

# Secondary School Learners' Transition to the University: A Qualitative Research Approach



Mbulaheni Paul Tshisikhawe<sup>1</sup>  & Buyisani Dube<sup>2</sup> 

<sup>1</sup> School of Education, Department of Professional and Curriculum Studies, University of Venda, South Africa.

<sup>2</sup> Department of Educational Administration, Leadership and Management, BA ISAGO University, Botswana.

## ABSTRACT

The transition of learners from secondary school to university education, while inevitable, has always been marred by myriad uncertainties and challenges. This is especially so for secondary school learners who register in previously disadvantaged higher education institutions. The purpose of this study was to explore the challenges experienced by first-year learners who transition from secondary school to university. The study followed a post-positivist methodological stance. A phenomenological design of the qualitative research approach was used in this research. The study adopted a purposive sampling technique to select two lecturers and ten first-year learners, who were interviewed using face-to-face and focus group interviews. The sample was drawn from the lecturers who taught first-year modules and all first-year learners in the school of education. Data was analysed and interpreted thematically. The study findings showed that challenges related to the orientation of learners, class attendance, language of teaching and learner support compromise the transition of first-year learners, a majority of who end up failing or dropping out of the university. This implies that learner integration and academic growth require supportive interaction with all stakeholders and the provision of resources and facilities. The study concludes that learners should be adequately prepared for the transition from secondary to university to enable them to cope with the social and academic demands of university life. The study has shown that the assumptions of Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory can profitably be infused in learner transition thinking and practices to yield a successful university life.

## Correspondence

Mbulaheni Paul  
Tshisikhawe  
Email:  
[paul.tshisikhawe@univ.en.ac.za](mailto:paul.tshisikhawe@univ.en.ac.za)

## Publication History

Received:  
30<sup>th</sup> August, 2024  
Accepted:  
10<sup>th</sup> December, 2024  
Published online:  
30<sup>th</sup> December, 2024

**Keywords:** *First-Year Learners, High School Learners, Institution of Higher Learning, Learners, Transition.*

## INTRODUCTION

The transition from secondary school to university represents a crucial stage in the academic journey of learners. The final years of secondary schooling turn out to be more stressful and competitive for many learners because they would be in their final lap of being dependent on their teachers and parents. It is also the time to evaluate how prepared they really are to face post-secondary education. This preparedness is seen at the beginning of the new year of post-secondary education. This is a time when learners take various pathways such as seeking employment, remaining at home doing nothing, and transiting to higher education institutions to further their studies. Learners tend to find themselves at a crossroads during this period, which is filled with a lot of anxiety.<sup>1</sup> Some learners may be happy that they will be leaving home

<sup>1</sup> L. L. Lekena and A. Bayaga, "Trend Analysis of First Year Student Experience in University," *South African Journal of Higher Education* 32, no. 2 (2018): 157–75.

to go to other institutions where they will be far away from home and start a new life as independent persons without their parents and teachers. They will be away from a group of people that served as a pillar of their strength, supporting them in problem situations or when they needed advice.

Jindal-Snape describes the transition as the ongoing psychological, social and educational adaptation due to moving between and within schools.<sup>2</sup> Transition involves a large, complex and significant change that occurs in a student's life. The change may concern their learning, circumstances, self-concept, autonomy, maturity, etc. The change is usually regarded as significant by various stakeholders such as parents, friends, and educators and may also occur by design or chance. Eddaif et al. identify changes which may take place from home to university, dependent youngster to independent adult, novice to knowledgeable learner, skilled practitioner, or engaged student to disaffected dropout.<sup>3</sup> Those involved in education have the task of deciding which transitions are desirable and which are undesirable, and amongst the former, the priority and order in which they need to be made.<sup>4</sup>

The initial year of each individual learner at the university is a transition point, one that may affect the development of attitudes towards continuing with learning both at higher learning institutions and beyond. It is at this stage that a repertoire of experiences from home through primary to secondary school come to bear in the academic journey of learners. Nyar indicates that the early experiences from home, primary school and high school education are critical in establishing needed values, attitudes, and approaches to learning that will endure throughout their tertiary experience and beyond the undergraduate years.<sup>5</sup>

