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## Experiences of Multicultural and Multilingual Baccalaureate Nursing Students: A Literature Review

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Experiences of Multicultural and Multilingual Baccalaureate Nursing Students:

A Literature Review

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Scholarly Project

### Abstract

Baccalaureate degree seeking nursing students have varied experiences while in the nursing programs. These experiences can be viewed as factors and forces (both negative and positive) that promote or hinder their success in nursing school. Some of these forces and factors have a greater impact, and others have a smaller impact on the students' experiences and ultimately, their outcomes. This paper examines the influence of positive and negative factors and forces affecting multicultural and multilingual baccalaureate nursing students. Positive experiences explored in this paper include; multicultural nursing student associations, self-motivation, and resilience, and student colleague support. Negative experiences explored in this paper include; academic navigation, personal constraints, and language difference.

*Keywords:* Nursing, Baccalaureate, Student Experiences, Multicultural, Multilingual

With the diversification of the population in the United States of America, the workforce has an increasing need to diversify as well. There is a greater need now more than ever before to increase in number and diversity, especially for the nursing workforce. In response to growing opportunities and demand, an increased number of multicultural (MC) and multilingual (ML) students are pursuing a baccalaureate degree in nursing. This population of students is increasingly being accepted into nursing programs all over the country. However, acceptance rates into programs and graduation rates from programs are disparate and concerning (Harris, Rosenberg, & Grace O'Rourke, 2014). Determining what forces and factors hinder or promote successful completion of nursing programs and better understanding the MC/ML student experience is necessary. This scholarly project aims to provide insight into the positive and negative experiences of MC/ML baccalaureate nursing students. In the following sections, the author outlines the factors and forces contributing to the top three positive experiences and top three negative experiences of these students. This project concludes with recommendations for nurse educators and the profession of nursing as a whole.

### **Background and Significance**

It is important to capture the experiences of MC/ML students while in nursing school as they are pursuing a baccalaureate degree. This knowledge is essential so as to better understand their journey which is often unique. Multicultural and Multilingual nursing students, parents, multicultural and multilingual communities, schools of nursing, nursing faculty, institutional executive leadership, and the broader university community would find this information helpful to better meet the needs of this population. Gaining a better understanding of these students' experiences will not only increase awareness, but it may also encourage further research and exploration of the experiences pointed out, promotion of positive experiences and attention to

interventions aimed at decreasing and/or eliminating negative experiences. It is currently known that MC/ML baccalaureate nursing students do experience retention and academic challenges (Memmer, 1991). MC/ML student recruitment efforts exist, however, there is a mismatch between the number of students recruited and the number of MC/ML nurses that successfully graduate. This is concerning given the continued growth of the MC/ML population in the United States of America (Baker, 2010). If the experiences of the MC/ML nursing student are not captured, understood, and incorporated, the gap in graduation rates and subsequent availability of MC/ML nurses in the workforce will continue to exist and possibly increase. This directly impacts a number of key stakeholders, including but not limited to; patients, MC/ML students, faculty, and MC/ML nurses. Supporting the positive experiences and minimizing the negative experiences has the potential to improve the experiences of MC/ML students, faculty, patients, and MC/ML nurses, increase program completion, reduce the gap in diversity of the nursing workforce, and improve the ability of the workforce to meet the needs of culturally diverse patients (Condon, Morgan, Miller, Mamier, Zimmerman, Mazhar, 2013).

As outlined by the IOM (2004), patients expressed greater satisfaction and improved access to care when served by minority providers. It is, therefore, important that more diverse nurses are in the workforce. MC/ML students have a role in striving to gain access to baccalaureate nursing programs, and successfully completing their studies so that they can add to the diversity of the nursing workforce. Faculty have a role in facilitating the success of MC/ML nursing students in their programs so that gap in diversity in the nursing workforce and the U.S population can be bridged. MC/ML nurses can be involved in resolving and/or providing opportunities to improve the cultural and lingual challenges that affect MC/ML patients. Efforts by the stakeholders mentioned in the former section of this paper should be geared towards

attaining representative diversity. Failure to do so has the potential to impact MC/ML patient outcomes.

