

**African Journal of Development Studies (AJDS)**

Published consistently since 2012

ISSN 2634-3630 E-ISSN 2634-3649

Indexed by IBSS, EBSCO, ERIH PLUS, COPERNICUS, ProQuest,  
SABINET and J-Gate.

Volume 15, Number 4, December 2025

pp 213-229

**Rural High School Learners' Perceptions of  
Transitioning from High School to Higher Education  
Institutions (HEIs) in Mpumalanga, South Africa**

Doi: <https://doi.org/10.31920/2634-3649/2025/v15n4a10>

**Percyval Bayane**

*Department of Sociology  
College of Human Sciences  
University of South Africa,  
Pretoria, South Africa  
Email: bayanp@unisa.ac.za*

**Enid Manyaku Pitsoane**

*Directorate for Counselling  
and Career Development,  
University of South Africa,  
Pretoria, South Africa*

**Sheron Mathlatse Masekoameng**

*Institute for Social and Health Sciences (ISHS),  
University of South Africa,  
Pretoria, South Africa*

---

**Abstract**

This paper explores rural high school learners' perceptions of transitioning to higher education institutions (HEIs) in Mpumalanga, South Africa. Drawing on

data from focus group discussions and reflective essays conducted during a community engagement initiative, the study investigates high school learners' expectations, meanings, and concerns about transitioning into tertiary education. Guided by the transition theory, the findings reveal that high school learners are aware of the academic demands of HEIs and view higher education as a pathway to social mobility. However, they also expressed concerns about financial challenges, limited preparedness, and social adjustment. The study highlights the importance of academic support, career guidance, mentorship, and financial assistance in enabling better transitions. By centring rural high school learners' voices, the paper contributes to the literature on equitable access to higher education and the challenges rural learners face in navigating this critical shift.

**Keywords:** *High School Learners, Higher Education Transition, Academic Support, Financial Barriers, South Africa*

## 1. Introduction

The transition from high school to higher education marks a critical point in the educational and personal development of young people. This period is frequently marked by anticipation, uncertainty, and academic and socio-emotional adjustments. Learners must adapt to new environments that demand greater independence, self-regulation, and academic preparedness (Bayane et al., 2025; Lombard, 2020; Pennington et al., 2017). For many rural learners in South Africa, this transition is not only a change in educational setting, but a significant step towards economic and social advancement and with the hopes of supporting their families. However, the challenges faced by learners in under-resourced rural communities are intensified by structural inequalities, including poor schooling conditions, limited access to information, and financial constraints (Gamede & Ajani, 2020). These challenges directly affect learners' confidence, expectations, and preparedness for higher education. Understanding learners' perspectives is therefore crucial for designing appropriate support interventions and widening access to higher education.

While existing literature has explored the academic and psychological aspects of first-year university students (Coertjens et al., 2017; McMillan, 2013), fewer studies have examined the perspectives of high school learners before entry, especially those from rural South African communities. This paper seeks to address this problem and gap by investigating the meanings, expectations, and concerns attached to transitioning from high school to higher education institutions (HEIs). Accordingly, the study was guided by the following research question: How do rural high school learners in

Mpumalanga perceive and make sense of their transition to HEIs? The study draws on data collected through focus group discussions and reflective essays with learners at a rural high school in Mpumalanga, as part of a university-led community engagement initiative. Guided by Schlossberg's transition theory, the paper contributes to the literature by foregrounding the voices of rural learners and offering practical insights for policymakers and educators concerned with equitable access to HEIs. Research also highlights the persistence of socio-economic disparities limiting mobility within higher education (Maringe & Osman, 2016). Maringe and Osman (2016) critique South Africa's skills-driven reforms, arguing that despite expanded access, entrenched inequalities rooted in apartheid continue to hinder true educational transformation. In response, this paper aims to critically examine the subjective experiences and expectations of learners who stand at the threshold of this significant educational transition.

