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The Journal is international in scope and includes work by scholars in a wide range of academic fields and disciplines. Contributions from researchers and professionals in fields like sociology, psychology, higher education, philosophy, education, and cultural studies are welcome in the Journal.

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U.S. Department of Education Data Document a Declining 17-Year Trend in Black College Student Graduation Rates

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to conduct the largest (2002-2018) longitudinal analysis and comparison of Black and White college student 6-year graduation rates. Data were obtained from the U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) for 17 cohorts (1996-2002 to 2012-2018) of Black and White students. Regression analyses confirmed: (1) a statistically significant negative linear trend for Black students, (2) a statistically significant positive linear trend for White Students, and (3) statistically significant differences between the Black and White student regression lines for both the y-intercepts and slopes. In addition, adverse impact, using the EEOC's "4/5ths rule" was documented for Black students, as compared to White students, in all 17 cohorts.

Keywords: 4/5ths rule, black and white graduation rates, graduation rates, national graduation trends, six-year graduation rates

INTRODUCTION

The personal and societal benefits of obtaining a 4-year college degree are considerable and well-documented (e.g., higher salaries and work benefits, greater rates of employment, improved health and life expectancy, greater productivity, and higher tax payments (Chan, 2016)). Black students earned only 10.3% (National Center for Education Statistics, 2019) of bachelor's degrees awarded in 2019 (while constituting 14.7% of the US population, US Census Bureau, 2022) and among Blacks 25 and older in 2019, only 26.1% held 4-year college degrees, compared to the national average of 36.0% and White figure of 40.1% (US Census Bureau, 2020). Unfortunately, Blacks in the United States are grossly under-represented among college graduates and lag significantly behind White Americans. It is essential to increase the rate of college graduation for Black students.

A necessary first step in this effort is to carefully assess and clearly understand recent trends in college graduation rates for Black students, as well as White students for comparison purposes. The primary goal of this paper is to locate and analyze the best, most comprehensive longitudinal data to investigate these issues. First, a review of available measures of college graduation rates will be provided. Second, a comprehensive review of the research literature on Black and White student graduation rates will be presented in a timeline format to give a sense of how this research has progressed. Third, gaps in the literature will be identified and specific research questions will be offered. Fourth, 17 years of 6-year college graduation data from the U.S. Department of Education will then be analyzed to formulate answers to the research questions. Finally, statistical results will be presented and discussed.

Assessing College Outcomes

Among the various metrics used to assess student success in U.S. 4-year colleges and universities (persistence, GPA, engagement, satisfaction, and graduation), arguably the most important is graduation (Cook & Pullaro, 2010). If admitted and enrolled full-time students do not graduate from a 4-year school, it is often viewed as an institutional, personal, and societal failure, although switching schools and temporary repeated enrollment interruptions can significantly impact graduation statistics (Cook & Pullaro, 2010).

In their consideration of the strengths and weaknesses of several college graduation rate measures, Cook and Pullaro (2010) also noted that, prior to 1985, there were no national-level data on institutional higher education graduation rates. Thus, policy makers and researchers were limited

to institutional, state, and regional figures, and unable to monitor and compare student graduation rates for the nation as a whole. Gold and Albert (2006) asserted that passage of the Student Right-to-Know Act (SRK) in 1990 marked the beginning of the federal government's direct involvement in collecting and disseminating graduation rate information from U.S. colleges and universities.

Currently, the most widely accepted and commonly used measure of full-time student graduation success at 4-year institutions of higher learning is the U.S. Department of Education's 6-year cohort graduation rate (Cook & Pullaro, 2010). The 1990 SRK required all postsecondary schools participating in Title IV Federal student aid programs (e.g., Pell Grants) to annually submit overall 6-year graduation rates, along with rates for various demographic subgroups.

Submissions are compiled, analyzed, and published by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) of the U.S. Department of Education in the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), Graduation Rate Survey (GRS). The NCES requires one year to process this information and release provisional results, allowing institutions an additional one year to submit revised figures before final results are released. There were currently 17 cohorts with finalized results, through 2012-2018. The first full 6-year cohort was 1996 – 2002. Data for the 2013-2019 cohort are considered provisional and under review.

Reliable estimates of national college student graduation rates can also be obtained from another survey sponsored by the NCES – the Beginning Postsecondary Student (BPS) Study. While the IPEDS GRS focuses on full-time students who graduate within six years from their first school, the BPS follows a national sample of students for six years, regardless of whether they remain at their first institution or transfer. Thus, national graduation figures for BPS graduation rates are consistently higher than those for IPEDS GRS.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Published empirical research comparing Black and White college student 6-year graduation rates, using either the NCES's IPEDS GRS, BPS, or other comparable national samples will be chronologically reviewed in this section. This approach covers the period from 1996 – 2020 and provides insight into how data was compiled and analyzed over the years and how, regardless of the research focus, the results revealed the same trends.

1996

The pioneering work of Astin et al., (1996) represented the first attempt to examine national graduation rates from 4-year colleges and universities. In the fall of 1985, 365 baccalaureate schools participated in the Cooperative Institutional Research Program's annual survey of entering freshman. From this pool of students, 95,406 were randomly selected for inclusion in the study. Degree attainment data were successfully obtained from 75,752 (79.4%) individuals after four, six, and nine years. Percentage results for African American and White students are summarized in Table 1 below.

Table 1
Point-In Time Graduation Rates for African American and White College Students

Student group	4-Year graduation	6-Year graduation	9-Year graduation
African-American students	19.4%	31.2%	33.9%
White students	42.7%	46.8%	47.3%

The graduation rates were substantially lower for African American students in all three completion year categories. The gap was especially large in the 4-year category, with the African American graduation rate of only 19.4%, which was less than one-half of the White rate of 42.7%.

2002

This line of research was continued when Berkner et. al., (2002) reported results for the Beginning Postsecondary Study (BPS: 1996-2001). This study utilized a national sample of 4,920 students who first enrolled in 4-year U.S. colleges and universities in the 1995-1996 academic year. The sample was drawn from participants in the National Postsecondary Aid Study Program, sponsored by the U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. Graduation rates after six years, at the same institution, for Black and White students were respectively, 40.9% and 59.0%.

2004

Horn, et al. (2004) also analyzed data using BPS. They conducted a comparison of 5-year college graduation rates at U.S. 4-year colleges and universities for two periods of time 1989-1994 and 1995-2000, based upon data collected during two administrations of the Beginning Postsecondary Students Longitudinal Study (BPS: 90/94 and BPS: 96/01). Student samples

were selected from participants in the corresponding National Postsecondary Student Aid Studies (NPSAS: 90 and NPSAS: 96) sponsored by the U.S. Department of Education. The 1989-1994 cohort consisted of 3,800 students who were enrolled in a U.S. 4-year college or university for the first time in fall 1989, while the 1995-2000 cohort included 6,600 students enrolling in the fall of 1995. At the conclusion of each 5-year period, graduation rates were calculated and compared. Their results indicated that Black student 5-year graduation rates for 1989-1994 and 1995-2000 were respectively, 42% and 37% similar figures for White students were 54% and 57%. Thus, while the Black student 5-year graduation rate declined by 5 percentage points (42% to 37%), the White student rate increased by 3 percentage points (54% to 57%). Although the authors concluded that "no *overall* [emphasis added] change in the 5-year bachelor's degree completion rate was detected" (Horn, et al., p. iii), this statement was inaccurate when applied to Black and White student subgroups separately.

2006

In 2006, two studies showed the continuation of the disparity between these two subgroups. As part of a larger study examining the impact of institutional characteristics on college degree completion among various racial/ethnic student groups, Oseguera (2005-2006) reported 6-year graduation rates for Black and White students. Although NCES data were not used, her sample was drawn from a national longitudinal study of 303 4-year schools participating in the Cooperative Institutional Research Program (CIRP). Results for the sample of 2,210 Black students indicated a 6-year graduation rate of 50%, while that for 4,421 matched White students was 60%.

Similarly, *The Journal of Blacks in Higher Education* (2006) reported that U.S. Department of Education national graduation data showed the completion rate for Black students in 2006 was 42%, fully 20 percentage points below the rate for White students of 62%. Although this gap was very large, they noted that since 2004, the Black student rate had improved slightly from 39% to 42%.

2010

In 2010, more evidence of distinct differences in Black graduation rates was noted when Radford et. al., (2010) presented results for the Beginning Postsecondary Study (BPS: 04/09). They tracked a national sample of 8,470 students (Wine et al., 2011) who first enrolled in 4-year U.S. colleges and universities in the fall of 1995 for a period of six years. Participating students were selected from enrollees in the U.S. Department of Education's

National Postsecondary Aid Study Program. Findings indicated that the Black student 6-year graduation rate from their first institution was 34.8%, while that for White students was 20 percentage points higher at 54.8%.

2014

In 2014, IPEDS data were again used to demonstrate graduation-rate disparity. The Education Trust (2014) published their report entitled *The State of Education for African American Students*, which addressed participation and achievement at all levels of the U.S. educational system. They concluded that "over the past few decades, African American students across the nation have made real gains in academic achievement… [but] the performance of African American students lags behind that of White students" (p. 2). As evidence of racial differences in the postsecondary sector, they cited IPEDS statistics for the 2003-2009 cohort that revealed a 6-year graduation rate at U.S. 4-year colleges and universities for Black students of 40%, fully 23 percentage points lower than the White student rate of 63%.

2015

A 2015 longitudinal study also confirmed lower graduation rates for underrepresented minorities. In a paper entitled *Rising Tide: Do College Grad Rate Gains Benefit all Students?*, Eberle-Sudre et al., (2016) reviewed 10 years of national data and concluded that "the graduation rate for African American, Latino, and Native students has increased by 13 points in the last decade" (p. 1). Moreover, "the large improvement among underrepresented minority (URM) students has cut in half the gap in graduation rates between these students and their white peers – which was 14 percentage points in 2003" (Eberle-Sudre et al., 2016; p.1).

2016

Using IPEDS 6-year graduation data for 2003 and 2013, Nichols et al., (2016) compared relative changes in graduation rates for Black and White students. They found that consistently lower Black rates rose modestly from 38.2% in 2003 to 40.3% in 2013 (a gain of 5.5%), relative to a much larger rise for White students, from 55.4% in 2003 to 60,7% in 2013 (a gain of 9.6%). Thus, while there was a small percentage gain in Black student 6-year graduation rates from 2003 to 2013, the spike for White students was much larger, further widening the college completion gap between the two racial groups.

Racial differences in educational trends at all levels were examined in a comprehensive study by Musu-Gillette, et al. (2016). For students beginning at 4-year U.S. colleges and universities in the fall of 2007, the

researchers used IPEDS data (2007-2013) to determine 6-year graduation rates from the first institution attended for all students and several racial subgroups. They found that the graduation rate for Black students was 41%--22 percentage points lower than the White rate of 63%.

2017

Working with the National Opinion Research Center (NORC), the National Student Clearing House (Shapiro, et al., 2017) created a very large representative sample (1,236,815) of students who entered college at 4-year public schools in the U.S., in the fall of 2010. They tracked and reported 6-year graduation rates for those who completed their degrees at the starting institution. For 123,147 Black students, the 6-year graduation rate was 35.3%, while that for 748,836 White students was 52.4%.

2018

The Journal of Blacks in Higher Education (2018) cited interesting 6-year graduation results, compiled by the National Collegiate Athletic Association from IPEDS data, comparing Black and White students at Division I schools during the 2010-2016 period. The Black student graduation rate of 46% was 23 percentage points lower than the White rate of 69%.

2020

Myers and Myers (2020) addressed what they termed persistent institutional gaps in 4-year college graduation rates in the U.S. between Whites and underrepresented minorities (URM), which included Black male and Black female students. They noted that historical data from the NCES (2019) "showed that the 6-year graduation rates for Whites, Blacks, and Hispanics have improved, albeit unevenly, between the initial 1996 [IPEDS] cohort and the 2011 cohort" (p. 146) and sought to explore the potential impact of institutional expenditures and financial aid on these deficits between URM and White students. Their analytical sample consisted of 3, 6-year IPEDS cohorts (2009-2015, 2010-2016, 2011-2017). Among their findings were: (1) a confirmation of consistent differences in graduation rates as a function of race and (2) the largest gaps in graduation percentages were between White and Black males (23.09), followed by White and Black females (18.67).

Hobson et al., (2020) utilized IPEDS data for the 2010-2016 cohort to assess and compare 6-year graduation rates for Black and White students. At the national level, the Black student rate was 35.9%, while that for White students was 60.8%. In its first published application to 6-year college graduation rates, the authors used the "four-fifths rule," originally introduced

by the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) (1978) and three other federal agencies, as an objective framework to determine if an organizations' employee selection process unfairly affected minority group applicants. According to the EEOC (1978) "adverse impact" was deemed present if the rate of selection for a minority group was less than four-fifths of the rate for the majority group. When this rule was applied to compare Black and White student 6-year graduation rates, Hobson et al., (2020) documented adverse impact in graduation rates for Black students at the national level and in 48 (94.1%) of the 50 states and the District of Columbia.

Summary

Based upon the national research reviewed in this section dealing with Black and White college student 6-year graduation rates, the following conclusions can be reasonably drawn. First, Black student graduation rates are consistently lower than those for White students. Second, White student graduation rates appear to be steadily increasing over the last two decades. Third, the 6-year graduation rates for Black students are reported to be increasing, but more slowly than White rates. Fourth, the four-fifths rule provides a useful interpretational framework to assess the magnitude and severity of differential graduation rates.

Gaps in Literature

Unfortunately, multiple significant gaps appear in the empirical literature. To begin with, there have been no statistical evaluations of national trends in 6-year college graduation rates over the last 20 years for either Black or White students. In addition, there are no statistical comparisons of recent national trends in graduation rates for the two student subgroups. Finally, while Hobson, et al. (2020) addressed adverse impact in 6-year graduation rates for Black students in the 2010-2016 national cohort, these calculations have not been conducted for any other recent cohorts.

RESEARCH METHOD

Purpose

The current study was designed to address the research gaps discussed above, using the comprehensive IPEDS national database of 6-year graduation rates for 17 cohorts (1996-2002 through 2012-2018). Specifically, answers to the following four research questions were sought:

1. What has been the trend in 6-year college graduation rates over this 17-year period for Black students?

2. What has been the trend over this period in White student 6-year graduation rates?
3. How do the trends for Black and White students compare?
4. Is there evidence of adverse impact in the 6-year graduation rates for Black students?

Data

The data used in this study were retrieved from the U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics' (NCES) Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS). As discussed in the Introduction, the Student Right-to-Know Act of 1990 required any college or university participating in Federal student aid programs to report 6-year graduation rates for full-time students who remained at their first institution, along with rates for various student subgroups. Currently, NCES has information available for 17 6-year cohorts, beginning with 1996-2002 and ending with 2012-2018. The agency requires two years after initially receiving school data to verify results and give schools an opportunity to submit corrected information. Six-year graduation rates for Black and White students were retrieved and analyzed as described below

Analyses

Regression analysis was conducted to assess trends in 6-year graduation rates over the 17-year period for which IPEDS data are available. Dey and Astin (1993) evaluated the comparative effectiveness of linear regression, logit, and probit in analyzing college outcomes measured using percentages (including graduation rates). Although problems may arise with regression analysis if the frequency distribution of the dependent variable evidence concentration in the tails, potentially resulting in predicted values falling outside of the possible range from 0 to 1.0, they concluded that "there are few practical differences" (p. 575) between the three techniques. Given broader familiarity and ease of interpretation, they recommended the use of regression analysis in most applications. In response to the potential problem with regression analysis identified by Dey and Astin (1993), Scott et al., (2006) suggested a corrective strategy involving the following transformation of data in the form of percentages: logit (percentage) = natural-log (percentage/(1-percentage)). After this transformation, they concluded that linear regression analysis could be used without concern about errors in prediction. Thus, following each regression analysis conducted in this study, the transformation recommended by Scott et al. (2006) was made and a second regression analysis performed. Results from the two analyses were then reviewed for consistency.

A regression analysis was conducted for Black students addressing the relationship between 6-year graduation rates and time, over the 17-year period for which national data are available. As mentioned above, the recommended transformation in graduation percentages was made and a second regression analysis performed. Similarly, for White students, two regression analyses were conducted. In the bivariate regression analyses for both Black and White student, the dependent variable was 6-year graduation percentage, and the independent variable was time, measured in years.

To evaluate differences in the regression lines (y-intercepts and slopes) for Black and White students, the data sets for the two groups were combined and analyzed using an expanded set of independent variables/predictors. In addition to Time, a dichotomous variable for Race and one for an interaction term between race and time (Race x Time) were entered into the regression analysis. Once again, this was followed with a second regression utilizing the transformation discussed above. In both expanded multiple regression analyses, the dependent variable was 6-year graduation percentage, and three independent variables were evaluated. They included: (1) time, measured in years, (2) a dichotomous variable for race, coded 1 = Black and 2 = White, and (3) an interaction term between race and time, defined as the product of these two variables.

Finally, "four-fifths rule" calculations (EEOC, 1978; Hobson, et al. 2020) were applied to each of the 17 cohorts in IPEDS data set. Specifically, the White 6-year graduation rate was multiplied by four-fifths (.8) and compared to the corresponding Black graduation rate. If this figure was less than four-fifths of the White percentage, adverse impact was documented.

RESULTS

IPEDS Data Summary

Table 2 provides a summary of the 6-year NCES graduation data analyzed in this study, along with adverse impact calculations that will be described later. Specifically, the five columns in the table offer the following information: (1) the six-year periods constituting the 17 cohorts examined, (2) the White student 6-year graduation rates for each cohort, (3) the four-fifths rule cut-off values (White rate x four-fifths or .8), (4) the corresponding Black student 6-year graduation rates, and (5) a determination if adverse impact was present by comparing the Black student graduation rate with the four-fifths rule cut-off score (.8 x White student rate). The range in the number of students included in the 17 cohorts was 1.12 million to 1.79 million, with a mean of 1.49 million.

Table 2
National Six-Year Graduation Rates[1] for 17 Cohorts (Initial Cohort 1996-2012) and Adverse Impact by Student Race for U.S. Four-Year Colleges and Universities

6-Year Cohort Period	White Students Only,6-Year Grad. Rate	4/5 Rule Cut-Off (.8x White Rate)	Black Students Only,6-Year Grad. Rate	Adverse Impact, 4/5 Rule Comparison
1996-2002	57.2%	45.8%	38.2%	Yes
1997-2003	57.3%	45.8%	38.5%	Yes
1998-2004	58.2%	46.6%	39.8%	Yes
1999-2005	58.9%	47.1%	40.4%	Yes
2000-2006	59.4%	47.5%	41.2%	Yes
2001-2007	59.4%	47.5%	40.5%	Yes
2002-2008	59.4%	47.5%	38.9%	Yes
2003-2009	59.5%	47.6%	38.0%	Yes
2004-2010	59.8%	47.8%	37.8%	Yes
2005-2011	60.2%	48.2%	37.5%	Yes
2006-2012	60.0%	48.2%	37.4%	Yes
2007-2013	59.8%	47.8%	36.9%	Yes
2008-2014	59.5%	47.6%	36.2%	Yes
2009-2015	59.1%	47.3%	34.7%	Yes
2010-2016	60.6%	48.5%	35.4%	Yes
2011-2017	60.7%	48.6%	34.4%	Yes
2012-2018	63.0%	50.4%	38.4%	Yes

[1]U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Statistics, Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS)

Black and White Student Graduation Rate Trends

Regression analysis results for Black students are summarized below in Table 3.

Variable	*B*	*SE*	*t*	*p*
Constant	40.562	.728	55.690	.001
Time	-.290	.071	-4.079	.001

For the independent variable represented by time (as measured in years), these findings confirm a statistically significant negative linear trend in Black student 6-year college graduation figures over the 17-year period

from 2002-2018. The rate of decrease per year is approximated at .29 percentage points. The R^2 for this regression model was .526, $F(1,15) = 16.64$, $p = .001$, with an adjusted R^2 of .494.

Calculations for the regression analysis of Black student 6-year graduation rates using the transformation proposed by Scott, et al. (2006), logit (percentage) = natural-log (percentage/1-percentage)), were nearly identical (untransformed adjusted $R^2 = .494$; transformed adjusted $R^2 = .496$) to the untransformed analysis, confirming Dey & Astin's (1993) contention that there are no practical differences in using linear regression, logit, or probit in analyzing dependent variables consisting of percentages and recommendation that regression be used in most applications.

Essentially, identical results were found when comparing all regression analyses in this study using untransformed and transformed dependent variables. Thus, a decision was made to simply report regression results without transforming the dependent variable.

Results for the regression analysis with White students are provided in Table 4.

Table 4
Regression Results for White Students

Variable	*B*	*SE*	*t*	*p*
Constant	57.563	.387	148.846	.001
Time	.218	.038	5.786	.001

Evaluation of the independent variable in this equation (time) revealed a statistically significant positive linear trend in college graduation rates for White students. The annual increase over the 17-year period is approximately .22 percentage points. The computed R^2 for this regression model was .691, $F(1,15) = 33.481$, $p = .001$, while the adjusted R^2 was .670.

Comparison of Black and White Student Graduation Rates

Regression analysis results comparing (both y-intercepts and slopes) the lines of best fit for Black and White students are presented below in Table 4. Recall from the Method section that data for both student subgroups were combined for this regression analysis and two additional independent variables were added to the equation: (1) a dichotomous variable coding race and (2) an interaction term of Race x Time.

Findings for the regression analysis comparing Black and White students are offered in Table 5.

Table 5

Regression comparing Black and White Students with Race x Time Interaction

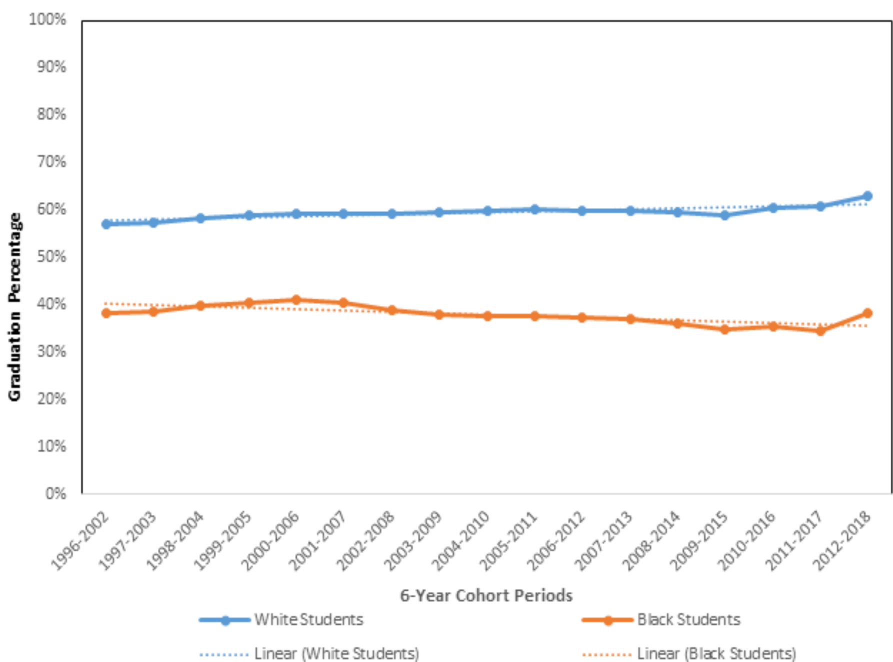
Variable	*B*	*SE*	*t*	*p*
Constant	74.565	1.304	57.186	.001
Time	.727	.127	5.711	.001
Race	-17.001	.825	20.616[1]	.001
Time x Race	-.508	.080	6.613[2]	.001

Note. Differences in y-intercepts and slopes are provided.

[a] This is a test of the difference in the y-intercepts/constants in the two individual equations for Black and White students, with-17.001 representing the Black intercept of 40.562 minus the White intercept of 57.563.
[b] This is a test of the difference in slopes between the Black and White student regression lines, with-.508 representing the Black student slope of -.290, minus the White student slope of .218.

Figure 1

Comparison of Regression Lines for Black and White Students



The computed R^2 for the overall regression model was .990, F (3,30) =1,011.86, p = .001, with minimal shrinkage present in the adjusted R^2 value of .989. The findings in Table 5 confirm major differences in the 6-year college graduation rates between Black and White students for all three of the independent variables included in the analysis. Specifically, statistically significant results were found for time, race, and the interaction term of race x time.

