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(In)Effectiveness of Summer Bridge Programs among First-year Low-income, First-generation College Students

Joy N. Emmanuel

Summer bridge programs have become a widely adopted strategy in four-year institutions to address the unique challenges faced by first-time first-year, first-generation low-income college students (*FTFY FGLICS*). These initiatives seek to enhance academic preparedness, foster a sense of community, and improve retention. However, in this study, I critically examine the effectiveness of summer bridge programs in achieving these goals. Drawing on a review of the existing literature, it becomes evident that although summer bridge programs offer certain benefits, they may be less effective in promoting holistic success, persistence, and retention among this specific group of students. The analysis highlights several limitations, including a limited focus on socio-emotional support, potential stereotype threat effects, and the short-term impact of these programs. I conclude by emphasizing the need for more comprehensive and student-centered approaches, recognizing the importance of addressing both academic and non-academic challenges and ensuring sustained support throughout *FTFY FGLICS*'s college journeys. Future research, policy, and program improvements are essential to better serve the holistic needs of *FTFY FGLICS* in four-year institutions.

Keywords: summer bridge programs, first generation students, success, persistence, retention

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(In)Effectiveness of Summer Bridge Programs among First-year Low-income, First-generation College Students

Transitioning from high school to college is often connected with many changes and developmental milestones and can be challenging for many students (Thomas & Zolkoski, 2023; Becker et al., 2017). For most students entering college, embarking on a new phase is a period of significant stress. Although research indicates that students encounter many difficulties after the transition to college, the interaction of ecological factors, such as pre-university education, university context, and the larger social environment, puts certain student subpopulations at an increased risk for undesirable academic outcomes (Kroshus et al., 2021). Evidently, first-generation students experience these stressors and additional risk factors contributing to academic underperformance and university attrition quite differently than their continuing-generation counterparts do (Kroshus et al., 2021; Becker et al., 2017). For instance, first-generation students are less likely to be prepared for college entry, have lower standardized test scores, rely less on successful learning and self-regulation skills, and have higher levels of worry, stress, and depression.

In recent years, summer bridge programs have become increasingly popular as a means of supporting first-year college students, particularly those with low-income and first-generation backgrounds. Research shows that bridge programs are potentially helpful in boosting the retention and academic success of at-risk students by providing an early orientation to the college experience and establishing connections between these students, their peers, and the community (Institute of Education Sciences, 2016; Eblen-Zayas & Russell, 2019). However, we are faced with the question of how effectively summer bridge programs can be tailored to develop incoming first-year first-generation students' skills as they transition into four-year institutions. Hence, through this study, I aim to review the existing literature to inform the development of effective summer bridge programs that can support the success and retention of low-income, first-generation college students in four-year institutions.

Purpose Statement

I seek to investigate and answer the question of how effective summer bridge programs are in four-year institutions. In addition, my objective is to identify the impact of SBPs on fostering academic success, persistence, and retention of low-income, first-generation students.

My scholarship aims to target higher education stakeholders and professionals such as policymakers, higher education administrators, faculty, researchers, and student affairs practitioners. It is worth noting that my targeted audience wields substantial power and control over the subject matter under consideration in their different capacities. For instance, policymakers have a lot of influence in the higher education landscape for *FTFY FGLICS* through the formulation and implementation of educational policies. As these policies dictate program structures, funding allocations, and institutional

priorities, it is my call for policymakers to utilize their authority to center the needs of *FTFY FGLICS* in their decision-making process. Similarly, higher education administrators play a key role in making decisions and implementing policies that affect program design, resource allocation, and overall institutional support for *FTFY FGLICS*. Thus, there is a need to re-examine the decisions made and implementation of policies that impact the holistic success of *FTFY FGLICS*. In addition, faculty, researchers, and student affairs practitioners shape the narrative and educational outcomes of *FTFY FGLICS* through their respective actions. Imperatively, there is a need to foster an environment that maximizes support and success for *FTFY FGLICS* through a well-informed collaborative effort and reevaluation process targeted at improving summer bridge programs.