## **2. Literature Review**

Transitioning from high school to higher education institutions (HEIs) is a multidimensional process involving academic, emotional, and social adjustments. Coertjens et al. (2017) describe transition as a shift between periods of stability, where learners are expected to adapt to unfamiliar educational demands, living arrangements, and personal responsibilities. For many learners, particularly those from rural and disadvantaged communities, this transition is accompanied by anxiety, uncertainty, and financial strain (Lombard, 2020; Pennington et al., 2017). Rural students face barriers that hinder their ability to fully participate in higher education, including limited access to guidance and counselling, poor academic preparation, and systemic socio-economic inequalities (Chidakwa, 2025). These learners must not only manage the typical challenges of adjustment but also navigate an environment that is often alienating and linguistically unfamiliar (Kelly-Laubsher & Luckett, 2016).

The structural and pedagogical differences between high schools and HEIs can contribute to transitional difficulties. At university, students are expected to assume greater independence and academic responsibility. Assessment methods differ significantly, as do teaching styles and expectations regarding self-study (Awang & Ismail, 2010; Bangser, 2008). The lack of alignment between secondary and tertiary curricula has been identified as a major barrier to epistemological access (Kelly-Laubsher & Luckett, 2016). To bridge this gap, secondary schools need to offer more targeted preparation beyond academic content, including skills such as time management, academic writing, and critical thinking. Early interventions,

such as coaching and mentoring programmes, can improve learners' understanding of HEI expectations and reduce the cultural and academic disconnect that many students experience (Lombard, 2020; Gehreke et al., 2024).

Learners often enter HEIs with expectations that may not align with institutional realities. These expectations shape how learners perceive their academic journey, and misalignment can contribute to frustration, disengagement, or dropout (Coertjens et al., 2017; McMillan, 2013). For instance, in Zambia, first-year students expressed concerns about their expectations not matching the realities of higher education, particularly about academic workload and institutional support (Akakandelwa et al., 2015). In sub-Saharan Africa, access to HEIs remains uneven, and rural learners often view higher education as a way for upward social mobility (Mupemhi, 2013; Mocca et al., 2019). Studies show that South African learners tend to have idealised views of university life and expect high levels of academic support, approachable lecturers, and streamlined transitions into the labour market (Letseka, 2007; Pather & Dorasamy, 2018). Secondary school learners often hold strong expectations about higher education, which shape how they anticipate the transition and their likelihood of adjustment (Guzman et al., 2021). These expectations, though aspirational, are typically unmet due to funding shortages, overcrowded institutions, and poor student support infrastructure.

The legacy of apartheid continues to affect the educational outcomes of rural learners, particularly those attending historically underfunded schools (Navsaria et al., 2011). Rural schools often face teacher shortages, limited access to laboratory equipment and libraries, and poor exposure to university pathways (Jones et al., 2008; Rohleder et al., 2008). These deficits create academic and psychological barriers that undermine learners' confidence and readiness for higher education. Moreover, financial insecurity remains one of the most pressing barriers to higher education access. While bursary schemes such as NSFAS are available, delays in disbursement and inadequate support structures contribute to financial stress among students (Gamede & Ajani, 2020). Learners from low-income households feel compelled to provide for their families, which can further delay or derail their studies (Kahlenberg, 2001). As Letseka (2007) argues, a student's socio-economic background continues to play a decisive role in their access to and success in higher education. Addressing these inequalities requires a more integrated approach that includes better preparation in secondary schools, comprehensive financial aid systems, and sustained mentorship from early adolescence through tertiary education.

