The Factors Influencing The Late Graduation Of Inner Cities Students Of Los Angeles

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Research Methodology

Introduction

To replicate the present study, sufficient methodological information must be provided. Chapter 3 defines the study's methodological procedures and research design. The chapter begins with a description of the research design, including the particular strategies adopted. This is followed by sections addressing data analysis, data trustworthiness, ethical procedures, and the data-gathering process. The chapter concludes with limitations and delimitations.

The general purpose of this study was to explore the factors influencing whether students graduate on time from middle and high schools in the inner city of Los Angeles. Specifically, the study employed a sequential mixed-methods design to examine the educational institution and the issues it faces and to make recommendations based on the findings. These findings can then be used to improve the likelihood of student success within the district. This chapter details the investigation techniques, ethical considerations, data-collection procedures, and measures of trustworthiness.

Statement of the Problem

The primary objective of the study was to explore factors influencing late graduation among inner-city students in Los Angeles. Some students in the inner cities of Los Angeles are unable to complete high school graduation on time; therefore, the study seeks to identify the reasons for late graduation among high school students in Los Angeles. The study will help schools, students, and families identify predictors of late graduation.

Research Questions

1. Why do some students not graduate on time? What roles do socioeconomic status, school status, and family play?
2. How does student failure affect the student and the family?

3. What impressions do school teachers have of student achievement in inner-city Los Angeles?
4. What are instructors' perspectives on student progress in inner-city Los Angeles?

Research Methodology

Research is one of the most important and influential tools for guiding development and advancement. Without organized research, development and progress would be limited. Technical and systematic research can guide development and progress at different stages of life. The growth of relevant research in biological, physical, psychological, and social fields has led to the discovery of new concepts, methods, products, and evidence (Creswell, 2013). Today, research is not confined to research laboratories or scientific laboratories. A central purpose of the scientific process is to find solutions to problems. Research can also help discover facts that have not previously been identified or established. Quantitative and qualitative research both involve a series of activities that include the investigation and analysis of information (Hahn, Knopf, Wilson, Truman, Milstein, Johnson & Moss, 2015). Numerical procedures and techniques are used in quantitative analysis and are important in developmental research. Quantitative methods can provide numerical or statistical answers to research problems and therefore hold an important place in research (Balfanz, R., Byrnes & Fox, 2015).

Quantitative Research

Quantitative analysis uses mathematical or numerical procedures and data to examine characteristics and relationships. Levels of measurement include ratio, interval, ordinal, and nominal scales, and these are important factors in selecting appropriate forms of analysis (Creswell, 2013).

Qualitative Research:

Qualitative research is an approach used in different academic fields, including the biological and physical sciences and the social sciences. It is also used in non-academic settings such as business, nonprofit services, and market research (Creswell, 2013).

Research Design

The primary purpose of this research was to identify factors that cause students not to graduate on time from middle or high school in the inner city of Los Angeles. To address this purpose, a mixed-methods sequential-explanatory research approach was employed. The study was particularly suited to a mixed-methods approach because this design can address weaknesses associated with relying solely on either quantitative or qualitative research.

A mixed-methods design was required by the nature of the research questions. Research questions one and two, for example, sought individuals' perspectives and therefore required an in-depth qualitative approach, while questions three and four examined relationships between variables and therefore required a quantitative approach. Thus, neither a purely qualitative nor a purely quantitative approach was sufficient to answer all of the research questions.

The design had two phases. The first phase involved a quantitative approach to examine relationships among variables such as ethnicity, family status, gender, grade retention, and mobility. These variables were examined to determine their relationships with graduation status among a cohort of students in inner-city Los Angeles.

Data for students who enrolled in the school during the fall of 2012 and were expected to graduate in 2016 were provided through district cumulative records. The quantitative strategies implemented during the research provided a broad understanding of the study. However, quantitative strategies alone could not provide a holistic view, which required qualitative analysis. Hence, principals and teachers provided a total of 57 responses during phase 2.

Population and Sample Selection

Participants for Phase I:

Information for this study was obtained from nine middle schools in the inner city of Los Angeles. The Phase I sample consisted of students at the high school level in the inner-city Los Angeles school district. The student cohort came from the 2012 school session. In 2016, a total of 391 students were expected to graduate.