The calculated values in Table 5 confirm that there are statistically significant differences between the regression lines for Black and White students, in terms of both y-intercepts and slopes. This information is displayed graphically in Figure 1 below.Finally, the adverse impact calculations were summarized earlier in Table 2. Results indicated that, using the four-fifths rule, adverse impact in graduation rates for Black students was confirmed in all 17 cohorts.

DISCUSSION

Four Research Questions

The first research question focused on the trend in Black student 6-year college graduation rates present in 17 6-year IPEDS' cohorts. Contrary to the conclusions drawn from the literature review, there was a strong statistically significant declining trend in Black student graduation rates from 2002 to 2018. Thus, instead of rising at a slower rate than that for White students, the Black student rate was steadily falling at approximately .29 percentage points per year.

Results related to the second research question concerning the graduation trend for White students were less surprising and more consistent with previous studies. There was a strong, statistically significant positive trend, across the 17 IPEDS cohorts, in White student graduation rates, with an average annual gain of approximately .22 percentage points.

The third research question in this study focused on a direct comparison of graduation trends for Black and White students. Multiple regression results revealed compelling statistically significant differences between the two student subgroups. The y-intercepts in the regression equations subgroups were statistically different, with that for white students (57.563) being 17.001 points higher than that for Black students (40.562). Thus, the respective regression lines indicated that the White student graduation rate at the beginning of the 17-year period covered by the IPEDS data (2002) was 57.563%, which was 17.001 percentage points higher than the comparable Black student rate of 40.562.

The slopes (or rates of change) of the regression lines for Black and White students were also statistically different. While the slope for White students was .218, that for Black students was -.290, a difference of -.508 (-.290 - .218). Unfortunately, Black students, who began the 17-year period covered by IPEDS data (2002) with a 6-year graduation rate of 40.562% (17.001 percentage points below the White student rate of 57.563%), have experienced steady graduation rate declines, while those for White students have been consistently rising. Thus, the differences between the two student subgroups have been growing each year.

In only the second published application of the four-fifths rule to Black student 6-year college graduation rates (the first was Hobson et al., 2020), the results in this study confirmed adverse impact in all 17 IPEDS cohorts. Thus, in every cohort, the Black student graduation rate was less than four-fifths of the White student rate, providing a clear and compelling answer to the fourth research question concerning adverse impact. It was present in 17/17 (100%) cohorts.

Conclusions and Implications

Based upon the findings in this study, four important conclusions and implications (for researchers and practitioners) can be drawn in four areas. First, perhaps the most surprising and dismaying conclusion was the decline in Black student 6-year graduation rates. As recently as 2020, Meyers and Myers reviewed historical graduation rate data from the *Digest of Education Statistics* (NCES, 2019) and opined that completion rates were improving for all racial/ethnic groups. They further noted that the improvement was uneven across subgroups and that Black students were not making progress in closing the gap in graduation rates with White students. Their statements were consistent with the prevailing narrative that Black graduation rates have been increasing, but not quickly enough to reduce the observed deficit with White graduation rates. Clearly, the results from this study contradict the notion of slowly rising Black student 6-year graduation rates and instead confirm a statistically significant consistent downward trend from 2012 to 2018, using the most comprehensive national database – IPEDS. Research implications suggest that scholars largely failed to identify the significant downward trend in Black student 6-year graduation rates and need to do a better job in aggregating longitudinal data to measure changes more accurately over time, as well as determining whether similar problems have occurred in related domains. Likewise, practitioners, beginning with leaders at the Department of Education, other federal government officials, and university

administrators also missed the downward trend and should redouble efforts to facilitate graduation success for Black students.

The second conclusion is closely related to the first. The 6-year graduation rates for Black and White students have been diverging over time. As Myers and Myers (2020) asserted, White graduation rates have increased, but at the same time Black graduation rates have fallen, resulting in a steadily widening gap between the two subgroups. This phenomenon can be confirmed with data presented earlier in Table 1. The gap between Black and White student 6-year graduation rates in the first IPEDS cohort (1996-2002) was 19.0 percentage points (White students = 57.2%, Black students = 38.2%). By the 17th cohort (2012-2018), this gap in percentage points rose to 24.6 (White students = 63.0%, Black students 38.4%). Thus, from 2002-2018, the difference between White and Black student 6-year graduation rates grew by 5.6 percentage points (24.6-19.0), an increase of 29.5%. Once again, both researchers and practitioners failed to identify the divergent trends in Black and White student graduation rates or develop a sense of urgency about the expanding gap between the two subgroups.

The third conclusion involves the application of the federally endorsed (Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, Department of Labor, Department of Justice, and the Civil Service Commission for use in employee selection) four-fifths rule (EEOC, 1978), in evaluating Black student 6-year graduation rates, compared to White student graduation rates. Unfortunately, for each of the 17 cohorts in the IPEDS database, there was evidence of adverse impact. Specifically, in all 17 cohorts, the Black student 6-year graduation rate fell below four-fifths of the rate for White students. These findings confirm pronounced, chronic adverse impact on Black students and would be actionable with the EEOC, if evidenced in employment settings with employee selection. Given the fact that adverse impact in employment settings can trigger enforcement action by the EEOC and federal courts, its manifestation in college graduation rates implies that researchers could explore possible avenues of action by the Office of Civil Rights (OCR) in the U.S. Department of Education or federal courts. Practitioners in postsecondary education would be well-advised to follow adverse given to employers concerning adverse impact—be proactive, monitor institutional adverse impact rates, and initiate corrective action before complaints are filed.

The fourth and final conclusion centers on the four-fifths rule itself and how it could be utilized in higher education. As asserted by Young Invincibles (2017) and Myers and Myers (2020), there is currently no metric or threshold for evaluating the severity of disparities in 6-year graduation rates. The four-fifths rule represents a reasonable option to fill this void. Since

its introduction in 1978, the four-fifths rule has a decades-long, successful history of providing a useful metric to assess the severity of adverse impact in employment settings (Noe et al., 2020) and could perform the same function in the educational arena. For scholars, the availability of the four-fifths rule provides an objective, easily calculated, and understood methodology to operationally define discrimination in educational outcomes. Similarly, practitioners can utilize the four-fifths rule to gauge the impact of educational programs and policies on minority student graduation rates.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are offered for consideration.

1. To put it bluntly, the documented decline in Black 6-year college graduation rates is a national disgrace. Reversing this inimical and corrosive trend must become a priority of the highest order for America and all institutions of higher education. Responsibility and accountability for progress must be squarely placed on national and state leaders, as well as college and university presidents.

While the NCES is required to submit an annual report to Congress on The Condition of Education, this document does not contain a breakdown of 6-year college graduation rates as a function of race (sex is included). Thus, our elected federal officials may not be aware of the decline in Black student graduation rates, even though NCES has the data. Consequently, an obvious recommendation would require the NCES to include a racial breakdown of college graduation rates in its annual report to Congress. To encourage accountability at the institutional level, the federal government could and should make financial support a condition upon achieving improvements in Black (and other underrepresented minorities) student graduation rates and reductions in adverse impact. Amid the Black Lives Matter movement and serious deliberations about reparations for descendants of slaves, reversing the decline on Black student college graduation rates is a moral imperative.

2. Given the lack of a threshold or interpretational framework for assessing the severity of disparities between Black and White student graduation rates (Myers & Myers, 2020; Young Invincibles, 2017) and the broad federal acceptance of the four-fifths rule to determine adverse impact in employment settings (i.e., it is used at the EEOC, Department of Justice, Department of Labor, and the Civil Service Commission), we recommend that the Department of Education adopt this operational definition and require that institutions participating in federal student aid programs report the information annually. This would provide all stakeholders with an objective,

standardized metric to assess the impact of school programs on student subgroups.

3. We recommend that the U.S. Department of Education enhance the NCES's IPEDS and BPS programs in the following ways. Given the differential rates at which students complete college degrees, we suggest that the tracking period in both programs be extended from six to 10 years. Within the BPS program, a substantially increased national sample size would allow for a more accurate assessment of student academic progress and barriers to degree attainment. Substantial additional funding would be necessary to implement these improvements, especially for the periodic monitoring involved in the BPS.

Limitations

There are two important limitations that should be addressed when considering the generalizability of the results found in this study. First, Cook and Pullaro (2010) identified several significant disadvantages associated with using IPEDS data to define 6-year graduation rates at U.S. baccalaureate institutions. Among these were: (1) the inclusion of only first-time full-time students starting in the fall semester, (2) the exclusion of part-time students, (3) the exclusion of transfer students, and (4) the failure to account for students who take longer than six years to graduate. Given these drawbacks, the authors estimate IPEDS fails to include roughly 40% of students who enroll at 4-year colleges and universities. Notwithstanding these legitimate concerns about IPEDS baccalaureate data, the facts remain that Black student 6-year graduation rates have been declining, while those for White students have been increasing; an adverse impact was documented in all 17 cohorts, from 2002-2018 IPEDS dataset. Second, information concerning cohort 6-year graduation rates is only available for 17 continuous years, from 2002-2018. While IPEDS data is the most comprehensive, standardized national data available, it represents a relatively short time span in modern U.S. history and limits generalizations to earlier or later periods.

Future Research

While the IPEDS data analyzed in this study provided clear and compelling answers to the four research questions that were addressed, five additional important issues surfaced that warrant future research. First, the unexpected and unacceptable decline in Black student 6-year college graduation rates from 2002-2018 requires both explanatory and corrective strategy research. Reasons for this national decline must be identified and fully understood in order to formulate and test effective remedial solutions. A

review and continuation of "best practices" research can be helpful in locating/developing successful initiates at the institutional and state levels.

Second, given the documented national adverse impact on Black college students found in the present study, it would be useful to address this issue in the 50 states and D.C. As Hobson, et al. 2020 noted, for the 2010-2016 cohort, only three (Maine, New Hampshire, and Rhode Island) of 51 states/District of Columbia showed no evidence of adverse impact. States that have successfully eliminated adverse impact and improved Black student graduation rates can be used as examples for other states still struggling with these issues. The publication of statistical analyses comparing Black and White student success from 2002-2018 can also serve to motivate the legislatures in lagging states to implement stronger corrective measures.

Third, future research on the most effective policies/programs to provide incentives to institutions and states to address Black student graduation rates and adverse impact more successfully would be very instructive. What types of incentives work best? What monetary levels are most impactful? Are penalties (e.g., reductions in federal funding) more effective than incentives?

Fourth, the pronounced, pervasive, and long-term adverse impact found in this study for Black students at the undergraduate level provides a persuasive rationale for examining this issue at the graduate level in master's and doctoral programs. Finally, the limitations and criticisms in the NCES IPEDS dataset articulated by Cook and Pullaro (2010) justify future research on national educational data collection systems that are more inclusive and comprehensive.

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Development of a Research Mentorship Program for Minority Students at a Southeastern Predominately White Institution

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ABSTRACT

Mentorship is an underestimated asset that focuses on growth and accomplishments and offers broad forms of support to students from marginalized populations, including intersectional and overlapping identities. This article aims to identify the gaps in current literature regarding mentorship, propose an adaptive mentorship model and identify the model's strengths in practice. Traditional mentorship models focus on one specific aspect of student identity, and this gap marginalizes an individual's identity's duplicity or multi-faceted complexity. Such models often offer great educational support but dismiss the value of high-impact research. High-impact research has been shown to positively impact marginalized communities because it allows the unique opportunity to engage in all stages of research. The model described in this paper is grounded in principles of collaboration and cooperation across an interdisciplinary team. Each faculty mentor and mentee possess intersectional and overlapping identities adding unique perspectives and resilience to the work they engage in. This resilience is united with various intersectional study complexities in behavioral sciences, medicine, social studies, and humanities. Thus, it offers a strengths-based experience that widens student opportunities and challenges unitary models of peer-peer/peer-to-adult mentorship patterns.

Keywords: intersectionality, mentorship; research mentorship; mentorship models; minority students

INTRODUCTION

Though long touted as an effective practice in improving academic success, the key characteristics and conceptualization of mentorship have been, and still are, severely underdeveloped for minority students on college campuses. While research highlights the importance of mentorship for various marginalized and minority students in higher educational settings, such as black women (Chang et al., 2014), LGBTQIA+ students (Linley, 2016; Nguyen et al., 2016), disabled people/people with disabilities (Patrick & Wessel, 2016), and military veterans (Finney, 2015), mentorship for minority students often emphasizes identity-based, discipline-based, or relationship-based mentorship programs. That is, research on mentorship of minority students often focuses on their identity as minority students, *or* as a minority in a specific discipline, *or* mentorship by an adult or established peer. Despite the arguments that successful mentorship programs emphasize multiplicity in activities, interactions, domains of experience, and reciprocity across types of relationships (Crisp & Cruz, 2009), minority mentoring scholarship emphasizes singularity, highlighting either students' identity, discipline, *or* type of relationship with mentors

This paper focuses on the need for and development of a new model of research mentorship for minoritized students that centralizes the intersectionality, multiplicity, and complexity of minority student experiences in higher educational settings. Focused on the high-impact practice of research and scholarship (Kuh, 2008) – central to students across all majors, departments, programs, and colleges – we outline our model of the Interdisciplinary Minority Student Research Group (IMSRG), a collective of faculty research mentors and student mentees. The group was founded in Fall 2018 and initially funded via an internal grant mechanism through the Office of Applied Learning. IMSRG provides an interdisciplinary, interprofessional, collaborative, and intersectional model of mentorship for minoritized tertiary students, grounded in critical theories, trauma-informed approaches (SAMHSA, 2014), and adaptive mentorship models (Ralph & Walker, 2013), that incorporates various aspects of formal and informal mentorship (Jacobi, 1991) through attention on development of students' research potentials. After reviewing the literature and detailing our academic setting and model, we present preliminary data to support the efficacy of the IMSRG program. We ultimately argue that by incorporating theoretical frameworks that attend to marginalization and its effects, utilizing a cross-disciplinary team of peer-peer and peer-adult relationships in various iterations, and centralizing the key practice of research, IMRSG

may serve as a preliminary model in order to develop more inclusive mentorship practices and programs for minority college students.

Mentorship and Minority Students

Early definitions describe mentoring as the relationship between a younger adult and an older adult who holds more experience. This “traditional” vision of mentorship involves the older adult assisting a younger individual in navigating the adult world and the world of work (Kram, 1985). Traditional models eventually evolved to include the nuances of formal and informal mentoring, and ways in which such strategies contribute to academic success, despite continued discrepancies about what practices specifically define mentorship (Jacobi, 1991).

Crisp and Cruz (2009) systematically reviewed research in the specific context of mentoring college students, and highlighted characteristics of successful mentorship models. They found the following characteristics across the literature, demonstrating that: 1) mentorship relationships focus on the growth and accomplishment of an individual; 2) mentorship includes broad forms of support, such as professional and career development, role modeling, psychological support, planned activities with a mentor, participation in undergraduate research, and participation in peer mentoring and discussions; and 3) mentoring relationships being personal and reciprocal (Crisp & Cruz, 2009). However, they argued that the field of mentorship still remains largely atheoretical, with *discipline-specific* needs of both the mentor and the mentee/protégé contributing to this ambiguity (Crisp & Cruz, 2009). Additionally, their critical review highlighted the resounding lack of targeted focus on mentorship for marginalized groups and demonstrated a need for the development of models and assessment of outcomes on mentorship for such specific groups (Lunsford, 2017). Therefore, mentorship models focused on marginalized student populations and with theoretical frameworks remains underexplored.

Minority students on college campuses do report that mentoring has a significant effect on personal growth, academic experiences, and career advancement (Kosoko-Lasaki et al., 2006; Tillman, 2001; Wilson, 2010). Mentoring increases minority student academic achievement, enrollment, and retention (Kendricks et al., 2013; Wilson et al., 2010). Additionally, mentorship impacts women of color who are challenged with double marginality grounded in racism and sexism. Further, Davis (2009), Evans and Cokley (2008), and Kosoko-Lasaki et al. (2006) argued that mentoring could provide the necessary knowledge and skill development, socialization, career advancement opportunities, and psychosocial support to allow

women of color to survive and thrive in higher education (Chang et al., 2014). Students with disabilities benefit from mentoring because of the assistance it can provide moving from high school to college (Patrick & Wessel, 2013). Research has shown that students living with mental and physical disabilities benefitted from having faculty mentors. In the study, they explored the students' experiences, and all twelve students in the study expressed positive relationships with their mentors, explaining how they assisted them in transitioning academically to their new settings while helping them find necessary services on campus that would better benefit them. In the limited research on lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, questioning, intersex, asexual and others (LGBTQIA+) students, it was found that there is a need for students reported a desire for their community and faculty that would understand the needs of this group. Craig et al. (2017) conducted a study in a social work program and found that a majority of the students who identified as LGBTQIA expressed a lack of representation in the workplace. These findings were congruent with those from Linley's (2016) work. Nguyen et al.'s (2016) qualitative semi-structured research on support systems for LGBTQ college students found that having representation and mentorship from LGBTQ faculty was paramount to seeing themselves as a fit in their field. First-generation students often identify with multiple-marginalized identities on campus and when being mentored. For military veteran students, there is more exploration needed related to their support and mentorship needs on college campuses. Finney's (2015) needs assessment demonstrated four key needs for military veterans in higher education: physical wellness, mental wellness, support operations, and mentorship. We wish to contribute to the literature for and with students who are military-affiliated and contribute to this group's recognition of being marginalized in academic settings.

The authors here present an argument for developing an adaptive mentorship model that accommodates the needs of minority students on college campuses and addresses evidence of discipline-specific needs by incorporating principles of interdisciplinary education. We seek to describe the initial development of a minority research mentorship program and our future efforts towards building a minority mentorship model that can be adapted in other higher education settings. We aim to cultivate an inclusive model that considers the needs and growth of several minority student identities on college campuses, specifically racial/ethnic minorities, those with disabilities, those who identify as LGBTQIA+, first-generation, and military veterans. We recognize that student mentees may have intersecting minoritized identities and address this by integrating critical [race]

mentorship into the evolution of our overall mentorship model, as well as collaborating with university groups that engage in education and discussions related to race consciousness and intersectionality (Longmire-Avital, 2020). Further, in the assessment that we discuss later in this paper, we intend to learn more about our student's intersecting identities and needs by way of evaluating their experience each year, and the way in which our mentorship strategies support those identities. Our overarching goal in mentoring minoritized students through research is to support minority communities both locally and more broadly by way of ethical, student involved, community engaged impactful research.

Scholarship of mentorship for marginalized populations in tertiary education indicates several research gaps. First, mentoring programs often target one specific aspect of student identity, like race, *or* gender and sexuality, *or* veteran status, despite the more complex and intersectional identities of compounded marginalization, such as marginalization due to both race and gender, or as a first-generation and disabled student (Chang et al., 2014; Craig et al., 2017). Second, mentoring programs emphasize a wide range of important educational supports, but few specifically address the high-impact practice of research, despite the positive impact specifically for students in marginalized communities (Kuh, 2008). Finally, despite the expansion of mentorship from an older adult to younger adult pairings to other types of relationships (Davis et al., 2011), mentorship in higher education still often is siloed, emphasizing student identity as a basis for mentorship, a given discipline (such as Science, Technology, Engineering, Math, or STEM), or relationship type, such as peer-adult or peer-peer mentoring.

Our project attends to all three of these gaps. First, we operationalize marginalization to include a wide range of identities, including intersectional and overlapping identifications. We developed these distinctions by considering minority status in our local university context of a Predominantly White Institution (PWI) in the American South in a majority student context of middle-class, able-bodied, non-veteran affiliated students. Therefore, we intentionally invite students who identify as one or more of the following categories: racial and/or ethnic minorities, LGBTQIA+ students, veterans, first-generation, and students with disabilities. As faculty mentors, we either identify as one or more of the same categories, and/or focus or research and practice on such communities.

Next, we expand mentorship in two directions: we formed an interdisciplinary team with affiliations across two colleges, the College of Health and Human Services (CHHS) and the College of Arts and Sciences

(CAS), and originally spanning four disciplines (Social Work, Nursing, Public Heath, and English/Linguistics), with inclusion of Sociology/Criminology and English/Literary Studies in our second year. We unite perspectives from behavioral sciences, medicine, social sciences, and humanities; we mirror the intersectional complexities of students' identities with cross-disciplinary and intersecting perspectives on research and mentoring. Students then experience research differences across disciplines rather than simply reading about them in methods class, including the ontological, epistemological, and methodological challenges and distinctions of conventional disciplinary paradigms.

Additionally, our team-based approach widens opportunities for our students and challenges the unitary models of peer-peer and/or peer-adult mentorship patterns. Our students work with faculty and student mentors, and we pair students within and across levels (i.e., undergraduate, and graduate level-students). We developed an iterative model whereby mentees become mentors, with a third-year goal of students leading other students in mentoring practices in consultation with faculty mentors. We also aspire to engage alum mentees to contribute to the development of research alongside current mentees.

Finally, we ground our mentorship in the high impact practice of research (Kuh, 2008). We include students in all aspects of research, from initial development and ethics trainings to data collection, coding, and analysis, to data presentation, academic writing, and dissemination of data results, as well as applying findings in practical and useful ways.

Academic Setting

The University of North Carolina Wilmington (UNCW) is a part of the University of North Carolina system and has a total enrollment of a little under 18,000 students – 14.6K undergraduate students and approximately 3.2K graduate students (UNCW At a Glance). As it relates to diversity, 66% identify as female and 76% of university students identify as white (UNCW Data Dashboard). More data is needed on the demographics of other minority statuses such as military veteran enrollment; as well as those who identify as LGBTQIA+ and students who identify living with disabilities.

As previously stated, our program mentors minority students across educational levels. *Undergraduate research,* in addition to opportunities such as study abroad, community engagement, and internships, is identified as a high-impact practice (Kuh, 2008). High impact practices (HIPs), according to the National Survey on Student Engagement, explains that students must be actively engaged in deep learning (Kuh & O'Donnell,

2013). Further, the authority on high impact practice, the American Association of Colleges and Universities, has noted that there is a "positive differential impact" (people of particular characteristics are affected in differently than other groups) on students who have been historically underserved and under-represented (Kuh, 2008). We believe that IMSRG serves as a tremendous resource for combining an intentional focus on minority student achievement and the importance of research on academic and career trajectory. In Fall 2020, the University of North Carolina Wilmington (UNCW) developed a High Impact Practices Council to broaden the scope of focused student development via applied learning experiences. To this end, we believe it is timely to have developed IMSRG in this university setting and necessary that we expand our work to inform minority engagement in research as a high impact practice.

METHODS

In our work, we've achieved three primary goals: 1) explored the literature and existing knowledge related to minority mentorship in higher education settings, 2) applied the aforementioned knowledge to developing program goals focused on mentoring minority students to engage in impactful community research; 3) assessed its impact, 4) developed and honed a minority research mentorship model infused with adaptive principles relevant to minority student needs; and 5) demonstrated and disseminated its impact on the development of research skills and academic success of minority students.

Given the focus of this paper on the development of this new initiative and preliminary findings outlining success in meeting our goals, we present the following: 1) accomplishments related to pedagogy and research towards diversity and inclusion; and 2) pilot data on a post-test only survey administered at the end of Year II. This survey will be administered as a pre- and post-test survey for new IMSRG mentees in the future and the findings presented hereafter will inform its' adaptation and use, as well as inform the development of our minority mentorship model in Year 3.

The IMSRG post-test only survey that will be described in this paper was developed as a part of a larger effort to capture outcomes related to high impact practices on the campus of UNCW. The survey was originally developed by the UNCW Office of Applied Learning Assessment team in collaboration with IMSRG. The survey was administered in May/June of 2021 and includes several measures that evaluate student

mentees' research skills, self-efficacy in research, mentorship experiences, as well as collects demographic data related to minority identity.

The *Self-Efficacy in Research* scale is a 14-item measure that evaluates self-confidence across several specific research skills, such as "formulate a research hypothesis," "collect data," and "discuss research at a professional meeting or conference" (Rorrer, 2018). The response options include Likert scale options that range from "1-Strongly Disagree" to "5-Strongly Agree."

The *Intentions to Attend Graduate School* (participants excluded who were already attending graduate school) scale is a 9-item measure that evaluates whether students plan to apply or attend graduate school by asking about intentions, their peers' point of view about graduate schools' importance, and expectations of them to go to graduate school (Rorrer, 2008). The response options include Likert scale options that range from "1-Strongly Disagree" to "5-Strongly Agree."