### **3. Theoretical Framework: Transition Theory**

This study is guided by Schlossberg's transition theory, which offers a useful framework for understanding how individuals experience and adapt to significant life changes. According to Schlossberg (2011), a transition refers to any event or non-event that results in a change in relationships, routines, roles, or assumptions. Importantly, the theory recognises that transitions are experienced differently depending on personal and contextual factors. The theory identifies four key dimensions referred to as the 4 S's that influence an individual's capacity to cope with transition: situation, self, support, and strategies (Killiam & Degges-White, 2017). These components interact to determine whether the transition is perceived as an opportunity for growth or a source of stress. Situation refers to how learners appraise their transition, including whether it is anticipated or abrupt, and what constraints (e.g., financial or geographic) they face. Self includes individual characteristics such as socioeconomic status, identity, and resilience. For many rural South African learners, poverty, language barriers, and first-generation status shape their self-perception and confidence. Support denotes the availability of interpersonal and institutional assistance, such as family, teachers, peer networks, or school-based career counselling. Strategies involve the coping mechanisms learners use, such as seeking help, setting goals, or problem-solving (Killiam & Degges-White, 2017; Schlossberg, 2011).

Schlossberg's (2011), framework assists this study in several ways. First, it provides a lens through which to analyse how learners make sense of the shift from high school to higher education, particularly in under-resourced rural contexts. The 4 S's enable a structured analysis of learners' subjective experiences, how they view their readiness, anticipate challenges, and mobilise available support. Secondly, the framework helps interpret learners' narratives in the findings by showing how structural barriers (e.g., lack of finances, weak academic preparation) intersect with personal aspirations and coping strategies. For example, learners' emphasis on the need for mentorship and financial aid corresponds to the support domain, while their fear of academic workload and social isolation reflects challenges in the situation and self domains. Finally, the theory is relevant for understanding not only individual resilience but also systemic inequalities, as it allows thinking about rural learners by focusing on the relational and contextual nature of transition. In this way, the study contributes to localising transition theory within the South African educational landscape, where historical and socio-economic factors shape learners' readiness for higher education.

## **4. Methodology**

### ***4.1 Research design***

This study adopted a qualitative research design situated within an interpretivist paradigm, which emphasises understanding participants' lived experiences and subjective meanings (Babbie, 2021; Creswell & Poth, 2016). The research formed part of the Tirisano Community Engagement Project, an initiative by the College of Human Sciences at the University of South Africa (UNISA), aimed at fostering dialogue between university and rural high school learners on educational aspirations and challenges. The project provided a platform to explore rural learners' perceptions of transitioning to higher education institutions (HEIs), using interactive and reflective methods suited to capturing nuanced perspectives.

### ***4.2 Research site and participants***

This study was conducted at a public high school located in Mpumalanga province, South Africa, as part of the Tirisano Community Engagement Project under the College of Human Sciences at the University of South Africa (UNISA). The high school serves a rural community characterised by high levels of poverty, limited educational resources, and poor access to post-school opportunities. The research site was selected due to its participation in the Mandela Day outreach programme organised by the project, which aimed to provide career guidance and information about higher education pathways. With the permission of the school principal, 20 learners (10 girls and 10 boys) from Grade 12 voluntarily participated in the study. These learners were considered particularly relevant to the study, as they were at the threshold of completing their secondary schooling and contemplating the next phase of their educational journeys. The participants were selected through a convenience sampling approach, based on their availability and willingness to engage in the discussions and reflective activities facilitated by university staff. Their imminent transition to higher education, coupled with their rural schooling context, provided rich and relevant perspectives for this inquiry.

### ***4.3 Data collection methods***

Multiple qualitative data collection were used to elicit learners' perceptions, namely focus group discussions (FGDs), questionnaires, and reflective essays. These data collection strategies were chosen for their suitability in

capturing learners' subjective understandings, emotional responses, and practical concerns regarding the transition to higher education. Two FGDs were held on 22 August 2023 during the Mandela Day outreach visit. UNISA facilitators, including academic staff, clinical psychologists, and student counsellors, engaged the learners in structured yet open-ended conversations about their aspirations, perceived readiness for higher education, career choices, and anticipated challenges. Facilitators were trained beforehand in social dialogue facilitation techniques and were encouraged to adopt a supportive, non-hierarchical approach to enable learners to speak freely. These discussions allowed for rich interaction, peer learning, and spontaneous expression.

