

Vocational counseling and the aspiration of achieving a university admission of students with a migratory background in The United States, Latin America, and South Europe. A systematic literature review

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Abstract

There is limited research that considers students with migratory background cultural characteristics within vocational counseling processes in high schools of the United States, Latin America, and South Europe. A systematic literature review was made, guided by the question: In young migrants and second-generation migrants, how vocational counseling influences the achievement of being admitted into a university, comparing their life trajectories during secondary and high school?

A total of ten articles, out of three hundred eleven initially found, were selected based on a protocol for the literature review (available on request). All these articles belong to the United States context. One also considered the Spain reality. Based on the protocol used, neither another Southern Europe article, nor any article on the Latin American context was selected. All the analyzed articles pointed up the central role of counseling processes regarding students' vocational decisions. Nonetheless, there is not much attention to counseling processes given to students with a migratory background and their specific needs. Among others, this fact reveals one of the failures of the system in giving post-secondary opportunities to these students. Limitations and recommendations to improve the vocational counseling processes and their influence on the achievement of admission into a university for these students are presented. Besides, some gender differences and the transcendental role of families in the vocational decisions of students are analyzed within the literature review.

Keywords: Vocational Counseling, high school students with a migratory background, university admission.

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Introduction

To make vocational decisions is difficult for teenagers who currently are in secondary schools. They need more than only information from the universities. They need an educational process, addressed to vocational decisions, where they can explore their internal and external factors. These must be analyzed by correctly relating them, considering the characteristics of their particular life cycle stage, and the globalized and interdependent world where they live as shown by Di Palma (2017)

Those choices are difficult and demanding, more than in the past because today's job market is weak and not inclusive especially for young people. Those vocational choices single out personal instances and motivations that, from one hand they regard future self-projection, from another hand they are the products of one's personal history (p. ix).

When these decisions are analyzed in the reality of migrants or second-generation migrants, there are other cultural features and characteristics of their transitions and life trajectories that must be taken into account in the vocational guidance given in secondary schools. These processes must achieve their wellbeing and social inclusion. From a pedagogical point of view, Pozzebon (2020) mentioned schools as integrative, inclusive, intercultural, and transformative contexts, that take into account the mixed and plural identity of students with a migratory background. She also mentioned the importance of not imposing them the fact of belonging to one culture (that of the host country) over the other (the parent's origin country), nor vice versa, and also schools that promote encounters and dialogues within diverse cultural backgrounds, to enrich all the education processes.

With these characteristics in mind, a systematic review of scientific literature was made in order to identify previous research outcomes on these issues. For this study, it was used a protocol with initial criteria, including articles to be analyzed, and exclusion criteria for the analysis guided by the research question: In young migrants and second-generation migrants: how vocational counseling influences the achievement of being admitted into a university, comparing their life trajectories during secondary and high school?

The systematic literature review was made searching for articles related to students with a migratory background that lives in the United States, Latin America, or South Europe since these geographic areas are characterized by a growing number of migrants coming from different countries.

On one hand, the context of the United States was considered due to the increasing number of students with a migratory background who graduate from high school and access post-secondary study centers. For example, Kimura-Walsh, Yamamura, Griffin and Allen (2009) mentioned that: «From 1991 to 2001, there was a 74% increase in the number of Latina/o undergraduates attending postsecondary institutions» (p. 299). Also, the United States historically is one of the countries that have an integral part of the advances in the vocational counseling theories. Di Palma (2017) made a categorization of career/vocational theories, and in her work, a lot of authors developed their theories in this context. For example, she mentioned seminal authors such as John Holland, Donald Super, Erik Erickson, John Krumboltz, and more recent authors such as Mark Savickas.

On the other hand, the systematic literature review was expanded to Latin America and South Europe contexts by the interest of the author taking into account the fact that in these geographic areas the number of students with migratory background who access to post secondary education is lower than in the United States. The articles were researched in English, Spanish, or Italian.

