

Hispanic Serving Institution Student Success during a Pandemic

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Abstract: The Pandemic has affected the success rates among students in Higher Education. In general, Higher Education success rates are typically lower among minority groups. Considering the Pandemic effects in Hispanic Serving Institutions, this research study will focus on understanding the impact of the pandemic on currently enrolled undergraduate students in a Hispanic Serving Institutions and how technology may have played a role in their success. A qualitative approach will be used. Specifically, researchers interviewed 7 students whom were currently enrolled in a Hispanic Serving Institution in a Sociology class. The data will be analyzed using a grounded theory approach. Findings showed students saw technology as a contributing factor towards their success, the pandemic positively impacted their lives with the increase of flexible schedules, and males mentioned more barriers for success with high rates of struggling with anxiety. These data imply the need for a department focused on helping students succeed. Specifically, a department focused on providing all the resources needed by students in a Hispanic Serving Institution. These needs were amplified after the pandemic.

Keywords: Pandemic, COVID 19, Hispanic Serving Institution

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Introduction

The pandemic has negatively impacted students in higher education (Anderson, Rayburn, & Sierra, 2021; Chen et al., 2021; Habbak & Selko, 2021). Issues can range from internet speed, emotional well-being, feeling disconnected, and the list continues. Flores and Flores (2021) emphasized the importance to continue to research the effects of the pandemic in students attending Hispanic Serving Institutions, qualitatively. In this study we will focus on gathering data through interviewing students enrolled in a Hispanic Serving Institution. The

purpose is to better understand how the pandemic is impacting undergraduate students and how technology may play a role in success rates. The qualitative data will be analyzed using the grounded theory approach.

Literature Review

With the pandemic, negative effects among higher education students have been reported (Anderson, Rayburn, & Sierra, 2021; Chen et al., 2021; Flores & Flores, 2021; Habbak & Selko, 2021). Students have reported negative emotions as an outcome to attending a higher education institution during a pandemic (Anderson et al., 2021; Flores & Flores, 2021). Other negative effects in higher education brought on by the pandemic included internet issues (Chen et al., 2021). Students reported a feeling of disconnect (Anderson et al., 2021; Habbak & Selko, 2021) which is an important factor to succeed in higher education (Chong et al., 2021; Hug & Thiry, 2021). Chen et al. (2021) added that some students were living with families which led to lack of privacy needed to better focus on school work. The number of siblings in one household led a student to complete homework in the restroom. Habbak & Selko (2021) found students simply had trouble adjusting to the “new normal”. Some students reported limited access to educational resources (Anderson et al., 2021). While other students reported being financially impacted negatively (Biediger-Friedman et al., 2021; Flores & Flores, 2021). Overall, these data represent the need to further understand the impact of the pandemic on the success of students in higher education, especially students enrolled in Hispanic Serving Institutions (Flores & Flores, 2021).

Hispanic Serving Institutions and Student Success during a Pandemic

The Hispanic Serving Institution is an institution that serves primarily the Latinx population. Before the pandemic these institutions served the student population, in ways that support their personal needs to help them succeed in college (Miranda et al., 2021). Some of these support systems include food insecurities (Biediger-Friedman et al., 2021; Miranda et al., 2021). During the pandemic these services were decreased (Miranda, 2021). These services are needed in order to meet the needs of students to promote higher education success (Biediger-Friedman et al., 2021; Miranda et al., 2021). Additionally, implications for services to be offered to address psychological distress was prevalent (Flores & Flores, 2021; Hug & Thiry, 2021; Miranda et al., 2021). Hug and Thiry (2021) added that virtual support and student engagement would also contribute to student success in students enrolled in Hispanic Serving Institutions.

Technology and Student Success during a Pandemic

Although technology is a huge factor incorporated in higher education during the pandemic, research focused on how technology supports student success during a pandemic was limited. Researchers mainly focused on the online teaching experiences among faculty during a pandemic (Moessen et al., 2021; Arnold, Ulber, & Vogel, 2021). Akcil & Bastas (2020) focused on how technology impacted students in higher education, in Cyprus. They found students who demonstrated digital citizenship behaviors had positive attitudes towards e-learning. Social exchange was noted to be an issue, lacking, during the pandemic among students in an online learning environment (Arnold et al., 2021; Moessen et al., 2021). Arnold et al. (2021) added that students had more issues

with self-organization and issues with privacy due to living with flat mates. Social connection or engagement seem to be a reoccurring theme (Anderson et al., 2021; Arnold et al., 2021; Habbak & Selco, 2021; Hug and Thiry, 2021; Moessen et al., 2021). To better understand how the pandemic impacts the success of students enrolled in a Hispanic Serving Institution, a qualitative approach using grounded theory to analyze the data will be applied in this study.

