Transition to University Life: Insights from High School and University Female Students in Wolaita Zone, Ethiopia

Mary Thuo*
Department of Educational Planning and Management, Wolaita Sodo University
P.O Box 138, Wolaita Sodo, Ethiopia

Medhanit Edda
Department of English, Wolaita Sodo University, P.O Box 138, Wolaita Sodo, Ethiopia

Sara Abite, Alemnat Derso, Nuniyat Kifle, Medhanit Getachew, and Letebrehan Alemayehu
Department of Information Technology, Wolaita Sodo University, P.O Box 138, Wolaita Sodo, Ethiopia

Abstract
The purpose of this study was to get an insight about how high school female students perceive the transition to university life, and to understand the transition experience of university female students in the first semester. An exploratory study design was used where 166 high school female students and 88 first year university female students participated in the study. Questionnaires consisting mainly of open-ended questions were used. Data analysis employed descriptive statistics, and categorization for open-ended questions. Findings from high school female students showed that they prefer universities that are nearer home, so as: to maintain social connections, ensure security and family support. Findings showed that high school female students worry about socialization issues, finance management, language, sexual harassment, staff-student relation and academic. On transition experience, result showed that university students relied on parents' support, friends and senior students, but rarely consulted with instructors or used university support systems. During the first semester, students felt fear, were afraid, frightened, confused and disorientated. Also university female students rue about first semester academic outcomes, and as they journey with education they worry about failure, peer pressure, sexual harassment, pregnancy, and substance abuse. This study concluded that students at the high school need exposure on the realities of university life. The culture of seeking help should also be instilled early at the high school to give them exposure on realities of campus life especially through university community services.
Keywords: Transition, Female, High school, University life, Ethiopia

INTRODUCTION

First year university students undergo transformational changes as they negotiate the handles of transition so as to fit in the new university setting. Longwell-Grice and Longwell-Grice (2008), noted that students encounter all sorts of anxieties, dislocation and difficulties during the transition which involve changes related with culture, social and academics. Like other countries (Kuh, Kinzie Buckley, Bridges, & Hayek, 2006), a considerable percentage of female students in Ethiopia get enrolled in tertiary institutions (Harris, 2016). However, studies (e.g., Gelana & Cheru, 2014) indicate that the dropout rate of female students is higher compared to that of male students in the institutions of higher learning. This shortfall could be attributed to poor student preparation at the high school on what to expect at the college/university which consequently affect the effort put forth to get integrated to the system.

Harris (2016) pointed out that the first year experience is a transitional marker that is critical to students' success; meaning, it is a stage when academic skills and social foundations are laid. Besides, the first year experience is particularly important as it impacts on attrition which is costly to both the student and the university (Brinkworth, McCann, Matthews & Nordström, 2008). In this study, transition refers to a process involving 'a period of significant adjustment, development and change which requires significant adaptation on the part of the student' (O'Shea, 2008, p.15).

Initial encounters during transition to the university may cause difficulties in adapting to campus life (Briggs et al., 2012). Huon and Sankey (2002) noted that changes are expected on students' physical, psychological and social environments. Besides, for most students there is significant social displacement when they leave for the university which may be intensified by factors like, being the first in their family to attend university or they may come from an ethnic group that is under-represented in the university population (Briggs, Clark & Hall (2012). According to Urquhart and Pooley (2007) students are forced to take unfamiliar paths which could make them feel vulnerable as they attempt to negotiate and make sense of the demands of the transition in the new environment. Researchers argue that failure to get relevant orientation with regard to academic expectations and social integration during the transition period may lead to a mismatch between expectations and the reality about university life (Briggs et al., 2012; Hodgson, Lam & Chow, 2010). Such encounters may lead to drop-out or potential withdrawal from the university (Mudhovozi, 2012).

Transition involves students' reflection on the total experience of university which includes incidences in the classroom and outside of it, the course structure, and academic interaction with other students and staff (O'Shea, 2008).   Obstacles that students encounter before entry into the campus, and difficulties with the enrolment systems may contribute to the cumulative effect on their engagement with the institution. O'Shea argue that although institutions cannot control every part of this experience, there is need to clarify both what students can expect and what is provided by the university so as to remove unrealistic expectations from both parties. As noted by Harris (2016, p.1) students need to feel that 'their university supports them, not only academically but also socially and personally.'

