



**INFLUENCE OF PEER SUPPORT ON STUDENTS'
PREPAREDNESS FOR SECONDARY-UNIVERSITY TRANSITION:
A CASE OF MOI UNIVERSITY, KENYA**

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Abstract:

Universities are taken to have multiple transitions in terms of culture, content (what is taught), environment, inter, and intra-personal relationships. As a result, the transition of students to university is an important aspect that should be examined because despite the expansion of secondary schools and institutions of higher learning in sub-Saharan Africa, the throughput rate is still very low, especially in terms of the skills and competences among the graduates. This study, therefore, sought to establish the influence of peer support on students' preparedness for secondary-university transition. The study took a pragmatist philosophical view whereby mixed methods research design was used to generate data using a concurrent triangulation approach. Purposive sampling was applied to sample first-year students at Moi University and proportionate simple random sampling was used to select 375 respondents comprising of both male and female students. Data was collected quantitatively and qualitatively whereby questionnaires and focused group discussions were used respectively. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, Pearson' Correlation Coefficient and simple linear regression. The findings of this study revealed that although the majority of first-year students consulted continuing senior students and friends for guidance in transition to university, some ended up being misled especially on academics and social life. The results showed that peer support (PS) had a positive significant relationship ($r = .740$) with students' level of preparedness (LP) at $p < .05$). The regression results gave a coefficient determination of $R^2 = .657$ which means 65.7% of the variation in the level of preparedness (LP) can be explained by peer support (PS) and therefore, the null hypothesis (H_0) was safely rejected. This study provides new and relevant insights into the literature on peer support and the transition of students from secondary to universities in Kenya.

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Keywords: peer support, students' level of preparedness, secondary-university transition

1. Introduction

Generally, peers have an important role to play both socially, emotionally and academically among first-year students. It is argued that a student who relates well to fellow students; either supportive friends or discipline-specific peers, will have a successful university transition (Editor, Fergie, Maeorg, & Michell, 2014). As one advances in age, there is a mandatory transition from one stage to the next and this is also true for educational institutions. This is normally accompanied by different challenges if proper guidance and support are not forthcoming to individual transition. Transition refers to the behavioral and inner mental process that occurs when students experience adjustments and move from the known to the unknown, reacting to cultural, social and reasoning challenges (Edwards, Hawker, Carrier, & Rees, 2015). This change happens in peoples' lives either with acceptance or rejection. As unavoidable life process, if it happens rapidly, the successful transition can be a challenge. In this case, universities are taken to have multiple transitions in terms of culture, content (what is being taught), the environment and inter- and intra-personal relationships. First-year students in universities may be regarded as victors since they performed so well in their final examinations in secondary school (Hodgson, Lam, & Chow, 2011). However, the guidance that they may have received from both parents and teachers during their secondary school life may not be forthcoming at the university level.

Social transition into the university is a very important component for any student to become successful and in producing graduates with the required skills for socio-economic development (Labadi, 2017). From the foregoing, the transition of students to university is an important aspect that should be examined. This is because despite the expansion of secondary schools and institutions of higher learning in sub-Saharan Africa the throughput rate is still very low, especially in terms of the skills and competences among the graduates. The throughput rate can only be improved if there is a successful transition to the university which, in this case, is the "factory" for producing successful citizens (Bloom, Canning & Chan, 2006; Vavrus, Thomas & Bartlett, 2011). Available literature indicates that coping with university life is not easy for new students especially in terms of independent decision-making, making new friends and academic involvement. Consequently, if effective measures are not implemented, the students are likely to experience poor transition which will result in various challenges such as alcohol and drug abuse, rioting and irresponsible sexual behaviour, academic performance, delay in the completion of studies, the wrong course selection and misuse of finance and time (Trotter & Roberts, 2006). It is therefore prudent that the students have successful transition in every stage of their life, especially in career development. Kalimasi & Chisalala (2016) argue that in Africa, many secondary school leavers face challenges in the university and in their career choice, because of poor guidance and inadequate

information and skills from parents, peers, secondary school teachers and university personnel. Similarly, if the expectations of first year students contrast from their experiences in the university, they may become disorientated and hence may not succeed during other phases of their life (McInnis, Hartley, Polesel, & Teese, 2000). When faced with such situations, first year the students may feel confused, insecure, anxious, disturbed and even helpless especially during the first semester (Brinkworth et al., 2009).

