The Non-Financial Factors that Can Explain the Low Graduation Rate of Black Students in Higher Education

* Plem Kijamba, Michaëlle Aubourg & Tanya Matthews–McGill University
email: plem.kijamba@mail.mcgill.ca

Aim/Purpose
The purpose of this paper is to evaluate literature that considers how nonfinancial factors can influence the enrollment and the low graduation rates of Black students in higher education institutions.

Background
Background Non-financial factors such as the academic, social, and family environments can have a significant impact on the school trajectory of individuals in Black communities. In this paper, we reviewed and analyzed qualitative and quantitative papers that examined school environmental factors as well as social and family environmental factors.

Methodology
This paper is a review of the recent literature around the social factors influencing Black students’ academic experience.

Findings
The main social factors retained from the literature that affect the graduation rate of Black students in higher education are adjustment and challenges, type of school and structure, stereotypes and prejudices; family background and structure effect, peers’ effect/role models and students’ social status, and non-linear academic path.

Impact on Society
We seek to highlight information about how family and social environmental elements intersect with the school environment and how this intersection affects academic success and dropout rate.

Keywords
Black students, higher education, graduate rates, non-financial factors

Corresponding Author
© The Author(s) 2020. Open Access: This article is distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License. (https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/)
## Areas of Contribution

### Paper Category

- [ ] Original Research
- [ ] Case Study
- [x] Reviews
- [ ] Position Paper
- [ ] Technical Briefs
- [ ] Student Paper
- [ ] Opinion
- [x] Comparative
- [ ] Innovation Ideas

### Type of Study

- [ ] Radical
- [ ] Incremental/Enhancing
- [ ] Disruptive
- [ ] Breakthrough
- [ ] Basic Research
- [ ] Sustaining
- [ ] Architectural
- [ ] Component/Modular
- [x] Discriminatory Bias

### Industry

- [ ] Media
- [ ] Telecom
- [ ] Consumer Financial Services
- [ ] Retail
- [ ] Technology
- [ ] Insurance
- [ ] Consumer Products
- [ ] Non-Profit
- [ ] Business/Professional Services
- [x] Higher Education
- [x] Diversity and Inclusion
- [x] Training
- [ ] Health Care
- [ ] Manufacturing
- [ ] Transportation

### Discipline

- [ ] Business Technology
- [ ] Human Resources
- [ ] Management
- [ ] Marketing
- [ ] Finance
- [ ] Accounting
- [ ] Computer Science
- [ ] Engineering
- [x] Medicine / Healthcare
- [ ] Law and Justice
- [ ] History
- [ ] Philosophy
- [ ] Religion/Theology
- [ ] Mathematics
- [ ] Physics
- [ ] Digital Media
- [ ] Astrology
- [ ] Social Sciences
- [ ] Art and Culture
- [ ] Psychology/Consciousness
- [ ] Astronomy
- [ ] Economics

### Human Elements Addressed

- [ ] Personality Traits
- [ ] Behavior
- [x] Equality and Equity
- [ ] Development
- [ ] Environmental
- [ ] Social
- [ ] Mental Wellbeing
- [ ] Consciousness
- [ ] Physical Wellbeing
INTRODUCTION

According to Statistics Canada, there were an estimated 1.2 million Black people in Canada in 2016, and 26.6% of them resided in Quebec. (Turcotte, 2016). The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) asserts that education is fundamental as it constitutes a durable mechanism to get out of poverty, reduce inequalities and help individuals to access other fundamental rights (UNESCO, n.d.). Interestingly, the Canadian census reports a similar high school graduation rate for Black students as for non-Black students which agrees with the importance of giving access to quality education. However, the statistics for post-secondary education are less encouraging, as displayed in the Canadian Census 2016 chart below.

