

TERTIARY EDUCATION AND THE DIRECTION FOR FUTURE RESEARCH: ACCOMMODATING THE SHIFTING DEMOGRAPHICS OF THE CARIBBEAN'S TERTIARY STUDENT

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Within recent times, governing bodies throughout the Caribbean region have been heavily concentrating upon highlighting the value of higher education. They have subsequently sought to widen access to such educational opportunities in an effort to propel their nations forward against an international backdrop of simultaneously expansive higher education incentives. This heightened emphasis has sparked an overwhelming demand among citizens for tertiary qualification. A by-product of this has been the growth of private tertiary institutions and a subsequent diversification of the Caribbean region's tertiary student body. The phenomenon of the on-traditional student has risen to the fore and is especially prominent at the University of the West Indies St. Augustine campus since the participation of these more mature students are encouraged through the campus' Evening University Programme. The present paper will make the argument that student needs must be researched in order to cater for this heterogeneous student body. Furthermore, the incorporation of more mature students especially at the undergraduate level presents a novel area of research that requires immediate investigation. The factors impacting upon their motivation and the various challenges endured while pursuing their undergraduate degrees should be examined as these findings can lend themselves to institutional and policy reform. Recommendations for future research are also outlined. Finally, the paper will advocate that such student-centered inquiry is essential for the true benefits of the tertiary sector to be harnessed.

Keywords: Higher education, student motivation, challenges, policy, research, non-traditional student.

Introduction

The global demand for higher education has exponentially increased within recent years. The quantitative expansion of student numbers serves as testimony to this fact (Schuetze and Slowey 2002). It has progressively become apparent that a growing number of students are now lengthening their academic careers by making a direct transition from the secondary to tertiary academic hallways. Additionally, within recent times, an increasing number of working adults – or re-entry students (Dill and Henley 1998) as they are sometimes quoted as in the literature – who have not previously obtained tertiary certification are now seeking such qualifications. Consequently, there has been a growth in student enrollment in the numerous tertiary institutions

that have become available to meet the growing desire for post-secondary qualification. Researchers are of the view that a combination of factors is responsible for this growth in enrollment numbers especially among this more mature cohort of students (e.g. Bowl 2001). Depending upon one's viewpoint, this heightened interest in higher education can be understood as either a consequence of or a catalyst for the employers' heavy demand for persons with post-secondary qualification.

Interestingly, a by-product of this increased demand for higher education has been the development of a lucrative economic market that benefits private providers of such tertiary certification. Technocrats have recognised the profits that can be gained from this sector and have therefore sought to capitalise upon this opportunity. Chao (2013) refers to this as the "privatisation and commercialisation of higher education." This growth in "private for profit" (Gibney 2013) higher education is rapidly expanding in all parts of the world in an effort to satisfy the ever-increasing demand for higher education. The result has been the tremendous growth of private tertiary institutions to service public demands for higher education. Ali (2007) outlined that the Caribbean tertiary education sector has expanded from being limited to a single regional provider – The University of the West Indies (UWI) – to a multiplicity of private tertiary education institutions. Such institutions include the School of Accounting and Management (SAM) and the School of Business and Computer Science (SBCS) in Trinidad and Tobago. These institutions have established campuses across the country and are partially state-funded. In Trinidad and Tobago 95.56% of the country's tertiary and post secondary institutions are privately owned and receive fifty percent financing from the Government (Ministry of Science, Technology and Tertiary Education 2010). Chao (2013) describes such governmental financial arrangements with private providers as a mechanism for alleviating the state's economic burden for the provision of higher education opportunities.

Additionally, this shift in focus toward tertiary qualification has further intensified the competition for scarce resources in that a greater proportion of the world's population is now tertiary-certified thus no longer is tertiary qualification solely relegated to the privileged few within society. Schuetze and Slowey (2002) describe this as a transition from an "elite to a mass system" of higher education services. For instance, the World Bank reports that the percentage of the American population enrolled in tertiary education rose from eighty-five percent (85%) in 1993 to ninety-five percent (95%) in 2007, while the British enrolled population increased from fifty-seven percent (57%) in 1993 to sixty percent (60%) by the year 2007. Furthermore, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) estimates that the global percentage of adults receiving tertiary education will continue to climb though at a slower pace (Gibney 2013). Regional increases are also evident, for instance Trinidad and Tobago recorded a 3.21% increase in tertiary enrollment from the period 2008 to 2010 (Ministry of Science, Technology and Tertiary Education 2010).