Issues highlighted by researchers are not isolated, but, they are common globally among university students. Female students unlike the male are the most affected in terms of challenges experienced during the transition. In Ethiopia for example, gains have been documented on the female student enrollment in secondary and high school levels. For example, a spot check with the Wolaita zone (Ethiopia) education bureau indicated that the number of female students that completed grade 12 at the zone in 2015 was far higher than that of male counterparts (i.e., female = 3,816 and male = 3,400) of which about 90% passed the national exam. Despite these gains, trends at Wolaita Sodo University (WSU) indicate a disparity between the number of female students enrolling and those graduating (personal conversation, WSU gender coordinator). Factors attributed with this trend include; pregnancies, socialization problems, language barriers, anxiety, and lack of financial budgeting skills.

A study by O'Shea (2008) argued that the silent departure of other students from lectures may create an impact on students' own sense of resolution. The researcher pointed out that witnessing other students withdraw from the university (e.g., due to pregnancy) may initiate a sense of uneasiness or '… even a 'me next' syndrome' (2008, p.177) for females left behind. The researcher argued that lack of provision of space to negotiate with others may lead to 'lack of a knowledgeable other … that travels with the student as they journey through their university project' (2008, p.179).

Female students experience challenges which become part of even bigger issues as they go through the transition. Personal conversation with the Woreda (district) gender office head (27th August 2015) in Sodo Zuria woreda (Ethiopia) indicated that grade 12 female students deal with challenges, such as; peer pressure, lack of focus on their educational goals (i.e., they take education as a benefit for their parents), lack of creativity or competiveness (i.e., they imitate others), they lack ideas on how to share experience and rarely discuss freely with their parents). Understanding high school female students' expectations about transition to university life and the experiences of university female students' during their first semester is vital while designing university support programs.

LITERATURE REVIEW
Theoretical framework
Theories of student retention in colleges and/or universities have been dominated by models of social and academic integration (O'Shea, 2008; Harvey, Drew & Smith, 2006). According to O'Shea (2008), Tinto's model of student retention and persistence is the most widely cited and tested empirically. Tinto's (1987) seminal work on students' attrition states that student retention or withdraw from the university is to some extent determined by their integration, both socially and academically in their institution (see also Briggs et al., 2012; Clark & Hall, 2010). According to Clark and Hall (2010), academic integration may be reflected by students' enjoyment, involvement, and identification with academic norms and values which determine their progress with the course of study. Additionally, students circle of friends, good interpersonal relationships, and bonding with other students and academic staff is an indicator of positive social integration; and hence, a sense of belonging (Clark & Hall, 2010).

Student lack of integration into the academic social system (O'Shea, 2008) is linked with negative impacts on students' level of commitment leading to lack of connection with the new environment. O'Shea (2008) and Braxton (2000) noted that Tinto's work on students' departure theory references *van Gennep's* 1909 concept of *'rites* of *passage'* where integration into a community membership sequentially follow three phases; 'separation', 'transition' and 'incorporation'.

In stage one, students must separate themselves from their previous community affiliations where failure to do so could lead to withdraw earlier on in the semester (O'Shea, 2008; Braxton, 2000). Tinto's (1987) model show that individuals must make some adjustments with regard to past affiliations in terms of norms, values, beliefs and behaviors that characterize previous associations, requiring transformation at the personal and at public level. This involves a decline in interaction with members of one's previous affiliations which could be family or friends (Braxton, 2000). Based on the model, students who willingly dissociate themselves from familiar associations increase their chances of integration in a new social setting.

The second phase of transition referred to by Tinto as the 'period of passage', individuals interact with members of the new group being sought (Braxton, 2000). Individuals go through rituals and training to facilitate

separation; consequently, they acquire new knowledge and skills of the new group (Braxton, 2000).

Incorporation or stage three, individuals take new patterns of interaction with members of the newly formed group and get embedded into its culture (Braxton, 2000). Incorporation is a socialization stage, requiring acceptance of new norms, values, attitudes and behavior patterns, and integration of the student to the university society (Habley, Bloom & Robbins, 2012; Mudhovozi, 2012). The process of integration could be envisioned as similar to being incorporated into the life of human communities (Braxton, 2000; Tinto 1987).

In the process of integration, Tinto (2009) argue that universities need to move beyond provision of add-on-services that have limited impact towards students' retention. Studies (e.g., O'Shea, 2008) indicate that at one time or another, majority of the students may consider dropping-out due to thoughts related to the institution rather than personal or family issues. According to Tinto universities need to recognize that the root cause of attrition does not only lie with the students and the situations they encounter, but the educational setting also contribute to students' withdraw. Changes thus need to be initiated in the universities' structures and practices to appropriately meet the needs of the changing student body (Tinto, 2009).

