



Research Article

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Students' Difficulties in Spelling Vowels: Case Study

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Abstract

This paper aims to reflect the difficulties students have in spelling the vowels of the Albanian language. The unified spelling of a language, in our case the Albanian language, is an expression of the crystallization of the national literary norm in all the main links of the phonetic, grammatical, word-forming and lexical structure. It reflects the current state and general trends of the development of our literary language. Given that the basic principle of Albanian spelling is the phonetic principle and seeing the constant spelling errors of Albanian speakers in the use of vowels, we conducted research with primary school students in rural areas, to see the most common errors frequency in vowel spelling. Our goal was to see the differences between students whose parents have primary education and those with higher education. Through this research we have also seen the reasons that lead to the impossibility of writing correctly and how the vowels should be written in different words. Our hypothesis is that children of parents with primary education make more mistakes in vowel spelling than children of parents with high education. We have conducted the research through the theoretical, comparative method, distribution of questionnaires and data analysis. The results have shown that parents' education does not affect children's knowledge of spelling.

Keywords: difficulty, cause, spelling, vowel, school, student

1. Introduction

In every language, spelling and orthography play an important role in the totality of literary norms and their connections with other norms of the literary language. According to Memushaj: "It is known that one of the main features of the literary language is the normative character, the presence of mandatory norms for all its users. (Memushaj, 2012: 85). Each subsystem of the language has its own literary norm. But the standard language is used in the written form and in the spoken form, which have, apart from the common norms, also special norms. Common to both the spoken form and the written form of the standard language are the grammatical norm (with some changes in the syntactic

norm), the word-forming norm and the lexical norm. Special for the written form are the spelling and punctuation norm, while for the spoken norm the spelling norm. Mastering the norms of the literary language is the main task of learning the Albanian language at school. Not knowing the essence of each of these norms, the mutual connections between them and the peculiarities of working with each of them, constitutes one of the causes of weaknesses in language acquisition at school. Thus, if despite the insistence of language teachers on spelling issues, the number of students' writing errors is still high, this is also because spelling is seen as detached from other norms and, therefore, its rules are not related to spelling morphology. The leading place that spelling occupies among other norms is explained by the leading role of the written language in the unity of the literary language. However, this does not mean that its rules can be acquired in isolation from other norms. On the contrary, *"spelling ultimately reflects what has been achieved in the phonetic, grammatical and lexical structure of the national literary language."* (Kostallari, 1974: 3). To make this dependence of spelling on phonetics and morphology clearer, we will turn to students' writing errors. A good part of linguistic errors in students' written work stems from the influence of their dialect pronunciation. Although the Albanian language is taught in our schools from the first grade, we still encounter many spelling and logical errors among students at all school levels. Regarding the importance of spelling and knowing the standard language, according to Qemal Murati *"To express a certain idea or thought, it is not enough to say it only in a logical order, so that it makes sense, but we must also express it with linguistic regularity: with correct spelling, correct grammar and beautiful expressions"* (Murati, 2009: 159).

