ISSN: 2572-9810 (Print)
ISSN: 2572-9829 (Online)

Journal of Education and Social Development

Volume 1, Number 1, Sept 2017

Published by Institution of Business Intelligence Innovation

Journal of Education and Social Development

Vol. 1, No. 1; September, 2017

DOI https:// 10.5281/1038493

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Sept. 2017, pages 1-6
doi: 10.5281/zenodo.808617
http://www.ibii-us.org/Journals/JESD/
ISBN 2572-9829 (Online), 2572-9810 (Print)

Barriers to Historically Black Colleges and Universities Alumni Giving in the Baby Boomer and Silent Generations: An Interpretive Phenomenology Analysis

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Received on May 04, 2017; revised on June 13, 2017; published on June 14, 2017

Abstract

Most HBCU alumni are not donating at rates substantial enough to aid in the sustainability of their alma maters. In this interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) study, the researchers addressed the lack of and barriers to giving for Baby Boomer and Silent Generations graduates. The researchers chose this population because they are the wealthiest generations and their contributions could make a significant impact for their alma maters (Stillwell, 2014). The researchers also explored their perceptions on online giving due to the growing popularity of integrating online giving in fundraising strategies. The researchers also identified ways HBCUs could increase donations in the Baby Boomer and Silent Generations.

The researchers confirmed most older alumni are reluctant to donate online because of their limited knowledge of the process and mistrust of the security process. The researchers also found the more connected participants were with their alma mater, the more likely they were to donate. To circumvent barriers to alumni giving at HBCUs, the researchers recommend relationship building activities, peer-to-peer fundraising, cultivating a spirit of philanthropy in undergraduate students, educating alumni on the importance of giving, and addressing the security concerns regarding online giving.

***K**eywords*: Baby Boomers, Silent Generations, Historically Black Colleges and Universities, and Alumni Giving

1 Introduction

Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) originated with the purpose of providing education to African Americans who were unable to enroll in Predominately White Institutions because of their race (Glenn, 1997). Today, the role of these institutions has expanded to include the education of all races. Like most institutions of higher learning, HBCUs depend on federal and private support to operate and provide financial aid to students. This dependence poses a problem for HBCUs because states have cut funding for higher education. The institutions do not have adequate revenue to supplement the funding gap because university endowments are small and alumni donations are low (Clay, 2013).

To operate and sustain despite the decline in federal funding, HBCUs must find strategic ways to increase alumni donations. For most of these colleges and universities, raising tuition is not a viable option. HBCUs are positioned as low-cost institutions that provide access to students with low incomes, and tuition hikes could lead to declines in enrollment. Students typically within HBCUs' enrollment pool due to low-income status would not be able to pay, and other students would have to borrow more money to attend if the cost of tuition is increased (Clay, 2013; Palmer, Hilton & Fountaine, 2012). To fill the gap left by decreasing federal and corporate funding, HBCUs are looking to their alumni for financial support.

Statement of the Problem

HBCUs are faced with challenges that threaten their existence, and 2 out of 107 of those HBCUs have closed within the last five years (White House Initiative on HBCUs, 2015). A common theme among these universities and other HBCUs is the inadequate alumni giving. The problem this study seeks to address is the lack of alumni giving at HBCUs. Barriers giving for donating in the Silent and Baby Boomer generations may include frustration with the online giving systems or disillusionment with their college experience. In 2014, the percentage of online donations grew by 13%, and this mechanism for giving is predicted to remain a source for securing gifts for many years to come (McCully, 2015). Despite new and innovative ways to donate to higher educational institutions online, alumni donors who are Baby Boomers (born 1946-1964) or in the Silent Generation (born 1927-1945) may be less likely to participate in online giving (Stevenson, 2007). This resistance to making donations online is arguably due to these generations of alumni not being as technologically savvy as younger generation alumni, Generation X (1965-1981) and the Millennials (1982-2002) (Stevenson, 2007).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore the barriers to alumni donations by the Silent and Baby Boomer generations with specificity in online giving. These two generations are the wealthiest in America (Stillwell, 2014); if they donated more, it could positively impact the sustainability and mission of HBCUs. If alumni do not participate in giving back, HBCUs may not be able to compete for the best students, faculty, and staff. HBCUs with limited funds may also face enrollment declines, program cuts, mergers, and closures.

Research Questions

What are the barriers to alumni donations?

a. What is the perception of alumni in the baby boomer and silent generation on online giving?

b. What impact does the degree of connectivity to the alma mater have on giving?

2 Literature Review

Historically Black Colleges and Universities are faced with financial hurdles that threaten their existence and longevity. These obstacles include economic downturns, cuts in federal funding, increased competition for private donations and inadequate alumni giving. These challenges affect both public and private HBCUs, who trail behind PWIs in resources (Rivard, 2014). Though these institutions have little control over external factors, there is an opportunity for increasing financial support from their alumni.

Social Identity Theory

Multiple researchers have explored the link between social identity theory and behaviors in higher education. Alumni who feel an emotional connection with the college or university view themselves as being part of the in-group, based on social identity theory, and are more likely to donate back(Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Lertputtarak & Supitchayangkool, 2014) . According to Kritsonis (2007), donors who do not feel connected their institution and its leadership are least likely to donate a major gift, and they perceive themselves to be part of the out-group. C. W. Jones (2014) found that the lack of transparency in leadership, the institution not getting to know them on a personal level, not being acknowledged or recognized for accomplishments or contributions, and not being part of key alumni meetings are contributing factors. To increase alumni giving, HBCUs must develop a positive sense of identity amongst their alumni. Gasman (2001) recommended that HBCUs work to establish "a sense of ownership in the university," since African Americans are more likely to give back to an organization to which they feel connected (p.288).

Relationship Marketing Theory

The second theoretical framework used in this study is relationship marketing theory. The premise of relationship marketing is that a customer's behavior can be predicted by how strongly they are connected with an organization (Bowden, 2011). For the purpose of this research, the customers are undergraduate students and alumni.

According to Mann (2007), a customer's relationship with an organization can range from "transactional to highly relational" (p. 37). Alumni with transactional relationships with their alma maters are not emotionally invested in the institution and least likely to donate back because they perceive their education as just a service in exchange for their tuition (Mann, 2007).

Building highly relational connections with alumni starts with giving great customer service when they are students. According to Bowden (2011), engaging students through customer service builds trust, satisfaction, and commitment, and they become loyal alumni. Colleges and universities benefit from loyal alumni because they tend to be financially supportive for as long as the relationship remains positive (Oluseye, Tairat, & Emmanuel, 2014).

Sustainability and Survival of HBCUs

HBCUs are fighting to survive, and several factors threaten their sustainability including enrollment drops, declines in federal funding, and leadership conflicts (Rivard, 2014). Lee and Keys (2013) noted that heightened competition, low retention and graduation rates, financial aid system changes, increased regulatory requirements and penalties, and lack of action from administrators are also threats to the sustainability of HBCUs. These institutions are taking measures to budget their finances and secure longevity. In April 2015, Howard University, one of the top HBCUs in the nation, cut 22 staff members to ease financial hardships (Nick, 2015).

Drops in enrollment are a threat to the sustainability of HBCUs. Due to their small endowments, these institutions rely heavily on tuition revenue (Johnson, Brunch, & Gill, 2015). Fewer registered students mean less federal funding for HBCUs, and enrollment decreased for African American students more than any other race nationwide in 2011 (Johnson et al., 2015). This occurrence could have been contributed to the federal government tightening the eligibility for the Federal Parent Loans for Undergraduate Students (PLUS) and placing new stipulations on HBCUs with high default rates on student loan repayment (Rivard, 2014). PLUS provides loans to parents of undergraduate students to help supplement costs that are not covered by financial aid (Johnson, et al., 2015).

Older Alumni Groups - Silent and Baby Boomer Generations

In a 2007 study, Weerts and Ronco found that age is correlated with alumni giving. According to their research, the older the alumnus is, the more likely they will donate back to their alma mater. A 2015 study by Merrill Lynch and New Wave predicts an $8 trillion increase in charitable giving in the next two decades because Baby Boomers are retiring and retirees are able to give more.

HBCU alumni from the Silent Generation, also known as Silents, were born between 1925 and 1945, and according to Fogg (2008), were influenced by the Great Depression, World War II, and the Korean War. Fogg (2008) explained that this generation is known for valuing loyalty, recognition of hierarchy, and for being resistant to change. They are also the most generous generation according to Rovner (2013), and 88% make charitable donations. Since Silents are the wealthiest and most generous generation, their donations could significantly impact their alma maters.

Born between 1946 and 1964, HBCU alumni, aged 51 to 70, are classified as Baby Boomers (Fogg, 2008). During 18-year span, there was a boost in the U.S. birthrate called the "Baby Boom", and according to Macunovich (2000), this phenomenon was arguably due to Americans desiring to get back to normalcy after World War Two. Most Baby Boomers who attended HBCUs received their undergraduate degree over 30 years ago and, like the Silent Generation, owe much of their opportunities and success to HBCUs, which were their only segue to higher education during a period of segregation (Clay, 2013). Because people are living longer and the birth rate is declining in America, Baby Boomers are the fastest growing demographic (Jacobson, 2015). According to Rovner (2013), 43% of charitable donations come from Baby Boomers and 72% of the generation are donors. Due to the large population of the Baby Boomer generation, their donations could greatly impact the alumni participation rates at HBCUs.

Differences in Donating between PWIs and HBCUs

Though studies showed African Americans donated a larger percentage of their income, there is a disparity between alumni giving from HBCUs and PWIs. According to Johnson (2013), PWI alumni are able to provide more financial support to their institutions due to the wealth gap between alumni from PWIs and alumni from HBCUs. A 2010 study found that Caucasians had six times more accumulated wealth than African Americans (Carnevale & Strohl, 2013).

3 Methods

This study was best done as a qualitative study because not only did it allow the researchers to gather the thoughts and opinions of the participants about alumni giving, but it also allowed the researchers to tap into the participant's perceptions. In this study, the researchers used IPA to gather data through interviews. The researchers did not use other methodologies in this study because, according to Larkin, Watts and Clifton (2006), other approaches could not "produce a coherent, third-person, and psychologically informed description, which tries to get as 'close' to the participant's view as is possible" (p.104).

Sample

During this study, the researchers interviewed four alumni in the Silent and Baby Boomer generations (aged 51 to 92) who graduated in good standing from a four-year HBCU. The researchers ensured an even distribution of male, female, Baby Boomer and Silent Generation participants were included in this research through snowball sampling. According to David (2008) the snowballing technique is useful when study

participants are hard to find due to sample qualifications. As part of snowball sampling, the researchers emailed a flyer to HBCU alumni and asked them to refer individuals meeting the sample criteria. Next, the researchers sent a recruitment letter and consent form to prospective participants requesting permission to conduct the study. Upon the receipt of consent form with signatures, the researchers proceeded with 30 minute to one-hour semi-structured interviews of four HBCU alumni in the Baby Boomer and Silent Generations.

The subjects responded to structured interview questions, and the researchers recorded the audio of the interview. Participation was voluntary which is communicated clearly to participants in the consent form. Through the consent form, participants learned they could withdraw at any time and refuse to be recorded.

Due to the short timeframe for the study, the researchers selected individuals who were in close driving proximity. Before each session, the researchers described the nature of the interview and presented each participant with a consent form to sign. For anonymity, each participant was assigned a pseudonym.

Data Collection

Research data from this study were gathered from face-to-face semi-structured interviews because of the emphasis on the shared experiences of how older alumni in the Baby Boomer and Silent Generations connect and give back to their alma maters. The recorded interviews took place at neutral locations such as a library, office, conference room or bookstore. According to Merriam (2015), it is important for the researchers to remain open-minded and unbiased so they can understand the experiences of the participants. During the interviews, the participants were asked a series of identical questions related to barriers to alumni donations, how they felt about online giving, and whether or not they felt connected with the institution post-graduation. Once the interview process was over, the researchers transcribed the responses of the participants verbatim. For triangulation, the researchers used recordings, field notes and member checking to verify what was said during the interviews.

Data Analysis

In this study, interview transcripts were analyzed by the researchers using IPA and grounded coding approaches. When reviewing the interview transcripts, the researchers identified themes as they emerge in the study using the grounded theory approach. According to Taylor and Gibbs (2010), researchers can use grounded codes instead identifying codes before the interview from pre-existing theories. The researchers were better enabled to put aside biases and focus on finding themes without prejudice and preconceived notions by using this method (Taylor & Gibbs, 2010).

4 Results

Description of Participants

The researchers chose four alumni from two HBCUs in the Southwest region of the United States. Two were part of the Silent Generation and the other two were Baby Boomers. Three of the participants received their undergraduate degree from Silver State University (pseudonym), and the other received his undergraduate degree from Bronze State University (pseudonym). The participants graduated from their alma maters between 1965 and 1979, and their ages ranged from 58 to 75 (See Table 1).

Table 1
Participant Demographics

Name	Age	Gender	Generation	University	Grad. Year
Inez	75	Female	Silent	Silver State	1977
Alfred	75	Male	Silent	Silver State	1965
Michelle	60	Female	Baby Boomer	Silver State	1977
Jim	58	Male	Baby Boomer	Bronze State	1979

Research Questions

RQ1: What are the barriers to alumni donations?