2. Statement of the Problem

Successful transition to university is a very important stage for any individual admitted to the institution, since it forms the foundation for mature life, for making personal decisions and choice of careers, hence being a very important stage in one's life (Wangeri et al., 2012; Hanna, Hall, Smyth, & Daly, 2014; Kalimasi & Chisalala, 2016). Many students do well in secondary school examinations in Kenya and are consequently admitted to pursue various degree programmes universities. However, the puzzle is how well are these students prepared for university life? Available literature indicates that even after the establishment of guidance and counseling programs, a number of university students find themselves engaged in criminal, immoral and irresponsible behaviors (Nakalema & Ssenyonga, 2014). This behaviour may be attributed to the change in the social and academic environments from the secondary school set ups to the universities. Literature on student support systems in the universities is replete with the exponential benefits of peer support as the students transit from secondary school level to universities (Engstrom & Tinto's, 2008; Ginty & Boland, 2016; Venezia & Jaeger, 2017). Contrary to the positive role of peer support on students transition to universities, there is a school of thought that argues that peer support has little bearing on students' success and adaptation at university (Lotkowski, Robbins, & Noeth, 2004). In the light of these inconsistencies, there was need to further probe the influence of peer support on students' preparedness for transition from secondary schools to universities in Kenya.

3. Theoretical Framework and Model Underpinnings

The study was based on two complementing theories namely, Havighurst's (1972) Developmental Task Theory and Erikson's developmental theory (Erikson's, 1994). Havighurst's developmental task theory (1972) outlines the life stages and their respective characteristics while on the other hand, Erikson's developmental theory (1994) has the crisis associated with each stage of human life that one has to overcome for a successful transition.

Havighurst's (1972) classifies human life into six stages but only two stages adolescence (13 to 18 years) and early adulthood (19 to 29 years) were relevant to this study because of the target population. Havighurst contends that every stage has some characteristics, experiences or tasks that individuals must achieve for a successful transition to the next stage, and if these tasks are not achieved, the individual faces

challenges transiting to the next level. According to the proponents of the theory, the developmental tasks of early adulthood are selecting a partner of the opposite sex. The individual also achieves masculine or feminine social roles in society for instance; girls acquiring the qualities of being good mothers and home makers and learning to live with a marriage partner. Furthermore, one learns how to detach themselves from the parents and show tendencies of independent life especially in making decisions. Moreover, during early adulthood, the individual starts to choose careers, occupations and investments of his or her choice hence being a very important stage in the mature stage of life. The individual also takes responsibility for civic roles in society by behaving according to the societal expectations and finding congenial social groups to identify with away from family members.

Erikson's (1994) developmental theory on the other hand divides human life into eight psychosocial stages but only two stages namely, adolescence (12-18) and young adult (19-40) were applicable to this study. According to this theory, every stage is accompanied by different crises that are formed as a result of a conflict emerging between the individual and societal needs. Personality development is measured in terms of successful moderation of the conflict between self and societal needs. According to this theory, individuals try to identify who they are and who they will be in the future during the adolescence stage. The individual also tries to be independent in decision making in order to fit into society. It is after successfully completing the stage that an individual starts to form relationships with people outside their family especially the opposite sex, and also identifying with a certain career and if the individual does not transit successfully to this stage, isolation develops. From the foregoing, it is apparent that first year students may become frustrated and discouraged if they do not go through a successful transition to university life, hence leading to poor academic performance, completely dropping out of university or even indulging in criminal activities.