### **Methods**

A computer literature search was undertaken to identify the experiences of multicultural and multilingual baccalaureate nursing students, and it produced numerous references. The following databases were searched: MEDLINE (EBSCO), Cumulative Index to Nursing and Allied Health Literature (CINAHL), and ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global. Key search words such as nursing, baccalaureate, student experiences, multicultural, multilingual, education outcomes, cultural diversity, success, and minority groups were applied to database indexes. The criteria used to select articles included experiences of multicultural and multilingual baccalaureate nursing students. Articles selected were published between 1991 and 2015.

A total of 121 were retrieved and reviewed initially. After sorting, 19 articles were used for the in-depth literature review. Of these; nine were research studies, five were cross-sectional studies, and five were literature reviews. An identified challenge was the focus on negative factors and forces impacting the population. For the purposes of this article, some inferences were made on some of the positive factors and forces based on the stated negative ones.

### **Results**

On reviewing the literature, there are six major themes that emerged which are categorized as positive and negative experiences. Positive experiences include; multicultural nursing student associations, self-motivation and resilience, and student colleague support. Negative experiences include; academic navigation, personal constraints, and language difference. Each of the positive and negative experiences forces and factors which influence and ultimately contribute to MC/ML nursing student experiences will be described next.

## **Positive Experiences**

**Multicultural nursing student associations.** Amaro, Abriam-Yago, & Yoder (2006) reported that student organizations' are a valuable resource for MC/ML students. More specifically, the multicultural nursing student association environment was influencing to these students' overcoming some barriers. A safe space would be provided in this setting and students got success strategies, were motivated, got social support, and were given a sneak peek into what to expect in upcoming classes, clinicals or projects. In this setting, students connected with other MC/ML students. The multicultural nursing student associations provided an avenue for peer mentoring to take place. In this study, MC/ML nursing student who were ahead of the mentees in the program would mentor those who are a level behind them. This fostered inspiring connections which created a positive experience. In another article, Etowa, Foster, Vukic, Wittstock, and Youden (2005) described the importance of informal sessions between MC/ML students and their faculty over a 'pizza social' so that the students could voice their concerns as well as share their points of view, and achievements. These sessions served as forums for informal feedback from students to faculty members. However, it should be noted that students indicated that it was preferable that faculty who were not directly involved with the particular group of MC/ML students were the ones present instead of those who were directly involved. The role of the non-direct faculty was to offer the support, empowerment, and listening ear that the MC/ML student desired and then to subsequently write a brief summary of the meeting and share it with faculty who were directly involved. The purpose of this was to create a safe environment for the students where they felt free to express what was on their mind knowing that their academic performance would not be affected, or somehow influenced by some of the exchanges that took place at the informal meeting. These associations created a forum for student

colleagues to connect and interact. These interactions would eventually lead to the formation of friendships which increases their sense of belonging which is important given that MC/ML nursing students' sense of belonging is reliant on their interactions with others in their program including peers. (Oosterbroek & Ponomar, 2014). Having an active multicultural nursing student organization has the potential to continue to enhance MC/ML nursing students' positive experiences and be beneficial to them.

**Self-motivation and resilience.** In an article by Olson (2012), the driving force for MC/ML students to complete their baccalaureate program of study was desiring to do and be better not only for themselves but also, for their families and communities. Realizing their dreams and fulfilling their goal contributed to students' success. This author goes on to explain that prayer and determination go into fostering resilience which ultimately aids in graduation. Resilience is also fueled by a personal commitment to do well which is a fundamental element of self-motivation which influences the experience and success of MC/ML students. These findings were supported by Batykefer (2013), who reported that minority baccalaureate nursing students have a strong intention to complete their program of study and their retention rates should be higher than that of nonminority students. This author also mentioned that there may be other characteristics of nursing programs that may supersede a student's intention not to leave, which should be looked into. Hence, a student's intention to complete their program of study may be a predictor of their success.

