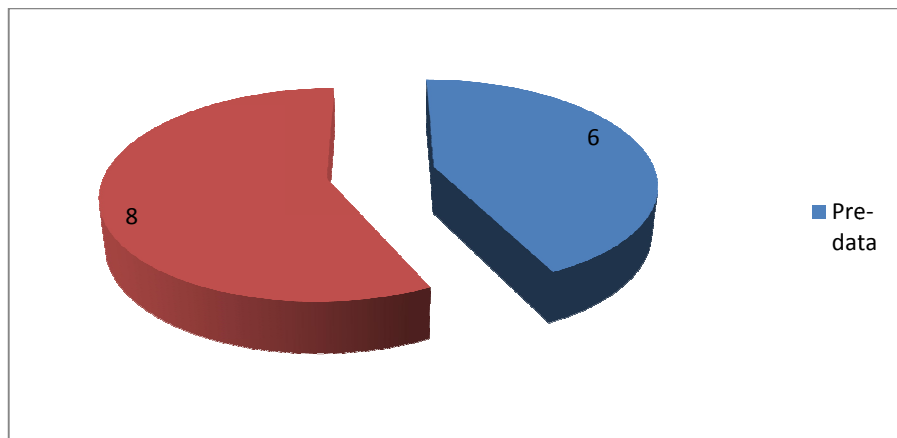
the pre-test maximum error was 16 and the post-data shows nine errors which means the number of errors decreased by seven. The study proves that writing an article also improves spelling. Cooper & Kiger [12] studied another way to help students learn to spell and make the connection between reading and writing is to have them write a summary of a text they have just read (P.341). Their study also proves that writing a summary of text they read promotes spelling improvement. Fei Long's [14] studies found that students were made listeners with scarce resources, least learning space, and creativity dominated by teacher center (P.32). This study talks that teachers must create enough learning spaces for learners to be creative. This may contribute to self-learning, however may not support spelling improvement. Morrow [13] Studied modeling independent word study activities, phonemic awareness and phonics improve word building skills (P.52). The researcher strongly supports the study of Marrow where word building contributes to spelling improvement since to build a word, one must learn writing correct word keeping phonics skills.

The Fig. and Table in 5 show a comparison of pretest and post-test of observation of the notebooks. The findings of the study are that in the pre-test six students out of 10 were able to come up with correct spelling. In the post-test, eight students managed to write their assigned activity with correct spelling. It is clear in the study that improvement of 20% increases from 60% to 80%. The study indicates that observation of notebooks serves the purpose of improving spelling.

Shalaway [10] studied creativity is about the process of creating, not the product. Product-oriented activities limit their ability to exercise creativity (P. 200). Another study found similar data, showing that creating a learning space increases the creativity of the learners [11]. Both the studies have similar findings on creativity but indirectly contribute to improving spelling. The above two studies state that providing learning spaces for children increases creativity. Their findings strongly support the research since the researcher had provided a set of questions to answers it; the grade four students could improve their spelling from 60 percent to 80 percent. Therefore the study has a great impact on the research question to improve the spelling of grade four students.

Table 6. Observation of the notebooks

Pre-data (A)	Post- data (B)
6	8

**Fig. 6. Observation of the notebooks**

5. LIMITATIONS

Time factor plays a vital role in carrying out any kind of work. Here, also while conducting research; the researcher had a very difficult time managing time properly. The reason was due to limited time where the researcher had to take up both instructional hours and management. Time constraints hampered the progress of research; enough time was required for the execution of the intervention programs but got only about a month. Therefore, the intervention programs had to be rushed out. Another drawback, researcher faced was receiving comments from critical friends. The critical friends had to endure lots of problems like arranging her classes for a full day. One thing the researcher realized that huge gaps since conducted action research only in 2015 when under-gone B-Ed primary course at Samtse college education.

Another positive is that Mr. Nima Tshering, Vice-principal of Dawakha Lower Secondary School, Paro who has a high language proficiency supported correcting language and write-ups.

6. CONCLUSION

This is the work after five years of the gap that the researcher is coming up and happy for somehow managed to achieve the set goal, which is to improve the spelling of class four students. The researcher endured lots of difficulties as a school leader besides

management and instructional responsibilities while coming up with this research. However, getting a positive result, in the end, was a great pleasure and a success after having endured such difficulties.

Conducting Action Research is challenging and interesting work. Moreover, it is very helpful in developing the education system as a whole as it contributes a lot in helping a student to improve in his/her learning process. Therefore, henceforth will do conduct more action research work; and encourage my teacher colleagues also to initiate a small research work individually or in the group. Now, the researcher has more confidence to go ahead with the research work to grow professionally to enhance language proficiency.

7. RECOMMENDATION

This action research done on how to improve the spelling of class four students will largely help the English teachers in general. They can refer to the interventions that the researcher has used in this research and apply them in their real classroom atmosphere. The researcher would recommend the future researchers use this research to modify future changes. The strategies and the methodologies that were used for doing this research can also help Royal Education Council (REC), Ministry of Education, with coming up with new curriculum strategies, especially the New Normal Curriculum (NNC)

that can be implemented in the curriculum development for the further improvement of the students.

CONSENT

As per international standard, parental written consent has been collected and preserved by the authors.

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COMPETING INTERESTS

Author has declared that no competing interests exist.

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Appendix A

1. **Baling:** Name of the village under Trongsa district.
2. **Trongsa:** Name of the district in Bhutan.
3. **Pangzoor:** Name of the village under Trongsa district.
4. **Koshala:** Name of the village under Trongsa district.
5. **Zhemgang:** Name of the district in Bhutan.
6. **Gelephu:** Name of the sub-district of Sarpang district.
7. **Daksaan:** Title of the story.
8. **Kusum Kapur:** Author of the story “**Daksaan**”.
9. **NNC:** New Normal Curriculum.
10. **REC:** Royal Education Council.
11. **Dzongkhag:** district in Bhutanese term.

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