

# SPELLIRAN

*Alireza Talebzadeh gives students a new experience.*

Looking for a game that would challenge and engage students, I came across the spelling bee contest, which started in the US before spreading to many other countries. I decided to customise it for my local context. I realised that what I needed first was an instruction manual, an emblem and a title. I wrote a manual in L1 and concocted the word SPELLIRAN to introduce and promote the programme and show that it was for our whole country. I then borrowed a green vine leaf from our teachers' association logo to symbolise the growth and development of spelling as one of the key components of learning English.



## Piloting

The next step was to pilot it in my local context. Armed with large signs with numbers and a list of words taken from local English textbooks, I went to a few junior/senior high schools and, with the generous assistance of the English teachers and head teacher, conducted the contest in two large classes. The spellers stood in front of the board, the head teacher was the judge, and I played the role of pronouncer. Student spectators clapped and cheered, I read out the words from the list I had prepared, we all praised the winners and the head teacher gave them prizes. The students enjoyed it immensely, particularly in the junior high schools, so I decided to keep the focus on grades 7 to 9.

## Cascading

Teacher feedback was positive and so, to cascade it to other teachers in the district, I ran a workshop. Participants familiarised themselves with the rules and played the different roles. Then we all took part in a demo contest where I played pronouncer again, a group of three were 'judges', ten teachers were 'spellers' and others were 'spectators'. After time for questions and sharing ideas, the teachers were given an instruction manual and a certificate to use in their schools.

## Competing

It was decided to hold SPELLIRAN at three levels: class, school and district with a view to extending it to the province and national level in the future. The class winners competed to determine the single winner of the school. All the school winners were called School SPELLIRAN Champs and participated in the district level contest. A few weeks later, 37 excited school spelling champs, with their parents, friends and other spectators from all over the district, stood before

me. I read out the words and the five judges listened attentively. It went on for many rounds and lasted over three hours until the happy winner was announced.

## Roles and rules

### Roles

You need judges, pronouncers and coordinators, and spectators too—the more the merrier!

### Setting

A large space with a podium would work perfectly.

### Resources

The spelling words should be taken from local textbooks and participants should be told this in advance. The word list should be given to the judges and pronouncers and the words can be categorised by difficulty or number of letters. You also need badges, number cards/name tags and a lanyard/cord. And don't forget prizes for the winners.

### Rules

- The pronouncer reads aloud the word on the list, giving the translation and/or definition to make sure the speller understands it, while the speller listens carefully. Then s/he starts spelling the word clearly within a maximum of 20 seconds.
- While spelling a word, the contestant stands and when done sits down. A correctly spelt word means the speller remains in the round. A misspelt word eliminates the speller from the game.
- When a speller misspells a word, s/he sits down, and at the end of the round leaves the stage. If all the contestants misspell their word, the contest is reset and they all remain in the game.
- No speller spells somebody else's word except when there are only two spellers left, in which case, if one speller is incorrect, the other speller must spell that word correctly, plus one more word to be declared the spelling champ.
- The judge(s) determines whether the word is correct or incorrect and has the final say.

If you believe in 'no game, no gain', why not try it in your local context? Happy spelling!



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