

# Students Views on Universal Access Transition and Completion of their Higher Education at Kwame Nkrumah University

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**Abstract.** This paper is a research carried out at Kwame Nkrumah University to establish the views of students on how they access and complete their higher education. The objectives of the study were to; determining how students access higher education, establishing the students' transition during the period of acquiring higher education and to examining students' completion of higher education. This study used a mixed approach to collect data. Questionnaires and interview schedules were used for collecting data. The population comprised of all the forth year students, without and with disabilities. The sample size was thirty. Data analysis was done using thematic and SPSS soft-ware version 22. The key findings were that, universal access was realized, during transition period some students faced challenges which made some to stop school and it was also discovered that majority of the students manage to complete higher education successfully while a small number failed to complete successfully.

**Key Words:** Students, Access, Transition, Completion, Higher Education, Disabled and Non-Disabled

## I. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

Education is a process of imparting knowledge into learners (Ndhlovu, 2012). Higher Education institutions have this noble duty of imparting knowledge into the students. This is done through teaching and learning, research and publication, giving of service to the institutions and community service. In order for students to acquire this education, the students have to access it. Universal access to higher education is the ability of all people that is both the disabled and non-disabled to have the equal opportunity of accessing it regardless of the social class, gender, ethnicity, background, physical or mental disabilities. There is also a great need to students who are enrolled to have a driving force which makes them benefit from education as it is being offered to them which helps them to keep on going or transit from one academic year to another. According to O'Donnell, Kean and Stevens (2016), education transition presents a challenge to researchers, policy makers and practitioners alike because of the variety of ways in which the term is used and understood. Colley (2007) argues that it is impossible to arrive at a single definition of transition that might gain consensus, yet lack of engagement with the definition means that conceptualizations of transition are not explicitly articulated. Ecclestone (2006) suggests that there are four ways in which transition is conceptualised. The first he terms 'institutional transition' and refers to (for example) moves from one

educational context to another, from one occupation to another, or from one structure or system to another. However, in this study, the term transition is conceptualized as the progression from secondary school level to tertiary education, and to industry.

Universal transition under higher education is highly supported through the promotion of quality education as a driving force which helps in creating smooth transition of students from one academic year to another and it increases the chances of succeeding. According to Grafter and Mauder (2012), there should be a focus on the provision of social resources, networking opportunities and support to establish new relationships with existing members of the community in order to facilitate transition. Students need to acquire knowledge, skills and values for progression. Therefore, students need to achieve the completion of full courses either for undergraduate or post graduate studies. Universal completion of higher education is the accomplishment of the course of study and promotes the notion of leaving no one behind. Therefore, one would argue that the success of transition could be measured or assessed through retention or dropout rates.

However, Jansen (2008) observes that there is considerable evidence that school preparation is inadequate in securing a successful transition from high school to higher education. Most students find the transition difficult, lacking the necessary skills and motivation to succeed in higher education. Furthermore, Jansen, observes that despite the high dropout rates during the first academic year and the dearth of helpful information provided to high school learners, many students are still able to make a successful transition from high school to higher education. It is from this background that this study was carried out at Kwame Nkrumah University to establish the views of students on how they access and complete their higher education.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

In Zambia, higher education institutions started as far as 1966 with the University of Zambia, followed by Copper-Belt University in 1986 and Mulungushi University in 2008, then later, three universities followed suit, these were Kwame Nkrumah University, Mukuba University and Chalimbana University though still at transformation stage currently.

There are more universities that have been opened. In these institutions there is need for promotion of universal access of education, universal transition or progression and completion of education.

Universal accesses is a creation of equal access or opportunity for all individuals by removing barriers and create inclusion which is guided by universal standards that are non-discriminatory and has greater impact on people's lives socially and economically because it is a source of empowerment. This is supported by Singh (2014) who pointed out that, universal access calls for greater emphasis upon the fulfillment of state obligations to ensure that the fundamental principle of equality of opportunity in education which is common to almost all international human rights treaties is given effect to. Singh added that, equality of opportunity in education is a fundamental principle to educational institutions and programs that have to be accessible to everyone, without discrimination, within the jurisdiction of the State. Singh further argued that, states must be reminded of their core obligation that of ensuring the right to education without discrimination or exclusion is fully respected and fulfilled and must abide by the fundamental principles of non-discrimination and equality of opportunity for all in education because it is a human right.

