



**Students' view on the transition from secondary school to university in
Mauritius**

Qualitative research

Keywords: transition, students' view, secondary school, university, Mauritius

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Summary

The transition from secondary school to university can be a problematic phase in students' life. However, there was no research on this topic in Mauritius. Therefore, this research focuses on the transition from secondary school to university in Mauritius. Interviews are held with secondary school students (n=18), both state (n=10) and private schools (n=8). Also, a focus group with students from the University of Technology Mauritius (n=8) is conducted. The main results are that students have the intention to go to university, mainly to get a decent career. However, external factors such as insufficient financial means can complicate this transition, especially for students with the desire to study abroad. Academic background is another external factor that can also complicate this transition. Recommended is that there should be adequate preparation in secondary school, where the focus is on developing independent learning skills and the development of realistic expectations about university. Besides, there should be further research into the image and quality of universities in Mauritius. When necessary, the image and quality of tertiary education should be improved.

Key words:

transition, students' view, secondary school, university, Mauritius

Samenvatting

De transitie van middelbare school naar de universiteit kan een problematische fase zijn in het leven van studenten. Er is echter geen onderzoek gedaan naar dit onderwerp in Mauritius. Deze studie richt zich daarom op de transitie van middelbaar onderwijs naar de universiteit in Mauritius. Er zijn interviews afgenomen bij middelbare scholieren (n=18), zowel op staat- (n=10) als privé scholen (n=8). Daarbij is er een focusgroep gehouden bij studenten van de University of Technology Mauritius (n=8). De belangrijkste resultaten uit het onderzoek zijn dat meeste studenten de intentie hebben om naar de universiteit te gaan. Hun voornaamste reden is zodat zij een carrière kunnen opbouwen na de universiteit. Hoewel studenten deze intentie hebben, zijn er externe factoren, zoals onvoldoende financiële middelen, die deze transitie kunnen bemoeilijken. Dit blijkt vooral het geval te zijn voor studenten die buiten Mauritius willen studeren. Daarnaast blijkt de academische achtergrond van een student ook een bemoeilijkende externe factor te zijn. Vandaar dat er wordt aanbevolen dat studenten beter voorbereid moeten worden op het middelbaar onderwijs voor deze transitie. De focus zou daarbij moeten liggen op het ontwikkelen van *independent learning skills*. Daarbij zouden op de middelbare school al realistische verwachtingen gecreëerd moeten worden over de

universiteit. Tot slot moet er onderzoek gedaan worden naar het beeld en de kwaliteit van universiteiten in Mauritius. Indien nodig, dienen hier verbeteringen gemaakt te worden.

Kernwoorden:

Transitie, inzichten van studenten, middelbare school, universiteit, Mauritius

Students' view on the transition from secondary school to university in Mauritius

The government of Mauritius has had several policies and goals in the past to increase the enrolment of students in universities in Mauritius. For example, publicly funding the University of Mauritius in 1988 resulted in more enrolment of students from lower-income groups and girls (Ramtohul, 2012). However, the goal to reach a Gross Tertiary Enrolment Rate (GTER) of 72% by 2015 as described in Ramtohul (2012) was not accomplished, since the actual GTER was 37% in 2015 (UNESCO, n.d.).

Tertiary education remains, however, a high priority on the political agenda. The Government of Mauritius aims to reconstruct Mauritius into a knowledge-based economy by 2025 (Van 't Rood, Bairsto, Danbakli & Haug, 2015). Due to the increasing globalisation of knowledge, tertiary education appears to be crucial for economic and political development (Materu, 2007). The government has developed the Tertiary Education Strategic Plan (TESP) 2013-2025 to become a knowledge-based economy. The Ministry of Tertiary Education, Science, Research & Technology has identified several goals for this TESP. One of these goals is to increase the enrolment to tertiary education in Mauritius to 68.000 students in 2025, including secondary school leavers (Ministry of Tertiary Education, Science, Research & Technology, n.d.).

Besides advantages for economic and political development, tertiary education has other benefits. According to the research of the Santiago (2008) and Arnal and Weko (2008), more equity can be achieved in society through tertiary education. More equity occurs by reducing the educational and income gaps between different groups in society. Examples of characteristics of these groups in society are socioeconomic status, gender or ethnic background (Santiago, 2008). Thereby, tertiary education has also individual benefits for the graduates. It can strengthen their position in the job market. A university degree often provides graduates with higher wages and lower unemployment (Arnal & Weko, 2008; Hill, Hoffman, & Rex, 2005). However, a critical note is that this research does not include any data on Mauritius.

As mentioned in Van 't Rood et al. (2015), the TESP also focuses on personal development of students. This personal development includes the development of entrepreneurial skills and attitude. At last, the quality of education is important. Meaning among others that students are enriched with competences gained through education. These competencies prepare students to be contributing members of society who can make a decent living for themselves and for those who they have to take care of (Van 't Rood et al., 2015).

