

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN COMMUNICATION DISABILITY AND STUDENT ENGAGEMENT



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This study analyzes the engagement strategies of students with Communication Disability using National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) indicators. It is hypothesized that communication-disabled students may have significantly lower engagement scores than the general population.

INTRODUCTION

Student engagement is critical for student learning, development, and persistence on college campuses (Kuh, 2001).



Erroneous beliefs about students with disabilities create negative attitudes and engagement barriers on college campuses (Bruder & Mogro-Wilson, 2010).

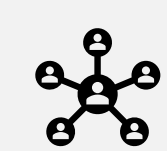
Non-disabled students and faculty may feel uncomfortable interacting with disabled students (Evans et al., 2017).



Students with communication disabilities (CD) may have reduced persistence due to the absence of accommodations to aid their interactions with peers and faculty (Mamiseishvili & Koch, 2011).

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Interactionalist Model (Tinto, 1993) explains the factors affecting student persistence and departure in higher education.



Effective engagement is crucial for college students as it improves academic performance and fosters development (Tinto, 1993). However, CD can impact their ability to engage effectively.

Dancer and Kamvounias (2005) suggest that CD may affect college persistence and success.

METHOD

Data are from the 2021 administration of the NSSE. Engagement indicators were scored on a 60-point scale (four steps between), then converted to a 60-point scale and averaged.

This study analyzed responses from students with communication disabilities ($n = 367$) and the general population ($n = 125,955$).

Effect size is reported with significance to demonstrate the importance of observed differences. In higher education, an effect size of .15 may be small, .3 medium, and .5 large (Mayhew et al., 2016)



MEASURES

For ***Quality of Interactions***, items include:

Indicate the quality of your interactions with the following people at your institution:

- Students
- Academic advisors
- Faculty
- Student service staff (career services, student activities, housing, etc.)
- Other administrative staff and officers (registrar, financial aid, etc.)

For ***Student-Faculty Interactions***, items include:

During the current school year, how often have you:

- Talked about career plans with a faculty member
- Worked with a faculty member on activities other than coursework (committees, student groups, etc.)
- Discussed course topics, ideas, or concepts with a faculty member outside of class
- Discussed your academic performance with a faculty member

MEASURES

For ***Collaborative Learning***, items include:

During the current school year, how often have you:

- Asked another student to help you understand course material
- Explained course material to one or more students
- Prepared for exams by discussing or working through course materials with other students
- Worked with other students on course projects or assignments

For ***Discussions with Diverse Others***, items include:

During the current school year, how often have you had discussions with people from the following groups:

- People of races or ethnicities other than your own
- People from economic backgrounds other than your own
- People with religious beliefs other than your own
- People with political views other than your own

RESULTS

Table 6

T-test Showing Difference Between Students with CD and those without in All Variables

| Variable | <i>t</i> | <i>p</i> | 95% CI | | Cohen's <i>d</i> |
|--|----------|----------|--------|--------|------------------|
| | | | LL | UL | |
| Collaborative learning | -2.58 | 0.01 | -3.731 | -0.515 | 0.132 |
| Discussions with Diverse Others | -1.79 | 0.07 | -3.552 | 0.164 | 0.098 |
| Student-Faculty Interaction | 2.85 | 0.01 | 0.793 | 4.324 | 0.158 |
| Quality of Interactions | -3.83 | 0.00 | -5.060 | -1.627 | 0.234 |

