Transição acadêmica: expectativas dos estudantes moçambicanos do ensino secundário em relação ao ensino superior

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Resumo
Durante a transição do ensino secundário para o ensino superior, os estudantes levam consigo várias expectativas sobre o que vão encontrar nesse novo contexto com características bem diferentes das do ensino secundário. A conclusão do ensino secundário coincide com o momento de preparação para o ensino superior e de elaboração de projetos fundamentais de transição para o futuro. A nossa pretensão ao desenvolver este artigo, visa identificar e descrever as expectativas dos estudantes concluintes do ensino secundário público de Moçambique, e os fatores que interferem no processo de transição para o ensino superior. Trata-se de um estudo qualitativo, desenvolvido a partir da entrevista compreensiva de Kaufmann (2013) aplicada a sete estudantes de escolas públicas da região sul de Moçambique. Usando a análise de conteúdo (BARDIN, 2011) e análise de discurso (BAKTHIN, 2007), constatamos a necessidade de haver diálogo entre as instituições do ensino secundário e as do ensino superior para divulgar os cursos que oferecem e as condições de acesso.

Palavras-chave: Transição acadêmica. Moçambique. Escola pública. Expectativas acadêmicas.

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Academic transition: expectations of Mozambican secondary school students in relation to higher education

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Abstract
During the transition from secondary education to higher education, students carry with them several expectations about what they will find in this new context with characteristics quite different from secondary education. Completion of secondary education coincides with the time of preparation for higher education and the preparation of fundamental projects for the transition to the future. The expectations of this phase. Our intention in developing this article is to identify and describe the expectations of students completing public secondary education in Mozambique, and the factors that interfere in the process of transition to higher education. A qualitative study, developed from the comprehensive interview by Kaufmann (2013), involved seven students from public schools in the southern region of Mozambique. Using content analysis (BARDIN, 2011) and discourse analysis (BAKTHIN, 2007), we found that there is a need for dialogue between secondary and higher education institutions to publicize the courses they offer and the conditions of access.

Keywords: Academic transition. Mozambique. Public school. Academic expectations

Transición académica: expectativas de los estudiantes mozambiqueños de secundaria en relación con la educación superior

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Resumen

Durante la transición de la educación secundaria a la educación superior, los estudiantes llevan consigo varias expectativas sobre lo que encontrarán en este nuevo contexto con características muy diferentes a la educación secundaria. La finalización de la educación secundaria coincide con el tiempo de preparación para la educación superior y la elaboración de proyectos fundamentales para la transición hacia el futuro. Nuestra intención al desarrollar este artículo es identificar y describir las expectativas de los estudiantes que finalizan la educación secundaria pública en Mozambique, y los factores que interfieren en el proceso de transición a la educación superior. Un estudio cualitativo, desarrollado a partir de la entrevista integral de Kaufmann (2013), involucró a siete estudiantes de escuelas públicas en la región sur de Mozambique. Utilizando el análisis de contenido (BARDIN, 2011) y el análisis del discurso (BAKTHIN, 2007), encontramos la necesidad de un diálogo entre las instituciones de educación secundaria y superior para dar a conocer los cursos que ofrecen y las condiciones de acceso.

Palabras clave: Transición académica. Mozambique. Escuela pública. Expectativas académicas.

Introduction

The present work was supported by the CAPES PEC-PG Program in Brazil, aiming to identify and describe the expectations of public secondary school graduates and the factors influencing their transition to higher education. The article focuses on the young age condition and the expectations of secondary school students, presenting the methodology and theory used in data production, data analysis and discussion, and final considerations.

Life is a cycle that begins at conception and extends until an individual's death. During development, at each stage, there are specific actions that society expects individuals to take, necessitating many adjustments. According to Pais (2009), age norms continue to persist, which are socially disseminated and considered ideal for taking certain steps.

The Constitution of the Republic of Mozambique (MOÇAMBIQUE, 2004) defines the age range for youth, considering two poles: minors from 0 to 17 years old and adults from 18 years old and above, with youth ending at 35 years of age. However, the 2017 population census from the National Institute of Statistics (INE), released in 2019, also reinforces the end of youth at 35 years (MOÇAMBIQUE, 2019).

