



Black Men are Present: Examining Enrollment Patterns in Education Degree Programs

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Despite the increased enrollment of Black males in postsecondary education (NCES, 2018), limited research has focused on their concentration in education degree programs. This article examines universities enrolling the highest number of Black males in education degree programs. Secondary data from the Diverse Issues in Higher Education Top 100 Producers of Minority Degrees database were utilized. Findings highlight increased enrollment of Black men in education degree programs at predominantly White institutions and online universities. Researchers suggest a counter narrative that validates the presence of Black men in education programs and utilization of enrollment data to plan for future recruitment.

Keywords: Black males, education degree, online universities

There is power in the presence of Black teachers in academic settings and its ultimate influence on student outcomes. When Black students have a Black teacher, they are more likely to be in gifted programs (Grissom, Rodriguez, & Kern, 2017), disciplined less frequently (Butler, Lewis, Moore, & Scott, 2012; Lindsay & Hart, 2017), have increased standardized test scores, and graduation rates (Gershenson, Hart, Lindsay, & Papageorge, 2017). Furthermore, Black male teachers play a critical role serving as father figures in teaching positions and improving overall academic outcomes (Brockenbrough, 2012; Irvine & Fenwick, 2009). While their presence is critical in the academic setting, their representation is dismal. Nationally, Black men comprise only 2% of teachers (Bailey, Bocala, Shakman, & Zweig, 2016).

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The pursuit of education degrees by many Black males is based on the premise that education is a great equalizer (Harper & Davis, 2012). Teaching in the classroom provides Black males with a platform to educate the masses while empowering diverse learners. Yet, former schooling experiences have often provided them with negative views of the education field, resulting in a lack interest in these careers (Bell, 2009; Means, 2013). As a result, Irvine and Fenwick (2009) argue for creative programming, targeted recruitment efforts, scholarships, and fellowships as a strategy for increasing their representation in education degree programs.

While Black men are not represented well within the education profession, patterns of their enrollment and representation in education degree programs has been less studied. This paper seeks to investigate enrollment patterns of Black males within education degree programs to increase understanding of where they are primarily enrolled. It begins with a synthesis of the literature regarding the presence of Black males in postsecondary education with a focus on institutional characteristics including Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU), Predominantly White Institutions (PWI), brick and mortar universities, and online universities. Next, it presents and analyzes data regarding Black male enrollment in education degree programs. Ultimately, this research seeks to examine variations in the characteristics of these education degree programs successfully enrolling Black males, and provide potential strategies for recruitment and enrollment efforts. Few, if any studies, have examined Black males enrolled in education degree programs through this particular lens.

Black Males in Education

Environmental Factors and Education Degrees

The low representation of Black males in undergraduate education degree programs has been linked to negative educational experiences they endured as students (Goings & Bianco, 2016). Collectively as students, Black males have experienced disproportionate discipline in school settings, racial microaggressions, low expectations, and other negative stereotypes (Butler, Lewis, Moore, & Scott, 2012; Goings & Bianco, 2016). Unfortunately, these experiences do not necessarily improve as they ascend into higher education. Researchers have found that undergraduate Black male students reported feeling as if they not represented or visible within the curriculum (Sleeter, Neal, & Kumashiro, 2014). Even within teacher education programs, Black males are not feeling validated (Sleeter, Neal, & Kumashiro, 2014).

Career related factors including low pay and high stress environments influence the low representation of Black male teachers (Walker, 2016). Black males are often relegated to high stress school environments where they are able to have an impact but also have the greatest potential for burnout (Lewis, 2012). Furthermore, there is a lack of validation regarding their value-added teaching contributions, including their ability to teach diverse as well as gifted learners (Bryan & Ford, 2014). They also spend time countering a hostile Black male perspective perceived by some of their colleagues (Lewis, 2014).