Based on research transition changes require making connections between pre-university experiences and experiences at the university which is enhanced by getting an opportunity to form positive social relationships with students and staff. According to Briggs et al. (2012) this process begins before the transition where students make visits to higher education institutions and make contact with current students, enabling them to imagine what 'being a university student' would be like. Students aspiring to join the university need to reorganize the way they think about themselves, as learners, and as social beings (Huon & Sankey, 2002).

Tinto (2009) highlighted five conditions that standout while addressing students' integration to a university setting, namely; 1) expectations (i.e., providing a clear road-map for students' program completion and how to use it to achieve their personal goals); 2) support (i.e., providing academic and social support), 3) feedback (i.e., providing early and frequent feedback on their performance within the first year of study), 4) involvement (i.e., academic and social involvement for both faculty and students), and 5) learning (i.e., finding purpose of their learning, drives students' retention).

Empirical research on transition
Different theoretical perspectives on student retention and persistence provide an account of key factors which indicate the effect of students' preparedness to university life, and influences these experiences have on their social and academic integration in a university setting. Kur et al. (2006, p.17) for example argued that 'Who students are, what they do prior to starting their post-secondary education, and where and how they attend college' or university has an effect on their chances of attaining a baccalaureate degree or any other academic credential.

A study conducted by Maylee and Sarigiani (2006) in the United States on students' views regarding parental support during college transition found that parental positive support influences students' transition. Based on the students' responses, the researchers reported a number of areas where parent contribution was found to be useful during the transition, namely; giving emotional support, providing material/functional and financial support, giving autonomy (freedom to develop self-sufficient skills), teaching life-skills, and providing academic and social readiness.

Based on Urquhart and Pooley (2007), factors that affect students successful transition to university life include: 1) Challenges in adjusting to a new learning environment where students experience difficulties in taking responsibility for their own education; 2) Adjusting to academic workload where students feel overwhelmed by the volume of work; 3) Financial adjustment especially lack of budgeting skills; 4) Time management where students experience difficulties in trying to allocate sufficient time to all the live demands, (e.g., peers, friends, religion, and study); And 5) dealing with emotions like excitements as a result of starting a new chapter in their lives, and being nervous since they know no-one and have concerns about how they would integrate into the social environment.

A study by O'Shea (2008) pointed out that potential retention failure maybe due to factors such as; poor marks on assignments, poor relations with academics, and excessive time commitments. O'Shea stated that female students encounter obstacles of varying levels of difficulty, and may require different kinds of support to overcome the hurdles of university life to successfully finish their first year of study. For example, the researcher emphasized that there is need to recognize that first year students who are the first in the family to attend university may have limited number of people outside of university to discuss their experiences with, and equally this lack should be recognized as an ongoing element of the university experience.

Studies conducted in Ethiopia show that female students face a number of challenges during transition to campus life (e.g., Melese & Fenta, 2009). For example, female students face institutional culture which has not been transformed and in a way is hostile to their gender needs including; lack of confidence, insufficient financial support, poor knowledge about reproductive health issues and sexual harassment.

Mersha, Bishaw and Tegegne (2013) conducted a study on female students' academic achievement at

Bahir Dar University, Ethiopia, and found that although the rate of attrition has decreased at the university level, the number of female students dropping out has increased. Problems on female students academic achievement were categorized into four, namely; personal (lack of confidence, inadequate study efforts, poor planning and organization, anxiety, homesickness, and social influence related to substance abuse and entertainment houses), university environment (sexual harassment by male students and staff, poor guidance and counseling services, lack of support from teacher, unwelcoming social climate, and inadequate free reading space), academic (previous academic background, difficulty with the new education system, and program placement), and economic (financial problems). These factors affect female students' connectedness with the university life, as they are essential in helping students' take ownership in learning. Consequently, there is sustained integration and expending of effort towards education, and there is observed improved task masterly and academic achievement.

Gelana and Cheru (2014) study on the effectiveness of female students academic support programs at Bahir Dar university, Ethiopia, indicated that support services like guidance and counseling services by the gender office, and tutorial support are not effective. With regard to counseling services, the researchers noted issues related with lack of convenient office for counseling services, lack of training for counselors, lack of avenues for experience sharing and lack of attention given to the service by management. Besides, the culture of seeking help from counselors on the part of the students is lacking (see also Kamuyu, Ndungo & Wango, 2016); a fact associated with provision of the services by only male counselors at the university. On academic support, Gelana and Cheru found that advisors had high work overload and lacked willingness to support students. On their part, students don't feel free to seek help from their advisors.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

An exploratory research design was employed to help understand expectations and experiences of female students at the high school and at the university, respectively. The study was conducted in Wolaita zone as part of a baseline assessment for a mentoring project that was initiated to mentor grade 12 female students on transition issues under the Research and Community Service in Wolaita Sodo University (WSU). Two groups of participants served as data sources for this study. Group one comprised of 88 first year female students randomly selected from eight departments in WSU. The second group comprised of 166 grade 12 female students randomly selected from four government preparatory schools in three urban administrative towns (Boditi, Sodo, and Areka towns) in addition to Humbo, a semi-urban town located in Wolaita Zone.

