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At-Risk in TRiO: Perceptions of African American Male First-Generation Students

Diana Ogbevire

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At-Risk in TRiO:

Perceptions of African American Male First-Generation Students

(TITLE)

BY

Diana Ogbevire

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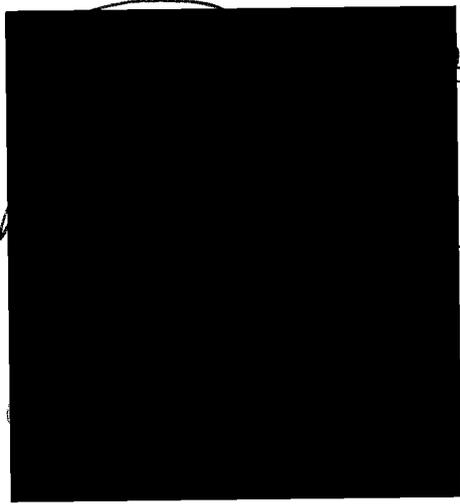FOR THE DEGREE OF

Masters of Science in College Student Affairs

IN THE GRADUATE SCHOOL, EASTERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY
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ABSTRACT

This study employed phenomenology to explore at-risk African American male first-generation students' experiences in the TRiO Student Support Services Program (TRiO) and the role they perceived it played in their college success. Participants were six upperclassmen who were interviewed about their overall college experience, the challenges that they faced, and the role that TRiO played in helping them overcome those obstacles. Data were interpreted within a cultural capital theoretical framework, as well as, Schlossberg's Transition Theory. Findings indicated that the risk factors influencing African American male first-generation student's college experience are challenges with academics, finances, culture, and social integration. Although these risk factors can contribute to negative experiences for African American males, the participants have indicated that the support and services provided by the TRiO program has led them to continue to persist towards college completion.

DEDICATION

I would first like to dedicate this to my mother. Although you are gone I know your spirit continues to guide and protect me. Thank you for all of your love and support. Many your soul continue to rest in perfect peace.

To my dad- Thank you for all your love and support. Although I felt that I could not do this. You pushed me and helped me believe that I could accomplish anything.

To my sisters and brother- You all have been my strength through all of the hard times. Thank you for pushing me to finish this and know that you all can accomplish anything you put your mind to.

To my TRiO family- I am a product of TRiO and I do not know where I would be with your guidance! Continue to fight for the funding of our program! TRiO Works!

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To my thesis chair, Dr. Polydore, thank you for your patience and motivation. You have been such a great help and guide during my two years at Eastern. I truly look up to as a mentor and I would have not been able to do this without you. Thank you so much!

I would like to thank Dr. Davenport and Dr. Reynolds for serving on my thesis committee. Thank you for seeing that my thesis could be a lot more than what I originally thought it should be. Thank you for challenging me!

I have had a great deal of support from many family and friends. I would like to give a special thank you to my cohort, my SLO and Minority Affairs family!

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES

Tables

CHAPTER I

Introduction

Although the recent economic crises have plagued higher education with declining enrollment the change in demography remains (U.S. Census, 2014). Among this population are first-generation students (Choy, 2001). First-generation students make up a high proportion of the student population at 2-year and 4-year institutions comprising about 53% and 34%, respectively (Choy, 2001; Pascarella, Pierson, Wolniak, & Terenzini, 2004). Though they usually face challenges typical of traditional students such as adjustment to college and general academic anxieties (Jenkins, et al., 2013), studies have shown that they also have challenges that differ from their traditional counterparts in areas related to knowledge of college, personal commitment, and the level of support from family (Thayer, 2000; Pascarella et al., 2004). Past studies have indicated that first-generation students present a high risk in their persistence to attain a college degree and this is linked to their lack of academic and social integration (Terenzini, Springer, Yaeger, Pascarella, & Nora, 1996).

Among the first-generation student population, African American males have been known historically to be less educated (Rowan & Hall, 2000; Cuyjet 2006; Warde, 2008). This demographic has faced many barriers that have contributed to their academic failures (Rowan & Hall 2000; Warde, 2008). This can be seen through the declining enrollment of African American males in college as well as in the college retention and graduation rates (Cuyjet 2006; Warde 2008). Similar to most first-generation students, African American males face issues with academic and social integration, but present many different experiences due to their racial identity (Rowan & Hall 2000).

With the risk factors that impact this demographic, research has shown that

support services for students may help improve persistence in high-risk disadvantaged

students (e.g. Farrow, Martinez, & Thomas, 1998). According to Farrow, Martinez, and

Thomas (1998), the availability of support services is important in retaining low-income

and first-generation students. In addition, academic advising and counseling in student

support services programs were shown to be beneficial and effective for college students

at risk of failing.

One federal program, which has achieved varying degrees of success in this

regard, is the TRIO program (U.S. Department of Education, 2010). The TRIO program

was coined in the late 1960s to describe the three federal programs (Upward Bound,

Talent Search and the Student Support Services) with the goal of fighting poverty,

creating outreach and providing support for disadvantaged students (U.S. Department of

Education, n.d.). Over the years, TRIO expanded to include eight programs "designed to

identify and provide services for individuals from disadvantaged backgrounds" (U.S.

Department of Education). Furthermore the programs aim at serving and assisting "low-

income individuals, first-generation college students, and individuals with disabilities to

progress through the academic pipeline from middle school to post baccalaureate

programs." Unfortunately, TRIO has been viewed as ineffective and has experienced

numerous cuts (Herrmann, 2010, Abdul-Alim, 2012). According to Nelson (2013), after

four decades TRIO programs have showed minimal return in the U.S. Department of

Education's $1 billion annual investment.

Though the argument made at the national level may be met with some support, it

is the effects at the local level that are meaningful. At Eastern Illinois University,

approximately, 175 individuals per year benefit from the TRIO Student Support Services (SSS) program. The TRIO SSS program was created to aid in the increase of retention and graduation rates among low-income and first-generation college students (Eastern Illinois University, 2013). The program also provides a supportive environment for these students to strive for academic success (Eastern Illinois University, 2013). A thesis study conducted by Flores (2008), focused on the perceptions of Latino students on the overall effectiveness of the TRIO SSS program at Eastern Illinois University. Flores (2008) discovered that students appreciated the TRIO program and the numerous resources the program had to offer. For some, it may have been their only means of access to higher education. Flores asked her participants about their uses of the TRiO SSS program and found that many of them utilize their TRiO advisors for guidance and also reassurance of their academic abilities. How do the experiences of African American males at risk in TRiO compare with what Flores found?

Purpose of Study

Despite the many benefits and positive impact of the TRIO SSS program on students' academic outcomes, some students still perform at a level, which places them at risk of departure from the institution. This can be due to not embracing the full benefits that the program has to offer. In order to gain some insights into the unique experiences of these at-risk students, a phenomenological approach was utilized. Among those at risk in the TRIO SSS program are African American males. These students are particularly vulnerable because they tend to be first-generation students and may be subjected to all the risks associated with being first-generation (Engle &Tinto, 2008; Chaney, Muraskin,

Cahalan, & Goodwin, 1998). In addition, African American males have traditionally been under-represented in institutions of higher learning (Russell & Atwater, 2008)

The purpose of this phenomenological qualitative study was to explore Eastern Illinois University's TRIO SSS program and its impact on the academic improvement and college adjustment of African American male first-generation students that are at-risk. Through one-on-one interviews, the study identified areas within the TRIO SSS program in which African American male participants attributed to their academic improvement and college adjustment. In all, this study looked at the experiences of African American male first-generation students enrolled at Eastern Illinois University who are academically at risk – defined as having a GPA of 2.5 or lower.

Research Question

The following questions guided the study:

1. What risk factors influence African-American male first-generation students' college experience?

2. How do African American male first-generation students perceive the role of the TRIO SSS program in their transition to college?

3. How do African American male first-generation students perceive the role of the TRIO SSS program in their academic improvement?

4. How do African American male first-generation students perceive the role of the TRIO SSS program in their persistence towards college completion?

Significance of Study

Research has shown that first-generation students, whom are economically and educationally disadvantaged, are less likely to complete a postsecondary education

(Engle &Tinto, 2008; Chaney, Muraskin, Cahalan, & Goodwin, 1998). The challenges that hinder their success were not only due to the lack of academic preparation, but also to the lack of social inclusion on-campus (Murphy & Hicks, 2006; Chaney, Muraskin, Cahalan, & Goodwin, 1998). African American males are among those first-generation college students that have struggled with academic and social integration at institutions (Russell & Atwater, 2008). Despite the fact the population of African American males has started to increase at Predominately White Institutions (PWIs), the problems with retention and college persistence continues to be a problem (Cuyjet 2006; Davis, 1994). In order for disadvantaged students, such as at-risk African American male first-generation students, to combat these challenges and be retained at institutions, special services that create a supportive environment are needed.

