

## **Nursing Education Research Conference 2020**

### **The Relationship Between Nursing Students' English Language Proficiency and Academic Success Variables**

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#### **Purpose:**

A high level of English language proficiency is required in nursing programs as communication is the backbone of nursing practice. It is paramount that nursing students have the English language proficiency necessary to communicate with patients and healthcare providers in order to promote positive health outcomes without medical errors (Hull, 2016). Unfortunately, some nursing students have had difficulty in the academic and clinical settings related in part on their lack of English language proficiency (Crawford, and Candlin, 2013). The purpose of this study was to investigate the relationship between nursing school English language proficiency admission criteria met by ESL students and their measures on academic success variables when compared to English-speaking students.

#### **Methods:**

A cross-sectional study was conducted with 391 English-speaking students and 50 ESL students from an undergraduate BSN program at a large Midwestern public university. A survey was administered to identify the ESL students in the nursing program and which English language proficiency admission criteria was met by the ESL student. The English language proficiency admission criteria was operationalized using the measures of English language proficiency test scores, number of years living in the United States, and the number of years attending an English-speaking school. The participants provided consent to access their educational records for academic success variables which included measures of grades in nursing courses, grades on Clinical Evaluation Tools, and scores on ATI standardized assessment scores (York, Gibson, and Rankin, 2015).

#### **Results:**

Statistical analysis was utilized to identify relationships between the ESL students' English language proficiency admission criteria and their performance on academic success variables correlated with the native English-speaking student for academic variables. ESL students living less than seven years in the United States scored significantly lower on just under half of the academic variables. The ESL students who graduated from a U.S. high school scored significantly lower on more academic variables than the ESL student who had attended at least one year of an English-speaking college. The relationship between English language proficiency test scores and academic variables was not explored because there was only one student in the study admitted based on test scores. A pattern emerged that showed that the ESL student group had lower mean scores on a majority of the academic measures, although not all findings were significant.

#### **Conclusion:**

The findings of this study showed that the ESL nursing students struggled on academic success variables when compared to English-speaking students. The study used a correlational design to show relationships between two variables. There was no way to

prove causation for the relationships identified in the study. Are the relationships due to language barriers or other factors that negatively affect the ESL student's academic performance? It is most likely a combination of factors (Snow Andrade, Evans, and Hartshorn, 2014). Looking at the lower average scores on academic variables for ESL students, the next step is to ask how those scores manifest themselves in patient care and what factors can be addressed to improve those scores.

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**Title:**

The Relationship Between Nursing Students' English Language Proficiency and Academic Success Variables

**Keywords:**

ESL nursing students, English language proficiency and academic success

**Abstract Summary:**

The purpose of this presentation is to bring awareness of the relationship between nursing school English language proficiency admission criteria met by ESL students and their measures on academic success variables when compared to English-speaking students followed by an open dialogue to address possible inequities.

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**Author Summary:** Ellen Gajewski has a PhD in Educational Leadership, a master's degree in nursing education and is a certified nurse educator. She has been teaching in nursing education for the past ten years including teaching ESL nursing students. Based on her observations of some of the struggles that the ESL nursing students experience in their studies, Ellen completed her dissertation research on Students' English Language Proficiency and Success in a Nursing Program.