4. Literature Review

There are different levels of preparedness for transition that students possess by the time they are in their first year of study in university. These are in terms of individual life on campus, which is how a student is expected to conduct her/himself in the university, university environment, and the expected challenges and how to deal with them. Another form of preparedness relates to career progression whereby every student should be made aware of various programs and prospective career advancement after university, as well as professional bodies in different professions. They should also be prepared in terms of competences required in different fields before and after joining university. In terms of scholarship, students need to be acquainted with the sources of university funds that are available including organizations, Higher Education Loans Board (HELB), donors among others. Finally, students need to be prepared for admission, where they are taken through the qualifications of joining university for each course they would like to undertake.

A study conducted in Ireland sought to explore first year students and staff commitment with two first year experience initiatives; Learning with Peers (LWP) programme and Skills Development Module (SDM). The study found out that a majority of first year students appreciated the mentorship program that was provided by their peers with the help of lecturers (Ginty & Boland (2016). The mentorship program was organized by trained student leaders, to support first year students to transit successfully to their third level of learning. The findings of the study further revealed that eighty-eight (88%) percent of the students identified the program of learning with their peers (LWP) as having assisted them in dealing with social and academic challenges in the university. The findings were not different from Venezia & Jaeger (2017) who found that in the transition from high school to college, peer support plays an important role. Similar findings were put forward by Engstrom & Tinto's (2008) who in their study established that students were able to access support services and develop confidence with the help of their peers and thus making learning easier.

Contrary to the above findings, a study by Lotkowski, Robbins, & Noeth (2004) found out that peer support has little bearing on students' success and adaptation at university. In the light of these contradictions in literature, there was need to further probe the influence of peer support on students' preparedness for transition and to make contributions to this academic debate.

5. Methods

5.1. Sample

The target population comprised of approximately four thousand six hundred (4600) first year students across all the schools in the university. The first-year students were purposefully selected because it was the group experiencing immediate transition from secondary school to university. An online sample size calculator was used to determine the sample size that would precisely reflect the target population. At a confidence level of 95%, a sample of three hundred and seventy-five (375) was arrived at. Stratified simple random sampling technique, and more specifically an online list randomizer was used to proportionately select respondents from the twelve schools. For confidential reasons, the schools were assigned dummy names and their proportionate list of respondents were as follows; A (106), B (34), C (54), D (1), E (99), F (13), G (34), H (5), I (6), J (6), K (2), L (15) Total (375). Once all the participants had filled out questionnaires, the researcher randomly selected 50 participants from the same sample, comprising 25 male and 25 female first year students to participate in focused group discussions. Five Focused Group Discussions (FGD) comprising 10 participants (5 male & 5 female students) were formed.

This study used the following two instruments; questionnaires and focused group discussions to collect data. The main instrument was the questionnaire which was administered on three hundred and seventy-five (375) first year students in order to obtain information on peer support and level of preparedness for transition. Two

hundred and eighty-nine (289) questionnaires were duly filled and returned. Focused group discussions were used to generate qualitative data.

5.2. Model and Analysis

In order to establish the influence of peer support on students' preparedness for secondary-university in Kenya, the aggregate mean scores of the independent variable; peer support (PS) was regressed on the aggregate mean scores of the dependent variable level of preparedness (LP) in the following model:

$$LP = \beta_0 + \beta_1PS + \varepsilon.$$

6. Results and Discussion

6.1. Independent Variable: Peer Support (PS)

The descriptive statistics for all 6 items measuring peer support were obtained. The analysis indicated that the overall mean for the items measuring peer support was 2.6396. The descriptives demonstrated a good balance as half of the items (PS1, PS3, PS4) fell below the mean and the other half (PS2, PS5, PS6) were above the mean as shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics for Peer Support

Code	Item	Mean		SD
		Stat	SE	Stat
PS1	I received some guidance from my peers.	2.4602	.07702	1.30941
PS2	I have roommates/housemates who are ready to advise me	2.6955	.07713	1.31128
PS3	I am comfortable relating to other students	2.1211	.07473	1.27034
PS4	I did not have any challenge in adjusting to new friends	2.4983	.07256	1.23357
PS5	My friends are always helpful	2.9377	.07553	1.28409
PS6	Continuing students showed me the way	3.1246	.08529	1.44999

Source: Survey data (2018).

