"You're going to serve people from all different backgrounds": CSD Students' Perceptions of an Introductory Online Social Justice Program

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Abstract

Constructs of social justice has become an increasingly prevalent area of interest in the field of Communication Sciences and Disorders (CSD). In fact, competencies related to social justice are required program content per the Council of Academic Accreditation in Speech-Language Pathology and Audiology. This study's purpose was to describe and evaluate an online, introductory course designed to address such concepts. Students' perceptions of (a) the concept of social justice, (b) program content, and (c) program usability were examined. Undergraduate students from two universities completed the program, and a sample of students provided data about their perceptions during pre-program and post-program semi-structured interviews. Using a qualitative design (i.e., thematic analysis) the authors identified themes reflected in the data. This data revealed that the students had little to no prior experience with social justice yet were motivated to learn more about the topic due to perceptions that the topic is important to the field. Analysis of the program content and usability revealed that the students perceived an increase in knowledge and self-awareness. Outcomes show that the program holds promise and supports further study to evaluate program impact on students' attitudes and beliefs.

Keywords

Social justice, undergraduate curriculum, online course

Cover Page Footnote

Introduction

Social justice is one of the most complex and intersecting factors in contemporary society. Although there is not a single definition of social justice, most definitions do have in common the ideas of inclusion and fairness. Broadly defined, social justice is fairness and how it manifests in society. In a socially-just society, everyone has the equal and fair allocation of rights, privileges, resources, information, service, decision-making, and opportunities (Center for Social Justice Education, 2021). Social justice can also refer to the political, social, and economic institutions, laws, or policies that ensure fairness and equity (Duignan, 2024). Miller-Farrar (2019) argues that social justice is an action-oriented value grounded in humanistic principles and enacted through an ethic of care. Further, social justice is also a personal virtue that is impacted by an individual's awareness, values, and skills and aims to correct historical marginalization and promote future equity between groups through improved access to both resources and rights (Frederick, 2017). For this study, this is the operational definition we have chosen to use throughout the paper.

The murders of George Floyd, Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor and the social agitation that followed evoked reactions from various members of society including community leaders, lawmakers, social justice advocates, and university leaders. These events highlighted the most pressing issues in the US and around the globe (Meikle & Morris, 2022). Additionally, many professional organizations penned letters to their members vowing to support social justice initiatives and work that would advance equality in society. The American Speech-Language Hearing Association also put forth a statement which was highly criticized by its constituents and later revised (Farrugia, 2023). This chain of events was a catalyst for many scholars in communication sciences and disorders (CSD) to begin to advocate for the profession to move beyond increasing representation of BIPOC professionals and cultural competence but argued that a need existed for more action by the profession beginning with the examination of the practices and procedures used within the profession related to various issues (i.e., admissions, clinical education, academic training, etc.). For example, scholars note that although programs utilize holistic admissions processes, caution should be taken to ensure the procedures being used are indeed less biased and do not continue to disadvantage students from marginalized backgrounds (Newkirk-Turner & Hudson, 2022; Scheer-Cohen et al., 2022). Others have challenged color-blind racism in the professions and have suggested action to dismantle systemic racism within the professions (Bonilla-Silva, 2018; Yu et al., 2022)

Professionals in CSD are concerned with social justice and are boldly advocating for the voices and experiences of marginalized stakeholders to be heard and for appropriate action to follow. Recent years have seen the publication of the first book devoted to social justice in speech-language pathology (Horton, 2021) as well as the first journal, *The Journal of Critical Study of Communication and Disability*, within the profession with overall aims related to advocacy for linguistic justice, equity, and access for diverse communicators (Khamis et al., 2023). Additionally, the revised standards for accreditation, effective 2023, point toward an emphasis on social justice in that CSD programs must provide evidence that diversity, equity, and inclusion are incorporated (Council on Academic Accreditation in Audiology and Speech-Language Pathology, 2023). Required program content including the impact of the social determinants of health and implicit and explicit bias on clinical service delivery as well as approaches to addressing culture and language that include cultural humility, cultural

responsiveness, and cultural competence are underpinnings of social justice (Millar et al., 2023). Considering the call to action, the profession may benefit from moving beyond these concepts into embracing social justice within our training programs.