The *GRIT* scale was an 8-item measure that evaluates students' ambition and relevant to students' 'grit' and persistence while participating in the IMSRG program and/or on several related research projects (Duckworth, 2009). Some items on this scale include, "I often set a goal but later choose to pursue a different one" and "Setbacks don't discourage me." The response options include Likert scale options that range from "1-Not like me at all" to "5-Very much like me."

The 24-item measure on *Research Skills* also evaluates students' self-assessment of completing a number of research-related tasks (Chemers, 2011). These include skills such as "understanding a summarizing journal articles," "explaining my project to people outside of my field," and "analyzing data with statistics or other tools." The response options include Likert scale options that range from "1-Not at All" to "5-A great deal."

The *Scientific Leadership* scale consists of 9 items and evaluates students' ability to engage in teamwork, collaborate, and lead (Chemers, 2011). This scale includes items like "I know how to cooperate effectively as a member of a team" and "I know a lot about what it takes to be a good leader". The response options include Likert scale options that range from "1- Strongly Disagree" to "5-Strongly Agree."

The *Professional/Scientific Identity* measure is 6 items and assesses how much research is engrained with a students' identity (Chemers, 2011). This measure and the previously aforementioned scale were specifically designed for underrepresented minority students pursuing careers in science and/or research. Two example items from this scale are, "Being a researcher is an important reflection of who I am" and "I am a researcher". Response

items ranged on a Likert scale from "1-Strongly Disagree" to "5-Strongly Agree."

The *Mentoring Experience and Effectiveness* measure consists of 10 items evaluating the effectiveness of faculty mentoring relationships (Berk, 2005). The *Mentoring Experience* measure includes items such as, [my mentor was] "Helpful in providing direction and guidance on research project issues" and "Challenged me to extend my abilities." Response options range from "1-Strongly Disagree" to "5-Strongly Agree."

A measure of *Overall Program Satisfaction* consists of 6 items that were adapted to respond to the overall experience with IMSRG reflecting on, "What are your overall feelings about your experience in [this] Applied Learning course or experience?" with prompts such as about "Your research experience," "Your interaction with project staff," and "Your interaction with other students." Responses range from "1-Highly Dissatisfied" to "5-Highly Satisfied."

Additionally, students were asked to respond to qualitative questions about involvement in IMSRG as an applied learning experience. The questions included the six criteria uniquely developed by UNCW or the assessment of applied learning/high impact practices and influenced by Association of American College & Universities (AAC&U): *learning outcomes, intention, reflection, acquisition of knowledge, application of knowledge, and summative conclusion.*

RESULTS

Annual Goals

IMSRG was funded by an Office of Applied Learning 3-year Strategic Initiative Award at UNCW. As a central part of this initiative, our research team strategically outlined goals for years one through three of the grant. We will focus on years 1 and 2 in this paper as we are currently in year 3 of the initiative. We were pleased to not only meet, but to exceed, many of our goals. Accomplishments related to Year I and Year II goals can be found in Table 1.

Pilot Post-Test Data

As a part of a larger assessment initiative in the Office of Applied Learning, the IMSRG team developed a survey to be used each academic year to assess the success of our programming. In Spring 2021, we piloted the survey in hopes of assessing the use of the individualized measures utilized, potential data hang-ups and/or discrepancies, and its utility for future use. Beginning in Fall 2021, the survey is being used in a pre-

test/post-test format to evaluate change over time in alignment with IMSRG's mission and expected evidence-based outcomes. Here we share the findings from our original pilot post-test only survey.

It should be noted that some scales were altered (i.e., removal/addition of items) as a means of improving the applicability to our specific study sample. For example, the *Intentions to Attend Graduate School* scale was adapted to include only four questions from this scale that did not overlap with demographics and other items asked on the survey and considered the context of mostly graduate-level students (all but 1) who answered the pilot survey and were skipped out of this scale. Additionally, we adapted the *Research Skills* measure to meet the specific needs of our sample by modifying items that read for example, "Research proposal write-up" to "Writing a proposal or abstract" and "Research Presentation Preparation" to "Preparing a research presentation" and removed the item referencing "Project Management" as this is not a skill we have intentionally identified for IMSRG as we work alongside mentees. We plan to include the additional measure described, *Mentoring Experience and Effectiveness* scale, with questions about a students' experience with his/her faculty mentor, on the post-test survey that will be provided at the end of each academic year. These modifications did not result in poor reliability, as evidenced by the Cronbach alphas reported below. We anticipate even better reliability in the future with a larger sample size of mentees and will continue to give intentional consideration to our assessments based on the unique needs of our focus population.

Of the participants who completed the IMSRG student mentee survey, one was a fourth-year undergraduate, three were masters graduate students, and one was a PhD graduate student.

One participant indicated that they had applied to a graduate or master's degree program, and no participants indicated that they had applied to a doctoral program. Three were majoring in social work, one was a public health major, and one was a sociology major. In the sample, one was a transfer student, and two were the first person in their family to attend a four-year college or university. Two identified as male and three identified as female, and all participants identified as cisgender. The average age of the sample was 25 years old (SD = 1.41). Four participants were white, one was black or African, and none of the participants identified as Latinx. Four participants were single/never married, and one was married. With regards to living arrangements, one participant indicated that they were renting alone, three indicated that they were renting with others, and one indicated that they own their residence. One participant had served in the US Armed

Forces, Reserves, or National Guard, but no participants were currently serving. One participant identified as having a disability. All five participants indicated that English was their first language. Three indicated that they were currently working, with two working full-time and one working part-time. Three participants were currently receiving a Pell Grant or another source of needs-based federal funding. No participants indicated that they were student athletes.

Self-efficacy around research was evaluated using 14 items measured on a five-point scale, ranging from 1 (*Strongly disagree*) to 5 (*Strongly agree*). The average score on this scale was 4.5 (SD = 0.37). Intentions to attend graduate school (α = .667) were evaluated using four items measured on a five-point scale, ranging from 1 (*Strongly disagree*) to 5 (*Strongly agree*). The average score on this scale was 4.88 (SD = 0.25). Grit was evaluated using eight items measured on a five-point scale, ranging from 1 (*Not at all like me*) to 5 (*Very much like me*). The average score on this scale was 3.53 (SD = 0.45). Research skills (α = .946) were evaluated using 22 items measured on a five-point scale, ranging from 1 (*Not at all*) to 5 (*A great*). The average score on this scale was 4.55 (SD = 0.52). Scientific leadership was evaluated using nine items measured on a five-point scale, ranging from 1 (*Strongly disagree*) to 5 (*Strongly agree*). The average score on this scale was 4.53 (SD = 0.56). Professional/scientific identity was evaluated using six items measured on a five-point scale, ranging from 1 (*Strongly disagree*) to 5 (*Strongly agree*). The average score on this scale was 3.88 (SD = 1.27).

Mentoring effectiveness (α = .97) was evaluated using 10 items measured on a five-point scale, ranging from 1 (*Strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). The average score on this scale was 4.6 (SD = 0.8). Looking at the items individually, the average scores for "Was accessible," "Was helpful in providing direction and guidance on research project issues," and "Suggested appropriate resources" were 4.5 (SD = 1). The average scores for "Was approachable" and "Answered my questions satisfactorily (e.g., timely, clear, comprehensive) acknowledged my contributions appropriately" were 4.25 (SD = 1.5). The average scores for "Demonstrated professional integrity," "Demonstrated content expertise in my area of need," "Was supportive and encouraging," and "Provided constructive and useful critiques of my work" were 4.75 (SD = 0.5). The average score for "Challenged me to extend my abilities" was 5 (SD = 0). Additionally, the average scores for "Provided informal mentoring (support through life challenges and academic experience)" and "Provided advice on career and future goals" were 4.75 (SD = 0.5).

Four participants indicated that their faculty mentor was female, and four participants indicated that their faculty mentor had identities that aligned with their own. One participant stated that these intersecting identities were gender, field, and discipline, while another participant indicated that the identities that aligned with their faculty mentors were field, research interests, race, and gender identity.

Overall program satisfaction was evaluated using six items measured on a five-point scale, ranging from 1 (*Highly dissatisfied*) to 5 (*Highly satisfied*). The average score on this scale was 4.67 (SD = 0.47). Looking at the items individually, the average satisfaction scores for "Your housing arrangements (if applicable)" and "Your interaction with other students" were 4.5 (SD = 1). The average satisfaction scores for "Your faculty advisor," "The program in general," "Your research experience," and "Your interaction with project staff" were 4.75 (SD = 0.5).

Looking at student learning outcomes, three participants indicated that they were aware of specific expectations for their learning, and three participants indicated that they believed these expectations were met. Participants also answered three questions related to learning outcomes on a five-point scale, ranging from 1 (*Strongly disagree*) to 5 (*Strongly agree*). The average scores for "The learning outcomes for this experience (which might be the same or different from a course learning outcome) were clearly stated" and "The learning outcomes for this experience were met" were 4 (SD = 1.15). The average score for "The learning outcomes for this experience are clearly tied to applied learning" was 4.25 (SD = 0.96).

Several questions related to the opportunity to set goals or expectations were also included. Only four participants responded to the question about their expectations and final reflection for the experience. Two participants indicated that they did have the opportunity to set goals or expectations at the start of the experience, while two participants indicated that they did not. Participants also answered two questions on a five-point scale, ranging from 1 (*Strongly disagree*) to 5 (*Strongly agree*). For both items, "The intention activity/assignment provided an opportunity for you to consider the purpose, expectations, and goals of the applied learning activity" and "The intention activity/assignment helped you to prepare for the upcoming experience in a meaningful way," the average score was 5 (SD = 0).

With regards to reflection, two participants indicated that they had the opportunity to reflect on their IMSRG experience after it concluded, while two participants indicated that they did not have this opportunity. Participants also answered three questions on a five-point scale, ranging

from 1 (*Strongly disagree*) to 5 (*Strongly agree*). For all three items, "There was an opportunity to make meaning of this applied learning experience through reflection," "There was an opportunity during and after this applied learning experience to make sense of its' overall importance for my growth," and "The reflection was a valuable component of this learning experience," the average scores were 5 (SD = 0).

In addition, participants answered three items related to knowledge acquisition and four items related to knowledge application. All items were answered on a five-point scale, ranging from 1 (*Strongly disagree*) to 5 (*Strongly agree*). For all three knowledge acquisition items, "The experience learning gained in/out of the classroom will be useful in my future endeavors," "My experience in the classroom allowed for growth in my educational skills," and "I feel like I learned something new from this applied learning experience," the average scores were 5 (SD = 0). With regards to knowledge application, the average score for "There was an opportunity to practically apply the knowledge I acquired in the applied learning experience" was 4.5 (SD = 0.58), the average score for "The application of knowledge gained contributed to the learning outcomes provided at the beginning of the semester. Applying the knowledge, I gained in this experience helped to meet the goals and expectations set" was 4.75 (SD = 0.5), the average score for "I believe I gained valuable tools and experience from the practical application of knowledge" was 5 (SD = 0), and the average score for "What I learned in this course only applied within this or a limited context" was 4 (SD = 1.41).

Finally, three participants indicated that there was an opportunity to conclude the applied learning experience in a meaningful way.

DISCUSSION

In considering the findings from this small pilot survey, it seems that with IMSRG's initial development, there was success in meeting the needs of mentorship and the foundation of building research skills by engaging students in high impact research engaging minoritized communities. We intend to continually consider objectives that consider minoritized students' needs in similar contexts and assess whether we are meeting these objectives. As we aim to mentor future generations of scientists, clinicians, and researchers from marginalized and underrepresented backgrounds, IMSRG's mission and vision to formulate a sustainable mentorship program affirming and supporting student's unique and intersecting identities, while facilitating each student's personal and professional development was essential. To accomplish this, we drew on

various mentorship models while utilizing an interdisciplinary approach (Seibert et al., 2020) in allowing our student mentees to truly embody the constructs of community engaged research for which IMSRG is recognized. Below we share the theoretical foundations for our preliminary model which we hope to hone in the next academic year, by continuing to evaluate our current practice and evolving based on what we learn moving forward. The underpinnings from the mentorship model constructs presented below will be additionally assessed utilizing a concept mapping methodology engaging mentors, mentees, students, and university and local community.

The adaptive mentorship model begins when a mentor interacts with their mentee for the first time (Ralph & Walker, 2013). Mentors may start by assessing the student's readiness to perform specific tasks, such as a comprehensive literature search and synthesis. As the mentor grows in their understanding of their mentee's ability, the mentor adapts their mentorship according to the abilities and needs of the mentee. IMSRG mentors incorporated aspects of this model as the need to be flexible and responsive to the mentee's competency was held central to this alliance. While this model is useful in helping mentors to start where the mentee is at, we expanded from this model to help us better meet the intersectional experiences and needs of minoritized students conducting research focused on marginalized communities across disciplines.

Critical mentorship is a framework that includes many aspects like those found in the adaptive model and specifically situates the mentor/mentee relationship within an understanding that the student (and potentially the mentor) has and will continue to experience discrimination and a lack of acknowledgement of their personal strengths and cultural capital within academia and the larger socio-cultural environment. Critical mentorship necessitates that mentor and mentee acknowledge and seek to deconstruct the power differentials in traditional mentor/mentee models (Liou et al., 2016). To reduce the power imbalance, the IMSRG mentor and mentee draw on their unique strengths and learn from each other. They also discuss and work together to navigate and challenge educational and professional spaces that have historically limited opportunities for minority students.

Utilizing a Trauma-Informed Approach in mentoring allows mentors to see mentees through the lens of "what happened to you?" versus "what's wrong with you?". There is a recognition that every student, and every faculty, has experienced at least some trauma. Further, given identities for which IMSRG recruits mentees, these students may be at heightened risk for the experiences of trauma and potentially collective trauma. Any trauma

informed organization should incorporate these 4 R's: 1) realization and understanding of trauma, 2) recognizing signs of trauma, 3) respond by applying to six principles (safety, trustworthiness and transparency; peer support; collaboration and mutuality; empowerment, voice, and choice; cultural, historical, and gender issues), and 4) resist re-traumatization (SAMHSA, 2014).

In considering the importance of having IMSRG mentors engaging in mentoring via a trauma informed lens, it is just as key that each mentor serves as a "buffer" or protective factor for a mentee by "meeting the mentee where he or she is utilizing the adaptive mentoring approach, providing psychosocial support as mentioned in critical mentoring, and finally focusing on strengths to build resilience. The strengths-based approach, necessary for meeting students in a way appropriate for skill level and confidence in an adaptive method, focusing on individual strengths rather than deficits. This focus applied to mentorship allows for a collaborative effort where the mentee sets their goals alongside their mentor.

Guided by the Institute of Medicine's position on the need to develop the healthcare workforce through the lens of an interdisciplinary approach, as well as UNCW's strategic vision, IMSRG is grounded in the principles of collaboration and cooperation of an interdisciplinary team (IOM, 2001). As we, six faculty from four differing schools on campus, embark on community engaged research mentoring for our students' interprofessional education and care (IPE/IPC) practices within our multidisciplinary research activities, we will help to build well-prepared researchers of the future. Additionally, interdisciplinary mentorship carries a sense of communal learning in that various disciplines organically collaborate while conducting community engaged research. This models for mentees the natural state of social constructs. By joining with students using an interdisciplinary team, we fortify the value of collegial partnership in critical decision making. Our strategies in engaging in research mentorship as an interdisciplinary team collaborating amongst each other and other research-engaged partners will continue to grow as we learn alongside one another.

CONCLUSION

This article offered a review of existing mentorship models, identified gaps in the mentorship literature, and discussed the development of IMSRG as an approach to expanding on current mentorship approaches. We use previous literature incorporating adaptive mentorship, one-on-one mentoring, and peer mentoring as a template for continually building a model that is iterative and addresses the needs of minoritized students, in

particular integrating critical [race] mentorship and trauma-informed approaches. As we seek to diversify professions and assist students from marginalized groups to gain the skills that they need to be successful in a range of professional environments, there is a need to develop new mentorship approaches that honor students intersecting identities and experiences and that prepare them to work in and with interdisciplinary teams. We hope that our discussion of the development of IMSRG will serve as an example and catalyst for other institutions interested in pursuing this work.

NEXT STEP AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

As IMSRG continues forward, we aim to develop and refine this minority-specific mentorship model. The model will be grounded in our mission to mentor students through interdisciplinary methods, and will remain adaptive, responsive, and contextualized to the needs of our students, community, society, and culture.

Mentees, community stakeholders, and mentors will be co-creators and revisors of our minority mentorship model. IMSRG also aims to develop a training process for future mentors and mentees to ensure their experiences are guided through the stages of co-creating the mentor/mentee alliance. Finally, to sustain our efforts across time and stages of students' educational growth, IMSRG will establish a peer-mentorship program. Through peer-to-peer learning, IMSRG believes many barriers minority students encounter can be more easily understood and overcome.

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Getting Around in a College Town: A Case Study of Transportation Barriers Faced by International Students at the University of Alabama

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ABSTRACT

University students' day-to-day lives largely depend on transportation. Public transit alternatives are not widely available in small-town, rural, and suburban collegiate environments in the United States (U.S.). In this study, an online survey was conducted among international students studying at The University of Alabama (UA) campus located in Tuscaloosa, Alabama. The objective of this research was to investigate and analyze international student travel experiences in a city with a significant college-affiliated population, as well as to highlight, in particular, some of the transportation issues in the area. The survey results show that international students face various challenges in transportation in and around the campus, finding it difficult to travel within Tuscaloosa without a personal vehicle, as other modes of transportation including walking, biking, and using public transportation are not always convenient or reliable. The study findings may be of interest to transportation experts, city planners, university administrators, and college students who want to better understand travel-related challenges experienced by international students.

Keywords: Accessibility, Automobile-Dependency, International Students, Mobility

INTRODUCTION

Over the last decades, there has been a steady growth in the number of international students worldwide and in the United States (Adnett, 2010; Institute of International Education, 2021; Israel & Batalova, 2021; Kemp, 2016; West, 2018). Between 1990 and 2014, the number of international students worldwide has quadrupled and reached five million and is expected to increase to eight million in 2025 (West, 2018). In the United States (U.S.), the number of international students has grown from 26,000 in 1949-1950 to nearly 1.1 million in 2019-2021 (Institute of International Education, 2021). For most countries, international students are important economically, strategically, and diplomatically, as the movement of international students and scholars around the world helps foster global engagement, ensures the diversity of student bodies on university campuses, promotes cross-cultural understanding, and helps grow enrollment and revenues for higher education institutions (Adnett, 2010 Ruby, 2009; Ward, 2017).

In the United States, the number of international students fell by 1.8% between 2019 and 2020, likely as a result of a series of tightened immigration policies implemented by President Trump's administration as well as safety concerns and travel restrictions related to the global coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic (Allen & Ye, 2021; Institute of International Education, 2021). However, the U.S. remains the leading host destination in the world for international students with 1,075,496 students enrolled in U.S. higher education institutions in 2020 (Institute of International Education, 2020; Liu & Wang, 2008). Given the benefits that international students bring to the economy and higher education institutions, nearly half of all U.S. universities and colleges currently have strategic international student recruitment plans with specific enrollment targets (Ward, 2017).

BACKGROUND

Adjustment Barriers

Since 2015, the number of international students present in the U.S. has consistently exceeded one million, with the exception of the academic year 2020/2021 when the decline in the international student enrollment was primarily caused by travel restrictions due to the COVID-19 pandemic (Institute of International Education, 2021; Moody, 2021). In the U.S., international students represent 5.5% of the total U.S. higher education population (Institute of International Education, 2019). Existing literature on college student experiences shows that in comparison to their domestic

counterparts, incoming international students may experience greater barriers to adjustment and more distress during their initial transition to university life and may report greater academic and career needs (Duong, 2020; Icel & Davis, 2017; Poyrazli & Grahame, 2007). Particularly, some of the more common problems may include lower levels of English language proficiency of incoming international students which may affect their academic performance and social interactions, lack of familiarity with local culture, social norms and expectations, experiences of homesickness, difficulties in finding internships and jobs due to international students' temporary, and non-immigrant student visa status (Duong, 2020; Poyrazli & Grahame, 2007). Past research on the topic suggests that the quality of international student experiences on U.S. college campuses may be closely related to their social participation and cultural assimilation into American society (Baba & Hosoda, 2014; Cemalcilar & Falbo, 2008; Sumer, 2009; Ward, 2017).

Commuting Scenario

In the U.S., the majority of daily trips are made using personal vehicles as a transportation mode: the latest National Household Travel Survey completed in 2017 showed that 87% of daily trips take place in personal vehicles, and 91% of people commuting to work use personal vehicles (Bureau of Transportation Statistics, 2017). Given the U.S.' high dependence on automobiles, especially in small-town, suburban, and rural areas, international students who do not own personal vehicles may face difficulties with transportation and access to essential services and social activities due to the lack of public transportation options. This may significantly impede international students' adjustment to American culture by limiting their access to social interactions and making essential daily tasks, such as grocery shopping, daily commutes to school, participation in after-school activities and social events, more time-consuming and challenging (Poyrazli & Grahame, 2007). Especially in small-towns and suburban and rural areas, where college campuses tend to be spread out while public transportation options tend to be limited, the lack of access to a personal vehicle may result in an increased commute time to school. Previous studies on the topic have shown that longer commute times are negatively correlated with academic performance and students' involvement in extracurricular activities (Alfano & Eduljee, 2013; and Kobus et al., 2015).

University students represent a relatively large portion of the U.S. population. In 2018, college enrollment represented 6.2% of the U.S.

population and 41% of the 18- to 24-year-old age group (Bustamante, 2019; National Center for Education Statistics, 2020). Although past research has examined college student activity-travel patterns and travel behaviors along with commuting mode choices in and around university premises (Balsas, 2003; Eom et al., 2009; Shannon et al., 2006; Sisson & Tudor-Locke, 2008), there has been a lack of research focusing on transportation-related experiences of those college students that do not have access to personal vehicles. The authors of this paper have not been able to identify any previous studies that would specifically focus on the transportation-related experiences of international students in U.S. colleges.

Auto-dependency

Delmelle and Delmelle (2012) discussed the reliance on cars by university students and found that car usage in small university towns increases significantly when the walking time from campus to student residence is between 10 and 15 minutes, and then further increases at a higher rate if the walking time exceeds 15 minutes. A survey of commuter students administered on campus at Iowa State University found that 25% of commuter students who live within a two-mile radius from campus prefer to use a personal vehicle to commute to and from school (Zhou et al., 2018). This may be explained by the fact that in a small college town like Ames, where the main campus of Iowa State University is located, the area surrounding the campus might not have all the essential services to meet students' basic needs (such as grocery shopping, healthcare facilities, post office, banking, and financial services and others); thus students may need to travel long distances to access such services. In small-town and suburban areas with limited public transportation options, access to a personal vehicle naturally implies a greater convenience in getting around and a shorter commute time. Likewise, a study conducted at the University of Nebraska Omaha found that out of 234 surveyed commuter students, 77.7% traveled to campus alone on a daily basis using a personal vehicle (Grant, 2008). The negative consequences of such a trend include high volumes of automobile traffic and high demand for parking (Daisy et al., 2018).

Few research studies have focused on the issue of auto-dependency among university populations (Barla et al., 2012; Shannon et al., 2006). When it comes to the issue of auto-dependency among international students, hardly any research on the topic has been conducted. The objective of this study was to contribute to academic literature about international students' transportation-related experiences and document issues of auto-

dependency that international students may face on college campuses located in small-town, suburban, and rural settings.

RESEARCH METHOD

Study Context

This study was conducted at The University of Alabama's (UA) flagship campus in Tuscaloosa, Alabama, and was based on the results of an online survey administered among UA international students. The objective of the study was to examine international students' experiences when it comes to getting around a city that hosts a significant college-affiliated population and to highlight issues related to transportation options in the area. Based on the study objective, following research question was investigated: *What transportation-related barriers do international students at UA face?*

UA was recently ranked 159th out of 1,300 colleges and universities in the U.S. for popularity among international students (OIRA, 2019). According to the statistical data provided by the *Students by Level and Geographic Origin Report* from the Office of Institutional Research and Assessment (OIRA), in the fall of 2018, there were 1,219 international students from 76 countries enrolled in UA. These students represented 3% of the total 38,392 students enrolled at UA during that term (OIRA, 2018).