6.1.1 Continuing Students Support (PS6)

The majority of first year students consulted continuing senior students for guidance in transition to university. This item posted the highest mean of the items that were used to measure peer support at 3.12(62.4%). This shows majority of first year students relied on continuing students so much for guidance. The above findings were not different from the findings arising from the focus group discussions. The majority of the students stated that they had consultations with their peers especially the continuing students. They prepared them for transition to university, especially academically and socially. One of the students highlighted this viewpoint as follows:

"It was just on the personal basis where by being that I had a friend that was here before so that friend of mine was the one who helped me on course selection."

Another respondent said,

"Most of us are not informed and majority of us learn from peers."

The findings were similar to Kalimasi and Chasilala (2016) who alluded that majority of first year students consult their peers in university course selection. Furthermore, Moore et al., (2010) in their study found out that those students who had siblings who had attended university, were found to be aware of university expectations. However, those from families with no siblings at the university were willing to learn more about the university hence working harder to be admitted.

6.1.2. Adjustment to New Friends (PS4)

Majority of first year students had challenges in adjusting to new friends leading to loneliness among them, hence the item scored a very low mean of 2.49 (49.8%). This made a high number of first year students uncomfortable when relating to other students, which is evident from the statement that scored a mean of 2.12(42.4%) from descriptive statistics. The respondents though gave reasons why they were not comfortable with their roommates in focus group discussion where one of the respondents said the following,

"It becomes difficult to interact with others because most of us come from different backgrounds."

6.1.3. Negative Peer Support (Qualitative Data)

One challenging part that seemed to be replicated by the respondents relating to their peers is the negative peer influence especially on their social life, both by fellow first years and continuing senior students. Some of the information provided to them by their peers about the university, not helping them much but instead, giving them false expectations and hopes about the university leading them to feel frustrated on arrival. This view point is indicated by the following students:

"From high school people from university come and hype you up about campus life like you can't miss this and they do not tell anything about importance of studying in the university they tell like imagine having all the freedom in this world and life away from parents you know. So, you are eager for that life without parents so when you come here you just want to live a reality."

Concerning the same, another respondent said,

"I had too much expectation in campus from the story you have heard that campus is like 7th heaven but then reaching in campus I found something totally different."

From a third respondent,

"Many people are misinformed when we come to campus as like your friend will come and tell you there is freedom in the university there is a lot of time na ukienda (and when you go to) university usijifungie (don't be strict to yourself) you must socialize with people there is a lot of time a person will come and tell just go and see how people do in clubbing freshers night."

The above report agrees with Cook (2014), that some students have the notion that a university is a holiday camp, where people are not expected to work hard and others have the expectation of having freedom for different social activities away from their guardians, hence affecting the successful transition to university.

Other respondents confessed that as a result of interaction with their peers, they were led to engage in bad behavior, expressed as follows:

"Other students are influential like my roommate likes ladies, so every time he comes with ladies and they romance when you are seeing there so you also have that feeling that you do the same."

Another respondent confessed that he introduced to alcohol by friends.

"You might find that majority of the friends are drinking, you because you have relationship with them you opt to joining that team of drinking hence you continue drinking."

Furthermore, one of the respondents stated that she was influenced by friends to prostitution so that she can afford expensive clothes.

"Some student they have peer pressure like if you see some girls with some expensive clothes, you also feel you should also wear if you are from a poor background you want to have some boyfriend that can provide."

Another respondent said that academically, he was influenced by his peers negatively to copy exams so that he could perform as well as they did.

