

The Impact Of Transition From Primary And Secondary Education To Higher Education

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Abstract: Transition from one stage of education into another is among the most important and influential processes in the life of every pupil. Therefore, proper attention and care must be dedicated to such issue by all the relevant stakeholders, making sure pupils get the best knowledge that is consistent throughout all the different phases of education. As such, this paper will look into the impact this transition creates in pupils, by reviewing what different literature found on such issue say, analyzing it from the students' point of view, and finally, offering relevant recommendation based on the findings from the students' questionnaires. Of course this issue is quite complex in its nature, which in turn would mean that there is still the need for further and deeper studies to be made, in order to make sure that the transition from primary to secondary and then tertiary education, may be as smooth as possible for all the pupils. Making sure to do so, means that the students will feel equipped with the right tools of knowledge during all the phases of their education.

Index Terms: Educational Gap, Educational Outcomes and Transition Experience, Knowledge Acquisition, Smooth Transition within the System

1 INTRODUCTION

It is a well-known and important fact that systematic knowledge leads to a complete stage of our formal education. Everything of course has a start and that is a very crucial point in people's lives. As such, the role of primary knowledge acquisition in the very early stages of life takes a special focus of its own. If any child is given proper amount of attention and importance of transmitting the knowledge in the right way, at the right amount and most importantly, through the right educational tools and methods, then he or she is bound to continue on with the same rhythm of interest toward education. It is actually an undeniable fact that the transition from primary to secondary schools, including its equivalent everywhere else, has been portrayed both as "one of the most difficult in pupils' educational careers" (Zeedyk et al. 2003, 67) and more precisely and generally speaking within the lives of young people, a 'key rite of passage' (Pratt and George 2005, 16). The fact related to the challenges within pupils' education career reveals the view that this move from a smaller and more personal environment of the primary school into the much bigger, impersonal environment of the secondary school, in minimum includes certain problems and challenges of adjustment within the pupils. Whereas the later phases of education, in addition to the new educational demands and an exposure to many other older pupils, as well as much peer groups and pressures, represents a more important challenge identity related issues. The most crucial question, as Mackezie (2002) puts it, is how much and to what extent this transition really matters for all pupils, both regarding the formal schooling as well as their informal peer social systems (Measor and Woods 1984), and more specifically, how important this impact of their transition influences their experiences on future learning and their well-being in general. Even though and quite surprisingly we might say, despite the importance accredited to a 'smooth transition' of the educational phases, still this problem remains very controversial. In large that's because of the evidence base which presently speaking is so inconsistent and incomplete. The focus of the research and different studies made over the last two decades, has been solely on swapping back and forth between the experience of transitions among pupils, the extensively recognized post-transfer educational attainment and finally, between the curricula and pedagogic continuity. There is so little look in depth about the relevant links and much is supposed about the connections between these

issues, in particular between the transitional experience and educational outcomes, and so much less on pupils' well-being. That's why it is important to take into account all the relevant stakeholders' responsibilities and roles, regarding all these transition process issues, in order to get proper implementation of how the system must support the pupils. Such proper implementation of making pupils' transition smooth must be in line with all the necessary tools that serve the purpose. Such tools would include a good evaluation system for all the programs offered in different school stages, and how the stakeholders are achieving all the relevant goals of the expected curriculum. The most important part during all of this process is making sure that pupils' knowledge from one stage of school into another is properly and adequately fulfilled thoroughly, as they transit from one school stage to another. From our personal experience as English lecturers, ex-Head of Curriculum and Teaching Section of the Foundation Program, Higher Educational system and present deputy head of the Quality Department in Ibra College of Technology, as well as working for the Ministry of Education, we have noticed that there are many discrepancies, or better say lack of previous knowledge among entering students, as well as ways of how these students should acquire such knowledge. The latter facts mentioned, lead us to think that lower proficiency students, particularly in English language subject in such Higher Education Institutes, were not given proper attention and training as on how they could assimilate knowledge, starting from the very early stages of primary school, and then leading consequently and unavoidably, to further lack of knowledge as they go to secondary school. As a result, such students at the Foundation Level in the Higher Education, not only struggle a lot to survive into the English as a medium environment they encounter in this system, but also along the way during their studies, as they try to acquire the new knowledge in these institutions.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

