American Sign Language: Monitoring Student Progress

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Background

- Increasing number of students are taking American Sign Language (ASL) to fulfill world/foreign language requirements in high school and post secondary settings.
- ASL is a visual language which poses unique challenges in teaching and learning.
- Teacher monitoring of student progress and provision of adequate feedback for improvement is notable since there is no written form for ASL.
- The researchers focus on identifying the feasibility of Curriculum Based Measure (CBM) in monitoring student ASL progress.
- CBM assessment measures the participant’s ability to identify pictures and copy ASL sentences as indicators of language fluency.

Methodology

- 7 participants were recruited from a Deaf Education graduate program and the TRIO McNair Scholars Program.
- Participants were asked to rate their ASL skills on a 7 point scale and identify the number of ASL classes completed.
- Participants logged into AVENUE ASL software and completed 13 prerecorded tasks independently.
- Tasks prepared by the researcher included 5 photographs of common object (e.g. chair, dog) and 8 ASL based short sentences consisting of 4-9 ASL signs, ranging from easy to difficult.
- Participants’ responses were automatically recorded and forwarded to the researcher.
- One external reviewer and I viewed participant responses and scored them independently.
- Scoring parameters included key words, non-manual markers (NMM), and accurate completion of the sentence.
- Key words were scored on a scale from 0-17, non-manual markers on a scale from 0-13, completion of sentence as yes or no, and picture naming as correct or incorrect.

Results

Inter-rater reliability of scorers on the picture naming and sentence completion tasks was 100%, on key word scoring 95%, and 85% agreement on non-manual markers.

Discussion

- Sentence retell using key word scoring protocols appears to be a successful measure of ASL fluency.
- This CBM holds promise of reducing subjectivity in assessment, increasing the standardization of measures, and increasing the frequency of instructor feedback.
- Non-manual markers as a scoring parameter is not an effective measure of student progress.
- Scoring of NMM required a lot of discussion between scorers resulting in excessive time and increased opportunities for subjective scoring.
- Participants who were beginners in learning ASL were unable to recognize and copy NMM.
- Picture naming served as a preliminary measure of ASL vocabulary knowledge and not language fluency.

Hypothesis

Picture naming and sentence retell are valid and reliable indicators of student progress in American Sign Language fluency.

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