Questionnaires were developed to collect data from high school and first year university female students. Apart from personal data, the questionnaires comprised of open-ended questions to allow participants to freely state their expectations about university life (high school students), and experiences for female students in their first semester at WSU. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics for quantitative data (background information) while data from open-ended questions were categorized and summarized. Besides, questionnaires were coded to remove identifiers (e.g., HS_{100} = high school students, US_{100}=university student).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The study examined high school female students' expectations about transition to university life, and also sought insights about female students' experiences during their first semester at the university. Findings are discussed in the following sections.

Participants' Background Information

Results presented in Table 1 provide the background information regarding the study participants. In relation to age, high school female students were on average 17.9 years (yrs) with a standard deviation = .790 and a range of 17 to 19 yrs. For the university students, the mean was 19.4 yrs with a standard deviation of .808 and a range of 18 to 20 yrs. The result indicates a small variation based on age for the two groups.

Table 1: Descriptive statistics

Variable		Descriptive statistics			
		Min	max	mean	Std. Dev
Age (yrs)	US	18	22	19.39	.808
	HS	16	20	17.85	.790
Family size	US	3	14	6.46	2.177
	HS	3	14	6.75	2.020
Number of family members who have	US	0	5	1.21	1.345
attended university	HS	0	1	.54	.500

Note: US=University students (N=88); HS= High school students (N=166)

In terms of family size, Table 1 indicates a mean of 6.5 and standard deviation of 2.177 for university students, and a mean of 6.8 with a standard deviation of 2.020 for high school students; roughly seven members

per household for both categories. It could also be stated that majority of students came from households with roughly 4 to 9 family members. In extreme cases, Table 1 shows that some households had large families with a maximum of 14 members for both categories. On attendance to university, Table 1 indicates that roughly only one family member had attended university. Worth of note is that in some households, some of the female students were the first to attend the university.

Choices and Expectations about University Life
Data on choices and expectations about university life were collected using a questionnaire that was distributed to high school female students. Data obtained from the open-ended were categorized and summarized. Major questions focused on; 1) Family members' feeling regarding female students attending the university, 2) university preferences and reasons to why they prefer those universities, 3) what they expect to encounter at the university during the transition, and 4) what other people suggest regarding smooth transition to university life.

Results indicated that parents were positive about female students' university education; a fact that is in line with Maylee and Sarigiani (2006) findings that parental support provides a platform in which students rely on earlier in the transition. Parents had high expectation on their daughters to be become role models in their community; they expected them to be successful, to hold good work positions, and to support them later on. For example a student said that *'my family is happy and they wish I get better knowledge like our neighbor' (Student, HS_{106})*. This kind of expectation made them hopeful, especially those who were first born in their family and those with no family members attending university.

On university preference, out of 166 students only 146 (93%) had complete data on this question. Students were requested to rank the universities of their choice in order of preference. From the result (Table omitted) about 58 (36.9%) female students mentioned Wolaita Sodo University as their first choice followed by Hawassa with 53 (33.8%), Addis Ababa had 26 (16.6%), while 5 (3.2%) and 4 (2.5%) mentioned Jimma and Arba Minch universities as their first choice, respectively. The remaining 6.9% of the students had their choices distributed among eight other universities. There was no much difference on second and third ranking where the four universities mentioned as first choice also featured as second and third ranks for most students.

In the questionnaire, students were requested to state reasons why they preferred certain universities. Result obtained from 157 out of 166 female students was categorized into themes (see Table 2). Major themes included: proximity to home, social connection, location (urban/rural), institutional popularity, security and freedom.

Table 2: Reasons on university preferences

Theme	Sub-theme	Freq. (%)
1. **Proximity to home**	• Need to be near home	56 (35.7)
	• Fear because of being female	
	• Language problems	
	• Financial issues or cost effectiveness	
2. **Social Connection**	• Fear of separation	37 (23.56)
	• Networks	
	• Family influence	
3. **Location (urban/rural)**	• Attractiveness	30 (19.11)
	• Adaptability	
4. **Institution popularity**	• Institution reputation	26 (16.56)
	• Access to reading material and good instructors	
	• Access to preferred programs	
5. **Security**	• University rating on security	6 (3.82)
6. **Freedom**	• Need to manage self-life	2 (1.28)

On proximity to home, about 35.7% of the students stated that they prefer to be nearer home; a fact reflected by their choice of Wolaita Sodo and Hawassa universities. The need to stay closer to home could be linked with the fact that high schools in Ethiopia are not boarding schools; meaning, students have never had a chance to stay away or separate from their family until after high school (grade 12). As such, they lack exposure to practical life skills like; cleaning, planning, managing money, studying, and staying safe and healthy, and hence, they rely more on family support and people who are close to them.