Even though these advantages exist, research in other countries has shown that the transition from secondary school to university can be a complicated, problematic phase in students' lives (Brinkworth, McCann, Matthews, & Nordström, 2009; Hassel & Ridout, 2018; Terenzini et al., 1994). Problems can occur on a personal level, such as low self-esteem and the feeling of failure. Besides, the transition can be problematic for students' well-being as they can experience high levels of stress when they feel not adequately prepared (Hassel & Ridout, 2018). Problems can also occur on an academical level, such as being unprepared for the heavy workload and complexity of the subjects (Kantanis, 2000). Besides that, research shows that it can lead to underachievement or even drop-out when students fail in this transition (Hassel & Ridout, 2018; Kantanis, 2000; Lowe & Cook, 2003).

Theoretical framework

Several factors influence this transition. First of all, there are several reasons why students make this transition. Research has shown that students' personality, motives to go to university, and academic and occupational ambitions influence the decision, whether students decide to go to university (Terenzini et al., 1994). Hassel and Ridout (2018) have clustered ambition, lack of other opportunities, social factors and perceived status and expectations as reasons to attend university. After their research, they conclude that some students make this transition because they expect higher chances of being employed after university and it will develop their independence. Also, social and external factors, such as peer network, educational, family, and socio-economic background can all influence this decision (Terenzini et al., 1994). Besides that, Hassel and Ridout (2018) also allocate worries about academic ability, finances and emotional support as influencers. They call this academic aptitude.

Besides reasons why students make the transition, existing literature explains why the transition can be problematic. First of all, students seem to have unrealistic expectations of university (Brinkworth et al., 2009; Hassel & Ridout, 2018; Kantanis, 2000; Lowe & Cook, 2003). Research suggests that unrealistic expectations can occur in, for example, expecting immediate feedback, expecting smaller classes, and expecting more help from teachers (Hassel & Ridout, 2018; Kantanis, 2000). Hassel and Ridout (2018) emphasise on teaching expectations in their research. At last, accurate preparation for this transition, such as the shaping of realistic expectations is a crucial element to prevent failure and underachievement. These realistic expectations can be shaped in the pre-entry stage (Lowe & Cook, 2003).

However, it is questionable if all students have the same opportunities to get an adequate preparation. Research in Australia, the UK and the US suggest that school type also

influences the transition from secondary school to university. Research in Australia suggests that students in state secondary schools tend to have a more successful transition than students in private secondary school since they had to work more independent in secondary school (Birch & Miller, 2007; Win & Miller, 2005). Research in the UK and the US shows that students from a private school have more chance of getting admitted into universities. However, once in university, students from private school perform worse than students from state schools (Dobson & Skuja, 2005; McNabb, Pal, & Sloan, 2002; Smith & Naylor, 2001). However, research in several African countries (e.g. Nigeria and Kenya) found that the quality of state schools are often low (Tooley & Dixon, 2005). Therefore, it is questionable if the same effect occurs with students from these African countries. However, none of the existing research focuses on Mauritius. Therefore, these samples cannot be generalised to another context without caution to demographic differences, cultural values and economic differences (Abubakar, 2015; Arnett, 2008; Henrich, Heine, & Norenzayan, 2010; Keller, 2016), in this case, the Mauritian society.

Besides, the unrealistic expectations and school type, research shows that the skills that students learn at secondary school do not match the required skills at university (Brinkworth et al., 2009). According to research, students are often not prepared for the independent learning skills that universities request from them (Brinkworth et al., 2009; Hassel & Ridout, 2018, Kantanis, 2000). In addition, some students do not have the necessary skills for stress management and adaptation to make a successful transition from secondary to university (Brinkworth et al., 2009; Parker, Summerfeldt, Hogan, & Majeski, 2004).

At last, Kantanis (2000) describes several factors that can contribute to academic success and personal fulfilment if these factors are recognised and appreciated. These factors are among others: realisation of the different nature of learning and teaching between secondary school to university, realisation that it is expected that they are independent learners who take responsibility for asking information or assistance if it is needed, and the freedom to be treated and to act like an adult.

Gaps in knowledge

As mentioned before, the transition from secondary to tertiary education is one of the educational goals in Mauritius. Besides the enrolment of more students in general, Mauritius also focuses on higher enrolment rates of students from lower-income families and students with disabilities (Ministry of Tertiary Education, Science, Research & Technology, n.d.). However, little is known about the difficulties students in Mauritius have with making this

transition. Therefore, this research has two goals. The first goal is to determine what factors influence students' decision to make the transition to go to university. And the second goal is to determine the experienced difficulties in the transition of university students. This information might give insights into the transition and how the transition can be supported, to increase the GTER in Mauritius. The educational landscape in Mauritius consists of state and private schools (Ministry of Education and Human Resources, Tertiary Education and Scientific Research, n.d.). This research focuses on state and private fee-paying schools since research suggest that there can be differences between those schools.