Tuscaloosa is a college town with a population of 101,129 people (U.S. Census Bureau, 2019). While the UA campus itself is a pedestrian- and bicycle-friendly environment and offers a variety of free public transportation services to its community during the academic year, the City of Tuscaloosa currently has very few public transportation options. The business district and downtown areas of the city are walkable and bicyclefriendly. However, other parts of Tuscaloosa may be challenging to access without a personal vehicle. Outside of Tuscaloosa's downtown area, there is a general lack of pedestrian and bicycle facilities (such as sidewalks and bike lanes) and most of the existing walking and biking infrastructure is not Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)-compliant (The City of Tuscaloosa, 2019).

The Tuscaloosa County Parking and Transit Authority (TCPTA) provides transportation services via bus, van, and trolley that serve only a limited number of areas within the city limits, between 5 am - 6 pm on weekdays, with no weekend service available (Tuscaloosa Transit Authority - Route Information, n.d.). As a result, international students at UA who do not have access to a personal vehicle may find it challenging to get around the city at their will. That said, UA runs a free shuttle service to several

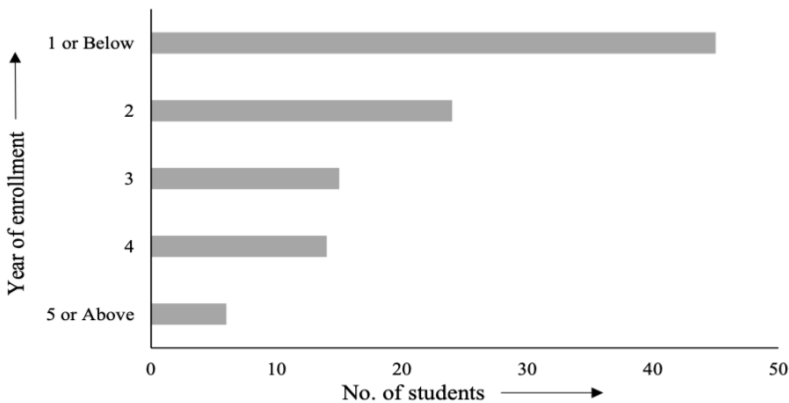
department stores and retail locations near campus for limited Saturday hours as well as an on-call service on Sundays (also for limited hours). Furthermore, UA provides a rideshare shuttle service (348-Ride) on weeknights to serve a limited-service area with daily operations from 9 pm-12 am. It is a convenient way for students to safely return to their places of residence later in the night. The findings of this study may be generalized to college towns of similar size across the U.S. As such, the outcomes of this study may be of interest to transportation researchers, city planners, university administrators, and students motivated to learn more about the travel-related challenges experienced by international students in the U.S.

Participants

The study's target population were all the 1,219 international students registered at UA in the Fall 2018 semester. The participation was voluntary, and respondents were not compensated for participating. Based on a 95% confidence level and 10% error margin, the ideal sample size for the research would be 90. We recruited 110 participants, which represented approximately 9% of the target population. Survey participants represented 35 countries around the globe. Figures 1 and 2 illustrate the survey respondents' distribution by enrollment year and age range, respectively.

Figure 1

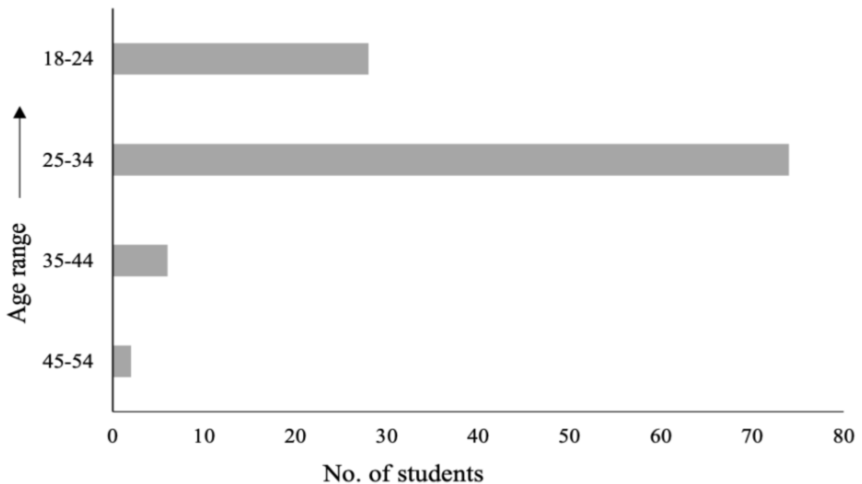
Survey respondents by the year of enrollment at UA



The following table (Table 1) provides a comparison of the study sample with the international student population enrolled at UA for the Fall 2018 semester (OIRA, 2018). Women were disproportionately represented in the survey; specifically, there were 47.27% of participants who identified as

women. At the same time, the proportion of the UA international student population that self-identified as women averaged 29.04% in the Fall 2018 semester. It is important to note that the University of Alabama's statistical data on international students only includes binary gender categories ("male" and "female") while the data is based on students' self-reported responses. Therefore, the data may not reflect all other gender categories that international students enrolled at the University of Alabama may hold (such as transgender, non-binary, and others).

Figure 2
Survey respondents by age group at UA



Most of the participants (75.40%) were graduate students in doctoral or master's programs, and less than 20% were undergraduate students. The remaining students were in non-degree seeking programs such as UA English Language Institute (ELI) programs. The percentage of graduate student participants also differed drastically from that of the international graduate student population. Furthermore, the sample included a larger proportion of students who identified Asia as their region of origin compared to the overall international student population (63.30% vs. 49.06%). In contrast, students that identified the Middle East and North Africa as their region of origin were underrepresented in the survey compared to the overall international student population at UA (11.10% vs. 27.81%).

Table 1
Comparison between International Student Population and Study Sample

	Total Population of International Students Enrolled at UA as of Fall 2018	Survey Respondents
Gender		
Male	70.96%	51.82%
Female	29.04%	47.27%
Transgender/Gender Nonconforming	-	-
Prefer not to respond	-	0.91%
Degree Level/student status		
First-year	13.20%	5.50%
Sophomore	6.73%	3.60%
Junior	12.96%	4.50%
Senior	15.18%	3.60%
Master's	8.37%	10.90%
Doctoral	35.68%	64.50%
Others	7.88%	7.30%
Region of Origin		
Asia	49.06%	63.30%
Europe	10.01%	8.26%
Latin America	6.81%	9.17%
Middle East & North Africa	27.81%	11.01%
North America	2.05%	0.92%
Oceania	1.31%	0.92%
Sub-Saharan Africa	2.95%	6.42%

Procedures

Student survey is a popular method to capture the feedback of the student population (Qualtrics, n.d.-a). The perceptions of college students have been studied in the past using both paper surveys (Skeeter et al., 2019) and internet-based questionnaires (Barla et al., 2012; Grant, 2008; Shannon et al., 2006). Online survey questionnaires are cost-effective for many institutions and handy for tech-savvy participants like college students (Carini et al., 2003; Shannon et al., 2006). Conducting a student perception survey involves planning, creating, administering, discussing survey results,

and acting on survey findings, using a survey questionnaire containing close-ended questions, likert scale, multiple choice, and open-ended questions (Qualtrics, n.d.-a). A survey questionnaire was designed in Qualtrics following these criteria. Before it was distributed, the questionnaire was field reviewed and evaluated by research associates at a prominent research institute. Based on the feedback received, the authors revised the questionnaire several times before it was finalized. Since the research included human subjects, authorization from the University of Alabama's Institute Review Board was obtained before disseminating the survey. The International Student & Scholar Services (ISSS) office at UA agreed to assist with distributing the survey to international students who were enrolled at UA at the time of the survey. ISSS distributed the survey via a link posted to their monthly emails and their official social network accounts including Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn. The survey link included a QR code that allowed participants to scan the code through their mobile phones to access the survey. The survey was published online on March 4, 2019 and was closed on April 11, 2019.

Measures

The survey questionnaire consisted of 36 questions (see Appendix A). Among these questions, 23 were main screening questions and 13 were branching questions (branching questions send respondents down different paths in the survey, depending on how they answered screening questions). The majority of survey questions were multiple choice; however, there were a few open-ended, Likert scale, and dropdown questions. The survey questions were divided into five categories: demographic, student background, ownership of personal vehicle, if any, travel information, and opinions. Table 2 shows completion rates for each question along with the question type. Even though it may be confusing for readers when the sample size varies from question to question, including partial replies reduces the bias of subject salience and enhances the sample size for initial questions (Henning, 2021). The number of responses for each question was used to compute descriptive statistics for that specific question following the approach of Skeeter et al. (2019). For instance, the stated percentage for age responses was estimated as a percentage of 110 students, whereas the response to present student level on campus was calculated as a percentage of 109 students (Table 2).

Table 2
List of Survey Questions and Corresponding Number of Responses and Question Type

Questions	Number of Responses (n)	Completi on Rate	Question Type
Demographics			
Gender	110	100.00	Multiple Choice
Age	110	100.00	Multiple Choice
Country of Residency	103	93.64	Dropdown
Current Student Level on Campus	109	99.09	Multiple Choice
Is Your Current Address within the Grid Map?	107	97.27	Multiple Choice
Grid Number Based on Current Address*	92	83.64	Dropdown
Current Address Outside of Grid Map*	14	12.73	Multiple Choice
On-Campus Job Employment Status	106	96.36	Multiple Choice
On-Campus Job Title*	76	69.09	Multiple Choice
Student Background			
Year of Enrollment at UA	103	93.64	Open-ended
Driver's License Status in Home Country	105	95.45	Multiple Choice
Popular Travel Mode in Home Country	102	92.73	Multiple Choice

Questions	Number of Responses (n)	Completion Rate	Question Type
Preferred Travel Mode in Home Country	102	92.73	Multiple Choice
Vehicle Ownership			
Do You Own A Personal Vehicle?	105	95.45	Multiple Choice
Status of U.S Driver's License	110	100.00	Multiple Choice
Did You Purchase A Personal Vehicle Before or After Arriving in Tuscaloosa?*	63	57.27	Multiple Choice
When Did You Purchase A Personal Vehicle After Arriving in Tuscaloosa?*	46	41.82	Multiple Choice
Payment Option for Personal Vehicle Purchase*	60	54.55	Multiple Choice
Using On-Campus Parking Permit*	62	56.36	Multiple Choice
Travel Information			
Preferred Travel Mode in Tuscaloosa	102	92.73	Multiple Choice
Places Most Visited Soon After Arriving in Tuscaloosa	101	91.82	Multiple Choice
Travel Mode for Getting to Places Soon After Arriving in Tuscaloosa*	102	92.73	Multiple Choice
Do You Stay on Campus Past 9 pm?	102	92.73	Likert-Scale

Questions	Number of Responses (n)	Completi on Rate	Question Type
Preferred Travel Mode for Getting Home After 9 pm*	87	79.09	Multiple Choice
Have You Ever Used Public Transportation System in Tuscaloosa (Besides the UA Bus Service)?	102	92.73	Multiple Choice
How Frequently Do You Use Public Transportation System in Tuscaloosa (Besides the UA Bus Service)?*	25	22.73	Likert-scale
Have You Ever Used Services like Uber, Lyft, or Taxi in Tuscaloosa?	102	92.73	Multiple Choice
Opinions			
Do You Prefer Using Public Transit Over Personal Vehicle?	102	92.73	Likert-Scale
Perceptions of Existing Public Transit Services in Tuscaloosa	102	92.73	Multiple Choice
Perceptions of Using Uber, Lyft, or Taxi Services in Tuscaloosa*	53	48.18	Multiple Choice
Perceptions of Conveniences of Using Uber, Lyft, or Taxi in Tuscaloosa*	27	24.55	Multiple Choice
Perceptions of Inconveniences of Using Uber, Lyft, or Taxi in Tuscaloosa*	6	5.45	Multiple Choice

Questions	Number of Responses (n)	Completi on Rate	Question Type
Perceptions of Existing Public Transportation System in Tuscaloosa	102	92.73	Multiple Choice
Do You Think That It Is Challenging to Get Around Tuscaloosa Without A Personal Vehicle?	102	92.73	Likert-Scale
Additional Comments			Open-ended

*Branching questions

This study collected quantitative data from closed- and open-ended survey questions presented to international students at the University of Alabama. Descriptive statistics are the fundamental measurements that are used in the process of describing survey data since they consist of summative descriptions of individual variables and the accompanying survey sample (CVent, 2019; Qualtrics, n.d.-b; Torchim, n.d.), whereas the traditional approach to analyzing responses to open-ended questions is quantitative content analysis (Züll, 2016). Descriptive statistics with quantitative content analysis include the opportunity to learn more about participants' experiences and enrich the findings of the study. Hence, the study employed descriptive statistics to analyze the close ended questions and quantitative content analysis to analyze the open-ended questions. The survey responses were exported to Microsoft Excel from Qualtrics. Each author carefully examined the open-ended question answers to determine how often specific categories of information came up. The authors then went through these categories and summarized the contents such as the transportation-related barriers that international students at the UA encounter.

RESULTS

Researchers used quantitative content analysis to summarize and explain the open-ended questions, and descriptive statistics to evaluate the remainder of the survey data. The results obtained from the survey highlight international students' shared experiences related to getting around in a mid-sized college town.

High Automobile Ownership Rates

The results from the survey that allowed gathering information about the number of respondents who held a U.S. driver's license, the number of respondents who owned a personal vehicle in Tuscaloosa, and how soon those survey respondents owning a vehicle purchased it after they arrived in the U.S. are summarized in Table 3.

Table 3

Summary of Survey Respondent Vehicle Ownership Situation in Tuscaloosa

Do you have a U.S. driver's license?		
	No. of responses	Percentage
Yes	63	60%
No	25	23.80%
Learner's Permit	12	11.40%
International driver's license	5	4.80%
Do you have a personal vehicle?		
	No. of responses	Percentage
Yes	63	60%
No	42	40%
How long after arriving in Tuscaloosa, took you to purchase a personal vehicle?		
	No. of responses	Percentage
Within a month	7	15.21%
Within 3 months	6	13.04%
Within 6 months	8	17.39%
Within 1 year	8	17.39%
Within 1.5 years	12	26.09%
2 years and above	5	10.87%

More generally, the following comments summarize the extent to which respondents perceived their need for access to a personal vehicle in Tuscaloosa:

- Respondent 1, a master's student, said, "I usually walk to close destinations on daily basis, but I feel so strange since I am the only one walking on pedestrians. I have never been to this kind of city where everyone is using personal vehicle, and nobody is walking."
- Respondent 2, a senior student mentioned, "Car is necessary. Can't go anywhere without personal vehicle."
- Respondent 3, a Ph. D. student said, "I experience one year without car and it took time and money to get around town."

Lack of Reliable Public Transportation

Generally, many survey respondents found Tuscaloosa to be highly auto dependent and reported the lack of reliable public transportation options to be a major hindrance in getting around the city. The survey found that public transportation was not popular among international students. Among 102 students, upwards of 75.5% students reported that they never used any public transportation within Tuscaloosa except for the free transportation services offered to the campus community by UA. Within this group, nearly 46% were not aware of the availability of any existing city bus service in Tuscaloosa, whereas another 35.3% found the service to be highly infrequent and unreliable. Overall, 67% of the respondents expressed dissatisfaction with the existing transportation system in Tuscaloosa.

We used a five-point Likert scale to ask respondents to rate their preference for using public transportation over personal vehicles; the options ranged from "definitely yes" to "definitely not". Thirty-five percent (35.3%) answered "definitely yes", 12.8% answered "probably yes", 11.8% answered "might or might not", 19.6% answered "probably not", and 20.6% answered, "definitely not". When responding to a different question in the survey, nearly 75.5% out of the 102 respondents said that they had never used Tuscaloosa's public transportation services. The following open-ended responses by survey participants reflect the extent to which the respondents perceived a lack of reliable public transportation in Tuscaloosa:

- Respondent 4, a Ph. D. student mentioned, "Public transportation doesn't work on weekends. I think on Saturdays it only runs up to noon and it doesn't reach all parts of the city and residential areas. The routes are so limited and depending on where you live, it will take you a long time to get to where you want to go because it has to go all over before it can get to where you need to be. It is very time-consuming."
- Respondent 5, a Ph. D. student said, "The public transportation only takes people to certain distance; however, a lot of other places to reach are located beyond that and are somewhat necessary for student living such as Walmart, Water service etc."

Limited Access to Facilities

The survey inquired about the places international students visited most frequently upon their arrival in Tuscaloosa keeping in mind that typically, international students would not have access to a personal vehicle immediately after their arrival (this question offered the opportunity to choose several responses categories). Out of 110 respondents, nearly 40%

went to department stores like Walmart, Target, etc., 20.9% went to utility company offices, 16% to the local driver's license office, 11.9% went to the court to obtain their social security documents, 7.8% went to the local post office, and another 4.1% went to other local places. In order to reach these places, 64.7% of respondents noted that they asked their friends to drive them while another 32.4% used a personal vehicle.

The survey provided respondents with a map which helped the researchers gain a better understanding of how far most students lived from the campus area. Particularly, we learned that a total of 75% of the respondents were located just a few miles from the UA campus. Whereas, many department stores, utility company offices, and the local driver's license office among other places are located farther away from the campus area and thus, not within a reasonable walking or biking distance.

Additionally, in the survey, students were asked to share their opinions about the convenience of existing ride-sharing services provided in Tuscaloosa such as Uber and Lyft. Three fourth of 32 respondents said that these services were highly convenient since they were easily available and another 7 suggested that they were safe to ride. More generally, the following comments highlighted the respondents' perception of their limited access to facilities:

- Respondent 6, a Ph. D. student mentioned, "Without car, somebody should spend whole day to get somewhere and come back home."
- Respondent 7, a Ph. D. student stated, "Getting anywhere other than school is almost impossible without a car. For example, other than Publix, there isn't any grocery store that's a walking distance from campus."
- Respondent 8, a Ph. D. student said, "You are kind of confined to the campus bubble, especially if you can't walk or bike far either."

Perceived Safety Concerns

The results of the survey highlighted safety concerns among international students regarding getting around in Tuscaloosa without a private vehicle. Female students especially emphasized such concerns as they shared that walking or biking outside the UA campus area made them feel vulnerable and unsafe. The survey found that out of 19 respondents, 42.1% of females preferred walking back home from campus after 9 p.m., and out of 7 respondents, no females preferred to bike back home from campus after 9 p.m. Additionally, out of 14 female respondents, 28.6% were more likely to ask a friend to drop them home after leaving campus past 9

p.m. The following comments by a female graduate student and a senior year female student reflect their views on perceived safety around campus:

- Respondent 9, a Ph. D. student stated, “It is impossible to live without a car. It is unsafe walking or biking around the city if you don't live on campus.”
- Respondent 10, a senior student said, “Before I bought my car, I could not go to any places because it was not easy and convenient for me. Actually, it is not safe enough to walk in the city at night.”

High Financial Burden

Purchasing a personal vehicle is a significant expense for any student. With this understanding in mind, the survey asked respondents whether they owned a personal vehicle and how they purchased their vehicle. Out of 60 respondents, 70% reported that they purchased their car with cash, 8.3% reported taking out bank loans, and another 1.67% leased their vehicle.

Furthermore, students reported feeling a significant amount of financial burden related to traveling using ride-sharing vehicles to get around the city. Among those who had used ride-sharing services, 85.7% believed that ride-sharing services were very costly. More generally, the following comments summarize the extent to which respondents perceived financial constraints to be a barrier within the broader conversation about automobile dependence in Tuscaloosa:

- Respondent 11, a Ph. D. student said, “Not everyone knows driving or can afford buying a car when they come to the USA for the first time.”
- Respondent 12, a Ph. D. student mentioned, “Taxies are costly. Comparatively cheap stores are far from campus. If you don’t have car, you have to depend on others, which is not convenient. If you don’t depend, it won’t be convenient for the pocket.”
- Respondent 13 said, “If I’d not have one, I will need to use Uber or taxi and they cost a lot of money.”

DISCUSSION

Difficulties in getting around

This study revealed that most UA international students that participated in the survey found it difficult to travel around Tuscaloosa, Alabama without a personal vehicle. This is consistent with the previous

research showing U.S. residents' relatively high level of auto-dependency and transportation-related challenges experienced by college students that do not have access to a personal vehicle (Bureau of Transportation Statistics, 2017; Poyrazli & Grahame, 2007; West, 2021). The responses of our study participants have shown that most international students arrive in Tuscaloosa without a car but decide to purchase a personal vehicle soon after their arrival. Particularly, over half of those UA international students that reported they owned a car when they took the survey, said that they purchased their cars within the first 6 months after they arrived in Tuscaloosa. Yet, it is important to realize that purchasing a personal vehicle may not be feasible for those international students who have limited financial resources. Lower-income international students similar to lower-income American college students may be disproportionally affected by limited access to transportation which, as explained earlier in the paper, may lead to increased commute time (and therefore, reduced time available for academic and extracurricular activities) or increased cost on other expenses. Yet in the case of international students, the negative impact of limited transportation options may be even stronger than that for their American counterparts because for international students, the issue of limited transportation access is combined with language and cultural barriers, lack of ties to the community and the absence of a support system such as family and friends (who may occasionally be able to give a ride, let the student borrow a car, or offer another kind of support).

Most survey respondents, who attended classes and worked on the UA campus, owned a personal vehicle but chose not to hold a UA parking permit. This demonstrates that within the UA campus, most survey respondents were comfortable using transportation options other than a personal vehicle (such as biking, walking, and UA transportation services). However, the same respondents stated that traveling outside the UA campus was not convenient without a personal vehicle. The respondents reported that many areas in Tuscaloosa were not designed for walking or biking due to the lack of sidewalks and bike lanes. Indeed, students who live within walking distance from the UA campus and mostly rely on walking and public transportation as their main transportation modes may find it difficult to access essential services that are located further away from the campus. Additionally, walking and biking in Tuscaloosa were found to be associated with safety concerns, especially among female respondents.

The survey also showed that over three-quarters of the respondents have never used public transportation in Tuscaloosa other than the UA campus transportation services. A little over 40% of the survey respondents

stated that they “probably” or “definitely” would not use public transportation in Tuscaloosa. The respondents who had the experience of using public transportation services in Tuscaloosa reported that these services were not always convenient since they did not cover most of Tuscaloosa’s neighborhoods. Additionally, the respondents stated that the schedule of public transportation service routes was limited, especially on holidays and weekends. While many international students found public transportation services provided by the City of Tuscaloosa inconvenient and limited, the participants stated that using Uber or Lyft on a regular basis was costly.

Challenges of vehicle ownership

For those international students who decide to purchase a personal vehicle in the U.S., doing so may be less affordable than for their American counterparts. Individuals who are not U.S. citizens or permanent residents may often encounter challenges when trying to obtain credit loans from car dealerships and banks, often requiring co-signers (Santra, 2022). Indeed, in most cases, international students may find themselves in a situation where paying for a car purchase in full in cash may be the only feasible option (International English Institute, 2017; Vanderbilt University International Student and Scholar Services, n.d.). This is consistent with the finding of our study: 71.21% of participants reported that after they arrived in the U.S., they paid cash for their cars in full. This trend was nearly opposite to what is generally observed among the U.S. population; between the first quarter of 2017 and the second quarter of 2020, the share of new vehicles purchased in the U.S. using financing as a payment method was between 85.5% and 87.9% (Statista.com, 2020).

Furthermore, it may not always be practical and feasible for an international student to own a personal vehicle if the purpose of the student’s stay is to participate in a short-term academic program (such as the UA English Language Institute programs that usually last from one to twelve months and offer reading, writing, oral communication, and grammar courses for international students). At the same time, living in an automobile-dependent city without a personal car may pose significant difficulties and reduce the quality of students’ experiences even if the duration of a student’s stay is no longer than a few months.

Socioeconomic mobility concern

Every year, hundreds of thousands of international students arrive in the U.S. in search of education with the expectation that such academic experience would help them improve their future employment opportunities

and have a positive effect on their socioeconomic mobility. The high quality of U.S. higher education and its perceived value on the international labor market improved access to job opportunities in the U.S., and a positive impact on the socio-economic mobility of the international alumni of U.S. higher education programs are some of the factors that make international students choose the U.S. as a destination for their study abroad experience (Israel & Batalova, 2021). Socioeconomic mobility refers to the concept of climbing the socioeconomic ladder from childhood to adulthood and could be defined as the difference in an individual's income, wealth, or occupation in adulthood from that of the individual's family when he/she was a child (Slaughter-Acey et al., 2016).

