



Perceptions of Hearing Students Towards Deaf People: A Change Within Education

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Thank You

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Abstract

Schools within the United States have been slowly adding American Sign Language (ASL) to their curriculum as an option for a foreign language credit. ASL is ranked as the 3rd most used language in the United States (Lee & Scott, 2018). The purpose of this study is finding what perceptions hearing people have about deaf people and determining if previous perceptions change once receiving education about the population. I examined if hearing students' perceptions of Deaf people change before and after taking an American Sign Language 1 course with an online pre- and posttest survey sent to students at the beginning and end of the semester. My hypothesis was hearing students' perceived knowledge of Deaf people and their culture would positively increase showing better understanding of deaf people compared to their perceptions before taking ASL1.

Within my findings, 38 participants completed the surveys. I discovered hearing students' perceptions of Deaf people and their culture positively increased after completing ASL 1 courses.

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Peoples' perceptions change every single day, whether it be looking at jobs, beliefs, cultures, careers, etc. Major effects of one's perception revolve around their culture and who is included in that culture. How people perceive one another depends on their own culture and how they choose to view others. If people are viewing individual's culture from an autonomic perspective, they are comparing their own culture to someone else's culture, therefore subconsciously making assumptions about the individual. According to the Sociology Dictionary, cultural relativism is defined as, "The view that a culture can only be understood and judge by the standards, behaviors, norms, and values within the culture and not by anything else." If someone chooses a cultural relativism approach, the person is recognizing the difference in both cultures and may allow for an open perspective on the opposing culture.

The purpose of this literature is comparing both positive and negative aspects from perceptions of hearing and Deaf people towards one another. Focusing within the education system, I explored merging American Sign Language (ASL) and Deaf culture classes within hearing public schools. The goal of this study was determining what perceptions hearing people have about Deaf people and understanding how those perceptions and knowledge had changed over time.

Within the literature, I wanted to highlight the importance of labeling between "Deaf" and "deaf." In the text, I may refer to people who have either completely lost their hearing, are hard of hearing, or was born without being able to hear as "deaf" or "Deaf." The capitol 'D' in "Deaf" is used to describe people who identify themselves as culturally Deaf. These individuals actively use sign language, interact frequently within the Deaf community, and are ultimately proud of being Deaf. Whereas the lowercase 'd' in "deaf" refers to having total or partial hearing loss.

Literature Review

Both hearing students and Deaf students have different perceptions of one another. Typically, these differences arise from having an extremely different lifestyle and upbringings simply because deaf people are minority groups within a hearing society (Vernon, M., Andrews, & Jean F., 1990). Integrating these two worlds within a school system has its pros and cons. A positive outcome of integrating both hearing and Deaf people is the opportunity to better connect, communicate, and understand each other's lives. However, many municipal areas do not have necessities for Deaf people to succeed within a hearing school such as long-term interpreters (Lee, C., & Pott, S. A., 2018).

A study conducted by Brown & Foster (1991) integrated hearing students with Deaf students at a collegiate level. The study focused on both the hearing and deaf perceptions of one another. The researchers learned perceptions of each side had both negative and

positive perceptions. Researchers found there was not a significant correlation between negative perceptions of both parties while being educated within the same space. On the other hand, there was a significant difference in perceptions when focused on social constructs. Hearing students had more negative perceptions of Deaf people for social aspects (e.g. communication, social cues, noise, etc.). Either they did not know how to talk to deaf students and became frustrated or found deaf students' social skills less respectful due to being too loud while others were trying to study (Brown & Foster, 1991). Socially being too loud may occur from the inability of hearing themselves as they are communicating to one another or from playing music too loudly in order to feel the vibrations of the songs. The hearing students suggested implementing more ASL and Deaf culture classes, allowing them to learn how to communicate and understand one another on a more social level (Brown & Foster, 1991). This is important within the study to understand the implications of why hearing students and deaf students are not integrated as much within public school systems.

When hearing students are united with deaf students, they are able to connect and learn more about one another. A research study by Bowen (2008) included enrolling deaf and hearing children within the same classes to see their perceptions of one another. The researchers found hearing students who had the most negative comments about their deaf peers also had the worst signing skills (Bowen, 2008). This may correlate to the small rates of intersectionality between both hearing and deaf worlds due to lack of communication within both languages. It is difficult to gain connections with others if people are not able to communicate with each other. This enhances to the research by exemplifying the language barrier that many hearing people have with deaf individuals and the importance of having ASL classes within a hearing education.

A study conducted by Suzanne Reading and Robert J. Padgett (2011) focused on the connection between service learning and American Sign Language instruction. Within this study, the Deaf community served as communication partners with college-aged hearing students. Together, they did service-learning projects along with students learning the language of ASL. The study showed hearing students who participated in service-learning experiences with the Deaf community was advantageous to their perceptions of the minority population. The undergraduates had more connections within the Deaf community by gaining ASL instructions and learning about the culture as well (Reading, S., & Padgett, R., 2011). This is important for research in order to understand the positive change in perceptions of hearing people towards Deaf people and their culture once they are integrated and can interact with one another.