This research uses the ASE-model of De Vries, Dijkstra, and Kuhlman (1988) to investigate the reasons why students make the transition from secondary school to university in Mauritius. The ASE-model predicts behaviour by behavioural intention. According to this model, attitude, social influences and self-efficacy determine behavioural intentions. Besides that, external factors also influence behaviour (Kloek, Van Lenthe, Van Nierop, Schrijvers, & Machenbach, 2006).

Attitude means that a person shows a kind of behaviour depending on his/her beliefs about the benefits and cost of that specific behaviour (Fishbein & Yzer, 2003). According to the existing literature, students think going to university has as a benefit either to get a job or to become more independent (Hassel & Ridout, 2018).

Secondly, social influences consist of three elements. The first one is the social norm, which means that the opinions of the environment about this behaviour influence the actual behaviour. Second, social support which means that the stimulation of significant others influences the intention of behaviour. At last, social influence also consists of model-learning, which means that the social environment can serve as an example of specific behaviour (De Ridder & Lechner, 2004). Existing literature has shown that students who are the first in their family to enter university worry about disappointing themselves and their family (Kantanis, 2000).

Self-efficacy means that behavioural intention, as well as the behaviour itself, is influenced by an estimation that people make about their ability to perform the behaviour and the skills that are required for that behaviour (De Ridder & Lechner, 2004). This research looks at these factors since existing literature suggests that different factors might influence students to make the transition from secondary school to university.

Another part of the ASE-model is external factors (Kloek et al., 2006). External factors, such as finances, can prevent behaviour from happening, even though the intention to perform

the behaviour is high (Ajzen, 1991). Research suggests that there are several external factors, such as educational background and socio-economic background that can influence this transition (Terenzini et al., 1994).

For this research, the researcher formulated the following research question and sub-questions. The general research question is: ‘What factors influence the decision of students whether or not to make the transition from secondary school to university in Mauritius?’. The sub-questions to answer this research question are:

1. What are the intentions of secondary school students whether or not to make the transition from secondary school to university?
2. What were the intentions of university students to make the transition from secondary school to university?
3. Which external factors influence the decision whether or not to make this transition?
4. What are the difficulties university students experience after making this transition?
5. What are the differences between state and private schools regarding this transition?

Secondary school students that do not make the transition are also included in this research, which is innovative in comparison with the existing literature. Besides, the inclusion of secondary school students is important, since literature suggest that realistic expectations can be formed in a pre-entry stage before university (Lowe & Cook, 2003). However, university students have made the transition and can provide information about this transition and the experienced difficulties. At last, this research can give insights into the current situation in Mauritius. By doing so, the government of Mauritius might know where they can focus on, so they can achieve the GTER and stimulate students to make this transition.

Expectations are made based on research. First of all, research in other countries has shown that students do not have realistic expectations about university (Brinksworth et al., 2009; Hassel & Ridout, 2018; Kantanis, 2000; Lowe & Cook, 2003). Therefore, it is hypothesised that Mauritian secondary school students do not have realistic expectations about university. Unrealistic expectations might influence the estimation of their ability to be successful in the transition (self-efficacy). Secondly, school type seems to influence this transition in Australia, the UK and the US (e.g. Birch & Miller, 2007; Dobson & Skuja, 2005). Based on research it is expected that there is a difference between state and private schools in making the transition. However, due to cultural, demographic, and economic differences, there is not a clear expectation whether students from state schools or private schools make a more successful transition. At last, research has shown that social and external

factors influence the transition (Terenzini et al., 1994). Therefore, it is hypothesised that external factors such as financial means also influence the transition from secondary school to university in Mauritius.

Method

Procedure

A qualitative design was used to explore the transition from secondary school to university. First, in-depth semi-structured interviews were held with the secondary school students. Afterwards, a focus group with university students was carried out. Before the interviews and the focus group, the participants had to sign an informed consent form. If students were under 18 years old, their parents also had to sign an informed consent form. All interviews and focus groups were audiotaped and transcribed. The analysis was based on 18 in-depth semi-structured interviews with secondary school students and one focus group with eight participating university students.

Participants

Secondary school students. Data were available for 18 secondary school students that are currently enrolled in grade 13, the last year of secondary school in Mauritius. There were eight secondary school students from private schools, three students from Le Bocage and five students from Northfields. 10 secondary school students participated from state schools, five students from Phoenix SSS and five students from Sodnac SSS. Secondary school students of grade 13 could decide after a brief explanation of their headmaster if they wanted to participate. A 50/50 boy-girl ratio was sought for in this research. However, due to the voluntary participation, fewer girls than boys were interested in participating in the study. In the sample of secondary school, 15 students were Mauritian, and three students had an expat background. Mauritian meaning that at least one parent is Mauritian or students identify themselves as Mauritian. All secondary school students were between 17-19 years old ($M=17,6$), and 10 boys and eight girls participated in the study. The interviews took approximately 25-40 minutes.

