The procedure in the classroom setting by which nursing faculty construct academic accommodations for undergraduate nursing students with learning disabilities: A scoping review

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ABSTRACT

Background and objective: A scoping review was conducted to determine what is currently known about the procedure in the classroom setting by which nursing faculty construct academic accommodations for undergraduate nursing students with learning disabilities. The number of nursing students with disabilities is growing, and nursing students with identified learning disabilities require academic accommodations to facilitate their success. Effective understanding of the academic accommodation procedure by faculty is necessary to promote student success and inclusive learning environments within nursing education.

Methods: The framework from Arksey and O’Malley was used to identify gaps in the literature related to the procedure in the classroom setting by which nursing faculty construct academic accommodations for students with learning disabilities.

Results: The themes of faculty attitude, previously used accommodations, and lack of understanding of the procedure of accommodation implementation were derived from the literature.

Conclusions: Current research fails to adequately answer the research question related to the procedure by which nursing faculty in the classroom setting construct academic accommodations for students with learning disabilities. Further research into the procedure by which faculty make academic accommodations in the nursing education classroom is needed.

Key Words: Learning disability, Nursing education, Accommodations, Student with disabilities, Accommodations process, Nursing faculty

1. BACKGROUND

In recent years, an increased number of students with identified disabilities are entering higher education seeking degrees.\[1,2\] Students with disabilities represent approximately 11% of the higher education student population.\[2\] Within the higher education student population, learning disabilities comprise 31% of all disabilities reported by institutions.\[2\] While increased numbers of students with learning disabilities are reported, so are descriptions of difficulties with academic accommodations.\[3-6\] Experiencing difficulties with academic accommodations correlates with negative student success in obtaining a degree.\[3,4,7\] Furthermore, several studies consistently reported a correlation between faculty lack of knowledge of academic accommodation procedure practices to the ineffective provision of help to students with disabilities.\[3,8,9\] Unfortunately, higher education literature

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Academic accommodations are primarily assigned to nursing students with disabilities. In addition to an increased number of students with identified disabilities entering higher education, health professions such as nursing are also noting an influx of students with disabilities. Learning disabilities are the most prevalent disability noted within higher education as well as in nursing education. This increased prevalence results from legislative changes in higher education creating expanded access to nursing education for students with disabilities. However, while students with learning disabilities are increasing, successful completion of programs is decreasing. Additionally, students with learning disabilities continue to be underrepresented in nursing education as historically nursing education has excluded students with disabilities.

Since the population of nursing students with disabilities is primarily comprised of students with learning disabilities, it is imperative for nursing faculty to understand how to promote success within this population. While nursing faculty has a high percentage of being exposed to students with learning disabilities, a lack of understanding exists regarding the procedure for how to provide academic accommodations to promote student success with this type of disability. Additionally, nursing faculty contribute the lower percentages of nursing students with disabilities to the negative faculty perceptions and a lack of faculty understanding of disabilities, accommodations, and resources.

Furthermore, the procedure of academic accommodations for nursing students with learning disabilities has not been examined within nursing literature. Therefore, an understanding of the procedure in the classroom setting by which nursing faculty make academic accommodations for undergraduate nursing students with learning disabilities is necessary.

Academic accommodations are primarily assigned to nursing students with disabilities at the discretion of the institution’s disability services office. Students with learning disabilities are more successful with the use of disability services. Research has documented that students with learning disabilities face additional challenges in nursing education. Students with learning disabilities often require additional educational interventions to be successful in nursing education. These interventions, referred to as academic accommodations, provide students with an equal opportunity of success when compared to non-disabled students. However, faculty’s understanding of the procedure and implementation of academic accommodations could inhibit or promote the use of such services. Unfortunately, a scarcity of literature inhibits nursing faculty to promote services for successful inclusion of students with learning disabilities in the classroom. Therefore, it is important to identify nursing literature to assist with understanding the procedure in the classroom setting by which nursing faculty construct academic accommodations for undergraduate nursing students with learning disabilities.