Special services like TRIO programs create such supportive environment for disadvantage students, but despite the Department of Education's $1 billion annual investment, the TRIO programs have showed minimal return after four decades (Nelson, 2013). Some have described the program as ineffective (Nelson, 2013) and it has experienced numerous cuts in funding (Herrmann, 2010, Abdul-Alim, 2012). Regardless of the critics intake on the effectiveness of TRIO programs nationally, it is important to view the impact of a TRIO program locally. In all, the intention of this study is to explore the attributes within the TRIO SSS program that impact the overall academic success and college persistence among female first-generation students.

Limitations of Study

Limitations of a study must be identified to lower the possibility of problems that could affect its results (Creswell, 2007). In this vein the following limitations were

identified: First, this study involved a small number of participants. Though this is not necessarily a limitation within the qualitative methodology framework, this limited the applicability or transferability of the findings. However, Crouch and Mackenzie (2006) argued that sample size does not impact qualitative research since participants are not drawn from a target population, but are seen as a group of participants that share the same experience.

Another limitation is the sampling method that was utilized. This study utilized convenience sampling. However, Maxwell (1996) described this as the least rigorous of the three sampling methods typically utilized in qualitative research. A judgment or purposeful sampling would be more desirable, but given the limited resources of the researcher, access to information from the population was difficult. One result of this is that the sample was not representative of the African American male first-generation student population.

Lastly, the study was limited by potential bias of the researcher. A qualitative researcher must "set aside their experiences to take a fresh perspective toward the phenomenon under examination" (Creswell, 2007, p. 59). The study was susceptible to researcher bias as the researcher was a first-generation female college student involved in the TRIO SSS program. In order to reduce this bias, the researcher worked closely with her committee and committee chair during data analysis. The first transcription was coded independently by the primary researcher and the thesis chair. There was then a discussion about the results of the coding. Any discrepancies were resolved through discussion. In addition, a copy of complete transcripts was sent to participants for review to ensure the accuracy of the participants' intent.

Definition of Terms

Academic achievement. When students achieve satisfactory or superior levels of academic performance as they progress through and complete their college experience (Cuseo, 2007). The operationalized definition for this study will focus on the student's ability to persist toward college completion. Academic achievement within this study will be based on a minimum Grade Point Average (GPA) of a 2.75. This minimum GPA is used because it allows students numerous opportunities such as the opportunity to enroll in a graduate school program.

Academic resources. Information and/or assistance provided to students to aid in their academic studies. This assistance comes from institutions and could include tutoring, online services, and guidance from the institution's faculty and staff (Grant-Vallone et. al, 2004).

Academic success. See academic achievement.

At-risk students. See High-risk students.

College persistence. Entering college students remain, re-enroll, and continue their undergraduate education (Cuseo, 2007).

Cultural capital. The familiarity with a dominant culture within a society. Bourdieu states that cultural capital surfaces around the use of educated language and impairs educational attainment within low-income students. Cultural capital impacts low SES students in their ability to succeed in postsecondary education (Sullivan, 2001).

Disadvantaged student. Students who do not have the same opportunities as other students when entering college and may require assistance to help prepare them for college (Groutt, 2003).

First-generation student. A student whose parents or single parent does not hold a bachelor's degree (Sanchez & Nichols, 2007, Jehangir, 2009).

High-risk students. First-generation, low-income, and ethnic minority students with a GPA of 2.5 and lower.

Student attrition. A departure or delay in completing a program requirements or completion of a college degree (Ishitani, 2006).

Student Support Services. This program provides college students that are first-generation or low-income assistance in academic development and aids in the adjustment of college. The primary goal of this TRIO program is to increase retention and graduation rates of disadvantaged students at colleges and universities as well as encourage these students to continue their higher education.

TRIO. In the 1960s, the TRIO program was created to "provide supplementary academic support to low-income, historically underrepresented students," (Bergerson, 2009, p. 89). TRIO consists of three programs, which are Upward Bound, Talent Search, and Student Support Services. Mandated by Congress, all programs are required to have two-thirds of its students come from low-income families or be first-generation students (Coles, 1998). More than 1,200 colleges and universities provide TRIO services (Coles, 1998).

CHAPTER II

Review of Literature

This chapter presents a review of the literature pertaining to first-generation students and the TRIO program. The review will first address who first-generation students are. It will then go into the characteristics as well as the challenges of first-generation students compared to their advantaged peers. The review will also address African American males and their experiences within higher education. Since the focus of this research will be the impact of support services on African American male first-generation students, the overall importance of support services based on empirical findings will also be a discussed. This will then lead into the history of TRIO programs with a primary focus on the TRIO Student Support Services (SSS) program, which provides assistance to first-generation students during their college years. Lastly, this literature review will examine the theoretical and conceptual framework that would guide the study.

First Generation College Students

First-generation college student, a term coined by Fuji Adachi in 1979, is defined as a student entering postsecondary education with neither parent completing a college education (Billson & Terry, 1982). During the 1990s, four-year U.S. institutions experienced changes in the demographics of their student population (Choy, 2000). These demographic changes, in part, resulted from high enrollment of first-generation students (Hsaio, 1992; Pascarella et al., 2004; Engle & Tinto, 2008). First-generation students tend to have different enrollment characteristics from their advantaged peers (Choy, 2000). They are more likely to be older, and married (Nunez & Cuccaro-Alamin, 1998), and

those enrolled in four-year institutions are more likely to come from minority

backgrounds, be female, and come from low-income families (Engle & Tinto, 2008). By

virtue of their status as first-generation, these students face a number of challenges when

compared to their non-first-generation counterparts. These differences persisted even

when factors such as socioeconomic status and type of institution (Nunez & Cuccaro-

Alamin, 1998).

Challenges Faced by First Generation College Students

     Cultural adaptation. Although first-generation students have differences in

enrollment characteristics from their non-first-generation counterparts, studies have

shown that they go through the same anxieties and difficulties as traditional college

students, but their experience is compounded by cultural adjustment at institutions

(Cushman, 2007; Jenkins, et. al, 2013; Terenzini, et al., 1996). Cultural adaptation is a

challenge many first-generation students face during their college transition. The

straddling of two cultures, friends and family at home along with the college community

creates a barrier during their transition to college (Cushman, 2007; Richardson &

Skinner, 1992; Hsaio, 1992; Engle & Tinto, 2008). First-generation students experience

stress trying to maintain relationships with their family and friends who are not college-

educated, while facing the alienation felt within their campus environment (Hsaio, 1992;

Richardson & Skinner, 1992; Engle & Tinto, 2008). When facing the campus

environment, Cushman (2007) found that first-generation students often feel that they do

not belong within the collegiate atmosphere of their advantaged peers. They feel the

differences among their peers in income, social styles and speech patterns, which then

creates a barrier for interaction with others (Cushman). The cultural challenges faced by

first-generation students are among the reasons they do not return to institutions and adversely impact their persistence towards college success (Cushman).

Academic integration. In addition to the challenges brought about by cultural adaptation, first-generation students may also struggle with academic integration (Engle & Tinto, 2008). Academic integration can impact first-generation students' persistence and overall college experience (Engle & Tinto, 2008). First-generation students have been known to have lower academic ambitions (Jenkins, Belanger, Connally, Boals, Duron, 2013). This can be due to their lack of academic preparation and not receiving a rigorous curriculum during high school compared to their peers. This has led to a weakness in cognitive skills in the areas of reading, math, and critical thinking (Engle, 2007; Terenzini et al., 1996). Furthermore, first-generation students lack skills in studying and time-management and express complications with trying to navigate through organizational aspects of academic life (Engle, 2007). Along with the weaknesses in the necessary skills for college success, first-generation students also tend to have less interaction with faculty and students in and out of the classroom and tend to not utilize the support services offered at their institutions (Engle, 2007).

Social integration. Studies have found that first-generation students have differences from traditional students in their knowledge of college and their personal commitment (Terenzini, et al., 1996). They are less likely to socialize with faculty and students outside of the classroom and to develop close relationships with other students (Engle, 2007). Along with lack of interaction with faculty and peers, first-generation students are less likely to participate in extra-curricular activities and campus life, in

general. Their non-involvement in extra-curricular activities and campus life are due to their need to have control of their academic life (Engle, 2007).

