Formal Handwriting Assessment for Children with Writing Difficulties

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Abstract. In this study, we looked at the characteristics of various tools used to evaluate the handwriting of children since 2000. The results are broken down into the following categories: test domains, quantitative and qualitative characteristics. The final number of evaluation tools that met the criteria was six. The study results yielded some implications for children with writing difficulties.

Keywords: Handwriting, Assessment, Children with Writing Difficulties

1 Introduction

Handwriting is a complex task in which perceptual, motor, and cognitive processes interact [1]. Learners bring their own knowledge and experiences about handwriting and its value to the educational setting but they need further explicit experiences that will enable them to develop understanding about the knowledge, attitudes and skills and abilities involved in developing their handwriting [2]. Several potential explanations exist for why children may experience difficulties with writing, including but not limited to impaired cognitive abilities, impaired in-hand manipulation, poor motor planning, and differences in academic teaching [3]. Evaluating the writing capabilities of children with writing difficulties is the starting point for providing needed guidance, and the results of such evaluation could serve as an invaluable resource for future interventions. As of now, there are essentially no standard evaluation tools for handwriting in Korea, which makes it challenging to come up with a logical and scientific approach incorporating evidence-based practice to aid children with writing difficulties.

Therefore, this study attempts to shed light on the needs of students with writing difficulties in order to yield implications for their guidance on the basis of an investigation of the writing evaluation tools used in special educational institutions since 2000.
2 Method

Criteria for winnowing these were as follows: (a) writing evaluation had to be the main purpose of the tool; (b) the tool must have been used since the year 2000; (c) the tool must be (or have been) commercially distributed and used in educational institutions; (d) the tool must be in English. The final number of evaluation tools that met the criteria was six.

3 Result

3.1 Assessment Description

Test Domains. Throughout the study, grades covered, alphabet writing, numeral writing, near-point copying, far-point copying, and dictation were the main points of assessment. Two evaluation measured handwriting speed, but the remainder did not.

Characteristics. Three evaluation tools measured quantitative characteristics and dealt with the 3P’s (posture, position, pencil). All evaluation tools except one measured qualitative characteristics. Handwriting legibility comprises several components that can be assessed in a writing sample; slant, letter formation, spacing, alignment, size and connectedness. The content of a student’s writing can be analyzed

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to examine: planning, ideation, elaboration, cohesiveness, spelling, fluency, grammar, syntax, capitalization, punctuation, consistency, and proofreading [4].

4 Discussion

The results of this study show that the writing evaluation tools investigated can be summed up as follows. First, Tools enable the assessment of three factors: test domains, quantitative characteristics and qualitative characteristics. Test domains are measured along four dimensions, alphabet/numerical writing, near/far copying, dictation and handwriting speed. Learners will develop; hand-eye coordination, fine motor control, correct letter shapes by following the suggested sequence of movement, consistent size, slope, spacing, proportion and alignment of letters, appropriate use of pen lifts, a relaxed technique, legible handwriting, strategies to assess their own technique and styles [2]. With demonstration and opportunities for practice, and with application in meaningful contexts, handwriting movement patterns are established and reinforced, becoming automatic processes within the learner’s control.

The implications for handwriting education for children with writing difficulties are as follows. First, in addition to a research-based writing curriculum, the complexity of the writing process speaks to the need to integrate preparation for large-scale writing assessments throughout the existing writing curriculum, particularly for children with writing difficulties [10]. Recent studies of highly effective literacy educators indicate that test preparation is successful when integrated within the context of the grade-level curriculum rather than in a concentrated one-shot period [11]. Second, to receive higher scores on handwriting assessments, children with writing difficulties must understand the criteria on which they are being assessed. Rubrics are powerful tools when used to teach students how to identify their strengths and weaknesses in response to specific writing tasks [12]. Teachers who use a variety of writing rubrics across the curriculum help children with writing difficulties gain self-evaluation skills that allow them to adjust their writing approach to diverse writing situations, including large-scale assessments [10]. When students use rubrics, they develop self-regulation abilities, including goal setting, progress monitoring, and self-evaluation skills.

References

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