2. Knowledge synthesis method

A scoping review of the literature was performed to determine the extent of literature available in relation to the procedure in the classroom setting by which nursing faculty construct academic accommodations for students with learning disabilities. A scoping review is an assessment of the scope of available literature surrounding a topic to identify a need in a research area that has not been comprehensively reviewed. This scoping review followed Arksey and O’Malley’s methodology and framework includes quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods research as well as non-research articles and grey literature. Arksey and O’Malley’s framework includes five steps: (a) identifying the research question, (b) identifying relevant studies, (c) study selection, (d) charting the data, and (e) summarizing results.

2.1 Identifying the research question

The first step in a scoping review is to identify the research question. This scoping review was conducted to answer the following question: What is known from the existing literature regarding the procedure in the classroom setting by which nursing faculty construct academic accommodations for undergraduate nursing students with learning disabilities?

2.2 Identifying relevant studies

The second step in a scoping review is to identify sources relevant to the research question. Consistent with Arksey and O’Malley’s methodology, multiple comprehensive searches through multiple sources were conducted from May 2017 to August 2017 to locate all relevant articles. Electronic databases, reference lists from related writings, and web-based searches consisted of broad language to include all relevant literature related to the topic. The same or similar combinations of key words were used to search the electronic databases and the internet. The key search terms utilized can be found in Table 1.
Table 1. Search terms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Search Terms</th>
<th>Search Limiters</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nursing Education</td>
<td>Written in English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning Disability or Mental Impairment</td>
<td>Published between 2008-2017*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic Adjustment or Academic Accommodation</td>
<td>Peer Reviewed</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nursing Student</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>College or University or Higher Education</td>
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*With exception of two articles published in 2006

Electronic databases, reference lists, and internet-based searches were examined through an iterative process to complete a thorough search of the relevant literature. Electronic databases included CINAHL: Nursing and Allied Health, ProQuest Nursing and Allied Health Source, Health Source: Nursing/Academic Edition at EBSCOhost, and MEDLINE (with Full Text) at EBSCOhost. In electronic databases, searches were limited to the search years of 2008-2017 as regulations governing students with disabilities in higher education took effect in 2009. However, two studies published in 2006 were discovered and included as the only articles that pertained specifically to students with learning disabilities in the classroom setting of nursing education. Grey literature was not eliminated, and the selected relevant articles reference lists underwent reviews by hand; they were also limited to the search years of 2008-2017. Google and Google Scholar were also utilized with multiple attempts of various word transitions searched related to the topic. All searches were limited to resources that were published in English.

Table 2. Inclusion and exclusion criteria

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Inclusion Criteria</th>
<th>Exclusion Criteria</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Studied Nursing Classroom Education</td>
<td>International Literature</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Studied Nursing Students with Learning Disabilities</td>
<td>Literature on Physical Disabilities in Nursing Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Addressed Academic Accommodations</td>
<td>Literature on Secondary Education or Transition to Higher Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conducted in the United States</td>
<td>Literature on Nurses and Nursing Students Working with Disabled Patients</td>
</tr>
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2.3 Study selection

In the study selection step, inclusion and exclusion criteria are examined and applied in relation to the search results. In total, 800 articles were identified from database searches. Titles and abstracts were reviewed, and several articles were noted on health care disciplines other than nursing, international literature, physical disabilities, higher education, secondary education, practicing nurses and nursing students working with patients with learning disabilities. After exclusion criteria were applied, 40 articles were maintained for further review based on the inclusion criteria displayed in Table 2.

Articles retrieved from web searches and reference lists were also reviewed based on inclusion and exclusion criteria. Twenty-seven articles remained that addressed implementation of academic accommodations. Only articles that met all inclusion criteria and contributed valuable information to the research question where chosen for inclusion. Figure 1 diagrams the study selection process.
2.4 Charting the data
The fourth step in the scoping review process is to chart the data. Charting the data requires an examination of the selected articles to extract pertinent issues.[26] The pertinent issues are then scrutinized for themes or connections within the articles.[26] Complete results from data charting are located in the appendix. A narrative approach was used, as recommended by Arksey and O’Malley,[26] to allow for a broad inclusion of resources related to classroom accommodations and students with learning disabilities in nursing education.

