

# The Basics of Disabilities Etiquette: The Awareness of People First Language (PFL) among Special Education Students in Prayagraj, India

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## Abstract

Recently, one of the important topics of discussion has been the importance of language to define and describe people with disabilities which has a direct impact on the personal and professional integration of the target population worldwide. A person is respected and recognised for who they are as a person first and foremost when they are addressed in "people-first language", which places their impairment in the background. What might be appropriate for one person may not be for another. This is the objective of this research paper to understand the awareness of People First Language among certain sections of academicians in the district of Prayagraj, India.

By surveying special education students in the city of Prayagraj, this web based research further the discussion on the application of Person First Language (PFL) and Identity First Language (IFL). This adopted and modified study involved D. Ed., B. Ed. and M. Ed. special education students to collect information on familiarity levels and the use of person-first language. As part of this study, 141 special education students (D.Ed and B.Ed) responded to an online questionnaire designed to gauge their knowledge of person-first language. The survey contained of eight demographic/background and 17 fictional people with disabilities survey questions. However, the results reported in this simple analysis study shows that students have general and above average knowledge about peoples first language.

Globally, research exploring cultural background and peoples first language is limited. Finally, suggestions for further investigation are proposed.

**Key Words:** Stereotype, peoples first language, individuals with disabilities, disability, stigma

## Introduction

Stereotypes, prejudice, and stigma contribute to the exclusion and discrimination that people with disability and their families encounter in every aspect of their life on a global scale. Language serves as a medium and a connection point for people all over the world. The society should create an environment where everyone including people with disabilities feel comfortable and respected. The selection of phrases can unintentionally aid in the process of disablement and create 'disabling barriers' for individual with disabilities in full participation in our society. In the past, people with disabilities were considered with sympathy, occasionally as pitiful, and sporadically with horror (Blaska, 1993). People without disabilities were

frequently kept secret from society, which prevented the general public from learning about their conditions and, more significantly, from seeing them as individuals with capacities.

It is difficult to recommend a language that support phenomenon of disability and address people with disabilities in respectable manner. This is often dependent on a range of situational, individual and cultural factors what might be regarded as ‘normal’ in one country and place may be regarded as ‘abnormal’ in another. For example, in many countries targeted group is comfortable with the use ‘people with disabilities’, but certain segments of the general public in rest of the world prefers to be addressed as ‘disabled people’. Emily Ladau (2015), an individual impacted by disability, supports the use of identity first language (disabled people) as she considers her disability as a source of pride, and describes it as a fact of life and a state of being. This article investigates at available evidence on one of the drivers of disability stigma: the use of person-first language versus identity-first language.

Whether spoken or written, respectful language improves the effectiveness of communication. Additionally, it reassures people with impairments that other people do not view them as beings from another planet. The most significant experience a person will have is their first interaction with someone who has a disability, and everything depends on that crucial first contact. People should feel respected and comfortable when engaged in a conversation, rather than being judged. People first language provides a platform for the society to engage with people with disabilities in respectful manner which focusses on the abilities of a person, than the bodily impairments. Language usage can raise questions about what is acceptable and unacceptable. The language that respects other people is acceptable. Therefore, it's crucial to choose language that is acceptable for both speaker and the person you are speaking to.

The rational for promoting peoples first language is to is to make it clear that the individual is being addressed is regarded primarily as a “person” rather than the focus on the disability that he or she may happen to have. It sought to be primarily a linguistic research with academics and linguists in mind. The goal of the current study was to determine whether or not students pursuing diploma, bachelor's or master's degrees in special education were acquainted with using person-first language to describe people with disabilities.

We include a brief history of the terminology used to refer to disabilities in this section, highlighting the conflicts between IFL (e.g., "disabled person") and PFL (e.g., "person with disabilities").

Teachers have a very important role in making inclusive education a success and academic success of students with disabilities solely depends on them. For students with disabilities to achieve academic achievement, the role of special education teacher is crucial. Implementing special education policies and integrating children with disabilities require special education teachers to perform complex tasks (Woulfin & Jones, B., 2022).

Table 1: Examples of People First Language

Sr. No.	Labels Not to Use	People First Language
1	The handicapped or disabled person	Person with disabilities (Snow, 1998)
2	The mentally retarded	People with mental retardation (Snow, 1998)

3	Autistic person	Person with autism (Snow, 1998)
4	A Monogoloid	Person with a down syndrome (Snow, 1998)
5	Paraplegic	Person with paraplegia (Snow, 1998)
6	Crippled	Person with physical disability (Snow, 1998)
7	Dwarf	Person with short stature (Snow, 1998)
8	Learning disabled person	Person with a learning disability (Snow, 1998)
9	Blind or visually impaired person	Person who is blind (Lipscomb, 2009)
10	Deaf	Person who is deaf (Lipscomb, 2009)
11	Dumb	Person with a speech disability (Lipscomb, 2009)
12	Wheelchair bound Person	Person who uses a Wheelchair (Lipscomb, 2009)
13	Schizophrenia	Person with schizophrenia ( Jensen et al., 2013)
14	Alzheimer's disease	Person who has Alzheimer's disease ( Jensen et al., 2013)