Universal access to education is the ability of all people to have equal opportunity in education regardless of their social class, gender, ethnicity, physical or mental disability with a view of granting the right to education. According to Singh (2014) universal access is guided by equitable approaches in favor of the marginalized, in particular the children from poor families, the disabled as well as those without disabilities

Despite universal state obligations to provide universal education and fair access to higher education through all appropriate means, education is not fully accessible for many people in the country and around the world. Developing countries like Zambia still face particularly acute challenges with regard to great social and economic inequalities.

Universal transition is having access to quality education for upward mobility (Reyes, 2010). In other words universal transition is the progressive access of education from secondary education, from the field of work, undergraduate to postgraduate in the higher education on the basis of capacity. According to Rado (2001) the main direction of universal transition can be characterized as a move from a "command driven" system to a "demand driven" system and the typical stages of the transformation process are the period of rectification measures, the period of the development of education sector strategies and the period of implementation and fine tuning.

For universal transition and access to education to be realized, there is need to encourage the use of variety of pedagogical approaches for dissemination of knowledge, skills and concepts across the diversity of social, cultural, economic, national and biological boundaries. Furthermore, there is need

to rethink about the methods of facilitating universal transition and access in classrooms in universities by providing variety of assessment methods of learning and retention. For example, the use of research papers. Portfolios, literature review, oral exam, assignment, tests. During the transition period modification of teaching methods should be encouraged because it promote inclusive learning.

Universal transition is for the idea that, during transition period quality education should be offered to students. This is because quality education result in the full development of human personality, promotion of respect for human right, understanding, tolerance and friendship among individuals, races, religious groups, cultures and nations (Reyes, 2010). Furthermore, universal transition addresses the problem of culture, language for instruction, academic rich curriculum, resources and socio-economic status. Universal transition according to Reyes, (2010) model students to the lives and realities of the communities in the country. It is also done to equip the human resource for socio- economic development (Aful-broni and Sekyi, 2014)

During the transition period at times the quality of support received by students is so bad that it is enough to discourage them from carrying on with the course entirely (Heussi, 2012). For example lack of support financial, from families, academic and community support. Tuition fees appear as the most obvious financial obstacle, and the accumulation of indirect costs such as those related to transportation, school materials.

While significant efforts have been undertaken to improve access to free primary schooling in Zambia, less efforts have been made in relation to higher levels of education. Students with limited resources thus have very limited prospects to progress from secondary education to higher education and complete their training. States have the responsibility to alleviate this financial burden and ensure access to higher education subject to availability, and equally accessible to all.

Universal completion is the realization of having all the disabled students and non-disabled who enrolled in higher institute of learning finishing their education programs successfully. Universal completion can only be realized through reduction of education cost and use of income generating projects which promote education access, retention and completion rate (Miano et al 2014). It is imperative that, their theoretical studies at university should prepare them for their professional experiences (practicums) in the work place for example they should be equipped with the skills of solving various problems such as the managing of unruly classrooms in the main stream society (Buchanan et al 2013).

Universal completion according to Singh (2014) addresses issues of access to education, quality of education, drop-out rates, and special measures to ensure inclusion of individuals and communities which face discrimination and overcoming inequalities and eliminating disparities closing up the attainment gap in education with emphasis being placed on

the inclusive dimensions of the right to education, which does not admit of any discrimination or exclusion. It also addresses aspects such as guaranteeing the right to education to marginalized and underprivileged groups, combating poverty, ensuring the right to education for all, removing gender-based imbalances in education, strengthening efforts to expand opportunities for (basic) education (Singh, 2014).

Education is considered as an expenditure which is an investment that yields returns reasonably quickly after individuals complete education and also later throughout their working lives it also facilitate the movement of labor from underutilized industries to high production industries (Britain and West 1992).

### III. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

This study was guided by the following objectives:

1. To determine on how students access higher education
2. To establish what drives students to move forward during their training under higher education.
3. To assess what helps students complete their full course in higher education.

#### Research Questions

This study answered the following questions

1. How do students access higher education?
2. What drives students to move forward during their training under higher education?
3. What helps students complete their full course in higher education?

#### Statement Of The Problem

In Zambia, higher education started as far back as 1966 with the University of Zambia. Since 1966 to date, higher education has realized a lot success in terms of students' access, transit and completion of higher education. However, the success realized in line with access, transition and completion of higher education from 1966 to date has not been reviewed and documented. This is the reason this study was instituted. This study therefore meant to answer the question – how do students access, transit and complete higher education in a Zambian context?

#### Significance of The Study

The study is significant in that its findings may bring to light on how students access, transit and completes academic courses of higher education. The study may further help the ministry of higher education realize their achievements in terms of students; access, transition and completion of higher education.