This study was conducted in Mozambique, and in an attempt to establish the limits of young age, considering geographical and contextual issues, we adopted the standard set by the Constitution of the Republic of Mozambique (18 to 35 years). This segment of the population, called "youth," can be in secondary education, preparing for entry into higher education, or already in the workforce. Ideally, this would be the case, but the current reality presents different scenarios, as we find young people who do not fit into any of these groups—those who are neither in the workforce, nor in school/university, and have not yet started a family. Nevertheless, this stage of life is assigned the task of developing fundamental projects for future transitions.

In traditional societies, as noted by Pais (2009), transitions were constituted by rites of passage. However, in contemporary times, transitions are constituted by rites of impasse. When a transition occurs, it involves the construction of autonomy in the individual's life, including financial independence. For example, when a young person enters higher education, their first job, or decides to start a family, these experiences can be considered rites of passage. However, when there are barriers to transition, they can be seen as impasses. This is when young people feel their essential needs for security and self-esteem are unmet, losing their sense of belonging, and perceiving their identity as fragile, thus facing difficulties.

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In this context, Braga and Xavier (2016) suggest that to address the development of projects and expectations of secondary school students, it is important to discuss the individual's relationship with time, specifically future time.

In this study, we consider transition, according to Fagundes, Luce, and Espinar (2014), as a complex process that brings about multiple and significant personal and vital changes for the young individual. We conceptualize academic transition as a process that begins with choosing an academic trajectory and a future professional field during secondary education and culminates in overcoming the first two semesters of higher education (FAGUNDES, 2012). Thus, we understand the transition process as the period from secondary education, through the decision to continue studies, the choice of a higher education course, to entering and adapting to the new context.

Braga and Xavier (2016) consider secondary education as a preparation phase for higher education and the development of fundamental transition projects for the future. Personal expectations are important and fundamental; they should consistently focus on assertively defining goals and pursuing an action plan to achieve them and build self-confidence.

Expectations, according to Oliveira, Santos, and Dias (2016), are cognitions, motivations, and affections that students have regarding what they hope to find and achieve in higher education. Expectations are present in the transition and manifest as mental idealizations created by students regarding their entry into higher education.

In this understanding, we sought to identify and describe the expectations of students attending the 12th grade in public schools in southern Mozambique. This article presents the introduction, development (describing expectations and factors), methodology, analysis and discussion of the results, and final considerations. Discussing the trajectory of secondary school graduates refers to the construction of transition expectations, where some may choose to seek work or engage in other activities, and others may continue their studies in higher education, which is the focus of our interest.
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1. Academic Trajectory and Expectations

We highlight the understanding of Ussene (2011), who considers that secondary school students are faced with multiple decisions: whether or not to continue their studies, and if they choose to continue, deciding on the course and the higher education institution where they will enroll. In Mozambique, a

young person should start projecting or building their expectations before reaching secondary school. According to the National Education System (SNE) law, which establishes the age of six for school entry, if a student is not held back, they should complete the 12th grade at the age of eighteen (18).

Students face decisions or preferences regarding the subjects to take in secondary education. Thus, the 12th grade is a critical point in their decision about their future, where they must decide whether to apply to higher education or not. During the transition from secondary to higher education, students should already be aware of the opportunities, advantages, and requirements of continuing their studies, which necessitates that schools promote the importance of higher education for the future of the young people. According to Ussene (2011), schools play a crucial role in making students realize that school content is linked to building their future, which could motivate them to continue their studies by enrolling in university.

The path to educational longevity does not begin at the start of secondary school but is part of the entire educational trajectory. Thus, young people play an active role in building their educational and professional paths when they can rely on support from friends and family, who in some cases influence or decide on the course to choose. Sampaio and Santos (2011) argue that the meaning attributed to school and extended schooling is constructed through a dynamic of investment and belonging, varying according to the resources available to the young people.

The transition process is also marked by doubts that arise in the decision-making about the area to choose. Since general secondary education for the second cycle, or high school, in Mozambique is stratified into three areas according to the Secondary General Education Curriculum Plan (PCESG), developed by the National Institute for Educational Development (INDE) in 2007 (MOÇAMBIQUE, 2007). The curricular areas of General Secondary Education for the second cycle (ESG2) and their respective subjects are organized with consideration of specialization areas or courses in higher education, namely:

a) A common core consisting of mandatory subjects: Portuguese, English, Introduction to Philosophy, Mathematics, Physical Education, and Information and Communication Technology;

b) Specific areas: Communication and Social Sciences, Mathematics and Natural Sciences; Visual and Performing Arts and;

c)   Vocational subjects: Basic Entrepreneurship, Introduction to Psychology and Pedagogy, Agriculture, Tourism, and technical-professional courses.

