

PREFERRED LEARNING STYLES AND MODES OF BACCALAUREATE NURSING STUDENTS

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As the student demographic on today's college and university campuses changes, approaches to teaching and learning are challenged in an ever increasing way. The heterogeneous nursing student populations - from the high school graduate to the second degree student - bring a range of learning styles to the educational milieu. Nurse teachers often teach in ways that reflect their preferred learning styles but that are not always congruent with the learning styles of students. When students' learning styles do not match the teachers approaches to learning students may fail to acquire the desired skills and knowledge they need for professional practice. Understanding the learning style preferences of students is a beginning step to achieve greater congruence between teaching approaches and learning styles. Better matching learning style with teaching approach should also serve to increase students' ability to master content, acquire critical thinking skills, and understand increasingly complex issues. Although the learning style preferences of junior, senior, and post-basic (RN-BSN) baccalaureate nursing students have been studied independently, there have been no studies that have described the learning styles of baccalaureate nursing students across the curriculum. Further, it is not known to what extent learning style preferences are affected by the year the student is in the nursing program nor by the student's demographic variables.

Purpose: To compare the learning styles of nursing students across the baccalaureate degree program (BSN), from first semester junior to graduating senior and to assess the association between learning preferences and selected demographic variables.

Methodology: A cross-sectional comparative-descriptive design was used and involved a convenience sample of 137 undergraduate nursing students from a college in southeastern United States. Near the end of spring semester, junior and senior students completed a modified version of Kolb's learning style inventory (LSI). The LSI, a 36-item Likert scale inventory, measures students preferred learning styles and mode if put in any given learning situation. Students additionally completed a background sheet profiling demographics and educational background information.

Findings: Between-year comparisons revealed no significant differences in learning preferences or modes; however, nursing students as a group demonstrated a tendency for one preferred learning style and mode. The findings suggest a relationship between preferred learning styles, modes and demographic variables, which require further investigation. The overall results for BSN students preferred learning styles and modes will be highlighted.

Discussion: Implications of these findings for nurse educators in designing and implementing learning style centered teaching strategies that benefit nursing students will be highlighted.