Study participants were asked what they perceive as barriers to donating to their alma maters. Only one participant, Michelle, was a non-donor, meaning she had never made a financial donation to her university. Though she was on campus weekly and knew where and how to donate, she never made time to do it. One reason Michelle did not feel compelled to donate is the disconnection with her classmates. She explained:

> Our class of 77, we haven't done anything to go back as a class. And I think that prevents you from really giving as much is as you would if your class, if others were as eagerly active as you are. I think that kind of hampers that.

Another barrier to alumni donating is the lack of direct communication and personal solicitations. When asked how well Silver State engaged and kept Michelle informed about current events, she derisively answered, “Well, luckily I live here in the city.” Then Michelle went on to describe the elaborate Silver State billboards around the area and the news coverage about the university she views on television. This prompted the researchers to ask if Michelle ever receives any personal communications from Silver State. Michelle thoughtfully reflected:

> Personal communications… Now, I'm not a member of the alumni association, however, I still deal with the Silver Sports Association at Silver State. Those ladies are always giving you something about what’s going on at Silver State. I still get the calendar for the year for the school when I’m on campus, at a game, or at an event. That’s pretty much how I’m kept informed about what's going on over there.

When asked if Michelle ever received any personal solicitations from Silver State, Michelle disappointedly replied:

> No I haven’t. Surprising, I haven't here lately. I have in the past. But even when I was on the website the other day, they have my correct information and everything. And I have not heard a lot from the alumni association or development from Silver State. No, I haven’t.

Not receiving personals communications or solicitations is a barrier to Michelle donating to Silver State. From Michelle’s interview, the researchers also gathered alumni not knowing how their money would be used as a barrier to them donating to their alma mater. Michelle expressed with concern:

> You need to see your money. And a lot of organizations don't put a lot of effort into making sure you can see where your funds are going...you hear these negatives when you give to nonprofits or give to organizations, half of it doesn’t get to where it needs to be. So it's always that fear in the back of your mind, “are they doing the right thing with my money?

Michelle did not donate directly to Silver State University, but she mentioned she donated to the children’s hospital at her place of employment and to a coin drive hosted by the Southwestern Atlantic Conference at Silver State basketball games. She donated to these two areas because she saw how the money was being used. Jim was a lapsed donor who had not donated to Bronze State since 2013 because he retired and was on a fixed income. He also discontinued his membership with the alumni association because of his retirement status and his part-time job.

He explained:

> I try to give back as much as possible. Of course I attend as many games as I can, and I go back to homecoming every year. I used to be associated with the alumni chapter here in the county before I retired. But with my work schedule I wasn’t able to keep up that pace.

Alfred is confident that some of his peers do not donate because they disagree with decisions made by administration. He gave an example of when he tried to solicit a financially stable classmate to contribute to their 50th graduation reunion. The classmate refused to give because she was unhappy the way things were going on campus.

SQ1: What is the perception of alumni in the Baby Boomer and Silent

Generation on online giving?

The researchers found only one out of the four interview participants had a positive perception of online giving. Inez, who is part of Silent Generation, not only donated online, but she renewed her alumni association membership, paid bills, and banked online. Inez enjoyed the convenience of conducting online transactions. She stated, "I just sit here and plug it in and it's done. I get confirmation back that it's been received. So that's easy." Though Inez was at ease with donating online, she understood her peers may be reluctant and intimidated about the process. She felt reassurance from her alma mater that the process is safe and secure would help put her peers at ease. She also encouraged her peers to give online donations a try. She assured:

> I would just encourage people said go ahead and take that chance and make that contribution because it's really easy to do that for our school. I haven't found any problems with it. I think we have people…we have accountability. I believe that, and if I didn't, I wouldn't keep giving.

Alfred, who was also part of the Silent Generation, did not have the same perception of online giving. He preferred donating through writing checks. He confessed:

> Well, I've seen so much about computers and hacking, and to be honest with you, and I hate to say this, but I'm computer illiterate. I mean, I can pull up my emails and what have you, but as far as making transactions and all of that, and paying bills by the computer, I haven't reached the stage at this point... And being 75 years old, I think I'm going to stay where I am... Not unless they stop taking checks (laughter) then I have to do something else. Michelle, the non-donor in the Baby Boomer Generation, was hesitant about putting her debit card information online. She noted that if she were to give a donation in the future, it would be by check. Part of her uneasiness about donating online stems her mistrust of online security.

She explained:

> I understand speed. I understand being in the 21st-century. I understand all of that. But I still have some drawbacks to that because I know of a personal friend of mine who did that. She looked up in her account was just wiped out. People are so dishonest in this society in which we live. I noticed they got the firewalls and protective measures, but people can break all of that. Just like you created it, someone can access it. So, I just don't do that.

SQ2: Does the degree of connectivity to the alma mater have an effect on giving?

The researchers concluded the degree of connectivity study participants had with their alma mater affected their donation patterns. Inez and Alfred, of the Silent Generation, were involved with their alma maters during the time of the interview and were also active financial donors. Michelle and Jim, the two Baby Boomers, were not connected to their alma mater through active memberships nor financial donations. Inez was connected to Silver state through her membership with the alumni association, and she led the faculty and staff giving campaign for her department.

Inez also led a senior giving initiative, and in 2015 they collectively raised $10,000 to establish an endowed scholarship for students at Silver State. She added that over the course of 2015, she personally donated over $5,000 to Silver State. In addition to being part of organizations directly connected to Silver State, Inez developed relationships with all the university presidents since her undergraduate year. She proudly explained, "I knew all the presidents...I got a chance to actually meet them, sit in their office and talk to them."

Alfred was also heavily connected with Silver State University. He was a lifetime member of the alumni association, and supported the athletic program. Alfred's connection with Silver State started during his undergraduate years when he worked with the athletic department and was on the yearbook staff. He felt his alma mater a good job of keeping him engaged and informed about current events throughout the years. He expressed:

> By the mere fact of my family and I coming up to a lot of different events and interacting with other alumni, it had been tremendously important in keeping us up to breast of all the activities going on and what the university is doing. And also by being a lifetime member of the alumni association, we get constant information updating us and telling us the status of the institution and who's making donations and things of that nature.

Since Michelle was not actively involved in any clubs and organizations directly related to Silver State, the information and updates she received were second hand. Jim was a member of Bronze State's alumni association, but after he retired, was put on a fixed income, and picked up a part-time job, he no longer found time to be involved. For that reason, his connectivity decreased and as a result, he discontinued his financial support.

5 Conclusion and Discussions

The purpose of the study is for the researchers to identify barriers to alumni giving for HBCU alumni in the Baby Boomer and Silent Generations with specificity in online giving. By analyzing the data in the IPA style interviews, the researchers answered the following questions that shaped the study:

RQ1: What are the barriers to alumni donations?

In the study, the first two participants were donors (Inez and Alfred), the third was a non-donor (Michelle) and the fourth was a lapsed donor who had not donated in two years (Jim). The researchers identified the following barriers to HBCU alumni giving in the Baby Boomer and Silent Generations: disengagement, lack of personal communication and solicitations, mistrust or lack of knowledge on how funds will be used, financial hardships, and disgruntlement. These finding tie closely to the reviewed literature in the study.

Disengagement

Sheperd (2015) and Stephenson and Bell (2014) found alumni with a strong sense of identity or connection with their alma maters are more likely to make financial donations. The researchers also found this to be true, as the least connected participant, Michelle, never donated before. Michelle mentioned a disconnection with her classmates impeded her willingness to donate.

Lack of Personal Communication and Solicitations

The researchers found that though Michelle was kept abreast of current events at Silver State, it was through second-hand information. Since she lived in the same city as her alma mater, she was able to see the university's outdoor billboards and receive updates from local news coverage. Michelle's friends, who were part of a Silver State affinity group, also kept her informed about Silver State's current events. The researchers' findings align with C.W. Jones' 2014 study that identified poor communication as a barrier to donating back.

Mistrust or Lack of Knowledge on How Funds Will be Used

Schmidt (2015) reported a top barrier to alumni giving is mistrust of how the institution will use the money, and donors with a high level of trust or more likely to give back. Additionally, C.W. Jones (2014) noted 50% of alumni in her study expressed that knowing how donations would be used motivated them to give. When the only non-donor, Michelle, was asked what would motivate her to give, she explained she would give to a worthy cause and she likes to see how the money is being used. Though Michelle does not financially support Silver State University, she is a charitable giver to other organizations and is driven by seeing the results of her financial donations.

Financial Hardships

Jim used to be part of the Bronze State Alumni Association until he retired, was placed on a fixed income and no longer had time because of working a part-time job. For that reason, he has not given in two years. This finding is in line with the studies conducted by C.W. Jones (2014), Sheperd (2015), Stephenson and Bell (2014) who all found financial hardships to be a barrier to giving.

Disgruntlement

Though none of the participants mentioned any personal grievances with their alma mater, Alfred forewarned through personal experience some of his peers "stop giving as a result of things not going the way

they think it should go."

SQ1: What is the perception of alumni in the Baby Boomer and Silent Generation on online giving?

The researchers found that 75% of the participants have never donated online and have no intention of doing so in the future. Inez, who was 75 and one of the oldest participants in the study, was the only one who made online transactions and o enjoyed the convenience of the process. Alfred and Jim confessed they are "computer illiterate" and not willing to learn how to donate online because of their age. Michelle is reluctant to give online because she does not trust the security measures that are in place to protect your private information. All three participants who have not given online expressed they are leery of their computers being hacked or someone stealing their identity. Additionally, the three participants emphasized they would stick donating through writing checks or using money orders.

SQ2: What impact does the degree of connectivity to the alma mater have on giving?

The researchers found the more connected participants were with their alma mater, the more likely they were to donate (social identity theory). The two participants actively involved with their universities were also donors. The two participants who were not connected with their alma mater through memberships either never donated before or ceased donations. The researchers also discovered that those with continued relationships with their alma mater over the years continue to give. This exemplifies the relationship marketing theory.

6 Conclusion

The researcher used the following research questions and sub questions to guide the study: (RQ1) What are the barriers to alumni donations? (SQ1) What is the perception of alumni in the baby boomer and silent generation on online giving? (SQ2) Does the degree of connectivity to the alma mater have an effect on giving? (RQ2) How can HBCUs increase the amount of donations received by alumni, specifically in the Baby Boomer and Silent Generations? These questions allowed to researcher to identify themes through an IPA approach. Through the emergent themes, the researcher uncovered the following barriers to older alumni donating back to their alma maters: disengagement, lack of personal communication and solicitations, mistrust or lack of knowledge on how funds will be used, financial hardships, and disgruntlement. To circumvent the barriers, the researcher recommends (a) relationship building activities to increase social identity, (b) inviting older donors back to campus (c) peer-to-peer fundraising, (d) reconnecting with older alumni at athletic events, (e) cultivating a spirit of philanthropy in students during their undergraduate years, and (f) educating alumni on the importance of giving and how donations are being used. The researchers also confirmed most older alumni are reluctant to donate online and are not willing learn how. All but one participant in the study were not comfortable with online giving because of their limited knowledge of computers and mistrust of the security process. To keep the Baby Boomer and Silent Generation alumni engaged in giving back, the researchers recommend HBCU leaders use segmented and integrated fundraising approaches inclusive of direct mail solicitations, which are preferred by the donors over online giving campaigns.

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Journal of Education and Social Development, 2017, 1–1
Sept. 2017, pages 7-13
doi: 10.5281/zenodo.834930
http://www.ibii-us.org/Journals/JESD/
ISBN 2572-9829 (Online), 2572-9810 (Print)

Asian Students' Experience of Culture Shock and Coping Strategies

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Received on May 12, 2017; revised on July 10, 2017; published on July 26, 2017

Abstract

For international students, studying abroad has not been free from personal challenges. Not all students can adjust in an alien culture with ease. This research on Asian students' experience of culture shock and coping strategies offers an understanding of the international students' needs, adjustment difficulties, managing of anxiety and coping strategies. The research will be beneficial in generating ideas for better management of culture shock. In this study, Asian students of collectivist culture were recruited from the existing international student body of a university in the United States. The students willing to spare nearly an hour of their time for in-depth interviews were invited to participate. The data gleaned from the interviews were interpreted and analyzed using a theoretical thematic analysis following the work of Braun and Clarke (2006). Salient themes emerged while applying constant comparison technique in relation to the research questions. It was found that the Asian students' culture shock closely followed a W-curve theory of transition pattern of stages suggested by Zeller and Mosier (1993). It is natural for the Asian students to experience a roller coaster ride of cultural adjustment cycle once they embark on a journey abroad for education. Knowing about this pattern could make the transition easier. While students may at times find different cultural values in the host culture frustrating, yet there are positive sides in every approach to life.