The school district and student population were selected for two reasons. First, researchers have noted that some students take a long time to leave the school system and that some formally drop out of middle or high school. A substantial proportion of students who eventually drop out begin experiencing difficulties in earlier grades, and warning signs can emerge as early as elementary school through eighth grade.

Researchers have discussed ways to reduce and prevent low graduation rates in later years of high school. They also argue that academic failure can begin during the primary years, contributing to the number of students who fail to graduate each year. Poor attendance can lead to bad grades and lower self-confidence, beginning in elementary school and contributing to poor academic progress. A lack of knowledge and support can also affect student behavior and reduce the likelihood of academic success (Krueger, Tran, Hummer & Chang, 2015). This research began by examining student information from cumulative student accounts and records. The investigator recorded student registrations, initial admission to the school district, and educational outcomes such as dropout, late graduation, graduation, transfer, homeschooling, and continued enrollment. The researcher also

recorded each student's background, family status, gender, and grade retention. Moreover, the Los Angeles school district was selected because of its high rate of late graduation within the state.

Phase II Participants and Design Overview

Research questions three and four were addressed through a stratified sample of teachers and principals from the inner-city Los Angeles school district. A random process was used to select individuals from this stratified sample, although the sample was not intended to be fully representative. The purpose was to provide meaningful qualitative perspectives to complement the quantitative data. The sample of administrators, teachers, and principals included individuals who had interacted with students from the Phase I cohort. The student sample for Phase II came from the cohort identified in Phase I, and only graduates and late graduates were included. Students who had left the district for other reasons were excluded.

The sample of administrators and teachers comprised 25 educators selected from a total of 290 teachers and 22 K-12 administrators in 63 schools in the Los Angeles district. Random sampling was used to obtain a broad sample of teachers and administrators. Additionally, the district provided the investigator with the names of 150 students who were either graduates or late graduates from the cohort.

School officials at the board office provided the researchers with the names of all teachers and administrators. It was important to include teachers and administrators representing schools across the district in order to reduce selection bias. The administrators' names were categorized separately in one group, while the names of qualified teachers were placed into 12 different groups.

Each group represented a school currently in the district, including two schools that had since closed but had existed before consolidation. The names on the master list were verified, and the groups were labelled to ensure that teachers assigned to specific schools were placed in the correct group. The random teacher sample included only qualified teachers.

The leadership sample comprised counsellors, instructional coaches, principals, and district supervisors. To create the initial teacher sample, one teacher was randomly selected from each group. After 12 teachers had been selected, one from each school group, the remaining teachers from all groups were combined, and three additional names were selected for a total of 15 teachers. A random sample of leaders was selected from the group labelled as administrators, which included principals, instructional coaches, and district supervisors. Ten names were selected from this group. In total, 25 teachers and leaders were selected for the research. Teachers and leaders were contacted by email and telephone to arrange suitable interview times.

Sixty-four students were selected from the cohort. The district had provided the names and contact numbers of 150 students during the quantitative phase. Cohort students were then contacted by the interviewer using names, contact numbers, and original elementary-school information obtained from

the board of education. The sample represented only students who had graduated or graduated late.

The questions were designed to obtain teachers' and leaders' views of student success in the district. School-related factors were discussed by asking leaders about school climate, grade-retention practices, strategies for preventing late graduation, and school equity. Family-related factors were addressed by asking teachers for their opinions on how families viewed late graduation, homeschooling, and the role of the family. Community-related factors were addressed through questions about how the community viewed late graduation.

Finally, questions about individual students focused on how students succeed and what students think about late graduation. To understand late-graduation information more fully, it was important to include late graduates themselves. Questions were developed around the four components of the student-success model and sought the perspectives of student graduates. School-related questions focused on the school's role in student success and on what educators in the district could do to support students' successful graduation.

Instrumentation

The records of a cohort of students were examined during the first phase of the research. The University approved an IRB proposal, and the project was also approved by the local school board. Meetings with district principals, the instructional supervisor, the superintendent, and seven other district community officials were held to discuss the project and its relationship to district objectives and goals.

The researcher requested the names of students enrolled in kindergarten classes during the relevant school year. Cumulative student records were obtained from the central office of the school district. Once all permissions were granted, the researcher contacted school officials to arrange suitable times to review student enrollment records.