2. Methodology

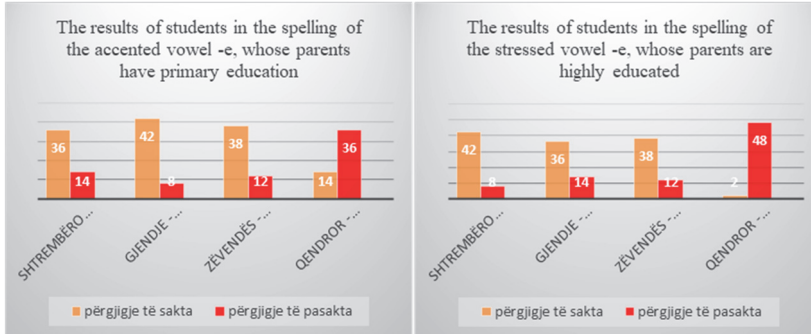
To do our research, in the first place, we have prepared the questionnaires, which at the beginning had clarifications for the students that they are completely anonymous and in no case endanger their privacy. Since the purpose of our research has been to find students' difficulties in spelling vowels and to draw out the differences between students whose parents have primary education and those with high education, then we have considered it reasonable to choose rural areas because in those the area has students whose parents have these levels of education. The selection of students to complete the questionnaires was done randomly and included one hundred participants. Within this group there were students of both sexes and students who had very good and less good success in lessons. Students involved in the research were students from sixth to ninth grade. Questionnaires were distributed at the same time to all students and the time for answering was also the same, i.e. 45 minutes. Initially, in the questionnaires, the children were asked to declare their parents' education, that is, whether their parents have primary or high school education. By primary education, we mean eight-year school, including secondary school, high school, and university. The questionnaires consisted of thirteen questions, where each question had four requests, which the students had to answer. These four requests were each composed of two answers, where one was correct, and one was wrong. The questions included requests for all Albanian vowels, as well as vowel groups. Through the theoretical method, in the paper, we provided information about the spelling rules of Albanian for vowels and groups of vowels. We used the comparative method when we extracted the data from the questionnaires, that is, we made comparisons about the mistakes and difficulties of students in spelling vowels between students whose parents have parents with primary education and those with high education. Whereas, we have presented the analyses through tables and figures.

3. Results

We see frequent problems in the spelling of the stressed vowel *-e*. According to the spelling rules of the Albanian language, words where this vowel is stressed and is followed or was followed in the past by a nasal consonant are written with *-e* and not with *-ë*. Derived or compound words formed from them are also written with *-e*, regardless of the movement of the stress. In our questionnaire, we have

included four words with the accented vowel -e, where, in addition to the correct forms, we have also given the incorrect forms. The words we have given are: *shtrëmbëroj* - *shtrëmbëroj*; *zëvendës* - *zëvendës*; *gjëndje* - *gjëndje*; *qëndror* - *qëndror*.

The students' results are as follows:

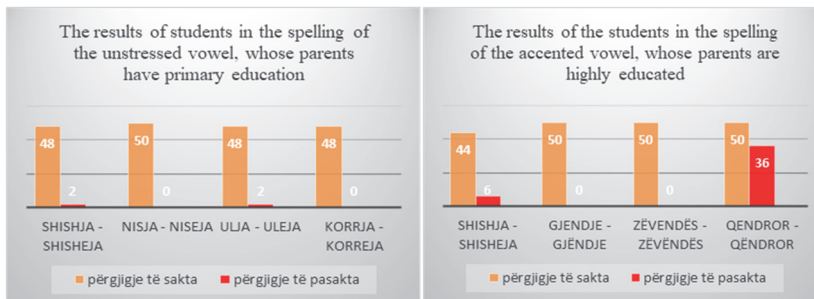


Graph 1 & 2:

From the results presented in the table, we see that there is a very small difference in the spelling of the accented vowel -e between students whose parents have a primary education and those whose parents have a higher education. From a total of four examples given, in two cases the students who have parents with primary education were more accurate (*gjëndje*, *zëvendës*), in one case the result is equal (*zëvendës*) and in another case the students were more accurate who have parents with higher education (*shtrëmbëroj*).

Another Albanian vowel that we often see written incorrectly is the unstressed vowel -e. Thus, in the Albanian language, for feminine nouns that have an unstressed final e in the singular indefinite form, the nominative drops -e, while in other cases it is written. Students are given four words that have this vowel in their composition. So, four words written correctly according to the standard and grammatical rules of Albanian, respectively and their wrong forms. The words we have given are: *shisheja* - *shishja*; *ulja* - *uleja*; *niseja* - *nisja*; *korreja* - *korreja*.