Gender issues were linked with the choice of universities where female students stated that they had fear being far from home which gives them a sense of security. For example, one of the student said that '... *my choice is because these universities are near and I don't want to go far because am female' (Student HS_{122})*. The student further said that;

> I am afraid to separate from family, I may face so many difficult things when I am far apart from my family … I worry that I may join unknown university and adapting to its situation … I am afraid to fail.

(Student, HS$_{122}$)

Other reasons given by students related with economic standing of their parents. They felt that being nearer home could be the best cost effective way to deal with financial crisis. One may argue that most of the students came from a large family setting who may be economically constrained. Therefore, being near home is the best option they have to deal with money issues.

On language, it is worth noting that very few students at the high school can speak fluent English or express themselves in English which is the mode of course delivery at the university. To some communicate in Amharic language (national language) is an issue, and some only speak fluently their local language. Being nearer home gives them a way to deal with language issues especially the national language. On this issue, a student said that *'I expect language problem, and my family doesn't want me to travel long distance' (Student, HS$_{119}$)*. Fear expressed by the students may indicate challenges that range from separation, transition and adjustment as mentioned by O'Shea (2008) and Braxton (2000) based on the three phases of integration to university life. The finding also relates with Mersha et al. (2013) who argued that students during the transition experience anxiety and homesickness; hence, they need to be nearer home.

University ranking was also linked with students' social connections. For example, due to fear of being alone in a new environment and fear of separation, about 23.56% of the students stated that they prefer certain universities because they have relatives, neighbors or friends enrolled in these universities. However, to some the choices were influenced by their family members. The findings are in line with results from a research by Urquhart and Pooley (2007) for Australian students who concluded that social support is a significant contributor in enabling successful adjustment to university study and life.

Location was cited as a factor while ranking university choices. Location is part of physical environment which include; classrooms, laboratories, libraries, other facilities and local community as well as the surrounding geographical location of the university (Fleming et al., 2005). About 19.11% of the students argued that urban universities were more attractive (located in the capital city Addis Ababa and regional capital Hawassa). Students argued that these places are more comfortable taking into consideration the geographical location. Towns and cities provide an escape from the university environment and if students' experience extreme changes in their physical environment it could have considerable effect on their studies. Students must therefore become aware of the university physical surrounding and its effect on student learning and development; both academic and socially. As a transition factor, Fleming et al. (2005) argued that too many distractions could be detrimental to the student; hence, they must strike a balance between the university setting and its surrounding to ensure that they have the opportunity to succeed.

Institutional popularity was another factor where about 16.56% of the students made their preference based on institutional reputation. Students stated that access to reading materials and libraries, and good instructors play a role on university of choice. Some students were specific on programs they want to enroll, like; medicine or computer science. For example, a student mentioned that *'... these universities are the most advanced in our country in technology, they have more fields or programs (sic) than others ... and they have well qualified lecturers and materials to learn in practice.'* (student HS$_{206}$)

Security was an issue on university ranking. A small percent (3.82%) of the students mentioned issues related with security around the university; like, being peaceful with no observed students' complains or disturbances. *Fleming et al (2005) stated that* if the distance to university support services is far from area of residence, chances are that the service will be underutilized. Students stated that their preferred universities have been observed to be good for study and social life.

Some students mentioned the need for freedom so as to manage their lives; hence, they want to be far from home. A student said that *'even if most students want to learn and get a job, other students want to be free from family and to enjoy life'* (Student HS$_{276}$). These findings indicate that students have different expectations during the transition and lack of relevant orientation as discussed by Briggs et al. (2012) and Mudhovozi (2012) could lead to a mismatch between expectations and the reality

Expectations about University life

A question was posed to the students on **'what they expect to encounter at the university in terms of economic, social life, and academic.'** Data were categorized into three themes; finance, social life and academic.

Finances: Most of the students were not sure about what to expect in relation to financial management, but, they stated that they lack skills on how to manage money. A considerable percent of students argued that they expect their family to adequately support them financially. The finding support work by Maylee and Sarigiani (2006) that parental financial support has a positive influence during the transition. The issue of opening and managing own bank accounts was noted by many as something they are looking forward to. However, a small percent of students look forward to making some cash when at the university.