"During exam most students use their phones to copy the exam so I used to feel like to do the same they will get the first class second class I should also copy during exam."

In relation to the above, another respondent stated that she was discouraged from pursuing the course she wanted by the continuing students.

"I liked to do education but when I ask some advices from those who were ahead of me they discouraged me."

6.2. Dependent Variable: Level of Preparedness (LP)

The overall mean for the items used to measure the level of preparedness among first year students was 2.5463 (50.9%), which is above average. There are two items among the items used to measure preparedness that scored very low mean of 2.19 and 2.36, hence lowering the overall mean. Table 2 below shows descriptive statistics for the items used to measure the level of preparedness among first year students in readiness for transition to university.

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics for Level of Preparedness

Code	Item	Mean		SD
		Stat	SE	
LP1	The number of units to be covered in my course	2.6125	.08438	1.43444
LP2	To Adjust to the new social life	2.5917	.08877	1.50902
LP3	To communicate and relate well with my lecturers	2.6401	.08814	1.49835
LP4	To relate and communicate well with other students	2.7785	.08699	1.47882
LP5	To build confidence	2.6713	.07749	1.31731
LP6	To be able to balance my study time with leisure	2.3609	.08368	1.42250
LP7	Settle and be comfortable with the course admitted	2.5156	.08320	1.41443
LP8	To work on my assignments independently.	2.1952	.08996	1.52938

Source: Survey data (2018).

6.2.1. Relating with other Students (LP4)

The item on students being able to relate and communicate with other students scored a high mean of 2.78 (55.6%). This means that more than half of first year students faced no challenge when relating and communicating with other students though there is a big number that felt that they are not prepared to relate and communicate with other students. This is evident from the responses given in focus group discussions where one of the respondents said the following;

"It becomes difficult to interact with others because most of us comes from different backgrounds."

Another one said,

"You find a roommate from a rich background and you are from a poor background you find it difficult interacting with them because most of the times things that he does are beyond your reach."

A study conducted in Kenyatta university on the challenges facing first year students' transition reported similar findings to the above in that the majority of the

students surveyed were not compatible with their roommates and also had social problems in their current environment (Wangeri et al., 2012).

6.2.2. Balancing Study Time with Leisure (LP6)

The item on how students are able to balance their study time with leisure scored a mean of 2.36(47.2%). This means that majority of the students are not well prepared on how to manage time independently. From focus group discussion, majority of the students confessed that they had a problem managing their time, since they have a lot of free time at university. Some of the respondents said the following,

"There is just enough free time for yourself and the things you love to do but then there is excess."

Another one said,

"Majority of the first-year student normally they have a lot of wasting time."

These findings contradict those by Amri (2014) based on a study conducted in Tunisia among first year English students at the Institute of Languages, which found out that students were able to manage their time properly and also eager to learn.

6.2.3. Working on Assignments Independently (LP8)

The mean of the item that students are able to work on their assignments independently scored the lowest mean of 2.19 (43.8%). This shows that majority of the students are not able to do research on their own, instead have to copy the work done by other students. This was also replicated by participants of focused group discussions, though a few of them claimed that during their free time they conducted research on the assignments given. Some of the respondents said the following:

"I used to work under some rules this time, you need to do this then when you come to the university there is no rule."

"But here in the university no one is interested even my friend can't ask me whether I have done my assignment sometime I even end up not collecting my assignment because I have nobody to push me."

Other respondents in the focused groups confessed that the majority of them do not do assignments but instead, wait for a few of their peers to complete them, and then copy them.

“A few students do assignment but the rest could take from them so a few do for the others it is called degree ni ya harambee (its combined effort). But majority do copy paste only a few attempts.”

Majority of first year students were found not able to manage their time hence affecting their academic work. They reported that they were not able to read on their own especially conducting research in the library.