Unger and colleagues (2021) suggested that early education and training related to social justice during undergraduate and graduate curricula may subsequently promote working toward social justice within the profession. Increasing knowledge and skills in the classroom and clinic may help students take action as professionals to uphold social justice principles (Gair, 2018). The goal of curricula content designed to promote social justice is that students develop a professional commitment to eliminating inequities in healthcare and education and understand their role in working toward social justice. Foundational courses, experiences, as well as activities infused across the plan of study that include social justice constructs may be important components to curriculum (Mayhew & Fernández, 2007). It may be beneficial for the initial content to focus on increasing students' knowledge of equity, barriers to equity, and social justice practices concurrent with developing an understanding of their perceptions of their identities and worldview (Lewis, 2020).

The purpose of this study is to describe and evaluate an introductory online, asynchronous program titled *Social Justice: You cannot change what you do not see*. Social cognitive theory drawing on the model of triadic reciprocal causation (Bandura, 1986) guided the development of the program. A dynamic interplay exists between personal factors (e.g., knowledge and an understanding of ones' beliefs and attitudes), environmental factors (e.g., social and physical surroundings), and behavior. As individuals understand and critically assess their beliefs, they may actively shape their environment and modify their behavior, which in turn reinforces or changes beliefs and attitudes. Content and opportunities to critically understand and evaluate one's beliefs and how they align with others may play a role in behavioral change and ultimately the application of new culturally appropriate skills (Mayhew & Fernández, 2007; Van Soest, 1994).

Social Justice: You Cannot Change What You Do Not See. The program included three modules designed to (a) increase undergraduate students' knowledge of healthcare and educational equity, barriers to equity, and social justice frameworks to promote equity; and (b) promote self-reflection about attitudes related to equity and social justice. The following describes a rationale for the topics and content. Appendix A includes a complete outline of topics and materials included in the program. Video content was provided by faculty in CSD, sociology, psychology, nursing, and education.

Module 1: Health and Educational Inequity: Social Determinants of Health. Definitions of health equity refer to an individual's opportunity to be as healthy as possible (Center for Disease Control [CDC], 2021; World Health Organization [WHO], 2021). Educational equity means students get what they need to develop their full academic and social potential (Center for Public Education, 2016). Achieving equity requires removing barriers linked to positive health and education outcomes. One framework to conceptualize barriers is models of social determinants of health, which are the conditions in the environments where people are born, live, learn, work, play, worship, and age that affect a wide range of health, and quality-of-life outcomes and risks. There are many models, but for the purposes of the online program described in this paper, Solar and Irwin's (2007) model developed for the World Health Organization (WHO) provided guidance. In

the model, relationships between social, economic, and political factors "give rise to a set of socioeconomic positions, whereby populations are stratified according to income, education, occupation, gender, and race/ethnicity (p. 5)." Based on these determinants, individuals experience differences in exposure and vulnerability to health conditions and educational outcomes.

Socioeconomic position and related factors are linked to access to services, patterns in diagnostics and identification, and outcomes. As such, this content was included. For example, we included information related to access and use of evidence-based treatments for hearing loss, which can be significantly limited due to different geographic and socioeconomic position factors (Schuh et al., 2021). Content from this article regarding the finding that minoritized ethnic groups are less likely to have insurance coverage for assistive technologies such as cochlear implants compared with white patients was used to highlight issues of inequity. In another example, we included information related to free and appropriate education (i.e., Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, 20 U.S.C. § 1400, 2004) and the reality that socioeconomic status, race, ethnicity, and language status predict diagnosis and educational placement. Ultimately, the long-term outcomes of a child or a population of children may be negatively impacted (Keller-Bell, 2021).

Module 2: Health and Educational Inequity: Role of Implicit Bias. Inequities seen in health care and education are not solely the result of social determinants of health. Implicit biases of professionals, unconscious stereotypes shaped by learned associations that inform understanding and decision-making, can perpetuate educational and health inequity, and create barriers to social justice. Implicit bias in healthcare professionals is likely to influence diagnosis, treatment, and levels of care (FitzGerald & Hurst, 2017). Increasing students' knowledge about the science of implicit bias followed by students' self-awareness may be the best initial content (Sukhera & Watling, 2018). To that end, this module included content defining neurological mechanisms that are linked to bias (Law, 2021).

Self-awareness involves not only examining one's culture, but also examining perceptions and assumptions about the culture of their patients and families. Through a self-reflective assessment of personal values, attitudes, and assumptions about other cultures, and articulating these assumptions and attitudes, students can gain the ability to understand the influences of their own cultural background (Ginsberg & Mayfield-Clarke, 2021). Competencies should include increasing awareness but must also ground the awareness in strategies on how to reduce bias for clinical application. Better appreciation of biases in clinical reasoning can help developing clinicians (Gopal et al., 2021). As such, this module included a series of activities to facilitate awareness of bias as well as scenarios that demonstrate how CSD professionals identified personal bias and changed their behavior to meet the needs of the client.