It was found that not much research has been made in the last twenty years (2000-2019) between the connection of vocational education processes received in secondary schools by migratory students with their desire of achieving a university admission. About this, Bryan, Moore-Thomas, Day-Vines and Holcomb-McCoy (2011) said: «Much of the research concerning high school pre-college counseling emphasizes counselors in college preparatory schools serving White and more affluent populations where counselors devote a substantial amount of time to college preparation activities» (p. 190). Consecutive we are going to develop the articles found.

Systematic Literature Review

A total of ten articles were analyzed, selected out of three hundred eleven found by the initial inclusion criteria. Some of the exclusion criteria used for this selection were: not to be published in a predator journal, being quoted at least twenty or more times, not to be about the application and/or validation of instruments of measurement, and consider topics related to the vocational accompaniment received by migrants students and its influences in the achievement of university admission. The detail of all the steps followed in the protocol used can be available on request for further explorations.

The first one was made by Perna, Rowan-Kenyor, Scott, Bell, Anderson, and Li (2008). They studied the college (postsecondary/tertiary system) enrollment rates in the USA, considering gaps across socioeconomic and racial/ethnic groups. They used multiple descriptive case studies, taking into account fifteen high schools from five states, to follow three research questions:

What is the availability of college counseling at selected high schools? In what activities do counselors at different schools engage with the goal of promoting college opportunity? How do external entities, including school districts, higher education institutions, and states, shape the availability of college counseling at different schools? (p. 136)

The second article used is the one presented by Ana Bravo-Moreno (2009). She used international comparisons to explore in which ways national differences (principally of the United States and Spain) «affected trajectories through education for immigrant and second-generation students and their succeeding socio-economic, civic and political integration» (p. 419).

The third article is the one presented by James R. Valadez (2008), about the decision of Mexican high school students in the United States. He collected ethnographic data over eighteen months of twelve Mexican immigrants high school students. Applying structuration theory to immigrant student decision making, he was capable of «understanding the duality between decision-making processes and the social forces that influence and constrain decisions» (p. 839).

Another article is presented by Bryan et al. (2011). Using social capital theory as a framework, the authors examined the data from the Educational Longitudinal Study of 2002 (United States of America) to investigate how students' contact with high school counselors influences their college application. They used a national senior high school representative who attended the US. Public schools sample (weighted sample = 1,048,435 students), where 54.3% were female and 45.7% were male; 3.7% were Asian/Pacific Islanders, 9.4% were Black or African American, 12.6% were Hispanic, and 74.3% were White students. The dependent variable used was “applying to college” and the independent variables were organized into “counselor” variables and “college-related” variables.

The fifth article is presented by Tovar E. (2015). He studied how the interactions between students and counselors, and the support programs influence the intention to persist to degree completion for Latino/a Community College students. Using social capital theory and college impact models, the study controls (among others), the transition to college

experiences. He analyzed 397 responses of Latino/a students of a large, urban, diverse community college in California, «In all, 56% of them were female, 44% male; 75% were the first generation to college; 89% were either a U.S. citizen or a permanent resident, while 11% were undocumented» (p. 58).

Next, Kimura-Walsh et al. (2009) studied the college preparatory experiences of Latina's at urban Latina/o majority high school in California. They used an Opportunity to Learn (OTL) framework, that «within the education policy literature, is often used to identify linkages between school context [...] and learning outcomes as a way of recognizing and assessing levels of educational inequality» (p. 302). The data was collected from ten urban and suburban high schools with at least 50% African American or Latino/a students, in Los Angeles metropolitan area. They collected quantitative and qualitative information, obtained with surveys and focus groups, with a participation of 496 students, 48 teachers, 31 counselors, and 51 parents.

Then, Martinez and Deil-Amen (2015) made a two-part qualitative study including 131 Latino students. They analyzed data from essays where scholars wrote about their decision-making process, including the message they received about college while they were in high school. Moreover, with semi-structural interviews, they explored the first-year university experiences of the same group of students after completing two semesters at college. All the transcriptions were coded using Nvivo.

Another article is presented by Robinson and Roksa (2016), in how seeing a high school counselor can help to reduce inequality in college destinations. They used data from the Educational Longitudinal Study, particularly a sample of 10th graders in 2002, and then made a follow-up with this sample in 2004.

