Chapter 99

Informing School Rehabilitation Professionals:
Evidence-Based Practices of Accommodations in the Inclusive Classroom

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ABSTRACT

The importance of appropriate use of test accommodations has drawn researchers to look closely for empirical evidence that supports the appropriateness and effectiveness of current accommodation practices over the last three decades. To inform teacher candidates enrolled in special education courses as well as school rehabilitation professionals who may or may not be new to the field, this chapter synthesizes research findings on the effectiveness of major accommodation categories and discusses how to make valid decisions for students with diverse special learning needs.

INTRODUCTION

Providing equitable education for all learners has become a concurrent core value for inclusive education worldwide (American Educational Research Association et al., 2014; Florian, 2008; Skiba et al., 2008). It has been asserted that students with special needs should not be penalized because of their exceptionalities (Popham, 2009; Principles for Fair Student Assessment Practices for Education in Canada, 1993). The existing policies are certainly an improvement on the past, where without the use of accommodations, students with special needs were often excluded from the learning opportunities offered to students without such needs (Pullin, 2008). As such, it is imperative to promote equitable teaching practices of accommodations for special education student populations who are placed in the inclusive classroom setting.

A test accommodation is characterized by a change in an aspect of the test administration that can help students with special needs bypass learning difficulties. It is not related to the knowledge or skills the test is intended to measure (e.g., American Educational Research Association et al., 2014; Bolt & Thurlow, 2007; Fuchs et al., 2000a, 2000b), thus maintaining test validity and fairness. These changes are usually in one or more of four types of the test administration: timing, setting, presentation modality, and response modality (Fuchs el al., 2005; National Research Council, 2004). Examples of accommodations include the provision of extra time, the use of assistive technology, or reading text aloud.

In an earlier study, Fuchs et al. (2000a) found that teachers were over-accommodating students with learning disabilities for a reading comprehension test. More importantly, teachers had difficulty in accurately predicting whether or not students would benefit from the accommodations. In this study, teachers recommended accommodations to students who actually did not benefit from them. It was even more problematic when students without recommended accommodations had better outcomes than those with the accommodations recommended by teachers. Similar findings were also found in mathematics (Fuchs et al., 2000b). These findings highlight the needs for teacher training in the use of accommodations. As it is imperative to make use of evidence-based practices (Chorpita & Starace, 2010; Kretlow & Blatz, 2011; National Institute for Literacy, 2005), this paper reviews previous studies on accommodations for students with special needs and summarized the major findings of the research. Our review can be used to inform teacher candidates enrolled in special education courses as well as school rehabilitation professionals who may or may not be new to the field.

This paper reviews the relevant research on the effects of accommodations on students' performance on large-scale assessments. The theoretical bases for accommodations, and practical considerations for choosing accommodations are also discussed.

What are Test Accommodations?

Broadly, test accommodations are defined by the *Standards for Educational and Psychological Testing* (American Educational Research Association et al., 2014) as "relatively minor changes to the presentation and/or format of the test, test administration, or response procedures that maintain the original construct and result in scores comparable to those on the original test" (pp. 58-59). Often, the term accommodations is limited to changes to test administration conditions that are intended to support students with disabilities and/or English language learners (ELL) in demonstrating their knowledge and skills, but do not change what the test is intended to measure. These changes are usually in one or more of four aspects of the test administration: timing, setting, presentation modality, and response modality. Changes that do affect what the test measures are sometimes referred to as modifications. That is, accommodations are designed and provided to students needing accommodations to "remove construct-irrelevant barriers and support valid interpretations of scores for their intended uses (American Educational Research Association et al., 2014, cluster 3, pp. 67-70). Because the terms accommodations and modifications are not used consistently by testing programs or in the research literature, it is important to define the terms.

In this paper, we will define a test accommodation as a change in an aspect of the test administration *that is not related to the knowledge or skill the test is intended to measure.* For example, imagine a student who cannot read the usual printed version of a mathematics test because she has a visual impairment. Without an accommodation, this student will probably receive a score of 0 on the test, even though she may in fact have the mathematical knowledge and skills required to solve the problems. Because the purpose of the test is to measure students' mathematical knowledge and skills, not their ability to

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