Tayyab indicates that most first-year learners need help adapting to life in higher education institutions.<sup>6</sup> They have to develop into autonomous learners who feel positive about themselves and their education so that they can adjust well to higher education. This process requires the collaboration of concerned people to realise desired outcomes. Nyar observes that integration through supportive interaction with parents, friends and teaching staff greatly enhances adjustment in the same way that access to learning resources and facilities contributes to academic growth.<sup>7</sup> Cole posits that learners' success is strongly related to their social, cultural, economic, and educational experiences during the first year of post-secondary education and that shaping the contours of this experience will likely promote successful transition.<sup>8</sup> It is, therefore, in this regard that learners' first year of transition experience should be a priority of administrators, lecturers and staff in the higher education system. This is meant to help, guide, motivate and monitor learners through their adjustment journey to learning in higher education institutions.<sup>9</sup> The implication of this realisation makes it critical for post-secondary education institutions to take student transitions seriously to ensure smooth adaptations are experienced in the learning trajectory.<sup>10</sup>

The successful integration of first-year learners occurs in both social and academic domains, as it is highly likely that difficulties in adjusting to one domain will impact the other as well. Social integration and academic performance have both been identified as strong predictors of attrition from post-secondary study, as has been the issue of satisfaction with university life.<sup>11</sup> Information on learners' transition, experiences and perceptions during the first year of tertiary education is therefore important for the development of lifelong learning. Thus following a post-positivist methodological stance, this study

<sup>2</sup> D. Jindal-Snape, *A-Z of Transitions* (Basingstoke, United Kingdom : Palgrave Macmillan, 2016).

<sup>3</sup> Bouchaib Eddaif et al., "Transition from High-School to University: Obstacles and Difficulties," *IOSR Journal of Research & Method in Education* 7, no. 2 (2017): 33–37.

<sup>4</sup> Reyagalaletsa Felicity. Tom, "Adjustment Experiences and Coping Strategies of First-Year Students at the University of Limpopo " (Turffloop Campus, University of Limpopo, 2015).

<sup>5</sup> Annsilla Nyar, "The 'Double Transition' for First-Year Students: Understanding the Impact of Covid-19 on South Africa's First-Year University Students," *Journal of Student Affairs in Africa* 9, no. 1 (2021): 77–92.

<sup>6</sup> R. Tayyab, "Flourish a Strength Based Resilience Approach to Support Learners' Transition from Secondary to Post-Secondary Education Final Report Submitted to Ontario Ministry of Advanced Education and Skills Development," *University of Toronto*, 2019.

<sup>7</sup> Nyar, "The 'Double Transition' for First-Year Students: Understanding the Impact of Covid-19 on South Africa's First-Year University Students."

<sup>8</sup> James S Cole, "Concluding Comments about Student Transition to Higher Education," *Higher Education* 73(2017):539–51.

<sup>9</sup> Venicia McGhie, "Entering University Studies: Identifying Enabling Factors for a Successful Transition from School to University," *Higher Education* 73, no. 3 (March 9, 2017): 407–22, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10734-016-0100-2>.

<sup>10</sup> Eddaif et al., "Transition from High-School to University: Obstacles and Difficulties."

<sup>11</sup> Nyar, "The 'Double Transition' for First-Year Students: Understanding the Impact of Covid-19 on South Africa's First-Year University Students."

sought to explore the experiences of first-year learners in the transition from high school to university education. The findings are presented subsequently.

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study adopted Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory. This theory is useful as a very broad framework for understanding how internal needs interact with external influences of social context and life experiences to motivate performance. Maslow argues that the primary source of motivation in human behaviour is the fulfilment of needs.<sup>12</sup> The first of the five levels of this theory comprises biological or physiological needs such as warmth. The ability to satisfy these needs to a reasonable extent gives impetus to the individual to think about higher-order needs.<sup>13</sup> The relevance of this aspect in the transition is that the first-year learners at the university would need to be welcomed with warm hands to be able to adapt to the new environment. The members of staff, inclusive of the academic, administrators, learners' representatives and support staff in the university, should receive and accommodate them fully so that they can be part and parcel of the new academic community. Proper accommodation allows learners to study without major challenges that might disturb them. The chance of them to succeed throughout their studies would be increased.