University students. Besides the secondary school students, data were available for eight students that are currently enrolled in a university in Mauritius. Four universities, private and state, were approached to participate in the study. However, due to non-responses from universities or scheduling issues due to exams, only one state university participated. The professional network of the researcher was used to get in contact with professors at universities. One sociology professor at the University of Technology Mauritius (UTM) made

his class available. After a brief explanation of the research by the professor, students could decide if they wanted to participate. Eight out of 11 students wanted to participate in the study. All participating students were from the UTM, studying sociology. All university students were first-year Mauritian female sociology students. All students were enrolled in a state secondary school before university. The students were between 18-25 years old (M=20,1).

Measuring instruments

The topic list was based on the student questionnaire of Hassel and Ridout (2018). Hassel and Ridout (2018) used the following categories in their questionnaire: reasons for attending university, academic aptitude and, teaching expectation. However, the questions were recategorised for the topic list. The topic list had the following sections: general background questions, attitude, social influence, self-efficacy and external factors. The last four sections are based on the ASE-model. Moreover, the questions of the questionnaire were adapted so it would fit the qualitative nature of the study. In each interview, the topic list was used. This increases the reliability of the instrument. A strict protocol was in place with the introduction of the research. After the data collection with the secondary school students, the topic list was revised so the questions would fit the target group of university students. By including different settings and data collection methods, triangulation was obtained. Through triangulation, the risk of systematic biases are decreased (Maxwell, 2008). In addition, triangulation also increases the validity and reliability of the data (Van Staa & Evers, 2010).

Data analysis

All the interviews and the focus group were transcribed to analyse the data. Afterwards, the transcripts were implemented in the software programme QRS NVivo 11. This programme was also used for the coding process. Several steps were taken to answer the research questions. The first step was to explore and get familiar with the data with open coding. In this open coding process, codes were assigned to fragments in the data (Boeije, 2010). A few examples of the codes that are used in this coding process are the cost of university, parental support, help other people, not knowing what I want and more free time in university. An inductive approach is used in this open coding process.

After the open coding process, codes are assigned to specific categories. This was axial coding (Boeije, 2010). Also, codes with synonyms are taken together, and irrelevant codes were deleted. Codes such as required study skills university and expectations study skills were taken together in this process. The specific categories that were used were attitude, social

influences, self-efficacy and external factors, based on the ASE-model. This makes the axial coding process more deductive.

After the axial coding, the last phase of coding was selective coding. The selective coding was used to find the essential concepts for each research question (Boeijs, 2010). Again, the ASE-model was used, and the main categories intention and external factors were used as a framework to answer the research questions.

Results

The researcher based the analysis of the data on the ASE-model (see method). Therefore intention and external factors are the main categories. De Vries et al. (1988) divided the category intention into attitude, social influence, and self-efficacy (see introduction). First, the results of the interviews with the secondary school students are discussed. Afterwards, the results of the focus group with the university students are discussed.

Secondary school students

The results for secondary school students are based on 18 semi in-depth interviews with students from state and private schools. This section answers sub-questions 1, 3 and 5. After the direct quotation information about the participant is given: state school (state) or private school (priv.), male (M) or female (F), and age in years. When the researcher refers to students and it is not explicitly stated otherwise, both students from state and private school are referred to.

Intention

Attitude. 15 out of the 18 students anticipate it as a benefit for them to go to university to get a degree. They see a degree as a requirement to get a decent career in the future. *Because nowadays it is very important to get a degree. All the companies want to see a degree to get a good job and to get a promotion* (state, M, 17). However, three students (priv.) think that a university degree is not necessary to get a decent career. Two of these students see it as a backup plan but not a necessity to get a decent job. In contrast to one student, who wants to follow his passion and make a profession out of it.

Besides attending university for a future career, all 18 students assume that there are other benefits of going to university. 11 students see the university as an opportunity to meet new people and learn from them. *I am quite a social person, so university offers me a chance to meet new and interesting people. Kind of being interactive with new people, share their view, share my culture and see what their cultures are like* (priv., M, 17). Although the

quotation suggests that university offers the possibility to meet new people, one student (state) also worries about that. She worries that it is going to be hard to meet new people since the classes in the university are less structured than in secondary school. One of the students that does not want to go to university (priv.) considers it as a cost to be missing out on the social aspect of university. However, he still does not want to go to university

Another benefit of the university is to get the opportunity to grow personally according to the interviewed students. Nine of the students think that the university offers an opportunity to enrich their knowledge and skills. Besides that, all students, even the ones that do not want to go to university, see it as a chance to become more independent.