My identity and positionality as a low-income first-generation student resonate with the unique challenges that first-year, low-income, first-generation college students face in navigating the complexities of collegiate life. Existing research has also shown how access and retention are perennial concerns, especially in four-year institutions. I believe that there is a need to examine the various factors that contribute to the effectiveness of summer bridge programs and their impact on fostering greater educational equity and achievement for underserved populations of students, such as low-income, first-generation college students, in higher education. Thus, it is vital to delve into the intricacies and outcomes of summer bridge programs to provide evidence-based insights that can inform the design and implementation of more targeted support initiatives, ultimately contributing to enhanced collegiate experiences and the success of this specific population of students. Therefore, through my research, I aim to investigate how summer bridge programs can empower students to overcome barriers and unlock their full potential. I further seek to examine the significance of summer bridge programs in facilitating and fostering success, persistence, and retention among first-generation, low-income students in higher education.

Theoretical Framework

In this paper, I draw on the theoretical framework of existing scholarly research that focuses on the U.S. Higher Education System. Using the framework, I examine how to effectively utilize Summer Bridge Programs (SBPs) in promoting success, persistence, and retention among *FTFY FGLICS* in higher education. This framework helps to comprehensively analyze how Summer Bridge Programs impact the development and retention of *FTFY FGLICS*. The approach I adopted in the study allows for a holistic exploration of the multifaceted aspects of *FTFY FGLICS* success and persistence in higher education, providing a deeper and more nuanced understanding of how these programs can effectively support this specific student demographic in their pursuit of academic achievement and college completion.

To examine how the effectiveness of bridge programs impacts academic success, personal development, and retention of *FTFY FGLICS*, I draw from Chickering's Seven Vectors of Student

Development and Tinto's Model of Student Retention (Chickering, 1969; Tinto, 1975). Chickering's Seven Vectors of Student Development illustrates how educational programs can influence students' personal and academic development through the establishment of identity. Identity as proven by Chickering's theory is a core developmental issue college students grapple with (Chickering, 1969). According to Chickering (1969), the seven vectors encompass competence development, emotion management, transitioning from autonomy to interdependence, developing mature interpersonal relationships, identity formation, developing purpose, and developing integrity. The vectors help identify and enable an understanding of the key components of successful summer bridge programs, such as academic preparation, social support, leadership development, and immersion programs. Consequently, understanding Chickering's development theory offers a valuable lens through which to assess the impact of SBPs on *FTFY FGLICS* academic development. *FTFY FGLICS* academic development can help in fostering their exploration and holistic growth for effective transition, retention, and success. Alongside Chickering, Tinto's model centers on the significance of academic and social integration in influencing student retention (Tinto, 1975). The model is instrumental in understanding how the Summer Bridge Program impacts the integration processes of *FTFY FGLICS*. Academic integration in Tinto's (1975) model underlines how Summer Bridge Programs enhance students' academic preparation and involvement, leading to improved academic success and persistence. Furthermore, the concept of social integration in Tinto's model helps enhance the sense of belonging and connectedness, reducing feelings of isolation, and promoting social support networks for students. The social integration facet significantly influences *FTFY FGLICS* persistence by providing a supportive community through the Summer Bridge Programs.

For this study, I utilized Chickering's Seven Vectors of Student Development and Tinto's Model of Student Retention as complementary theoretical frameworks. Chickering's model, which emphasizes psychosocial development, is vital for understanding personal growth and identity formation in *FTFY FGLICS*. As these targeted students navigate the challenges of a new academic environment, they undergo a transformative process of developing competence, autonomy, and a sense of purpose that aligns with Chickering's vectors. Fostering *FTFY FGLICS* personal development strongly influences their ability to integrate into the academic community; thus, enhancing a sense of belonging and institutional commitment, as emphasized by Tinto's model. The integration of Chickering and Tinto's frameworks enables a comprehensive exploration of the interplay between personal development and academic success. Thus, these frameworks shed light on the factors that contribute to holistic success, persistence, and retention among *FTFY FGLICS*. The integrated approach provides a more nuanced understanding of how to develop more effective support programs and how summer bridge programs can better serve the diverse needs of *FTFY FGLICS* in four-year institutions.