There has been many literature reviews (McGee, Ward, Gibbons and Harlow, 2004) focusing on trying to bring into light what happens exactly regarding transition between the primary and secondary schools. Such studies emphasized certain issues, which were found in other previous studies involving the impact of transition of the children's academic performance as well as their adjustment to secondary schools, including any other impacts on different groups of pupils.

There were some exact themes which have been identified belonging to such impact, by Evangelou M., et al. (2008), and they would include the academic attainment, social adjustment, linkages between schools, organizational issues, pupil perceptions and socio-economic factors. We shall analyze them one by one in order to indicate the range of issues arising from such school stages transition. The first one involves academic attainment, whereby the two relevant issues regarding transition involve: 1 – after the transition to secondary school, the pupils have a tendency to suffer reductions in their academic attainment, and 2 - academic achievement in the first year of the secondary school appears to be related to pupils' reduction of interest in the relevant academic activities and an growth in the non-academic activities towards the middle years. The second factor involves the social adjustment, with its two pertaining issues: 1 - transition is stressful, which in turn means that it must have adequate information and social support activities to help pupils form friendship networks, which are so fundamental factors in coping with the present situation and 2– it must be taken into account that increased self-esteem may help increase pupils' academic motivation. The third factor influencing the transition regards the linkages between the schools, which would in turn refer to the fact that the: 1 - continuousness of the curriculum suffers on transitional phase, as statistics show that few secondary schools have continued linking arrangements, which focus on the learning progression of the individual pupils; 2- teaching expectations most often are different between the primary/intermediate and secondary schools, because the fact remains that pupils' previous experience or achievement is often disregarded by secondary schools. Another fourth factor that relates to the impact in academic attainment, which evolve round the organizational issues, by which we can include: 1 - the difficulties that some pupils have in moving from the primary to secondary school structure are found to be just temporary and 2 – actually prior to transition, it is necessary for the pupils to be held more responsible toward their learning, to be taught properly about the strategies for self-learning, and last, to be provided with a more challenging curriculum, which has set, clear goals for academic achievement. The fifth factor regards the pupils' perceptions which would include 1 - primary pupils view the transition phase quite positively and 2 – the fact that at-risk pupils or those who need special care require some kind of intervention prior to transition. Finally the last factor related to the impact concerns the socio-economic factors, which are seen 1 - as factors that may eventually lead to poor pupils' achievement, but also 2 – as the family support related directly to the pupils' achievement after transition, for parents' role and their influence is always accumulative. Current studies attempt to build on the previous findings such as the above, in trying to bring into full light all possible effective practices and factors that have an influence on transition, as well as to deeply explore the continuity and its relevant issues between the primary and secondary schools, moving on later to tertiary education. The potential importance of the primary–secondary transition is greatly increased because of the impact it may have on educational attainment. International data are consistent in revealing a 'dip' in attainment following transfer to secondary school, the significance of which is increased because it occurs at different ages in different educational systems, thereby making other explanations (e.g. pubertal onset) less likely (McGee et al. 2003). However, while this