Keywords: International Student, Asian, Culture Shock, Coping, W-Curve Theory of Transition

1 Introduction

Studying abroad has the possibility of grooming students to become accomplished citizens, however, they also throw up challenges. For instance, not all students can adjust to a new culture with ease. Being exposed to an alien culture requires students to confront a range of additional challenges besides studying. These challenges involve social adjustment, interpreting an unfamiliar culture, overcoming language barriers, academic challenges, cultural shock, personal disorientation, and psychological distress, to name a few (Buttaro, 2004; Khawaja & Stallman, 2011; Lin, 2006; Xiaoqiong, 2008). International students in a foreign culture must adjust to many cultural challenges. The experiences they face once they stumble upon an unfamiliar culture have been studied before, for instance Lin (2006) studied how Chinese students dealt with culture shock in the United States. However, further research in culture shock, especially with the Asian students per se, and their coping strategies have not been done till date. Therefore, it is, critical to understand the experiences and needs of Asian international students, their difficulties in adjusting to a new culture, management and coping strategies that will help evolve ideas to manage culture shock. The information gleaned from this research could be used to guide future international students and assist university services that help these students to adjust to new cultures.

2 Literature Review

Many students who travel to foreign countries for studies experience situations that are different from those in their home country (Naysmith & Corcoran, 2001, Xiaoqiong, 2008). Such situations lead to what is called culture shock. According to Oberg (1960), culture shock is the anxiety that is caused by loss of familiar social surroundings and exchanges. Adler (1975) argued that culture shock is the confusion that arises after a person is exposed to unfamiliar social signals. Xiaoqiong (2008) argues that Asian students experience culture shock after they eat unfamiliar food in a country that is noticeably different from their own. Food becomes an obvious cue to Asian students that indicates that they are in an alien environment. Besides food, even table manners in a host nation makes them realize that they are in a different culture. For example, most people from the Southeast Asia, use their hands to eat than use knife and fork. The East Asians and the Southeast Asians like to eat warm food and vegetables than have them cold. There are religious

restrictions that comes into play as well. Hindus don't eat beef, and the Muslims don't eat pork.

Having animals as pets in countries such as the U.S., the U.K. and Australia contrasts with Asian cultures where most people have little, if any, affinity for pet animals. Many Asian students, therefore, are afraid of dogs, as they were brought up with a belief that dogs were dangerous and dirty. This understanding is in contrast with Western cultures where dogs and cats are loved. Other such culture shocks include importance to privacy by many people of Western nations. For instance, in Western nations most adults do not live with their parents. This is in contrast with Asian cultures where infringement on privacy is not frowned upon (Xiaoqiong, 2008). Privacy being of the Western core values, it is one of the fundamental premises of the day by day interactions. Besides, the Westerners place considerably more emphasis regarding privacy in intercultural communications. In any case, however, Chinese cultural esteem, for example, is greatly different. Ordinary Chinese individuals including most of the college students pay less heed to such considerations as privacy. A lot of misunderstandings happen on account of the absence of privacy awareness (Zhang, 2013).

Lin (2006) argued that for many international students culture shock starts even before they travel out of their home country. For such students, culture shock intensifies during the first few weeks or months of their exposure to a foreign culture (Khwaja & Stallman, 2011; Lin, 2006). Often these pre-arrival stressors comprise feelings of excitement, uncertainty, anxiety, and stress. While international students sometimes feel excitement in travelling to a foreign nation for studies, there are times when such excitement is overtaken by feelings of uncertainty, anxiety and stress. Uncertainty in finding suitable accommodation add to the existing pre-arrival stressors. For international students, post-arrival stressors in a host nation were lack of transportation, living expenses, language barrier and getting accustomed to the academia (Buttaro, 2004; Khwaja & Stallman, 2011; Lin, 2006). Other post-arrival stressors included feelings of isolation during the first few years of living in a host country (Buttaro, 2004, Khwaja & Stallman, 2011), separation from family members and homesickness (Khwaja & Stallman, 2011; Lin, 2006), poor cooking facilities, monotonous small-town life and political discrimination (Lin, 2006). Buttaro (2004) contended that the culture and traditions of the home countries of international students have an impact on their study habits. Little, if any, research is available on coping strategies of international students with regard to culture shock in foreign countries. Lin (2006) argued that international students should interact with students from their own home nation to adjust to a new culture. Student organizations, too, can play a major role in helping international students fit into a new culture (Lin, 2006).

For many students coming from collectivistic cultures, it is often difficult to live independently and many of them lack survival skills needed in an individualistic society. At times, many students find it difficult to adjust to living conditions, for instance leasing an apartment and following rules laid out by the apartment owners. Other hurdles include lack of familiarity with public transportation, lack of information on food outlets and prices of food, and limited shopping hours, etc. In some instances, the foreign students also experience culture shock after they are exposed to racism (Khwaja & Stallman, 2011). Though people from collectivist societies tend to put greater worth on behaviors promoting in-group reliance and in-group objectives, people from individualistic societies are more inclined to underwrite practices identified with freedom from in-group reliance. People from individualistic societies also endorse behaviors that assist in the attainment of individual objectives (Hofstede, 1991; Triandis, 1990).

Agreeing with this hypothesis, the psychological aspect of culture shock can be comprehended in terms of social dissimilarities and of sentiments of dejection in the host nation. The social element of culture shock can be explained in terms of people lacking adequate cultural knowledge about the host nation, and people having solid cultural identities that would make them less inclined to adjust to the host society. As indicated by this approach, conformity with diverse culture would depend on people's capacity to bridge cultural differences between their home country and the host nation, and also on significant cross-cultural interactions with people from the host nation (Chapdelaine & Alexitch, 2004).

3 Research Questions

RQ1: How do contemporary Asian students of collectivistic cultures experience culture shock in an individualistic host country?
RQ2: What are the coping strategies that contemporary Asian students adopt to settle in the existing host culture environment?

3.1 How is the Study Different than the Existing Ones

Little, if any studies look into the phenomena of adapting strategies of culture shock in foreign cultures of international students, especially Asian students. As of yet, not many existing studies have focused on the experiences of culture shock and coping strategies of contemporary Asian students from collectivistic cultures, particularly in context of a US University. Through qualitative studies reflected on the coping strategies of international students in a British University, Cooper and Newsome (2016) investigated this phenomenon on a medley of students from different backgrounds– most of the study participants were from the Asian and Far Eastern background, and some from European and North American backgrounds. Khwaja and Stallman (2011) studied this particular phenomenon on the Asian students of an Australian University.

4 Methodology

4.1 Sample Characteristics

International students of a large university in the U.S. were asked to participate in long, in-depth interviews regarding their experiences pertaining to culture shock and coping strategies while studying abroad. A purposive non-random sample of Asian students from different countries studying in different departments of the university was taken. Third parties like different student associations on campus were approached in order to reach out to potential participants with pertinent information about the study and ways to contact the researcher. This allowed the potential participants to choose whether they wanted to contact the researcher and share their contact information. After the potential participants agreed to be part of the study, a convenient schedule and time was arranged for the interviews. The participants were interviewed about their experiences in the United States. Nine graduate students of Asian origin—seven from Southeast Asia (four from Bangladesh, and three from India), one from the Middle East (Kuwait), and one from East Asia (Taiwan) participated in the in-depth interviews. The students moved to the U.S. for study purposes in 2010, 2011, 2013, 2014, and 2015. Purposive sampling is popular in qualitative studies regarding identification and collection of information-rich participants who are particularly knowledgeable or experienced regarding the phenomenon of interest (Palinkas, Horwitz, Green, Wisdom, Duan, and Hoagwood). In purpos-

ive sampling, a researcher has sufficient knowledge on the topic to select a sample. The participants were chosen in this sampling method according to the nature of the topic. Therefore, skills and capabilities of the researcher to find appropriate individuals to contribute to the achievement of research objectives played an important role in the outcome of this study using this sampling technique.

4.2 Instruments

The instrument of study was qualitative in-depth interviews. In a semi-structured open-ended long interview, the probes developed around the stages of cultural immersion, culture shock, adjustment, and coping strategies. The researchers dived into the participants' personal and exclusive encounters with the phenomenon of culture shock utilizing the case study approach (Tsui, 2003) and semi-structured (Ribbons, 2007), in-depth (Nisbet, 2005), informant-style interviews. The questions were semi-structured to obtain conformity with the pattern of questions that would enable the researchers to codify answers in a systematic manner. The questions were not rigid as a little customization was required to allow leeway for probing. Asking probing questions is actually an alternative way of discovering more detail. The way to do this could be asking the interview participant an example to help the interviewer understand or clarify a statement that the interviewee has made. For instance, "Since you said this had been the first time you had come here (in the USA) when you stayed all alone, tell me, was that the very first time of your staying all alone in your life?" Sometimes, additional information from the participant could be sought for further clarification. For instance, "As you talked about gay couples here, is there any other thing that was different from your home culture? Can you recall another time or other times if you had any feelings regarding any differences between your home culture and the new culture that became apparent?" With the follow-up probes, the participants were asked about their initial experiences and feelings while beginning their journey to study abroad, apparent disorientation (if any, i.e., noticing any contrasting scenario between the home country and the host country), any phase of uncertainty or confusion, any struggle to fit in at any stage of this journey, the difference in food choices (if any), missing native culture festivities, holidays and events, inability to adjust to changes (if any), apparent contrasting power distance and cultural difference with regard to teacher-and-student relationship (if any), comparison between the home and host country communication styles and lifestyle, ways of coming to terms with problems that made them confused or lost, the adjustment phase when they felt comfortable and competent in the new host culture, previous experiences of traveling abroad (if any), experience of reverse cultural shock (if any), narrative of the cultural adjustment cycle, the recollection of the types of stress experienced (if any) while being immersed in a culture shock, and the participants' coping strategies when immersed in shock, etc.

4.3 Procedure

With this research project, ethical clearance in the form of Institutional Review Board (IRB) permission was obtained. The participants were recruited from the existing international student body at the university. Students willing to volunteer in order to participate and spare about one hour of their time for an interview for the study were invited to a public place in natural settings like the university library discussion rooms or relatively quieter areas in the cafés around the university during mutually convenient times. The interview sessions were audio-recorded with permission and were later transcribed verbatim. Refreshments were served to the participants for a better ice-breaking in a relaxed atmosphere. Before starting the interview, the participants were briefed about the study and its purpose which was geared towards adding to the literature in order to promote students' adjustment to an alien culture and environment. The participants were also briefed about their voluntary participation and that they were free to discontinue the interview anytime. Before the interview, they were also told about the confidential nature of the interview and the use of pseudonyms when the researchers were supposed to be analyzing the results. Then the participants were asked to sign an informed consent form before the researcher started the interview.

After data collection, a theoretical thematic analysis was conducted. The themes were dependent on the capacity of the themes to capture something salient in relation to the research questions. With the deductive or top-down approach, the researchers' theoretical and analytic interest in the area was prioritized and therefore, more explicitly analyst-driven (Braun & Clarke, 2006). A constant comparison technique was used to determine the salient themes while coding the data. The salient themes were patterned responses emerging from the data set in relation to the research questions. The themes were identified on a semantic or explicit level using the surface meaning of the data (i.e. not looking for anything beyond what the participants have said) (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The W-Curve Theory of Transition by Zeller and Mosier (1993) was utilized as a basis for the analysis of data.

4.4 Limitations

A majority of responses gained from interviewing the participants matched with the feedback from others, yet a larger number of participant feedback would only ensure greater validity and reliability. To obtain triangulation of viewpoints, more participants would be required. At the time of the interviews, a number of students did not return to their home culture even for a sojourn. Therefore, whether they experienced any kind of strain that is typical in the mental isolation stage could not be addressed and interpreted in their case for this study. Researcher bias could also play a part inadvertently. No research is without any flaw, and neither is this research.

4.5 Theoretical Framework of the Methodology

The phenomenon of culture shock is a complex construct that cannot be articulated by mere a questionnaire survey. The experience of mental adjustments and transitions that foreign students have to go through can be better addressed with qualitative study. Understanding of the contexts related to the experience of the phenomenon and the environment in which the complexity of the phenomenon is experienced, could be explained with subtlety only through the methodology described in this paper. Also, in order to address the question of 'why' and 'how' of this particular phenomenon, only a qualitative study with purposive, non-random sample is justified for the purpose of study. The W-Curve is an anticipated example of stages that happen when a person experiences culture shock. This is based on a research study done on students studying abroad. Zeller and Mosier (1993) found that the W-Curve could likewise be connected to the first-year students and the stages they experience in adjusting to another society. It is typical to have ups and downs of the W-Curve and knowledge about this may make transition simpler. The typical W-Curve points include the following stages— Honeymoon,

Culture Shock, Initial Adjustment, Mental Isolation, and Acceptance and Integration.

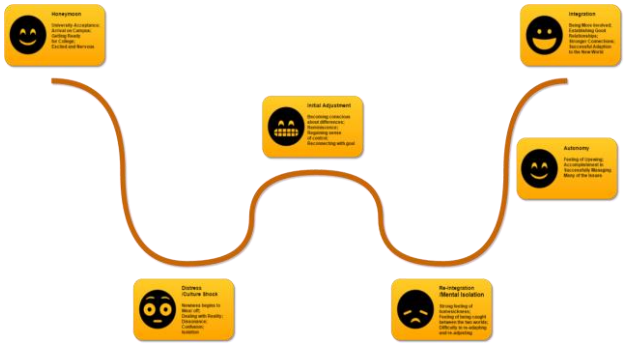

Figure 1.1 The W-Curve of Cultural Transition by *Zeller and Mosier (1993)*

5 Results

Asian students of a U.S. university were asked about their experiences of transition from their home culture to the host culture while studying in the U.S. For the sake of respecting students' confidentiality, all the original names of the interview participants have been changed in the results while reporting and analyzing their feedback.

