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Factors Deterring Male Enrollment in Higher Education in Barbados

Debbie Bovell, Doctor of Education

Problem

The worldwide Gross Tertiary Enrollment Ratio (GTER) is increasing by 1% a year (Marginson, 2016). However, there is an emerging and growing gender gap in higher education, also known as the reverse gender gap in many countries of the world (Conger & Dickson, 2017; Tienxhi, 2017). This phenomenon is also occurring in Barbados and it is concerning to many stakeholders. It is negatively impacting men's ability to develop to their fullest potential and contribute to the development of the island. However, no research was conducted in Barbados, among young men who never enrolled, to identify the factors that deterred them from enrolling in higher education. Knowledge of the deterrents are critical to increasing male enrollment (Cross, 1974; Roosma & Saar, 2017).

Purpose

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to provide insight into the factors deterring young men who graduated from secondary school with the requisite number of certificates needed for entry to a higher education institution but did not enroll.

Significance

The study is significant in that the findings add to the body of knowledge on the reverse gender gap in higher education.

The project, if implemented, could increase in the number of young men enrolled in higher education in Barbados. It could lead to increased diversity in colleges and universities.

This study is a catalyst for the personal development of young men in Barbados. The uptake of higher education may allow them to have greater access to higher-paying jobs and social mobility.

Social Change Implications

Social change implications include a possible reduction in poverty, stagnation, and crime among young men in Barbados and an increase in the number of men who are more productive.

Theory or Framework

Chain of response model (Cross, 1981), Knowles' **andragogical learning theory** (Knowles, Holton, & Swanson, 2015), and **social capital theory** (Bourdieu, 2014) were used to frame the study.

Relevant Scholarship

Dispositional Barriers

- Poor self-concept as learners resulting in a feeling that they were not intelligent enough to further their education (Nienhusser, 2017; Vaughan, 2016)
- Disinterest due to unfavourable high school experiences (Collins, 2014; Scott et al., 2013) and feminization of higher education (Vaughan, 2016)

Institutional Barriers

- Lack of information on higher education programmes in high school (Grant, 2015; Nienhusser, 2017; Hunter, Wilson & McArthur, 2018)
- Lack of relevant courses at higher education institutions (Collins, 2014; Tienxhi, 2017).

Situational Barriers

- Lower expectations for men to pursue higher education (Kester, 2017; Klevan, 2017)
- Financial challenges. (Callender & Mason, 2017; Matsolo, Ningpuanyeh & Susuman, 2016)
- Economic environment. Weak economy (Fulge & Wise, 2015; Livingstone & Raykor, 2016)
- Policy conditions. Lack of childcare support (Fulge & Wise, 2015)
- Familial factors – Poor socialisation, family problems, absentee father (Collins, 2014; Doherty, et al, 2016; McWhirter, 1997; Tienxhi, 2017)

Research Questions

RQ1 – Why are young men deterred from enrolling in a higher education institution in Barbados even though they have the requisite certification to enroll in higher education?

RQ2 – What do young men perceive to be the benefits of not enrolling in higher education?

RQ3 –What are the perspectives of young men in Barbados, who are qualified to enter college or university, on how male participation in higher education might be increased?

RQ4 – What are the perspectives of educational leaders in Barbados on how male participation in higher education might be increased?

Participants

Purposeful and maximum variation sampling were used to identify **7 young men** (ages 19 – 21), who had completed their secondary education and were not in a higher education institution.

Key informants, key knowledgeable, and key reputational sampling was the method used to identify **5 educational leaders** in various sectors of the education system in Barbados.

Procedures

Sources of Data:

- **Interviews** –20-25 minutes in restaurants and parks. 19 questions asked.
- **Focus group** - one and a half hours, using researcher-created protocol. 4 questions asked.

Analysis

Data were transcribed, member checked, and then inductively coded for emergent themes using attribute, descriptive, versus, and axial coding.

Findings

Factors deterring young men from enrolling in higher education:

- **Dispositional** – The young men expressed a lack of interest in books and a greater interest in earning money
- **Institutional** – The length of programmes, irrelevant courses, course times, use of traditional teaching methods, and the lack of a practical component were identified as deterrents to enrollment in higher education
- **Situational** – Young men were deterred by the cost of higher education and the lack of job opportunities due to the poor performance of the Barbados economy

Benefits of not enrolling in Higher education:

- earning money from a job, time, freedom, gaining work experience, and opportunities to travel

How to Increase male participation

- **Men:** encouragement, mentorship, practical component
- **Educational Leaders:** practical component, flexibility of programmes, link between industry and higher education, expansion of courses being offered

Interpretation

The findings provide insight into the factors deterring male enrollment in higher education in Barbados.

Within the context of Cross' chain of response model, stakeholders in Barbados could use this information to inform policy going forward.

Limitations

This research used a case study as the only methodology. Its findings are specific to the Barbados context.

Recommendations

To support practice in higher education settings in Barbados:

- Express strong expectations for men to enroll in higher education (Etheridge, 2013)
- Increase practical and applied learning modalities in higher education
- Introduce competency-based education in higher education
- Create shorter degree programmes
- Offer higher education using varied types of delivery: face to face, blended, online
- Diversify programmes (Wisker & Masika, 2017)
- Build linkages between higher education institutions and businesses (Broek & Hake, 2012)

For future research:

- There should be a focus on identifying the factors influencing male enrollment in higher education in Barbados by targeting men who are either current students or alumni.
- There is a need to better understand the origins of the weak higher education aspirations at the secondary level.

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