

Navigating the Shifts In OT Academia: Educators' Perspectives on the Potential MSOT to eOTD Transition

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ABSTRACT

As key stakeholders in occupational therapy (OT) education, OT faculty play a vital role in the implementation of a single-entry OT doctorate program transition. The study aimed to seek the implications of OT educators' perspectives and experiences at various phases of a program degree transition. Participants were recruited to complete a mixed-methods survey using convenience sampling. Analysis revealed themes like training, mentorship, institutional support, and work-life balance as needs for success in an eOTD program transition. Expanding recruitment, considering longitudinal approaches, and examining additional factors in future iterations of the study may provide more understanding on how to support educators in the future of OT education.

INTRODUCTION

What is the significance of transitioning from MSOT to and entry-level (eOTD) programs?

AOTA recommended a move to a single-entry OTD degree by 2025, prompting many institutions to shift from MSOT to eOTD programs (Tobin, 2020). This transition has implications for accreditation, curriculum development, and faculty qualifications.

Why is it important to consider faculty perspectives in this transition?

Understanding their challenges, workload and professional development needs is essential for guiding effective, sustainable education reform in OT (Sweetman & Giles, 2023).

What is the perceived benefit of an eOTD program?

To meet the rise in demand for healthcare workers (Fisher & Crabtree, 2009) and maintain standards compared to other professions, such as physical therapists.

METHODOLOGY

Participants: 32 OT educators of an accredited PP-OTD, e-OTD, or MSOT program in the U.S.

Data Collection: Mixed methods design survey via Qualtrics was sent via e-mail and postings to AOTA's CommunOT online forum. Submissions were accepted from September - December 2024.

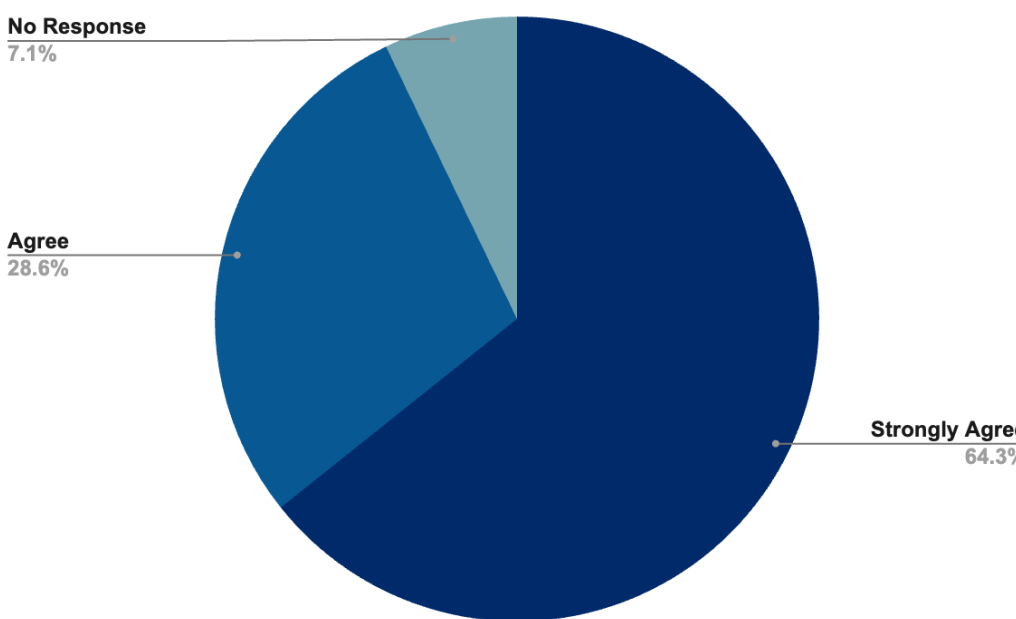
Data Analysis: manual analysis of qualitative data transcribed by Qualtrics Software, highlighting any recurring themes and patterns within open-answer responses. Quantitative data was analyzed through manual thematic analysis, using appropriate statistical techniques, such as descriptive statistics and inferential statistics.

RESULTS

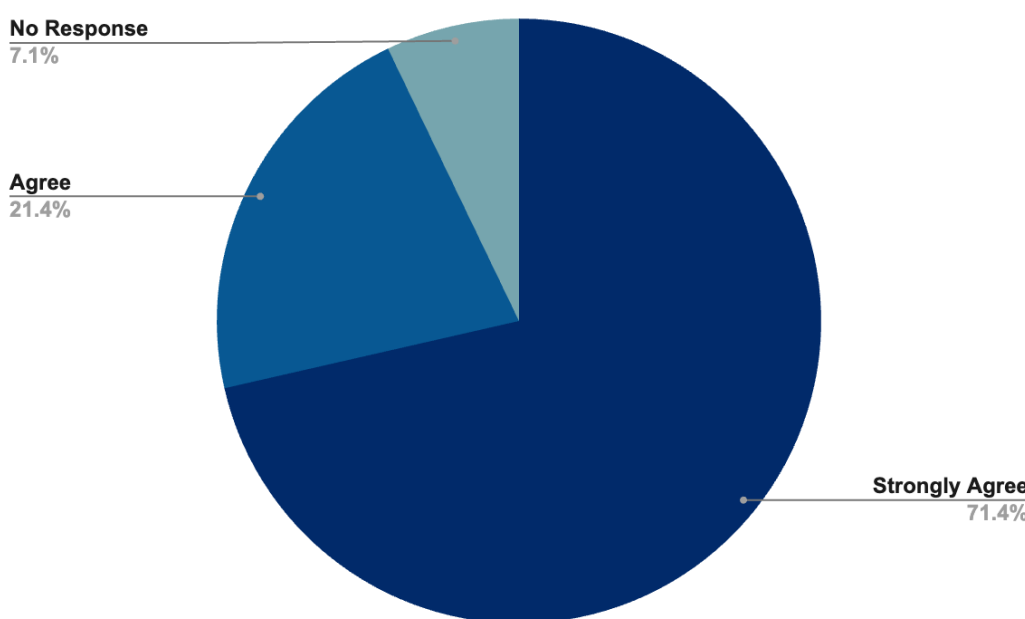
Responses to Likert Questions

Group A: Educators that experienced the transition + Group C: Educators in MSOT programs