Bristol and Goings (2019) examined through a phenomenological study the experiences of 27 Black male teachers in 14 urban school districts. They found that participants reported being viewed as incompetent or unqualified by their colleagues. There was also a perceived skepticism regarding their teaching abilities which created alienation. On the other hand, they reported that colleagues were intimidated by them when they appeared too overqualified to teach. Ultimately, this created the need for them to set boundaries while also making their White

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colleagues feel more comfortable. These environmental factors provide additional barriers that potentially influence the pursuit of education degrees.

Black Males and HBCUs

Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) have been successful in fostering an encouraging and caring environment for Black males which has positively impacted postsecondary matriculation and attainment (Lundy-Wagner & Gasman, 2011). Several factors are attributed to their success in these environments. HBCUs have played a significant role in affirming the potential of Black male students and guiding them on how to handle systemic racism after their HBCU experience (Shorette & Palmer, 2015). Furthermore, an emphasis on spirituality in these environments supports their persistence in degree programs and provides them with additional support and coping strategies (Riggins, McNeal, & Herndon, 2008). Additional academic support including remediation also contributes to their success (Palmer & Davis, 2012). Lastly, it has been found that Black males attending an HBCU are positioned to academically and socially outgain their same race counterparts who attended a PWI (Kim & Hargrove, 2013). However, included in this narrative are barriers for Black males attending HBCUs. Researchers have indicated that financial support is a barrier to persistence and they are reluctant to ask or seek help while attending an HBCU (Palmer, Davis, & Hilton, 2009). Navigating between the needs of their home environment and rigorous academic requirements, are also challenges impacting their persistence and retention at HBCUs (Palmer et al., 2009). Consequently, inattention to these struggles has the potential to reinforce Black underachievement in higher education (Lundy-Wagner & Gasman, 2011).

Black male preservice teachers have a variety of experiences at HBCUs. Goings, Bristol, and Walker (2018) noted that HBCUs created nurturing environments for U.S.-born Black male preservice teachers. Yates, Pelphrey, and Smith (2008) also affirmed that HBCUs provided affirmation and support for Black male preservice teachers (Yates, Pelphrey, & Smith, 2008). Strategies implemented to support these preservice teachers included shaping their leadership, providing images of successful Black teachers, and providing financial assistance (Yates et al., 2008). Many HBCUs offer support for their Black preservice teachers as a way of meeting their social and emotional needs during development (Hobson, Harris, Buckner-Manley, & Smith, 2012). Yet, immigrant Black male preservice teachers have faced ethnocentric opposition primarily as a result of how they speak (Goings et al., 2018). Thus, these experiences varied even with the population of Black males.

Black Males in Predominantly White Institutions

The narrative of Black men enrolled at Predominately White Institutions (PWIs) also illustrates an interesting story. The regularity of student-faculty interaction has a positive correlation amongst Black males who attend PWIs (Hylton, 2013). Additionally, spirituality was found to increase persistence of Black male students enrolled at PWIs and was a coping mechanism for them (Herndon, 2003). Mentoring programs at PWIs have afforded Black males an opportunity to disclose feelings of racism and hostility they experience at these institution (Williams, 2017). It also provides the opportunity to share coping techniques to help them maneuver through attending a PWI (Williams, 2017). Black males enrolled at PWIs have correspondingly challenging experiences. Black males have reported being less likely to initiate

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relationships with faculty particularly regarding academic concerns (Lucas, 2018). It was also found that Black men at PWIs may also experience lower academic achievement due to less ambitious goals and disconnection (Brooks et al., 2012). Additionally, Black male preservice teachers at PWIs have a more difficult time understanding their positionality as a Black male (Segalo, 2013).

Black male preservice teachers have a unique experience as teacher candidates at PWIs. Specifically, they experience a double consciousness that guides their perceptions about how they are viewed by their peers (Lewis, 2014). For example, Lewis (2014) suggests that Black male preservice teachers are apprehensive about being identified as aggressive in cross-conversations with other teacher candidates. Black male pre-service teachers are also reminded of their race and gender when interacting with clinical and supervisory personnel (Burnett, 2016). Additionally, Black male preservice teacher's face assumptions on their abilities such as being expected to relate to the most challenging Black students (Goings, Bristol, & Walker, 2018). Overall, Black male pre-service teachers have been noted as experiencing feelings of rejection in their clinical school training, which has the potential to be a factor in their lack of Black male teacher representation in public schools (Maylor, 2018). These challenges have the potential to influence Black male's pursuit of education degrees at a PWI.

