

Research on College Professors' Perception of Classroom Disability Support Services in South Korea

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ABSTRACT

The present study is designed to examine college professors' perception of classroom disability support services. A survey questionnaire was developed to measure college professors' perception of three areas including: 1) expanding higher education opportunities for students with disabilities, 2) types of classroom disability support services, and 3) barriers in providing services, and implemented with eighty-two college professors. Overall, results indicate that college professors are permissive in providing disability-related classroom support, although they showed differences in terms of the type and scope of service depending on the nature of the discipline. To improve college disability support service in South Korea, the present study suggests to increase educational opportunities such as booklets, guidelines, and training workshop, specifically designed for college professors who are not familiar with classroom disability support services.

Introduction

Students with disabilities are in need of program adjustment as well as various supportive services for a flourishing university life (Barvaro 1982). Although type of classroom disability support services may vary depending on several factors such as contents, methods, and service entities, they are a critical component in that they enable students to bring their best possible performance.

One of the key entities in providing classroom disability services at the university setting are the professors as their attitude and perception on disability support service can have a significant impact on students' learning outcome. Generally, college professors are encouraged to have: knowledge of disability services and its educational implications in addressing students' special needs; ability to develop and operate an individualized supervision plan; awareness of ethical responsibility in providing such specialized services; and an ability to adopt and/or adapt various teaching pedagogy and relevant learning outcome assessment strategies (Park 2002; Park 1995). However, due to the unique characteristics of higher education in South Korea, there have been various cultural factors that interfere the improvement of college professors' perception and attitude toward students with disabilities.

First of all, university professors may overemphasize student's independence in school performance and believe that students should be fully responsible for their education despite their disability. Also, both students with disabilities and university professors may not be well aware of disability support services available through the university system. As compared to K12 education system where the student-teacher relationship is automatically established via everyday interaction, the relationship building between college professors and students in higher education is voluntary (Kim, 1993), thus students may feel uncomfortable disclosing their disability unless the belief system is established, thus losing an opportunity to take advantages of reasonable accommodations and other disability related services (Tincani 2004). It is also possible that many university professors may not be well experienced or trained in working with students with disabilities, simply overlooking the importance of classroom accommodations necessary for students with disabilities (Fichten 1992).

In providing classroom disability support services, professors' perception and attitudes toward students with disabilities are critical as it may have a significant influence on the interaction between professors and students with disabilities, a critical success factor in college education (Kim 1992). This study first aimed to examine professors' perception of the disability support services provided for students with special needs in a classroom setting. The second purpose of this study was to examine the barriers that may hinder professors from providing classroom disability services. When professors perceive disability support services are easily providable and permissive from their end, the difficulties that disabled students experience in higher education are greatly mitigated. To improve professors' perception of classroom disability support services, it is necessary to look at barriers that interfere with the provision of classroom disability support services.

Methods

Research Participants

Upon the Institutional Research Board (IRB) approval, a sampling frame that provides a list of tenured professors in a University located in Seoul, South Korea was obtained, and a survey was conducted. In terms of a survey method, phone calls were made randomly to the listed professors and questions were asked to those who gave consent for the survey. In the end, a total of eighty-two professors participated.

Research Method

The questionnaire used in this study was composed largely of three areas: 1) Expanding Higher Education Opportunities for Students with Disabilities, 2) Types of Classroom Disability Support Services, and 3) Barriers. Specific contents of the questionnaire are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1. Contents of the Questionnaire

Area	Subcategories	Question Items	No. of Items
Expanding Higher Education Opportunities for Students with Disabilities	Necessity of Higher Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expanding college education opportunity for students with disabilities • A social trend that emphasizes the university's responsibility in expanding higher education opportunity for students with disabilities • Importance of higher education in the development of ability and aptitude of students with disabilities 	3
	Students with Disabilities' Qualification for Higher Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Abilities of students with disability to complete college education • Discriminatory admission policy and procedure that underestimate the qualification of students with disabilities • Professors' authority in restricting students with disabilities' course enrollment depending on disability characteristics 	3
Types of Classroom Disability Support Services	Permissive vs. Less Permissive	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Special Considerations (changing classrooms, prior provision of syllabus) • Human resources (support with note takers, assistants in laboratory and practice, sign-language interpreters, letter interpreters) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support for students with visual impairment • Support for students with hearing impairment <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adjustment of course assignment • Adjustment in grading 	21
Barriers	Barriers by university	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Insufficient information provided for professors regarding the nature and characteristics of students' disabilities • Insufficient disability awareness education/training available for college professors • Lack of facilities and equipment to help students with disabilities • Lack of disability support units/offices on the university level 	12