The ninth article is presented by H. Kenny Nienhusser (2013). This study described how seven New York City high schools tried to educate their undocumented students about the possible benefits they can achieve within their college choice process. It describes five categories of activities developed by institutional agents: one on one counseling, presentations, outreach, scholarship, and curriculum. The study had taken as reference two theoretical frameworks: college choice and institutional agents. The research question was: «What activities have institutional agents in New York City high schools pursued to address undocumented students' college choice?» (p. 8). This investigation followed a multiple case study research design, with 29 institutional agents interviewed and using Nvivo for the analysis.

At last, McKillip, Rawls and Barry (2012) carried out a literature review that put forward a summary of the research on college preparation in high school and the role of school counselors.

The central role of counseling processes regarding students' vocational decisions

About the central role of the vocational counselor at high schools, on one hand, Perna et al. (2008) paid special attention, describing them as «an especially important source of assistance and information for Blacks, Latinos, low-income students, and students whose parents do not have direct experience with college» (p. 132).

On the other hand, in her paper, when Bravo-Moreno (2009) presented the role of educators in general, furthermore can be seen the vision of counseling accompaniment and how it can be played by every single educator at high school. Related to this, she concluded that:

[...] educators are viewed as agents who have the potential to develop a social conscience orientated to justice, recognizing that all knowledge is political, value-laden and contested; and who choose to hold it open for critique and deconstruction. Educators' beliefs and assumptions about social justice are not immune from questioning. They need to reflect and critique their positions of ascribed privilege reshaping and shifting their thinking and practice by recognizing that they learn from and with students. Thus, critical multiculturalism aims to invite students and educators to examine how their modes of seeing and listening have been shaped specifically by the dominant culture at a historical moment and at a particular geographical location (p. 431).

In addition, Valadez (2008) concluded that educators and policymakers have «... the need to develop strategies and interventions that take into account the cultural perspectives of Mexican immigrant youngsters» (p.857). This conclusion can be applied to all the vocational accompaniments given by educators and to all the migrants' populations (not only Mexican immigrants). He continues focusing on the role of the vocational educators:

High school college counselors, in particular, must develop a deeper understanding of the cultural perspectives and values of immigrant students and their families to create interventions that address the questions and informational needs of this group. Interventions that focus on contending with the impact of college on family life, strategies for financing a college education, and informing families regarding the long-term benefits of a college degree would be helpful to immigrants. Specific programs that help parents cope with their anxieties about their children going away to college would also be relevant (p.857).

About how counseling influences the student's decision, Bryan et al. (2011) concluded that «Both the number of school counselors in a school and students' contact with the school counselor for college information appear to

have an effect on college application rates» (p. 195). Having a counselor was not significant in the application for one or more colleges in Black and Hispanic students. However, «Students in schools with higher numbers of school counselors were more likely to apply to two or more schools (vs. none)» (p. 194). Clearly, where available, counseling constitutes an integral part of student's decision processes.

Besides, these authors concluded that «in general, student-counselor contact for college information is a significant positive predictor of applying to college, and these effects appear stronger for earlier student-counselor contact...» (p. 195). Nevertheless, accordingly to these authors

These findings seem to suggest that school counselors may serve as limited social capital for Black or African American students, and there is still much work that must be done in examining the practices of school counselors and the efficacy of those practices as they specifically relate to the needs of this student population (p.196).

Moreover, according to Tovar (2015), «high school teachers and counselors, as institutional agents and gatekeepers, play a crucial role in transmitting knowledge and information to students about college choice process» (p. 51). Actually, in his conclusion, he mentioned that «this study found a small but significant impact of support programs and institutional agents' interactions with Latino/a community college students' success and intention to persist to degree completion» (p. 63).

