# EXPLORING THE EXPERIENCES OF FEMALE STUDENTS' EDUCATIONAL TRANSITION FROM SECONDARY TO TERTIARY EDUCATION. A STUDY IN A UNIVERSITY IN PAPUA NEW GUINEA.

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# Abstract

Educational transitions take place when children move from home to start early childhood education and from primary school to secondary school then to universities and other tertiary institutions. Internationally, women are transitioning into tertiary education, achieving higher qualifications and securing jobs in areas that were once male dominated. Women in Papua New Guinea (PNG) are also entering tertiary education within PNG and abroad despite facing the barriers imposed by a male-dominated society, socio-cultural and socio-economic constraints and other setbacks which challenge their sense of self as women from PNG. The National Gender Equity Policy (2003) clearly advocates for fair and equal educational opportunities to be given to the female gender in PNG. However, the challenges and experiences of educational transition to university for female students from both urban and rural areas in PNG have not been researched to date.

The main aim of the study was to explore and document educational transition experiences for female students from secondary to tertiary education in PNG. The study examined the students' choices, challenges and sources of support. It also considered factors they perceived as possibly contributing to success and failure with university courses.

A qualitative approach was used to gather data from twelve young women, six from urban settings and six from rural settings, in a university in PNG. Semi-structured and focus group interviews were used, with a thematic approach for data analysis to provide a comprehensive knowledge of their experiences of educational transition.

The key findings showed that the participants made their own choices about choosing university study. Parents, teachers and other people inspired and acted as role models for the young women and initiated their interests in further education. It was evident that the socio-cultural context of PNG had a considerate impact on the choice of the young women. Both positive and negative stories were presented to the young women; however, they resisted the negative comments and pursued

their education. Some men acted as role models and used their power within a patriarchal society to disrupt existing patterns to support women in education. Wider family involvement is a feature of PNG life and should be considered as having an important role in supporting transition. Upon entering the new micro-system of the university the young women encountered academic, social and welfare challenges which had an impact on their sense of self. They displayed different characteristics, including unconfidence, nervousness and despondency. However, the university provided a positive learning environment with its resources that encouraged and motivated learning to take place over time. The young women sought help and assistance from their families, lecturers, friends and others around them to sustain their transition to university. Having access to friends' resources is an important determinant when negotiating transitions. Overall, the young women's positive characteristics of interactions and interconnected relations with others in the new micro-system of the university played an important role in their transition.

This study suggests that to enable more women to make a successful transition to university parental support, role modelling and cultural change are essential. This process will require the support and cooperation of all stakeholders.

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# Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to the following people my immediate and extended family members who have supported me.

To my father, Petrus Yawi. Thank you, for giving me the opportunity to have an education and for encouraging me to come this far in life and education. I owe you this thesis for your trust and belief in me, your daughter.

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# Chapter 1: Introduction

This first chapter describes key features of my thesis and provides an overview of the full thesis by outlining the main components of the study. To start this chapter I describe the focus of the study. To provide a context to the study I present the research setting. I then explain the structure of the education system in Papua New Guinea (PNG), including tertiary education. I describe the significance of this research and I present the research topic and the research questions. In the fourth section I present a brief account of my experience and observation as a Papua New Guinean woman that initiated my interest in the subject of exploring young women's experiences of educational transition. In the last section, an overview of the thesis as a whole is provided by outlining what each chapter comprises.

## 1.1. Statement of the research problem

Overall, there are relatively low levels of education in Papua New Guinea, especially for women (Unesco, 2007). Women who are educated in PNG come mostly from coastal and urban areas. In these areas they may have better access education because of easy access to schools and the increased likelihood of having socio-economic support from their families (Geissinger, 1997; King & Hill, 1993; Spark, 2010). Toliman (2000) and Weiner (1999) mention that women who come from matrilineal societies in PNG are given more opportunities to pursue their education than those in patrilineal societies. In a matrilineal society, a family's heritage (land, etc.) is passed on from mothers to daughters and women when they are married live on their land. Women are respected and given leadership roles for example, clan leaders in PNG.

In the patrilineal society a family's heritage moves down the male line. For example, Kewa (2007) said that "As a woman in this part of PNG [patrilineal society], I do not even own any land. I live my life at the mercy of my brothers, fathers, uncles" (p.18). Kewa (2007) has given very comprehension coverage of how women are treated in a male-dominated society, particularly the patrilineal society of PNG. As soon as a woman gets married, she leaves her family to live with her husband's clan. Women have less say in what is going on in the family

unit and the wider community. Leadership roles and all decision making is dominated by males. Women are under-mined in PNG's patrilineal societies as compared to the country's matrilineal societies (Brouwer, Harris & Tanaka, 1998; Kewa, 2007). However, Dovona-Ope (2008) and Toliman (2000) have argued that educational opportunities for women in both types of societies are slim because when it comes to decision making on who is going to school priority is given to males.

PNG's gender equity policy (Department of Education, 2003) calls for a fair representation of both genders in education. However, even with the introduction of the gender equity policy women are still under enrolled, underrepresented or outnumbered by males in education as well as job opportunities (Department of Education, 2003). In 1998 Brouwer and colleagues commented "The low enrolment of women at all levels means that this is not likely to improve dramatically over the next decade" (p. 34) and this has proved to be the case. The enrolment figures of women are still low compared to those of males at all levels of education (Education Statistics Office, 2005). The women experience challenges with their education because they tend to be overlooked or ignored by the education system and other immediate stakeholders. To enable support to be provided to assist more women to access tertiary education and to enable them to be successful when they are still studying it is important to understand more about the experiences of those women who are attending tertiary education setting in PNG. One aspect that seems of particular interest is the transition period itself as they move from school to tertiary education. Currently, education authorities and other immediate organisations may not be responding to and addressing women's issues of educational transition from secondary to tertiary level in PNG.

An interest in educational transitions, especially for women who have managed to access tertiary education despite being in an education system that favours males, prompted me to conduct research on female students' educational transition from secondary to tertiary education. The study aimed to learn about the challenges they experience and ways in which they might be supported in their enrolment and continuity of tertiary education in a PNG university environment.

## 1.2. The research setting

This study was conducted in PNG, a developing island nation in the South Pacific. It is one of the biggest island countries in the Melanesian group of countries. The geographical and physical features of the country include mountains, rivers, islands, swamps, valleys, savannah grasslands and virgin rain forests. The country is extremely diverse in its cultures, traditional rituals, customs, dances, initiation ceremonies and the bride price ceremonies. It has over eight hundred (800) different languages and a variety of dialects. The people's every-day way of life is different when compared across the country. PNG comprises twenty (20) different provinces with four regions: Momase, Highlands, Papuans and New Guinea Islands (Geissinger, 1997; Rannells, 1995). PNG has an estimated population of over six million people (2000 census). Despite the country's rich natural resources, poverty is high (Unesco, 2007). Almost 80% of the people live subsistence lives in the rural areas (2000 census). They typically use hunting, fishing and gardening as their means of survival. In contrast, 20% of the population lives in the urban areas where life is depended on paid jobs and employments. Money earned is spent on goods and services needed for their daily lives and is also shared with relatives who are living in the rural villages (Geissinger, 1997).

Women in PNG traditionally, not have the same access to education and employment as men (Toliman, 2000). The women tend to house chores of cooking, washing, looking after children and cultivating the land for gardening. They sell produce in the local markets to earn the family's income. The money that is earned is saved to pay school fees for their male relatives (Spark, 2010). Earlier research by Geissinger (1997) indicated that in the rural areas of PNG males treat women as a means of gaining access to education through their hard work. On the same note, women in PNG are not respected and fairly treated by the men who are their husbands, uncles, nephews, cousin brothers, grandsons and grandfathers. Many women in PNG are abused in all forms (sexually, socially, mentally, physically and emotionally) at all levels by the very males that could have protected, embraced, loved and respected them. Women in PNG are still

fighting for their rights of freedom and education after 36 years of independence (Brouwer et al., 1998; Kewa, 2007). 1

## 1.3. Population and school enrolment figures

PNG's population figures in the last census in (2000) interestingly showed that there were more males than females in each of the twenty provinces in the country. The total population of the country was 5,190,786 of which 2,691,744 were males and 2,499,042 were females (National Statistics Office, 2000). The census figures represented the population for the 20 provinces. There were no figures which specially compared rural and urban settings, nor for the school age children.

Enrolment figures in the PNG school system vary across different levels of education in PNG. It is also noted that there were different enrolment figures for both genders across each levels of schooling. The following were the enrolment figures for 2005 (latest updated figure). A teachers' college had 1664 males and 1447 females and at the University of Goroka the male enrolment figure was 1060 compared to the female figure of 578. The enrolment figures for secondary schools were in favour of males, with 51,185 males and 34, 414 for the females and the enrolment statistics for primary schools were males 369, 262 and females 295,122 (Education Statistics of PNG, 2005). The striking imbalance in the enrolment figures strongly suggest that males are likely to be more privileged at all levels in education than females in PNG. When comparing the population and the school enrolment figures it is likely that the population figures in favour of males may contribute to the imbalance of the school enrolment however, this does not explain the degree of difference reflected in the enrolment statistics. Interestingly, at the university where I conducted my research the 2011 enrolment figures favoured women. The university had a total population of 1472 students, of which 790 were females and 682 males. It appears that this university was supporting and promoting women in education.

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1 An email was sent to the university asking if it would be possible to have the enrolment figures for the last decade to see if there was consistency in the figures; however, there has been no response to date.

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## 1.4. Papua New Guinea education structure

The PNG education system has a primary, secondary, tertiary and university education system. It provides nine years of basic education (3 years elementary and 6 years primary). Children aged six are to begin basic education at the elementary level and should leave at the age of 14, which is at the end of primary education (Department of Education, 2009; 2002). Secondary education is the next level of education, with four years duration (Grades/Years 9-10 lower secondary and Grades/Years 11-12 upper secondary) (Department of Education, 2009; 2002). After completion of upper secondary the next level is tertiary and university education. National examinations are conducted at various stages of the school system, at the end of grades eight, ten and twelve, as students move on to the next level of education. Those who do not pass the exams can enrol in vocational schools or do open and distance learning to continue their education (Department of Education, 2009).

**Figure 1.** Papua New Guinea – Structure of Education System
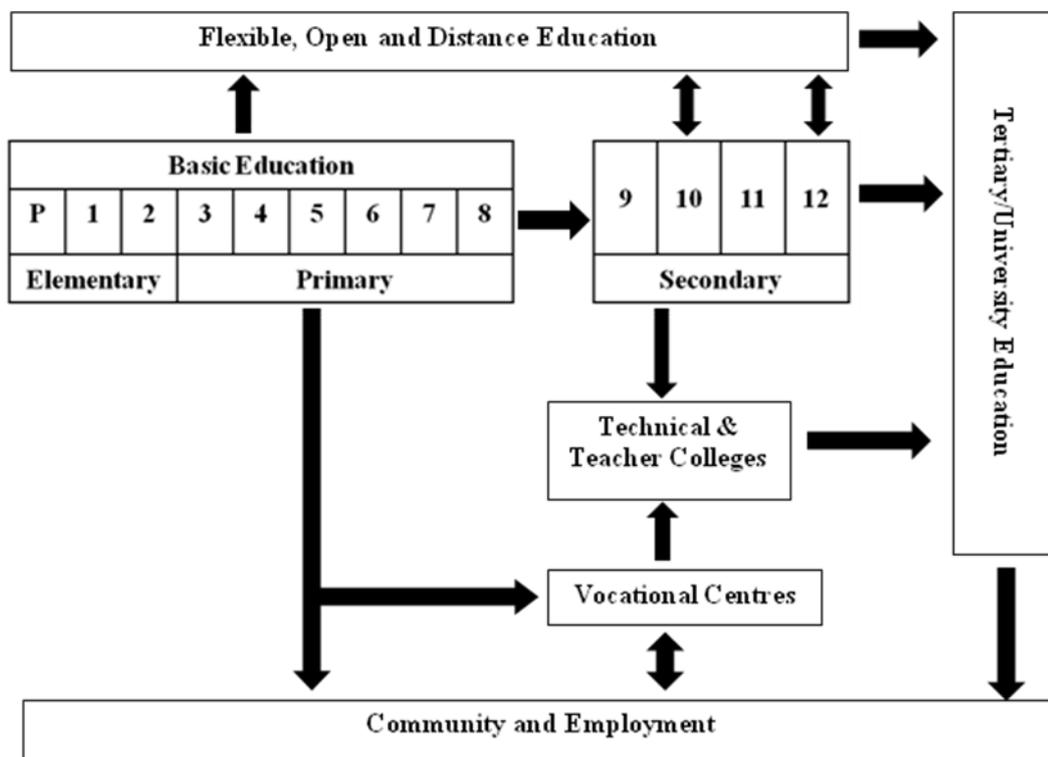


Adapted from Department of Education (2009). Achieving universal education for a better future. Universal basic education plan. Retrieved from http://www.education.gov.pg

### 1.4.1. Tertiary education system

Tertiary education comprises universities, technical and specialised colleges like general nursing and primary school teaching (Unesco, 2011). It takes two to three years for students to complete their studies and attain a diploma in technical and specialised colleges. The university is the highest level of education in the country. Students who continue to universities have four to six years to complete their studies. After successful completion of studies, the students obtain a primary degree in disciplines such as medicine, law, engineering, business, environmental science, and secondary school teaching. The tertiary institutions (technical and specialised colleges) including primary and elementary schools are taken care of by the National Department of Education (NDOE). NDOE is responsible to pay for the students' school subsidies and not for the school fees at the primary level, however, it does subsidise tuition fees at the tertiary level.

There are six universities in the country. Four are government owned and two are church owned and administered. All universities and tertiary institutions in the country cater for both males and females (Papua New Guinea Education, 2011). The universities are the responsibility of the Office of Higher Education (OHE). Although OHE is within the NDOE, OHE has the responsibility for employing staff and monitoring and providing subsidies to the universities. The OHE subsidises students' tuition fees in tertiary education depending on students' Grade Point Average (GPA). OHE caters for students under the Tertiary Education Students Study Assistance Scheme (TESAS). There are four different categories. These are Academic Excellent Scholarships (AES), Higher Education Contribution Assistance Scholarship (HECAS), Self-Sponsor (SS) and Private and Corporate Sponsorship (PCS). The government subsidises school fees for AES and HECAS students because they meet the required GPA for entry into tertiary education while the SS students pay 100% of their tuition fees in tertiary institutions as they fall below the required GPA average. This PCS category consists of students who are sponsored by their employees and includes other Melanesian students as well as Papua New Guinean students who are sponsored by overseas governments. Their sponsors pay all their education costs but set conditions and requirements which the students have to meet otherwise their

sponsorships could be terminated (Department of Education, 1995; Pacific Adventist University, Scholarships, n.d).

**Table 1.** TESAS Categories

| No | Categories | GPA and Selection | Government Subsidy |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Academic Excellence Scholarship (AES) | Students who fall in this category are those who scored above the cut-off GPA requirement for students into the tertiary institutions including universities. They are known as A students. | The government subsidises certain percentage of the school fees. |
| 2 | Higher Education Contribution Assistance Scholarship (HECAS) | The students who meet the national cut-off mark come immediately under this category. The government sponsors these students by subsidising their school fees. | The government subsidises certain percentage of the school fees. |
| 3 | Self- Sponsor (SS) | In this category the government does not sponsor students because their GPA is below the required cut-off mark into tertiary institutions. However, they are given a space at a tertiary institution. | No government subsidy. Students meet all the expenses. |
| 4 | Private and Corporate Sponsorship (PCS) | Students sponsored by employers or overseas sponsors. | No government subsidy. Sponsors meet all the expenses. |

## 1.5: Significance of the study

This research explored how female students experienced the transition from secondary to tertiary education in a university in Papua New Guinea. Despite the low levels of education generally and underrepresentation of females at all levels of education there are nonetheless a number of women in PNG who are transitioning into high educational institutions in the country. This study

investigated the challenges and the factors that might constitute to their success and failure at the university. Female students go through various transitions in life. Education is one of those transitions and is an important one in anyone's life. It is often claimed that successful transition from school to university determines the students' future life success (Kantanis, 2000; Purnell, 2002). It is at the end of secondary education that academically able students undertake tertiary education (Madjar, McKinley, Deynzer & Merwe, 2010b). Students decide their future by choosing career pathways at the tertiary level. Various studies conducted in Australian and New Zealand universities have found that students entered universities with limited knowledge of the university's academic and social expectations. The universities played significant roles in helping student transition (Madjar, et al., 2010b; Lawrence, 2002). Kantanis (2000) emphasised that successful social transition to tertiary education promotes and supports successful academic performance at the tertiary level. Students develop friendships that generate resources to support their learning and educational transition. This study was interested in learning more about female students who in PNG are doing well academically and socially, despite the many cultural barriers impacting educational progress (Brouwer et al., 1998, Spark, 2010).

It is anticipated that the findings of this study will provide significant information that:

1. can help to initiate transition programmes for students in universities and other tertiary institutions in the country;

2. can help other stakeholders including the education department in PNG to improve women's education and develop policies to address cultural practices of male dominance;

3. can help universities to promote and encourage social activities for students to help their social transition and to provide meaningful support services for students;

4. can give insights to successful women to act as role models to inspire future young women;.

As a woman advocate, I aim to develop a better understanding of the notions of educational transitions in tertiary education in my country. I believe that this research project is one way to enhance such understanding.

## 1.6. Research questions

The research topic in this study is *"Exploring the experiences of female students' educational transition from secondary to tertiary education in Papua New Guinea"*. This research topic is guided by the following questions:

a) What are the experiences of the choice the female students make to enter a university?

b) What challenges do they identify as part of this transition?

c) What factors do they identify as contributing to their likely success or likely failure in their university courses?

## 1.7. What inspired me?

My own experiences of transitions after coming to study in a new learning environment and in a new country challenged my 'sense of self'. Educational Transition, a course I took second semester of my post-graduate studies reflected my own struggles in education and family. The paper has given me more insights and various opportunities to understand how my experiences of parental support, sense of self, socio-economic and socio-cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1997; Lee & Bowen, 2006; Tieben & Wolbers, 2010) influenced my own educational transition. Beach's (2003) and Gilbert's (2005) writings about identity have made me reflect on my life and sense of self since I first started my primary education. I have been through different educational transitions and have experienced academic and social challenges. These challenges happened because of change of identity as I moved and engaged in different communities. I have had to change my roles, status and ways of doing things in the process of adjusting, to follow the rules of different settings and get accustomed to these routines (Beach, 2003). I did not realise this until I took the course on educational transition. Before that I took things for granted. I thought that the way things happen was inevitable, and that I just had to face the challenges and live with the changes. The knowledge gained in this course motivated me to explore the experiences of female students' educational transition from secondary to tertiary education.

As a female I struggled to achieve my educational dreams and have come this far in life and education and through determination and perseverance. I had set my 'possible self' of who I am and who I am going to be, and my mind was focused. Possible selves are shaped by social contexts (Markus & Nurius, 1986; Oyserman, Bybee, Terry & Hart-Johnson, 2004). Possible selves are the ideal selves we would very much like to become. They are also the selves we could become and are afraid of becoming. Further still, the bad experiences I had in my family and marriage did not overwhelm me. I took my own experiences as challenges to move on and achieve my dreams. I come from a happy family of uneducated parents who were subsistence farmers and we lived a traditional PNG village life style. When I was a teenager doing my grade seven in a high school; my mother left my father for another man. She neglected my siblings and me and left us with my father. The pain and struggles I went through to survive my teenage life and education were very challenging. At times it was confusing and frustrating as I had to cope with studies and house chores; however, there were some influential people who contributed positively to my life, education and teaching career. My teachers were amongst these people. I still applaud the work of any teacher to this very day as they were the inspirations of my life. I had friends and they encouraged and supported me. However, my own determination to get an education, secure a job and help my father to raise my siblings drove me to higher educational achievement. By sharing my experiences I want other women to learn that the challenges they may encounter in life, in any relationships, family, in education and marriage, may be negative but can also be inspirational. Such experiences can elevate them to the next level in life. So I would like to say to women especially those from rural PNG, despite all the odds, I have come this far; I now would like you to wake up, face the world head on and move forward, to leave your past behind and start a new chapter in your life and education. There is no time to waste, now is the time to begin the new chapter. No-one will make it happen for you, it is up to you and you alone.

## 1.8. Overview of the thesis

This thesis consists of seven chapters. Chapter One presents the introduction and the context of the study. It also highlights the statement of the issue and the significance of the study. Chapter Two provides a review of literature which is

relevant to this study and the rationale for the research questions. Chapter Three describes the methodology used in this study. The description of the interpretative paradigm and qualitative research is outlined. The research methods of semi-structured and focused group interviews are examined as a means to interact with the women to address the topic. The ethical aspects of this research are then considered and the research procedures are described. Chapter Four presents the research findings according to a number of themes which emerged. The themes are identified and grouped according to similarities that are identified in the young women's stories. Chapter Five presents a case study of a particular participant of my study. Chapter Six discusses the findings from Chapter Four in light of the literature reviewed in Chapter Two, making sure that the research questions have been addressed throughout the discussions. Chapter Seven summarises the research. It highlights the limitations of the research and provides recommendations for the stakeholders, suggestions for future research and the conclusion of the thesis.

The following chapter explores and examines literature about transition and educational transition in developed and developing countries to provide a framework for my study.

# Chapter 2: Literature review

## 2.1. Introduction

This literature review assembles and synthesises relevant literature regarding transitions and educational transitions. The literature is drawn from different countries as there is very little which is centred on the Melanesian context. In places it also draws on literature regarding other transitions, including the transitions to school, where this can shed light on the transition to university. This review is divided into five main sections. The first section presents the theoretical perspective of the study. The second section of the review defines transitions and draws connections to defining and understanding educational transition. The third section discusses and describes research about transition to tertiary education and the key issues that underpin this particular transition. The fourth section presents and evaluates ideas of transition to tertiary education for girls and women. This was undertaken from a global view but makes links to the PNG and Melanesian context of the study. The fifth part examines and presents literature on the factors that affect young women's transition to higher education particularly in PNG. The chapter concludes with a summary.

## 2.2. Theoretical perspective underpinning my study

The theoretical perspective underpinning my study is Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological model and some of his later revisions of this (Bronfenbrenner 2005; Bronfenbrenner & Ceci, 1994; Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1997). The later models took account of the proximal processes (the interaction of individual and environment over time) which vary as a function of the characteristics of the environmental contexts, time periods and the developing person. The latter aspects involved in developing a person are drawn in from the ecological model which considers how other people in the lives of a person participate in shaping and moulding her/him potentially maintaining and building his/her character and holistic development. The development occurs when the developing person interacts and interrelates with others with and within the immediate environment over time (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1997). Bronfenbrenner (1979) was

interested in the roles, relationships and power within the micro-system and the mesosystem and links between the exosystem and macrosystem. The micro-system is defined as a pattern of social and physical activities experienced by the growing person during face-to-face interactions which are responsive and reciprocal with people close to him or her. The physical and social environment within that setting motivates, encourages and invites the developing person to participate in progressive activities within its sets of rules and power. All interconnections and interpersonal relationships are under taken in a particular setting, for example, within his/her immediate family. The mesosystem is defined as a set of interrelations between two or more settings in which the developing person becomes an active participant. There are four means of interconnections a person becomes part of. A) Multisetting participation: this is the basic form of interconnection between settings whereby the same person actively participates in activities in multiple settings. B) Indirect linkage: in this interconnection the active person is passive or not actively involved in both settings but there is still a connection through a third person who acts as an intermediate person between the two settings. C) Intersetting communications: this concerns passing of messages from one setting to another with the intention to provide specific information to persons in other settings. This is done through face to face communication, telephone conversations, correspondences and other written messages. D) Intersetting knowledge: this refers to information and experiences that exist in one's setting about the other such can be obtained through intersection communication (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, pp. 209-210).

The exosystem consists of one or more settings that concern people who are not directly connected to a developing person (these can be parents' work-mates, elder brothers and sisters' friends, and school mates) but the growing person is affected by events that occur in the settings (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1997). Finally, the macrosystem "refers to the consistency observed within a given culture or subculture in the form and content of its constituent micro-, meso-, and exosystems, as well as any belief systems or ideology underlying such consistencies" (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p. 258). For example, when looking at the wider community, the country and society as a whole, the global context, the ministry of education, policies, researchers etc.

**2.2.1. Proximal process**

Proximal process is described as the relationship between children and the environment and how the environment contributes to a person's development. Proximal processes acknowledge the interactions, interconnections and relationships between individuals and the environment in different contexts which affect the developing person in a variety of ways. According to Bronfenbrenner and Morris (1997):

> Three types of personal characterises are distinguished as most influential in shaping the course of future development through their capacity to affect the direction and power of proximal processes through the life course. The first are dispositions that can set proximal processes in motion in a particular developmental domain and continue to sustain their operation. Next are the bioecological resources of ability, experiences, knowledge, and skill required for the effective functioning of proximal processes at a given stage of development. Finally, there are demand characteristics that invite or discourage reactions from the social environment of a kind that can foster or disrupt the operation of proximal processes. (p. 995)

The interpersonal interactions and connections with adults and children within the environment of the ecological model can help a person develop cognitively and emotionally. It is a process and time is considered an important factor in the proximal process to enable full achievement of activities with its relevant knowledge and skills over time (Bronfenbrenner & Ceci, 1994). The skills, knowledge and attributes learnt from others can be of benefit to an individual over time and contribute to future life satisfaction in education, jobs, etc. The individual and the environment are interrelated; learning and development take place when children interact with people, objects and symbols by constantly taking part in activities within the environment and the setting the individuals are engaged in (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1997). Bronfenbrenner (1979) noted that during the initial participation and involvement of activities within the different systems of the ecological model, children may be able to identify themselves through responsive and reciprocal interactions which can foster a developing sense of belonging and acceptance in any settings. This brings to light another relevant theoretical perspective for my study, which is identity.

### 2.2.2. Identity theory

The concept of identity has been defined and described by different authors from different perspectives, situations and contexts (Beach, 2003; Gilbert, 2005). The definition of identity which best suits my study is by that of Rose and Buehler (2004). They note that "people's sense of identity often includes a perception of who they were, who they are and who they will be" (p. 25). Rose and Buehler focused on identity through time, looking at thoughts about the past and future and using people's memories to distinguish people's sense of self. The authors used the social psychology perspective to describe identity as people's personal histories, which other people used to assess their abilities, personalities and self-worth. Gilbert (2005) argued that "our understanding of individuality is changing along with our understanding of knowledge....Knowledge and individuality are closely connected. If one changes, we can expect to see changes in the other" (p. 99). The students' identity is determined by the kind of knowledge or education received in the school system. Later, in the future, students are likely to display their individuality or identity in workplaces, and social contexts. Identities can also be represented by stories in any context. Identity is an important determinant of which of one's roles, responsibilities, status and identities are displayed in different contexts and situations. Identity influences people's ways of doing things and their standing in the society (Gilbert, 2005).

