

## Comparison of learning Chinese characters through storytelling versus traditional writing methods on Chinese beginners' recall, retention and cognitive load

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It is widely agreed that the written system of Chinese characters is the most difficult aspect experienced by learners of Chinese. The difficulty is caused in part by the fact that the constituent components within each character have to be simultaneously processed before being stored as schema in learners' long term memory. The traditional method of remembering characters that emphasizes repeated writing, has neglected the importance of dealing with the relationship among the constituent components within characters. To alleviate this problem, a mnemonic method was developed by Heisig and Richardson, whose effectiveness will be explored in this study. According to the principles of this 'story method', students first learn a key meaning for each constituent component, and then create an imaginative story to associate all components with the meaning of the entire character. Since this method was first published in 2009, no study has empirically examined its effectiveness in learning Chinese characters. At this moment, I am doing a pilot study to use this method with self-developed materials on seventeen students of a Chinese Beginners' course. The results of unannounced assessments indicate, that on average around 80% of the characters and their components were correctly recalled by students, which appears to much higher than using traditional methods. Moreover, students were very satisfied with the effectiveness of this story method. Despite these encouraging findings, it is still necessary to verify the effects of this method.

Therefore, the aim of the follow-up study is to examine the effects of traditional methods that emphasize repeated writing versus the story method on students' recall and retention performance of meaning on the constituent components and the entire character. In addition, cognitive load is measured by using unidimensional a mental effort questionnaire. A quasi-experimental design will be applied. Ten characters per week will be learned by the students. Each week, one group of students will practice using the traditional method, and the other group with the story method. It is hypothesized that students in the group using the story method will perform better on recall and retention tests and experience a lower cognitive load.