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Transitioning from under-resourced schools to university: an application of Schlossberg's transition model to the South African context

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Abstract

The transition from school to university is a process commonly characterised by stress and significant challenge. Ensuring that this transition happens successfully is critical for academic success. The challenges associated with this transition are exacerbated for students from under-resourced environments. It is believed that failure to transition effectively contributes to the high university drop out-rates in South Africa currently. This study explores the individual experience of the under-resourced student's transition to university through the application of Schlossberg's (2011) transition theory. This was done with specific focus on Schlossberg's (2011) *4S System*, which focuses on the resources that students' utilise during a transition. These resources (4 S's) include *situation, self, support and strategies.* This model was specifically chosen, as Schlossberg (2011) emphasises the importance of understanding the individual in transition. Participants were obtained through a purposive sampling technique. Interviews were conducted with nine participants from under-resourced backgrounds, with an age range of 20 to 23, in different faculties at The University of the Witwatersrand. Thematic Content Analysis was utilised for data analysis. Findings demonstrated the centrality of students' access to various resources, in the context of their transition to university, as these impacted the transition process. Concurrent stressors including insufficient skill, language barriers and culture shock which were among the factors that compounded participants' *situation*. Further, participants' sense of *self* was often compromised due to feelings of inferiority and a sense of lack of control. However, some participants demonstrated high self-efficacy and motivation. In terms of *support,* participants expressed the importance of family, friends and academic staff, and the stress associated in the absence of these support structures. Lastly the exploration of *strategies* indicated how students used an array of strategies in order to manage the transition. Importantly, the results demonstrated that under-resourced students are not passive victims in the transition to university, but are active agents attempting to negotiate in the processes to which they are exposed. These themes and additional subthemes were explored and considered in the light of previous literature.