In addition to the group discussions, learners were asked to complete questionnaires and write brief reflective essays. These written reflections were crucial in capturing individual perspectives, especially from learners who might have felt shy or hesitant to speak in a group setting. The essays revealed deeply personal insights into learners' hopes, fears, and the symbolic meaning they attach to higher education, such as being the first in their family to attend university, or their desire to change their family's circumstances. Facilitators also contributed their reflections after the engagement, documenting their impressions of the learners' responses and the overall atmosphere of the interaction. These reflections captured both the emotional tone and the socio-cultural dynamics of the session. These methods provided a triangulated and holistic understanding of learners' transitional perceptions.

#### ***4.4 Data analysis***

Data were analysed using reflexive thematic analysis, following the steps outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006). First, researchers familiarised themselves with the data by reading through learners' completed questionnaires, reflective essays, and facilitator notes multiple times. This immersion enabled the identification of meaningful patterns across responses. Initial coding was done using comments and notes in PDF documents, where similar phrases and recurring sentiments were highlighted. Codes were then clustered into broader categories that reflected thematic coherence. For example, statements about needing to "study hard," "work smart," and "get good marks" were grouped under the theme of academic preparedness, while concerns about "paying fees," "finding accommodation," and "delayed bursaries" formed part of the financial concern theme. Themes were refined and reviewed for internal consistency and relevance to the study's research question. Where overlapping themes

were found, they were collapsed into a single, more inclusive category. This layered and reflexive approach to data analysis allowed the researchers to move beyond surface-level responses and interpret the deeper meanings and structural constraints embedded in learners' narratives.

To ensure the reliability and validity of the analysis, we adopted several strategies consistent with qualitative research trustworthiness (Guba, 1981). Credibility was enhanced through triangulation of data sources, drawing from focus groups, reflective essays, questionnaires, and facilitator notes, which provided converging perspectives. Dependability was ensured by maintaining a clear audit trail of coding decisions and theme development, with researchers reviewing and refining categories collaboratively. Confirmability was promoted by researcher reflexivity, where facilitators documented impressions and positionality reflections to minimise personal bias (Slade et al., 2020). Transferability was addressed by providing detailed descriptions of the research context and participants, allowing readers to assess the applicability of the findings to similar rural settings. Together, these measures enhanced the trustworthiness of the data analysis.

#### ***4.5 Ethical considerations***

The research followed stringent ethical guidelines to ensure the safety, privacy, and dignity of all participants. Before data collection, permission was obtained from the school principal and the university's ethics committee. Learners were informed of the purpose and voluntary nature of the study, and both learners and facilitators signed informed consent forms. In recognition of the sensitivity of the school environment and the emotional nature of the discussions, no audio recordings were made. Instead, facilitators took handwritten notes during and after the FGDs. All identifying information was removed, and pseudonyms were used to ensure anonymity. Participants were assured that their responses would remain confidential and would only be used for research and developmental purposes. Counsellors were on site during the visit in case any participant felt emotionally distressed.

### **5. Findings: Transitioning From High School to Higher Education: Learners' Expectations, Meanings, and Concerns**

This section presents findings from focus group discussions, reflective essays, and questionnaires completed by high school learners in Mpumalanga regarding the transition from high school to tertiary education at an institution of higher learning. Schools have a crucial role in helping

learners identify potential career paths and areas of interest for further studies (Maree, 2019). The analysis is structured around three key themes that emerged from the data: learners' preparation and academic readiness, the personal and symbolic meanings attached to higher education, and their concerns about financial survival and social adjustment. These themes are interpreted using Schlossberg's transition theory and supported by relevant literature.

