



ELSEVIER

Contents lists available at [ScienceDirect](http://www.sciencedirect.com)

International Journal of Educational Research

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/ijedures

A qualitative study of the academic and social factors affecting Latino students at a liberal arts college: Accomplishments and challenges



Getnet Bitew*

College of Education and Behavioral Sciences, Haramaya University, P.O. Box 138, Ethiopia

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 18 September 2014
 Received in revised form 25 July 2015
 Accepted 30 November 2015
 Available online 10 December 2015

Keywords:

Accomplishments
 Challenges
 Curriculum
 Latino students
 Social interaction
 Teaching methods

ABSTRACT

This study considers Latino students' social and academic accomplishments and challenges at a liberal arts college. A qualitative methodology was employed, using 74 interviewees. Thematic analysis was used. The findings showed the relevance of the curricula to students' future career and life. Teachers' positive role was highlighted in the students' academic accomplishments. The challenges included content difficulty, uneasiness with some teaching methods, amounts of schoolwork, limited social interaction and English language skill.

© 2015 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

1. Introduction

Students' learning at institutions of higher education – how they develop with regard to thinking, attitudes and habits, the knowledge and skills they acquire – is affected by all their experiences there: what they do on campus inside and outside of the classrooms and their interactions with the campus community, both formal and informal, play crucial roles. In connection to this, [Harwick \(2000\)](#) asserted that our schools, including institutions of higher education, must make efforts to meet the varied levels of students' knowledge and backgrounds – academically, socially and emotionally – in order for all students to succeed. Moreover, students need to feel they belong to their campus community and are accepted and respected by peers and teachers.

In order for our efforts at education to be successful and comprehensive, we must pay special attention to students who come from other backgrounds. Supporting this, [Shields \(2000\)](#) noted that he met many students from other backgrounds during his research study that did not get maximum benefit from their educational experience. His study showed the need to make more effort in helping those students. Latino students attending institutions of higher education in the US are among the many who come from other backgrounds and who need special attention in their education. Research findings (e.g., [Rodriguez, Guido-DiBrito, Torres, & Talbot, 2000](#)) indicated the presence of “distinct challenge and barriers” for several groups of Latino students in their higher education. In addition, since there are a growing number of Latino students in the US, their educational success has fundamental long-term implications for US society. The relative increase of Latino students

* Fax: +251 255 530 325.

E-mail address: getnetd@hotmail.com (G. Bitew).

in colleges over the past two decades (Otero, Rivas, & Rivera, 2007) also calls for increased attention to their college experiences.

To this end, this paper addresses the accomplishments and challenges of Latino students at Goshen College (GC), Indiana, a relatively small, private, residential, Christian, liberal arts college with Anabaptist-Mennonite roots. Both because of their size, relational and personal approach to teaching, liberal arts colleges represent an important pathway to consider in improving their academic learning for this particular population. Historically, liberal arts institutions have emphasized the study of knowledge for its own sake. However, this study highlighted the need to consider the application of theoretical content to practice in the study of different subjects. Moreover, liberal arts colleges may need to devote more time to developing both academic and social support programs for students to ensure their success. These areas of student engagement have not been areas that these kinds of institution have developed as much, as many of their students often come from higher socio-economic backgrounds and with stronger academic skills. Although there is rich literature on Latino students' school experience in general, there is limited research on this group of students' experience who are attending school in private institutions.

In particular, the study focuses on the curricular, pedagogical, and social experiences of Latino students attending GC in the 2008/2009 academic year. It includes Latino students from both the Center for Intercultural Teaching and Learning (CITL) and non-CITL cohorts. CITL was a center established to support Latino students academically, financially, socially, culturally and etc., so that they can cope up with the US tertiary education system and succeed at the college. For instance, the CITL students attended special programs such as Peer Mentor, Faculty Mentor, Academic Support Center, the 1st Mondays Leadership program and the 2nd Mondays program which provided them with the necessary information and experience for the semester and the years to come. However, non-CITL students generally do not have access to these programs. Latino students joined the CITL on a competitive basis; that is, they needed to apply for a scholarship. In addition to fulfilling the college's academic admission criteria, eligible candidates for application in this program were only Latinos by parents/ancestors.

Goshen College was chosen because the researcher was working in the college with Latino students, as a postdoctoral fellow, during the aforementioned year. With the objective of looking for major accomplishments and challenges in the students' learning at the college, the paper addresses the following research questions:

- What curricular accomplishments have Latino students achieved and what curricular challenges do they face?
- Which pedagogical practices help or hinder Latino students in their learning?
- In their day-to-day interactions with students and teachers, what social accomplishments have they experienced and what social challenges do they continue to face?

2. Theoretical framework and summary of the literature

A conceptual framework developed by Ogbu (1981) for the study of "Minority children's school experience" (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 21) was adapted. This conceptual framework emphasizes the effect of curriculum, teaching/learning styles, teacher-student classroom interaction, students' past experience, beliefs about schooling, "survival" strategies, community-college relations, students' academic attitude and effort, access to facilities and other factors, and their relations in the students' learning outcome.

However, it seems very difficult and sometimes impossible to show all the relationships of the different experiences a student has through his/her interaction in the college environment, as there are unforeseen experiences in which the student could be involved. Nonetheless, there are at least some common college experiences that are shared by many students. The framework was used to sketch the interview questions and find out the students' areas of strength and challenges during their learning at college which later led to the analysis.

The current literature on college experiences of Latino students mainly focused on the effect of the instructional program, and presence of academic and social support (e.g., Saunders & Serna, 2004). More specifically, authentic classroom activities, social support for learning and caring teachers that promote authentic learning and offer challenge, help, and listening ears are some of the factors under the instructional program that foster students' involvement. A study on students' engagement reveals that students' involvement in the instructional program increases when teaching methods and contents are based on students' interests, culture and experiences, and when these methods and content are appropriately challenging (National Academy of Sciences, 2004). In line with this, Berumen (2004) cites many authorities (e.g., Valencia, 1991; Vigil, 1997) who support the idea that pedagogical and curricular strategies affect students' participation in a classroom and determines a college's failure or success. Besides, the presence of difference between students because of their different needs, backgrounds, aspirations, cultural understandings, etc. requires specific curriculum responses.

Most important of all is the relation between the classroom experiences, especially the lessons, and the realities outside the college. That is, students' participation in classroom activities is affected by the degree of relationship between what they are learning and what they are facing outside the classroom. The presence of one's own small group of friends, having the opportunity and time to socialize, and reducing levels of conflict among cliques contribute to students' participation in college activities. Thus, colleges have the responsibility to create a supportive social organization for all students and to pay careful consideration regarding peer social climate (Roberts, 1996; National Academy of Sciences, 2004).

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/356886>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/356886>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)