The courses to be attended in higher education are defined based on the combination of the above areas. Students must choose subjects according to the course they intend to pursue, meaning there is no single exam for all courses, as seen in Brazil; each course has its own admission requirements. The transition from secondary to higher education, according to Azevedo and Faria (2006), is one of the most important moments in students' lives, being decisive, complex, and rigid due to the imposed requirements. During this transition, students face numerous personal, social, academic, and vocational challenges, requiring a balance between the challenges posed by the new context and the actions institutions must take to facilitate students' reception and integration into this new academic learning environment.

Secondary education in Mozambique is divided into two cycles: the first cycle includes the 7th, 8th, and 9th grades, and the second cycle includes the 10th, 11th, and 12th grades, also known as secondary or pre-university education. This indicates that secondary education is not the final stage but a preparation for university (CASTIANO, 2005). The fundamental objective of secondary education is to consolidate, expand, and deepen students' knowledge in mathematical, natural, and social sciences, as well as in cultural, aesthetic, and physical education areas. Specific objectives of general secondary education, which is our area of interest, include: (a) consolidating, expanding, and deepening knowledge acquired in primary education, in natural and social sciences, mathematics, and cultural and aesthetic education; (b) preparing students for continuing studies in higher education or participating in productive activities; and (c) developing knowledge about health, nutrition, and environmental protection.

In Mozambique, students must choose subjects based on the course they wish to pursue, meaning there is no single exam for all courses; each course has its own admission requirements. This differs from some European countries where, for example, selection is based on final results obtained in secondary education, and in Brazil, where selection is made by institutions accredited by the Ministry of Education (MEC) through the National High School Exam (ENEM) and the Unified Selection System (SISU). The results are valid for all public institutions the student wishes to attend, and based on the ENEM result, the candidate can choose the course to pursue based on their score.

Literature highlights that students create expectations about the transition to higher education during secondary school. However, various factors can hinder this transition and break the expectations students have, such as the characteristics of the institution, the course attended, the curriculum, pedagogical policies, the academic environment, the relationship between teachers and students, social support, and the psychosocial characteristics of students. Among several studies on this topic, we can highlight the works of Coulon (2008); Fagundes (2012); Pinho, Dourado, Aurélio, and Bastos (2015); Braga and Xavier (2016); Almeida, Araújo, and Martins (2016); and Paivandi (2019).

1.1 Expectations and Factors Affecting the Transition Process

The education process is filled with transitions accompanied by expectations and barriers that students face when moving to the next level. To understand the transition, which is our focus, we can draw on the idea of Braga and Xavier (2016), who consider that secondary education should be a time of preparation for higher education and the development of fundamental transition projects for the future. These transitions can be seen as rites of passage or, in some circumstances, rites of impasse.

Attending secondary education involves, to some extent, preparing for the transition to higher education and also coincides with the phase of youth. This is why young people experience a period of stress linked to changes, increased responsibilities, and decisions related to future aspirations. Therefore, at this stage, we can say that they are in the interval between adolescence and the early stages of adulthood, or chronological age. In Mozambique, it serves to legitimize individuals' access to rights and duties, judicial responsibility, and military service, appearing as an important milestone in transitioning to another stage of life, as stated in Article 88, numbers 1 and 2, which state that "[...] education is a right and duty of each citizen; and [...] equality of access for all citizens to enjoy this right" (MOÇAMBIQUE, 2004). The reality shows that youngest people lack autonomy and are still seeking to enter university, as seen in the portals of the country's two largest and oldest universities. For instance, for the academic year 2022, more than 25,000 candidates applied to *Universidade Eduardo Mondlane* for 5,890 available spots. At *Universidade Pedagógica de Maputo*, 14,058 candidates applied for 3,187 spots available for the academic year 2022. Thus, it is clear that a significant number of Mozambican youths who wish to access higher education cannot do so due to the high demand and limited supply from the country's higher education institutions.

