

Transition from High School to University in Lebanon

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Abstract: Education policy in the Middle East still raises major concerns. Looking at the socio-psychological background of learners gives a holistic view of students' transition from High School to University. A complex integration between individual characteristics and educational background affect transitions. The transfer involves adolescents in transition toward adulthood and a change from the state of dependent to independent learner. A study of high school Lebanese Curriculum reveals no clear career guidance, and having a rigid baccalaureate program make students ill prepared at university. Reviewing the literature that university proposes revealed that 75% of learners expected to be in charge of their own study habits. However, financial struggle, combine paid work and multifactorial phenomenon make difficulties in transition. A possible smooth transition to university is the International Baccalaureate to illuminate the blind spots of the Lebanese one. Analyzing the process of difficulties in High School and University Transitions may be a step toward a better clarification of the phenomenon and underpinning strategies to its reduction.

Key words: transition, High School, University, education, socio-psychology, dependent, learner, International Baccalaureate.

I. Transition from High School to University

Education policy in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) (Egypt, Jordan, Qatar and Lebanon) has gone immense changes in the last century. Yet the persistent issue of poor quality education continues to raise major concerns (Shuayb, 2019). Looking at the socio-psychological background of learners gives a holistic picture rather than a fragmented view of students' transition from High School to University (Tett et al. 2016).

The purpose of this study is to investigate the transition that High Schools offer to students, the transition to Universities, gaps, possible solutions and future perspectives.

Tett et al. (2016), Siri et al. (2016) framed the transition from high school to university by socio-cultural perspectives influenced by the learning environment and an array of personal factors, including students' prior learning experiences. A complex integration between individual characteristics in terms of parental, social, educational background and educational environment offered by universities affect transitions. Further, according to several authors self-efficacy is paramount because it favors a positive motivation, cognitive, affective, behavioral process and good adaptation to academic requirements in the new environment of the university. We could assume a global perspective and postulate that these variables will evolve together and that one factor will have an impact on the score of transition (Michael et al. 2017).

Higher educational experience represents a particular period in a student's educational career, as it places students in front of several changes, including, in particular, the organization of studying activities and the way of approaching them. The transfer involves adolescents in transition toward adulthood, struggling to learn a new studying system that requires more flexibility, self-regulation and self-organization (Siri et al. 2016). In fact, the phase of entrance into new university environment determines a change from the state of dependent to independent learner, from studying in a carefully monitored environment with a highly regulated timetable to a new phase of life where learners manage their time and make decisions in a more responsible adult way (Siri et al. 2016).

II. Lebanese High School Curriculum and its Limitations

With the above difficulties encountered, a study of the high school Lebanese curriculum is required to find commonalities that could make transitions to university easier. The few critical studies on education reform in MENA countries was attributed to political agenda-driven reforms without participation of experts and professionals (Shuayb, 2019). The main issue plaguing the Arab World is the use of knowledge produced by scholars and researchers is constrained with a small elite groups and rarely translated to policy or public awareness. Authors critique the existing disconnection between research and society (Shuayb, 2019). Moreover, policy makers in the Center for Education Research and Development (CERD), a public institution under the Lebanese Ministry of Education and Higher Education, when interviewed noted the absence of a specific policy for engaging in research when designing policies or reform (Shuayb, 2019).

Although the new education framework in Lebanon did away with Baccalaureate part I (National Educational Strategy in Lebanon 2006) which is considered a major obstacle in the face of students, Baccalaureate II is a must for Lebanese students to have an end of studies degree and enter university. The curriculum of Baccalaureate II is a continuation of Baccalaureate I, and if Baccalaureate I is a major obstacle to students, what does one assume the curriculum of Baccalaureate II to be? (See Table 1).

High School Curriculum	Bac. I	Bac. II (Humanities)	(Sciences)
Sciences/periods/year	240	330	480
	(Physics & Chemistry)	(Physics & Chemistry)	(Physics, Chemistry & Life Science)

Table 1: according to CRDP, Lebanese Ministry of Education.