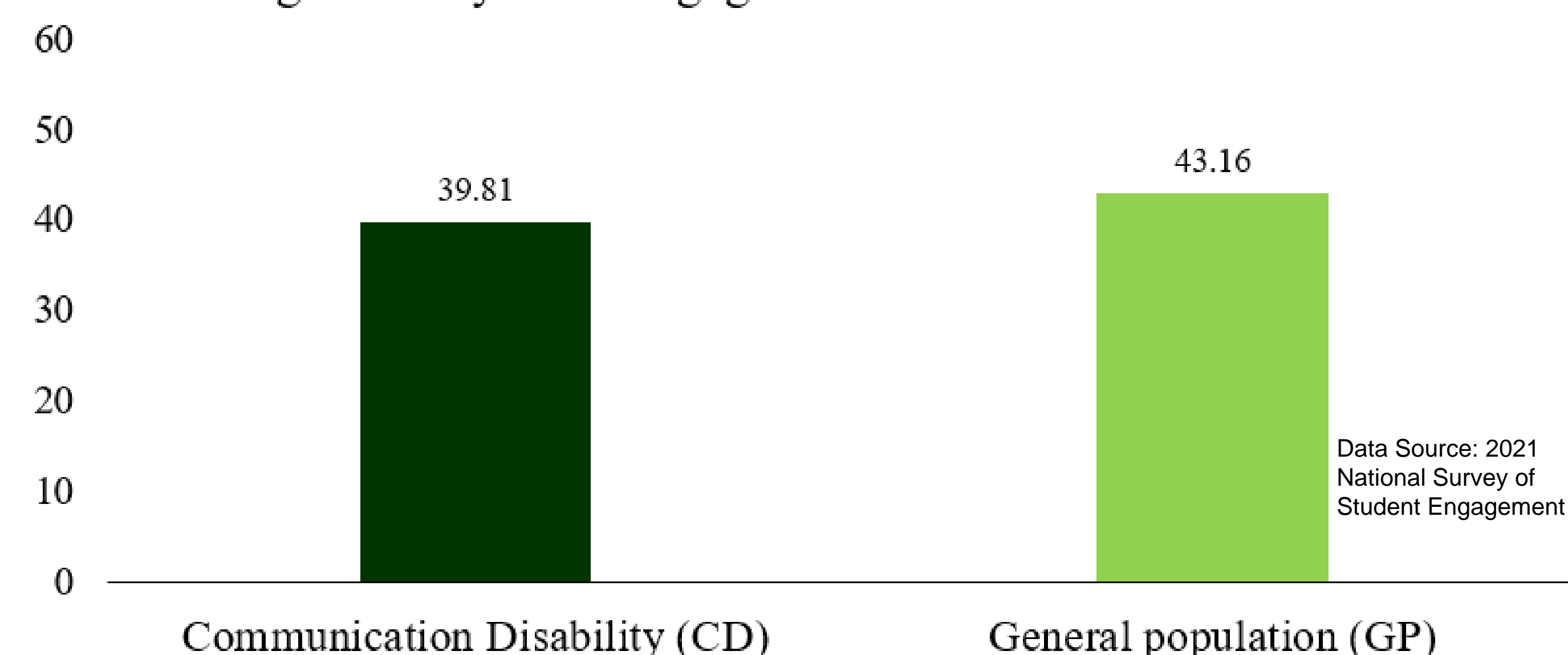
Two sample t-tests were conducted to compare student engagement scores with communication disability (CD) and the general population (GP) across ***Collaborative Learning***, ***Discussion with Diverse Others***, ***Student-Faculty Interaction***, and ***Quality of Interactions***.

There were statistically significant differences with small effect sizes in student-faculty interaction [$t(364) = 2.85, p = .01$, Cohen's $d = 0.158$], collaborative learning [$t(126320) = -2.58, p = .01$, Cohen's $d = 0.132$], and quality of interaction [$t(334) = -3.83, p = 0.00$, Cohen's $d = 0.234$] scores respectively, between students with CD and the GP.

No statistical significance was found between these groups in relation to their discussion with diverse others.

Quality of Interaction

The GP is significantly more engaged than students with CP



DISCUSSION

College students with CD engage less in collaborative learning and discussions with diverse others and report fewer quality interactions with other students, faculty, and staff than the general population, similar to the findings of Evans et al. (2017).



Students with CD report increased interactions with faculty but of lower quality, perhaps to request accommodations or talk over lessons, compared to other students without CD.

Interactionalist Model (1993) implies that insufficient accommodation and support may hinder student engagement, impacting academic performance and persistence. **This study highlights the inadequate academic and social support available to students with CD on college campuses.**



Implications for practice

▪To Improve the Quality of Interactions, practitioners should enact policies to improve interactions between students with CD on campuses, such as regular training and awareness seminars on CD to increase effective communication strategies.

▪Ample campus accommodations should be available to students with CD to encourage collaborative learning by providing assistive technology to support different communication needs.

Implications for future research

▪Future NSSE surveys should probe persistence among disabled students, confirming the link between engagement and retention.

▪This study aggregated all speech-language impairments as communication disabilities. Future research should disaggregate communication disabilities into the various types.

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