

Influence of Visiting Educators on Learning in OT Education Programs

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PURPOSE: Universities and governments are implementing occupational therapy education programs worldwide to meet the occupational needs of various populations. Many occupational therapy education programs have few resources and must use educators from other countries to implement their curricula. While utilizing educators from other institutions and countries was recommended by the WFOT (Hocking & Ness, 2004), the teaching philosophies and strategies of visiting instructors may not be appropriate or effective in a different culture (Frambach et al., 2014). Therefore, this study explored how using a visiting instructor influenced students' and educators' perceptions of teaching and learning in an occupational therapy education program.

DESIGN: The researchers used a phenomenological case study design to examine the ways in which use of a visiting instructor from a country and culture other than which the education was located, influenced the learning process.

METHOD: The primary investigator (PI) conducted focus groups with current occupational therapy students and interviews with two local instructors and one educator from another country teaching in the program. Students were asked about their perceptions of learning from visiting instructors. Educators were asked questions about their approach to teaching in the South Asian setting. Each team member read all transcripts and performed initial inductive coding. The researchers coded iteratively and constructed themes through consensus.

RESULTS: Four themes describe the influence of the visiting instructor on learning in this South Asian occupational therapy program: 1) Language as facilitator and barrier, 2) Active learning to develop higher level thinking, 3) Linking content to local context, and 4) Contrasting views of knowledge. Although English was the official language of the educational institution, students reported that they had challenges learning content in a second-language. The use of small groups enabled students to discuss topics in their first language improving understanding of the content. The local and visiting instructors stated that they preferred to use active learning strategies even though this may not be a familiar or preferred form of learning. Students stressed the importance for content to be relevant to their practice context. Finally, examination of the focus groups and interviews demonstrated that students and instructors have different views of knowledge. The instructors perceived students as preferring a transmission style of learning where knowledge is seen as fixed and passed from educator to student. Instructors preferred active teaching approaches demonstrating that knowledge is contextual and encourage students' critical thinking skills. Students and educators recommended that any visiting educator learn about the local context by visiting local clinical sites, discussing the local context with local instructors, and using local examples.

CONCLUSION: In this study, students and educators acknowledge the importance of integrating local health systems and realities of the place in which the program is located. Research has shown that student-centered methods originated in Western contexts may not work in every culture (Pham, 2016). In this case, while students may have preferred the transmission style of learning, both students and educators indicated that active learning methods were accepted by students and perceived to be more effective by the local and visiting instructors to facilitate critical thinking skills. This study highlights the importance of understanding and acknowledging the context where one teaches to meet both the needs of students and the local service users they will serve.

References

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