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**ASSESSING PURPOSE AND IMPORTANCE OF TRANSITIONAL CHANGE  
THROUGH STUDENT DEVELOPMENT PERSPECTIVE**

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**ABSTRACT**

**Nature:** Personal growth depends upon the choice of the experience a person chooses for herself/himself. This scientific study is looking into the life experience of the students, experiencing in their learning development stage.

**Purpose:** This paper is about the importance and purpose students attribute, to their learning and experiences, in their post-secondary development phase. The grounded on Schlossberg's Transition theory and to understand the implication of Sanford's Challenge and support the theory. It is an attempt to know that how students experience their development during their university life.

**Methodology:** Two Pakistani students as case studies were interviewed, studying in Chinese universities. The thematic data analysis technique was used to analyze the qualitative data.

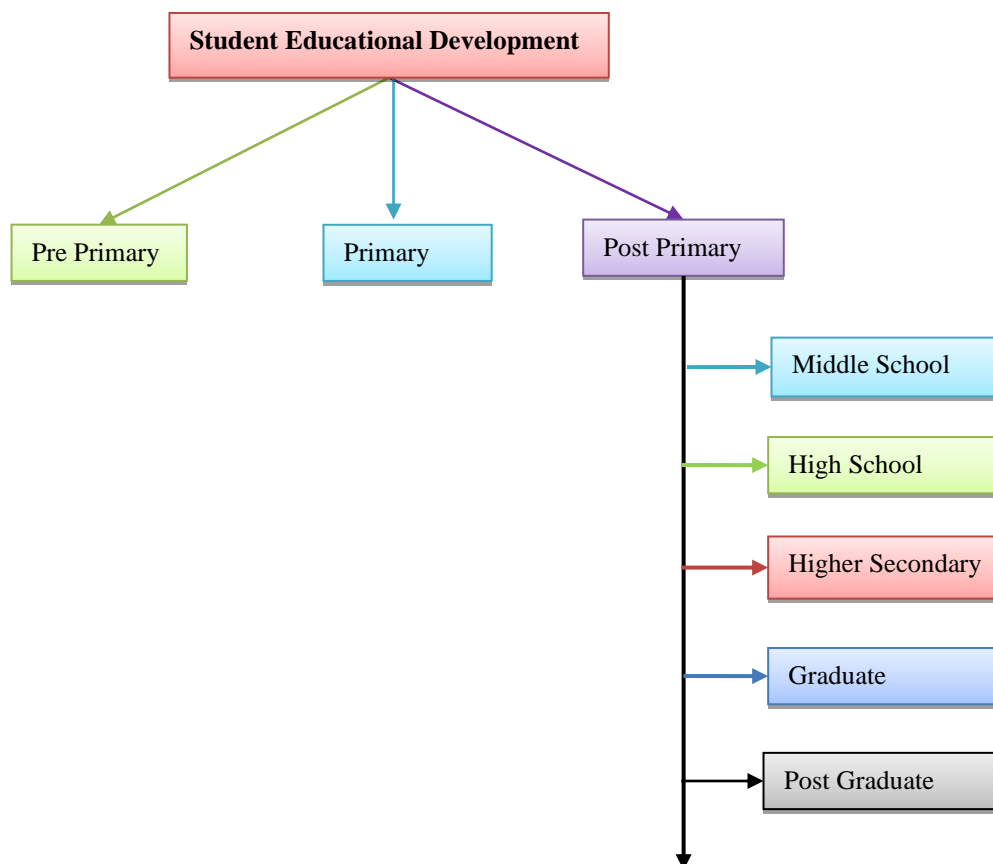
**Findings:** Preliminary findings indicate that students can not properly recognize their development even at their higher education level and they don't name or can recognize it. They lack the recognition power in their life study experiences.

**Implications:** This study helps the educators, teachers, trainers to understand the students' learning development in universities and also in developing their teaching philosophy to improve the students in recognition of their development during higher education level. This study implies the importance of learning experience for students to help in identifying their self-recognition in a transition phase.

## INTRODUCTION

Student development in post-secondary education goes through personal, interpersonal, moral, intellectual, relational, and leadership experiences (Walker, 2008). These are the basis of the student development theory. During college student experience a different kind of issues and challenges in every stage of life, among them some experiences gives life learning. Learning growth is the outcome of these challenges, which occur in different periods. However, the experience of learning during student life is completely different which occurs in practical life. In my understanding, student development occurs before and through the student life which I divide into mainly three basic phases i.e. Pre-primary, Primary, and post-primary, and then post-primary is divided into further sub-phases, which is explained in following figure 1.1.

