Research Proposal

Language Brokering Experiences
Barriers to Student Success in Interpreter Education Programs.

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REFERENCES

CHAPTER 1 THE PROJECT INTRODUCTION

PROBLEM STATEMENT

Interpreter educators have set high achieving goals for Interpreter Education Program (IEP) students so they may be successful within the post-secondary environment. Their outcome is seeing students become successful contributors within the interpreter workforce. Elements that either aid or impede student success rates, if more comprehensively understood, would assist educators in shaping instructional methodologies to ensure a higher student success rate while closing or eliminating the readiness-to-work-gap (Winston, 1994).

Readiness-to-Work-Gap

The increasing demand for interpreters has created an environment with many under-credentialed and under-qualified interpreters (Godfrey 2010). This has been compounded by the fact that students who enter an IEP may be hindered by any number of factors that interfere with their successful matriculation to the workforce. Furthermore, some students who graduate may not have fully developed their skills to enter the labor market, which further increases the readiness-to-work-gap. Anderson and Stauffer (1990) had first coined the phrase the "readiness-to-work-gap" which referred to the generally accepted fact that students were not employment ready upon graduation (Patrie, 1994; Witter-Merithew & Johnson, 2005). Therefore, the potential causes of the readiness-to-work-gap must be identified through a critical evaluation of the specific barriers that impede student success.

Adapting Curricula for the Native Signer

Historically, educators have expressed an interest in identifying the essential characteristics of students who aspire to study interpreting and eventually work within the field of interpreting (Shaw and Hughes, 2006). Additionally, children who have grown up in deaf households with deaf parents and served in a language brokering role may also aspire to the role of a professional sign language interpreter. These children, who have at least one signing deaf parent, are referred to as Children of Deaf Adults (CODA) (Bull, 1998). By the nature of their environment, they have learned sign language within a different cultural arena, and have had different life experiences than those students who are entering an IEP with no previous exposure to the interpreting environment. Therefore, different instructional methodologies may be required as compared to those students who enter an IEP with little or no background in sign language. Successful outcomes in an IEP are critical for ensuring that students are able to develop skills needed to work as a qualified sign language interpreter for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing community. Programs that can assess and apply the various factors that assist a student whether they had previous experience as a CODA or not, will close or eliminate the readiness-to-work gap.

Language Brokering

Ninety percent of children born to deaf couples can hear (Moore & Lane, 2003). Some CODAs, based on their past language brokering experiences, may ultimately decide on a career in sign language interpreting and in so doing, they may opt to enter the workforce without professional training, while others may decide to enter a more formalized IEP.

Those CODAs that enter IEPs may find their past language brokering experiences an advantage and/or hindrance in developing knowledge, skills and abilities to serve as professional sign language interpreters. Some of these experiences include but are not limited to language and interpreting experiences, understanding of what the role of an interpreter is, and perception of linguistic and cultural identities and status. Therefore, a primary outcome of this study is to identify new instructional methodologies that can be tailored to teach students who grow up as native signers.

Defining Academic and Personal Traits

In recent years, it has been more widely accepted that both personality factors and general cognitive ability influence performance (Bontempo and Napier 2011). An additional aim of this research is to assemble and evaluate the linguistic ability of native and non-native sign language users as well as the socioeconomic, scholastic, psychological and cognitive factors that may hinder students within an IEP.

The outcome of this research will help understand why certain students are able to develop their knowledge, skills and abilities to effectively serve as professional interpreters, whereas others drop out or do not leave with qualifications that allow them to matriculate to the work force. Despite foundational research in this domain, little is known about what distinguishes sign language interpreting students who complete programs successfully from those who do not persist to program completion or who experience severe anxiety during their studies (Shaw and Hughes 2006).