Black Males and Online Universities

Online universities pose a unique opportunity for distance learners. They are utilized as a way to increase access to postsecondary education, especially for those who have been historically underrepresented in brick and mortar institutions (Lederman, 2013). However, research indicates that men experience adverse effect from online courses such as lower grades (Laderman, 2013). Concurrently, researchers also suggest that students in online learning experience a decrease in overall academic performance especially males and Black students (Xu & Jaggars, 2013). As a result, findings suggest that students who are not academically successful in brick and mortar institutions are even less successful in online courses (Laderman, 2013).

While some students experience challenges with online learning, completing the coursework still proves beneficial in postsecondary education (Xu & Jaggars, 2013). Not only does it increase adaptability for students and universities but is also encourages opportunities for students who are balancing work and home (Xu & Jaggars, 2013). Students adjustment or lack of adjustment with online may lead to poor learning (Hoskins & van Hooff, 2005; Muse, 2003; Jun, 2005; Stewart et al., 2010). Largely, findings indicate that average students may potentially struggle with online course, especially if they are male or Black (Stewart et al., 2010).

HBCUs have recently increase online learning opportunities as a means to address enrollment and financial challenges (Smith, 2011). Smith (2011) suggested that HBCUs should take cues from the practices of for-profit institutions with online learning (Smith, 2011). For example, Florida A&M University has partnered with the University of Phoenix to create new online learning tools (Davis, 2015). The technologies created in this project will help design courses that will merge classroom and online content. It is argued that HBCUs may not be doing enough to compete with online schools such as University of Phoenix for student enrollment (Smith, 2011).

Black Males and Enrollment in Education Degree Programs

Black males' educational experiences may have resulted in them not pursuing or enrolling in education degree programs (Caton, 2012). Lack of culturally relevant teaching can potentially lead to these students becoming apathetic and disinterested in school. As they matriculate through school, with limited exposure to Black male teachers or administrators, they are confined to images of Black males in academic spaces to athletic or janitorial positions. These factors influence Black males socially and psychologically (Howard, Flenbaugh, & Terry, 2012) and may deter enrollment in education degree programs. However, the notion that Black males have the potential to positively impact a child through education, is a source of inspiration for enrolling in education degree program (Brown & Butty, 1999).

Many Black males pursuing degrees in education are informed that education is the entrance to the American Dream (Smith, Hung, & Franklin, 2011). A strong desire to complete a degree is rooted in the longing for Black males to become educated. In a cyclical way, educated Black males tend to produce more educated Black males. Impacting the next generation is a strong motivation for Black males to pursue education degrees (Smith, Hung, & Franklin, 2011). Researchers suggest that Black men also feel a sense of responsibility to educate the next generation as a political act by equipping Black children to be liberated in the face of the dominant White culture (Smith, Hung, & Franklin, 2011).

Theoretical Framework

Critical Race Theory guides our analysis of enrollment patterns of Black males in education degree programs. Critical Race Theory (CRT) was derived from legal studies in an effort to explain race and racism in America (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995), applied CRT to education in order to understand positioning of stakeholders within the educational system based on a construct of racial background. Through their seminal work, the following three propositions were offered: 1) a significant consideration in the educational system is race; 2) the culture in the United States is more geared towards property rights than consideration for human rights; 3) an examination of the intersectionality of race and possession of property (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Property is defined as a construct that entails both material and nonmaterial options with whiteness being defined as a major possession that provides access to power, privilege, and a right to exclude others (Harris, 1993).

