Transcription Skills and Written Composition in Chinese

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Abstract : Background: Recent findings have shown that transcription skills play a unique and significant role in Chinese word reading and spelling (i.e. word dictation), and written composition development. The interrelationships among component skills of transcription, word reading, word spelling, and written composition in Chinese have rarely been examined in the literature. Is the contribution of component skills of transcription to Chinese written composition mediated by word level skills (i.e., word reading and spelling)? Methods: The participants in the study were 249 Chinese children in Grade 1, Grade 3, and Grade 5 in Hong Kong. They were administered measures of general reasoning ability, orthographic knowledge, stroke sequence knowledge, word spelling, handwriting fluency, word reading, and Chinese narrative writing. Orthographic knowledge-orthographic knowledge was assessed by a task modeled after the lexical decision subtest of the Hong Kong Test of Specific Learning Difficulties in Reading and Writing (HKT-SpLD). Stroke sequence knowledge: The participants' performance in producing legitimate stroke sequences was measured by a stroke sequence knowledge task. Handwriting fluency- Handwriting fluency was assessed by a task modeled after the Chinese Handwriting Speed Test. Word spelling: The stimuli of the word spelling task consist of fourteen two-character Chinese words. Word reading: The stimuli of the word reading task consist of 120 two-character Chinese words. Written composition: A narrative writing task was used to assess the participants' text writing skills. Results: Analysis of covariance results showed that there were significant between-grade differences in the performance of word reading, word spelling, handwriting fluency, and written composition. Preliminary hierarchical multiple regression analysis results showed that orthographic knowledge, word spelling, and handwriting fluency were unique predictors of Chinese written composition even after controlling for age, IQ, and word reading. The interaction effects between grade and each of these three skills (orthographic knowledge, word spelling, and handwriting fluency) were not significant. Path analysis results showed that orthographic knowledge contributed to written composition both directly and indirectly through word spelling, while handwriting fluency contributed to written composition directly and indirectly through both word reading and spelling. Stroke sequence knowledge only contributed to written composition indirectly through word spelling. Conclusions: Preliminary hierarchical regression results were consistent with previous findings about the significant role of transcription skills in Chinese word reading, spelling and written composition development. The fact that orthographic knowledge contributed both directly and indirectly to written composition through word reading and spelling may reflect the impact of the script-sound-meaning convergence of Chinese characters on the composing process. The significant contribution of word spelling and handwriting fluency to Chinese written composition across elementary grades highlighted the difficulty in attaining automaticity of transcription skills in Chinese, which limits the working memory resources available for other composing processes.

Keywords : orthographic knowledge, transcription skills, word reading, writing
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