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The 'Self' of Hearing-Impaired Learners and their Transition from Primary to Post-Primary Education in Uganda

Bonaventure Wasswa Ssebyanzi^{1*} & Mary Kagoire Ocheng¹

¹ Uganda Christian University, P. O. Box 4, Mukono, Uganda.

* Author for Correspondence ORCID ID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0006-4388-9737>; Email: ssebyanzi2020@gmail.com

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In Uganda, post-primary education is one of the milestones in a child's education. It is characterized by many challenges, particularly faced by learners with hearing impairments attempting to transition from primary to post-primary level. The transition has long been recognized as one of the most challenging issues for learners with hearing impairments, yet it has not been resolved by impeccable empirical scrutiny. This quagmire prompted the researcher to use a phenomenological investigation to explore the significant self-concepts affecting the learners' transition from primary to post-primary studies. Interviews and group discussions with randomly selected learners who had joined and those who had failed to proceed to post-primary schools were involved. Also, corroborative views and opinions were obtained from preferred teachers and parents in interviews and discussions. It was discovered that the transition of learners with impaired hearing from primary to post-primary level was substantially influenced by family socioeconomic status, gender, age, health, and the learner's cultural issues – validating the applicability of Schlossberg's Theory of Transition to provide person-centered answers to transition deterrents, inhibiting the learners from joining and or staying in post-primary schools. It was recommended that self-advocacy training at the primary level be enhanced to help learners develop the skills they need for confidence growth in their abilities before, during and after the transition to post-primary educational institutions.

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INTRODUCTION

The primary to post-primary school transition is a distinct upward moment in learners' education which often reduces feelings of anxiety, stress, and excitement. Zeedyk et al. (2003) described the transition to secondary school as "one of the most difficult in pupils' educational careers." Moving from the smaller, more personal primary school environment to the larger, more demanding secondary school environment is complex and requires individuals to negotiate several changes (Tobbell, 2003; West et al., 2010). Most children adapt quickly and successfully to this transition following an initial decrease in well-being and attainment. The transition process is more challenging for children with hearing impairments, resulting in long-lasting negative consequences. In Uganda, the Act of 2006 on Persons with Disabilities conceives disability as a substantial functional constraint to daily natural life activities. The learners with hearing disabilities are just a fraction of those children, often referred to as children with disabilities (CWDs). The challenges CWDs face while at school are wide-ranging. Therefore, the need for dependable support systems to enable prudent transitioning need not be over-emphasized.

Problem Statement

Uganda, like many developing countries in Africa, has embraced International Conventions, including ensuring primary education to all children without discrimination, according to Macharia (2018). Uganda also ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) in 1990 and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) in 2008. Despite the entrenchment of the international and even local policy frameworks, children with hearing impairments appear to face increasing challenges, especially in education. However, Population and Housing Census plus Education Ministry's information system (EMIS) revealed that more

than 90% of People with Disabilities (PWDs) did not go beyond primary education. From 2012 to 2016, Uganda's Ministry of Education and Sports recorded that the primary-level learners with hearing impairments ranged between 28% – 30% of the national total enrolment. The enrolments at the secondary level during the same time dropped to a mere 18% from 21%.

Despite the availability of extensive research on the issues and challenges faced by children with disabilities (gender issues, family socio-economic status, ethnic mentality, talents and personal values) - (Van *et al.*, 2018; West et al., 2010), almost no studies have been published on the transition of learners with hearing impairments (Van *et al.*, 2018). No detailed studies have evaluated this issue to establish the predominant causes and, at the same time, suggest remedial measures to the quandary. This research *lacuna* compelled the researcher to delve into this study. This paper explores the experiences of these learners, focusing on their transition from primary education to post-primary education in Uganda. It intended to evaluate the outstanding self-concepts among learners with impaired hearing that affect their transition from primary to post-primary schools.

RELATED LITERATURE**Self-Concept and Transition of Learners**

Schlossberg's transition theory conceives of self with three antecedents: personal and demographic characteristics plus psychological resources – which was also upheld by Troiano et al. (2010). According to this researcher, personal and demographic characteristics shape how an individual perceives what happens in his or her life. This perception has also been underscored by other researchers, such as Merriam (1998) and Schlossberg et al. (1995). The scholars inferred that the relevant factors in the self-component were socioeconomic status, gender, age, life stage, health, ethnicity, and culture (Milsom & Hartley,

2005; Troiano et al., 2010). In other studies, nevertheless, particularly Walpole & Chaskes (2011) and Coccarelli (2010), such students were found to be heavily relying on their parents, teachers, and counsellors to advocate for them while in high school. Most of the underpinnings of the self-concept variable were investigated or implied in this study.