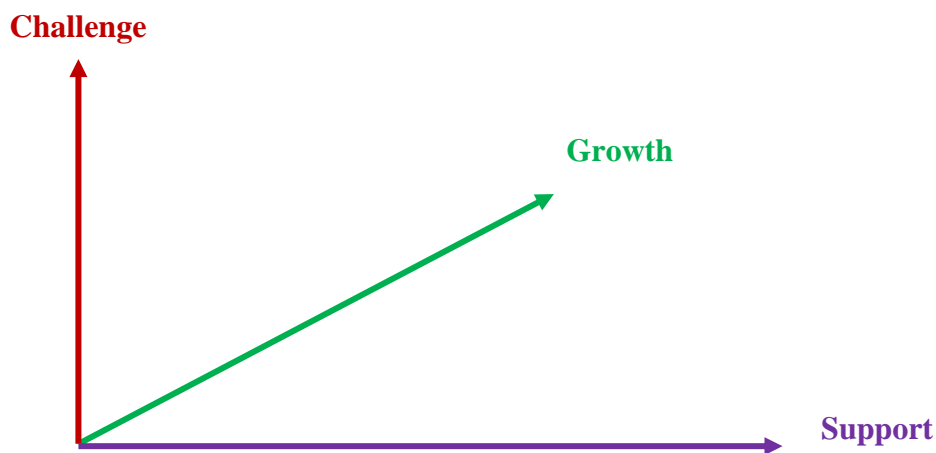
## CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK



**Figure 1.1 Student Education Development**

Each phase develops a student from a different perspective. This paper will discuss two different students' experiences of personal and student life of post-secondary development phase under Schlossberg's Transition theory. Challenge and Support theory can be used in many situations and areas including advising, counseling, and support service situations (Sherman, 2011) but transition theory includes an examination of what constitutes a transition, different forms of transitions, the transition process, and factors that influence transitions (Schlossberg et al., 1995). A student's education in college goes beyond the academic side and the intellectual development that it provides. Similarly, challenges, which face college students, go beyond academics. Students are required to navigate themselves through the challenges of adjustment in college environments, learning the academic culture, applying for financial aid, making class schedules, and applying for jobs or applying to transfer to another institution upon graduation.

Like Challenge and support, the theory of Sanford (1967) discusses disequilibrium, differentiation, integration, readiness, stimuli, dissonance, retreat, and stagnation. Sanford explains that many learning experiences incorporate a balance between challenge and support in the educational environment but for growth and personal development to occur, a student needs to have enough challenge/support balance (fig. 1.2).



**Figure.1.2 Challenge & Support**

“The basic idea of this theory is that for growth to occur, a person needs a balanced amount of challenge and support as appropriate for the task” (Sanford, 1966). Likewise, Case study A faced different kinds of challenges including language barrier, cultural shock, homesickness, lack of motivation, new learning environments, sharing with unknown, routine management, unfamiliarity with system and social life, and pressure of independence, self-reliance, studies, and competition. In the form of support, she had received from family, friends, teachers, peers, and encouragement. I established that challenge and support was having a little balance somewhere due to which she was able to adapt to the new learning situation.

**TRANSITIONS AND CHALLENGES**

Challenge and support theory is one of the first developmental theories that pay attention to ideals of student development as a function of a person's environment interaction. Sanford argued that to develop intellectually, emotionally, and otherwise, a balance of challenge and support is necessary. People grow

best where they continuously experience an appropriate balance of challenge and support (Evans, Forney, and Guido-DiBrito 1998; Sanford, 1966). “If the challenge is too great and the student is not ready for the challenge, a student may go into a state of retreat, where they cease to develop and pull away from the challenge (Evans, 2010).” Transitions also pose a certain amount of challenges that a person has to face. Transitional environments without adequate support are toxic in the sense that they promote defensiveness and anxiety (Walther, 2006). On the other hand, environments with heavy support, while inadequate challenges are boring as they promote lifelessness. The third factor of this model that Sanford added in 1966 is ‘the Element of Readiness’ holds that without the preexistence of the readiness the physical or psychological growth of a person is not possible. The maturity of an individual and conditions of the environment is the great determinant of readiness to face the challenge and seek and accept support and it varies person-to-person’s situation (Renn, 2013).