**Social support.** This is a positive experience that MC/ML students encounter while in the nursing program. Sources of social support are; supportive families, supportive colleagues, multicultural student nursing associations, and mentors (Harris et al., 2014). The literature reports various mentorship relationships such as nursing faculty mentors, nurse mentors, senior

nursing student mentors, and master's nursing student mentors as being helpful to the MC/ML student. Mentors serve as counselors, role models, and coaches for students and offers mutual benefits to mentors and mentees (Banister, Bowen-Brady, and Winfrey, 2014). These reports are also supported by Wilson, Sanner, and McAllister (2010), who reported that formal mentoring programs were fruitful in helping MC/ML nursing students be successful in the nursing program. Specific qualities associated with successful mentorship programs include adequate preparation of mentors prior to mentoring, focusing on the success of mentees, and intentional creation of a bond and trust between the mentor and mentee. These qualities should be core considerations when developing a mentorship program as not all mentor programs are of equal value (Banister, 2014).

Conversely, while there are positive experiences that support the MC/ML student during their academic programming, there are also negative experiences that can hinder their success. The following section addresses the three most prevalent experiences reported in the literature.

### **Negative Experiences**

**Academic navigation.** Academic navigation, defined by Amaro et al. (2006) as, “study workload, the need for tutoring, and the need for study groups...” is an area where MC/ML nursing students often have negative experiences. Academics is the main reason why MC/ML students enroll in baccalaureate nursing programs but unfortunately, there are lots of hoops to jump through in this area. First, there is a lot of material to be understood and practiced in a condensed amount of time. A wide array of projects such as care plans, simulations, class preparation, presentations, papers, and group projects may be expected depending on the program requirements. This is an important consideration for the MC/ML students because these types of projects are complex, time-consuming, and overwhelming (Amaro et al., 2006).

Second, to digest all that there is, tutoring or some form of group studying is considered vital. However, Amaro et al. (2006) reported that some MC/ML nursing students did not find study groups helpful and instead choose to study on their own. While for some students tutoring or group study may be helpful, MC/ML students reported tutoring and group study as heightening their anxiety. Not only can tutoring and/or group study sessions be negative for MC/ML students, some nursing programs don't even have the option, or if they do fail to meet the needs of the MC/ML nursing student. To meet the needs of the MC/ML nursing student, tutoring and group sessions should include ways to summarize complex content, ways to review content, ways to assess one's knowledge/understanding related to topic/focus of study (Keane, 1993). Other reasons reported for not participating in group study included the size of the groups, and the pace of studying/learning was not comfortable. Sometimes, a combined effort in studying and learning was found to be successful through giving the MC/ML a sense of less burden and anxiety related to their academics.

**Personal constraints.** Constraints, as defined in the literature, include a wide array of factors such as lack of finances, family and child (ren) responsibilities, and time limitations which stand in the way of MC/ML students' success in the nursing programs (Amaro et al., 2006). These factors align with a negative experience because they are components of one's life that have to be attended to. Failure to attend to these factors can contribute to the lack of success in the baccalaureate nursing program. For instance, while time management is challenging for many college students, the literature indicates that time management may be more of a challenge for the MC/ML student as there are many other things that compete for the MC/ML students' time. These factors are similar to the constraints listed previously including family responsibilities and employment (Kirkland, 1998). A more recent study by Carthon, Nguyen,

Chittams, Park, & Guevara (2014) additionally reports that the increased financial constraints of many MC/ML students impact graduation rates more often than their non-MC/ML peers.

Financial needs, such as tuition, class materials, and personal expenses exist and are necessary for successful completion of the program (Baker, 2010). However, meeting these needs may need to be met in different ways than a traditional student. This includes navigating loans, working longer and/or more hours, borrowing money from family, and using what they have very frugally (Kirkland, 1998). With this in mind, dealing with personal constraints is a balancing act for the MC/ML student.