Module 3: Models of Social Justice. Health and educational inequities suggest that social injustice in opportunity and resources to marginalized groups exists. Differences in health and educational outcomes between people and groups of people become a health disparity when there is an underlying social injustice in opportunities and resources. Social justice ensures fair distribution of opportunities and resources within society and that individuals and groups work toward equity when this does not occur.

SLPs generally view social justice principles as important to the profession, yet clinicians are often unaware or uncertain of how they can support social justice in their practice (Unger et al., 2021). The difficulty in understanding and implementing social justice may be partially explained by the broad spectrum of frameworks used to define the term. The context in which social justice is used often determines which elements are included or excluded in certain frameworks; however, certain ideas are relatively consistent across different definitions. Module three emphasized the prevalence of these ideas across multiple different frameworks, while also acknowledging how the definition for social justice can transform because of both the individual using the term and the situation in which it is applied. These common components were revealed through the presentation of various frameworks from sociological perspectives and related fields of study.

Further, an emphasis on interprofessional collaboration is key in reducing healthcare disparity and supporting positive patient outcomes (Vanderbilt et al., 2015). Understanding how these professions implement social justice in their practice can help to guide clinicians in making social justice informed decisions within the CSD field. This module included videos from experts in nursing, education, and psychology. The topics discussed included the use and significance of social justice in their field, personal experiences and attitudes toward equity, and the importance of interprofessional collaboration between all areas of study. Program content included videos in which professors discussed social justice principles within their own practice. Such content may support students' ability to connect interprofessional collaboration with reducing healthcare and educational disparity (Vanderbilt et al., 2015).

Learning Principles. Each module utilized a narrative approach to communicating equity, barriers to equity, and social justice frameworks. Personal beliefs and emotional understanding play a role in helping people consider their current understanding of the world and change when needed (Downs; 2014). In this program, scenarios and case studies focused on socioeconomic position at the meso (i.e., community) and micro (i.e., individual interaction) level. Although work in the area of broader social and political awareness and advocacy are critical components of the profession (American Speech-Language-Hearing Association [ASHA], n.d.), this curriculum was designed to support clinical education and training at the individual and family level.

Summary and Study Aims

Formalized instruction during undergraduate programs of study may support service-learning training and clinical cultural competencies at the graduate level (Pace et al., 2019). The program described in this study focused on requisite background knowledge of social justice constructs via three online modules. Each module included text and video content, scenarios of real-world application, case studies for reflection and critical thinking, and self-awareness activities.

Development of a program designed for instructional purposes includes the following stages: (a) design and planning for development; (b) development and formative evaluation; and (c) summative evaluation (Richey & Klein, 2007). Following the summative evaluation, the program is evaluated for impact, which consists of an evaluation of the effects of the program on the intended audience. This program has undergone the initial stage of design in which the authors developed content and outcome measures (Appendix A). As noted, these decisions were guided by evidence-based principles and adult learning principles. The formative evaluation is the purpose

of this study. The results will lay the groundwork for the summative evaluation and portability of the program for use with students in other CSD programs. We examined the perceptions of the intended audience on the content and usability of the program. The following research questions guided the study:

1. What were the students' perceptions of the concept of social justice prior to program completion?
2. What were students' perceptions of the concept of social justice following program completion?
3. What were the students' perceptions of the program usability?

Method

Participants. Following human subjects approval (IRB #2202002), undergraduate students were recruited from one state university and one private university in the Southern Region. The universities were the employers of the second and third author. Ten students enrolled in the program, and nine completed the program which included eight females and one male. The students were characterized as traditional undergraduate students (i.e., under 25 years of age, attending college full-time; Institution of Educational Science, 2023). There was one sophomore, three juniors, and five seniors. The majority of students identified as White (n=6) one student identified as Asian, one student identified as Black Hispanic, and one student identified as Hispanic. Of the nine, 67% (n = 6) participated in individual semi-structured interviews conducted by the first author to decrease the power differential between participants and researcher. This was also done to eliminate the likelihood of students feeling obligated to answer in a favorable way given the topic of social justice (Rosen et al. 2017).

Program Development and Delivery. The first and second author developed the program during the 2021-2022 academic year. The first author was a junior majoring in CSD with a minor in social problems. She was also a Lilian E. Smith Scholar at the Lilian E. Smith (LES) Center. The LES Center carries on Lillian E Smith's legacy of social justice. The LES Scholar's program encourages students to fully explore the values and convictions that shaped the life and work of Lilian E. Smith. The second author suggested the development of an online program to both enrich the student's knowledge of the profession and extend her application of social justice.