The progression of growth advance connotation, characterized by the constant change from the stable to the unstable stage, which leads to the continuous rebuilding relationship between man and the environment (Kegan, 1982). Therefore, Renn (2013) posits that leadership, campus employment, and campus activities are all potential locations for providing students with these two key elements for learning and development. Sanford (1962) concluded that the balance between challenge and support provides the growth and personal development of the student. Kegan supports his theory that “parents should support their children’s fantasies while challenging them to take responsibility for themselves and their feelings as they begin to perceive the world realistically and differentiate themselves from others” (Patton, Renn, Guido & Quaye, 2016, p. 357).

**TRANSITION THEORIES**

William Bridges' (2004) book, "Transitions" is a thorough account of life's transitions in which, a transition occurs in three stages: ending, neutral zone, and beginning. This theory is innovative and it begins the transition with an ending, instead of the beginning, with the claim that every transition that an individual goes through in life begins with an ending of some kind (Bridges, 2004). Nancy K. Schlossberg a professor of counseling has studied life transitions of all kinds. Schlossberg’s mission is to help people cope with the difficulties of life Schlossberg (2011). Schlossberg writes self-help books on dealing with transitions, lectures at conferences worldwide, and directs workshops on managing change (Schlossberg, 2011). The 4S model of the theory is explained in figure 1.3.

Situation	Support
Self	Strategies

**Fig. 1.3 ‘The 4S Model’**

Schlossberg’s transition theory was devised because she believed a need existed to develop a systematic framework that would facilitate an understanding of adults in transition and direct them to the help they needed to cope with the “ordinary and extraordinary process of living” (Evans, Forney, Guido, Patton & Renn, 2010, p. 213). Often categorized as an adult development theory, Schlossberg’s theory is also relevant to traditionally aged college students (Evans et al., 2010). According to Goodman, Schlossberg, and Anderson (2006), a transition is “any event or non-event that results in changed relationships, routines, assumptions, and roles” (p. 33). Goodman et al. (2006) explained that to understand the meaning that a transition has for a particular person requires considering the type, context, and impact of the transition.

Schlossberg's theory describes three different types of transitions- anticipated, unanticipated, and non-events. Anticipated transitions happen expectedly and include such events as graduating from high school. Unanticipated transitions happen unexpectedly, which are not scheduled; events of this type include being fired, the sudden death of a family member, or getting a divorce. Nonevent transitions are ones an individual expected to occur but that did not happen, like the marriage that never took place or the child who was never born. Transitions include both negative, or neutral also affect how the person feels and copes with the transition. When examining the first "S", a person's situation, it will vary according to what triggered the transition, timing, amount of control the person has over the transition, new roles that individual is taking on, duration of the transition, one's previous experience with a similar transition, how the individual assesses the transition, and other stresses the individual is experiencing.

Factors considered important about the second "S", self, are personal and demographic characteristics and psychological resources. An individual's personal and demographic characteristics affect how they view life and include socioeconomic status, gender, ethnicity/culture, age, stage of life, and stage of health. Psychological resources include ego development, outlook, personal values, spirituality, and resiliency. The third "S", support that an individual has, impacts one's ability to adapt to a transition. People receive support from family, friends, intimate relationships, and institutions, and/or communities. Functions of support include effect, affirmation, aid, and honest feedback. The fourth "S", strategies, refers to the ways individuals cope with a transition. Coping responses include those that modify the situation, those that control the meaning of the problem, and those that aid in managing stress (Evans et al. 2010). Individuals who want to change their situation or reduce their stress can choose among four coping modes: information seeing, direct action, inhibition of action, and intra-psycho behavior. Goodman et al. (2006) emphasized that individuals cope best when they remain flexible and use multiple strategies.

## **STUDENT ASSESSMENT**

Utilizing Nancy K. Schlossberg's transition theory, the development of two university students was assessed. One is Master Student and the other is Ph.D. Scholar. The assessment of each student consisted of a personal face-to-face interview. Both students were asked the same question at the beginning of each interview session. The question was, "What major changes have happened in your life during the past year?" Based on the responses received to this question, further asked follow-up questions were asked about the 4 S's- situation, self, support, and strategies. It was evaluated that each student wanted to determine, where they were in the transition process. The next section gives a summary of each student interview, as well as the assessment of the phase of transition each student is experiencing. To protect the students' identities, the following pseudonyms: Student- A and Student- B were used.