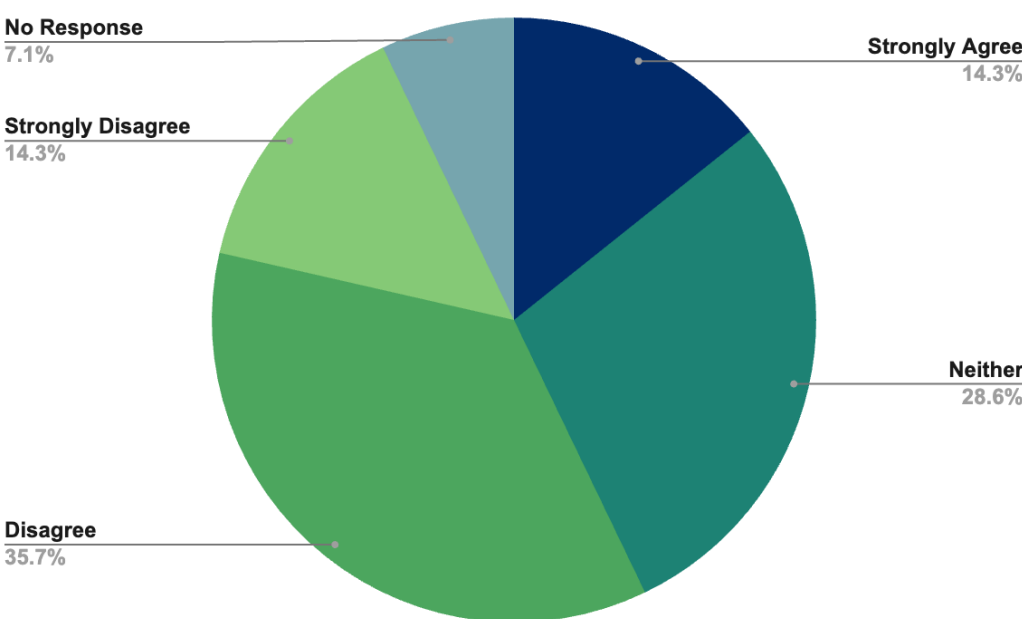
I feel that my level of academic education would be sufficient to teach students at the eOTD



I believe that an overall work life balance is critical when working in academia.



I feel that it is necessary for the OT profession to progress toward a terminal eOTD degree.



How did your institution prepare you to teach eOTD students compared to MSOT students?

"...resources to advance teaching and learning which were helpful with learning new methods and integrating new ideas."

"Faculty retreats." (2 respondents)

"Within the program there is senior faculty to junior faculty mentorship."

"They did not." (4 respondents)

What are the challenges in faculty preparedness at your institution when transitioning to an eOTD program?

"Balancing teaching MOT students, developing new courses, maintaining high standards in service and scholarship."

"Having enough faculty to cover all the new content/higher rigor."

"My institution is an hbcu... Unfortunately, it's so bad I have accepted a program director position at a new school in Georgia to start an eOTD program."

Name any motivating factors and/or deterrents to job satisfaction.

"We pride ourselves in our teaching and dedicate a significant amount of our time to that."

"We have excellent collaboration and communication and all put students/student learning first."

"...cohesive and close-knit faculty motivates me."

"Overwhelmed, uncertain about the direction of the profession."

DISCUSSION

Many participants reported **frustration due to limited institutional support, lack of resources, and minimal involvement in program development**, which often led to increased workloads and reduced job satisfaction. However, several educators emphasized **strong peer collaboration and faculty cohesion** as important sources of support and resilience during the transition. Some viewed the transition as a **chance to improve working conditions**, while others considered **leaving** their roles due to transition-related stress, raising concerns about faculty retention. **Uncertainty** was common, especially among those whose institutions had not yet transitioned, often tied to doubts about institutional preparedness and lack of faculty development. Among participants that had completed the transition, respondents reported added responsibilities without appropriate compensation or administrative support. Though a few noted positive changes, such as curriculum improvements, mentorship, and teaching support. **Importantly, job satisfaction appeared more influenced by supportive leadership and the ability to focus on teaching than by pay increases alone.**

LIMITATIONS

Limited Existing Research: Lack of existing research on faculty perspectives prior and during the transition to an eOTD program.

Insufficient Sample Size: Lack of representation of all OT faculty in the U.S., however there was a large variety of responses from multiple states, faculty positions, and academic experience.

Subjectivity in Thematic Analysis: Qualitative data was analyzed through the researchers' thematic analysis, which generated themes through coding and developed overall findings based on responses. Thematic analysis is contingent upon the researchers' subjectivity.

CONCLUSION

Pedagogical approaches that emphasize faculty collaboration, mentorship, and access to institutional resources enhance educator buy-in and curriculum quality during the eOTD transition, while work-life balance and job satisfaction are key areas for further exploration. Longitudinal studies of educators who are currently enthusiastic about the eOTD transition but do not have institutional support or transparency can also provide insight as to how perspectives of educators evolve over time. Further investigation on how best to include and support educators may create a positive impact on the education of future occupational therapists and OT educators in the U.S.