	Barriers by students	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Responsibilities and commitment of students with disabilities • Disclosure of disabilities • Severity of disabilities 	
	Barriers by Professors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of understanding of disability characteristics • Lack of knowledge of disability relevant teaching methods/pedagogy • Lack of interests shown by students with disabilities in the course • Fairness issues in regards to students without disabilities 	
Total			39

To examine the questionnaire’s reliability used in the study, Cronbach’s coefficient alphas were computed. Reliability of the overall scale was .75, indicating a good internal consistency. Reliability coefficient values for survey subscales were .58 for “Expanding Higher Education Opportunities for Students with Disabilities,” .86 for “Types of Classroom Disability Support Services,” and .75 for “Barriers.” To address the validity, content experts were recruited from the participating universities’ disability student office and professors in special education department reviewed the survey questionnaire. Their recommendations were taken into consideration to modify the survey.

Data Processing

In this study, to examine professors’ level of perception on the areas listed in Table 1, the total mean of items and the effect size of the mean of each item were computed. Concerning the level of perceptions on barriers, responses from the professors who had experience with students disabilities were addressed. Also, the independent sample t-test was executed to see the differences in professors’ perception by their demographic characteristics (e.g., sex, class experiences with disabled students, and persons with disabilities in families and relatives). Finally, one-way ANOVA was performed to examine the differences in professors’ perception by age and affiliated schools within the university.

Research Results

The mean scores of the overall questionnaire and the means for each item were compared to examine professors’ perception toward students with disabilities. If the mean score for one survey item is higher than the total mean, it indicates that professors have a positive and permissive perception of that item; however, if the mean for a survey item is lower than the total mean, it is interpreted as professors having relatively negative and less permissive perception on that item.

The reason the total mean score is seen as a cutoff is to determine the level of perception as it is deemed to be more statistically reasonable to compare the item mean to the total mean, the average level of perception among survey respondents, than comparing the item-mean to a fixed middle number of 3 (“Fair”) on the 5-point rating scale. Also, the effect size was used to determine items that show significantly higher or lower levels of perception compared to the total mean.

Professors’ Perception of Expanding Higher Education Opportunities for Students with Disabilities

The total mean score of the questionnaire was 3.85, which indicates that professors’ perception of supportive services for students with disabilities in classes is overall positive.

Table 2. Professors’ Level of Perception on Expanding Opportunities of Higher Education Provided for Persons with Disabilities

	Level of Perception			es
	N	M	SD	
Total	82	3.85	.40	
1. Disabled people’s opportunities of higher education should be positively expanded and provided for persons with disabilities.	81	4.70	.48	2.21
2. Disabled people’s opportunities for higher education should be expanded, as a university should correspond to the social flow to pursue diversity.	82	4.46	.77	1.52
3. Disabled people’s opportunities of higher education should be expanded to develop the skills and aptitude of students with disabilities.	82	4.62	.53	1.92
4. Students with (visual, hearing, and physical) disabilities should have an ability to complete university education.	78	4.26	.63	1.02
5. With consideration of educational curricula, it is possible to restrict the admission of disabled students depending on colleges and schools.	81	2.46	1.02	-3.37
6. I can deny disabled students of attending my class depending on the characteristics of the class and the characteristics of disabilities.	79	3.50	1.18	-0.87

Item 1, 2, 3, and 4 on Table 2 on the area of “Providing Opportunities of Higher Education for the Disabled” show that professors have positive and permissive perception. The item 5 and 6 relate to limiting university admission and lecture attendance of students with disabilities show low scores. In particular, the item related to restricting university admission of disabled students is marked with the lowest point ($\mu=2.46$) out of the six questions on Providing

Opportunities of Higher Education for the Disabled. Also, compared to the total mean score, item 5 and 6 have $es = -3.47$ and $es = -.087$ respectively, demonstrating the differences between the total average level of professors' perception. However, it is important to note that 5 and 6 are negative questions, and a lower score on these items indicate that professors are skeptical and negative in terms of restricting admission opportunities and denying their course registration because of disability.