All 18 students acknowledge the importance of work experience for a future career. *Because nowadays, not only a degree counts but experience as well. I think that working experience is very important and without it, you just have a drawback (state, M, 17).*

Although all students think that it is beneficial to have work experience, only a few students plan to work. Six students from the state schools and one student from a private school want to work between secondary school and university. The students from state school find work beneficial to gain experience, however also need finances to pay for university. Whereas the student from the private school is motivated by working to gain experience.

All students, except one, give their preference to study at a university abroad. These students see several benefits to studying abroad. According to them, the quality of education is better, the degree is recognised internationally, and the life is more independent than in Mauritius. The student (state) that does not want to study abroad wants a study that focuses on the Mauritian society. Besides benefits, some students see also cost in studying abroad. Six students think that they will miss their family and friends in Mauritius. However, they still want to go abroad. Besides that, three students (two state, one priv.) question if the tuition fee abroad is worth the degree.

Social influences. The interviewed students experience different opinions in their social environment about the transition to university. Social environment is meaning friends and family in this context. 16 students experience that their social environment finds the transition to university important. However, one student (state) experiences that his parents do not see this transition as important, since they expect him to have a career in the government. A degree is not necessary to get this job. One student's (priv.) parents are neither positive nor negative towards the transition. 13 students talk with their environment about the transition and value their opinions. *We can ask their opinion about our friends. What are the*

advantages of going what are the disadvantages? So that is good (state, M, 17). The student in the quotation refers to talking with his friends about university. *I do talk about it. If I want advice, I ask them about it. And then they tell me what I should do and that is sort of like a second opinion (priv., M, 18).* The student in this quotation refers to asking advice from his parents.

However, 11 students suggest that they feel pressured by the opinion of their parents or other relatives to go to university. They feel like they have to obey to the expectation their family has about the transition. Three students (state) school suggest that this has to do with the Mauritian culture. According to these students, the parents will experience disapproval from their environment, when their children do not go to university. *My parents want me to go to university. Every parent here in Mauritius forces their children to go to university. Because they are going to judge you if you do not (state, F, 18).* Four students feel that they need to go to university, because it is a tradition in their family. In contrast to one student (state), who suggests that she feels pressured since she is the first one in her family to make this transition. Three students explicitly say that they do not experience any pressure from their parents.

Furthermore, in the interviews, several examples of stimulation came up such as financial support, help with searching for information, help with preparation and encouragement. All students see financial support as the main support parents can give. However, some students say that their parents do not have the financial means to support them. This occurs especially in state schools, but also with one student from a private school.

Additionally, most students get support from their social environment through encouragement. Besides that, students are supported through help in the preparation or the process. *And I know that my parents are supportive. They are going to support me mentally, no matter what problems I have, they are going to help me (state, F, 18).* Three students suggest that their family helps to search for information, while six students are encouraged and prepared by friends.

All students, except one (state), have family or friends that attended university. The student that does not have anyone of her social environment in university sees this as extra pressure. *Because being the first person, I cannot ask anyone. I cannot ask if the people are okay, how the teachers are like, how are the lecturers. Being the first person is like, I am going for trial right now (gov, F, 18).*

On the other hand, there are discrepancies in the experience of students that have family or friends that already went to university or that are currently enrolled in university. For six students, the success and experiences of their family and friends stimulate and prepares them. In contrast to four other students, who experience their successes as pressure to continue the family tradition and make the transition to university.

Self-efficacy. Initially, all 18 students expect that being independent is crucial for the transition to university. However, only two out of 18 students say that they feel prepared to live independently. The remaining 16 students feel not prepared for an independent life. 14 students that want to go university abroad foresee several difficulties with being independent. The most crucial difficulty for 13 students is missing their family when they are abroad. They see this as an enormous step towards their independence. *I guess one problem will be leaving home. Because I'm very attached to my family. That's going to be one of the biggest steps in my life, moving out (priv., F, 18).* However, even though 13 students acknowledge this as a difficulty, these students estimate that they can cope with it. Although one student (priv.) acknowledge that she is going to miss her family, she is not worried about it.

Students seem to have different expectations about lectures and teachers at university. Four students do not know what to expect. Whereas two students (state) think that the support of the teachers and lecturers will be the same as in secondary school. Most students (12 out of 18) expect that the teachers and lecturers only give the main points in a lecture. Therefore, they expect that researching and independent learning skills are required. There is a lot of discrepancy to what extent students feel prepared for these researching and independent learning skills.