**Language difference.** Verbal communications such as reading and writing have also been reported as challenging for some MC/ML nursing students. For many MC/ML students, students must first translate the message into their native language mentally to understand it and then back again to English. This process takes time and leaves some students feeling “slow” or “inadequate” during this process especially when there are high stakes involved. Harris et al., (2014) elaborated that MC/ML students need more time to study and take timed tests. Time is a barrier in regards to how much of it is needed by MC/ML students especially when assimilating and applying nursing knowledge. This population of students benefited from supportive programming such as writing help, more time to take tests, more time for active learning activities, and varied learning experiences. Amaro et al. (2006) identified that some MC/ML students requested more time to complete tests and assignments from their faculty. They also recorded lectures on devices so that they could review the material taught at their own time and pace for better understanding. In addition to the struggles of interpreting the written or spoken communication from others, the literature reports that some students also encountered prejudice from non-MC/ML students, faculty, clinical instructors, clinical preceptors, and nurses because

of their accent which sounds different (Amaro et al., 2006). Cultural insensitivity negatively impacts MC/ML nursing students and has the potential to influence a student's success or failure (Childs et al., 2004)

In summary, multicultural student associations, self-motivation and resilience, and social support make for positive experiences among MC/ML nursing students while struggles with academic navigation, personal constraints, and language difference can negatively influence the experiences among MC/ML nursing students. When negative experiences are allowed to influence the MC/ML student's ability to be successful in a nursing program, there are direct implications for diversity within the nursing workforce (Porter, 2008). It is imperative that systemic changes in nursing programs take place that acknowledges the unique needs of the MC/ML learner so that the nursing workforce is representative of the communities which they serve.

### **Discussion/Implication for Nurse Educators**

This literature review was conducted to provide insight into the experiences of MC/ML baccalaureate nursing students. The ultimate goal was to thematically explore the positive and negative experiences of the MC/ML nursing student, and subsequently offer recommendations as to how nurse educators can support the MC/ML student's success. While the nurse educator's role is important, the MC/ML nursing students, nursing programs, and learning institutions have a part to play in reducing the challenges these students experience.

Academic navigation, as defined previously, was reported to be one of the main challenges that MC/ML nursing student's encounter. It was among the top contributors to student attrition in nursing programs and is costly. Ways in which the negative influence can be diminished include an investment by nursing programs in study skills sessions for MC/ML

nursing students. These study skill sessions would need to be presented to the MC/ML student through multicultural student associations. In these study skills sessions, senior MC/ML nursing students who are in good academic standing could collaborate with nursing faculty to provide students strategies for studying, preparing for, and taking tests. A study strategy that may be helpful is outlined by Keane (1993, p. 220), where it is suggested that “having students summarize main points from lectures and read assignments and/or vignettes, while ensuring that they understand the meaning of test questions, are additional classroom methods that may help them to manage the extensive and difficult nursing content.” The literature demonstrates that it is motivating for MC/ML nursing students to see other MC/ML students share their journey while offering tips and encouragement on how to succeed academically. Within these study skill sessions, some MC/ML nursing students might find additional support by forming study groups to collectively navigate some of the challenges of academia while simultaneously forming positive relationships. Faculty can also promote the formation of study groups by encouraging and engaging students in doing so. This would be appropriate by identifying MC/ML students who are willing to participate or those who are underperforming academically.

Not only are study groups helpful, but as Batykefer (2013) reports, peer interaction is positively associated with student retention. By investing in recruiting and compensating senior students in good academic standing to run tutoring sessions throughout the semester at different times of the day, nursing programs might dually meet the need to support the MC/ML student and achieve better retention/completion rates which are important for accreditation purposes. There are also additional benefits for the tutors including the opportunity for them to polish their knowledge and skills as well as get a work-study opportunity. The MC/ML nursing students attending these sessions would have a chance to break down the hefty concepts and knowledge

with the help of another successful student and walk the journey with someone else decreasing isolation and loneliness (Amaro et al., 2006).