The second is safety needs. According to Redmond, safety needs comprise protection and involve elements of security such as law, order and stability.<sup>14</sup> As a result of the physiological needs having been addressed, the learners would experience safety and security in the knowledge that they are in a warm environment. They would be in a better state of mind to concentrate on studying. The learners have to be safe from victimisation, to make friends and social relationships and to study without fear of victimisation by individuals concerned in their academic endeavour. Physical, social and emotional safety are quite imperative for the education of learners. The third step is the belonging and love needs. Jerome contends that people will always work to prevail over conditions where they feel lonely and alienated. This covers the need to give out and receive a sense of love and belonging.<sup>15</sup> Once the safety needs are satisfied, learners strive to fulfil the next-level needs. The learners have to be assured that they are with supportive others within the university such that needs and feelings can be exchanged. These are needed to feel connected to others. The need to live with friends, lecturers and administration staff enjoying interpersonal linkages is a representation of this area of motivation. When learners feel that they now belong and they are loved, they move to the next level.

The fourth hierarchy is the self-esteem needs. This reflects that individuals are driven to perform because of the need to be recognised and valued by both peers and authority. Anderson states that learners must be shown that they are valued and respected in the lecture halls and within the institutional environment.<sup>16</sup> Learners with low self-esteem are less likely to progress at an optimum rate academically until their self-esteem is strengthened. When these learners feel they are worth it, they will work hard, and the university will be their second home as they will enjoy what they do. To show learners that they are important even when they have shown little improvement is a motivation enough for them to do better next time.

The last and the highest need is self-actualisation. This relates to the aspiration of individuals to become what they are capable of achieving in life. It pertains to realising and using the individual's talents, capabilities and full potential. This need level can be attended to only when the prior needs have been satisfied.<sup>17</sup> Self-actualisation needs to emphasise self-fulfilment and experience that border around growth. To satisfy the need for self-actualisation, learners must constantly focus on issues such as

---

<sup>12</sup> D. Donald, S. Lazarus, and P. Lolwane, *Educational Psychology in Social Context: Eco Systemic Application in Southern Africa* (Cape Town: Oxford University Press, 2012).

<sup>13</sup> Zeynep Ozguner and Mert Ozguner, "A Managerial Point of View on the Relationship between of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs and Herzberg's Dual Factor Theory," *International Journal of Business and Social Science* 5, no. 7 (2014).

<sup>14</sup> B.F. Redmond, "Need Theories: What Do I Want When I Work? Work Attitudes and Motivation," *The Pennsylvania State University World Campus*, 2010.

<sup>15</sup> N Jerome, "Application of the Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs Theory; Impacts and Implications on Organizational Culture," *Human Resources and Employee's Performance*, 2013.

<sup>16</sup> Allison Anderson, "Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs," *The Prairie Light Review* 36, no. 2 (2014): 7.

<sup>17</sup> Orobosa A Ihensekien and Arimie Chukwuyem Joel, "Abraham Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs and Frederick Herzberg's Two-Factor Motivation Theories: Implications for Organizational Performance," *The Romanian Economic Journal* 85 (2023).

problem-solving, appreciation of life and personal growth.<sup>18</sup> This concept of self-actualisation mirrors the totality of a person's aspirations.<sup>19</sup> After learners have realised their abilities and capabilities, they strive to study to accomplish better academic performance, which will put them in the right position to meet the responsibilities expected of them by the market and society. Self-actualised learners would face any challenge anywhere without fear because they exude faith and belief in their competencies.

## METHODOLOGY

Post-positivism paradigm was used as it is more concerned with understanding the world as it is from the subjective experiences of individuals.<sup>20</sup> This augured well with the purpose of the study, which sought to explore the views of lecturers and learners on the challenges encountered in the transition from secondary school to university. The study used a qualitative research approach which has connections with the adopted post-positivism. The study was guided by phenomenological research design. This assisted in the description of the meanings of lived experiences of participants because the aim of phenomenology is to transform lived experiences into a description of their essence, thereby allowing for reflection and analysis.

