



Transition from High School to University: Challenges faced by First-year B.Ed. Students at a University of Technology in South Africa

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ABSTRACT

The recent Council on Higher Education report avers that Higher Education in South Africa experiences serious shortcomings in graduate output and outcomes. The report corroborated the general belief pervading existing research into students' first-year university experiences. Students are unable to cope with the rigours of academics during this transition. Furthermore, research, especially from the field of psychology, also holds that first-year students struggle to succeed in their first year due to emotional and behavioural problems. However, this study argued that the transition from high school to university is a period characterised by mismatches and discontinuities in the lives of students. The purpose of this article was to investigate the mismatch and discontinuities, expressed as the articulation gap in the exposition of the article, experienced by first-year students at a university of technology. Data was drawn, using a cutting-edge qualitative instrument, from selected first-year B.Ed. students. The findings revealed that first-year students' high school experiences are often not replayed at university. Students experience a myriad of new challenges which require new ways of learning (academic), and new ways of relating to peers (social challenges). The study recommended that universities need to engage in full orientation programmes to narrow the transition gap between high schools and universities. Universities should also provide ongoing programmes for mentoring, counselling and support services to help students navigate social and psychological challenges.

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INTRODUCTION

Students in South Africa and indeed around the world, face a myriad of adjustment issues during the transition from high school to university. Sheard, Lowe, Nicholson and Ceddia argue that during the transition, students need to adjust to concurrent changes i.e. new teaching and learning environments as well as different social and physical environments.¹ Fischer posits that friendships help in integrating students into university life and provide companionship, a valuable source of emotional support, advice and information.²

Madjar, McKinley, Deynzer and Van der Merwe state that transition is a set of interconnected personal, social and academic processes that often occur alongside a geographical (campus size, class location, new city)

¹ Judithe Sheard et al., "Tackling Transition: Exposing Secondary School Students to Tertiary IT Teaching and Learning," *Journal of Information Technology Education: Research* 2, no. 1 (2003): 165–80.

² E Mary J Fischer, "Settling into Campus Life: Differences by Race/Ethnicity in College Involvement and Outcomes," *The Journal of Higher Education* 78, no. 2 (2007): 125–61.

relocation.³ High dropout rates of first-year students and poor success rates are a big concern. Studies conducted by the Council on Higher Education (CHE) show that the degree completion rates are below fifty per cent (50%) except in the four-year professional degrees in the Health and Social Sciences which have a slightly higher completion rate of just above sixty (60%) per cent.

There is, however, anecdotal evidence to suggest that there is a lack of communication in different settings to which students need to adapt when they move from one setting to another. In essence, there is a decline in social and emotional adjustment during this period of transition. The transition from high school to university is said to disrupt the social security, physical comfort and the ability to enjoy the activities of first-year students. Often, more than half of first-year students battle persistence to complete a degree. In Hong Kong, existing research shows that students from the Asian-Pacific tradition prefer collaborative learning and a respect-and-care relationship between students and teachers.⁴

An appropriate degree programme that matches students' expectations and abilities can be a major tool in the successful transition to university.⁵ Bigger mentions that many institutions have adopted programmes designed to provide a 'rite of passage' in which students are welcomed, supported, celebrated and eventually assimilated into the campus customs and activities.⁶ An extract from CHE (2013) supports the notion by indicating that under-preparedness is multi-faceted because it does not only imply a lack of subject knowledge but also the cognitive, epistemological, affective and sociocultural dimensions. The cultural gap between high school and the university constitutes another category that is the mismatch or discontinuity between high school and university and this is referred to as the 'articulation gap' (CHE 2013). The articulation gap has been identified as a major cause of student failure and dropout rates.