Extant-reviewed literature on the issue of self-concept and transition of learners has highlighted several factors that affect an individual with hearing impairment. Hintermair (2018) identified poor parental communication skills, inadequate maternal bonding, feelings of mistrust due to a sense of inequality and negative attitudes toward people with hearing impairments. Also, poor sign language skills, lack of appropriate role models, social isolation, negative body image, lack of a strong cultural identity, and rejection from family members and society in general were put by Hintermair (2018). In relation to Hintermair (2018), another scholar, McIlroy & Storbeck (2011), found that people with culturally deaf and bicultural identities could be expected to have higher self-esteem. In a recent study, Hintermair (2018) examined 629 DHH people and showed that those with marginal acculturation collectively have lower self-esteem and less satisfaction with life than those with a stronger cultural identity.

To Ashton (2019), self-concept is a collection of beliefs about oneself. However, its measurement was simultaneously problematic due to its multifaceted nature - people can perceive themselves in dozens of ways. One aspect of self-concept that is important in the school years has been the academic or learning self-concept (Burden, 2008). Academic self-concept includes enjoyment and involvement in learning and problem-solving, a sense of agency, feelings about the nature of learning, general feelings of competence/ability and feelings of learned helplessness and anxiety. These also may vary based on whether the student is disabled or not.

Galton et al. (1999) highlighted that all learners experience opposing transition-related challenges, and for many, the post-transition anxieties may

reduce within the first term of starting secondary school. However, although the anxieties may reduce, most pupils can experience some degree of concern well into the first year at secondary school (Stradling & McNeil, 2000). For many students, the transition is an overwhelming process where adequate support is essential (Bloyce & Fredrickson, 2012). This is particularly important given that anxiety disorders typically have age differentials in childhood and adolescence - something that can result in significant disability in social and occupational functioning (Van Ameringen *et al* 2002).

This study used qualitative phenomenological analysis to investigate the firsthand self-concept experiences of learners with hearing impairment transitioning into post-primary education. The aim was to gain in-depth insight into first-hand experiences to identify remedies to help the learners get a predictable transition.

CONCEPTUAL PERSPECTIVE

This research adopted the *self*-component from Schlossberg's transition theory for its conceptual framework. Schlossberg's *self-factor* is split into *personal* and *demographic* characteristics and *psychological resources*. Personal and demographic characteristics shape how an individual perceives what happens in his or her life (Merriam, 1998). Schlossberg's *self-factor* shows the components that can directly affect the transition of learners with hearing impairment from primary to post-primary level of education. The relevant factors in this grouping are socioeconomic status, gender, age, life stage, health, ethnicity, and culture. These are alleged to affect transition through enrollment and non-enrollment for and completion or lack of completion of post-primary education by learners with a hearing impairment (Bonanni, 2015).

Although students with learning disabilities anticipate the academic transition from primary to post-primary school, they remain unprepared for many social and emotional situations they encounter in the transition process and while in the post-primary educational institution. Many of these learners must cope with life lived by family,

friends, and other valued support groups. They must also adjust to new social settings and environmental challenges, according to a study by Barnett (2014). Learners with disabilities compare themselves with non-disabled pupils in respect to their academic and social needs, though they differ substantially. Try to have particular limitations and experiences - requiring them to use exceptional devices. This is not the case with the non-disabled peers. So, to help these learners successfully transition to and stay in post-primary

education, specialists working with this student population must understand these unique challenges. This must be followed by incorporating appropriate resources in school programmes to help the learners overcome their predicament. Worryingly, though, insignificant efforts have so far been invested in the Ugandan setting to pave the way forward using the learner self-concept information to craft more relevant interventions and remedies.

Conceptual Diagram

Investigated Variable LEARNER'S SELF
✓ Family socio-economic variables
✓ Age & gender

The conceptual diagram presents two general variables (family socio-economic variables, age and gender) of the learner. These guided the case study through open interviews to extract further underpinnings of the 'self' of learners. These are revealed in the findings of the study, hereinafter.