The two theories align with Duran and Jones' (2019) study of context and contextualizing student development using critical theory. It is important to understand the influence of 'context' in being aware of historical, intellectual, and political contexts that shape what *FTFY FGLICS* think/do and how Summer Bridge Programs can be tailored to meet their peculiar needs to promote their holistic success. Merging these three theories under the theoretical framework is important to understand how the holistic success of *FTFY FGLICS* is influenced by their psychosocial development, sense of belonging, and past socio-historical experiences. Thus, the awareness of the impact of students' past experiences and socio-historical influences on how they navigate institutions of higher learning should shape the design and implementation of bridge programs. Additionally, the consideration of their cognitive, interpersonal, and intrapersonal domains of development is crucial as transitional measures in college (Duran & Jones, 2019).

Literature Review

In this section, I provide a comprehensive examination of the existing literature related to the challenges and opportunities faced by first-year, low-income, and first-generation college students in the context of summer bridge programs. I explore the overarching goals and outcomes of these programs, emphasizing the need for increased holistic success, persistence, and retention among this specific student population. For proper elucidation, this literature review is based on the lens of two theoretical frameworks I utilized in the study - Chickering's Seven Vectors of Student Development and Tinto's Model of Student Retention. The two frameworks, coupled with Duran's article, provide clearer insight into the complexities of student success and the factors impacting retention. Also, I leveraged existing literature to evaluate the effectiveness of summer bridge programs by investigating their impact on academic preparedness, socio-emotional support, and long-term retention outcomes. By delving into previous scholarship, this review serves as a foundation for my research paper. Based on the review, I identify gaps in the literature and propose recommendations for enhancing the effectiveness of summer bridge programs in supporting the targeted student population.

Challenges and Barriers After Transitioning into Institutions of Higher Learning

First-generation college students (FGCS) are typically defined as individuals whose parents do not hold a bachelor's degree; in contrast, continuing-generation students have at least one parent who has. (Stebbleton & Soria, 2012; Katreovich & Aruguete, 2017). The definition reflects the need to understand these students as learners, as they enter the gates of higher education during their initial admission. The initial transition to college can be an overwhelming experience for these targeted students. Research has shown that the first year is critical for first-generation students. According to Checkoway (2018), if institutions are unprepared for the success of first-generation students, this experience can disorient them to a level of anxiety that affects their learning. For example, building

upon the work of Choy (2001), LeBouef & Dworkin, (2021) also found that first-generation students tend to drop out after their first year. Given their inadequate academic preparation, lack of social integration, and heavy work and family responsibilities, Engle & Tinto (2008) established that one-fourth (26%) of US first-generation students leave in their freshman year, as opposed to 7% of other students. Similarly, Forrest Cataldi et al. (2018) discovered that 33% of first-generation students who started college during the 2003–2004 academic year dropped out of their respective college or university 3 years later without a degree, compared with 14% of students whose parents earned a bachelor's degree. These discoveries point to the urgent need to support the unique peculiarity of these students as learners by aligning the effectiveness of SBPs to foster their holistic success.

First-generation students often need to understand the realities of post-secondary education, family income, and support needed to attend college. Further leaning on Evans et al. (2020) study, FGCS needs to understand the academic expectations for college-level study, and what constitutes adequate college readiness. According to Engle et al. (2006), as the first in their families to attend college, these students experience academic, social, financial, and family issues that make it difficult for them to transition to college. Ives & Castillo-Montoya (2020) similarly found that FGCS experience academic and social challenges as they transition into college due to unfamiliarity with institutional norms and practices and having no personal networks to ask for guidance. Among the several obstacles they experience, first-generation students encounter many academic and social challenges after transitioning to college (Stebleton & Soria, 2012; Woosley & Shepler, 2011; Katrevich & Aruguete, 2017). The foregoing provides a foundation for higher education stakeholders to understand the specific issues impeding the success of FGCS as they transition into college. This knowledge can help to inform the objectives and design of Summer Bridge Programs to adequately address the unique challenges of these students. As also discovered by Engle et al. (2006), Ives & Castillo-Montoya (2020) found that the most difficult transition faced by undergraduate students relates to academics. For instance, building on the work of Balemian & Feng (2013) and Bui (2002), Katrevich & Aruguete (2017) established that first-generation students need to prepare more academically than their continuing-generation peers, as they tend to be less likely to take university-level classes in high school and often have lower average results on standardized pre-university admission exams and critical-thinking evaluations. As demonstrated in Tinto (2004), this unique challenge of FGCS necessitates the need to improve the accessibility of campus academic and social support services to facilitate student integration. In addition, the academic challenge of FGCS is indicative of the need for supplementary academic preparation and support compared to their continuing-generation peers.