### 2.2.3. Identity as narratives

Sfard and Prusak (2005) discussed identity as narratives which are critical and can shift a person's sense of self: "Critical stories are those core elements that, if changed, would make one feel as if ones whole identity had changed" (p. 18). This seems to fit in well with Beach's (2003) description of transition as consequential when one's identity is reflected upon during the transition which is likely to manipulate a shift in one's identity. Summarising Sfard and Prusak (2005), narratives or stories about ourselves and others influence one's identity during transitions. Narratives told about people by themselves and others signify identity in different situations and context. Narratives as identities can be actual and designated (Sfard & Prusak, 2005). Actual and designated identities are identified by the verbs used in describing identity. The present tense is used to represent actual identity and the future tense is used for designated identity. For

example, 'I am a university student' is an actual identity and 'I want to be a good student' is a designated identity.

Positive narratives appraise people and make them feel good about themselves. On the other hand, it is likely for negative stories to question a person's identity and make a person struggle with his/ her sense of self. Sfard and Prusak (2005) emphasised that negative stories which are critical can cause feelings of unhappiness. People are different and so they react to stories differently. Some stories are likely to have more impact than others. Therefore, when narratives are made for people can have impacts on their sense of self (Sfard & Prusak, 2005). However, stories may not be made in isolation, people's roles, status and the way they do things or behave in different context and situations manipulates and stimulates the kind of narratives said about them. All of these tie in and illustrate the interpersonal and interconnected relationships with and within settings. The use of different forms of communications also allows for stories to be used as a means of passing on information from one setting to another.

The next section provides the definition and descriptions of transitions and educational transition.

## 2.3. Transitions definition

The concept of "transitions" is complex. It is defined in different ways by different scholars depending on the theoretical perspectives that underpin the word, the contexts, and authors' experiences (Beach, 2003; Brooker, 2008; Dockett & Perry, 2007; Dunlop & Fabian, 2007; Fabian, 2002). According to Beach (2003):

> We define transition as a developmental change in the relation between an individual and one or more social activities. Changes in their relation can occur through a change in the individual, the activity, or both. Transition, then is the concept we use to understand how knowledge is generalized, or propagated, across social space and time. A transition is "consequential" when it is consciously reflected on, struggled with and shifts the individual's sense of self or social position. (p. 31)

Additionally, Beach (2003) described transition as lateral, collateral, encompassing and meditational. The transitions that seemed most likely to fit my study are lateral and collateral transition. "Lateral transition occurs when an individual moves between two historically-related activities in a single direction" (Beach, 2003, p. 43); for example, the movement of students from secondary to tertiary education. On the other hand, "collateral transitions involve individuals' relatively simultaneous participation in two or more historically-related activities" (Beach, 2003, p. 43). For example, this might be moving from the dormitories to class and moving between different classes during the week. Both lateral and collateral transitions involve students taking part in two historical and social events which already exist.

Furthermore, from a human development perspective general human growth and development can also be thought of as a developmental transition. Developmental transitions can be identified as a series of transitions from birth to adolescence and into adulthood and are marked by different individual physical, intellectual, and emotional changes (e.g. puberty) (Anderson, Jacobs, Schramm & Splittgerber, 2000). According to Madjar et al. (2010b):

> For school leavers, transition to university occurs during adolescence, and is therefore often intertwined with a search for a sense of identity (at a personal, cultural and spiritual level), and a search for purpose and direction in life (including choice of future career); all made more acute by leaving home, and mixing with more heterogeneous groups of people and being exposed to new ideas and different role models. (p. 31)

Additionally, Madjar et al. (2010b) argued that transition is not just about geography and time; at its core it is about growth, learning and self-transformation. As students go through the transition process different fundamental aspects of being a human take shape and they grow in proportion to height and weight (Dockett & Perry, 2007). In comparison, Beach's (2003) definitions of transitions do not overlook the components of human growth and development. Similarly, Brooker (2008), Dockett and Perry (2007) and Fabian (2002) have not overlooked other transitions when defining transition. Beach's

(2003) definition of transitions seemed appropriate for my research as it highlights an individual's sense of self as a social being in different discourses, contexts and situations. This supports Bronfenbrenner' (1979) model whereby a person's character interacts with environmental factors to foster development. It links knowledge to the different choices that an individual makes to cope with different communities (Gilbert, 2005) such as the university context.

During the students' educational transition and within the socio-educational context of the educational setting students participate in different social activities which contribute to shaping their identity. The changes in a person's sense of self can determine his/her success in an educational transition if displayed and defined positively (Beach, 2003). Petriwskyj, Thrope, and Taylor (2005) described educational transition as being both vertical and horizontal. Vertical transitions include; "[T]ransitions across time between educational levels, for example, preschool, reception and the first grades school," and horizontal transition can be described as "across one point in time such as within a one day" (p. 61). This was similar to Beach's (2003) description of transition as lateral and collateral. Educational transitions can challenge children's daily lives as they try to modify their sense of self and cope with the changes in educational settings, particularly the one in which they are currently engaged. In many societies individuals make a number of educational transitions, for example, starting early childhood education, moving from home and early childhood education to primary school, then to secondary to tertiary or higher education and eventually from higher education to work. Educational transitions often involve students moving from small and familiar settings to larger and unfamiliar ones and although the contexts are different there are similarities for each educational transition.

## 2.4. Transition to tertiary education

Transition to tertiary education is important as it is at the tertiary level that students choose and develop career pathways which impact on their future life satisfaction. Loader and Dalgety (2008) highlighted the outcomes of tertiary education in a New Zealand study:

> The outcomes of tertiary education are numerous: for the economy, society and the individual. Overseas studies suggest that tertiary education

is the key to raising labour productivity and through this, economic growth. Higher levels of education are associated with better health and lifestyles, and lower crime rates. Furthermore, the evidence shows that enrolment and completion of tertiary qualification leads to improved outcomes for individuals. Individuals with tertiary qualifications, even sub-bachelor qualifications, have greater labour force participation and on average, earn higher incomes. (p.7)

Given the importance of tertiary education, many authors have written about transition to tertiary education from a number of perspectives (see for example, Kantanis, 2002; Madjar et al., 2010b; Tieben, 2009). At the end of secondary education after a successful completion of external examination students either enrol at university or technical and specialised colleges like nursing and teaching or undertake modern apprenticeship programmes (Ussher, 2007). Studies in New Zealand and the Netherlands have identified that students with high GPA enter higher tertiary education while others who did not meet the required GPA entered vocational schools or do not consider further education at all (Madjar et al., 2010b; Tieben, 2009). Although some countries, like New Zealand, have special admission policies for older adults, in many contexts students who do not meet university entrance requirements when they leave school leave the education system or find a place in vocational institutions. This is common in PNG context (Department of Education, 2002; Strachan, 2009).

Studies of particular interest were the Starpath Project in New Zealand initiated for the Ministry of Education by Madjar et al. (2010a, 2010b). The project emphasised developing a deeper understanding of educational transition from secondary school to university study. The focus was on underrepresented groups in New Zealand, such as Maori, Pacifika and students from low-decile urban and rural schools. Data were gathered using a range of methods such as semi-structured interview and student journalling and photographs. The key finding of the study was that:

> Transition from secondary school to university was found to be a complex process, lived through by individual students, which began well before they set foot on a university campus. Their experience of transition was influenced by attributes, knowledge and skills they brought with them, as well as the conditions they encountered in the new learning environment. (Madjar et al., 2010b, p. 4)

The Starpath Project identified some practical difficulties (also called stumbling blocks) experienced by the underrepresented groups of students in New Zealand and suggested some helpful implications for families and the university to help support the university students to make a successful transition. These will be discussed in a later section on universities' roles in the transition (see, subsection, 2.5.5).

The next section discusses key issues in transition to tertiary education.

## 2.5. Key issues in transition to tertiary education

Transition from secondary to tertiary education can be either smooth or difficult depending on a wide range of factors, including students' family support and background, amongst others. These factors have been identified as key issues which can evolve around the micro-system of the ecological model (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) and have implications for students' transition to tertiary education.

### 2.5.1. Parental socio-economic capital

There is evidence in international literature that parents' high socio economic status (SES) has an impact on their children choosing higher tertiary educational institutions (Madjar et al., 2010a, 2010b; Tieben, 2009; Tieben & Wolbers, 2010). Teiben and Wolbers (2010) highlighted that university courses took four to six years to complete and the fees were high; and it thus was easier for students whose parents were financially secure to be studying at universities. This means that advantaged children benefit from the financial power of their parents and are able to achieve higher educational qualifications than other students. Research in the Netherlands showed that disadvantaged children did not have the opportunity of tertiary education because their families' SES meant that the families did not have the resources to support them (Almquist, Modin & Osterberg, 2010; Tieben & Wolbers, 2010). This is likely to be similar to PNG where the family's ability to generate income considerably determines the child's continuity of education (Geisinger, 1997; Strachan, 2009). In PNG disadvantaged students tend to enter vocational schools or the labour market and in most cases female students return

to the villages at the end of their primary and secondary education to live subsistence lives (Geissinger, 1997).

However, parental SES is not the only important factor. Tieben (2009) and Dumais (2002) also argued that a child's ability and effort to perform well in schools determined a placing in tertiary education. Tieben (2009) further stated that students from disadvantaged family backgrounds are not totally disadvantaged. They were able to enter higher education by embarking on lower educational pathways then making their way later up to higher education. Similarly, Sutherland (1988) suggested that although it took years to obtain a higher qualification, the interesting outcome is that the developing person achieved degrees in education over time. In addition, there were other incentives available for students to take up loans and get scholarships from the government to pay their university fees (Scott, 2005). Scott (2005) states that "New Zealand's lifelong approach to tertiary learning and its relatively open access to enrolment and student loans have acted to increase participation in tertiary education and, in particular, to groups not traditionally involved in formal post school study"(p. 14). This is likely to be a common practice in the developed countries and students are responsible to repay the school fee loan after completion of their studies (Scott, 2005) unlike what is happening in some developing countries when loans are not available.

### 2.5.2. Parental educational background

It is noteworthy that parental educational background is another key issue in transition to tertiary education. In a number of studies, having educated parents impacted student choice in higher educational pathways (Lee & Bowen, 2006; Lysaght, 2007; Stevenson & Baker, 1987; Tieben & Wolbers, 2010). In recent years research has shown that students coming from educated parents have more opportunity to gain higher educational achievement, with access to well-paid jobs in the future. Tieben and Wolbers (2010) in their study in the Netherlands identified that the effects of parental education for making the transition to senior vocational education and university were strong, while the transition to lower tertiary education was not influenced by parental background characteristics. Children from uneducated parents, though they are likely to have potential and

capabilities to study at universities, tended to make less ambitious educational decisions by choosing low educational pathways (Teiben, 2009; Tieben & Wolber, 2010). Stevenson and Baker (1987) conducted a study in the United States that examined the relation between parental involvement in school and the child's school performance. The data collected were based on a nationally representative sample of American households and showed that decisions to attend vocational schools were made by children from uneducated parents. In comparison to other social characteristics of families, such as family size and income, the parental educational level has been found to be a very important determinant of their children's educational achievement and success (Stevenson & Baker, 1987). Studies conducted in higher education in some Australian and New Zealand universities (Loader & Dalgety, 2008; Lysaght, 2007) showed that parents with low educational qualification are less likely than educated parents to be involved with their children's education because they have less confidence and are not familiar with what goes on in the school curriculum

This section has shown that there is inequality in the education systems and children's achievement, attainment of education qualifications and progression to tertiary education are impacted by parental backgrounds (Loader & Dalgety, 2008; Stevenson & Baker, 1987). This view of inequality is supported by Blanden and Machin (2004). Blanden and Machin (2004) examined the educational policy of United Kingdom (UK) on educational inequality and the expansion of UK Higher Education (HE). They stated that the distribution of the HE expansion was not equally distributed. It benefited richer children, not poorer children. Further still, because of the HE expansion it impacted and widened the participation gaps between the richer and the poorer children in the UK. To address the inequality, measures were taken to expand the HE system in the UK to benefit children from poorer family backgrounds. The students were given equal opportunities to participate in the HE system. The findings determined a change in policy to increase the number of students in HE to 50% of all backgrounds, allowing both advantaged and disadvantaged to equally participate and benefit from UK's HE education by 2010 (Blanden & Machin, 2004). It is encouraging to learn that the UK education sector recognised the inequality gap in parental background and adjusted its policies to give fair and equal opportunities for everyone. While this is

interesting the same approach, might not work for PNG as it is unlikely that the PNG government would encourage and motivate more women to participate in education. The government is likely to rely on non-government organizations (NGOs) to improve the education system and policies and ignore its responsibility to provide adequate and fair education for everyone (Unesco, 2011). Overall, students benefiting from their parental backgrounds illustrate the operation of proximal process indicating that bioecological resources of ability, experience, knowledge, and skills are required for the effective functioning of the developing person at a given stage of development (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1997). However, student resources interact with features of the environment (e.g. as provided by policies such as those described in the UK) so that environmental changes also contribute to possible developmental outcomes.

Other issues have also been found to influence students' contribution and participation in their transition to tertiary education. Social relationships, sense of self, parental and schools' roles in the transition, challenges encountered at university and the academic successes and failures have all been shown to be key issues in transition to tertiary education. These issues are further discussed below.

### 2.5.3. Social relationship/friendship

Several authors (for example, Almquist et al., 2010; Demetriou, Goalen & Rudduck, 2000; Ladd, Kochenderfer, & Coleman, 1997; Tynkkynen, Nurmi & Salmela-Aro, 2010) have written about friendship and its impact on students' decisions as they transitioned from one level of education to another. The authors used different measures to determine the quality of the relationship and the effects the types of friendship had on students. Kantanis (2000) in her study on social transition to university mentions that:

> Social transition underpins a successful academic transition to university. The research highlighted that the development of a friendship network was a major contributory element in this process. The data indicated clearly that not having friends made the whole process of transition to university more difficult, whilst having friends helped students to settle in quickly and make progress with their studies. (p.3)

When university students establish friendship relationships it constitutes a resource to help with the transition. Without friends, students might not have the appropriate resources to assist them navigate the process of transition to university (Kantanis, 2000; Madjar et al., 2010b). Madjar et al. (2010b) in their New Zealand study identified many factors that sustained students through their university experience. One of them was through making friends which helped them not only to persevere in their studies but to enjoy student life. Almquist et al. (2010) in a longitudinal study conducted in Sweden indicated that friendships established at an early age had an impact on the choices students make to attend higher education and significantly influenced their life satisfaction in the future.

An ongoing study by Tynkkynen et al. (2010) which examined adolescents' career goal-related social ties during educational transitions identified that differences in career goal-related social ties were related to gender, GPA, family structure and SES. The $9^{th}$ grade students were undergoing the transition from compulsory to post-compulsory education in Finland. It was noted that gender, GPA, family structure and SES all contribute to the kinds of social resources adolescents have access to which help them to negotiate the transitions. Friendships can be classified as strong and weak. Social relationships established between students and their parents and relatives and close friends are the most important social ties and can be classified as strong ties; weak ties are those between students and their counselors, and others. These social ties constitute and help generate resources such as knowledge and support which contribute to successful goal attainment in tertiary education and future life satisfaction (Tynkkynen et al., 2010). When comparing two studies (Demetriou et al., 2000; Ladd et al., 1997) on gender differences, boys were likely to seek group acceptance while girls were likely to seek best friends. Both studies reported evidence of the negative effects of friendship and peer relationships. For example, anti-school feelings within the group had a negative influence on individuals' commitment to learn. Children establishing friendships to discuss their own agendas outside of school activities can be an academic risk so teachers and parents may intervene to discourage such friendships. A particular concern that most parents have is that they want to see their children make friends with peers and adults who are supportive and have positive personal characteristics (Ladd et al., 1997).

### 2.5.4. Identity and transition

Much research exists in the area of sense of self, identity and individuality (Beach, 2003; Gilbert, 2005; Merry, 2007; Rose & Buehler, 2005). As stated earlier, a sense of self can be described as a person's perception of who they were, who they are now and who they will be (Ross & Buehler, 2004). Gilbert (2005) stated that sense of self/identity impacts students' ways of doing things in different contexts and social situations within any settings in which a student is engaged. Students can feel insecure, unconfident, have low self-esteem and not have the sense of belonging because of leaving their familiar setting (comfort zone) to move to an unfamiliar setting. Beach (2003) observed that students trying to get used to a new setting experienced changes in their roles, status and ways of doing things. Displaying one's sense of identity in different settings can be stressful and challenging. Many educational transitions involve moving from a familiar setting to somewhere larger and less well known. Students moving to university may experience changes in that the learning environment will be much bigger than school (Purnell, 2002). Students navigate these changes in context and roles. It may not be easy to learn, accept and live with the multiple changes in identity that may result from the start of any transition and especially the complex transition from school to university (Madjar et al., 2010b). Students are entering an unfamiliar territory and are faced with new challenges, experiences and possibilities (Purnell, 2002). Beach (2003) emphasised that both knowledge and transition change a person's identity. He noted that knowledge is acquired, learnt, and performed as a person transitions and socialises in different contexts. From that perspective, knowledge changes a person's identity and his/her social position in any new setting (Beach, 2003).

### 2.5.5. Universities' roles in the transition of students

Studies conducted in Australia and New Zealand have identified that some universities contribute significantly to successful student transition (see for example, Beder, 1997; Ditcher & Tetley, 1999; Kantanis, 2000; Madjar et al., 2010a, 2010b). Lysaght (2007) highlighted that:

> Research in the higher education sector indicates that early engagement with the culture of university is a key factor in shaping the academic and social development of new students. A positive first-year experience that

supports students as they grapple with academic, administrative and social processes is more likely to encourage academic application and success at the individual level and to reduce attrition rates at an institutional level. (p. 108)

Lysaght (2007) in her study noted that University of Wollongong (UOW) in South Australia attracted students who were first in family students (students whose families had no previous direct university experience). They came to university ill-informed of the university's expectations. Students from such families have problems adjusting to university life. Parents lacked knowledge of university life and would not know whom to refer their children to for advice. These findings are similar to those studies done with younger children (Dockett & Perry, 2007), where parents were unsure of how to obtain information to help their children. Additionally, several projects (Madjar et al., 2010a, 2010b), made findings similar to those of Lysaght's study in Australia. In the New Zealand study there were factors identified as either "stepping stones" or "stumbling blocks" for students during the transition process. Before university factors such as having inspirational role models, developing clear academic goals and strong personal motivation to study at university level were considered helpful by students. During the first semester at the university students had practical difficulties in accessing relevant information; students with less confidence needed more information, guidance and encouragement. The studies concluded that it is important for students from underrepresented groups to recognise their individual strengths and specific needs during the transition and to be involved with support services to assist them academically and socially while studying (Madjar et al., 2010a; 2010b).

Madjar et al.,'s study (2010b) also had implications for different people who can help the students with transition problems. These stakeholders included the students themselves, their families, secondary schools and universities and other degree-level education providers. For example, parents could help their children choose career options prior to university enrolment, encourage them to work hard and take responsibility for their own decisions. Parents are the children's first contact and are more experienced in life and can use their own experience to help children settle into the new learning environment. When they have the knowledge and resources to help, their contributions play a significant role in their children

adjusting and settling into their learning environment (Dockett & Perry, 2007). It has been suggested that schools should prepare students for academic and social transition, particularly those students with limited knowledge of the university's expectations. The university can also assist the underrepresented groups with the enrolment process and by making available academic advice on different courses offered at the faculty level (Lysaght, 2007; Madjar et al., 2010b). Orientation programmes and support networks within and beyond the university were available to assist students in both the Australian and New Zealand studies. Not many of the students were making use of the services for the first few weeks at the university. However, the students knew the services were available. Over time students who made use of the services were able to perform well academically in their university courses (Cameron & Tesoriero, 2003; Madjar et al., 2010a, 2010b).

2.5.5.1. Academic roles in transition to tertiary education

Concerning university staff's assistance in the transition, Lawrence's (2002) study in Australian universities suggested that academics should from the beginning make their expectations clear and explicit by encouraging students to use their socio-cultural knowledge to negotiate learning:

> The ability to make social contact and social conversation, in socially and culturally appropriate ways, across a multiplicity and diversity of cultural groups is also an essential ability for a new student. This competency is crucial as it facilitates the development of study groups, writing groups or learning circles, as well as study partners, mentors and friends, and perhaps, the support of a "significant other". (p. 8)

Similarly university teachers can make a difference in the transition by helping their students to develop competent learning skills and become confident in knowledge learning and acquisition (Lawrence, 2002). Purnell's (2002) New Zealand study was conducted in a university which has two campuses. Thirteen students enrolled in the Business and Social Sciences Bachelor's degree courses were interviewed. She interviewed students to discover their experiences and perceptions of their first year at university. A flow chart of the different phases of a transition cycle was developed. The flow chart had five phases and includes: preparation-phase i & v, encounter-phase ii, adjustment-phase iii and

stabilization-phase iv. She noted that transition to HE education for students can be problematic and stressful in each of the phases. The university and academics were required to identify students' problems at different phases of the cycle and negotiate ways of helping them. Purnell (2002) argued that both academics and the institution should be aware of the transition phases that students go through and provide help for them where necessary. For example, Kantanis (2000) highlighted that academic staff can help to facilitate students' transitions by offering academic tutorials (for example, essay writing formats, demonstrations of laboratory practical and report writing). Academics can also acknowledge the importance of social transition by encouraging students to participate in the formal educational context and programmes to familiarise their transition to university (Kantanis, 2000). It is likely that the academic staff of these universities in New Zealand and Australia was doing their best to help first year university students; and that area would benefit from further research in some developing countries.

The next section presents the challenges encountered at tertiary education.

## 2.6. Challenges encountered at tertiary education

The motivational drive that made students select university varies with individuals, so the challenges encountered at that level would not be similar (Brownlee, Walker, Lennox, Exley & Pearce, 2009; Madjar et al., 2010a, 2010b). The challenges to be described here are the academic and social or welfare challenges that have been indicated in a range of studies.

### 2.6.1. Academic challenges

In any country students enter tertiary education having had different experiences, and with different expectations and perceptions of learning at that level (Brownlee et al., 2009). The academic challenges they encounter may vary with students and according to what level they are studying at in universities and educational institutions. Kantanis (2000) and Madjar et al. (2010b) found that the teaching and learning experienced at university differed from what the students were familiar

with in secondary schooling. For example, Kantanis (2000) stated that students are overwhelmed by:

> …the sheer volume of reading that has to be completed in a relatively short space of time. Assigned written work is particularly intimidatory by virtue of its assessment weighting, and the fact that most of it falls due in the latter part of the semester often precluding feedback prior to examinations, and creating a time management nightmare with several pieces due at about the same time. Significant numbers of commencing students are unsure of what is expected of them in lectures and tutorials/seminars, and at a more fundamental level, require direction on manner of address, and appropriate interaction with lecturers and tutors. Students, especially those who are "pioneers", that is, the first one in the family to attend university, are worried about letting down themselves and their families. (p.6)

These are the academic challenges students face at university. Kantanis's (2000) findings are similar to those of New Zealand studies by Madjar et al. (2010a, 2010b) and Ward (2000). Madjar et al. (2010b) in a longitudinal qualitative study identified the academic challenges as "stumbling blocks" to academic success. They also identified "stepping stones" or factors of persistence and success at the university and factors that sustained students through the university experience. The latter included, for example, having to work hard to achieve a university degree, love of learning or self-motivation, families' support and having faith in God (Madjar et al., 2010a, 2010b). Additionally, in investigating perception of learning and knowing Brownlee et al. (2009) in an Australian study using semi-structured interviews identified that students held different beliefs about knowledge and concepts of learning. The students' beliefs were different from the requirements of the university. They entered universities ill-informed and had trouble becoming independent learners. The authors emphasised that it was the university's responsibility to deal appropriately with the challenges experienced by the students (Brownlee et al., 2009). However, despite the challenges encountered, students were able to continue their education, seeking help from university support services, staff and friends. Interestingly, it was reported that the students' self-motivation to learn and desire to achieve a university degree sustained them to persist with their education (Madjar et al., 2010b).

### 2.6.2. Social challenges

Several studies have noted that first year university students experienced significant social challenges when adjusting to university life. The challenges affected their success and progress at the university (Beder, 1997; Kantanis, 2000). To demonstrate understanding of social transition, an Australian study by Kantanis (2000) explored the roles of social transition in students' adjustment to the first year of university. Kantanis (2000) identified that students go through a lot of difficulties with associating and adjusting to fit into their social, physical and academic surroundings in the new learning environment. It was noted in her study that students not having positive experience in making the social transition found it difficult to cope with studies and as a result faced challenges with academic work. On the same note, Beder (1997) mentions that:

> Social integration is more than a simple matter of students having social interactions. It requires students to see themselves as a "competent member of an academic or social community" within the university, such as the Faculty of Arts, and may be aided by "rites of passage" whereby students move from membership of one community to another; from school, child rearing or work, for example, to university. (p. 3)

Beder (1997) concluded that in order for students to fully integrate and actively participate in the university's activities and full life at the university they have to develop a sense of belonging and an appropriate identity as a university student. Social transitions can also include other social activities beyond the academic life of the university. For example, Walker (2010), in a qualitative study, highlighted from the students' responses that social life goes beyond meeting new friends. Consumption of alcohol, partying and dancing are likely to affect academic work if students are not careful. Further still, Madjar et al. (2010b) highlighted that the challenges of social and academic transition to tertiary study that includes changes in lifestyles that can influence the students' emotional and physical wellbeing. Students encountered problems related to alcohol consumption, sleep, stress, eating habits, exercise and physical health that might affect them academically and socially (Madjar et al., 2010b). Fabian (2002) stressed that students have to first read and understand the situation, then become social members of their groups so that they do not put themselves into situations which they might regret later.

## 2.7. Academic success and failures

Many factors impact academic success and failures at the university level. Ditcher and Tetley (1999) noted that "Academic success at the university is usually described in terms of grades and degree completion" (p.1). Kantanis (2000) reaffirms that academic success depends on students and how motivated they are to learn. Their own understanding of the academic expectations and how well they cope with the transition of the academic setting promote success. Gilbert (2005) suggests that aacademic success is likely for anyone who has the motivation, effort and ability to meet the academic expectations of the school/university. Dowling (2005) added that confidence in oneself is a characteristic that students may have developed in the early years of their education. Having a confident and positive mind-set may lead to success whether in life, school, work or social encounters. Moreover, success at universities depends also on the different cohorts enrolling in university programmes. For example, Laoder and Dalgety (2008) state that "there are advantages to students enrolling in tertiary education direct from school: school leavers have higher completion rates, lower attrition rates and are more likely to go to higher levels of study than other cohorts of students in New Zealand tertiary education" (p. 7). Kantanis, (2002), using focus group interviews in Monash University, identified issues that affect mature age and undergraduate students' transition to university. The older students despite being matured and experienced encountered challenges with doing assignments unlike many of the undergraduate students.