Schlossberg's Theory of Transition

This study was supported by Schlossberg's theory of transition (1981). Schlossberg first came out with this theory in a periodical called '*The Counseling Psychology*' in 1981 and then reviewed it in 1995 in a work named "*Counselling Adults in Transition*" (Estrella & Lundberg, 2006). Although the theory was initially applied to adult transitions, learners' development theorists have adopted it to present comprehension of primary to secondary learners' transition challenges, among others. Generally, Schlossberg's Transition theory was propounded to expedite a shared appreciation of how people progress from one stage to another (Schlossberg, 1981). The theory embraces the classification of transition, diverse forms of transitions, transition progression and the factors that impact transition (Schlossberg *et al.*, 1995). According to this theoretical basis, *transition* is defined as any event or non-event that results in altered relationships, routines, assumptions, and roles (Sargent & Schlossberg, 1988; Schlossberg *et al.*, 1995). This

phenomenon also focuses on the advantages and disadvantages a candidate carries to the transition phase, according to one of the inferences of Powers (2010). On the contrary, though, Evans *et al.* (2009) concluded that the phenomenon would involve personal and demographic characteristics - socioeconomic status, gender, age, stage of life, state of health, and the learners' ethnic variables.

The theory embeds various elements: transition characterization, transition forms, transition process and other factors influencing transition (Estrella & Lundberg, 2006; Schlossberg *et al.*, 1995). These determinants are said to be lacking or missing in Uganda's education system, as many vulnerable groups, such as children with impaired hearing, are detoured from continuing with schooling when they complete their first level of primary education.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

A constructivist paradigm was adopted to utilize a multiple research design to gather qualitative information from the participants to answer the research question. A purposive research sample of 36 participants was involved in interviews and discussions for the desired qualitative data, respectively. The research sample of 36 was used in the study in 4 randomly selected schools (one from each of the four regions of Uganda). The

research stratified sample comprised four randomly selected upper primary section learners, one from each region, and four conveniently selected learners who represented those who had graduated from primary education and had joined post-primary schools. The sample also included 8, selected by snowball sampling technique to

represent those who had failed to transit to the post-primary level. It included the purposively selected eight teachers, including H/M, eight parents and 4 District Education Officers, respectively. This information is summarized in Table I below:

Table I: Population sample, sampling technique and data collection techniques

Stratum	Sample	Sampling technique	Info/gathering method	Reason
In upper Primary	04	Random	Interview	Divergent locations
Transited to post-primary education	04	Random	Interview	Divergent locations
Failed to transit to post-primary	08	Snowball	Interview	
Parents	08	Purposive	Interview	Divergent locations
Teachers & H/M	08	Purposive	Interview	Ease to engage singularly
District Education Officers	04	Purposive	Interview	Found in places apart
Total	36			

Source: *School Records (2023)*

Data Collection methods

The researcher and another research assistant, an expert in sign language, used an interview guide to capture information from the research participants after informing them of the purpose of the study and its significance, getting their unconditional acceptance to participate, and recording their responses. The collected information was systematically recorded with codes to ease its analysis.

Data Analysis, Findings

The study sought to evaluate the influence of the self of learners on their transition to post-primary education. Through interviews, the participants produced several responses. These were subjected to strict cleaning and organization to identify those corresponding with Schlossberg’s self-concept. Percentages were then manually computed to determine the significance of thematic frequencies. The significant percentages were 70% and above - Table II.

Table II: Key themes on RQ: ‘How do the outstanding self-concepts among learners with impaired hearing influence their transition from primary to post-primary schools?’

Code	Substantial emerged themes	Frequency N=36	Percent
1	Gender issues	28	77.78%
2	Family socio/economic status	34	94.44%
3	Tribal/ethnic mentality	31	86.11%
4	Talents	27	75%
5	Personal values	26	72.22%

Source: *Interviews (2023)*

According to Table II, the participants’ self-concepts revealed that the most outstanding factors affecting the transition of learners with impaired hearing from primary to post-primary education were gender, family socio-economic

status, ethnic mentalities, talents, and personal values.

Gender and Transition of Learners

It was revealed that NGOs were supporting more female than male learners, as participant PKI4 testified:

"I have seen that most NGOs are more sympathetic to girls than boys and thus some tend to enroll only girls or a higher number of girls than boys."

This revelation was accompanied by the assertion that boys, at the age of transition, start to make some earnings from little jobs and lose interest in continuing with studies, unlike girls.

