



*Araştırma Makalesi / Research Article*

## Spelling Games and the Orthographic Abilities of Young EFL Learners

### Yazma Oyunları ve İlkokul Öğrencilerinin İngilizce Yazma Becerileri\*

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**ABSTRACT:** Learning a language requires acquiring a complex and a four-language-skills-integrated process and a target language can only be fully comprehended by mastering these skills. However, in the latest version of Turkish Primary and secondary school English lesson curriculum, listening and speaking skills are seen as primary, while reading and writing skills are secondary. Thus, young Turkish EFL learners' writing skills in English do not develop to the full. Once, the differences between the Turkish and English orthographies are added the writing task is becoming even more challenging for young Turkish EFL learners. Most of the related literature on orthographic abilities of EFL learners focus on the differences between L1 and L2 and the reasons for misspellings but experimental studies are rare. Therefore, this experimental study aims to explore the effects of spelling games on the orthographic abilities of 3rd grade young EFL learners in a Turkish primary school context. The results were examined in terms of participants' and target vocabulary correct spelling rates and the experimental group scored higher in both. In the light of the findings, it is argued that spelling games positively affect the orthographic abilities of young EFL learners and therefore, should be used during spelling activities.

**Keywords:** Young EFL Learners, Orthography, Spelling Games, Dictation

**ÖZ:** Dil öğrenmek karmaşık ve dört temel dil becerisini birleştiren bir süreç edinmeyi gerektirir ve hedef dil ancak bu dört temel dil becerisinin öğrenilmesiyle tam olarak anlaşılabilir. Ancak, Türkiye'deki ilk ve ortaöğretim okullarının İngilizce dersi öğretim müfredatının son halinde dinleme ve konuşma becerilerine öncelik verildiği, okuma ve yazma becerilerinin ise ikincil olarak belirlendiği görülmektedir. Bu nedenle Türkiye'deki ilkokullarda İngilizce öğrenen öğrencilerin yazma becerileri tam olarak gelişmemektedir. Bu duruma, bir de Türkçe ve İngilizcenin yazım farklılıkları eklendiğinde öğrencilerin yazma görevi daha da zorlayıcı bir hal almaktadır. Yabancı dil olarak İngilizce öğrenen öğrencilerin yazma becerileri üzerine yapılmış olan araştırmaların büyük bir bölümünün anadil ve hedef dil arasındaki farklılıklara ve yanlış yazmanın nedenlerine odaklandığını, ancak çok azının çözüme yönelik fikirler öne sürebildiği görülmektedir. Bu nedenle, bu deneysel çalışma yazma-oyunlarının bir Türk ilköğretim okulu bağlamında 3. sınıf İngilizce öğrencilerinin yazma becerileri üzerindeki etkilerini araştırmayı amaçlamaktadır. Sonuçlar, katılımcılar ve hedef kelime doğru yazım oranları açısından incelendiğinde deney grubunun her ikisinde de daha yüksek sonuçlar elde ettiği görülmüştür. Bu bulguların ışığında yazma-oyunlarının, ilkokul öğrencilerinin yazma becerilerini olumlu yönde etkilediği ve bu nedenle yazma etkinliklerinde kullanılması gerektiği öne sürülmektedir.

**Anahtar sözcükler:** İlkokul öğrencileri, İngilizce yazma becerisi, Yazma-oyunları, Dikte.

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## Introduction

The process of learning and teaching English as a foreign language (EFL) can differ according to the students' ages (Harmer, 2001) and the starting age to learn English has been an issue for governments especially in the last two decades (Haznedar & Uysal, 2010). In Turkey, parallel to the world and within the light of research findings, there have also been educational reforms in primary FL teaching. With the enactment of the law (n. 4306) announced in 18.08.1997, the primary and secondary educations were accepted as 'uninterrupted 8-year-educational-reform' which was compulsory (T.C. Resmi Gazete, 23084) described as 8+4 system. Besides, English as a compulsory foreign language (CFL) was lowered to primary level, starting at the 4<sup>th</sup> grade in government schools (Şevik, 2009). With a later amendment that has been put into effect with another law (n. 6287) in 11.04.2012 (T.C. Resmi Gazete, 28261), primary, secondary and high school duration are systemized as compulsory 4+4+4, and teaching English as a CFL has been lowered to 2<sup>nd</sup> class of primary schools.

The CFL program has also been revised. According to the latest version of the Primary Schools English Language Teaching Program (MoNE, 2018), "the new curricular model emphasizes language use in an authentic communicative environment" (p.3). Moreover, "the new curriculum strives to foster an enjoyable and motivating learning environment where young learners/users of English feel comfortable and supported throughout the learning process" (MoNE, 2018, p.3). Besides, the syllabus for each grade was reviewed, key competences of the program were framed as similar to European commissions and Common European Framework (CEFR) was embedded to the program (MoNE, 2018). As the main emphasis is on listening and speaking skills, 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> grade students were just observed and evaluated according to their progress based on the objectives of the curriculum (MoNE, 2018). Therefore, activities involving reading and writing are at the word level (e.g., learners see a picture of a dog and write the word "dog" underneath); in other words, "reading and writing tasks at the lower grade levels are limited" (MoNE, 2018, p.10).