As noted earlier, one factor likely to lead to failure is that students may have difficulty adjusting to university life and coping with the transition to higher education (Madjar et al., 2010b). To investigate perceptions of academic success and failing factors Ditcher and Tetley (1999) in a quantitative study emphasised that students and academics at the university should combine to promote academic success. A survey was used as a data collection tool listed 19 success items and 19 failure items. Both students and academic staff of Canterbury University in New Zealand responded to the items by using a likert scale. The success factor rated highest was self-motivation and the highest failing factor was lack of self-motivation. These findings fit with school studies that show students

may experience complex and conflicting feelings making them feel in secure, distressed, anxious, and confused about the unknown and this affects their ability to learn well while in school (Dowling, 2005). Friendships established with peers anti-school feelings may lead to academic failure if students engaged in out of school activities with those friends (Demetriou et al., 2000; Ladd et al., 1997). The challenges experienced by students at the new micro-system of the school/university can be better managed by students if they set their priorities right and work hard to achieve them. There are demand characteristics and happenings in the social environment that invite or discourage reactions that can foster or disrupt the operation of development and achievement of long-term goals (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1997).

The following sections highlight tertiary education transition for women and the factors likely to affect women's educational transition to higher education in PNG.

## 2.8. Transition to tertiary education for girls and women

Internationally girls and women are progressing well into tertiary education and are competing with the opposite sex in academic performance and achievement. Women in the developed world are flooding the universities and other tertiary educational institutions in high numbers and outnumbering males, particularly in this century (see for example, Callister, Newell, Perry & Scott, 2006; DiPrete, McDaniel, Buchmann & Shwed, 2009; Ivosevic, 2007; Sutherland, 1988). Using New Zealand as an example the table below shows the increase in enrolment figures for women to tertiary education for the years 2000 to 2004.

**Table 2.** Enrolment figures of universities in New Zealand**.**

| Years | 2000 | 2001 | 2002 | 2003 | 2004 |
|-------|------|------|------|------|------|
| Male | 144,101 | 158,054 | 171,568 | 200,888 | 219,284 |
| Female | 185,508 | 208,406 | 240,696 | 269,117 | 294,439 |
| Total | 329,609 | 366,459 | 412,264 | 470,005 | 513,723 |

Adapted from Callister et al. (2006). The gendered tertiary education transition. *Policy Quarterly*, *2*(3), 4-11. Retrieved from http://ips.ac.nz/publications/files/627083dc2a9.pdf

Much of the recent literature on girls' and women's progress to tertiary education comes from the developed nations like New Zealand, Australia, Netherlands and the United States of America (USA). The findings show that women are completing higher education and entering the labour market and securing jobs that were once male dominated.

### 2.8.1. New Zealand and elsewhere

In this section I took New Zealand, Australia and USA as examples of countries that showed good participation rates for women in higher education. A quantitative study conducted in New Zealand by Callister et al. (2006) stated that women in New Zealand were actively participating in tertiary education and transition at a higher rate than males. This was a new trend in the New Zealand context, and women were even moving into fields which were once male dominated. The data analysed for the years 1994 to 2004 used different measures including fields of studies and courses offered at tertiary institutions. The data showed significant increase in women's participation. The findings also included women from other ethnic groups entering New Zealand tertiary education and getting higher educational qualifications. New Zealand is a developed country which ensures that women's education is a priority. For that reason, it leads in example of high numbers of women accessing education and succeeding at higher educational levels. However, Callister et al. (2006) suggest that it is a policy matter for New Zealand to reconsider policies related to women so males are not disadvantaged in the future. Furthermore, Newell and Callister (2008) in an Australian Population Association conference in Australia mentioned that in the years 1981-2006 in Australia and New Zealand there was "a rapid shift from a male to female led pattern of growth in tertiary educational attainment" (p.2). Different age groups were used to compare the increase in gender tertiary educational achievement for Australia and New Zealand. In comparison of the two countries, the age range from 20-24, 25-34 and 35-44 in both countries showed that females outnumbered males in tertiary education while for ages 45-64 males were taking a lead. The reasons for the increase are different for the two countries.

Studies in the USA identified a similar increase in the gender gap in college graduates was in favour of females. DiPrete et al. (2009) in a conference paper in Texas University highlighted that women's achievement of degrees and new graduates in colleges had increased to 58% of the total compared to 42% for males. One possible reason for the increase in college completion was the achievement of successful transitions at various points. For example, females had lower dropout rates in lower high school than males and this gap widened in the 1990s. Data were collected using the census figures for the six decades from 1940 to 2000. A comparison of race and gender highlighted that females were doing better than males of the same race. However, African American females were doing less well than their white counterparts and white males had higher rates of college completion than that of African American males (DiPrete et al., 2009).

I am drawing from research done in only three developed countries, Australia, New Zealand and USA, for women's parity with males in higher education; however, no general conclusions can be made lightly as there are different reasons why women are participating at a higher rate than males. It is noteworthy that males are competing with women in higher education and women do experience challenges and barriers in the fields of studies chosen at the university. This may happen when women choose to study in male-dominated disciplines such as science and engineering (Ivosevic, 2007; Sutherland, 1988). Sutherland noted the challenges women were facing such as stereotyping and gender bias; and women felt they were undermined in some disciplines as not capable in a men's world. However, these findings were from 1988 and the trend may have changed today.

In a global picture highlighting women's participation in higher education Ivosevic (2007) in a European Student Union (ESU) seminar stated that over the past decade:

> …women continued to progress towards achieving parity with men when it comes to access to higher education. At the world level the share of women in tertiary enrolment rates in 1997 was 46.8% worldwide. However, it is important to note that already in 1990 women represented more than half of total enrolment rates (51.2%) in the developed countries. The trend of high share of women in enrolment to higher education continued in the developed world to reach 52.9% in 1997 – in absolute terms an increase of 3.5 million. In the developing countries in 1997 6.2

million more female students enrolled to higher education compared to 1990. (p.1)

Although there was an increase in women's participation in tertiary education worldwide in 1997 (Ivosevic, 2007), this may not be the case for PNG. In 1997 gender disparity was higher than the world figures reported by Ivosevic (2007), with only 30% of females in PNG engaged in tertiary education. These enrolments were concentrated in the fields of nursing and teaching (Brouwer et al., 1998). Brouwer et al. (1998) noted that all major studies done in PNG highlighted that cultural factors were a major drawback for females' participation in education at all levels.

## 2.9. Transition to tertiary education for girls and women in PNG and Melanesian context

Every year women in PNG and other Melanesian countries are given the opportunity to participate in tertiary education through aid agencies such as Agency for International Development (AusAid) (Spark, 2010) and New Zealand Development Scholarship (NZAID). Akao (2008), Kilavanwa (2004) and Vali (2010) were examples of women benefitting from NZAID scholarships. Women are progressing in education and are competing with men in education even so the number is slowly increasing. Geissinger (1997) interviewed 27 educated women from PNG to find out the challenges they faced as educated women. Educated women in PNG face challenges both at home and at the workplace. A recent study by Spark (2010) in PNG examined case studies and identified the following challenges faced by educated women:

> male jealousy and anxiety about educated women as competitors, female jealousy and suspicion about educated women's opportunities and morality; active discrimination against women, including in relation to promotions, the provision of accommodation, and the opportunity for further study; the absence of formal childcare; and culturally entrenched notions about women's roles. (p. 28)

Despite the fact that women are educated they still are not free from humiliation and oppression in PNG society.

Investigating women's leadership positions in three ethnic groups, New Zealand Maori, Pacifika and Melanesian, Strachan's (2009) qualitative study identified issues that affected women. Strachan, (2009) found that the potential of women engaging in educational leadership positions started with women's and girls' access to education. If girls and women were able to complete tertiary education they were likely to find employment in the public and private sector and to earn leadership positions (Strachan, 2009). There is literature on women's education and educational leadership in the Melanesian context which is relevant to educational transition particularly regarding factors affecting women to participate in leadership roles (see for example, Akao, 2008; Kilavanwa; 2004; Strachan, 2009; Vali, 2010). Factors such as: male dominance, gender bias, unfair distribution of finance and unfair decision making can impact girls' education as early as primary level, which in turn affect women's participation in tertiary education. This may have lifetime consequences such as women appearing to be illiterate compared to males. These factors are compounded by the cultural setting of PNG society because young women are denied social rights and access to education (Spark, 2010). There is limited literature generally about girls and women and education in PNG (see Dovona-Ope, 2008; Geissinger, 1997; Spark, 2010; Toliman, 2000) and nothing directly related to my topic on educational transition. However, these authors have identified major contributing factors which are hindering girls and women's education in PNG. Vali (2010) and Kilanvanwa (2004), in their studies on women's educational leadership roles in PNG, identified that there is an underrepresentation of women leaders in the education system. This is the result of fewer women participating in secondary education and moving on to tertiary education. While research in PNG shows that women are underrepresented in educational leadership positions it is important for researchers to understand the socio-cultural, economic and the political aspects of PNG that oppose women's education advancement, before assuming probable counter-measures.

The factors that affect women's educational transition to higher education in PNG are discussed below.

## 2.10. Factors affecting the likelihood of women's transition to higher education

A number of factors that may affect educational transitions were mentioned earlier, in chapter 2.5, highlighting the key aspects to educational transition (for example, parental backgrounds) and these can also affect students in PNG. However, this section specifically addresses factors in the PNG and Melanesian context. These factors may be present in other developing nations which share a similar cultural background to PNG.

### 2.10.1. Socio-cultural effects on educational opportunities

Dovona-Ope (2008) and Kewa (2007), writings from a feminist perspective, identified cultural factors and how they affect women's and girls' educational opportunities in PNG. The socio-cultural backgrounds of all students affected their education but the female gender was most significantly affected in education at all levels (Strachan, 2009). "Being a woman in Papua New Guinea and "fighting" to gain education is a struggle in itself. Many women and girls in PNG today are compromising their education because of so many reasons" (Kewa, 2007, p. 55). One of the likely reasons is the cultural practices of PNG. Vali (2010) and Kewa (2007) both mentioned some examples of cultural barriers which continue to affect women in PNG. For example, women are seen as child-bearers and their role is to look after the household, they are bullied at school by males, forced to get married at an early age (marriages are arranged without first seeking consent from the girl), then work the gardens and look after their husbands and children. Summarising Kilavanwa's (2004) and Vali's (2010) research findings, they emphasised that it is seen as the man's job to work for the family to earn an income as he is considered to be stronger than a woman. The men, not the women, are recognised as the heads of the families, leaders and decision-makers. The men take part in public gatherings and in speech making, not women. Men can go out of the house and stay out for long hours without the women's consent, but not for women; they are expected to stay in the house. If women were to leave the house for whatever reasons without permission, when

the husband finds out some women suffer the consequences, which in most cases lead to domestic violence (Kilavanwa, 2004; Vali, 2010).

PNG's socio-cultural practices impact female students in education as early as primary school and later affect transition to tertiary education. Toliman (2000) in her conference paper on fighting cultural barriers in education observed that the inferiority of women was deeply entrenched in the cultural beliefs and practices of the people, and for that reason it was very difficult for females to pursue their education beyond the primary level. Furthermore, concerning secondary education for women in PNG, Dovona-Ope (2008) presented a critical reflection of issues hindering the progress of women and girls' education and emphasised that it is at secondary level that most female students decide their future career pathways. If they were faced with these cultural challenges they were discouraged from tertiary education which affected their educational opportunities.

In demonstrating the socio-cultural construction of PNG society Kewa (2007), a Papua New Guinean woman who was born, raised, lived and worked in a male-dominated society, wrote a book describing her life experiences while incorporating challenges and struggles other PNG women are facing in PNG. She was outspoken and influential regarding the many cultural practices that affect women of PNG in her book *Being a woman in Papua New Guinea*. She comprehensively covered some interesting and true stories about social issues, for example, the different rape cases faced by women in PNG. She wrote about the effects of male dominance on women and described many ways in which women are struggling to be recognised, accepted and appreciated by their male partners. Women are unfairly treated at all levels, they are abused and their rights to freedom and education are denied by males, the government and particularly the socio-cultural climate of the country. Similarly, Vali (2010) in a qualitative study identified that women's social values have not been changed over a long period of time because of the society's perception of women. Kewa (2007) further added that women are continuously being undermined and disrespected by their own male relatives and others; and she argued that the Education Department does not have any policies that protect women from such practices. Although Vali (2010) and Kewa (2007) expressed similar comments about cultural factors in PNG, it is

difficult to draw conclusions regarding women's perception of their social rights and freedom in PNG. In Vali's (2010) study the sample size was small and only educated women participated in the study, while Kewa (2007) used practical examples of women suffering in a patriarchal society with less attention given to women in the matrilineal society.

### 2.11.2. Socio-economic constraints

Another obvious hindrance to education in PNG is socio economic factors. Dovona-Ope (2008) highlighted that the majority of the parents living in the rural areas and some in the settlements of the urban areas are less likely to be able to generate income for their families. The parents are claiming that there are few avenues and means of generating income for their families (Geissinger, 1997). In identifying parents' perception of socio-economic constraints, Gibson and Rozelle (2004), Spark (2010) and Strachan (2009) found that sending children to school in PNG is a problem because many parents cannot afford school fees. Due to the inability of the family to generate sufficient income to meet the educational needs of all the children in the family, girls' education was overlooked and boys were given first priority. Geissinger (1997) in her qualitative study of girls' access to education in PNG revealed that most PNG female students tried their best to compete with others to find a placing at vocational schools but it was the school fee that constrained their enthusiasm. Similarly, Spark (2010) and Gibson and Rozell (2004) added that limited financial resources allowed boys to continue their education while girls' education was sacrificed. Women's and girls' education was not a major concern for families, particularly in rural areas, because parents' perception of educating girls was still culturally oriented where males are advantaged in most areas. According to Dovona-Ope, (2008):

> When the average income per family is very low, it places a considerable burden on many parents and guardians, despite government subsidies provided to assist parents with the cost of educating their children. To raise such amounts of money to pay for their children's school fees and other educational costs was often difficult for many families who were from low socio-economic backgrounds. Many parents represent 85% of the population who live in villages and survive on the subsistence economy or who live in urban settlement where the income per day is very small. (p.101)

Drawing from various studies conducted in PNG, it is evident that lack of socio economic support from parents in PNG impacted the young women's access to education at all levels. Parental SES may have a more serious impact on educational choices for women in rural areas than in urban areas. Most parents living in urban centres in PNG have some means of paid employment, unlike the rural parents who depend mostly on cash crops and selling produce at the local markets (Toliman, 2000).

## 2.10.2. Rural and urban drawbacks

It is significantly important to note that PNG has rural and urban areas and these contexts affect women and girls' education (Department of Education, 2002; Geissinger; 1997). Several authors have drawn attention to the effects of rural and urban settings on female students' educational transition at all levels of education in PNG (Geisinger, 1997; Toliman, 2000). In relation to education, the rural setting appears to be a drawback for girls and women's access to education (Department of Education, 2002). Young women who come from the very remotest rural settings of PNG are more disadvantaged than others who come from less remote areas because of not having access to schools, having to walk long distances and other social issues of rape etc. (when girls are walking long distances to school) (Department of Education, 2002). Strachan (2009) emphasised that because parents see males as more able to put up with challenges while traveling to and from schools in the rural areas, and they were therefore privileged over females regarding educational opportunities. It therefore appears that the geographical features and make-up of the country combine with social practices and attitudes hinder females' education in rural PNG (Department of Education, 2002; Geissinger, 1997). The Department of Education (2002) has identified the problem of inaccessibility as starting as early as primary school. As a result it affects all subsequent educational transitions. Furthermore, there were other reasons why rural parents were reluctant to send their daughters to school. They feared that when the girls were educated they might marry men from other cultures and would not come back and help their parents when they grow old. They also feared that their daughters might get pregnant and would not complete their education (Dovona-Ope, 2008). In the western world girls are sent to school because education is compulsory from primary to secondary education, unlike in

rural PNG. Parents in the western world may also fear that their children become pregnant or father a child while still children themselves (Knowles & Mulcahy, 2008) but these fears centre on teen relationships and going out on dates and do not prevent girls accessing education. Otherwise education is accessible to everyone in the western context (Knowles & Mulcahy, 2008) unlike in some developing countries.

In contrast to their rural counterparts, the female students in urban areas in PNG are privileged because of the accessibility of schools and because they are more likely to have the financial and emotional support of their parents (Geissinger, 1997; Strachan, 2009). Spark's (2010) study using urban educated women as her participants identified that urban female students in tertiary institutions in PNG are advantaged because of their family backgrounds. This is because most urban parents are educated and they understand the importance of girls' education. As educated and working parents they were able to support their children in education (Spark, 2010). The young women benefited from parental resources as they entered the education system, and moved from one level to the next. However, Spark's (2010) research only involved only urban women participants. Information about both rural and urban settings would enable a range of varied and comprehensive responses from women in both contexts to be gathered on issues concerning women. It appears that there are few educated women living and working in the rural areas of PNG; and it is likely that their experiences will be different to those of women living in the urban areas. Therefore, it would be fair to gather adequate information from women from both settings if there be any future research regarding women issues in PNG.

While the above factors hinder female students' educational transitions one of the enablers in making successful educational transitions is having inspiring women leaders and mentors as role models.

### 2.10.3. Women role models

Having role models motivated and encouraged women to enter the education system and study and complete their studies in the PNG context (Strachan, 2009). Strachan's (2009) intensive research in Educational leadership in the Melanesian

context has identified the importance of women role models as part of the motivation and encouragement of women in educational leadership. Strachan (2009) mentioned that "Melanesian girls lack women role models in education, in politics and to a lesser extent, in the community" (p. 103). She also drew on the research of Kilavanwa (2004) on women principals in PNG, which showed that only one woman was a principal of a secondary school. In identifying women role models, Akao's (2008) and Vali's (2010) research on women educational leadership interviewed a number of inspiring women in leadership positions. Having such well-educated and successful career women in PNG and in the Solomon Islands had a positive effect on young women. The young women saw these women as role models and this impacted both their choice of and transition to tertiary education. Interestingly, most of these educated women are seen in the urban areas. Dovona-Ope (2008) reflected on her experiences of how her parents, especially her father, perceived that education encouraged him to send his children to school. She stated that she saw her father as role model; as some-one who inspired her in her education and career despite being a male in the PNG society. Dovona-Ope (2008) and Geissinger (1997) highlighted that in rural PNG young women were struggling to make a start in their lives. They needed role models to motivate them and to help change the views of their parents so that they could get an education similar to that available to their male counterparts in a male-dominated society. Furthermore, as there were no role models in rural areas it was difficult for people to understand the significance of educating women, making the parents want to keep their daughters at home for fear of losing them through education.

## 2.11. Summary and rationale

This literature review has examined the theoretical perspectives underpinning this study and defined various aspects of transitions, drawing a link to and defining educational transition. It also discussed transition to tertiary education and the key issues in educational transition such as family backgrounds and parents' and universities' roles in educational transition. Thus, this literature review has helped me to understand the concepts of transition and educational transition and the issues that challenge and sustain students who are making the transition. Research

has shown that during the transitions the students experienced changes in their roles, status, ways of doing things and expectations as they tried to modify their sense of self and develop a sense of belonging to and acceptance in the different settings they entered. Much of the literature on educational transition is from the western context and not from PNG and Melanesia generally. This literature review has revealed that women were progressing well to and through higher education in the developed world and in places their participation rate was higher than that of males. The educational achievement of these women is much better than that of women from PNG and other Melanesian countries. On the other hand, the number of women entering tertiary education in PNG and Melanesian context is slowly increasing but it will take years before it matches the figures of women in the developed world. There are also many reasons why women been oppressed and unable to progress easily into tertiary education in the Melanesian context. The literature highlighted the factors that tend to impact and hinder young women and girls in education in the PNG context. These include socio-cultural barriers, socio–economic constraints and rural drawbacks. Nothing is said in the literature about educational transition for women in the PNG context and there is no research regarding students undertaking educational transition to tertiary education in PNG. Therefore, this prompted me to research young women's experiences of educational transition from secondary to tertiary education in PNG. The findings of this study can document the experiences of educational transition for women in higher educational institutions in PNG. The findings may also shed light on the underlying factors that affect rural and urban women in educational transition so that strategies can be developed to overcome the challenges.

The following chapter provides a description of the methodology that was used to provide answers to the research questions that guided this thesis.

# Chapter 3: Research design

## 3.1. Introduction

The key purpose of undertaking this research was to explore the experiences of female students' educational transition from secondary to tertiary education in PNG. The research sets out to capture the experiences encountered by the young women because of the choice they made to enter a university rather than any other tertiary institutions in the country. It further explored the challenges and the factors that contributed to their likely success and failure at the university. The methodology employed in this study provided answers to the following questions:

1. What are the experiences of the choice the female students make to enter a university?

2. What challenges do they identify as part of this transition?

3. What factors do they identify as contributing to their likely success or likely failure in their university courses?

This chapter explains the research methods and the methodology used in this study. The first part of this chapter examines the interpretive paradigm and the qualitative research approach. This is followed by a discussion of the data collection methods (semi-structured and focus group interviews) and highlights the benefits and limitations of each of these methods. The third part of the chapter presents the research process and includes the research site, the participants and the data collection procedures. The fourth part refers to research quality, and includes ethical aspects of informed consent, confidentiality and anonymity. The validity and trustworthiness of data collected are also examined in this section, and the chapter concludes with a summary.

## 3.2. Interpretive paradigm

The research was located within an interpretive paradigm. Interpretive paradigm is characterised by a concern for individuals as social beings that have the potentials and capabilities to interact with one another. It is centered on people's actions and behaviour and how they interact and make sense of their surroundings and of their subjective world (Burton & Bartlett, 2009; Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2007).

Cohen, et al. (2007) described an interpretive approach as follows:

> [The] interpretive paradigm tend[s] to be anti-positivist…The central endeavor in the context of the interpretive paradigm is to understand the subjective world of the human experience. To retain the integrity of the phenomena being investigated, efforts are made to get inside the person and to understand from within. The imposition of external form and structure is resisted, since this reflects the view point of the observer as opposed to that of the actor directly involved. (p. 21)

The focus is on understanding human experiences and how people's experiences affect their lives in any settings. Additionally, people's behaviour and actions in various social situations show the subjective feelings that affect their actions (Burton & Bartlett, 2009). Lather (1991) discussed interpretive research from a feminist perspective by considering women participants' views of reality. Lather (1991) emphasised that women's points of views must be heard in various life experiences and situations to gather a fair representation of information that benefits women in all walks of life. Lather argues that women's views are often unheard in education, but they are as important as those of men and should be heard. This was in 1991 but is still relevant to the PNG context where women's voices have tended to be ignored. Furthermore, Sarantakos (1998) stressed that:

> Feminists are concerned with human beings but primarily with women and their position in the contemporary societies. Women are seen in a dynamic context with options and opportunities which, however, are being misused and appropriated by men. Men are seen as oppressing and exploiting women in all social contexts (family, community and work) as well as in the personal world. (p. 37)

Thus, an interpretive paradigm was suited to this research as it enabled me to explore and examine the experiences of the female student participants in terms of their roles, identities, status and actions in educational transition. Since women were the main focus of this study, I as the researcher attempted to understand them, which Lather (1991) suggests retains the integrity of the information gathered.

## 3.3. Characteristics of qualitative research

Interpretive studies frequently draw on qualitative methodology when generating data from participants (see, for example, Anderson & Arsenault, 1998; Ary, Jacobs & Razavieh, 2002; Burns, 2000; Cohen et al., 2007). Burns (2000) stressed that:

> Qualitative researchers believe that since humans are conscious of their own behaviour, the thoughts, feelings and perceptions of their informants are vital. How people attach meaning and what meanings they attach are the bases of their behaviour. Only qualitative methods, such as participant observation and unstructured interviewing, permit access to individuals in the context of ongoing daily life. The qualitative researcher is not concerned with objective truth, but rather with the truth as the informant perceives it. (p.388)

Furthermore, Anderson and Arsenault (1998) have said that qualitative research is a form of enquiry exploring phenomena which are carried out in natural settings using multi-methods to analyse what is being explored. Multi-methods might include case studies, life stories, an observational approach, historical-interactional, ethnography, document analysis and interviews (Ary et al., 2002; Burton & Bartlett, 2009). Cohen et al. (2007) emphasised that the qualitative method involves smaller size sampling than quantitative research but the data collected in most studies tend to be more detailed and richer. Whatever the samplings are Burns (2000) noted that participants as human beings are conscious of their behaviour and are careful with how they display their emotions. They can display different behaviour in different situations. It is up to the researcher to interpret the actions taken. Therefore, the use of the qualitative approach in research can assist researchers to understand people and the reasons for their behaviour.

Qualitative research allows for thematic data analysis. It involves organising and making sense of information gathered from the participants' views and categorising them into themes and patterns and identifying similarities and differences (Cohen et al., 2007).

My research sought to understand the participants' experiences of coming to university. A qualitative approach was most applicable to my study. The

conceptual and theoretical framework of my research allowed for the interview method as data generating technique to be used in this research.

The next section presents a description of the interview method.

## 3.4. Interview as data generating method

It is noted that the interview method is probably one of the most widely used methods in generating data (Anderson & Arsenault, 1998; Dowling & Brown, 2010). According to Creswell (2005), interviews occur when researchers ask people questions and record their responses. Cohen et al. (2007) defined the interview method as a conversation between the researcher and the participants to collect data by exchanging ideas on a topic of mutual interest. Kvale (1996) stated that data are collected through active and meaningful conversations amongst the participants, between the group of participants and the researcher, the researcher with individual participants, and the researcher with another researcher. On the same note, Burns (2000) emphasised that an interview is considered a two-way process, which through conversation can develop new knowledge in a specific area of study. It is through interactions and dialogue between participants and the interviewers that knowledge is derived (Kvale, 1996).

The interview method can also help develop rapport between the interviewer and the interviewee (Kvale, 1996). As they talk they learn from one another, creating new knowledge, ideas and making critical judgments of what is discussed in relation to the phenomena being explored. Ideally a research interview, is systematically organised so that all participants are given the opportunity to voice their opinions on issues (Cohen et al., 2007). The interview can be seen as a flexible tool for data collection as it enables multi-sensory channels to be used: verbal, non-verbal, spoken and heard (Dowling & Brown, 2010; Hesse-Biber, 2007). Body language can be interpreted and analysed because gestures, facial expressions etc. add meaning to the spoken word. Therefore, researchers can consider the behaviour of their participants in an interpretive approach to add meaning to the data (Anderson & Arsenault, 1998) but only when it is necessary to that particular study. On the other hand, Best and Kahn (1998) argued that data

collected from interviews can potentially be biased and perhaps provide misleading information about the study.