Transition problems are characterised by first-year students experiencing high dropout rates, low pass rates and lower grade achievements (Chute 2008). Failure to retain students not only hurts the institutions financially but also reveals a failure to carry out educators' mission of student success (American College Testing [ACT] 2009). This article thus outlines the importance of self-concept and personal support systems as factors which help student persistence into the second year of undergraduate programmes. This links with the suggestion by Tinto (2008) that the extent to which students are academically and socially involved at university is related to their persistence to succeed and lay the foundation for their success in later years of study. This process should start with appropriate and stimulating induction programmes. A brief literature review is outlined below.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Students entering university face a variety of challenges ranging from engaging in new relationships, modifying previous relationships with family and friends, learning new study habits for a relatively new learning environment and functioning independently as adults. Fromme, Corbin and Kruse (2009) posit that the transition from high school to university is an important milestone that holds the potential for personal growth and behavioural change. Lewin and Mawoyo (2014) argue that academic transition is a process during which institutional and social factors influence students' educational careers positively or negatively. To ease the transition, all stakeholders should equip students with motivation and skills to learn beyond school.

CHE (2013) states that the cultural gap between high school and university constitutes another category which involves the mismatch or discontinuity between high school and university. This is sometimes referred to as the 'articulation gap'. The articulation gap is identified as a major cause of student failure and dropout rates. CHE (furthermore mentions that this fault line has to be corrected to improve students' academic success.⁷ As students make the transition from the support framework of school, they commonly find it difficult to manage the levels of autonomy and flexibility that come as part of the higher education environment. Research reveals that students who were inclined towards independent learning seemed better able to integrate into learning at university. Kantanis mentions that students find teaching styles and the pace of learning different from what is

³ I. Madjar et al., *Stumbling Blocks or Stepping Stones? Students' Experience of Transition from Low-Mid Decile School to University* (Auckland: The University of Auckland, 2010).

⁴ Beverley J Webster and Min Yang, "Transition, Induction and Goal Achievement: First-Year Experiences of Hong Kong Undergraduates," *Asia Pacific Education Review* 13 (2012): 359–68.

⁵ Richard James, "How School-Leavers Chose a Preferred University Course and Possible Effects on the Quality of the School-University Transition," *Journal of Institutional Research* 9, no. 1 (2000): 78–88.

⁶ J.J. Bigger, *Improving the Odds for Freshman Success* (London: Sage, 2005).

⁷ Council on Higher Education, "A Proposal for Undergraduate Curriculum Reform in South Africa: The Case for a Flexible Curriculum Structure," *Report of the Task Team on Undergraduate Curriculum Structure* (Council on Higher Education Pretoria, 2013).

found at the secondary school level.⁸ Adjusting to independent learning is another difficulty. Some students were less proficient at adapting to new approaches to learning. This could, according to Kantanis in particular cases, cause anxiety.⁹

Soundy acknowledges that it is beyond dispute that under-preparedness and the articulation gap are major challenges faced by first-year university students.¹⁰ However, more emphasis is put on intrinsic factors which are academic rather than extrinsic. These aforementioned factors embrace socioeconomic and psychological factors that can also be construed as barriers to learning. She furthermore mentions that these factors are interrelated. Factors such as personal autonomy, self-confidence, ability to deal with cultural differences, study behaviours, or social competence have as much or more to do with grades' retention and graduation than how well a student writes or how competent they are in their courses.¹¹ Understanding the external factors can provide a basis for identifying required intervention programmes that can be put in place to alleviate the adverse effects on learning.

Research by Twigg shows that successful transition is dependent on the following factors among others: a) academic preparedness, b) emotional stability, c) ability to make friends, and d) the sense of belonging. Transition from school to tertiary education is another obstacle that prevents students from performing well as educational disparities persist.¹² Uncertainty arises generally through a combination of factors, which can include a lack of accurate initial information, poor course choices, failure to get their degree choice, and unrealistic expectations of the amount of work and time involved in university study. Researchers have found that students are poorly prepared academically, or they lack critical thinking or independence.¹³ Research findings by these theorists highlight the urgent need to curb attrition rates. Students need to enter university with a strong high school curriculum background.

