

Unveiling Educational Barriers: Examining Disparities and Inequalities Faced by Latinx
Individuals in Higher Education Access and Attainment in the United States

MASTER OF PUBLIC POLICY AND ADMINISTRATION

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Latinx individuals encounter alarming barriers in accessing higher education in the United States, hindering their pursuit of the American Dream. Despite aspiration for higher education, Latinx individuals still face multifaceted challenges that limit their enrollment and attainment in colleges and universities. With Latinx students having the lowest college enrollment rates compared to other racial and ethnic groups, the urgency to address these barriers becomes evident. Socioeconomic disparities significantly hinder Latinx individuals, with financial constraints serving as a major barrier to higher education attainment. Moreover, cultural and linguistic barriers present additional challenges, increasing the disparities in educational access. Limited English proficiency and cultural norms within Latinx communities contribute to academic difficulties. Furthermore, the lack of social and psychological support further these challenges, with Latinx students experiencing isolation and mental health issues due to the absence of mentorship and peer support networks.

Therefore, this policy report dives into the significant barriers encountered by Latinx individuals in accessing and succeeding in higher education, focusing on socioeconomic, cultural, linguistic, social, and psychological barriers. Regarding socioeconomic barriers, it presents a significant challenge for Latinx individuals, with financial constraints limiting their ability to pursue higher education. Latinx students, despite being the largest and fastest-growing minority group in the United States, have the lowest college completion rates. Economic disparities, combined with limited awareness of financial aid resources, increases the challenges faced by Latinx individuals, hindering their aspirations for higher education.

Cultural and linguistic barriers further hinder Latinx individuals' educational success, with cultural norms and language differences affecting their academic experiences. Familial

expectations, language proficiency issues, and underrepresentation in educational settings contribute to disparities in educational attainment among Latinx individuals, perpetuating cycles of inequality within their communities. Additionally, the lack of social and psychological support within educational institutions complicates these challenges, with Latinx students facing isolation, alienation, and mental health issues. The absence of mentorship, role models, and peer support networks increases feelings of disconnection, hindering academic and personal growth. These barriers have connections for educational attainment and economic outcomes among Latinx individuals, perpetuating broader social and economic inequalities within their communities and society at large. Despite recognizing the importance of higher education, Latinx individuals continue to face significant challenges, limiting their ability to achieve upward mobility and the American Dream.

By examining these barriers, specific policy recommendations are proposed to foster educational equity and empower Latinx students to achieve their academic goals. In order to address these socioeconomic barriers, high school support programs tailored for Latinx students are recommended. These programs will offer services like academic counseling, college application assistance, and financial aid workshops, preparing Latinx students early for successful college transition. Expanding dual-language programs and ESL support services in schools with significant Latinx communities, along with recruiting bilingual educators and counselors, can address the cultural and linguistic barriers. Additionally, increasing mental health resources and implementing peer mentorship programs will provide essential social and psychological support for Latinx students. Community engagement is also essential for successful policy implementation. Establishing committees involving educators, parents, and nonprofit representatives will provide valuable insights into Latinx individuals' challenges.

Collaborating with community-based organization and advocacy groups will ensure interventions meet community needs and promote greater access to educational opportunities.

Furthermore, advocating for increased state and federal funding is crucial to support targeted interventions and education equity initiatives. This includes funding for recruiting bilingual educators, expanding college preparatory programs, and tailoring financial aid initiatives to Latinx students' needs. Intergovernmental collaboration is necessary to allocate funds equitably based on relevant demographics. That said, this report highlights the urgent need to address barriers hindering Latinx individuals' access to higher education and emphasizes the importance of inclusive policies and targeted interventions. While the policy recommendations offer promising strategies, ongoing monitoring, evaluation, and stakeholder engagement are essential. Collective action and commitment are needed to achieve educational equity for Latinx individuals, unlocking their full potential and fulfilling their American Dream.

Introduction

Latinx individuals in the United States face significant barriers when it comes to accessing higher education. Many Latinx students want to pursue higher education to achieve this so-called "American Dream" because their families often believe they can reach it by enrolling in higher education (Cisneros, 2013). However, their opportunities to accomplish this through higher education are limited because they face numerous barriers, which results in many of them not enrolling in college. For instance, Latinx students have the lowest college enrollment rates in the United States compared to other races and ethnicities. In fact, approximately 36% of Latinx students are enrolled in college, whereas 42% of white students are (National Center for Education Statistics, 2022). Despite efforts to promote diversity and inclusion, these barriers continue to happen, which restricts the full realization of educational opportunities for Latinx individuals. This data reflects the numerous challenges Latinx individuals face in the United States, such as the lack of financial, social, and psychological support regarding accessing higher education.

Socio-Economic Disparities

Latinx individuals are disproportionately affected by socioeconomic challenges in the United States. This includes poverty, limited access to quality healthcare, housing instability, and more. These factors often create financial barriers that restrict their ability to pursue higher education, as Latinx households tend to have lower median incomes compared to their white counterparts. Financial and economic constraints play a significant role in why many Americans do not finish a four-year degree, especially among Latinx individuals, according to a Pew Research Center Survey (2021). Moreover, for Latinx individuals without a bachelor's degree

who are not currently in school, about 71% stated that they need to work to support their family as a major or minor reason, while 69% mention affordability as a barrier to pursuing a four-year degree (Pew Research Center Survey, 2021).