The students' results are as follows:

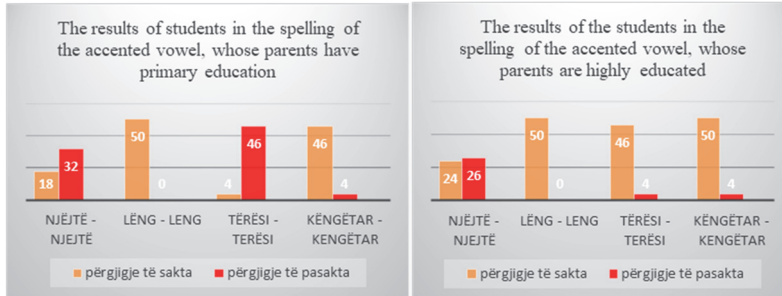


Graph 3 & 4:

In the tables, we see that the differences in the spelling of the unstressed -e are very small. Only in one case, students of parents with higher education got an (*qëndror*) example to a large extent wrong compared to students of parents with primary education.

We also see many mistakes and frequent difficulties in the use of the bent vowel. In Albanian,

all words in which this accented vowel historically corresponds to an *-a* followed by a nasal consonant are written with *-ë*. All derived or compound words, formed from them, are also written with *-ë*, regardless of the movement of the accent. The words written correctly, respectively wrongly, that we have selected for the students are: *njejtë - njejtë; tërësi - tërësi; lëng - lëng; këngëtar - këngëtar*. Below are the students' results:

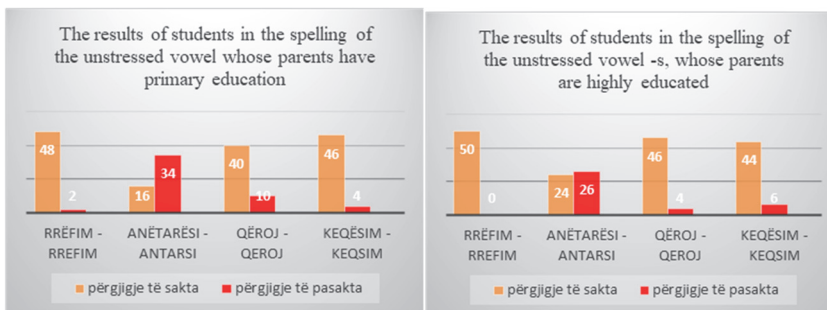


Graph 5 & 6:

We also see small differences in the spelling of the accented vowel. Only in the third example (*tërësi*), students who have parents with primary education made mistakes to a large extent compared to students who have parents with higher education.

The unstressed vowel *-ë* in Albanian is a constant problem in spelling. This vowel is written in the first words and in all words where it belongs to the first syllable, as well as in the words formed from them. It is written in derived words, formed from a subject in *-ë* by suffixes that begin with a consonant and in compound and attached words that have such a subject in *-ë* as the first part, followed by a subject that begins with consonants. The words that we have included in the questionnaire and that constitute difficulties in writing are: *rrefim - rrefim; qëroj - qëroj; anëtarësi - antarsi; keqsim - keqsim*.

The results give us the following data:



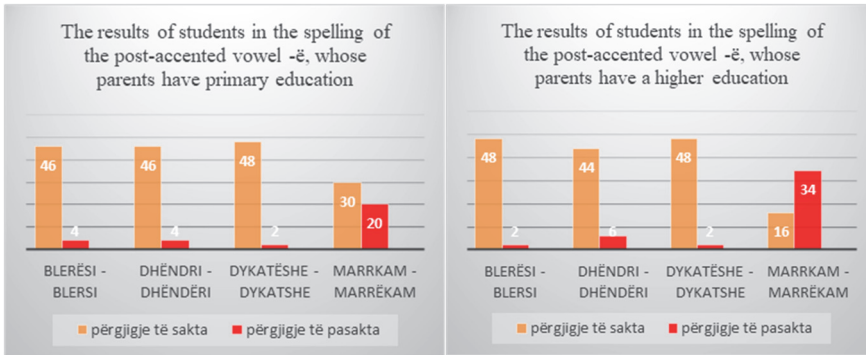
Graph 7 & 8:

From the presented table, it is easy to see that in the spelling of the unstressed vowel *-s*, the students' results do not have big differences, except in one case (*anëtarësi*).