Past research has shown that individuals' transportation mobility (i.e., ease of travel from one place to another) impacts their socioeconomic mobility and that there is a strong relationship between socioeconomic mobility and transport disadvantage (Hine, 2012). Lower levels of access to transportation tend to limit access to employment opportunities, shopping, services, health facilities, and recreational activities (Hine, 2012; Jansuwan et al., 2013). In the context of a college student's life, limited access to reliable transportation options may imply longer commute times to, and from school, grocery stores, recreational facilities, and other essential services. Additionally, limited access to transportation may make it challenging to access professional development events and job interviews as well as restrict one's ability to hold off-campus jobs and internships for an extended period of time after hours. These combined disadvantages can have a negative impact on an individual's quality of life and also reduce their chances of professional advancement after graduation. Auto-dependency in rural and suburban college campuses is a burden on most students that do not have access to a personal vehicle, and such a disadvantage is even more pronounced in the case of low-mobility individuals including older adults, low-income individuals, and people with disabilities (Jansuwan et al., 2013). Research has shown that among the different groups of low-mobility individuals, individuals with disabilities are more likely to rely on public transportation than on private transportation (Jansuwan et al., 2013). Therefore, international students with disabilities arriving at rural or suburban campuses in the U.S. may find themselves in an especially challenging situation where campus transportation options are limited, and the use of a private vehicle is not feasible.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Although public transportation options in Tuscaloosa are limited compared to large metropolitan areas, survey responses showed that many international students were not familiar with all of the services currently available in the city. This made it harder for students who didn't have a car to get around. Therefore, it may be important for the UA ISSS to make additional efforts to help incoming students orient to learn more about all of the transportation options available in Tuscaloosa during their initial orientation time. Additionally, where feasible, it may be helpful to expand the existing public transportation network in Tuscaloosa in order to serve more communities. For example, Iowa State University in collaboration with the City of Ames provides a bus service called CyRide that serves multiple communities outside of the ISU campus. The ISU Student Government's general funds cover 45% of the operation and maintenance cost of CyRide (Zhou et al., 2018). Similar public transportation partnerships between universities and municipal governments may be a helpful strategy in other college towns across the country.

LIMITATIONS

It is important to acknowledge a few limitations of the study. Particularly, when considering the findings of the study, one must note the potential demographic bias of the sample, making it not fully representative to the target population of international students enrolled at UA in the fall 2018 semester and the relatively small size of the sample (110 observations). While invitations to participate in the survey were sent to all foreign students regardless of their demographic status, women and graduate students were more likely to respond.

Although the gender breakdown of international students enrolled at UA during the Fall 2018 semester was 71% men vs. 29% women, the gender breakdown of survey participants was 52% men vs. 47% women. While the previous study indicated that males were more likely than females to complete a survey on the Web (Smith & Leigh, 1997), Underwood et al. (2000) showed that college women were more likely than men to reply to any survey technique, including the Web. However, the authors think that perceived safety concerns may be one of the main reasons why female students were represented in the survey more than expected. Another notable inconsistency in the survey response was the larger number of graduate-level students (75%) participating in comparison to the percentage (44%) of international graduate students enrolled at UA during the Fall 2018 semester. According to Park et al. (2019), undergraduate students are more

concerned with the technical aspects of a survey (i.e., survey duration, convenience, etc.), but graduate students are more likely to respond according to content. While investigating the characteristics that influence student survey participation and method of completion, Hunt-White (2006) found that students with a higher degree are more likely to participate in a survey, however, this probability may rise if the survey is conducted online. As a result, the authors perceive that the survey topic may have piqued the interest of graduate students. Additionally, students show more, or less psychological reactions based on where they come from (Poyrazli & Grahame, 2007). For example, compared to European students, students from Asia, Central/South America, and Africa report more acculturative stress (Yeh & Inose, 2003). This may explain why Asian, Latin American, and Sub-Saharan African students were overrepresented in the survey.

An ideal representative sample with a characteristic identical to the population from which it was chosen may be unattainable (Education Development Center, 2018). Given the demographic bias of the sample, it is possible that the recorded survey responses may not be representative of the population of all international students at UA. However, the authors think that, if interpreted qualitatively, the findings of this study could meaningfully contribute to the discussion about ways to improve international student experiences in the U.S.

The authors opted to conduct the study with the sample size as obtained considering that a significant amount of information would be lost if a larger sample size is consistently insisted upon (IPCT, Robin Hill). Moreover, numerous survey researchers have started to cast doubt on the generally accepted belief that low response rates produce biased findings (Curtin et al., 2000; Groves et al., 2006; Keeter et al., 2000; Massey & Tourangeau, 2013; Peytchev, 2013). Given the gap in current research about college students' experiences (especially, international students' experiences) related to transportation options in college towns, the results of this study may be valuable to researchers, university workers, stakeholders, and policymakers that work to improve international students' experiences at the U.S. college campuses. Additionally, the survey methodology applied in this study may be helpful in the development of a larger-scale study about international students' experiences with transportation options serving many U.S. college campuses located in small-town, rural, and suburban settings.

CONCLUSION

Transportation and mobility-related challenges faced by international students are complex and often interconnected with a multitude

of social and psychological factors. When arriving in the U.S. for the first time to pursue their studies, international students may often face challenges that are typical to those relocating to a new country, including the lack of a social support system such as family and friends in the new country of residence, limited access to a personal vehicle, difficulties in communication due to language and cultural barriers, and others. These challenges, combined with prejudice, negative stereotyping, and discrimination that may sometimes be experienced by international students, may negatively affect international students' overall experiences in the U.S. and make them feel unwelcome and marginalized. Careful and thoughtful transportation planning in U.S. college towns may help alleviate some of the international students' challenges, enhance the opportunities to find friends, build a social support network and succeed academically through improved access to essential services (such as shopping, healthcare services, financial institutions, and others), access to campus outside of business hours for extracurricular activities, social events, tutoring, sports, and recreation, etc. (Ward, 2017). Therefore, improving international students' transportation-related experiences may greatly benefit their physical, psychological, and social well-being.

Furthermore, improving the experiences of international students is strategically important to the U.S. higher education system. International students tend to be high-ranked students in their home countries even though some of them may initially have lower levels of English language proficiency when enrolling in U.S. institutions, compared to their American counterparts (Wu et al., 2015). International students enrich the cultural diversity of U.S. college campuses and provide opportunities for American faculty, students, and the communities where they live to enhance their cultural awareness and sensitivity and learn about different cultures and traditions (Wu et al., 2015). Lastly, international students represent a significant investment for U.S. universities and campus communities from an economic standpoint because international students may help universities and nearby communities generate higher revenues from international students' academic, living, travel, and entertainment expenses (Wu et al., 2015).

Some possible ways to improve international students' transportation-related experiences include providing informational support to incoming international students and their families through pre-arrival outreach initiatives and on-campus orientation for international students. Thorough planning needs to be conducted at the university level to develop strategies for cost-effective and possibly, cost-neutral methods to provide

transportation and transition support to international students after their arrival. Additionally, administering additional transportation services at the beginning of an academic semester (such as airport pick-up and shared transportation services) could help international students without personal vehicles perform necessary tasks upon their arrival on campus and facilitate the adjustment process (Ward, 2017).

Lastly, more research needs to be done to understand students' experiences with transportation options in college towns. This study identified that student commuters are often underrepresented in travel surveys (Volosin, 2014). Along with international students and scholars, students and employees from low-income communities as well as persons with disabilities may be among campus populations that do not have reliable access to a personal vehicle and therefore, may experience challenges due to limited public transportation options in small-town, rural and suburban settings.

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Every Family Succeeds: The Contrast between Title I and Non-Title I Schools in Terms of Limited-English Proficient Parents' Engagement Experiences in their Children's Education

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative phenomenological study aimed to compare the engagement experiences of Limited-English Proficient (LEP) parents in urban public schools receiving Title I funds under the Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015 with those in non-Title I schools within the same school district in the Midwestern US. Data were analyzed thematically and comparatively to explore the experiences of the participants. A major theme of LEP parents' lack of engagement in their children's education was revealed in non-Title I schools versus those in Title I schools. The study calls for a schemed federal monitoring process and a restructuring to schools' funding allocation in order to uphold LEP parents' civil rights and ensure the fulfillment of their needs as a matter of social justice.

Keywords: Engagement Experiences; Limited-English Proficient (LEP); Qualitative Study; Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA); Title I Schools; Non-Title I Schools; Urban Public Schools

INTRODUCTION

The number of students whose primary language is other than English was 10.2% as of Fall 2018 (National Center for Education Statistics, 2022). According to Matuszny, Banda, and Coleman (2007), changes in student demographics continue to create challenges for the current education system. The contrasting demographics between student and teacher populations mean that educational professionals "may not be familiar with culturally embedded student behaviors, may not speak a student's or parent's language and, as a result, may not fully interpret all students' needs" (Matuszny, Banda, & Coleman, 2007, p. 24). Additionally, collaborative partnerships between schools and Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CLD) families remain elusive (Harry, 2008; Trent, Kea, & Oh, 2008). Neglecting to collaborate with CLD families creates barriers that can prevent CLD families from fulfilling their expected roles in their child's educational process, along with their linguistic challenges (Park, Turnbull, & Park, 2001).

Title I funding has been the largest federal program for K–12 education in the last 5 decades with an objective of eliminating the achievement gap between minority and nonminority students (ESSA, 2015). Under Title I, schools are required to build parents' capacity for engagement and help parents understand the Title I law and how to help their children. Almost every school district under Title I is required to spend at least 1% of its Title I funds on training and education programs for parents (ESSA, 2015). Additionally, parents must collectively develop and agree on the district and school's parent involvement policies, which should spell out how this allocated fund is spent.

Despite the above affirmation, the achievement gap continues to widen in many school districts and states. This study explored differences in engagement experiences among LEP parents of students attending both Title I and non-Title I schools within the same school district. Outcomes for this study can be used to help schools identify where to focus attention and allocate resources to improve LEP parental engagement.

LITERATURE REVIEW

There continues to be a growing number of children from CLD backgrounds (*Impact | Volume 19, Number 3 | Providing Culturally and Linguistically Appropriate Services for Students with ASD*, n.d.). Harry (1992) argues that, in the 1990s, the US education system did not aim to understand, respect, or address the needs of CLD students and their families. Unfortunately, not much has changed since then. According to Harry (2008)

and Wolfe & Duran (2013), schools often create obstacles that hinder the path to successful collaboration with CLD families by remaining culturally unresponsive, failing to provide appropriate linguistic accommodations and translations, and demonstrating little respect for familial expertise and contributions.

Furthermore, schools serving diverse populations have long been criticized for having a deficit view of CLD parents. Some critics declare that educators view CLD families as "an obstacle" and marginalize them, giving all the attention to white middle class parents. Research reveals that CLD family members desire to be involved actively and share a deep concern about the education of their children but have not felt particularly welcome by schools (Benmaman & Trueba, 1988; Thorp, 1997).

It should also be noted that multiple studies have reported the low engagement of CLD parents (e.g., Hanline & Delay, 1992; Sharpio, 1996; Smalley & Reyes-Blanes, 2001) although research proves that higher parental engagement leads to better student outcomes (Jones & Velez, 1997; Bogenschneider, 1997). These positive outcomes for CLD students can be achieved when schools create collaborative partnerships with families (Blue-Banning et al., 2004; Gay, 2010; Haines et al., 2015; Harry, 2008). As Fults and Harry (2011) explained, "in a multicultural world, it is not possible to be family centered without being culturally responsive" (p. 28).

The concept of parental involvement in schools has developed significantly over the years especially under the complexity of school bureaucracy (Hiatt, 1994). The need for parent-school partnerships was first officially recognized by the formerly known Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA, 1965). Although this federal statute did not directly highlight parental involvement until its reauthorization in 1994, many scholars argue that it paved the way and shed light on the importance of parent and community engagement in children's education. In more explicit terms, Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 required schools receiving federal funding to ensure LEP individuals meaningful access to programs and activities (Rosenbaum, 2004). Under the light of ESEA and conforming to the Civil Rights Act of 1964, a research study was commissioned by the US Department of Education to learn about the disparity between segregated schools in the United States. This study was known as the Equality of Educational Opportunity (EEO) and dubbed as the Coleman Report. Beyond school quality, the report found that children who lacked support at home were severely disadvantaged (Nichol, 1966). In the years following, public laws and policies (e.g., Follow Through in 1967 and the Handicap Act in 1974) began to explicitly address the need for and

require family-school partnerships and allocate funds for this goal (McLaughlin & Shields, 1986). Grolnick and Slowiaczek (1994) corroborated the increasing recognition of home engagement and its responsibility for the socialization and education of children. Following, the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001(NCLB), the 2001 reauthorization of the ESEA, provided a shift in parents' expected role (Webster, 2004). Parents became empowered decision makers in addition to participants and observers of their children's education. Title I, Section 1118 of the Act is primarily devoted to parental involvement, its principles, and its significance (Epstein, 2005). This has persisted through the Act's most recent reauthorization in 2015 as the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), which provided more lenient requirements for states and flexibility for districts; for example, districts are only required to implement one strategy to engage families effectively.

In accordance with these policies, Ferlazzo (2011) argues that schools need to understand the difference between family involvement and family engagement, where the latter emphasizes doing *with* families, rather than doing *to* families, as implied by the former. Parent engagement is about engaging families to become partners with the school and listening to "what parents think, dream, and worry about" (Ferlazzo, 2011, p. 12). The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA, 2015), which has been reauthorized eight times since 1965, uses the term "parent and family engagement" rather than parental involvement. The goal of family engagement is not to serve clients, but to gain partners.

To contrast the two, Ferlazzo (2011) compares school-to-home invitations: those that follow parent involvement often come through one-way forms of communication, such as notes sent home with the student, automated phone calls, or requests for assistance for a particular project, whereas those that arise from parent engagement tend to come as a result of *conversation*. Conversing with LEP parents cannot be accessible without providing interpretation services to ease the communication process. Moreover, Rodriguez, Blatz, and Elbaum (2014) reported a positive relationship between schools' successful facilitation of parental engagement and the frequent translation of materials into the parents' native language and provision of interpreters during meetings.

Researchers attribute LEP parents' lack of active involvement to language barriers, unfamiliarity with the educational system, and discouragement from school professionals (Chavkin, 1989; Campos, 2022). Along with social class and cultural differences (Lai & Vadeboncoeur, 2013) and an unavailability of transportation or child-care (Hayes, 2012),

these barriers can create tension and hinder LEP parents' engagement in their children's schools.

The study constructs its framework on Local Education Agencies' (LEAs) obligation to ensure meaningful communication with parents who have limited English proficiency under the nondiscriminatory requirements of Title VI and the EEO, as well as federal legal requirements discussed in the January 7, 2015, OCR's Dear Colleague Letter.

RESEARCH METHOD

Qualitative Approach Rationale

Qualitative research involves an interpretive, naturalistic approach to its subject matter; it attempts to make sense of, or to interpret phenomena "in terms of the meaning people bring to them" (Lincoln & Denzin, 2013, p. 3). According to Creswell & Guetterman (2021), qualitative research is especially useful when little is known about the problem at hand because it is explored at a complex level. A key characteristic of qualitative research is that it helps researchers understand people and how their backgrounds shape their experiences (Creswell & Guetterman, 2021).

Ensuing with this definition, the researcher gathered information on participants' engagement experiences through inductive qualitative research methods such as questionnaires and interviews (Lester, 1999), representing this information and these perceptions from the perspective of the research participants.

Phenomenological Method Rationale

This qualitative research followed a descriptive phenomenological approach to explore the participants' engagement experiences in their children's education. This approach aligns with the purpose of phenomenological research, which is to "record the experiences of another person's life" (Creswell, 2007, p. 55). "Phenomenology is the way of access to the world as we experience it pre-reflectively. Pre-reflective experience is the ordinary experience that we live in and that we live through for most, if not all, of our day-to-day existence" (van Manen, 2014, p. 26). Through interviews, phenomenology explores common experiences of participants to identify the essence of the experience (Creswell, 2013). Founded by German philosopher Edmund Husserl (Spinelli, 2005), phenomenology is considered a vital philosophy when researching to discover individuals' personal experiences (McLeod, 2012).

Descriptive phenomenology is defined by (a) intuiting, during which the researcher learns the phenomenon from participants' narratives,

(b) analyzing, which requires the researcher to identify emerging themes that are core to the phenomenon, and (c) describing, where the researcher explains the phenomenon in light of participants' experiences and themes found (Spiegelberg, 1975). This approach was selected as it is often recommended for under-researched topics (Giorgi, 1997). The researcher asked each participant to describe the interactions experienced with her/his child's school to encourage variability in their descriptive responses (Thomas & Pollio, 2002).

Research Purpose

The purpose of this phenomenological, qualitative study was to describe the parental engagement experience of LEP parents in Title I schools and non-Title I schools within one school district. The findings gained from this study can help in relating theory to practice when revisiting the current guidelines and is given precedence based on these parents' needs for successful engagement. The study explored how such parents' thoughts, perceptions, and feelings impacted their levels of engagement in the learning of their children (Creswell, 2007).

Research Question

Through the experiences of 8 LEP parents, this study explores the following research question: What are the experiences of LEP parents in terms of meaningful engagement in their children's Title I and non-Title I schools?

Selection of Site and Participants

Data was collected at the Rally School District (pseudonym), which serves a large urban community in the Midwestern US. This district was selected because of the administration's willingness to participate in the study. To participate in the study, participants had to be unable to effectively communicate in the English language as identified by the school based on prior communication experiences. This criterion helped the researcher evaluate the engagement experiences of CLD parents who have limited English knowledge in their children's education. Invitations to the study were restricted to Arabic-speaking families to maintain participants' confidentiality and reduce the expenses associated with interpretations, since the researcher was Arabic-speaking.

Data Collection Procedure

First, the researcher conducted semi-structured questionnaires with the 8 LEP parents. Eckerdal & Hagström (2017) recommend the use of

qualitative questionnaires to generate informative data on the respondents' everyday life. Then, semi-structured interviews were chosen to allow the same parents to engage in conversations as well as discussions and give the researcher windows for questioning (Newton, 2010; Creswell, 2013). All parents were asked to describe their interactions and engagement experiences they had with their children's schools.

The researcher carried out a content analysis, a flexible method for analyzing text data, on the district's and each school's website in order to obtain a better understanding of the existing engagement efforts available for LEP families. The content analysis in addition to member checking and peer debriefing were used as triangulation to validate findings and enrich the trustworthiness of the qualitative inquiry (Hays & Singh, 2012).

The researcher collected data during the second semester of the 2018-2019 academic year. The school district facilitated four four-hour meetings at the Rally School District's administration building between the researcher and the selected parents. The first three meetings were dedicated for data collection while the fourth was for member checking.

Data Analysis Procedure

Bogdan and Biklen (1992) define qualitative data analysis as "working with the data, organizing them, breaking them into manageable units, coding them, synthesizing them, and searching for patterns" (p. 145); its aim is to discover concepts, critical themes, and meanings. To accomplish this, the researcher engaged in "open coding" (Corbin, 1990) to identify patterns and group parents' experiences into critical themes. Each part of the questionnaire and the interview was segmented and labeled with codes. Codes were examined for overlaps and redundancy, then collapsed into broad themes (Creswell, 2012).

Research Ethics

Approval for human subject research was first obtained from the University's Institutional Review Board (IRB) as well as verification of translation consistency from the University's language department, as required by the IRB, after translating all documents from English to Arabic. Participation in this research was voluntary, without compulsion or obligation. Participants were also given the right to stop participating at any time with no consequences. During the data collection meetings, the researcher explained the study thoroughly and answered any questions before the participants signed the consent form.

FINDINGS

The researcher met with eight LEP parents from different Arabic-speaking countries, six mothers and two fathers. All names used in this study are pseudonyms. Most participants had recently arrived in the US, and were taking English classes. Children of two LEP parents, Peter and Belal, attended Title I schools and children of one parent, Daliah, attended a non-Title I school, while the other 5 parents; Safaa, Fajr, Hana, Amal and Farah, had children in both Title I and non-Title I schools.

During the questionnaire, all participants selected "language barrier" when asked about the main obstacle that hinders their engagement. Research shows that the language barrier is one of the most significant obstacles LEP parents must overcome to be fully engaged in their children's education (Jung, 2011; Brilliant, 2001; Thorp, 1997). The study reveals that the inaccessibility of interpretation services, as all participants with children attending non-title I schools emphasized, was the main obstacle to their engagement. Accordingly, an underlying theme of a lack of engagement at non-Title I schools compared to Title I schools developed.

On the other hand, at his children's Title I school, Peter expressed his satisfaction with the translation services he received that made him feel fully engaged. He was happy to be involved in events such as the school's Halloween Party and Father's Day. Similarly, when Belal was asked in the questionnaire about the current services his children's school offers to help keep him engaged in school activities, he selected the provision of translation services during meetings at the school. In the space provided, however, Belal added, *"The translation services are only offered when the school requests the meeting, but not vice versa."* Participants' responses to personal interviews and their questionnaires are summarized in Tables 1-3.

Table 1

Participants' interview responses

Participants	Non-Title I School	Title I School
Daliah	I am not engaged in my children's education because of my limited English knowledge and lack of interpretation services. When I first arrived to the US, I did not understand the education system here, as no one had introduced it to my family in a way they could understand.	

Participants	Non-Title I School	Title I School
	I arranged my [school] visit with a friend who translated for me. My family was not aware of delays and closings announced by the schools through English voice messages.	
Fajr	I am not engaged in my children's education, as I do not know how to communicate with the school in English. I did not understand a word, as it was all in English and I was sitting among English-speaking parents. I don't understand a single word from the letters that are sent to me in English… If those letters were translated, I would feel more engaged in the school.	At my youngest child's school though, I usually call the school and request that I talk to the [Arabic-speaking] Para to understand the content of those letters. I went to a movie night with my child and I was happy that the movie had Arabic captions.
Farah	I am not engaged in my children's education, as I do not speak English. There were multiple incidents where I wanted to raise some concerns to my children's schools, but was unable to communicate with the school in English. There were multiple instances where I felt that the school should have contacted me as a parent and kept me informed when they did not. I was hoping that someone would contact me to assist with this but no one did…I feel that the language barrier discourages the school from keeping me informed. My struggle was when there was a 2-hour delay due to the weather or a cancelled school day. I did not understand the	

Participants	Non-Title I School	Title I School
	content of the messages sent to me and would send my kids to school in drastic weather conditions…I was unable to fill out the applications for after-school activities as they were sent in English.	
Belal		Translation services are only offered when one of my children's school requests the meeting but not vice versa.
Safaa	I am not engaged in all my children's education… There were two occasions when I urgently needed to interact with the school, but was unable to due to the lack of interpretation.	Interpretation services are available at only one of my children's school. I had volunteered at a trip there to the pumpkin fields before Halloween.
Hana	I usually ask a friend who can speak English and Arabic to accompany me.	Only the elementary school provided translation services during meetings.
Amal	I am not engaged in my children's education, as I do not know how to communicate in English with teachers and staff, and there are no interpretation services except at one school, which makes it difficult to raise any concerns. I assumed that they were talking about my daughter's learning goals.	Interpretation services are available at only one of my children's school. I was invited to almost 5 meetings to monitor my child's progress and the interpretation provided during each meeting was very helpful.
Peter		I'm very engaged in my children's school because interpretation services are available there. I went to the Halloween party and Father's Day celebration.

Note. Participants' responses were collected in May 2019.

Table 2

Participants' questionnaire responses

	Title I		Parents with children in both Title I & Non Title I schools					Non-Title I
	Peter	Belal	Safaa	Fajr	Hana	Amal	Farah	Daliah
	Q1: What services does the school currently offer that help you be engaged in school activities?							
Translation services during meetings	X	X						
Introducing a member from my community who speaks my native language								
English classes								
School website that explains district policies in my native language								
Other: Translation services, although not offered at all schools.			X	X	X	X	X	
Other: I arrange my visits with a friend who translates for me.					X			X
Other		Translation services are only offered when the school requests the meeting, but not vice versa.		Bilingual Para in one of my children's school.		My other child's school has yet to request to meet me.		

Note. Participants' responses were collected in May 2019.