Professors' Level of Perception on Types of Classroom Disability Support Services

The questions regarding supportive services for students with disabilities include: one-to-one meeting with student with a disability; changing lecture rooms, providing lecture materials in advance (e.g. handouts and PowerPoint presentations); permission to record lectures and to write transcripts; permission of classroom assistants; permission for requests of the information necessary for assignments and special services for visually-impaired and hearing-impaired students; permission of assignments in different forms; adjustment of the scope and volume of assignments; adjustment of assignment contents; extension of deadlines; extension of exam periods; providing separate exam space; and consideration of functional limitation in grading. Out of the questions on supportive services in classes, the items showing the level of perception with a difference of effect size of $-.8$ and more were: adjustment of the scope of assignments ($es = -0.85$); adjustment of assignment deadlines ($es = -1.15$); and consideration of handicaps in grading ($es = -2.75$).

Professor's Level of Perception on Barriers for Students with Disabilities in Classes

Barriers for students with disabilities in classes were largely divided into university factors, student factors, and professor factors. The survey on the perception of barriers was limited to professors who experienced students with disabilities in their classes, and the scores of barriers were used as inverse scores. In terms of university factors among the barriers for students with disabilities, professors perceive university facilities and equipment for students with disabilities as the most significant barrier ($\mu = 4.23$, $es = 1.88$), followed by support system for students with disabilities ($\mu = 4.05$, $es = 1.47$), availability of the information on the characteristics of and classes for students with disabilities ($\mu = 4.00$, $es = 1.36$), and availability of the information on disability attributes and learning traits of students with disabilities ($\mu = 3.94$, $es = 1.22$).

Also, the results of the survey show that professors did not see professor factors as serious barriers for students with disabilities, compared to university factors. The only professor factor that professors perceive as barriers for college students with disabilities is lack of knowledge on teaching methods. Finally, as student factors, professors point out the item that students do not express difficulties stemmed from their disabilities as the most significant barrier, but when the effect size is considered, it did not appear to be a significant barrier considerably impacting on disabled college students ($es < 0.8$).

Differences in Professors' Perception by Individual Variables

To examine the differences in professors' perception by sex, age, teaching experience, affiliated school, experiences with students with disabilities, and persons with disabilities in families or relatives, an independent sample t-test and one-way ANOVA were conducted.

First, to see the difference of perception by sex, the mean among male professors ($\mu=3.94$) and that of female professors ($\mu=4.13$) were compared to the total mean score. Although it was found that female professors showed more positive and permissive perceptions in providing opportunities and supportive services in classes for students with disabilities than male professors, but no statistical significances were found. Concerning the items of supportive services in classes, adjustment supports (extended deadlines and consideration in grading) show statistically significant difference in the mean scores comparison between male and female professors ($p<.05$), indicating female professors have more positive perception on adjustment supports to provide direct adjustment services with professor's discretion in classes. Yet, as the number of male respondents ($n=71$) is much higher than that of female counterparts ($n=12$) out of the total 83 respondents, it is difficult to conclude that this result can reflect the characteristics of all respondents.

The scores of professors' perception by age group are as follow: 40s ($\mu=4.02$), 30s ($\mu=3.99$), 60s ($\mu=3.92$), and 50s ($\mu=3.91$). This shows that professors in their 40s in raw mean score comparison show most positive and permissive perception on providing opportunities of higher education and supportive services in classes for students with disabilities. However, the differences in the scores were too small, and no statistical significances were identified. In pairwise comparison, it was confirmed that there is a difference in perception by age. In the area of expanding opportunities of higher education for students with disabilities, a significant difference was found between the means among professors in their 60s ($\mu=4.00$) and those in their 40s ($\mu=4.70$) ($p<.05$). This indicates that compared to professors in their 60s, those in their 40s show a more positive perception on the need to expand the opportunities of higher education for students with disabilities.

School to which professors are affiliated was also a variable that showed statistically significant differences in perception, mainly in the items on access to higher education and adjustment support. Compared to others, professors in the School of Engineering, School of Natural Science, and School of Fine Arts showed relatively lower scores in the overall level of perception.