In addition, the increasing costs of tuition and fees at colleges also present a significant barrier for Latinx individuals who often come from low-income backgrounds. Many Latinx students face financial constraints that limit their ability to pursue higher education, which is especially difficult given that their communities tend to have lower incomes and higher poverty rates in the United States.

Cultural and Linguistic Barriers

Latinx individuals also often face cultural and linguistic barriers within the educational system, especially if English is not their first language. Language proficiency issues can impact academic performance and limit access to support services and resources, further increasing education disparities. The Independent Educational Consultants Association (2014) mentioned that even in some parts of the United States, where they are experiencing rapid Latinx population growth, nearly 35% of families face limited English proficiency. For students, navigating education with English as a second language can have significant barriers. These language barriers also extend to parents, impacting their ability to fully understand the education system and the importance of their child's college attendance and graduation.

Since English may not be their first language, it creates challenges in academic settings. Limited English proficiency can impact students' ability to understand course materials, participate in class discussions, and complete assignments effectively. Nevertheless, when it comes to cultural norms, Latinx individuals can face cultural barriers that affect their educational

experiences. This could be because cultural norms within Latinx communities may prioritize family obligations, impacting students' academic choices and career pathways (Marrero, 2016). Lastly, cultural differences in parental involvement and engagement in education can impact Latinx students' academic success. Some Latinx families face barriers in navigating the educational system, advocating for their children, and accessing resources to support them (Marrero, 2016).

Lack of Social and Psychological Support

The lack of social and psychological support is another significant barrier for Latinx individuals to access higher education in the United States. For instance, Latinx individuals lack access to mentorship and role models within educational institutions who share similar cultural backgrounds and experiences. The absence of mentorship relationships can prevent Latinx students from providing guidance, support, and opportunities for personal and professional growth. According to Ed Source by Betty Rosales (2021), since these Latinx students are mostly first-generation students, they may have less support and guidance from family members as they go through college. Latinx students also face challenges in having peer support networks within the educational system since they are underrepresented within their academic environments. For instance, Rosales interviewed Latinx students, and one said that attending college was such a big deal for her since she was the first in the family to participate in and graduate. Throughout her experience in higher education, she had to navigate the college system and find support from people who could understand her. That said, this represents the lack of Latinx faculty in higher education. Rosales stated that during the 2018-2019 school year, only 16% of faculty at the California Community Colleges were Latinx. Having a lack of access to mentors and role models

who share their cultural background can hinder students' personal and professional growth. Additionally, the absence of peer support networks with educational institutions further isolates Latinx students, making it difficult for them to navigate the college system and find understanding and guidance, which can lead to feeling isolated and alienated. Therefore, without a support system in place, Latinx students struggle to navigate the complexities of the education system and achieve academic success.

As mentioned, without access to mentors, role models, and peer support networks, Latinx students also experience feelings of isolation, loneliness, and disconnection from their academic community. This sense of alienation can contribute to stress, anxiety, and depression, as students struggle to navigate the challenges of college life without having a support system in place (Novotney, 2019). Furthermore, the pressure to succeed academically while also facing cultural and familial expectation can contribute to these lack of psychological challenges. Latinx students may experience imposter syndrome, feeling like they don't belong or aren't capable of achieving success in higher education, especially if they lack representation in the faculty and staff (Dueñas, 2021). Overall, the lack of social and psychological support in higher education can have an impact on the well-being of Latinx students.

Purpose

Despite efforts to promote diversity and inclusion, Latinx individuals still face educational barriers. Latinx individuals in the United States face significant barriers to accessing higher education, leading to disparities in educational attainment and economic outcomes. This problem contributes to social and economic inequalities, limiting the potential for upward mobility and the realization of the American Dream for many within the Latinx community.

Therefore, this policy report aims to reveal the importance of addressing disparities in educational attainment and economic outcomes among Latinx individuals in the United States.

Accessing higher education is a fundamental right and a pathway to social and economic mobility. Addressing these barriers can promote equity and inclusion within the education system, ensuring all individuals have equal opportunities to pursue their educational goals. Higher education is linked to economic opportunities, and removing barriers to access will contribute to the overall economic growth and well-being of communities. Nevertheless, unveiling the experiences and voices of Latinx individuals will empower Latinx communities to advocate for change and hold policymakers and institutions accountable for addressing educational disparities. By providing an in-depth analysis of the barriers faced by Latinx individuals in accessing higher education, this policy report seeks to inform policymakers and stakeholders about the urgency of addressing these barriers. Therefore, this policy report serves as a call to action to address the systemic barriers restricting Latinx individuals from accessing higher education. By understanding the issue's importance and taking steps to address it, this can create a more equitable and inclusive society for everyone in the United States.

Summary of Rest of the Paper

The remainder of this policy report will dive into the complexities of Latinx individuals' barriers to accessing higher education in the United States. It will examine the socioeconomic, cultural, and psychological factors contributing to these barriers and explain various policy recommendations to address them. Additionally, the policy report will provide awareness and policy recommendations for Latinx communities and stakeholders to promote educational equity and inclusivity.