This graph illustrates the graduation rate among Canadian Black students (dark blue) compared to non-Black students (light blue). Although the high school graduation rate was the same for Black and non-Black students, the post-secondary graduation rate was significantly lower for Black students compared to non-Black students. In addition, the graduation rate of Black students in higher education was lower than the graduation rate of non-Black students. Even after the Canadian census authors neutralized the socioeconomic factors that could affect Black students’ graduation rate, their rate remained lower than their non-Black counterparts, which leads us to hypothesize that there may be non-financial factors that could contribute to the lower graduation rates of Black students in higher education. This paper highlights findings in the scientific literature that address possible non-financial factors that influence Black students’ academic paths.
RESEARCH QUESTION

This paper first responds to academic polarization, which increasingly identifies the lack of scientific studies on social issues surrounding minority groups. This is not due to the absence of will among social science researchers; rather, it is due to the complexity surrounding these issues, especially the difficulties related to the accessibility and presence of data in research environments. Studies that have attempted to examine the educational paths of Black youth in Montreal report these difficulties. As a result, most of these studies have referred to U.S. literature. It should come as no surprise, then, that some of the explanatory theoretical angles of this research are drawn from the literature of our American neighbors. It is widely discussed in the literature that Black students possess greater academic ambitions and aspirations than other groups (Eller & DiPrete 2018, Collins & Magnan 2018, Kamanzi 2021). In a study that recruited second-generation immigrant youth from Haiti in Québec, participants asserted their intentions to join university. Although some participants expressed a desire to pursue a degree (technical) and other participants had concerns about being able to afford university, all participants expressed a common goal to attend university which was as a driving force motivating their decision making (Collins & Magan, 2018). Nonetheless, there seems to be a disconnect between the overarching goal of university attainment as it relates to academic success – often measured by university completion and graduation – with Black students representing a low rate of completion (Eller and DiPrete, 2018).

These high dropout rates are recorded during their academic paths (Ford & Harris, 1996) and financial challenges may be the most likely explanation to explain these rates. Black students may be deprived socially and economically compared to other racial groups (Turcotte, 2016). Eller and DiPrete (2018) postulated that socioeconomic status is one of the main factors explaining the gap between Black and white students in obtaining a university degree. Further, the findings revealed that socioeconomic status can have an influence on students’ educational paths both at the family and the school level (Eller & DiPrete, 2018). Rowley and Wright (2011) reported that poor allocation of funds to the school is more than likely to affect the school’s available resources. Fewer resources might explain the incentives of some schools to increase the size of the classes to increase their resources. This decision may have a negative effect on the selection of teachers and the student-teacher ratio in the classroom. Consequently, the authors found out that Black students are the most affected when schools have fewer resources, while white students maintain a high student-teacher ratio (Rowley & Wright, 2011). In addition, Kamanzi (2019) reported the possible political factors that can impact academic success in Black students. The author argued that inequalities in educational environments result
from specific public policies that can influence the relationships between different racial groups and social/educational institutions (Kamanzi, 2019). At the same time, as the financial factors remain a constant explanatory variable of these inequalities, we are still convinced that other factors could explain the low rates of university graduation among the ranks of Black students. This literature review will, thus, focus on the non-financial factors that influence the educational path of young Blacks from high school graduation to university degree completion. We will review the statistics provided by the Canadian census statistics in 2016 and literature that reports the low rates of university graduation among young Blacks; we intend to answer the following question: What non-financial factors might explain the low university graduation rates among Black students? We hope that our review paper will highlight possible answers to this question, contribute to research that addresses Black-specific topics, respond to the lack of Black studies that address this topic in this context, and shed light on the discrepancies between Black youth and other racial groups when it comes to completing a university program.

**LITERATURE REVIEW**

**Non-Financial Factors**

Quantitative data show that perseverance in post-secondary education depends on many factors – social, economic, cultural, political, etc. We categorize these factors according to the socialization environments in which students develop family/social environment and academic environment. For this research, the educational environment, on the one hand, is concerned with the status or type of school attended, school experiences, the relationship between students and teachers, and students’ general performance. On the other hand, the social environment encompasses, among other things, family experiences, parental education, and role models.

**Academic/School Environment**

There is a link between school experiences and university graduation or drop-out encounters (Thiessen, 2009; Pierson et al., 2004; Lohfink & Paulsen, 2005). These experiences are multifaceted in that they encompass many aspects that may facilitate or hinder the post-secondary academic career of Black students. Much of the literature on the non-financial factors explaining the low graduation rates among Black students is framed around three challenging aspects surrounding the academic environment. The first aspect is the adjustment and adaptation of Black students who attend predominantly white institutions. This process challenges the students and can impact their decision-making process.
and preparation during college or university entry. The second element is the school type or structure, which encompasses the school’s prestige and academic performance. The third factor is the stereotypes and racial prejudices, which stand for the negative experiences Black students face while attending educational institutions. In summary, the following sections will discuss the adjustment and adaptation challenges, the school type or structure, the stereotypes, and racial prejudices.