### ***5.1 Preparing for higher education institutions***

Learners demonstrated a strong awareness of the academic demands associated with accessing and succeeding in higher education institutions (HEIs). The majority of participants emphasised the importance of obtaining good grades in high school as a key condition for university entry. For example, one learner explained:

It means that we have to study hard but be smart so that we can apply with good results. (High School Learner 1)

Another learner echoed:

Going to a tertiary institution will mean that I need to work hard and get good marks. (High School Learner 2)

These narratives reflect how learners interpret the situation they are transitioning into as one demanding academic excellence, discipline, and self-regulation. Schlossberg (2011) notes that a person's ability to appraise a transition, whether as a challenge, threat, or opportunity, is critical to how they cope. In this case, learners considered the transition as a high-stakes opportunity that required clear strategies, including time management and goal setting.

However, preparing learners for higher education is not the sole responsibility of the learners; the schools and teachers are also responsible. Lombard (2020) mentioned that high schools should support learners to enhance their transition from high school to HEIs. Likewise, high school learners expressed their gratitude for the efforts made by their school in preparing them for higher education.

There are people coming here, like UNISA and TUT to talk to us and motivate us. (High School Learner 3)

People from different universities and colleges have been coming to give us all the information we need and by so doing that can help us to apply. (High School Learner 4)

There have been programmes whereby people from different learning institutions teach about applying for bursaries and tertiary (sic) and career guidance. (High School Learner 5)

The high school made an effort to prepare and support learners with the transitioning from high school to higher education institutions. As described by high school learners 3, 4 and 5, learners received support in the form of having people from different universities or colleges to share information regarding higher education institutions, application for admission as well as financial support available. During the school visit, learners received valuable insights from people from various institutions who shared practical examples of daily encounters related to their career choices. This made learners aware of what to expect in higher education institutions. According to Schlossberg's (2011) transition theory, support during the transition from high school to HEIs is significant as it contributes towards a smooth transitioning. Therefore, high school learners are provided with support to prepare for higher education institutions. They are guided on what is required to gain admission into universities or colleges. Moreover, schools and teachers assist students in their preparation by inviting people from higher education institutions to share their knowledge and provide information on career choices, the admission process, and financial aid opportunities (Maree, 2019; Lombard, 2020).

## ***5.2 Meaning and expectations attached to going to higher education institutions***

Many high school learners aspire to attend higher education institutions after completing their studies. According to Mocca et al., (2019), it is every individual's dream, irrespective of their social class, to relocate from their home to a place where higher education is accessible. Learners from High School A also aspire to attend higher education institutions, and this pursuit carries various meanings. For example, high school learner 6 expressed the following sentiment regarding attending a higher education institution:

It will be the best thing because I will be the first one in my family to go to tertiary, everything will be starting with me. (High school learner 6).

High school learners understand that going to higher education institutions is not only about them, but their families. In particular, high school learner 6 highlights that going to a tertiary institution would mean a lot for her and her family because she would be the first person in her family to do so. It is therefore clear that going to university or college is more than just transitioning from high school to higher education. Other high school learners echoed that going to higher education institutions would mean a lot because they would have a chance to be successful like other people. High school learner 8 said:

It would mean the world to me; I want to change my background and also my family situation. Therefore, going to varsity would mean that I will be able to change everything and achieve my goals. (High school learner 8).

These narratives show that the transition to university is infused with social and emotional significance, particularly for learners from marginalised rural communities. Maree (2019) and Mocca et al., (2019) argue that for many first-generation students, higher education represents a path to upward mobility and a break from generational poverty. From Schlossberg's (2011) perspective, such narratives speak to the self-domain, specifically how learners' identities, life experiences, and motivations shape their perception of the transition. The idea that learners feel responsible for uplifting their families suggests a deep emotional investment in succeeding, even under conditions of structural disadvantage.

Learners also understand that higher education institutions will afford them an opportunity to learn and be successful in life. As high school learners spoke about what going to a higher education institution would mean for them, they were sharing their expectations of universities/colleges. One of them said:

My expectation is that I want to learn more and be able to do things by myself and stand up for myself. (High school learner 9)

Yet another one explained that:

I have to depend on myself, be able to do things on my own, and make everyone around me proud, and mostly my family. (High school learner 10).

