

Nurse Educators Recommend Study Strategies with Mixed Levels of Utility to Nursing Students



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ABSTRACT

The **objective** of this research is to survey Texas nurse educators in order to ascertain which learning strategies nursing faculty frequently suggest to their students. This aspect of nursing education research is under-explored and is of potential interest to nurse educators who seek to improve the learning success of their students.

Respondents (n = 52) were nursing faculty with Master's (n = 30) or Doctoral (n = 22) Degrees and who currently teach in Practical Nursing (n = 1), Associate's Degree in Nursing (n = 10), Bachelor's Degree in Nursing (n = 29) or Graduate Nursing (n = 12) programs in the State of Texas.

Preliminary findings reveal that while nursing faculty suggest an array of high- and moderate-utility study methods, they continue to advise students to employ low-utility study methods. These findings reveal the need for further research and potential faculty education regarding efficacious study strategies in nursing education.

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BACKGROUND

Study strategies are methods of active learning that students engage to learn material (Kober, 2015). While some students master concepts relatively quickly, other students require more time when attempting to learn new material. In addition, the type of learning material can have an effect on the amount of time necessary for students to successfully study and learn that material.

This is particularly true of nursing students who are challenged daily to learn dense materials in short periods of time in order to provide safe and effective patient care. As such, nursing students can benefit from utilizing study strategies that are more time-efficient and effective at increasing retention of materials over time.

Common forms of study strategies employed by students include re-reading, summarizing, note taking, and highlighting materials. Unfortunately, these popular study strategies have been shown to be less effective at successful retention and recall of materials than under-utilized but more efficacious strategies such as practice testing, distributed practice, and self-explanation (Dunlosky et al., 2013). While the methods by which students study and learn is often a decision made by each individual student, educators can play a pivotal role in the educational success of their students by encouraging efficacious learning strategies or techniques of adaptation to course content (Kober, 2015).

This project surveys a representative sample of Texas nursing faculty to ascertain the study strategies they most frequently suggest to nursing students. Such data is intended to identify ways by which nurse educators may better assist their students to adopt efficacious study practices. This aspect of education research is under-explored in the nursing field of study and is of potential interest to nurse educators who seek to improve students' learning success.



Nurse educators were surveyed from institutions throughout Texas.

METHODS

Nursing faculty from institutions of higher education across the State of Texas were surveyed. Individuals were recruited to participate using email addresses published on their respective institution's websites. The recruitment emails and survey were distributed via the Qualtrics® online platform.

The survey consists of an informed consent agreement and six subsequent questions which generally require less than five minutes to complete. Initial questions require the respondent to indicate various aspects of their teaching experience, gender, and their highest level of education obtained. These independent variables are measured to determine their effect, if any, on the types of study strategies recommended.

Respondents are then asked to select the study strategies that they recommend from a list of fifteen widely-used study strategies. Qualitative data may be entered in a text box for strategies that an educator recommends which is not included in the list provided. Finally, respondents are asked to prioritize the strategies that they recommend in terms of their strength of recommendation to nursing students.

Recommended learning strategies are assigned ratings of either "high", "moderate", "low" or "unknown" utility which correspond to the rating assigned in the utility index identified by Dunlosky (2013). These scores are then evaluated to determine the potential relative utility of the study strategies which nurse educators are recommending to their students.

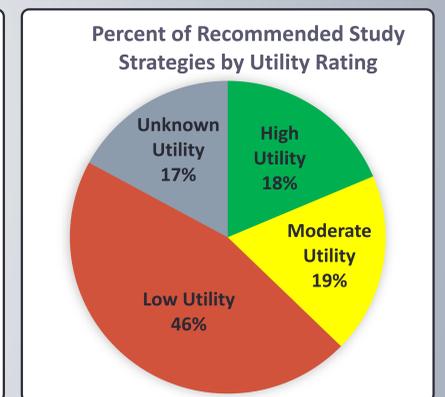
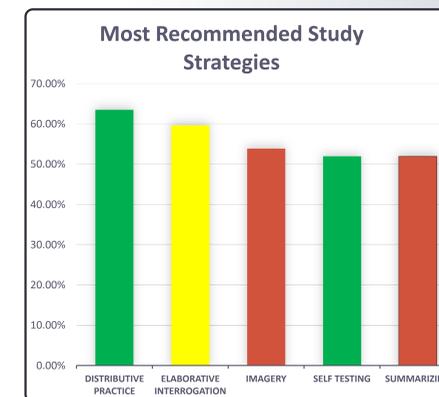
Recommended Study Strategies	Relative Utility Index Rating
Practice Testing / Self-Testing	High
Distributed Practice	High
Interleaved Practice	Moderate
Elaborative Interrogation	Moderate
Self-Explanation	Moderate
Summarization, Highlighting, Underlining, Note-taking, Rereading, Keyword Mnemonics, or Imagery	Low

Adapted from Table 4, p. 45 (Dunlosky et al., 2013).

RESULTS

Nursing faculty (n = 553) from seventeen institutions of higher education were surveyed. Data was collected from respondents (n = 52) for a 10.6% response rate. Respondents were female (n = 48) and male (n = 4) nursing faculty who have Master's (n = 30) or Doctoral (n = 22) Degrees and who currently teach in Practical Nursing (n = 1), Associate's Degree in Nursing (n = 10), Bachelor's Degree in Nursing (n = 29) or Graduate Nursing (n = 12) programs in Texas. Teaching experience of respondents was diverse: 0 to 2 years (n = 4), 3 to 5 years (n = 14), 6 to 10 years (n = 12), 11 to 20 years (n = 12), and 21 or more years (n = 10).

Preliminary findings reveal that while nursing faculty do suggest an array of high- and moderate-utility study methods, they also recommend that students employ low- and unknown-utility study strategies. In fact, this study shows that low- and unknown-utility strategies comprise over half (63%) of the study strategies recommended by nursing faculty.



CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

- The data reveal that efficacious study methods are being recommended by nurse educators alongside a much larger group of less effective methods.
- High- and moderate-utility study strategies such as distributive practice, self-testing, and elaborative interrogation are being recommended, but they risk being overshadowed by recommended low-utility study methods which may be more familiar to students.
- A fundamental weakness of this study is the lack of a discipline-specific study strategy utility index for use in nursing education. Additionally, the low overall response rate and limited number of responses from educators within Practical Nursing and Associate Degree programs restricted the ability of researchers to fully evaluate any potential relationships between variables.
- Future research should seek to determine the study strategies that nursing students report utilizing as well as the efficacy of these methods.
- Further attention should be given to the potential need for faculty education regarding how to teach students to employ efficacious study strategies in order to improve students' educational success.