This increased demand for higher education has placed access to such training on the front burner for Caribbean governments (Persad-Bachan 2010). In an effort to satisfy this demand, various government policies and programmes have been implemented throughout the Caribbean within recent times. Increased awards of national and open scholarships coupled with government subsidising the cost of tertiary education through the Government Assistance for Tertiary Expenses (GATE) programme in Trinidad and Tobago and the Student Loan Bureau in

Jamaica have, to some extent, reduced the economic burden that accompanies higher level training. In Trinidad and Tobago for instance, the number of scholarships awarded to students who successfully completed the 2013 Caribbean Advanced Proficiency Exams (CAPE) exceeded the number of scholarships issued for the previous five years (Chan Tack 2013). Furthermore, 100% of undergraduate tertiary tuition expenses at selected institution is covered by the Trinidad and Tobago Government.

The region's pursuit of economic growth and overall development may be the reason behind this increase in government expenditure on the provision of higher educational opportunities. Firstly, within modern industrial society a highly skilled and specialised labour force is required. Such specialised personnel is produced by the tertiary education system (Ali 1975). Secondly, the generation of new ideas that inform economic growth and other facets of the development schematic is now the driving force within society today (Bray 2007). The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) outlines that the boom in higher education opportunity within developing economies is related to efforts of knowledge cultivation (Gibney 2013). These new forms of knowledge are produced through research conducted by academics, post-graduate students and other researchers involved in the tertiary level of academia.

Examination of the existing literature reveals that research into the area of higher education is mainly centered on the expansion of higher educational incentives and programmes offered. For instance, studies on the UWI Extra-Mural Department have been undertaken by Bernard (2002) for instance, who examined the growth of opportunities for adult learning. Additionally, research on the UWI Open Campus has been conducted by Woodall (2011) exploring the attitudes of stakeholders to online learning but failed to take into account student perceptions of such endeavours. In both instances, the attitudes of students themselves toward such incentives, especially the more mature, non-traditional students were not examined. Thus far, the growing emphasis placed upon tertiary education has been researched but a more holistic exploration of the system necessitates an examination into the perspectives of students within the system. For example, one important aspect highlighted by Dill and Henley (1998) are problems faced by students including the task of readjusting to student life after a long period of time. In this light, expansion of opportunity should not be the sole focus of universities, but equal emphasis must also be placed upon catering to the increasingly diverse needs among contemporary tertiary student populations (Schuetze and Slowey 2002).

It has been illustrated that student enrolment in this sector has increased and that a burgeoning private education sector has resultantly emerged (Asian Development Bank 2012). But a question still remains - Why? It is indeed true that societies have become knowledge-driven (Bray 2007) thus Universities and other tertiary establishments have risen to the forefront, but why are students filling these institutions? What motivational factors can be attributed to students' pursuit of post-secondary training? Are they being directed by the economy or are they the ones directing the economy? Subsequently, is the system meeting the needs of the students?

While it is true to state that around the world and even within the Caribbean region, students are filling tertiary establishments, are their individual needs being met? In order to adequately answer this question, an investigation into the challenges/stresses students encounter throughout their tertiary career must be undertaken (Dill and Henley 1988). Student experiences, therefore,

need to be at the forefront of future research. Quality education can only be provided once the needs of the tertiary learners are adequately understood (Sockalingam 2012).

An understanding of the population dynamics of the contemporary tertiary student body requires an inquiry into the motivation of and challenges faced by today's students. As will be subsequently discussed further along in this paper, the notion of the Caribbean's tertiary student has undergone a transformation (Plummer-Rognmo 2012) and it is important that these changes and new characteristics be researched and documented (Schuetze and Slowey 2002).

Furthermore, narrowing the focus to the St. Augustine campus of the UWI, an examination of the impact of the Evening University is necessary. This programme was introduced in the 2004/2005 academic year and is offered by the faculties of Law, Science and Technology, Food and Agriculture and Social Sciences in an effort to provide avenues for working adults to participate in undergraduate classes. Resultantly, undergraduate student demographic characteristics have been diversified since the population now encompasses older, employed, self-financing adults.