As illustrated under the theoretical framework of this study, Tinto's Student Integration Model (1975) identifies variables that influence the performance and persistence of university students, including first-generation and under-represented groups. According to Tinto (1975), individual characteristics (such as pre-university experiences and first-generation status) and the extent to which

students are assimilated into the university environment determine student attrition. This integration occurs in the form of academic and social integration, through which students interact with faculty over course material, gain access to research experiences, utilize tutoring centers, and establish friendships with peers and mentorship with faculty and staff (Tinto, 1975; Katrevich & Aruguete, 2017). Expanding upon the work of Jenkins et al. (2009), Katrevich & Aruguete (2017) pointed out that when FGCS enroll in a university, they are more inclined to participate in remedial classes. These students are also less secure in their academic abilities and are less likely to approach professors for assistance. Thus, overcoming academic obstacles is essential for first-generation students to persist in higher education (Dika & D'Amico, 2016). From the preceding, it is important to note that a lack of academic and social integration may jeopardize first-generation students' academic achievements.

Furthermore, first-generation students need help navigating the social environment of the institution and often feel dissatisfied compared to their peers (Stebbleton et al., 2014). As demonstrated by Engle and Tinto (2008), first-generation students are less likely to be involved in the university's social experiences. They rarely interact with faculty (Jenkins et al., 2009) and typically turn to their peers for guidance on academic matters (Torres et al., 2006). Similarly, recent research has found that FGCS face challenges in becoming socially engaged in campus life due to factors such as financial constraints. However, low social engagement may contribute to a low sense of belonging among first-generation students, thus inhibiting persistence and degree completion. Also, these students continue to encounter academic challenges due to infrequent interaction with faculty because of large classes in most institutions. These studies highlighted demonstrate the need for targeted support and resources to improve FGCS academic and social experiences.

(In)effectiveness of Summer Bridge Programs

Summer bridge programs are developed to facilitate the transition to college and post-secondary school success for students. SBPs aim to provide students with academic skills and social resources over the summer while acquainting them with college expectations and the institutional cultural contexts (Institute of Education Science, 2016; Eblen-Zayas & Russell, 2019; Gonzalez & Garza, 2018). They usually occur in the summer between high school graduation and the first term of college and differ in content, program size, and duration (Gonzalez & Garza, 2018). There are five main components: a detailed orientation to college life and resources, academic coursework, academic advising, academic support to prepare students for the rigors of college academics and college life, and social support to develop strong networks among students and faculty to enhance a stronger sense of connection to the institution (Institute of Education Science, 2016). Research demonstrates that bridge programs are potentially effective in improving the retention and academic achievement of at-risk students by providing an early orientation to college life and fostering relationships between them and the community (Institute of Education Science, 2016). According to Engle et al. (2006),

Students develop study habits and skills to succeed in college courses, with additional tutoring and other support provided during SBPs. Recent research has also shown summer bridge programs assist students in gaining experience with class registration, locating classrooms on campus, and visiting bookstores. The potential benefits of SBPs demonstrate how important they are in preparing FGCs for effective transitioning into college.