Changes in the educational policy over the past two decades in South Africa have placed increasing emphasis on the concept of widening participation in lifelong learning. These changes are underpinned by the need to provide equal opportunities for groups such as lower socioeconomic groups, which were underrepresented in tertiary and Higher Education.¹⁴ However, growth in enrolment has been accompanied by high failure and dropout rates. The learning needs of the majority group have also not been catered for.¹⁵

According to Soundy, changes in the educational policy over the past two decades in South Africa have placed increasing emphasis on the concept of widening participation in lifelong learning.¹⁶ These changes are underpinned by the need to provide equal opportunities for groups such as lower socioeconomic groups, which were underrepresented in tertiary and higher education.¹⁷ However, growth in enrolment has been accompanied by high failure and dropout rates. The learning needs of the majority group have also not been catered for.¹⁸ Ahmad, Fauziah, Azemi, Shaari and Zailani indicate that the use of English as the official mode of communication among Malaysian students posed a challenge, and this in turn caused high dropout rates.¹⁹ Difficulties with the medium of instruction are undoubtedly a contributing factor to poor performance and impact the success and throughput rates.²⁰

⁸ S. T. Kantanis, "The Role of Program Cohesion in Effecting a Smooth Transition from Secondary to University," *Journal of Institutional Research*, 9, no. 1 (2000): 100–110.

⁹ Kantanis, "The Role of Program Cohesion in Effecting a Smooth Transition from Secondary to University."

¹⁰ Patricia Nthabiseng Soundy, "Transition from High School to University: Challenges Faced by First Year B. Ed. Students at a University of Technology" (Tshwane University of Technology, 2016).

¹¹ M. A. Miller and C. Murray, *Advising Academically Unprepared Students* (London: Sage, 2005).

¹² C. A. Twigg, "Increasing Success for Underserved Students: Redesigning Introductory Courses ," *Monograph from the National Centre for Academic Transformation* (London: Sage, 2005).

¹³ K. Krause et al., *The First-Year Experience in Australian Universities: Findings from a Decade of National Studies* (Canberra: Australian Department of Education, Science and Training, 2005).

¹⁴ B Liezel Frick, "The Profile of the Stellenbosch University First-Year Student: Present and Future Trends," *Unpublished Research Report, Centre for Teaching and Learning, Stellenbosch University, South Africa*. Retrieved from [Http://Stbweb02. Stb. Sun. Ac. Za/Ctl/Documents/Student](http://Stbweb02.Stb.Sun.Ac.Za/Ctl/Documents/Student), 2008.

¹⁵ Education, "A Proposal for Undergraduate Curriculum Reform in South Africa: The Case for a Flexible Curriculum Structure."

¹⁶ Soundy, "Transition from High School to University: Challenges Faced by First Year B. Ed. Students at a University of Technology."

¹⁷ Frick, "The Profile of the Stellenbosch University First-Year Student: Present and Future Trends."

¹⁸ Council on Higher Education, *A Proposal for Undergraduate Curriculum Reform in South Africa: The Case for a Flexible Curriculum Structure* (Pretoria : Council on Higher Education, 2013).

¹⁹ K Ahmad et al., "Adjustment to College Life and Academic Performance among Universiti Utara Malaysia Students," *Unpublished Manuscript. Universiti Utara Malaysia, Kedah, Malaysia*, 2002.

²⁰ Soundy, "Transition from High School to University: Challenges Faced by First Year B. Ed. Students at a University of Technology."

Research suggests that choosing an appropriate degree programme that matches students' expectations and abilities can be a major factor in a successful transition to university.²¹ When students discover that their chosen areas of discipline are different from what they expected, they become disappointed and discouraged. Therefore, students need information about the structure and content of the degree programmes they intend to pursue. Hence challenges incumbent upon the students as they progress from the transition from high school to first-year university studies were investigated in this study.