What has been the impact of such a programme on not only the demographic structure of the population, but also in motivating adults to return to the classroom? This phenomenon provides an interesting area for future research. Ali (2007) suggested that Caribbean governments now have to face the challenge of accommodating the multifaceted student population and the simultaneously increasing diverse workforce. He continues to outline, that Caribbean educational systems must introduce non-traditional forms of learning to meet the varying needs of this heterogeneous tertiary student body. The findings of such investigations will add to the existing literature on the Caribbean's experience of higher education.

The tertiary student of the contemporary Caribbean

Historically, the Caribbean region has been subjected to political, economic, social and cultural changes. The territories continue to be molded and altered within contemporary times as the global scenery continues to evolve. Coupled with this progression, is the evolution of the Caribbean's tertiary student body, which the literature suggests, has experienced a tremendous demographic alteration.

Plumer-Rognmo (2012) indicates that the classification of the Caribbean's undergraduate student has undergone a 'paradigm shift.' She is of the opinion that today's tertiary student is drastically different from the tertiary student to which the region has become accustomed. For instance, in her estimation, no longer does the population comprise students specifically from middle to upper socioeconomic backgrounds since students from the lower social classes now partake in higher education. Their involvement in this sector may be a consequence of the increased access and affordability of higher education due to programmes such as GATE, Higher Education Loan Programme (HELP), the Student Loan Bureau and the numerous national and institutional scholarships available to students. For instance, in 2004 an average of twenty seven thousand students received GATE funding while between the years 2007 to 2010, this figure almost doubled to an average of fifty thousand students (Ministry of Science, Technology and Tertiary Education 2011).

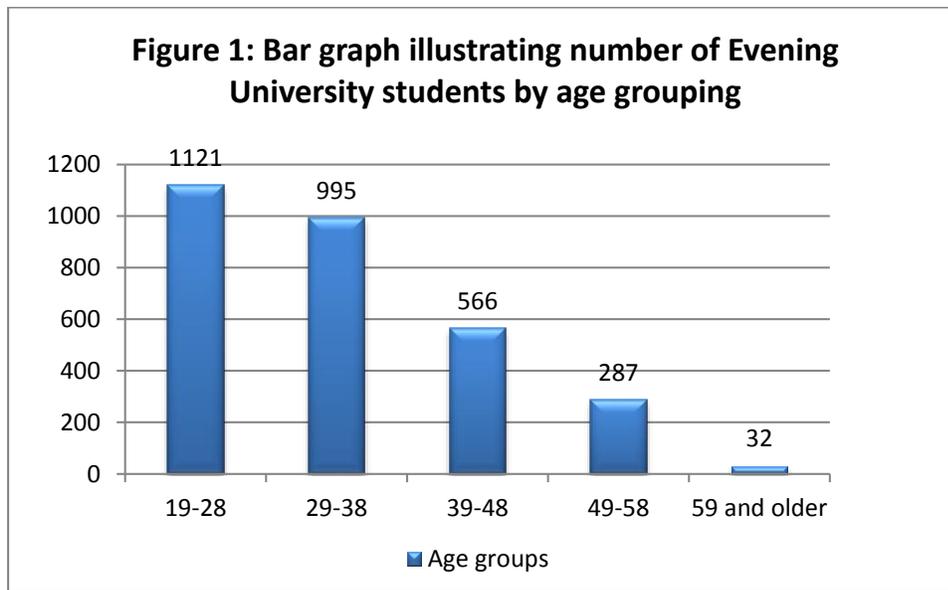
Moreover, Plummer-Rognmo (2012) asserts that students are now older, some even beyond the age of retirement and highlights the part-time status of the contemporary student as another distinguishing feature among this new cohort.

Such changes in student demographics have also been noted internationally by various researchers who have documented the rise of non-traditional learners within the realm of the tertiary level. However, in discussing this phenomenon of the non-traditional student, researchers suggest that a universal definition may not be achieved and that the nontraditional students cannot be understood as a homogenous group (Miller-Brown 2002). Schuetze and Slowey (2002) purport that the conceptualisation of students as non-traditional is dependent upon the context within which the term is being used. For instance, from an equality standpoint, non-traditional students may be categorised as those who have previously been barred from access to tertiary education on account of financial barriers, and are no longer restricted from participation. Another case in point can be gleaned from the work of Bowl (2001) who classifies non-traditional students in the United States as female ethnic minorities over the age of twenty-one.