Likewise, frequent mistakes are observed in the writing of the post-accented *-ë*. The post-accented *e* is written to feminine nouns with *-ëz*, to nouns and adjectives with *-ës*, *-ësh* and to the corresponding feminine, in all their forms of declension. It is also written to the adjectives in all their forms of declension. Meanwhile, the post-accented *-ë* is not written in nouns and adjectives with *-ët*, -

ër, -ërr and in male nouns with *-izëm*, *-azëm* during inflection, when these endings are followed by a vowel. It is not written in *-ëm* and *-shëm* adjectives during declension, when these suffixes are followed by a vowel or a *-j*. Also, it is not written before the suffixes *-shëm* and *-të* in all the forms formed by them, as well as, in the first limb of the attached forms of exclamation. The words with which the students were challenged for this vowel were: *blerësi - blersi*; *dykatshe - dykatëshe*; *dhëndëri - dhëndëri*; *marrëkam - marrkam*.

The results are as follows:

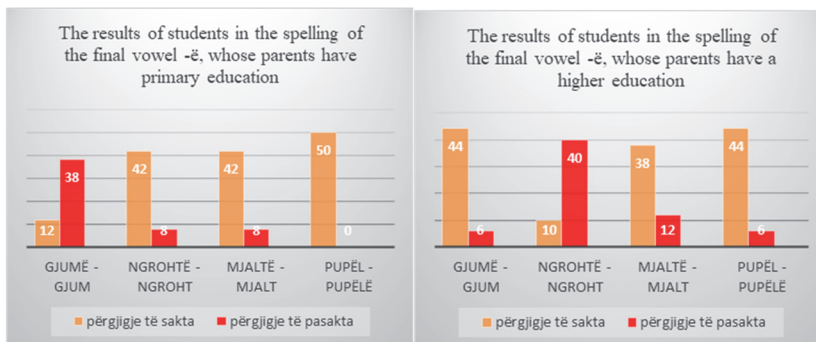


Graph 9 & 10:

Even in the spelling of the post-accented -ë, there are no big differences.

We also encounter constant mistakes in the spelling of the final -ë. The final -ë is written in words with an accent from the beginning of the time in the penultimate syllable, being preserved even in their forms where it is no longer final. As such, we find it in some feminine nouns, in masculine nouns that follow the declension of feminine nouns, some masculine nouns that are also used as genderless, some adjectives and adverbs, etc. The words we gave the students are: *gjumë - gjum*; *mjalt - mjaltë*; *ngrohtë - ngrohtë*; *pupël - pupëlë*.

Their results are as follows:



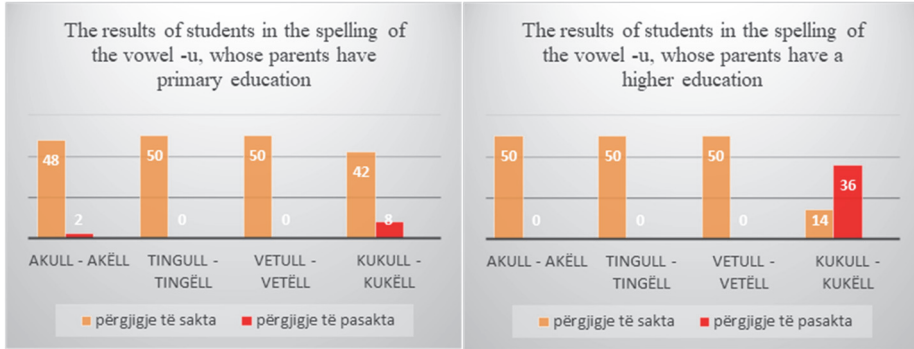
Graph 11 & 12:

From the presented tables, we see that in one case (*gjumë*), students who have parents with primary education made a large number of mistakes and in one case (*ngrohtë*), students who have parents with higher education made more mistakes.

Albanian speakers often confuse the spelling of the vowel *-u*. It is confused with other vowels,

and the most specific cases are those of replacing it with the vowel -ë. According to the rules of Albanian spelling, nouns, and adjectives with *-ull*, *-ur*, as well as words formed from them, are written with *-u* in all cases. We asked the students for the correct answers to the words: *akëll - akull*; *vetull - vetëll*; *tingull - tingëll*; *kukëll - kukull*.