African American Males and Higher Education

African American males have been known to have a history of underachievement within postsecondary education (Cuyjet, 2006; Jenkins 2006). Furthermore, the number of African American males incarcerated exceeds the amount enrolled in college (Cuyjet, 2006; Jenkins, 2006; Warde 2008). The small percentages of African American males that are enrolled in college are not receiving the support needed to aid in the completion of a college degree (Cuyjet, 2006; Jenkins, 2006; Warde 2008). Although there are relatively few African American males that do experience college success, they are still amongst the lowest student population compared to other racial/ethnic student populations in regards to college completion and retention (Warde, 2008). Many researchers believe that there are many factors that impact the college retention and declining enrollment of African American males. These factors include their under preparedness academically, experiences with oppression, and lack of support (Rowan & Hall, 2000; Cuyjet 2006; Warde, 2008).

According to Jenkins (2006), an African American male student usually starts their education as being disadvantaged as many of them come from underperforming high schools. Due to their lack of academic preparation, they are more likely to have lower grades and depart from the institution (Warde, 2008). The college experiences they have play a role in their ability to continue to persist toward college completion, but some institutions have failed to provide an encouraging learning environment (Jenkins, 2006). Many researchers have found that overall support is a primary factor in African

American males' academic success such as family and institutional support and mentorship (Freeman, 1997; Rowan & Hall, 2000; Strayhorn, 2008; Warde, 2008).

Importance of Institutional Support Services

To cater to the challenges faced by African American male first-generation students, many universities have made student services, also known as support services, a standard feature within higher education (Purnell & Blank, 2004). Universities have initiated student services with the intent to increase retention rates and create a positive campus environment for first-generation students and students from underrepresented groups. These student services include academic guidance and counseling, academic support, personal guidance and counseling, career counseling, and supplemental services (Grant et al., 2004; Purnell & Blank, 2004). Students that utilize these student services are able to become well adjusted to the campus environment and continue to persist towards completion (Grant et. al, 2004).

When support is provided to students, they become integrated into campus life (Grant et al., 2004; Hsaio, 1992). Students that are provided support become well adjusted academically and socially. Universities have created and/or implemented programs that would aid in the increase of retention by meeting the needs of high-risk students (Grant et al., 2004). Particularly with first-generation students, they need academic support programs and services in order to succeed in college and programs like TRIO provide such academic support (Hsaio, 1992).

History of TRIO Programs

When President Lyndon B. Johnson signed the Economic Opportunity Act in August 1964, it opened educational opportunities for students from disadvantaged backgrounds (Graham, 2011; Groutt, 2003; McElroy & Armesto, 1998). This legislation led to the establishment of TRIO programs in 1965 with the primary goal of ensuring equal opportunity in education for Americans (Balz & Esten, 1998; Graham, 2011; Groutt, 2003; McElroy & Armesto, 1998).

The first program created under TRIO was the Upward Bound program; this was due to the creation of the Higher Education Act of 1965 (Groutt, 2003; McElroy & Armesto, 1998). The Upward Bound program caters to high school students, who experience low academic success. The program targets students from low-income families whose parents did not earn a bachelor's degree. The primary goal of the Upward Bound program is to increase the rate of disadvantage students that enroll and graduate from college. Through the services provided such as support with the college admission process and preparation for college entrance exams, the program is able to accomplish its primary goal (Groutt 2003; McElroy & Armesto, 1998). Following after Upward Bound, the Talent Search program was established. This program aims to seek out disadvantaged individuals who are overlooked in the college preparation process. It provides counseling in the areas of academics, career exploration, and finances. This program primarily caters to high school dropouts (Groutt, 2003; McElroy & Armesto, 1998). After the reauthorization of the Higher Education Act in 1968, the TRIO Student Support Services (SSS) program was established. The TRIO SSS Program provides first-generation and low-income students assistance in meeting college requirements. The program aims to

increase college retention and graduation rates among first-generation and low-income

students (Groutt, 2003; McElroy & Armesto, 1998).

For many years, TRIO programs have been known to have a huge impact on

numerous institutions because of its abilities to improve educational outcomes for first-

generation and low-income students (Blake, 1998). The programs have emphasis on

persistence in college and aims to help students achieve their educational goals

(Bergerson, 2009).

TRIO SSS Program. The TRIO SSS program was created to help disadvantaged

college students persist towards the completion of college (Farrow, Thomas, & Martinez,

1998) and had the following primary goals: 1) to increase the college retention and

graduation rates of program-eligible students; 2) To increase the transfer rates of eligible

students from two to four-year institutions; and 3) To foster an institutional climate

supportive of success for low-income, first-generation college students and students with

disabilities (p. 389-390). Overall, the TRIO SSS program provides many services to its

students. According to Farrow et al. (1998) the services provided are "academic

advising, career exploration, counseling/remedial developmental courses, pre-freshman

and other summer components, study skills courses, supplemental instruction, and

tutoring"(p. 390).

Studies have shown that these programs are not only serving low-income and

first generation students but the TRIO programs are also meeting their programmatic

goals for these students (Dale, 1996; Mahoney, 1998; Farrow et.al, 1998). Mahoney

(1998) noted that there are many factors in federal government studies that can contribute

to overall effectiveness of TRIO programs, but many do not look at the success of these

programs at a local level and how different factors can come into play to explain the success of these programs. Many studies have shown the overall effectiveness of the TRIO SSS program in regards to college retention of disadvantaged students attending a particular institution (Dale, 1996; Mahoney, 1998; Farrow et. al, 1998). It can be seen throughout these studies that they all have a common trend on the impact that the SSS program has on their students' college persistence.

Amongst these trends are graduation rates of participants in the TRIO SSS program. Researchers have found pertaining to specific institutions that disadvantaged students involved in the TRIO SSS program were more likely to persist towards graduation than those that were not participants (Chaney et. al, 1998; Dale, 1996; Farrow et. al, 1998; Mahoney, 1998). Along with an increase in graduation rates among participants, retention rates were also known to have an increase among participants in the TRIO SSS program (Chaney et. al 1998; Dale, 1996; Farrow et. al, 1998; Mahoney, 1998). Lastly, it was seen within past studies that those involved in the TRIO SSS program were more likely to have an increase in their GPA as college years progressed (Chaney et. al, 1998; Dale, 1996; Farrow et. al, 1998; Mahoney, 1998). Overall, the qualities that make these programs effective can be seen through responsiveness, synergism, supportiveness, and successfulness that are placed within the structure of the TRIO SSS programs locally (Mahoney, 1998).

Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

Although many theoretical perspectives have been associated with academic achievement/underachievement, persistence and challenges, four have been identified to guide the current study. These theories provide insight into the reasoning behind

academic achievement and college persistence and the overall importance institutional support has on impacting first-generation students in these areas.

Cultural capital. Cultural capital was first introduced in Pierre Bourdieu's work "The Forms of Capital" (Bourdieu, 1986; Bills, 2003). Bourdieu aimed to provide an explanation behind the reasoning of unequal achievement among students from different social classes (Bourdieu, 1986). Cultural capital is a term used to represent the non-economic factors that influence academic success (Bourdieu, 1986). Other researchers have defined cultural capital as forms of knowledge, practical skills, and advantages that provide a higher status in society (Bills, 2003; Jaeger, 2011). Cultural capital can exist in three forms: the embodied, objectified, and institutionalized state.

The embodied state primarily focuses on the individual's personal attributes and how their overall knowledge and abilities influence their academic success. During this state, the individual can improve their knowledge and abilities through learning and it will then become their character or way of thinking, also known as habitus (Bourdieu, 1986). When cultural capital is in an objectified state, it primarily represents cultural goods and material objects (Bourdieu, 1986). Lastly, cultural capital in an institutionalized state involves recognition through academic qualifications. Academic qualifications provide "a certificate of cultural competence which confers on its holder a conventional, constant, legally guaranteed value with respect to culture." (Bourdieu, 1986, p.50).

Cultural capital provides an explanation behind first-generation students' obstacles during college. With differences in parental styles between advantaged and disadvantaged students, it can be seen that advantaged students are more likely to have

parents involved in their overall education and live in an environment that caters to their cognitive growth (Lareau &Weininger, 2003). Mekolichick and Gibbs (2012) stated "by deliberately engaging them in culturally enriching activities and encouraging academic achievements, more privileged parents are cultivating cultural capital."(p. 40). Disadvantaged students are more likely to have parents that stress work-related skills that overshadow the importance of postsecondary education (Lareau & Weininger, 2003). Overall, due to the cultural skills acquired by their parents, advantaged students are more likely to go to college and graduate than first-generation students (Mekolichick & Gibbs, 2012).