In addition, the **Literature Review** section provides background information and theoretical discussion on the past and current state of higher education policies in both state and federal regarding disparities among marginalized groups, specifically Latinx individuals. The literature review also identifies the key barriers to the access and success of higher education among Latinx individuals in hopes of finding issues that currently are happening when it comes to their access and success to higher education to aim for a policy recommendation. The **Methodology** section then describes the methods used in this policy report to analyze the current barriers for Latinx individuals when accessing higher education in order to recommend a policy solution that addresses these issues.

Furthermore, the **Findings** summarize findings from the literature review, data analyses, and existing case studies regarding the barriers among Latinx individuals in accessing and succeeding in higher education and how these challenges restrict the full realization of educational opportunities for Latinx individuals. The **Policy Recommendation** section presents a policy solution addressing the most significant barriers and factors Latinx continue to face when accessing and succeeding in higher education. The policy solution analyzes existing data and the Critical Race Theory in order to provide policy recommendations. Lastly, the **Conclusion** summarizes the methods and findings of the policy report. This section also further explains the final policy recommendation to reduce the challenges Latinx individuals face in higher education and describes possible barriers to the policy's success and the study's limitations.

Literature Review

In order to promote equal access to and success in higher education, it is essential to understand the barriers that Latinx individuals face. Higher education is crucial to achieving social mobility and economic success in the United States. However, Latinx individuals encounter various barriers that limit their educational opportunities, which can significantly impact their educational journey. Understanding the historical evolution and context of higher education policies provides insight into significant decisions like affirmative action, Proposition 209 in California, and financial aid programs, as well as their implications for diversity initiatives. Moreover, these current policies suggest promoting equity and addressing barriers for Latinx individuals. These policies involve financial aid programs as well as non-monetary interventions like outreach, and affirmative action. Therefore, these policies play a crucial role in addressing barriers faced by underrepresented students and can significantly impact their educational outcomes, especially for Latinx students in higher education (Salmi and D'Addio, 2020).

Previous studies have examined the barriers Latinx individuals have experienced in accessing and succeeding in higher education in the United States through various methods, including qualitative research and scholarly analysis (Salmi and D'Addio, 2020). These studies have shown multiple patterns of inequality in educational opportunities and outcomes, highlighting the interconnected challenges facing Latinx students in higher education. However, it is crucial to understand these educational studies' analyses of disparities, particularly among Latinx students, and identify the key factors contributing to these barriers. This understanding is vital because it defines educational disparities as differences in access to and outcomes of education that come from social, economic, and institutional factors (Quintana & Mahgoub, 2016). Therefore, this literature review will focus on a few important moments that define the

current federal and state funding policies and briefly address the Critical Race Theory that will guide the policy recommendations provided at the end of this paper.

Higher Education at the Federal Level

The historical context of federal-level policies regarding the access to higher education for Latinx individuals in the United States is shaped by various social, political, and legal evolutions. Therefore, it is essential to start at the beginning when these barriers start in higher education. One significant moment was the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s, which brought attention to systemic discrimination and inequality, including within the education system. The Civil Rights Act of 1964 prohibited discrimination based on race, color, religion, sex or national origin in programs receiving federal financial assistance (U.S. Department of Education, 1999). The federal civil rights policies helped improve the educational opportunities of many students of color, especially for Latinx individuals. That said, this legislation started the foundation for addressing educational disparities, including access to higher education for Latinx individuals.

Following the Civil Rights Act, federal aid programs have played a crucial role when it comes to expanding the access to higher education for Latinx individuals. For instance, the Higher Education Act of 1965 established federal student aid programs, which included grants, loans, and work-study programs, to help students cover the tuition for higher education (Watson, 2019). Furthermore, when it comes to the Pell Grant, it has provided financial support to low-income students, including many Latinx individuals, seeking to pursue higher education. According to O'Connell (2020), Latino males who had full Pell Grants when enrolled in higher education the first year mentioned that the Pell Grant program positively impacted their academic work ethic and study since they felt a sense of support.

However, federal-level policies have also faced challenges and setbacks, especially for Latinx individuals wanting to pursue higher education. For instance, ongoing debates over immigration policy and the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program have created uncertainty for undocumented Latinx students seeking access to higher education. This is because without DACA, undocumented students will not even be able to get temporary Social Security numbers. As a result, undocumented students will not want to pursue higher education because they would not be able to get legitimate jobs after receiving their degrees (Gordon, 2020). Overall, the historical context of federal-level policies reflects both progress and ongoing challenges in ensuring equitable access to higher education for Latinx individuals.

Higher Education at the State Level

In addition, the historical context of state-level policies is essential when it comes to the access to higher education for Latinx students, including Proposition 209 in California and community college initiatives. Proposition 209 was passed by California voters in 1996 and it banned the use of racial preferences when it came to admissions at public colleges in California. It was found that after Prop 209 was passed, minority graduation rates increased, including for Latinx students (Arcidiacono, Aucejo, Coate, & Hotz, 2012). However, even though it was found that minority graduation rates did in fact increase, many argued that Prop 209 promoted equal treatment for admissions but it also limited the use of affirmative action programs, including the ones aimed at increasing diversity in higher education. Therefore, Prop 209 did lead to a decline in enrollment of minority students, including Latinx individuals, in California public universities, as colleges were no longer able to consider race or ethnicity when it came to the admissions

decisions, but regarding graduation rates, Prop 209 led to more efficient variety of minority students (Arcidiacono, Aucejo, Coate, & Hotz, 2012).