This author quoted Stanton-Salazar (2001, on Tovar, 2015), who mentioned that institutional agents have a transcendental role in either changing or reproducing reproduction of class, racial, and gender inequality. These quoted authors proposed a theoretical framework that describes institutional agents as persons that:

(a) possess and have the capacity to transmit knowledge, (b) serve as bridges or gatekeepers, (c) advocate or intervene on students' behalf, (d) serve as role models, (e) provide emotional and moral support, and (f) provide valuable feedback, advice, and guidance to students. While in these roles, institutional agents have the capacity to assist students in the college choice and admission process (Stanton-Salazar, 1997, on Tovar, 2015 p. 51).

About the influences of counselors in the student's aspirations and success, Tovar (2015) stated the importance of providing «both psychological and instrumental support» (p. 51). He also mentioned that support programs can give students special skills needed to connect to community colleges and increases the probability of persistence, and

«participation in mentoring programs/services has also been shown to influence positive college outcomes for community college students, including Latino/as» (p. 52)

In brief, Tovar (2015) concluded that:

Given this study's findings, it is imperative that counselors systematically address not only academic issues, but developmental issues as well, such as students' career interests, or their degree of career decisiveness. Counselors should approach this in a systematic fashion, and make effective use of their counseling and interviewing skills to assess students' needs, and identify areas of support already available to them, or introduce them to new resources. Simply providing academic assistance (no matter how frequently) is not in itself conducive to Latino/a student success (p. 64).

Instead, Martinez and Deil-Amen (2015) went into the relevance of high school messages and how the students internalize those messages. They also put forward the importance of «the relationships and experiences students have with teachers and counselors [...], in addition to counseling, the quality of teacher interaction and tone of those relationships matter as well» (p. 27).

Also, Robinson and Roksa (2016) put forward the importance of counseling processes of going further the college information, and how «there is a suggestive evidence that seeing a counselor may be more relevant in schools with moderate college-going culture» (p. 847). This study pointed out the role of high school counselors as

[...] key institutional agents that have the capacity to transmit valuable information, institutional resources and opportunities regarding college to students [...] in addition to providing information in general, counselors could potentially facilitate access to higher education for students from less socioeconomically advantaged backgrounds (p. 848).

Considering the multiple sources of information available for students, it is an integral part of counseling not only the traditional role of informant, but also to become a facilitator of processes for making meaningful decisions.

In fact, Robinson and Roksa (2016) pointed out that: «since students in these – low college-going culture – disproportionately hail from less advantaged families, counselors may be particularly important in those contexts» (p.862). As a conclusion they also mentioned that: «the presented results show that meeting with counselors is indeed related to students college application decisions» (p.863).

Similarly, McKillip et al. (2012) pointed up the «particular need to find ways to support traditionally under-represented students in preparation for

and pursuit of post-secondary degrees. This includes [...] students from Black, Latino/a and American Indian Background...» (p. 50). Consequently, they determined the central role that counselors can play in the post-secondary path selected by students with a migratory background and their college transition.

Limitations in counseling processes

The big counselor-students ratio is in fact the most frequent limitation presented by the analyzed articles. According to Perna et al. (2008), «college related counseling is limited not only because of high student-to-counselor ratios, but also because of other school and counselor priorities» (p. 140). For example, at low-resources schools (where students with migrants' background assisted), it seems to be more important to ensure that students graduate from high school than promoting college enrolment (p. 143). They also conclude that:

Efforts to improve the availability of college counseling must reflect the overlapping contexts of school, district, higher education, and state. Nonetheless, the results of this study also suggest that the availability of college counseling may be enhanced by explicitly and intentionally making use of all available resources, including teachers, district offices, and state agencies, and local colleges and universities, and by recognizing the intended and unintended consequences of the various layers of context (p. 156).

Within their findings, Bryan et al. (2011) also point up the importance of a smaller counselor-students ratio. In fact, Kimura-Walsh et al. (2009) study mentioned that the counselor-to-students ratio is highest at the low-resourced public schools that many Latina/o students attend. In addition, the authors said that «where counselor-to-student ratios seem highest, counselors tend to focus their time and energies on either the highest achieving students or the most disruptive students» (p. 300). The average ratio in these high schools is one counselor for every 725 students. Nonetheless, some students of the sample shared a positive review of her counselor, but just 1 of every 4 students of the sample accessed the counselor for college advice and information.