The major aim of the latter is to succeed in the government exams i.e. baccalaureate and get the high school diploma. In the discussion and results of a study, Shuayb (2019) revealed that in the reforms of 2010 the relationship between policy makers and research institutes seemed reluctant in cooperation and developing policies based on empirical research, and that was not always on the mind of policy makers in Lebanon. Further, according to an informant of the Lebanese baccalaureate program in a well-known high school, the Ministry of Education launched a reform in 2020, but it will not be in scholastic fields before 2023. And yet, Lebanese students have to wait for a more appropriate curriculum that could help them in making a smooth transition from school to university among other problems awaiting.

In the overwhelming secondary High School program Ghiey, adjoint vice-president at the Lebanese American University (LAU), pinpointed that students do not have time to think of what to study at the university, to discover possible subjects available or know what is happening outside school (L'OLJ, 22/2/20). Liberating learners in the secondary High School from the Lebanese Baccalaureate gives learners the possibility of choosing a research project in the field they like and give them the opportunity to think and test through research the field of their choice in their career (Ghiey, 2020).

III. Career Guidance at School: a transition

Career guidance came into the spotlight in 2002 national education strategy, but it came to little practice: indeed a World Bank technical vocational guidance was cancelled 2 years later (Vlaadingerbroek et al. 2017). As one informant stated, "There is nothing called career guidance in Lebanon. No law, no decree, no department, no practice... It is just a theory which has nothing to do in practice" p.34 (Vlaadingerbroek et al. 20017). In the private school sector, a small number of schools have well-established career guidance offices and others refer to private organization such as Waznat Group (a major career guidance sector). Some schools provide career guidance by means of an annual career fair. Further, Ghiey (2020) stated that presentation given

by some representatives of universities in schools was not helpful. Some schools also do not allow university representatives, but reduce interaction with students to answer some question of interested ones. Also, no one takes time to discuss, with students, different disciplines, subject matters of the formations, career perspectives and salaries.

Having a rigid baccalaureate program in High School and no clear career guidance, what are students' expectations in entering university? The most significant difference between what some students think university is like or what they expect from university relates to their preparedness academically i.e. their expectations of potential academic difficulties. Others, reported that students expect to struggle with the demands of learning at university (Hassel et al, 2018). In fact, transition from school to university can cause concern for many students. They often arrive ill prepared for studying at university, where teaching regularly takes place in large class sizes, where students are taught by staff who are involved in a variety of other roles. They often view the university as a continuation of secondary school. Others arrive at university and realize that what worked well in school does not produce the expected results anymore and it becomes necessary to find new tools (Hassel et al, 2018).

IV. Career Guidance at University: a transition

Viewing the complexities and the multifactorial variables that students face in their transition from High School to University, it is requested to review the literature that university proposes to smooth transition. In the study undertaken by Tett et al. (2016), students revealed at the beginning of the first year, the loss of a sense of belonging. At the end of the first semester, the majority of the students felt uncertain about what was expected of them, the problem of anticipating the standard of work required and the support that would be available (Tett et al, 2016). By the end of their first year, the majority of learners had learned to fit in the role of peers, others reported to speak to students rather than academic staff about their difficulties, the importance of managing academically, the availability from academic staff and how to access it and the need of some students to get the emotional and practical support from their family and friends (Tett et al, 2016).

On the other hand, a study undertaken by Hassel et al. (2018) revealed that over 75% of the learners expected to be in charge of their own study habits. Less than 50% of students expected that teaching would be different at university than at secondary school, and over 40% anticipated emotional and financial struggles. Although the majority of learners expected to be in charge of their studies, sociocultural perspectives and an array of personal factors, including students' prior learning experiences affect their university performance and expectations. The researcher herself as a previous lecturer at the American University of Beirut (AUB) said to the father of a student who was questioning some facts, *the university is a jungle*.

