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The Effectiveness of Using a Podcast to Teach Person-First Language

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Introduction

The language individuals use to address each other develops the foundation for successful relationships. This is particularly relevant when referring to people with disabilities. Improper or outdated language, such as using stereotypes, can have a negative impact on how students with disabilities perceive themselves, whereas positive language promotes feelings of value and acceptance (Blaska, 1993; Clinton, & Higbee, 2011). The accepted discourse for referring to people with disabilities is person-first language, wherein the individual is addressed prior to the disability (American Psychological Association, 2010). This pattern of language places emphasis on the individual, and reduces objectifying the disability (e.g., person with autism; Lynch & Groombridge, 1994).

The use of person-first language is particularly relevant for educators. The language teachers use when referring to students with disabilities effects the self-esteem of the student with a disability and serves as a model for how other students refer to students with disabilities (Stanulis & Manning, 2002). The type of verbal environment created by the teacher has the ability to impact student's self-worth and how they perceive other students. Therefore, there is a need to educate preservice teachers on proper use of person-first language, which can be accomplished through a variety of means.

One way to deliver content is through use of a content acquisition podcast (CAP). A CAP is a learning tool that delivers content through audio and video based on evidence-based design principles (Kennedy et al., 2015). Previous research on CAPs suggests that is an effective mode for preservice teachers to acquire content knowledge.

Purpose

The purposes of this investigation were to determine:

- How a podcast intervention impacts undergraduate students' use of person-first language when discussing people with disabilities
- Undergraduate students' perceptions about podcasts as tools for learning.

Methods

Participants:

- Convenience sampling
- Undergraduate students with education ($n = 43$)
- Enrolled in education diversity college course

Data Collection (Table 1)

- Completed demographics survey and pretest after regularly scheduled class
- Given one week to listen to CAP
- Completed posttest, perceptions survey, and focus group discussion after regularly scheduled class

Results

Demographics (Table 2)

Content tests

- Pretest scores: $M = 10.30$, $SD = 1.96$, 73.6%
- Posttest scores: $M = 11.95$, $SD = 1.85$, 85.4%
- Mean difference = 1.65*, Std. Error = 0.30
- $t(42) = -5.450$, $p < 0.001$, $d = 0.87$

Perceptions survey

- Composite (overall) mean score of 5.72 on 7-point Likert Scale ($SD = .98$).
- No significant correlation between posttest scores and perceptions towards the CAP ($r = .06$, $p = .68$).

Table 1

Data Collection Procedures

Step	Description
1	Demographics survey -12 questions (e.g., age, race/ethnicity, gender, college experience, personal experience with people with disabilities, previous course related to people with disabilities)
2	Pretest -14-question test on person-first language use. -Participants asked to identify inappropriate language (e.g., "a hearing impaired infant", "wheelchair users", "an adult who suffers from cerebral palsy") and restate phrase appropriately -Adapted from the IRIS Center of Vanderbilt University
3	Listen to CAP -CAP designed based on Cognitive Theory of Multimedia Learning -Reviewed by three experts in disabilities and person-first language, and checked for adherence to CTML principles -Addressed definitions of person-first language, examples of usage, and why it is the preferred model
4	Perceptions survey -10 Likert-type scale questions about the participants' perception of podcast -Adapted version of the <i>Perceptions of Professional Development Survey</i> (Buschang, 2012)
5	Posttest -Identical to pretest
6	Guided group discussion -Questions on impact of CAP on understanding of person first language -Analyzed qualitatively using inductive category reasoning (Thomas, 2006)

Table 2

Sample Demographic Variables

	% (n)
Gender	
Female	74.4 (32)
Male	25.6 (11)
Had taken a prior course related to disability	
Yes	18.6 (8)
No	81.4 (35)
Had listened to podcasts for learning	
Yes	23.3 (10)
No	72.1 (31)
Had listened to podcasts for recreation	
Yes	27.9 (12)
No	72.1 (31)
Education college major	
Elementary	40.5 (17)
Specials (i.e., P.E., art, music)	18.6 (8)
Subject specific (i.e., math, science, social studies, ELA)	28.6 (12)
Early childhood	9.5 (4)

Results Continued

Focus Group Discussions

The guided group discussions revealed varying themes of ideas that participants had based on the podcast. The emergent themes with sample representative statements are listed below:

Empathy towards people with disabilities

"Using a certain label, like this person has a learning disability, it can have a major effect on their personal life."

"It would be like saying, 'Oh the guy with the glasses,' and that's what you're known as. It's less like a person."

Using person-first language for job application

"I had never heard of it, so now I'll become acclimated (to it), but I'll also be practicing putting them (students with disabilities) first."

I'm in music education, so it will help me think of them as a musician first, then disability."

Person-first language and personal identity

"If we are truly person first, you need to ask the individual person how they want to be addressed. Just like we need to ask how an individual if they want to be addressed like 'he' or 'she'."

"My go-to is to ask them what their name is...I try to avoid putting labels on people because you don't go up (to someone) and go, 'Oh, you are red haired girl.'"

Confusion on how to properly use person-first language

"I was also confused, so I avoided the situation to not offend (anyone), but in avoiding it I also felt like I was offending them."

"(I had) never heard of it before this class. (I) didn't know what to refer to them as and not this helps me a lot."

Effectiveness of podcast as learning tool

"I am an auditory learner and I could get ready for class and listen to it, or listen on my drive while commuting."

"(I like that I could) rewind and go back to hear it again."

Critique of the podcast as a learning tool

"(It would have been) more relatable and personal if there would be more personal experiences or stories in there that we could relate to."

Limitations

- The CAP was not tracked for participant listening
- Participants may not have felt comfortable speaking up, or may not have told full truths during focus group discussions
- Pretests and posttests were from the IRIS website (provides free resources to support education of students with disabilities)

Conclusions

The CAP was an effective learning tool for preservice educators to attain knowledge, which aligns with previous research (Kennedy et al., 2015). This study is unique in that it shows a relatively short podcast (8 min) can positively impact one's knowledge with regards to person-first language.

Application of person first language is ambiguous and can vary based on individual preferences (Peers et al., 2014). The results indicate that CAPs are an effective means for delivering complex material to undergraduate students where application can vary based on circumstance, which was further supported by the results of the focus group discussions. The emergent themes align with previous research on the impact of person-first language, such as importance in successful workplace interactions (Jensen et al., 2013) and that it effects how the speaker views the person with the disability (Clinton & Higbee, 2011).

The insignificant correlation between the posttest scores and perceptions survey demonstrate that the effectiveness of the CAP was not dependent on whether participants' perceived the CAP positively or negatively. This suggests that CAPs are an effective way to deliver information regardless of how the listener perceives their effectiveness.

References Available on Request