A coding system was established for the different variables before the researcher's initial visit to review the records (e.g., female = 0 and male = 1). The main focus in developing the design was on four elements associated with student success: community, school, student, and family. One of the first elements incorporated into the research was the school component of the theoretical framework. Instead of using student names, codes were assigned to preserve confidentiality. A code consisted of digits representing the student and the elementary school in which the student had been enrolled (e.g., in 332002, the last three digits represented the student ID, and 002 represented the elementary-school number).

Data regarding parent or guardian status, ethnicity, educational outcomes, gender, and grade retention, including outcomes such as homeschooling, moving, continued enrollment, death, graduation, or dropout, were recorded in PASW (SPSS 18) during each data-collection appointment. Family factors, such as whether the student was under the care of the mother only, father only, or

another guardian; school factors, such as withdrawal status and number of grade retentions; and individual factors, such as gender, mobility, and race, were examined. This study included two primary dependent outcomes: late graduation and on-time graduation, although other graduation-status outcomes were also documented. It was important to record not only late and on-time graduation but also other student outcomes in the district to provide a sufficiently comprehensive analysis (Morrow & Villodas, 2017).

After all data were collected, the researcher made several attempts to locate missing enrollment information. The school district's pupil-personnel office assisted the investigator, and many enrollment cards were found, although not all student information could be obtained. Some records were missing because district staff had not returned registration cards to the correct location on time or because records had not been filed correctly.

The community component was also an important area of concern. Students were asked about difficulties they commonly faced, the role of the community in supporting success, and how the community viewed the issue of dropping out. The individual-student component focused on students' motivation to graduate and their own explanations of success.

A research questionnaire was also developed for students who had dropped out, using a structure similar to the questionnaire for graduates. Because the questions were sensitive and addressed students who had not completed high school successfully, care was taken in their formulation. Five questions were developed based on the study's major elements. The school component collected information about grade retention and what schools could do to prevent students from dropping out. The individual and community components focused on why students dropped out and how the community viewed dropout. The family component asked students how they believed their families perceived school dropout as an important issue (see Appendix D for the student dropout questionnaire).

Validity

All interviews with leaders, student dropouts, student graduates, and teachers were properly recorded and coded. Interviews were assigned combinations of letters that helped the researcher track responses, such as certified teacher interviewee = CTI, administrator interviewee = ADMI, student dropout = SDI, and student graduate = SGI. Each question was analyzed systematically using grouped responses, and themes were identified from the answers. The inclusion of students and educators from the inner-city Los Angeles school district was important to the contextual validity of the research.

Reliability

Four criteria were considered for qualitative-research trustworthiness: credibility, confirmability, dependability, and transferability, as described by researchers (Archambault, Janosz, Dupéré, Brault and Andrew, 2017). The research process was documented transparently so that procedures could be understood and reviewed. Data were gathered and discussed using a coding system, and a copy of the coding system was maintained.

The study sought credibility by using different research methods to identify and address weaknesses systematically. To develop an in-depth understanding, the researcher used multiple sources and methods. Triangulation was used to cross-check student data, contextual information, and other evidence. These procedures were intended to make the findings more credible, believable, and trustworthy. Transferability was addressed by providing contextual information that would help readers determine whether findings might apply in other settings. Dependability was assessed through an inquiry audit. The researcher's own background and prior experience as a student were also recognized as potential sources of bias. The researcher was not an educator in the inner-city high school district. Interview findings were summarized, interpretations were reviewed for consistency, and feedback was obtained.

Data Collection and Management

A general interview format was selected for all groups in order to collect detailed information about respondents' experiences. For exploratory research, semi-structured interviews allow the researcher to ask essential analytical questions while also following up on issues that emerge. The interview questions were open-ended, allowing participants to explain their experiences in their own words.

Face-to-face interviews were conducted in natural settings during teachers' planning periods or after school so that the interviews would not interfere with administrators' or teachers' responsibilities. Interviews with leaders were conducted in their school offices or in empty classrooms. Before each interview, proper permission was obtained from the participant. The same general method was used for every participant, and the same core questions were asked. If a respondent was unavailable, the researcher rescheduled the meeting for a convenient date. Respondents were also given an opportunity to add comments after the interview if relevant issues had not been covered by the interview questions.