## **DETAILS OF CASE STUDIES DATA**

### **Student-A**

Student-A is 38 years old and he works as an accountant in a store along with that he is running his own business. He has done electronics engineering 15 years ago after that he left Pakistan and came to Denmark to find a job but his life was completely changed due to his work routine. He is the only son of his parents. His father had got married to his mother after the death of his first wife, who had two sons from his first wife. He had done his graduation in Physics from Pakistan. He ever wanted to be get settled in abroad. So he went to Denmark for Job where he found a good salaried job as an Accountant. He was getting a handsome salary. When he was working there his father was expired. He was informed about his father's expiry after a week, which got hurt him very badly. He haphazardly came back to his mother but his family had made him more depressed due to their bad behavior. After the death of his father, his family never accepted his mother and him, which made him more and more disturbed. Due to such circumstances, he had left Pakistan permanently. Later on, family issues had made him bring his mother

with him to Denmark because of his share in his father's property, other family issues, and bad behavior of his family members with his mother made him so upset. He was disappointed in his family's love and affection. They never accepted him as their family member and treated him and his mother as an outsider.

Then he had constructed his own house from his job's money and brought his mother to a new house. The family attitudes become completely changed with him just because he had become a rich person. His brothers and other relatives came to him with open arms and started making good terms with him. Student -A decided to live in Pakistan with his mother near his relatives because he felt that his mother was happy around his people. They were showing care and affection to them. There was another reason to come back to Pakistan because his mother was getting ill and weak. He loved his mother so much that he wanted to do everything for her. He ignored the hatred of his family after his mother's love.

Slowly and gradually, he settled a business in Pakistan along with his cousins. He had left Denmark and shared his business and home with them. His cousins and brothers became his business partners. Everything was going well but suddenly he got lost in his business and then his so-called and more business partners had left him alone and they have asked him to give them their share back, which he had to pay. His friends have also deceived him. He lost 20 million in his business due to his loss he had sold out his house, Mercedes, and father's property on them. He left Pakistan and went back to Denmark to earn some good money to stand again. In his absence, his mother was caught by the heart disease due to his loss and bad behavior of the family she got severe mental stress which made her direly sad. In this gloomy situation, her mother got a severe heart attack and then Student-A came back to his mother. She was in the ICU room when she passed away. When he got the news of his mother that she passed away, he went into trauma for 3 days. He even could not see his mother's face. His eyes were opened and his tears were coming out but he was unable to speak anything due to severe shock. When he came back from trauma, he was unable to think and accept the reality that his mother is no more with him.

He is now living in Denmark working as an accountant and instructor in Gym. He is under medical treatment due to depression. For which he is taking medicines if he does not take his medicines he again goes into the phase when he lost his mother. His stressful life is making him each time upset but he is still hopeful. His friends left him in bad times whom he helped so much in their worst times, but when his time came, nobody stood with him. Now Student- A is in the neutral zone under the Schlossberg theory and he is in the struggle of helping himself to be ready for any unanticipated or predictable event in his life.

### **Student-B**

Student-B is 24 years old and she belongs to a high middle-class family. She has completed her High school in premedical from Pakistan but for medical she came to China. In 2013, she has completed her Medical and served for two years in a Pakistani hospital and now she has come again for specialization in China. She is a young, intelligent, beautiful, and smart girl. Over and above she is a good, dedicated student and humble and caring by nature. She has spent her time, successfully, in China for 5 years during Medical completion. She had remained a bright student throughout her study career and still, she is because she is gifted with good social and communication skills. She has participated in extracurricular activities throughout her student life.

StudentB shared that her life become completely changed after coming to China. She was only 18 years old when she entered China and she was not ready for the hostel life but she had to face it for 5 years. She told that her relationship with her roommate was not good because her roommate was not compromising. She gave her a very tough time in terms of cleaning and room keeping due to which she has faced so many problems in sharing. She said that her poor relationship and life in sharing room was an uneventful thing in her life. Even on the issue of keeping room and toilet cleaning both had a conflict with each other, which had made her go back to Pakistan but at that time support from her family was there to make

her calm on the issues that she was facing at that time. She shared that this unwanted change had taught her so many complicated things which taken her towards an independent and strong personality. Now her life is easier and better in the hostel as compared to that time, which she has spent in China. She knows how to tackle and deal with things if any problems arise.

