

First Generation Students and the Risk of Dropping Out of College

Research question: Are first-generation students at a higher risk of dropping out compared to their peers whose parents earned a degree?

Literature Review

According to Parr & Bonitz (2015), the level of socioeconomic status and parental involvement are vital in influencing absenteeism and academic performance. Academic performance and absenteeism are significant in predicting student drop out during schooling period. According to the author, the education background of parents affects the ability of First generation degree students to complete college in two ways: first by influencing their choice of college and secondly in their ability to persevere through college. Nearly half of first-generation degree students attend community colleges compared with less than 25% for students whose parents have a college education. A study by Ishitani (2016) indicates that first-generation degree students have a marginally lower college persistence behavior that leads them to withdraw from college by the second year. The social integration and nature of varying academic times were noted to have a significant impact on the behavior of students. First generations students are less likely to persevere through a 4-year program hence prefer shorter programs. The study further notes that students who show persistence behavior and integrate socially with other students and administration have higher chances of completing college. Unlike first generation students, students with college educated parents are motivated to join and complete college mainly not because of the passion but to avoid being the exceptions in their families. They are driven by the urge to emulate their parents and siblings and get a better life for themselves and avoid being the laughing stock to the family (Stewart et al., 2015).

On the other hand, as noted by Azmitia et al. (2018), first-generation degree students have different goals, practices, and cultural values than students from families that have attained post-high school education. Attaining a college degree has become an essential stimulator for an upward trajectory in standards of living among US citizens. Attaining a degree by first-generation degree students is viewed as a means of increasing occupational opportunities, which consequently increase their chances of getting better housing and healthcare for their families and breaking the poverty cycle (Parr & Bonitz, (2015)). In the US statistics show that only about 36% of youth from low-income families enroll in colleges with the numbers dropping further for youths from African Americans and Latin Americans. The complexity of the matter originates from the point when students turn down full scholarships to prestigious institutions and enroll in local community colleges that are close to their families (Azmitia et al., 2018). They prefer to stay close and support their families during their college time. According to Stewart et al. (2015) and Parr & Bonitz (2015), when first-generation students leave home to attend distant colleges, they tend to feel ambivalent owing to the fact that families and friends may fail to understand the reason to leave. Those who leave home sometimes feel overwhelmed by the home anomalies in terms of responsibilities and college obligations leaving them to feel homesick and lonely. Majority of those who drop out of school report to experience financial problems, feel unwelcomed at college, face discrimination, academic unpreparedness, and the guilty of abandoning home responsibilities (Ishitani, 2016).

Theory and Hypotheses

Cultural mismatch theory explores and explains the implications of the behavioral and psychological that inhibit underrepresented groups from successfully integrate and fit an organization. According to the theory, chances of inequality are high when there is a cultural

mismatch between institutions' common practices and certain underrepresented social groups. For instance, US institutions tend to exhibit mainstream independent cultural norms, thereby excluding underrepresented social groups with interdependent cultural norms. In supporting mainstream independent cultural norms, these institutions fuel inequality that hinder the performance of interrelated cultural norms. It can be noted that cultural mismatch US colleges by adopting independence norms against first-generation interdependence norms increase their stress levels, discomfort, and ability to perform optimally as expected. Such mismatch renders transition by first-generation students difficult, threatening, and uncertain relative to students with college-educated parents. First generation students, especially in their first year, find it difficult to belong and fit in the institution making their experience to be stressful when compared to students who receive parental guidance in transitioning to college (Phillips et al., 2016). The interaction between the model of self for first-generation students Versace the traditional institution culture of independence influence the fitting experience among students; when these cultures meet, student should successfully transition and fit in the institution and prosper in academics, but if they don't it diminishes and flounders the ability of the student to adapt and flourish.

According to Stephens & Townsend (2015), when a mismatch exists, gaps in social classes are widening, and the consequential outcomes can be witnessed in student's social relationships, mental and physical health, and academic performance. The lack of fitting experience hinders social and academic outcomes among first-generation students (Phillips et al., 2016). Outcomes, for example, studies have shown that mismatch of fitting experience can contribute to poor performance and drop out among first-generation students in college.

In summary, a lot of previous studies confirm that the independent cultural norms in colleges create mismatch among first-generation students, which result in numerous negative consequences. Firstly, it hinders the ability of the students to have a successful fitting experience hence undermining their academic performance and equally force some to drop out of college in their early years. However, notably, there is little known about how some first-generation students have a successful transition while others don't that lead them to drop out of school. Investigating how first-generation students from different socio-cultural backgrounds interact with common independent college overtime, we can highlight how and whether inherent social classes are maintained or changed. This is a crucial aspect of cultural mismatch that is unexplored. What really transpires among students with different socio-cultural backgrounds and unique self-models during interaction with the independent culture of college during their transitioning years?

The big question is whether these students change or maintain their social class whether they transition successfully, continue their education, or drop out of college. Varying perspectives of hypotheses regarding the theory suggest that the interaction with college culture by first-generation students shape and change their social class overtime or not. The cultural change hypothesis suggests first-generation students will change from their interdependence background to the institution's independence culture while, on the other hand, cultural mismatch hypothesis indicates that first-generation students will not shift to independence culture from their interdependence.

Protagonists of the cultural change hypothesis argue that college students are mainly emerging adults; hence, it's a critical stage in life when they are still developing psychologically and physically; therefore, the college offers the environment to experiment living away from

their families. At this stage, students are malleable and have the ability to shift values, beliefs, and identities held previously (Stephens & Townsend, 2015). Colleges provide students with a standard platform where independent institutional norms are shared to develop effective student culture by spending daily lives interacting with institutions and colleagues.

Cultural mismatch argues that due to different self-models among first generation students, cultural transition is usually unsuccessful as students maintain their interdependence cultural norms. The supporters of this hypothesis suggest that youth normally interact with various people of different backgrounds before they attain 18 years. Even though college time arrive while still at their developing stages, early experiences build much stronger foundations; hence, college experience have little or no impact on the first-generation student (Stephens & Townsend, 2015). Even if college culture shapes some beliefs like politics, for instance, early sociocultural experiences shape how people interact and behave in life. Despite strong cultural pressure in colleges, early acquired beliefs and values prevent people from changing how they interact with others and institutions. When socialization practices in institutions do not conform to those exhibited by first-generation students, socialization ceases to exist, affecting how students interact going forward (Stephens et al., 2019).

References

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