In response to Proposition 209, California implemented various community college initiatives to expand access to higher education for Latinx individuals and other minority groups. These initiatives include outreach programs, support services, and transfer pathways designed to help with the transition from community college to a four-year college. For instance, programs such as Puente and the Extended Opportunity and Services (EOPS) provide support, counseling, and financial assistance to help Latinx students succeed in community colleges. Research showed that Puente students have reported that this program does make a difference when it comes to students' college aspirations, persistence in college, and preparedness, which provides students with some type of tools necessary to navigate higher education (Pedraza, 2019). EOPS, on the other hand, targets low-income students facing language, social, economic, and educational barriers, providing academic support (Yong, 2020).

Additionally, California Community Colleges also have the Associate Degree for Transfer programs that guarantees admission to the California State University system for community college students who complete specified coursework and meet GPA requirements (Mejia, Rodriguez, & Johnson, 2016). Therefore, the historical context of state-level policies shows the efforts that are made to promote equitable access to higher education for Latinx individuals. While Prop 209 limited affirmative action, California Community College initiatives have helped by providing various pathways to higher education and supporting the success of Latinx students. However, even with these efforts at the state-level, there are still many barriers that many Latinx individuals face when accessing and succeeding higher education in the United States.

Framework in Higher Education

This report will use Critical Race Theory (CRT) to address the barriers Latinx individuals face in higher education in the United States. CRT provides a framework for understanding systemic racism and racial inequalities in institutions, including higher education (McCoy & Rodricks, 2015). It challenges color blindness and highlights the intersectionality of race with other social identities (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). Latinx individuals face discrimination due to their racial identity, linguistic barriers, socioeconomic inequalities, and immigration status. Furthermore, CRT emphasizes the importance of recognizing these intersections in shaping individuals' experiences within institutions. It encourages policymakers to have a race-conscious approach and prioritize equity and inclusion in policy development.

Methodology

When analyzing Latinx individuals' barriers to pursuing higher education within the United States, this report is a case study, which conducts secondary data analysis such as academic literature, reports, and policy documents to analyze Latinx individuals' barriers in higher education and to develop policy recommendations. The purpose of using archived data is to provide insight into potential solutions and their impacts. Nevertheless, I will be focusing on Latinxs' enrollment and attainment rates, as well as the specific barriers, such as the lack of social, financial, and psychological support regarding accessing higher education. These data collections and case studies aim to address these various categories by interconnecting the archived data with more recent data to define the problem.

Case Studies

Case studies can offer valuable insights into addressing educational disparities among Latinx individuals. By examining real-life situations and identifying potential solutions, I can uncover the underlying factors contributing to these disparities. Analyzing case studies can provide a more in-depth understanding of the barriers faced by Latinx individuals in higher education, which can inform decision-making and policy recommendations (Pressbooks, n.d.). Additionally, case studies can help us examine the systemic inequalities experienced by Latinx communities, including issues related to the lack of financial, social, and psychological support.

Moreover, case studies provide an opportunity to evaluate the effectiveness of existing policies that are aimed at addressing education disparities among Latinx individuals. Therefore, by analyzing real-world examples using existing surveys and interviews through these case studies, I can better evaluate the impact of various initiatives and identify the best implementation that can be built up to address similar challenges in order to develop a policy recommendation to help find a solution for these issues. As mentioned, case studies can help find a deeper understanding of the lived experiences of Latinx individuals navigating the higher education system. By centering the voices and experiences of Latinx students, educators, and community stakeholders, case studies provide insights into the educational inequities and how these disparities impact Latinx individuals.

Secondary Data Collection and Analysis

This report presents a comprehensive research approach aimed at collecting relevant data and information on the barriers faced by Latinx individuals in accessing higher education in the United States. The main focus of this research is to examine existing academic literature, reports,

and policy documents related to the educational disparities among Latinx individuals. To achieve this goal, targeted searches will be conducted mainly through scholarly databases such as JSTOR, Google Scholar, and the Sacramento State Library, as well as a wide range of peer-reviewed articles, research studies, and policy documents. In addition, reports from governmental agencies, non-profit organizations, and advocacy groups will also be analyzed. By collecting data from reliable sources, it is possible to obtain various insights and evidence into the barriers that Latinx individuals face in higher education.

The purpose of this report is to reveal the key insights into the barriers faced by Latinx individuals in higher education by examining existing academic literature, reports, and policy documents. The analysis aims to identify recurring themes, trends, and disparities in education access and outcomes among Latinx individuals by analyzing the information and data gathered from these sources. The data collection process plays a significant role in providing the necessary evidence and insights to inform the development of policy recommendations to address these barriers. This report then aims to understand the underlying issues and challenges Latinx individuals face when accessing and succeeding in higher education in the United States by gathering data from these various sources. According to Huh and Kitson (2018), governments use data to allocate resources better and measure success. Therefore, by presenting critical findings on Latinx individuals' barriers and challenges in accessing higher education, this paper aims to contribute to the ongoing themes of educational equity and access for Latinx individuals.