### Study Area

This research was conducted at one of the rural universities in South Africa. The school of Education at the university admitted and trained undergraduate learners to become primary (BDETEF) and secondary (BEDFET) teachers. These were four-year degree programmes for teacher training. The learners were admitted according to merit using a point system; they would have passed grade 12 with a Bachelor's degree, and the points were to exceed 36, excluding Life Orientation. This showed that learners who were admitted had the abilities and capabilities to graduate in record time within the period of four years. The challenges arose when these learners were unable to cope with the transition from secondary school to university within their first year of study, which either delayed them from completing or dropped out because of failure to cope. The study was intended to explore the experiences of secondary school learners in their transition to university and to establish ways to enhance their coping styles for successful academic life at university.

### Sampling

The sampling technique used was purposeful. It allowed for the selection of participants who were suitable for this study. The sample was drawn from the lecturers who taught first-year modules and all first-year learners because it was easy to access them and to find how they were performing academically from their lecturers. These participants were chosen because they had first-hand experience regarding the focus of the research. Purposive sampling, therefore, was used to select two lecturers and ten first-year learners, who were interviewed using face-to-face discussions and focus group interviews. 20-minute interviews were conducted with lecturers in their offices during their free periods to avoid disrupting normal business times. Learners were interviewed at lunch break to avoid disturbing lessons. The discussions centred on two major themes: challenges encountered by first years and measures to improve the transition of first-year learners to university education. Data was analysed and interpreted thematically based on the dysfunctionality of the education system, learners' orientation, class attendance, the language of teaching and learning, loneliness and learner support.

### Ethical Considerations

The study observed ethical considerations which are crucial in research that involves the participation of human subjects. The researcher sought permission from the University Research Ethics Committee to conduct this study. This further led to seeking the consent of participants to contribute data for analysis.

---

<sup>18</sup> Emmanuel Oppong-Gyebi, Shashidar Belbase, and Kwadwo Amo-Asante, "The Identification and Utilization of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs in Ghana's Senior High Mathematics Curriculum," *Journal of Mathematics Instruction, Social Research and Opinion* 3, no. 2 (2024): 171–88.

<sup>19</sup> Ihensekien and Joel, "Abraham Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs and Frederick Herzberg's Two-Factor Motivation Theories: Implications for Organizational Performance."

<sup>20</sup> M. T. McCrudden and D. N. Rapp, *Handbook of Educational Psychology* (New York: Routledge, 2024).

The participants were told that participation in the study was voluntary and that they were free to disengage at any point of the study without attracting reprisal. It was also emphasised that the study will not cause any harm to participants, whether physical or emotional.

## PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The findings from the study were presented according to the themes that emerged from the collected data. The selected lecturers were coded LE 1 and LE 2, while in the focus group of learners, individual participants were coded from FGST1 to FGST10. This coding took the order in which they were selected to participate in the study. The anonymity and privacy of participants were assured as their views carried no identifying clues. Codes were used to represent individual and group participants. Member-checking was also conducted with some participants to ascertain the accuracy or representativeness of the information that they shared with the researchers.

### Orientation

The views of participants were sought regarding the meaning and significance of orientation programmes for learners enrolling for the first time at university. The study showed that lecturers understood the importance of student orientation. This was presented as an occasion where new learners are familiarised with activities and practices that transpire at institutions of higher education. Lecturers are introduced to them so that they can know who will be lecturing, which module and who to consult when they have problems. This was revealed by LE2, who indicated that *“student orientation is a time when learners are welcomed and inducted into the new university culture and life”*. FGST3 echoed the same sentiments, observing that *“orientation is an opportunity for new learners to get to understand the cultural dynamics of the institution, inclusive of the programmes offered, the university community, location of specialised facilities and to forge relationships as peers.”* Despite the acknowledged essence of orientation activities for new learners, the study revealed that a majority of learners do not attend such orientations. This was confirmed by LE 2, who affirmed that *“it is unfortunate that a lot of learners deliberately absent themselves from this orientation, which further makes them vulnerable when they encounter challenges in the course of their educational stay at the institution.”* FGST7 added that *“orientation seems to be a waste of time because learners sometimes spend the whole day doing nothing during times scheduled for the orientation.”* The orientation activities are disturbed by student registration which takes time to conclude and ends up encroaching into times set aside for other academic activities. Missing out on this important experience causes learners to continuously move from pillar to post in an endeavour to meet certain programme expectations.