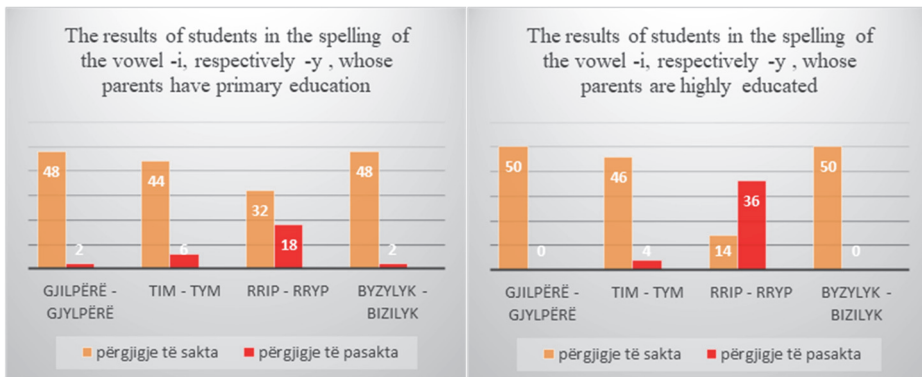
The students' answers gave the following results:



Graph 13 & 14:

In the spelling of the vowel *-u*, the differences are quite small. Out of the four examples given, in three cases the results are almost the same, only in one example (*kukull*), the children of parents who have a higher education wrote the majority wrongly.

Difficulty and frequent mistakes are seen in the spelling of the vowels *-i*, respectively *-y*. So, most Albanian speakers confuse these vowels and write them incorrectly instead of each other. In the questionnaire we put the words: *gjilpërë - gjylpërë*; *rryp - rrip*; *tim - tym*; *bizilyk - byzylyk*. According to the Albanian standard, we have decided some words that should be written with *-i* and some that should be written with *-y*. From the sent requirements, the students' answers give the following results:



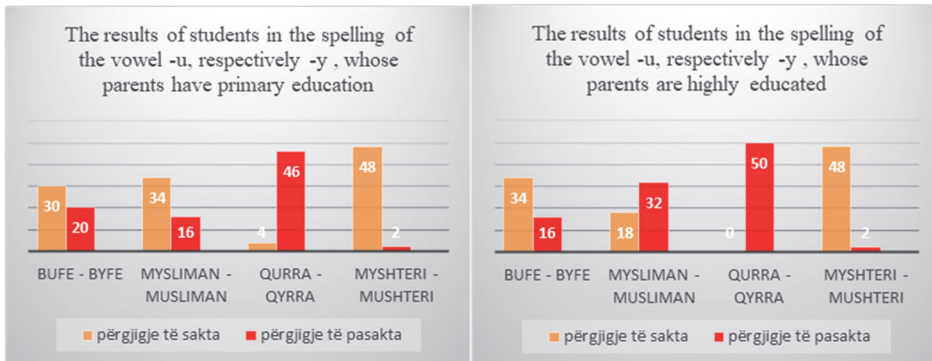
Graph 15 & 16:

There is a slight difference in the spelling of the vowel *-i*, respectively *-y*. In the same case (*rrip*), in both groups, the example was written incorrectly by most of the students.

Other vowels that are confused with each other are the vowels *-u* and *-y*. We have submitted the same request for these vowels. The words we have given are: *byfe - bufe*; *qurra - qyrra*; *mysliman -*

musliman; mushteri – myshteri.

For these vowels we have the following results:

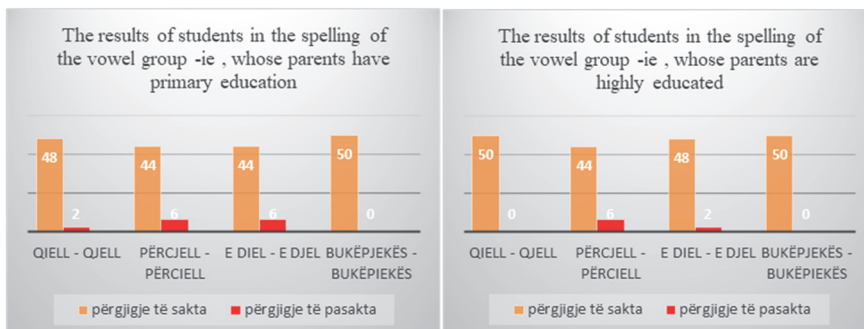


Graph 17 & 18:

Also, in the spelling of the vowels -u and -y, we have almost similar results between the two groups of students. The two most misspelled examples are: *mysliman* and *qurra*.