For the purposes of the present paper however, non-traditional students will be defined as financially independent persons who, in addition to playing the role of student, simultaneously play the roles of employee and parent (Dill and Henley 1998). They further explain that such persons do not usually make a direct entry from secondary to tertiary training and can therefore be termed re-entry students. Allen (1993) adds that non-traditional students are also married. This definition, coupled with the observations made by Plummer-Rognmo (2012) that the Caribbean's tertiary students are now older part-time students are representative of the Evening University students enrolled at the St. Augustine campus.

Figure one below shows the distribution of age groups among the Evening University students for the academic year 2012/2013 and lend support to Plummer-Rognmo's statements that Caribbean student populations are now encompass a much older cohort.

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Source: University of the West Indies. 2013. *The University of the West Indies St. Augustine Student Statistics 2012/2013*. The University of the West Indies.

In contrast, members of the traditional cohort are usually younger, financially dependent, play the singular role of student and move directly from secondary school to university (Dill and Henley 1998).

In light of these substantial changes, it has become essential for tertiary institutions to identify and evaluate the needs and motivations of adult students and the differences between these non-traditional learners and their traditional counterparts if they are to adequately service this new dynamic student body (Schuetze and Slowey 2002). Ali (2007) notes that it is crucial for policy makers to understand this diversity in order to draft suitable policies that will enable the sustainable development of this sector.

Factors impacting upon student experiences: motivation and challenges/stress

The main argument of this paper is to bring attention to the need for more student-centered research to be conducted at the tertiary level institutions and in particular, at the St. Augustine campus so that the Evening University programme (which is specific to this institution) and the evening university students can be evaluated. It also suggests that two of the major features of student experiences – student motivation and challenges/sources of stress – must be factored into research in order to provide a holistic understanding of the region’s tertiary student body.

For instance, Garrison (1997) highlights the importance of motivation as a core component of adult self-directed learning. He continues to emphasise that understanding the independence, self-direction and determination of mature learners is crucial in ensuring that students attain valuable educational outcomes. Furthermore, motivation directs student behaviour and this concept proves to be a valuable area of research especially in developing economies. This is so since understanding the reasons for student enrollment in higher education can strengthen student retention in this sector within such economies (Chong et al. 2012).

Researchers, in defining student motivation, have conceptualised the term according to both intrinsic and extrinsic motivational factors. Students who are intrinsically motivated are interested in the learning process while extrinsically motivated students classify the education system as a means to an end (Vallerand et al. 1992). That is to say, students are encouraged to pursue higher education because of both intrinsic or internal rewards such as the fulfillment of personal goals, and extrinsic or external rewards such as parental expectation or economic remuneration.

In an examination of the existing literature on student motivation, a host of variables impacting upon motivation have been gleaned. Each one is outlined and its relationship with student motivation is explained below:

Motivation and age:

In their research on sources of motivation among traditional (younger) and non-traditional (older) tertiary students, Wolfgang and Dowling (1981) uncover differences in motivation between both cohorts of students. Their findings illustrate that the traditional students were guided to pursue higher education by extrinsic factors such as expectation of family members and the prospect of professional advancement upon completion of their undergraduate degrees. Wolfgang and Dowling (1981) underscore that these, along with the possibility of forming new social bonds were the top reasons for student enrollment. A more recent study by Sandeen (2008, quoted in Drekmeier and Tilghman 2010) revealed that networking and building connections was a common reason for student enrollment regardless of age.

On the contrary, intrinsic motivational factors inclusive of personal interest in formal education and organised learning were found by Bradley and Cleveland-Innes, (1992 quoted in Ratopuro and Vaisanen 2001) to be the most influential sources of motivation for the non-traditional undergraduate students. In contrast to the younger students, (Broekemier 2002, quoted in Drekmeier and Tilghman 2010) the influence of friends and family was the least influential factor for the non-traditional group.

The aforementioned findings clearly indicate that sources of student motivation vary according to age groups and this information is of paramount importance to policy makers so that programmes can be better tailored and suited to the various student needs and interests (Wolfgang and Dowling 1981).

Motivation and personal goals/aspirations:

The concept of motivation is intricately linked to a person's goals and aspirations. Individual goal setting is one of the reasons for student enrolment highlighted by Kember et al. (2010) whose research outlined that students viewed tertiary education as a natural step to take upon completion of secondary schooling. Can the same be said to explain why students in the Caribbean gravitate directly toward the tertiary institutions upon successfully completing their Caribbean Advanced Proficiency Examinations (CAPE)?