Eddaif, et al., emphasised that good orientation is necessary to improve student life at the university. Orientation allows for an improvement of learners' information by creating a dynamic high school-university relationship.<sup>21</sup> It further raises social and academic awareness, which enables learners to follow a course of training that is consonant with their profiles and to value university training as an integral way towards school success and future employment. Reyagalaletsa argues that it is through an orientation that first-year learners are taught how to become familiar with what it means to be a self-managed, independent learner and how to adapt to a new style of teaching and learning.<sup>22</sup>

### Class attendance

Learners who were part of the interviews indicated that they understood that university is not the same as secondary school, where one is forced to attend classes. Some first-year learners were perceived to miss lessons due to lack of commitment, ignorance, abuse of independence of study, and establishing friendships with the wrong people. FGST5 noted that *“associating one-self with wrong peers who have low self-efficacy perceptions and esteem with regard to academic work has a negative impact on school attendance.”* The study indicated that many learners who do not attend classes on a regular basis tend to be those with financial problems. Such learners rely on public transport in the form of buses and taxis when coming for lessons, and these buses have specific times to ply their routes. This situation creates,

<sup>21</sup> Eddaif et al., “Transition from High-School to University: Obstacles and Difficulties.”

<sup>22</sup> Tom, “Adjustment Experiences and Coping Strategies of First-Year Students at the University of Limpopo .”

at times, excessive adaptation problems for first-year learners who would either have been at boarding schools or delivered by their parents to schools during their secondary school education. LE1 confirmed that “*some first-year learners experience class attendance hurdles, such as failure to report for classes, coming without learning materials or showing up with headphones on.*” The situation may be allowed to linger because of the large class sizes at the university, making it impossible for the lecturer to know all the learners and execute quick remedial measures. Lecturers use the one-size-fits-all method to teach and engage with student behaviour. The late bloomers tend to remain behind in mastering concepts as focusing on them much would end up affecting the progress of the entire group of learners.

### **Language of teaching and learning and communication**

The study revealed that many learners admitted to the university was from poor rural families and disadvantaged schools. They used to be taught in their mother tongue while at secondary schools. This applied even when they were being taught subjects like the English Language and Literature. When admitted to the university, such learners are faced with considerable language challenges. Lectures at universities are conducted in English, which is the international language of communication and trade. This is also influenced by the diversity of university learners from multicultural backgrounds. FGST5 said, “*Learners have to grapple with the use of English for communicating academic work, and this is a disaster for those learners from deeply disadvantaged and under-resourced home and school environments.*” The issue of fluency in English was a problem for many learners. Doygun and Gulec posit that the main concern of first-year learners is when it comes to fluency and confidence in oral speech, especially during presentations and discussions.<sup>23</sup> FGST8 added that “*during lessons, some learners just sit and do not take part in the discussions, not because they don’t know but because they cannot express themselves fluently in the preferred medium of instruction.*” Some learners were afraid to be laughed at by their classmates for failure to present their ideas fluently. The inability to understand the language of teaching and learning affects student performance as they would not comprehend the question raised, and as such, they would just have to answer for their own sake. In addition to the challenge of using English for instruction, learners felt that the teaching and learning methods at university differed from those used at secondary school. They indicated that most contents were provided to them at secondary school, but the university education encourages them to fend for themselves. This makes learners intimidated and scared of higher education. FGST6 stated that “*university education underlies the need to use research or discovery methods which are engaging compared to those which present teachers as providers of static truths.*” Lecturers and learners agreed that proper guidance should be given to learners in regard to expectations of university life. They must be taught to be independent and to search for adequate information pertaining to their academic stay at the university.

