Diverse Deaf Student Populations and Standardized Assessment Accessibility

Summary of Cawthon et al., "From the Margins to the Spotlight:
Diverse Deaf and Hard of Hearing Student Populations and Standardized Assessment Accessibility"[1]

Why was this work done?

- Researchers wanted to explore the context around current standardized assessment policy and practice and accessibility for deaf students and deaf students with additional disabilities (deafdisabled).

- There is often a mismatch between characteristics of deaf and deafdisabled students and the format and structure of standardized assessments, and very little is known about how to create accessible assessments.

- Accessibility in standardized testing is not one-size-fits-all, and approaches to enhancing accessibility must be carefully considered, as any changes to the delivery of test content, including provision of access, can affect the validity of tests.

What did researchers find?

- Much of the concern about providing accessible standardized tests revolves around maintaining test validity.

- Research on the effects of accommodations on test scores is inconclusive.

- State legislation regulates the provision of access and accessible tests to ensure that test validity is not compromised. As such, there are various policies pertaining to formats, alternate assessments, and accommodations, which can sometimes be problematic to navigate.

- For deaf and deafdisabled students, standardized assessments are sometimes unable to capture the full spectrum of the student's abilities and thus the standardized testing scores may be punitive rather than facilitative in that they capture an inaccurate picture of the student's aptitude.

"Assumptions about the depth, breadth, or types of exposure to test content may not equally represent what [deaf and deafdisabled] students are actually learning in the classroom."

What do these results mean?

- The interaction between language, culture, and disability status is an important consideration for test developers in the early stages of accessible test development.

- Any changes to test content, and/or the provision of accommodations and access need to be considered in tandem with ensuring that the tests remain valid and viable. Unintended consequences, such as increased difficulty, can occur when attempting to increase accessibility for standardized tests.

[1]Cawthon, S. (2015). From the margins to the spotlight: Diverse deaf and hard of hearing student populations and standardized assessment accessibility. *American Annals of the Deaf, 160*(4), 385–394.

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Research Summarized

- Culturally and cognitively affirming and responsive instructional strategies are seen as helpful in preparing students who are deaf & deafdisabled with core knowledge and test-taking skills.