Talking about European countries (in special the Spain case), Bravo-Moreno (2009) presented the following principal barriers for migratory students: the language challenges, the low educational level of their original countries, their parent's low paid jobs and the living location. She also concludes that

[...] children of immigrants, children of minority groups and children from a poor economic background tend to be concentrated in state schools and often in marginalized neighborhoods where they can afford housing. Thus, this inequality becomes a social problem and not a question of intellectual capacity (p. 426).

Besides, the study presented by Kimura-Walsh et al. (2009) presented another limitation when indicated that only 27% of students mentioned using counselors as their primary source of college information. Consequently, the authors recommended that counselors should «find ways to be attentive to all students' needs regardless of their achievement level» (p. 312).

Similarly to other studies, Robinson and Roksa (2016) concluded that counselors in schools with low college-going culture, dedicated much less attention to college counseling. Therefore, in these schools, «college conversations typically occur late, if at all, and students are given one-size-fits-all advice...» (p. 850).

In some cases, the immigration status of students is a limitation to counseling services, as exposed by the study of Nienhuser (2013):

Undocumented immigrants live in a precarious situation. They often grapple with familial pressure not to reveal their immigration status to officials due to fear associated with possible deportation. As a result, counselors in HS2, HS5, and HS7 described efforts to deliberately send out passes to meet with students individually, since staff members were aware that some students avoided them because such a meeting would likely expose their undocumented status (p.15).

In order to avoid this limitation, counselors used the presentation activities, they were used usually as college enrollment information sessions, where counselors «deliberately mentioned undocumented immigrants' eligibility to pay in-state tuition in New York's public postsecondary institutions». (Nienhuser, 2013, p. 16). They also made activities to advocated undocumented students with a representative of college and other efforts to connected undocumented students with resources in the community, for example, private scholarship funds.

Finally, McKillip et al. (2012) on their literature review mentioned the same notions of migrants' decisions already presented by other analyzed articles (Kimura-Walsh et al., 2009; Perna et al., 2008): preference of two-year community colleges, lack of good counseling processes about post-secondary options, parents without experiences to advice their children, big counselor-students ratio that limited the effectiveness of counseling processes and lack of time for counselors to spend on college counseling.

Recommendations for improving counseling processes

As the main recommendation, shared by at least four of the analyzed articles, is the one on one-on-one counseling, to satisfy each particular student's needs. (McKillip et al., 2012; Nienhuser, 2013; Robinson & Roksa, 2016; Perna et al., 2008). As a matter of fact, «the most common activity referenced was in the area of one-on-one counseling [...] with individual undocumented students and/or their parents [...]. One on one counseling was the preferred activity for secondary school staff» (Nienhuser, 2013, p.15).

Another recommendation presented by some authors suggests an early start of counseling, for example at ninth grade, and the collaboration between counselors and the rest of the school community (McKillip et al., 2012; Robinson & Roksa, 2016)

In addition, almost all authors consulted proposed to reduce the counselor-students ratio, which is one of the main limitations on counselors' work, as already said.

Another recommendation is to expand the «research conducted on school counselors and their work to prepare high school students for college success» (McKillip et al., 2012, p. 55). As a matter of fact, there is not much research that associates the cultural characteristics of students with a migratory background with vocational counseling.

System failures in giving post-secondary opportunities to migratory background students

Accordingly to Bravo-Moreno (2009), the education systems failed in allowing social mobility and inclusion of immigrants in national society (p.430). She also argues that education systems “are involved in the production of new expressions of social and political inequalities from a comparative and historical perspective” (p. 430).

About the USA cases, she explained that Hispanic students tend to achieve admission for a two-year college more than a four-year one. Also, that «Hispanic students have the lowest college completion rates of any other racial/ethnic group; even after surmounting the obstacles on the path to college, further barriers such as low financial resources and inadequate career guidance, remain» (p. 429). This conclusion of inadequate career guidance for Hispanic migrants students is important to visualize the lack of vocational counseling received by this population.