Astin's Theory of Involvement. Alexander Astin first introduced his theory of student involvement in 1984. Astin created this theory aiming to provide insight on the environmental influences that impact student development (Astin, 1984). Astin defined student involvement as " the amount of physical and psychological energy that the student devotes to the academic experience" (Astin, 1984, p. 518). The theory of involvement has five basic assumptions. The first assumption is that objects within the involvement can be generalized or specific (Astin, 1984). The second assumption is that students will have different levels of involvement. Astin stated that "the same student manifests different degrees of involvement in different object at different times" (p. 519). The third assumption is that involvement can have areas that are both quantitative and qualitative (Astin, 1984). The fourth assumption is that the quality and quantity of student involvement correlates with educational programs that emphasize student learning and personal development (Astin, 1984). The last assumption is that the overall effectiveness

of educational programs or practices can have a relationship with student involvement (Astin, 1984).

Although Astin's theory does not shed light on first-generation students, it does provide an explanation of the overall impact of support as well as the importance social integration plays on student development. Astin also stated that " a highly involved student is one who, for example, devotes considerable energy to studying, spends much time on campus, participates actively in student organizations, and interacts frequently with faculty members and other students" (p. 518).

Schlossberg's Transition Theory. First-generation students face numerous challenges as they embark on their first college experience. Nancy Schlossberg's transition theory provides an explanation and understanding of students as they go through a transitional period while in college. Schlossberg believed that there is a need to understand adults in transition and provide insight on the factors that impact a transition. The term transition is described as "any event, or non-event, that results in changed relationships, routines, assumptions, and roles" (Goodman, Schlossberg, Anderson, 2006, p. 33). Schlossberg's theory of transitions examines what establishes a transition, the types of transitions, the transition process, and the influences of transitions (Evans et. al, 2010).

In order for one to understand the meaning of a transition, one must consider the type, context, and impact of the transition (Goodman et. al, 2006). There are three types of transitions that can take place. These transition types are anticipated transitions, unanticipated transitions and nonevents. Context involves the relationship that one has

with the transition and where the transition is taking place (Evans et. al, 2010). Impact

refers to how much the transition influences the life of the individual (Evans et. al, 2010).

Schlossberg et al. (2006) explained that the transition process consists of four

major set of factors which influences an individual's ability to handle the transition.

These four major factors are also known as the 4 S's, which are situation, self, support,

and strategies. The 4 S's provides an explanation behind why reactions are different

given the similar transition.

Situation. The situation factor focuses on examining the transition. According to

Evans et al. (2010), there are many areas within situation that must be considered when

examining the transition. These areas within the situation factor are the trigger of the

transition, the timing of the transition, the controlling of the transition, whether there is a

role change within this transition, the duration of the transition, and if the person has been

through a similar transition in the past.

Self. The self factor involves personal and demographic characteristics. This

provides overall insight behind the actions towards a student's transition. The personal

and demographic characteristics include ethnicity, gender, socioeconomic status, age, etc.

This factor also includes a students' ability to cope with transitions (Goodman et al.,

2006).

Support. The support factor refers to the help student receive throughout their

period of transition. According to Goodman et al., there are four types of support that

student may refer to. They are family support, institutional support, community support,

friends and intimate relationships. Functions of support include affirmation, aid, and

constructive criticism (Goodman et al., 2006). Overall, support is a need for students as they go through tough transitional periods during college.

Strategies. The strategies factor was based on Pearlin and Schooler's descriptions of coping responses (Goodman et al., 2006). The coping responses are in three sub-categories: modifying the situation, controlling the problem, and assisting those in need of help. Goodman et al. described four coping modes within this factor. The coping modes are "information seeking, direct action, inhibition of action, and intrapsychic behavior" (Evans et. al, 2010, p. 217). When first generation students are struggling during their transition to college, coping methods would be useful to help aid in the obstacles they may be facing.

Tinto's Theory of Student Departure

Vincent Tinto first introduced his model of student departure in 1987 through his published book "Leaving College: Rethinking the Causes and Cures of Student Attrition". Tinto's Theory of Student Departure is a well-known model used in many research focusing on retention in higher education. The model was intended to show the longitudinal process of student departure and how the events within institutions can lead to student departure.

Tinto believed when students enter higher education, they come with pre-entry characteristics and initial intentions (Tinto, 1987, 1993). Theses pre-entry characteristics include their family and community backgrounds, which bring along many personal attributes, skills, and differences in the types of precollege educational experiences and achievements. Although the pre-entry characteristics and initial intentions can indirectly affect student departure, it is how well a student integrates into the institution that can

determine their overall success (Tinto, 1987, 1993). Tinto's (1993) model argues that interactive experiences within the institution correlate to students' continuance at the institution. Tinto believed that interactive experiences can further a student's social and intellectual integration into college life, which can aid in persistence of college completion (Tinto, 1987, 1993). Positive interactive experiences or positive integration can help in strengthening student's goals and strengthen the belief that the institution can help attain those goals. Negative interactive experiences, where students' may feel separated from the social and intellectual college community, can lead to student departure (Tinto, 1987, 1993).

Summary of Literature Review

As shown through the literature review, first-generation students face many challenges, but also being an African American male creates many unique college experiences. These challenges tend to impact their persistence and success in college. In order for African American male first-generation students to persist through college, studies have shown that academic and social integration are important factors. To help them to be fully integrated into college life, it has been shown that institutional support services are helpful. These institutional support services include programs like the TRIO Student Support Services (SSS) program. Through reviewing the research, it can be found that the TRIO SSS program offers many resources with the primary goal to not only retain students, but to also make sure first-generation students persist towards college completion. Though we are aware of the resources provided by the TRIO SSS program, it is unclear of the factors within the TRIO SSS program that at-risk African

American male first-generation students believe cater to their overall academic

improvement, college adjustment and motivation towards attainment of a college degree.

CHAPTER III

Methods

This chapter presents, in detail, the processes involving the qualitative approach employed to answer the research questions: What risk factors influence African-American male first-generation students' college experience? How do African American male first-generation students perceive the role of the TRIO SSS program in their transition to college? How do African American male first-generation students perceive the role of the TRIO SSS program in their academic improvement? How do African American male first-generation students perceive the role of the TRIO SSS program in their persistence towards college completion?

Design of Study

This study utilized a phenomenological approach to qualitative inquiry. According to Creswell (2007), through a phenomenological study, one can understand the lived experiences of several individuals with one common phenomenon (Creswell, 2007), which in this case would be being at risk in the TRIO Student Support Services (SSS) Program. This approached allowed me to tap into how each participant, African American males at risk in the TRIO SSS program at the institution of interest, perceived their experiences in search for the "essential, invariant structure (or essence)" (Creswell, 2007, p. 52).

Participants

Given the limited resources available, convenience sampling was used to select six participants for this study, though judgment or purposeful sampling would be more desirable (Marshall, 1996). In order to be selected, participants had to meet the following

inclusion criteria: 1). be between the ages of 18 and 22; 2) must identify as an African

American male; 3) must be a junior or senior at the time of data collection; and 3) they

must be a first-generation student, as per the definition adopted for this study; 4) must

have a 2.5 GPA or lower and 5) must be a participant in the institution's TRIO SSS

program at the time of data collection. Participants were recruited with the help of the

Director of the TRIO SSS program, who provided a list of names of African American

male students involved in the program that were eligible to participate in the study, by

virtue of meeting the inclusion criteria. This resulted in 15 potential participants. Finally,

a "request to participate" email was sent to all students on the final list (Appendix C).

Four participants responded to the email and interviews were scheduled based on their

and the researcher's availability. The researcher made another attempt through sending

out the email a second time, which resulted in two more participants.

All participants were first-generation students. Eighty-three percent (83%) were

classified as juniors and seventeen percent (17%) were classified as seniors in the TRiO

Student Support Services Program. Of those that were involved in the TRiO Student

Support Services Program, fifty percent (50%) had prior involvement with TRiO through

the Upward Bound Program. Thirty-four percent (34%) had prior involvement in a non-

affiliated TRiO college preparation program and sixteen percent (16%) had no prior

involvement with a college preparation program.

Table 3.1

Participants' Pseudonyms and Demographic Data

Pseudonym	Age	Classification	Undergraduate Major
Curtis	21	Junior	Family and Consumer Sciences/Africana Studies
Jay	22	Senior	Public Relations
Marcus	21	Junior	Mass Communication
Tyler	21	Junior	Business Finance
Jake	21	Junior	Mass Communication
John	21	Junior	Mass Communication

Research Site/Location

Data was collected from a four-year mid-size Predominantly White public institution situated in the rural Midwest. According to the University Planning and Institutional Report, the total enrollment of students as of fall 2014 was 8,913. The institution has twice as many women as men and, first-generation students make up approximately 46% of the student body. The study focused on the institution's TRIO SSS program, which was established in 1997 and is under the Office of Minority Affairs. The institution's program only allows 175 participants with the goal to increase retention and graduation rates of student participants and to overall provide institutional support to those participants.