Findings

Despite efforts to promote diversity and inclusion, a persistent gap exists, hindering the full realization of educational opportunities for Latinx individuals. Therefore, this section will dive into the various significant barriers that Latinx individuals in the United States face when it comes to accessing and succeeding in higher education. It will begin by examining the impact of socioeconomic factors, exploring the economic challenges that hinder Latinx individuals' pursuit of higher education. Through an analysis of financial constraints and their role in limiting opportunities, I will uncover the relationship between economic disadvantage and educational attainment among Latinx individuals. Furthermore, this section will continue to explore the cultural and social challenges faced by Latinx individuals within the education system. I will then discuss the impact of these barriers on educational attainment and economic outcomes among Latinx individuals by highlighting the widening gaps resulting from the barriers. I will also discuss the long-term consequences of these disparities, emphasizing the implication for social and economic inequalities. Lastly, this section will also explore the link between the identified barriers and societal disparities, particularly regarding social and economic mobility. By examining how these contribute to the limitation of upward mobility and the realization of the American Dream for many in the Latinx community, I will emphasize the urgent need for solutions to address systemic inequities and promote educational access and success for all in the United States.

Socioeconomic Barriers

Accessing higher education is often viewed as a pathway to opportunity and upward mobility. However, for many Latinx individuals in the United States, significant barriers hinder

their journey toward obtaining a higher education degree. One of the barriers is having financial constraints. For instance, Latinx students are at a higher risk of temporarily pausing or dropping out of higher education due to financial stress. Despite the Latinx community being the largest and fastest-growing minority group in the United States, they have the lowest college completion rate. Young Latinx students aged 25-29 have the lowest attainment of a bachelor's degree, with only 23% obtaining one, falling behind their counterparts from other ethnic backgrounds (Lopez, Guerrero, & Chavez, 2023). One of the main reasons for this educational gap among ethnic groups, is their belonging to low socioeconomic groups, with almost one-third of those attending public schools living at or below the poverty level (Lincoln, n.d.). Additionally, many families lack knowledge about financial aid, which can lead to the belief that higher education is unaffordable. Only about 44% of Latinx parents are aware of the Pell Grant, and the Latinx community, culturally, tends to be hesitant about using loans for college. That said, the Latinx community faces challenges in achieving higher education, predominantly resulting from socioeconomic disparities and limited awareness of financial aid resources. Moreover, economic hardships extend beyond the school environment, impacting Latinx individuals' ability to afford the costs associated with pursuing higher education. Rising tuition fees, with rising costs of textbooks, transportation, and housing, present even more barriers for many Latinx families. Prospective Latinx college students often find themselves burdened with financial concerns that overshadow their academic pursuits, prioritizing immediate financial needs over long-term educational goals (Martinez 2020).

Latinx individuals face a significant lack of financial support when compared to non-Hispanic whites. This is also primarily due to their lower socioeconomic status, which is reflected in their personal and family income, poverty rates, educational attainment, and

occupation (Morales and Lara, 2002). In the context of Critical Race Theory, the lack of financial support faced by Latinx individuals can be recognized through the lens of systemic racism and structural inequality. Latinx individuals' lower socioeconomic status is an evident of systemic racism embedded within economic structures. Historical practices, such as unequal access to quality education, employment discrimination, and limited economic opportunities, contribute to the socioeconomic disparities experienced by Latinx communities. In addition, it is also important to note that economic distress exists beyond the classroom. In many cases, schools predominantly attended by Latinx students often lack resources, leaving students without the tools and support necessary for academic success (The Education Trust, 2020). These schools frequently do not have access to advanced coursework, college preparatory programs, and experienced educators, which increases existing disparities in educational quality for Latinx students and their chances of going to and achieving success in higher education, furthering the continued cycle of financial inequality and limiting their opportunities to achieve their American Dream goals.

According to the U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey (2021), despite the fact that nearly 89% of Latinx young adults consider a college education essential for success in life, only 48% of the population plans to obtain a college degree, according to a national survey of Latinos conducted by the Pew Hispanic Center. The survey reveals that financial pressure to support their family is the major reason for the significant gap between their aspirations to go to college and their actual attainment. In fact, 74% of all 16-25-year-old survey respondents who cut their higher education goal mentioned this reason (Pew Research Center, 2009). These statistics highlight the need to address the systemic barriers that impede Latinx individuals' access to higher education. Although the majority recognize the importance of a college

education, the gap between aspiration and actual attainment continues to exist primarily due to financial constraints. Comprehensive policy interventions are necessary to reduce economic burdens, increase awareness of financial aid resources, and create a more equitable higher education system for Latinx individuals to achieve their academic aspirations.

Cultural and Linguistic Barriers

Achieving educational success can often be difficult for Latinx individuals in the United States due to various cultural and linguistic barriers. Despite the increasing number of Latinx communities across the United States, disparities in educational attainment persist, reflecting the complex interplay of sociocultural factors. Therefore, this section will explore the multifaceted challenges faced by Latinx individuals in accessing higher education, with a particular focus on the impact of cultural norms and language differences. Cultural influences play a significant role in shaping Latinx individuals' educational experiences, with their views towards education affecting their academic outcomes. According to the Pew Research Center (2009), 89% of Latinx young adults believe that a college education is crucial for success, but only 48% plan to pursue a degree. This shows the relationship between cultural values and educational aspirations within the Latinx community. The study also found that 74% of respondents stated that they cut their education short after high school due to poor English skills. Additionally, cultural values deeply impact Latinx individuals' educational journey, with familial expectations and societal pressures shaping their aspirations and decisions. Latinx parents, known for their protective nature, often prioritize familial bond over individual pursuits, which can influence resistance towards college attendance. For example, many Latinx parents prefer their children to remain close to home, fearing the loss of cultural identity or the financial burden of supporting college-bound students

(Lincoln, n.d.). Familial obligation and socioeconomic pressure often intersect with cultural norms, posing challenges for Latinx students striving to balance academic pursuits with familial responsibilities. Overall, the unwillingness of Latinx parents to embrace higher education due to cultural understanding further complicates the educational journey for Latinx individuals. This hesitancy towards pursuing higher education not only holds back individuals but also perpetuates cycles of inequality within Latinx communities.