Madjar, McKinley, Deynzer and Van der Merwe spell out the following as the stepping stones or stumbling blocks for students at different stages of the transition process:

- Students who felt secure in their family environment and had role models and mentors with university experience, developed clearer academic goals and realistic expectations of university study than students who lacked such support;
- On the other hand students' personal determination to get to and succeed at university make a successful transition despite the absence of mentors and role models;
- Thorough and careful selection of high school subjects contributes to students' readiness for transition to university;
- The development of independent study skills, diligence, persistence and the ability to do well during external examinations at the high school level are also significant stepping stones in the transition process. Students who meet only the minimum standards in high school experience more difficulties; and
- Students with broader interests in leadership roles in and outside their school, an inquisitive mind and the desire to learn, tend to approach the transition to university with greater confidence and realistic expectations.²²

In brief, while the national trends guide what to look for in describing modern students, each institution needs to develop a profile of its students and strive to create a good match between the students they educate, and the policies and practices they develop.²³ Orientation is commonly suggested as an effective enabler aiding the transition process in the first year of university study.

The researchers acknowledge that it is beyond dispute that under-preparedness and the articulation gap are major challenges faced by first-year university students. However, more emphasis is put on intrinsic factors which are academic rather than extrinsic factors, which are socio-economic and psychological factors that can also be construed as barriers to learning.²⁴

Transition in a pedagogic context through the eyes of and from the perspective of constructivism, states that learners construct knowledge based on what they already understand as they make connections between new information and old information; each learner individually and socially constructs meaning as they learn.²⁵ Students' prior ideas, experiences, and knowledge interrelate with new experiences and their interpretations of the environment around them.

In their first year at university, students are expected to negotiate new levels of challenges such as large lecture halls and extensive projects, new surroundings and developing new friendships with people of different backgrounds and belief systems.²⁶ Not surprisingly, studies have shown that there is a decline in social and emotional adjustment during this period.²⁷

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study was based on the realist social theory of Margaret Archer developed in 1995. The applicability of this approach is demonstrated by linking the theory to the transition from high schools to universities, thus looking at the concepts of structure, culture and agency as theoretical lenses to explore some of the challenges experienced by learners/students during such transition. According to the theory by Archer, the term

²¹ James, "How School-Leavers Chose a Preferred University Course and Possible Effects on the Quality of the School-University Transition."

²² Madjar et al., *Stumbling Blocks or Stepping Stones? Students' Experience of Transition from Low-Mid Decile School to University*, 94.

²³ M Lee Upcraft, "Today's First-Year Students and Alcohol," *College Drinking Prevention*, 2002.

²⁴ Soundy, "Transition from High School to University: Challenges Faced by First Year B. Ed. Students at a University of Technology."

²⁵ Jean Piaget, "The Theory of Stages in Cognitive Development.," 1971.

²⁶ Simon Larose, Annie Bernier, and George M Tarabulsky, "Attachment State of Mind, Learning Dispositions, and Academic Performance during the College Transition.," *Developmental Psychology* 41, no. 1 (2005): 281.

²⁷ E. T. Pascarella and P. T. Terenzini, *How College Affects Students: Findings and Insights from Twenty Years of Research*. (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1991).

morphogenesis refers to change (genesis) in the shape of things (morpho).²⁸ The theory refers to the change in structure, culture and agency. In analyzing the transition, researchers used the concepts of structure, culture and agency as theoretical lenses to interpret some of the key attributes that contribute to the success or failure of learners transitioning from high schools to universities. The results of the study are further discussed and interpreted through the three theoretical lenses as indicated above.

Application of Realist Social Theory to the study

This study focused on the learner transition from high school to university. The study is an attempt to bridge the gap between high schools to universities, to assist students to settle well in the universities. As indicated above, the teaching practices in the schools and university form a major part of such transition, and in this case, it is interpreted within the realist social perspective, using the concepts of structure, culture and agency as theoretical lenses. Below is the application of all three theoretical lenses into teaching and learning.