With summer bridge programs showing great promise, numerous studies have examined their implementation. However, researchers still need to evaluate or address some important questions: Are summer programs effective? If so, in what way? Despite the lack of assessment of the effectiveness of bridge programs in summer, only some studies have used evaluation techniques to address this issue. Pascarella & Terenzini (2005) and Walpole et al. (2008) compared the retention rates and academic success of summer bridge program participants. According to both studies, students who participated in summer bridge programs had a higher grade point average (GPA) and were more likely to continue to the second year than those who did not participate in a summer bridge program. Cabrera et al. (2013) also tracked retention and persistence rates and discovered that both retention and persistence for students were significantly higher than those for students who did not participate in a summer bridge program. These studies attest to the positive effect of summer bridge programs on academic success. However, the demographics of the target population in the studies were not predominately first-year, first-generation students. In addition, the potential ineffectiveness of summer bridge programs that could impact these underserved students was not shared. Although summer bridge programs can help build academic skills, they may not adequately address the psychological and emotional factors contributing to stereotype threats, limiting their effectiveness (Murphy & Zirkel, 2015). Summer bridge programs often emphasize academic support at the expense of socio-emotional support. First-generation students may struggle with imposter syndrome, feelings of isolation, or a lack of self-confidence, which can hinder their success (Stephens et al., 2012). The limited attention paid to these emotional factors in summer bridge programs may explain their ineffectiveness in addressing the unique needs of this group.

According to Bir & Myrick (2015) and Cabrera et al. (2013), the research on the effectiveness of summer bridge programs varies in scope and usefulness. Although some studies indicate that summer bridge programs enhance academic achievement (Strayhorn, 2011; Walpole et al., 2008), other studies have shown no effect or even a decline in academic performance (Fletcher et al., 2001; Ackermann, 1991). For instance, students who took part in UCLA's Summer Program/Transfer Summer Program reported needing more preparation to face the rigors of college coursework but showed significant drops between their summer and fall GPAs (Ackermann, 1991). Strayhorn (2011) discovered that students' self-reported academic competence and self-efficacy greatly improved after summer bridge participation. Nevertheless, only perceived self-efficacy predicted first-semester GPA. According to students' self-reports, the social impact assessments conducted through administered

surveys demonstrated that programmatic participation either positively impacted their adjustment to college life (Gutierrez, 2007) or sufficiently prepared them to engage in classroom discussions and interact with their peers (Ackermann, 1991). However, the outcomes are inconsistent and inconclusive. Walpole et al. (2008) found that, despite feeling socially engaged, students reported lower levels of involvement in campus clubs or organizations than their colleagues who did not participate in the program (Cabrera et al., 2013).

Nevertheless, many of these studies have used qualitative rather than quantitative methods to assess the academic outcomes of summer bridge programs. In numerous studies, for example, self-reported data regarding participants' assessed levels of academic preparedness and post-participation in a bridge program were measured, but participants' GPAs were not measured at subsequent dates (Cabrera et al., 2013). Although qualitative data are helpful when measuring the degree to which students consider a program beneficial, these studies generally lack hard data on the relationship between GPAs and attrition rates (for financial hardship) and cannot assess whether the program has truly impacted a student's academic performance.

Enhancing Holistic Success, Persistence, and Retention

The transition from high school to college is daunting for *FTFY FGLICS*. Although institutions have been proactive and have implemented various academic enrichment and intervention programs to aid in the success of the student's college experience, retaining students, most especially *FTFY FGLICS*, is a challenge for most four-year institutions, and more needs to be done to prepare students for successful college life. To increase the academic success, persistence, and retention of *FTFY FGLICS*, institutions need to understand their student populations, their needs, and how best to educate and prepare them for success in increasing their persistence to degree completion. As institutions plan their annual summer bridge programs, it is important to consider what has been done and identify areas for improvement. Programs tend to become stale and ineffective in higher education after some time; thus, there is a need for constant improvement to ensure success (Window & Korstrange, 2019). Summer bridge programs need constant review to ensure efficiency; otherwise, they may become irrelevant to the targeted student population in this study. Regardless of the type of structure of a summer bridge program, institutions must have an evaluation process to ensure that the program is effective and that adjustments are made as needed, which can be accomplished by collecting and monitoring data consistently (Melendez, 2020). It is important to continuously review the components of summer bridge programs and examine the issues associated with this intervention program to improve its efficiency in fostering higher *FTFY FGLICS* success and retention rates.

