Chapter 12

Opening the GATE to Improving College Students’ Human and Psychological Capital through Higher Education Funding

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ABSTRACT

Higher education has a positive effect on students’ and society’s human and psychological capital. However, higher education funding is an issue for both students and Government. Qualitative study, using interviews, presents the views of 81 students at a technical vocational tertiary educational institution in Trinidad on the Government Assistance for Tertiary Education. Demographic information indicates that 47 students belonged to nuclear families, 62 students completed the Caribbean Secondary Schools Examination Council (CSEC), and 31 were first generation tertiary level students. Most participants indicated that their mothers were employed in the service industry and most participants indicated “none” for their fathers’ occupations. Findings from the data, after coding, were: 1) improvement of human capital- relief from financial burdens, national service, continuation of GATE; 2) betterment of psychological capital- hope/self-improvement, career, and optimism. Recommendations made are for a more expansive study with students currently in the program as well as those who have benefitted from GATE.

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INTRODUCTION

Higher education in any society represents the highest end of the educational continuum. As a result, there is a growing demand for access to higher education. In fact, the current and future demands for higher education globally, regionally, and nationally is being stymied as “a major challenge faced by governments everywhere is the reform of finance of higher education (HE) in response to pressures of rising private demand for HE and heavily constrained public budgets” (Woodhall, 2006, p. 3). Similarly, Trinidad is facing such an issue.

With the price of oil at its lowest in years, it is doubtful whether Trinidad will be able to continue its funding of higher education for all tertiary level students (Hosein & Franklin, 2011). In fact, a task force has been appointed by the current Minister of Education, Anthony Garcia (2016), “to review the policy guidelines that govern GATE; to review mechanisms for reducing the overall cost of GATE funding; and to set criteria eligibility of programs and institutions” (p. 1). Basically, diminishing fiscal funding for higher education threatens the very existence of higher education where its survival is dependent on funding and students yet, governments that provide funding continue to be overburdened by the volume of money to be dispensed (Woodhall).

With this in mind, this chapter starts with a history of GATE and discusses the problem, purpose, and literature review. The literature review comprises discussions on higher education funding, higher education funding in Trinidad, human capital theory, human capital and higher education, and psychological capital theory. The methodology is presented as well as the findings based on the themes of human capital and the subscales of psychological capital: hope and optimism. The discussion segues and a conclusion stated.

History of GATE

Trinidad and Tobago’s Vision 2020, Operational Plan, Section 1 stated that education is critical in the development of a “cadre of academically, intellectually and skilled individuals who possess relevant life skills as well as positive attitudes, to facilitate and enable quick employability locally, regionally and internationally” (p. 23). Consequently, the Government of Trinidad and Tobago implemented the GATE program to ensure that, “there are no limits to accessing quality education” (Ministry of Science Technology and Tertiary Level Education, 2010, p. 1). The Ministry of Education’s website lists the following objectives of the GATE program:

1. To make tertiary education affordable to all so that no Citizen of Trinidad and Tobago will be denied tertiary education because of their inability to pay;
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