suggests the importance of transitional experiences, and even who might be most affected, it does not demonstrate a causal link. In a series of studies, Galton et al. (Galton and Willcocks 1983; Galton, Gray, and Ruddock 1999, 2000; Galton, Morrison 2002; Galton et al. 2003) found the attainment 'dip' was less associated with post-transfer anxiety, than with a decrease in enjoyment of school and pupil motivation. These authors have argued that too much attention is given to the transition process itself as a factor in under-achievement, and too little to (dis)continuities in education. Therefore, primary educators need to devote as much positive energies and creativity into organizing their teaching and learning process, so that the child could play an active role in class by participating freely and happily. Astin (1984) explains that involvement of pupils/students is a rather simple process that refers to "... the amount of physical and psychological energy that the student devotes to the academic experience". As we can see, involvement requires two parts that co-work for the same result of knowledge acquisition – the physical and the psychological part. In the primary education especially, teacher focuses more on the physical, kinesthetic part of the learning process, in order to involve the child as well as work on the psychological part which will naturally come more gradually as years pass by. Then, it will be the secondary education that will tend to somehow balance the two mentioned parts, of course trying toward the end of such education, to focus more on the psychological part by allowing the pupils to think and express more. Students' development and deepening of their thinking process would be a sign of their readiness to enter and continue on with the higher education, which in turn will naturally require more of the student thinking abilities. Thus, we as can see from all so far mentioned facts, everything is so interconnected together that each part cannot function properly without getting full results from the previous part. When it comes to experiencing curriculum continuity, Evangelou et al (2008) mentions that children reported experiencing high curriculum continuity if they: had received a lot of help from their secondary school to settle in and found the secondary school work interesting. One of the main features affecting a successful transition included whether or not children had received a lot of help from their secondary school. The sort of help that secondary schools could provide to their new pupils included help with getting to know their way around the school, relaxing rules, procedures to help pupils adapt, visits to schools, induction days, and booklets, offering adequate information, encouragement, support and assistance with lessons and homework. The vast majority of children had been taught by their secondary schools how to use reference sources (90%), how to revise (87%), how to make notes (80%), and how to write an essay (77%). The majority of parents (80%) reported they had received enough feedback from the school about their child's progress and behavior. Other things that promoted a positive transition among children included: looking forward to going to secondary school; the friendliness of the older children at secondary school and those in their class; having moved to the same secondary school with most of their primary school friends; having older siblings, who could offer them advice and support; and finding their new school work interesting. Eighty four per cent of children had felt prepared for moving to secondary school, and after spending a term at their new school nearly three quarters of the children said they felt happy. However, there were children, even though in minority,

who did not feel prepared. Interestingly enough, Michaelowa (2006) puts like this: "Undoubtedly, the overall education system of a country, from early childhood education until upper secondary, influences the selection, the knowledge and the attitudes of individuals who effectively enter higher education... Generally, the selection of those entering university is conditional on successful upper secondary attainment, which in turn is conditional on successful lower secondary attainment and so forth. This implies that a country with low levels of secondary or even primary completion will have a considerably reduced pool of students available for higher education in the first place." What this author is mentioning is indeed the actual result, when it comes to selecting students with high GPA from primary into post-secondary schools and later into the higher education.

3 METHODOLOGIES AND INSTRUMENTS

A method approach of quantitative analysis will be used in order to analyze the students' perceptions questionnaires about the impact of the transition from Basic to Post-Basic Education. SPSS software will be used in order to interpret students' responses to the defined-response and open-ended questions. Most of the questionnaire items have been developed especially for this article, whereas some others were taken from some previous studies made and of course modified accordingly, in order to meet the aims of this article. Some of the studies consulted would include: Deckhinat (2008), Kim (2008) and Lee (2005) and Chia and Ellis (2003). The format of the questionnaire was arranged as such that it comprised a combination of defined-response statements and open-ended questions, which will help students to both reflect on their transition experiences as well as choose their answers from the five options in the Likert-scale statements. On the other hand, the closed-response questions specifically shall "provide more uniformity across questions in terms of the types and specificity of the data" that we as the writers are trying to elicit from the students. Finally, the open-ended questions will offer "flexibility" for the respondents to express different dimensions of the issue under discussion (Brown, 2000, pp. 36-37). As about the procedure of how the questionnaires will be delivered, the writers plan to administer themselves all of this process, in order to make sure to get students to answer properly all the questions, by giving their honest and deeply thought feedback. There will be 100 questionnaires delivered to students of different English language levels, within the Foundation Program, in Ibra College of Technology. They will answer 10 defined-response and 2 open-ended questions related to the process of transition of their Basic and Post-Basic Education, which they will have to answer in their best abilities, providing as much detail as they remember. The questionnaires will be in two languages, in order to avoid language problems and make sure to get the clear answers wished for. All their answers will then be analyzed using SPSS software to then look into detail at their perceptions, as what students think of the transition period between all of their educational phases with the Ministry of Education, as well as how their previous knowledge is helping them or not, at this initial phase of their tertiary education.