To collect deeper and richer data during the interviewing process the interviewer uses probes to clarify uncertainty in questions to assist him/her to collect useful data. Probes are follow-up questions used by the researcher (Kruger, 1994; Patton, 2002; Steward & Shamdasani, 1990). However, these must be used carefully as they can sometimes be annoying to the interviewee if they are constantly used to get a response. The interviewer should know when to use appropriate probes to encourage participation and contribution of meaningful ideas from participants (Patton, 2002). Patton further argued that probes should be used naturally, as in any really interesting conversation.

In qualitative research four main types of interviews are used to generate data: the structured interview, the unstructured interview, the non-directive interview and the focused interview (Anderson & Arsenault, 1998; Burns, 2000; Cohen et al., 2007). In this study, I employed two types of interview techniques which were: semi-structured interviews and focus groups (see Appendix 6).

### 3.4.1. Semi-structured interview

Creswell (2005) defined semi-structured interview as "the one-on-one interview is a data collection process in which the researcher asks questions to and records answers from only one participant in the study at a time" (p. 215). Patton (2002) noted that the semi-structured interview can also be the base of developing mutual respect and understanding between the interviewer and interviewee. Wengraf (2001) described the designing of the semi-structured interview:

> … they are designed to have a number of interviewer questions prepared in advance but such prepared questions are designed to be sufficiently open that the subsequent questions of the interviewer cannot be planned in advance but must be improvised in a careful and theorized way. (p. 5)

On the same note, Barriball and While (1994) highlighted that guiding questions developed in semi-structured interviews can be used to assist the researchers in obtaining data in response to the main research questions of the study. The questions developed are similar for each participant to collect a variety of

responses from participants. The semi-structured interview gives opportunities to the participants to openly respond to the questions already predetermined by the researcher (Reinharz, 1992).

Additionally, where and how the interviewee and the interviewer are seated contributes to the collection of rich data and helps build rapport between the interviewer and the interviewee (Cohen et al., 2007). The seating arrangement has to be comfortable and friendly to allow for free flow of information during the interview process (the asking and answering of questions) (Kvale, 1996).

### 3.4.2. Focus group interview

In general terms, a focus group interview allows participants to interact with each other rather than with the interviewer. It is a planned informal discussion whereby one person's idea is further acknowledged, criticised and discussed openly by the immediate participants. Its purpose is to address a topic in a comfortable environment (Kruger, 1994; Patton, 2002). However, it is controlled and stimulated by the interviewer to encourage detailed discussions and collection of relevant data (Anderson & Arsenault, 1998; Best & Kahn, 1998). Anderson and Arsenault (1998) and Patton (2002) noted that a focus group interview is often conducted in a group of six to eight participants and it takes one to two hours. Ary et al. (2002) suggested that a researcher use a small number of questions to draw out participants' responses to a topic. The participants answer freely using their own words to express their understanding of the question. Focus group interviews can allow for greater flexibility than a semi-structured interview because participants may be more likely to pick up on each other's ideas and raise new issues for discussion. However, Creswell (2005) stated that it can be challenging for the interviewer if he/she lacks control over the discussion and if the interviews were recorded it can be difficult to distinguish the individual voices of people among the group during transcribing. He further mentioned that when conducting focus group interviews it is better for the researcher to encourage every participant to contribute ideas rather than allowing a few people to dominate the discussion.

In a focus group interview researchers can adopt the role of moderator. According to Hesse-Biber (2007):

> Moderation refers to the degree of control the interviewer exercises. Control comes in various forms, including guiding the conversation, letting the people speak as they choose or ensuring each member speaks to each question, and standardization (the extent to which each group follows the interview question guide). (p. 184)

During focus group interviews, the researcher controls the flow of conversation in the group. He or she ensures that adequate time is given for responses and fair opportunity is given to individuals in a focus group discussion (Hesse-Biber, 2007). I gathered additional data through focus group interviews (see Appendix 6). I acted as a moderator in my study and attempted to ensure fair and just participation from each participant. I also helped to re-orient the discussions to be within the scope and purpose of the study. The focus group interview encouraged the young women to collaboratively express their experiences of educational transitions from secondary to tertiary education.

Different methodological approaches used in the generation of data in research have their own advantages and limitations. The limitations of the interview method will be discussed below.

### 3.4.3. Limitations of the interview method

Limitations, as defined by Creswell (2005), are the potential weaknesses or problems in a research study. The interview method is considered as a flexible tool for the generation of data and it uses multiple-sensory channels (Dowling & Brown, 2010). An interview does not happen naturally so the interviewer has to be careful in conducting an interview because it can take place in a slightly artificial setting (Burns, 2000; Cohen et al., 2007). Furthermore, Burton and Bartlett (2009) have identified several disadvantages of the interview method: an interviewer may significantly affect the responses by inadvertently influencing or leading a respondent; interviews can take a great deal of time and may be difficult to set up. This inevitably restricts the number it is possible to carry out. In addition, the more unstructured the interviews are then the more variation there is

between interviews. The 'uniqueness' of each interview makes collating the data more difficult (Burton & Bartlett, 2009).

The specific limitations of semi-structured and focus group interviews will be highlighted below.

### 3.4.4. Limitations of the semi-structured interview

An interviewer in a semi-structured interview has an interview guide to assist him /her to ask appropriate questions during the interview (Cohen et al., 2007) but there are limitations to semi-structured interviews. Best and Kahn (1998) state that one of the limitations can be that it is time consuming as the interviewer tries to sequence and word questions to meet the scope and purpose of the research. This is likely to be the case if the interviewer is new to the research arena and is not sure of the purpose of the study and what data need to be collected. Furthermore, Mason (2002) mentions that if too much attention and time is given to asking the right questions in the right order and time, this could cause interviewees to become impatient and they would not fully participate and respond well to questions. Moreover, in some cases the interviewer might tend to control and dominate the interview by controlling the interviewee into producing what the interviewer wants and thus gain less much of the interviewee's perception on the research topic. If the interviewer is powerful and too prescriptive and directive the data can be influenced (Burton & Bartlett, 2009). In a semi-structured interview the interviewer should allow plenty of time for the interviewee to respond to questions, using probes when and wherever necessary to re-orient the interviewee. This is to avoid researcher bias in an interview (Burns, 2000). In my study I addressed some of these issues, firstly by piloting and refining the questions prior to the data gathering phase. Then, during the interviews I was careful to allow my participants to openly discuss and express their opinions without dominating the discussions. I wanted them to truly express their own views for each questions.

### 3.4.5. Limitations of the focus group interview

Like all forms of data collection techniques the focus group also has its limitations and challenges. Patton (2002) mentioned the following limitations of focus group interview: the questions to be asked can be restricted in the group setting;

response time for an individual must be constrained so that everyone is able to contribute; the interviewer should control the interview process so everyone is participating equally; and in a focus group confidentiality cannot be guaranteed. It is important to note that in a focus group interview people sharing the same interest can oppose one another and may not fully participate. Some of them can hesitate to provide relevant feedback and this may result in the gathering of unwanted data (Patton, 2002). Steward and Shamdasani (1990) emphasised that the participants can go to the extreme of withdrawal if there is conflict of interest and opinion amongst the group members. I have experienced this in my research, where two participants were less forthcoming in the group interviews. I made several attempts to get these students to participate but to no avail. Although Patton (2002) suggested that before choosing a focus group interview a researcher might want to make sure that the participants, although sharing the same background, are strangers to each other or they should not know the perceptions of the researcher to avoid providing misleading information. In my research, the participants were not strangers. They were students of the same university and they shared common interests, feelings and understanding of issues that were affecting them at the university. For these reasons, I felt their negative feelings and experiences towards each other would be limited.

The next section presents the research process.

## 3.5. Research process

I describe the research process that was followed when the research was conducted. It includes research participants, the research site, the data collection procedures and data analysis.

### 3.5.1. Research site

The research was conducted in one of the universities in PNG. It has a total population of 1472 students of whom 790 were females and 682 males. It has a total of 115 academic staff. The university comprises of six faculties, Faculty of Arts, Faculty of Business and Informatics, Faculty of Health Sciences, Faculty of Education, Faculty of Flexible Learning and Faculty of Theology. Students from

all over the country and other Melanesian countries are enrolled and educated at this university.

### 3.5.2. Research participants

The main participants of the study were 12 young female students from both the urban and rural settings in PNG. They were first and second year students at the university. The first year students were in their seventh week of study at the time of the interviews. Ten of the participants were female students from the Department of Social and Religious Studies under the Faculty of Arts. Two students were from the Department of Health Management under the Faculty of Health and Science; these were Monica in her second year and Judy in her first year of studies. The other ten students, Thressa, Hilda, Emma, Jane and Martha, were second year students and Lona, Mona, Tina, Zena and Wilma, were first year students all from the Department of Social and Religious Studies.

The twelve participants came from different family backgrounds, sizes and settings. Nine of the participants had educated parents with one or both parents working. The parents of one participant had separated and she had been looked after by an aunty. One of the participants was from a single parent home (father deceased) and the other two were from uneducated parents who were not working. The young women's backgrounds can generally be categorised into two groups that is from rural and urban settings, and in their first and second years of studies (see Appendix 3).

### 3.5.3. Data collection procedures

An ethics application was submitted and reviewed and approval was obtained from the Human Research Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Education at the University of Waikato, before the initial collection of data. Upon obtaining ethics approval I then negotiated with the research site for their permission to collect data using their students and the institution's facilities. A letter was emailed to the institution (see Appendix 1). When permission was granted I travelled to the research site and was directed to see the Post-Graduate Research Coordinator of the university. I met him and was given several ground rules and told which

people to see to arrange for access to my research participants. I met with the female students' dean and explained my research topic, its purpose and the likely participants. A letter was given to her during the discussion (see Appendix 2). I was told that to meet with all the female students would be difficult during the day as they were busy and were scattered across the campus. The deans made an announcement during one of their evening meetings of my presence and my reason for being at the university. The deans kindly requested the female students (those who were boarders) to volunteer to take part in the research. The meeting was conducted without my presence as I was living far away from the university. I met the participants two days after meeting the female students' dean and the assistant dean. I handed the participants the letter inviting them to participate in my research and the information sheet explaining the purpose of the research (see Appendices 4 & 5). The information sheets were given to the young women a week before the commencement of data collection. Briefings and other important aspects of the research, including their rights regarding participation, were made known to them. Their informed consent to participate in the research was obtained (see Appendices 7 & 8). Interviews were conducted on scheduled times in relation to the participants' free time on their class timetable for the semester.

Semi-structured and focus group interviews were used to collect data for the research (see Appendix, 6). It took me approximately three weeks for the data collection and three weeks for the transcribing process. All of the students completed the individual semi-structured interviews. These lasted for approximately one hour for each participant. Ten of the participants completed the focus group interviews. These were undertaken in two separate groups, one for first years and one for second years. The first year focus group lasted for an hour and the one with second years was also an hour. The semi-structured interviews for the two groups of students were based on the two sets interview questions (see Appendix 6). Two students, one each from either groups and both from the urban setting were not able to attend the focus group interviews and so were only interviewed once. I was not given an office space to work but able to use vacant classrooms for my interviews.

In my study I faced my participants without putting any table in between us. This was to create a feeling of equality. A chair was placed between us for the tape recorder which recorded the interview. The interviewer's dress is another aspect that requires careful consideration. A researcher should consider the cultural context of the setting and the kind of participants to be interviewed and dress appropriately. The interviewer has to be presentable and dress reasonably; if overdressed or under dressed and out of context she or he might not be given the right kind of information needed. The interviewee might be offended and not fully cooperate due to the distractions caused by the interviewer because of the form of dressing (Burton & Bartlett, 2009; Cohen et al., 2007). When I was collecting data in PNG I wore traditional PNG Meri blouse and laplap. This signalled to the participants that we shared a similar culture and we belonged to PNG society which hopefully made them comfortable and more relaxed during the interview.

Both semi-structured and focus group interviews were audio-recorded and later transcribed. The transcripts were given to the participants and they had one week to read through and make amendments to their transcripts. We all met on a scheduled time and I was able to collect their transcripts. They made some changes which I later typed into the original data. In the reporting of the direct quotes in my results chapter I used pseudonyms instead of their real names. Pseudonyms were also used for other people's names and places.

### 3.5.4. Data analysis

During the interviewing process the students and I interacted to collect data (Cohen et al., 2007). The data were carefully examined and interpreted for themes, contradictions and patterns. Different themes emerged and were categorised according to the three main research questions. Three different analyses were made, two for the semi-structured interviews and one for the focus group. After reading hard copies of the data several times and familiarising myself with the data I started organising the responses. Firstly, I organised the interviews by identifying major themes and patterns and putting the responses from the twelve participants together. I clustered the data by using different colours to signal themes, patterns and contradictions for each of the interviews according to participants' responses. I then categorised and clustered the data according to the

three main research questions. While doing that I wrote the names of the participants next to their responses to make it easier for me when it came to writing my findings. Next, I referred to the word document to colour, cut and paste data according to the major themes and patterns that have emerged from the analysis. Finally, I synthesized the major themes and further classified the data into specific themes looking carefully for contradictions of data among the twelve participants' responses. These findings are presented in Chapter Four.

During the initial data analysis process I noticed an interesting finding from a particular student. I made an illustrative case study for this rural participant. A case study according to Cohen et al. (2007) is designed and used frequently to illustrate and show more general information about a particular place, person and setting. It considers a human as a whole being and not just a part of a whole. Case studies investigate human beings participating in real contexts and events to find out reasons for their behaviour and to interpret and initiate approaches to overcome challenges or to help improve situations for people in groups or on individual basis (Cohen et al., 2007). This case study looked at a rural participant who made the transition to university and appeared to have succeeded against the odds. Her story is presented in Chapter Five.

This section explains how the research quality was maintained in this study.

## 3.6. Research quality

Quality must be maintained in educational research throughout the whole research procedures and processes (before, during and after) (Cohen et al., 2007). I have considered the following areas in this particular research; ethical considerations, informed consent, anonymity and confidentiality and validity and trustworthiness.

### 3.6.1. Ethical considerations

Scholars (e.g. Cohen et al., 2007; Kvale, 1996) have highlighted that ethical issues are to be given first priority when conducting research as they are the foundation of researcher and of participants' rights and responsibilities. Researchers have to be mindful of the possible risks when planning any type of research whether

qualitative or quantitative. Several important ethical considerations were taken into consideration during the designing of this study. These related to participants' safety, fear of exploitation, and possible damage and harm or risk done to the female students participating in this study (Boeije, 2010). It is necessary to consider and address any ethical issues before, during and after research. Ethical issues are faced in every research sequences, from within the research topic, the context, the data gathering method or process and access to the participants and the institution (Cohen et al., 2007). Ethical issues are taken into account so that researchers are aware of the possible ethical issues that may arise in the process of conducting the research (Guillemin & Gillam, 2004). As a student at the University of Waikato I followed the University's *Research Code of Ethics* (University of Waikato Human Research Ethics, 2009). This was to uphold and respect the integrity and identity of the University and my dignity as a novice researcher. I considered the following ethical issues: informed consent and anonymity and confidentiality and validity and trustworthiness.

### 3.6.1.1. Informed consent

This is the foremost and important ethical principle that is involved in any research. The participants by right should know the nature and purpose of the study and must show consent to participate in the study. Burns (2000) mentions that:

> Many researchers have their potential participants sign an informed consent form which describes the purpose of the research, its procedures, risks and discomforts, its benefits and the right to withdraw. This makes the situation clear and provides a degree of proof that the person was informed and has consented to take part. (p. 18)

The choice and the right to take part in the research should come from the participants with no influence or coercion from the researcher. It should be an independent decision made by the participant alone (Cohen et al., 2007). It is further highlighted that in signing the consent form both the participant and the researcher agree to share the consequences of any potential harm and risk that may arise from the research. The consent forms will describe the purpose of the study and risks, the benefits, and other ethical principles (Anderson &Arsenault, 1998; Burns, 2000). The main idea underpinning the use of informed consent is to

get the participants' permission prior to their engagement in the research. The signing of the consent forms ensured that participants' rights were protected during the data gathering process and provided evidence that participants were fully informed and had given their consent to take part in the study (Cohen et al., 2007).

Getting consent from the institution before accessing their facilities is important and is also part of informed consent. Cohen et al. (2007) state that:

> the relevance of the principle of informed consent becomes apparent at the initial stage of the research project-that of access to the institution or organization where the research is to be conducted, and acceptance by those whose permission one needs before embarking on the task. (p. 55)

Campbell, Gilbert and Jones (1992) contended that obtaining permission depends on the researcher's behaviour and attitude and particularly on his/her overall presentation. Generally the researcher's behaviour should reflect the qualities of honesty, compassion, trust, respect, generosity and kindness. These are important qualities as they may qualify researchers to gain access to and acceptance by the setting, participants and use of facilities for the duration of their research. Sax (1979) also noted that the researchers' behaviour is subject to scrutiny if they do not behave appropriately.

### 3.6.1.2 Anonymity and confidentiality

Researchers including Cohen et al. (2007) and Creswell (2005) have highlighted the significance of the ethical issues of anonymity and confidentiality. These two ethical principles of research aim to protect the privacy rights of the research participants (Burns, 2000; Cohen et al., 2007). Wilkinson (2001) suggested that the volunteers' role as participants should not be revealed and their identity should be kept confidential and anonymous. The data collected from the research will be published without identifying the participants. (Cohen et al., 2007) emphasised that the reader of the research should not be able to deduce the identity of the participants through any descriptive features. Furthermore, Wilkinson (2001) explained that, "ethical principles require that researchers maintain the confidentiality of information given to them and take every possible step to protect the anonymity of the participants" (p. 20). It is likely that the ethical issues

of anonymity and confidentiality could limit the researcher's right to talk openly or publicly about his/her research and about his/her research participants. These issues helped me to understand my role as a researcher and the restrictions I should adhere to in respect for my participants' privacy. However, total anonymity and confidentiality cannot always be guaranteed, for example, when the focus group interview is used as the data generating method. In a focus group interview participants are likely to know one another. This can influence the data and any information can be disclosed if research participants do not adhere to their responsibilities. This can cause embarrassment and harm to participants without the researcher's knowledge and consent (Wallen & Fraenkel, 2001). For these reasons, although the focus group participants were aware of each other's identity in other aspects, I have upheld the significance of the ethical issues of anonymity and confidentiality during the research process. I have told the young women that any issues discussed in the focus group interview were confidential and would not be further discussed after the interviews.

### 3.6.1.3. Validity and trustworthiness in qualitative research

Validity and trustworthiness in research is a requirement for both quantitative and qualitative research (Cohen et al., 2007). According to Burton and Bartlett (2009), "Validity refers to 'truthfulness, 'correctness' or accuracy of data" (p.25). Cohen et al. (2007) recommend eighteen (18) forms of validity. Some of these are: content validity; criterion-related validity; construct validity; internal validity; and concurrent validity. In my research I have used content validity in the data gathering instrument of the interview method. This means that the content of the semi-structured and focus group questions should fairly and comprehensively cover what they are intended to cover (Bell, 2005). The interview questions should specifically describe the kind of data to be collected so that the participants will respond appropriately (Best & Kahn, 1998). Burns (2000) argues that the interview questions have to be valid and reliable in order to collect trustworthy data while Lincoln and Guba (1985) stressed that trust-worthiness of data essentially refers to the accuracy, credibility and dependability of data which was generated from the research questions. Boeije (2010) states that "Data are necessary in [qualitative] research to give evidence of justification for everything

you present later on as your findings, such as descriptions, new ideas, relationships between subjects, interpretations and explanations" (p. 58). The researcher intends to collect valid and trustworthy information that he/she can depend upon in creating new knowledge. For these reasons researchers are to present data gathering instruments that accurately measure what they are intended to collect (Bell, 2005). Cohen et al. (2007) emphasised that in order to collect trustworthy data, researchers are to avoid bias in their interview techniques while using prompts and rephrasing questions. They may be conscious of their participants and collect information from a variety of audiences making sure that both researchers and participants understand the intention of the study.

Being a novice researcher, I made sure my interview questions were designed to collect trustworthy and reliable data that were applicable to my study (Bell, 2005; Boeije, 2010; Cohen et al., 2007). I developed interview questions that addressed the young women participants' experiences of educational transition. I addressed credibility of my research through two different criteria. Firstly, the validity and trustworthiness of the data collected was measured against the theoretical framework of my study. I checked and rechecked my data collecting instruments and the interview questions. I ensured that the follow-up questions were accurate and could answer the underpinning research questions that addressed the research topic. I also considered the research population as I wanted a fair representation of women from both rural and urban settings and from different parental backgrounds. This was because I wanted a range of perceptions of their experiences of educational transition from secondary to tertiary education in PNG. To avoid bias and having to influence the data, I did not interview any relatives and students known to me. I also compared data collected from the two methods (semi-structured and focus group). There were some consistency and differences to the data as the interview questions were not the same.

Secondly, I considered the trustworthiness of the knowledge claimed as it was grounded in the data. I tested the reliability and validity of the research questions with some of the PNG students who were students here in New Zealand before actually going home for data collection. I piloted the interview questions and I realised that some of the data collected during the trial were not relevant and

accurate to my research questions. I therefore altered some of the interview questions before collecting the actual data. In this study, I wanted to ensure that the women's voices were heard that I tried to get their point of views through the interview questions. The young women were comfortable and willingly shared their thoughts to the questions. Throughout the writing process I checked on my themes and key findings by revisiting the data several times to make sure that what I discussed was a true representation of my data.

## 3.7. Summary

In summary, qualitative methodology was used in this research to collect and analyse data. The interpretive paradigm underpinned the qualitative method in this research. It considers people's actions and behaviour as important to their lives as they make sense of situations and events of their subjective world. Two data collecting instruments were used for the research: semi-structured and focus group interviews. The interviews took approximately one hour each for individual and focus group interviews. The research procedures used in analyzing data was considered important as it gave me the opportunity to carefully examine the data in order to gather answers appropriate to the research questions. I interviewed 12 young and single women who were attending a university in PNG.

Ethical issues are considered important in any research as they are the foundations of researchers' and participants' rights and responsibilities. These included informed consent, anonymity and confidentiality. All the participants gave informed consent to take part in this study; their rights and privacy were respected. In addition, maintaining validity of the data gathering instrument is important as this determined the trustworthiness of the data. Thus, all guidelines regarding ethical considerations involving human participants by the University of Waikato ethical regulations (2009) were adhered to.

The following Chapters, Four and Five present the analysis of the research findings. Chapter Four presents the findings of the whole thesis and Chapter Five illustrates some of these findings through a case study of one participant.

# Chapter 4: Findings

## 4.1. Introduction

This chapter presents the core findings from the research that was conducted in a university in Papua New Guinea. The data were derived from two methods of data collection and these were semi-structured and focus group interviews. The major aim of the project was to explore the experiences of female students' transition from secondary to tertiary education in Papua New Guinea. Secondly, this research aimed to identify the challenges the young women encountered as part of this transition and how they overcame these challenges. The final aim of this research was to identify factors that contribute to their likely success and likely failure with their university courses. Data gathered from the semi-structured and focus group interviews were categorised into themes. The key findings or themes presented in this chapter are derived from the three main research questions. I conclude this chapter with a summary of the key findings.

## 4.2. Experiences of the choice the young women made to attend a university

The female students had different experiences of this particular transition as they moved from secondary to tertiary education in PNG. First of all, their choice of a university impacted on their experiences in many different circumstances academically and socially at the university.

### 4.2.1. Decision made to come to university

Eleven of the twelve participants of this study proudly mentioned that it was their own choice to come to university without much influence from anyone around them. They also mentioned reasons why they chose a university.

> It was my own decision to come to university. No-one forced me. (Mona).

> Because it is a patrilineal society males are the ones who make decision. They are the ones who are given first priority to education. I was thinking I will see more males than females here [university] but when I came it was a different situation. I see both genders studying at this institution. I

heard that this university is promoting gender equality and is giving first priority to female students. It was my own choice of choosing to study here. (Monica)

I want to further my studies and get a decent job. Firstly, is to get a job to help myself in the future. Secondly, is to help my parents and pay back what they have done to educate me. (Hilda)

It was my own choice of coming here. My decision to come to [name of university] is to get away from where I was living in Port Moresby. I want to be independent. I want to take up studies and move away from my parents. I just decided to come to the university to be independent. I want to live my own life and make my own decisions. (Emma)

However, only one of the twelve participants said that she discussed her choice with her parents:

Actually my coming to university was not my own choice. I did make the choice of coming to the university but I talked with my parents. They are educated and working. They did encourage me to come and gave their views of university life before my coming to university. (Judy)

### 4.2.2. Inspirational people in the students' lives

There were a number of people who inspired these young women to choose a university. Nine out of the twelve participants pinpointed that having inspirational people impacted on their decisions:

Actually some of my teachers in the secondary school inspired and motivated me to apply to university. One of my physics teachers used to tell me that you have to study hard and pursue your studies in the field of science... In particular, I have to be in the school of medicine to become a doctor or chemist. I was good at chemistry and that was why she encouraged me to study chemistry to earn a good living and be somebody or successful in the future. (Monica)

I admired a particular woman who is now a journalist. She was attending a conference as a representative of this university. Because of her I was intending to be a journalist but I did not because my marks were no good. When I saw her she told me when you come to this university you have the chances of getting a job. To me it was such an inspiration. For such a young person to have a career like that was very challenging for me. I admired her and she is like a role model to me. (Wilma)

Since my big sister came here. I followed her here. She told me that [name of university] is moving towards a paperless policy by which students are encouraged to use computers only to learn and to do work. They sent

email and all these... and like I was really interested and thought this university is offering quality standards of learning. That was why I decided to come here [university]. It is also a religious recognized institution and it really motivated me to come here. (Tina)

My mum is always there for me. She always backs me up even though my father was not that supportive. She is good. In fact I did not want to apply to university. I was planning to apply to a technical college. She was all for it, then my dad did not agree. You know what dads are like. After talking to my mum I thought about it and then decided to put university as my first choice just to please my dad. (Zena)

On the other hand, a second year student not only admired women, she adored her father and said he was also her role model:

He is the one who wanted me to have a decent life with a well-paid job. (Jane)

In contrast, three of the twelve participants stated that they had no inspirational people in their lives. Two of them were first year students from rural settings:

No-one inspired me…I wanted to come to the university because I saw that back at home not many of us (both genders) come to university. That was the very thing that inspired me to come here. I decided to be the first one to come to university so I can be a role model to other young women in my village. (Lona)

No-one inspired me to come to university. Back at home (my village) not even a woman came as far as attending a university. So in my thoughts I said if the boys can go to university why not me or us girls? This improved my moral and gave me the strength and courage to do better in my studies. My village is very remote in the rural setting. No-one especially female came to university. I am proud to be the first one to come to university. So even though no-one inspired me or motivated me or even supported me, I decided that if boys can do it, I can do it. Therefore, I put all my efforts into my work and study to pass and come here. That is why I ended up here [university]. (Mona)

### 4.2.3. Family input to the young women's choice

All twelve participants had family input after they were selected to study at the university. Nine of the twelve participants received positive remarks from parents and others:[2]

> Most of my friends and particularly my parents were very happy. They thought the course I am taking it is office stuff and it is good for me as a female. It is sort of a management and leadership course. It is a good course for me as I am interested in public speaking and organizing activities for the public involvement. (Monica)

> My family was happy because I made the choice to come here. Especially the course concerns social issues faced by the PNG society today. There are not enough competent authorities in PNG to address the social issues faced by people. There were no negative comments my parents were very supportive. (Jane)

Three of the twelve participants encountered negative remarks from their communities despite parents being supportive. These three participants were from the rural setting. They all had negative remarks made to them, unlike the female participants from the urban setting:

> My father was really proud, so were my mum and other relatives. For me as a Papua New Guinean coming from a strong Melanesian culture there were some negative comments made. Some people said she will be like the other female students who went to university, got pregnant and did not complete their studies. She is likely to follow their footsteps. (Hilda)

> My family really did not want me to come to university. Because they have these thoughts as women who come to university they would find problems. They will bring problems back to the village or to their families. Problems like women getting involved in unwanted pregnancy and getting involved with boyfriends. These are things that do not happen in the village and are discouraged. Only one of my aunties though she was uneducated, she supported me. I was living with her and she knew my personal attributes better than my parents. She encouraged and supported me to come this far. She told me you have the courage and strength of Christ in you. You will have a better life in the future. When I heard this I was just proud of myself. She told me something good about my life and it encouraged me to learn. It motivated and strengthened me to see life positively. (Mona)

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2 Note: The word "school" is often used in PNG to describe any forms of schooling from elementary to university. The participants frequently used the word "school" when referring to university and this is reflected in my findings where I have used their original words.

