

English Spelling Performance in Writing Samples Among Spanish-Speaking ELLs

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Abstract

The depth of the English orthography makes reading and spelling in English a difficult task; particularly for English language learners (ELLs) whose first language (L1) has a shallow orthography. Mastering spelling in English is a critical component of increasing the English literacy of ELLs. This study investigated the English spelling of 569 Spanish-speaking ELLs in Grades 4 to 6. Participants' writing samples were analyzed for spelling errors. Latent class analysis was utilized to discover hidden categories within the data using eight spelling error categories: (a) Vowel Omission; (b) Vowel Addition; (c) Vowel Substitution; (d) Vowel Sequence; (e) Consonant Omission; (f) Consonant Addition; (g) Consonant Substitution; (h) Consonant Sequence. Consonant- and vowel-based errors were nearly equal in each grade level. Latent class analysis resulted in a two-class model. Students in Class 1 made more types of errors than students in Class 2. As the grade level increased, the percentage of students in Class 2 increased. The results of this study show the effects of English and Spanish orthographies on the spelling of Spanish-speaking ELLs, with spelling errors occurring among both vowels and consonants. As omissions were the most prevalent errors in both classes, spelling instruction aimed at decreasing omissions should be considered for ELLs.

Keywords

English language learners, latent class analysis, orthography, Spanish, spelling