Thinking about the future in terms of building a life project and simultaneously defining oneself regarding future aspirations, according to Leccardi (2005), requires that young people's trajectories be

accompanied by expectations about their own future. These expectations can be so crucial that if they are not fulfilled, the young person may experience despair or frustration from feeling that something is left undone. Braga and Xavier (2016) suggest that these young people may have a future out of control and an extended present as their main reference.

A young person transitions to higher education still under the care of their parents and leaves university as an adult who is expected to be prepared for their first job, to live away from family, and sometimes to become a parent. Alongside this, entering university also brings changes in routine, such as specific demands, expanding cultural context, introducing discontinuities related to the educational environment, increasing demands for time management, longer study hours, and financial resources, which can make the experience daunting for students (SETLALENTOA, 2013).

The transition should not only be perceived as changes within the classroom but also outside it, as these changes can influence academic performance. In secondary education, students work in small classes with considerable individual attention from teachers, whereas in higher education, they face much larger and more diverse classes. To minimize these issues and make the transition less stressful, Setlalentoa (2013) suggests that secondary school teachers could help with their students' tertiary transition by equipping them with a solid foundation and necessary skills to handle higher education institutions.

The transition from secondary to higher education should be understood not only as an academic shift but as a genuine life transition, involving an integrated analysis of personal and contextual variables. This approach aims to achieve a holistic perspective on all related processes, including school learning, success, and the student's integration, as the transition will entail numerous changes in the student's life. These changes include the development of new types of responsibilities regarding financial, social, and family issues, emotion management, autonomy development, identity establishment, and setting academic goals (DIAS & SÁ, 2011).

The presence of expectations in students about their future projections is accompanied by various adversities that can be considered factors. Soares, Pinheiro, and Canavarro (2015) categorize these interdependent factors, influenced by prevailing ideologies, values, and prejudices associated with academic success, into four dimensions: students (family and socioeconomic conditions, social integration, study management autonomy, adequacy of study methods, participation in extracurricular

activities, alignment of values and lifestyle); teachers (relationship with students, scientific and pedagogical competence, alignment between teaching and assessment, and expectations regarding students); curriculum (alignment between educational levels, existence of appropriate prerequisites, organization of calendars and schedules, curriculum flexibility); and university institution (physical conditions, class size, work instruments, coordination of various structures).

Political factors are particularly linked to government policies and their stance on education, the philosophy adopted regarding secondary education, and specifically, the criteria for accessing higher education. These factors are not universal; each country formulates policies that respond to its context's needs and demands. In this regard, universities could involve schools in preparing future students, as well as parents, and create access policies, such as providing information about scholarships for disadvantaged students (NEL, BRUIN, BITZER, 2009).

Regarding economic and social aspects, economic factors are related to the labor market, globalization, and the informatization of professions. However, the lack of opportunities and employment difficulties, lack of resources and economic planning, and the decline in the purchasing power of the middle class are consequences of the neoliberal capitalist system and economic instability. Social factors involve the division of society into classes, the struggle for social ascent through education or higher education, the influence of society within the family, and the effects of globalization on family culture (SOARES, 2002).

In education, both the family and the school share a common goal: to see the young student progress. However, there is a need for mutual involvement of parents and teachers. On the one hand, teachers face increased difficulties with mass education and the rise in compulsory education, as well as the excessive emphasis on end-of-year and admission exams (MOÇAMBIQUE, 2018).

We have observed that the distance between secondary and higher education, although relatively close, involves different realities. The lack of coordination between the two ministries (the Ministry of Education and Human Development and the Ministry of Science and Technology, Higher Education, and Professional Technical Education), combined with insufficient dissemination of higher education offerings, makes access to information difficult. This, in turn, leads to parents being unable to provide the necessary comprehensive support to their children who are finishing secondary school and aiming for higher education. The lack of knowledge about the professional world can result in students choosing courses based on what a family member has already pursued, using that as their reference.

2. Instruments and Procedures for Data Collection

For the research, seven students[3] enrolled in public secondary schools in the Maputo province of Mozambique participated.

The in-depth interview method was chosen for data collection in the research. An interview facilitates a dialogue between the researcher and the participant in the field. Kaufmann (2013) views it as an economical and accessible method, requiring only a recorder, some courage to knock on doors, the ability to steer the conversation around a set of questions, and the skill to extract useful information from the collected material. This approach allowed for the detailed capture of narratives about the first-year students' transition experiences through recorded conversations. After recording, the interviews were transcribed and organized into categories based on: a) discourse analysis according to Bakhtin (2006), who argues that various genres are reworked through the diversity of everyday dialogue in immediate discursive communication conditions; and b) content analysis, as described by Bardin (2011), which involves creating categories to classify the meanings of messages into specific types of "bins," ensuring the preservation of the students' subjective information.