4 PROCEDURE OF THE RESEARCH PAPER

Researchers chose the students from different classes of the Foundation Program, at Ibra College of Technology who were

willing to take part in this endeavor. Though the researcher's target was 100 participants, and more than 100 questionnaires were ready to be distributed, only 89 were actually and fully completed. After the students completed all the tick type of questions, they finally wrote their comments on the last two open ended questions, in order to further look in depth the issue of transition from Basic to Post-Basic education and continuing on with their tertiary studies.

5 FINDINGS OF THE RESEARCH

After all the data was run through the SPSS Program, it resulted that the reliability was estimated at 0.7. While analyzing each question in the questionnaire the researchers, notice that regarding the first question on how important is the learning for students' lives, 88 students out of 89 in total, agreed with such statement and only 1 was uncertain. This result shows that students put much value to the learning process in their lives and therefore, seem quite motivated toward acquiring new knowledge. As about the second question regarding remembering previous past knowledge during their Basic and Post-Basic education, 43 students agreed to such statement, 17 students didn't agree and the remaining 29 students out of the total, were uncertain whether they remember much or not from their previous knowledge. At the same time, when students were asked to write more upon the extent of their previous knowledge in the Basic and Post-Basic Education and how it helped them to cope with the new environment in the higher education, most of the answers students gave was that they only remember little grammar, vocabulary, and alphabet, and the rest of them disagreed with the question. That in turn would mean that their previous knowledge was weak, since even though they seem positive, they are only able to mention certain areas but not main skills of the language, such as writing, reading, etc. On the third question of the questionnaire, regarding how comfortable students feel with the new knowledge they are getting at their tertiary education, 59 students agreed, 10 disagreed, and 20 students were uncertain as how they feel about it. The result of this question shows that the majority of the students feel at ease with the new knowledge they get and the methodologies used at this point. As about question four regarding the fact of whether or not students were given proper training on how to acquire knowledge during their Basic and Post-Basic Education years of study, 37 students agreed, 16 disagreed and 36 were uncertain about such fact. Since the number of those who agreed is almost the same with those who are uncertain, it shows that students seem confused when it comes to the fact of whether they got the proper training from the Basic and Post-Basic education years for acquiring new knowledge or not. On question five, students were asked if they are actually facing difficulties in the tertiary education, where English is the medium of instruction. Out of the total number of students, 22 agreed, 37 disagreed and 20 students were uncertain. The result for this question shows that the majority of students are facing difficulties in an English medium institution, and that their knowledge acquired up to this point is not to the expectations of the tertiary education level. In lieu to this question, on question six, students were asked if they feel that their previous English language knowledge is sufficient for them to function properly in the tertiary education. Out of the total, 11 students agreed with such statement, 48 disagreed and 30 seem to be confused on deciding about it. Still, it is obvious that the majority of the

