



# Retaining the Online RN to BSN Nursing Student: Does Instructor Immediacy Matter?



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## Background

Immediacy behaviors are actions that simultaneously communicate warmth, involvement, psychological closeness, availability for communication, and positive affect, both verbal and nonverbal. Some of the major issues that appear to affect the retention rates include the feelings of isolation, poorly designed courses, communication difficulties, lack of program support and guidance, as well as difficulty with the technology. RN to BSN students have different needs and issues compared with the generic undergraduate student. Most RN to BSN students have families, work full-time with extended and nontraditional hours. Understanding the link between instructor immediacy behaviors and retention and success could provide institutions with another tool to improve student graduation rates. Retention rates for online courses have been calculated to be 10 to 20 percent lower than the retention rates for the face to face classroom on a traditional college campus (7)

## Methods

The purpose of this study is to determine if perceived instructor immediacy behaviors impact the retention and student success in an online RN to BSN program.

**Design:** A descriptive correlational design for this study was utilized. A convenience sample of 128 undergraduate nursing students in a rural university in central Pennsylvania were recruited to participate in the study. This study employed two instruments to measure immediacy and retention. Both used a five-point Likert scale. Demographics and self reported GPA was also collected.

**Setting:** Lock Haven University, Nursing Department, Clearfield Campus, Pennsylvania

**Sample:** In the spring 2016 semester, junior and senior nursing students (N=105) completed the survey. Students were notified via email and online learning platform announcements.

**Data Collection:** IRB approval was obtained prior to recruitment and data collection. An anonymous Qualtrics online survey was used.

## Instruments

Jeffrey's Student Perception Appraisal (Jeffreys, 2007). The SPA-R is a 27-item survey, which addresses five factors thought to be influential in the retention of students. The five factors: environmental (10 items); institutional and integration (5 items); personal academic (5 items) college facilities (5 items) friend support (2 items).

Corona's Immediacy Scale (Corona, 2011). The 11-item survey, which address 3 factors thought to be influential on instructor immediacy behaviors.

The three groups:  
Words of Approval  
Examples provided  
Words of Support

Cronbach Alpha: .82, .77

## Results

It was hypothesized that there would be a positive correlation between instructor immediacy and retention. The hypothesis was supported with the results demonstrating a strong correlation ( $r=.79, P<.01$ ). It was also hypothesized that there would be a positive correlation between instructor immediacy and academic success. The resulting Pearson coefficient ( $r=.64, P<.01$ ) demonstrates a moderate positive correlation. Since the eleven-item measure of instructor immediacy behaviors can also be divided into three smaller 3-4 item groups indicating specific behaviors (words of approval, providing examples and words of support), similar correlations were performed on these components with similar results.

## Discussion

This study found instructor immediacy behaviors impact the online RN to BSN student's academic success and retention. Understanding immediacy behaviors in the online classroom provides educators another tool for increasing retention and academic success. Increased levels of student success and retention as a result of instructor immediacy would provide institutions of higher education with active teaching strategies to ensure success for the RN to BSN online student, thus improved retention and higher graduation rates. Smaller rural university offering web-based courses should strive to better understand instructor immediacy behaviors and the impact on student success and retention. The pursuit of a BSN rests ultimately with the individual nurse; however, institutional support can play a significant role in contributing to the successful completion of a BSN.

