The Impact of Writing Output Tools on Composition Length and Writing Quality

Comparison of Handwriting, Word Processing, and Dictation Writing Outputs for Fifth Grade Students

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In most schools today, educators place a tremendous emphasis on special education and properly serving students with special needs. Early processes such as the Response to Intervention model aid student learning and progress, but most of these programs focus on improving student reading and mathematics skills in the classroom (Ven, 2014). The effects of different output methods of writing to assist students with learning disabilities in writing seem to be consistently overlooked. Because of this problem, I plan to compare different writing methods in hopes to contribute to the research exploring the impact of writing method on writing length and quality for students with learning disabilities.

The writing methods explored in my research will include a handwriting sample, a word processing input sample, and a dictated sample given to a scribe or computer program. The goal will be to compare the quality of students’ writing samples through each different method. I aim to see how relieving the working memory of elements such as the physical task of handwriting and focus on proper spelling affects the quality and length of the students’ writing samples. My prediction is that as elements such as these are limited or removed, students will produce longer and better quality writing samples. I am also interested in how the students’ attitudes toward writing is affected as a function of using each different output method.
Currently, I plan to work at a suburban intermediate school with approximately 10 to 15 fifth-graders with mild to moderate learning disability who also struggle with writing. I will create three different writing prompts that require a similar genre of response composition such as narrative writing. In these prompts, students will receive appropriate background information to begin form their response. Each student will formulate a writing response to all three of these prompts. However, students will use a different output method for each sample by using a handwriting sample, a word processing sample, and a dictation sample. These compositions will be scored using the same rubric across the different response types and the results will be compared. A survey will also be given after each composition to determine each student’s attitude towards writing using that specific response type.

Although an intervention will not be conducted in this research, I hope to gather valuable information that will aid in developing a specialized learning plan for writing for students with learning disabilities. I look forward to gathering these results and sharing my findings.