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Teacher Perceptions and Perspectives on the Selection and Implementation of Accommodations

NCEO
National Center on Educational Outcomes

Many students with disabilities use accessibility features and accommodations during instruction and when taking assessments. It is important to consider teacher perceptions and experiences when making accessibility decisions. Individualized Education Program (IEP) teams make these decisions for students with disabilities. Teachers are part of these teams. They have valuable perspectives that are based on their knowledge of student characteristics and needs, as well as on their past experiences. They also provide the team with valuable feedback on how accessibility features and accommodations are working.

Both special and general educators have vital roles in the accommodations decision-making process. General education teachers have a deep understanding of the content area, and of the needs and accessibility challenges of students in their classrooms. Special education teachers have a deep understanding of students with disabilities, and of how to make instruction and assessments more accessible.

Teachers' Perceptions

The National Center on Educational Outcomes (NCEO) synthesized and summarized research conducted between 1999 and 2022 on the perceptions of teachers regarding accommodations (NCEO, 2020, 2021, 2022, 2023). See Table 1 for the research-based findings on teacher perceptions for selected accommodations.

Overall, the studies found that teachers had positive perceptions of accommodations, however, many teachers recognized that it can be challenging to make and implement appropriate accommodation decisions for individual students with disabilities. They found it particularly difficult to make accommodations decisions for assistive technology, oral delivery (e.g., human read aloud, text to speech), student reads aloud to self, scribe, translation of test directions, and tactile graphics. For example, some teachers reported that they did not make assistive technology available to their students because of their own discomfort, lack of experience, or knowledge of how to teach a student how to use it. Teachers also indicated that they would benefit from additional training on selecting and implementing accommodations for students with high incidence disabilities (e.g., specific learning disability, other health impairment, emotional disturbance).

Suggested Strategies

The research on teachers' perceptions of accommodations suggests several strategies that could improve practice:

Involve all teachers in accessibility and accommodations decision making. All teachers, including both special and general education teachers,[1] can provide valuable perspectives about student needs and should, whenever possible, be involved in the accommodations

[1]Related service providers also have valuable perspectives on accommodations. For details, see Lazarus, Goldstone, Thurlow, and Ghere (2021).

Accessibility Features and Accommodations Terminology

Both the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) refer to accommodations. However, a broader approach to accessibility is now often taken that is based on a three-level framework:

> **Universal features** are available to all students as they access instructional or assessment content.
>
> **Designated features** are available for those students for whom the need has been identified by an informed educator or team of educators.
>
> **Accommodations** are generally available for students for whom there is documentation on an IEP, Section 504, or English Learner (EL) Plan (Lazarus, Goldstone, Wheeler et al., 2021, p. 6).

The term **accessibility features** is sometimes used to describe both universal features and designated features. Even though the three-level framework is widely used, the research literature summarized in this Brief typically did not differentiate among the levels of accessibility and accommodations. Thus, we do not make that distinction when discussing the research findings.

Table 1. Findings of Research Studies that Examined Teacher Perceptions of Selected Accommodations[1]

Accommodations	Number of Studies[2]	Findings
Assistive Technology (AT)	7	Both special education and general education teachers struggled to make assistive technology available to students because of their own discomfort, lack of experience, and inability to communicate effectively with students about how to use of the technology.
Braille	1	The philosophy of reading teachers of the visually impaired may affect whether students received a braille accommodation on assessments. Students whose teachers put a high value of sounding out words were more likely to select accommodations other than braille (e.g., screen readers, large print).
Calculator	1	Special education teachers were more likely to provide the calculator accommodation than general education teachers.
Clarify/Simplify/ Repeat Directions	3	Teachers generally perceived the clarify/simplify/repeat directions accommodation to be helpful.
Color Contrast	1	Many teachers considered themselves knowledgeable about the use of color overlays; however, some believed that they needed additional training on when and how to use them with students who have high-incidence disabilities.
Extended Time	1	Teachers generally perceived the extended time accommodation to be useful.
Familiar Proctor/Test Administrator	1	Special education teachers often perceived that the familiar proctor accommodation addressed a social/behavioral need for students with a specific learning disability.
Human Read Aloud	4	There were mixed findings across studies in whether human read aloud or technology-based text to speech was preferred by teachers. Most teachers preferred text to speech, but some general education teachers perceived human read aloud to be useful. Special education teachers generally found professional development on making decisions about the use of the human read aloud accommodation useful.
Manipulatives	2	Teachers generally perceived manipulatives to be useful during assessments; however, they noted that students had difficulty using manipulatives during testing unless they had previously been used during instruction.
Math Charts/Tables	1	Both general education and special education teachers perceived multiplication math charts to be useful, and perceived that they encouraged independence, while noting that some students struggled to understand how to use them even after instruction.
Multiple Days	1	Teachers generally perceived the multiple day accommodation to be useful.
Preferential Seating	2	Both special and general education teachers generally perceived the preferential seating accommodation to be useful.