### **Loneliness**

On this aspect, the study showed that learners felt lonely and deserted for the first two to three months of admission to the university because they were used to being with their families and friends back home. Their enrolment at the university makes it difficult to establish quick new friends because learners speak different languages. FGST 2 said, “*At times, it is quite hectic to forge new friendships in a completely strange environment; this is worsened when there is no colleague from the former secondary school.*” This milestone of starting a new life at the university can be stressful, and one feels lonely because it means letting go of old secondary school friends and family in the transition to a more complex environment.<sup>24</sup> This entails living away from friends, separation from family, and long-established comfort zones. The anxiety disturbs learners from focusing on topics, causes them to miss deadlines for submissions and eventually leads to poor time management.<sup>25</sup> LE1 echoed similar sentiments when she stated that “*loneliness creates a depression in learners, blurs attentiveness to set guidelines and schedule, and this hampers their expected alertness and functioning.*” Some first-year learners fail to understand

<sup>23</sup> Ozlem Doygun and Selma Gulec, “The Problems Faced by University Students and Proposals for Solution,” *Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences* 47 (2012): 1115–23.

<sup>24</sup> Tayyab, “Flourish a Strength Based Resilience Approach to Support Learners’ Transition from Secondary to Post-Secondary Education Final Report Submitted to Ontario Ministry of Advanced Education and Skills Development.”

<sup>25</sup> Lekena and Bayaga, “Trend Analysis of First Year Student Experience in University.”

and manage the emotional transition from secondary to university education. The weak social support group, which is critical to facilitating the transition, tends to reduce the motivation that learners need to engage with their studies. In the long run, student commitment slumps, attitudes change, and eventually, goals start to fade.

### **Student support**

Student support refers to meeting the needs of all learners through the provision of quality learning, guidance about course choice, preparatory diagnosis, study skills, and access to group learning in seminars and tutorials.<sup>26</sup> Research findings indicated that learners were happy about some of the support that they were getting from the university. They indicated that they have bursaries that are helping financially. They received allowances to help in buying books and food and paying for transport and accommodation. FGST1 said, *“We receive bursaries from NSFAS to assist us with accommodation and tuition fees to continue with our studies. This enables us to also buy learning materials and food during the course of study.”* The study revealed that learners had access to the library 24 hours a day, and they were given tablets to use when writing assignments and accessing information that was not well elaborated in class. Lecturers indicated that they support learners through guidance on how to study effectively, manage time, meet submission dates and provide guidelines on study skills. Lecturers also appointed tutors to help learners improve on some aspects of their modules. These tutors are paid by the university. The university was again able to assist learners in regard to healthcare facilities and psychological services. There was a clinic within the university campus that learners attended for free, while counselling services were available for those experiencing intellectual, emotional and social problems.

### **The Dysfunctionality of the System**

Participants were of the idea that the system cannot be blamed for everything. Since democracy changed, the secondary school curriculum has been the same. Learners are treated the same, and they write the same examinations; however, as Letseka and Pitsoe indicate, Schooling in most of South Africa’s previously disadvantaged communities is characterised by dysfunctionality.<sup>27</sup> Dysfunctionality, vulnerability, alienation and a lack of social cohesion characterise many of the township and rural schools. Irrespective of this dysfunctionality, there are schools in rural areas that are doing very well. So are the universities; they might have been disadvantaged, but they are doing just well within their territories. The problems arise when rural schools are compared with urban schools and rural universities with urban universities. LE2 indicated that *“learners from dysfunctional settings are generally handicapped in academic progression, but while it is so, there are some learners that acquaint themselves very well in academics.”* This study indicated that there are learners who are from rural schools who were admitted to urban universities and perform very well. LE2 also stated, *“Gone are those days wherein we measure learners by the province from which they came from or the school that they attended; what matters now is how the student performs”*. The study further indicated that secondary schools are measured by the grade 12 results, and that makes teachers and the government neglect student performance at other grades to concentrate at that level. That is why some learners find it hard to cope with their studies in their first year at the university because they would not have been given proper attention, which could have built their self-esteem and encouraged them to face future academic challenges.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

Based on the findings of this study, it is recommended that first-year learners should be compelled to attend every scheduled session for student orientation. This perspective emanated from the lack of seriousness of learners in responding to and participating in activities meant to introduce them to university life. Learners should not be given an opportunity to miss out on any activity of the orientation

---

<sup>26</sup> M. Letseka and V.J.P. Pitsoe, “Access to Higher Education through Open Distance Learning: Reflections on the University of South Africa,” 2012.