My family was very happy when I came here. They supported the choice and agreed to it. Even though as rural parents they did not fully understand the courses offered and studied at university. When they heard that I was given an offer to come here they were very happy. They were over joyed. Apart from my family, others were opposed or jealous. They said all sorts of negative comments like she will not succeed. She is just a female. But I made up my mind to represent my community here. When I came, I knew that I would make a name (make my community proud because of my achievement) to my community and for my family. (Lona)

4.2.3.1. Parents were proud but they had school (university) fee problems.

Eleven of the twelve participants' parents whether from the urban or rural setting, had problems paying their daughters' university fees and other necessary items for their education:

My parents are not paying my school fees but my guardians are. My mum and dad separated and because of that my dad is not supportive. My brother paid my school fees this year as he is working. (Wilma)

My parents have difficulties with paying my school fees. I say that because from my family I am… not only me attending school I have my other siblings who are also going to school. It is a big burden to my parents especially in meeting school fees. (Judy)

My family has problems paying my school fees. My father is the only one paying for our school fees. I have other brothers and sisters at home who are going to school too. My father has problem paying school fees for every one of us. (Martha)

However, one of the twelve participants, a second year student, was fortunate to have all her university fees met by a company she was sponsored by:

I had school fee problems in the secondary level but I do not have school fee problems here: I won a scholarship in the [name of the sponsor]. I am privilege to come here with all my school fees paid for. I do not have problems with school fees at the tertiary level. With this sponsorship I do not rely heavily on my mother. Apart from my school fees, I am given K1200 pocket allowance every month and K600 book allowance every semester. (Thressa)

### 4.2.4. First reactions to university

All the twelve participants had different ways of displaying their sense of self in the new learning institution. Eleven of the twelve participants expressed feelings of stress, nervousness and lack of confidence:

> When I came here I was nervous as I walked into the lecture rooms. I could not cope well with the lecturers and their lectures. I was lost in the first and second weeks of studies. I found it hard to catch up quickly. I did not know what to do here. It is a new place and learning environment. (Monica)

> My first reaction was I was nervous. University is a big place compared to my secondary background. I was nervous thinking that there is very strong authority or rules enforced here... like whatever I do the rules and policies are very effective. If I do anything silly I will be expelled. I felt low. (Jane)

> My first reaction was I was scared. I was scared because the place looked so big to me and I looked so small in it. There were many different faces I saw in the campus ... of the lecturers coming from very different nationalities and all those buildings and stuff it was so scary. I was confident in my previous school not here. (Judy)

> My first reaction to the new learning environment was I am new here. I felt afraid or ashamed or not confident enough as a first year student. I felt that way because of the new learning environment (it's a university) with many students. Not just any students, they are bright students from all over the country coming here and are going to compete academically with me. (Martha)

> First, it was a bit tough for me. In my previous school, I attended [name of secondary school] in Mount Hagen. It was a girls' secondary school. We did not have male gender. I find... it was really... a bit hard for me to sit in class with boys. It was difficult to participate and interact with them. (Tina)

On the other hand, one of the twelve participants from the rural setting had a different experience. She was happy and looked forward to studying, unlike the other students:

> When comparing this environment with the previous setting that I came from. I think this is bigger. The environment is very nice. When I first entered the school, I was happy. I felt that I will learn good/new things from this environment because of the modern facilities. And also the

learning environment is good and educational. I was happy just to get away from my rural setting to an urban setting. I was not worried I was happy. I am happy to come out of my rural setting. I want to experience what life is like in an urban setting and in a big university. (Mona)

### 4.2.5. University learning styles and approaches

The findings show that the learning styles at the university were different compared to those met at secondary school. All twelve participants described similar experiences of the differences in the teaching and learning approaches they encountered in their new learning environment at the university:

The learning styles here [university] are very much different. Teachers only lecture or talk in class. There is not much writing on the board. You have to copy or make your notes as they are talking. Some lecturers give lecture notes while some don't so we have to copy note and do research. My secondary level experience is different. Textbooks are used by our teachers to help us to learn and set us work. We refer to textbooks to do homework and activities that teachers set for us. At the university the resources are provided but we have to refer to independently to search and identify the ones suitable for the course and assignments/tasks. (Martha)

The learning style is new and different. Lecturers teach and we have to fully give more attention to listening to be able to learn what is expected. From my previous learning setting, teachers were always beside us and give us all our activities and answers and in doing so they did not prepare us to how these lecturers would teach us here[university]. It is more lecturing here at the university where we have pay attention, copy notes and furthermore, do research on the topics at our own time. In secondary school it's like teachers who gave us questions and assignments was a bit like here[university] but most of the information was given by the teachers and we only added a bit to it from our research. Here its different, it is like things are thrown on me and it is my responsibility to go and do my research with whatever information is available and find answers and complete my assignments. Sometimes, the books are not there because there are too many of us and those who go first get the books while those who go late miss out on the relevant books. Sometimes when the books are not there and the computers are occupied we have to wait. (Lona)

### 2.4.6. Transition experiences

In the interview students were asked to identify how they were experiencing the transition and where they were now compared to when they first arrived at the university. All the participants expressed different feelings about their transition

experience. They stated that the transition was challenging when they first arrived but they got accustomed to the university life over time.

Two of the year one students stated that:

> The very first time I came I felt shy and I didn't want to talk to people especially other students the way they talk some people they go too fast and fancy type of speaking and I am shy to talk to them as they come the urban setting and I from rural setting and that makes me feel bad. But now I am catching up with them a bit they are responding to me. I am slowly coming out of this self to get along with people. My self-esteem is low because of my background. (Mona)

> I think I am more independent. That is not like before. When I first came I was still in my little shell and I could not open up to people. I was doing my own things because I just you know I was not interested in everything. Now like I feel stronger, like being away from home makes me to make my own decisions and work on my own. (Zena)

These were the statements of two of the year two students:

> It is good, I like it here [university] and I like it in the university. I can see that my lectures helping me to improve. Today I did a test and did not do it well. I cried during the test. I will have to study harder to improve in the next test to pull my marks up. (Wilma)

> So far it is from my own observation. Though it is challenging it is good on the other hand. After all if I get into the workforce I will take this transition as an experience to talk to younger female those who are yet to make this transition to be prepared to face and overcome the challenges. I am yet to decide where I am in this transition. I think I have overcome many of the challenges in this transition. (Thressa)

## 4.3. Challenges identified as part of this transition

The female students had experienced challenges in their education which affected them in many different ways academically, socially and emotionally.

### 4.3.1. Academic challenges

The participants encountered a variety of academic challenges. These included understanding and writing essays, managing their time as they coped with large amounts of research and numerous assignments, and meeting new disciplines such as Information Communication Technology Skills (ICTS).

Three of the participants from rural backgrounds said they had difficulty with ICTS while the other nine participants had a fair knowledge of ICTS. A year one student said:

> My first challenge is academic. This is particularly to do with computing communications skills. I am a computer illiterate or I lack the skills. I feel like I have to put up more time in going to the lab and search for computers to do my work. Then I have to sit down and try to type my work. I also needed to access the internet for information. How to open in boxes and to read the emails was difficult and problematic. It sometimes worried me because I might fail my courses. I think as a computer illiterate this will contribute to me failing the subjects/courses. (Lona)

A year two student stated:

> When I came here [university], one of the academic challenges I faced was with computer communications skills. Since this school has a paperless policy we have to program and use computers to communicate. I came from a secondary school where there were no computers. I was computer illiterate. At first when I went to class some students were well in advance with computer skills, while some of us were trying to catch up. It was a big challenge for me and it affected my GPA for the first year. (Monica)

In contrast, a year one student who was computer literate expressed concern at the lack of computers for students to use at the university:

> Trying to have access to Moodle [an online learning tool for university students] was difficult. Everything is posted through Moodle and you have to have a computer or laptop in order to access those materials. It is really challenging because of insufficient materials to help me with my studies. There are few computers and many students. I think mostly, it is to do with lack of computers. It is frustrating and I get emotional when I do not access a computer to do my studies. (Judy)

Two out of the twelve participants who were year one students had difficulty understanding and writing essays:

> I have difficulty with essay writing. We did not do much essay writing at the secondary level. I am trying my best to catch up with assignments that were given. They were all given through essay writing. The challenge is essay writing. The problem is I find it difficult to understand the essay questions and actually writing the assignment. (Mona)

Four of the twelve participants experienced assignment overload. Tina, a year one student, stressed that:

Academic work is a big challenge to me. We have to do a lot of research. We are not allowed to use only one but many sources. This is because many references are allowed in assignments. We have to read and understand readings to do our write ups. Not much direct quotation is allowed so we have to put in a lot of effort to complete one assignment. As for me, I am concentrating on one assignment and then the next day one more assignment is given by the other lecturer, so it is a big burden to me.

Two out of the twelve participants encountered time management as a problem. Jane, a year two student, highlighted that:

I have an academic challenge because of lack of time management. That has resulted in me getting lower marks in my assignments. I have problems with essay writing. Psychologically it affects my self-esteem because my parents have done a lot for me. I have to do my best here. I am not performing to the expected standard. It worries me like I am disappointing them. I am not also working to my standard as a university student to get that [low] mark.

In addition, a year two student said:

Academic challenges are tough, not similar to secondary school. I see that there is a big difference. It is very competitive here [university]. The work load and number of words to be written. I found it really hard to do presentations because I did not have confidence to face other students. With power point presentations I had mixed feelings. I might lose the whole thing on the presentation day. What if as I was trying to present, something might happen to the computer and destroy my presentation? (Hilda)

### 4.3.2. Social and welfare challenges

All twelve participants had academic challenges and also experienced social and welfare challenges. The most common challenge was boy-girl relationships. None of the year one students talked about this but five of the six second year students experienced boy-girl relationships as a social challenge. They said that they had difficulty establishing this particular relationship. However, as will be discussed later, the other second year student said that she had relationship with a boy and found it helpful:

I have problems with social/personal relationships with the opposite sex in this university. I have refused to get into a boy-girl relationship a number

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of times. This upsets the boys. I have my own reasons for not wanting to establish such a relationship. (Jane)

One of the challenges faced by many female students including myself is having boyfriend-girlfriend relationships. The very close intimate or love feelings towards the opposite sex. I am afraid and not comfortable to develop this relationship. I am in fear of destroying my studies because of the comments made by my community members before coming here [university]. (Hilda)

One out of the twelve participants pointed out that food and water were issues at the university:

For the welfare side as a student, it is really hard for me. The difficulty is to do with water problems. There are many girls in this university and there is not enough space to do laundry. The sinks are always full. Sometimes you have to wait until the sinks are empty. When you have finished your laundry the lines are already full. To get to class you must wake up early in the morning to have your shower. It is to do with water problems, sometimes water does not even run and we have shortage of water. Food is another problem. I do not really like the way it is prepared in the mess. The food is not really good, not always good. It can cause emotional stress and I feel it sometimes. (Emma)

Two of the twelve participants highlighted peer pressure as a problem for them. A year two student said that:

At the university the challenge that I have faced is peer pressure. I normally find it very hard to make my own decisions. If I see that the majority of my friends are all agreeing and doing the same thing, I go with the crowd. If I am the only one going against their decision, I feel bad. That is the biggest challenge I have been facing here [university]. I think I am still facing it. I do have problems with time management, academic essay writing and socialization is part of it. (Thressa)

One of the year one participants from a rural background expressed concerns about not having money to pay for personal items:

This is my personal problem. Back home in the rural area my parents have financial difficulties. We are not really financially secure. The only way they (my parents) get money is through copra, cocoa [cash crops] and gardening. They sell cash crops and vegetables to generate income... for my school fees. I sacrifice a lot. I need money for personal items but money is limited. When my parents do not send me money, I know there is food in the mess. I can just go there and eat. I just accept what I have here

[university], to give time to my parents to do what they can to assist me in my education. It is painful when I see other students have things I don't have. (Lona)

However, all the students from working parents got financial support from their parents:

> My father provided financial support and encourages me to continue with my studies. They buy me school accessories and pocket money for my personal use. (Hilda)

> My parents support me in many ways by giving me my pocket money, paying for my school fees and lunch money. They provide for my basic needs. (Tina)

### 4.3.3. Overcoming the transition challenges

All the twelve participants talked about overcoming the challenges using different strategies. Six out of the twelve participants mentioned that talking to friends and senior students helped them to overcome their academic challenges:

> I did ask the senior students to help me. One of them is my course mate. She is now doing year two. I talked to my friends and they said they will help me and most of them showed me samples of their essays. I read about essay writing and it helped me. I did not talk to my lecturers about my problems because I had difficulty communicating with them. My parents are living in the rural areas and it is difficult for me to contact them. They have no access to telephones and mobile phones. (Mona)

> I overcome these problems through talking to people in particular by talking to my friends. It helped when we talked. They gave me encouragements. They would say there are a lot of students here [university] and we have to learn/ study hard. Learning or studying is the only way for us to achieve our goals. So the best thing is I talk with my friends to overcome these problems. They helped and advised me to go on. (Lona)

A year one student emphasised prioritising time:

> It is about prioritizing your time/ activities. You know you have work to do. You put your studies as first priority so you have enough time to do whatever you like afterwards. I talk to my friends and read a lot about APA referencing. My senior students (friends) assisted me a lot. I have not

tried getting help from lecturers yet. It is still part of the transition to get to know my lecturers and associate with them. (Zena)

However, there was one year two student who did not ask for help but did her own reading:

> Actually I did a lot of reading and practising just to get over this problem of computing skills. I want to make it become part of me. I am doing health management or administration and computer is part of my future so I have to get used to it. It is a must that I have to know how to use computers in this technology world. (Monica)

Five out of the twelve participants found it easy to communicate with their parents. A year one student stated:

> I talk to my parents a lot about my friends' distractions. I discussed with them my academic challenges. They advised me to forget about my friends and concentrate on my studies. Their advice was to just ignore my friends and concentrate on my studies. (Martha)

Another year one student added that:

> I told my parents that I am computer illiterate. They told me not to worry, you can do it. They put their trust in me to do well. I talked with my parents and they are very understanding. (Lona)

> At home my dad used to encourage, help and support me. He even purchased my laptop. He used to encourage me by saying you can do it despite the challenges. My mum is supportive by taking care of my basic needs. One of my aunties back at home used to makes bilums [bags] for me to carry. She visits me at home when I was on holiday. She also supports me morally. (Monica, a year two student)

> My parents were significant people in this transition, especially my father because of his financial support. He helped me to settle in and continue with my studies. My lecturers were helpful in this transition because when I was in doubt I used to go and seek help from them for both academic and personal problems. (Hilda, another year two student)

However, it was not easy for two participants who came from rural areas and whose parents were poorly educated:

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I do not talk to my parents because they are uneducated and cannot understand what I am talking about…and also they do not have a mobile phone...They live in the remotest part of the country and region where I come from…So I only talk to my friends. (Mona)

A year two student stated that making regular use of the counselling service was helpful:

One of the ways that made it possible for me to overcome these challenges was to go to the counselling service to get advice from the counsellor on how to cope with these challenges. It is one of the helpful ways enabling me to do better in the second semester of my first year. (Thressa)

Five of the participants mentioned that lecturers were helpful and very encouraging in their transition:

We have different types of lecturers and some are very good mentors I can say like my HOD [name of HOD]...... She is a very good mentor… She talks about the challenges faced and how to overcome them in the health sector. She also told us how to build a life that would help us to overcome things or challenges. Most times she likes us to start lessons. We also have a lecturer who would like us to bring our assignments for him to edit and my HOD also helped with that. (Wilma, a second year student)

The university as a whole and the lecturers have helped me to really work towards achieving my goal. For me as an individual female student, they have encouraged me to do things for myself. I see that it is positive and helpful. They make us to come out of negative thinking and advise me to really work to strive for the best as a student. (Zena, a first year student)

On the other hand, seven of the twelve participants said that they did not ask lecturers for help and assistance:

I did not really ask my lecturer to help me. I did not feel like asking her because she went too fast with her teaching. I sometimes could not follow or I got lost and just did not want to ask her. Actually I started to develop the attitude of not asking questions... I disliked the way she lectured because to learn computer communication skills requires a more practical approach...we have to first understand her way of teaching. (Monica, a second year student)

I do not talk to my lecturers about my problems because I have difficulty communicating with them. I find it hard to talk with them because of their

status. They are more qualified than I am. I feel scared at times. (Mona, a first year student)

### 4.3.4. Social networks developed

All the young women established different social networks and they found that the relationships they developed helped them overcome challenges. All had developed and established provincial and cultural group network:

> I associate with the cultural group since [Manus group] I am from there. I joined the [Madang] group because I was born and brought up there. (Monica)

> I am in a lot of social groups...provincial groups. I am a member of both my provinces' [names of provinces] associations. By joining these provincial groups, I wanted to make it fair for my parents. It is good to promote your province and your culture. For the department club I volunteered to be in that club to do fund raising activities for my department. Actually for provincial club meetings or social get-togethers with departments we do not usually have time to talk about our academic problems. We talk about activities associated with our provincial clubs' activities for the yearly calendar that involve students in each province. (Emma)

All participants mentioned other common groups that they belonged to:

> I am part of these groups because I feel that they share the same feelings and interests as I. We know each other very well. I am also close to my course mates because we go for the same lectures and tutorials every time. For the boyfriends I have in school we come from the same province and we know each other. For the senior students I feel closer to them and when I have any problems I share and get advice from them. (Judy)

> I belong to the class groups because we have the same interest in sharing and discussing the academic challenges we face. We talk about the problems that we have and foremost we try to adjust ourselves to life at the university. I like the relationships, it is good. We all talk and discuss and try to find ways of helping each other. The boys are good and they are our friends. They discuss and talk with female students to share with us their experiences and how to overcome this and so it is good. (Zena)

> I developed these networks because I see that it is helpful for me. For my course mates if I have difficulties in doing some of my academic work I go to them to seek help. I do have boys as friends and they help me to go

shopping, or they provide security or comfort when I am upset. They are helpful in that regard. (Hilda)

I belong to different social groups to satisfy my needs to socialise with other students…so that I may know what is happening at the university. This is to avoid being lost or confused and left behind on the university's activities. These groups help me to have a sense of belonging to a place, a group, and become a social member (Lona).

Three out of the twelve participants joined religious groups to help them overcome the challenges:

… Every Friday we used to go for fellowship at the chapel. It is a religious group and also an opportunity for me to meet with other fellow students. Praying to God helped me with my studies. (Tina)

With the spiritual group… I am also available for any spiritual activity that is held in the school. The relationship helps me to stay focused on my studies. (Judy)

Eleven participants actively avoided boy-girl relationships because they feared distractions from studies, only one of the twelve reporting:

I have a boyfriend...My boyfriend was helpful. When I talked to him I got over the feelings of missing my family. On the other hand it was quite disturbing because every now and then he would like to see me. We spent time walking around the campus. When considering boys in my own class, I found them to be helpful. When it comes to group assignment and discussions they contributed meaningfully. (Thressa, a second year student)

Another of the twelve participants compared boys' cooperation in the different groups that she belonged to:

There are differences in all social networks. In the provincial groups the males' participation is really good. They participated well with the females as well as in the department executive club. However, in my own class the boys do not usually help the girls in group activities. Only a few boys are helpful. Most of them are lazy and they do not want to cooperate. They leave tasks to us females to do it for them. They are like… on the 'free ride' (they do nothing and get marks). The girls do everything, including presentations. It is unfair. We feel it is not right. They should be helping us with the group work. (Emma)

### 4.3.5. Settling into the university programmes

The findings indicated that the students tended to settle into their university programmes over time. All six of the second year students mentioned that they were more settled in the university programmes in their second year of study:

> I found it hard in the first semester of last year but in the second semester of study I did well. I was settling into the university programmes. Because when comparing my GPA for the first and second semester, I found out that I did well in the second semester. The results made me happy. I am now settling in to the university programmes because of the marks I got last year. (Wilma)

> I am settling into the university programmes both in academic and other social activities. We have cultural shows, I participated well in this particular group last year. I am doing well with my academic performance because of the marks I got last year. (Hilda)

> Some of the events have not come up yet but from last year's experience I kind of like it. I am getting into the university programmes. We have a lot of symposiums, open days and there was media freedom day, too many activities happening here [university]. It was too much for me because I had to sacrifice my academic work to take part in some of these programmes. On the other hand, it was a good experience for me to get involved in these programmes. It was an eye-opener and learning experience for me too. When I happen to get out into the field and start working, I will already have experiences of bigger programmes of showcasing in different departments. I can practise what I learnt when I am out working. It is a matter of time management, setting your priorities right and independent learning so you can get involved with other activities. (Emma)

In contrast, all the year one students said that they were still trying to settle into the university programmes. It was only their seventh week at the university during the time of the interviews:

> I am still trying my best to settle into the university programmes. People, students come from different ethnic and cultural groups and I find it hard to mingle around with them. I find it hard to get along with them. I am still having difficulties getting settled into my academic work as well. (Mona)

> I am a computer illiterate (lack ICTS) and I am in the process of learning the computing skills. Acquiring the skills would help me to settle in so I can move on. Being computer illiterate is holding me back. The university

with this paperless policy makes it difficult for me. It is too early for me to say, I am settling into the university programmes. I have to learn to use the modern technology. That is the only thing that is holding me back. I am still trying. I am slowly getting used to the routine of the university, like attendance and punctuality. (Lona)

### 4.3.6. What the institution is doing to support students in this transition

The findings highlighted a number of activities provided by the institution to support students with the transition. Most of the twelve participants mentioned the orientation programmes organised and run by the university at the beginning of every year:

> There was an orientation programme in the first week. All the HODs talked to the students. They introduced themselves to the students. We got to know them. Other ancillary staff from the library and IT people also talked to the students. It was an introductory session. It was helpful to me as I got to know some important people. (Mona)

> There were orientation programmes provided by the university. Some senior students helped us. They took us for a tour around the school and showed us where things like buildings and lecture blocks were. They told us of the basic rules and routines of the university. (Zena)

However, one participant mentioned that these programmes should be conducted at the department level:

> I think... I would like the university to like provide orientation programs at the department level. This is to let students get to know each other and what is in the department, apart from the university-wide programmes.

Five of the twelve participants talked about academic tutorials. Two commented on inadequacies relating to tutorials. A first year student said:

> There are academic tutorials provided but the notices of venue and time are sometimes confusing. This is the result of people not attending. They do not make formal and prior announcement to students. I felt like giving up in the middle of things. When we were supposed to be in the middle of things, we had to start from the beginning. This was because of the inconsistency of getting the announcement across to students. (Judy)

> There was a tutorial session for referencing. It is a requirement that all students should know the APA referencing system. The session was not

long, very short and was conducted only once. (Monica, a second year student)

Five of the twelve highlighted the counselling service provided by the university to help problem students:

The university provides a counsellor, which is good. We have someone to go and seek help from…. The university provides a counsellor for students with problems to make use of to get help and advice. There are female deans too, who can assist young women with their personal and other problems wherever needed. (Tina)

Three of the twelve participants mentioned other services provided by the university:

The post office, ATM and the food mart are part of the services provided by the university. They are for our convenience. The trading hours for the mart are not really good because on Sundays it closes. Sometimes when we are hungry there is no place to get food. (Judy)

We have the gutpela sindaun [peace-making] committee that helps to solve problems when arguments arise to reach consensus. They mediate between different parties to ensure their understanding which leads to solving the problem. (Jane)

Jane also acknowledged the effort the university is making to promote women in education. She said that:

One special thing the university is doing is that it is encouraging girls to step up and have dignity. I have the right to live life like all human beings and not to be oppressed. The university is giving priority to women in education. This year there are more women enrolled than males. They provide opportunities like awareness programmes... like the international women's day events at the university to promote women. I appreciate their [name of university] effort.

This final section presents the findings from the focus group interview question on factors contributing to the young women's likely success and failure with their university courses.

## 4.4. Factors contributing to their likely success and likely failure in the university courses

This section presents the comments students made on factors which they felt contributed to success and failure at the university.

### 4.4.1. Factors that contribute to academic success

It was evident in the findings that all twelve participants encountered academic success at the university.