As students often experience financial difficulties during their studies, they often expect to combine paid work along their studies (Hassel et al, 2018). Financial struggle is worse at present in Lebanon due to the actual economic, political problems and Covid 19 virus, in spite of the financial aid that the university provides. Further, it is not to be forgotten that culture and traditions play also their role in career guidance. Some students are influenced by their families in their choice and given advice even impose subjects that allow them to reach good job possibilities or prestige. Sometime, tradition requires the eldest in the family to choose the field of medicine or engineering regardless of his interest or the need of the country for such professions.

In sum, understanding in depth multifactorial phenomenon could impact on a smooth transition from secondary High School to University, and what also can smooth the transition at the university is staff-student interaction and the availability of the staff (Hassel et al, 2018). A need for better preparation aided by appropriate communication between teachers and students and between Secondary education institutions is needed. Universities too need to offer appropriate academic attitudinal and social preparation courses for incoming students. In addition, there should be an academic preparation to peer-mentoring and staff-student interaction opportunities (Hassel et al, 2018).

V. Postulate Further Smooth Transition

A further possible smooth transition to the university world is the International Baccalaureate (IB), to illuminate the blind spots of the Lebanese one. The curriculum program of IB middle years program (MYP), which corresponds to secondary High School, has the option, within certain limits, to take 6 out of 8 subject

groups to provide greater flexibility in meeting local requirements and individual student learning needs. (See Table 2)

MYP program in IB curriculum

- Language acquisition (depends on the nationality of students)
- Language and literature
- Individuals and societies
- Sciences
- Mathematics
- Arts
- Physical and health education
- Design
- + Long-term project

Table 2. According to IB School, Dubai
50 hours of teaching for each subject groups/year.

VI. Sample of youth long-term project in MYP

Students in MYP engage in a long-term project where they decide what they want to learn about, identify what they already know, and discover what they will need to know for completing it. The aim is to help students develop their personal understanding, their emerging sense of self and responsibility in their community. It also deals with the notion of cultural differences to create opportunity to learn and grow together, while intercultural understanding reinforces and infers a difference difficult to change (Kindson et al, 2019).

The following is an example of a young Lebanese student in MYP IB, Dubai. In her long-term project, Nour chose to interview “successful and inspiring women”. With the research she carried, one sees the reality of the issue. She had to look and find *successful and inspiring women*, request an interview, prepare a contract for the interviewee and one for herself to insure that she will abide by the law of respecting the right of the interviewee. (See Table 3) The proposal of her project needed to be researched on individual bases, and it needed the approval of the consulted teachers, teaching different subjects. Then the response of the questions asked was developed in paragraphs and presented in different drafts to the ‘successful and inspiring woman’ to be approved (See Table 4). The project was evaluated as a whole when presented orally to students, friends and parents. The project started in grade 9 MYP and presented in grade 10 MYP. Presenting a project orally is a stressful experience to some students at the university level, according to the researcher. By introducing this experience at a younger age, as it is done in MYP, would facilitate oral communication at university level. Oral presentation is also designed to expand basic speaking skills in interpersonal, business and public contexts (Chaffe, 1992). When Nour was asked later, by the researcher, what she is planning to study at the university. The answer was Law.

CONTRACT FOR PARTICIPATION IN “INSPIRING BLOG” PERSONAL PROJECT.

Part 1 of the contract for Loulou Al Akl to sign:

I, agree to help with the realization of Nour Eid’s personal project by being one of the successful role models that she interviews. By signing this contract, I agree to take part in this project while confirming that I am aware of and agree with the following circumstances:

This project is school related, and the interviewee agrees to take part with no compensation expected.

This student project is not guaranteed to succeed nor guaranteed to occur exactly as planned.

This project will take a long period of time, so the subsequent of the interview will not be seen instantly.

The conducted interview will be recorded, for reasons of proof and reference.

If the project succeeds, a picture of the interviewee will be shared online, being accessible by anyone.

If the project succeeds, the interviewee's information will be posted on a blog accessible by anyone.