Source: Based on literature review

It is crucial for teachers to advance professionally, increasing their theoretical knowledge, practical expertise, and technology skills because these factors have a significant impact on their ability to teach during their whole professional life (Gurgur, 2017). Internalisation of Disability as a social phenomenon is very crucial and special education teachers should propagate the important aspects of social model of disability in their pedagogy. The refusal to converse in first-person is a subtle but emancipatory form of discrimination. Surprisingly, the professionals that people with disabilities frequently turn to for help are sometimes the source of such subtly discriminatory behaviour (McCoy & DeCecco, 2011).

## Methodology

The approach taken in this manuscript is to provide historical and linguistic context of peoples first language and also to familiarize the reader with the importance of peoples first language in our contemporary society. The populations accounted for in this study are the D. Ed, B.Ed and M. Ed students (male and female) who are currently enrolled in these special education programs in the institutes in the district of Prayagraj. The researchers used the internet to look up the locations of the colleges and universities in the Prayagraj region that were to be the subject of the investigation. The information was available on the Rehabilitation Council of India (RCI) website. The Rehabilitation Council of India running master's degree/ bachelor's degree/ P.G.Diploma/ Diploma/ Certificate courses in the field of rehabilitation of persons with disabilities. RCI's mandate includes standardising curricula, regulating and overseeing services provided to people with disabilities, and maintaining a Central Rehabilitation Register of all competent staff working in the fields of rehabilitation and special education. For this study, 13 approved institutes were selected from RCI's list for Prayagraj.

This study was carried out within Prayagraj's 13 approved RCI's institutes providing D. Ed, B. Ed and M. Ed. Courses. A sample of 141 students from D. Ed Special Education and B. Ed Special Education in Prayagraj who participated in the questionnaire survey. Students participation helped in forming this study because they play a major role in the educational process at the level of actual practice in particular.

A self-administered questionnaire was used to collect the data needed for analysis: (1) a demographic section developed by the researchers based on literature review and (2) fictional people with disabilities survey. The first section comprises of demographic survey which was designed based on literature review and also to gather data pertaining to gender, age, enrolled course and few experience with disability questions.

In section 2, participants were asked to read statements about hypothetical people with impairments for 17 items and choose the statements that employed the language, or person's first language, for discussing about disability. These items don't have a reliability coefficient, but they seem to have face validity. The participants were asked to read all the statements carefully to confirm whether each statement complies with the person-first language principles by answering "Yes" when it does and "No" when it doesn't. The second section included in total 17 statements; eight statements from Culp, 2016 and 9 statements from SU\_CD L (2022). A previous study (Culp, 2016) explored if self-efficacy varied among college students participating in health education courses depending on knowledge, attitudes, sex, major, education level, and experience with disability. In this paper, the focus in more detail on the linguistics characteristics of people first language, particularly examining the use of both people first language ( people with disabilities) and identity first language (disabled people). SU\_CD L (2022) is an one of the quiz host on ProProfs web domain which provides an online quiz platform for individuals to take quiz on various topics.

However, this study was more interested in revealing the general impression of all participants who worked and taught in the special education department in the city of Prayagraj than it was in focusing specifically on a small sample of special education instructors.

The researcher created an email detailing the study and including directions on how to disseminate the email to students in their department. The email provided details on the research study, including information on the students' voluntary involvement in the study, the study's goals, and the fact that all personally identifiable information would be kept anonymous. The researcher made contact with the faculty and administrative offices of each institute and requested to be part of this research study. Contact number and email addresses were available on RCI website and respective institute website. The researchers also contacted staff and faculty on phone explaining the importance of study and survey link was forwarded to all them. Faculty and staff emailed the survey link to the students. Participants completed a web-based survey through Google Forms survey, which contained a series of questions. It took about 10 minutes to complete the survey, which was accessible to participants via the survey website (Google Forms) for about 8 weeks. In order to statistically respond to the study topic, statistical analysis utilising Statistical Software for Social Science (SPSS) was performed.

Table 2, provides an overview of the demographic characteristics of the selected sample (n = 141) on demographic variables. One forty one students from D. Ed and B.Ed course completed the web-based survey. In terms of enrolled course, 93 indicated that they were enrolled for D. Ed and 48, B. Ed.

### **Data Analysis**

As presented in Table 2, of the 141 participants in the study, 50 were male and 91 were female. Participants were also questioned on their current level of disability and past experien

ces with it. 0% of participants who were asked if they had a disability said "No." Of the 141 participants, twenty nine reported they have family member with disability, twenty seven reported they have a friend with disability and fifty two reported working with a person with disability.