**Adaptation and Adjustment Challenges**

Rachael et al. (2011) reported that Blacks are culturally disadvantaged in white-majority institutions. This disadvantage is significant in the adjustment and adaptation process since it is a de facto requirement for Black students who enter these institutions. In other words, Black students’ adaptation is double-demanding compared to the institution’s majority culture (Rachael et al. 2011). The adjustment and adaptation problems that Black students face translate into fears about their family’s ability to pay for their post-secondary education. This financial disadvantage means that most Black students attend less prestigious high schools, and most of these students are, therefore, less prepared for higher education (Rachael et al., 2011). Moreover, Black students who are accepted into prestigious schools still go through the adjustment and adaptation period compared to non-Blacks at the school. This adjustment is both social and academic, each one influencing the other. For example, studies have shown that social adjustment – including economic resources and family status – significantly affects academic adjustment (Rachael et al., 2011). Moreover, problems related to social adjustment are detrimental to the academic success of young Black students (*Ibid.*). Other than cultural differences, the adjustment problem partly results from inadequate academic orientation and a lack of access to adequate information (Cokley et al. 2016). In a study that recruited young Blacks of Haitian origin in Montreal, most participants reported having had few or no resources to prepare their admission applications (Collins and Magnan, 2018). Moreover, Black students are also prone to being misdirected by some educational staff in schools (Celemencki, 2020). We argue that this could be caused by the low expectations combined with negative stereotypes that some people have about the Black minorities – a point detailed in the following sections. For example, many Black students are discouraged from their academic and professional ambitions. They are instead steered towards the less demanding programs (which do not involve advanced math or science) or vocational programs that do not require a university degree (*Ibid.*). Overall, based on the literature adaptation and adjustment to higher level educational institutes is much more demanding for Black students compared to students from other
racial groups. Despite the heterogeneous nature of any racial group, the literature seems to conclude that school adjustment and adaptation challenges may be a non-financial factor that can explain poor educational experiences in turn leading to a higher incidence of dropout. In parallel, while adaptation problems and lack of information explain the under-representation of Black students in prestigious schools, we shall see in the following sections that the school type—public, private, or public with enriched programs—hugely influences university graduation.

**School Type/Structure**

The chances of a student attending higher education in Quebec vary according to whether the student completed their secondary education in a public, a private, or a public school with an enriched program. One element that sets private schools apart from public high schools is the high tuition fee of private schools. Furthermore, as opposed to public schools, the use of entrance exams with high admission criteria by private schools allows them to select the highest-performing students. Studies such as Kamanzi (2019) reported that the schooling system—meaning the school type (public or private)—perpetuates social inequalities in high education. Furthermore, Kamanzi (2019) also argued that the “reproduction of social inequalities in high education in Quebec” is encouraged by public policies through the “structure of the education market” (Kamanzi, 2019, p.23). The education market concept refers to the continuous competition between educational institutions invigorated by the liberty of schools to “select and classify” students. *(Ibid.)* In his findings, Kamanzi (2019) noted that the rate of access to any level of education depends on the type of institution attended in high school. Thus, private school students have higher rates of attending universities than students from public schools. *(Ibid.)* This could be explained by the enriched intellectual environment in which students from private schools develop themselves, that is, thanks to the financial means and the high academic level of their students. Furthermore, if accessing any level of education depends on the type of institution—public, private, or public with enriched programs—the same applies to persistence in school, which also depends on overall student performance in high school, mainly correlated with GPA accumulation. Studies have established a link between the student’s academic performance—primarily associated with GPA accumulation—and the student’s tendency to persist in school (Eller & DiPrete, 2018). Explaining the path leading to a bachelor’s degree completion, Eller and DiPrete (2018) maintained that it requires “a mostly social process of persistence by which students
derive satisfaction and become attached to the institution, and a mostly academic process of achievement whereby students earn good grades [...]” (Eller and DiPrete, 2018, p. 176). Other studies reported that bachelor’s degree completion is a result of resilience demonstrated by Black students throughout their educational path (Kamanzi, 2021; Krahn & Taylor, 2005). Based on Eller & DiPrete’s (2018) findings, it came to light that academic performance is essential in preventing school dropouts. They illustrate that college GPA decreases the risk of dropouts and report that students’ pre-college performance strongly predicts their college or university GPA (Eller & DiPrete, 2018). Thus, we can conclude that students’ pre-college performance can also determine their dropout risk once they enter college. Accordingly, a high academic performance predicts BA completion at university. We confront this analysis with two hypotheses to explain the low graduation rates among Black students in line with the institution type and the GPA accumulation. First, private school students will likely have higher grades (GPA) than public school students. Second, Black students are less likely to attend private schools due to their disadvantaged socio-economic status, as established above.

