

To see or not to see: How does seeing spellings support vocabulary learning?

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What was the purpose of the study?

- There is growing evidence for 'orthographic facilitation': that presenting a word's written form aids learning for that word's spelling, pronunciation and meaning
- This study was a systematic review and investigated whether orthographic facilitation can be seen across previous empirical studies that have looked at word learning
- It also investigated when orthographic facilitation occurs, including looking at:
 - Aspects of word knowledge: orthography (spelling), phonology (pronunciation) and semantics (meaning)
 - Different groups: age groups (children, adults), typically developing children, children with developmental disorders (e.g. developmental language disorder, autism, dyslexia) and second language users
- Whether the effect of orthographic facilitation is strongest in children with higher reading abilities

What is a systematic review?

- A systematic review is a method used to gather information and findings from many studies investigating a specific topic
- It involves establishing a strategy for searching for studies and criteria for which studies to include
- Searches are conducted and all studies that meet the criteria are considered for inclusion
- Searches can reveal less well known studies
- This reduces bias by addressing the tendency of researchers to just review the studies that they know of (which sometimes occurs in narrative reviews)
- Systematic reviews also involve quality assessment of studies so that this can be taken into account when interpreting findings
- Systematic reviews provide a reliable basis for decision making; e.g. which strategies to implement in the classroom and when/how to do so



Main findings

1. Seeing the spellings of words helps children to learn the spelling, pronunciation and meaning of those words
2. Children from various groups benefit from seeing the written forms of words (e.g. developmental language disorder, autism, dyslexia)
3. Evidence for orthographic facilitation is stronger for learning the spellings and sounds of words than their meanings.
4. All age groups in the study benefitted from orthographic facilitation
5. There is mixed evidence about whether orthographic facilitation is stronger in better readers

Implications for teachers

- Providing the written form of a word will help children to learn it
- This seems to be the case for children who can read, irrespective of their age, SEN status and reading ability
- Naturalistic studies carried out in the classroom context are needed to explore how these findings, based on carefully controlled conditions, translate to education