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Latinx First-Generation Students' Academic Experience: The Role of Institutional Supports during a Pandemic

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Introduction

Latinx first-generation students fall behind non-Latinx students in educational achievement. This study seeks to examine the Latinx first-generation academic experience amidst a pandemic, with an emphasis on looking at their perceived stress related to academics, their academic self-efficacy, and their knowledge/feelings toward the institutional supports. The roles of institutional and familial supports will be examined as well as factors contributing to the educational achievement. The psychological effects that the educational gap has on Latinx first-generation students will also be examined.

Objectives

- Discuss the higher education experience for Latinx first-generation college students
- Examine the role of institutional supports and familial supports in the Latinx first-generation college experience
- Examine the factors contributing to the educational achievement gap
- Discuss the effects of the achievement gap on psychology
- Examine how outside forces impact the educational landscape and the role of the COVID-19 pandemic in the academic experience

Higher Education: Role of Institutional Supports

- *Structural Diversity*: Latinx faculty and administrators increase opportunities for Latinx students to emulate positive role models.
- *Mentor/Mentoring Programs*: Mentors support the goals and aspirations of students and facilitate the necessary steps for academic success (Giraldo-García et al., 2019)
- *University Fit*: Universities fostering a sense of inclusion and intentionally promoting positive group relations between students, faculty, and staff with different backgrounds help with the academic success of their students (Franco & Hernandez, 2018).

Higher Education: Role of Familial Supports

- *Expectations for educational achievement*: Parents who set high expectations for educational achievement, increase Latinx students' educational aspirations and expectations (Armbruster & Hatch, 2019)
- *Parental engagement*: When perceived parental monitoring, schoolwork help, and advice is present, students' academic attainment increases (Armbruster & Hatch, 2019).
- *Educational Resources*: Families with a higher socioeconomic status can more easily afford costs of books and course materials, while families with lower socioeconomic status can create a disparity in educational achievement.

Educational Achievement Gap

Disparity in academic performance between students of different racial groups (Ansell, 2020).

- *Language*
- *Cultural barriers*
- *Socioeconomic status*
- *Lack of funding for Hispanic Serving Institutions (HSI)*
- *Lack of diverse faculty in higher institutions*
- *Lack of access to educational resources*
- *Lack of educational knowledge from family and community*

Psychological Effects Impacting Education

- *Social Emotions*: Latinx first-generation students face background-specific challenges that impact their mental health, emotions, and schooling
- *Stress and coping*: first-generation students experience higher levels of stress due to inadequate campus supports and important resources for alleviating stress and anxiety during college (Garriott and Nisle, 2018). Latinx students also experience stress due to ethnic discrimination and cultural conflict on college campuses (Piña et al., 2019).
- *Self-efficacy*: despite their desire to reach higher levels of education, most Latinx high school students do not believe attaining a higher education is achievable (Armbruster & Hatch, 2019).

Outside Forces Impacting Educational Landscape: Role of Pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic has led to a shift in virtual learning that increases the background-specific barriers Latinx students may face. Struggling to adapt to virtual learning may decrease accessibility for institutional supports and may impact academic success.

Current Study

The purpose of this study is to examine the Latinx first-generation academic experience amidst a pandemic, specifically examining perceived stress, academic self-efficacy, knowledge/feelings toward the institutional supports.

Hypotheses

Latinx first-generation students' perceived stress related to academics should significantly increase (at the $p < .05$ level) during the COVID-19 pandemic with a positive correlation of perceived missing institutional supports.

Latinx first-generation students' academic self-efficacy should decrease (at the $p < .05$ level) during the COVID-19 pandemic with a positive correlation of perceived stress.

Results

Primary Analysis

Correlational analyses will be conducted on perceived stress related to academics and perceived missing institutional supports for Latinx first-generation students.

Correlational analysis will be conducted between perceived stress of the COVID-19 pandemic and academic self-efficacy for Latinx first-generation students. It is hypothesized that there will be a significant relationship between stress and support at the $p < .05$ level.

Secondary analyses

A phenomenological approach to analyzing the responses to these open-ended questions will be completed, with the goal of accurately describing the participants' experiences.



Conclusions

Despite the Latinx population continuing to increase, inequities in higher education persist. Understanding the academic experience for Latinx first-generation college students is the first step in finding ways to narrow the educational achievement gap and provide equitable education to all Latinx citizens. Psychological challenges have a high impact on academic failure, so addressing these first can dramatically advance educational attainment for the Latinx population.

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