Signature:

Loulou AL AKL Khoury

Date: January 3, 2020

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Part 2 of the contract for Nour Eid to sign:

I, agree to interview Loulou Al Akl as one of my successful role models, for the single purpose of a school project. When signing this contract, I agree to protect the rights and respect the wishes of the interviewee, while confirming that I am aware of and agree with the following circumstances:

The recording of the interview will not be shared with anyone unless the interviewee wishes so.

The only information that will be shared on the blog, is that received from the interview.

The final written biography will not be posted unless approved by the interviewee.

The interviewee will be updated with the progress of the work, and the success of her story.

In case any changes are made in the project, the interviewee's permission will be taken before.

If at any time the interviewee wishes for the post to be taken down, it will immediately be deleted.

Signature: Nour Eid

Date: January 3, 2020

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Table 3: Contract sent by the student to the interviewee to sign, and the student of the project to sign.
(Tables 2 & 3 were presented as written by MYP student)

Interview question:

- Background (date of birth, nationality, family, where you lived).
- What was your childhood life like? (dreams, struggles, historical background, family)
- Can you tell me a bit about your career life, and the evolution of it? (previous jobs, evolution of your position)
- What made you want to get involved in literature as a career?
- As a retired woman describe what a typical year would be for you? (yearly trips, volunteer works, meeting new people, hikes)
- At this age most women spend all their time at home or even in retirement homes, how come you're so active and motivated?
- What are your goals in life and what do you strive by that keeps you going?
- Can you talk about an interesting experience you've had that changed your perspective of life?
- What are some valuable lessons you learnt during your life?
- What is your opinion on woman empowerment?
- What advice would you give to young women who want to succeed and live a happy life?

Table 4: Interview questions.

With the choice of Nour's subject, one perceives the interest of the learner in an actual societal issue, *successful women*, and one realizes that the student is getting out of her cocoon and projecting her idea into the actual

world and its complexities. It also teaches the young adolescent responsibility, independence and determines a change from the state of dependent to independent learner, although the learner is still in MYP. These qualifications are a necessary bridge to traverse and reach university (See Table 5).

Prashanti Shekhar's biography: **2nd draft:**

Although Prashanti Shekhar grew up in Kuwait: a very developed and modern country, as a young girl she always enjoyed being surrounded by animals.

Vegetarian aiming to be vegan, Prashanti always believed and still believes that animals have the right to be respected and protected and should not be exploited. For that reason, after having worked in the corporate world for 15 years, Prashanti decided to leave the stable job she had, to follow her passion and start her own business in plant-based gelatos.

With the aim of providing tasty yet healthy food, Prashanti began to experiment with unique flavors and natural ingredients, and after over a year of solidifying the idea and perfecting the product, her unique and creative business finally opened its doors to the public.

Known as "Artiserie", the business has these 3 simple objectives: delicious, nutritious, and conscious. Prashanti displays delicacy through the unique gelato flavors she offers, nutrition through the natural ingredients she uses, and consciousness through sustainable and environmental friendly packaging.

Although as expected, issues always occur behind the scenes of a successful business, and Prashanti's corporation, was no exception. In fact, Prashanti now working individually, was faced with the struggle of having to take unpredictable risks, as well as having to deal with high costs and struggles with procurement of key ingredients.

But what helped the entrepreneur pull through and keep going during times like these, was the support and help she received from her family, friends and other people in the plant-based scene in Dubai.

So now, to whoever wants to succeed in the workplace, Prashanti says: understand your passion and be true to it, as it can ensure you a long-time and stress-free career; and never forget to work hard, as your hard work will be reflected in the outcome.

Table 5: Response to an interview chosen by Nour for this paper.

Such a project makes learners perceive their major, its difficulties and perhaps think of other options once they are confronted with a real situation at the university. At least, they have been given the possibility of getting on the right track and not losing a year testing a chosen major as also mentioned by Ghiey (2020).