Students start to learn reading and writing in their mother tongue, Turkish, in the first grade of the primary schooling. Then, in the second grade, they start to learn English; however, as they live in a country in which English is not spoken in daily lives of people, the students do not have any chance to be exposed to the second language and practice it out of the classroom. Moreover, these two languages have different writing systems regarding to their orthographies. While Turkish orthography is "highly transparent" (Durgunoğlu, 2017), English orthography is at "the opaque end of the transparency dimension or the *deep* end of the shallow–deep dimension among alphabetic orthographies" (Perfetti & Harris, 2017). Thus, learning a second language (L2), which is not similar to their mother tongue (L1), makes the process more difficult for young learners who have recently learned reading and writing in L1.

While listening and speaking are the emphasized skills, reading and writing are offered with limited application in the program designed for English language teaching in Turkish primary schools. However, since knowing a language is a complex and four-language-skills-integrated process, no matter how much the students are successful in

listening and speaking tasks, without appropriate reading and writing, a language cannot be accepted as learned (Wright, 2010). Besides, in the lessons, although the limited version of reading and writing tasks were at the beginning level; the researchers, observed that young EFL learners make mistakes especially when it comes to read and write a word in L2. The researchers also observed that the students became confused most of the time and had hesitations when they were given spelling tasks and there were a highly L1-affected-misspellings in their L2 word-level writing tasks which was the main motive in starting to the present study.

This research seeks to address if there are any effects of spelling games on the orthographic abilities of 3<sup>rd</sup> grade young EFL learners in a Turkish primary school context. With this main purpose in hand, the research will focus on the following research questions:

1. Is there a difference between the participants' success rates in the weekly dictations?
2. Is there a difference between the target vocabulary correctness rates in the weekly dictations?

The current study is of significance for two main reasons. The first reason is that previous research mainly focused on spelling mistakes and their categorization; the reasons of spelling mistakes and the strategies used by learners during the task of spelling. However, the possible developmental stage of spelling ability has been underestimated most of the time. Even though there have been studies which describe the strategies used by good-spellers, there is a very limited number of experimental studies conducted to provide teachers with an effective strategy to use in the lessons with the purpose of developing orthographic skills of young EFL learners. Second, as far as the researchers are concerned, there have been no previous studies which used spelling games as instrumentation to investigate the development of the orthographic abilities in the context of young EFL learners in Turkey.

### **Teaching Literacy Skills to Young Learners**

Literacy is “the ability to read and write” (Cambridge Online Dictionaries, 2016) and in today's modern world, being literate is an unavoidable factor to survive in most of the societies. In other words, literacy is not only an important part of the school life but also an integral part of our daily lives as we are involved in a literacy event from the time that we wake up: i.e. reading the news, telling the time, using our phones and etc. Reading requires the knowledge of written symbols, phonology and semantic; while, writing brings together the motor skills and orthographic knowledge to represent words (Cameron, 2001). When children start to learn reading and writing for the first time, they support themselves with their previous knowledge based on the context, discourse, paragraph, sentence/clause, words and letters/sounds (Cameron, 2001). However, the combinations or the order of these factors can change according to learning English literacy as a first language (L1) or second/foreign language (L2). If the learners are already literate in their L1 and learning EFL, then *the nature of the written forms of the first language, the learner's previous*

experience in L1 literacy, the learner's knowledge of the foreign language and their age can influence the learning task (Cameron, 2001, p. 134).

Learner's knowledge of L2 is important to develop accurate literacy skills that should be a combination of orthoepic (reading) and orthographic (writing) competences. *Orthoepic competence* requires producing a correct pronunciation from the written form and it may involve "knowledge of spelling conventions; ability to consult a dictionary and a knowledge of the conventions used there for the representation of pronunciation; knowledge of the implications of written forms, particularly punctuation marks, for phrasing and intonation; and ability to resolve ambiguity (homonyms, syntactic ambiguities, etc.) in the light of the context" (CoE, 2001, p. 118). *Orthographic competence* "involves a knowledge of and skill in the perception and production of the symbols of which written texts are composed" (CoE, 2001, p. 117).

According to Seymour (2006) the type of the orthography is an important factor to decide a literacy teaching method. In Turkey, today, students learn their L1 literacy at the first grade with *Phonics teaching* method. As Turkish has a *shallow orthography*, the method makes the Turkish literacy learning easier for the students. However, there is not a determined approach by the government to teach the English (L2) literacy. Seymour (2006, p. 544) suggests that "in *deep alphabetic orthographies*, such as English, a combined method by which children learn basic alphabetic decoding procedures and at the same time master a 'sight vocabulary' of familiar words may be preferred".