We underscore the importance of race in the educational system particularly in relation to Black male enrollment in the education degree discipline. Our investigation examines universities with education degree programs enrolling the highest number of Black male students. The characteristics of these universities are defined as property and labeled as online, brick and mortar, Historically Black University or Predominantly White Institutions. Thus, we seek to examine the intersectionality of Black males within these various universities.

This article will analyze patterns, characteristics and similarities amongst the universities associated with the top ten education degree programs enrolling Black males. The following questions guide this research:

What are the differences in the top fifty education degree programs with the highest number of enrolled Black males?

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- a. Are there differences in Black male enrollment for online versus brick and mortar education degree programs?
- b. Are there differences in Black male enrollment for HBCU versus PWI education degree programs?

Methodology

Researchers utilized the Top 100 Producers of Minority Degrees database, which is electronically located on the *Diverse Issues in Higher Education* website. This data is imported from the National Center for Education Statistics Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS). The Top 100 Producers of Minority Degrees database is updated annually once survey data is released from IPEDS. For purposes of this study, researchers utilized the 2017 data reporting which is based on completion of the 2016-2017 IPEDS surveys.

Data Analysis

This quantitative study analyzed patterns among Black male students enrolled in education degree programs. Utilizing the Top 100 Producers of Minority Degrees database, we conducted a search to identify the top producers of Bachelor education degree programs for Black male students. We then sorted this data based on universities that had the highest number of Black male students enrolled in education degree programs. The data includes enrollment numbers for Black males in each of the universities listed. This search provided a total of 50 universities. Table 1 displays the data from the top 50 universities with the highest Black male enrollment.

Next, we conducted a variation-finding comparative analysis of this data to identify variations and differences with enrollment patterns for Black males in education degree programs (Tilly, 1984). Tilly (1984) suggests the importance of “explaining their characteristics as a function of their varying relationships to the system as a whole” (p. 83). Thus, we then purposely stratified the data into two additional groups including universities that are exclusively online based and brick and mortar universities to identify variances. Lastly, we stratified the listing based on HBCU and PWI. These stratifications were necessary in order to understand variations of this sample to inform overall enrollment patterns. This approach was ideal as it allowed for a systems level and group level examinations of patterns in the sample.

Findings

Data from the 2017 Top 50 producers of minority education degrees report indicates that there was a total of 2,262 Black males enrolled in these education programs. The top 10 universities listed accounted for approximately 48% Black male enrollment of all of the 50 universities listed. These universities included the following: 1) Ashford University; 2) Grand Canyon University; 3) Georgia State University; 4) Jackson State University; 5) Liberty University; 6) Kaplan University – Davenport Campus; 7) University of Memphis; 8) Louisiana State University and A&M College; 9) Alabama State University, and; 10) University of Central Florida. Furthermore, the top 5 universities listed accounted for 35% Black male enrollment and included Ashford University, Grand Canyon University, Georgia State University, Jackson State University, and Liberty University. The top ranked university, Ashford University, accounted for 18% ($n = 407$) of Black male enrollment for all 50 universities listed. Thus,

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enrollment was largely concentrated in the top 10 universities and moreover predominantly in the top listed university.

Table 1.

2017 Number and Percentage of Total of Black Male Students Enrolled in the Top 50 Producers of Minority Education Degrees Rank Ordered

University	Black Males ($n = 2262$)	%
Ashford University	407	0.180
Grand Canyon University	137	0.061
Georgia State University	93	0.041
Jackson State University	92	0.041
Liberty University	72	0.032
Kaplan University – Davenport Campus	67	0.030
University of Memphis	63	0.028
Louisiana State University and A&M College	56	0.025
Alabama State University	53	0.023
University of Central Florida	51	0.023
Albany State University	48	0.021
CUNY Brooklyn College	47	0.021
Morgan State University	45	0.020
Southern Illinois University – Carbondale	44	0.019
University of South Alabama	42	0.019
University of Maryland – College Park	39	0.017
Florida Atlantic University	37	0.016
Old Dominion University	36	0.016
Tennessee State University	36	0.016
Kennesaw State University	35	0.015
The University of Alabama	34	0.015
Fayetteville State University	34	0.015
Virginia State University	33	0.015
University of Louisiana at Lafayette	33	0.015
University of Mount Olive	33	0.015
Virginia Commonwealth University	32	0.014
Temple University	32	0.014
Western Governors University	32	0.014
University of Alabama at Birmingham	31	0.014
Mississippi Valley State University	31	0.014
Florida International University	28	0.012
Valdosta State University	28	0.012
University of West Georgia	27	0.012