students disagree with the fact that they can function properly in the tertiary level, and the reasons are in the same line of thought as with the previous question. As on question seven students were asked to compare the transition of Basic to Post-Basic with that to tertiary education. Out of the 89 students, 37 students agreed, 19 disagreed and 33 students couldn't decide whether that was true or not. On question eight, students were asked whether the curriculum of Basic and Post-Basic education properly developed their English language skills. For this question, 41 students agreed with such statement, whereas 20 students didn't and the 28 other ones seem confused of such fact. This actually shows that the majority of students were happy with the curriculum of their previous years, even though considering the fact that 20 did not agree and 28 were uncertain, it may also be an indication that it was not so easy for the students to decide upon the curriculum change, in preparing them properly for all relevant English language skills in the tertiary education. On the ninth question, students were asked about the fact whether their Basic and Post-Basic Education teachers devoted positive energies and creativity into organizing the teaching and learning process to transmit knowledge or not. For this question, 43 students agreed on such fact, 15 of them disagreed and 31 students were indecisive of whether that was true or not. That in turn shows that students were happy with the previous teaching techniques applied in Basic and Post-Basic education school years. Lastly, as for question ten, students were asked whether they felt there were big gaps of knowledge between Basic, Post-Basic and tertiary education. As such, 19 students agreed to such statement, 49 disagreed on that and the remaining 21 were unsure about such fact. According to their answers, it appears that students think that there were not as many gaps between the previous knowledge and the actual knowledge. Even though these were the answers that students provided for the 10 'tick' questions of the questionnaire, on the last open-ended question on how they feel about the transition of the learning process in Basic and Post-Basic Education and whether that was smooth - to what extent and why, their answers differed. What we easily notice is that the majority of the answers from students were that actually there was no smooth transition, and that the Basic and Post-Basic system is very different from that of the tertiary education. Very few students went on explaining a bit more in detail, by admitting that the planning process of the curriculum and teaching was very different; we thought we knew English but realize we didn't, in the tertiary education; the medium of instruction during Basic and Post-Basic was Arabic and now it's English, and that confuses us a lot; knowledge we get now and what we got in the past, is totally different, because in the tertiary education there is so much emphasis on English, etc. On the other hand, recently the Oman government agreed upon accepting students into Higher Education with lower GPA. That in turn means and it goes without saying, that there are a considerable number of low proficiency students who get into the system, and it gets obvious that they lack previous knowledge, which is so vital for them to properly function in Higher Education. But the fact that students with a low GPA or low proficiency are allowed to get into the system of Higher Education, is actually very good for the whole society in general, because no matter what happened up to that point, they can actually be taught professionally through the proper arrangements. What we mean is that this category of students, are to be treated less

academically and more profession oriented making use of suitable, practical teaching methods that will not only involve them more into the learning/teaching process, but will also increase their motivation about the final outcome of their studies. Curriculum obviously will play a very important point that is dependent on the overall newly adapted objectives and outcomes. If we are to keep these points in mind, then the transition of such students from secondary to higher education will serve the purpose, and fill in all the possible gaps there are up to this stage.

6 RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION

Observing students' answers carefully and thinking critically, the writers may obviously see that there are serious language problems to be considered within the transition from Basic to Post-Basic and then, in turn to the tertiary education. These kinds of problems deserve a serious attention on the part of curriculum writers, in order to make sure there is a smooth transition of knowledge between these three phases, and that students won't feel that much of gap between the systems. The gap becomes more serious when it comes to the means of instruction in these systems, which especially regarding English language classes, it must be only in English throughout all the students' educational years. On the teachers' side however, the teaching methodologies and techniques must match the students' age, and still not be so totally different when it comes to certain basic, common pedagogical framework. That in turn will make the students feel at ease and create a smooth transition from one stage of education to the other. At giving a final look at the impact that primary and secondary education have onto the higher education system, we may conclude that the issue under consideration, does not have an easy solution, but we have to keep in mind that every educational stage is so indispensably interconnected to each-other. From our own personal experiences of going through all the phases of such education, and especially getting involved as lecturers, ex-head of English Curriculum Section in the Higher Educational Institutions and working for the Ministry of Education in Oman, we surely place much emphasis to a smooth transition of going from one educational system to another. Thus and finally, it goes without saying that each phase of education, starting from early childhood onward is very crucial to be properly treated and given the right balance of attention, so that there won't be any future misplacement of its learners in the higher educational system.

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