CONTEXT SITUATED ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY TRAINING AND ITS IMPACT ON ENGAGEMENT, LEARNING OUTCOMES, AND ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY ADOPTION

ABSTRACT

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Abstract

This qualitative research study investigates a model of delivering assistive technology training to adult students with a variety of disabilities who are enrolled in academic upgrading classes at a Canadian college. The purpose was to examine whether an academic subject context for assistive technology training delivered by Academic Strategists impacted students' engagement in classes, independence, completion of learning outcomes, and adoption of assistive technology. The model of assistive technology training used in this study utilized subject area Academic Strategists to deliver assistive technology training in the context of their regularly scheduled academic strategies sessions.

The findings reflect advantages to this model which include students' perception of the relevance and direct application of training; strategists' ability to individualize training based on students' strengths, preferences, and conceptual abilities; and strategists' knowledge of course content. Disadvantages include strategists' lack of AT knowledge and students' desire to master course content over learning AT during strategies sessions. The findings also indicated that the degree to which AT was instrumental in fostering engagement and independence varied between students, but all felt that AT made it possible for them to complete their courses. Instructors, however, did not note an appreciable difference in student engagement after AT training.

Accuracy of AT assessments, student characteristics, and training contributed to integration or abandonment of the assistive technologies. A number of unanticipated but significant findings emerged in addition to those related to the research questions. Recommendations include accurate and timely AT assessments, knowledgeable and skilled staff, timely application of AT, and prior learning of computer skills. These recommendations reflect more general concerns for modifications to the training model and a review of the AT assessment and equipment procurement process.

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