Three of the participants mentioned availability of learning resources at the university:

> Some factors that are likely to contribute to our success are the availability of the resources and the commitment of lecturers in each department. Lecturers are to make sure that we are been taught to the best... meaning that their teachings enable us to understand the course contents well. This will guide us to do our assignments correctly. (Judy)

> Latest books and information [are] available in the library and having the computers to help in my studies at the same time having access to the internet. Reading and understanding of assignments. (Wilma)

> Having the latest books and information available in the library is important. Furthermore, computers help in my studies and at the same time having access to online materials. Of course...reading and understanding of assignments is of importance. (Emma)

Two of the participants talked about time management:

> Some of the factors that contributed to our success at the university are: how we discipline ourselves and manage our time properly. Using our time wisely is the main factor that contributes to our success at the university. (Lona)

> My success at the university has to do with proper time management. I have to do work according to time and get my work done. (Tina)

Five of the participants talked about other success factors:

> I have to read a lot and do more research on given topics and ask friends and lecturers for assistance and advice on what is best for me. (Zena)

> One of the factors that contributed to our success is getting to know the members of a group. As group work is common at the university we have

to work together by sharing ideas and knowledge. We have to research on given tasks and then do group presentations. Everyone has to cooperate and contribute meaningfully for us to get good marks. Otherwise we lose marks. (Mona)

Asking the lecturers a lot of questions to get further clarification on certain tasks and answering the assignment questions correctly. (Wilma)

Taking part in religious activities at the university contributes to my success. I pray to God and he helps guide me through my studies. (Monica)

### 4.4.2. Factors that contribute to academic failure

All the participants mentioned significant factors that they felt could contribute to academic failure at the university. These focused mainly on students' lack of commitment to studies, peer pressure and engaging in outside social activities.

Four of the participants referred to that lack of commitment to school work and getting involved in social activities. A year one student emphasised:

> Commitment to study… if I am not committed to my studies I am likely to fail. Additionally, when I get involved with many social activities in and around town and the institution that is not school oriented. (Lona)

A year two student said:

> Wasting a lot of my time doing something else rather than school work and not getting my priorities right leads to failure. (Emma)

One of the participants, a year one student stated:

> I think the main cause of female students failing in universities is because of peer pressure. Peer pressure can sometimes make us not do well in our studies. It can be a disadvantage to us. Peer pressure is like following our friends just to please them and not making our own decision of what is best for us. Like being involved or taking part in the consumption of alcohol, boy-girl relationships. That can lead to unwanted pregnancies. Following peer groups that can distract us from our main purpose of been in this institution. I mean the groups that we belong to can be good and bad. We have groups in the institution like the generation groups. Such groups can make us lose focus in our studies. (Judy)

One of the participants, a year one student pointed out that unwise use of time in doing other activities and not school work:

Making commitment to studies at the university and compared to courses in secondary schools, [where] the lessons are from 8 to 3. At the university you have certain classes each day. I find that we have a lot of free time on our hands. We may use this time unwisely and not complete what we have to do, especially assignments. There are other things like food and rubbish and the environment can affect you and your work. When I get sick I am not able to attend classes and finish my tasks on time. That can cause failure at the university. The environment and its surrounding can contribute to my failure at the university. (Zena)

A second year student stated that ignorance of how to study contributed to failure:

The other reason for failure can be plain ignorance and careless attitudes of studying displayed by students. Not setting your priorities right and misunderstanding assignment questions. Doing assignments without understanding can contribute to my failure at the university. (Martha)

A year one student talked about unsupportive parents:

Having family problems, parents not supportive and just do not care how we feel ...what we are doing…. like having their own domestic problems. (Wilma)

Two of the participants highlighted boy-girl relationship as a potential failing factor:

When the girls are involved with many social activities such as, drinking, partying and hanging out with boy and girl friends. (Monica)

Having boy/girl-friend relationship and spending much time talking with them... having no time to study. The likeliness of becoming pregnant can contribute to failing courses. (Martha)

The last section highlights the summary of the findings.

## 4.5. Summary

To summarise, this chapter has presented the findings of this research on "*exploring the experiences of female students educational transition from secondary to tertiary education*" in PNG. The first key finding highlighted the experiences the female students encountered during the transition. It started with the choice the students made to study at a university. The choice they made was influenced by some of the inspirational people in their lives such as teachers, parents, women as role models and their elder brothers and sisters. Their families' thoughts and expectations were received as a challenge by some of the students. The families were supportive but challenged their daughters to work hard and achieve their dreams and goals in life. Comparing rural and urban female students, the urban students are more privileged because of their background than the rural students. Nevertheless, all parents experienced problems paying their daughters' university fees. The students experienced shifts in their sense of self as they went through the transition to university.

The second key finding revealed the challenges encountered by the students at the university. The young women faced academic and social/welfare challenges. They experienced problems with writing essays and they often lacked ICT skills. Those students from the rural setting had ICT problems which challenged their sense of self. They had difficulties adjusting to university life as most academic work required the use of computers. The young women had other difficulties, such as time management, setting priorities and developing effective study habits. Other problems faced by students included as peer pressure, boy-girl relationships and water shortage. Despite being presented with these challenges the students managed to overcome them. They did not sit back and wait. They talked to their friends, senior students and parents and shared problems by attending the counselling services and when necessary they asked lecturers for further explanation of academic points.

The third key finding identified the factors that students perceived as likely to contribute to success or failure with their university courses. They felt that the main factor that promoted their success at the university was to do with the

availability of the learning resources at the university. Their own self-motivation to learn was also considered important to success at the university. The factors that might lead to failure included; poor time management, having lazy and careless study habits, socialising and engaging in boy-girl friend relationships and not setting constructive priorities.

The findings presented in this chapter will be discussed in Chapter Six while the next chapter, Chapter Five, presents the findings and a discussion of the case study. The case study was included to highlight a rural PNG student who made a positive transition to university despite experiencing many disadvantages.

# Chapter 5: Case study of Mona

Chapter Four presented the themes that arose in the data. In analysing the themes it was clear that the students from the rural areas were disadvantaged when compared with the girls from urban settings. One participant, Mona, who came from a rural setting in one of the remotest places in PNG, stood out as someone whose experiences did not fit the trends that were evident both in the literature and some of the data from the other students. Despite many disadvantages Mona experienced a very positive transition, both from rural PNG to town/city life and from secondary school to the new challenges at university. This chapter presents her story as an illustrative case study to explore the experiences of a student like Mona, who had managed to succeed this far against the odds.

## 5.1. Background

Mona came from one of the remote rural areas in PNG. She came from a big family of eight members and was the only one of her siblings who made it to university. She was enrolled in Social and Religious Study (SRS) course. Mona was in her seventh week as a first year university student when the research was undertaken:

> My parents are living in a rural village in the [name of province] of Papua New Guinea. I come from a family of eight siblings. Three of my siblings got married and had children. The first-born sister is an elementary teacher with two sons. Second- born sister had one child; the third brother had one child too. The fourth-born sister is at [name of vocational school] vocational school. I am the fifth-born. The sixth-born did his grade eight and dropped out of the formal school system. The seventh-born is doing her grade seven this year (2011) and the last-born is doing his grade three. My parents pay my school fees with the help of one of my relatives. He is my uncle and works as a male nurse at [name of the health centre]. My parents get money through agriculture to help my relative to pay my university fees and my siblings' school fees too. My parents grow crops and vegetables and sell the produce at the local markets to earn an income. Sometimes they work for other people as baby sitters or handymen to earn extra income. They save all this money to pay for my university fees. They completed all university fees at the beginning of the school year.

## 5.2. Findings

This section presents the findings of the case study.

### 5.2.1. Decision to come to university

Mona described her decision to choose university study:

> It is my decision to come to university, is like no one forced me. It is my own little secret, because I really wanted to come here. I didn't even…even though no-one informed me or gave me information about universities but through reading books and finding information about universities while in secondary school. I preferred to come to [name of university].I decided to apply and come here.
>
> I liked taking up responsibilities and taking a lead in doing activities which were ignored by my peers. By engaging in extra activities I thought I could make it to university and take part in other activities different to what I was doing.

When asked who inspired her, she stated that no-one inspired or motivated her to choose university studies. She was self-motivated to choose university study:

> No-one inspired me to come to university. Back at home no woman went beyond secondary schooling to attending a university. I was thinking secretly if the boys can go to university why not me or us girls? This raised my morale and gave me the strength and courage to do better. I am from [name of the district] in East New Britain and the village that I come from is [name of village]. It is on the boarder of [name of the provinces]. My village is very remote and inland. There is no one, especially females, coming to university. I am proud to be the first one to come to university. Even though no-one inspired or motivated or even supported me I made it to university. I worked hard, that is why I ended up here [name of university].

After she was given the placing at the university her family had a lot to say to her. She was discouraged by her parents but her aunty persuaded her parents to allow her to study at the university:

> My parents really did not want me to come to university because they had these thoughts that women who came to university would find problems and bring problems back to the village. My parents were discouraged by those problems and did not support me. Problems like women getting involved with boyfriend relationships and unwanted pregnancy. These

were issues that did not happen in the village. While I was going to school I was living with an aunty. She observed my behaviour and knew I could make it to university. She trusted me and encouraged me to continue my education. She made my parents gave me the opportunity to study here [university]. Without her I would not be here. My aunty was uneducated but she knew I can make it as I have faith in Christ. She knew I would have a better life in the future. I was proud with what my aunty did for me. I am just proud of myself …as she told me something good about myself…when she backed me up. My aunty knew I had the qualities to perform better and succeed. She motivated me and gave me the courage and encouragement to come here [university].

### 5.2.2. Description of the physical set-up of the two learning environments.

Mona's first impression of the new learning environment was very positive, despite it being very different to what she was used to:

> Comparing this university environment with the previous setting that I came from, I think this is bigger. The environment is attractive, inviting and educational. When I first entered the school [university] I was happy and I felt that I would learn good things and gain more knowledge in this new learning environment because of the facilities. I was happy just to get away from my rural setting to an urban setting. I was not worried, I was happy. It is a pleasure being here.

Mona described and compared the learning resources at university and school:

> In my previous learning environment the classrooms were all, rotting, run down and not conducive to learning. The library books were also not updated. The learning environment at the university is fully equipped with latest resources like computers, internet and books. In the old setting not all the computers worked. Most of the time students did not attend computer lessons because not enough computers were available. This is the reason why I am not good with computing skills. I lack the most important skill in learning at the university.

Mona was keen to describe her previous teaching environment at the secondary school as lacking resources to teach. The teachers though they were qualified, she felt did not carry out their responsibilities seriously. She recalled that student behaviour was not good and that teachers showed signs of retaliation by not teaching properly. This was different to what she experienced at the university:

> We had well qualified teachers at the secondary level but from my observation they never taught us properly to get knowledge across. Every time they came to class they showed signs of anger and disrespect towards

the students. For example, in our mathematics class we used to hate our mathematics teacher because he never taught us properly. He used to give exercises to do and never explained activities properly for students to fully understand what he was trying to bring across. He could just give us activities and could leave anytime he wanted to. When students went to him for clarification on certain mathematics questions he would tell us to find answers to the problems ourselves. Teachers did not have enough teaching materials and resources to teach. On the other hand, student behaviour was not good and teachers took advantage of that and did whatever they thought would punish the students.

Here at the university the teaching environment I would say is very nice, better than at the previous school. Lecturers are friendly and kind, they talk to us nicely and make us feel relaxed and that we want to learn. Lecturers are prepared to impart knowledge to students with the help from resources provided by the university.

### 5.2.3. Teaching styles in the two learning environments

Mona observed that the teaching style, the methods and the approaches taken by teachers of the two institutions to impart knowledge to students were quite different. She said that teacher-centred approach was applied in secondary school while student teacher-centred approach was used at the university:

> In our secondary schools the teachers used text-books to give us schoolwork while the teachers used to teach in front. The text-books were available for us to follow through and there were enough books for everyone. Additional handouts were given to help us. Teachers guided us and helped us to learn. They gave and checked homework regularly, especially subjects like biology and chemistry, though not mathematics. The mathematics teacher only put mathematics answers on the board without further discussing answers with the students. If students had problems with mathematics, they would answer the questions themselves or we would go to other teachers for help. The teachers from the previous school did not teach us properly, their facial expressions showed that they hated students. Tests were given at the end of units covered for each subjects. A teacher-centred approach was used in secondary school.

> I am very happy to be here [at university] because the teachers are very helpful. When teaching they talk kindly to us and make us feel comfortable and this motivates students to learn. They do lecturing most of the time and tell us to do more research to find answers to assignment questions. They provide encouragement by advising us and provide counselling that concerns students' behaviour and about other activities that we should not get involved in, for example getting drunk or involved in boy-girl relationships.

However, despite finding the lecturers helpful, Mona noted that she experienced some difficulty adapting to the learning styles at the university. She found the way the lecturers were teaching was confusing and she was slow in understanding their tone of voice and the usage of the English language:

> For the past six weeks I did not fully get what the lecturers were lecturing and talking about. I am still adapting. I am trying my best to understand the lecturers and my colleagues too. Sometimes they go too fast. The way they speak English is not what I am used to.

Before she came to university Mona had no idea what it would be like. She came to university unprepared. It was a new and surprising experience for her:

> No one told me anything about university life. I had not heard about university life before so I was not prepared to move from secondary to tertiary education. I moved to university with less knowledge of what it would be like here at [name of university]. It is a new experience that is full of surprises for me.

### 5.2.4. Transitional experiences

Mona said the main challenge she faced at the university was essay writing. She said that she lacked understanding of essay questions and was discouraged when materials like books were unavailable:

> I have difficulty with essay writing as we did not do much at the secondary level. I am trying my best to catch up with the assignments that are given to me. There are all given through essay writing. The main challenge is essay writing. It is difficult to understand the essay questions and then writing the assignment. There are also fewer resources like books as there are too many students enrolled in the same course. Whoever goes to the library before other students gets most of the books and those who go later miss out on relevant books. We access online resources but we need books too …to use as references. I feel discouraged, like I am not doing my work. I really need those resources too like books to complete one essay before completing others. Most books should be put in the library that caters for the students' demand.

### 5.2.5. Overcoming the transitional challenges

Mona said that she overcame the transitional challenges by talking to her friends. She did not ask lecturers to help her and it was not surprising that she did not contact her parents, given the background that she came from:

> To overcome these challenge sufficient books should be made available according to the number of students. I did ask senior students' one of my course mates who is a second year student. I read about essay writing and that helps me a bit. I do not talk to my lecturers about my problems because I have difficulty communicating with them. They are more qualified and I have difficulty approaching them. My parents live in the rural areas. They are uneducated. They do not know what it is like at the university. It is difficult for me to contact them as they have no access to telephones and mobile phones. I did contact them through letter but it takes a while before the letter reaches them. I do call my uncle but it is expensive. I talk to my friends, and most of them …showed me samples of their essays, making it easy for me to understand the essay formats.

Mona said that she made friends and belonged to several social groups which included both genders. She stressed that it was fun to share ideas with them and she felt that she had a sense of belonging:

> In [name of university] three week ago I joined Legion of Mary, a religious group. I am a member of [name of province] cultural group. I have lots of girlfriends from Madang, Morobe and Sepik. At school I have male friends, especially my class mates they are all my friends. I am not in a relationship with any one of them. I am so scared to establish a boyfriend relationship with the boys.
>
> I joined these groups to tell stories and share ideas in class. When it concerns group presentation and group work we work collaboratively and do presentations. We also discuss given assignments and do them individually. Practically, I find it fun and exciting when I talk to someone or anyone. It makes me feel happy as I know I belong to a group.

### 5.2.6. General feelings about the transition

Mona generally felt that she tried her best to settle into university programmes. She said she would decide at the end of the year whether it was successful or not:

> I think …I am still trying to work out whether it is good or bad. Probably at the end of the year I will decide whether it is successful or not. At this time it is difficult for me to decide. At the moment I am doing ok. I am getting along well with friends by talking and chatting. I would say it is successful when I perform academically well. Generally the transition is challenging, exciting and full of surprises.

### 5.2.7. The University's support

Mona stated that the university supported her in this transition by providing the learning resources and the university-wide orientation programmes to introduce students to certain teaching and learning resources:

> There was an orientation programme in the first week and all the HODs talked to the students. The students were introduced to the department staff. Other ancillary staff from the library and IT talked to the students. It was an introductory session…. I think I am already a university student and I feel I should know what I am supposed to do. I have to know all these things like academic writing stuff previously before coming to the university. I should not have difficulty here. The university has provided computers and library for students to use. I use the library and the internet to access information to complete assignments. Additional information for personal knowledge is also obtained through reading books.

## 5.3. Reflections on Mona's story.

Mona experienced a number of challenges that the literature suggests would mean she was not very likely to access a university education. These included, for example, her rural background, her coming from a male-dominated society, geographical and physical features of PNG, cultural traditions and expectations of her community that viewed education for girls negatively (Dovona-Ope, 2008; Geissinger, 1997; Toliman, 2000), uneducated parents who lack knowledge about university (Loader & Dalgety, 2008; Lysaght, 2007), parental lack of money, other resources and support (Tieben & Wolber, 2010). Despite these challenges, however, Mona nurtured a dream to come to university that she secretly thought she would achieve one day. She managed to access information about university courses from school and enjoyed the support of an aunt who persuaded her parents to allow her to go to university.

The findings showed Mona arrived at university ill-informed of what was expected of her and thus entered what Lysaght (2007) describes as an unfamiliar territory. In common with other students and girls from rural PNG (see for example; Geissinger, 1997; Spark, 2010; Madjar, 2010a, 2010b; Toliman, 2000) she was conscious of the cultural concerns expressed by her family and their fear that away from home she might engage in relationships that could lead to an unwanted pregnancy. Despite this, Mona entered university excited and motivated

to learn. This was perhaps surprising given that the two settings were very different in terms of structural organisation and administration. However, she experienced the changes as positive, with better ICT facilities, more learning resources and the different kind of teachers at university. According to Bronfenbrenner and Morris (1997) consideration of proximal processes recognises that the objects and symbols in the environment can manipulate and encourage learning. For example, the ICT and internet facilities at the university, while being unfamiliar and constituting challenging knowledge and skills, also invited and attracted Mona's attention in a way that fostered positive experiences for her at the university (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1997).

Her story illustrated the way in which Mona experienced in two transitions. These were the transition from a rural to an urban setting alongside the transition from secondary school to university studies. These transitions involved changes in her sense of self and the multiple roles she had to play (Beach, 2003) to get accustomed to life at the university. For example, there were differences between urban and rural students' background, and Mona said she had difficulty interacting with urban students when she first arrived at the university. She stated that the urban students and the lecturers spoke English too fast and that she did not understand them well. The new microsystem of the university had therefore exposed Mona to lots of changes when she left her home environment and school, and there were few mesosystem links between these settings (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). For example, it was difficult to contact her family through the use of mobile phones as it was too costly for her.

What was particularly interesting is that despite the changes and challenges, Mona found that the new learning environment of the university was "nice, better and inviting" and had a welcoming atmosphere that motivated her to learn. Its physical appearance strongly encouraged Mona to continue her education. According to Bronfenbrenner and Morris (1997) environmental characteristics can foster the development and achievement of long-term goals of an active participant such as Mona. The university environment had impacted on her eagerness and enthusiasm to learn in this new setting. The resources available motivated Mona and she was excited and was willing to persist to become

successful. She already saw herself as a university student and wanted to be successful; she was willing to put up with the challenges and valued her new role and identity as an university student. These changes in identity demonstrate Beach's (2003) consideration of transition as developmental change that occurs within a person when he /she participates with one or more social activities that lead to changes in the individual. This also resembles Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ideas when he defined development "as the person's evolving conception of the ecological environment, and his [sic] relation to it, as well as the person's growing capacity to discover, sustain, or alter its properties" (p.9). Mona's willingness to learn illustrated how she perceived the new microsystem of the university in how she interacted within and with the university (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Mona's exposure to the university's environment for a period of time allowed the proximal processes to take place. The university provided developmental resources that encouraged participation and engagement in the process to a degree that Mona had not experienced in the other setting. At the same time, Mona's own positive characteristics of active involvement and the ability to seek help had shaped her to initiate and engage in activities alone and with her friends and others in the university that contributed to her achieving her long-term goals (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1997).

The findings also showed that Mona was able to interact with others in the new microsystem of the university to establish social relationships. Her continuous interactions and interplay with the students slowly helped her to get used to the university setting and the people within it. She belonged to different groups and made friends with students who were her course mates and students with whom she shared similar cultural backgrounds. These findings coincide with the view of Tynkkynen et al. (2010) that social ties help to generate resources such as knowledge and skills to support students in tertiary education, and foster long-term goal achievement and life satisfaction over the years. For example, encouragement and advice from Mona's friends sustained her transition. Kantanis (2000) stated that having friends makes the transition process less difficult and helps students to settle in quickly and make progress with their studies at the university. Therefore, Mona's access to her friends' resources and support helped her to continue her studies at the university.

## 5.4. Summary

Mona was the fifth child in a family of eight members. She came from a rural setting in PNG and had succeeded against the odds to make the transition to university. As a female and rural student she represented underrepresented groups of students studying at the university. Her desire to come to university was encouraged by her aunt when her parents were against the idea of her going to university for cultural reasons. Some rural parents are afraid that they will lose their daughters through education. Despite all the adverse cultural factors Mona was given the opportunity to study at the university.

Mona's arrival at the university was welcomed by the university's set up and the modern learning facilities provided by the university. She was excited and motivated to experience life at the university without worrying about the challenges. It was Mona's first exposure to a lot of new changes in terms of her life in urban PNG compared to her rural background. The changes and challenges affected her sense of self in the many different roles she played during the transition. She encountered challenges during the transition process but these did not affect her motivation to learn. Her own motivation, determination, perseverance and enthusiasm to learn combined with her interpersonal relationships with others played a significant role in her learning and achievement of goals over time. Mona obtained help, advice and encouragement from friends to sustain her transition to university. The resources for example, knowledge and skills she obtained from others were the sign posts that she used to negotiate her transition to university. It was highlighted in this case study that an individual's positive personal characteristics interacting with the resources provided by the environment fosters developmental changes in individuals and achievements of long-term goals. This was what happened to Mona that made her to succeed very much against the odds.

The overall findings of the study were presented in Chapter Four and here in Chapter Five one case study has sought to provide some of the richness of the individual stories that sit behind the themes in Chapter Four. This chapter has

included some initial reflections and discussion of the case study. The next chapter provides an overall discussion of all the findings of the study.

# Chapter 6: Discussion

## 6.1. Introduction

Chapter Four presented key themes in the findings obtained from the two methods of data collection, namely, semi-structured and focus group interviews. Chapter Five provided a case study of one of the participants. Chapter Six will present an overall evaluation and discussion of the findings presented in Chapters Four and Five regarding the experiences of female students' educational transition from secondary to tertiary education in PNG. These discussions are the reflections of the intentions of the research questions which were to explore:

1. What are the female students' experiences of the decision they make to enter a tertiary institution?

2. What challenges do they identify as part of this transition?

3. What factors do they identify as contributing to their likely success or likely failure in their university courses?

First I will focus on the decision the female students made to enter the tertiary institution. Secondly, I will discuss the challenges they encountered during the transition. Finally I look at the factors that the students perceived as contributing to their likely success or failure in their university courses. I conclude the chapter with a summary of the discussions.

The overall findings of this study showed that the transition from secondary to tertiary education was experienced in different ways by the students undertaking this transition. The cultural and parental backgrounds of the students influenced what they brought with them to university and how well they coped with the challenges. Although the backgrounds and experiences were very different to those of the students in Madjar et al.'s (2010b) New Zealand studies, there were some similarities in that both studies were looking at underrepresented groups in society who were moving from secondary school to university. Madjar et al.'s (2010b) statement below reflects the transition experiences of the twelve participants in my study:

Transition from secondary school to university was found to be a complex process, lived through by individual students, which began well before they set foot on a university campus. Their experience of transition was influenced by attributes, knowledge and skills they brought with them, as well as the conditions they encountered in the new learning environment. (p. 4)

## 6.2. Choices of coming to university

The findings of this study concern the experiences of educational transition for the female student participants as they moved from secondary to tertiary education in PNG. The thesis looked at pathways to university. There were interesting differences depending on whether the girls were from rural or urban backgrounds. This started with the choice the students made. All the young women highlighted that the choice was made without much input from their parents. This is not surprising in the PNG context students tend to discuss their career pathways with their secondary school teachers. The participants came to university with the expectation of getting a decent job in the future and the belief that having a job would enable them to look after their parents and siblings. The students' focus on their future roles coincides with the views of Gilbert (2005) and Rose and Buehler (2004) when they described identity as people's perception of who they were, who they are and who they want to be in the future. The young women in the study had looked ahead and focused on what to do after their university studies. Their future sense of self will be achieved over time as they develop skills, knowledge and attitudes which shape their future identity. The young women reflected on their previous identity to develop strategies and negotiate the achievement of their designated identity over time (Rose & Buehler, 2004).The perception of who and what they want to be and the motivation of getting a job influenced their decision to go to university .

The young women chose university study in the context of a variety of individual experience. Three of the participants had elder brothers and sisters who had been to university and had discussed their experiences with them. Surprising, although two of the participants had university-educated parents, neither of the girls mentioned their parents sharing their university experiences with their daughters. After listening to stories and reading about universities and the kind of courses

offered at the university, the girls were motivated to further their education at the university level. The power of these conversations fits with my experience of PNG as an oral society where communication is done through social interactions with people taking part in formal and informal conversations and messages are passed on and registered in individuals' mind. The impact of the women's engagement with these stories reflects Bronfenbrenner and Morris's (1997) description of proximal processes, where the skills, attributes and knowledge learnt from others through interpersonal relations and interconnections with people and within various settings can be of benefit to the developing individual over time. Whatever the person comes in contact with can contribute to decision making, which can have an impact on future life satisfaction, for example, in education and jobs (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1997). The experiences the young women encountered during the process of learning enabled them to make choices and they took responsibilities for the choices for their own benefit. Likewise, Sfard and Prusak (2005) discussed identity as narratives or stories people make about others and themselves that shift their sense of self. People tell stories about their experiences that have an impact on whoever is listening. Both positive and challenging stories made the women assess their past identity, study their actual identity, then plan and develop their chosen identity. The stories influenced their choice and made them look at life ahead of them by developing their future sense of themselves as university students.

### 6.2.1. Parents' contribution to the young women's choice

From the findings it is evident that all twelve young women made their own choices for higher education. However, parents made their voices heard when the students were deciding where to go after secondary education. This is because the students were dependent on parental resources for their education. One of the participants discussed her choice with her parents: the young woman wanted to go to a technical school and the mother agreed however, the father was not with the idea. He wanted the young woman to apply to university without listening to the young woman's views. The father's attitude was illustrative of fathers as head of the family and decision makers and the way in which PNG women can be voiceless in their own family and society (Kewa, 2007; Vali, 2010). However, it was interesting that the father was using his power to promote university

education for his daughter. Similarly, a brother and an uncle paid their female relative's university fees. These findings illustrated the ways in which males within a patriarchal society could use their power within the family to support females' education and thus help to disrupt existing patterns and provide fair opportunities for young women in education and jobs. I support these three males in this study and can say that such men are beginning to realise the importance of educating women in PNG.