Although the NGOs were extending more assistance to the girls than to their counterparts, the boys, the learners in the upper primary school, held that there are more boys than girls who continue with their studies after the primary school level. They argued that boys concentrate and revise, while girls misbehave due to sexual involvement, leading to unwanted pregnancies and dropping out.

Even the female participants who did not transit exclaimed that at the age they join post-primary education, they are taken advantage of due to gifts from males due to their failure to express themselves and poor self-advocacy. Consequently, they end up getting impregnated and dropping out of school.

Teachers and parents' experiences regarding gender disparities in transiting to post-primary studies varied though there was consensus that boys transited more than girls to secondary education; girls were more vulnerable to sexual assaults, cultural and attitude biases that endanger their progress into post-primary studies. They lack essential requirements like sanitary pads and trusted adults for guidance.

Family Socioeconomic Status and Transition

Based on this factor, and by learners in upper primary, it was found that poverty was a major hindrance to the continuation of studies by most of their colleagues, whom donor agencies and friends do not support, pay tuition fees, and meet other requirements.

Also, the participant learners who had transited to post-primary education said that they do not see their friends due to lack of school requirements, owing to poverty. This assertion was corroborated by the inference from one of the teachers, saying that parents' poverty has reached unimaginable heights; even those who enroll their children for post-primary education have reached the extent of hiding and changing phone contacts to avoid any possible follow-ups. It was reported;

"Due to poverty, many parents keep changing phone numbers, give learners to motorbike cyclists to bring them to the school; afraid of follow-up calls demanding school fees and requirements".

In any case, due to wanton poverty, parents opt first to pay for their other children who are not impaired – while thinking of more educational investment viability. Even to the extreme, parents of learners whose fees had been paid by donors could not afford to support their children when the donors pulled out.

Ethnic Mentality and Transition

From the study findings, the issue of ethnic mentality stood out prominently. Participants revealed that some cultures in Uganda were not valuing (and even discouraging) the education of children with disabilities, including those under scrutiny in this study. The participant learners who had not transited gave a response on it, and teachers and some parents re-echoed their expressions. One learner testified,

"My parents were not willing, but the Local Leaders came with some men with guns and spoke with force. They ordered them to bring money to take me to school".

Expressions of such a participant who did not transit indicated that parents had no intentions of educating their child with a hearing impairment. Authorities forced them, destabilising the home's peace, which disrupted the learners and discouraged them from transiting into post-primary education.

In a similar version, the teachers recounted the negative attitude of the parents in educating their children with hearing impairments, especially girls who are only forced into marriage rather than education. It is recounted,

"They do not care which level of education the young person is at provided they get a suitor, and the next thing is just marriage."

These girls are only considered a source of bridewealth; therefore, their families do not consider the values of their studies.

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The study revealed that some parents still hold negative attitudes towards education. Shockingly, some of these parents even curse their children who go to school. This hampers the child's educational journey and signifies a lack of familial support from the outset. Such instances underscore parents' crucial role in the education of children with hearing impairments and the need for their active involvement and support.

Talent and Transition

Findings from this study revealed that the talented and skilled learners had opportunities to transit into post-primary institutions. In this regard, a primary school participant indicated that their talented classmates transitioned to post-primary studies because they got sponsorships for school fees and school requirements. The learners further adduced that talented learners can continue since everything is always arranged for them by donors. Learners affirmed,

"Talents have helped some of our friends to be sponsored for further studies, especially those talented in football, netball, athletics, and MDD".

In a parallel vein, teachers affirmed that talents and skills play a pivotal role in continuing studies in post-primary education. They observed that skills derived from talents, such as time management, personal hygiene, and self-reliance, are instrumental in learners' development. Importantly, these talents also serve as a financial

resource, enabling learners to secure sponsorships for further studies, even when they initially lack the means.

Study findings revealed that talented learners were productive and generated income to finance their studies. Their productivity also attracts the attention of donors, who in turn render support. This eases their transition to post-primary education since sponsors are motivated. As reported, "Some sponsors are moved by learners who have been into growing crops and making arts/crafts. They can promote the learners as role models to inspire others in society."

Findings further show that parents agreed with teachers and learners regarding the influence of talent on transition. A Participant's parent revealed that their son, who was talented in football, was offered vacancies in several institutions because of his talents. Such learners get sponsorship, and the sponsorship is attached to further studies. Even those who had no intentions of transition get bursaries, and once everything is catered for, they have no reason but to transition to post-primary studies.