<sup>27</sup> Letseka and Pitsoe, “Access to Higher Education through Open Distance Learning: Reflections on the University of South Africa.”

programme. To enforce compliance, a register has to be marked meticulously which would allow those who missed certain sessions to be offered another chance to make amends. The study recommends that attendance to the first group of lessons should be mandatory for all learners. Attendance registers for each activity or module need to be provided for all learners to sign, and consequences are drawn to discourage the performance of any future negative behaviours. It may be desirable for learners attending conventional classes to be given individual study activities for submission or presentation during initial lessons. This would ensure their physical presence during scheduled lessons or avoid absenteeism. Learners should be guided to be self-motivated so that they do not take class attendance as a burden but as their right and responsibility. Their self-concept should be built and strengthened to enable them to be who they should be in life.

It was revealed that learners in their first year of university experience loneliness as they are in a new environment without parents, family members, and secondary school friends. On this note, the study recommends that learners form study groups and share contacts so that they can talk to each other as they strive for smooth social and academic adjustments. They must always contact each other on a daily basis and help each member who needs assistance. Learners need to be encouraged to participate in sports activities, which can help them make friends more easily and develop critical connections.

The study showed that English as a language of teaching and learning was a problem for some learners. Learners experience challenges with both written and spoken language. They could not express themselves properly. The study recommends that such learners join different cultural activity groups that foster exposure to diverse languages and appreciation of the same. That would help learners learn to use English as a communication medium and improve their understanding and speaking of the language. Learners should give themselves time to read newspapers and magazines written in English. For learners to speak and understand English, they must use it more often to garner language efficiently. The ability of learners to speak and understand the language ultimately helps them in class to understand the lecturer's content of teaching and be part of discussions that happen in the process. Then, learners would enjoy the class activities and everything happening there because they will be taking part and making contributions to the learning discourse.

The reflection on the support given to learners indicated that some lecturers care less about helping or giving support to learners. It was recommended that lecturers should always avail themselves to help learners when they need support. The Student Affairs offices should help expedite the financial applications of learners so that they do not struggle financially in their adjustment to university life. This has the effect of drastically impacting their academic performance. The campus clinic should be accessible at all times to mediate the health and well-being of learners. This should also be complimented by the student psychology department, which has to be prompt in providing psycho-social and emotional support to needy learners. Further, parents and guardians should support learners morally and financially to enhance their adaptation to university life and academic growth.

## **CONCLUSION**

This article explored the views of lecturers and learners on the problems that first-year learners encounter through their transition from secondary school to university life. Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory, adopted as a theoretical framework in this study, assisted in delineating some of the needs experienced by first-year university learners. The orientation of new students is critical, such that efforts should be made to ensure learners attend all scheduled activities through marking registers and rescheduling sessions that they would have missed out on. The partnership of all key stakeholders in the transition of learners to university life is paramount to fostering a smooth and significant landing experience.

## **LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY**

The study focused on the transition of first-year learners from secondary school to university only from the school of education in the studied context. The study ignored first-year learners from other schools who may have experienced different challenges from those reflected in this exposition. Lecturers from other schools at the university were also left out of this study and might have contributed other unique perspectives. The study used a qualitative research methodology, which precluded quantitative

reflections that could otherwise have enhanced the validity of the findings. However, the triangulation of sources of information and participants helped secure the study's value.

### **Declaration of conflict of interest**

The researcher declares no conflict of interest in this study.

### **Funding**

This study was not funded by any business organization.