7. Correlation and Conclusion

7.1. Correlation Analysis

Correlation analysis was done to determine relationships between the study variables. Pearson product moment correlation coefficient test showed that there was strong positive relationship between peer support (PS) and level of preparedness (LP) and therefore it was safe to run regression analysis as shown in Table 3.

Table 3: Correlation Matrix (N=289)

	Level of Preparedness	Peer Support
Level of Preparedness	1	.689**
Peer Support	.689**	1

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

Source: Survey Data (2018).

7.2 Relationship between Peer Support (PS) and Level of Preparedness (LP)

The aggregate mean scores from data on peer support (independent variable) were regressed on the aggregate mean scores from data on level of preparedness for transition from secondary school level to the university (dependent variable). Hypothesis set was tested using simple linear regression method and the model set constructed as shown in Table 4.

Table 4: Significance Level of Simple Regression Analysis of PS on LP (N=289)

ANOVA ^b						
Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Squares	F	Sig.
1	Regression	94.387	1	94.387	220.934	.000 ^a
	Residual	104.669	287	.427		
	Total	199.055	288			

a. Predictors: (constant), Peer Support
 b. Dependent Variable, Level of Preparedness

Source: Survey Data (2018).

ANOVA results based on the F-test (1,287) = 220.934, $p=000$ showed that the regression model was robust enough to explain the level of preparedness for successful transition from secondary to the university (LP) using peer support as a determinant as shown in Table 4.

The model also showed that R^2 (coefficient of determination) is 0.474, which means that approximately 47.4% of the variation in level of preparedness for successful transition from secondary to the university (LP) can be explained by peer support (PS) as shown on Table 5.

Table 5: Model Summary for Simple Regression of PS on LP (N=289)

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Standard Error
1	.689 ^a	.474	.472	.654
Predictors: (constant), Peer Support				

Source: Survey Data (2018).

Because peer support (PS) significantly predicted successful transition from secondary level to the university (LP), $F(1,287) = 220.934$, $p < 0.05$, $R^2=0.474$, the null Hypothesis (H_0), was therefore safely rejected. On the basis of the results on Table 6, the following model was constructed to explain the effect of peer support (PS) on level of preparedness for successful transition from secondary level to the university (LP) in Kenya:

$$LP = .987 + .858PS + .333TS + .455UP.$$

Where;

LP = level of Preparedness,

PS = Peer Support, and

.987 = y-intercept-constant.

Table 6: Beta coefficient of Simple Regression of PS on LP

Model		Coefficients ^a				Sig.	Tol.	VIF
		Unstandardized		Standardized				
		B	SE	Beta	t			
1	(Constant)	.987	.170	.693	5.810	.000	1.000	1.000
	PS	.858	.058		14.864	.000		

a. Dependent Variable, Level of Preparedness

Source: Survey Data (2018).

8. Conclusion

This study successfully extended knowledge by empirically testing whether peer support (PS) has some influence on preparation of students for successful transition from secondary level to the university (LP). The Pearson's correlations test and simple regression analysis have demonstrated that peer support (PS) goes a long way in ensuring that the transition of students from secondary school level to the university is a success. Data from focused group discussions has shown that the largest percentage of first year students consult their peers in making various decisions during their transition to university. From the results, there is intensive negative peer pressure on social life among first year students. As a result, they interfere with their academic transition hence

affecting their careers. Some first-year students were also found frustrated with their university expectations that were not met due to kind of preparation they received from their peers. A few students were supported positively by their peers for successful university transition.

9. Recommendations

Several practical implications arise from the findings of this study. The importance of peer support for successful transition among students from secondary school level to the university has been demonstrated by its findings. Based on the conclusions drawn from the study, the study recommended that there should be collaborative programs by secondary schools and universities in making high school students aware of university courses and university life in general. Student leaders should be the key drivers to orientation of first year students. This will ensure proper choice of courses, and correct mentorship given to first year students to enable them to settle down with minimum down time.

Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors declare no conflicts of interests.

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