5.1 Arrival

This stage begins with students getting admission to the university and their arrival on campus. It continues as they prepare for their first few weeks in college. The foreign students in this stage are likely to feel both excited and nervous. Along with excitement, students also feel homesick. *Priyodorshini*, *Arhaan*, *Irene*, *Shahida*, *Shumon*, *Evelyn*, *Disha*, *Farid*, and *Waseem* (not their real names) moved to the U.S. for a better future (through education), as the U.S., according to many of them was, a land of opportunities.

This stage hovered around two things — excitement, and a feeling of being overwhelmed. They were excited about attending college in the United States, and meeting new people in a new culture. The interviewees also felt overwhelmed due to loneliness after they set foot on foreign soil. Priyodorshini said:

> ***I was overwhelmed because it was a new country for me and this was the first time I had set foot out of my country. I was happy that I got to come to the United States for my studies because, getting an admission here is a challenge and I had worked hard for admission.***

For Waseem, the honeymoon stage was more about excitement and meeting new people in a new culture:

> ***We expected we will meet new people from different cultures and diverse people from many countries that we don't get to meet in Kuwait.***

5.2 Shock Sets In

At this stage the newness begins to wear off once international students start to deal with reality and adjust to a new life. Cultural differences may make international students feel confused and isolated as they miss their family and friends.

Among the interviewees for the study, Irene had always lived with her family. Living away from her loved ones was not easy for her. She would cry and did not want to stay in the U.S. Her apartment was far away from school; she had to daily commute large distances. Moreover, regular fights with her roommate was a major turn-off for her that made her first semester miserable. She said:

> ***…for the first semester you have this excitement then slowly reality sets in and you know that life is not easy here… you have to work hard, you have to work late at night.***

Shahida left her children in her home country when she came for a Ph.D. to the U.S. She was homesick in the United States. Upon arrival Disha was thrilled because everything seemed new. For the initial six to seven months, she was anxious about the difficulties in getting medical help for her baby. For Farid, who was a doctoral student in the U.S., learning to drive was a major stressor for him because he did not drive in his home country. A few of the interviewees said they had a hard time adjusting to the transport system in the U.S. Evelyn said about her home country's transportation:

> ***We have a very convenient mass transportation system. Here I felt really inconvenient when I did not have my car.***

Priyodorshini felt overwhelmed due to living alone and not knowing her neighbors. Disha did not have friends in the U.S. for a long time. A feeling of skepticism swept through her as she, just like Priyodorshini and Evelyn, did not feel comfortable talking to or socializing with a non-native person (i.e., people from the host culture) for a long time because they feared their inadvertent expression of anything inappropriate to the host culture might be considered impolite.

Both Priyo and Disha appreciated the host culture's respect for privacy and personal space yet they also felt that it could both be good as well as bad. Disha missed out on being part of a community that she used to sense back home:

> ***Some things that I missed was the community feeling that you get when you are with the people that are from the same culture… the festivals, the events, the spirit that I had for Indian festivals and Indian culture.***

This is the period where homesickness increases. An international student in a foreign nation maintains strong ties with his home country. Priyo said:

> ***I actually called my parents every day for the first three (to) four years… I think I called them every day and I talked to them… that was, my way of connecting with something familiar.***

Though all the participants were appreciative of privacy in the host culture yet they realized it could also be a double-edged sword for them. Coming from a collectivist culture, they missed the family ties. This was very much about staying in touch with the family and friends. They also missed the friendly and respectful relationship that they had with their teachers back home. Besides privacy, many interviewees found the nuances of language a hurdle. For instance, Arhaan was given hot chocolate in a cup when in fact he wanted a cookie. In his native country India, chocolate refers to a cookie.

Language barrier seems apparent when Asian students come to study in the U.S. Most of them from childhood get used to the British style of spelling and accent in English, but in the U.S., it is quite different. Even the local dialect is distinct from what a foreign audience is used to. When Priyo landed at the Newark airport, she asked an African American person for directions and his accent confused her:

> ***I told him to repeat it but I still didn't get it so I started crying because I thought that I was here for my studies and now I didn't even understand English.***

She later got used to the accent by watching news and other shows on television.

The participants talked about the stress of living alone. Priyo, Disha, and Waseem talked about missing out on having good friends and the difficulties that came with it. The coping strategies to combat this phase of loneliness were: 1) Attending different kinds of public or private events (like religious festivals, picnics, pool parties, valentine's dinner, basketball game, etc.) where they could meet new people; 2) Immersing themselves in ample course work.

5.3 Becoming Familiar

In this stage students become conscious about the differences between what they were used to at home and the university life in the host country. Remembrance of what one was used to and reconnecting with what one values most in his life happens in this stage.

Priyo, Waseem, Disha, and Arhaan realized that the nature of teacher-student relationship in their home countries was more personal and caring, which was a stark contrast to the professional nature of the teacher-student relationship in the U.S. Arhaan said:

> ***In India, human relations are long term; nothing is short term… according to the Hindu culture, they say 'Matridevbhav, pitridevbhav, gurudevbhav'… (meaning) see God in father, mother, and teacher.***

Priyo and other participants like Waseem, Disha, Farid, Shumon, and Arhaan felt celebrating their religious festivals in the U.S. was different from doing so in their home countries because they did not get holidays for the festivals. Instead, they had to go to the university for classes. Because all the Asian students in the sample did not get religious and cultural holidays, they had to make do with low-key celebrations.

5.4 Trapped Between Two Worlds

In this stage, students go home for an extended period. They feel homesick. College life still is not as comfortable as home used to be, and home now is not as familiar as it once was. The feeling of being trapped between the two worlds — a sense of not completely belonging to either --- makes students feel isolated. Arhaan explained:

> ***I do not feel comfortable because I miss my parents, I miss those long term relations, I miss everything that India stands for. I even miss the politics of the Indian sub-continent.***

Farid, who lived with his parents in Bangladesh, keeps a target of visiting his home country once every two years. Here in the U.S., he experienced mental isolation when he was alone dreaming of flying back home. He realized the warmth of his parents that he had been missing when he got up from sleep.

5.5 Taking Control

Feelings of upswing occur when students are successfully able to manage many of the challenges faced during culture shock in this stage. Students gain confidence with the new routine and their ability to handle the challenges posed by the academic and social settings. Extroverts reach the initial adjustment stage quicker than introverts. Most respondents in the present research said that their stay in the U.S. had made them independent and able to take up challenges. Priyo felt that five and a half years of studying in the U.S. had taught her to be independent. She said:

> ***It has shaped me into who I am today. I have matured a lot over time that would not have had happened if I lived with my family.***

5.6 Blending in

As students become more involved in the university life and begin to establish good relations in the host country they feel more connected to the university. Connections to campus become stronger as one becomes more involved in campus activities, in developing stronger friendships and connecting with faculty and staff. The students feel successfully adapted to their new world. At this stage, the culture of their home nation becomes somewhat foreign. There is less dependence on parents and former peers.

After staying in the U.S. for a while, Priyo does not call her parents as often as she used to. She said:

> ***I still do that but not that frequently maybe once a week… And now they sometimes***

call me on the Internet like Google Hangout.

Farid would try to learn good values from the U.S. culture, while leaving out values that he said were bad. Irene involved herself with activities of international students' associations and enjoyed meeting new people, learning about their culture, and trying out different cuisines at international festivals on the university campus. For Disha, the initial unease to talk to people from the host culture disappeared after living in the U.S. for some time. Her initial unease to talk to people from the host culture went away when she decided to overcome her hesitation and talk to students from the host culture in her class. She realized that it was not too difficult to mingle with people from different cultures.

6 Discussion

The W-Curve theory of transition propounded by Zeller and Mosier (1993) is a predictable pattern of stages of occurrence of culture shock that a person experiences. They talked about six stages that occur whenever a person goes through the phenomenon of culture shock. They found that the W-Curve theory could be applied to the first-year college students while they go through the phases of adaptation to the host culture. It is normal for the students to experience the roller coaster ride of ups and downs while they adjust to the new culture. Knowing about the W-Curve could make their transition easier. Analyzing the interview feedback in the present study, exemplars could be easily drawn to match their experiences according to the stages outlined in the W-Curve by Zeller and Mosier (1993).

The findings of the present study indicate that the six stages laid out by the authors of this study closely match the six stages laid out by Zeller and Mosier (1993). The present study is different from Lin's (2006) study with regard to coping strategies of international students. While Lin (2006) argued that international students should interact more with other international students from their home country, the researchers of the present study found that coping strategies involved socializing more with members of the host nation. None of the participants in the present research acknowledged the role of their university in helping them overcome culture shock. The researchers of the present study believe that ideas gleaned from the interviews would further facilitate academic accomplishment for international students if they follow the W-curve of transition to cope with culture shock. Most of the participants interviewed have been living in the U.S. for at least five years. A few of the participants who were from India and Bangladesh had not travelled to their home nations since they came to the United States. The other students, however, had visited their home country after they came to the U.S. Therefore, it can be construed that most of them have lived through the adjustment cycle successfully and dealt with cultural challenges in the host nation.

Culture shock is a consequence of various things. Not everybody will see the same occasions as a trigger. Culture shock may be due to the absence of learning or questioning the way of life in the host nation. To help international students successfully negotiate culture shock the authors of the present study recommend the following: An international student should do a little research about host culture. The more a student gets to know about host culture, the better one will comprehend the way things are. When the international students get to the host nation they should consult their instructors and their classmates from their home nation to overcome culture shock. Having self-belief goes a long way in successfully facing cultural challenges. One should try to be intelligent when attempting to understand a host nation's cultural issues, for instance table manners.

International students should not hesitate to act in accordance with their instincts. However, an international student should be careful to not hurt the sentiments of a person from the host nation. One needs to be circumspect and considerate. It is inappropriate to go around bashing the host nation's way of life and culture; it won't help one feel better if one tries to do so. International students should instead strive to learn from the host nation's culture to adapt and thrive in a new culture.

7 Conclusion

The present study would enable prospective students planning to travel abroad to know that it is not unusual to expect a roller coaster ride in a foreign land. The prospective students would learn to encounter and appreciate different cultural values in host nations. Based on the findings of the present study, it will be advisable for universities to pair international students with host families to help the students smoothly blend into a new culture. The host families will be able to help international students better negotiate the host nation's culture. Having the Universities departments for international student development (specifically geared towards facilitating the international students' transition from the home country to the host country) improved, should make a proactive effort in organizing orientation sessions mainly focusing on the phenomenon of culture shock and arranging several briefing sessions for the incoming students to help acclimatized with the new environment. There should be international showcasing sessions like national themed programs where international students could be introduced to the host country students.

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Journal of Education and Social Development, 2017, 1–1
Sept. 2017, pages 14-20
doi: 10.5281/zenodo.893618
http://www.ibii-us.org/Journals/JESD/
ISBN 2572-8849 (Online), 2572-8830 (Print)

Citizenship Engagement: Responses from High School Students

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Received on March 20, 2017; revised on September 6, 2017; published on September 17, 2017

Abstract

In the United States, the main mission of social studies education is to prepare students for citizenship. With this in mind, the following study examined 191 high school students' views on how they demonstrated citizenship. Traditionally with this age group, personally responsible citizenship has been a common form of self-reported citizenship engagement. However, in this study, the students seemed to conceptualize citizenship differently. With the Akwesasne Mohawk students, the European American students, and the students who classified themselves as other, disengaged citizenship was the most popular form of citizenship while patriotic citizenship was the least popular form of citizenship. Although attitudes about citizenship are changing, by understanding students' perceptions about citizenship, citizenship education curriculum can be recalibrated to better meet the needs of students in the 21st century.

Keywords Citizenship, American Indians, Native Americans, high school students, Mohawks, social studies education

1 Introduction

In the United States, the main goal of education and social studies education has been to prepare youth for citizenship (Farber, 2011; Glickman, 2009; Herczog, 2013; Keels, 2009; National Council for the Social Studies, 2010; Reid, 2014). However, there are different views on what types of behaviors citizenship should include. For example, Parker and Beck (2017) note that the Athenians used the term idiocy to describe individuals who focus on their own needs sometimes more than the needs of their community. Yet, Westheimer (2015) highlights the limitations of civic behaviors that are oriented merely to helping others and following laws, arguing that citizens should focus on addressing the root causes of social justice issues such as poverty (Westheimer, 2015). In contrast, Donahue (2000) argues that while seeking to address the root cause of a social justice issue may help long term efforts, following a natural disaster, the act of helping others can address the immediate needs of homeless survivors such as food and water. Yet, conflicting views of desirable citizenship behavior go beyond the act of helping others. For the National Council for the Social Studies (2013), social studies is about citizenship and content knowledge, but for Francis Bellamy, the author of the United States Pledge of Allegiance, citizenship is about cultivating love for the nation via the United States Pledge of Allegiance (Ellis, 2005; Jones & Meyer, 2010).