Within the preparation, there seems to be a difference in curriculum. According to students, there is a difference between students that follow an International Baccalaureate (IB) (5 out of 18 students) curriculum and students that follow A-levels (13 out of 18 students). The state schools only offer the A-levels. Whereas at one private school students can choose between A-levels and IB and at the other private school all students follow IB. According to seven out of eight private school students, IB prepares students to go to university by giving them certain skills such as time management, independent learning skills and referencing. *It did help me in a lot of ways. It helps me grow, and it helps me understand how to write essays, referencing, different perspectives and be more open-minded. That really helps me in case I go to uni [=university] (priv., F, 18).* However, one private school student that expects the contrary. He thinks that IB students get too much support and are therefore not

independent compared to the A-level students. Although IB students feel more prepared than A-level students, there is still much uncertainty what skills and attitude are expected of them at the university.

In contrast to the IB students, eight A-level students feel unprepared. However, there are two A-level students from a state school and one A-level student from a private school that do feel prepared. They feel like they have skills such as independent learning, handling a heavy workload and making their notes.

However, 10 A-level students (state and priv.), find that the education system consists of spoon feed learning. Meaning that students do not learn to form an opinion or to do research. They get the notes from the teacher, and they have to reproduce that exactly in the exams.

Actually the system here it is like, the teacher is going to give you all the notes. It is a bit in our culture, so you get all the notes with what you need to study. So only this and this. So it is in the mindset to have good grades and to pass. And not really know [=understand the topic at stake] sometimes. However, when you do research by yourself, you tend to grow a bit more, so, that is about the spoon feeding system (state, F, 18).

According to these 10 students, this spoon feeding system prevents them from developing themselves as independent learners. However, all 18 students expect that being an independent learner is an important skill at university.

Students in state and private schools are often uncertain what to expect from the university. Nonetheless, most students (14 out of 15 that want to go to university) expect that they can handle it with getting a more mature attitude. They expect that this attitude comes to them as soon as they go to university. One student (state), however, worries a lot. He does not think he can take on responsibilities without teachers strict support.

External factors

At last, according to the ASE-model, behaviour is also influenced by external factors. 15 students want to make the transition from secondary school to university. However, financial means can prevent this from happening. Four students (state) worry that they cannot make the transition since they do not have sufficient financial means to cover the cost of university. For three students (state), it is not clear if they can go to university and they can probably not make it to a university abroad. Four other students have a university in Mauritius

as a backup plan, while they are sorting out the finances to go abroad. The remaining students that want to study abroad have the financial means to do so.

Nonetheless, students suggest that a scholarship would help them. According to the students, however, it is extremely difficult to get a scholarship to go to university, and these scholarships are often not sufficient. According to five students, the scholarships only cover part of the cost and are not sufficient to bear the costs of international universities.

In the interviews, students suggest that another factor that influences the transition is the Mauritian society. According to 15 students, the competition in the Mauritian society to get a decent job is high. *Well, to get a job later. I think that is the main one. Because if you don't go to university, you are going to compete against the ones that do get that extra skills (priv., F, 17).* They feel obligated to get a university degree otherwise they feel like they do not have a chance at the labour market. This competition is not only in the labour market but also in schools. According to eight out of 10 students in state schools, the spoon feeding system is a result of the competitive school system in Mauritius. Students and teachers try to get the best results for themselves and the schools. This competitive and spoonfeeding system negatively influences the preparation for university.

There are some differences between state schools and private schools in providing information about universities. Especially students in state schools feel that the information is insufficient. The school organises university fairs, but according to three students, the timing is inconvenient due to final exams. Besides that, eight students find that the school provides limited information about the relationship between their subjects and the entry requirements at university. In addition, according to the students the school also provides limited information about universities in general.

Students in private schools feel more prepared regarding information. They can discuss their choices with a career person at school. Besides that, there are regular university fairs where several universities present themselves and give information. However, four students find the provided information selective and limited.

University students

The main results of the focus group will answer sub-question 2, 3 and 4. Although the sample was small, some interesting results emerged from the focus group. There was not a lot of discussion among the students. All students shared the same opinions, except regarding experienced social influences. These results are discussed separated from the secondary

school students since these students already have made the transition. Students' age is given in years after a direct quotation.

The intention to go to university was comparable for university students with the secondary school students. Again, these students also stressed the importance of a university degree to get a job in the competitive society of Mauritius. Besides that, students also say that their life became more independent than their life in secondary school. Seven out of eight students say that they experienced support with their transition. However, one student was questioned by her environment if university was the best option for her. Her parents suggested that it might be better to work or go in the family business.

The main topic in the focus group was the lack of preparation for this transition in secondary school. This lack of preparation expresses in the ability to perform the required skills. All students indicate that they lack requested skills such as writing, researching and presenting. *To come forward with more realistic approach in college. So that we, when we come to university, we do not lack of things. Especially on our sides (20)*. Students suggest that secondary schools can prepare students more to get the skills requested at university.