Personal Values and Transition

The primary personal values that emerged were good discipline and the fear of God. The learners' expressions underscored the pivotal role of discipline in their academic pursuits. They shared, "We adhere to instructions from teachers and others, as these guide our path to higher studies."

The learners also noted the negative impact of their peers' indiscipline on their academic records, hindering their transition to further studies.

On the value of loving God, the participant learners' expressions indicated that learners with hearing impairment seek God's guidance and trust in God to help them perform better in examinations so that they can progress to further studies. Learners expressed,

"We pray on Sundays, but during the week, some of us go for daily mass because, with God on our side, we can easily pass the exams and proceed to post-primary schools."

The teacher participant affirmed the learners' deep commitment to their faith. They reported, "Some are so devoted to God that they independently attend daily morning prayers (mass) at the church." This commitment to prayer further underscores the learners' active engagement with their faith.

DISCUSSION

By Schlossberg's component of self, five major themes emerged in this study - focusing on the individual involved in the transition process. In terms of his/her personal and psychological aspects. The findings indicated that gender, family socio-economic status, ethnic mentalities, talents and personal values were within Schlossberg et al. (1995) theoretical component of self.

It was established that gender, both girls and boys, face different challenges that sabotage their transition to post-primary studies. The males with a hearing impairment who opted not to transit were influenced by involvement in income-generating activities, which discouraged them from continuing with their studies. Conversely, their counterparts, the females with similar impairments, their opportunities for transition to post-primary education were found to be dwindling, owing to inadequate self-advocacy – allegedly making them sexually exploited and to unfortunate early marriages.

Interestingly, the females were attracting more donor attention than their male counterparts. These revelations aligned with what Luckner &

Sebald (2013) found: that female learners with hearing impairment lacked the self-advocacy to specify their needs and the ability to create appropriate solutions to address them. Other issues that stood out more prominently were domestic roles assigned to the female learners in the families. This aspect negatively affected their transition to post-primary studies, an issue also established by earlier researchers, such as Milsom & Hartley (2005) and Troiano *et al.* (2010).

The family's socioeconomic situation was found to affect the transition of these learners from primary to post-primary level of studies. Outstanding issues on this notion – as outright determinants were the failure of parents to visit their children at school and delegating transportation of learners to motorbike riders for fear of being demanded fee payments. Ntekan (2018) also reported earlier that parental involvement in the education of such children was owed to low family income. Other issues included the costs associated with post-primary education, which were anticipated to be prohibitively high. The findings re-echo research by Schmidt & Mawenu (2013) cited that poor parents in countries like Uganda could only enrol their children in UPE and USE schools.

Another factor related to Schlossberg's self-component was the mentality of the family background regarding the education of learners with hearing impairment. The findings established that some communities hide children with hearing impairments since they consider them a shameful occurrence. This is partly the reason why some of them come to school late. These findings were in line with Marschark *et al.* (2015), who had conducted a similar study and concluded that the achievements of children with impaired hearing were related to racial and ethnic mentalities in education. Further revelations were such that children with a hearing impairment failed to transition to post-primary schools because parents did not conceive the value of educating such learners. The negative mentality and attitudes aligned with the inference of Stone-MacDonald and Butera (2012), who found out that some families reached the extent of hiding these

children to avoid public shame. Others just saw them as a mere burden.

Conclusion

Based on the analysed information, it is concluded that:

- learners with hearing impairment lack constant and adequate training and support from those responsible for their academic growth and development, and more so, among the girls who were found not to match with their counterparts, the male learners
- It was discovered that the parents of impaired children were not aware of the benefits that accrue from supporting the wellbeing of these children to enable them transit to the next level of education from primary.
- It was further learnt that gender, socio-economic issues, cultural apathy, were serious deterrents to household wellbeing and in turn these issues were prohibiting these children to effectively cross from primary to the next level
- Lastly, the issue of favourable and preventive interventions on the alleged ramifications to better the transition of these learners was also identified in this study as being too scanty.

Recommendations

Based on the revelations, it is recommended that the learners be constantly trained and supported to remain their advocates—increasingly responsible for their academic growth and development. This will most likely bring on board more girls to match the numbers of their counterparts, the male learners at the post-primary level.

Greater involvement of stakeholders (particularly parents of impaired children) should be encouraged and supported to raise awareness on gender, socio-economic issues, cultural apathy, and others implied in the discussion of the findings. The intent is to create favourable and preventive interventions on the alleged ramifications to better the transition of these learners in Uganda and possibly beyond.

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