Aforementioned are the reasons students seek to engage in tertiary study but are not related to the reasons adults return to the classroom. This is so since the more mature tertiary student does not make a direct transition from the secondary to the tertiary realm within the Education system. For instance, the UWI classifies mature students as those who has successfully completed and been out of the secondary school system for at least five years (Experience UWI, UWI Undergraduate Prospectus 2013/2014). Research conducted by Scala (1996) underscores that these non-traditional students have reverted to the role of student because of their desire to learn and aspiration toward personal growth and development.

The literature also revealed that men and women held different goals and aspirations and were therefore motivated to pursue tertiary qualification for different reasons. Results published by Ford (1999) attest that advancement within their field was the main factor motivating men to seek tertiary education while women sought university qualification to change careers. This gender differentiation with regard to motivation to undertake tertiary study sheds light to the fact that men and women are differently influenced and as such, policy should reflect this distinction. Additionally, Covey (1980, quoted in Scala 1996) explains that generally, students are compelled to seek higher education as part of personal quest for academic accomplishment and personal enrichment.

Kennett et al. (2009) have focused their study on directly questioning undergraduate students about their reasons for enlisting in institutions for higher learning and have found that students expressed both *internal reasons* such as self-improvement, achievement of life goals, and also highly endorsed *external reasons* pertaining to career objectives and familial and societal expectations. This line of reasoning coincides with the earlier point that sources of motivation can be derived from both intrinsic and extrinsic factors. Kennett et al. (2009) further exemplified that students' predominant and central reasons for attending university were for self-improvement, to achieve the goal of attaining a degree and to secure a well-paying job.

Motivation and Evening Programmes

Harb et al. (2007) suggests that the increased student enrollment in tertiary programmes reflects their drive to advance or even complete their academic and career objectives. Moreover, Armour (2003) explains that another factor driving adults to return to the classroom is the fact that institutions have become more accommodating to employed adults seeking to further their studies by offering Saturday classes. Therefore, students with full-time jobs are in a better position to manage study and classroom responsibilities, as there is now a reduced impact upon their regular five-day workweek. This is a feature of the Evening University programme since through the South Initiative of the St. Augustine Campus, Evening University students are given the option to attend classes at the Naparima Boys' College in San Fernando on Saturdays. Enterprises such as these further accommodate the academic interests of working students, hence the rate of return will be twofold. On the one hand, students are provided with additional avenues for learning and it is this flexible scheduling that Drekmeyer and Tilghman (2010) encourages older employed students to enroll in tertiary institutions. On the other, the St. Augustine campus would have adequately met the needs of its students by providing an environment that caters to the diverse requirements of an employed student population since suitable support programmes are essential for the non-traditional students (Miller Brown 2002).

It is interesting to note, however, that the reasons expressed by undergraduate students for embarking upon the course of tertiary education do not remain static throughout their academic career. Lieberman and Remedios (2007) report that initially, the main desire of tertiary students was to master their subjects but over time, maintaining passing grades became their main objective. The question of making student experiences more enjoyable and rewarding within Caribbean universities is now raised. In answering this question, the diversity within today's student population has to be factored into research. Such an approach will prove beneficial to the students, the tertiary institutions and the higher education system as a whole since lifelong learning would be encouraged (Miller Brown 2002). This increasingly heterogeneous population produces both a burden and an opportunity for Universities who must now strive to accommodate a plethora of student interests (Miller-Brown 2002). Student centered, or micro level research, will shift focus from the structure (the education system as a whole) to the agent (the student) allowing their perspectives to be highlighted. This, by extension, will be useful to the tertiary sector since factoring the specific needs of student into policy and institutional changes will produce a more effective higher education sector.

An analysis of the existing literature illustrates that the causal factors for student participation in higher education are wide ranging. An extensive enquiry is therefore required to understand student motivation and thus ensure that student expectations are met or even surpassed. This type of analysis is especially necessary from the perspective of the Caribbean given that the tertiary sector has become part of regional government's modus operandi for the social, economic and political development of the territories. The fact that the largest allocation of the 2013/2014 budget of Trinidad and Tobago was allotted to the nation's education sector serves as testament to this standpoint.

