Helping or hindering language growth?
A snapshot of Hispanic ‘in-transit’ learners in Trinidad

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This study was conducted at the University of the West Indies (UWI) St Augustine campus with English as a Second Language (ESL) learners (n=51) from twelve nationalities. It examines learner satisfaction among resident and short- and long-term in-transit ESL students.

Introduction

Venezuelans currently fleeing from the political and economic hardship in their homeland often seek refuge in other Latin American countries and the Caribbean although a great majority head to the United States, some coming to Trinidad & Tobago in-transit to other destinations as an opportunity to learn English as a Second Language (ESL). The conceptualization of Trinidad for English-language learning corresponds with its strategic location. While it is acknowledged as a hub of economic activity across the two hemispheres, Trinidad has, interestingly, also earned its reputation as a site for illegal immigrants, a convenient location between the production and consumption of drugs, as well as a human trafficking destination.

Methodology

A socio-cultural theoretical framework was adopted to investigate learner satisfaction, and the collection, analysis and interpretation of data were guided by principles of a grounded-theory ethnographic approach.

Methods

In Phase One, data were primarily sourced through focus groups, and findings informed the design and distribution of questionnaires. Phase Two entailed a series of focus groups, modified questionnaires and individual semi-structured interviews.

Findings

Findings showed that despite student satisfaction with the university ESL programme, Hispanic in-transit learners, in-particular those who spent fewer than six months in Trinidad, faced race and gender discrimination. Short-term in-transit Hispanic learners

Unfavourable and discriminatory attitudes towards Hispanic in-transit learners hampered their opportunities for interaction and integration and restricted their freedom to learn.

Level of proficiency

Elem= Elementary, Pre-Int= Pre-Intermediate, Int= Intermediate, Upper-Int= Upper-Intermediate, Adv= Advanced

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