### Language Games

The etymology of 'game' in contemporary usage originates from *gamen* – Old English for 'joy, fun, amusement' - a term itself derived from Norse and Saxon forebears (Online Etymology Dictionary, 2018). Other than its' dictionary meaning, the term 'games' is described differently within the language learning environment. In a language classroom, 'game' means "an activity which is entertaining and engaging, often challenging, and an activity in which the learners play and usually interact with others" (Wright, Betteridge & Buckby, 2006, p. 1). Pound (2005, p. 73) refers to games as 'play' and defines it as "a range of activities, undertaken for their own interest, enjoyment or the satisfaction that results". In another definition, games are "student-focused activities requiring active involvement of learners" (Yolageldili & Arikan, 2011, p.220).

Games can be categorized according to the four language skills, language functions, topics, the learning styles of students and working group types of learners. Slattery & Willis (2001), for example, present games in categories according to the four language skills and the activity types with the combination of language focuses, topic talks and pronunciation points they include; in detail, e.g. under the 'Listen and Do' title there are games classified in subtitles such as Listening and Identifying, Listening and Doing (TPR), Listening and Performing-Miming, and finally Listening and Responding games. The main titles of the book which include sample games are Listen and Do; Listen and Make; Speaking with Support; Speaking More Freely; Reading in English; Writing in English; Reading and Telling Stories; and Story Activities.

McCallum (1980) argues that there are many advantages of games such as the fact that they focus students' attention on specific structures, grammatical patterns, and vocabulary items; games can function as reinforcement, review and enrichment; involve equal participation from both slow and fast learners; be adjusted to suit the individual age and language levels of the students; contribute to an atmosphere of healthy competition, providing an outlet for the creative use of natural language in a non-stressful situation; be used in any language teaching situations and with all skill areas (reading, writing, speaking or listening); provide immediate feedback for the teacher; ensure maximum student participation for a minimum of teacher preparation.

### Spelling

Apel, Wilson-Fowler & Masterson (2011, p.231) list the basic cognitive components of the spelling skill as follows:

1. *Phonological knowledge*: Phonemic knowledge is the conscious awareness of the sounds of language, and the ability to talk about and manipulate those sounds. In particular, the ability to segment words into their individual phonemes or sounds is important for spelling. "In general, in shallow orthographies, phonology is activated directly from print, whereas in deep orthographies, phonology is derived from the internal lexicon" (Perfetti, Zhang & Berent, 1992, p. 243). Thus, across alphabetic writing systems *letter knowledge* and *phoneme awareness* should be critical for phonological and conventional spelling ability (Caravolas, 2006, p. 617).

2. *Orthographic knowledge*: In alphabetic writing systems, orthographic knowledge consists of "knowledge about the spacing of words, the orientation of writing, acceptable and unacceptable letter sequences, and the variety of ways in which certain phonemes may be represented, depending on such factors as their position in a word" (Treiman & Cassar, 1997, p. 70). It represents the information that is "stored in memory that tells us how to represent spoken language in written form; borrowing from the word's etymology, it is knowledge for the correct way to write language" (Apel, 2011, p. 592). Apel, Wilson-Fowler & Masterson (2011, p. 231) note that it "includes an understanding of letter-sound correspondence, rules for which letters can be combined to represent sounds or which can occur in certain situations".

3. *Semantic knowledge*: When readers and writers are aware of semantic links of words, they know that similarly pronounced words can be written different because a word's definition also dictates its spelling: e.g. the word *son* represents a family member, while the word *sun* represents a celestial body.

4. *Morphological knowledge*: Morphological awareness is "required to understand the importance and uniformity of spelling affixes as they are placed onto simple base words" and it also helps learners "to understand modification rules when affixes are added to base words, as well as increasing their knowledge of meaning relations, and shared spelling, among words that are derivations of a base word" (Apel, 2011, p. 592).

## Methodology

### Participants

A total of 42, 3rd grade students studying in a Turkish village primary school in Isparta voluntarily participated in the current study in the second term of the 2017-2018 academic year. They could all speak, read and write in their mother tongue, Turkish. They were divided into two classes as 3A and 3B, 21 students in each class. There were 10 males and 11 female students in 3A and 11 male and 10 female students in 3B. They were aged between 8.5-9.5. The classes were selected randomly as experimental and control groups. They were attending to a two-lesson compulsory English course per week (40 minutes each).

The participants had the same proficiency level (A1) in English and therefore considered as identical due to two main reasons. Firstly, they all attended the same school and took the same English course from the same teacher when they were in the 2nd grade. Secondly, when the participants' English lesson evaluation results (scores) for the first term were considered, the two groups had the same averages: out of 21 students, each group had 14 'Very Good' and 7 'Good' learners.