Schooling in the United States have been adding ASL courses to their curriculum as an option for a foreign language credit. Currently, ASL is ranked as the third most used language in the United States (Lee & Scott, 2018). Then why doesn't the United States offer ASL classes within every high school? Without the knowledge of the culture and language, hearing people will not be able to learn or understand deaf people and the hearing culture will continue to result in negative perceptions throughout time.

I wanted to further explore if hearing students' perceived perceptions of Deaf people change after taking an ASL 1 course. Unfortunately, findings displayed there were not many previously conducted studies focusing on hearing students' perceptions of Deaf people and their culture. Many of these studies focused on adolescent deaf students integrating themselves within a hearing school (Brown & Foster 1991). Typically, these studies were conducted by Gallaudet University, the only Deaf university within the United States. With this information, the I decided to conduct a study focusing on hearing students' own perceived knowledge.

Methods

Participants

A total of 38 participants completed both the pre- and post-test surveys. Students were enrolled in an American Sign Language 1 class at one Midwest University. The population demographic consisted completely of college-aged students with 34 females and 4 males. Majors varied across the sample, but 13 students were majoring in Communication and Science Disorders.

Procedure

A pre- and post-test online Qualtrics survey was sent out to students in an American Sign Language 1 class to assess their perceptions towards deaf people. This research had approval from the formal Institutional Review Board (IRB) to ensure the ethicality of the study. The questionnaires asked students perceived perceptions of their own knowledge of Deaf people, Deaf culture, American Sign Language, and background knowledge of these topics prior to taking ASL 1. I also asked about the student's background knowledge about deaf people along with demographic questions (e.g. age, race/ethnicity, gender, etc.).

Both the pre-and post-Qualtrics surveys had the same questions, allowing to completely determine which part of the students' perceptions had changed over the course of a semester. Participants chose whether they wanted to answer the survey on their own accord. Upon completion of the surveys, I assumed the participants had given consent to participating within the study, which was stated within the cover letter before the survey began.

To determine hearing students' perceptions of deaf people, I implemented three main variables understanding students' own perceived knowledge of Deaf people, Deaf culture, and American Sign language. The students' answers for these specific questions were determined by a 5-point scale: 1 being the least amount of perceived knowledge and 5 being the most amount of perceived knowledge. Example items for perceived knowledge of Deaf people included, "To what extent was your knowledge of Deaf people?" and "Does every Deaf person in the world use American Sign Language?" Examples of questions focused on the variable knowledge of Deaf culture included, "To

what extent is your knowledge on cochlear implants?” and “Do you consider a Deaf person as “disabled?” Example questions asked about American Sign Language were phrased, “Is it important to use facial expressions when signing?” and “How comfortable do you feel signing to a Deaf person?”

The hypothesis was the hearing students' perceived perception of Deaf people, their culture, and ASL will positively increase after taking an American Sign Language 1 course. This allows the students to better understand how Deaf people communicate and their lifestyle compared to before they had taken the course.

Results

To determine hearing students' perceived knowledge, I utilized a paired-samples t-test for each variable on the software Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) comparing the difference of students' own perceptions before and after completing an ASL course with the data received. The main outcome variables were the students' perceptions of their knowledge of Deaf people, Deaf culture, and ASL.

Knowledge of Deaf People

The first variable I analyzed was the students' knowledge of Deaf people. The goal was determining the change in perception of this variable to detect if the student's perception increased in knowledge, resulting in a better understanding of the minority population. The finding was statistically significant: $t(37) = 17.40, p < .001$. The results showed a pre-test mean score of 2.05 and a post-test mean score of 3.32 out of 5 possible points with a standard deviation of .38. Comparing these two mean scores, the post-test score is higher than the original pre-test score, meaning the hearing students' perceived perception of Deaf people had positively increased to better understand the population. Please see Figure 1.

Knowledge of Deaf Culture

The aim of this variable was determining how learning about Deaf culture and the mechanisms Deaf people use to interact within the hearing world (e.g. communicating with hearing people by writing down words) would influence a student's perception on Deaf culture. The finding was statistically significant: $t(37) = 18.9, p < .001$. The pre-test mean score being 1.68 and the post-test score was 3.24 with a standard deviation of .40. This assisted me in discovering the student's perceived knowledge of Deaf culture and how it may have influenced their perception of Deaf people after completing an ASL 1 course. Please see Figure 2.