Instruments

Semi-structure interviews. Each participant took part in a one on one interview with the researcher. The researcher and the thesis chair created the interview protocol. The interview protocol was divided into the following sections: demographics, TRiO Involvement, Cultural adaptation, academic integration, and social integration (Appendix A). The questions were created to discover the risk factors that impact at-risk African American male first-generation students and the overall impact TRiO has had in helping the participants overcome these risk factors. Within the demographic section, the questions consisted of close-ended questions, which included the selection of their pseudonym. The demographic section also consisted of an open-ended question asking participants to talk more about themselves in regards to their cultural background and experiences as a first-generation student. The other questions focused on their risk factors and their role the TRiO program has played throughout their college experience.

The researcher as instrument. Unlike the quantitative paradigm, as a qualitative researcher I recognize that I am "a central figure who influences, if not actively constructs, the collection, selection and interpretation of data" (Finlay, 2002, p. 212). According to Glesne (1999), the researcher's role can be determined situationally since the researcher's personality, values, experiences and predispositions can carry on to their qualitative research. This is relevant to the current research study as I have biases that could influence my analysis of the data. I am a first-generation student and a product of the TRIO Program; I was involved in the Upward Bound program during high school and was highly involved in the TRIO Student Support Services program throughout my undergraduate college experience. In addition I attribute my academic success and ability

to persist toward college completion to the TRIO Programs. My interest in this study was

spurred by the national attention and opinions, which alluded to the TRIO program's

ineffectiveness. I was able to investigate this issue through looking at a first-generation

student population that is highly at risk, African American males. I was able to discover

their experiences and how impacted they were by the TRiO program. I recognized the

importance of trustworthiness in qualitative research and through the guidance of my

thesis chair was able to implement strategies by other such as Krefting (1991) to

minimize biases.

Data Collection

All interviews were held at in an office on the 3rd floor of the MLK Union at the

time convenient for the participant. The researcher provided a welcoming setting, through

providing snacks and water, for each participant to ensure honest responses throughout

the interview. Each interview was conducted using the semi-structured interview protocol

(Appendix A) and lasted 30 to 45 minutes. The semi-structured interview allows

participants the freedom to express their own views and experiences, and have been

known to provide reliable qualitative data (Glesne, 1999). The researcher greeted them

and checked on comfort before proceeding with the informed consent form (Appendix

B). Once read the informed consent form, the researcher asked the participant if they had

any question before proceeding with signatures. The researcher provided explanation that

the incentive would be given to the participant after their approval of transcript. Once

informed consent form was signed the researcher continued with the interview protocol.

Each interview was audio recorded with participant's permission.

Data Analysis

Each interview was transcribed within three days of completion. To reduce bias and to aid in better analysis, the researcher's thesis chair reviewed the transcriptions. Each participant received his transcription for review. Once all transcriptions were reviewed, the researcher underwent the coding process. The researcher's first coding consisted of an open-ended process called initial coding (Saldana, 2009). The researcher coded based off of first impression when looking at each participant's transcription. After the first initial coding, the researcher started the process coding (Saldana, 2009), which involved coding for patterns that would later develop into the themes presented within the findings. Based on the responses of the participants, the researcher developed subcodes for each research question. With this organization, the researcher was able to find connections and themes among the participants' responses relevant to the being at-risk in the TRiO SSS program.

Treatment of Data

The data was handled based on confidentiality protocol listed by the IRB. The audiotape was only accessible to the researcher and the thesis advisor. Each of the interviews was transcribed on the researcher's computer, which is password protected. The names of the participants were removed and replaced with pseudonyms in order to protect the participants' identities. No other identifying information was collected.

CHAPTER IV

Findings

This chapter will provide the findings from six one-on-one interviews conducted to answer the following research questions: What risk factors influence African-American male first-generation students college experience? How do African American male first-generation students perceive the role of the TRIO SSS program in their transition to college? How do African American male first-generation students perceive the role of the TRIO SSS program in their academic improvement? How do African American male first-generation students perceive the role of the TRIO SSS program in their persistence towards college completion?

The participants within this study were asked questions regarding the risk factors that influenced their college experience and the role they perceived the TRiO Student Support Service Program played throughout their college experience. The next section provides a detailed description of each participant at the time of data collection.

Participant Profile

Curtis. Curtis was a 21-year old African American male majoring in Family and Consumer Sciences and Africana Studies. He was classified as a junior from a city in Illinois. Curtis was involved in the National Association for Advancement of Colored People and Black Student Union while at the institution. He was also apart of the TRiO Upward Bound Program while in high school. The program gave him the boost to consider college. Curtis wants to graduate from college and help his family and community.

Jay. Jay was a 22- year old African American male majoring in Public Relations..
Jay was a junior at the time of data collection, and came from a city in Illinois. He is
involved in the National Pan-Hellenic Council, STRONG MENtoring Organization,
National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, Panther Pals, and a Teen
Reach volunteer. Jay's high school influenced his consideration to attend college as well
as his cousins. Jay wants to continue to motivate and encourage other African American
males to complete their college degree.

Marcus. Marcus was a 21-year old African American male from a city in Illinois.
He majored in Mass Communication. At the time of data collection, Marcus was
classified as a junior. He was involved in the National Pan-Hellenic Council, Alpha Phi
Alpha Fraternity, Inc., Black Student Union, and National Association for the
Advancement of Colored People. Prior to college, Marcus was involved in the TRiO
Upward Bound Program in high school. The program exposed Marcus and his mother to
the financial capabilities that would allow him to attend college. Through the program's
initiatives, Marcus was able to see the opportunities college provides outside of being in
his neighborhood.

Tyler. Tyler was a 21 year old African American male majoring in Finance. He
was classified as a junior, and came from a small town in Illinois. He was involved in the
Performing Arts for Effective Civic Education (PAECE), Black Student Union, the
Untold Truth, STRONG MENtoring, National Association for the Advancement of
Colored People, University Board Mainstage Committee, and Student Accounting
Society. Prior to college, Tyler was involved in the Senator Claybourne Mentoring
Group. The program allowed him to interact with the Illinois Senator and inspired him to

attend college through their summer college tours. Along with the program, Tyler had a personal connection with a TRiO staff member, which encouraged him to attend the institution.

Jake. Jake was a 21-year old African male, Mass Communication major. Jake was classified as a junior, and was from a suburb in Illinois. This participant was involved in the TRiO Upward Bound Program in high school. He was also involved in track, which he ended up having a lot of success in. He was an All-American in high school and came to the institution when competing for the State title. His involvement in track and the Upward Bound program led to his decision to attend college.

John. John is a 21-year old African American male from a city in Illinois. He majored in Mass Communication and was classified as a junior. John was involved in STRONG MENtoring. Prior to college, John was involved in the Advent College Preparation Program. Through this involvement he was able to gain understanding of college that led to his decision to attend the institution.

After examining the data, eleven themes emerged related to their risk factors and TRiO involvement. These are organized under the research question to which it related. **Research Question #1: What risk factors influence African-American male first-generation students college experience?**

Students were asked to describe the obstacles that formed part of their college experiences and to provide specific examples. They were also asked to go into further detail about their specific academic challenges. Four major themes emerged from their overall experiences (Table 4.1).

Table 4.1

Summary of Themes Regarding Participants' Factors Impacting College Experience

Challenge/Risk Factors	# of Occurrences
Academic Challenge Attributable to Deficient Writing and Math Skills (Academic Challenge)	6
Lack of Stable Financial Resources (Financial Challenge)	4
Cultural Challenges Due to Race and Geography (Cultural Challenge)	6
Problems in Balancing College Academics and Social Involvement (Time-Management Challenge)	4

Academic Challenge Attributable to Deficient Writing and Math Skills. This

theme describes the participants attributing their academic challenges to their deficits in

math and writing skills. The theme is also relevant to skills that are needed for students to

excel academically but due to being underprepared by their high school they are unable

to. Participants stated that they felt underprepared and viewed many of the college

coursework to be challenging. The participants' academic challenges impacted their

ability to succeed. Writing was the most common academic challenge among the

participants. John stated his experiences with writing at the college level,

> My freshman year, I took an English class and it showed that I wasn't prepared for
>
> college writing. A lot of it was simple stuff like usage of commas and I wasn't
>
> taught the proper techniques that the [professors] felt that I should know. I know
>
> that they are not going to back track. So I feel like in my writing, I wasn't
>
> prepared by my high school.

Some of the participants struggled with math while in college and viewed that as a reason for not excelling academically during their first two years of college. Jay stated how his struggle with math impacted his ability to continue on in his former major,

> I hate math so much and that's pretty much the thing that held me back with my first major. I'm not good with numbers and the teachers didn't really adapt to my learning style or I couldn't adapt to their teaching style. Either way I couldn't do it. I tried to go to math tutors and it was the same thing I have to have a certain learning style. I need repetition and that's something that I wasn't getting. I was told to go to math tutors and stuff, but that's like extra time. I guess I didn't put forth as much effort as I could have and that's pretty much the academic setback.