### Instruments

Three spelling games were chosen and applied to the experimental group and data was collected by administering a weekly dictation activity to both groups at the end of each two-hour English lesson. The spelling games used in this study were: Grab Bag, Alphabet Jumble and Prisoners Base, adopted from Graham, Freeman and Miller (1981). The dictation activities were based on the target vocabulary of the corresponding units. The participants received a blank paper and were instructed to write the dictated words or sentences. A full list of the target vocabulary used during the weekly dictation activities can be seen in Tables 1, 2, 3, and 4. In the first week of each unit, isolated words were dictated while in the other two weeks of each unit the words were dictated in sentences. However, during the evaluation of the results only the target words, italic in the tables, were analyzed. The teacher pronounced the words or sentences 3 times in a row while the students individually wrote them on a blank paper and the teacher collected the papers for further analysis. This procedure was repeated from week 1 to week 12.

**Table 1.** Dictated Words and Sentences for Unit 6

Weeks	1	2	3
	<i>chair</i>	The car is in the <i>garage</i> .	Where is the <i>soap</i> ?
	<i>kitchen</i>	The <i>kettle</i> is on the table.	It is under the <i>bed</i> .
	<i>cup</i>	The <i>soap</i> is in the <i>bathroom</i> .	Where is the <i>shampoo</i> ?
	<i>kettle</i>	The sofa is in the <i>living room</i> .	It is in the <i>bathroom</i> .
	<i>garage</i>	The ball is under the <i>bed</i> .	Where is the <i>kettle</i> ?
	<i>living room</i>	The <i>cup</i> is on the <i>chair</i> .	It is in the <i>kitchen</i> .
	<i>sofa</i>	The cat is under the <i>table</i> .	Where is the <i>cup</i> ?
	<i>table</i>	The dog is on the <i>sofa</i> .	It is on the <i>table</i> .
	<i>bed</i>	The fish is on the table.	Where is the <i>chair</i> ?

<i>soap</i>	The doll is in the <i>bedroom</i> .	It is in the <i>playroom</i> .
<i>shampoo</i>	The <i>television</i> is in the living room.	Where is the <i>television</i> ?
<i>bedroom</i>	The ball is in the <i>playroom</i> .	It is in the <i>bedroom</i> .
<i>playroom</i>	The teddy bear is under the table.	Where is the <i>sofa</i> ?
<i>television</i>	The cup is in the <i>kitchen</i> .	It is in the <i>living room</i> .
<i>bathroom</i>	The <i>shampoo</i> is in the bathroom.	Where is the car?
		It is in the <i>garage</i> .

**Table 2.** Dictated Words and Sentences for Unit 7

Weeks	4	5	6
	<i>zoo</i>	Where is the <i>hospital</i> ?	I am at the <i>cafe</i> .
	<i>museum</i>	Where is the <i>park</i> ?	I am in the <i>classroom</i> .
	<i>park</i>	Where is the <i>school</i> ?	I am at the <i>park</i> .
	<i>restaurant</i>	Where is the <i>bank</i> ?	I am in the <i>bank</i> .
	<i>carnival</i>	Where is the <i>classroom</i> ?	I am at the <i>school</i> .
	<i>bank</i>	Where is the <i>zoo</i> ?	I am in the <i>home</i> .
	<i>classroom</i>	Where is the <i>museum</i> ?	I am at the <i>shopping center</i> .
	<i>hospital</i>	Where is the <i>restaurant</i> ?	I am in the <i>hospital</i> .
	<i>school</i>	Where is the <i>campus</i> ?	I am at the <i>restaurant</i> .
	<i>home</i>	Where is the <i>cafe</i> ?	I am in the <i>zoo</i> .
	<i>campus</i>	Where is the <i>home</i> ?	I am at the <i>museum</i> .
	<i>shopping center</i>	Where is the <i>carnival</i> ?	I am in the <i>campus</i> .
	<i>cafe</i>	Where is the <i>shopping center</i> ?	I am at the <i>carnival</i> .