Structure

Structure refers to all building materials and resources. Resources may include textbooks, policy documents, instructional materials, and memorandum of understanding between institutions of learning. In this case, such institutions are high schools and universities. Archer, in her realist social theory, regards issues of structure as one of the critical elements for any successful project.²⁹ In the context of this study, structure refers to all resources that relate to teaching in schools and universities and other technological resources. Structure in the context of schooling refers to educational resources of which most of the schools in South Africa experience some challenges when it comes to physical resources, as well as learner material resources. For example, some of the schools that are based in rural and township contexts are without resources such as access to the Internet. Therefore, such unprivileged results in learners relying too much on their teacher for academic success. Coming to universities, such learners are exposed to a different context, whereby they are expected to be independent for their academic success.

Khoza argues that universities endowed with more and better technological materials produce better quality graduates than schools.³⁰ Researchers such as Thompson argue that teaching a student in the 21st century is becoming more complex as it requires the facilitator to be more experienced with the use of technology.³¹ Moreover, teaching in the 21st century requires one to be mindful of the issues on the ground and be responsive which brought some debates about Africanizing the curriculum. In the context of this study, the structure of the schools and universities determines the success of the teaching and learning agenda. Therefore, there is a need to align the two institutions for a smooth transition from high schools to universities.

In this study, using structure as a theoretical lens, researchers investigated the nature of structure in schools and universities, to determine the impact of the current education offered to learners and students, and if it contributes to the preparation of learners to cope with university education. Sokhulu discovered a very strong positive significant relationship between instructional resources and academic performance.³² Therefore, the resources and the kind of curriculum offered by schools were scrutinized to ensure the success of the transition from high schools to universities.

Culture

Archer regards schools and universities' culture as the day-to-day practices of its community members.³³ In this case, students are moving from secondary school culture to universities which can be difficult for one to settle in. In the context of universities, many aspects influence its culture. The combination of characteristics from students, lecturers, staff personalities, academic staff support, and practices within the departments, schools and faculties encompass the institutions' culture. Societal cultural values affect schools, colleges and university culture, and the community where the institution is located also has a significant influence. The family background of the learners and teachers may affect the institutions' culture as well. In the context of this study, the concept of culture is interrogated within the ambit of transition from secondary schools to universities. The researchers interrogated the culture in the institutions to determine if such culture complements and affects students in their first years of study. Obviously, if students are experiencing culture shock when joining a

²⁸ Margaret Scotford Archer, *Realist Social Theory: The Morphogenetic Approach* (Cambridge university press, 1995).

²⁹ Archer, *Realist Social Theory: The Morphogenetic Approach*.

³⁰ Simon Bheki Khoza, "Academics' "Why" of Knowledge-Building for the Fourth Industrial Revolution and COVID-19 Era.," *International Journal of Higher Education* 9, no. 6 (2020): 247–58.

³¹ R.T. Thompson, "Social Tagging for Enhancing E-Learning Experience," *Computers and Education* 1, no. 18 (2018): 166–81.

³² Lerato Hlengiwe Sokhulu, "Students' Experiences of Using Digital Technologies to Address Their Personal Research Needs during the COVID-19 Lockdown," *African Identities* 19, no. 4 (2021): 436–52.

³³ Archer, *Realist Social Theory: The Morphogenetic Approach*.

university, it is likely to affect their academic performance. From the school perspective, there is a culture of reliance on the teacher which makes it difficult for students to maintain their independence which is the culture of the university.