Personal constraints are indeed varied because one MC/ML nursing student's challenge is not what is faced by another (Harris et al., 2014). Learning institutions should have accessible and effective centers or organizations within it for support such as student-parent organizations, career and development centers, and scholarship and funds organizations. Such avenues would be helpful in alleviating some of the constraints faced by MC/ML nursing students. For example, a student-parent organization can have a center where there is a play area with volunteers and a study area with computers. Students who are parents can study while their children play. An environment where MC/ML students can get professional help searching and applying for scholarships, funds, and grants would also be helpful as financial support would help alleviate some of their monetary needs for tuition and upkeep (Hesser et al., 1996).

Lastly, in order to better accommodate students with a language difference, nursing faculty can implement a policy in their classes stating that students should not leave the classroom until the allotted time for an examination, project, or quiz is up. This may help MC/ML students not to feel rushed, "slow/inadequate," or intimidated because other students completed their task and left the classroom. Faculty have a part to play in creating and maintaining an inclusive environment for all students even with the language difference and implementing such as strategy would be one way that they could contribute. Other ways in which faculty can reach out and support the MC/ML student include consistently educating and challenging their students to have a global perspective, encouraging them to learn, and, to seek to be culturally sensitive.

Other means of supporting the MC/ML student with language differences include encouraging the student to take a medical terminology class prior to starting the nursing program (Porter, 2008). Gaining knowledge of medical terminology may help ease into the "nursing language" which is already quite different. A class on English for nursing would also be beneficial for MC/ML nursing students prior to starting the nursing program. In one university, a course was designed to prepare MC/ML students for the reading, writing, listening, and oral communication skills needed to succeed in the baccalaureate nursing program (S. Boshier, personal communication, April 22, 2016). This class focused on the role of culture in nursing and was positively reviewed. The class is no longer offered because the nursing curriculum was revised and students no longer have room in their schedule for electives. Offering a similar class for MC/ML in other universities could be beneficial in bridging some of the gaps that exist when learning in a different language (Amaro et al., 2006).

### **Mentorship Programs**

While informal peer tutoring has been reported as helpful, more formal mentorship programs may have an even greater benefit. Wilson et al., (2010) elaborated that formal mentorship programs aid in nursing student success. In their study, adding a component of creating a workshop for faculty to prepare them with skills, knowledge, and attitudes to be mentors was of great value. Faculty gain insight into what it entails to competently serve MC/ML students. A supportive mentoring relationship consists of a mentee who has a positive attitude and is willing to learn; and a mentor who notices growth and is attentive. When a student perceives support from faculty, they are more likely to carry on in their nursing degree pursuit (Porter, 2008). An organized peer mentorship program from MC/ML nursing students could help in countering some of the difficulties experienced in understanding what is expected of them

academically. This program could offer small rewards to students who offer to participate in the mentorship program (Mbulu, 2015). In an article by Banister et al. (2014), these authors assert that “mentors served as role models, boosted mentee confidence, and helped them appreciate the opportunities afforded by nursing.” This statement further goes to show the impact and importance of mentorship for students in the nursing program.

### **Cultural Competence**

An additional consideration for how nurse educators can support the MC/ML student includes the concept of cultural competence. Cultural competence is vital for nursing faculty to possess. This is because MC/ML students have diverse backgrounds and experiences which shape their culture which is different from the mainstream culture in the United States of America. Gaining an understanding of how to better meet MC/ML nursing students needs will be helpful to both students and teachers. When faculty identify with and meet the needs of MC/ML students, they can aid them in being successful in nursing school Ume-Nwagbo (2012). Cultural competence training will equip nursing faculty who are not culturally competent to develop and enhance the competence of those faculty who are. Amaro et al. (2006) explained, “Cultural biases can significantly impact the faculty’s perception of students from a cultural and/or racial background different from their own. Therefore, it is imperative that faculty develop an awareness and sensitivity toward the culture of students from a racial and ethnic group different from their own. This can be achieved through cultural awareness- or sensitivity training workshops...” (p. 253). These workshops are made possible by the nursing program administration as they provide the needed resources and time for faculty to be engaged in it.