3. RESULTS
After charting the relevant information from acquired literature, the last step in the scoping review process involves reporting the findings and themes to draw conclusions from the literature and answer the research question.[27] Three themes were identified from the relevant literature with the use of qualitative thematic analysis. Thematic analysis is the most appropriate method for quantifying results and identifying themes in a scoping review.[28] The article abstracts were analyzed, resulting in the creation of themes. The thematic analysis uncovered three themes related to the research question: the themes of faculty attitude, previously used academic accommodations, and lack of understanding of the procedure of academic accommodation implementation provide valuable insight into the research question and include support for understanding the procedure in the classroom setting by which nursing faculty construct academic accommodations for students with learning disabilities.

3.1 Faculty attitude
The facilitation of academic accommodations in a classroom setting for students with learning disabilities requires a positive faculty attitude. Nursing faculty attitudes and beliefs towards students with learning disabilities greatly impact student success as well as student perceptions of acceptance.[8, 17, 22] Positive faculty attitudes towards students with learning disabilities correlated with an increase in students seeking academic accommodations, faculty compliance with accommodation practices, and faculty having increased knowledge of learning disabilities.[8, 9, 14, 17, 22]

Increased faculty knowledge of academic accommodation practices for students with learning disabilities enhanced students seeking and using accommodations within the classroom setting.[22] The request and use of academic accommodations by students have been positively associated with student academic success.[16, 22, 24] However, students may resist seeking academic accommodations because of negative faculty attitudes.[9, 22]

Negative attitudes correlate with a knowledge deficit by faculty of different learning disabilities as well as the procedure for academic accommodations for students with disabilities.[21, 23] This knowledge deficit translates into a failure of nursing faculty to consistently provide academic accommodations due to perceived ineffectiveness of use.[9, 29] Additionally, Levey[17] discovered varying degrees of the small knowledge held by faculty for the understanding of the procedure and applicability of academic accommodations among nursing faculty. The variability of faculty understanding of the accommodation procedure contributed to negative faculty attitudes and inconsistency with accommodation implementation. The frequent use and understanding of the procedure for academic accommodations enhanced faculty’s adherence to use and perception of the effectiveness of accommodations.[9, 17, 20]

Negative faculty attitudes are also associated with student resistance to seek academic accommodations.[9, 22, 29] Nursing students often do not seek academic accommodations based on the perception that nursing faculty associated a disability with a lack of intelligence.[22] Additionally, fear of retribution by the faculty and the refusal to grant academic accommodations inhibited students from seeking academic accommodations.[22]

Burgstahler and Doe[30] discovered that nursing faculty understood physical disabilities more than learning disabilities and were more willing to provide accommodations for students with physical disabilities compared with learning disabilities. Therefore, faculty knowledge about learning disabilities and academic accommodations is essential to student success. Therefore, to understand the current procedure in the classroom setting by which nursing faculty construct academic accommodations for students with learning disabilities is essential to a positive faculty attitude regarding accommodations.

3.2 Previously used academic accommodations
While previously used accommodations are noted within the nursing education literature, there is a lack of research supporting or explaining the procedure for implementing academic accommodations for students with learning disabilities that would be effective within the classroom setting.[14] Kolanko[31] described effective academic accommodations from student perspectives with a learning disability that assisted learning. Additionally, Ardary[14] focused on nursing faculty experiences with students with learning disabilities. A paucity of literature exists regarding learning disabilities in nursing education and the implementation of an effective procedure for academic accommodations. While working with students on an individual basis and early intervention with
the use of academic accommodations are emphasized within
the literature, not one source provided a specific outline or
demonstrated effectiveness for this procedure.