**Table 3.** Dictated Words and Sentences for Unit 8

Weeks	7	8	9
	<i>car</i>	Where is the <i>car</i> ?	You can go by <i>car</i> .
	<i>bike</i>	It is on the <i>road</i> .	You can take a <i>bike</i> .
	<i>plane</i>	Where is the <i>plane</i> ?	You can go by <i>plane</i> .
	<i>ship</i>	It is on the <i>sky</i> .	You can take a <i>ship</i> .
	<i>train</i>	Where is the <i>ship</i> ?	You can go by <i>train</i> .
	<i>bus</i>	It is on the <i>sea</i> .	You can take a <i>bus</i> .
	<i>motorcycle</i>	Where is the <i>boat</i> ?	You can go by <i>motorcycle</i> .
	<i>boat</i>	It is on the <i>river</i> .	You can take a <i>boat</i> .
	<i>helicopter</i>	The <i>helicopter</i> is on the sky.	You can go by <i>helicopter</i> .
	<i>truck</i>	The <i>bike</i> is on the road.	You can take a <i>truck</i> .
	<i>balloon</i>	The <i>train</i> is on the rails.	You can go by <i>balloon</i> .
	<i>sea</i>	The <i>balloon</i> is on the sky.	It is on the <i>sea</i> .
	<i>sky</i>	The <i>truck</i> is on the road.	It is on the <i>sky</i> .
	<i>road</i>	The <i>motorcycle</i> is in the garage.	It is on the <i>road</i> .
	<i>river</i>	The <i>bus</i> is on the road.	It is on the <i>river</i> .

**Table 4.** Dictated Words and Sentences for Unit 9

Weeks	10	11	12
	<i>rainy</i>	How is the <i>weather</i> ?	Is it <i>rainy</i> ?
	<i>snowy</i>	It is <i>rainy</i> .	No, it is <i>snowy</i> .
	<i>sunny</i>	It is <i>snowy</i> .	Is it <i>sunny</i> ?
	<i>hot</i>	It is <i>cold</i> .	Yes, it is <i>hot</i> .
	<i>cold</i>	It is <i>sunny</i> .	Is it <i>cold</i> ?
	<i>warm</i>	It is <i>cloudy</i> .	No, it is <i>warm</i> .
	<i>nice</i>	It is <i>foggy</i> .	How is the <i>weather</i> ?
	<i>weather</i>	It is <i>windy</i> .	It is <i>nice</i> .
	<i>cloudy</i>	It is <i>hot</i> .	It is a <i>snowman</i> .

<i>foggy</i>	It is <i>warm</i> .	Is it <i>cloudy</i> ?
<i>windy</i>	It is <i>cool</i> .	No, it is <i>foggy</i> .
<i>cool</i>	It is <i>nice</i> .	Is it <i>windy</i> ?
<i>snowman</i>	It is a <i>snowman</i> .	Yes, it is <i>cool</i> .

### Data Collection and Analysis

The implementation process took 12 weeks in total. From the 1<sup>st</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup> weeks, during the lessons, the target vocabulary was introduced by flashcards and the same listening, speaking, reading and writing activities were applied to both groups. 3 weeks were spent for each unit and the target vocabulary were chosen from the English program (MoNE, 2018) and from the book titled “İngilizce 3” provided by MoNE (Dağlıoğlu, 2015). Both groups used the same materials (e.g. books, felt materials, PowerPoint presentations, worksheets, listening tracks, speaking activities and homework) and were assessed by weekly dictation activities. The only difference was the spelling games that the experimental group played for 10-15 minutes at the end of the English lessons. In the meantime, the control group continued their English lessons without the spelling games. At the last 3-5 minutes of the lessons both groups were assessed by a weekly dictation activity. The weekly dictation activity sheets were collected for further analysis.

To maintain a clear understanding of the implementation process, the first 3 weeks (Unit 6) will be explained in detail, because in the other 9 weeks, the same implementation was carried out for the units 7, 8 and 9.

Week 1: The topic for Unit 6 was My House. The target words of the unit were bathroom, bed, bedroom, chair, cup, garage, kettle, kitchen, living room, playroom, shampoo, soap, sofa, table, and television. In the first hour (40 minutes), the students practiced the vocabulary by the help of flashcards and the pronunciations of the words were practiced as a whole class. Then the teacher guided the students to do the related activities in the course book (Dağlıoğlu, 2015). In the second hour (40 minutes), the teacher continued with the activities and some exercises were done via similar worksheet activities suggested in the book. Then, the experimental group played the ‘Grab Bag’ game for 10-15 minutes. The control group did not play any spelling games. In the last 3-5 minutes, first week’s dictation activity was applied to both groups.

Week 2: The topic and the target vocabulary for the second week were the same. The teacher started the first lesson by revising the words, this time with the help of the magnetic representations of the words. The teacher asked the students the English word by showing them one of the materials, and once the correct answer was given, she stuck it to the board. Then the teacher continued the lesson by the related activities from the book (Dağlıoğlu, 2015); however, this time the target vocabulary was given in sentences (see Table 1). In the second hour, the teacher continued with activities and some exercises were done via similar worksheet activities suggested in the book. Then, the experimental group was divided into two teams to play the ‘Alphabet Jumble’ game for 10-15 minutes. In the last 3-5 minutes, second week’s dictation activity was applied to both groups.

Week 3: The target vocabulary was still the same; however, this time, according to the lesson plan, the students were introduced interrogative sentences. The first hour started with a short revision of the words with the help of PowerPoint presentations and the



teacher asked each student a question about where the furniture, animal or materials were in the picture. In the second hour, the activities related to the unit and the objectives of the lesson were implemented using the websites of education platforms (e.g. EBA). Then, the control groups' lesson continued without the spelling games, but the experimental group was divided into two teams to play the 'Prisoners Base' game for 10-15 minutes. In the last 3-5 minutes, third week's dictation activity was applied to both groups.