Knowledge of American Sign Language

Lastly, the analyzation of hearing students' perceived knowledge of American Sign Language. With this variable, I determined the capacity of learned information from the class about the language. Once completing the analyzation for this data, I understood

the student's comfortableness of communicating with a Deaf person. The results of knowledge on ASL was statistically significant: $t(37) = 20.3, p < .001$. The mean score for the pre-test was 1.74 on a scale of 5 with the post-test mean score being 2.87 along with a standard deviation of .38. Therefore, this data showed that participants felt more knowledgeable about ASL after the semester compared to the beginning of the semester. Please see Figure 3.

Conclusion

In this study, I anticipated finding a change of students' perceived perceptions on their knowledge of Deaf people, Deaf Culture, and American Sign Language. Since these are the biggest topics taught within the course, the hypothesis predicted the scores would have the most significant change within students' perceived perceptions.

The findings supported the hypothesis hearing students' perceived perceptions of Deaf people and their culture would positively increase after taking ASL 1 to better understand how Deaf people communicate compared to before they had taken the course. Each variable was significant within the tests, discovering that students' perceived knowledge on each variable increased after completing an ASL 1 course.

With this information, I anticipate having evidence showing surrounding high schools the importance of adding ASL courses into their school curriculums. There are many high schools within the midwestern states who do not offer American Sign Language courses within their school programs. I wondered why, considering many individuals are constantly surrounded by Deaf or hard of hearing people. Deaf and hard of hearing people have occupations within customer service industries, different schools, medical industries, etc. People are constantly encountering Deaf people and many hearing individuals are not able to serve them or even remotely communicate with them. The data from this research may convey to intermediate schools how imperative it is to have American Sign Language courses within their curriculum in order to immerse the hearing world with the Deaf world.

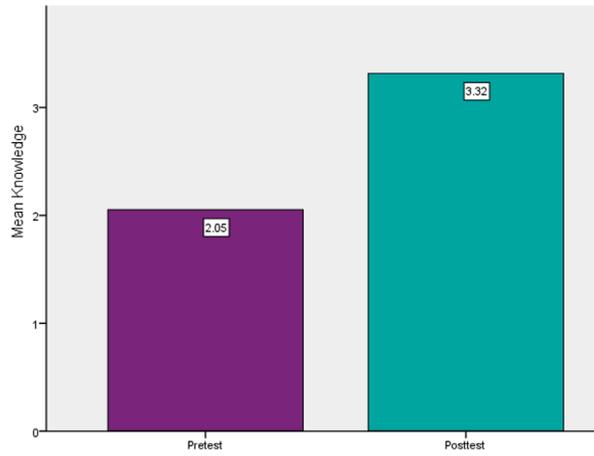


Figure 1 Student's average reported knowledge of Deaf people

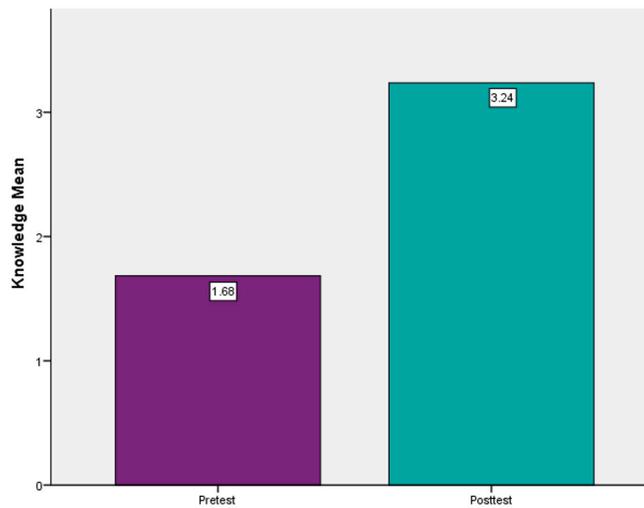


Figure 2 Students' average reported knowledge of Deaf culture

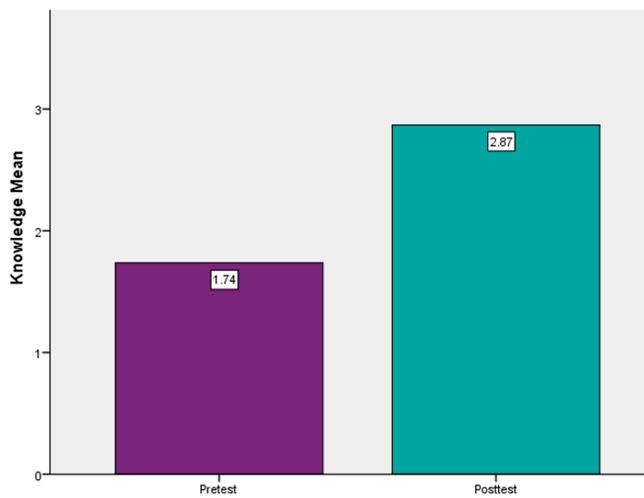


Figure 3 Students' average reported knowledge of ASL

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