Table 3

Participants' questionnaire responses

	Title I			Parents with children in both Title I & Non Title I schools				Non-Title I
	Peter	Belal	Safaa	Fajr	Hana	Amal	Farah	Daliah
	Q3: What can the school do to encourage LEP parents to attend more meetings/events and ease their communication with the school?							
Translation services during meetings	X	X	X	X		X	X	X
Sending letters and voice messages in my native language	X	X	X	X			X	X
School website that explains district policies in my native language								X
Introducing a member from my community who speaks my native language						X		
English classes	X	X		X	X			
Other		Translation services, regardless of whether parents or school request meeting.						

Note. Participants' responses were collected in May 2019.

Lack of engagement in Non-Title I schools compared to Title I schools

Parents at non-Title I school, such as Daliah expressed, their lack of engagement due to their limited English knowledge and the unavailability of interpretation services at their children's schools. While completing the questionnaire, Daliah was asked about the current services her children's school offer that help her stay engaged in school activities. She answered in the space provided, "I have to arrange my visits with a friend who translates for me."

Daliah explained that when she first arrived in the US, she did not understand the education system, as no one had introduced it to her family in a way they could understand. Daliah stated, "My family was never aware of school delays and closings because we didn't understand what those voice messages were saying." Daliah also recalled when there was an online threat to the school at the previous district, and the school administration had to call all parents to assure them that kids were safe. However, Daliah did not understand what had taken place until her children came home and explained to the rest of the family.

Parents with children attending both Title I and non-Title I schools, could not justify the paradox of services they received within the same school district. For example, during the questionnaire portion and as indicated in Table 1, when Safaa, Fajr, Hana, Amal and Farah were asked about the current services offered by their children's schools that made them feel engaged in their learning, none of the parents selected a choice, but added in the space provided that only one of their children's schools provided translation services during meetings while the other schools did not. For example, Fajr expressed her needs for interpretation services. She explains,

> One of my children's schools has an Arabic-speaking Para in class… this really helps with some of the communication issues… but I get letters sent with my child that I don't understand, so I have to call the school and talk to the Para to get an explanation. This is not offered at my other children's schools, so it is even more difficult for my family to express our concerns or just communicate with the school.

When Fajr was asked about the obstacles that hinder her engagement at her children's schools, she stated that she did not understand "a single word" from the letters that were sent to her in English. She also indicated that if those letters were translated, she would feel more engaged in the school system, as she would be aware of what was going on. Fajr then described her interactions with her children's school, saying,

> I was invited to one parent meeting at the beginning of the academic year for each of my children, but I did not really understand what was going on; it was all in English and I was sitting among English-speaking parents.

On the other hand, at her child's Title I school, she attended a movie night and stated that she was happy that there were Arabic captions were provided. In a similar manner, when Farah was asked in the questionnaire about the current services her children's school offer to help her be engaged in school activities, Farah answered that translation services were offered during meetings with parents at only one of her children's schools, and that she considered it the most effective way to foster a mutual understanding between schools and LEP parents. When asked to describe any interactions she had with her child's school, Farah expressed her frustration that there were multiple incidents where she was unable to communicate with the school in English. Farah, justifying LEP parents' need for translated messages, stated,

> My struggle was when there was a 2-hour delay due to the weather or a cancelled school day… I did not understand the content of the messages sent to me and would send my kids to school in drastic weather conditions, and they would return after realizing that school was cancelled that day.

Amal also reported that she was invited to an IEP eligibility meeting to determine whether or not her daughter, who attends a non-Title I Junior High school, qualifies for special education services and an Individualized Education Program (IEP). There was no interpretation during the meetings and Amal was left assuming that they were talking about her daughter's learning goals. Amal also explained that her daughter did not understand English yet and had difficulties in her classes, because instructions were given to the student in English from American teachers.

Incoherently, at her other two children's Title I school, Amal was invited to almost five meetings to monitor her children's progress and she stated that the interpretation provided during each meeting was very helpful. She reported that they made progress because of an Arabic-speaking ESL teacher's support in all their classes. Amal also stated in the space provided that her other child's school (non-Title I) has not yet requested to meet with her.

When parents were asked to suggest ways that the school could encourage LEP parents to attend more events at the school, they all recommended translating letters and voice messages that are sent home and providing interpretation during meetings at the school regardless of who

requests the meeting. In addition, some parents noted how helpful it would be to see the school website, which contains vital information, translated to their native language. They also emphasized that facilitating English classes would be the most effective tool that would greatly boost their engagement levels.

Content Analysis

An analysis of the Rally School District, Title I and non-Title I schools' websites, used as a triangulation assessment tool (Creswell, 2013; Merriam, 1998; Bogdan & Biklen, 1992), revealed the existence of well-structured and informative school webpages. Nevertheless, they are only offered in English, depriving LEP parents to benefit from their contents. The researcher was informed from the website about the existence of English classes that were offered within the district. However, participants were not aware of such services because they could not locate the information in their native language. The researcher was a key person in introducing the service to participants and helping them understand the expectations of the program.

Additionally, both the district's and the Title I schools' websites explain guidelines for parent and family member participation in Title I programs in English. Again, this deprives LEP parents from being acknowledged of the services offered at their children's school. No activities have been recognized for LEP parental engagement on non-Title I schools websites.

Even though some non-Title I schools hosted parent clubs and programs, they appeared as a monoculture effort for a homogeneous group of parents. Hallgarten (2000) describes parental involvement as a 'lever' that maximizes the potential of the already advantaged parents by involving them to reflect the norms and values of the school while overlooking those hard-to-reach parents who will freely embrace the cultural image of the school.

DISCUSSION

Research emphasizes the continued growth of culturally and linguistically diverse students in American classrooms (Xu, 2007), and the need to provide culturally sensitive and responsive services for this population as well as professional development for school personnel (Turnbull et al., 2015; McHatton, 2007). In this study, most parents whose children attend non-Title I schools stated that they were not engaged in their children's education because of a lack of interpretation services. In suffering tones, participants voiced their urgent *need* to understand the information delivered to them in meetings, texts, and letters.

Farah and Daliah explained their struggles when there was a 2-hour delay due to the weather or a cancelled school day. They would not understand the content of the voice messages sent to them and would send their kids to school in drastic weather conditions, and their kids would return after realizing that school was cancelled that day. Additionally, Amal's child's non-Title I school had not requested meeting with her yet. Amal reported that she was invited to an IEP eligibility meeting for her daughter in junior high school. There was no interpretation during the meetings, and she assumed that they were talking about her daughter's learning goals. This observed parental struggle is in direct conflict with Title VI of the Civil Rights Act (1964) and the Equal Education Opportunity Act (EEOA, 1974). These policies and laws exist to ensure that Local Education Agencies (LEAs) have obligations to develop and implement a process for determining whether parents are LEP and what their language needs are to provide effective language assistance with appropriate, competent staff or appropriate and competent outside resources.

Moreover, parents who have children in both Title I and non-Title I schools could not justify the differences in service delivery among their children's schools and were unable to describe the Title I parental involvement policy although not only their agreement but also their evaluation for the effectiveness of the existing policy is federally mandated by ESSA (2015). This observation uncovers an alarming uncertainty and leads to the question: Do LEP parents genuinely have a voice in Title I schools' parental engagement policy? The answer to this question has been declared by Robinson-Cimpian, Thompson, and Umansky (2016) when they confirm that the current education policies limit English Learners' access to equitable educational opportunities and puts them at a disadvantage compared to their monolingual peers.

Lewig et al. (2010) explain that culturally and linguistically diverse families often want to help, but they are unable to access services such as language and transportation (Conroy, 2017), making it difficult for them to attend school functions (Finders & Lewis, 1994; Pena, 2000). Based on the Title I school policy, meetings with parents of children receiving Title I services must be scheduled at convenient times with assistance such as childcare and transportation. Farah, and Fajr, whose children attended both Title I and non-Title I schools, added the transportation barrier to the language barrier, as neither of them had drivers' licenses and were unable to reach any of their children's schools.

Further, Schneider, Martinez, and Owens (2006) encourage English language proficiency in CLD students and parents at the earliest possible

stage and indicate that it is likely to lead to a stronger foundation for academic achievement. Parents can greatly benefit from school-community collaboration efforts to provide literacy programs, translators at school-related activities, advice on academic help, and community outreach programs (Schneider, Martinez, & Owens, 2006). This directly concurs with Peter, Belal, Fajr and Hana's recommendation for schools to offer English classes to LEP parents to encourage engagement. Hana stated that she started joining English classes a couple of years ago, which helped her to start communicating with her children. Teaching English to CLD parents helps them support their children in education (Staff, 2008) and ultimately leads them to becoming more involved in their children's education.

On the other hand, parents, such as Peter, whose children attended Title I schools, referenced the interpretation services there and how much they impacted his engagement. Whereas Belal, whose children also attend Title I schools stated, "The translation services are only offered when the school requests the meeting, but not vice versa." This alerts us of Title I schools' complacency when basic needs such as translation services are provided to LEP parents in terms of one-sided support, which violates both the accessibility section of ESSA (1116[f]) and the school-parent compact section (1116[d][1-2]), which was generated to ensure regular two-way, meaningful communication between family members and school staff, and to the extent feasible, in a language that family members can comprehend.

CONCLUSIONS

The major theme that emerged answered the research question. Seeing non-Title I schools overlook LEP parents' needs for engagement in their child's schooling, a process that has worn parents out and made them feel incapable, was very unfortunate. There was an evident denial of linguistic service provision that is obligated under Title VI and the EEOA, which would ultimately lead to undesired segregation. It is easy to place the responsibility of engagement on families. However, schools must understand the circumstances that LEP parents are in, especially those who only recently arrived in the US. One argument here may be that non-Title I schools do not have the resources needed to provide these services to families. However, school districts have obligations to analyze their budgets to see if resources have been allocated primarily based on a student's need.

Lynch (1992) and Conroy (2017) explained that when language constitutes a barrier to CLD families and hinders their engagement, a cultural guide or liaison could be useful. Identifying someone from the family's culture who speaks the same language and can act as a mediator

and translator can help the school better understand families from a particular culture. However, this does not waive contacting the family directly and building a professional partnership with them.

Schools can also foster LEP parents' engagement by providing interpretation services during meetings regardless of who requests them and translating documents, forms, letters, and voice messages. The school website should be translated to other languages at schools where majorities of CLD parents are served. Conclusively, this study intended to initiate an essential dialogue to gain policy makers' attention on Limited-English Proficiency (LEP) parents' needs by delving into their day-to-day suffering at non-Title I schools.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Although all schools, whether they receive Title I funds or not, are federally obligated to provide LEP parents with translation, those services are currently limited to Title I schools that are obliged to by Section 1116 of ESSA's Title I. This fact deprives parents in non-Title I schools from being engaged in their children's education and is in violation of Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the EEO. This injustice throws light on fund misallocation with no regard to students' needs and promotes the fact that districts should adopt more effective strategies when determining where funds are allocated. Therefore, a schemed federal monitoring process may provide additional insight into the current regulations and will uncover areas needing more attention. Also, school districts may need to consider funding allocation reform through utilizing a Weighted Student Formula (WSF) approach for schools' funding allocation within the same district to avoid inequities and disparities between schools.

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"They Don't Care About You": Exploring Socioemotional Barriers in School Settings for Black, Trauma-Exposed Boys

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ABSTRACT

The study explores how a sample of trauma-exposed, Black boys experience their school environment and socioemotionally navigate barriers in their school setting. A content analysis was completed on focus group data collected from ten Black boys at a high school in an urban setting. The content was reviewed under the constructivist-interpretivist epistemology, using an empowerment theoretical framework. Findings included the following themes: (1) Teachers Change Your Moods—conflictual relationships with teachers negatively impacted their mood; (2) They'll Switch Up on You in a Half Second—interactions with classmates (e.g., social posturing or physical touch) could also be a barrier to their success; (3) When I'm Having a Bad Moment—descriptions of how they cope with challenging experiences in school; and (4) Tell Me Why This is Useful—instructional and relational suggestions for school staff to improve their learning environment. Implications for school policy and practice are discussed.

Keywords: African American; Education; Qualitative Methods; Race/Ethnicity, Trauma; Urban Context

INTRODUCTION

Whether exposed to higher levels of community violence due to a lack of economic and educational resources (Rich, 2016) or being more susceptible to adverse childhood experiences due to historical inequities and environmental factors (Sacks & Murphey, 2018), literature has shown that Black adolescents are at high risk of trauma exposure (Beasley et al., 2014, Chapter 1; Noguera, 2008). Middle adolescence (ages 14–17) has been recognized by scholars as an important transitional period for youth, where teens are attempting to solidify their identity and core friend group, continuing to adjust to school-related goals and expectations, establish positive self-image, and strive to make important life decisions (Gutman et al., 2017). Historically, Black adolescents have encountered substantial barriers to academic success, including ongoing racism and societal injustices (Kayama et al., 2015). While coping with these systemic and interpersonal prejudices, Black youth are expected to also navigate the typical developmental challenges common successfully during adolescence (Brittian, 2012), while also finding academic success in the classroom (Kayama et al., 2015).

Black youth are four times more likely than Caucasian youth to experience educational risk factors and barriers (Caton, 2012; Kirk, Lewis, Lee, & Stowell, 2011). Studies have explored factors that impact academic achievement for Black adolescents (Darensbourg, & Blake, 2014; Hayes, 2012), how attitudes toward racial socialization effect school outcomes (Noguera, 2003), how teacher expectations impact school performance, and the impact of the zero-tolerance policies on Black males' educational outcomes and experiences (Caton, 2012). These studies have found myriad factors that influence the academic achievement and school outcomes of Black boys. Still, not much attention has been given to the socioemotional experiences and perspectives of Black boys in schools or how they navigate existing barriers to their educational well-being. This study seeks to address this gap, exploring the complexities of school success from the perspective of Black, male students themselves. This study examines how trauma-exposed, Black boys experience their school environment, perceive socioemotional challenges, and navigate barriers to academic success.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Black Boys and Well-Being

Literature has consistently illustrated the ways in which African American boys disproportionately experience ecological risks to their well-being, including greater exposure to psychological trauma (Beasley et al.,

2014, Chapter 1; Noguera, 2008). Black youth have a higher chance of being exposed to violence and crime in their neighborhoods, and are also disproportionately targeted by the juvenile justice system when compared to the general adolescent population as well as other minority groups (Hirschfield, 2018). National statistics have shown that the mortality rate of young African American males is the highest among all racial/ethnic youth (Miniño, 2013). Black youth are particularly at risk for experiencing adolescent delinquency and poor school adjustment that can reduce the chance of future success (Caldwell et al, 2006). Overall, young Black males experience significant stress as they develop into adulthood surrounded by the historical, social, economic, and political realities that encompass many of the unjust elements of the Black experience in America (Caldwell et al., 2006).

Black Boys, Education, & Coping

Academic identification represents one's internal connection to his/her academic performance and the extent to which this performance impacts one's view of self, whereas academic dis-identification is defined as the steady process of mental disengagement from educational interests (Beasley et al., 2014, Chapter 1; Osborne & Jones, 2011). Prior studies demonstrated that students who highly identify with school earned higher academic marks, missed fewer classes, and had less behavioral problems than academically dis-identified learners (Beasley et al., 2014, Chapter 1). However, literature suggests that academic dis-identification represents one coping strategy that some Black males utilize in response to chronic stigma and negative stereotypes in educational contexts (Beasley et al., 2014, Chapter 1). Many African American males are often faced with the harsh realities of systemic racial injustice, which manifests itself in the form of run-down and overcrowded schools, less qualified teachers, and Eurocentric curricula (Beasley et al., 2014). These factors may cause Black boys to discount the feedback offered in traditional school settings, devaluing the scholastic process, and disengaging from what they believe to be an unfair education system (Beasley et al., 2014, Chapter 1).

African American males, on average, are disproportionately more likely than white males to be placed in special education, suspended or expelled from schools, and have lower grades (Beasley et al., 2014, Chapter 1). Black boys also have poor high school graduation rates and underrepresentation in postsecondary education in concert with overrepresentation in other areas, including out-of-school and in-school suspensions, school expulsions, unemployment and low employment, crime, and incarceration (Holzman, 2012). These challenges become compounded

when considering Black boys who have experienced childhood trauma. Literature expounds on the ways in which childhood trauma can negatively affect social, emotional, and cognitive processes, and also lead to behavioral and academic difficulties problems (Romano et al., 2015).

Research on inner-city, Black children has identified them as "complex copers", who use more types of strategies than do white children (Gaylord-Harden et al., 2008). In particular, Black girls generally apply more support-seeking strategies, while Black boys utilize more frequent uses of distraction and avoidant coping (Gaylord-Harden et al., 2008). For example, music can be a useful and preferred coping tool for emotional self-regulation among such adolescents (Saarikallio, 2011). Additionally, strong, positive student-teacher relationships are also healing and helpful for these students, as relationship quality between students and teachers is associated with a broad number of behavioral and emotional outcomes (Murray & Zvoch, 2011). Researchers recognize the importance of socializing agents (e.g., teachers) on the academic and psychosocial development of Black boys (Osborne & Jones, 2011). However, there is some evidence to suggest that Black students are particularly vulnerable to poor relationships with teachers, as the U.S. public school teaching force is predominately white and may knowingly or unknowingly conduct their classrooms using racialized prejudices and misconceptions (Beasley et al., 2014, Chapter 1). Additionally, for Black male youth, stereotypical perceptions of them as being dangerous can even further exacerbate these prejudices in ways that are less common for other students (Rios, 2011). Particularly, when these youth also have a trauma background, emotional sensitivity and coping tools are paramount in classroom settings (West et al., 2014).

Present Study

This study is grounded in Empowerment theory, which posits that empowerment is a key component of social change that is innately intertwined with shifting power structures (Hur, 2006; Page & Czuba, 1999). The purpose of this study was to explore how a sample of trauma-exposed, Black boys experience their school environment. In particular, the central aim of this study was to examine how these youth socioemotionally navigate barriers in their school setting as well as the factors that they perceive as helpful to their educational wellbeing. This paper utilizes the work of Paulo Freire (1973), one of the founding scholars of empowerment theory in education, as a platform for exploring these students' perspectives.

RESEARCH METHOD

A secondary analysis was conducted on cross-sectional, qualitative data from 10 youth participants. An Institutional Review Board at a local university approved the study. School administrators obtained informed consent/assent from students to participate in the focus group during the school registration process during the 2015-2016 school year.

Sample

A purposive sample of students were invited by the school's administration to participate in the focus groups, based on their varied self-reported histories with previous trauma exposure as well as their time enrolled at the school (i.e., all students invited to participate had been enrolled at the school for at least six months prior). Of those invited, 10 students opted to participate; the sample consisted of 10 Black, male students, enrolled between September 2015 and June 2016 at a public, charter high school, located in an urban Midwestern metropolitan area. Consistent with the surrounding community, the school's student population is predominantly African American (i.e., approximately 99%) and come from households with lower socioeconomic status (i.e., approximately 90% are eligible for free/reduced lunch). Participants ranged in age from 14 to 18 years old. Data on students' specific trauma histories were not included in the study.

Data Collection

A content analysis was completed on secondary focus group data collected from participants. A semi-structured interview protocol was used to collect youth perceptions of their school environment. The focus group convened in a designated classroom in the school building and lasted for approximately one hour. Focus group content was reviewed under the constructivist-interpretivist epistemology, using an empowerment theoretical framework.

Data Analysis

The focus group was audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. The transcript was coded independently by the first and second author, using reflexive bracketing for confirmability and extensive writing of memos. Then, researchers confirmed the reliability of our codes through consensus (Padgett, 2008). The analysis utilized a constructivist-interpretivist epistemology, which views the creation of knowledge as a subjective process that largely depends on context and the perspective of the individuals involved (Van der Walt, 2020; Wahyuni, 2012). Therefore, codes, themes,

and broader takeaways in this study were gathered by considering the specific positionality of the participants (i.e., African American male adolescents in the Midwestern region of the United Stated who have experienced trauma). If participants in this study had different identities or experiences (e.g., youth of a different race or raised in a different region of the United States), the drastically different themes may have emerged. Further, the researchers in this study acknowledge that their own experiences and positionality influence the interpretation of the data (Schwandt, 1994; Steier, 1991). In regard to researcher positionality, it should be noted that coding and interpretation of the focus group data were conducted by one African-American male researcher and one African American female researcher who have either directly or indirectly had experiences similar to those described by the participants of this study. Also, given the empowerment framework guiding this study, the analysis utilized the direct language of participants as major themes rather than researcher-generated words and phrases (Saldaña, 2009). Therefore, the analysis was grounded in the voices of the student participants. The empowerment theoretical lens was critical in both data collection and data analysis as participants were encouraged to honor their own experiences and lived reality in relation to navigating their school environment.

RESULTS

In sum, twenty-three different codes emerged from the analysis (see Figure 1). These codes were interpreted as four main themes, with the codes that were most commonly reported across participants being described below within each of the four themes: (1) Teachers Change Your Moods; (2) They'll Switch Up on You in a Half Second; (3) When I'm Having a Bad Moment; and (4) Tell Me Why This is Useful.

Theme 1: "Teachers Change Your Moods"

Participants expressed a variety of triggers that served as barriers to their success at school. Foremost, they reported that conflictual relationships with teachers negatively impacted their mood, serving as triggers for bad moods throughout the school day. One student explained, "I feel that teachers change your moods because some teachers, they actually, like, show that they don't care about you." In particular, participants did not feel that most teachers were helpful when they were upset, but rather made their moods worse. One student expressed,

> Well, like, most of the time they, like, just trying to see you go home, like, "Oh, he gotta go home and stuff". [Teachers] make us call our parents and come get us. They won't even pretend to ask us what's

> wrong with us…They'll ask you to go home before they ask you what's wrong with you.

This lack of perceived concern from teachers appeared to manifest in feelings of mistrust among the students and the perception that some teachers did not care about the students' well-being, but rather wanted to suspend or exclude students as a first resort.

Participants also reported a perceived lack of academic instruction from teachers during classroom time. On student stated: "And, it's certain teachers, when they give you classwork, they don't want to explain it. They just like, do this. It's on page blah, blah, blah, and they don't want to actually explain how to do it or where to find what...". This is exacerbated when teachers become frustrated with negative student behavior. One student expressed how a teacher handled their own frustrations in the classroom by withholding academic instruction when dealing with negative student behaviors:

> Okay like ... for instance, our biology teacher….it will be like at least about three people she'll yell at on a daily basis. And then she wanna punish the whole class like ... she'll be in the middle of a lesson and these three people, they'll just keep talking—disrupting her. And then she'll just like go sit out, won't teach nobody who wanna learn.

Another common trigger for mood change included the physical condition of the school. One student explained, "Like this school is real crap 'cause there's too many people in it." Multiple participants expressed frustration with crowded hallways and being in a "rundown" building, which affected their mood throughout the school year.

Theme 2: "They'll Switch Up on You in a Half Second"

Participants reported how interactions with classmates could also be a barrier to their success. They reported that they were sensitive to physical touch from peers, particularly when attempts were being made to physically comfort them by peers with whom they did not have a strong rapport. One student explained, "I hate when people touch me unless ... It's weird, it's just ... like ... Don't touch me if I don't want you to touch me." Many participants explained that being touched by someone that they were not friends with, even when intended for consolation, was a trigger for a mood change that could negatively impact the rest of their school day.

They also spoke about specifically contentious relationships with peers and how this could impact their experience at school. In particular, participants described female peers as emotional and challenging. One student stated, "Especially, like they [female classmates]- their feelings, it's

crazy 'cause they'll switch up on you in a half second and then they get mad at you over some stupid stuff." Participant also explained the stresses that come from interacting with male peers in potentially confrontational situations. One student explained that situations with male peers have the potential to escalate because of social posturing:

> …You could do something really simple, like accidentally ... say I accidentally bumped into John's shoulder. He'd get super angry for no reason. And most of the time the person doesn't even think it's that serious. It's just the fact that other people are around and their egos is like…oh you gotta prove you're tough or ... you know, something stupid like that.

Participants perceived their male peers as attempting to prove themselves through hyper-masculine posturing in order to gain respect from other peers. Participants also reported their attempts to prevent potential peer conflicts in order to avoid the escalating into more serious situations. One student explained his decision-making process when dealing with potential conflict:

> "I have like a three step process. The first one is, you know, straight-forward respectful. Second one is if you can't be straight-forward or respectful. If you wanna be all mad and oh, you know, "fight me", I'll just avoid you, cause, you know. And the third one, is if I do have to fight, then yeah."