As the findings illustrated, most parents were proud and supportive of their daughters' choices; however, they still had problems with the payment of university fees and other costs for their daughters' education. University fee problems were encountered by all parents regardless of their backgrounds. This is contrary to the findings of other research done in PNG and other Melanesian communities (see for example, Dovona-Ope, 2008; Geissinger, 1997; Spark, 2010; Strachan, 2009; Toliman, 2000) and other developing countries (King & Hill, 1993) on gender issues and other matters related to women which have suggested that women from rural areas were affected because rural parents have limited resources to fund their daughters' school fees. In my findings nearly all parents were facing university fee problems, not just those from rural areas. Other factors contributed to university/school fee problems. One reason was family size; some of my participants came from families of twelve, eight and seven children. Their parents had difficulties raising and saving money for their university fees because other siblings were also attending schools. This is a reality in PNG and when parents have limited earning power. It is stressful and it affects the family unit as a whole (Geissinger, 1997). It is in such situations that parental decisions can affect female students' educational opportunities. For example, Strachan (2009) found that when resources were limited priority was given to males as the parents trusted males and saw them as future heads of the family and decision-makers and therefore invested what resources were available in their education ahead of their female siblings (Strachan, 2009).

One interesting finding illustrated that students needed financial support from parents. It was evident that rural parents were unable to provide sufficient financial support for their daughters. This is because rural parents were unable to

find employment as there are no employment opportunities in rural PNG. The only means of getting money is to sell crops and vegetables at the local markets. The money earned per day depends on demand. Sometimes the parents will return home without selling their vegetables at all. In my study parents could not afford to send their daughters pocket money and at the same time save money for their university fees for the following year. This is when other relatives stepped in and supported the young women. Some young women in the study were supported financially by their parents. This finding is similar to Madjar et al.'s (2010) New Zealand study in that families' financial and practical support is required to sustain students through university. On the other hand, comparing New Zealand with PNG in terms of economic growth and development, PNG rural parents cannot be compared with parents in rural New Zealand. The services and opportunities provided by the New Zealand government to meet the needs of disadvantaged children are better than the PNG government provides for its disadvantaged students. In my study, it appeared that the transition to university was full of surprises and these could be confusing and more stressful when lacking financial support from parents.

Despite the school fees problem experienced by eleven young women, there was one participant who was sponsored by a private company for her education. Investment in scholarships like this could assist other girls from disadvantaged families to attend university.

### 6.2.2. Inspirational people in the women's lives

It was evident that there were inspirational people in the lives of these young women. These people had an impact in different ways on the choice the young women made to come to the university. Inspirational people may be considered especially important in initiating individuals' choices in life-changing opportunities such as education. For example, parents and other people such as teachers at primary or secondary schooling, big sisters and other women acted as role models. Madjar et al. (2010b) stated that the participants in their study reported that before coming to university factors such as having role models, developing clear academic goals, with parental support and personal motivation, had enabled them to stay focused upon university enrolment. One young woman

said that although she admired other women she still saw her father as a role model and mentor who motivated and encouraged her to come to the university. This was similar to Dovona-Ope (2008) reflections upon educational experience in her own study which indicated that her father was her role model. Vali's (2010) found that the women leaders in her study saw their fathers as inspirations to their leadership roles. Again it seems fathers could change the trend of male dominance by supporting their daughters to have education and careers in PNG today. Similarly, educated mothers and big sisters also inspired their daughters and small sisters. Many of the young women saw their mothers and sisters as role models. These findings demonstrated the interconnection and interpersonal relationships within the micro-system of the family (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Parents and their children are partners in the child's developmental progress and they are the principal people that children come in contact with every day. Other relatives also play vital roles in helping children to make decisions for their own future life satisfaction but parental roles within a family unit play an important part in children's social and academic outcomes (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). The findings were similar in other studies conducted on parental educational backgrounds, which have shown that parental background and contributions impacted the choices made by students to attend higher education. Advantaged family backgrounds provided resources such as knowledge and support for children to achieve higher educational qualifications (Tieben, 2009; Tieben & Wolbers, 2010). However, it is interesting to note that in my study not only educated parents were involved in the women's education; other educated family members played a role in supporting the young women.

On the other hand, in my study there were two young women who came from rural settings and from typically uneducated parental backgrounds. Rural students are an underrepresented group of students participating in tertiary education in PNG. It is important to note that the groups who are underrepresented in this way may differ from country to country. For example, the participants in Madjar et al.'s (2010a, 2010b) studies were underrepresented groups of students in New Zealand and included Maori, Pacifika and other students from low-decile schools. Madjar and colleagues examined the experiences of these groups of students to understand their experiences of transition to university in New Zealand. When

comparing underrepresented groups, it is important to remember that these groups are not all the same.

Two young women in my study claimed that no one inspired them as there were no women role models in the rural areas they grew up in. One of these women was discussed in Chapter Five. They heard about university when they were in secondary school so they decided to apply for university and were given placings. This suggests that stories are powerful and can change a person's sense of self (Sfard & Prusak, 2005). The young women were enthusiastic and wanted to be the first women from their areas studying at the university and getting a university qualification. They wanted to come to university to change the perspective of people in their rural home areas to show that women are as capable as males and can get an education at a higher institution. This finding reflects Bronfenbrenner and Morris (1997) concept of proximal processes. The developing person and the environment are interrelated; learning and development take place when children interact with people, objects and symbols by taking part in activities within the environment and the settings the children are engaged in. The people, books, newspapers and televisions that they come in contact with subconsciously affect individuals' subsequent choices. Their environment contributed over time by motivating the young women to further their education to a higher level (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1997).

Other studies have found that rural women in PNG are disadvantaged as there were less likely to be role models and educated women in the rural environment because of the paucity of professional jobs (Dovona-Ope, 2008). From my experience, young women are struggling to make life better for themselves because there are no women role models in this setting to motivate and encourage them to look at life beyond their rural setting. Lack of role models is a hindrance to girls and women's education in rural PNG (Toliman, 2000). It is significantly important to have women as role models in rural PNG so that they can change the perspective people have on women as inferior and voiceless (Vali, 2010). As my study indicated, role models are not always needed but they seemed to be helpful and should be encouraged. Thus, the two young women in my study were taking an encouraging step to act as role models to other women of that particular

environment. They also demonstrated the importance of making information about university available to girls in the rural areas that might encourage them to enrol. These women were also breaking the barrier to represent the under-represented group of rural women studying in universities throughout PNG.

### 6.2.3. Negative comments made to the young women

While there were positive stories about starting university, there were also negative ones. For example, three of the women from rural backgrounds realised that the fact of them going to university was not easily accepted by some of their family members or the community. Parents were in fear of their daughters engaging in boy-girl relationships, getting pregnant and not completing their studies. This was in line with Dovona-Ope's (2008) research findings and is exemplified by the account of the young women in my case study (see Chapter Five). Vali (2010) had a similar experience when she won a scholarship to study in New Zealand in 2008. One of Vali's participants was also affected by negative comments made by a male colleague in her work place. It was within the micro-system of the family unit Bronfenbrenner's (1979) that this particular impact of negative stories of PNG culture was experienced by the young women in my study. Some of the people around them, their immediate families and distant relatives whom the young women trusted and expected to be supportive of their education assumed instead a negative role. I am of the view that the negative comments are strategy that families use to discourage young women from moving far away from them and it affects women's education and other leadership roles. It is evident from research done in PNG that people typically undermined women's potential and capabilities and suggested that males rather than females should be engaged in leadership responsibilities and studying at the university level (Kewa, 2007; Spark, 2010; Vali, 2010). Nevertheless, some women like Vali (2010) and the women in my study, are starting to resist these negative messages.

In PNG such stories are potentially an impediment to women's education and job aspirations. As illustrated in the findings one of the women was hurt by a negative comment and felt low but she nonetheless took it as a challenge. Negative comments can help inspire, shape and develop one's future sense of self. These findings illustrated Sfard and Prusak's (2005) view that negative stories may

develop a sense of unhappiness but that the outcome depends on the recipients. People may endorse stories about themselves and others without realising that other stories are possible. Stories can also be instrumental in decision making which can affect one's designated identity (Sfard and Prusak, 2005), as happened with one of the participants in my study, leading her to strategise to overcome the challenge presented. Environmental factors can foster or discourage development and learning. What the young woman faced were some of those factors that can disrupt education and learning for other women in the PNG context (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1997) but this individual challenged the negative stories and took a positive step.

### 6.2.4: Changes in sense of self

Eleven participants in my study expressed changes in their sense of self when they arrived at the university, for example, feelings of nervousness, dejection, anxiety and unconfidence. They felt small in a big place and were scared to move around and do the things that they were used to in their previous environment. The rural students felt isolated and out of place when interacting with urban students. As also described in the case study, the rural girls may find it hard to socialise, they may feel inferior or uncomfortable because they do not dress and speak English like the urban girls and they have different childhood experiences. This finding is well supported by the literature on 'sense of self or identity'. Drawing from a number of authors (Beach, 2003; Gilbert, 2005; Merry, 2007; Rose & Buehler, 2004) it is evident that students going through transitions encounter experiences that change their sense of self. Gilbert (2005) stated that sense of self/identity impacts students' ways of doing things in different contexts and social situations within any settings in which a student is engaged. Lysaght (2007) highlighted that first-time university students felt insecure, lacked confidence, had low self-esteem and did not have a sense of belonging because of leaving their familiar setting (their comfort zone) to move to an unfamiliar setting. Beach (2003) observed that as students maneuvered around trying to get used to a new setting they experienced changes in their roles, status and ways of doing things. However, Bronfenbrenner (1979) affirmed that during their initial participation and involvement in activities within the new micro-system of the university, the students may be able to identify themselves through responsive and reciprocal

interactions which can foster a developing sense of belonging and feeling accepted in the new settings. I had a similar experience when I came to study here in New Zealand. My sense of self was challenged. However, like the women in this study I had people who helped me settle into my university programmes.

As discussed earlier in the case study presented in Chapter Five, one of the rural students was significantly happier than the other eleven participants. This is surprising, as she might have been expected to be the one struggling with her sense of self as she was making two different transitions, (rural urban and secondary to university) instead she was happy unlike the others. I talked further with her during the interview and she said:

> I want to learn. I am happy to come out of my rural setting and experience what life is like in an urban setting and in a big university.

It appears that the people and objects, for example, the new learning resources, that she came in contact with in the new micro-system of the university motivated her to learn more than had been the case in her previous experiences. This once again demonstrated Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological model which illustrated the changes and differences in the two microsystems (rural and the university). The new micro-system of the university challenged her sense of self and motivated her to learn. It is evident from her stories that her previous transition lacked motivation so she was looking forward to a positive experience. In addition, her own positive personal characteristics combined with the environmental factors of coping with challenges enabled her to be positive in her approach to navigating this particular transition (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1997).

The above section discussed the first research question regarding the choice the young women made to attend university. Their choice was supported by parents and other inspirational people in the young women's lives. The rural women were faced with negative stories that impacted on their sense of self but they challenged the stories as they were motivated to learn.

The second research question seeks to address the challenges the young women faced during the transition. In this section I present the findings from the data in relation to this research question.

## 6.3. Transitional challenges and support

The study identified transitional challenges and support experienced by the women during the transition. These were academic and social/welfare challenges and parents' and university's support in the transition each of which will be highlighted in the next segments

### 6.3.1. Academic challenges

The findings revealed that all the young women had experienced academic challenges in a variety of ways. The extent and the degree of the challenges encountered again reflected the types of backgrounds the students came from. For example, most rural students had difficulties coping with ICT. The university had a "paper less policy" meaning that everything was sent electronically to and from lecturers and students. The policy was introduced to save cost and provide a friendly educational environment. Accessing information and resources through the internet and Moodle was a challenge to the young women. These findings have practical implications for the orientation to university of rural students. The university can assist by providing extra ICT classes for this disadvantaged group of students. At the same time schools might do more to prepare their students in the use of ICTs. Gilbert (2005) emphasised that the education system is responsible to prepare students to develop their future sense of self and should accommodate changes in the curriculum that will enable students to meet the demands of the working environment or next level of school. However, this is not without its own challenges in the PNG context. The school curriculum accommodated the changes in technology but funding problems made it impossible to have ICT installed in all schools in PNG. Where there were computers and ICT classes in some schools in PNG, the facilities were sometimes run down and not maintained. Apart from that, the experts and skilled people in ICT were not available in some schools to monitor the operations of ICT. These problems are particularly evident in the rural areas, whereas urban schools generally have much better resources. The government could potentially address

some of the inequalities in ICT facilities and support in the rural areas so that appropriate ICT provision and education reaches most of the rural population.

In addition to the ICT issues, the study identified other academic challenges such as, understanding and writing assignment and time management. The students also found that it was difficult to be an independent learner. These findings are similar to those of studies done in Australia and New Zealand regarding students' experiences of transition to universities (Kantanis, 2000; Madjar et al., 2010a, 2010b; Purnell, 2002). For example, Kantanis (2000) and Madjar et al. (2010b) identified several changes the students encountered in their study at university compared with school. These were: differences in content coverage, referencing authors into their texts and writing up and using examples to support their texts. University work was more formal and involved a lot of reading and independent learning, coping with assignment due dates and examinations. This was complicated for new students by not knowing what to expect in tutorials and lectures and having to create time management strategies. While there were these similarities between the participants in my study and other young women at the university level, in Kantanis' (2000) and Madjar et al.'s (2010a, 2010b) findings ICT was not the problem to first year university students that it was my study's participants. It might be that the context and school curriculum organisation contain significant differences when comparing PNG with developed countries like Australia and New Zealand.

### 6.3.2. Social and welfare challenges

The study indicated a variety of experiences of social and welfare challenges encountered by the young women. These challenges included boy-girl relationships, peer pressure, water shortage, food quality and overcrowding in the dormitories. Intimate boy-girl relationships in the PNG context are very much discouraged by parents for fear of their daughters getting pregnant and not completing their studies. The young women were advised accordingly before they came to the university so any intentions of establishing boyfriend relationships would not easily be accepted by their parents (Dovona-Ope, 2008). Madjar et al. (2010b) stressed that other challenges of social and academic transition to universities associated with changes in life styles on entry to university can have

an impact on the students' emotional and physical wellbeing. The students in my study and Madjar et al.'s (2010a, 210b) all found that the transition to university was a complex process. However, the attributes, knowledge and skills the PNG women brought with them to university were quite distinct from those of the underrepresented groups of students in New Zealand, highlighting the importance of taking account of cultural context when trying to understand the participants' experiences.

Financial issues are also part of the transition too. For some girls it was their first encounter with what others have in terms of material possessions. They were confronted with what they did not have. Rural girls in PNG do not tend to travel when they are growing up so moving to university may be the first move out of their home context and their first encounter with what other people have, things they were not aware of before. According to Kewa (2007) it is in difficult financial situations that some female students are drawn to activities like prostitution and having sexual relationships with married and business men, primarily so the men will assist them financially so that they may complete their formal education. This was not what the young women in my study were doing to secure financial assistance but the constraints they experienced showed the challenges for some students. In contrast, the urban girls have grown up with these material things. It was clear that financial problems can overlap with other disadvantages. Overall the findings are similar to those of other studies which have found that parents with high SES support their children while parents with low SES did not fully support their children in higher education (Spark, 2010; Tieben & Wolbers, 2010) however, in the PNG context even parents who were working still could not support their children financially.

### 6.3.3. Overcoming the challenges

The findings noted that the young women took different measures to address their own problems and sustain their transition. Family and social support was very important. All the participants established relationships with different people and groups in the campus to assist them to overcome the challenges. The girls turned to family and friends for information and support. This coincides with and supports Madjar et al.'s (2010b) findings which identified factors that sustained

students through university experience and helped them negotiate and overcome the challenges experienced by Auckland university students. Madjar et al. (2010b) included a range of experience, motives and influences very much related to personal reasons. For example, students' enjoyment of what they were doing, sheer determination, family and faith etc. The findings of my study highlighted factors that included responsive and reciprocal interactions with others the young women came in contact with every day. As Bronfenbrenner (1979) proposed, the students in my study sought to overcome their challenges by interacting with people in the micro-systems of the university and their homes. For example, in the new micro-system of the university such people included friends, lecturers and school counsellors and in the home they contacted their parents and other immediate relatives to negotiate appropriate ways of overcoming challenges. It is significant to note that people around the students helped them to have a sense of belonging and acceptance in this transition (Fabian, 2002). In addition, the proximal process is not limited to contacting people to initiate and activate learning; objects and symbols also play a role in an individual's development. The university's learning resources encouraged learning and also helped overcame some of the challenges. It was the environmental characteristics that fostered and sustained the transition for some of the young women (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1997) prior to their establishing social networks. It would have been interesting to interview married students to find out how their husbands supported them in overcoming the challenges. Their contributions would had added my findings.

### 6.3.4. Parental support in the transition

The findings revealed that parents played a significant role in the young women's transition. Some students turned to parents for advice and encouragement and by talking to their parents ten of the young women received help, advice and encouragement which helped them settle into their studies. These adult students show similarities to younger children; for example, Dockett and Perry (2007) stated that as parents are more experienced and very close to their children, they would be the first to be contacted for advice, help and comfort when needed by their children. In my study the students contacted their parents because they knew their parents understood and knew them better than others. Bronfenbrenner and Morrris (1997) also noted that parents are the important people in the

developmental process of children; children need them over an extended period of time to interact with, initiate and participate in activities to encourage development and acquisition of knowledge and skills. Other people come into their lives and help foster development as the children grow older and that includes teachers, peers, friends and others. This was what the young women experienced in this transition.

However, this was not the case with two rural students (one is in the case study) once they got to university. They had difficulties contacting their parents and when they did contact them their parents had difficulty understanding the general life at the university. One of them mentioned that her parents had very little understanding of the life and the types of courses offered at the university. For that reason, parents would not understand what their daughters were facing during the transition. This findings support Madjar et al.'s (2010b) study of underrepresented groups of students in a university in New Zealand. Parents were unfamiliar with the university life and were not able to help their children in the transition. Again this is similar to findings from studies with young children. For example, Dockett and Perry (2007) state that "parents were often confused by the ways in which the school curriculum had changed since their own school days, and sometimes this resulted in a sense of inadequacy and feelings that they would not be able to support their children as they had hoped" (p. 90). In a study of university students, parents had difficulty referring their children to appropriate people for advice as they lacked understanding about what goes on at a university (Lysaght, 2007).

One other disadvantage for rural parents in PNG was either they did not have mobile phones or the phone reception in the area was poor making it difficult to get in touch with their daughters. This is another practical reflection of the ways in which students from low socio-economic backgrounds may be disadvantaged at university. Other research studies on parental socio-economic background (Almquist et al., 2009; Tieben, 2009; Tieben & Wolbers, 2010) showed that uneducated parents were unlikely to have the resources to fully support their children in tertiary education and as a result children chose lower educational pathways even when they had the potential for higher education. However, in my

study the young women were attending university; the problem was that they lacked adequate parental support because their parents lacked the requisite knowledge and resources.

In the western literature, children benefitted from their parents' involvement in their education. In PNG other family members played an important role in supporting the girls. Wider family involvement is a feature of PNG life although the patterns are changing. However, it is important to consider the role of the wider family when thinking about transitions.

### 6.3.5. University's assistance in the transition

The findings are also consistent with other research in Australian and New Zealand universities. Brownlee et al (2009) and Purnell (2002) also identified that first year students go to university ill-informed of the expectations and courses offered at the university because they were entering an unfamiliar territory. In my study the participants indicated that the university had played a significant role in their transition. All the participants stated that the university had orientation programmes for the student body in the first week of each academic year. Apart from the orientation programmes the university provided academic tutorials sessions for students who encountered problems with academic writing. The students' active engagement with the services provided by the university assisted them to get accustomed to their academic work and social life at the university. Brownlee et al (2009) suggested that it is the university's responsibility to deal with challenges the students are faced with. Universities can identify the challenges and deal with them appropriately to help students settle in and have a sense of self as university students. Where universities do have student learning support services it is the responsibility of individual students to make use of the services for their benefit. For example, Madjar et al. (2010b) in a qualitative study in Auckland University in New Zealand highlighted important implications for students, families, schools and universities to help support university students from the underrepresented groups to make a successful transition to university. They suggested that parents were to help their children choose career options prior to university enrolment, encourage them to work hard and take responsibility for their own decisions. The schools were to prepare students for academic and social

transition, particularly those students with limited knowledge of the university's expectations. The university can assist the underrepresented groups with the enrolment process and by opening the door for academic advice on different courses offered at the faculty level (Madjar et al., 2010b).

On the same note the findings revealed that lecturers were supportive in the young women's transition to university. The lecturers identified students' problems and were able to assist them. Purnell (2000) emphasised that academics who were teaching students should be aware of the transitional phases that students go through and provide help for them where necessary. Kantanis (2000) highlighted that the academics can help to facilitate students' transitions by providing academic tutorials in for example, essay writing formats and networking classes to accommodate students' transition at the university. Academics were to encourage students to negotiate transition by making use of the attributes and knowledge they brought with them to university through interpersonal and interconnection relationships with peers (Kantanis, 2000). In my study the girls turned to their family and friends for information and support. They were not confident about approaching their lecturers, so not all students were accessing lecturers' support even though lecturers would have been the people who were best able to help. This may be partly due to the PNG culture where lecturers are not seen as approachable. Their titles are used such as Dr, Mr, Mrs and Ms and these titles especially Dr; give the lecturers status that can scare students away from making contact and instead they make use of informal support. One possible recommendation can be that girls starting university should be encouraged to get in touch with their lecturers and the lecturers in turn should be encouraged to be available to offer support. The lecturers are the best placed to assist the students as parents and others do not know the answers to the students' questions in the ways the lecturers will.

### 6.3.6. Making friends supported the transition

It was evident that developing a social network had significantly impacted on the young women's transition. All twelve students had developed different social networks. These included provincial/cultural groups, religious groups, class/course mates, department contacts, friends (both boys and girls) roommates

and senior students that assisted them to overcome the challenges. This finding supports Tynkkynen et al.'s (2010) work which identified that students develop both strong and weak ties amongst their friendship relationships. The participants' strong friendship ties (Tynkkynen et al., 2010) tended to be with parents and close friends because they constantly contacted them when they met problems. In the PNG context the ethnic groups that students belong to demonstrate a strong bond because students were able to interact on a regular basis which helped them have a sense of belonging and acceptance as soon as they arrived at the university. Other relationships the young women established with roommates, class groups, and lecturers can be classified as weak ties (Tynkkynen et al., 2010) as they did not normally get around talking about their challenges with these people on a regular basis

The establishment of social relationships by the young women developed their knowledge and access to resources which supported their successful goal attainment and success at the university; this is similar to findings of Almquist et al. (2009). Kantanis (2000) stressed that successful social transition is significant to academic success at the university. One student in my study had a boyfriend relationship. She found the relationship helpful as she communicated her feelings to him especially when she was homesick. The other eleven women mentioned having boyfriends but not in a close relationship. The students in my study developed friendship relationships to sustain their transition. Without friends they would not have the appropriate resources to negotiate their transition to university (Kantanis, 2000).

In this last section, I discuss the data from the focus group interview which addressed the third question of my study regarding what the students saw as likely success and failure factors with their university courses.

## 6.4. Likely success and failure factors with university courses

The female students in this study are privileged to have university acceptance in PNG, which many of their secondary peers did not. Attending a university in PNG is an opportunity one has once in a lifetime. This section discusses the

participants' reflections on what they felt were the factors that could contribute to success or failure in their studies.

### 6.4.1. Factors that contributes to academic success and failure

In discussing the students' experiences of transition there was clear evidence of factors that helped to determine success, both to reach university and then to succeed in their studies when they got there. The students also had their own views on this, many of which linked closely to their own experiences. The factors the students thought might contribute to academic success included: lecturers' effective teaching and availability of important resources, self-discipline and time management, cooperative and collaborative group work, self-reading and seeking assistance, taking part in religious activities of praying and trusting God, and better study habits. These findings support those of Ditcher and Tetley (1999), whose qualitative study in New Zealand included nineteen academic success items on a questionnaire and completed by students and academics of Canterbury University. The success items listed were similar to what was mentioned by the participants of my study as success factors. However, Ditcher and Tetley identified self-motivation as a major success factor that helped the students to succeed at Canterbury University, something which was not strongly highlighted in my study, perhaps because my questions, unlike Ditcher and Tetley's, did not specifically ask about this. Madjar et al. (2010a) also identified 'stepping stones' of persistence and success in another of New Zealand study. Again these were similar to my findings but these researchers had obtained the data from individual students rather than through focus group interviews. These "stepping stones" were: having clear and personal goals, becoming more independent, confident and relaxed in the university, receiving positive feedback on academic work, support of like-minded friends and fellow students, learning from personal experience and mistakes, and the benefits of academic and social engagement in smaller classes (Madjar et al., 2010a).

The findings suggested that the students thought they were likely to fail courses or assessable tasks at the university due to a variety of reasons. The twelve participants had not experienced failure but had ideas about what they thought might contribute to failure. A key theme that arose was peer pressure which the

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participants felt could lead them to doing things which were of no benefit to them. For example, they followed their friends if they could not make their own decisions but felt that succumbing to this kind of peer pressure could lead to alcohol consumption and having boy-friend relationship and falling pregnant, meaning that they would possibly fail their courses and perhaps not complete their studies. Again some of the failing factors were similar to those identified by Ditch and Tetley (1999) on their questionnaires for their survey. However, while Ditch and Tetley found that lack of self-motivation was seen by the students as a determinant of academic failure at the university, this was not mentioned in my study. It was interesting that both academics and students participated in Ditch and Tetley's (1999) study which was good as they were both partners in teaching and learning. They all responded to the same items on the survey with differences highlighted from each item. In my study the participants were all students so there was a lack of comparison between students and academics.

On the other hand, Demetriou et al. (2000) suggested that students develop positive self-image and specific techniques of coping with situations that could lead them away from failure. They felt that students are able to tell themselves that success is better than failure. Anyone who enters a university has to work hard for superior achievement (Demetriou et al., 2000). Students hoping for success at university should be self-motivated to learn in order to achieve their long term goals. The young women displayed positive attitudes towards their studies and this indicated that they are likely to achieve their qualifications at the end of their studies at the university.

The last section of the discussions addressed the likely success and failure factors of courses offered at the university. The next section provides the summary of the discussions.