Another important tool was the field diary, used to record all events occurring during the research development, including the scheduling of interview sessions and the conditions of the locations where the interviews took place. The data collection interviews occurred from January to July 2021. The first meeting with participants took place at *Universidade Pedagógica*, where they signed the Informed Consent Form (TCLE). The interviews were conducted at various locations suggested by the participants based on accessibility and convenience. Each interview lasted between 35 and 47 minutes, and all interviews began with an open-ended question: "What do you plan to do after completing secondary school?

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[3] This study is part of a doctoral thesis defended in 2022, which involves a total of 15 participants attending public secondary and higher education institutions in the country. The study aims to understand the transition process of young people from secondary to public higher education.
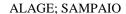
The research project was submitted to the Ethics and Research Committee of the Institute of Psychology (CEPIPS – UFBA) with protocol number 4.653.179 for analysis and authorization and was approved by CAAE: 39363920.8.0000.5686. Participants were informed about the objectives, justification, and procedures to be followed, as well as the risks and benefits that might occur throughout the research process. They participated in the interview after being informed, agreeing, and signing the Free and Informed Consent Term (TCLE), based on the ethical principles established for research with human beings by Resolution No. 466/12 of the National Health Council and the parameters established by the Professional Ethics Code of Psychologists. Institutional consent was also obtained from the administration of the college from which the research participants were drawn.

The interview data were transcribed, and the participants were presented, describing their sociodemographic data and their narratives on the topic under analysis. The discourses and similar contents were then grouped to allow a holistic discussion of the theme, focusing on expectations and factors affecting the transition from secondary education to higher education, with the following categories emerging: expectations, interaction, and the construction of the path to higher education. The discussion of the results was supported by symbolic interactionism theory, which emphasizes interaction in the construction of knowledge, where face-to-face interactions, such as those between parents and children and in the classroom between teachers and students, play an important role. This article is part of the ongoing doctoral research, and the names of the participants used in this article are fictitious.

3. Discussion of Results: Expectations and Interactions of Secondary School Students

To reflect on the aspirations of students in the 12th grade of general secondary education in Maputo, Mozambique, it is crucial to consider the characteristics and demands of this educational level, while also keeping in mind the expectations of the individuals involved. The transition from secondary to higher education is one of the most significant moments in a young person's life. This period is marked by its decisive, complex, and rigid nature due to the demands imposed, as well as the need for students to develop projects and define their expectations, as noted by Azevedo and Faria (2006) and Braga and Xavier (2016).

Defining an academic path involves constructing a trajectory where the journey is shaped through the interaction among all actors within the social context in which the individual is situated. This interaction forms a fundamental component of social construction, where participants must be active and

engaged in the processes of reality-building. These relationships between individuals and society go beyond mere interdependence, emphasizing a more collaborative construction (COULON, 2017; Sampaio and Santos, 2011). In this context, interactions between 12th-grade students and secondary school staff (administrators, teachers, and support personnel) should be prioritized to facilitate the creation of a secure path towards higher education.

All of our secondary school participants expressed a desire to enter higher education, indicating that their expectation is to enroll in and attend a higher education course. Therefore, they seem to have defined plans for after completing secondary education[4] as exemplified by the expression: "[...] a*pply for a spot in higher education*." The use of this expression by the students refers to participating in entrance exams for admission to a public university.

Braga and Xavier (2016) argue that secondary education is a crucial period for preparing for higher education and for developing fundamental transition projects for the future. This transition requires the coordination of important aspects that emphasize interaction, the conception of the individual as an active agent in constructing their path, and the subjective experiences, daily life, and relationships that shape the process of creating expectations connected to their lived experiences (VASCONCELOS; SANTOS; SAMPAIO, 2017).

The narratives of our participants align with the views expressed by Azevedo and Faria (2006) and Braga and Xavier (2016), as they appear to have well-defined plans upon completing this stage. In the cultural and social context of Mozambique, formal education or university training is still seen as a gateway to the job market and anticipated social mobility. This understanding is evident in the students' narratives, such as the statement that university "[...] *is a place that opens doors to employment, because they say that once a student finishes university, it's easy to find a job*" (Almenia). This opinion is also shared by other interviewees, who view university as "[...] *a place where I can showcase my skills and obtain the degree I need to stabilize my life* (Cleyde).