On the contrary, in their examination of the challenges tertiary students face, researchers such as Kasayira et al. (2007) have conceptualised these impediments in terms of 'stressors' inclusive of "Vocational/Academic" which refers to inadequate library resources and study material, "Personal/Social" inclusive of financial burdens and adjusting to university life, and "Administration Processes" referring to inadequate campus infrastructure and poor hygiene and sanitation of campus utilities. From this regard, challenges faced by tertiary students throughout their academic career are wide-ranging and are not limited only to institutional downfalls or cognitive ability. Furthermore, in utilising the Student Stress Survey (Ross et al. 1999) explored environmental, academic, interpersonal and intrapersonal factors that produce stressful situations for students enrolled in post-secondary study. Challenges/stresses also encompass personal issues with which students must grapple while assuming the role of tertiary student. The most pertinent sources of stress gleaned from the literature will be now explained.

Cognitive ability as a challenge/source of stress

Even though "grey-haired" students (Armour 2003) have become more acceptable within the undergraduate halls, these non-traditional students are still faced with psychological problems such as developing a sense of belonging. Zeidner (1992) reveals in his study that these students grapple with feelings of shyness and nervousness since they often stand out among their younger counterparts. This finding needs to be researched within the context of the Caribbean since the

sole focus of universities should not be limited to the production of qualified graduates, but to produce ones that are confident.

The infiltration into the tertiary system by these non-traditional students – who can be likened to the Evening University population at the St. Augustine campus – calls for certain adaptations to be made to cater to this new segment of the population. Inability to keep up in class, meeting deadlines, difficulty with exams (Scala 1996) and emerging oneself into the world of academia after a long respite from study (Zeidner 1992) are sources of stress experienced by the more mature student.

In an effort to counteract such stresses, policy needs to be tailored to address these specific concerns and credit must be given to the St. Augustine campus for workshop initiatives conducted by the Office of the Evening University. These workshops included “Managing Stress” in February 2012, “Exam Strategies” in March 2012 and “Writing Skills: Academic Writing Skills” in October 2012. These workshops were geared toward alleviating some of the problems faced by the evening university students and are very much in line with the aforementioned research findings. Such efforts should not be limited to these areas; however, the need for a deeper understanding of the challenges students face, including the full time traditional students, must be gleaned through research. Furthermore, such workshops may also prove effective and necessary among the younger cohort of students thus validating the claim for more student-centered research to highlight the needs of students in the region’s tertiary system. However, even though Macan et al. (1990) agree that time management seminars can aid students in dividing their time among their various activities, they caution that such training sessions do not actually reduce stress among students given that time management is multidimensional.

Socioeconomic Status and Family Background as challenges/source of stress

There is substantial research that shows the relationship between a student’s socioeconomic status and family background and their educational attainment. Researchers in Education such as Bernstein have indicated that one’s family can positively or negatively impact upon educational goals depending upon their views on higher education. This idea is supported by Harb et al. (2007) whose research indicates that a lack of encouragement from family members and significant others may pose problems for the traditional and non-traditional cohort. For instance, family settings such as crowded households are not conducive to learning and do not allow sufficient time or privacy for study.

In like manner, Cooke et al. (2004) indicates that students from “disadvantaged backgrounds” or a low socioeconomic status are less likely to receive encouragement from family members to seek undergraduate degrees.

While the institutions may be unable to affect students’ home environment, their educational environment can be better structured to counteract challenges/stresses experienced within the home. Longer hours of operation for campus libraries and the provision of additional study rooms are two such methods that may be employed. However, these and other provisions should

be introduced at the request of students so that provisions reflect their specific needs. In order for such an endeavor, student-centered research is required.

An analysis of the existing literature on student motivation and sources of stress underscores the abundance of factors that have an impact upon student experiences within the tertiary realm of academia. More importantly, the wealth of international studies in the face of the relatively little Caribbean research emphasises the need for such research to fill the existing gap in Caribbean literature. What is required therefore, are studies specific to the region that take into consideration the changing demographic structure of the Caribbean's undergraduate population. The contemporary undergraduate faces a myriad of challenges and seeks tertiary qualification for various reasons, some of which are direct consequences of the changing global economy and cultural landscape. Thus, in order to tailor research to adequately investigate the reasons students engage in higher education and the various forms of stress they face throughout this academic activity, an understanding of today's students is fundamental.