An additional component of this study will examine language brokering experiences of CODAs who have participated in IEPs, and those CODAs who have entered the workforce without formal education. By properly applying the research findings, IEPs can enrich their respective curricula through development of new instructional methodologies and new learning tools aimed at increasing student success rates, which in turn provides consistently higher quality interpreters to serve the deaf and hard of hearing community.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

This research proposes a detailed analysis on the factors that impede success rates for students who have previous language brokering experience, and those that do not. Determining these factors will increase student achievement and can help close or eliminate the readiness-to-work gap. In order to accomplish this, the researcher intends to determine if there are consistent and/or systematic barriers affecting student success rates within Interpreter Education Programs, and demarcate these in an empirical and quantitative/qualitative manner.

RESEARCH QUESTION

Using the findings obtained through this research, the following research question will be answered:

1. Are there consistent and/or systematic barriers affecting student success rates within Interpreter Education Programs?
    a. If barriers are identified, how do they impact CODA and non-CODA students?

b. If barriers are identified, how would an IEP adapt curricula to teach students with past language brokering experiences?

c. If barriers are identified, what specific instructional methodologies can be adopted to improve student outcomes within an IEP.

HYPOTHESES

This research examines student success rates within Interpreter Education Programs. There are two primary hypotheses for this research.

Hypotheses: There are consistent and/or systematic barriers that affect student success rates within an IEP.

Null-Hypotheses: There is no correlation between identified barriers and student success rates within an IEP.

Hypotheses: Native sign language users such as CODAs would benefit from curricula adapted to their past language brokering experiences.

Null-Hypotheses: There is no correlation with past language brokering experience and student success rates within an IEP.

GENERAL PROCEDURES

In order to answer the above research questions, data will be analyzed from IEPs located in Australia, Canada, United Kingdom and the United States. The student enrollment and graduation rates from participating IEPs will serve as the primary data source. Data of CODA enrolled students will serve as an additional subset. The research will use both survey data and personal interviews as part of a mix method design. The primary source of gathering data for this study will be through analysis of (1) previously published research results, followed by (2) qualitative investigation using a semi-structured interview and (3) quantitative survey and testing. These data will provide sufficient grounding to test the validity of the two primary hypotheses.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

This study will provide valuable information regarding systemic educational barriers and their impact on student success rates. Identified barriers, along with best practices in course instruction and curriculum design will be shared with other educators as part of a review to streamline curricula and to introduce evidence-based rigor and adaptive capabilities. This will assist in providing program improvements through higher-quality admissions screening, enhanced instructional methodologies, innovative curriculum design and student-learning aids. Additionally, if programs are adapted to instruct the CODA student, there may be increased participation of native sign language users entering IEPs.

DELIMITATIONS OF THE RESEARCH

In proposing this research, the following delimitations have been set by the researcher. These delimitations have helped constrain the scope and define the boundaries of the research. The delimitations set for this research are:

1. Interpreter Education Programs listed with the Australian Sign Language Interpreter's Association in Australia, Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf in the United States; Association of Visual Language interpreters of Canada; and the National Registers of Communication Professionals working with deaf and deaf blind people in the United Kingdom will be accessed.

2. Sign language programs independent of an IEP will not be accessed.

3. Two and four year programs will be analyzed separately to find similarities/differences.

LIMITATIONS OF THE RESEARCH

The researcher anticipates the following limitations:

1. Some students may withdraw from their program due to personal matters outside the scope of their studies.

2. Students who withdraw due to poor performance may be reluctant to continue with the proposed research.

3. There may be differences in program structure and curricula.

4. Program dates may be slightly different which may affect the timing for data collection.

5. The research relies on self-reporting and as such, information may not be accurately provided.

6. During research interviews, study participants may desire to present their performance in a manner that may misrepresent research findings.