Language proficiency is another critical factor in Latinx educational success, with limited English proficiency posing significant challenges in academic settings. According to Lincoln (n.d.), in some areas of the United States that have the largest and fastest-growing Latinx populations, nearly 35% of families struggle with limited English proficiency, making it difficult for students to navigate academic environments, especially in higher education. Speaking English as a second language presents barriers for these students, hindering their academic progress and increasing feelings of alienation. Additionally, these language barriers extend to their parents, limiting their ability to understand the education system and advocate effectively for their children's educational needs. With limited English proficiency, parents struggle to understand the importance of their child's academic journey or engage with school meaningfully.

Within the educational system, Latinx students face various challenges arising from cultural and linguistic disparities. For instance, standardized testing, which heavily favors English proficiency, presents another barrier for bilingual or English as a Second Language (ESL) students, increasing inequities in academic assessment. According to Bach (2020), racial/ethnic minority backgrounds, particularly for Latinx students, often find themselves disproportionately segregated in under-funded schools that perpetuate education inequities. High-stakes standardized tests, deeply rooted in Texas education policy, exacerbate these

disparities by further disadvantaging minority students. This study highlights the flaws in high-stakes testing, showing its role in widening existing educational inequalities. Despite these drawbacks, standardized tests remain a foundation of educational assessment in Texas. Regarding ESL students, they often face significant obstacles, such as time constraints preventing regular class attendance, the perceived low priority of education relative to its, and transportation challenges. On the other hand, factors such as skepticism about the usefulness of classes, concerns about familial disapproval, and unsettling with fellow students ranked lowest in importance. This reflects that ESL programs among Latinx students are often seen as a time constraint and have cultural influences, which adds to the barriers to accessing and succeeding in higher education. In short, the challenges faced by Latinx students in the educational system highlight the need for comprehensive reform to address cultural and linguistic disparities. Standardized testing, segregation in under-funded schools, and limited access to ESL programs all contribute to widening educational inequalities. It is necessary that policymakers, educators, and communities work together to create a more inclusive and equitable educational environment for Latinx students. By recognizing and addressing these challenges, we can strive towards a more just and accessible education system for all.

Social and Psychological Barriers

Another barrier that Latinx individuals face when it comes to their academic success is the lack of social and psychological support within educational institutions. One significant issue when it comes to the lack of social and psychological support is the absence of mentorship and role models who share similar cultural backgrounds and experiences. Without access to mentors who understand their unique struggles within the higher education institutions, Latinx students

lack guidance, encouragement, and opportunities for personal and professional growth. As Rosales (2021) highlighted, many Latinx students, particularly first-generation college students, lack support and guidance from family members, making mentorship from within the academic community even more crucial.

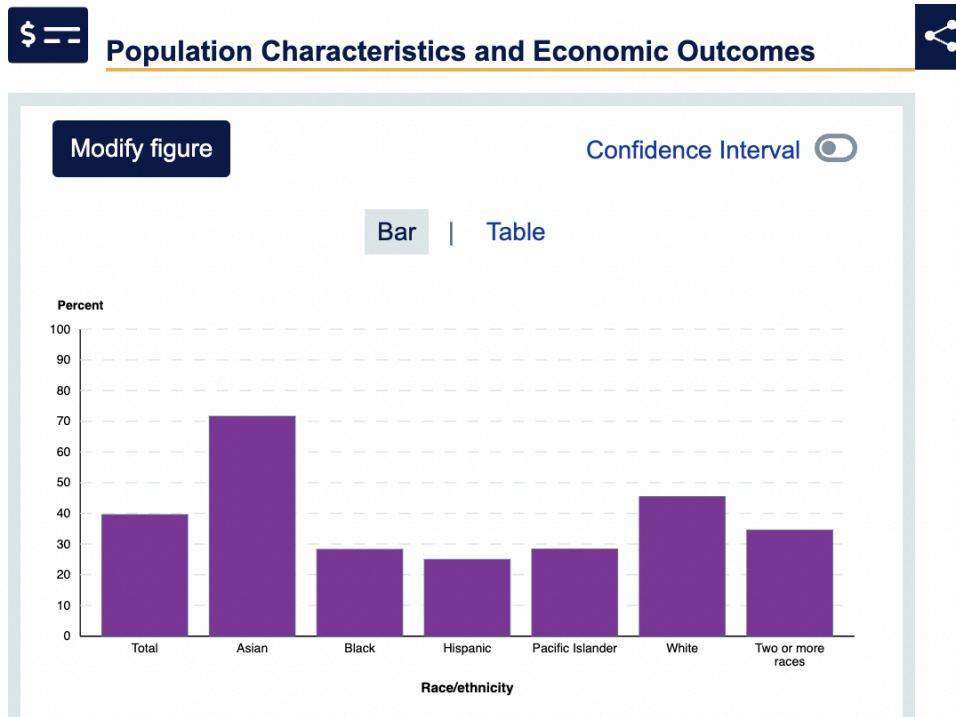
Additionally, Latinx students often struggle with a sense of isolation and alienation within their academic environment. Due to underrepresentation, they may struggle to find peer support networks and connections with others who share their cultural identity. For instance, Rosales' (2021) interviews with Latinx students underscored the importance of having a supportive community in navigating the complexities of higher education. The lack of Latinx faculty further increases the feeling of isolation and hinders students' ability to find relatable mentors and role models. The lack of social and psychological support systems can also take a toll on Latinx students' mental health. Without enough support, students may experience increased levels of stress, anxiety and depression. The pressure to excel academically while juggling cultural and familial expectations can contribute to feelings of not having enough support and imposter syndrome. Furthermore, cultural stigma surrounding mental health within the Latinx community also discourages students from seeking help, leading to untreated mental health issues, further increasing their distress. That said, the lack of social and psychological support represents a significant barrier to success for Latinx students in higher education. To address this issue, educational institutions must prioritize the establishment of inclusive support systems that accommodate the unique needs of Latinx individuals. This includes increasing representation among faculty and staff, fostering mentorship programs, and promoting culturally competent mental health services. By addressing these issues, it can create a more supportive and equitable educational environment where Latinx students can thrive academically and personally.