A variety of institutional and structural factors impede the success and development of underrepresented and marginalized students such as lack of academic preparation. Thus, comprehensive and integrated programs offer an opportunity to coordinate a learning environment

that is explicitly oriented toward the needs and success of these underserved student populations. Essentially, curriculum forms a fundamental aspect of the implementation of summer bridge programs. Hence, the curriculum needs to be revised and tailored to the needs of *FTFY FGLICS* to provide students with opportunities for both academic and social integration peculiar to their unique contextual needs. The curriculum revision is important as these underserved students need additional transition support based on their contextual needs, as SBP participants. Thus, individuals developing SBPs, and other academic interventions must keep in mind that there is no 'one size fits all' that will meet the needs of every student (Dorimé-Williams et al., 2023). Therefore, offering a suite of services and experiences to support *FTFY FGLICS*'s success is a good approach. Students may not be fully engaged in every aspect of the program; however, having numerous opportunities and spaces to participate in academically purposeful educational activities can help address this challenge. Even though summer bridge programs are not necessarily remedial (Sablan, 2014), there is a need to enhance their developmental capacity for students from underrepresented minority backgrounds to provide holistic and academic support for them to succeed in a four-year institution. In addition, SBPs need to ensure that *FTFY FGLICS* are given the proper support and tools needed to succeed in institutions of higher learning.

Adopting student-centered assessment as a framework for creating, administering, and analyzing SBP evaluation can provide four-year institutions with tools to meet the needs of all students within SBP (Dorimé-Williams et al., 2023). Student-centered assessment provides students with a role in the evaluation process and respects the diversity of needs among learners. Through listening to the lived experiences of marginalized students within SBPs, higher education administrators can focus on how to create more equitable and inclusive learning environments (Jankowski & Marshall, 2017; Dorimé-Williams et al., 2023). Institutions can advance institutional goals by tailoring interventions to provide students with what they need, not simply with what administrators may assume they want. Given the focus of this SBP on supporting marginalized students, student-centered assessment is useful for considering how the program can further eliminate barriers to *FTFY FGLICS*'s success and promote more equitable outcomes. By focusing on the strengths and areas for improvement, SBPs could make targeted changes, informed by students, to improve program practices and student learning.

Though SBPs are a great starting point to offer students a strong foundation for their collegiate experience, ensuring their retention and persistence requires continued vigilance and support well beyond the physical and temporal bounds of their time in the SBP (Dorimé-Williams et al., 2023). The faculty, staff, and senior administrators must move beyond simplistic counts of inputs (e.g., dollars spent on a program, number of staff members hired, number of marginalized students in a program) and outputs (e.g., cost per student for a program, number of credits earned, number of students retained in a program) to focus on student learning and growth (i.e., skills developed, knowledge

acquired, and supportive relationships developed). These metrics should be used to evaluate institutional success (Ludvik, 2019), particularly to honor commitments to equitable outcomes for minoritized students. According to Odeleye & Santiago (2019), longitudinal quantitative student data should be analyzed in future evaluations of summer bridge programs. Future research should concentrate on summer bridge participants' GPAs, attrition rates, and four-year graduation rates. Participants in a summer bridge program ought to be paired with a control group for comparative analysis (Odeleye & Santiago, 2019). Hence, pre-and post-test research designs are recommended to determine whether a real change in student performance has occurred over time. Furthermore, quantitative and qualitative measures of ethnic matching should be included in the subsequent evaluations. More research is required to determine whether an ethnic match positively correlates with quantitative GPAs, graduation rates, attrition rates, and qualitative student experiences in bridge programs (Odeleye & Santiago, 2019).