Data was entered into the Microsoft Excel 2016 program, categorized and quantitatively analyzed by using IBM SPSS Statistics 25 packet program according to the weekly dictations. The results of the weekly dictation activities were calculated to find the group statistics, the percentages for 12 weeks and also for the 4 units. Then weekly comparison of groups was calculated according to the success they have performed in the weekly dictation activities. The correct spelling rates for the target vocabulary were analyzed according to weekly dictation activities. The results were calculated for the 56 target vocabulary and categorized according to units. Then the comparison of groups was calculated based on the 56 target vocabulary and they were also categorized according to units.

### Findings and Discussion

#### Analysis of the Weekly Dictation Activities: Participants' Correct Spelling Rates

First, Table 5 exhibits the participants' correct spelling percentages and the percentage difference between groups.

**Table 5.** Correct Spelling Percentages According to Weeks

Units	Weeks	Groups	N	Correct Spelling Percentage (%)	Percentage Difference (%)
	1	Control	21	51.43	5.40
		Experimental	21	56.83	
6	2	Control	21	55.56	14.60
		Experimental	21	70.16	
	3	Control	21	54.29	20.00
		Experimental	21	74.29	
	4	Control	21	35.16	14.66
		Experimental	21	49.82	
7	5	Control	21	49.08	11.36
		Experimental	21	60.44	
	6	Control	21	43.59	12.09
		Experimental	21	55.68	
8	7	Control	21	50.16	26.67
		Experimental	21	76.83	

8	Control	21	38.10	27.93
	Experimental	21	66.03	
9	Control	21	27.94	48.25
	Experimental	21	76.19	
10	Control	21	18.32	20.51
	Experimental	21	38.83	
9	Control	21	37.00	3.30
	Experimental	21	33.70	
12	Control	21	34.07	19.04
	Experimental	21	53.11	

As we can see in Table 5, the experimental group outperformed the control group in 11 of the weekly dictation activities out of 12, which was the 11<sup>th</sup> week and the difference was 3.30% -the lowest difference in 12 weeks. The highest difference between groups occurred in the 9<sup>th</sup> week, when the experimental group scored 76.19% and the control group scored 27.94%, and the group difference was as high as 48.25%. In fact, the experimental group scored the highest in the 9<sup>th</sup> week out of the 12 weeks, and the lowest in the 11<sup>th</sup> week. The control group on the other hand, scored the highest in the 2<sup>nd</sup> week and the lowest in the 10<sup>th</sup> week. Looking into Table 5 from a wider angle, we can clearly argue that games positively affected the spelling of the students in this study.

Second, in Table 6 the participants' correct spelling percentages are presented on a Unit-basis rather than weekly basis.

**Table 6.** Correct Spelling Rates of Participants: Percentages According to Units

Units		Unit 6	Unit 7	Unit 8	Unit 9
		My House	In My City	Transportation	Weather
Results of Weekly Dictation Activities	Control Group	53.76	42.61	38.73	29.79
	Experimental Group	67.09	55.31	73.02	41.88
	Percentages' Difference Between Groups (%)	13.33	12.07	34.29	12.09

As it was the case presented earlier on a weekly basis, the experimental group once again outperformed the control group on a unit-based evaluation, thus strengthening the earlier argument about the positive effects of games over spelling. The experimental group scored the highest in unit 8 (73.02%) and the lowest in unit 9 (41.88%). The control group, on the other hand, scored the highest in unit 6 (53.76%) and the lowest in unit 9 (29.79%). The highest difference between groups occurred in unit 8 (34.29%) and the lowest in unit 7 (12.07%). Taken together, both groups best performance was in unit 6 (120.85%), followed by unit 8 (111.75%), unit 7 (97.92%) and unit 9 (71.67%). Thus, both groups were least successful in Unit 9 –Weather.

### Analysis of the weekly dictation activities: target vocabulary correct spelling percentages

The 56 target vocabulary dictated in weekly dictation activities were analyzed and the results were first calculated weekly, and then turned into unit-based percentage averages. The tables were constructed according to the weekly dictation activity results in terms of correct spelling percentages and percentage differences between groups. The related target vocabulary of the corresponding units will be presented alphabetically in Tables 7, 8, 9 and 10.