Recommendations for future research

The new classification of the region's tertiary student represents a novel phenomenon that calls for empirical scrutiny since the present tertiary system must now make the necessary adaptations to cater for this newly formed, increasingly diversified student population. No longer is the student body solely comprised of young, middle to upper class, full time students (Plumer-Rognmo 2012) who migrated directly from the secondary school system, and this modification of the population must not only be reflected in research, but also in governmental and institutional policy. As previously mentioned, the UWI has recognised these changing demographics and have classified mature students as those above the age of twenty-one who have had at least a five year time period after completion of secondary schooling (Experience UWI, UWI Undergraduate Prospectus 2013/2014).

The present paper has shed light on the notion that Caribbean research in the field of education necessitates an exploration of the experiences of tertiary students. Such research is appropriate against the backdrop of shifting demographic characteristics of the region's undergraduate student body. One of the main purposes of research is to shed light on and explain new and evolving phenomena (Bray 2007) within society but Caribbean research is yet to adequately analyse the new dynamics of the undergraduate population.

All things considered, future research should seek to unearth the reasons students are flocking toward tertiary educational institutions. Therefore, sources of motivation for today's tertiary student necessitate enquiry. The findings of such investigations will answer the earlier proposed question, 'why?' An understanding of the reasons why students seek higher education will prove instrumental in assisting policy makers in better tailoring the system to motivate current students and attract prospective students. This is especially important since diversity in student populations will simultaneously lead to diversity in motivational influences (Chong et al. 2012). Caribbean researchers should also examine the challenges endured by these students. Studies of this nature will uncover the sources of stress affecting students and such information can inform existing and future policies in attempts to alleviate such burdens. The aforementioned international studies revealed institutional, personal and psychological factors that impact upon

today's tertiary students, and if similar findings are discovered within the region, such issues can be addressed.

Furthermore, the Evening University programme at the St. Augustine campus warrants immediate investigation. This programme has been in existence for almost ten years and it is yet to be substantially evaluated in terms of the experiences of its adult learners. These non-traditional students have diversified the demographic structure of the Caribbean's undergraduate student and the impact of this upon the structure must be analysed. Studies of this nature become increasingly important as universities continue along their drive toward massification (Chong et al. 2012) and expanding their horizons to more varied populations. Additionally, these more mature learners face challenges that are specific to their realities including but not limited to having to immersing themselves into study after a long respite and adapting to new forms of technology. Methods of better accommodating these students through the Evening University initiative must be established and therein rests the role of research to uncover such methods.

Conclusion

As the region continues to chart its course along the path toward social and economic development through the strengthening of its human capital, research within the area of higher education should be expanded. The area of student experiences – with emphasis upon their motivations and challenges – require investigation, thus a more student-centered thrust in Caribbean research should be forthcoming. As the Caribbean's higher education sector continues to expand, policy makers should be keen not to overlook the new realities of the contemporary tertiary students of the region. Socioeconomic status, age groupings, enrolment status, and employment status are some of the variables that reflect today's tertiary student and collectively impact upon their academic careers. No longer do tertiary students share the same social, economic and cultural backgrounds; therefore, such changes have to be analysed in future research. As such, student experiences should be at the forefront of future inquiry.

These initiatives will produce a tertiary system that is fashioned according to the specific needs of the Caribbean's tertiary student thereby maximising the gains that can be derived from this sector. Student-centered research will afford students an opportunity to inform policy directly related to their experiences and requirements and therefore increasing the effectiveness of the sector in contributing toward the holistic development of its students. This form of inquiry should not be a single occurrence, but there should be continuous assessment and re-evaluation of student bodies. Within the context of continuous social change, it is imperative that policy and institutions not remain fixed. Constant readjustment is necessary to satisfy the dynamic needs of the region's diverse student population which over time, may only increase in its complexity. The final result therefore, would be a sector that evolves along with the wider societal changes and more specifically, the shifts in future tertiary student populations.

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carrying out such endeavors. More specifically, she is interested in exploring the phenomenon of the non-traditional student of the Caribbean region. Miss Pragg has presented papers on her post-graduate work at the SALISES and CSA conferences in 2013. She is presently a Research Assistant attached to the Faculty of Social Sciences, UWI St. Augustine.

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