Implication and Direction for Future Research and Stakeholders

The positive effects of Summer Bridge Programs (SBPs) often diminish over time. Although SBPs can provide a vital foundation for first-generation college students (*FTFYFGLICS*) to transition into higher education successfully, their impact tends to decline throughout their collegiate experience. The decline in impact is mainly due to persistent systemic barriers that hinder *FTFYFGLICS*'s progress without continued support and resources throughout their academic journey. These barriers can encompass various challenges, such as financial constraints, lack of mentorship, unfamiliarity with college resources, and feelings of isolation. Consequently, *FTFYFGLICS* may find it increasingly difficult to overcome these obstacles, which can, in turn, inhibit their ability to attain holistic success. Also, *FTFYFGLICS*'s inability to surmount barriers can have an impact on how they sustain motivation and persistence toward degree completion. It becomes evident that while SBPs can be a valuable starting point, they are not a standalone solution. Instead, they should be considered as part of a comprehensive support system that extends throughout a student's college journey. The diminishing impact of SBPs underscores the need for further research and a deeper understanding of the unique challenges faced by *FTFYFGLICS* in a four-year institution setting. It is important to identify the specific factors that may render these summer programs less effective over time. By pinpointing these factors, institutions can develop more targeted and sustainable support systems that address the evolving needs of *FTFYFGLICS* throughout their academic careers. My findings in this study can inform and shape the development of long-term strategies to ensure that the positive effects of SBPs are not short-lived and that *FTFYFGLICS* continue to receive the support and resources required for their academic and personal success during their college journey.

Furthermore, policymakers must reassess existing policies and make necessary adjustments that address the unique challenges faced by *FTFY FGLICS*. The findings I made in this research demonstrate the need for policies to be responsive to the diverse needs of the targeted student population. Making policies receptive to the unique needs of *FTFY FGLICS* helps to greatly contribute to increased retention and success rates for them. Therefore, policymakers should center the needs of these underserved students when developing educational policies and allocating resources within the higher education landscape. In addition, the implication of the findings stresses the potential impact of institutional policies on the effectiveness of SBPs. Thus, higher education administrators should enhance institutional strategies and support mechanisms for *FTFY FGLICS*. By improving SBPs to address the multifaceted needs of *FTFY FGLICS* through enhanced policies and comprehensive cohesive practices, a more supportive and empowering learning environment can be fostered for these students, as they transition into college.

As part of my targeted audience, faculty and student affairs practitioners are not left behind in this revolutionary movement of enhancing the effectiveness of SBPs for *FTFY FGLICS*. Faculty and student affairs practitioners play a crucial role in ensuring the holistic success of *FTFY FGLICS* participating in SBPs. Thus, faculty should understand the specific challenges of these targeted students and tailor instructional methods to effectively enhance their academic outcomes. Similarly, student affairs practitioners should adapt support services such as mentorship programs, and resources for navigating college life and fostering a sense of belonging, to meet the nuanced needs of *FTFY FGLICS*. By taking up the challenge contained in the implications, faculty and practitioners can enhance a more seamless transition of *FTFY FGLICS* into the rigors associated with higher education and improve their overall college experience and success.

Conclusion

Through this research, I examined the (in)effectiveness of summer bridge programs in promoting academic preparedness, fostering a sense of community, and improving retention among first-year, low-income, first-generation college students. The findings showed the unique challenges, including lack of preparedness, stress, and depression, faced by *FTFY FGLICS* while transitioning to college from high school. As much as SBPs possess inherent benefits in supporting high school and at-risk students moving into college, some major limitations have been identified to impede the effectiveness of these programs in helping *FTFY FGLICS* achieve holistic success as they navigate college.

As my findings in this study have shown, SBPs assist incoming students with transition and their acclimation to college. However, given the diverse program designs and implementations, there are still opportunities to improve practices to prepare *FTFY FGLICS* for success. Although summer bridge programs have demonstrated success in certain contexts, they often fall short of meeting the

unique needs of first-generation college students. The limitations of these programs stem from inadequate consideration of social and emotional support, cultural competence, and the sustainability of their effects. Moving forward, it is crucial to adopt a more holistic and student-centered approach to support first-generation students, recognizing their strengths and experiences and addressing the social, emotional, and academic challenges they may encounter in the college environment. Further research, programmatic, and policy improvements are necessary to ensure that summer bridge programs effectively serve the diverse needs of first-generation students.

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