Agency

Agents stand for the ‘people’ in the sociocultural system (in this project, schools and universities) into which they enter, and who operate within a particular structural and/or cultural system. Archer argues that the agential role of schools and universities is likely to be affected by the structure as well as the culture of the institutions.³⁴ Therefore, there is a relationship between these three theoretical lenses, as articulated in the *Social Realist theory* by Archer.³⁵ In the context of this study, the agency of teachers, principals, lecturers, and university management determines the success of learner transition from schools to universities. For instance, schools or universities may have a good structure and culture that supports a smooth transition from schools to universities. Therefore, the researchers looked at how often teachers and lecturers in the two institutions used their agential role to ensure a fruitful transition of learners from the schools to the universities. The literature reviewed and the theoretical framework for this study, as discussed above, led to the choice of a case study following a qualitative approach at a University of Technology in South Africa.

METHODOLOGY

The main question in the study was the following: What challenges do first-year BEd students experience at universities of technology? For this purpose, a case study design and qualitative approach were employed to generate data in an investigation of the perceptions of students regarding transition from high school to university. Purposive sampling and an interpretive paradigm, involving semi-structured interviews were followed. The study was limited to a university of technology in Pretoria so as to permit comprehensive interviews with students and lecturers. A total of twelve (12) participants were involved in the study, categorised into various groups for analysis. The participants were four (4) first-year B.Ed. students who reside on campus labelled from S1 to S4. The researcher investigated students’ challenges from their perspectives during the transition to determine how universities could assist them in making the transition easier. Four (4) Students’ Representative Council members shed light on students’ challenges because they deal with these challenges daily labelled from SRC1 to SRC4. Also important were the lecturers who interacted with these students. Two (2) subject heads, labelled SH1 and SH2 who deal with students’ affairs assisted in providing information on the admission criterion, academic performance and other challenges faced by first-year students and the type of support provided by the institution. Interviews with two (2) Students’ Development and Support members labelled SDS1 and SDS2 further explored the range of challenges and assistance that the students receive to help them adjust socially, psychologically and academically. The interpretive design, based on the University of Technology in South Africa, led to the findings which are discussed next.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The study sought to investigate how prepared the students were for the university, their lecturers as well as the Students Development and Support members. The findings relied primarily on the researcher and the empirical evidence as lenses for understanding the participants’ lived experiences regarding student transition from high school to university. Based on the questions posed, the following themes and subcategories emerged:

Experiences during the first few weeks of university

An analysis of interviews showed that all students categorically stated that adjustment to their new environment was very difficult. First-year students remarked that they used to stay with their parents and were under their supervision but then they were on their own in the new environment. Students also acknowledged that it was difficult to know whether what they were doing was right or wrong because they were used to being cautioned by their parents. Consistent with the reviewed literature, the emerging findings on their experiences during the first few weeks of university suggest that students face a variety of university-related anxieties during post-transition. Their high school teachers used to explain concepts until they understood. Malatji and Singh argue that poor alignment of school and university practices results in many challenges when students transition from secondary schools to universities.³⁶ Homework was given every day so that they could understand the work

³⁴ Archer, *Realist Social Theory: The Morphogenetic Approach*.

³⁵ Archer, *Realist Social Theory: The Morphogenetic Approach*.

³⁶ Khashane Stephen Malatji and Rachael Jesika Singh, “Implications of the Articulation Gap between Geography Learners in Secondary Schools and University,” 2018.

better. Contrary to high school is the fact that at the university level, a lecturer can deliver a single lesson with one chapter of more than fifty pages. Lecturers may not always check completed homework, but students are expected to perform the tasks on tests; students are expected to initiate contact if they need assistance from their lecturer. Baleni, Malatji and Wadesando argue it is through peer tutoring that students are able to assist one another to settle at the universities.³⁷ The following were their responses:

S1: It was so difficult because we were used to being supervised by our parents. Here at university, we do as we please and later it hits us badly.

S2: University is different from home because no one is going to tell you that you must study. Lecturers are different from teachers. Lecturers don't care whether you write your homework or not. Unlike in high school, teachers will call your parents if you don't write homework or else you fail. The standard at university is too high for us especially those coming from rural areas, because we have to cope with English as a language.