Table 2: Demographic Characteristics

Item	n	%
<b>Gender</b>		
• Male	50	35.5
• Female	91	64.5
<b>Course</b>		
• D. Ed	93	65.9
• B. Ed	48	34.1
• M. Ed	0	0
<b>Has a disability?</b>		
• No	141	100
• Yes	0	0
<b>Friend with a disability?</b>		
• Yes	27	19.1
• No	114	80.9
<b>Family Member with a disability?</b>		
• Yes	29	20.6
• No	112	79.4
<b>Ever worked with a person with disability?</b>		
• Yes	52	63.1
• No	89	33.9
<b>Ever lived with a person with disability?</b>		
• Yes	45	68.1
• No	96	39.1

Source: SPSS results

## Results and Discussion

The results of the fictional people with disabilities section of the survey indicated that students have general and above average knowledge about peoples first language as evidenced in the overall average score. The overall average score of all special education students scores equalled 78.1%. A majority of participants scored a 50% or lower score on the fictional people with disabilities section. Establishing trusting relationships, creating appropriate health-related materials and programmes for individuals with disabilities, and ensuring that individuals with disabilities can comprehend and make use of these resources are all negatively impacted by poor communication (Williams-Piehot et al., 2010, cited in Culp, 2016).

Table 3: Frequency and percentage of correctly answered knowledge items

Knowledge Item	n	%
Her daughter has autism	58	41.1
I took a class about children with learning disabilities	124	87.9

Gallaudet is a college for the deaf	94	66.7
A learning disabilities teacher has many opportunities to help the mentally challenged	65	46.1
I donate money to organisations that help individuals with disabilities	105	74.5
After suffering a spinal cord injury, he was diagnosed with paraplegia and used a wheelchair	74	52.5
There was a blind girl in my calculus class	107	75.9
We saw a video about a woman with schizophrenia	66	46.8
He has had a physical disability since birth	59	41.8
The girl in the wheel chair is crippled from a car wreck	67	47.5
Sally uses hearing aid because she is hard of hearing	106	75.2
The actor has a physical disability and uses a walking aid	97	68.8
He is learning disabled and receives special accommodation during tests	47	33.3
My blind friend uses Braille to read	61	43.3
My brother is wheelchair bound and has a brain injury	60	42.6
Ro uses a cane and he is blind	63	44.7
Grandma needs closed captions to watch TV because she is Deaf	75	53.2

Source: SPSS.

In considering the value of using language that puts the needs of people with disabilities first, it is recognised that respectful language paves the way for respectful attitudes and behaviours (McCoy & DeCecco, 2011). On the other hand, instances of linguistic disrespect, even when disguised as humour, can give rise to disrespectful attitudes and actions. Each individual from the society must place emphasis on the use of people first language to remove stigma and stereotypes. Even though many teacher-librarians were familiar with the idea of person-first language, a review of their understanding of aiding students with disabilities found that they did not hold it at a high value in their job (Myhill et al., 2012).

The outcomes of the current analysis cannot be compared to any high calibre prior research conducted in India, hence the comparisons that are made should be considered with care.

The results of the current investigation provides evidence that participants scored well in sentences with common disability terms and phrases but struggled with few statements with unfamiliar terms, for example terms like “paraplegia” and “schizophrenia”. It can be interpreted that insufficient knowledge about the phenomenon of disability could be one of the reasons where they could not register their decisions.

It is crucial that all persons, including those with disabilities, are appropriately represented in society via language. Language empowers, language is instrumental in expressing feelings, perceptions, and attitudes” (Myers, Lindburg, & Nied, 2013, p. 86). It may be used as a tool to describe and improve things, but it can also be a weapon to distort, devalue, and stigmatise (Snow, 2007). Jensen et al., (2017) conducted a research to investigate the significance of using person-first language for the effective provision of recovery-oriented care. The role of psychiatric mental health nurses is vital in recovery of a patient in psychiatric rehabilitation care. Importantly, Nurses who speak in a non-person-first or demeaning manner may unintentionally discourage people from seeking the help that nurses may offer. Person-first language could be a powerful tool for easing the pernicious effects of prejudice and stigma.

### **Conclusion**

It is very difficult to select a language to address people with disabilities in modern times. To cultivate an environment of inclusion and in our communities, we must work to ensure

individuals with disabilities are recognized and respected. However, if the formulation is to become an international standard that can be utilised by researchers, physicians, governmental and regulatory organisations, as well as in other applications, language usage issues (either PFL or IFL) need to be resolved. It also looks for ways to promote the usage of person first languages.

One of the main causes of the stigmatisation of individuals with disabilities is a lack of knowledge and awareness about the use of people's first languages. Interpersonal and communal interventions will aid in spreading awareness of the value of people first language acquisition. Such a programme may show to be one of the most effective ways to lessen the stigma associated with people with disabilities.

Limitations of this study that might potentially prevent generalising the results. Since Prayagraj being a developing city, generalizations may not be applicable to metropolitan cities in India. There is a dearth of research on the significance of PFL in Indian literature, hence this study will supplement existing PFL research. Additionally, a survey has been created and put forward to evaluate the effectiveness of PFL knowledge among special education instructors.

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