Lack of Stable Financial Resources. The financial challenge theme describes the participants' perception on their financial stability and whether that hindered their ability to focus on academics or impacted their college experience. Some of the participants had to give up opportunities due to having to pay for college expenses. Jake stated, "Since I've been at [the institution], I had to stop playing sports because I needed money and my mom wasn't able to give me money anymore so I got a job." For others the financial challenge came before being enrolled in college since their financial aid status would determine their ability to attend college. Tyler shared how his financial aid status impacted his college experience,

> When I came up here to college, I was an independent student, which means that my mother doesn't help me financially or anything because I got into trouble back before I came here. But I didn't have a job so I would run out of ink and paper or money to buy things.

Cultural Challenges Due to Race and Geography. The cultural challenge theme describes the participants' perception on their role as African American males at a Predominantly White Institution (PWI) located in a rural town. The participants compared their home environment to the college environment and the overall differences that were significant to their college experience. Many of the participants explained their challenge of adapting to a small college town especially since many of them are from cities. Marcus stated the differences he noticed once he was fully enrolled at the institution,

> My transition was kind of rough because I'm from Chicago and it's a big city. I'm from an area where not many people go to college and actually coming to college and seeing other races than African American all the time was at first a little uneasy because you will receive the side eye just because you're an African American in a small town and then you are in college as well.

Many of the participants addressed their views of being African American males at the institution and how racism played a role in their college experience. Curtis stated his obstacles with diversity on-campus; "I've had obstacles as far as diversity because I'm still having trouble being a black male on-campus. I am being viewed as a problem before I'm being treated as a human being." Jay also explained his obstacles with racism on-campus,

> I'm from the inner city and you don't get called the "N" word on a random and that's pretty much how it goes because there are black people around [in Chicago]. So when I got out here it was like high racial tension. I stayed in Carman my freshman year and I was walking to Andrews and a random dude rolled down his window and

called me the "N" word. And I was just like is this what's going to happen from me being down here and it got to a point where I was scared to walk around somewhat.

Problems With Balancing College Academic and Social Involvement. The social challenge theme describes the participants' perception on their involvement on campus and how their ability to be socially integrated at the institution impacted their college experience. Many participants were excited for the social aspects of college as well as being able to have freedom. Although the participants enjoyed having freedom, they encountered problems with time-management, which impacted their ability to perform well academically. Jake stated how his social challenge impacted his academics,

> Instead of wanting to go study, I would hang out with a girl or something like that. I would go out on the weekends and turn up. It was just having the time to do what I wanted so when I thought of studying, I didn't want to do that. I wanted to go hang out with friends or go hang out with a girl.

For other participants, college provided many opportunities for campus involvement and to join student organizations. Similar to the social aspects, participants encountered problems with time-management due to being overly involved on-campus. Tyler stated how his campus involvement impacted his college experience, "Getting involved that was a big obstacle for me. I wanted to get involved but I didn't know what I wanted to do to be involved and then I got overly involved, so that kind of hurt my GPA a little."

Research Question #2: How do African American male first-generation students perceive the role of the TRIO SSS program in their transition to college?

Students were asked to provide examples of how the TRIO Student Support Services program influenced their transition to college. The two themes that emerged from the research question were the "Keep it 100" Phenomenon and "The Barbershop" Phenomenon.

Table 4.2

Summary of Themes Regarding Participants' Perception on TRiO's Influence on Cultural Adaptation

Cultural Adaptation Factors	# of Occurrences
"Keep it 100" Phenomenon	5
"The Barbershop" Phenomenon	4

"Keep it 100" Phenomenon. This theme describes the impact the TRiO advisors have on the participants, especially with their ability to counsel a student on academic and personal issues. Many participants enjoy taking the time to speak with their TRiO advisor and view them as their support system away from home. Tyler stated "The fact that I get to see my [TRiO advisor] and speak to her about anything and she tells me what I need to hear is something I cherish. {My TRiO advisor} invites me to her house and she's been a positive person in my life." Many participants appreciate the TRiO staff's authentic and honest opinions as it pushes them to succeed. John stated the impact his TRiO advisor had on his college experience,

They provide tough love. I mess up a lot and my advisor lets it be known and has

no filter and I like that. My advisor likes to keep it real with me and lets me know

what's really going on and tells me to get serious and get my head in the game.

For example, he was going to stop being my advisor. He said that if I don't come

here on time and prepared then he was going to send me to a different advisor. I

made sure I was prepared the next week.

"The Barbershop" Phenomenon

This theme is the participants' description of gaining comfort from having an

African American male mentor or surrounding themselves with other young African

American males with whom they can freely communicate without judgment. The

participants feel comfortable with being able around those that they identify with.

Through the Office of Minority Affairs and TRiO, the STRONG MENtoring program

allows the participants to have conversations about life as an African American male at

the institution. Jay stated his experience with STRONG MENtoring and the role it played

throughout his college experience,

> If it wasn't for TRiO and Minority Affairs there wouldn't be a STRONG
>
> MENtoring program and it's one of the biggest influences that I have on-campus.
>
> Being around a group of young black males such as myself and just being able to
>
> get mentored and mentor them over years has been the most positive thing.

Many participants value the African American male example within TRiO because they

feel like they have a father figure in their lives that wants to see them succeed. Jake stated

his experience with his TRiO advisor and their relationship,

[My TRiO advisor] has a big influence on where I'm at right now. Our

relationship has evolved he went from my advisor to my mentor/father figure

because he would always give me advice whether its school or personal stuff. He

gives me tips on school and I kind of idolize him because he is involved and has

his hands in so many things, but he always gets the job done.

Research Question #3: How do African American male first-generation students

perceive the role of the TRIO SSS program in their academic improvement?

Students were asked about the role the TRiO SSS program played in their

academic improvement. They were also asked to provide specific examples of the

academic resources that they credit to their ability to improve academically. Three

themes emerged from the research question: Tutoring/Workshops, Direct to on-campus

resources, and Limited use of academic resources.

Table 4.3

Summary of Themes Regarding Participants' Perception on TRiO's Influence on

Academic Improvement

Academic Improvement Factors	# of Occurrences
Tutoring/Workshops Services	4
Referral to On-campus Resources	2
Limited Use of Academic Resources	5

Availability of Tutoring and Workshops Opportunities. African American

males at-risk in the TRIO program credited tutoring and workshop services provided by

TRiO to their overall academic improvement throughout their college experience. With

the academic challenges the participants faced, they used these academic resources to aid in overcoming those challenges. Curtis said, "TRIO has definitely helped me in overcoming the obstacles by having different workshops and tutoring in writing. I'm able to go there and get that one-on-one help or they are able to come to me and I think that is awesome." Tyler stated his experience with using the tutoring services to help combat his math skills,

> I was struggling in one of my business statistics class; it was a 2000 level course. I asked for a math tutor and TRiO had the only tutor who was able to help me get through the class and pass with a B. I was pretty ecstatic about that because before I went to the tutor I was failing the class with an F and I manage to come out and pull a B.

Along with providing services that focus on academics, the TRiO program provides opportunities for workshops that focus on skills they believe are needed for the real world. Tyler stated his experience with attending a TRiO workshop,

> I've actually been to some of their workshops about financial management and study tips. With those I was able to take away a couple of things including more time-management and that I need a planner. I learned how to start my own savings account and I got a credit card now. I'm able to pay my bills and I have rent also, so I'm able to balance all of that now.

Referral to On-campus Resources. While TRiO provides a lot of academic resources to students within the program, the participants experienced times where their TRiO advisors would direct them to on-campus resources in order to help in an academic area that they could not cover. Curtis said, "TRiO directed me towards resources like the

student success center or a reading specialist to help in improving my reading skills." Although the participants did not mind making use of the on-campus resources directed to them by TRiO, they felt comfortable getting feedback from their TRiO advisors before making use of other campus resources. Jake said, "My TRiO advisor has directed me to the writing center, but there are times when I had {My TRiO advisor} look over my paper for me."

Limited use of TRiO resources. The participants described their experiences with not using TRiO resources as proactively as they should. Most participants stated they received information from TRiO about the tutoring and workshops, but they are not consistent is attending or using these services. Jay stated his experience with the decision to use TRiO resources,

> I got the emails about the workshops and I've probably only gone to one or two since I've been in TRiO. They keep you up to date on stuff going on as far as career services and different workshops that are sponsored through TRiO. They get the word out it's just a matter of if I want to take the time to go to them.

Many of the participants feel that they use the resource when they can or when they are struggling academically. John stated his experiences with using the TRiO resources.