S3: I felt like I didn't belong when I was surrounded by new people. I was scared because I didn't know anyone. I felt like I was abandoned by my family. I felt lost. Starting life with new friends was not easy.

SRC2: Students find it difficult to cope because they find university standards very high compared to high school. The experience of being on your own, especially for those students whose parents were strict at home can be daunting. When students start experiencing independence they start drinking and forget the reason for being at the university.

The challenges faced by first-year students during the transition from high school to university

An analysis of the interviews showed that students in high school were often taught that what was printed in the textbook was always true and had to be memorised. High school was more of reproducing what students have learned and at the university level, students apply what has been learned to new situations. Students stated that lecturers summarise chapters and they find it difficult to grasp and understand concepts. Subject heads support this statement by mentioning that the majority of students have language problems and cannot even construct a sentence. Students also commented that certain jargon used by lecturers can be challenging to understand.

Students also indicated that they were not emotionally and psychologically ready for university because they were under their parents' guidance back at home. The majority of students mentioned that because they were now independent, they tended to focus more on social issues and steer away from their studies. Other views expressed by students included the feeling of loneliness, homesickness and anxiety which led to the abuse of alcohol. Anderson, Goodman and Schlossberg state that adaptation to a new environment is affected by an individual's perception of the transition, the environment, the individual's characteristics before and after the transition, and lastly the characteristics of the individual experiencing the transition. Tinto's theory also adds that students enter college with "pre-entry attributes" (i.e. family background, skills and abilities, and prior schooling).³⁸ The following were some of the remarks:

S4: Lecturers are unreasonable sometimes; they finish one long chapter in an hour. We are unable to cope with their style of teaching. That is discouraging.

S3: The level of teaching is above us, especially with the professors. They talk so fast and don't explain in detail. We are not used to the standard of teaching. Sometimes we don't understand them, because they talk fast and we are not clear with English.

SRC3: Students complain that lecturers are not considerate about English not being their first language. They do not understand the work sometimes and sometimes prefer to dodge lectures and do other things.

³⁷ Lulekwa S Baleni, Khashane S Malatji, and N Wadesango, "The Influence of Peer Tutoring on Students' Performance in a South African University," *Journal of Communication* 7, no. 1 (2016): 127–33.

³⁸ M. L. Anderson, J. Goodman, and N. K. Schlossberg, *Counselling Adults in Transition: Linking Schlossberg's Theory with Practice in a Diverse World*, 4th ed. (New York, NY: Springer., 2012).

SH2: The majority of students have language problems. Most students cannot even construct a sentence in English. Mentors have to teach them how to analyse sentences and concepts, which can be time-consuming.

S4: It is difficult to share a room with a stranger. My roommate and I come from different cultural backgrounds. We do things differently, we speak different languages and no one is willing to compromise. We don't like the same food. We do not connect at all.

S3: When I first came to the university I became stressed because I left my parents in a bad situation in terms of hunger as they sacrificed all that they had for me to come here. I was shocked to see how people dressed and I did not have suitable clothes, which made me bunk classes and think about my mum always.

S1: University life can be confusing and stressful; that is why we drink alcohol over weekends. We are trying to forget the worries and problems of the week like too much work from lecturers and quarrels with noisy roommates sometimes.

SH2: Students sometimes misunderstand the freedom of being on their own and neglect their studies, which causes stress when they do not perform well in their studies. Poverty affects students so much that they lack self-confidence. Self-esteem is also lost because of a lack of English language proficiency.

