

Poster 6a: The elusive role of phonological short-term memory in children's spelling: Effects of Key Stage, phonological awareness and letter string type

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Abstract

We investigated the role of phonological short-term memory (PSTM) in single word spelling in 641 children aged 4- to 12-years. A spelling assessment was employed that includes separate subtests for regular and irregular words and pseudowords. The children were assessed in PSTM, phonological awareness (PA) and letter-sound knowledge (LSK).

For the analyses, the children were divided by age, PA and LSK. Separate regression analyses were carried out for the groups with spelling accuracy as the dependent variable and age and PSTM scores as predictor variables. We found that, for the children with good PA/LSK in both age groups, PSTM was a significant predictor of spelling for all word types. However, for children with poor PA/LSK, PSTM did not predict spelling for any of the word types.

We also conducted qualitative analyses of the children's misspellings. Results revealed that children with poor PA/LSK errors were more distant phonologically and orthographically from the actual word than children in the good PA/LSK groups. The findings suggest that the use of PSTM for spelling may be restricted to children who have good PA and LSK. We discuss alternative processes that may be used in spelling and implications of the results for educational practice.

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