Once the content of the program was completed, the second author recruited two instructional design staff, two CSD professors, two CSD professionals, and two sociology professors to evaluate the program, hereafter referred to as reviewers. Reviewers completed the program and evaluated the content design, delivery, and organization since these constructs are key indicators of positive student outcomes and equitable learning (Joosten & Cusatis, 2019). The program was built in a Canvas learning management system. Since this is a supplemental program designed to support a course or curriculum rather than a stand-alone course, the primary areas of interest included perceptions of the design and content to promote student learning and engagement. As such, evaluators completed the design and layout and the content and activities section of the Open SUNY Course Quality Review Rubric (OSCQR; Online Learning Consortium, 2015). This tool was selected because it can be used for developing courses, is designed to assist with continuous improvement of quality and accessibility, and does not require training (Baldwin et al., 2018). Educators were also asked to provide direct feedback and suggestions.

Responses from the survey indicated that four of the 13 items in design and layout were sufficiently met. These included (a) establishment of a logical, consistent, and uncluttered layout is established; (b) easily viewable text and background; (c) use of a sans-serif font with a standard size of at least 12 pt; and (d) avoidance of flashing and blinking lights. Minor revisions were noted for four of the 13 items (i.e., large blocks of information are divided into manageable sections with ample white space around and between the blocks; instructions are provided and well written; course is free of grammatical and spelling errors; text is formatted with titles, headings, and other styles to enhance readability and improve the structure of the document). For the criteria of including manageable sections, two reviewers suggested that the content needed to be divided into larger blocks. For the criteria related to formatting for readability, one reviewer remarked that adding boldness, or underlining headings might make the materials more 'visually attractive.' Another suggested more headings may leave a 'breadcrumb trail' for students. For the criteria related to instructions, one reviewer suggested that instructions could be clearer for the students. They stated the following:

> This is where I find my own students get less frustrated if I ask, "Name (or describe) 2-3 instances" rather than "what are some..." For this reason, I suggest going back through all discussion/reflection assignments and asking for a quantity for each. Do you want them to just reflect or reflect and then post a statement about their reflection? How many responses/reflection statements do you want them to give? Also, when providing readings, you may want to preface it with what you want the students to do with the readings on that page.

Five of the items in the rubric were related to the evaluation of tables and slideshows. These were not used in the design and layout of this program, so they were not applicable.

Responses from the survey indicated that all items in content and activities were sufficiently met. Reviewers perceived that the course offered access to a variety of engaging resources to present content, supported learning and collaboration, and facilitated regular and substantive interaction with the instructor. They agreed that the course provided activities for learners to develop higher-order thinking and problem-solving skills, such as critical reflection and analysis. They also judged that the course provided activities that emulate real world applications of the discipline, such as experiential learning, case studies, and problem-based activities. Other areas that included sufficiently present content were use of low-cost materials, inclusion of copyright and licensing status, understandability of text, descriptive hyperlink text, and accessible text. Minor revision was noted on using a text-equivalent for non-text information. One reviewer noted captions for the YouTube videos, but not the interviews of the professionals discussing social justice. One reviewer suggested embedding YouTube content, rather than including an external link. Reviewers emphasized the value of the videos, case studies, and reflection activities. One reviewer provided additional readings and videos to consider as a component of module one. Changes were made according to reviewer feedback.

Procedures. The current study employed purposive and convenience sampling procedures. Prior to program enrollment and following program completion, all students were invited to participate in semi-structured interviews. Six of the nine students who completed the program agreed to participate in the semi-structured interviews pre and post-program. Sixty-six percent of the total

participants was representative of our study population. A total of 12 interviews were completed resulting in 2 hours and 17 minutes of interview data. Each interview lasted approximately 10-12 minutes (see Appendix B for the interview questions). The purpose of the semi-structured interviews was to understand the students' perceptions of the program. The pre-program interview questions were created to understand students' perceptions of the concept of social justice. The post-program interview questions were designed to understand students' perceptions of social justice in CSD and program usability.