Other issues that we have seen fit to prove are some groups of vowels and diphthongs. According to the Albanian standard, nouns are written with -ie, in which this group of vowels is followed by a liquid consonant (*l, ll, r*) and all the words formed by them; verbs in which this group of vowels is followed by the ending -j; the singular forms of the simple present indicative of these verbs are written with -je; the passive-self forms of the present and the imperfect of these verbs are written with -i; representative verbs whose vowel group is in an open syllable; in the third person singular of the subjunctive, in the singular imperative and in the plural forms of this way, when joined with the short forms of the personal pronoun, these verbs are written with -j; in the second person plural of the present demonstrative, relative and imperative, in the imperfect of the demonstrative and relative, as well as in the passive forms, these verbs are written with -i; verbs with the subject of -l, -ll, -rr are written with -je, as well as other verbs of this type with a consonantal subject; these verbs in the second person plural of the present and in all the imperfect indicative and relative, in the imperative and in the passive-individual forms are written with -i. We gave the students the words: *qjell - qiell; e diel - e djel; përciell - përcjell; bukëpjekës - bukëpiekës*.

The questionnaire gave us the following results:

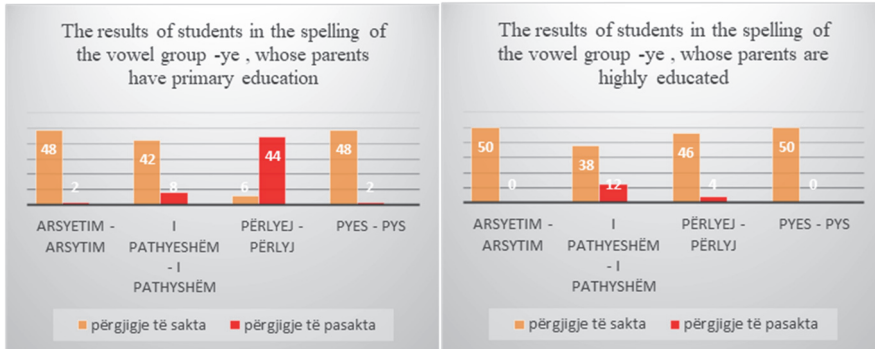


Graph 19 & 20:

In this vowel group -ie, the results are the same.

Other errors are often found in the spelling of the group -ye. This group is written in full in many Albanian words and unfortunately, we often find it abbreviated. Students are given words written in the correct form and in the reduced form of the -ye group. The words we have given are: *arsytim - arsyetim; përlyej - përlyj; i pathyeshëm - i pathyshëm; pys - pyes*.

The findings have yielded the following results:

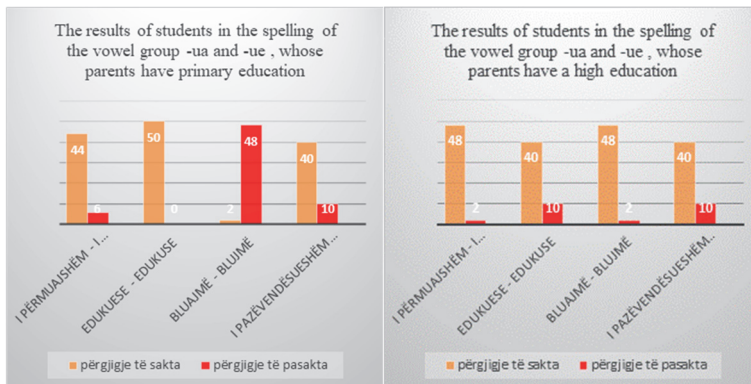


Graph 21 & 22:

In the spelling of the -ye group, in only one case (*përlyej*), students who have parents with primary education have given worse results than students who have parents with higher education.

