ABSTRACT

STUDENTS' ENGLISH LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY AND SUCCESS IN A NURSING PROGRAM

by

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A high level of English language proficiency is required in nursing programs as communication is a core component in nursing practice. Universities have admission criteria to ensure that International English as second language (ESL) students are prepared for language requirements in the academic setting. Domestic ESL students are not required to meet any English language proficiency criteria. Unfortunately, some ESL students do not have the English language proficiency skills necessary for success in the nursing program.

In this dissertation, I explored the relationship between nursing school English language proficiency admission criteria met by ESL students and their measures on academic success variables when compared to Native English-speaking students. I conducted a cross-sectional study of 391 Native English-speaking students and 50 ESL students from an undergraduate BSN program at a large Midwestern public university. The majority of the ESL students in my study were Domestic ESL students.

ESL students struggled in their nursing studies compared to Native English-speaking students. ESL students living less than seven years in the United States scored lower on just under half of the academic variables while the ESL student living seven years or more in the United States scored lower on a smaller number of academic variables. The ESL students who
graduated from a U.S. high school scored lower on more academic variables than the ESL student who had attended at least one year of an English-speaking college. Students who graduated from a U.S. high school and attended an English-speaking college scored lower on the least number of academic variables when compared to Native English-speaking students. I was unable to explore the relationship between English language proficiency test scores and academic variables because there was only one student in the study admitted based on test scores.

The findings from my study raised questions about the validity of using university English language proficiency admission requirements as a measure for identifying English language proficiency. I recommend identifying methods for Domestic ESL students to demonstrate English language proficiency requirements for nursing schools.