Data Analysis. A qualitative method, thematic analysis, was used to analyze the data. All three authors participated in data analysis. Interviews were audio recorded and orthographically transcribed by the first author. Transcripts were subsequently checked for accuracy by the second author. Statements comprising complete thoughts were organized into two excel files (i.e., pre-program interview data, post-program interview data) for data analysis. The data were analyzed using Braun and Clark (2006, 2013) framework for conducting a thematic analysis. First, all three authors familiarized themselves with the data by reading and re-reading the transcripts. In step two, the authors began to generate initial codes by organizing the data in a meaningful way to reduce the amount of data into meaningful chunks of information. Step three consisted of searching for preliminary themes. The research team examined our initial codes to determine if any fit together and collated them into an initial theme. Themes at this stage described patterns in the data that was significant to the research questions. Step four involved reviewing the themes to determine if themes were coherent and distinct from each other. Step five included refinement in which the authors defined each theme. Weekly meetings were held to discuss themes. When differences in the interpretation of themes occurred, researchers reviewed transcripts until consensus was reached. The researchers then used member checking to allow participants to review the findings in order to further support the credibility of the findings. Member checking is commonly used in qualitative research designs during the final stages to ensure the accuracy of the interpretive analysis. For member checking, we contacted all six of the participants who completed the semi-structured interviews. Four of the six (67%) responded and reported they agreed with the conclusions.

Results

Research Question 1: Pre-Program Perceptions. Pre-program interviews provided data to understand the students' perceptions of social justice and identify themes and subthemes during the cyclical interpretive analysis. The three superordinate themes – opportunities for discovery, brief encounters, and intersection with CSD – along with associated subthemes are described below.

Opportunity for Discovery. The superordinate theme, o*pportunity for discovery,* referenced the idea that students were in search of knowledge or experiences related to social justice. This was demonstrated in student comments that indicated their quest for knowledge and expression of commitment to the topic. There were generally high levels of enthusiasm and anticipatory attitudes among participants. Although the specific reasoning was varied, student comments indicated that each entered into the study with the expectation that they would benefit from the experience. In order to capture the way students viewed the *opportunity for discovery*, this supraordinate theme was further represented by three subthemes: (a) expectation; (b) benefit; and (c) advocacy.

The subtheme e*xpectation* included references to the students' anticipation and curiosity of the new knowledge that they would acquire. Five of the students' responses included this subtheme. For example, one participant stated the following:

> I had no prior knowledge of what social justice is, so at least this experience will give me some insight on what it is or what other people think about it. And then, it will shape my knowledge of it.

The sense of having limited knowledge mixed with a desire to learn resonated in other students' statements such as, "I'm not saying that we're ignorant to the situation, but it might highlight areas that we might not have known before taking this course." Some students openly revealed that they did not have any knowledge about social justice. One student stated the following:

> Because I don't know or I've never really been involved in that topic, I think that my knowledge will increase." Another stated, "I was just curious what it was about. I saw the flyer and it was an opportunity to learn more, and I just decided to take it.

The second subtheme, *benefits,* related to the students' expressions of personal gains or motivation. Four of the students' responses included this subtheme. One student stated, "I would hope that it would help me work through some things." Some students seemed to have more short-term goals in mind as it related to personal gain. For example, one student said, "Now that I'm writing my personal statements for grad school, I've been trying to find a way to connect social justice with speech pathology…." Another said, "I think that having the certificate I would get at the end would be good for me in multiple ways." Finally, one student was attracted to the program due to a personal goal to know more about research (i.e., "Mainly just getting involved in something. I wanted to do a little research project in my last semester, so that was the first thing I saw").

The third subtheme, *advocacy,* related to students' desire to advocate for marginalized groups. Four of the students' responses included this subtheme. Students communicated that they believed that knowledge gained from the program would be instrumental in allowing them to engage in advocacy work. Students reported that by obtaining the knowledge they would be equipped to act and do something to advance work in social justice. One student stated, "I will understand the importance of it, so I think I'll be more drawn to it and more able to stand up for those kinds of things having that knowledge and background of it." Another said, "I hope to actually practice it in my daily life and not just have it in the back of my mind."

Brief Encounter. In order to gauge their level of expertise prior to beginning the program, each student was asked about any previous experience they had with social justice. *Brief encounter*, the second supraordinate theme, was characterized by five of the students' responses about their orientation toward social justice. All students had heard of the term social justice; however, their exact levels of comprehension varied greatly. This theme reflected the students' responses in that they had briefly encountered social justice as a novel idea and had little to no experience with the term social justice. Several comments included exposure related to the social and political climate at the time of the study. For example, one student said "I think with everything that happened in 2020, that's when I mostly saw it in a first-person point of view, but yeah I think that's the closest I've gotten to it." Another said, "When I first hear it, it has kind of a negative connotation politically. Even though maybe it's not fighting to be negative, just from the media you hear it and think oh gosh." A similar observation was made by a student who stated, "I feel like I hear social

justice happen more with political movements." One student linked their brief exposure to the current social climate in content disseminated through ASHA. She stated, "I did just read a blog on the ASHA journal, and it was about LGBTQ+ and the diversity and how that's coming into play." Others noted that they had simply "kind of heard about it."