Even the groups -ua and -ue are written incorrectly. The group -ua is written in full on some nouns and adjectives; it is written in full in verbs with the subject in -ua. While verbal nouns and adjectives formed with the suffixes -s and -shëm from verbs with a subject in -o/-ua are written with -ue, so are the words formed from them. The words given to the students are: *i përmuajshëm - i përmuajshëm; blujmë - bluajmë; edukuse - edukuese; i pazëvendësueshëm - i pazëvendësueshëm*.

The results are as follows:

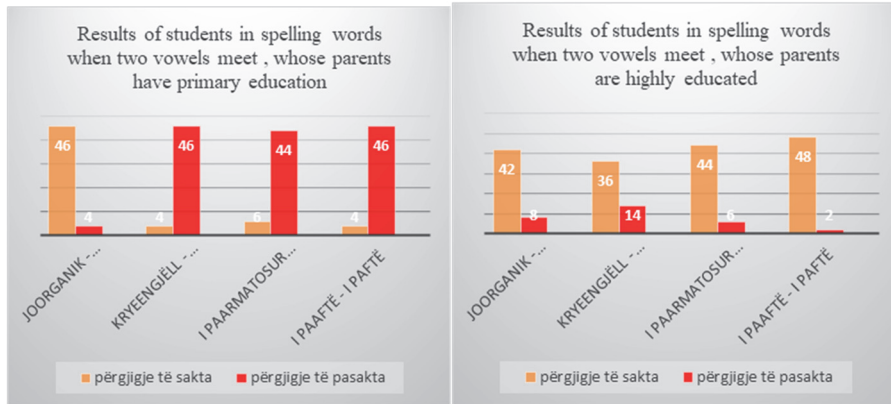


Graph 23 & 24:

Even in the spelling of the vowel groups -ua and -ue, there is a very small difference. In a concrete case, we have the word "*bluajmë*", where the first group of students largely wrote it wrong, unlike the second group, which most of them wrote correctly.

The last issue about vowels where Albanian speakers make frequent mistakes is the issue of meeting two vowels in different words. It is a rule of Albanian that both vowels must be written, when two identical vowels meet in word formations. The words we gave the students in the questionnaire are: *joorganik - jorganik; i parmatosur - i paarmatosur; kryengjell - kryengjell; i paaftë - i pafhtë*.

The answers gave the following results:



Graph 25 & 26:

From the results presented in the table, we see that we have a greater difference between the two groups of students in the spelling of words when two vowels meet. So, in three cases (*kryengjell, i paarmatosur, and i pafhtë*), students who have parents with primary education wrote in the wrong form, compared to students who have parents with higher education, while in one case (*joorganik*) the difference is very small.

4. Discussions and Conclusions

The spelling of the Albanian language is taught to Albanian students in the first grade. The subject of the Albanian language is included in every curriculum and students spend more time learning it than any other subject. However, in the orthographic issues that we have addressed, the results that our hypothesis is not confirmed. This is due to the fact that perhaps parents do not give importance to the standard language in communication with their children or even to the fact that they continue to communicate in informal language. Also, another possibility is careless communication when they write to their children in letters and phone communications. Through the tables presented with the results, the differences are very small, and for certain issues, children of parents with primary school do better than children of parents with high school.

Since the students are at a young age and have greater opportunities to learn, we consider that teachers and parents should make more efforts, to make them aware of the importance of writing correctly and without mistakes. For this importance, linguist Ragip Mulaku says: "*writing and speaking in accordance with language rules facilitate not only communication within us, on a nationwide scale, but also make communication and the spread of our values among other peoples and in their languages*". (Mulaku, 2015: 375). Also, in addition to teachers and parents, an important role in the written and linguistic culture of students is played by the media, which have the obligation to adhere to the rules of the standard language. Since our research aimed to find out the influence of parents' education on the acquisition of standard language spelling in primary school students, our recommendation for parents would be to pay more attention to the way they communicate with their

children, either verbal or written communication. Parents should be careful and speak the standard language with their children, even when writing with them on social networks, they should try to adhere to the grammatical rules of the Albanian language.