The same procedure took place with her twin sister. Sara discovered herself to like drawing, particularly *mandala drawing* that she practiced on birthday cards a year ago. She presented her proposal after researching her topic to her supervisor and then decided to present mandala drawing symbolizing the months of the year. Then the idea of using the monthly symbols in a calendar emerged. Arts and Design are subjects comprised in MYP curriculum, hence the realization of a calendar. As social service is part of the curriculum and part of their common humanity, the calendar is planned to be printed and sold to friends and relatives and the money collected will be presented to a social organization. Creativity and meta-cognition are skills bundled with critical thinking and underpin the curriculum as an inter-disciplinary thinking capacity (Cole et al, 2015). Again, when Sara was asked by the researcher what major she is planning to study at the university, she said, "Graphic Design, but I am not sure."

VII. Long-term project in IB Diploma Program (DP)

Again in (DP), which corresponds to High School baccalaureate i.e. *Terminal*, the curriculum comprised an extended essay, which is an independent, self-directed piece of research, finishing with a 4000-word paper. This piece of research is articulated as pre-given university level as the researcher has experienced in her teaching at AUB and (LAU). A long-term project in DP inclusive of critical thinking skill provides an optional preparation in the academic skills needed for university (Cole et al, 2015).

VIII. Objectives of MYP and DP Programs

Such projects in MYP and DP of the International Baccalaureate (IB), which is flexible to certain limits, give the learner a wider scope of knowledge using global context connected to their lives and their experience of the world. It also provides them with an easier faculty of adaptation to the world of university. The curricula provide students with a transition from controlled teacher-driven learning environment to university where students are responsible for their own learning which facilitates transition, in spite of the multifactorial social and academic complexities. It is reported that students who were more certain about their career goals were more likely to successfully transition to university than students who studied without clear career trajectories (Hassel et al, 2018).

Yet IB program has its limitations. Teachers need training and paper filling rules and regulations are seen as complex by administrations. 19 Anglophone private schools, approximately, and 2 or 3 Francophone in Lebanon provide students with the option of pursuing IB. Further, sociology theory argues that man is resistant to change. So parents, in general, resist the change and, perhaps, administration too. Yet findings support the hypothesis that families who choose DP already possess higher socioeconomic capacity. In fact, the portfolio of education programs offered by IB has a well established and influential place within the global education landscape (Kindson et al, 2019).

IX. Conclusion

Analyzing the process of difficulties in High School and University transitions may be a step toward a better clarification of the phenomenon and consequently underpinning strategies effective to its reduction. It emerges as a bridge in which institutions, families, students and political authorities may need to be involved (Siri et al, 2016). It also takes social economic status (SES) into account in a heterogeneous society, and students coming from a poor parental capital will have weaker transition to Higher Education. The insufficient basic qualification could also be resolved by strengthening the cooperation between High School/University transition in building activities allowing students to be aware of different educational experiences and provide programs to prepare students for the school/university transition. Further, students should have a say in how they are taught and the possibility concerning their education (Bahous and Nabhani, 2018).

Yet, university students, in spite of the multifactorial variables facing them, need to be aware to accept responsibility for their academic success and monitor their progress toward completing their degree (Hassel et al, 2018).

Higher education is an important and life-changing time for most students. Students' parents invest not only financially but also emotionally as well as time and effort. In fact, education is not limited to their success at the university but a 'life-long learning' and therefore, schools and university systems must train young people in order to achieve a functional integration into the working world (Hassel et al, 2018).

X. Future Perspectives

It could be argued that career guidance is realistically limited to advising students about clusters of career and by scholastic achievement more than by choice. A transition proposal more appropriate is to consider creating a 'technological' track at upper secondary level which involves students dually enrolled in mainstream secondary schools for academic subjects and attending technical institutes for occupationally specific education and training, a model to be found in the US and Australia. This would go a long way towards opening career oriented fields for many Lebanese students (Vlaadingerbroek et al, 2016). Although

technological track is poorly looked upon in Lebanon, by involving this track at college level, students will tend to copy the behavior of the community college student and rise to that level (Chaffee, 1992). Perhaps, this future perspective would overcome the traditional and prestigious view of following one's father career, regardless of the learner's interest and the actual needs of the country.

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It saddens and impresses me simultaneously to realize the capacities of Lebanese students abroad and their amputation in our country.

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