**Table 7.** Correct Spelling Rates for Unit 6 Target Vocabulary

Unit 6: My House Target Vocabulary			bathroom	bed	bedroom	chair	cup	garage	kettle	Kitchen	living room	playroom	shampoo	soap	sofa	table	television
Weekly Dictation Activities' Results	Correct Spelling Percentages (%)	Cont.	25.40	87.30	58.73	44.44	65.08	46.03	55.56	39.68	60.32	57.14	36.51	58.73	84.13	57.14	30.16
		Ex.	57.14	87.30	66.67	74.60	66.67	73.02	63.49	58.73	77.78	68.25	68.25	58.73	85.71	60.32	39.68
	Percentages' Difference Between Groups (%)		31.74	0.00	7.94	30.16	1.59	26.99	7.93	19.05	17.46	11.11	31.74	0.00	1.58	3.18	9.52

As it is demonstrated in Table 7, the experimental group performed the highest in writing the target word “bed (87.30%)” followed by “sofa (85.71%), both words following a direct sound-letter match as seen in the Turkish orthography. However, the least performance was in writing the target word “television (39.68%)” followed by “bathroom (57.14%)” in which case the two words followed a loose sound-letter match as seen in the English orthography. The control group also performed the best in writing the target word “bed (87.30%)” followed by “sofa (84.13%). However, the least performance was in writing the target word “bathroom (25.40%)” followed by “television (30.16%)”. The experimental group outperformed the control group in the spelling of all the target vocabulary except for “bed and sofa” in which case the scores were equal. Therefore, we may argue that games positively affected the correct spelling of target vocabulary. The highest difference between the groups occurred in the spelling of the word “bathroom (31.74%)”.

**Table 8.** Correct Spelling Rates for Unit 7 Target Vocabulary

Unit 7: In My City Target Vocabulary			bank	café	campus	carnival	classroom	home	Hospital	museum	park	restaurant	school	shopping center	zoo
Weekly Dictation Activities' Results	Correct Spelling Percentages (%)	Cont.	79.37	55.56	25.40	25.40	19.05	65.08	38.10	36.51	80.95	6.35	25.40	9.52	87.30
		Ex.	82.54	79.37	57.14	47.62	17.46	60.32	57.14	53.97	87.30	26.98	31.75	23.81	93.65
	Percentages' Difference Between Groups (%)		3.17	23.81	31.74	22.22	1.59	4.76	19.04	17.46	6.35	20.63	6.35	14.29	6.35

As it is demonstrated in Table 8, the experimental group performed the highest in writing the target word “zoo (93.65%)” followed by “park (87.30%), the words however had a loose sound-letter match in this case. The least performance was in writing the target word “classroom (17.46%)” followed by “shopping center (23.81%)” in which case both

words followed a loose sound-letter match as seen in the English orthography. The control group also performed the best in writing the target word “zoo (87.30%)” followed by “park (80.95%)”. However, the least performance was in writing the target word “restaurant (6.35%)” followed by “shopping center (9.52%)”. The experimental group outperformed the control group in the spelling of all the target vocabulary except for “classroom and home” in which case the control group performed better. Therefore, we may once again argue that games positively affected the correct spelling of target vocabulary. The highest difference between the groups occurred in the spelling of the word “campus (31.74%)”.

**Table 9.** Correct Spelling Rates for Unit 8 Target Vocabulary

Unit 8: Transportation Target Vocabulary		<i>balloon</i>	<i>bike</i>	<i>boat</i>	<i>bus</i>	<i>car</i>	<i>helicopter</i>	<i>motorcycle</i>	<i>Plane</i>	<i>river</i>	<i>road</i>	<i>sea</i>	<i>ship</i>	<i>sky</i>	<i>train</i>	<i>truck</i>	
Weekly Dictation Activities' Results	Correct Spelling Percentages (%)	Cont.	23.81	42.86	73.02	61.90	71.43	33.33	12.70	46.03	31.75	20.63	23.81	38.10	39.68	38.10	23.81
		Ex.	61.90	79.37	88.89	82.54	90.48	63.49	65.08	85.71	66.67	50.79	55.56	90.48	76.19	87.30	50.79
	Percentages' Difference Between Groups (%)	38.09	36.51	15.87	20.64	19.05	30.16	52.38	39.68	34.92	30.16	31.75	52.38	36.51	49.20	26.98	

As it is demonstrated in Table 9, the experimental group performed the highest in writing the target words “car and ship (90.48%)” followed by “boat (88.89%)”, the words however had a loose sound-letter match and therefore we may speculate that games were also effective in this case. The least performance was in writing the target word “road (50.79%)” followed by “sea (55.56%)” and both words followed a loose sound-letter match. The control group performed the best in writing the target word “boat (73.02%)” followed by “car (71.43%)”. However, the least performance was in writing the target word “motorcycle (12.70%)” followed by “road (20.63%)”. The experimental group outperformed the control group in the spelling of all the target vocabulary without any exceptions, thus strengthening the argument on the positive effects of games. The highest difference between the groups occurred in the spelling of the word “motorcycle (52.38%)”.