The board provided the researcher with the names of 150 students from the relevant cohort. Two lists were created: one for dropouts and one for graduates, including names and telephone numbers. There were 45 dropout students and 105 graduates. Students were contacted for interviews. If a respondent was not interested, was not at home, or had a disconnected telephone number, this was carefully documented. Students who were initially unavailable were contacted again on different days. Calls continued until a response was obtained or the contact attempt could not reasonably

continue. The same procedure was followed for the dropout list. Seventeen graduates agreed to participate, and respondents from the dropout group also participated. The same questions were asked in the same order during each student interview. Telephone interviews lasted approximately 15 minutes. The researcher obtained permission before recording each interview.

Data Analysis Procedures

After entering all data into PASW (SPSS 18), the researcher conducted crosstabs, descriptive statistics, and statistical tests on the cohort. Each elementary school was examined by gender, grade retention, ethnicity, late-graduation status, and family situation through crosstabulation.

The district's entire student cohort was examined to understand the broader pattern of graduation status. Students may have died, moved out of the school district, graduated on time, graduated late, or transferred to homeschooling. The analysis examined which variables were statistically associated with graduation and late graduation in the inner-city Los Angeles school district. Graduation status variables were recoded as necessary, including dummy variables for late graduation and graduation (e.g., late graduate = 0 and graduate = 1). The data were analyzed using the Chi-Square test for independence. This statistical test is commonly used to examine relationships between categorical variables. It can be used with frequency data to determine whether two categorical variables are associated.

The researcher used the Chi-Square statistic to determine whether graduation and late graduation were related to factors such as family status, mobility, gender, ethnicity, and grade retention. The null hypothesis stated that there would be no significant differences in factors influencing graduation and late-graduation rates in the inner-city Los Angeles school district. In contrast, the alternative hypothesis stated that there would be significant differences in factors influencing graduation and late-graduation rates. The alpha level for this study was set at.05.

Although the quantitative findings provided a substantial amount of information, deeper investigation was needed to understand those findings more fully. Important patterns emerged when the analysis focused on factors related to student success, including graduation status, grade retention, mobility, gender, family status, and race. However, the results also raised additional questions that could be answered only through qualitative research. For example, why did one school have more late graduates than another school in the same area? Why does grade retention frequently result in late graduation? By examining these issues through the four components associated with student success and building on the theory of achievement and the quantitative findings, the researcher developed additional open-ended questions and explored the perceptions of school leaders, graduates, late graduates, and teachers.

Ethical Considerations

Studies involving human participants are expected to comply with federal and institutional ethical guidelines. Compliance is overseen by an Institutional Review Board (IRB). Although this study might qualify for exemption from full IRB review because it occurs in an accepted educational setting and involves normal educational practices, it still falls within a domain requiring institutional review and consent (Isik-Ercan, 2010; Thornberg, 2014; Worrell, 2014). The researcher will ensure that surveys and observations are anonymous and involve minimal risk. If identifying information is required, it will remain confidential and will not be included in the final report (Bosworth *et al.*, 2011).

The researcher will follow ethical standards established by the American Psychological Association. These include competence, integrity, scientific and professional responsibility, respect for participants' rights and dignity, concern for their welfare, and social responsibility. Regarding competence, the researcher will undertake only work for which they are appropriately prepared. Regarding integrity, the researcher will act honestly and fairly in professional interactions. Scientific and professional responsibility requires maintaining high standards of professional behavior. Respect for participants' dignity and rights includes protecting confidentiality. Concern for welfare involves conducting research that addresses meaningful gaps in knowledge, while social responsibility involves using research skills for the benefit of society (Meral & Turnbull, 2014).

Limitations and Delimitations

The researcher assumed that the data required for the study were accessible through the district-level office and inner-city high schools and that student records could be obtained for data collection and review. This study investigated only one inner-city Los Angeles school district. Although many factors may contribute to late graduation among high school students, this research examined specific variables within the parameters of the four components of the student-success model. It can be argued that the focused scope of the research is both a strength and a limitation.

Summary

This chapter on research methodology describes the research participants, investigation techniques, data-collection procedures, ethical considerations, and limitations. The study used a mixed-methods approach to address the research problem. Phase I included a cohort of high school students from inner-city Los Angeles. The research examined factors related to late graduation and also included interviews with a random sample of teachers and students in inner-city Los Angeles. Family-related factors were also examined. The next chapter will present the findings of the research.

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