Québec’s transition rates from pre-college to college/university education confirmed our H2. (Kamanzi, 2019). Kamanzi’s (2019) data confirmed the assumption that school type or program highly influences students’ educational accomplishments and graduation. The research documented that 15% of students from public schools with regular programs attend university compared to 51% of students from public schools with enriched programs and 60% of students from private schools (Kamanzi, 2019). Moreover, when observing immigrant populations in Quebec, Black students from the Caribbean and sub-Saharan Africa are less likely to attend private high schools. Consequently, the inequalities generated by the type of school frequently affect Black students more negatively and can explain their relatively low graduation rate in post-secondary education (Ibid). Furthermore, some of these inequalities are found in the way classes are structured. Celemencki, (2020) reported that class streaming which consists in classifying and separating students according to their perceived or demonstrated abilities, contributes to Black students’ academic disengagement. Consequently, despite many Black students’ desires to pursue conventional academics, they are directed to vocational and technical schools by being placed in low academic courses (Celemencki, 2020). The pattern of streaming Black students into vocational programs instead of the university is also present in Québec. Potvin and Leclercq (2014) discovered that certain institutional methods are frequently employed to guide these students away from mainstream education – mostly attended by young people – towards vocational training. Moreover, these vocational trainings are usually shorter and often attended by adults.
As a result, this effectively prevents them from pursuing higher education opportunities; in other cases, it contributes to their dropout decisions or lack of motivation (Potvin & Clerk, 2014).

**Racial Prejudices and Stereotypes in School Environments**

Educational institutions’ social and political structures are one of the causes of inequalities in the school environment (Smith, 1918; Ford & Harris, 1996). Some of these structures are based on discriminatory and racial practices that systematically perpetuate the marginalization of certain racial groups (Krahn & Taylor, 2005). As a result, institutionalizing these practices leads to the creation of insignificant characteristics subsequently internalized by young minorities. Studies have identified the feeling of not being entitled to a university education, loneliness, isolation, exclusion, withdrawal, and cultural alienation as characteristics of minority youth (Smith, 1981; Ford & Harris, 1996). Racial prejudices induce feelings of exclusion and non-belonging. Moreover, individual isolation and self-exclusion feelings are susceptible to potentially compromising the overall education performance of students. (Smith, 1981). Overall, the educational paths of Black youth are overwhelmingly negatively affected by the perpetual combination of cultural alienation and the marginalization of certain racial groups in educational institutions. Krahn and Taylor (2005) argue that Black youth are discouraged by negative experiences during their high school education. In other words, they are exposed to challenges such as systemic racism that impede their future aspirations, negatively affecting their motivation to pursue or complete university studies (Krahn and Taylor, 2005).