Of note, only one student gave voice to how their prior experiences informed their knowledge of social justice. This student had prior experience with the term social justice through previous engagement in acts of social justice and as a person of color. This student reported the following:

> Well, it kind of struck with me because I did intern with a nonprofit that served for equity. It was a nonprofit that served refugee kids that are being integrated into western society" and "I'm also a POC person of color, so I've known social justice all my life.

Intersection with CSD. The third pre-program superordinate theme, *intersection with CSD*, included references related to four students' recognition that the topic informs clinical practice. Students expressed an interest in taking the course because they perceived the content to have relevance for their future careers. One student stated, "There's not a dedicated course. So, I'll be really interested to have that extra piece." Another student echoed a similar sentiment, saying, "And also, with undergraduate here, there's no class on that, and I think it's important because you're going to serve people from all different backgrounds." Students indicated curiosity on how social justice impacts clients in the field as well as clinical service delivery as expressed in this statement from a student, "For me personally, just to figure out more about how it relates to our profession specifically, and how we'll encounter it every day when we are practicing." One student identified a clear need for the content as it relates to healthcare. She stated:

> Obviously, I think it's really important in our field just because of the disparities that exist in the healthcare system now and the change that needs to happen there, and then obviously the change that's actively going on in the general population.

Research Question 2: Post-program Perceptions. Post-program interview data suggested that students reported that they found the program to be important for their professional development, resulting in the superordinate theme *value*. This theme is defined by the subthemes *increased knowledge*, *application*, and *personal growth*.

Increased knowledge included students' references to learning new content and reaching new understanding. All students made comments related to this subtheme. For example, one student stated, "It was a good experience to realize on a deeper level what was going on." Another said:

> I had one class where we talked about the difference between equality and equity but we just kind of skimmed over it and I didn't really have a good grasp of it so I think that that was really helpful.

In another example, a student was surprised to learn the information stating, "I felt like How could I not know this? How could I not be aware of this?" In a final example, one student said, "I think the modules were very eye-opening to those who even didn't have knowledge or to those who did know all about those things."

The second subtheme *application* was outlined in the post-program data through four students' statements suggesting that the course was valuable because it provided them with information that

they would be able to then use in the future. Several students focused on interprofessional education and practice. One student stated that it was helpful to understand how professors from different disciplines would implement social justice principles. Another student said, "I think it was realizing the amount of health disparities in every setting. That was very shocking to me. I hadn't thought about it for example in nursing or in psychology, that never crossed my mind." Another student echoed this sentiment stating that they learned about frameworks of social justice in speech-language pathology and within other disciplines which will help them "…work interprofessionally once we're actually practicing." One student linked their awareness of equity with their realization of how health and educational systems function in reality. She suggested that while people talk about equity "…they don't really provide the resources for those children." Others referenced the need for information outlined in the course to apply to their working life. This was noted in the statement, "I felt like it was hidden from view. It's something that's important we're not being taught about. It definitely impacts how we do our job." Finally, one student suggested that the information would help them work with populations that are disadvantaged stating, "If I work with disadvantaged populations I at least have somewhat of an understanding of the things they face and experience, so I can empathize with them better."

The third subtheme, *personal growth*, detailed the process by which all students felt that the content resulted in an increase in sense of self, including the desire to learn. One student noted that the discussions embedded in the program "really made me connect what I had just seen to my own life or try to find a point of understanding." This subtheme also included reflections on their personal experiences. One student stated that she had not heard of gifted and talented programs and did not have access. She stated, "Growing up, I didn't even have that opportunity, but maybe if I did, I'd be maybe more so successful as others." Personal growth also was seen in students' expressions of an increased sense of personal responsibility. Students made statements such as, "A lot of it was upsetting to know that a lot of those problems exist, but it also made me think of ways that I could help in those areas as well," and "It makes me want to advocate for it, because as I said, it's not really out there." These statements reflect a deeper consequence of the content; the information students gained from the course inspired them to consider the impact in their personal and professional lives. As one student put it, "I feel like it all goes hand in hand, not even just in a professional life but in a personal life as well. I feel like its prevalent in all aspects of whatever you're doing in everyday life."

