



THE EFFECTS OF DIFFERENT APPROACHES TO TEACHING CHINESE ORTHOGRAPHY ON CHARACTER ACQUISITION AND READING PERFORMANCE IN LEARNERS OF CHINESE AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE:

A SYSTEMATIC REVIEW

Sonia Qin, Hamish Chalmers



Key Terms



Chinese as a foreign language (CFL)

The teaching and learning of Chinese by students in contexts where Chinese is not the predominant language spoken or taught.



Mandarin

A spoken variety of Chinese, most commonly taught in formal educational settings.



Pinyin

The romanisation system used to represent Mandarin pronunciation using roman letters.

What can I learn?



Learn which approaches improve Chinese character learning and reading, and which are most effective at different learner proficiency levels.

What evidence is summarised?



Experimental and quasi-experimental studies evaluating the effects of different approaches to teaching Chinese orthography on literacy-related outcomes.

What does it find?

- 5 Results showed **five** categories of pedagogical approaches: **computer-assisted language learning**; **conventional (or traditional) techniques**; a **holistic curriculum** combining reading, writing, speaking, and listening; **various presentation methods** when introducing characters; and the **timing** of orthographic instruction.
- Studies generally **preferred technology-enhanced methods**, a **holistic curriculum**, and **varied presentations** of character information over conventional techniques.
- Findings on orthographic instruction timing were mixed**, with some favoring immediate character teaching over a pinyin-first approach.
- Participant samples **mainly included adult university learners**, primarily L1 English speakers. General **lack of consistency in the classification and reporting of CFL learner proficiency** across studies.
- The evidence's **methodological quality was weak**, limiting causal inferences and strong pedagogical recommendations.

How can I use the findings?



Use Technology Purposefully

Use technology-enhanced teaching tools like online games, digital flashcards, and animated stroke-order demonstrations.

Teach in Meaningful Chunks

Teach characters in small groups, **focusing on radicals or semantic/phonetic components** to enhance pattern recognition and connections.



Introduce Characters Early

Introduce **characters early along with pinyin**, instead of pinyin first.