While educators seek to promote their own views on how youth should demonstrate citizenship, the demographics of youth in the United States is changing (Gollnick & Chinn, 2016). By 2023, ethnic minorities will constitute 55% of United States kindergarten through twelfth grade students, and the increase in minorities is expected to continue (Department of Education, 2013). With this shift in United States demographics, the landscape of United States citizenship education is in a midst of change.

While citizenship education has examined individuals of different racial/ethnic backgrounds (Alazzi & Chiodo, 2008; Martin & Chiodo, 2007; Wood, 2014), Native American Indians have generally been underrepresented in the citizenship education research literature. Examining the experiences of and attitudes about citizenship of one Native American nation, the Akwesasne Mohawks, compared to European Americans and to students who classify themselves as other offers diversity to the existing citizenship education literature based on their identity and on their forms of civic participation. Consequently, the study examined the following research question: In what types of civic behaviors do high school youth participate?

2 Literature Review

2.1 Attitudes about Social Studies/History

There are diverse attitudes towards social studies/history. For example, in response to Native American youth having their culture being undermined in the classroom, some Native American youth and parents view the

United States educational system with caution or hostility (Verbos, Gladstone, & Kennedy, 2011). Similarly, Woodson (2015) notes that African American participants viewed social studies textbooks' limited coverage of United States Civil Rights leaders with strong suspicion and distaste.

Chandler (2010) notes that teachers in general but especially white teachers are extremely fearful of discussing race in the classroom because they view the topic as taboo, teachers are at a disadvantage when discussing races other than their own, and teachers are fearful of offending the community which may have differing views about race/ethnicity. For example, Swanson (1997), a European American, expressed anger that there was a film that examined the Native American Geronimo, and Swanson (1997) disliked the concept of having paintings of Native Americans on walls. In contrast, Bowman (2003), a Stockbridge-Munsee/Mohican, decries the absence of Native American educators, the absence of Native Americans in research studies, and the lack of culturally relevant pedagogy in kindergarten through 12th grade classrooms.

2.2 Citizenship Behaviors

Citizenship is defined as a person's membership within a state or country (Parker & Beck, 2017), and citizenship serves as the study's conceptual framework. There are different lenses for viewing citizenship behaviors, and this study examined four types of citizenship. They are disengaged citizenship, personal development citizenship, personally responsible citizenship, and patriotic citizenship.

2.2.1 Disengaged citizenship

Individuals who believe that they can impact the political process are more inclined to vote, to contact a public official with a concern, and to be psychologically engaged with politics (Levy, 2013). In contrast, disengaged citizens are individuals who state that they are not involved in citizenship activities (Martin, 2017; Mellon Humanities Focus Area, 2014). There are various possible explanations for this behavior. A 2016 Associated Press-Gfk poll found that nearly 80% of Americans of unspecified race/ethnicity were dissatisfied because they felt that the government was dysfunctional and ignores constituents' interests (Webber, & Swanson, 2016). Furthermore, when Flanagan and Gallay (2008) evaluated primarily European American middle and high school students' feelings of trust before/after the national election, post-election results showed a decrease in trust toward politics, the media, and other people. Additionally, there was a decline in their belief that the government cares about ordinary citizens and a decline in their belief that the United States offers opportunities for everyone. Later in 2014, Berson Rodríguez-Campos, Walker-Egea, Owens, and Bellara (2014) surveyed primarily Hispanic and European American middle and high school students on their desire to vote in the next election or to vote at age 18. Due to their dissatisfaction with voting and politics, only 40% of the students reported that they planned to vote. They felt disconnected from the United States, so for them, voting was not seen as an important responsibility of citizens; instead, voting was seen as irrelevant to their lives (Berson et al., 2014).

2.2.2 Personal development citizenship

Personal development citizenship involves citizens who develop themselves via activities such as school, sports, and clubs (Brookfield Community School, n.d.; Martin, 2017; University of Oxford, 2017). With respect to content knowledge, Berson et al. (2014) notes that the more knowledgeable youth are about civics and politics, the more likely they are to be involved in the political process. Because social studies content is so critical, the National Council for the Social Studies defines social studies as the development of citizens through the examination of social science and humanities content (National Council for the Social Studies, n.d.). The American high school curriculum provides students with social studies coursework to develop their content knowledge (El-Haj, 2007), and peoples' political knowledge can impact their attitudes about democracies, political participation, and democratic principles (Dias & Menezes, 2014). By participating on sport teams, individuals can experience a sense of belonging and a sense of connection to their school and to their community. Through sport, individuals have the opportunity to develop their leadership skills, work ethic, athletic skills, physical fitness, and problem solving skills (Kozub & Brusseau, 2012; Yeung, 2015). Furthermore, Lopez and Moore (2006) found that males and females of unspecified race/ethnicity who participated in sports during high school were more likely than non-sport participants to vote and volunteer.

Meanwhile, through clubs, students have opportunities to feel part of a group, develop communication skills, and cultivate leadership skills (Carter, Swedeen, & Moss, 2009; Kressly, Herbert, Ross, & Votsch, 2009). Also, when students are participating in after school clubs other than sport teams, their civic participation rises (Kahne & Sporte, 2008). Through the act of personal development, youth can prepare for their future within society, explore potential career options, enrich their minds, and strength their bodies.

2.2.3 Personal responsible citizenship

During personally responsible citizenship, the individual seeks to help others and strives to follow the society's rules and laws (Westheimer, 2015). To demonstrate this form of citizenship, an individual may donate blood at the local blood bank or may donate money to the American Red Cross. Through personally responsible citizenship, youth can learn more about their community and can help support their community (Berson et al., 2014; Martin & Chiodo, 2007).

In the United States and overseas, personally responsible citizenship is a popular form of citizenship. When primarily rural European American United States high school students were asked to describe how they displayed good citizenship, 51% of the 11th graders discussed helping other people and 36% of the 11th graders discussed the need to obey rules and laws (Martin & Chiodo, 2007). Likewise, when southwestern United States Native American high school students were asked to explain good citizenship, 71% of them discussed helping other people in the community and 61% of them commented upon the significance of complying with rules and laws (Martin & Chiodo, 2008). In the country of Jordan, among rural high school students of unspecified race/ethnicity, good citizenship meant helping others (50%) and following rules and laws (50%) (Alazzi & Chiodo, 2008). Next, in New Zealand, when primarily New Zealand European and Pacific Nations high school students were given an opportunity to define good citizenship, they explained that it involved helping other people (Wood, 2014).

2.2.4 Patriotic citizenship/commitment to country

A patriotic citizen demonstrates loyalty and support for the nation (Kahne & Middaugh, 2007; Martin, 2017). When Mitchell and Parker (2008) interviewed northwestern high school students of unspecified race/ethnicity on their views about citizenship after the 9/11 attacks, they described their feelings of numbness toward the United States flag and their limited connection to the United States; their sense of identity and their strong connection were for their city not the nation. In addition, when Bondy (2014)

interviewed high school Hispanic students in the southeastern United States, they felt disconnected from the United States and felt disinterest towards the Pledge ceremony. Conversely, when primarily European American and African American southeastern high school students were asked to discuss what the Pledge meant to them personally, 39% of them discussed the importance of loyalty to the nation while 28% of them discussed America. Unfortunately, for 28% of them, the United States Pledge of Allegiance meant nothing (Martin, 2014). Finally, when California high school students of unspecified race/ethnicity were asked about patriotism, Kahne and Middaugh (2007) found that patriotic citizenship/commitment to country was the most popular at 73% compared to constructive patriotism (68%) which involves looking at an issue from different perspectives, blind patriotism (43%) which involves following a position without reflection, or active patriotism (41%) where a person takes action on and enacts change in society on an issue.

2.2.5 Rural communities

Due to the location of many Native American reservations in isolated rural areas, an additional factor to consider is life within rural communities. For the Native Americans and non-Native Americans living in rural communities, job opportunities are less plentiful for them compared to individuals who live in major cities (Elder, 2015), and overall, approximately 30% of all Native Americans and Alaska Natives live in poverty (Elder, 2015). For the rural county where the study of Akwesasne Mohawks, European Americans, and students who classified themselves as other took place, the poverty rate in the county is 18.3% (United States Census Bureau, 2016 a), and the percentage of students eligible for free and reduced lunch is 72.4%.

Experiences with generational poverty impacts individuals' views towards society. Payne (2013) notes that when individuals live in generational poverty, they are apt to show distrust and dislike for organized society. This tendency has been exacerbated by the rural Akwesasne Mohawks' negative experiences with the United States government such as the loss of their tribal land coupled with their limited political power (Elder, 2015; Segwalise, 2005). Payne (2013) also notes that due to a lack of resources and a need to survive, individuals who live in generational poverty tend to see illegal behavior not as a negative behavior but a part of life and survival. For example, within the rural town where the study took place, amidst limited job options, some area residents work for the school district or the tribal casino while other Akwesasne Mohawks and European Americans smuggle immigrants and/or cigarettes across the United States/Canadian border for profit (George-Kanentiio, 2008). Yet, not all rural youth view the world through the same lens. Among rural southwest Native American high school students of unspecified tribal affiliation, the students wrote that they demonstrated good citizenship by helping others (71%) and following rules/laws (61%) (Martin & Chiodo, 2008). They also wrote that they planned to demonstrate good citizenship 10 years in the future via voting (68%) and community service (71%), and for them, community service included service to the community and service to the tribe (Martin & Chiodo, 2008).

The 2014 Pew National Research American Trends Study found that trust in the United States government was lower in rural areas (22%) than in urban areas (28%) (Cillizza, 2015). Rural areas can have different policy needs compared to urban areas, and a lack of political power among rural citizens can cause tensions. However, there are opportunities for synergy. Historical studies of rural communities suggest that economic self-interest and policy opportunities helped them to more closely connect to the community (Lauzon, 2011).

3 Methods

The study included 191 rural high school students of whom 88 were Akwesasne Mohawks, 80 were European American, and 23 who classified themselves as other. The students who classified themselves as other tended to be a combination of Akwesasne Mohawk and European American heritage. For this study, a rural community is defined as an area less than 2,500 residents (United States Census Bureau, 2016 b), and the city where the study took place meets the United States Census criteria. The high school is located within the northeastern United States and includes grades 9 through 12. To supplement the school's traditional course offerings, it provides coursework on the Akwesasne Mohawk language and culture.

3.1 The Akwesasne Mohawks

The Akwesasne Mohawk tribe is located on both sides of the United States/Canadian border, and United States treaties of 1784, 1789, and 1794 guaranteed the Akwesasne Mohawk tribe's sovereignty (Segwalise, 2005). Tribal members strongly value their tribal identity (George-Kanentiio, 2008), and a traditional Akwesasne Mohawk is "a person or a family who chooses to live outside the 'mainstream' life imposed on Native Americans by the European or European American culture or governments" (Johansen, 1993, p. xxviii). For example, when the United States Citizenship Act of 1924 imposed American citizenship upon the tribe, the tribe rejected American and Canadian citizenship (George-Kanentiio, 2008; Holm, 2010; Reid, 2014; Segwalise, 2005). Later, in 1977, while traveling to a United Nations conference, the Mohawk tribal members successfully used their Iroquois issued passports (Barreiro, 2005). By emphasizing tribal identity, the tribal members are demonstrating their strong connection to the tribe.

3.2 Data Collection and Data Analysis

During a one week period, six social studies teachers distributed the survey to their students and collected the responses. The survey encompassed demographic questions and the following survey question (Table 1): In your daily life, are you involved in any activities that you consider to be related to citizenship? If so, please describe them. The open ended format was used to hear their perceptions on what constitutes citizenship behaviors and to avoid biasing their responses. To obtain the data categories, the constant comparative method (Creswell, 2015) was used. The survey responses and the interview responses were transcribed and placed in an Excel spreadsheet. From the data, the author noted key words and phrases, searched for emerging patterns, and created codes. From the participants' responses, codes emerged. Then, descriptive statistics were used to analyze the data. For Table 1, the main codes were disengaged citizenship, personally responsible citizenship, personal development citizenship, and patriotic citizenship. Quotes from the participants were included to illustrate the categories.

4 Results

Overall, the most popular form of citizenship engagement was disengaged citizenship (36.63%) while the least popular form of citizenship was patriotic citizenship (6.3%). However, disengaged citizenship was more pronounced among Akwesasne Mohawk students (41.49%) and students who classified themselves as other (47.83%) than the European American students (28.24%). With this form of citizenship, a typical response was "No."

With personal development citizenship, participation rates were fairly similar among the Akwesasne Mohawk (26.60%), the European Americans (24.71%), and the students who classified themselves as other (21.74%). For example, a European American student wrote, "Yes, I go to school," an Akwesasne Mohawk student penned, "Sports," and a European American student wrote, "I am in the local volunteer fire department."