Social life: Majority of the students stated that they expect new experiences in the new environmental

setting. Considering students get enrolled in different universities across Ethiopia, they stated that they expect good exciting life full of cultural diversity and they expect to meet and form new social groups. A student said that *'I heard from by siblings and university friends that there is a lot of diversity … first thing I should take to campus is love, tolerance, respect, and being patient'* (Student HS_{358}). However, most students were not sure of how to handle cases of sexual harassment or deal with other challenges linked with relationships. Additionally, majority of students stated that they lack communication skills and conflict management skills, and lack experience on peer pressure management. Findings relate with work by Habley et al. (2012) and Mudhovozi (2012) that students must go through a period of initiation (socialization phase) by accepting values, attitudes and behavior patterns of the new environment to successfully integrate into the university society.

Academic: On study skills, majority of the students believe that university learning is hard and expect it to differ from high school experience. However, they cited communication with instructors as an issue as well as sexual harassment for grades. The findings on sexual harassment support work conducted in Ethiopia by Mersha et al. (2013), and Melese and Fenta (2009) who argued that sexual harassment is a challenge for female students which start early in their university life, and it continuous as they journey with their career as a university experience.

Students were asked to state the **'kind of advice they receive from others about integration into campus life'**. The following is a summary of advice students get on how to assimilate to the university life:

- University life is hard; stay focused on your goals and be responsible
- Expect cultural diversity; be tolerant, respect others and work on behavioral change
- Meet new friends; form un-conditional relationship or maintain normal relationships
- Don't be isolated; be quick to adapt to new environment and gain knowledge
- Sexual harassment could happen from staff or students

In relation to advice on university life, a student said that 'Female students should work hard to be successive or to achieve their aims … they should be careful on everything.' (student HS_{358}).

On sexual harassment a student said that, *'I heard many things … especially former students got different problems … like problems coming from male students' (student HS_{230})*. Another student said that, *'... university life is difficult if you cannot resist the challenges, but, it is interesting if you can go through or manage the challenges' (student HS_{358})*. The findings support a study by Mersha et al. (2013) who argued that female students must deal with different challenges some which are personal and some social to survive the first year of university.

Experience during the First Semester at the University.
Questions were posed to first year university students regarding; 1) their feeling and experiences during their first days of campus**,** 2) their sources of support, 3) advise they would offer to students joining the university, 4) what they would do different if given a chance, and 5) their fear regarding campus life. Findings regarding students' first day on campus are presented on Table 3. Out of 88 students, only 79 female students responded to this question.

Table 3: Students experiences during the first day of campus

Response regarding first day experience	Freq. (%)
1. Felt happy and comfortable about weather condition and campus environment	37 (46.8)
2. Felt happy, but had fear/afraid, worried, frightened and crying due to separation from family	28 (35.4)
3. Felt confused; lost sense of direction	12 (15.2)
4. Difficult weather condition, and water, and power problems	2 (2.6)
Total	79 (100)

Roughly 46.8% were excited and happy about campus life. They were happy about the weather condition and they felt the place was very beautiful during their first day at the university. However, about 35.5% expressed fear or were afraid, felt frightened and some were crying as they were separated from their family. Roughly 15.2% felt confused or had lost sense of direction to their place of residence while 2.6% were dealing with changes of weather and other basic necessities like power and water. For example, a student said that '*I felt lonely, and there was no one I knew not even a student from my home town. I was crying all day and night.*' (Student US_{202})

Experience during the first few weeks of the semester
From 88 female students 62 provided usable data to this question. Table 4 provides a summary of the responses. Students were requested to state their experience regarding the first few weeks at the university. About 35.4% of the students felt disoriented within the first few weeks in the campus. For example, they stated that everything felt new including the environment, the dorms, cafeteria, and classroom, and they felt lonely. Social life was

noted by about 43.5% as a new experience, like; meeting and communicating with new people, and diversity in terms of languages, culture, and religion. For example, a student said, *'I learnt how to communicate with speakers of other languages and living with different people from other nationalities or ethnicity (sic)'* (Student US$_{200}$).

Table 4: First few weeks of the semester experiences

Experiences	Freq. (%)
1. Social life: meeting new people, languages, culture, religion, weather, and food	37 (43.5)
2. Gaining new knowledge	13 (20.9)
3. Feeling disoriented and stressed	22 (35.4)
Total	62 (100)

About 20.9% of students mentioned learning and gaining new knowledge about different things including academic. Some stated that they gained confidence as they learnt more about the campus while some learnt how to manage themselves health-wise. However, some stated that attending class within a short time after registration was quite challenging. A student said that, *'I was tensioned in the first semester ... I could not study as I wanted'* (student US$_{202}$). The findings support what Urquhart and Pooley (2007) found that students had problems adjusting to academic workload and felt overwhelmed by the volume of work. These findings show that problems experienced in the first days of campus still persisted as the semester progressed for more than a third of the students.

