

Accessibility Awareness, Interest, and Knowledge of Occupational Therapy Students

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to assess whether the incorporation of an environmental assessment for accessibility, as part of an "Activity Analysis" course, would enhance new students' knowledge, competence, awareness, and interest in accessibility issues for people with disabilities. In this research, we included an out-of-class training of environmental assessment for accessibility. One hundred and two 1st-year occupational therapy students at Tel Aviv University participated in this research. Of the 102 participants, 56 experienced the training and 46 did not but attended the regular Activity Analysis course. The students explored a typical community environment, during which a specific checklist was used for assessing levels of accessibility. The "Accessibility-Knowledge Competence Awareness and Interests" questionnaire was administered before and after the course to both groups. Students who participated in the out-of-class training showed significant increases in their knowledge, competence, and partial awareness of accessibility and also had better grades in two separate courses that required knowledge of accessibility. There was no significant difference in the results of the Accessibility-Knowledge Competence Awareness and Interests before and after the Activity Analysis course in the control group. The findings of the current study support the contribution of teaching 1st-year.

Keywords: Accessibility; Curriculum; Occupational therapy

Introduction

Occupational therapy students the principles and practices of accessibility for people with disabilities, by improving their knowledge and level of competence at this early stage of their professional lives. Further studies are needed, however, to determine the optimal course of implementation in order to enhance awareness and interest in the subject of accessibility one of the most important aspects of maximizing an individual's performance in their daily activities is a supportive environment [1]. Professional organizations in occupational therapy have acknowledged this idea. In Western nations, the implementation of laws and regulations designed to combat discrimination against people with disabilities, particularly those pertaining to accessibility, has provided hope to those who stand to benefit. Disability is defined by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2006) as the result of the interaction between people with impairments and the environmental obstacles that prevent them from fully participating in society [2]. As a result, health professionals' educational approach needed to be reevaluated in order for students to fully comprehend these ideas. Opportunities to learn about the complex challenges that people with disabilities face in everyday life can be beneficial to students enrolled in health profession programs. An occupational therapy education program's objective is to incorporate these concepts into the curriculum, but this presents unique challenges [3].

Method

Additionally, occupational therapy educators must deal with the challenge of providing a curriculum that enables students to apply theoretical knowledge to the complexity of actual service situations. Problem-based learning, clinical experience, and simulation are some of the teaching methods utilized by health programs in general and occupational therapy in particular to close this gap. It has been recognized that simulation learning makes it easier to put theory into practice in a controlled and secure setting [4].

In their classes, occupational therapy instructors employ both more

active learning methods and more conventional lecture methods like "chalk and talk." They "use instructional methods that can be broadly classified as teacher-centred (e.g., lectures) or student-centred" and "develop teaching styles based on their pedagogical beliefs." Students' perspectives on the value of course material can be influenced by educators' construction and presentation methods [5]. Therefore, there is a positive correlation between improved academic performance outcomes and student-centered methods that involve active learning. In ways that lectures and in-class activities alone cannot, these methods help students integrate and analyze information [6]. Occupational therapy students who received multiple and flexible methods of instruction, such as course application through labs and fieldwork, gained a better understanding of the information than students who only received the traditional lecture-based approach, according to a study that investigated the effectiveness of a universal course design in an occupational therapy curriculum.

Results

Most first-year students are unaware of how much mobility technology affects the lives of people with disabilities. Students are better able to comprehend the difficulties associated with accessibility for people with disabilities and are more motivated to seek solutions if they are provided with the opportunity to physically encounter everyday environmental obstacles. As a result, students in several studies have been required to use wheelchairs for mobility. This not only made the students more aware of the consequences of disability,

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but it also made them more aware of how important accessibility is. In addition, it has been reported that students who have participated in fieldwork with individuals with a variety of disabilities claim to have a comprehension of disability as a multifaceted concept involving occupations, family and societal groups, the physical environment, and attitudes. Obviously, these students had a better grasp of the idea that environmental obstacles separate people from their social environment and context.

In conclusion, the research demonstrates the necessity of developing educational strategies that incorporate theoretical and practical approaches into the learning process in order to increase students' awareness of, competence in, and interest in, accessibility for people with disabilities. As a result, the goal of this study was to find out if students' knowledge, feelings of competence, awareness, and interest in accessibility issues for people with disabilities would be improved by incorporating environmental assessments for accessibility (outside of class) into an "Activity Analysis" course [7]. The first year of an occupational therapy bachelor's degree program includes an Activity Analysis course. We incorporated accessibility training outside of class into the Activity Analysis course for this study.

A variety of methods for analyzing occupations and activities are used in the Activity Analysis course. The students investigate the components of various occupations, environments, and activities, as well as their therapeutic potential, accessibility, and potential meaning for clients. Students practice activity analysis in the classroom by examining motor, sensory, and mental client factors in relation to a particular activity during the course.

Discussion

We added two sessions to this course as part of this study: The first was a class lecture on accessibility, and the second was outside-of-class training that included an accessibility assessment of the environment. The latter provided students with an opportunity to practice a comprehensive activity analysis of accessibility features outside of the classroom. Together with their instructors (the authors of this paper), the students looked into a typical community setting where a specific checklist was used to measure and record accessibility levels. The checklist, which was based on local regulations and included all of the things that needed to be looked at (like parking lots, signs, physical structures, furniture, websites, and utility accessories), covered everything that needed to be looked at. The answers were either "yes" or "no," and full accessibility was defined as having a score of "yes" for every aspect of that element [8]. The lecturers approached community nonprofit organizations that promote accessibility for people with disabilities in preparation for this experience. Students were granted permission to visit local cafes and document the conditions they found, as agreed upon by these organizations. The students started the actual assignment in accordance with this agreement. The nonprofit organizations received their reports in order to share the information with people with disabilities and the general public.

The "Accessibility-Knowledge Competence Awareness and Interests" (A-KCAI) questionnaire was created to measure the impact of additional outside-of-class training. The A-KCAI was based on previous questionnaires that the university used to get feedback from

students about their courses. Its purpose was to gauge the knowledge, competence, awareness, and interests of first-year occupational therapy students regarding accessibility for people with disabilities. The 16 questions on the A-KCAI covered a variety of accessibility-related topics, such as accessibility to various services and physical structures, as well as knowledge of local accessibility laws. There were three categories covered by the survey: Awareness (8 questions), knowledge and level of competence (4 questions plus one 4-part question), and interest in accessibility for people with disabilities (2 questions). Additionally, there was a stand-alone question about the significance of using a checklist when learning about accessibility. On a Likert scale of 1e5, each item was scored, with higher scores indicating greater knowledge, competency, and awareness of and interest in accessibility for people with disabilities. The students were required to fill out an electronic form that was available at the A-KCAI. The participants also provided demographic information, such as age, sex, and prior accessibility experience.

Conclusion

At an early stage of their studies, occupational therapy students were exposed to a comprehensive accessible experience, which significantly increased their level of competence and knowledge regarding accessibility for people with disabilities. However, the practical experience did not pique their interest in the subject and did not help them become more aware of these issues. However, the significant improvement in their grades in the Assistive Technology and Occupational Therapy in Physical Dysfunction courses, where knowledge of accessibility issues is required, suggests that the additional outside-of-class training helped the students succeed. Thus, the combination of subjective perception (the students' self-report as revealed by the A-KCAI) and objective parameters (quantitative grades in the courses) has validated the contribution of outside-of-class training as a learning tool to promoting understanding of environmental barriers that people with disabilities face on a daily basis.

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