This illustrates an intentional thought process to initially be respectful in the face of conflict with others, followed by avoiding the offending individual if the conflict persists. Then, as a third and final option, the participant will resort to fighting, if necessary. Some students also explained that their response to peer conflict was contingent on their peer's mood. One student explained, "It kind of depends with like a certain person mood 'cause like, sometimes you might avoid the person or other times like throughout the day you might actually cope with them and try to solve it."

Theme 3: "When I'm Having a Bad Moment"

Participants provided descriptions of how they cope with challenging experiences in school. They primarily focused on their peers and the use of music as coping tools. While they explained that there were times when other students were sources of frustration, they also expressed that peers could be a tremendous source of social support. Participants reported school friends as being a primary coping mechanism they utilized when they were upset. When asked about how their mood might improve throughout the day, one student stated, "I um…hang out with people that make me happy and there we go."

Another student echoed that sentiment when he stated, “Uh, like, talking to my friends…”

Participants also described the use of music as a preferred coping mechanism when they were upset or frustrated during school. One student explained, “…Yeah, like, um ... I listen to music. I just listen to music and....I daydream.” Another student explained, “When I'm having a bad moment I too, like put my hood on my head, listen to music.”

Theme 4: “Tell Me Why This is Useful”

Participants provided suggestions to teachers and school staff that would make their school environment more conducive for learning. Their suggestions centered around both relational and instructional improvements. For example, they suggested that teachers “try to build a relationship with them [students], but if the students don't want a relationship, just give them their space.” In addition, participants voiced the desire to be listened to by teachers and staff and to be treated with respect. One student stated, “follow the golden rule, which states treat people how you want to be treated”.

Participants also provided instructional suggestions, reporting the desire to have a curriculum that could be applied easily outside of school. One student explained, “…not just give them the intelligence; the math or whatever. Give them the wisdom with it. Like, tell them…what do you do with this [knowledge]?” The same student continued explaining,

> “Don't just give me a sheet with a graph on it, tell me to figure out what m, b, equals x, y. You know, all that stuff. I don't know what I'm gonna do with that. Tell me what I'm gonna do with that. Tell me why this is useful.”

Another student appeared to be echoing a similar sentiment when he stated, “If teachers gonna give you a lecture, at least let it be life changing that actually means something.” Additionally, with music being a common coping mechanism utilized by the students in the focus group, many of them suggested that teachers utilize music in their classrooms. One student suggested,

> “I'd tell the teachers to allow the kids to listen to music cause music really helps me to calm down and focus. Cause music- when I listen to music I can do a whole bunch of work.”

Participants emphasized the desire for improved relationships, practical application of their course content, as well as the inclusion of new techniques (i.e., music) to help them be successful in school.

DISCUSSION

This study explored the school experiences of a sample of trauma-exposed, Black boys. Participants identified myriad barriers to their socioemotional and educational wellbeing, as well as ways that they cope to navigate these barriers. They reported that social challenges with their peers can be a triggering barrier. While some participants identified these social relationships as a means of coping, they also highlighted the ways in which peers can serve as triggers as well as how they navigate these social challenges. This is particularly important when considering the ways in which trauma-exposed youth may be triggered by certain types of social interactions (e.g., bullying, unwanted physical touch).

Participants also expressed frustration with the physical condition of the school building as well as their interpersonal and curricular interactions with their teachers. This is not surprising, given the disparities in school funding that have consistently relegated racial minority students to more under-resourced and overcrowded schools when compared to their white peers (Anyon, 2005; Kohli, 2018; Oakes et al., 2004). Participants may have perceived these physical disparities in their school building, as well as perceived their teachers' instruction as lacking relevance, in ways that contributed to academic dis-identification, as they struggled to see value in their school setting and to see themselves reflected in the course curricula (Beasley et al., 2014, Chapter 1). Furthermore, while strong teacher–student relationships are vastly important to academic success (Hughes & Kwok, 2007; Shaunessy & McHatton, 2009), much of the discourse around social and emotional learning has focused on interventions that emphasize the skills of the students, but do not address the skills of teachers and staff (Gregory, & Fergus, 2017).

From an empowerment perspective, participants voiced many concerns and suggestions related to their school experience. Education should be a process where students are not just the recipients, but also actors who are able to identify their issues and be a part of the process of coming up with solutions to best change their circumstances (Perkins & Zimmerman, 1995). For example, participants identified music as a major coping tool, which has been shown to have an emotionally corrective impact with adolescents (Saarikallio, 2011). Further, they discussed the ways in which they attempt to avoid negative triggers from peers to elude conflict and other negative social situations.

LIMITATIONS

This study consisted of secondary analysis of data from one focus group interview of 10 Black, male, youth participants. Common to qualitative inquiry, our findings may not be transferable to other Black boys from other school settings who have experienced trauma. Additionally, focus group questions did not directly inquire about students' traumatic experiences outside of the school setting, which may directly or indirectly inform the findings of this study. However, students were recruited for the focus group via school leadership who were privy to this information. Additionally, data was not collected on teacher level demographics at the time of the study or on students' perceptions of teachers by race and gender.

IMPLICATIONS

Based on our findings participants desired to be heard and to have more inclusion in both the academic and disciplinary decisions made in their school. The participants' perceptions of being suspended from school as a first resort further supports other literature on the overuse and disproportionate nature of school exclusionary practices with Black boys (Beasley et al., 2014, Chapter 1; Holzman, 2012), and provides insight into the ways in which these practices create contentious teacher-student relationships. As an alternative, empowering students to voice their concerns in a constructive manner and providing trauma-sensitive school supports may be emotionally healing for trauma-exposed students. Further, schools may benefit from taking more collaborative and restorative approaches with students to empower them with feelings of personal value and to encourage feelings academic identification in the school's ecosystem. By soliciting the narratives and experiences of students, teachers, school social workers, school counselors, and school administrators may be better able to maximize students' potential and to utilize them as assets in their own education. Schools may also benefit from implementing social skills training as a part of their regular curriculum in order to help students improve peer relationships, understand appropriate boundaries, and learn strategies for navigating conflict. Also, teachers may need to explore alternative classroom strategies, such as letting students listen to music during class time in a structured way. This may create an environment that feels more emotionally safe for students and helps them to engage in learning.

While this study did not explore the demographics of teaching staff at the participating school, the racial makeup of the U.S. teaching force, in general, is vastly incongruent with the demographics of the student populations being served in the public school system (Beasley et al., 2014,

Chapter 1). However, research suggests that having role models who can provide culturally-relevant mentorship can improve the academic performance of Black boys (Gordon et al., 2009) and can be particularly healing for those with traumatic backgrounds (Jarjoura, 2013). Given this, the education field has expressed the consistent need for recruiting and maintaining a more diverse teaching workforce, recruiting teachers from similar urban communities, and better preparing white teachers to work with diverse student groups (Irizarry, 2007; Lau et al., 2007). The importance of enhancing teachers' understanding of diverse student populations is widely recognized in the teacher education field (He & Cooper, 2009). Preparing teachers to work with diverse populations and providing teachers with ongoing trainings about the importance of cultural sensitivity and cultural competency is necessary for teachers to build a strong teacher-student relationship that allows for trust, understanding, and growth to take place. To advance the cause of educational equity, educators of all backgrounds must examine their own conscious and unconscious beliefs, and truly reflect on whether they may hold negative stereotypes and perceptions about students' racial backgrounds and traumatic histories (Gregory & Fergus, 2017; Jones et al., 2013). This is also important for helping teachers to develop curricular changes and ways of instructing students that are personally relevant to students and their everyday lives.

CONCLUSION

Black boys who have experienced childhood trauma contend with a variety of factors that impact their socioemotional and educational wellbeing. School and school personnel can play a pivotal role in addressing these factors and providing opportunities for positive coping to improve school success. Youth perspectives are imperative to this mission and may not only empower students, but also assist schools in creating more equitable and holistic academic environments for their respective students.

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Cultural Partner Program: Enhancing Intercultural Interactions and Transitional Outcomes for International Graduate Level Students

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ABSTRACT

International students, especially graduate-level students, experience unique challenges as they make a transition to a new social and cultural environment. This study examines the impacts of the Cultural Partner Program on transition outcomes for incoming graduate-level international students. Of the 171 participants recruited from a public research university in the southeast U.S., 39 participated in the control group and the rest in the experimental group. Although the regression analysis did not reveal significant results, supplemental standardized mean difference analyses was conducted considering the wide 95% confidence intervals and the relatively small sample size in the regression analysis. The standardized mean difference analyses revealed that in comparison with the control group, the experimental group performed better on specific transition outcomes (i.e., intercultural interaction enjoyment, self-esteem, stress, perceived social support, social and academic integration, and attitudes toward seeking professional help) but performed worse on other intercultural sensitivity subscales and cultural identity. Higher education professionals need to foster inclusive and creative environments for international students to enhance their transition experiences and outcomes.

Keywords: intercultural interaction, stress, international graduate students, transition outcomes, help-seeking

INTRODUCTION

Globalization in the 21st century is a part of the realities of higher education (Fox & Hundley, 2011; Qi, 2016). According to Statista (2022), despite the COVID-19 pandemic and global issues, international student enrollment has increased significantly in the past 20 years. Higher education's globalization benefits from cross-country relationships, including economic advantage and intellectual capital (Institute of International Education, 2015). Furthermore, the socio-cultural benefits of globalization prepare students to live and work effectively within an international context by fostering intercultural interactions and competencies (Deardorff, 2006). The positive impacts of intercultural interactions include but are not limited to the facilitation of smooth transitions to new higher education systems and to new countries, enhanced educational, social, and cultural experiences, and the development of intercultural awareness and skills (Harrison & Peacock, 2010; Hendrickson, 2018). Higher education institutions need to address the developmental components of intercultural competence in a variety of ways, such as on-campus interactions, student learning, and the different backgrounds of students. (Deardorff, 2006).

Despite the importance of intercultural interactions, minimal interactions between international and domestic students exist on campus (Fischer, 2009). The lack of intercultural interaction is especially true among graduate-level students for the following reasons. First, graduate students experience tremendous academic and life pressures in addition to the challenges related to cultural and language barriers (Harrison & Peacock, 2010). Second, the lack of intercultural interactions among graduate students can be attributed to cultural gravitation toward and remaining within one's cultural group (Sherry et al., 2010). In 2019 and 2020, China, India, and South Korea are the top three countries of origin for international students within the U.S. (Israel & Batalova, 2021). Students from these countries readily identify with peers from their own countries on campuses and may choose to stay in their cultural silos without establishing meaningful connections with students from other cultures and countries. Matsuda and Miller (2007) highlight that connections between international and domestic students rarely happen.

Thus, the presence of international and culturally diverse students on campuses does not automatically lead to increased intercultural interactions and positive transition outcomes (Harrison & Peacock, 2010). Research is warranted to examine appropriate approaches to foster intercultural interactions and related transition outcomes for international graduate students.

Relationship between Intercultural Interaction and Transition Outcomes

The intercultural interactions of international students can be closely associated with various transition outcomes such as ethnic identity, self-esteem, perceived social support, academic and social integration, and help-seeking. Phinney et al. (2001) noted that a stronger ethnic identity supports psychological well-being. However, Li and Gasser (2005) suggested that international students with a greater sense of ethnic identity were less likely to seek out interactions with individuals from the host country. Phinney et al. (1992) further explained the complex relationship existing between self-esteem, ethnic identity, and intercultural interactions: individuals who favor separation identity (i.e., remain within their cultural silo and have limited intercultural contact) may maintain self-esteem when within their ethnic group; however, they often have a difficult time functioning when interacting with other cultural groups, which may lead to an increase in stress and a decrease in self-esteem.

Russell et al. (2010) noted that a lack of connection to academic and social life might be a significant source of stress for international students. Tinto (1975) identified student academic and social integration as a requirement for college success. According to Nilsson (2019), participation in social activities has increased social integration, which translates into better academic performance and comprehensive personal experiences. Campbell (2012) suggested that facilitating American and international student interactions might positively influence overall life satisfaction and encourage further exploration concerning international students' cross-cultural interactions.

International students' level of perceived social support has been shown to predict resilience when living in a new country (Sabouripour & Bte Roslan, 2015). Shigaki and Smith (1997) found that interactions between host and international students resulted in supportive friendships that allowed international students to overcome feelings of disconnect throughout the acculturation process. In addition, Geelhoed et al. (2003) suggested that in-depth intercultural contact is a critical component in developing cross-cultural sensitivity. On the other hand, international students underutilize mental health services and campus resources (Mori, 2000). Multiple authors (e.g., Kilinc & Granello, 2011; Swanbrow Becker et al., 2018) found that an international student's specific cultural value orientation might discourage them from seeking professional help and stigmatize mental health issues. Thus, international students with a greater willingness to have intercultural interactions were likelier to engage in help-seeking behaviors (Logan et al., 2017).

Past Approaches in Assisting Intercultural Interaction

A buddy program, through which international students are paired with their domestic counterparts, is one of the key strategies to facilitate the transition for international students. Some of the past studies focused on buddy programs among undergraduate students. Tolman's (2017) research assessed a program in which the host students were paired with international students as roommates in on-campus housing. Campbell (2012) featured a buddy program as a required component of a university-sponsored course, in which a domestic student was paired with an international student and had regular meetings, either social or task-oriented, for 2 weeks. Tolman's (2017) findings indicate greater overall satisfaction among international students with their intercultural experience. Campbell (2012) and Thomson and Esses (2016) also found that international students in a buddy program had less stress and anxiety when interacting with people from other cultures. They also challenged stereotypes, which made interactions more meaningful.

In addition to programs pairing undergraduate students, other studies focused on buddy programs between undergraduate and graduate students. Matsuda and Miller (2007) paired graduate-level international teaching assistants with undergraduate domestic students. International students in the study emerged from intercultural interactions with improved cross-cultural communication and enhanced cultural understanding. Other studies have similar findings of improved adaptation among undergraduate international students due to the buddy program (Geelhoed et al., 2003; Nilsson (2019). A significant component of this successful adaptation is the introduction to on-campus social opportunities such as clubs and service organizations, which international students receive through their host student pairings (Abe et al., 1998; Nilsson, 2019).

Research Gaps

Although research studies on peer partner programs indicate that college campuses integrate levels of international engagement, there are several limitations. First, to the best of our knowledge, no study has investigated the impact of peer partner programs specifically for graduate-level students within the U.S. Weir (2020) highlights the importance of appropriate pairing within the buddy programs to reduce the age gap limitations between undergraduate and graduate students. For example, graduate-level students often felt their needs were being overlooked as most programs were geared more toward undergraduates (Nilsson, 2019); whereas undergraduate host students reported struggling to connect with their graduate buddies and feeling as though their interactions were awkward, attributing

much of this awkwardness to the demographic differences (i.e., age) between themselves and their graduate-level international peers (Geelhoed et al., 2003).

Second, though essential, qualitative research on buddy programs, offers limited generalizability due to their small sample sizes and potential researcher bias and subjectivity in the research process (Campbell, 2012; Geelhoed et al., 2003). Third, many previous quantitative studies have not established control groups (Abe et al., 1998; Matsuda & Miller, 2007; Thomson & Esses, 2016). The lack of a control group may make it difficult to establish a reliable causal inference between participation in a buddy program and any given set of transition outcomes. Similarly, Smith and Khawaja (2011) highlighted that there had been a noticeable lack of longitudinal research conducted in this field to date, with most of the studies utilizing a cross-sectional design. Finally, previous research has overlooked comprehensive individual factors that can be highly influential in shaping international students' transition and educational experiences (Smith & Khawaja, 2011), such as ethnic identity, self-esteem, perceived social support, and help-seeking.

The primary purpose of this study is to examine the impact of intercultural partnership programs on intercultural competence, academic and social integration, willingness to ask for help, and sense of well-being of international graduate students through a pretest-posttest control group experimental design.

METHOD

Participants

We recruited 171 participants from one public research institution in the southeastern part of the U.S. from 2015-2018. These participants were from 27 different countries, with those from China constituting the most significant proportion (43.3%), followed by India (13.5%), and then by South Korea (9.4%), and each of the other countries accounting for less than 6%. Eighty-one participants (47.4%; 46 in the year 2017 and 35 in the year 2018) provided information about their academic disciplines. A total of 40 academic disciplines were involved, among which the discipline of "Statistics" was the most frequent (7%, or 12 out of 171), with "Computer Science" being second (4.7%) and "Sport Management" as well as "Civil and Environmental Engineering" being the third (2.4%) most frequent. Of all the participants, (22.8%) and (72.2%) were assigned to the control and experimental groups to maximize the benefits of the program. In Table 1., details for participants in the control and experimental groups were almost comparable in terms of age,

gender, education level, marital status, and past intercultural experience. Furthermore, the control and experimental groups had similar patterns in the composition of participants' countries of origin: participants from China and India accounted for the first- and second-largest portions, respectively.

Table 1

Frequencies and Relative Frequencies of Demographic Variables

	Control group (n/%)	Experimental group (n/%)	Total (n/%)
Gender			
Male	13/ 33.3%	51/38.6%	64/37.4%
Female	25/64.1%	69/52.3%	94/55.0%
Missing cases	1/2.6%	12/9.1%	13/7.6%
Education level			
Master	20/51.3%	55/41.7%	75/43.9%
Doctoral	17/43.6%	51/38.6%	68/39.8%
Do not expect one	1/2.6%	14/10.6%	15/8.8%
Missing cases	1/2.6%	12/9.1%	13/7.6%
Marital status			
Married	2/5.1%	7/5.3%	9/5.3%
Single but in a relationship	13/33.3%	15/11.4%	28/16.4%
Single and not in a relationship	20/51.3%	33/25%	53/31%
Missing cases	4/10.3%	77/58.3%	81/47.4%
Past intercultural experiences			
No	13/33.3%	33/25%	46/26.9%
Yes	25/64.1%	87/65.9%	112/65.5%
Missing cases	1/2.6%	12/9.1%	13/7.6%

Procedures

The Cultural Partnership Program (CPP), through collaboration between the Center for Global Engagement and the College of Education at a southeastern research university in the U.S., provides an opportunity to facilitate the transition process and enhance the intercultural competency and well-being of the participants. The participants were recruited through a list serve for new incoming international students through the assistance of the University's Center of Global Engagement. In addition, an informational table at graduate orientations was set up to recruit participants over the years. Prospective participants were informed about the potential benefits and risks of the study. Those who agreed to participate in the CPP were assigned to either a control or experimental group. A participant in the experimental group was paired up with one domestic graduate-level student at the same university and engaged in a semester-long intercultural interaction. Participants were asked to indicate their preference of gender for their cultural buddy to accommodate their cultural and religious needs. Participants in the

experimental group were invited to an orientation at the beginning of the fall semester in which they were introduced to their domestic cultural buddy. The orientation served as an opportunity to provide basic training on cross-cultural interaction and answer questions related to the program. Participants were informed to contact the principal investigator and their research team to solicit consultation and support if they encountered any problems during the cross-cultural interactions. Participants were asked to meet their cultural partners four to six times throughout the semester. Although the research team did not plan the meeting activities, participants were encouraged to engage in cross-cultural activities such as social, cultural, sports, and academic events or activities on campus or in the community. Participants in the control group did not participate in the CPP program but were offered material on cross-cultural interactions.

All participants in the experimental and control groups were requested to complete two online surveys: one at the beginning of the semester and one at the end of the semester. The participants were offered an incentive of a $5 gift card for completing each survey. The Institutional Review Board approved the study at the university of the first author. Research protocols strictly followed ethical standards during data collection and analysis to protect participants' personal information.

Instruments

The pre- and post-test surveys included questions regarding demographic information such as age, gender, majors, marital status, country of origin, language proficiency, previous intercultural experiences, and measures listed below.

Measures

Intercultural Sensitivity Scale. The Intercultural Sensitivity Scale (Chen & Starosta, 2000) is a 24-item self-reported measure of one's intercultural communication on five subscales: Interaction Engagement, Respect for Cultural Differences, Interaction Confidence, Interaction Enjoyment, and Interaction Attentiveness. The scale was found to have internal consistency with a Cronbach's alpha of .86 and good convergent validity (Chen & Starosta, 2000). A sample item included "I have a feeling of enjoyment towards differences between my culturally-distinct counterpart and me." In the current study, the alpha coefficients were above .80 for the total scale (.85 and .83) and ranged from .40 to .81 for subscales (Interaction Engagement: .60 and .64; Respect for Cultural Differences: .67 and .76;

Interaction Confidence: .81 and .71; Interaction Enjoyment: .59 and .79; Interaction Attentiveness: .40 and .43) during pre-and post-tests.

Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support. The Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (Zimet et al., 1988) is a 12-item self-report measure of one's perception of social support on three subscales: friends, family, and a significant other. The scale was found to have a strong test-retest reliability (.85), strong factorial validity and moderate construct validity (Zimet et al., 1988). A sample item included "There is a special person who is around when I am in need." The alpha coefficients were .89 to .90 for pre-and post-tests in the current study.

The Revised Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure (MEIM-R). The MEIM-R (Phinney & Ong, 2007), a 6-item instrument, was used to measure individuals' commitment and exploration of their ethnic identity. The scale demonstrates adequate internal consistency (Phinney & Ong, 2007). A sample item included "I have a strong sense of belonging to my own ethnic group." The alpha coefficients were .86 to .89 for pre-and post-tests in the current study.

The Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale. The Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (Rosenberg, 1965) is a 10-item self-reported measure of one's global self-worth, including both negative and positive feelings about oneself. The scale has been found to have strong internal consistency and reliability (Gray-Little et al., 1997). A sample item included "I take a positive attitude toward myself." The alpha coefficients were .79 to .88 for pre-and post-tests in the current study.

Satisfaction with Life Scale. The Satisfaction with Life Scale (Diener et al., 1985) is a 5-item self-reported measure of one's general satisfaction with life. The scale demonstrates good internal consistency and strong convergent and predictive validity (Pavot et al., 1991). A sample item included "In most ways, my life is close to my ideal." The alpha coefficients were .74 to .82 for pre- and post-tests in the current study.

Social and Academic Integration. The social and academic integration scale (Williamson-Asche, 2008) consists of 30 items and four subscales: academic and intellectual development; peer group interaction; interactions with faculty; and faculty interest in teaching and students. Internal consistency for subscales appeared to be good, ranging from .59 to .88 (Williamson-Ashe, 2008). Fifteen items whose factor loadings were lower than .70 were removed in the current study based upon the standards set by Shevlin and Miles (1998). A sample item included "I will be satisfied with my academic experience at my current institution". The alpha coefficients were .92 to .95 for the pre- and post-tests in the current study.

Attitudes Toward Seeking Professional Help. The 10-item Attitudes Toward Seeking Professional Psychological Help scale short form (Fischer & Farina, 1995) is an instrument measuring one's propensity for seeking professional help during challenging life circumstances. This measure demonstrated excellent test-retest reliability and internal consistency (Fischer & Farina, 1995). A sample item included "I might want to have psychological counseling in the future." The alpha coefficients were .79 to .74 for pre- and post-tests in the current study.

Stress. The stress was measured by the 21-item Beck Anxiety Inventory (Beck et al., 1988), which appraises the severity of self-reported anxiety. Beck et al. (1988) obtained internal consistency and test-retest reliability estimates of .92 and .75. The alpha coefficients were estimated at .86 and .96 for pre- and post-tests in the current study.

Statistical Analysis

We computed means and standard deviations (SDs) for all interested variables. Correlational analyses were conducted to examine bivariate correlations among these variables for pre- and post-tests, respectively. We also ran regression analyses for the post-intervention outcome measures separately. Specifically, we regressed each post-intervention measure on the presence or absence of intervention, adding its corresponding pre-intervention measure as a covariate. In addition, we checked ordinary least squares assumptions (e.g., independence of errors, homogeneity of error variances) for each conducted regression model. Data from *Respect for Cultural Differences*, *Interaction Enjoyment*, *Perceived Social Support*, *Attitudes of Seeking Professional Help*, and *Stress* did not satisfy the error assumptions (normality and/or homoscedasticity). Thus, for these measures, we resorted to a robust estimation method, which is robust to the assumption violation and corrects for standard errors of parameter estimates.