### IV. METHODOLOGY AND DESIGN

A mixed approach was used which involved both quantitative and qualitative methods. Convergent parallel research designs

was the best approach for this study because it required both quantitative and qualitative designs to address the problem statement. The study used a semi-structured interview schedule and questionnaires. Information from the responses of the sample of 30 students of Kwame Nkrumah University was analyzed using thematic analysis and SPSS soft-ware version 22.

### V. RESULTS

#### a. How Students accessed Higher Education

This study was limited to students' views, hence the interpretation was based on students' comments during the study and not from lecturers' point of view. The first objective was to determine how students accessed higher education at Kwame Nkrumah University. Table 1 shows the average responses from students concerning universal access to higher education.

Table 1

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
ACCESS	30	1	2	1.07	.254
INTERNET	30	1	2	1.90	.305
FRIENDS	30	1	2	1.27	.450
ADVERT	30	1	2	1.93	.254
MEDIA	30	1	2	1.90	.305
Valid N (listwise)	30				

The responses showed that students accessed the higher education through internet. Friends, advertisement and media. Figure 1 showed that the mean score in all categories were between 1.07 and 1.93. The lowest mean score was 1.07 and the highest was with use of an advert which was 1.93. It is worth noting that high scores were also under the use of internet and media 1.90.

#### One-Sample Statistics t-test

Table 2: One –Sample t-test for fourth year students at Kwame Nkrumah University

	Test Value = 0					
	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
					Lower	Upper
ACCESS	23.028	29	.000	1.067	.97	1.16
INTERNET	34.106	29	.000	1.900	1.79	2.01
FRIENDS	15.425	29	.000	1.267	1.10	1.43
ADVERT	41.738	29	.000	1.933	1.84	2.03
MEDIA	34.106	29	.000	1.900	1.79	2.01

Note: denotes significant value (<.05)

The one-sample statistics-t-test was run to compare the mean difference in the accessing of higher education. The statistics were significant in all situations, for instance the difference between the two mean was less than 0.05. Using of an advert to access higher education ( $t=41.738$ ;  $DF = 29$ ; sig. (2-tailed)  $=.000$   $a=0.05$  and how easily students accessed higher education ( $t=23.028$ ;  $DF = 2A9$ ; sig. (2-tailed)  $=.000$   $a=0.05$

*b. What drives Students during Training*

When establishing what drives students to move forward during their training under higher education, the responses are as shown in table 3.

Table 3: What drives them to move forward?

S/N	RESPONSE/S	FREQUENCE
1	Interaction with others	1
2	Quality skills being offered such as sign language and braille	1
3	Hard work through studying and personal effort and passing	1
4	Self-determination and conducive learning environment	1
5	Due to friendliness of lecturers	1
6	The help, support, encouragement and motivation received from friends	5

7	Encouragement, motivation and guidance from lecturers	7
8	Motivation and support from the family	5
9	Due to provision of quality education	1
10	Courage has helped me	1
11	Passion to know more	1
12	Self-motivated	2
13	The colorful graduation celebration at the institute	1

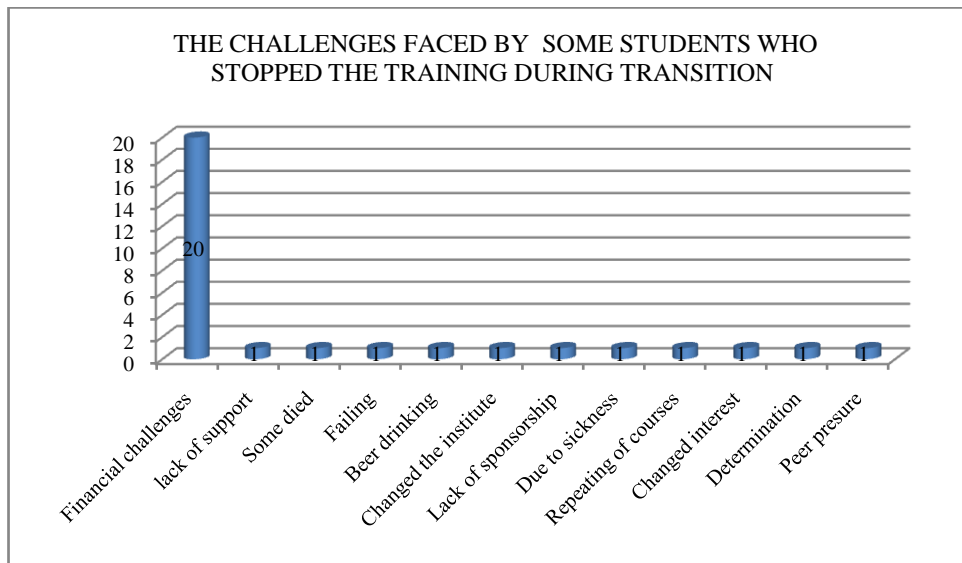
One of the student had the following to say:

