The Impact of Metalinguistic Awareness on the Spelling Skills of Grade 7 Students

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Abstract. This study aimed to explore the impact of metalinguistic awareness on the spelling skills of Grade 7 students at Crossing Bayabas National High School, Philippines. Guided by the Metalinguistic Awareness Theory (Tunmer Herriman, 1984), the research examined phonological, orthographic, and morphological awareness as factors influencing spelling accuracy, rule application, and error correction. The researchers employed a quantitative descriptive-correlational design and the study revealed significant correlations between metalinguistic awareness and spelling proficiency, with students demonstrating strong phonological and morphological skills but moderate orthographic awareness. Findings underscored the need for targeted interventions in orthographic instruction to address gaps and enhance literacy outcomes. Practical recommendations include teacher training, curriculum enhancements, and parental support to foster comprehensive spelling skills.

1.   Introduction

Low spelling proficiency among students has been a persistent challenge in education, undermining their ability to communicate effectively in writing. According to Rauf and Saeed (2021), poor spelling skills hinder students' capacity to articulate ideas clearly, affecting both their academic and future professional success. Globally, this issue remains evident across various contexts. For instance, Henbest et al. (2020) reported that spelling deficiencies negatively influence students' long-term academic and career achievements, emphasizing the urgent need for targeted interventions. In Southern-Bantu languages like isiXhosa, Makaure (2021) and Schaefer et al. (2020) have highlighted the lim-

ited research on spelling development, which further complicates efforts to address literacy challenges in these regions. In the Philippine context, low spelling proficiency among students is equally concerning. Manalastas (2024) revealed that Filipino students often struggle with spelling, particularly in contexts where language-based tasks are less emphasized, such as in technical-vocational tracks. These challenges are not merely isolated to individual struggles but have broader implications for academic performance. The persistent occurrence of spelling errors among Senior High School students in Sultan Kudarat, especially those in the Technical Vocational Livelihood (TVL)

METALINGUISTIC AWARENESS → SPELLING SKILLS

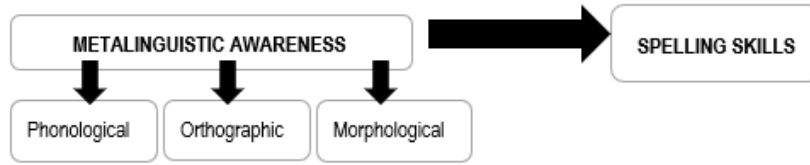Phonological Orthographic Morphological

Fig. 1. Conceptual Framework of the Study – The Impact of Linguistic

track at Esperanza National High School, exemplifies this problem. Their preference for hands-on activities over written tasks exacerbates spelling issues, underscoring the need for improved educational strategies. The urgency of addressing low spelling proficiency stems from its impact on overall academic achievement. Studies suggest that poor spelling skills limit students' ability to excel in tasks requiring linguistic precision, ultimately affecting their readiness for higher education and employment opportunities. Despite the recognized importance of spelling in literacy development, there remains a notable gap in understanding how linguistic awareness influences spelling proficiency, particularly among Grade 7 students in the Philippines. Existing research often focuses on general literacy skills, overlooking the specific relationship between linguistic awareness and spelling development. This study seeks to address this gap by examining how linguistic awareness impacts spelling proficiency among Filipino students. By exploring this connection, the study aims to provide valuable insights that can inform the design of effective educational interventions to enhance students' spelling skills and overall literacy.

1.1. Significance of the Study—This study is globally significant as it examines how linguistic awareness influences the spelling skills of Grade 7 students, focusing on phonological (sound awareness), orthographic (letter pattern recognition), and morphological (word part understanding) aspects. By identifying which of these dimensions most impact spelling accuracy, rule application, and error correction, the study aims to enhance literacy practices in secondary education. It benefits students by improving their spelling proficiency, teachers by providing insights for effective instruction, and school administrators by guiding curriculum decisions that support language development. Ultimately, this research contributes to global efforts in advancing literacy education.

1.2. Theoretical Framework—This study is based on the Metalinguistic Awareness Theory (Tunmer and Herriman, 1984). This theory emphasizes the role of metalinguistic skills, such as phonological, orthographic awareness, in literacy development. Together, these metalinguistic skills interact to influence accurate and proficient spelling.

2. Methodology

This chapter details the procedures followed in executing the study, including the research design, respondent selection, locale of the study, sample and sampling methods, research instrument, data gathering procedures, data analysis, and ethical considerations. To ensure the manuscript's accuracy and coherence, artificial intelligence tools were employed during the proofreading

2

process. The integration of AI demonstrates a commitment to ethical research standards and emphasizes its growing significance in refining academic and professional writing.

2.1. *Research Design*—This study used a quantitative descriptive-correlational research design, following the framework of Creswell (2014), to explore the impact of linguistic awareness on the spelling skills of Grade 7 students. The descriptive approach assessed the levels of phonological, orthographic, and morphological awareness, as well as students' spelling skills. The correlational method examined the relationship between these variables to determine if a significant connection existed.

2.2. *Locale of the Study*—The study was conducted at Crossing Bayabas National High School, located in Region XI, Davao del Sur, Philippines. This school was selected due to its diverse student population and the documented challenges students faced in spelling activities, making it an ideal setting for exploring the interplay of linguistic awareness and spelling proficiency.