Sources of Support during the Transition
Students were requested to state the kind of support they sought during the transition period. About two third stated that immediate family members acted as source of support during the transition. Less than a third reached out to parents and a small percent mentioned family, senior student, friends, and teachers as sources of support. Worth noting is that none of the students mentioned support services provided by the university as sources of support. Lack of utilization of support services by students confirms Kamunyu et al. (2016) study that students don't use university support systems. Additionally Gelana and Cheru (2014) also found that the university support systems are either not effective or the culture of seeking support is not ingrained in the students before they join the university.

Students' fear regarding Campus Life
Students were asked about what they fear most regarding campus life. About a third worried that they would fail or get lower grades. A small percent had fear on how to communicate with instructors while roughly a third had fear in relation to peer pressure, sexual harassment and pregnancy, theft, unhealthy relationships and drug abuse. For example a student stated *'... fear of engaging in alcohol drinking, peer pressure and difficulty in selecting good friends'* (Student US$_{177}$). Students mentioned that there is lack of information regarding pregnancy. *'when students go through unwanted pregnancy they try to kill themselves ... need to create awareness among newly fresh students before they get themselves into the mess'* (student US$_{202}$). A considerable percentage had fear related with isolation, managing cash, fear of lack of food, disturbance in campus, and lack of support from family members. However, only a small percent worried about too much freedom which may lead to lack of focus at the campus.

Students' Suggestions on Transition
First year female students were asked to give some suggestions on how female students could smoothly handle the transition process. Roughly, half of the students suggested; studying hard, understanding instructors, proper time management, attending class regularly, getting support of learning materials, and staying focused as critical in the first semester.

A small percent said that university life is full of lessons; hence, students should take full responsibility of their life, and follow rules and regulations. Besides, information circulating around might not always be correct; hence, students should be cautious of bad-information, and should make use of their freedom wisely. A student said that *'senior students impose their attitude regarding teachers and dropping out of campus. They deceive freshmen students ....' (Student US$_{232}$)*. Another student said that *'peer pressure can influence ... don't listen everything others say and be confident' (Student US$_{201}$)*.

A considerable percent stated that life in the university could be slightly harder for female students; thus, they should share information regarding social life, try to understand others' culture and religion, tolerate and give respect to others, work towards improving their communication skills, and seek help from others. However, a good percent stated that university life is not complicated, but, building self-confidence and self-awareness is critical to smooth integration into the university culture.

In summary a student had this to say*:*

> *University life is a lesson – we can learn lots of things ... like social life, how to manage our money,*

what kind of people to deal with, how to come up with solutions to our problems on our own and of course academic studies. So we have to choose what is good and bad for our life. (Student US$_{208}$)

Another student suggested that 'before going to a university they should know about the place, because having more information makes them confident and strong (Student US$_{183}$).

It is obvious that high school female students have diverse expectations about campus life. Understanding the variety of issues or what to expect during the transition could help them to become more flexible to changes, fears, and developments.

CONCLUSION

Based on the results, it's obvious that female students have a range of expectation driven by need to feel secure and supported during the transition. Results indicated that students prefer universities closer to home mainly based on their gender, lack of exposure to realities of life away from family, and economic reasons. The findings showed the society has high expectation for female students in economic life; meaning, dropping out would have a negative effect for the university, the student, the family, the society and the nation as a whole.

Despite efforts to provide female students with support at the university level, it was obvious that students relied more on parents of family, friends and to a lower extent senior students or staff to smoothly settle at the university. This could be linked to lack of awareness, ignorance or lack of culture of seeking help.

Results also indicated that students experienced stressful moments during the first few days at the campus and these experiences persisted as the semester progressed. They were also unhappy about their performance during their first semester where they felt overwhelmed with the work load; meaning, students require help during the first weeks of campus to quickly integrate into the system and to stay focused on academics. However, though the university cannot control every aspect of the students' experience, they expect the university to support them in one way or another.

The culture of seeking help should also be instilled in students very early in life. Students could also be supported through linkage to support programs, and mentorship at the campus. At the high school level, students could be given a chance to discuss issues to reduce the information gap regarding campus life through university community services.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

REFERENCES

Braxton, J.M. (2000). Reworking the Student Departure Puzzle. Vanderbilt Issues in Higher Education series. Nashville, Tennessee, Vanderbilt University Press.