*I had the problem of writing assignment when I just started my training but with the assistance which I received from the lecturers at personal level addressed my need and I no longer experience it and it has helped me move forward.*

Another participant had this to say:

*Group discussion helped me understand what I was required to do in my course which was difficult at first.*

*c. Challenges faced during transition which made some of them stop the training*



When students were asked to state what made other students to stop the training, the responses from most students were that it was due to financial challenges of paying tuition and accommodation fees. Then individual responses were that, it was due to lack of support from families due to socio-economic status, some of the students just died due to sickness and accidents, some students failed their courses even after repeating them due to lack of seriousness and intellectual capacity. Other students left the institutions due to heavy beer during which made them not attend lectures and finally lose interest in their training. Some students applied even to other institutions and when accepted, and because they were paid

for their tuition and accommodation fees in those institutions they left the institute. Some students left due to lack of sponsorship because the individuals and organizations who were sponsoring them died or stopped. Some students were perpetually sick, repeated most of their courses, some changed interest in the teaching career especially those who were forced to come for training by their parents, others were not self-determined and were socially challenged and most of the time they were found alone and were pressurized by their peers and lost interest in working hard in terms of studying as reasons for stopping their training.

What helped students nearly completing their full course in higher education was reported in the following manner. When the question was asked to students who continued with their training programs concerning what helped them to reach the final term of their training, one student had this to say:

*The institute has helped me acquire quality knowledge and skills needed in global economy.*

Another student had this to say:

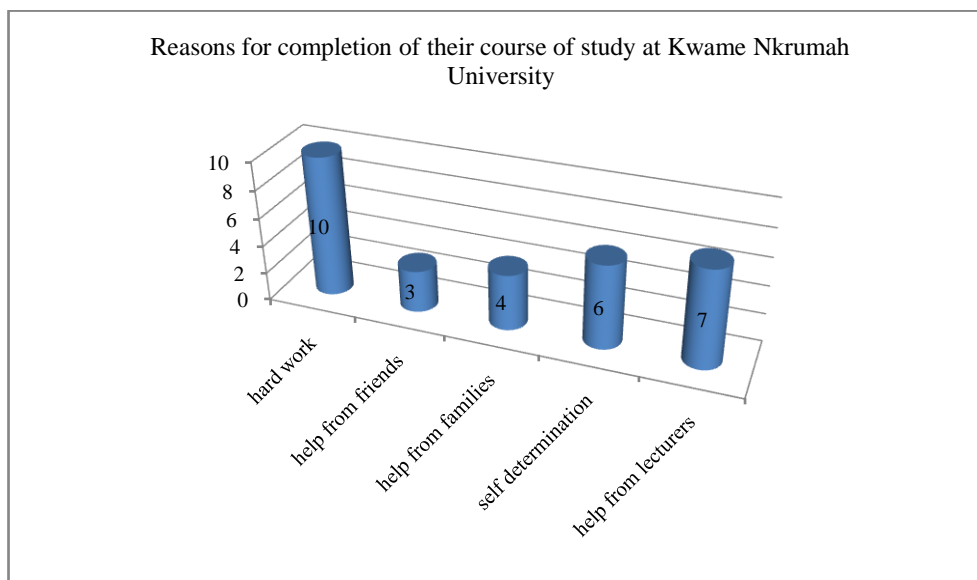
*Financial support and encouragement from my family has helped me complete my education.*

Another one had this to say

*The support from Donnas has made me reach my fourth year of study.*

The other responses which were revealed by individual students were that, they reach fourth year of study because they have been passing courses due to their love, interest, and desire for their courses and teaching career.

#### d. Responses for reaching final year of study



Most of the students narrated that, it was due to their hard work in terms of studying, help due to friendliness, guidance and commitment of lecturers. It was also out of self-determination, perseverance, commitment due their zeal, being focused, and having the courage to move on which made them reach their final year of study. Few individual echoed that, they received help from families because of being the only ones in the family studying at higher education institute and their wish of wanting to support the family. It was also due to help from friends through words of encouragement, group and pair work.