The following recommendations are addressed to teachers of the lower cycle of primary schools: to practice more the area of writing the language with the students in the classroom; to ask the students more often to write essays on free topics, but where the teacher assigns them some words that they must use within the text and these words are among those that the students encounter difficulties while writing; after the completion of written tasks by the student, the teacher should show interest and commit to correcting his spelling mistakes; in addition, the teacher should also show the correct way of writing the word and ask the student to correct his mistake; if necessary, to facilitate the writing of long words, the teacher can pronounce them slowly dividing them into syllables until the students reinforce the spelling; as an important factor, cooperation with students' parents, frequent meetings with them and informing them about the success or failure of their children is a necessary link in improving this situation; what should be requested from the parents in such cases is their help and commitment to the child regarding this matter.

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Appendix:

This is for the purposes of data collection and the data is theirs for a scientific paper about the reality of students in the acquisition of the Albanian standard. The questionnaire is anonymous and does not endanger the educational and social integrity of the students. Please, read the questions carefully and give the answers according to your own opinion and without being influenced by others.

Residence: a. village b. city

Gender: a. girl b. boy

Father's education: a. elementary b. medium c. senior (faculty)

Mother's education: a. primary b. medium c. senior (faculty)

Success in lessons: a. sufficient b. good c. very good d. excellent

How many books does your father read?

a. never b. rarely c. frequently

How many books does your mother read?

a. never b. rarely c. frequently

Circle only the correct answers!

1. In which case are the given words written correctly?
a. shtrembëroj a. shtrembëroj; c. zëvendës c. zëvendës;
b. gjëndje b. gjendje; d. qëndror d. qendror;
2. In which case are the given words written correctly?:
a. shisheja a. shishja; c. ulja c. uleja;
b. niseja b. nisja; d. korra d. korreja;
3. In which case are the given words written correctly?:
a. njejtë a. njëjtë; c. tërësi c. tërësi;
b. lëng b. leng; d. këngëtar d. këngëtar;
4. In which case are the given words written correctly?:
a. rrefim a. rrëfim; c. qëroj c. qeroj;
b. anëtarësi b. antarsi; d. keqsim d. keqësim;
5. In which case are the given words written correctly?:
a. blerësi a. blersi; c. dykatshe c. dykatëshe;
b. dhëndëri b. dhëndri; d. marrëkam d. marrkam;
6. In which case are the given words written correctly?:
a. gjumë a. gjum; c. mjalt c. mjaltë;
b. ngrohtë b. ngroht; d. pupël d. pupëlë;
7. In which case are the given words written correctly?:
a. akëll a. akull; c. vetull c. vetëll
b. tingull b. tingëll; d. kukëll d. kukull;
8. In which case are the given words written correctly?:
a. gjilpërë a. gjylpërë; c. rryp c. rrip;
b. tim b. tym; d. bizilyk d. byzylyk;
9. In which case are the given words written correctly?:
a. byfë b. bufë; c. qurra c. qyrra;
b. mysliman b. musliman; d. mushteri d. myshteri;
10. In which case are the given words written correctly?:
a. gjell a. qiell; c. e diel c. e djel;
b. përciell b. përcjell; d. bukëpjekës d. bukëpiekës;
11. In which case are the given words written correctly?:
a. arsyetim a. arsyetim; c. përlyej c. përlyj;
b. i pathyeshëm b. i pathyshëm; d. pys d. pyes;
12. In which case are the given words written correctly?:
a. i përnujshëm a. i përnuajshëm; c. blujmë c. bluajmë;
b. edukuse b. edukuese; d. i pazëvendësueshëm d. i pazëvendësushëm;
13. In which case are the given words written correctly?:
a. joorganik a. jorganik; c. i parmatorur c. i paarmatorur;
b. kryengjell b. kryeengjell; d. i paaftë d. i paftë;