These racial practices can be intentional or unintentional, sometimes consisting of asymmetrical relationships between Black students and their white teachers. In a study in the United States, Hyland (2005) describes teachers attempts at adopting anti-racist mechanisms can unknowingly accentuate racist practices. The author reports that teachers identify themselves as “helpers, benefactors, patrons: *they are there to help students and their families*” (p. 439). Consequently, teachers’ self-perception would imply that Black students and their families are in constant need. The result would be an asymmetrical relationship and unequal power dynamics between teachers and Black students (Hyland, 2005). Furthermore, according to Celemencki (2020), the predominant stereotypes involving Black students include them being immigrants, fatherless, athletes, troublemakers, and underachievers. Not only do some education professionals hold lower expectations regarding Black students, but, as a response, some Black students avoid reporting their difficulties at school to disprove the stereotypes against
them. These negative stereotypes negatively affect Black students as they receive different treatment than their white counterparts, including a lack of support to achieve academic excellence and a feeling of abandonment (Celemencki, 2020). Although the overall experience of Black students at school is generally positive – many expressing ambitious career aspirations – most first-to-third-generation Black students experience racism at school, making their academic experience more challenging (Celemencki, 2020). Another important observation that stems from racism, stereotypes, or prejudices is that, in Canada, Black students are penalized differently when misbehaving; more precisely, they tend to experience more severe penalties than their non-Black colleagues for the same fault (Celemencki, 2020). This could explain the overrepresentation of Black students in special needs classes. In a study in Quebec, 1/3 of the participants from the Caribbeans and Sub-Sharian Africa – who attended schools in which French was the used language – were labeled as “special needs,” meaning that they were thought to have learning and behavioral difficulties. The overrepresentation of Black students labeled as “special needs” and “at-risk” correlates with the high dropout rates and academic disengagement of Black students in Quebec. (Celemencki, 2020).

**SOCIAL/FAMILY ENVIRONMENT**

Most of the studies discussed the family environment by focusing on factors related to socioeconomic status. Indeed, fewer resources among Black families might explain the reason why most families take their children to public high schools. Moreover, as established in the previous sections, students attending public high schools attend college or university at a lower rate. Besides economic factors, there are studies that discuss the family background – notably parental education. The link between the parents’ educational achievements and the student’s overall school performance is based on the supportive resources, students are likely to receive from their two parents. These resources can be cultural or social and can be comprehended in terms of habits or behaviors that parents transmit to their children, inciting them to succeed academically. Moreover, within the social environment, the “peer effect” also stemmed from the literature as a significant influential factor, arguing from the sociological point of view that the socialization milieu plays a considerable role in determining the students’ attitude towards education accomplishments. In this regard, the “peer effect” can be understood as a social resource that can affect the student’s education career in any way possible. Lastly, a non-linear academic path may be another factor that can explain lower graduation rates for Black students in higher education – and this is linked to social circumstances such as the language barrier.
**Family Background/Structure**

Even though parental income is positively related to overall academic performance, research evidence suggests that parental education is most influential to students’ achievements. (Finnie & Mueller, 2008). In this study, the authors reported that the more educated the parents, the higher the level of their children’s education (*Ibid.*). The latter findings align with Rowley and Wright (2011), who noted in a qualitative study that academically, parents who have succeeded will often encourage their children to succeed. In fact, the authors concluded that parents would undertake actions to direct them on the right path toward success. In some cases, parents’ high expectations inspire their children to have high expectations of themselves, and parents often establish plans for their children’s future (Rowley and Wright, 2011). From a sociological point of view, Bourdieu (1966) maintained that parents with higher levels of education could transmit cultural wealth to their children, fostering the formation of the necessary attitudes and behaviors for school integration and success. According to Bourdieu (1966), cultural wealth implies the diplomas obtained by the parents and the type of schooling they may have completed. Moreover, the impact of cultural wealth is comprehended by observing the well-acknowledged relationship between the family’s overall background and the children’s academic achievements in school (Bourdieu, 1966). Similarly, a recent study has found out that students’ social attributes contribute to developing behaviors required for persistence in educational institutions (Kamanzi, 2019). This implies the fact that the more students relate to their parents’ cultural wealth, the higher the chances of academic success.