The responses above indicate that high school learners are aware of the changes that come with attending higher education institutions. They

mentioned that enrolling in universities or colleges would require them to be self-sufficient and independent. In this regard, transitioning to a new environment necessitates the development of new survival methods. High school learners' understanding of what going to university/college entails is further noted when learners spoke about the dynamics of good and bad friends, as well as the support needed to succeed in university. Learners mentioned that having bad friends would affect their studies and lives. High school learner 11 said:

Being surrounded by bad friends would result in not doing your schoolwork or attending classes. (High school learner 11)

Another one articulated that:

My expectation is having someone who can mentor me, where I will struggle and help me adjust to tertiary life. (High school learner 12)

Many of the high school learners understand the negative impact of having bad friends in higher education institutions. Schlossberg's (2011) transition theory also mentioned that strategies entail learners coming up with ways to cope with challenges that may come with transition. Some high school learners, therefore, plan and hope to have supportive friends or mentors to help them adjust to higher education life. They admit that they are not socially prepared for the transition from high school to university/college and require guidance and good friendships to survive and thrive in higher education institutions. High school learners also spoke about their expectations of going to higher education institutions and how they operate. One of them had this to say:

They have a lot of work, and I will be scared for the first time. (High school learner 13)

Yet another showed concern by saying:

It will be difficult to cope there because I will be scared for the first two days. (High school learner 14)

Learners highlight that higher education institutions come with a lot of work, as students register for several modules. High school learners, therefore, acknowledge how difficult it would be to cope, but with good friends, support, and mentorship, they will be able to survive and work hard.

Therefore, high school learners understand that they will need to take care of themselves and make good choices in order to be successful in their journey (Lombard, 2020; Maree, 2019).

### ***5.3 Learner's concerns about higher education institutions***

The previous sections demonstrate that high school learners have a clear understanding of what attending higher education institutions entails and what it will mean for them and their families. Despite their strong aspirations and sense of purpose, learners expressed widespread anxiety about the financial burdens of higher education. Participants identified tuition fees, accommodation, transport, and food as key concerns. Some learners shared:

We are coming from different families where others have money problems. As such, some of us might not have money for school fees, accommodation and so on. So, we have to apply and get bursaries. (High school learner 15)

I am worried about how I will pay for school fees, school stationery and finding accommodation. (High school learner 16)

High school learners were very concerned about the money required for higher education because most of them come from financially disadvantaged families. High school learners, therefore, mentioned that it is important to apply and get a bursary to pay for tuition, accommodation, and other things (Gamede & Ajani, 2020). Learners are aware of bursary schemes and intend to apply for funding from the National Student Financial Aid scheme (NSFAS) and others. However, high school learners were still concerned about financially surviving. In this regard, a high school learner 17 said:

NSFAS does not pay instantly, and our families will not be able to financially support us while waiting for bursaries to pay. (High school learner 17)

Despite the availability of bursary schemes, high school learners were still worried about their survival at higher education institutions because financial schemes sometimes take time to pay students. These comments illustrate how learners appraise the situation they are entering as economically precarious. The uncertainty surrounding funding undermines their sense of stability and future planning. As Jones et al. (2008) and Gamede and Ajani (2020) have argued, financial insecurity remains a primary barrier to

university access for students from disadvantaged communities in South Africa. From a transition theory perspective, limited access to reliable support mechanisms, especially financial support, can negatively affect learners' ability to manage the transition. Without stable support, even highly motivated students may struggle to remain enrolled or succeed academically. These concerns also point to broader structural inequalities within the education system, echoing Letseka's (2007) argument that socio-economic background is one of the most decisive factors in determining access to higher education and subsequent success.