Research Question 3: Perceptions of the Program Usability. Post-program interview data revealed two supraordinate themes related to the program usability. These themes represent the participants' experiences while navigating the program and its content. The term usability refers to the ease with which the participants accessed the curriculum. This considers the learning management platform itself as well as the interaction between the participants and the tasks required as part of the program. Two themes related to usability included *familiarity* and *satisfaction*.

The first subtheme, *familiarity*, describes all students' experiences in onboarding and navigating the program. Overall, students noted little difficulty in completing the course, saying that it was "pretty simple to navigate" or "very easy and very functional." The initial barrier to usability was a lack of familiarity with Canvas, the learning management system used for the online program. One student noted "I hadn't used Canvas so it was a little new for me, but I was able to get the

hang of it quick." Another student wrote "In the beginning it took some time to understand where I had to go specifically, but after that it was pretty seamless. You just go straight through them, so it wasn't too bad." In these cases, time was needed to adjust to the platform, but after a brief acclimation the participants were able to successfully access the program content.

The second subtheme, *satisfaction*, referenced all students' contentment with the program structure and format. A common sentiment across the post-program interviews was that the asynchronous format of the course allowed for better pacing and flexibility of the content. One student wrote that*:*

> Since it was self-paced, I was able to choose a time where I knew I could be focused on it. So, it was up to me, and I was able to put more effort in and pay more attention rather than it being more synchronous.

Another said that the course was functional because the format "makes it a lot easier to refer back to concepts that you need to apply to later things that you're learning." The subtheme *satisfaction* also includes positive reactions to the use of videos and discussions throughout the course, including statements that they "gave a very special insight that articles don't really provide for me," as well as "I believe it just gives a better display of what's going on just to enhance your experience even more." One student stated that she was a visual learner and that the videos helped when professors "talked about their experiences."

Discussion

We described the development and formative assessment of an introductory online, asynchronous program created to increase students' knowledge of equity, barriers to equity, and social justice practices concurrent with developing an understanding of their perceptions of their identities and worldview. Based on responses of a panel of experts, the program met requirements for online instructional quality. Responses from pre-interview indicated that the students in this sample were motivated to learn about the content. Results from post-interview data indicated the program met its intended goals. The following highlights how students perceived (a) concepts surrounding social justice in CSD prior to completing program; (b) content related to requisite knowledge related to social justice in CSD; and (c) usability of the program.

Student Perceptions about Social Justice Pre-Program. The students in this study were motivated to participate in the program due to a desire to learn more about social justice. Although, students had very little exposure to social justice they were aware of its importance to CSD and expressed a curiosity in learning more about social justice. All students expressed the need and desire to learn more about social justice despite their limited exposure to the topic. This is interesting given that although the students were undergraduate students and had only briefly been exposed to the topic, they all were motivated to participate. This finding supports the work of others that have suggested embedding social justice into the curriculum of pre-service professionals to promote societal change (Tanase & Lucey, 2017). Students' comments suggest that utilizing a program like this at the undergraduate level could help students enter graduate programs more equip to treat clients from marginalized backgrounds. Additionally, some CSD program introduce these topics at the undergraduate level considering that these topics cannot be comprehensively covered at the graduate level (Farrugia, 2021). Students in this sample expressed

the desire to learn more about this topic so that they would be empowered to advocate for marginalized groups. Even without prior experience or exposure, these students indicated that now they know they want to be agents of change for the profession. They saw this introductory online social justice program as an avenue to equip them with knowledge so that they would be able to put the information they learned to immediate use through advocacy and action.

Student Perceptions about Program Content and Usability. The theory of change guiding program development was that increases in knowledge, including self-awareness, may impact behavioral change (Mayhew & Fernández, 2007; Van Soest, 1994). Post-program data indicated that students did increase their knowledge and self-awareness. Students perceived that the program provided new information that they were able to access and understand. Student comments within the subtheme *increased knowledge* indicated that content facilitated their knowledge of the topic. The data from the pre-program interviews suggested that they were curious and expected to learn so it is interesting to note, that the data supports the idea that their expectations were met. Further, student responses that were classified within the subtheme *application* suggested that students increased knowledge and awareness of issues surrounding equity and social determinants of health. In both pre- and post-interview data students commented on how social justice intersects with the profession. This program not only met the students' expectations, but they also are clear about how this information applies to the field of CSD.

Student responses indicated that the program facilitated their self-awareness. As noted in Appendix B, we included content to probe self-awareness of bias in module two since self-reflective assessment of personal values, attitudes, and assumptions may support students' understanding of the influences of their own background (Ginsberg & Mayfield-Clarke, 2021). Student responses classified within the subtheme *personal growth* indicated that students had identified insight into their personal beliefs and feelings of personal responsibility.