With personally responsible citizenship, Akwesasne Mohawk students' participation rates (18.09%) were somewhat lower than European American (27.06%) and students who classified themselves as other (26.09%); however, in each of the groups, the participants strongly preferred to help others than follow rules and laws. For example, one European American wrote, "Activities in which we help other people that go through hardships. By helping another citizen, I feel that I help give back. I participate all the time, but we have meetings about every other weekend." An Akwesasne Mohawk student penned, "Volunteer in community events" while a student who classified himself as other noted, "In my daily life, an activity that I consider citizenship is helping at a local [food] pantry."

Finally, with patriotic citizenship, 5 out of 6 of the Akwesasne Mohawks (5.32%) preferred to express patriotism towards their tribe rather than towards the United States. For example, an Akwesasne Mohawk student penned, "For being a Mohawk I try to attend ceremonies. I wake up each day and I am proud of who I am and that's being Mohawk." However, a different Akwesasne Mohawk student wrote, "Stand up for the Pledge of Allegiance every day in school and sometimes sing the national anthem at my hockey games." In contrast, all of the European American students (9.41%) discussed the Pledge. For example, one European American student wrote, "Pledge allegiance to the flag every morning at school." In contrast, among the students who classified themselves as other, 0% of them discussed patriotic citizenship.

Table 1. High school students: In your daily life, are you involved in any activities that you consider to be related to citizenship? If so, please describe them and identify how often you participated.

High School Students			
Total participants = 191	Akwesasne Mohawk n = 88	European Americans n=80	Other n = 23
Total responses = 202	Total responses = 94	Total responses = 85	Total responses = 23
Disengaged citizenship = 74 (36.63%)	Disengaged citizenship = 39 (41.49%)	Disengaged citizenship = 24 (28.24%)	Disengaged citizenship = 11 (47.83%)
Personal development citizenship = 51 (25.25%) School = 29 (14.36%) Sports = 20 (9.90%) Club = 2 (1%)	Personal development citizenship = 25 (26.60%) School = 15 (15.96%) Sports = 10 (10.64%)	Personal development citizenship = 21 (24.71%) School = 11 (12.94%) Sports = 8 (9.41%) Club = 2 (2.35%)	Personal development citizenship = 5 (21.74%) School = 3 (13.04%) Sport = 2 (8.70%)
Personally responsible citizenship = 46 (22.77%) Help others = 42 (20.79%) Rules laws = 4 (1.98%)	Personally responsible citizenship = 17 (18.09%) Help others = 15 (15.96%) Rules laws = 2 (2.13%)	Personally responsible citizenship = 23 (27.06%) Help others = 21 (24.71%) Rules laws = 2 (2.35%)	Personally responsible citizenship = 6 (26.09%) Help others = 6 (26.09%)
Patriotic citizenship = 14 (6.93%) Pledge = 9 (4.46%) Tribe = 5 (5.32%)	Patriotic citizenship = 6 (6.38%) Pledge = 1 (1.06%) Tribe = 5 (5.32%)	Patriotic citizenship = 8 (9.41%) Pledge = 8 (9.41%)	Patriotic citizenship = 0 (0%)
No response = 9 (4.46%)	No response = 4 (4.26%)	No response = 5 (5.88%)	
Miscellaneous = 8 (3.96%)	Miscellaneous 3 (3.19%)	Miscellaneous 4 (4.71%)	Miscellaneous 1 (4.35%)

5 Discussion

This study sought to evaluate the civic engagement of high school Akwesasne Mohawk and European American high school students. Traditionally with this age group, personally responsible citizenship has been a popular form of self-reported citizenship engagement (Alazzi & Chiodo, 2008; Martin & Chiodo, 2007; Martin & Chiodo, 2008; Wood, 2014). However, in this study, for the European American students, the Akwesasne Mohawk students, and the students who classified themselves as other, disengaged citizenship was the most popular form of citizenship, and patriotic citizenship was the least popular form of citizenship. The overall popularity of disengaged citizenship among these high school students supports the 2016 Associated Press-Gfk poll which found that nearly 80% of adult Americans of unspecified race/ethnicity feel that the United States government is dysfunctional and ignores constituents' interests (Webber, & Swanson, 2016).

5.1 Disengaged Citizenship

With disengaged citizenship, ethnic differences occurred. Disengaged citizenship was higher among the Akwesasne Mohawks (41.49%) and the students who classified themselves as other (47.83%) compared to European Americans (28.24%). This finding supports previous research which found that Native Americans, African Americans, and individuals of unspecified race/ethnicity had negative attitudes about social studies/history (Chandler, 2010; Verbos, et al., 2011; Woodson, 2015).

Within the Akwesasne Mohawk tribe, tribal identity is strongly valued (George-Kanentiio, 2008), and the Akwesasne Mohawk students' strong interest in disengaged citizenship may be a byproduct of the male and female tribal members' negative experiences in the United States through the years (Segwalise, 2005). For example, the United States treaties of 1784, 1789, and 1794 which guaranteed their sovereignty were followed by illegal settlements (Holm, 2010). Later, in 1985, due to industrial pollution, the Mohawk reservation was "one of the worst PCB-polluted sites in North America" (Johansen, 1993, p. 11); "residents were warned not to eat vegetables from their own gardens" (Johansen, 1993, p. 6). These negative experiences provide potential context on why the Akwesasne Mohawks responded to an open ended survey on citizenship engagement with

a simple response of no. This historical context also impacts students who classify themselves as other; this history is part of their heritage and their family's heritage. Meanwhile, with respect to the European Americans, this racial/ethnic group has historically held a more privileged place in American society and this status might have contributed to their lower rates of disengaged citizenship.

5.2 Personal Development Citizenship

Overall, the second most popular category of citizenship was personal development citizenship. Previous research has highlighted the benefits of personal development citizenship (Berson et al., 2014; Carter et al., 2009; Dias & Menezes, 2014; El-Haj, 2007; Kahne & Sporte, 2008; Kozub & Brusseau, 2012; Kressly et al., 2009; Lopez & Moore, 2006; Yeung, 2015), and in this study, the self-reported participation rates among the three groups was fairly similar with the Akwesasne Mohawks at 26.60%, the European Americans at 24.71%, and the students who classified themselves as other at 21.74%. This form of citizenship reflects activities in the students' daily lives such as school, clubs, and sports; however, personal development citizenship has been devalued because it focuses on helping the individual rather than the community (Alazzi & Chiodo, 2008; Parker & Beck, 2017) and because social studies coursework has shown mixed results on political socialization (Hutchens & Eveland Jr., 2009). However, it is through personal development citizenship that students are learning social studies content, developing their identity, and developing skills such as leadership skills, communication skills, and organizational skills. While personal development citizenship lays down a foundation for future civic growth, the rates of disengaged citizenship among the participants is an area of concern. If students continue to feel disengaged citizenship as they become adults, their future overall citizenship engagement on the local, state, and national levels may be limited, which in turn, weakens the nation.

5.3 Personally Responsible Citizenship

Out of the four types of citizenship engagement, personally responsible citizenship ranked near the bottom at third place. This finding differs from previous research with primarily European Americans high school students in Martin and Chiodo (2007) who viewed citizenship in terms of helping others and obeying rules/laws, Native American high school students in Martin and Chiodo (2008) who viewed citizenship in terms helping others and following rules/laws, Jordanian high school students of unspecified race/ethnicity who saw citizenship as helping others and following rules/laws (Alazzi & Chiodo, 2008), and primarily New Zealand European and Pacific Nations high school students who regarded citizenship as helping other people (Wood, 2014). Self-reports of personally responsible citizenship among the participants were similar among European Americans (27.06%) and students who classify themselves as other (26.09%) but lower among the Akwesasne Mohawks (15.96%). For the Akwesasne Mohawks, their responses may be due to them having had negative experiences with the United States government (Segwalise, 2005) coupled with the consequences of rural poverty. Previous research notes that wealthier students are 1.89 times more inclined than their low socioeconomic peers to partake in service activities (Kahne & Sporte, 2008); in poor rural areas, some struggling families simply may not be able to afford to donate money or canned goods to charity.

Payne (2013) notes that individuals who live in generational poverty tend to feel distrust and dislike for government, and a lack of trust in the government can reduce an individuals' political efficacy and their overall desire to participate politically within a society's government (Levy, 2013). Furthermore, schools which have high levels of low income students tend to have high levels of cynicism (Hutchens & Eveland, 2009).

Payne (2013) also notes that individuals who live in generational poverty tend to place less value on rules and laws. The study results support this tendency. Overall, the participants' desire to help others was 20.79% while their interest in following rules and laws was 1.98%; in each of the groups, helping others was valued much more than following rules and laws.

5.4 Patriotic Citizenship/Commitment to Country

Among the different self-identified forms of citizenship participation, the least popular category was patriotic citizenship, and differences occurred among the groups. With the Akwesasne Mohawk students, five out of six viewed patriotic citizenship in terms of the tribe. All of the European Americans discussed the United States Pledge of Allegiance, and none of the students who identified themselves as other discussed patriotic citizenship. The negative response to the Pledge by the Akwesasne Mohawk and the students who classified themselves as other supports previous experiences such as the numbness described by high school students of unspecified race/ethnicity in Mitchell and Parker (2008) and the disinterest that Hispanic high school students in Bondy (2014) felt towards the Pledge. The European American students' support of the Pledge aligned with the primarily European American and African American southeastern high school students' positive feelings toward the Pledge.

In response to negative experiences, some individuals choose to retreat from the dominant culture and to more closely identify with their group's culture (El-Haj, 2007). For example, in a case study of four Muslim high school students who were born in Palestine or in the United States (El-Haj, 2007), the students had encountered negative experiences in school such as classmates who accused them of carrying a bomb, and their family members encountered negative experiences such as police stops due to racial profiling. The participants did articulate their feelings of disengagement, and the majority of the participants refused to pledge their allegiance to the American flag (El-Haj, 2007).

6 Limitations and Future Research

This study was limited to one geographical area and one Native American tribe. Future research could include other geographic areas and other Native American tribes. Future research could also examine students of other racial/ethnic backgrounds and students from other tribes.

7 Conclusion

Voluntary citizenship engagement is not automatic (Kahne & Middaugh, 2008). While societies wish to preserve their culture and traditions, there is a tendency for youth to re-conceptualize traditions to reflect their lives and their times (Jones & Meyer, 2010; Santrock, 2016). In this study, while the Akwesasne Mohawks have long held an interest in their tribal identity, disengaged citizenship was also the most popular form of citizenship among the European American high school students and the students who classified themselves as other. The students' emphasis on disengaged citizenship shows a change from the traditional form of citizenship participation – personally responsible citizenship. By understanding students' perceptions about citizenship, citizenship education curriculum can be recalibrated to better meet the needs of students in the 21st century.

Funding

None declared

Conflict of Interest: None declared.

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Journal of Education and Social Development, 2017, 1–1
Sept. 2017, pages 21-28
doi: 10.5281/zenodo.945792
http://www.ibii-us.org/Journals/JESD/
ISBN 2572-9829 (Online), 2572-9810 (Print)

GED Recipients versus Traditional High School Graduates: Exploring the Academic Achievement – Locus of Control Relationship

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Received on September 05, 2017; revised on September 21, 2017; published on September 22, 2017

Abstract

A study was conducted to investigate academic achievement and the role locus of control played in GED recipients' and traditional high school graduates' post-secondary performance. The covariates of gender, age, race, and number of previous semesters students spent in college, were examined as well. No significant difference in academic achievement of either group in terms of locus of control, age, or time in college was found. However, with regard to locus of control, participants exhibiting higher internality also had higher GPAs – thus supporting the prevailing supposition that an internal locus of control is associated with greater academic outcomes. Further, gender and the interaction of type of diploma and gender was shown to be significant in that females in the sample had a significantly higher GPA than males. The covariate of race was shown to be significant in that Caucasian participants had significantly higher GPAs than African Americans and others.

Keywords: GED recipient, Locus of Control, Academic Achievement, Postsecondary Performance

1 Introduction

In 2015, the United States Department of Education reported that the high school graduation rate had "hit an all-time high" of more than 83% (Obama White House Archives, 2016). Deputy Secretary John King remarked, "It is encouraging to see our graduation rate on the rise and I applaud the hard work we know it takes to see this increase" (U.S. Department of Education, 2015). But as was also indicated, despite the apparent rise in the numbers of students completing high school, the dropout rate continues to be a serious issue. In 2009, more than 500,000 students dropped out (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2013). Further, 1.8 million young adults ages 16-21 are neither enrolled in school nor have completed a high school education (EPE Research Center as cited in Sparks, 2013). Moreover, it is estimated that nearly 39 million Americans between the ages of 18 – 44 lack a high school diploma (Broad, 2014). For students who, for myriad reasons, do not persist to high school graduation, without the opportunity to obtain a high school equivalency credential, the actualization if a lucrative future may never be realized (Pew Research Center, 2014).