Briggs, A.R.J., Clark, J. & Hall, I. (2012). Building bridges: Understanding Student Transition to University. *Quality in Higher Education,* 18(1), 3-21, DOI: 10.1080/13538322.2011.614468.

Brinkworth, R., McCann, B., Matthews, C., and Nordström, K (2008). First Year Expectations and Experiences: Student and Teacher Perspectives. *High Educ*, DOI 10.1007/s10734-008-9188-3

Fleming W. J. B., Howard, K., Perkins, E., and Pesta, M. (July 13th, 2005). The College Environment: Factors Influencing Student Transition and Their Impact on Academic Advising. The Mentor, Penn State's Division of Undergraduate Studies.

Gelana, G., and Cheru, M. (2014). Teachers', Students' and Academic Support Staff Views on the Effectiveness of Female Students Academic Support Programmes at Bahir Dar University. *Journal of Education and Practice,* 5(10), 37-48.

Habley, W. R., Bloom, J.L., and Robbins, S. (2012). Increasing Persistence: Research-Based Strategies for College Student Success. New York: John Wiley & Son.

Harris, A. (2016). Transition and The Art of Engagement, Nuts And Bolts: Student Services Department, Australian College of Applied Psychology (ACAP). Accessed from http://fyhe.com.au/past_papers/papers11/FYHE-2011/content/pdf/5A.pdf

Harvey, L., Drew, S. and Smith, M. (2006). The First Year Experience: A Review of Literature for the Higher Education Academy. New York: Higher Education Academy.

Hodgson, P., Lam P., and Chow, C. (2010). Assessment Experience Of First-Year University Students: Dealing with the Unfamiliar. Hong Kong: University, Centre for Learning Enhancement.

Huon, G., and Sankey, M. (2002). The transition to University: Understanding Differences In Success. Paper Delivered at 6th Pacific Rim, First Year in Higher Education Conference, Changing Agendas – Te Ao Hurihuri, July 8th to 10th, 2002, at the University of Canterbury, Christchurch, New Zealand.

Kamunyu, N.R. Ndungo, C., and Wango, G. (2016). Reasons Why University Students do not Seek Counselling Services in Kenya. *Journal of Education and Practice,* 7(15), 142 -144.

Kuh, G.D., Kinzie J., Buckley, J. A., Bridges, B.K., and Hayek, J.C. (2006). What Matters to Student Success: A Review of the Literature. Commissioned Report for the National Symposium on Postsecondary Student Success: Spearheading a Dialog on Student Success.

Longwell-Grice, R., and Longwell-Grice, H. (2008). Testing Tinto: How do Retention Theories Work for First-Generation, Working-Class Students? *J. College Student Retention*, 9(4), 407-420.

Maylee C.E. and Sarigiani P.A. (2006). Students' Perspectives of Parental Support in the College Transition. Poster presented at the 19th International Conference on The First-Year Experience Toronto, Ontario, Canada, July 24-27, 2006.

Melese, W., and Fenta, G. (2009). Trend and Causes of Female Students Dropout from Teacher Education Institutions of Ethiopia: The Case of Jimma University. *Ethiopian J. Educ. & Sc.,* 5(1), 1-19.

Mersha, Y., Bishaw, A., and Tegegne, F (2013). Factors Affecting Female Students' Academic Achievement at Bahir Dar University. *CICE Hiroshima University, Journal of International Cooperation in Education,* 15(3), 135-148.

Mudhovozi, P. (2012). Social and Academic Adjustment of First-Year University Students. *Journal Soc Sci,* 33(2), 251-259.

O'Shea, S.E. (2008). Choices, Challenges and Changes: Exploring Transition, Persistence and Engagement for First Generation, Female University Students. Thesis Presented for a Doctoral Degree, University Of Sydney.

Tinto, V. (1987). Leaving College: Rethinking the Causes and Cures of Student Attrition. Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press).

Tinto, V. (February, 2009). Taking Student Retention Seriously: Rethinking the First Year of University. Keynote Speech delivered at the ALTC FYE Curriculum Design Symposium, Queensland University of Technology, Brisbane, Australia, February 5, 2009. Accessed from http://www.fyecd2009.qut.edu.au/resources/SPE_VincentTinto_5Feb09.pdf

Urquhart, B.A., and Pooley, J. (2007). The Transition Experience Of Australian Students to University: The Importance of Social Support. *The Australian Community Psychologist,* 19(2), 78-91.

Whittaker, R. (2008). Quality Enhancement Themes-The First Year Experience: Transition to and During the First Year (No. 978 1 84482 791 6). Glasgow: The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education.