7. Response rates will not be at the full control of the researcher, which may affect the data sample.

SUMMARY

This research is being undertaken to determine if there are consistent and/or systematic barriers that affect student success in IEPs. The survey instruments will organize the data to help determine if (1) there are consistent and/or systematic barriers that affect student success rates within an IEP, and if (2) Native sign language users such as CODAs would benefit from curricula adapted to their past language brokering experiences. In Chapter 2, a review of the primary peer-reviewed literature on this subject has been conducted to help substantiate the validity of and provide a foundation for this research.

CHAPTER 2 REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

INTRODUCTION

This chapter focuses on the analysis of secondary data that substantiates the validity of the project while adding depth and perception. Background was selected from past studies that examined interpreter characteristics, including an examination of goal-oriented students. Personality evaluation of the sign language interpreter assisted in further defining characteristics of sign language interpreters. In some instances, the lack of language fluency for CODA interpreters was identified as a concern for deaf consumers.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The underlying theory behind the development of a successful Interpreter Education Program has evolved from a variety of different channels. However, educators continue to express a desire to further improve upon their programs and have embraced the need for additional research on the learning barriers that may be impeding students from becoming successful contributors within the interpreter workforce.

Schein (1974) was the first to introduce interpreter characteristics. He noted that what separates interpreters from the conversational signers might relate to personality, intelligence, language facility, and physical makeup. It is through Schein's research that it was determined that the sign language interpreter profile should not be made up of high anxiety or overly dependent personalities.

Graham (2003) discovered that students who are goal-oriented and aspire mastery within their working languages would bring positive results to their language and interpreter development. Ficchi (1999) also stated students who thrive in student-centered learning environments could excel within Interpreter Education Programs. However, Botempo and Napier (2011) discovered that "goal-oriented was not a personality factor of major interest and was not a predictor of interpreter performance."

Seal (2004) conducted a personality evaluation of sign language interpreters using a personality test instrument, which determined that abstract reasoning, concentration ability, and rapid information processing were primary characteristics of sign language interpreters. Seal claimed further research is needed on interpreter personality characteristics due to the lack of normative data available on the population. He also indicated that without the use of specific instrumentation, personality characteristics and learning styles that aid or impede interpreter success are hard to specify.

Like Seal, Botempo and Napier (2011) noted, there is currently no research on a psychological profile of interpreters. Therefore, Karen Bontempo and Jeminia Napier (2011) did a study on evaluating the emotional stability as a predictive of competent interpreters. This study measured goal orientation, negative affectivity, and self-efficacy and interpreter competence. Cognitive ability (Ree & Earles 1992) and personality (Barrick & Mount 2005) have been successfully linked to workplace performance (Judge et al. 1999) and educational success (Phillips et al 2003). Thus, it makes sense that interpreters with emotional instability issues have a harder time

succeeding within an Interpreter Education Program and the field at large. Using psychometric tools, data was collected on 110 sign language interpreters accredited through the National Authority for the Accreditation of Translators and Interpreters. Their findings demonstrate that personality does have an impact on an interpreter's self-perception of competence. Moreover, emotional stability had the strongest impact to perceived competence in the research. It is suggested that education programs create a curriculum that teach trait awareness to develop self-confidence, coping skills, and resilience. If such skills are taught, it could improve student success in meeting education outcomes.

Stuard (2008) researched perceptions of interpreter qualification by deaf consumers and hearing interpreters. This research indicated that deaf consumers and interpreters viewed CODA interpreters not having the necessary language skills to serve as qualified interpreters. They noted that the lack in language fluency could be based on a number of factors including, education levels of their parents, usage of home signs (i.e. gestural communication systems that are created in the home and not part of official signed languages), linguistic problems, interpreting abilities and their parents' level of activity within the Deaf community. In addition to their lack of language fluency, many CODAs were perceived to not be well versed in interpreting models. Another concern addressed by Deaf Consumers and Interpreters was that CODA interpreters lack interpersonal skills and develop inappropriate boundaries while serving with a helper mentality. Specifically one deaf respondent within this research stated,

> "While some CODAs may have more native-like skills, that does not necessarily mean that they are natural interpreters. Many CODAs, though fluent in ASL, are often lacking in some of the crucial interpersonal and processing skills that are required of qualified interpreters" (Stuard, 2008, p.182).