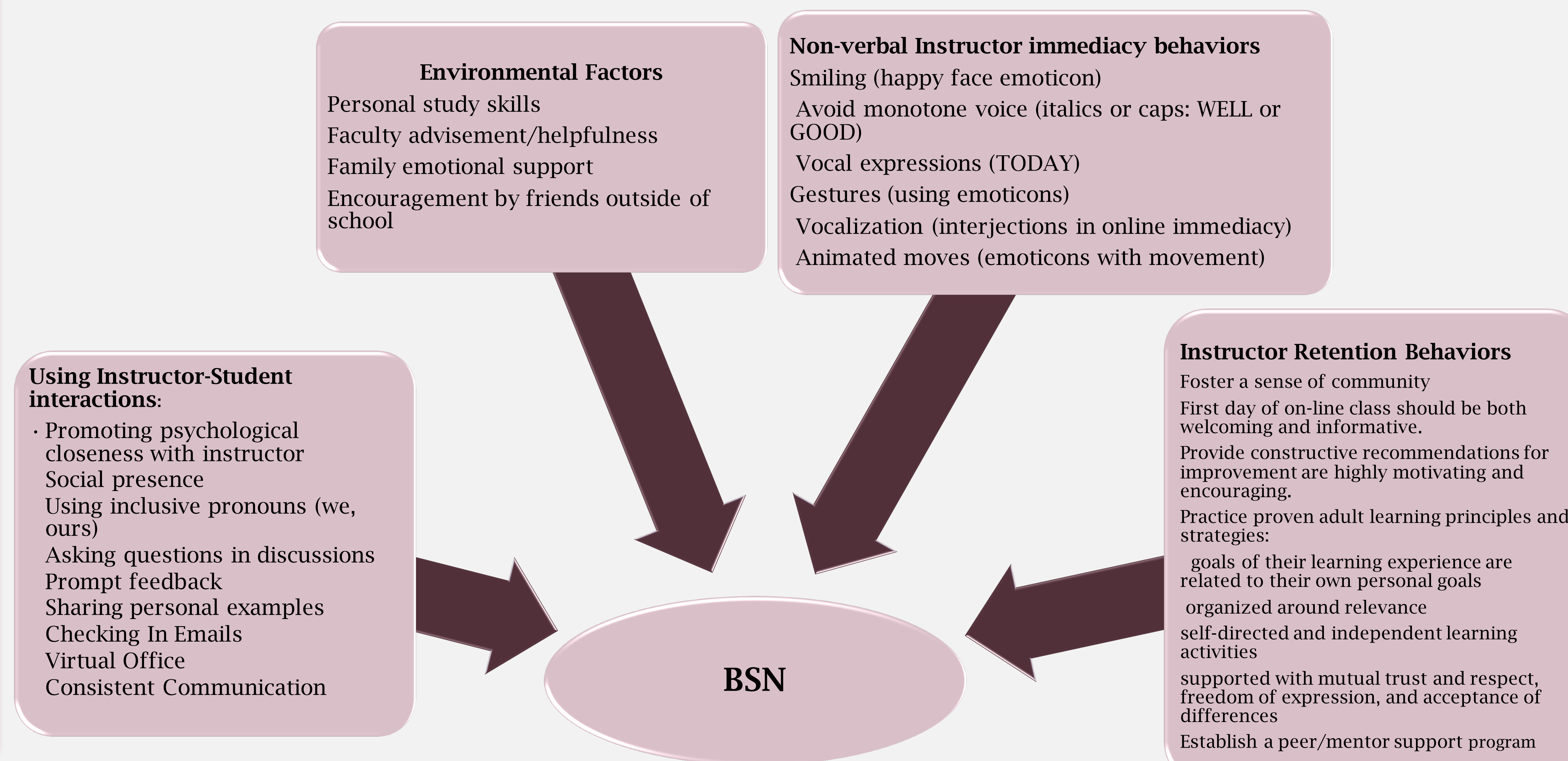
## Theoretical Framework

Jeffreys (2004) Nursing Undergraduate Retention and Success (NURS) conceptual model provided the framework for this descriptive correlational study.

As a model of student retention, the underlying assumptions of the NURS model (Jeffreys, 2012, p. 11) are:

- Retention is a priority concern for nursing leaders
- All students have the potential to benefit from professional socialization and enrichment throughout education
- Persistence can be influenced by psychological and academic outcomes
- Professional integration and environmental factors greatly influence retention

• Jeffreys, M. R. (2012). *Nursing student retention: Understanding the process and making a difference*. Springer Publishing Company.



## References

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