Impact on Educational Attainment and Economic Outcomes

As stated, for many Latinx individuals in the United States, these significant barriers hinder their journey towards obtaining a higher education degree. Therefore, this section will dive into the impact of these barriers on educational attainment and economic outcomes within the Latinx community, highlighting the long-term consequences on both individual and community levels. It also explores how these challenges contribute to wider societal disparities and limit upward mobility, consequently affecting the realization of the American Dream for many Latinx individuals in the United States.

Latinx individuals face alarming barriers to accessing higher education, including financial constraints, lack of social and psychological support, and cultural and linguistic disparities. These barriers often result in lower educational attainment rates among Latinx individuals compared to their non-Latinx counterparts. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2023), the attainment rate among Latinx individuals in 2022 was up 34%, which is the lowest rate compared to their non-Latinx counterparts.

Figure 1



Note: National Center for Education Statistics (2023).

As mentioned, while 89% of Latinx young adults believe that a college education is crucial for success, only 48% plan to pursue a degree. Additionally, Latinx individuals are less likely to complete college, with only 23% of Latinx individuals between the ages of 25-29 attaining a bachelor’s degree, as reported by a study by Pew Research Center (2009). With that in mind, the results of these educational disparities extend beyond the individual level and have economic consequences. Latinx individuals with lower levels of educational attainment are more likely to face limited job opportunities and lower wages, perpetuating cycles of poverty within their communities. Furthermore, studies have also shown that Latinx individuals with higher levels of education experience lower rates of unemployment and higher medium earning compared to those with lower levels of education (Mora and Dávila, 2018). Therefore, barriers to

higher education increase economic inequalities within the Latinx community in the United States, contributing to broader social and economic disparities.

The recognizable barriers to higher education among Latinx individuals contribute to wider societal disparities, particularly in terms of social and economic inequalities. The limited access to educational opportunities and lower levels of educational attainment among Latinx individuals hinder their ability to achieve upward mobility and attain the American Dream. According to Latino Policy Forum (2022), Latinx individuals are more likely than non-Latinx whites to have jobs with low wages, minimal benefits, and unstable employment. As a result, many Latinx individuals remain trapped in low-wage jobs with limited prospects for advancement, perpetuating intergenerational cycles of poverty and inequality. Furthermore, the lack of representation and inclusion within educational institutions and the workforce further marginalized individuals and reinforces systemic inequalities. Latinx individuals are underrepresented in higher education institutions and face barriers to accessing employment opportunities that offer economic security and advancement. Consequently, the American Dream, which promises opportunities for success regardless of background, remains elusive for many within the Latinx community.

Therefore, the barriers to higher education faced by Latinx individuals have far reaching consequences on both educational attainment and economic outcomes. These disparities not only affect individuals' ability to achieve economic security and upward mobility but also perpetuate broader social and economic inequalities within the Latinx community and society at large. Addressing these barriers requires comprehensive strategies and policy reforms aimed at increasing access to higher education, providing adequate support systems, and dismantling systemic barriers that hinder Latinx individuals' educational and economic advancement. That

said, by bridging the gap in educational and economic opportunities, we can create a more equitable society where all individuals have the opportunity to fulfill their potential and achieve the American Dream.

Policy Recommendations

Addressing the barriers to educational attainment faced by Latinx individuals requires a multifaceted approach that incorporates targeted interventions, community engagement, and strategic allocation of resources. Therefore, in this section, I propose specific policy changes and interventions designed to mitigate the impact of socioeconomic factors, cultural and linguistic barriers, and the lack of social and psychological support on Latinx student's educational outcomes. By considering both short-term and long-term strategies and fostering collaboration with stakeholders at the state and federal levels, these policy recommendations aim to create a more equitable and inclusive educational system that empowers Latinx students to succeed academically and pursue their educational goals in the United States.