2.3. *Research Respondents*—The study targeted Grade 7 students enrolled in Crossing Bayabas National High School in the previous academic year. A stratified random sampling technique was employed to ensure representation across 21 sections, allowing for a comprehensive analysis of the population. From an estimated population of 879 Grade 7 students, a sample size of 268 students was determined using the Raosoft online calculator, with a 95 confidence level. This sample size ensured that the findings were statistically significant and generalizable within the school context. The stratification accounted for students' academic tracks and performance levels, ensuring that diverse linguistic capabilities and spelling skills were represented in the study.

2.4. *Research Instrument*—The primary research instruments were a standardized linguistic awareness assessment combined with an adapted spelling test from works by Rauf Saeed (2021), Makaure (2021), and others, tailored to Grade 7 learners. The linguistic awareness test evaluated phonological, orthographic, and morphological skills, while the spelling test measured accuracy, rule application, and error correction.

2.5. *Data Gathering Procedure*—Preparation of Instruments: The linguistic awareness and spelling tests were developed and validated with input from language educators. Securing Permissions: Approval was obtained from the school administration, and consent was secured from participants and their class advisers. Data Collection: The tests were administered in a controlled classroom setting. Data Encoding: Test results were recorded systematically for analysis. Validation of Data: Data entries were cross-checked to ensure accuracy and completeness.

2.6. *Data Analysis*—The collected data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics. Descriptive Statistics: Mean and standard deviation were computed to summarize the levels of linguistic awareness and spelling skills. Inferential Statistics: The Pearson correlation coefficient was used to examine the relationship between linguistic awareness and spelling proficiency. A significance level of 0.05 was applied to test the null hypothesis.

2.7. *Ethical Considerations*—The study prioritized ethical integrity by adhering to the following measures: Informed Consent: Participants and their advisers were informed about

the study's objectives, procedures, and rights to withdraw at any time. Confidentiality: Personal information and test results were anonymized and stored securely. Minimization of Harm: The tests were designed to avoid causing undue stress or discomfort to participants. Fair Representation: The study ensured impartiality in the analysis and reporting of findings to maintain credibility.

3. Results and Discussion

This study presents a thorough analysis of the collected data, accompanied by an in-depth discussion and interpretation of the results. It examines the respondents' levels of metalinguistic awareness and spelling skills, as well as the relationship between these variables.

3.1. Levels of Metalinguistic Awareness— The levels of phonological, orthographic, and morphological awareness were assessed. Most students scored "High" in phonological (Mean = 12.3), "Average" in orthographic (Mean = 9.2), and "Very High" in morphological awareness (Mean = 13.1).

*3.2. Spelling Skills—*Students achieved "High" accuracy in spelling (Mean = 10.8), with "Average" scores in rule application (Mean = 9.0) and error recognition (Mean = 8.5).

*3.3. Correlation—*A strong correlation was found between metalinguistic awareness and spelling skills:

Table 1. Summary of Mean Scores and Interpretation for Aspects of Awareness

Aspect	Mean Score	Interpretation
Phonological Awareness	12.3	High
Orthographic Awareness	9.2	Average
Morphological Awareness	13.1	Very High
Spelling Accuracy	10.8	High

The findings confirm a significant relationship between metalinguistic awareness and spelling skills. Phonological and Morphological Awareness: Strongly influence spelling accuracy, supporting Tunmer and Herriman's (1984) theory. Orthographic Awareness: Lower scores highlight the need for improved instruction in letter patterns and spelling rules.

Practical implications include integrating targeted activities, such as morphology-focused lessons and spelling games, to improve both awareness and spelling proficiency. Teachers are encouraged to emphasize all aspects of linguistic awareness to enhance overall literacy skills.

4. Conclusions and Recommendations

4.1. Findings—Based on the findings, it can be concluded that Grade 7 students demonstrate strong skills in phonological awareness and spelling accuracy, alongside exceptional performance in morphological awareness. These results highlight their ability to recognize sound patterns and understand word structures effectively, contributing significantly to their spelling proficiency. However, the average performance in orthographic awareness underscores a notable gap in their ability to identify and apply letter patterns and spelling rules consistently. This imbalance suggests that while students excel in certain aspects of linguistic awareness, targeted interventions are needed to strengthen orthographic skills. Addressing this weakness will not only enhance their overall spelling ability but also support broader literacy development by fostering a more comprehensive understanding of written language.

4.2. Conclusions—This research highlights the strengths and gaps in Grade 7 students' metalinguistic awareness and spelling skills. While they excel in phonological and morphological awareness, their average performance in orthographic awareness calls for targeted interventions.

4.3. Recommendations—Based on these findings, the following recommendations are proposed: For Teachers: • Focus on improving orthographic awareness by teaching letter patterns and spelling rules through interactive activities like spelling drills, word-building exercises, and visual aids. • Continue reinforcing phonological and morphological awareness to sustain students' strengths in these areas. For School Administrators: • Offer training programs for teachers on strategies to improve orthographic awareness and integrate linguistic skills into lessons. • Provide classrooms with supplementary materials, such as spelling games, flashcards, and educational software, to enhance spelling instruction.

For Curriculum Developers: • Include specific learning outcomes and activities in the curriculum that directly address orthographic awareness. • Develop interdisciplinary modules linking spelling proficiency with real-world applications to make learning relevant and effective. For Parents and Guardians: • Encourage reading, writing, and spelling practice at home using educational tools like apps or board games that reinforce orthographic skills. • Support children by providing consistent practice opportunities in a fun and engaging manner. For Future Researchers: • Explore the effectiveness of innovative teaching methods and digital tools in improving orthographic awareness among students. • Conduct longitudinal studies on how improving orthographic awareness impacts overall literacy and academic achievement.

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5

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