This transition is crucial and requires the management and cooperation of all the institutions to which the young person belongs: the family, the school, and the universities that will receive them. This collaboration is essential to allow students' expectations to be adjusted and made meaningful within the processes of creation and recreation, as noted by Sampaio and Santos (2011), due to the complexity of

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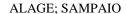[4] These terms have the same meaning; see PCESG, 2008

the transition process, which involves both intrapersonal and contextual aspects (ALMEIDA; SOARES; FERREIRA; 2000).

The lack of information dissemination by secondary and higher education institutions about available university courses is a complaint from Alminia, Cintya, and Cleyde. They call for schools to open up and discuss courses with students finishing secondary education as a way to help build a more secure academic path. Alminia states: *"[...] at school, they don't talk about higher education courses, I haven't seen people from universities come to talk about the courses... I know people who are already there, I sought to find out, and they give me the necessary information*.

Cintya's narrative reflects that "[...] *neither the school nor the university talk about the offered courses and how they work*"; and Cleyde reinforces: "[...] *I received this information at home with my parents, here at school this year I didn't hear anything about the courses at universities*." This practice could be implemented in partnership with higher education institutions, through a process of meaningful interpretation that involves the individual's interaction with others. It is from the perspective of others that the individual can perceive and transform themselves, facilitating the construction of their path as a young person inspired to continue their studies (CASAGRANDE, 2014).

The lack of information dissemination highlighted by our participants has also been analyzed by Braga and Xavier (2016), who noted that the transition period is characterized by poor dissemination of information about higher education, making it difficult to follow aspirations and expectations due to the absence of guidance and a bridge between the two educational levels. Moreover, this is associated with the student's trajectory, where disruptions may occur that disrupt the normal course of life. In this context, Paivandi (2019) argues that a rational and thoughtful transition requires building bridges between secondary and higher education to facilitate students' decisions and minimize problems, making the transition less traumatic. It is within this continuous interplay that experiences, interpretations, and constructions are socially shared to facilitate smoother transitions (Sandstrom, 2016).

Through this social sharing, secondary school teachers could assist in the tertiary transition of their students by equipping them with a solid foundation and the necessary skills to navigate higher education institutions, as they will face changes in routine, an expanded cultural context, discontinuities from a structured teaching environment, autonomy in time management, increased workload, and financial demands (Setlalentoa, 2013).

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The educational context is, by its nature, a privileged space for interaction and possibilities for self-formation, which should offer learners the opportunity for learning and transformation through the sharing of social, cultural, and academic information related to their daily lives. However, it has become evident that public schools in the country do little to prepare high school graduates regarding course information, cooperation with universities, and other activities that could bridge the gap between students and university reality, as shown in the narratives presented.

These discourses reveal a lack of communication between public secondary and higher education institutions, which undermines the encouragement and preparation needed for the transition. Similar narratives were found in the research by Nel, Bruin, and Bitzer (2009), who confirmed that while it is necessary for secondary schools and higher education institutions to cooperate in facilitating the transition process, higher education institutions seem not to contact schools early enough to provide information about access and the functioning of courses and programs, as well as career opportunities.

Nevertheless, schools could support secondary students in partnership with universities to adequately prepare them for higher education, through motivational lectures for 12th-grade students. Given that preparation is often insufficient in crucial skills for future university students in terms of intellectual demands in this new stage, providing a more realistic picture of the academic challenges students will face in higher education would be beneficial

(SETLALENTOA, 2013; SAMPAIO; SANTOS, 2015; NEL; BRUIN; BITZER, 2009).