Besides the skills, all interviewed students do not feel prepared to handle the heavy workload at university. They expected the workload to be heavy. However, the heavy workload regarding assignments was astonishing for the students.

At last, according to the students, the quality of education in Mauritius is not profound. One student suggests that the knowledge of the teachers is not sufficient, especially regarding research and reviewing research. Besides, one student also thinks that the lectures are not in-depth enough and students do not get the chance to learn new things. Also, due to the teaching styles in secondary schools, the quality is not profound. Since it is teacher centred learning instead of learner-centred learning. All other students agreed with these students.

What she wants to say is that Mauritian education is very traditional. With teacher centred teaching instead of student centred teaching. So students are less prioritised by the teachers because students are seen as probably objects where teachers should just deliver the messages. And students are expected to learn (25).

Students expect the quality of education to be higher abroad. However, due to the external factor financial means, none of the students can afford to go abroad. Students feel like Mauritius cannot give them opportunities in education, healthcare and careers in comparison to opportunities abroad.

Although all students suggested that a scholarship would be beneficial, these students think that the scholarships the government offers are not sufficient regarding finances. In addition, two students say that the competition for a scholarship is too high and too focused on academics instead of other talents (such as sports or arts).

Discussion

This research is the first to investigate the transition for secondary school to university in Mauritius. The aim of this study was to gain insights into why Mauritian students make this transition and what difficulties they experience. It is an important topic since research in other countries shows that this transition can be a problematic phase in students life (e.g. Briksworth et al., 2009; Hassel & Ridout, 2018).

The main research question was: ‘What factors influence the decision of students whether or not to make the transition from secondary school to university?’. The main results showed that several factors influence this transition. Most secondary school students (n=15) have the intention to go to university. The main reason is to get a decent career. Other reasons to make the transition are pressure from family, meeting new people and a desire for independence. Most students (n=14) want to go to a university abroad. For university students, the intention was similar to the intention of secondary school students. However, external factors, such as financial means, lack of proper preparation through secondary school, school type and Mauritian society also seems to influence this transition. University students suggest that they lack skills and attitudes which they could have gained at secondary school. Examples of these skills and attitudes are writing and presenting skills, and independent learning. At last, there seems to be a difference in preparation within state and private schools. Private schools tend to inform their students more about university. Academically, however, students who follow IB seem to feel better prepared than students that follow the A-levels. Especially due to the development of independent learning and researching skills IB offers.

The results meet some of the expectations. First of all, it was expected that students do not have realistic expectations about the university. However, it is difficult to determine if this expectation was met for secondary school students since they have not made the transition yet. Nonetheless, students in state and private schools have difficulties on creating expectations. The majority of the students (n=16) did expect the teaching to be different. This is high compared to previous research, where most students expect the same teaching skills in secondary school as in university (Hassel & Ridout, 2018; Lowe & Cook, 2003). University

students were not expecting the workload to be so bulky. This is in line with previous research (Hassel & Ridout, 2018).

Secondly, it was expected that there was a difference between state and private schools. The findings meet the expectation since students from private school tend to feel more prepared than students from state schools. Especially the students that followed IB, which is only available at private schools, feel academically more prepared. Students feel less prepared when they are doing the A-levels. According to the students, this is because IB emphasises the development of independent learning skills. Whereas according to most students, the A-levels are focused only on results.

At last, it was expected that external factors would influence the transition. For secondary school and university students, the findings meet the expectations. In line with previous research, external factors such as financial means and educational background influence the transition.

The ASE-model of De Vries et al. (1998) can be used to explain the factors whether or not students decide to make the transition to university. However, the results imply an emphasis on attitude to determine the intention of the students. Overall, it seemed that most students believed that going to university is the most beneficial option for their future. Secondly, the extent to which social influences determine the intention to make the transition varies by the students. In addition, some students do not know what to expect from university. Therefore, it is difficult to determine to what extent students can estimate their ability to be successful at university (self-efficacy). At last, students put a great emphasis on external factors such as school type and financial difficulties.

The differences between the expectations and results might be explained by the Mauritian educational system. Especially students from state schools suggest that the focus is only on obtaining high results since the Mauritian education system is extremely competitive. These results are in line with previous research about the Mauritian educational system, explaining that the system is highly competitive (Bunwaree, 2001; Foondun, 2002; Van 't Rood et al., 2015), and only focused on getting high results (Bunwaree, 2001).

Several consequences arise due to this educational system. Students have a high intention to make the transition. However, they feel unprepared for the requested skills. According to most of the secondary school and university students, teachers spoon feed the students. Meaning that the teachers dictate the information necessary for the exams and students need to reproduce this, without further understanding of the topic. In the literature,

this is also known as rote learning (Biggs, 1991). Active learning occurs when students are involved in the learning process (Prince, 2004). In case active learning is used, a constructivist approach can be used. This approach means that the existing mental framework of the students are used to learn new things in interaction with their social environment (Van 't Rood et al., 2015). By doing so, the existing knowledge of the student is used and extended.