Betz et al.\cite{15} discovered that the most frequently requested
and received accommodations by nursing students were class-
room related. Regularly provided classroom accommoda-
tions were extended testing time, extended assignment com-
pletion time, provision of a quiet environment during testing,
adaptive technology, preferential classroom seating, and note
takers.\cite{8,15,29} Cawthon and Cole\cite{8} discovered students in
the higher education environment rated note takers, extended
time on tests, adaptive technology, and preferential classroom
seating as being more effective academic accommodations
than alternative testing environments. With varying effec-
tiveness of accommodations, perhaps an understanding of
the academic accommodation procedure remains unclear.
However, increased faculty understanding of the academic
accommodation procedure improved faculty confidence and
willingness to properly accommodate students with disabili-
ties in the classroom setting.\cite{8,29}

Meloy and Gambescia\cite{23} attempted to assist faculty with the
current process of academic accommodations by providing
examples of academic accommodation requests followed by
suggestions for best practice. The scenarios consisted of nurs-
ing faculty who encounter students that appear to have the
intellectual ability but struggle with course content even after
multiple mentoring or tutoring sessions by faculty. Faculty’s
time-intensive interventions of reviewing course content and
multiple tutoring sessions may not address learning com-
prehension issues.\cite{23} The student issues related to learning
comprehension may underlie a learning disability beyond
the scope of faculty expertise, which delays appropriate aca-
demic accommodations to help students be successful.\cite{23}
Nursing faculty need to be in close collaboration with the
disabilities services office and compliance officer to facil-
itate a universal design approach for all students.\cite{23} This
universal design approach ensures all students are held to
the same standard for meeting program outcomes.\cite{23} As
nursing faculty cannot anticipate or possibly incorporate all
conceivable formal accommodations, this close collaboration
can facilitate the handling of academic accommodations as a
more systematic approach.\cite{23} This systematic approach also
ensures nursing faculty provide consistent disability-related
accommodations as best practice for maintaining academic
rigor and standards.\cite{23} However, the systematic approach is
hypothetical and does not provide data or specifications on
the process or effectiveness for the systematic approach.\cite{23}
Therefore, while literature does exist about what accommo-
dations can be used and have been implemented, further
research is needed regarding the procedure by which aca-
demic accommodations are constructed by nursing faculty.

3.3 Lack of understanding of the procedure of academic
accommodation implementation
While a significant body of literature exists in higher educa-
tion regarding students with learning disabilities, literature
on academic accommodations for learning disabilities in
a classroom setting in nursing education is extremely lim-
ited.\cite{12,14,19} The lack of current research results in a lack
of best practices for accommodating nursing students with
learning disabilities.\cite{15,22} While nursing faculty have a high
percentage of interaction with students with learning disabili-
ties due to the increasing prevalence, a lack of understanding
exists regarding how to provide academic accommodations
to promote student success.\cite{9,14,29,32} Additionally, nursing
faculty may have experienced academic accommodations,
but few understand the procedure for how academic accom-
modations are implemented within a classroom setting.\cite{17,23}
This lack of knowledge provides a vital rationale for the
need for literature to guide faculty’s understanding of the
procedure and implementation of effective academic accom-
modations.\cite{22,23,29}

One article was discovered that provided suggestions for
a systematic approach as best practice when students re-
quest academic accommodations without compromising the
academic rigor of a nursing program.\cite{23} However, the sys-
tematic approach is hypothetical and does not provide data
or specifications on the process or effectiveness for the sys-
tematic approach.\cite{23} Therefore, nursing faculty have limited
guidance when attempting to implement academic accommo-
dations potentially affecting the success of nursing students
with learning disabilities in the classroom setting.\cite{20,22}

4. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION
A paucity of literature exists regarding the procedure in the
classroom setting by which nursing faculty construct reason-
able academic accommodations for undergraduate nursing
students with learning disabilities. This scoping review un-
covered beneficial information regarding faculty attitudes to-
wards students with learning disabilities and previously used
accommodations but did not provide a systematic method of
the procedure in the classroom setting for accommo-
dation implementation for students with learning disabilities.
Without knowledge on how to systematically implement ac-
commodations for nursing students with learning disabilities,
inconsistent classroom accommodation practices that do not
foster student success are likely to result. Therefore, the
discovered available literature failed to answer the research
question: What is the procedure in the classroom setting by
which nursing faculty construct academic accommodations
for undergraduate nursing students with learning disabilities?

Consequently, additional research is needed to determine the procedure in the classroom setting by which nursing faculty construct academic accommodations for such students with learning disabilities.

**CONFLICTS OF INTEREST DISCLOSURE**

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest.

**REFERENCES**