> I use the resources when I am in trouble academically, sometimes it be too late. Whenever I'm having trouble I just go straight to them and they help me out with it. Like, when I have problems with math, I just go to the TRiO tutors and they really help explain things to me.

Jake stated that his experience with using the resources to the best of his knowledge.

I feel like I could do better. I feel I use them to the best of my knowledge of what

to use. If I know about something, I use it whenever I can. I feel like there are

things that I can get from TRiO that I don't necessarily know about that I could

use. I would say that I need to use it more.

Research Question #4: How do African American male first-generation students

perceive the role of the TRIO SSS program in their persistence towards college

completion?

Students were asked about the factors within TRiO that played a role in their

motivation to continue college. They were asked to provide specific examples of TRiO's

role in their college persistence. Two themes emerged from the research question:

Examples of Success and Reassurance.

Table 4.4

Summary of Themes Regarding Participants' Perception on TRiO's Influence on College
Persistence

College Persistence Factors	# of Occurrences
Role Models who look like me	4
A gentle push from caring people	3

Role Models Who Look Like Me. This theme describes the participants' need to

see success of other African American males, in order to continue to persist towards

college completion. The students expressed that seeing others complete college whether

they are TRiO participants or other African American males, motivates them to want to

earn a Bachelors degree. Jay said, "My TRiO Advisor graduated from here. He left and

got his Masters and came back here and is still taking classes now. So having people who have already done it telling you that you can do it and they are young black males that I can look up to because I identify with them." TRiO provides students with many recognition opportunities and seeing those recognitions because they are thriving to be recognized, motivates some of the participants. John stated how he wants to be recognized for his achievements,

> In the program you see a lot of other people and they have people on the wall for their achievement. I want my picture on the wall for doing good too, so that is motivating me to do good too because I see everybody else doing good and I want to be at the same level that they are on.

Tyler also expressed his need for recognition as well. "Everyone that is in TRiO, the average GPA is a 2.7 I think and I know that I am below that so I'm striving to get up there with everyone else. So seeing everyone else makes me strive to keep up my GPA."

A Gentle Push from Caring People. This theme describes the participants' need for constant motivation by the TRiO staff. The students expressed how they appreciated the "push" that they receive from TRiO staff members. Curtis said, "The TRiO program motivates me because I am able to go in there and they are always talking about something related to graduation. So it's just that they push you and let you know that you are not far away from it." Some of the students cherish the time the TRiO staff invests in them and their education. Jay expresses how the TRiO staff has impacted his desire to complete his degree,

> They are constantly pushing me. If they can take the time out of their schedule and out of their busy workday to make sure that I'm on task. I'm going to finish.

I'm going to make sure that it is not done in vain. I'm going to do what they are

breaking their necks to make sure that I do.

Summary of Findings

This study focused on the risk factors that impact the college experiences of

African American male first-generation students as well as the factors within the TRiO

Student Support Services Program that play a role in their academic improvement and

college persistence. The results are based on six one-on-one interviews with the

participants. After analyzing the data, eleven themes emerged from the research questions

related to African American male first-generation students and their experiences with the

TRiO Student Support Services Program. The themes provided insight into the

perceptions of the participants on the overall role, positive or negative, that the TRiO

program has played in their college experience. The participants experienced academic,

financial, cultural, and social challenges throughout their college experience. Participants

felt that they were motivated to complete college because of the TRiO staff and examples

of successful African American males. With regards to use of academic resources, the

participants made use of the academic resources on a needed basis. They would mainly

use the tutoring and workshop services, but did not use the academic resources

consistently.

CHAPTER V

Discussion

The purpose of this phenomenological qualitative study was to explore Eastern Illinois University's TRIO SSS program and its impact on the academic improvement and college adjustment of African American male first-generation students that are at-risk. This chapter will provide a discussion about findings and its relationship to the literature review. The chapter will also provide recommendations for student affairs professionals and future research.

First-Generation College Student Challenges

Participants in this study experienced several challenges (academic, financial, time-management and cultural) during their tenure at the institution studied. This corresponds well with previous research, which reported that first-generation college students face many barriers during their college matriculation (Cushman, 2007). The barriers that were described under the theme "cultural challenges" can be explained by Cushman's concept of cultural adaptation. African American males tend to have unique experiences in regards to cultural adaptation as they experience oppression and institutional racism (Warde, 2008). Many of the participants shared their experiences as an African American male at a Predominantly White Institution (PWI) and how they noticed the differences between themselves and their advantaged peers. One participant shared the differences between the institution and his former high school in regards to being progressive and how he experienced culture shock once enrolled in the institution.

Along with cultural adaptation, many first-generation students struggle with academic integration. According to Jenkins (2013), first-generation college students tend

to struggle with the college coursework due to the lack of a rigorous curriculum in high school. This was echoed by Jake who shared that he felt underprepared academically especially in his writing abilities and was able to see his weakness through his college coursework. This lack of academic rigor means that students are ill-prepared for the academic expectations of college and produce the lowest GPAs of the student population (Cuyjet, 2006; Warde, 2008). The ultimate result is that African American males are amongst the lowest student population in college retention and graduation. African Americans males at risk in the TRiO Support Services Program, reported academic challenges especially in the area of writing and math.

Cultural Capital Theory

Probably the most significant finding from the current study is captured in the theme "Limited use of TRiO resources" which described African American males in the TRiO program acknowledgement that they do not utilize the resources available to them. Why is it that though students are aware of the available resources, they do not make use it? This is somewhat baffling but may be explained within a cultural capital framework. Cultural capital is a non-economic factor that impacts academic success (Bourdieu, 1986). The lack of knowledge of available resources is part of the formula to college success as it falls under the umbrella of cultural capital. According to Bourdieu (1986), the embodied state with cultural capital theory involves the personal attributes of a person and how the attributes affect academic success. All participants shared some common obstacles that preceded their enrollment in college, which continue to impact their college experience. For example, Jake and John shared their problems with study skills and time-management that was foreseen during high school. They also expressed their abilities to

not be consistent in using resources and going back to their "old ways". Although these

attributes impact their college success, Bourdieu (1986) states that an individual can

improve in their knowledge and abilities by learning. The TRiO workshops, tutoring

services, and staff guidance provides the opportunity to gain such knowledge and

abilities, but due to the personal attributes of the participants these resources are used

inconsistently.

Schlossberg's Transition Theory

Schlossberg's Transition Theory corresponds with many of the themes presented

within the research. Schlossberg's Transition theory provides an understanding of

students as they go through their transitional period, which in this study would be college.

The theory is broken down to the 4S's: Situation, Self, Support, and Strategies.

The situation factor involves examining the transition of the individual and the

overall impact the transition may have on the individual (Goodman et al., 2006). Within

the research, the participants experienced many challenges during their transition, which

are the "academic challenge", "social challenge", "cultural challenge", and "financial

challenge" themes. The participants made comments about their triggers and role change

during their college experience. Many participants explained how their experiences with

the differences in environment and how that was an adjustment. For example, Marcus

shared his experience with culture shock as he went from being in a big diverse city to a

town that seemed to have a lot of racial tension. Other participants commented on their

adjustment to becoming independent in college because they were use to having family

support their wants and needs.

The self factor involves the characteristics of the individual that could impact their transition (Goodman et al., 2006). Within this research, some of the participants identified their racial group, African American, as being a characteristic that has impacted their overall college transition. For example, Curtis commented on how he feels the college community views African American males as a problem and this has impacted his college experience greatly since this is the first time he has witness institutional racism.

The support factor involves the help individual receive during their transitional period (Goodman et al., 2006). TRiO acts as a support system for the participants as it provides family support, institutional support, and community support. Many of the participants viewed TRiO as the center for all of their needs from academic to personal support. For example, John shared his experience where he was involved in bad conduct and the TRiO advisors set him back on track by their authentic conversations. Along with support, the participants shared the impact that African American male mentorship has had on their college experiences. According to Warde (2008), many African American males credit their academic success to the supportive same-race peer relationships they developed on campus. For example, Jake shared his experience with having an African American male advisor and how that relationship is his reason for wanting to succeed academically. Overall the participants view the TRiO program as family support, as they need the support in order to continue to persist through college.

The strategies factor involves providing assistance to individuals to aid in coping with the transition (Goodman et al., 2006). TRiO has provided these coping resources through their workshop and tutoring services in regards to academic integration for the

participants. Many of the participants believe these resources helped in their academic challenges and when used consistently some experienced academic improvement. For example, Tyler shared how his use of the tutoring services improved his grade in his upper-level business course. He also shared the impact the financial workshop provided by TRiO improved his financial challenges. Along with academic improvement, many of the participants credited the one-on-one meetings with their TRiO advisors for their ability to cope with personal issues during their college experience. John stated how his TRiO advisor made him get out of his bad habits and focus on why he decided to attend college.