Therefore, this research supports the need to further explore adapting curricula to instruct native language users within an IEP.

Shaw and Hughes (2006) identified characteristics that were thought to aid in the successful completion of Interpreter Education Programs. Characteristics researched were in three domains, which included academic habits and skills, information processing skills and personality characteristics. Participants specified and rated specific traits that were deemed important characteristics. Now that such characteristics have been identified, further research is needed to see if students and successful working professionals encompass such characteristics and if they are a predictor of success within an Interpreter Education Program.

Lopez Gomez et al. (2007) administered testing of interpreting students in Spain. The purpose was to examine student's perceptual-motor coordination, cognitive skills, and personality traits and students' academic backgrounds. In his research, perceptual-motor coordination was found to be the most significant predictor of sign language above cognitive and personality factors. Personality and cognitive ability, although not significant, were identified as important factors in skill development which supported research by Shaw and Hughes (2006), Botempo and Napier (2011) and Seal (2004).

Anderson and Stauffer (1990) first described the readiness to work gap in the field of sign language interpreting. This gap has been further explained by Frishberg, Patrie Robinson and Stauffer (1994), Cokely (2005), Witter-Merithew and Johnson (2005) and Godfrey (2010). This additional research created an awareness of the gap and its impact on graduates of Interpreter Education Programs.

Godfrey (2010) researched characteristics of effective interpreter education programs in the United States. Through her research, she discovered that four-year programs are producing more students who are ready to gain certification upon graduation than two-year interpreter training programs. Godfrey also concluded that that faculty is an important component of interpreter education and do have an impact on student success, both positively and negatively.

Merithew and Johnson (2005) opened dialogue amongst stakeholders in the interpreting profession through focus groups, interviews and surveys with key stakeholders within the profession including students, educators, practitioners, employers, consumers and policy makers. One major goal of their research was to "address the gap that exists between program exit requirements and competent practice." After an analysis of Interpreter Education Program exit competencies and common Interpreter Education Program outcomes, along with the conversations with stakeholders, the primary results indicated the following:

- Students had concerns of insufficient mastery of ASL
- Students had difficulty with simultaneous interpreting
- Students realized they would not be certification ready for a number of years after completing the program
- Students struggled with the overall curriculum (Merithew & Johnson 2005)

This research has been very beneficial because it continued to acknowledge that there is in fact a readiness gap and based on those findings, developed specific exit competencies. The question that remains is what specific factors are preventing certain students, both CODA or Non CODA, from developing those competencies and entering the workforce?

CHAPTER 3 PROPOSED METHODOLOGY

INTRODUCTION

This section has been divided into seven sections; listing of the null hypotheses, description of subjects, description of the instrumentation, description of procedures, treatment of human subjects, data collection procedures, and treatment of the data.

The Null-Hypotheses

There is no correlation between identified barriers and student success rates within an IEP.

There is no correlation with past language brokering experience and student success rates within an IEP.

Description of the Subjects

Participants for this research will include faculty, staff and students of participating IEPs within Australia, Canada, the United Kingdom and the United States. This broader sample will assist in looking at the global aspects of IEPs. Program graduates who have matriculated to the work force as well as students who withdrew from programs help define the survey sample. Additionally, CODAs will be incorporated into this research. CODA participants will be categorized into two distinct groups, those who have had or are enrolled in formal training from IEPs and those who have elected to enter the interpreting profession without formal training.

Finally, the correlation between identified barriers affecting student success rates can be further assessed with the participation of credentialed interpreters who have graduated from an Interpreter Education Program. Specifically, these participants hold certification through the Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf in the United States; Association of Visual Language interpreters of Canada; and the National Registers of Communication Professionals working with deaf and deaf blind people in the United Kingdom.