### **BIBLIOGRAPHY**

- Anderson, Allison. "Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs." *The Prairie Light Review* 36, no. 2 (2014): 7.
- Cole, James S. "Concluding Comments about Student Transition to Higher Education." *Higher Education* 73 (2017): 539–51.
- Donald, D., S. Lazarus, and P. Lolwane. *Educational Psychology in Social Context: Eco Systemic Application in Southern Africa*. Cape Town: Oxford University Press, 2012.
- Doygun, Ozlem, and Selma Gulec. "The Problems Faced by University Students and Proposals for Solution." *Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences* 47 (2012): 1115–23.
- Eddaif, Bouchaib, Driss Boriky, Fatih Mustapha, Mounir Sadik, Mohamed Amine Hanine, Radouane Kasour, Mohammed Moustad, and Mohammed Talbi. "Transition from High-School to University: Obstacles and Difficulties." *IOSR Journal of Research & Method in Education* 7, no. 2 (2017): 33–37.
- Ihensekien, Orobosa A, and Arimie Chukwuyem Joel. "Abraham Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs and Frederick Herzberg's Two-Factor Motivation Theories: Implications for Organizational Performance." *The Romanian Economic Journal* 85 (2023).
- Jerome, N. "Application of the Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs Theory; Impacts and Implications on Organizational Culture." *Human Resources and Employee's Performance*, 2013.
- Jindal-Snape, D. *A-Z of Transitions*. Basingstoke, United Kingdom : Palgrave Macmillan, 2016.
- Lekena, L L, and A Bayaga. "Trend Analysis of First Year Student Experience in University." *South African Journal of Higher Education* 32, no. 2 (2018): 157–75.
- Letseka, M., and V.J.P. Pitsoe. "Access to Higher Education through Open Distance Learning: Reflections on the University of South Africa.," 2012.
- McCrudden, M. T., and D. N. Rapp. *Handbook of Educational Psychology*. New York: Routledge, 2024.
- McGhie, Venicia. "Entering University Studies: Identifying Enabling Factors for a Successful Transition from School to University." *Higher Education* 73, no. 3 (March 9, 2017): 407–22. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10734-016-0100-2>.
- Nyar, Annsilla. "The 'Double Transition' for First-Year Students: Understanding the Impact of Covid-19 on South Africa's First-Year University Students." *Journal of Student Affairs in Africa* 9, no. 1 (2021): 77–92.
- Oppong-Gyebi, Emmanuel, Shashidar Belbase, and Kwadwo Amo-Asante. "The Identification and Utilization of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs in Ghana's Senior High Mathematics Curriculum." *Journal of Mathematics Instruction, Social Research and Opinion* 3, no. 2 (2024): 171–88.
- Ozguner, Zeynep, and Mert Ozguner. "A Managerial Point of View on the Relationship between of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs and Herzberg's Dual Factor Theory." *International Journal of Business and Social Science* 5, no. 7 (2014).
- Redmond, B.F. "Need Theories: What Do I Want When I Work? Work Attitudes and Motivation." *The Pennsylvania State University World Campus*, 2010.
- Tayyab, R. "Flourish a Strength Based Resilience Approach to Support Learners' Transition from Secondary to Post-Secondary Education Final Report Submitted to Ontario Ministry of Advanced Education and Skills Development." *University of Toronto*, 2019.
- Tom, Reyagalaletsa Felicity. "Adjustment Experiences and Coping Strategies of First-Year Students at the University of Limpopo ." *Turfloop Campus, University of Limpopo*, 2015.

## **ABOUT AUTHORS**

**Mbulaheni Paul Tshisikhawe** is a Senior Lecturer who holds a Doctor of Education degree in Curriculum Studies from the University of Venda and a postgraduate diploma from the University of KwaZulu Natal, South Africa. He researches and supervises postgraduate studies on school capacity building on learning and teaching, curriculum issues in education, as well as on the impact of school service provision on learner outcomes.

**Buyisani Dube** is a lecturer in Educational Leadership and Management who holds a Doctor of Education in Curriculum Studies from the University of Venda and being a lecturer at Baisago University in Botswana. He has developed programmes at Diploma, Masters and PHD levels. He has published many research papers in accredited peer reviewed journals.