**EXAMINING THE IMPACT OF VARYING THE PACE OF INSTRUCTION ON SKILL ACQUISITION IN YOUNG CHILDREN WITH AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDER**

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**Objectives:** Intensive behavioral intervention (IBI) is the best-established intervention for ASD (Eldevik et al., 2009). Less intensive IBI may, in some cases, be equally effective but there is little guidance on selecting the most efficacious intensity of intervention for a particular child with ASD. By conducting a brief experimental analysis (BEA), a process in which instructional variables are manipulated and systematically presented, a practitioner may efficiently and effectively determine the optimal intensity of instruction for a learner (Neil & Jones, 2015). This study aimed to examine the influence of one aspect of intensity (pace or interstimulus interval) on skill acquisition in young children with ASD. In previous research exploring the pace of instruction, more closely-spaced opportunities produced greater correct responding and fewer minutes to mastery for individuals with developmental disabilities (Neil, 2015). Therefore, the authors hypothesized that similar results would be obtained.

**Method:** Two young children with ASD were recruited for this study. The Preschool Language Scales- Fifth Addition (Zimmerman, Steiner, & Pond, 2011) was used to assess verbal skills and the Vineland Adaptive Behavior Scales (Vineland-II; Sparrow, Cicchetti, & Balla, 2005) was used to assess adaptive levels of the participants prior to intervention. A BEA was conducted for each participant, in which selected targets were taught using interstimulus intervals of 30 s, 40 s, 60 s, 120 s, and 150 s. Skill development during the BEA for Participant A focused on listener responding skills, and intraverbal skills were targeted for Participant B. These skills were taught using discrete-trial teaching with a most-to-least prompting hierarchy. Trials to mastery, minutes to mastery, and maintenance of skills were assessed to determine the efficiency and effectiveness of skill acquisition using the designated interstimulus intervals. Extended analyses are currently underway.

**Results:** Cumulative plots of the trials with independent correct responses were used to depict the results. Both participants A and B reached mastery criteria in the fewest number of trials for skills taught using the longer interstimulus intervals (150 s and 120 s for Participant A and 150 s for Participant B). Minutes to mastery for skills targeted were calculated and displayed in a table. The interstimulus interval of 60 s was most efficient for the skill acquisition of Participant A with 13 minutes to mastery, while the interstimulus interval of 40 s was most efficient for the skill acquisition of Participant B, with 24 minutes to mastery. Maintenance of the targeted skills were displayed as a percentage of correct responses per opportunity.

**Discussion/Conclusion:** Consistent with previous studies (e.g. Neil, 2015), the findings demonstrate that shorter interstimulus intervals were more efficient (fewer minutes to mastery) in teaching verbal skills. Inconsistent with previous research (e.g. Majdalany et al., 2014) targets in the shorter interstimulus interval conditions required a greater number of trials to master verbal skills than long interstimulus intervals. Differences in the efficiency of acquisition emphasize the importance of conducting assessments to enhance the effectiveness and efficiency of interventions for young learners with ASD. We highlight the importance of using multiple measures of efficiency.

References

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