## **6. Conclusion**

This study examined the perceptions of rural high school learners in Mpumalanga, South Africa, regarding their transition to higher education institutions (HEIs). The findings revealed that while learners are highly aspirational and aware of the academic demands of university life, they also face significant structural and emotional barriers to access and success. Guided by transition theory, the findings demonstrated how learners make sense of their impending transition across the domains of situation, self, support, and strategies. Learners expressed strong motivation and a sense of responsibility to uplift their families, yet financial insecurity, limited preparedness, and anxieties around social adjustment remain pressing challenges. The findings highlight the tension between resilience and structural inequality. On one hand, learners attach deep symbolic value to higher education, often framing it as a pathway out of poverty and a means of transforming family circumstances. This points to an opportunity: rural learners are highly motivated and willing to adopt strategies such as goal setting, mentorship, and peer support to succeed. On the other hand, their concerns about tuition fees, delayed bursary payments, and limited guidance illustrate how systemic barriers can undermine even the most determined learners. The results, therefore, suggest that the issue is not a lack of aspiration but rather the inadequacy of enabling structures to support learners through this transition.

The study also reveals opportunities for intervention. Learners' strong sense of purpose and appreciation for guidance programs suggest that early and consistent support can make a difference in shaping successful transitions. Schools play a critical role not only in academic preparation but also in providing structured career guidance, psychosocial support, and mentorship that address learners' emotional and social readiness. Higher education institutions, in turn, need to strengthen school–university partnerships, particularly in rural areas, by providing outreach, summer

bridge programmes, and simplified bursary application processes. Policymakers should consider mechanisms for improving the efficiency of financial aid disbursement, expanding rural career guidance initiatives, and investing in digital infrastructure to reduce rural–urban inequalities in access to information.

## References

- Akakandelwa, A., Changala, M., & Moonga, A. L. (2015). Attitudes, experiences and expectations of first-year undergraduate adult education students at the University of Zambia. *National Journal of Advanced Research Online*, 1(1), 13–19.
- Awang, H., & Ismail, N. A. (2010). Undergraduate education: A gap analysis of students' expectations and satisfaction. *Problems of Education in the 21st Century*, 21, 21–28.
- Babbie, E. (2021). *The practice of social research* (15th ed.). Cengage.
- Bayane, P., Smith, B., Pitsoane, E., & Nyamakazi, K. (2025). Higher Education, job or entrepreneurship? Rural high school learners' perceptions of post-matric options in Mpumalanga, South Africa. *African Journal of Career Development*, 7(1), a177. <https://doi.org/10.4102/ajcd.v7i1.177>
- Bangser, M. (2008). *Preparing high school students for successful transitions to postsecondary education and employment*. MDRC. [https://www.mdrc.org/sites/default/files/PreparingHSSStudentsforTransition\\_073108.pdf](https://www.mdrc.org/sites/default/files/PreparingHSSStudentsforTransition_073108.pdf)
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77–101.
- Chidakwa, N. (2025). Rural students' pathways to higher tertiary education in Zimbabwe: Overcoming barriers, promoting inclusion and success. *Interdisciplinary Journal of Rural and Community Studies*, 7(1), a02.
- Coertjens, L., Brahm, T., Trautwein, C., & Lindblom-Ylänne, S. (2017). Students' transition into higher education from an international perspective. *Higher Education*, 73(3), 357–369.
- Creswell, J. W., & Poth, C. N. (2016). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches* (4th ed.). SAGE.
- Gamede, B. T., & Ajani, O. A. (2020). Challenges of high school learners' transition into universities: A case of a South African rural university. *Gender & Behaviour*, 18(2), 15803–15812.