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Columbus State University	27	0.012
Winston-Salem University	26	0.011
Harris-Stowe State University	26	0.011
Armstrong State University	26	0.011
Eastern Illinois University	26	0.011
University of South Florida – Main Campus	23	0.010
Florida Agricultural and Mechanical University	22	0.010
University of Kentucky	21	0.009
University of Missouri – South Louis	21	0.009
University of Southern Mississippi	20	0.009
South Carolina State University	18	0.008
Alabama A&M University	18	0.008
Auburn University	18	0.008
Bowling Green State University – Main Campus	18	0.008
University of Louisville	17	0.008
Grambling State University	15	0.007
Delta State University	12	0.005

Of the 2,262 Black males enrolled in the top 50 degree producing education programs, 23% (n=527) were attending HBCUs and 77% (n=1,735) were attending PWIs. As a result, over two-thirds of Black males enrolled in the top 50 degree producing education programs were attending PWIs. This population is heavily concentrated at PWIs.

Table 2.

Frequency Statistics of Enrollment of Black male students in the Top 50 Producers of Minority Education Degrees Based on HBCU and PWI

Institution	<i>n</i>	%
HBCU	527	.23
PWI	1735	.77

In consideration of the type of university, approximately 68% (n=1,547) of identified Black males were attending brick and mortar institutions and 32% (n = 715) were attending online universities. As a result, over two-thirds of Black males enrolled in the top 50 degree producing education programs were attending brick and mortar institutions.

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Table 3.

Frequency Statistics of Enrollment of Black male students in the Top 50 Producers of Minority Education Degrees Based on Online and Brick and Mortar.

Institution	<i>n</i>	%
Brick and Mortar	1,547	.68
Online Universities	715	.32

Further analysis of the top five schools enrolling the most Black male education degree earners, indicates that three of the universities were online, one was brick and mortar, one was online/brick and mortar, one was a HBCU, and four were PWIs. One of the universities listed, Liberty University, is classified as online and brick and mortar university and fit into both categories. The number one and two schools enrolling the most Black male education students were both online schools and PWIs.

Table 4.

Characteristics of the Top 5 Universities enrolling the highest number of Black Male Students in the Education Degree Programs in 2017

University	<u>Physical Features</u>		<u>Type</u>	
	Brick & Mortar	Online	HBCU	PWI
Ashford University		X		X
Grand Canyon University		X		X
Georgia State University	X			X
Jackson State University	X		X	
*Liberty University	X	X		X

Note. Liberty has approximately 15,000 classified as residential and 100,000 students through online programming.

Discussion

Examining the representation of Black males in education degree programs at the top 50 minority producing degree programs revealed a total of 2,262 Black males enrolled in the top 50 programs. This indicates that Black men are indeed present in education degree programs. Additionally, 18% of these Black men were enrolled exclusively at one university, which is featured as an online university. The concentration of Black men in education degree programs at online universities should warrant further investigation. Examination of the Top 50 data reveals that approximately 32% of these Black males attended HBCUs and 68% were enrolled at PWIs. This finding suggests that Black males are more likely to enroll in education degree programs at PWIs. Based on findings, approximately one-third of Black males are enrolled in online education degree programs based while two-third were enrolled in brick and mortar colleges and universities. Additionally, the top two universities account for 24% of the Black male enrollment and both were fully online programs. This demonstrates a higher concentration of enrolled Black males in online education degree programs.