Besides, Valadez (2008) also mentioned the community college administrators, saying that they «must become more active in recruiting and

preparing immigrant students for entry into community college. Programs that address the community college's preparation for careers and 4-year college transfer opportunities must be communicated to immigrant students» (p. 857).

Also, Bryan et al. (2011) said that: «Much of the research concerning high school pre-college counseling emphasizes counselors in college preparatory schools serving White and more affluent populations where counselors devote a substantial amount of time to college preparation activities» (p. 190).

Furthermore, Kimura-Walsh et al. (2009) suggested that even though the students had the motivation and desire to achieve an admission to third education, «Unfortunately, the resources necessary to translate college goals into a reality are not equitably distributed further exacerbating the disparities between Latinas and their peers in college access» (p. 299). Based on students' narratives and survey responses, they also indicated that “their high school provided limited OTL and failed to address barriers to college» (p. 306).

As Martinez and Deil-Amen (2015) main conclusions on students that assisted to low socioeconomic status high schools, they put forward that they «were expected by teachers to enter into the [...] workforce after graduating [...] how teacher doubted their ability to get into university» (p. 18). The study also pointed up that

Besides negative messages from teachers, students in the general curriculum also reported encounters with their counselors that were negative toward college-going and did not communicate the college-for-all message. Students discussed limited access to their counselors, receiving discouraging messages about the possibility of engaging in university pursuits, and a general inattentiveness to their college choice needs. They expressed frustration with what they perceived to be extremely limited counseling services, which, according to students, caused them to search for other sources to obtain information about postsecondary pursuits (pp. 18-19).

Gender differences in vocational decisions

There is also a gender difference presented in some of the analyzed articles. Kimura-Walsh et al. (2003), mentioned that Latina students have to deal with race stereotypes, and in vocational and educational processes, they are «being perceived as less academically able than White students or being pushed toward vocational education» (p. 301). These authors also suggest that there may be gender differences in educational experiences that can be understudied. Therefore, they concluded that: «Latina students from low

socioeconomic backgrounds are less likely to participate in higher education» (p. 301).

Among others, Bryan et al. (2011) conclude that «overall, female students were more likely to apply to college than were male students» (p. 193). Also, that the aspirations of relatives (especially mothers) influence in the college application of high school students.

Transcendental role of families in vocational decisions

Among other factors that influence the intention to continue studying after high school, Tovar (2015) mentions supportive family and friends, transition assistance from the institution, adequate studying time, and personal commitment. Consequently, «having significant family responsibilities, experiencing a challenging transition to college, and encountering academic difficulties had a deleterious impact on Latino/a students' grades» (p. 63).

Also, as said before, Bryan et al. (2011) mentioned that the aspirations of relatives (especially mothers) influence in the college application of high school students.

According to Kimura-Walsh et al. (2009), although families motivated Latina students to continue studying after high schools, their lack of experiences with the education systems «limited parent's abilities to offer specific advice and college preparatory information» (p. 305).

Conclusions

After analyzing these articles, it is notorious that more studies that take as outcomes vocational accompaniment and counseling processes received by migrant students and its influences in the achievement of university admission in the United States, Latin America, and South Europe needs to be developed. Indeed, there is a lack of studies that consider students with migratory background cultural characteristics within vocational counseling processes in high schools.

Also, the analyzed studies explained that one of the main critical points which have an impact on the migrants' relative low participation to third education is a lack of good vocational counseling and accompaniment received by students with migratory backgrounds in high schools.

These studies also showed that counseling services and special support/mentoring programs can influence students' persistence to achieve

third education and positive college outcomes. These processes, considering the multiple sources of information available, must go further the college information, and emphasizes on students' particular needs in their transition to college. They must also take into account the family-center role and the gender differences in vocational aspirations and decisions of students with a migratory background. They must include at least one on one counseling, group counseling, presentations, and activities in collaboration with teachers and other institutional actors.

Accordingly to these studies, other similar explorations can be made in other European and Latin American countries, to compare the outcomes mentioned in this paper with their particular situations, taking into account their historical, cultural, and educational similarities and differences with the USA and Spain.

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