Significance

According to Kroll (1993), society's economic success can be predicted by the educational attainment of its members. As such, reconnecting out-of-school youth to educational opportunities and then aiding in transitioning them from high school completion (either traditional graduation or via high school equivalency) to postsecondary education should remain paramount. Merely obtaining a high school credential will not be enough to be competitive in today's technologically rich society (Git, 2014). Persons who have only a high school diploma will fare worse than their counterparts did in earlier generations – by almost every economic measure (Pew Research Center, 2014). Today, a college education is viewed as the key to sustained economic success (Ma, Pender, & Welch, 2016). The trend towards a higher educated labor force is prompting educators and policy makers to thoughtfully consider all facets of college and career readiness including high school equivalency.

For more than 70 years, the General Education Development assessment (GED), accepted in lieu of a traditional high school diploma at post-secondary institutions in both the United States and Canada has served as a gateway to educational opportunity for nearly 20 million people. Many GED recipients view further education as the key to successful participation and productivity in a complex society. In fact, Brown (2000) reported that the greatest benefit of GED attainment is the potential for continuing

education and training. Therefore, post-secondary educators must be able to support all students – regardless of the path (either by traditional high school diploma or via high school equivalency certification) that led to the student's arrival on their campuses. Further, understanding factors that are associated with academic success should be investigated to ensure complimentary post-secondary supports are made available, which underscores why the present study is important.

Purpose

Recognizing the need to ensure the best possible post-secondary educational outcomes for all students, regardless of high school credential, the present study sought to elucidate cognitive and non-cognitive factors related to academic achievement. The purpose of this study was two-fold. First, the researcher wanted to determine if there were significant differences in the post- secondary academic achievement of students who had obtained a high school equivalency credential – specifically GED recipients – and that of traditional high school graduates. Second, the researcher sought to determine the extent to which locus of control of reinforcement, a personality construct grounded in Julian Rotter's social learning theory – played a role in that academic achievement.

Research Questions

The present study addressed the relation of locus of control and other factors to academic achievement. Specific research questions were:

1. Is there a significant difference in student's academic achievement as it relates to type of high school credential (GED vs. traditional) or locus of control (internal vs. external)?
2. Is there a significant difference in academic achievement between GED recipients and traditional high school graduates as it relates to gender?
3. Is there a significant difference in academic achievement between GED recipients and traditional high school graduates as it relates to race?
4. Is there a significant difference in academic achievement of GED recipients and traditional high school graduates as it relates to age and number of semesters previously attended (time spent in college)?

By partitioning out the effects of mediating variables such as race, age and number of previous semesters enrolled in college, the present study provides perspective with regard to these factors and offers suggestions for practice. What follows is a review of related literature and the theoretical framework for the study.

2 Literature Review

GED – A Measure of High School Equivalency

Countering the negative effects of not completing high school, the General Education Development test (GED) has, for more than 75 years, served as the hallmark of high school equivalency and has provided not only a high school credential for non- high school completers, but has opened the door to postsecondary education, better jobs, and greater earning potential for millions of Americans (American Council on Education [ACE], 2017; GED Testing Service, 2014). First administered in 1942 as an alternative educational path for World War II veterans, the GED measures competencies in math, science, social studies and language arts. To ensure the GED remains relevant and in an effort to better align the test to current educational standards that indicate test takers have the skills necessary to succeed in college and the workforce, the test has undergone five major revisions, the most recent of those in 2014 (Adams, 2014).

Today, thousands of individuals take the GED each year and many do so with the hopes of continuing their education. In 1988, 47.5% of all GED test takers planned to go to college. In 2013, 63.7% of test takers indicated that postsecondary education was the motivating factor for taking the exam (GED Testing Service, 2014). Vastly different from the mostly male, returning servicemen who took the test 70 years ago, today, most GED recipients are older, mostly female and are more likely to attend community colleges or technical schools than non- GED recipients (Prins & Kassab 2015; Zhang, 2010).

GED and high school equivalency in Louisiana. Because the present study took place in Louisiana, it is important to note that while it appears that more U.S. high school students are graduating, Louisiana still has one of the lowest graduation rates in the nation. Though touted as vaulting to an all-time high in 2014-2015, the state still ranks below the national average (Louisiana Department of Education, 2016). Nearly 25 % of adults in Louisiana do not have a high school credential (Hanford, Smith & Stern, 2013). For this reason, the GED has played a significant role for thousands of Louisiana students. Currently, Louisiana uses the High School Equivalency Test (HiSet), which most resembles the 2002 GED test series.

GED as a measure of college readiness. The General Education Development test (GED), once catering mainly to servicemen, is considered an important vehicle for persons desiring to complete the high school credential and pursue postsecondary education (Maralani, 2011). In theory, successful completion of the GED should signify that one has skills and knowledge equivalent to that of a high school graduate, but that theory is often debated. While obtaining the GED credential is considered a milestone of achievement, test takers are often stigmatized as lacking the academic skills necessary to compete with traditional high school graduates. The very fact that a person did not complete a traditional high school program of study, regardless of the reasons for not doing so, is associated with negative long-term outcomes. Consequently, since the first offering of the GED in 1942, researchers, policy makers and practitioners have questioned the efficacy of the GED, studying everything from economic benefits of the credential and comparison of GED recipient and traditional high school graduate postsecondary academic performance to age differences of test takers and individual motivation for taking the exam (Lance, 1998; Locke & Smith, 1999; Tyler, 2003). Questions related to whether the GED serves as a reliable indicator of college readiness have been examined with great vigor – oftentimes yielding conflicting results.

Extant research that focuses on GED recipient postsecondary academic performance is plentiful, though findings from studies have been inconsistent. Kroll's (1993) meta-analysis provides an excellent example of the glaring disparities in antecedent research. Kroll found that some studies suggested that GED recipients achieved a similar (or sometimes, higher) level of academic success as traditional high school graduates. Yet other studies in her meta- analysis indicated that GED recipients were less academically prepared than their traditional high school graduate counterparts. In addition, there were divergent findings related to the notion that the GED is a valid predictor of postsecondary performance (Kroll, 1993). Because of the conflicting results, Kroll recommended that intervening variables, such as gender and motivation be investigated to determine if an interaction existed which could explain discrepancies.

In addition to Kroll, many other researchers obtained results that added to the conundrum regarding to post-secondary academic performance of GED recipients, as well. Turner (1993) found that the GED was not a suitable tool for predicting college performance and should therefore not be used to preclude recipients from the same educational opportunities as traditional high school graduates. Similarly, researchers such as Banner (1989) Baldwin (1995), McElroy (1990) and Rose (1999) found that GED recipients perform as well as or even better than traditional high school

graduates in postsecondary settings. Conversely however, other researchers found that traditional high school graduates performed significantly better (Hamilton, 1998), had lower attrition rates (Ebert, 2002) and took fewer developmental courses (Blue, 2015) than GED recipients. Blue (2015) found that in addition to requiring more remedial coursework, particularly in math, GED recipients earned fewer college credits and were less likely to complete a degree or certificate program when compared to traditional high school graduates. Like Kroll, these researchers suggested that mediating factors, including motivational characteristics which have been significantly related to academic achievement, be investigated in greater depth. With this in mind and guided by research that links personality constructs to academic performance, the present study sought to examine the relationship of locus of control of reinforcement (LOC) and postsecondary academic performance of GED recipients and traditional high school graduates.

Locus of Control and Theoretical Framework

Julian Rotter's social learning theory forms the theoretical basis for the present study. Rotter's theory is composed of four components: (a) behavior potential – BP, (b) expectancy – E, (c) reinforcement value – RV, and (d) psychological situation, which can be combined into a predictive formula for behavior wherein behavior potential (BP) is depicted as a function of expectancy (E) and reinforcement value (RV): BP = f(E& RV). It is important to note that the fourth component, psychological situation, though not a direct component of the behavior prediction formula, is influential in that situations may be interpreted differently depending on the individual and therefore influences expectancy. Social learning theory posits that people learn certain behaviors through observing and imitating the behaviors of others and consequently, receive resulting rewards or punishments (Feist & Feist, 2002). Locus of control of reinforcement, founded in social learning theory "is conceptualized as a type of learned expectancy that reflects the degree to which individuals perceive connections between their behavior and reinforcements they receive" (Kalecstein & Nowicki, 1997, p. 30). In this regard, social learning theory facilitates a clear predictive relationship (due to the influence of psychological situation on expectancy) between locus of control and academic achievement.

Locus of control can be either general or specific and progresses along a continuum of very external to very internal. (Findley & Cooper, 1983, Kalecstein & Nowicki, 1997). The prevailing supposition suggests that individuals classified as internal, believing they control their own destiny, have better outcomes including a propensity towards high academic achievement and greater achievement motivation. (McLeod & Adams, 1980). Further, persons exhibiting an internal orientation are "more perceptive to and ready to learn about their surroundings" (Lefcourt, 1982, p. 80) and are more likely to graduate from college in a more judicious fashion (Hall, Smith & Chia, 2008). The converse is true for persons with an external orientation, however. Externals tend to possess lower behavioral goals, have lower academic achievement than internals and believe that luck, chance or fate are more likely to be the determinants for the outcomes of their behavior (Lefcourt, 1982; McLeod & Adams, 1980).

Locus of Control and Academic Achievement

Rotter's paradigm has influenced a great deal of literature. Researchers have conducted a number of studies wherein a significant relationship between locus of control and academic achievement was found. Gifford, Briceno – Perriott & Mianzo (2006) concluded that locus of control was a predictor of first-year academic success in that college freshmen in their study who were internals demonstrated a statistically significant higher GPA than externals. Rakow and Sterbin (1996) using the full research sample of the 1988 National Educational Longitudinal Study found that study participants with a higher internal locus of control achieved higher scores on standardized tests. In addition, Schonwetter, Menac, Struthers, Hecter and Perry (1993) found that college students exhibiting internality performed better in instructional situations than externals. But, just as with studies of GED recipient performance, there were instances where inconsistent results regarding locus of control and academic achievement have been found. In Aspelmeier, Love, McGill, Eliott, and Pierce's study (2012), internal locus of control though found to be largely associated with better college adjustment was not significantly associated with GPA.

3 Methods

By delving into factors related to post-secondary performance of GED recipients, the present study aimed to add to the existing body of knowledge with respect to the achievement – locus of control relationship. To assess the relationship of locus of control to GED recipient and traditional high school graduate (THSG) post-secondary academic performance (as measured by semester GPA), this study employed an ex post facto (after the fact) – factorial model research design. This design was most appropriate in that the independent variables (high school credential, gender and LOC) could not be manipulated and were already present prior to participant selection. The factorial model allowed for the determination of how independent variables (LOC, high school credential, gender) interacted in their effects on the dependent variable ([GPA], Pedhazur & Schmelkin, 1991). Moreover, group comparisons (GED recipients versus THSG) and an estimation of the magnitude of relationships could be determined with this method. To ensure internal validity, the following additional variables (covariates) were included: race, age, and time the subjects spent in college prior to participating in the study.

Sample

The present study was conducted at three, 2-year post – secondary institutions in Northern Louisiana. The study employed a purposive sampling technique – intensity sampling – because the sample size was largely dependent on what could be done within the existing constraints of the selected postsecondary institutions. The GED population at the selected institutions represented a small proportion of the total enrollment and it was anticipated that the GED cohort of participants would be relatively small in comparison. Therefore to obtain desired participants, GED recipients were purposefully sought after. In addition, an important criterion for participation in the study was that all participants must have been enrolled in one of the institutions during the previous semester. This was important because previous semester GPA was used as the measure for the dependent variable – academic achievement.

To ensure that optimum participation was achieved, administrators at each location provided liberal assistance. At two of the institutions, college administrators assisted with the identification of potential participants. At the third institution, no assistance was provided and the researcher had to rely on individual instructors at the institution to administer data collection instruments during their classes with the hopes that GED recipients would participate. For comparison purposes, a random sample of the total enrolled population of traditional high school graduates (THSGs) was selected. The purposive sampling technique employed, resulted in 90 GED recipients. From the total group of THSGs that partici-

pated, a random sample of 90 traditional high school graduates was selected. Each participant was provided with a data collection packet that included a letter of informed consent, a researcher made Demographic and High School Credential Survey, and the Adult Nowicki-Strickland Internal – External Control Scale (ANS-IE) developed by Stephen Nowicki and Marshall P. Duke (found here).

Instruments

The ANS-IE, used to assess locus of control, was adapted from the original locus of control scale developed by Julian Rotter. It is important to note that the locus of control – academic relationship is more consistent with social learning theory when measured by the ANS-IE (Duke & Nowicki, 1974; Johnston, 1999). In addition, the ANS-IE is suitable for use with persons who have as little as a 5th grade reading ability. The ANS-IE is composed of 40 items that require a yes or no response and is scored in the external direction such that the score received represents the degree of externality (i.e., a higher score indicates higher externality [Nowicki, 2015]). The instrument is psychometrically sound and reliable and construct validity has been established via significant positive correlation between the Norwicki – Strickland and the Rotter I/E Locus of Control Scale (Duke & Nowicki, 1974 [r = .68, df = 47, p < .01; r=.48, df = 37, p < .01; r = .44, df = 33, p < .05]; Hoover, 2000; Lefcourt, 1982). To obtain study participants' demographics (age, race, gender), time spent in college and information about the type of high school credential earned, a researcher made Demographic and High School Credential Survey was used.