According to the university students, the Mauritian educational system seems to focus on teacher-centred education (TCE) instead of learner-centred education (LCE). The university students also criticised this. However, a study of existing literature on LCE that includes several African countries has shown that LCE should be a long-term goal instead of an abrupt paradigm shift in education. By doing so, LCE can be implemented correctly, and sensitive to the culture (Schweisfurth, 2011). However, the findings of this research suggest that changes should be made towards more LCE, starting with a focus on active learning in the classroom.

Active learning, instead of rote learning, has several benefits. Students who learn material actively have more motivation to learn and have a better conceptual understanding (Benware & Deci, 1984). Besides, according to the master's thesis of Dielwart and Ontsenk (2016) students grow to be autonomous, independent learners when they learn actively. As suggested in the theoretical framework, independent learning skills are important to be successful at university (e.g. Brinkworth et al., 2009; Hassel & Ridout, 2018). Besides, Mauritian students suggest that the development of these skills are what they are missing in secondary school. This is in line with the findings of Van 't Rood et al. (2015), which also suggest that there should be more focus on the independence of the student and entrepreneurial skills in the Mauritian educational system. Both literature and the findings, therefore, suggest that it would be beneficial for the transition when the educational landscape of Mauritius would transfer and educate their students to be active learners.

Additionally, active learning has also benefits for students that do not make the transition. Entrepreneurial skills, such as critical self-reflection, leadership and being able to take initiative (Van 't Rood et al., 2015) in combination for example ICT skills are also necessary for youth to adapt in the labour market (Voogt & Roblin, 2010).

Implications for professional practice

One of the issues that emerge from these finding is that there should be more preparation in secondary schools. Therefore, these findings support previous research that there should be more emphasis on the transition in a pre-entry phase (Lowe & Cook, 2003).

According to the findings, students are often uncertain of what is expected from them at university. Besides that, university students experience that they lack the necessary skills and attitudes requested at university. Therefore, the findings suggest that students should be more prepared in terms of expectation and required skills. This preparation should consist of a change in the educational system in Mauritius. That means that the focus should be less on competition and results and more on active participation and entrepreneurial skills. The students would benefit when they make the transition to university in Mauritius or abroad. Also, students that do not make this transition benefit when they go to the labour market.

Thereby, the findings suggest that there should be more focus on the image and quality of universities in Mauritius. Students prefer to study abroad since they found the quality of Mauritian universities not profound. The students suggest that the quality of lectures is insufficient and that lecturers lack in knowledge regarding research. According to the findings, Mauritian universities should be made more attractive and of higher quality. Perhaps it will increase the enrolment rate closer to the 68.000 students as described in the TESP (Ministry of Tertiary Education, Science, Research, & Technology, n.d.).

Strengths and limitations

It is questionable to what extent the results can be generalised to the Mauritian society. This has several reasons. First of all, participation was voluntary. Voluntary participation might result in a sample bias since it can be questioned if more engaged students participated. Besides that, the Mauritian society also has non-fee paying private schools. These schools are of the lowest quality in the Mauritian school system (Bunawee, 2001). However, due to lack of resources these schools were not included in the study. For an overall view of the Mauritian educational system, further research should include these non-fee paying private schools.

Another limitation is that the sample for participants at university was small. Due to unforeseen circumstances, such as a different academic calendar, it was difficult to get universities to participate in the study. However, the information gained out the focus group was in line with the results of the interviews with secondary school students.

Triangulation was obtained due to the combination of different settings and data collection methods. This showed the topic from different angles. Besides that, it also increased the validity of the research. At last, due to a strict protocol for the in-depth semi-structured interviews and the focus group the reliability was increased.

Recommendations for further research

Further research on the topic in Mauritius is recommended. First of all, further research should be done on the preparation in secondary schools regarding this transition. Several factors should be taken into account. To begin with, further research should focus on the current state of preparation at secondary school. Emphasis should be on how to implement LCE in the Mauritian education system. Further research should also include non-fee paying private schools, to get an overall image of the education landscape in Mauritius.

In addition, the quality and image of universities in Mauritius is a field that still needs exploration. In the current research, questions arise whether the students have a certain image of Mauritian universities or whether the quality is insufficient.

Conclusion

Mauritian students tend to go to university since they expect that a university degree is a necessity to get a decent career in the future. However, external factors, such as financial means, influence this transition. It is also recommended that students should be better prepared for this transition in terms of expectations, skills and attitude. Improvements can be made by focusing on active learning in the Mauritian educational landscape. Improvements are recommended, since tertiary education is beneficial for individuals and society.

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