Level of preparedness for high school students for university education and support given to underprepared students

The purpose of this question was to assess whether there were any intervention programmes for first-year students to orient them within the new environment. Analysis of the interview showed that both subject heads and students agree that there is only one week for orientation programmes that the institution offers to familiarise students with their new environment and introduce them to different departments that can offer support. Both respondents remarked that one week was not enough to know everything. Students end up being frustrated, despondent and disillusioned when they have problems. Students and student representative council members also highlighted the fact that some students were from rural areas and were disadvantaged because they did not know how computers were used. The following were respondents' responses:

S1: We are so frustrated during the year. We don't know where to go if we have problems. We have orientation for one week, but you can't know everything in one week.

S2: The programme for orientation is one week and they can't expect us to know everything. We are from rural areas and don't even know how to use a computer.

SRC2: Some students don't even know how to use computers. The institution should consider those students and provide special programmes to assist them.

SH2: We do have an orientation programme, but it is only for one week. It becomes difficult for students to grasp everything in one week. Some students are from rural areas and have never been exposed to technology. This is a real challenge as assignments must be typed in most instances.

SRC4: There is a campus tour during orientation, but because of information overload within a week students tend to forget some of the things they were told.

SH1: The majority of students have a problem understanding and expressing themselves in English as a language of teaching and learning. When assignments are given to students they just copy and paste the work as it is. Students don't read books outside their prescribed textbook; therefore it becomes difficult for them to improve their language proficiencies.

SDS1: Student and brain profiling assessment, which is a short assessment with an in-depth report, identifies students' thinking preferences and is applied as a developmental tool at the beginning of the year. It aims to heighten students' self-knowledge and facilitate interpersonal feelings.

SRC3: It should be noted that there are no reminders about the above-mentioned facilities. Information is given once during orientation and students tend to forget about some of these facilities. The other thing is some of these committees do not avail themselves but instead want students to go to them.

The academic performance of first-year B.Ed. students

Students lack the academic ability to endure the pressure of university courses, but even those with appropriate academic preparation may arrive at university emotionally and socially incompetent to succeed. Thus, developmental approaches, when working with students, are vital. Students remarked that the fact that they had never set foot in a science laboratory or a computer laboratory makes coping with university workload a nightmare.

Amongst other explanations given for poor performance, is the acknowledgement by students that there is a lot of work given at the university level and therefore they need to work hard. Furthermore, the university is more challenging for them as they are doing too many courses compared to high school subjects. Technology is still a problem as seen by the students' remarks below:

S4: Lecturers give us assignments and expect us to use computers as early as March and we have never used computers before. We are expected to listen to the lecturer and write notes all at the same time. This is not fair for us; that's why we fail.

S1: My performance has dropped because I have to balance school work and social life.

Following up on the latter comment, it can therefore be assumed that students are not given enough time to adapt to the new and challenging learning environment.

Summary of Discussion

Based on the literature review and analysis of results, it is clear that secondary education has not adequately prepared students for what lies ahead of them at tertiary institutions. Overall results of the study confirmed that success in higher education is influenced by multiple factors. This indicates that education practices extend beyond the formal curriculum into the socioeconomic and psychological factors. Students success is multifaceted, vast and multidimensional. Institutions should therefore move towards more holistic and sustainable approaches to education to penetrate through all the challenges and reach academic success.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the analysis of results, it is recommended that universities need to engage in full orientation programmes to help students to close the gap between high schools and universities. Universities should also offer continuous programmes on mentoring, counselling and support services to assist students with social and psychological challenges. These programmes will not only help students from disadvantaged-communities but will build and boost every student's self-confidence.

CONCLUSION

There is a noticeable disjuncture between high school and university, revealing students' inadequacy in preparing for the social and academic transition. Additionally, challenges in language skills and computer literacy, particularly among students from rural and disadvantaged communities, further complicate the transition. Having said that, graduation from university is a process and a developmental milestone. Therefore, students need to see the transition as a normative shift and not a crisis. It is also crucial to shift focus from high school practices and contextualise themselves with university practices, which is the opportunity to learn and unlearn how to do things as a university student. Such a transition needs a new pedagogical shift with some mastery when it comes to academic writing.

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