Description of the Instrumentation

The instrumentation proposed for this research is as follows:

1. Qualitative investigation using semi-structured interviews. Interview questions developed by the researcher and reviewed by a defined focus group of subject matter experts will enhance the depth of the interview while increasing the ease of understanding.

2. The second instrument used for data collection is the participant survey which is used to collect demographic/social, academic and educational/curriculum data. The focus groups of subject matter experts will help provide feedback on the survey questions, which will assist in limiting researcher bias.

3. Specific to participants who have been identified as CODAs, a survey will be used to seek biographical and language proficiency data, including their language brokering experiences.

4. Personality testing, learning assessment inventories and cognitive testing will be conducted to help identify the cognitive, psychological and physical traits that aid in interpreter competency. Instruments include the Myers Briggs comprehensive personality test, the VARK inventory and the Test for Information Processing known as TIPS. The researcher recognizes that additional testing instruments may be required as the research develops.

Description of the Procedures

This research is being undertaken to determine if there are consistent and/or systematic barriers that affect student success in IEPs. In order to answer the identified research questions, data will be analyzed from Interpreter Education Programs located in Australia, Canada, United Kingdom and the United States. The data covers student enrollment, graduation rates from participating Interpreter Education Programs and language brokering experiences. The sample consists of students who enrolled within an Interpreter Education Program. The research proposes the use of survey data and personal interviews as part of a mix method design. The primary source of gathering data for this study will be through an analysis of (1) previously published research results, followed by (2) qualitative investigation using a semi-structured interview and (3) quantitative survey and testing. These data will provide sufficient grounding to test the validity of the primary and secondary hypotheses.

Treatment of Human Subjects

As the proposed research relies on the use of human subjects, the procedure process will include generally accepted practices for the protection of human rights and privacy. The identity of the interviewees and participating institutions will be kept confidential. Pseudonyms and unrevealing nomenclature will be used.

Data Collection Procedures

The survey and testing instruments will be transmitted electronically to the identified two and four-year Interpreter Education Programs in Australia, Canada, United Kingdom and the United States. A record keeping plan will be developed noting return of the survey instrument along with a checklist to ensure that multiple documents have been received. A process to notify respondents when their data has been received will also be implemented.

Due to the location of program participants, the semi-structured interview will be conducted via phone or on-line video conferencing systems. A brief overview to establish rapport and clarify the interview process will be provided before the start of the interview.

Treatment of the Data

This research proposes a number of safeguards to ensure data verification. These precautions include pilot studies, the use of a focus group made up of Subject Matter Experts and Triangulation.

The purpose of pilot studies using subject matter experts are designed to increase the validity of the survey forms and testing processes. According to Mackey and Gass (2005), a pilot is a trial of the proposed procedures, material, and methods and is used to uncover problems to the main study (Mackey & Gass, 2005; Sampson, 2004).

"Triangulation is the process of corroborating evidence from different individuals, types of date or methods of data collections in descriptions of themes in qualitative research" (Creswell, 2005, p 252). It is anticipated that the qualitative data will be summarized by constant comparison methods (Lincoln & Guba, 1984). The quantitative responses will be analyzed by conventional descriptive statistics and inferential statistics, Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) where assumptions were met and Chi square where assumptions were not met.

Proposed Timeframe

This research will be completed within three academic years. An estimated timeline for completion is identified below:

1-10 Months:

- Conduct a further review of previously published research results
- Develop and acquire testing instruments
- Create data collection logs and spreadsheets
- Establish focus groups with subject matter experts

11-21 Months:

- Perform pilot testing of instruments
- Identify and contact participants
- Begin semi-structured interviews
- Complete semi structured interviews
- Distribute surveys and tests to participants

22-33 Months:

- Collect and organize data
- Notify participants data has been received
- Analyze and assess data
- Prepare research findings and finalize research project

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