- Gehreke, L., Schilling, H., & Kauffeld, S. (2024). Effectiveness of peer mentoring in the study entry phase: A systematic review. *Review of Education*, 12(1), e3462. <https://doi.org/10.1002/rev3.3462>
- Guba, E.G. (1981). Criteria for assessing the trustworthiness of naturalistic inquiries. *Educational Communication and Technology*, 29(2):75–91.
- Guzman, P., Gomez, G. C., & Santelices, M. V. (2021). Secondary students' expectations on transition to higher education. *Educational Research*, 63(2), 164–179.
- Jones, B., Coetzee, G., Bailey, T., & Wickham, S. (2008). *Factors that facilitate success for disadvantaged higher education students: An investigation into approaches used by REAP, NSFAS, and selected higher education institutions*. Rural Education Access Programme.
- Kahlenberg, R. D. (2001). The significance of the socioeconomic makeup of schools. In R. D. Kahlenberg (Ed.), *All together now: Creating middle-class schools through public school choice* (1–62). Brookings Institution Press. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.7864/j.ctvb6v7j5.9>
- Kelly-Laubsher, R. F., & Lockett, K. (2016). Differences in curriculum structure between high school and university biology: The implications for epistemological access. *Journal of Biological Education*, 50(4), 425–441.
- Killam, W. K., & Degges-White, S. (2017). *College student development: Applying theory to practice on the diverse campus*. Springer.
- Letseka, M. (2007). Why students leave: The problem of high university drop-out rates. *Human Sciences Research Council Review*, 5(3), 8–9. <http://hdl.handle.net/20.500.11910/5859>
- Lombard, P. (2020). Factors that influence transition from high school to higher education: A case of the Junior Tukkies programme. *African Journal of Career Development*, 2(1), a5.
- Maree, K. (2019). *Shaping the story: A guide to facilitating narrative career counselling*. Brill.
- Maringe, F., & Osman, R. (2016). Transforming the post-school sector in South Africa: Limits of a skills-driven agenda. *South African Journal of Higher Education*, 30(5), 120–140.
- McMillan, W. (2013). Transition to University: the Role Played by Emotion. *European Journal of Dental Education*, 7(3), 169–176.
- Mocca, E., Rojon, C., & Hernandez, J. (2019). Great expectations? A systematic review of the relationship between the school-to-higher education transition and social mobility. *Sociological Spectrum*, 39(4), 264–280.
- Mupemhi, S. (2013). Factors Influencing Choice of a University by Students in Zimbabwe. *African Journal of Business Management*, 7(36), 3723–3729.

- Navsaria, I., Pascoe, M., & Kathard, H. (2011). "It's Not Just the Learner, It's the System! Teachers' Perspectives on Written Language Difficulties: Implications for Speech-language Therapy. *South African Journal of Communication Disorders*, 58(2), a31. <https://doi.org/10.4102/sajcd.v58i2.31>
- Pather, S., & Dorasamy, N. (2018). Students' Expectations and Experience alongside University Access and Success: A South African University Case Study. *Journal of Student Affairs in Africa*, 6(1), 49–64. <https://doi.org/10.24085/jsaa.v6i1.3064>
- Pennington, C. R., Bates, E. A., Kaye, L. K., & Bolam, L. T. (2017). Transitioning in higher education: an exploration of psychological and contextual factors affecting student satisfaction. *Journal of Further and Higher Education*, 42(5), 596–607. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0309877X.2017.1302563>
- Rohleder, P., Swartz, L., Carolissen, R., Bozalek, V., & Leibowitz, B. (2008). Communities isn't Just About Trees and Shops: Students from South African Universities Engage in Dialogue About 'Community' and 'Community Work'. *Journal of Community and Applied Social Psychology*, 18(3), 253–267.
- Schlossberg, N. K. (2011). The challenge of change: The transition model and its applications. *Journal of Employment Counseling*, 48(4), 159–162.
- Slade, D., Martin, A., & Watson, G. (2020). Practitioner auto-ethnography: Self-reflection for discovery and deeper understanding. *Curriculum Studies in Health and Physical Education*, 11(3), 252–264.

Reproduced with permission of copyright owner.  
Further reproduction prohibited without permission.