To handle missing data, we conducted regression analyses using full information maximum likelihood estimation (Enders, 2010). Regression analyses were run in *R* version 4.0 using the *Lavaan* package. The robust maximum likelihood (i.e., MLR) estimation method was applied in the regression analyses involving *Respect for Cultural Differences*, *Interaction Enjoyment*, *Perceived Social Support*, *Attitudes of Seeking Professional Help*, or *Stress*, for which error assumptions were violated; the default maximum likelihood (i.e., ML) method was used for the other regression analyses. All other analyses were conducted in IBM SPSS 26.

RESULTS

Descriptive Analyses

Table 2 reports Pearson correlation coefficients among measures, and the mean (SD), skewness, kurtosis, and sample size for each measure. Specifically, correlations among pre-intervention scale scores are present above the diagonal, while correlations among post-intervention scores are below the diagonal. The correlations among pre-intervention measures ranged from -.27 to .76, and the correlations among post-intervention measures were in the range of -.54 to .78.

Table 2

Correlations between Pre-intervention Measures and between Post-intervention Measures, plus Descriptive Statistics for Each Measure

	LS	ISS	ISS_IE	ISSR_CD	ISS_IC	ISS_IEN	ISS_IA	CEI	SE	SS	SAI	APHS	Stress
LS		.32	.24	.15	.38	.14	.21	.28	.50	.40	.29	.16	-.27
ISS	.15		.75	.70	.76	.70	.62	.31	.51	.34	.60	.35	-.01
ISS_IE	.18	.78		.49	.47	.46	.34	.28	.39	.17	.41	.33	-.10
ISS_RCD	-.02	.75	.44		.25	.45	.33	.11	.30	.24	.50	.43	-.02
ISS_IC	.21	.62	.36	.16		.48	.35	.24	.45	.27	.37	.09	-.02
ISS_IEN	.03	.67	.27	.71	.26		.35	.10	.39	.28	.36	.16	-.09
ISS_IA	.13	.49	.42	.06	.36	.03		.37	.28	.18	.44	.24	.09
CEI	.28	.39	.47	.08	.34	.05	.40		.31	.19	.25	.21	.08
SE	.52	.47	.35	.36	.26	.43	.15	.35		.51	.46	.31	-.10
SS	.37	.44	.37	.21	.35	.29	.27	.45	.58		.52	.22	-.06
SAI	.43	.41	.34	.27	.28	.28	.19	.42	.70	.55		.45	-.08
APHS	.18	.48	.39	.55	.07	.38	.15	.16	.39	.28	.36		.05
Stress	-.19	-.06	.00	-.12	.03	-.19	.12	-.24	-.54	-.06	-.50	-.20	
Mean [a]	18.37	94.47	25.50	26.70	17.20	12.60	10.70	20.50	38.60	32.40	61.70	35.70	27.73
SD [a]	4.01	9.02	3.47	2.53	3.32	1.63	1.70	4.11	4.81	5.49	7.14	4.96	6.65
Skewness [a]	-.15	.15	.40	-.65	.12	-.18	-.01	.27	-.06	-.77	-.17	.19	1.61
Kurtosis [a]	-1.00	-.61	.02	-.12	-.46	-.36	-.42	-.32	.49	.86	.05	.16	2.93
n [a]	171	170	170	170	171	171	170	169	170	170	169	170	132
Mean [b]	18.10	95.10	27.50	25.80	18.20	12.70	10.90	21.10	38.20	31.99	59.70	35.20	29.58
SD [b]	4.50	9.17	3.33	3.40	2.73	2.09	1.87	4.59	6.36	5.70	9.78	5.11	11.34
Skewness [b]	-.38	-.07	.20	-.99	.23	-1.60	.14	-.08	-.28	-.44	-.95	.22	2.09
Kurtosis [b]	-.35	-.48	-.42	1.14	-.01	4.66	-.09	.42	.95	-.38	3.31	-.67	4.67
n [b]	98	98	98	98	99	98	99	97	97	96	97	98	48

Note. Correlations among pre-intervention measures are present above the diagonal, and correlations among post-intervention measures are below the diagonal.
[a] These are for pre-intervention measures; [b] These are for post-intervention measures.
LS: Life satisfaction; ISS: Intercultural sensitivity; ISS IE: ISS Interaction Engagement; ISS RCD: ISS Respect for Cultural Differences); ISS IC: ISS Interaction Confidence; ISS IEn: ISS Interaction Enjoyment; ISS_IA: ISS Interaction Attentiveness; CEI: Cultural Ethnic Identity; SE: Self-esteem; SS: Perceived social supports; SAI: Social and academic integration; APHS: Attitudes toward professional help seeking.

Regression Analyses

Checking Interaction Effects

Results for testing the interaction effects did not indicate any significant interaction terms at $\alpha = .05$, so we removed the interaction term from each regression model. We reran each revised models to examine the conditional difference between experimental and control groups.

Differences between Experimental and Control Groups

Table 3 reports the results of the regression analyses for testing intervention effects, including test statistics and 95% confidence intervals. We found that, at $\alpha = .05$, there was no significant difference between the experimental and

control groups. The 95% confidence intervals of the estimated group differences were wide on most post-intervention measures, especially *Stress, Social and Academic Integration, Intercultural Sensitivity, Self-esteem, and Perceived Social Support*. The wide intervals were uninformative regarding the true group differences and signs of the possible imprecision of the estimates. Thus, we conducted the additional group mean analyses.

Table 3

Results of Regression Analyses for Testing Group Differences

Model		*b*	*t*	95% C.I.
1	Group	.555	.515	[-1.559, 2.669]
	LS_pre	.551	5.259*	[.345, .756]
2	Group	-.35	-.174	[-4.295, 3.595]
	ISS_pre	.607	6.917*	[.435, .779]
3	Group	-.420	-.513	[-2.022, 1.183]
	ISS_IE_pre	.425	4.865*	[.253, .596]
4	Group	-.722	-1.181	[-1.921, .477]
	ISS_IC_pre	.447	6.414*	[.311, .584]
5	Group	-.477	-1.146	[-1.291, .338]
	ISS_IA_pre	.587	6.348*	[.405, .768]
6	Group	.369	.314	[-1.933, 2.672]
	ISS_RCD_pre	.639	4.345*	[.351, .927]
7	Group	.851	1.078	[-.697, 2.399]
	ISSIEN_pre	.337	2.282*	[.048, .627]
8	Group	-1.031	-.980	[-3.092, 1.031]
	CEI_pre	.626	6.329*	[.432, .820]
9	Group	1.244	.903	[-1.457, 3.946]
	SE_pre	.765	6.892*	[.548, .983]
10	Group	.657	.510	[-1.869, 3.182]
	SS_pre	.715	7.957*	[.539, .891]
11	Group	2.956	1.202	[-1.862, 7.774]
	SAI_pre	.464	3.261*	[.185, .743]
12	Group	1.679	1.489	[-.531, 3.889]
	APHS_pre	.550	5.863*	[.366, .734]
13	Group	-7.843	-1.558	[-17.709, 2.023]
	Stress_pre	.954	4.993*	[.579, 1.328]

Note. *$p < .05$.

Additional Information on Group Differences

We examined group means of both pre- and post-intervention measures and computed standardized mean differences (Cohen's *d*) (see Table 4). The standardized mean differences are free of the original measurement scales and can be compared directly**.** We then compared the post-intervention *d* values to the pre-intervention *d* values to check whether there were changes in standardized mean difference after the intervention. The standardized mean differences improved after intervention on *Interaction*

Enjoyment, *Self-esteem*, and *Stress*. On *Perceived Social Support*, *Social and Academic Integration*, and *Attitudes of Seeking Professional Help*, the experimental group reported lower scores than the control group before the intervention but obtained comparable or higher scores after intervention. On *Interaction Confidence*, however, the experimental group scored higher than the control group in the pre-test but scored slightly lower after the intervention. On *Interaction Engagement*, the standardized mean difference decreased (from .62 to .18), although the experimental group consistently obtained higher scores before and after intervention. On *Interaction Attentiveness*, scores of two groups were almost the same during the pre-test, but after the intervention, the experimental group scored slightly lower than the control group. On the other variables, *d* values were quite similar before and after the intervention.

Table 4

Group Means (SDs) and Standardized Mean Differences

	LS	ISS	ISS_ IE	ISS_ RCD	ISS_ IC	ISS_ IEN	ISS_ IA	CEI	SE	PSS	SAI	APHS	Stress
Pre-intervention													
Ctl.	17.90 (4.25)	92.59 (8.05)	23.87 (2.64)	26.00 (2.37)	16.56 (3.02)	12.15 (1.68)	10.72 (1.88)	19.77 (3.96)	38.51 (4.45)	33.51 (5.41)	62.97 (6.69)	36.62 (5.40)	29.14 (6.24)
Exp	18.52 (3.95)	95.03 (9.25)	25.96 (3.55)	26.84 (2.56)	17.41 (3.39)	12.70 (1.60)	10.68 (1.65)	20.65 (4.15)	38.59 (4.93)	32.07 (5.50)	61.38 (7.28)	35.47 (4.81)	27.36 (6.73)
d	.15	.27	.62	.33	.26	.34	-.02	.21	.02	-.26	-.22	-.23	-.27
Post-intervention													
Ctl.	17.62 (4.91)	93.65 (9.30)	27.00 (3.61)	25.06 (4.31)	18.41 (2.29)	11.82 2.94)	11.35 (2.32)	20.71 (5.05)	36.65 (8.21)	32.41 (6.78)	57.59 (13.12)	33.47 (5.97)	36.90 (17.79)
Exp	18.20 (4.44)	95.42 (9.17)	27.59 (3.28)	26.00 (3.19)	18.12 (2.82)	12.88 (1.84)	10.80 (1.77)	21.14 (4.52)	38.47 (5.91)	31.90 (5.49)	60.15 (8.96)	35.56 (4.87)	27.66 (8.25)
d	.13	.19	.18	.28	-.11	.51	-.29	.09	.29	-.09	.26	.41	-.86

Ctl: Control group; Exp: Experimental group; *d*: standardized mean difference

DISCISSION

The study aims to examine the impact of the CPP on transition outcomes among first-year graduate-level international students. The regression analysis did not reveal any significantly conditional differences between the experimental and control groups. The nonsignificant results may be partly due to the relatively small sample size, which could lead to the low power of significance tests. The wide (95%) confidence intervals for conditional group differences on most post-intervention measures also indicated a lack of statistical power. The supplemental analyses regarding standardized mean differences revealed substantive findings. The findings in the current study highlight the positive impact of the CPP for the international students in the experimental group compared to their counterparts in the

control group for the following measures: interaction enjoyment during their cultural interaction process; self-esteem levels; stress; perceived social support; social and academic integration; and attitudes toward seeking professional help. The body of past literature and current study findings indicate that increased perception of social support is a common outcome of buddy programs such as CPP participation (Sabouripour & Bte Roslan, 2015; Shigaki & Smith, 1997). International students frequently report feeling isolated and lonely on campus; thus, the friendship and advice of their American counterparts appear to provide a supportive outlet on which international students can rely (Shigaki & Smith, 1997).

Similarly, participation in the CPP increased the degree of social and academic integration experienced by international students, as evidenced by multiple past studies (e.g., Nillson, 2019; Shigaki & Smith, 1997). The collaboration between international and domestic students in the academic settings, facilitated through a structured program such as CPP, may be a contributing factor to this outcome of increased academic integration (Nillson, 2019). Likewise, participation in socially geared activities on campus may help international students to step outside their comfort zone and feel more open to experiencing social interactions with peers (Nillson, 2019). Help-seeking is a less frequently measured outcome in the body of literature. Many of the issues encountered by international students are often addressed after the fact—probably due to a lack of knowledge of resources available on campus and associated stigmas surrounding help-seeking (Kher et al., 2003). The outcome of improved help-seeking behaviors seems consistent with our prediction, as the CPP exposes international students to resources available on campus through domestic students who are likely to have utilized or at least heard of these available sources of assistance. Thus, the CPP may reduce the incidence of challenges international students may encounter as new members of the campus community.

Past findings have indicated that international students may experience a lack of confidence and decreased self-esteem on campus due to language barriers, culture shock, and perceived discrimination (French-Sloan, 2015). Exposing international students to diverse elements of American culture with a "buddy" to help guide them through these barriers seems to result in increased self-esteem. Similar CPP studies reported the interaction enjoyment outcomes both positively and negatively. Studies that randomized buddy pairs considered only certain limited factors in the matching process were found to occasionally result in both international and domestic students experiencing discomfort interacting with their pair (Weir, 2020). The current study carefully considered factors such as age, gender, and academic level,

which might serve as the likely reason behind the positive interaction enjoyment outcome.

Despite the above-mentioned positive outcomes, the international students in the experimental group performed poorer than their counterparts in the control group in several intercultural sensitivity subscales (e.g., interaction engagement, intercultural confidence, intercultural attentiveness), as well as cultural and ethnic identity. The failure of the results to indicate improvement in intercultural sensitivity (except for the subscale of interaction enjoyment) and other scales (e.g., ethnic identity and life satisfaction) in the supplemental analyses may be due to the following reasons: First, a reduction in power resulting from a small sample size may have contributed to the lack of significant findings. Second, intercultural interaction is a complex process that requires expertise and skills to make it work. Previous studies (e.g., Campbell, 2012) have found that developing these outcomes is a lengthy process that may require longer than the short intervention period of the current study. Third, the post surveys were taken at the end of the semester, at a time when international students are likely to experience homesickness after a whole semester in another culture. For most students, it was likely the first time being in a foreign country on their own and living independently away from their past social networks. Considering that it takes time to establish new social networks within an unfamiliar environment, these students are likely to be experiencing high barriers that translate into other struggles across the acculturation process. Thus, despite the potential effectiveness of this intervention in promoting intercultural competence and racial identity development, it may have lacked the strength and the supportive contexts for facilitating shifts in schemas related to intercultural competence and racial identity development.

Practical Implication

The findings of this study offer several practical implications for successful transition experiences. First, the study highlights the benefits of offering international students opportunities for structured interactions with domestic students inside and outside the classroom. Higher education institutions should consider implementing programs such as the Cultural Partnership Program, which not only encourage intercultural interactions but also provide both domestic and international students with guidance on how to engage in these interactions. Higher education institutes may overlook programs of this sort as their benefits remain underrecognized. In implementing a CPP program on campuses, the goals and objectives of the program must be made clear from the start to ensure that the program's full

potential is benefited and widely known. Thus, surrounding students with inadequate program representation might result in students losing benefits and dropping out of the program. Mandating orientations and training for faculty and students may enhance the experience for all participants by clarifying the explicit goals their participation in the program seeks to produce. Program faculty members need to pay attention to the matching criteria utilized in creating buddy pairs, as creating trust and connecting beyond the surface is essential to the success of intercultural interactions. With graduate students, in particular, we see the unique needs they face, as their circumstances may not necessarily align with those of undergraduate students. Thus, ensuring pairs are compatible with their life circumstances is essential to achieve the best results.

Second, higher education institutions need to properly equip their faculty with the necessary skills to facilitate positive interactions and communicate with international students to better understand their unique needs. Universities may consider mandating cultural sensitivity and communication training among all faculty, particularly in roles where there may be greater exposure to international students or intercultural themes within the curriculum. Ongoing workshops and open discussions in which individual faculty can share their experiences and collectively establish best practices to encourage meaningful intercultural interactions and knowledge acquisition in and outside the classroom may be a successful strategy. Further, U.S. institutions must include a level of cultural diversity among faculty that mirrors that of the student body. The voices of international faculty or those with intercultural experiences should be amplified to ensure the first-hand accounts of these successful adults are being considered in formulating programs to assist international students in achieving success in the increasingly globalized workforce.

Finally, universities should create a more inclusive and diverse environment by hosting regular campus events that encourage participation by both domestic and international students. Examples may include international potlucks, international film festivals, or specific holiday celebrations such as Chinese New Year, Diwali, or Oktoberfest. Hosting events of this sort allows students to engage in these intercultural interactions without imposing the additional stress associated with initiating and organizing opportunities for socialization. These events may allow international students to take pride in sharing their cultural heritage with their domestic peers while also providing the opportunity to learn more about American culture. Further, the findings revealed that participation in the CPP increased the help-seeking behavior of international students. Thus, offering

these opportunities in which students may become more comfortable around their domestic peers may increase the help-seeking tendencies of international students outside of the structured intercultural interactions, thereby improving their transition experience and well-being. Universities may utilize these events as opportunities to promote mental health services offered on campus, making international students aware of these services to use if needed.

Research Implications

Considering the differences among students from various countries and cultural backgrounds, future research warrants examining these graduate students' unique transitional experiences. Transition experiences can differ for an international student who has a lot of peers from their own country on campus from that of another international student who has few or no peers from their own country. Research is warranted to compare transition needs and experiences for these groups. An understanding of their needs may assist college campuses in establishing programs tailored to the students' varied situations.

Second, future research may use qualitative approaches (e.g., focus groups, interviews, and case studies) to examine transition experiences and factors associated with the successes and challenges of transitions for graduate-level international students. Understanding these challenges and successes may help comprehend their needs and facilitate the development of transition programs to foster student success.

Third, future research may consider providing a long-term cultural interaction program with an ecological perspective, considering the complexity of intercultural competence development and the challenges of cultural interaction between international students and host students. In addition, future research should pay more attention to environmental factors like institutional policies, strategies, and interventions that help people from different cultures connect with each other.

Limitations

Several limitations exist in the study. First, the participants were recruited from one public research university in the southeast of the U.S.; thus, the sample may not represent the body of international graduate-level students. Second, some subscales of Intercultural Sensitivity had low-reliability estimates, suggesting that the scale scores used might not reasonably represent the constructs of interest. Therefore, results involving these subscales should be interpreted cautiously. Third, the small sample size might cause low statistical power for testing conditional group mean differences and inefficient parameter estimates.

CONCLUSION

Intercultural interactions are essential to enhance transition outcomes, which are pivotal for students' education and career success. The current findings (i.e., standardized mean difference) reveal that the Cultural Partner Program positively impacts some, though not all, transition outcomes for incoming international graduate-level students in the experimental group. Higher education professionals must work hard to create conducive institutional and social environments to foster intercultural interaction and competence.

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Research Methods for English Studies

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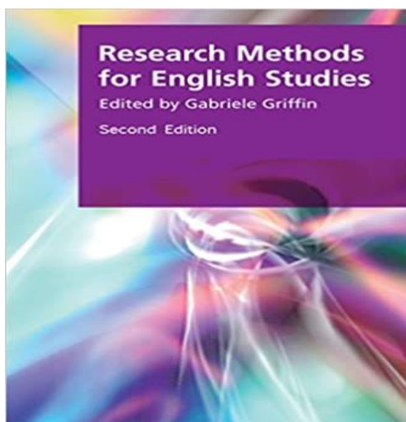

Research Methods for English Studies, edited by Griffin, systematically explores useful research methods for English Studies. Griffin was a professor at the University of York, United Kingdom and was involved in various research projects related to gender studies. This book briefly depicts Griffin's experiences with research, as Griffin outlines a lack of literature surrounding research methods for English Studies. Griffin argues that "research methods were not widely discussed in English Studies and in many respects this remains the case in 2013" (Griffin, 2013, p. 1). This book, therefore, covers this deficit by introducing and discussing a wide range of research methods to make research more vibrant and systematic in English Studies. The book is divided into twelve chapters, incorporating various research methods and describing ways they may be utilized in English Studies.

In the first chapter, *Research Methods for English Studies: An Introduction,* Griffin discusses Griffin's interpretation of research in English Studies, which Griffin observed as a postgraduate student in the 1980s. Griffin argues that research methods in English Studies were not

systematized, and to enhance research methods in English Studies in the late 1990s, research trainings were developed by librarians and computer technicians. However, these trainings were based on simply improving basic skills on computer and using library instead of involving researchers in academic inquiry. Reflecting on personal experience, Griffin states that all the participants of Griffin's students' group did not enjoy and learn anything from these research trainings, so researchers in English Studies were mostly dependent on learning by following the work of their supervisors. Gradually this trend changed with the publication of various research reports and the improvement in the quality of research training. Nonetheless, research in English Studies was heavily dominated by textual analysis rather than exploring other various fields such as films, music and arts to name the few. From 2008 onward, scholars realized that the research in English Studies could be more than textual analysis. As a result, research in English Studies embraced wider range of new areas.

In chapter two, *Archival Methods,* Steedman introduces the importance of archives as a way to gather information about various disciplines such as history, anthropology, sociology so on. Steedman compares receiving information from archiving as communication and providing life to something that was once dead. Steedman describes archival methods as having the features of quest and adventure as one ultimately explores hidden materials. Archival research practices in English Studies can compliment other research methods to enhance results. However, researchers require specific skills and techniques to explore archival resources. In chapter three, *Auto/biography as a Research Method,* Evans argues that among various purposes of research, investigating the life is prominent. With the growth of human life study, auto/biographical research method has increased and transformed from searching information about life to interpretations of particular aspects of human life.

In chapter four, *Oral History as a Research Method*, Summerfield describes oral history as recovering hidden stories from the past that can be employed as a research method in English Studies. This method has grown after the cultural turn of 1960s which embraced the voices of ignored and marginalized people as a source of history. After the publication of Thompson's, *The Voice of the Past* in 1978, this approach reached a new height in exploring the hidden histories of oppressed people (e.g. working class women). Like all methods, oral history research has limitations and challenges that are related to finding

appropriate participants, the memory of participants, and the authenticity of research findings. In chapter five, *Visual Methodologies,* Rose introduces three methods for analyzing visual images. First, compositional interpretation seeks vivid observation of entire visual images and interpretation from various perspectives. Second, the semiotic method is the study of signs and lastly there is the discourse analysis of visual images.

In chapter six, Griffin introduces *Discourse Analysis* as a research method in English Studies and exhibits how this method connects text with the context by focusing on special kinds of language uses. More importantly, discourse analysis research method supposes that the use of language is not neutral but is rather socially and politically motivated. Thus, language requires special analysis to unfold its hidden meanings. Furthermore, the author discusses various kinds of discourse analysis and ultimately emphasizes critical discourse analysis, which seeks to transform society by critiquing social injustices with the support of discourse and computer aided discourse analysis which utilizes various computer software to receive, store, organize and display large quantity of information. Moreover, in chapter seven Alsop in Alsop's research article *The Uses of Ethnographic Methods in English Studies* argues that ethnographic research method can be utilized in English Studies particularly in writing about travel and audience response criticism. Writing about travel captures a wider range of writing incorporating nature, culture, religion, and customs of people. Audience response criticism explores social perception on literary texts by involving in discussion and interaction with public in certain cultural context.

In chapter eight, *Numbers and Words: Quantitative Methods for Scholars of Texts,* Hudson argues that statistical and computational procedures can be employed in the research of English Studies. Statistical procedures can organize quantitative data of literary text such as income, expenditure of characters and exhibit them with the help of graphs, tables, figures, and pie charts and so on. Computational procedures assist analyzing text by investigating repeated patterns of the text such as similar sentence structures, sound patterns, and specific word categories with the support of latest developed computer software. In chapter nine entitled *Textual Analysis as a Research Method*; Belsey introduces textual analysis and depicts how to analysis pictures as a text by illustrating examples from a painting. Belsey claims that textual interpretation requires extra-textual knowledge; consequently, multiple

possibilities of meanings are possible from textual analysis. Moreover, in chapter ten, *Interviewing,* Griffin depicts the importance of interviewing in English Studies, which can be supportive to gather qualitative information from various participants such as authors, readers, publishers, wholesalers, booksellers and so forth. However, Griffin depicts some challenges of interviewing such as finding appropriate participants, textualization of interviews, analyzing interviews and some ethical issues.

In chapter eleven, *Creative Writing as a Research Method,* Cook explains that creative writing can be a useful research method in English Studies since the major purpose of creative writing is to explore new ideas. Thus, creative writing as a research method depends on notion that writing is a technique of discovery. As a research method, writing leads from the known to the unknown information and needs regular practices of writing to achieve new insights through writing. Finally, in chapter twelve, *English Research Methods and the Digital Humanities,* Deegan introduces the latest developed discipline as digital humanities and exhibits how this emerging discipline supports research in English Studies. Deegan claims that natural homes for digital humanities are English departments. Similarly, digital humanities transform the research in English Studies by providing various computational skills and resources which support to make research faster, reliable and effective.

This edited text introduces various research methods related to English Studies that may assist research scholars. The research contents discussed in this book are relevant and can help to enhance the quality of research. More importantly, this book provides various resources at the end of each chapter that will help the reader explore each method. This book offers an honest contribution to research methods in English Studies.

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