When students were asked if those who dropped out were of a large number, they stated that, those who dropped out were a few compared to those who had remained. Challenges faced by those who continued with the training up to fourth year were that, most students stated that, they had not moved forward as expected during their training because they had been struggling when moving forward in terms of paying tuition and accommodation fees because they were sponsoring themselves through the business venture of selling fish, rice and fresh maize. Another student mentioned that;

*I delayed in finishing my education because I became pregnant. Yet another respondent narrated that I delayed in finishing my program of study because I was repeating*

*the courses in which I failed to perform well or did not clear.*

Another participant revealed that;

*I am finishing this year but I was supposed to finish last year but I could not due to socio-economic status of my family.*

## VI. DISCUSSION

Basing on the empirical findings, it was discovered that students accessed higher education easily through their friends, families, internet, media and radio. It was further noted that, the students accessed higher education mostly through friends as compared to the use of internet, radio and media platforms. This finding was in line with what was stated by Singh (2014) who echoed that, equality of opportunity in education is a fundamental principle to educational institutions and programs that have to be accessible to everyone, without discrimination, within the jurisdiction of the state which is a commitment to inclusive education. The findings of this study has discovered that at Kwame Nkrumah University individuals are able to access higher education with less difficulties including the means used while accessing it.

This study revealed that, universal transition was realized by some students and the following helped or drives them to move forward from first year to fourth year. These are friends, quality skills and knowledge they were obtaining, passing of their courses, conducive learning environment, family support, self-motivation, group discussions and friendliness, guidance, motivation, encouragement from lecturers. The current study discovered more way apart from receiving quality education as reasons which made some students move forward. This finding is supported by Reyes (2010) who contends that universal transition is having access to quality education for upward mobility. The study also found that what drives students mostly was the lectures' support and then followed by families' help as compared to other drives. However, it was also observed that adapting to the new context of higher education, as a consequential transition was challenging.

However, the study further discovered that, other students did not manage to move forward due to the following; financial problems, failing of courses, lack of social skills, repeating of most of the courses, peer pressure, lack of help from their families due to poverty, self-determination and interest, some were sick others died. These findings were not in agreement with what was found by Afful-broni and Sekyi (2014) who revealed that, universal transition is done to equip the human resource for socio- economic development. This is because these students due the hardships they encountered they were not fully prepared for the noble course of overcoming poverty. In this case, the researchers' point of view was that since there were even some students failing to transit due to for example poverty, then accessing of higher education at Kwame Nkrumah University was universal or inclusive.

Through this study, it was unveiled that universal completion was realized though few students did not manage to finish their education due the problems mentioned earlier on and others did not manage to finish on time. The following were reported to have helped them to have reached their fourth year of study such hard work, help from lecturers, friends, families and self-determination. This is similar to what was found out that, universal completion according to Singh (2014) addresses issues of access to education, quality of education, drop-out rates and special measures to ensure inclusion of individuals and communities which face discrimination and overcoming inequalities and eliminating disparities closing up the attainment gap in education with emphasis being placed on the inclusive dimensions of the right to education, which does not admit of any discrimination or exclusion. Nevertheless, the current study has discovered that some few students dropped out and were excluded due to various challenges they were faced with. Due to the finding of this study, the researchers state that some few students still experiences exclusion in terms of completion rates. To address this problem, O'Donnell, Kean and Stevens (2016), transition support must be prolonged on this view, then, rather than short-term. Further, O'Donnell et al (2016) contend that the significant changes which individuals may be undergoing

in terms of identity reconstruction have the potential to be hugely powerful and transformative in positive ways. Rather than problematizing transition and attempting to address the 'problem' in a short period of time, practitioners should allow students to engage in their own processes of meaning making, and support them to negotiate challenges and opportunities along the way, rather than attempting a 'quick fix'. A focus on the process of transition and students' successful negotiation of personal change, rather than on the product of transition in the form of the acquisition of new skills or knowledge, is more likely to allow for transformative development towards a successful learner identity (O'Donnell et al. 2016).

## VII. CONCLUSION

Basing on the findings of this study, it was discovered that universal access was realized. However, universal transition and completion was not fully realized. This was because there were some students at Kwame Nkrumah University failing to transit due to for example poverty. Higher education was universal or inclusive to most of the individuals and to the few minorities in society who experiences exclusion especially for example those who stopped the program.

## VIII. RECOMMENDATION

Thus, the recommendation was that, there is need to pay attention even to those few individuals who dropped out in order to realize universal transition and completion of higher education. If no attention will be paid to consider those who drop out, the implication will be that, universal transition might not be realized.

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