Finally, with regard to program usability, student responses indicate that the mode of delivery, design, and layout provided a platform in which the content was accessible. Students without pre-requisite knowledge were able to understand the content and respond to the presented activities and prompts evidenced by no report of difficulty managing the learning platform. As seen in student comments within the subtheme *familiarity*, students had experiences using online learning platforms. Of note, those who had not used Canvas prior to this program were able to onboard with relative ease. Overall, students appeared to be satisfied with how the content was delivered and appreciated the self-paced nature of the content and the use of videos. Students' comments related to interprofessional education and practice emphasized their connection with this video content.

Taken together, this program appears to address key constructs related to social justice as identified in curriculum requirements (Council on Academic Accreditation: Audiology and Speech-Language Pathology, 2023). Specifically, content related to implicit and explicit bias on clinical service delivery and social determinants of health appeared to be accessible and understandable to this sample of undergraduate students. Of course, as reported in pre-program data, the students in this sample entered the program with a mindset toward understanding social justice and how it influences the CSD discipline. All students who completed the program volunteered, which demonstrated requisite motivation and interest. If this program is utilized for larger undergraduate cohorts as required content, the impact may not be consistent with the sample in this study.

Additional, didactic instruction about the Council on Academic Accreditation Audiology and Speech-Language Pathology competency prior to engagement in the online, asynchronous material may be necessary.

Study Limitations and Future Directions

The findings from this study should be interpreted with caution. As noted, the students in this study volunteered suggesting they came to the program with prior motivation. Another limitation is that data was not collected on the amount of time spent per module. To determine portability of the program, future large group studies will collect such data. Future studies will formally evaluate attitudes and beliefs pre- and post-program. Additionally, within program data should be examined to provide information on the manner with which students consider these topics while actively engaged in the program. Results from the formative assessment indicate that the program taps into knowledge and content related to social justice and the usability is satisfactory for traditional undergraduate students.

Disclosures

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Appendix A

Modules and List of Pages

Module 1: Health and Educational Equity: Seeing injustices in CMSD
    Module 1 Outcomes
    Equality versus Equity
    Explaining the Difference
    What is health equity and inequity?
    What is educational equity and inequity?
    See: Inequity in your experiences (discussion prompt)
    Social Determinants of Health (SDOH)
    Intersectionality
    Videos of CSD professionals discussing personal experiences
- SDOH and Hearing Loss:
- SDOH in Early Childhood and Schools
- SDOH and Parental Support
- SDOH and Adults with CD
- SDOH and Stuttering

    Case example and reflection activity: Aphasia and SDOH
    Conclusion of Module 1
Module 2: Health and Education Inequity: Role of Implicit Bias
    Module 2 Outcomes
    What is implicit bias?
    Implicit Bias in Educational and Healthcare Settings
    Awareness
- Self-Awareness
  - Self-awareness discussion (discussion prompt)
- Your Worldview
  - Your Worldview Discussion (discussion prompt)
- Your Multiple Identities
  - Your Multiple Identities (discussion prompt)
  - Seeing others multiple identities (discussion prompt)
- Acknowledging assumptions and biases
- Accepting Responsibility and Tolerating Ambiguity

    Scenario of professionals identifying bias and resolving clinical situations (reflection activity)
    Conclusion of Module 2
Module 3: Defining Social Justice
    Module 3 Outcomes
    The Various Frameworks for Social Justice
    A Sociologist's Perspective on Social Justice
    Common Components of Social Justice Frameworks (discussion prompt)
    See, Judge, Act
    Social Justice in CSD
    Social Justice and the ASHA Code of Ethics

Social Justice in Related Fields
- Education
- Nursing
- Psychology

Social Justice in Related Fields (discussion prompt)
Case Example: Dialect vs Disorder
Conclusion of Module 3

Appendix B

Interview Questions

Pre-program questions

1. Do you have any prior thoughts about the term social justice?
2. What drew you toward participating?
3. Do you think something like this is effective in increasing knowledge and awareness?
4. How do you think your feelings on SJ might change as you go through the program?

Post-program questions

1. What are your overall thoughts on the program?
2. Describe the effort it took to go through the program and whether it was functional.
3. What were your thoughts on audio/visual components?
4. Share your experiences in completing discussion prompts.
5. How practical do you think it is and what would make it easier or harder to participate?
6. What are some areas that resonated with you?
7. How effective was the program in increasing knowledge and understanding?
8. What were your feelings while going through program?
9. What knowledge do you think people need before participating?