## 6.5. Summary

The discussion in this chapter was theoretically and practically consistent with much of the literature on students making the transition from secondary to tertiary education. Specifically, the challenges the young women faced when undertaking

the transition were strongly influenced by the environment and the participants' cultural and parental backgrounds. Parental and cultural backgrounds influenced the choice students made to attend universities. People in the students' lives and others within their environment motivated them to choose university study. An impact of the culture was that a number of negative comments were made to the young women; it appeared that some people endorsed those stories and did not realise that other stories were possible. However, the students, and in many cases the families too, resisted these negative messages and the women were given the opportunity to pursue university study. Interestingly, the study highlighted a changing pattern in PNG with some men using their culturally sanctioned power to support and encourage women to participate in university studies. This signalled that although PNG is a male-dominated society there is some evidence of people beginning to consider education is important for women today.

The study indicated that the positive set up of the university provided helpful resources for students making the transition from secondary school to university. Knowledge was also continued, discontinued and altered to help their transition to university. Even though it was difficult for some students upon entry, with time they became accustomed to the new setting. There were significant differences in the transitional challenges experienced by rural and urban students. The study highlighted that the support provided by parents and university eased the participants' transition to university, and that students felt able to use the services available to them. The young women also overcame the challenges by using helpful approaches included establishing interpersonal relations with people closest to them. The friendship networks funded resources to support them with the transition. The young women's positive attitudes displayed towards learning interacted with the environmental factors these are the learning resources of the university, initiated, invited attention and manipulated them to learn and sustain their transition to university.

In the next chapter, I present the conclusion of the thesis

# Chapter 7: Conclusion

## 7.1. Introduction

This study is unique as it explored the experiences of educational transition from secondary to tertiary education for twelve young women in a university in PNG, an area where there does not appear to have been any other research. The narratives of the twelve young women in this study played a significant role in identifying their experiences in educational transition from secondary to tertiary education in PNG. The young women were interviewed and the data were analysed using a qualitative thematic approach.

The findings of my study indicated that the transition from secondary to tertiary was experienced differently by the students undertaking this transition. The findings show similarities to research in universities in Australia, New Zealand and the Netherlands (see for example, Kantanis, 2000; Madjar et al., 2010a, 2010b; Teiben & Wolbers, 2010) which showed that first time university students entered university with different expectations and they bring with them different attributes, knowledge and skills. These expectations and attributes interacted with the characteristics of the environment that fostered learning. However, while there were some similarities with overseas research, there were also key points of difference due to aspects of PNG culture, and these features of the cultural context had to be taken into account when understanding the women's experiences.

In this final chapter, I provide recommendations to the university which I believe will assist the institution to promote and support transition activities and programmes for students. Recommendations are also made to the National Department of Education (NDOE) to address the issues of social justice by providing equal opportunities to all female students with considerations given to rural female students. This chapter also highlights some limitations of the study, likely areas for future research and a summary to conclude the thesis.

I firstly present recommendations for the institution.

## 7.2. Recommendations to the institution

The findings illustrated that academic and welfare challenges were experienced by the young women. For example, the university lacked sufficient computers for the increasing number of students and support services were inconsistent. The students felt that the lecturers were not approachable and thought that the orientation programmes should be conducted at the department level and not so much as a university-wide programme.

At the micro-system of the university, firstly, the institution could make an attempt to buy and install enough computers for everyone. A curriculum could be developed that enhances interactive and social experiences for the students. The university could take steps to foster and encourage friendship networks within and outside of the education environment and create social opportunities for students to meet and make friends which, as suggested by Tynkkynen et al. (2010), can consist of both strong and weak friendship ties. The university could offer professional development and support for staff to assist them in coping with the diversity of students. It could develop more professionalism in teachers so that they can cope with the students. Girls starting university should be encouraged to get in touch with their lecturers and lecturers in turn should be available to offer support. Parents and others do not know the answers to the students' questions in the ways the lecturers will.

Secondly, the university could provide effective support services for students such areas as proof-reading, analysing assignment questions, reading and editing student work. The services provided should be consistent and address specific needs for the students. Orientations programmes could be conducted at the department level.

Thirdly, ideally, the people within the micro-systems for example, the family and university, will work cooperatively to support the young women in their transitions to university. The university could develop strategies to address the needs of the diversity of students attending the university. Materials should be

provided to schools so that students have access to information about university and are encouraged to see university studies as achievable goals for themselves.

## 7.3. Recommendations to the NDOE

The data analysed indicated that, consistent with Toliman's (2008) research, there were no women role models in the rural setting to inspire other women to progress in education. It was evident that women faced negative comments and stories that affected their sense of self (Sfard & Prusak, 2005). They lacked ICT skills and experienced university fee problems and found it difficult to obtain other kinds of financial, academic and support from their uneducated parents. Gilbert (2005) suggested that the education system should cater for students' needs by addressing changes in the curriculum so that students are prepared to accommodate those changes in the future.

A number of things need to be done to address women's issues at the macro system level as illustrated in (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) model.

Firstly, the NDOE could make education a priority for everyone in the rural areas. It is already stated in the Gender Equity policy that the government should make education accessible to everyone (Department of Education, 2003) but this research indicates that specific strategies and policies need to be developed to address educational issues for young women in the rural areas. Kewa (2007) suggested that there are no policies in placed in PNG to cater for cultural issues that affect PNG women. The government could consider developing policies to initiate creation of professional employment opportunities for women in the rural areas and then employ educated women to work in those areas so that they act as role models to other young women in that immediate environment. The National Education Gender desk within the NDOE could be realistic and make practical changes and policies to address education issues for women.

Secondly, the NDOE or the government could consider subsidising schools fees for female students in the rural areas to help motivate them to get an education. NDOE could provide all secondary schools in the country in rural areas with ICT

buildings and encourage ICT classes to be taught in secondary schools. The NDOE could make sure that high quality and committed teachers are placed in all secondary schools so that students are taught appropriate and relevant knowledge in all subjects especially to do with English lessons and essay writing strategies prior to entering university.

## 7.4. Limitations of the study

It is obvious to say that all research has limitations. Likewise my research had limitations. The research was conducted in only one university. Gaining opinions from other female students in other universities as well would give much broader data on the topic; only one university was used because of financial and time constraints. One other limitation was that the participants interviewed were mostly from educated parental backgrounds even though they came from rural setting. I had hoped to gain more insights from rural female students from uneducated parental background but the very people I wanted to contact or hear from seemed hard to get hold of. I am of the opinion that the rural women were not comfortable with their background and so hesitated to take part in my study, or that the numbers of these students at university was limited. It would also be interesting to interview married women as the participants in my study were all single. It was difficult because most of the married students were living off campus and were not available at the times of the meetings. Interviewing them would give a much broader perspective on the many challenges women experienced making the transition to university by including any issues that are specific to married women in PNG.

Once I began to analyse the findings I became interested in issues of identity that arose in the data. The questions used in this study explored only the practical experiences of educational transition for the young women. In retrospect, I would have liked more details on aspects of identity. If I had allowed more time between the two interviews (semi-structured and focus groups), I might have thought of ways to modify the questions to get more insights into aspects of identity. Alternatively, another round of interviews later in the study might have facilitated this.

During the focus group interviews I had problems with students' punctuality, attendance and their interest in contributing to the discussions. Two of the participants from urban settings did not turn up for the discussions (one from each group) while those who attended did not fully participate. I encourage them to participate but they were still reluctant to voice their concerns.

## 7. 5. Suggestions for future research

Important issues have emerged from this study that has implications for future research in the PNG context to help improve educational transitions for women. An area for future research would be looking particularly at the impacts of parental support and how parents from urban and rural background contribute to support female students in tertiary education. This could highlight the many challenges and specific needs of parents and how these affect educational choices and transition for PNG women.

One other area would be to explore the university's roles in educational transition for students in PNG in order to examine the relevant support services provided by the institution and to initiate establishment of new support services as described under the recommendations section to address challenges encountered by the diversity of students.

Another significant area for future research highlighted by the findings could be investigating socio-cultural as barriers to women's education in PNG. Such a study would explore both males and females' perception of education for women. This would reveal the specific thoughts of PNG men towards women's education and highlight ways in which they can contribute to support women in education.

## 7.6. Summary

The theoretical perspectives underpinning my study were Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological model and his view of the process of proximal processes Bronfenbrenner and Morris (1997). A qualitative methodology was deployed in this study and the narratives of the twelve young women played a significant role in identifying their experiences of educational transition from secondary to

tertiary education in PNG. The young women interviewed were from both rural and urban settings in PNG. The micro-systems of the university and the home environment affected the young women's experiences of educational transition; this has implications for the macro-system. The young women made their own choices to attend a university and the immediate choice they made impacted on their experiences in the university setting.

The purpose of the study was to explore the experiences of female students' educational transition from secondary to tertiary education. In doing so, I have discussed the experiences of the choice the young women made to attend a university in PNG. I also addressed the challenges they encountered in significance to the choice made by the young women. Furthermore, I discussed the factors that they perceived contributed to their likely success and failure with their university courses.

There were significant differences and similarities regarding the challenges experienced by the young women from both urban and rural settings. The key findings of the study indicated that the young women made their own decisions regarding going to university and were supported by their parents and extended family members. The backgrounds the young women came from played a role in their interpersonal interactions and interconnection with and within the university and their home environment to negotiate and sustain their transition to university. Challenges were encountered during the transition and these were overcome largely by means of establishing social relationships and making friends with other students at the university. The university, some of the parents and lecturers also helped sustain the young women's transition to university. It was also noted that some men used their power to support the young women in their university studies, which might be starting to change the pattern in PNG society by which males were traditionally given priority in education over women. Males within a patriarchal society could use their power within the family to support females' education and thus help to disrupt existing patterns and provide fair opportunities for young women in education and jobs. In the PNG context wider family involvement in children's education is expected although the pattern is slowly changing. It is important to encourage the contribution of wider family when

negotiating transitions. Overall, it was the young women's positive attitudes combined with the factors of the environment that contributed to sustain their transition to university. Their ability to initiate and negotiate the many ways to sustain their transition enabled them, in time to develop a sense of belonging to and acceptance to the university.

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# Appendices

## Appendix 1: Letter seeking approval to conduct research

The President

Divine Word University

P. O Box 483

**Madang**

Madang Province

Papua New Guinea


*Subject: Seeking permission to conduct research in your institution.*

Dear Sir,

I am a Papua New Guinean female student who is currently enrolled in Masters of Education at the University of Waikato in Hamilton, New Zealand. As part of the program I am required to undertake home–based research to complete my Master's thesis. I am seeking permission to conduct my research in your university.

My research topic is '*Exploring the experiences of female students' transition from secondary to tertiary education in a University in Papua New Guinea (PNG)'* As a female, I have keen interest in finding out the experiences of educational transition of female students and to develop a better understanding on the notion of educational transition in PNG tertiary education.

Significant findings gained through the interviews can be helpful to the institution. I will provide you with a summary of the significant findings of the research, which may provide insights into the practice of teaching; social networks; students' staff relationship; policy making; programmes and courses offered and assessment practices.

I intend to interview twelve female students from different parental backgrounds that are in their first and second year of studies. Six year one and six year two female students, three each (first and second year) from the rural setting and other three from the urban setting, who are both school leavers and non- school leavers. My participants are likely to be married and single.

The twelve potential participants will be involved in an individual semi-structured interview and two focus group interviews. The research will be adherent strictly to the University of Waikato's Ethical Conduct in Human Research and Related Activities Regulations (2008) located at

http://calender.waikato.ac.nz/assessment/ethicalConduct.html<https://webmail2k. waikato.ac.nz/exchweb/bin/redir.asp?URL=http://calender.waikato.ac.nz/assessm ent/ethicalConduct.html>

All information is strictly confidential, and every effort will be made by use of pseudonyms for the institution and participants to remain anonymous. I anticipate conducting my research in March, 2011 should I be given access to your institution. The meetings will be conducted during the students' free/break times and within the vicinity of the university.

The project has the approval of the Faculty of Education Research Ethics Committee as required by the University of Waikato Ethical Conduct in Human Research and Related Activities Regulation 2008.

This research project is under the supervision of Dr. Sally Peters at the University of Waikato and for any quires, her contact details are: Telephone: (64) 7, 8384466 ext 8386 Facsimile: (64) 7 – 8384555 and Email: speters@waikato.ac.nz. If you wish to contact me, my contact details are:

egy1@waikato.ac.nz/eritayawi@gmail.com and mobile phone (642) – 0211553626.


Yours faithfully


Erita Gabby Yawi
Masters of Education
Research Student

## Appendix 2: Letter to the dean of female students

1/34 Hogan Street
Hillcrest
3216, Hamilton
New Zealand

The Dean
Female students
Divine Word University
P O Box 483
Madang
Madang Province

Dear Madam,

*Subject: Seeking permission to have access to research participants.*
I am a Papua New Guinean female student who is currently enrolled in Masters of Education at the University of Waikato in Hamilton, New Zealand. As part of the program I am required to undertake home–based research to complete my Master's thesis on a chosen topic. My research topic is *"Exploring the experiences of female students' transition from secondary to tertiary education in a University in PNG in a university in PNG"*. Therefore, I am seeking permission to gain access to the research participants. Since my potential participants are female students who are in their first and second year of studies I would like to gain your permission to conduct a meeting with them. This may help me to identify the type of participants I want for my study. I also have a personal information sheet (attached) for them to fill and this information sheet will help me to select my participants. However, their participation is entirely voluntary. Data will be collected through individual and focus group interviews. All information collected will be kept confidential. The data collected and produced will be used for the submission of my thesis and I will provide you with a summary of the significant findings of the research.

I would appreciate if you could contact me by email (egy1@waikato.ac.nz).

Your assistance is greatly appreciated and I thank you in anticipation.

Yours sincerely

Erita Gabby Yawi
Masters of Education Research Student

# Appendix 3: Students' (background) information sheet

Individual student will be given a sheet each to fill in their personal information.
Please fill in the necessary information in the spaces provided in this table.

| Name and contact details | Home Province | Year of study | Marital status | Parental Backgrounds (State if they are working) | | | Settings (place a tick /) | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | Father | Mother | Living with both or single parent (if single state parent). | Rural | Urban |
| | | | | | | | | |

Participants of the study

| Total No of participants:12 |
|---|

| *Year of studies* | | *Parental background* | | | *Marital status* | *Settings* | | *Course of study* | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Year one | Year two Th | Both parents working | One parent working | Parents not working | All single | Rural | Urban | Social and religious studies | Health management |
| Lo Mo Ti Ze Ju Wi | Th Hi Em Ja Mn Wi | Ju Ma Ze Em | Ja Hi Mn Wi Ti | Mo Lo Th | | Th Mo Hi Lo Mn Ti | Em Ja Wi Ze Ma Ju | Th Hi Em Ja Ma Lo Mo Ti Ze Wi | Mn Ju |
| 6 | 6 | 4 | 5 | 3 | 12 | 6 | 6 | 10 | 2 |

Name Key:

Lo-Lona, Mo-Mona, Ti-Tina, Ze-Zena, Ju-Judy, Ma-Martha: Year one students

Th-Thressa, Hi-Hilda, En-Emma, Ja-Jane, Mn-Monica, Wi-Wilam: Year two students

## Appendix 4: Participants' information sheet

> "Exploring the experiences of female students educational transition from secondary to tertiary education in a University in Papua New Guinea"

*Student Researcher*:     Erita Gabby Yawi
*Supervisor:*              Sally Peters

                          Department of Human Development and Counselling

*My background*

My name is Erita Gabby Yawi. I have a Certificate and Diploma in Primary Education from Madang Teachers' College, Madang Province, and a Bachelor's degree in Education (Curriculum Studies) from the University of Goroka, Goroka, PNG.

I am currently pursuing Masters in Education in the Faculty of Education at Waikato University in Hamilton, New Zealand. I have completed my Post Graduate Diploma in Education last year. I had three years' experience of teaching at a Teachers College and sixteen years of Primary School Teaching. In between my teaching career I was taking out years for further studies for higher qualifications. Because of my own self determination and perseverance of higher achievement in education, I have come this far in education. I have a variety of experiences of different transitions in life. The most significant and challenging for me is particularly the work to school and school to work transitions. My own experience and while taking up the course "Educational Transition" at the University of Waikato, under my thesis supervisor, Dr. Sally Peters, has motivated me to research "educational transition from secondary to tertiary education" for my master's thesis.

*The project:*

The project is looking at exploring your experiences of educational transition from secondary to tertiary education in our country. You are among the many female students coming from different backgrounds that are enrolled in secondary schools and taking up studies in tertiary institutions in PNG. You are studying with variety of experiences which entails their own challenges and ways of

overcoming them. The aim of this research is to explore your experiences of educational transition. It is hoped that this research will bring to light how educational transition is perceived by you as women. This research will highlight the challenges you identify as part of this transition and how you overcome these challenges. It is also my intention that this research will contribute to the body of literature on educational transition to tertiary education on women's perspective.

My research topic is *"**Exploring the experiences of female students' transition from secondary to tertiary education in a University in Papua New Guinea".** The research is guided by these questions:

    a) What are the female students' experiences of educational transitions from secondary to tertiary education?

    b) What challenges do they identify as part of this transition?

    c) What factors do they (students) identify as contributing to their likely success or likely failure in their university courses?

As a woman advocate it is my aim to develop a better understanding of the notions of educational transitions in tertiary education in our country. And I believe that this research project is one way to enhance my understanding within our context from your shared experiences.

*Your part in this study*

This is a chance to hear your stories or experiences of being a student going through this educational transition. You will be asked to participate in two separate interviews; an individual (semi-structured) and a focus group interview. The duration for both interviews is approximately an hour each. Both individual and focus group interviews will be held at a mutually agreeable time and place within the vicinity of the university.

*Confidentiality and ethical considerations*

The project has the approval of the Faculty of Education Research Ethics Committee as required by the University of Waikato Ethical Conduct in Human Research and Related Activities Regulation 2008. Granted by your permission, the interviews will be tape-recorded. No attempts will be made for interviews unless you consent voluntarily to participate in the research project by signing the consent forms. It is essentially important that you are kindly asked not to disclose

the identity or names of other members in the focus groups. Additionally not to disclose any information discussed in the focus group interviews, instead all shared information should be kept strictly confidential so that no one is harmed in any way.

*Publication*

In the first instance, I will be submitting my written report on this research to the University of Waikato as a requirement for the completion of my Masters of Education programme. The findings may also be shared through academic presentations and seminars and publications in academic journals. I am likely to present the research findings to the PNG National Research Institute for them to further make recommendations to policy making that can possibly affect female students. If you wish you will be sent a copy of the thesis upon completion via mail. A summary of the significant findings of the research will be provided to your university.

*Supervisor*

I will be supervised by Dr. Sally Peters at the University Of Waikato Faculty Of Education. You are free to contact her if you have any concerns about this project. Her contact details are: Telephone: (64)7 8384466 ext. 8386, Facsimile: (64)7 8384555 and Email: speter@waikato.ac.nz.

You may also contact Wendy Drewery, Head of Department, Human Development and Counseling, Associate Professor and Chairperson. Her contact details are: Telephone (64)7 8384466 ext. 8465, Facsimile: (64)7 838 4555 and Email: w.drewery@waikato.ac.nz.

## Appendix 5 Participants' invitation letter

Date: 7th March, 2011

Dear _____

*Subject: An invitation for your participation in a research project.*

I wish to cordially invite you to participate in a research project that I am currently undertaking as part of my thesis in Masters of Education at the University of Waikato, Hamilton, New Zealand.

The research project is titled: *Exploring the experiences of female students' educational transition from secondary to tertiary education in a University in Papua New Guinea.* The research aims to explore the experiences of young women in educational transition. What are your experiences, views and perceptions of educational transition? It is hoped that this research will bring to light how educational transition is perceived by young women in tertiary education in PNG. As a woman advocate it is my aim to develop a better understanding of the notions of educational transitions in tertiary education in our country. And I believe that this research project is one way to enhance my understanding within our context from your shared experiences.

I have further elaborated this research project on the attached participant information sheet, including what your roles and rights are if you wish to participate. Please sign the attached informed consent form to indicate your consent to voluntarily participate in this study.

Yours faithfully

Erita Gabby Yawi
Masters of Education
Research Student

## Appendix 6: Interview questions

Semi-structured interview

These are the interview questions I will use for the semi-structured interview.
Welcome to this interview. The purpose of this interview is to be able to find out what your experiences are as women in educational transition from secondary to tertiary education. The interview is also intended to identify the challenges you encountered during the transition. I will reiterate the following rights you have as participants of this research. You have the right to decline to answer any particular question, or even to withdraw from the interview at any time.

1.) *What are the female students' experiences of educational transitions from secondary to tertiary education*?

a) Please tell me about your decision to come to university and you experiences that led you to being here.

b) Who really inspired you to choose a university instead of other tertiary institutions?

c) How did they inspire you?

d) What did your family think of the choice you made?

e) What were you first reactions to the new learning environment?

f) How is the learning environment different from the previous setting?

g) What is the teaching environment like?

h) What can you say about the learning styles?

i) Have you adapt to the new learning styles?

j) How well were you prepared for moving from secondary to tertiary learning environment?

k) What are the main differences in the two learning environments?

l) What are your main experiences of educational transition, especially from secondary to tertiary education?

m) Please tell me your understanding of educational transition.

*2. What challenges do you identify as part of this transition?*

a) How long have been at University?

b) Please tell me your experiences of the challenges you face here and how these challenges affect you as an individual?

c) How do you overcome these challenges?

d) Please tell me some things about your background and how your back ground contributes to your studies here.

f) What kind of social networks do you have? How and why have these developed?

g) How are you settling into your university programmes? What makes you feel that way?

h) Please tell me if they were some significant people in your life in this transition and why you say that.

i) How do they help/motivate you to make this transition?

j) What are your general feelings about this transition?

k) How and where can you see yourself while making this transition?

l) Please tell me what the institution is doing to support you in this transition.

**Prompts**

Tell me more about….?

Why did you say that….?

Can you explain…? Or can you clarify…?

What do you mean by that…?

What is an example of …?

How do you feel…?

In what ways…?

Why is it…?

How is it…?

*Note:* List of inductive questions

**Focus Group Interview**

Welcome to this focus group interview. The purpose of this interview is to be able to find out what factors contribute to your likely success and likely failure in the university courses? I will reiterate the following rights you have as participants of

this research. You have the right to decline to answer any particular questions, or even to withdraw from the interview at any time. It is important that group confidentiality is upheld by every member (see appendix 5).

> 3. *What factors do you identify as contributing to your likely success or likely failure in your university courses?*

a) Please tell me main factors that contribute to your success and failure in the university courses?

b) How do you view the courses offered at the university in comparison to the secondary courses?

c) What can you say about the academic standard here compared to your secondary education?

d) What are some of the academic challenges you face? Why?

e) Please tell me of people who supported you to overcome these academic challenges and how they support you.

f) How do you feel when you do well or do not in your courses?

g) What contribute to you passing some of your courses?

h) If you had failed a task or a course last year, why do you think you failed?

i) Can you say that your transition has been successful? Why?

j) If your transition is not successful? Why not?

k) From you own experiences of the transition, how can you help others to make a good transition?

k) What would you like to see done here that would help students to make a good educational transition?

**Prompts**

Tell me more about….?

Why did you say that….?

Can you explain…? Or can you clarify…?

What do you mean by that…?

How did you feel…?

What is an example of …?

In what ways…?

Why is it…?

## Appendix 7: Participants Rights

If you agree to participate in the interview, you have the following rights before, during and after the interview.

a) To refuse to answer any particular questions, or to withdraw from the interview at any time.

b) Right to withdraw from the research up until 6$^{th}$ of May 2011.

c) To ask further questions about how the information will be used, or the research project up to a period of 2 months after the interview.

d) Examine any information you have provided either to amend any part you wish to, or request that certain information be withheld and not be used, up to the period of data analyze or after the interview.

e) Examine the transcript to confirm that it is a true representation of your responses.

f) Information you provide will be kept strictly confidential and that every effort will be made to keep you anonymous by use of pseudonym.

g) To raise any complaints regarding the interview or the research project to the Faculty of Education Human Research Committee: University of Waikato, Private Bag 3105, Hamilton, 3240 or contact my thesis supervisor whose details are as followed:

Dr. Sally Peters

Telephone: (64) 7-838 4466 ext. 8386

Facsimile: (64) 7-8384555

Email: speters@waikato.ac.nz

**RESEARCHER'S CONTACT DETAILS**

You can contact me should there be any quires regarding the study and/ or its procedures.

Erita Gabby Yawi

1/34 Hogan Street, Hillcrest

3216, Hamilton,

New Zealand

Mobile: (642) 0211553626

Email: egy1@waikato.ac.nz / eritayawi@gmail.com

## Appendix 8: Consent form

I _____ have read and understand the nature of research study on women and educational transition and what my role is as a participant.

I also understand that my participation is completely voluntary and that I am free to decline answering any particular questions during interviews or to withdraw from the study up to the point at the beginning of the analysis stage of the data on 6th of May 2011.

I also understand that the identity of my institution and all information obtained shall be kept strictly confidential and that I will remain anonymous when quoted. And I also agree to take part in the individual/semi-structured and focus group interviews and for the interviews to be taped recorded.

Name:      _____

Signature: _____

Date:       _____

# Appendix 9: Time line of activities

| Weeks | Dates | Activities | Comments |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 07/03/11 - 11/03/11 | • Gain permission for access through university authorities (letter/formal appointment)<br>• Gain permission for research participants through authorities<br>• Gain access to participants<br>• Information session with female students about the research | |
| 2 | 14/03/11 - 18/03/11 | • Completion of consent forms<br>• Negotiations with participants for interview dates<br>• 1x individual interview (A)<br>• 1x individual interview (B)<br>• 1x individual interview (C)<br>• Transcription of A, B & C | |
| 3 | 21/03/11 - 25/03/11 | • 1x individual interview (D)<br>• 1x individual interview (E)<br>• 1x individual interview (F)<br>• Transcription of D, E & F | |
| 4 | 28/03/11 - 01/04/11 | • 1x individual interview (G)<br>• 1x individual interview (H)<br>• 1x individual interview (I)<br>• Transcription of G, H & I | |
| 5 | 04/04/11 - 08/04/11 | • 1x individual interview (J)<br>• 1xindividual interview (K)<br>• 1x individual interview (L)<br>• Selective Transcription of J, K & L | |
| 6 | 11/04/11 - 15/04/11 | • 1x focus group interview (first year)<br>• 1x focus group interview (second year)<br>• Transcriptions of focus group interviews | |
| 7 | 18/04/11 - 22/04/11 | • All selective transcription given to participants (both individual and focus group interviews)<br>• Participants cross check and modify the transcribed data | |
| 8 | 25/04/11 - 29/04/11 | • Attend to participants queries on transcriptions (data).<br>• Discuss any arising issue concerning data with participants | |
| 9 | 02/05/11 - 06/05/11 | • Organization and analysis of data<br>• Preparing and organizing the data phase<br>• Data exploration and reduction phase | |

This time table is likely to change during the research process to cater for any unexpected changes that may occur before, during or after the research.