In line with Black students’ education paths, we argue that the low graduation rates can be explained by the fact that Black students are likely to live in single-parent families; hence, family cultural wealth and support are ineffective and inadequate. This inadequacy is explained and supported by research-established evidence according to which Black students are more likely to live in single-parent families than their white counterparts, who benefit from resources from two parents (Rowley and Wright, 2011). Thus, the academic achievement gap between Black and white students can be linked to the unequal supports these two groups receive from their family structures – single or two-parent family – in which white students are more advantaged than Black students. Moreover, the family’s support inconsistency significantly affects the student’s overall performance in a way that the family’s cultural wealth predicts grade scoring (*Ibid*). Moreover, parental education also predicts the level of high education students are likely to attain. The latter affirmation correlates with Kamanzi’s (2019) findings, according to which the level of education depends partly on the “social
origin” of the students, meaning the parents’ levels of education. Transitioning to college ranges around 54% for students whose parents hold at least a low college diploma and 60% when either parent maintains a university qualification (Kamanzi, 2019). Summarizing this section, we first explain the low graduation rates among Black students by analyzing their chances to join university, which in the initial phase depends significantly on one’s possibilities to attend private or public schools with enriched programs – and that is in their high school levels. In our analysis in the previous section, we found that Black students are less advantaged in this possibility since their chances to attend such schools are gradually low. Second, we bring in the additional analysis that reveals that the probability of joining a private or public school with enriched programs hugely depends on the family’s educational background – including the social support students receive from their parents. Here, Black students are again disadvantaged if we consider studies that revealed that Black students are likely to live in single-parent families.

**Peers’ effect/Role Models and Students’ Social Status**

Regarding the social environment, peers’ attitudes compose a social circle of individuals from the students’ communities. Consequently, as South et al. (2003) pointed out, a social group – or peers’ attitudes – can strengthen the devaluation of education, leading to increased rates of students leaving school prematurely and diminished academic achievements. According to a study conducted by Horvat and Lewis (2003), it was found that when a student has multiple friends who quit high school, there is an increased likelihood that the student will also drop out. Additionally, students who excel academically may feel pressured to dissimulate their abilities in order to conform to their peers. On the other hand, students who associate with a high-achieving peer group tend to experience less of a decline in their academic performance than those involved with a low-achieving peer group (Rowley and Wright, 2011). In line with the peers’ effect, we argue that the availability of a high-achieving peer group will significantly depend on the structural standings of the students’ community – meaning the social status of the students’ families. In Black immigrant communities, it implies that the presence of role models or high-achieving peer groups will depend on the degree of proximity Black families maintain with the hosting communities. Certain studies claim that this proximity must be cultural. Based on the assimilation theory (Portes & Zhou, 1993), the academic achievement of young individuals with immigrant backgrounds hinges significantly on how well they integrate into society, particularly by adopting the cultural values of the dominant majority in the host country. The level of closeness or distance to the host society would then influence their cultural connection and chances of social integration, ultimately affecting their overall well-being.
In this manner, feelings of exclusion can emerge within the immigrant community due to perceived distance from the broader society, thus, negatively impacting the integration of both parents and their children. Consequently, as Collins & Magnan (2018) reported, these feelings of exclusion contribute to disorienting Black students’ educational pathways, characterized by significant levels of indecisiveness, confusion, and lack of awareness regarding post-secondary education. In their study – which consisted of second-generation Black Haitians in Montreal – the authors documented that after high school, the participants appeared to initiate their post-secondary education journey with a disadvantage, primarily caused by inadequate guidance and lack of information and role models in their communities (Collins & Magnan, 2018). Conversely, in a de facto scenario, we suppose that feelings of inclusion among Black students would impact how they identify or feel in their social and academic environments. However, some Black students are not inspired nor motivated due to the lack of representation of Black individuals in their academic settings, and classroom materials sometimes face criticism for being exclusive of Black history (Celemencki, 2020). For instance, only white narratives are supposedly said to be taught in predominantly white schools. Additionally, the lack of exposure to Black teachers fosters the feeling of exclusion some Black student experience. This aligns with what Tuitt (2012) finds to be the hopes of most Black students enrolled in predominantly white institutions: to have Black professors who would comprehend their situations and to whom they can identify with. Additionally, they expect these professors to serve as their role models and intellectual mentors. The presence of Black professors who can relate to them positively influences the success of Black students (Tuitt, 2012).