Recommendations

Recommendations for Administrators and Student Affairs Professionals. The recommendations listed will serve as a resource for administrators and student affairs professionals that work with at-risk African American male first-generation students. The recommendations will also serve as a resource for TRiO programs and those similar to the program.

1. Promote benefits of academic services-tutoring and workshop services
    a. Showcase the impact the academic resources have on academic improvement to further promote the importance of consistent use.
    b. Provide assessment and evaluation of the academic resources to ensure it is meeting the needs of the students
    c. Find ways to get African American males to use the resources available on-campus.

2. Hiring practices to include diverse backgrounds to help in the support of underrepresented students

   a. Try to implement programs that may benefit ethnic minority students

   b. Create opportunities for diverse faculty and staff to be involved with diverse students

3. Continue to promote and support mentorship programs for students in underrepresented groups

Recommendations for Future Research. This study presented limitations due to the small amount of participants, but the study provides insight into the factors needed for at-risk African American male first-generation students to succeed in college. The recommendation list below provides suggestions for further research based on the findings in this study.

1. A qualitative study on male mentorship and its influence on male first-generation students college experience

2. A quantitative or mixed methods study on the use of TRiO academic resources and its impact on academic success

3. A history of the TRiO program and its role in the retention and degree completion of African American males.

Conclusion

This qualitative study was created to explore the experiences of at-risk African American male first-generation students in the TRiO Student Support Services (SSS) Program. The study looked at the challenges the participants faced and the role the TRiO program played in each participant's college experience. The findings indicated that the

participants face four challenge factors throughout their college experience: academic challenge, cultural challenge, social challenge, and financial challenge. During their challenges, the students used the TRiO program in a variety ways to cope. The participants credited their ability to adjust to college to the guidance provided by their TRiO advisors. They also credited their academic improvement to the academic resources provided to them by the TRiO program. Although, the students found improvement in there academic performance, many expressed that they do not use the TRiO resources consistently which has led them to possibly fall back into old habits. Many of the participants also appreciate the recognition TRiO provides their program participants as it motivates them to strive for academic success.

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Appendix A

Interview Protocol

Introductory Questions

Welcome and thank the participant. Ensure that the participant is comfortable. Provide the participant with informed consent. Go through the informed consent with the participant and answer any questions that she might have.

1. I will be taking a video/audio recording of this interview. DO you consent to this?

I: The following questions are simply to gather demographic information about all participants in my study. They will not be used to identify you.

1. To ensure this, please give me your First Name and Last initial.
2. How would you like to be called in my study?
3. How old are you age?
4. Are you a junior or senior?
5. A first generation student is someone whose parent did not receive a bachelor's degree. Are you a first-generation college student?
6. How do you identify racially?
7. What is your current GPA?
8. Tell me more about yourself. (Cultural background, experiences as a first-generation student, why did you decided to attend college)

Overall TRIO Questions

9. How long have you been involved in the TRIO Student Support Services (SSS) program?
10. Why did you decide to be involved in the TRIO SSS program?
11. Tell me about your experiences in the TRIO SSS program?
    Were they generally positive or negative? Please provide me with an example of a negative/positive experience which you had. Any other examples that you would like to share.
12. What obstacles have you faced throughout your college experience thus far?
13. How has the TRIO helped in overcoming those obstacles?
14. How does the TRIO program motivate you towards college completion?

Cultural adaptation Questions
When first-generation students start college they find themselves not feeling welcomed and not fitting into the college environment. Can you please tell me of a time where this has happened to you?
15. Tell me about your experience adjusting to college.
16. Explain the obstacles you faced trying to adjust to college

17. How did TRIO help you in your transition into college life?

Academic Integration Questions
In this study an academic challenge is a factor that hinders your ability to learn. This could be bad study habits or bad test taking practices.

18. What academic challenges have you faced throughout your college experience?
19. What resources did you use within the TRIO SSS program to overcome those academic challenges?
20. How do you utilize the academic resources provided to you by TRIO?
21. What resources by TRIO do you credit to your academic success/achievement?

Appendix B

Informed Consent

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

At-Risk in TRiO: Perceptions of Male First-generation Students in the TRIO Student Support Services Program

You are invited to participate in a research study conducted by Diana Ogbevire, Graduate Student from the College Student Affairs department at Eastern Illinois University. You have been asked to participate in this study because you are a male first-generation student at Eastern Illinois University, who is involved in the TRIO Student Support Service program. Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. Please ask questions about anything you do not understand, before deciding whether or not to participate.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study is to explore Eastern Illinois University's TRIO Student Support Services program and the impact it has on academics as well as college persistence of at-risk male first-generation students. This study will help in identifying factors within the TRIO Student Support Services program that play a role in the academics, college persistence, and college involvement of male first-generation students.

PROCEDURES

If you volunteer to participate in this study, you will be asked to:

Participate in a 30-45 minute interview to discuss your experiences as a first-generation student at Eastern Illinois University and the role the TRIO Student Support Services program has played in your academic achievement and college persistence.

All interviews will be audiotaped and videotaped. The researcher and the faculty thesis advisor will be allowed to see the audio and video. To further help you in confidentiality, your name and other identifiers will be removed in the transcriptions.

POTENTIAL RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS

This study could pose a risk to confidentiality, but the researcher will ensure the use of proper protocol to maintain your confidentiality. This study also has a minimal chance of negative psychological emotions depending on your experiences/reflections. If you feel any psychological distress please feel free to contact the on-campus counseling services.

POTENTIAL BENEFITS TO SUBJECTS AND/OR TO SOCIETY

There is no direct benefit to involvement in this research study. You will have the opportunity to reflect on your experiences as a male, first-generation student involved in the TRIO Student Support Services program. Your participation in this study will help identify factors within the

TRIO Student Support Services program that are influential in academic achievement of male, first generation students in order to increase the program's effectiveness.

INCENTIVES FOR PARTICIPATION

If you choose to participate in the interview, you will be given a $10 Wal-Mart Gift Card. The gift card will be given after completion of the study. If you choose to withdraw from the study, the Wal-Mart Gift Card will not be given.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified with you will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission or as required by law. This interview will be audiotaped and videotaped for transcription purposes only. All names within the interview will be removed and replaced with pseudonyms to ensure your confidentiality. Once the interview is transcribed, you will be given the transcript for your review and approval. All audio recordings and transcripts will be locked in a secure location for three years upon completion of research study and then be destroyed.

PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL

Participation in this research study is voluntary and not a requirement or a condition for being the recipient of benefits or services from Eastern Illinois University or any other organization sponsoring the research project. If you volunteer to be in this study, you may withdraw at any time without consequences of any kind or loss of benefits or services to which you are otherwise entitled. There is no penalty if you withdraw from the study and you will not lose any benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

IDENTIFICATION OF INVESTIGATORS

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RIGHTS OF RESEARCH SUBJECTS

If you have any questions or concerns about the treatment of human participants in this study, you may call or write:

Institutional Review Board
Eastern Illinois University
600 Lincoln Ave.
Charleston, IL   61920
Telephone: (217) 581-8576
E-mail: eiuirb@www.eiu.edu

You will be given the opportunity to discuss any questions about your rights as a research subject with a member of the IRB. The IRB is an independent committee composed of members of the University community, as well as lay members of the community not connected with EIU. The IRB has reviewed and approved this study.

I voluntarily agree to participate in this study. I understand that I am free to withdraw my consent and discontinue my participation at any time. I have been given a copy of this form.

_____
Printed Name of Participant

_____   _____
Signature of Participant   Date

I, the undersigned, have defined and fully explained the investigation to the above subject.

_____   _____
Signature of Investigator   Date

Appendix C

Participant Recruitment Email

Dear TRiO Participant,

You are invited to participate in a research study conducted by Diana Ogbevire, Graduate Student from the College Student Affairs department at Eastern Illinois University. You have been asked to participate in this study because you are an African American male first-generation student at Eastern Illinois University, who is involved in the TRIO Student Support Service program. The research study is conducted as part of an assignment for the Thesis and Research course and a requirement for the Master's of Science program in College Student Affairs. Dr. Catherine Polydore is thesis chair and has approved this study.

For participation study, I am asking for you to take part in a 30-45 minute interview to discuss your experiences as a first-generation student at Eastern Illinois University and the role the TRiO SSS program has played in your college experience. Upon completion of interview and transcription, you will receive a $10 Walmart Gift Card. Your participation in this study is completely voluntary and the information received will be kept confidential.

If you have any questions pertaining to this research study, please contact Dr. Catherine Polydore at cpolydore@eiu.edu.

Thank You!

Diana Ogbevire