Grounded Theory

Creswell (2009) introduced grounded theory for qualitative research, such as this one, to formulate a theoretical explanation after all the data is gathered and analyzed. Furthermore, Green (1998) explains how grounded theory was developed by Anselm Strauss and Barney Glaser to assist with developing a theory with data gathering through research. A coding process is applied to gather data, in this case interview conversations, to better analyze the data and identify patterns that support a theory. Lastly, Elliott and Higgins (2012) defend the use of grounded theory in higher education and suggest focusing on how inductive enquiry contributes to new knowledge, importance of grounded theory questions used in data gathering, focus on research-theory link, and how grounded theory provides an inductive and deductive means to generating a theory in the field. Overall, grounded theory is the best suited qualitative approach to better understanding how the pandemic influences success rates among students enrolled in Hispanic Serving Institutions. The development of a theory from this research may better serve student's success rates in the future.

Method

The purpose of this research is to better understand the influences on students enrolled in a Hispanic Serving Institution during a pandemic that support or hinder their success rates. With this in mind, after Internal Review Board approval, students were sought out for interviews in a Hispanic Serving Institution, located in a South Texas region. The Sociology Departmental faculty were contacted to help recruit students over the age of 18. No extra credits were offered for compensation. Students contacted the researcher to schedule interviews, that lasted between 20-30 minutes.

Design

Students who scheduled an appointment were sent an internet speed test link and the consent form to prepare for the upcoming interview. Upon logging in to the online interview, using the team's and zoom application, students were read the consent form, and verbally consented and continued with the research study with the option to end the interview at any time. Lastly, students completed an online demographic survey for future research use. Students were then asked to discuss contributing resources helping their success in Higher Education, the lack of contributing resources inhibiting success in Higher Education, technological contributing resources helping their success in Higher Education, lack of technological resources preventing success in Higher Education, Pandemic related resources that helped their success in Higher Education, and the lack of Pandemic related resources that inhibited their success in Higher Education. Please see appendix A for more

information. The dedoose program was used to analyze the data. All excerpts/texts were imported. Demographic data were entered as descriptors and attached to each assigned excerpt. Codes were then created to represent each question asked. Child codes were created under each code. The dedoose program allowed for the data to be normalized or weighted based on overrepresentation by one group over the other. Additionally, the dedoose program allowed to analyze the codes as percentages. The initial analysis was focused on demographic data. Then the most discussed codes were sought out through a cloud analysis. Finally, a code co-occurrence analysis was applied to see the most common discussed codes and child codes.

Population and Sample

For this qualitative research study, students enrolled in a Hispanic Serving Institution during a pandemic were the population. Because the pandemic limits access to students, the recruitment of participants was heavily reliant on faculty willing to announce the research opportunity in their online course shells. Eventually, Faculty returned to campus after the first month of the semester, some students were informed about this research study in class. Faculty from the Sociology department were sought out, due to convenience. Thus, a convenient sample was used. A total of 7 students scheduled and completed interviews. Of the seven students, all were first generation students, 5 were female, 2 were male, 3 were Sociology majors, 1 was a Social Work major, 1 was an Organizational Leadership major, 1 was a Psychology major, and 1 was a Technology major.

Results and Discussion

The demographic analysis yielded a few gender themes. Both genders mentioned Pandemic Barriers for success in a Hispanic Serving Institutions at same rates. Females mentioned technological impact on success and technological resources impact on success at higher rates. Males discussed direct and indirect influences on success, online learning impact on success, and positive contributions the pandemic provided to student's success at higher rates. Lastly, males discussed barriers for success, adjustment issues, and stress issues at higher rates.

A quick pack code cloud, demonstrated students interviewed focused on Student Success Barriers in Hispanic Serving Institutions the most. Then students focused discussing the technological impact on success, direct influences on success, the Pandemic positive contributions to success, and technological resources and their contributions to success in a Hispanic Serving Institution. As per the code co-occurrence analysis, the most discussed topic was the Hispanic Serving Institute barriers on success. The discussions in this area included lack of socialization that is a typical contributing factor in succeeding in a classroom. Lack of resources was also discussed. Resources in this case, focused on websites or information guiding students on how to be successful. Students also discussed issues in adjusting to the new way of learning. Typically, the demands of multiple roles under the same household was mentioned as a common adjustment issue. Other adjustment issues included adjusting to the new online platform, English was a second language, and stress related to the new way of life.