The lack of Black role models results in adopting the cultural values of the dominant majority, which implies that some Black students need to “act white” to fit in. “Acting White” involves, for instance, dressing, walking, and talking a certain way, which creates a form of internal dissonance among Black students, as they want to fit in while being true to their cultural heritage (Celemencki, 2020). Moreover, although the effects of such internal dissonance might seem weak, it predicts the solidity of social engagement, which includes overall students’ self-perceptions of how respected and accepted they are (Celemencki, 2020). Similarly, studies have established a positive correlation between social engagement and university attendance (Racheal et al., 2011; Rowley & Wright, 2011; Smith, 1981). Though we did not find enough direct evidence on the peers’ role or influence in shaping the educational paths of Black students, we maintain that the students’ identification with their peers is essential. This will
depend on the availability of high-achieving peer groups in the community. In Quebec, Black students who are first-generation immigrants are more affected by difficulties of insertion (Celemencki, 2020). As mentioned above, these difficulties are sometimes due to the lack of role models to which Black students can identify, and the lack of proper groups in which students can integrate. The lack of an adequate insertion process might contribute to the lack of motivation, leading to lower academic identification. Academic identification is part of academic engagement, which also necessarily requires self-esteem, valuing being at school, and academic preparation. Academic engagement is positively linked to university attendance as it is necessary to do essential tasks such as completing homework, attending school, etc. It is possible to suppose that it is less probable to achieve high grades when academic engagement is reduced.

Previous analysis revealed that high grades are essential in determining whether a student will attend higher education and supposedly graduate from university (Celemencki, 2020; Finnie & Mueller, 2008), and that is no matter the level of education of the parents.

**Non-linear Academic Path**

A non-linear academic path may be another factor that can explain lower graduation rates for Black students in higher education. Studies maintain that the geographic origins of the parents can influence access to higher education for immigrant students (Kamanzi, 2019). For example, the chance of attending higher education is relatively reduced for students coming from Latin America or the Caribbeans compared to other geographic regions such as Asia, North Africa, and the Middle East. Moreover, this difference deepens when focusing on a university education compared to a college education. This can be explained by the fact that students from Latin America and the Caribbean are more subject to having a non-linear academic path than immigrant students from other geographical regions (Kamanzi, 2019). Language is one of the factors that contributes to the tendency for Black students not to follow a linear academic path. English-speaking Black students are more likely to receive their high school diploma from an adult education center because of Bill 101. Immigrant English-speaking Black students must attend welcome classes where students are classified according to their level of French and not their academic level, forcing students to re-take courses they have already taken in their home countries (Celemencki, 2020). As a result, the educational path of Black students might be prolonged, and its linearity might be affected. Moreover, the students having to learn a new language while retaking classes are psychologically negatively affected. In fact, immigrant students experience stress as they often experience family issues and need to adapt to a new society as they learn.
The addition of challenges caused by immigration while attending school in a language that is not yet mastered can make it hard for students to achieve good academic results, which makes some of them prone to drop out of school. Also, some students reported feeling humiliated since they were placed in classes of a lower level than the ones in their home countries, which, once again, negatively affect their motivation to pursue their schooling (Celemencki, 2020).

**CONCLUSION AND REMARKS**

In conclusion, although the financial issues are an important factor that could explain the low graduation rates of Black students in Canadian universities, there are other non-financial factors that also contribute to this relatively low graduation rate. The objective of the literature review was to provide the non-financial factors that influence Black students academic path to fill in the gap in the literature when it comes the academic experience of Black students in Montreal. The main environmental and academic factors expressed that could explain the low graduation rate of Black students in university are poor quality academic guidance, lower access to private education and racism in the education system. At the social level, the main factors are a disadvantaged family background or structure, the lack of role models and representation of Black people in higher education and the non-linear academic path taken.

This literature review could serve as a knowledge basis on which an exploratory study that looks at the non-financial factors that explain the low graduation rate of Black students in university could be conducted. It would be interesting to focus on the area of Montreal. Such research could shed light on the factors that play into the likelihood of Black students from Montreal attending higher education.

**REFERENCES**


**AUTHOR’S BIOGRAPHY**

**Plem Kijamba** is an undergraduate student at McGill University. He is completing a Bachelor of Arts in political science and international development.

**Michaëlé Aubourg** is an undergraduate student at McGill University. She is completing a Bachelor of Arts and Science in cognitive science.

**Tanya Matthews** is a speech pathologist who obtained her Ph.D. in communication sciences and disorders form McGill University. She is a McGill Third Century research fellow. Her research explores the relationship between income inequality and reading outcomes. She is currently conducting an ethnographical study to document the oral language and preliteracy practices used in the homes of Black families in Montreal.