Full-semester and time-compressed fluency disorders course: An evaluation of student perceptions of competence, satisfaction, and workload

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Background

Time-compressed (TC) (e.g., summer, interim sessions) are becoming more commonplace in higher education. **Outcome differences.** Final course grades for students in TC classes were significantly higher than those of students taking the same courses during a full semester (FS) (Anastasi, 2007; Ferguson & DeFelice, 2010)

**Workload rigor.** Students spent more time per credit hour (63 minutes per week for a three credit course) when taking a FS equivalent than when taking a TC COURSE (Lutes & Davies, 2013)

**Student satisfaction.** With instructor teaching style, content, instructional materials, and evaluation components held constant, students in TC courses were more satisfied with student-student communication than in FS courses (Ferguson & DeFelice, 2010)

**Motivation for present study.** Little research on course delivery model for content specific to SLP field. Recently, UNO graduate program moved course in fluency disorders from a FS format to TC format with instructor, text, etc. held constant.

Research questions

1. Are there differences in students’ perceptions of fluency disorder competencies at the end of FS vs. TC courses?
2. Are there significant patterns of perceived strengths / weaknesses (e.g., identification, assessment, treatment issues) for students’ perceptions of fluency disorder competencies across both course formats?
3. Are there differences in students’ overall satisfaction with the course between formats?
4. Are there differences in students’ perception of course workload difficulty between formats?

Method

**Participants.** SLP graduate students (n = 78); enrolled in Fluency Disorders graduate course over a period of five semesters (2010-2014)

- Three of the five courses were FS (n = 50); two were TC (n = 28); Class size range was 10-19 (M = 13.6)

**Measures.** Fluency Disorders Competency Checklist (Gottwald et al., 2010) on first and last day of class.

- Consists of 23 competencies rated on a scale from 1-5
- “1” correlates to a response of “Very Incompetent”
- “5” corresponds to a response of “Very Competent”
- High level of internal consistency (Cronbach’s alpha of 0.887)

**Results.**

- Post-test competency level: No significant differences between groups (U = 846, z = 1.355, p = 0.175)
- Growth in competency levels for identification, assessment, or treatment: No significant differences (U = 706.5, z = -0.077, p = 0.939).
- Students’ overall satisfaction: Significant difference (U = 889, z = 2.300, p = 0.021), preference for TC
- Course workload difficulty: Significant difference (U = 973, z = 3.381, p = 0.001), higher for TC

Discussion

In conclusion, students who are highly motivated, self-directed, and mature are more suited to favorably navigate the workload demands of a TC course, a description that aptly depicts typical speech-language pathology graduate students.

Limitations & Future Directions

- Long-term retention; replication with other disorder content; compare with online course delivery formats

References

- Gottwald, S., Metter, S., & Lutes, L. (2010, May). An ACT, or Are students more likely to achieve better grades in the same course when the course was offered in FS format. Paper presented at the 2010 AUPS conference, New York City.

Figure 1. Mean ratings for course satisfaction and perceived workload (on a 6 Likert scale with 1 = ‘Very Poor’ and 5 = ‘Very Good’). Main findings were significant for Group (p < .05) on both dependent variables.