Lastly, students mentioned a lot of negative mindsets, stress, and issues like the war that distracted them from focusing on being successful.

Students then focused on Direct Influences on Success in Hispanic Serving Institutes. Details included financial aid resources, support from family and for child support, and resources. Resources was a child code that was most commonly discussed and included influences that directly helped students to succeed, included online citation resources, financial aid resources, library resources, support for childcare, advising provided, and resources provided on blackboard.

Similarly, Technological Resources that contributed to success included communication devices and apps, online resources, and technological devices for work. Popular child codes discussed under Technological Resources that contributed to success included Technological Devices for Work and then Communication Devices and apps. Technological Devices for work included the internet, computer, cell phones, online books at the library, scanners, blackboard messages, laptops, tablets, and cell phones that one can complete work on. Communication Devices and Apps included cell phones, blackboard messages, and the pronto app.

Needless to say, the next popular codes or topics discussed were focused on Technological Impact on Success and Pandemic Barriers for success in Hispanic Serving Institutions. Online resources and searches, the online platform, connecting online, and wifi and wifi apparatuses were the most discussed items that helped students succeed. The Pandemic Barriers for success in Hispanic Serving Institutions include the loss of family or friends, lack of socialization, lack of resources to help students in need of laptops, hotspot devices, and tablets, stress, and technical issues.

Amongst the least topics discussed were Positive Contributions to success in a Hispanic Serving Institution During a Pandemic with a child code of online learning. The positive contributions the pandemic provided included flexible schedules and the option to learn online. The option to learn online during a pandemic helped participants transition to online learning and most participants were more dedicated to their academic career after this transition.

Limitations

Limitations for this study included the lack of participants volunteering without incentives. During a pandemic, incentives will assist any study requesting time away from a student's busy schedule. Additionally, students were not asked if they were 18 years of age or older during the interviewing process. However, during the recruiting stage all volunteers were informed of the age requirement. Lastly, students were not asked about their academic success. Follow up questions was an option.

Conclusion

The focus of this study is to better understand the effects of the pandemic on undergraduate students who are currently enrolled in a Hispanic Serving Institution and how technology played a role in their success. This research study included students from a Hispanic Serving Institution. Participants were interviewed to gather pertinent information to better understand success in a Hispanic Serving Institution during a Pandemic. The sample was a convenient sample. Dedoose was the program used to analyze the data and apply grounded theory. Findings include barriers, technological impact on success, technological resources and the impact on success, direct influences on success, and positive contributions the pandemic has provided in a Hispanic serving Institution.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, the negative impact of the pandemic was mentioned to increase “fear and lack of resources.” Thus, more resources should be made available to students via a website or an assigned staff member. Other students mentioned, “resources on helping students to be successful,” negatively influenced their success in college during the pandemic. Specifically, advertising resources must be modified to target males with barriers such as adjustment issues and stress issues. Some comments related to stress included, “there is still stress...about the war,” “fear of lack of resources, stress, and sadness due to family losses,” “my mindset sometimes becomes negative.

There’re days where I don’t want to do a single thing. But I pushed myself to do it,” “I don’t think I have something that affected me negatively, probably sometimes my mindset.” Both males and females need more assistance dealing with the lack of socialization and lack of resources available to them, “the lack of contact with other people, sometimes affect my English.” Another student mentioned, “relationships between people changed.” Although, technology was a contributing factor in success, resources must be made available to all students to maintain these effects. Again, a staff member or office should be available to provide technological resources needed such as wifi apparatuses, laptops, or tablets.

A student, “wished that the school provided hot spots, laptops, and tablets,” not knowing the library department offered these resources at the time of the interview. Direct influences must continue or start to support financial aid services, tutors for online citation needs, enhance or maintain library resources, provide support for childcare, maintain or enhance advising, and maintain or enhance resources provided on blackboard. The focus on contributions provided by the pandemic were on the online platform and sustaining that way of learning to maintain a demanding lifestyle imposed by the pandemic. The online platform, itself, is simply an option that must be sustained through stellar customer service that should focus on support for and from multiple resources.

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