Table 1. Findings of Research Studies that Examined Teacher Perceptions of Selected Accommodations[1] (continued)

Accommodations	Number of Studies[2]	Findings
Recorded Oral Delivery	1	Many teachers believed prerecorded oral delivery of an assessment was more efficient and more feasible than human read aloud live oral delivery.
Scribe	4	Many teachers believed that they needed additional training on making decisions about how to select and implement the scribe accommodation.
Signed Administration	4	Teachers reported that professional development was needed on how to translate test directions and items to ensure there were no changes to the test content. They also were concerned that signed administration often required more time for the administration of the test than district and building schedules allowed.
Small Group/ Individual Administration	1	Most teachers believed that they understood when it was appropriate to use the small group and individual administration accommodations.
Student Reads Aloud to Self	1	Many teachers were unable to accurately predict which students would benefit from using student reads aloud to self, and may benefit from professional development on this accommodation.
Tactile Graphics	2	Teachers of students with visual impairments generally reported being confident teaching students to use tactile graphic devices, Most preferred low-tech tactile graphics options over newer and higher-tech devices.
Test Breaks	4	Teachers generally perceived test breaks to be a useful accommodation for students with emotional, attention, or concentration issues as well as for students with challenges related to fatigue and frustration.
Text to Speech (Computer Generated Voice)	1	Teachers generally perceived the text-to-speech accommodation to be useful, particularly when it was provided using a synthesized voice.
Word Prediction	1	Teachers generally believed that students enjoyed using word prediction programs and found them beneficial for the writing process.

For additional information and details about the studies and findings, see the Accommodations Toolkit (NCEO, 2020, 2021, 2022, 2023).

[2]A total of 44 studies are included in this table. Several studies reported findings for more than one accommodation.

decision-making process. This does not mean everyone needs to be at an IEP meeting; rather some teachers' input can be elicited through other means to share at the meeting. Some strategies for soliciting input include a quick oral or written conversation or short survey with teachers who will not be at the meeting.

The research on teacher perspectives shows that teachers provide valuable insights about accessibility features and accommodations, but it also shows that teachers sometimes have biases. For example, a teacher may not consider the use of the multiple day accommodation because they are unfamiliar with it. They may have always instead used extended time, even though the multiple day accommodation might be very helpful for a student who becomes easily fatigued. The use of state guidelines or other relevant frameworks can help ensure that appropriate decisions are made.

Provide professional development on assistive technology and other technology-based accommodations. The research on teacher perspectives indicated that many teachers are uncertain about how to make decisions about assistive technology and other technology-based accommodations. It is important for teachers to receive the training they need on the selection and use of assistive technology and other specialized accommodations. Teachers need to know how to select these accommodations as well as how to teach students to use them properly.

Gather information on how accessibility features and accommodations worked. It is important to evaluate accessibility and accommodations decisions both at the individual student level, and at the school or district levels. This will help ensure continually improved decisions in the future. Teachers' knowledge and perspectives change over time as they learn more about accessibility features and accommodations, and as they grow more knowledgeable and skilled at decision making and implementation processes.

Discussion

There is a need to gather not only teacher perspectives, but also to gather student perspectives. Students are often the best source of information about their strengths, needs, and preferences (Lazarus et al., 2023).

Both special and general educators provide input and contribute to the IEP team accessibility and accommodations decision-making process. Teachers are knowledgeable about student accessibility needs and the helpfulness of various accessibility features and accommodations. Teachers who share their insights and perspectives about the importance, feasibility, and use of various accessibility features and accommodations will support sound IEP decisions that benefit students during instruction and on test day.

Resources

Publications

Lazarus, S. S., Fleming, K., Ressa, V. A., & Ghere, G. (2023). *Suggestions for involving students in selecting and implementing accommodations* (NCEO Brief #30). National Center on Educational Outcomes. https://nceo.umn.edu/docs/OnlinePubs/NCEOBrief30.pdf

Lazarus, S., Goldstone, L., Wheeler, T., Paul, J., Prestridge, S., Sharp, T. Hochstetter, A., & Warren, S. (2021). *CCSSO accessibility manual: How to select, administer, and evaluate use of accessibility supports for instruction and assessment of all students. Council of Chief State School Officers* (CCSSO). (See Tool 5: Accessibility Selection Questions for Teams and Tool 7: After Test Accessibility Questions for Student-Teacher Discussion.) https://nceo.umn.edu/docs/OnlinePubs/CCSSOAccessibilityManual_2021.docx

Lazarus, S. S., Goldstone, L., Thurlow, M. L., & Ghere, G. (2021). *Related services providers: Important contributors to the accommodations decision-making process* (NCEO Brief #27). National Center on Educational Outcomes. https://nceo.umn.edu/docs/OnlinePubs/NCEOBrief27.pdf

NCEO. (2020, 2021, 2022, 2023). *Accommodations toolkit*.

NCEO Videos Showing Discussions About Accommodations

Discussing Common Misperceptions about Accommodations

Individualized Education Program (IEP) Team Meeting

Preparing for Assessment Accommodations

Teachers Working Together to Identify Student Needs

Evaluating Assessment Accommodations

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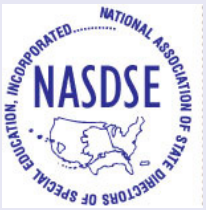

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