In addition to the poor dissemination of information about available courses and the functioning of public higher education institutions, which have a limited number of spots to meet the demand from high school graduates, this is another factor that also blends with the hesitation period before entering university life. Participants revealed, among several factors, that: "*It's thinking a lot about the number of competitors, nervousness, the lack of dedication to studies, because I know that many of us are competing, so the tendency is to have a higher grade* (Alminia)." "*Little preparation time, I think there are many people competing and the spots are few or limited, and just one month is very little time*" (Cintya). "*Maybe the lack of confidence, like those who competed last year and didn't get in will come more prepared, with more determination, and one keeps thinking about this point of competition*"*(Cleyde).*
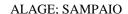
As revealed in the narratives of Almenia, Cintya, and Cleyde, who express apprehension about applying to university due to the high number of candidates compared to the limited spots available each academic year, the pre-university period is marked by various feelings, including hesitation. This stage of life, where professional choices are among the most significant, is often accompanied by family pressure regarding the new academic path (Silva & Silva, 2019).

The youth's complaints point to state policies where governments are obligated to provide quality education for all by creating sufficient institutions to meet the high demand for these services. Sampaio and Santos (2015) argue that expanding spots for new students seeking university access, and supporting these students until they successfully complete their higher education, is crucial. This involves the proper use of public resources and achieving the educational goals required for productive life and guaranteed access to cultural goods in a knowledge-based society.

Additionally, students sometimes turn to their families as a source of inspiration for realizing their expectations, relying on them to shape their academic paths. The young participants in the study reported that there is little or no discussion about university in their schools, indicating a lack of encouragement for higher education. In this context, students often look to family members' professions or academic paths as models to follow upon completing high school. This is the case for Almenia and Cleyde, who received information about university courses from their parents, who have a university background. Cintya got information from friends, Bridget from a cousin who attended university, and Bilton wanted to study at the institution where his sister was enrolled. The lack of information about course options and their functioning from higher education institutions limits the expansion of career choices. The few universities could collaborate with secondary schools to develop access policies and provide information about scholarships for disadvantaged students (Nel, Bruin, & Bitzer, 2009).

These narratives align with Soares (2002), who notes that parents often construct a future plan for their children. The author further explains that course choices for young people are influenced by family heritage, where the family's past experiences are integral to the young person's self-representation. According to Soares (2002) and Setlalentoa (2013), parents may suggest career paths that they were unable to pursue themselves, leading young people to conform to the professions defined by their parents.

Final considerations

Transitioning from secondary to higher education is a complex, multidimensional, and ongoing process. In the field of education, this concept is challenging due to the diverse ways in which "transition" is used and understood to characterize the period of changes and adjustments it entails for individuals moving from one stage of their development to another. In the context of this research, which examines the transition from secondary to higher education, the data prompts us to reflect on this concept to achieve a comprehensive understanding that goes beyond simply "what is" the transition, to "how it unfolds." We believe that a detailed understanding of how these processes occur for young individuals aspiring to higher education can help influence and implement effective practices involving all actors in this context in Mozambique.

The study highlighted the necessity of creating a bridge between the two educational levels to facilitate the transition, supporting the formation of the student's identity, which is crucial for successfully navigating this next stage of life. To meet the expectations of secondary school graduates, it is necessary to initiate a process of formation in schools. This training can occur through organized lectures or through exchanges with public universities. It is essential that this begins well before the student enters university, allowing them to gain a broader perspective on higher education before they start. Such events can be significant in the students' lives, serving as sources of change in terms of assuming new social roles, whether personal, professional, or intellectual. Encounters with prominent personalities discussing university life can result in reflections that aid in making better decisions about their future academic path, ultimately leading to the adoption of a profession.

The transition from high school to higher education, for the studied population, proved challenging due to the lack of information dissemination about available higher education courses by secondary schools and the lack of dialogue between secondary schools and public higher education institutions. Participants reported that their information about higher education came from family members or friends who are or were in university.

The unavailability of information about the admission process and the functioning of higher education institutions and courses makes the transition more demanding for students who, within their families, do not have anyone with a university education or who do not have a network of friends in higher education. These students are generally from more disadvantaged socioeconomic backgrounds.

The research demonstrated that friendships are often formed with peers from the same high school or age group, and to some extent, social status influences friendship choices. The influence of parents and family members on students' career paths was also evident, as knowledge about university courses often comes from family and friends, which somewhat influences the choice of courses. Participants revealed a desire to attend courses that a family member had pursued.

Universities, in coordination with secondary schools, can create communication platforms by establishing exchanges through university extension programs. These programs should aim to disseminate information about university life, admission criteria, available courses, and career opportunities. These findings do not conclude the discussion on the subject but open the door for further research. Future researchers interested in this topic may explore other possibilities and elements that were not discussed or that did not fit within this study.

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