### **Financial Support**

Consideration of finances and how institutions and/or faculty can support MC/ML students to feel financially secure is an additional factor that needs to be addressed. Financial support contributes to MC/ML nursing student retention (reference), therefore, it is in the best interest that learning institutions would encourage and support their faculty and students to apply for grants and funds for MC/ML nursing students who are eligible to receive it (Childs, Jones, Nugent, & Cook, 2004). This can be in the form of stipends, scholarships, grants (federal and state), and emergency funds. According to Hesser, Pond, Lewis & Abbot (1996), advising efforts such as financial would be beneficial to MC/ML nursing students. Providing employment opportunities in healthcare fields or work-study avenues coordinated by the nursing program could be a relief to some students. These opportunities could be part-time during the academic year and part-time during the summer allowing ample time to master study skills and the knowledge necessary to be successful in the nursing program. Having financial aid, tuition discounts, and loans (low interest) for nursing students coordinated by the nursing program would also be helpful in alleviating some of the financial constraints experienced by all students, but especially the MC/ML students.

### **Minority Faculty**

Lastly but notably one of the perhaps most important considerations for higher education to consider when examining how to improve the MC/ML student experience is the need for a more diverse faculty body. Similar to the call for the nursing profession to diversify their workforce to better represent the communities that they serve, higher education must begin to better represent the students they serve. One avenue that nursing can improve the diversity within the faculty is through the application and use of a federal government grant called the Nurse Faculty Loan Program (NFLP). The NFLP is a loan forgiveness program that cancels 85%

of a nurse educator's student loans over the course of their first four years of full-time faculty employment. The main purpose of the grant is to add qualified nursing faculty in institutions of higher learning however, precedence is given to future faculty of color. While more faculty are needed to decrease the shortage of nurses in the United States in general (United States Department of Health and Human Services, n.d.), the shortage of faculty, and in particular, faculty of color is even greater.

It is recommended that administration should increase recruitment and retention efforts for minority faculty as one additional means to increase minority student recruitment and retention (Harris et al., 2014). In addition to the importance of having faculty that represent the student body, having ethnically diverse faculty also serves the additional purpose of having role models/mentors for the MC/ML nursing students (Olson, 2012). To increase diversity within the nursing faculty, more diverse nursing students are needed to successfully complete undergraduate programming, continue towards completion of a terminal degree and subsequently serve in a faculty role, thus the importance of assuring the MC/ML student success at the baccalaureate level is imperative (Childs et al., 2004).

### **Summary**

The literature implies that the negative experiences outlined in previous sections contribute to the attrition of the MC/ML student population. Changes in nursing curriculum, teaching strategies, student preparation, policies, and role preparation may contribute to increasing the positive outcomes and experiences for MC/ML nursing students, increasing faculty, nursing program and institutions for higher education ability to recruit and retain MC/ML students, and ultimately, the ability of the nursing workforce to best serve the community at large.

### **Conclusion**

Pursuing a baccalaureate nursing degree is costly and taxing financially, emotionally, intellectually, socially and physically for MC/ML nursing students. For this reason, this pursuit should not be taken lightly by all who are involved and efforts should be geared towards students' success. Multicultural and multilingual baccalaureate nursing students have positive and negative experiences while in their program of study. Schools of nursing, nursing faculty, and institutional executive leadership have a vital role in helping to increase positive experiences and decreasing negative experiences for this population. They can address the themes pointed out in the results section of this paper in an effort to increase the diversity of the nursing workforce but retaining MC/ML nursing students. Resources, commitment, and time should be invested in making changes to further facilitate the success of these students.

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