Pathways to Success: High School Programs for Latinx Empowerment

In order to address the socioeconomic barriers faced by Latinx individuals, I propose the implementation of high school support programs tailored specifically for Latinx students. These programs will offer comprehensive services, including academic counseling, college application assistance, and financial aid workshops. By targeting Latinx students early in their high school years, these programs aim to prepare them with the necessary resources and guidance to navigate the college application process successfully. This policy recommendation comes from the ideas, such as Puente and EOPS in California Community Colleges, which have shown effectiveness in

supporting Latinx students in their pursuit to transfer to higher education after completing their time in community college. Therefore, implementing similar support structures in high schools will ensure that Latinx students have early exposure to college readiness resources, setting them on a path towards educational success. In addition, while the focus is on high student Latinx students, exploring options to extend support to non-traditional Latinx students returning to school could further broaden the impact of these programs.

Additionally, to overcome cultural and linguistic barriers, I recommend the expansion of dual-language programs and ESL support services in schools with significant Latinx communities. That said, I propose incorporating role models for Latinx students. By investing in bilingual education and recruiting bilingual educators and counselors, it will not only facilitate better communication and understanding between schools, state officials, and Latinx students and parents but also provide role models who can represent the interest and needs of Latinx students. This approach, based on the representative bureaucracy theory, ensures that students see themselves reflected in the educators and counselors who support them, fostering a stronger sense of belonging and support within the Latinx community (Grissom, Kern & Rodriguez, 2012). Moreover, to address the lack of social and psychological support, I propose increasing the availability of mental health resources and support services within high schools and community colleges. This could include having counseling centers staffed with culturally competent mental health professionals who specialize in supporting Latinx students. Additionally, implementing peer mentorship programs where Latinx students can receive guidance and support from peers who share similar cultural backgrounds and experiences can be highly beneficial. These programs would provide a safe space for Latinx students to discuss their concerns, receive guidance, and access resources tailored to their unique needs, which will help

foster a supportive environment that is useful for their academic and emotional well-being. Therefore, by investing in culturally competent counseling and mentorship programs, it can create a supportive environment that empowers Latinx students to thrive academically and emotionally.

Building Bridges: Community Engagement in Latinx Education Policy

Community engagement and involvement is essential for successful implementation and sustainability of proposed policies (Granicus, n.d.). Emphasizing the importance of establishing advisory committees composed of educators, parents, community leaders, and representatives from non-profit organizations. These committees will provide valuable insights into the unique challenges faced by Latinx individuals and inform the development of culturally responsive policies and programs. That said, by fostering partnerships with community-based organizations and advocacy groups, this will ensure that interventions are informed by the community needs and effectively implemented through the public level. Collaborative efforts between state agencies, educational institutions, and community stakeholders will increase the impact of policy initiatives and promote greater access to educational opportunities for Latinx individuals.

State and Federal Policy for Additional Funding

Adequate funding is essential to support initiatives aimed at addressing educational disparities among Latinx individuals in the United States. Therefore, by advocating for increased state and federal funding to support targeted interventions and educational equity initiatives. This includes funding for the recruitment and professional development of bilingual educators and counselors, as well as the expansion of college preparatory programs and financial aid initiatives

tailored to Latinx students' needs. By advocating for equitable funding plans and allocating resources towards proven intervention, this can create a more inclusive and supportive learning environment that empowers Latinx students to achieve their full potential. Intergovernmental collaborations are necessary to determine how to allocate funds per state, considering factors such as the population of Hispanic students, average household income per state and any other relevant demographics.

In short, these policy recommendations show a comprehensive approach to address the barriers faced by Latinx individuals in accessing higher education. By implementing targeted interventions, fostering community engagement, and advocating for additional funding, this can create a more equitable and inclusive educational system for everyone in the United States, which will empower Latinx students to succeed academically and pursue their educational aspirations.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this policy report sheds light on the alarming barriers Latinx individuals face in accessing and succeeding in higher education in the United States. From socioeconomic factors to cultural and linguistic barriers to lack of social and psychological support, these barriers significantly hinder the educational journey of Latinx students. That said, the summary of key findings emphasizes the urgent need for action in order to remove these barriers and pave the way for equitable educational opportunities. Moreover, policymakers, educational institutions, and community leaders must take notice of the call to action. Implementing inclusive policies and targeted interventions can address the systemic issues perpetuating educational disparities

among Latinx individuals. Collaboration and show efforts across sectors are essential to ensure that all Latinx students have the support and resources they need to succeed academically.

It is important to note that this policy report has its limitations. For instance, I relied solely on secondary data analysis and existing case studies about Latinx individuals' challenges in accessing higher education. While these methods provide valuable insights into specific examples, they might not fully represent the diverse experiences and perspectives of Latinx individuals nationwide. Secondary data analysis and case studies can also overlook some factors and challenges Latinx communities face in different regions or socioeconomic contexts. Moreover, despite the policy recommendation offering promising strategies to increase Latinx students' access to higher education, it also has limitations. Recognizing the complexity of the issues at hand, monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of these policy recommendations is necessary. Additionally, ongoing dialogue and engagement with stakeholders are crucial to refining and adapting the approaches to meet the evolving needs of the Latinx community. Therefore, the journey towards educational equity for Latinx individuals requires collective action and commitment. Addressing the identified barriers and advocating for inclusive policies will create a brighter future for the Latinx community, unlock the full potential for all, and achieve their American Dream.

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