Recommendations

Based on these findings, it is recommended that a counter narrative is created regarding Black males and their interest in education degree programs. Black men are present in education degree programs. Creating this counter narrative can assist in attracting more Black males into education degree programs. Additionally, utilizing this data to connect Black males across high enrollment education degree programs, could be a catalyst for their persistent and retention within the field. Education programs must also begin to resist the old adage that Black males are not interested in becoming teachers or educators, as this is dispelled from these results.

HBCU and PWI Collaborations Needed

Efforts for education degree program to collaborate in order to meet the needs of diverse students is strongly recommended. Partnerships between HBCUs and PWIs can provide additional academic support and for Black males to progress through these programs. For example, opportunities for education degree students at PWIs to take courses at a local HBCU, may be a strategy to attract more diverse students into education degree programs. Similarly, students attending HBCUs may benefit from taking education courses at PWIs and connecting with diverse learners in these settings. Both HBCUs and PWIs can partner with alternative certification programs to bring students from both types of institutions together. These programs can act as a mediator between the HBCU and PWI to collectively develop the diverse group of teachers in both settings.

Online Degree Program Patterns

Another recommendation includes a focus on development of online degree education programs that are designed specifically to meet the needs of diverse learners. If this is becoming a preferred means for earning an education degree among Black male students, then strategies should be created to target this population and ensure their learning needs are met. Additionally, resources should be integrated into these online degree programs to assist with ensuring that

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Black male students are prepared for entry into teaching positions post-graduation. Support post-graduation can also help to ensure that they are able to successfully obtain a position within education and preferably within a classroom setting.

Preservice Teacher Preparation for Online Degree Earners

Differentiated approach to preservice for Black male teachers obtaining degrees from online institutions is also recommended. Preservice programs have the potential to play a key role in creating face-to-face professional development for online education degree earners entering the classroom. Given the percentage of Black males enrolling in online degree programs, specialized preservice development needs to be offered between completion of online degree program and entering the classroom. School districts need to partner with online Universities to determine ways to effectively prepare these Black male online degree earners for the classroom. Universities can also develop summer sessions specifically designed for the online students which will give the Black male online degree earner the opportunity to build in-person relationships with individuals in the same field. Community organizations can also partner with online Universities to be the bridge to the communities where the Black male online degree earner will teach. Building relationships with the school community is key to the success and retention of Black school teachers, especially in the urban community.

A differentiated approach to clinical experiences would also provide the online degree earner the skills needed to enter a classroom. The lived experiences of Black male educators present the need for different exposure during clinical experiences. Traditionally, clinical experiences have catered to the white female teacher, however the needs of Black male teachers are different. Black male teachers need to be placed in a clinical setting that challenges them to go beyond their lived experiences. Preservice programs need to spend special attention on developing the Black male teacher in order to make sure that the clinical experience is not the same as the teacher's lived experiences but prepares them in ways they have never encountered.

Limitations

This research relied heavily on data available from the Top 100 Producers of Minority Degrees database located on the Diverse Issues in Higher Education website. This data utilizes existing data from the IPEDS national survey. The use of this secondary data is a limitation for this study as we are relying on other sources to obtain data. Additionally, we were not involved in the transfer of existing data on the national IPEDS database to the Top 100 Producers of Minority Degrees database. As a result, we are unable to verify its authenticity and we are relying on existing methods for the secondary data sets.

Conclusion

We have attempted to counter the narrative that Black men are not present in education degree programs as the enrollment data proves otherwise. They are not only interested in education degree programs but are obtaining degrees from universities with a variety of characteristics. Through our study, we have presented findings regarding the characteristics of these universities and highlighted where Black males are concentrated to further understand variation. We suggest further exploration in understanding reasons for Black males increasing

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enrollment in online degree programs and how these specific education degree programs are successful in recruiting them. We also recommend additional research regarding Black male patterns for enrolling in education degree programs at primarily White universities versus primarily Black universities. In summary, we strongly recommend that efforts to attract and recruit Black men into education degree programs are priorities for all universities.

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