More specifically, professors in School of Engineering gave lower scores than professors in School of Education to students' capacity to receive university educational opportunities ($p<.05$). Also, professors in School of Natural Science show low scores in the adjustment of the scope of assignments (compared to those in School of Social Science and School of Engineering) and in the extension of assignment deadlines (compared to School of Engineering and School of Education). Professors of Fine Arts expressed that they would refuse students with disabilities taking classes more than Professors of Natural Science, although they answered that they would consider functional limitation in grading more favorably than Professors of Humanities. These results imply that school characteristics can affect the supports and service types that professors can provide for students. Lastly, it was found that there is no significant difference in professors' perception by their experiences with students with disabilities and persons with disabilities in families and relatives.

Discussion and Recommendation

The main purpose of this study was to examine professors' perception of supportive services for college students with disabilities in their classes. Specifically, the first objective was to see professors' perception of providing opportunities of higher education for persons with disabilities. Second, the study examined the level of professors' perception on types of supportive services provided for students with disabilities in university classes. Also, this study addressed barriers that professors perceive as interfering with students with disabilities support services in university classes. Lastly, the study examined the differences in perception on disability support services for students with disabilities depending on professors' individual characteristics that can affect their perception on supportive services for disabled students. From the survey results grounded in these research objectives, it is possible to make the following arguments.

First, research findings show that professors have a high level of perception in the aspect of the necessity of providing opportunities of higher education to students with disabilities, while they have a low level of perception in relation to a practical approach. For example, professors gave the mean score of 4.70 to the item "Opportunities of higher education should be positively expanded and provided for persons with disabilities," but gave the mean score of 2.46 to the negative item "With consideration of educational curriculum, students with disabilities can be restricted for different schools." This indicates that professors, in general, are permissive for providing opportunities of higher education for students with disabilities, and practical enhancement regarding disability support service relevant to school characteristics would further improve perception toward students with disabilities.

Recently in South Korea, the cases of certain universities regulating eligibility of students with disabilities admission were socially issued (Kim 2000). This study shows that professors' perception on this trend was negative, indicating that it is necessary to devise multidimensional efforts to reduce system barriers associated with admission procedure.

Second, in this study, among supportive services provided by professors, the level of perceptions is lower for adjustment of the scope and deadlines of assignment than for other services such as the use of human resources and aids. This shows two types of professors' attitudes toward supportive services in classes: 1) Professors who have a more permissive attitude toward relatively simple services (e.g., allowing students with disabilities to use necessary aids or human resources), and 2) Professors who have less permissive attitudes toward relative direct services provided from their end, indicating that this professor type feel much more psychological burden from the latter case. Further, it also implies a need for a disability student office that is responsible for authorizing classroom support service. By doing so, professors psychological burden associated with providing service from their end may be reduced.

Third, most of the professors in the study point out the lack of knowledge or information relative to students with disabilities who may experience barriers. Specifically, they highlighted that university offers insufficient guidelines in providing classroom disability support services as well as the information on the characteristics of learning traits of students with disabilities, which can be linked to the development of teaching strategies for students with disabilities. This raises an issue that while the number of students with disabilities increase in universities, professors are not equipped with sufficient knowledge on what to do to support students with disabilities (Askamit et al., 1987; Campbell et al., 2003; Fonosch et al., 1981). Thus, it is necessary for a university to offer a wide variety of training opportunities for effective teaching and learning for both professors and students with disabilities.

Fourth, in terms of the difference in professors' perception by individual characteristics, it is important to pay attention to the difference associated with their affiliated schools. For example, compared to other schools, professors in a Fine Arts school determined their permission on students' course enrollment heavily by relying on disability characteristics. This may be explained on how professors of Fine Arts majors are more concerned about the types of disabilities that may have a relatively higher risk in accomplishing degree requirements. This finding implies that universities should individualize the level and methods of supports services accommodating specific needs associated with disability characteristics, and to explore the ways to alleviate the difficulties professors may experience in their classes with students with disabilities.

The implications of this study demonstrate that the barriers students with disabilities experience in university classes revealed the need to provide professors with educational opportunities such as informational booklets, guidelines, or training workshops to better understand disabilities. Moreover, this study allows the university to identify supportive services relevant to professors' school affiliation. Therefore, it is anticipated that the findings of this study can be useful data for the university in preparing educational programs for professors or publishing informative guidelines.

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