**Table 10.** Correct Spelling Rates for Unit 9 Target Vocabulary

Unit 9: Weather Target Vocabulary		<i>cloudy</i>	<i>cold</i>	<i>cool</i>	<i>foggy</i>	<i>hot</i>	<i>nice</i>	<i>Rainy</i>	<i>snowman</i>	<i>snowy</i>	<i>sunny</i>	<i>warm</i>	<i>weather</i>	<i>windy</i>	
Weekly Dictation Activities' Results	Correct Spelling Percentages (%)	Cont.	9.52	28.57	28.57	41.27	63.49	12.70	30.16	23.81	38.10	26.98	41.27	11.11	31.75
		Ex.	11.11	41.27	38.10	50.79	82.54	38.10	50.79	17.46	44.44	52.38	58.73	31.75	26.98
	Percentages' Difference Between Groups (%)	1.59	12.70	9.53	9.52	19.05	25.40	20.63	6.35	6.34	25.40	17.46	20.64	4.77	

As it is demonstrated in Table 10, the experimental group performed the highest in writing the target word “hot (82.54%)” followed by “sunny (52.35%)”, both words with a loose sound-letter match. The least performance was in writing the target word “cloudy (11.11%)” followed by “snowman (17.46%)”. In this unit, the experimental group performed the least in comparison to the other three units. The control group also performed the best in writing the target word “hot (63.49%)” followed by “foggy and warm (41.27%)”. However, the least performance was in writing the target word “cloudy

(9.52%)” followed by “weather (11.11%)”. In this unit, the control group also performed the least in comparison to the other three units. Thus we may argue that the target vocabulary in “unit 9- weather” was the most challenging for the students in this study. The experimental group outperformed the control group in the spelling of all the target vocabulary except for “snowman and windy”. The highest difference between the groups occurred in the spelling of the words “nice and sunny (25.40%)”.

### Conclusion

The purpose of the present study was to investigate the effects of spelling games on the orthographic abilities of 3<sup>rd</sup> grade EFL learners in a Turkish primary school context. The literature on spelling does not provide sufficient evidence for the impact of spelling games on the orthographic abilities of learners. However, in a Turkish primary school context, this study provided a broad investigation of how spelling games affect participant success and examined the correctness rates of the target vocabulary to draw a conclusion on which words are easier to spell for young EFL learners. Thus, the study provides a methodological and empirical contribution to the field of foreign language education. The overall findings presented earlier clearly demonstrated that games positively affected the spelling practices of the students in this study.

The most obvious findings to emerge from the analysis of the weekly dictation activities are that; experimental group outperformed the control group in 11 weeks out of 12, strengthening the positive effects of games over spelling; that out of 56 target vocabulary, experimental group outperformed the control group in 52 words (92%) with the exceptions *classroom*, *home*, *snowman* and *windy*. In fact, it will be worthwhile to interpret the results about the target vocabulary. Both groups spelled the words *bed*, *sofa*, *cup*, *living room*, *zoo*, *park*, *bank*, *home*, *boat*, *car*, *bus*, and *hot* with more than 60% success, which shows that young Turkish EFL learners do better when the English words are monosyllabic, relatively shallow to spell because of one-to-one-phoneme correspondence, and contain short vowels. These well-spelled words’ features are similar to Turkish words’, constructed by Turkish orthographic rules (Durgunoğlu, 2006).

However, both groups spelled the words *television*, *school*, *restaurant*, *shopping center*, *classroom*, *cool*, *nice*, *weather*, *windy*, *snowman* and *cloudy* with less than 40% success. This result demonstrates that young Turkish EFL learners have difficulties in spelling English words which are polysyllabic, highly deep, written with unfamiliar letters (w) and their combinations (sch, sh, cl, th), contain diphthongs and consonant clusters. Moreover, it should be noted that the control group misspellings were observed mostly in vowel diagraphs and consonant clusters.

When the 13 cognates used in the study (*balloon*, *bank*, *boat*, *café*, *campus*, *carnival*, *garage*, *helicopter*, *park*, *restaurant*, *shampoo*, *television*, and *train*) are examined in terms of correct spelling rates, we can see that orthographic pattern plays bigger role than the knowledge of the meaning of the word. Although the students know the meaning or immediately guess, they misspelled the cognates when unfamiliar patterns were to be printed. The results show that students are using their previous literacy knowledge in L1 to spell in L2. However, as these two languages have different

orthographic systems, the attempts fail especially when more than one-to-one-correspondence are required. These results support the proven fact that students' L1 literacy experiences are one of the most important factors in determining their success in L2 literacy.

As a final word, it would be possible to argue that using orthographic practices as a strategy in education should be encouraged in teaching EFL to YLs since it is clearly seen that practicing L2 spelling significantly increases students' achievement and motivation at the primary school context. In addition, based on the findings regarding the participants' and target vocabulary correct spelling rates, it is possible to suggest that spelling games should be used in language classrooms.

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