

Abstract

In Hong Kong education system, Chinese and English are two important languages for students to learn. Being a Chinese-English bilingual, poor in either or both languages may cause learning difficulties. The purpose of this study is to investigate whether poor readers of Chinese also had difficulty in reading English. Additionally, it is known that poor readers may possess various cognitive deficiencies. This study also aims at finding the reading-related cognitive deficiencies of poor readers in Chinese and poor readers in both Chinese and English. 277 Cantonese-English speaking children were included in the study. It consisted of 185 first graders and 92 second graders. Participants with bottom quarter scores in Chinese word reading were classified as poor readers in Chinese. Those who also scored as the bottom quarter in English word reading were classified as poor readers of both Chinese and English. In this sample, around two-third of poor readers in Chinese were also poor in English. 5 Chinese-reading-related cognitive skills, including rapid digit naming, lexical decision, phonological awareness, morphological awareness and delayed copying, were assessed for all participants. Children who were poor in Chinese had significantly poorer performance in rapid digit naming than the control group. For children who were poor in both Chinese and English, they had significantly poorer performance in not only rapid digit naming, but also phonological awareness and morphological awareness than the control group. When comparing poor readers in Chinese and poor readers in both Chinese and English, the latter performed significantly poorer in phonological awareness. Result suggested there may be high probability of being poor in English given those who were already a poor reader in Chinese. Moreover, there may be differences in cognitive deficiency profile among poor readers.