Data Analysis

To summarize data, descriptive statistics were obtained using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). To assess the effects of the three independent variables (LOC, gender, and High School Credential) and the effects of the interaction (Cronk, 2002), a 2 x 2 x 2 factorial Analysis of Covariance (ANCOVA) was conducted as well (see figure 1). ANCOVA is used as a procedure for the statistical control of

Fig 1. 2x2x2 Factorial ANCOVA Design Model depicting academic achievement as

		Locus of Control	
Diploma Type	**Gender**	**Internal**	**External**
GED	MALE	*Academic Achievement	*Academic Achievement
	FEMALE	*Academic Achievement	*Academic Achievement
TRADITIONAL	MALE	*Academic Achievement	*Academic Achievement
	FEMALE	*Academic Achievement	*Academic Achievement

a function of multiple measures (Locus of control [LOC], Type of diploma and gender). * - Indicates that covariates have been partitioned out of academic achievement.

extraneous variables – covariates (Hinkle, Jurs, & Wiersma, 2003). ANCOVA combines regression analysis and ANOVA to control for the effects of a covariate by partitioning out the variation attributed to this variable, thus allowing an increase in the precision of the research by reducing the error variance (Cronk, 2002). Further, the factorial model depicts the two levels of each of the three independent variables – hence the 2 x 2 x 2 designation.

4 Results

Descriptive Statistics

Results of analyses revealed that both groups, GED recipients and THSGs, were comprised of mostly female participants (72% and 57%, respectively). In addition, the majority of participants in the sample were Caucasian (66%). Further with respect to age, the sample could be categorized as non-traditional (*m*=28.36). Specifically, the GED cohort was significantly older than the THSG cohort. GED recipients had an average age of approximately 31 years old compared to 23 years old for THSG. Both GED recipients and THSG spent approximately 3 semesters in college prior to data collection for this study.

Table 1. Distribution of Cohorts by Gender, Race and Credential Type

		Sample	GED	THSG
Gender				
	Male	64	25	39
	Female	116	65	51
	Total	180	90	90
Race				
	Caucasian	118	62	56
	African American	56	24	32
	Other	6	4	4
	Total	180	90	90

GED: General Education Development (Equivalency Certificate) Recipient
THSG: Traditional High School Graduate

With regard to LOC, on average, the sample had a relatively low score (*m* = 10.81). This score is indicative of an internal orientation and falls within the range of mean scores for other college students (*m* = 9.06) and community subjects (*m* = 10.96). African Americans in the sample exhibited a slightly more external orientation than did Caucasians. Sub – group means indicated that males in the THSG cohort tended towards greater externality (*m* = 11.18, SD = 4.64) than females in the THSG cohort (*m* = 10.69, SD = 4.73). Further, female GED recipients were slightly less external (m = 10.68) than male THSG (m = 10.72).

Table 2. Summary of Sample Means by Diploma Type, Gender and Race for Age, Semesters in College and Locus of Control

		Age	Semesters	Locus of Control
Diploma				
	GED	31.31	3.62	10.71
	Traditional	25.40	3.33	10.91
Gender				
	Male	26.88	3.14	10.98
	Female	29.17	3.67	10.70
Race				
	Caucasian	27.71	3.37	10.98
	African American	29.36	3.64	11.23
	Other	31.67	4.00	11.17
Total		28.36	3.48	10.81
	SD	9.60	2.46	4.24

N=180

Table 3. Comparison of Subgroup Means

Diploma Type	Gender	Locus of Control	SD
GED			
	Male	10.68	3.40

	Female	19.72	3.93
	Total	10.71	3.77
THSG			
	Male	11.18	4.64
	Female	10.69	4.73
	Total	10.89	4.67
Total Sample			
	Male	10.98	4.18
	Female	10.71	4.28
	Total	10.81	4.23

N=180

With regard to GPA, the sample mean was above average. Females in the sample had an average GPA of 3.12 and males in the sample had an average GPA of 2.87; Caucasians had a higher GPA (3.14) than African Americans; GED recipients had an average GPA of 3.09 and THSG had a mean GPA of 2.97.

Table 4. Mean GPA for Sample by Diploma Type, Gender and Race

		GPA	SD
Diploma			
	GED	3.09	.735
	THSG	2.97	.787
Gender			
	Male	2.87	.823
	Female	3.12	.715
Race			
	Caucasian	3.14	.733
	African American	2.79	.718
	Other	2.98	.463
Total		3.03	.762

N = 180

Inferential Statistics

Before the factorial ANCOVA was conducted, data were screened to ensure fulfillment of the assumptions of factorial ANOVA. Outliers were identified and GED holders with a GPA of less than or equal to 1.4 were recoded and THSG with a GPA less than or equal to 1.0 were recoded also. The preliminary ANCOVA, which included Levene's test to assess the homogeneity of variance, indicated no significant factor interaction, $F(62.117) = 1.130$, $p = .283$, $\eta^2 = .375$ and because $p > 0.05$, equal variances could be assumed. Therefore, main effects for each factor and covariate were more accurately interpreted.

Table 5. Test of Assumption of Homogeneity of Variance

Source	SS	*df*	MS	F	P	η^2
Diploma x Gender x LOC x Race x Age X Semesters	38.92	62	.628	1.13	.283	.375
Error	64.98	117	.555			
Total	1755.43	180				

N = 180

After partitioning out the effects of race, age and time in college, F ratios and p values indicated that there was no significant difference in students' academic achievement with respect to type of high school credential they had received, $F(1,115) = 2.178$, $p > .05$. The GPA for the GED cohort was not significantly different from the GPA of the THSG cohort. In addition, just as the main effect for type of diploma was not significant, the main effect for locus of control was not significant, $F(21, 115) = 1.12$, $p > .05$. Both GED recipients and THSG exhibited an internal locus of control, which coincidently, was not a significant factor in the academic achievement of either group.

Results of analyses did however, indicate a significant main effect for gender, $F(1,115) = 3.981$, $p < .05$. Females in the sample had a significantly higher GPA than males though the effect size for gender ($\eta^2 = .033$), was relatively small. The interaction of high school credential and gender was also significant, $F(1,115) = 5.02$, $p > .05$). This interaction was present for males and females in the THSG group only. The GPAs of males and females in the GED group were not significantly different but it is important to note that male GED recipients (m=3.16) had significantly higher GPAs than male THSGs (m = 2.66).

The covariate of race was significantly related to academic achievement in that the mean GPA for Caucasians (3.14) was significantly different from that of African Americans (m=2.79, SD = .718). The effect size for race was large ($\eta^2 = .082$) indicating that about 8% of the variance in GPA was attributed to this variable. The covariates of age (m = 28.34, SD = 9.58) and time in college prior to participation in the study (m = 3.47, SD = 2.46) did not significantly affect GPA for either group.

Table 6. Summary Table for Factorial ANCOVA/Tests of Between Subject Effects

Source	SS	*df*	MS	F	P	η^2
Race	5.28	1	5.28	9.77	.002**	.078
Age	1.91	1	1.91	3.53	.063	.030
Semesters	.53	1	.53	.98	.324	.007
Diploma	1.50	1	1.50	2.78	.098	.024
Gender	2.15	1	2.15	3.98	.048*	.033
LOC	12.65	21	.60	1.12	.342	.169
Diploma x Gender	2.71	1	2.71	5.02	.027	.042
Diploma x LOC	7.61	13	.59	1.09	.379	.109
Gender x LOC	12.22	13	.94	1.74	.061	.164
Diploma x Gender x LOC	3.42	10	.34	.63	.782	.052
Total	1755.43	180				

Note. * = p < .05. ** = p < .01

5 Discussion, Implications and Conclusion

This study sought to determine if there were significant differences in the academic performance of GED recipients and THSGs and the role if any, that locus of control played. With regard to academic performance, there was no significant difference in the academic achievement or locus of control for the two groups of students. The present study's findings were consistent with those of researchers such as Baldwin (1995), Rose (1999) and Akins (2009), in that GPA was not a function of the type of diploma the study participants possessed. Though, the findings were contrary to results by previous researchers such as Ebert (2002) and Blue (2015). In those studies, traditional high school graduates had significantly higher GPAs than GED recipients.

With regard to locus of control, Kalecstein and Nowicki (1997) and Linder and Janus (1997), found that students who had higher internality also had higher academic achievement. In the present study, although locus of control did not contribute significantly to academic achievement of either group, the trend that higher internality is associated with higher academic achievement was supported. It is important to note that despite the fact that locus of control was not shown to have an independent effect, the Pearson Product – Moment coefficient (r =.-118) indicated a weak, negative relationship with GPA which means that as the value of locus of control increased (more external), the GPA would decrease and vice versa. In the present study, both groups of students had an above average GPA and both groups displayed an internal locus of control orientation.

Gender was also shown to have a significant effect on achievement in that females in the sample had a higher average GPA than males. Interestingly, with respect to locus of control, males had the highest (most external) scores and male THSG had a GPA that was significantly lower than female THSG and significantly lower than both male and female GED recipients. This adds further credence to the supposition that academic achievement can be related (although weakly) to one's locus of control.

Further, results revealed that when treated as a mediating variable, race significantly impacted the GPA of the participants such that Caucasians had a higher average GPA than both African Americans and those who identified as – other. When comparing participants' locus of control on the basis of race, it was found that both African Americans and others exhibited greater externality than did Caucasians in the sample. Interestingly, Duke and Nowicki (1974) posited that "years of living under conditions where reinforcements were in the hands of powerful others would lead blacks to respond in more external manner than whites" (p. 6). If the locus of control – academic relationship were to be acknowledged, the findings of the present study would be consistent with theoretical assumption that higher academic achievement is related to higher internality. No significant difference existed as it relates to age or semesters spent in college prior to beginning the study and neither factor influenced GPA across sub-groups. With respect to age however, the GED cohort was somewhat older though, this did not appear to affect the group's performance.

Implications for Practice

Historically, there has been a negative stigma attached to the concept of GED recipients going on to college (Gewertz, 2010)– despite data that indicates a majority of GED takers do so with the intention of furthering their education (GED Testing Service, 2014). Based on the findings of the present study, it can be concluded that the type of high school credential is less of a predictor of academic performance than other factors such as race and gender. In addition, the aforementioned results also support the prevailing supposition that higher internality is associated with higher academic achievement and therefore provide important implications for adult basic education programs and professionals in higher education.

First, in that locus of control has been associated with achievement, it would be beneficial to include an assessment of this personality construct with new student orientation or freshman success courses at postsecondary institutions. Doing so would provide useful information to guide the placement of these students and the development and implementation of programs and services to assist them (Jackson, 2004). Further because locus of control is an attribute that is changeable (McKay, B. & McKay, K., 2010), reattribution interventions that attempt to change students' explanations about the dysfunctional behavior (i.e. encouraging freshmen students to attribute any academic problems to temporary factors) may improve academic achievement (Wilson, Damiani & Shelton, 2002). Research, guided by Wiener's Attribution Theory of Achievement Motivation, has determined that individualized attributional retraining techniques are effective for students and can lead to substantial improvements in academic performance (Hall, Hladkyj, Perry & Ruthig, 2004). In addition, research has suggested that courses stressing study and adjustment skills can raise grade point averages and influence locus of control toward greater internality (Feldman & Poirier, 2013).

Second, according to the College Success Factors Index, responsibility and control are two of 10 factors that are considered essential to academic performance and retention. A process requiring a gradual increase in student responsibility and an acceptance by the student that he or she has increasing control over academic success can influence academic achievement. As such, post-secondary educators should assign activities that offer an opportunity for students to take responsibility. Taking responsibility is integral to taking control. It is posited that when students take responsibility and this process is intrinsic, scholastic aptitude increases (Hallberg, E., & Hallberg, K., n.d.). Further, Lefcourt (1982) explained that "without an expectation of internal control and without persistence despite imminent failure", an individual might not take the steps necessary to ensure success (p.81).

Conclusion

Despite scrutiny about its efficacy, the General Education Development Test (GED) continues to be an viable albeit non-traditional path for adults to earn a high school credential, enter post-secondary institutions and, with complimentary and targeted support services, obtain a college degree and ultimately, a successful, financially stable future. Results of the present study indicated that there was no significant difference in academic achievement of GED recipients and THSG in that both groups of students have above average GPAs. Therefore, it can be concluded that for these students, possession of the GED credential did not predict performance and it can be posited that merely having a GED did not indicate that the individuals were less prepared for postsecondary work than their THSG counterparts. Further, results revealed that within this sample, gender could be a more accurate predictor of academic achievement than type of diploma.

Acknowledgements

The author offers many thanks to the registrar's offices and faculty and staff at the participating institutions.

Funding

This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

Conflict of Interest: none declared.

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Journal of Education and Social Development
(Quarterly, Started in 2017)
Vol. 1, No. 1, Sept, 2017
Price: $80

Published and printed by Institution of Business Intelligence Innovation
P. O. Box 218241, Houston, TX 77218, USA
Phone: 1-281-619-5661
E-mail: contact@ibii-us.org
Website: http://www.ibii-us.org

ISSN 2572-9810
9 772572 981018