## **DISCUSSION AND CRITIQUE OF SCHLOSSBERG'S THEORY**

Schlossberg's theory in understanding the purpose and importance that people give to life transition can be applied. It is explored that the framework of this theory is beneficial in one-on-one meetings to have with students. One of the strengths of the theory is its applicability to a wide range of individuals. In addition, Schlossberg's theory is practical and uses language that makes sense to students.

Student-A was a humble, loving son, caring friend, and respectful fellow. His life went under uneventful circumstances throughout but he never lost his heart and tried to live how he could at that time. He was doing a Ph.D. abroad was an event that changed his life and helped him to understand himself and develop a framework accordingly that has served as an understanding of himself in transition to cope with the ordinary and extraordinary process of living (Evans et al., 2010, p.213). He has the opinion about life, "person never goes according to his plan but we have to compromise with what is already planned for us". In his life, some anticipated events made him to left for the job in Denmark but another part of his life, was completely non-anticipated and non-event (Schlossberg, 2011). His nonevent life made him never get married or having a relationship with any girl because he is now taking life as unpredictable for him on each step of life. The death of his parents was an uneventful thing that triggered a transition in his life.

Student-B is good at making friends she has good social capital because of her friendly nature. She had a completely different experience in China when she was doing her medical in China because she had a stronger network of friends as compared to now. She has changed her living style after the previous experience of living in China. Her unanticipated transition has brought in her life a full-time predictable calmness, which guides her to make her life better.

It is contemplated that it would be useful if transition theory would have a formal assessment tool; however, the researcher created a quick one-page sheet listing the 4S's, along with highlights of the theory, and used this sheet to guide my interview with each student. In the end, though, determining where an individual was in the transition was left to the researcher's interpretation. Talking with students about their ratio of assets to liabilities gave them and the researcher great insight into their situation and sparked a conversation about the next steps to manage the stress of the transition. No matter what, transitions are unavoidable. Everyone experiences both predictable and unanticipated transitions throughout their life, and a theory that provides a framework for understanding transitions and how individuals cope is helpful.

## **IMPLICATIONS OF THE STUDY**

The major implication of the study is that students during their transition period (beginning, ending, or neutral) if get academic and emotional advice or counseling then it would help them to understand the situation, support, self, and strategies to deal with it. Two case studies have utilized the support to use strategies in life situations. Robert Kagan (1994) in his theory of the 'Evolution of Consciousness' posits that the development of the unified form of individual involvement is not simply substituted in the growth process, but integrated into a more intricate psychological system. The growth has its stages of knowing which has through more complex stages (Kagan, 1982). This study is also observed while teaching the course of 'Guidance & Counselling' when students were observed after being academically advised. They started trying to observe the changes and their choices during their first year of university.

## CONCLUSIONS

This study concludes that students in every stage of their study and personal learning growth (psychological, physical, and mental) needed to be guided through their alma mater. It is concluded that students can determine, themselves in the transition process. The advisory services can help them to endorse self-authorship and defeating suspicions. Baxter & King (2008) well explained it that the transference to self-authorship takes place when person face challenges that test their assumptions, are allowed to reflect on their assumptions and are helped to rephrase their assumptions in further difficult structures of orientation. Life inclines to attempt to unravel their difficulties for them rather than support them to absorb solely.

## BROADER IMPACT OF THE STUDY

The study implies the importance of advisory settings in higher education institutions to meet the transition situations of the students. Endorsing the self-authorship values into the academic consulting environment requires the discipline of academic advisers to suppress the urge to quickly resolve students' situations and defeat their suspicions (Schulenberg, 2013). The case studies encourage students through their transitions, which can help them in self-recognition and understanding their needs. Quin (2017) applies the challenge and support theory by utilizing the self-authorship theory of Baxter Magolda's (2001) as the base. In academic advising and concluded that one theory to advise is not enough and cannot be understood without implying the other. So the similar results this study implies that in formal and informal counseling situations the challenge and support theory has the potential to play a significant part. In academic advising, the challenge and support theory has a special place but with lacking lie with the actual student development. This study infers that the challenge and support theory needed to be applied to truly transform the students' life in academic advising and transitioning.

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## AUTHOR'S CONTRIBUTION

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**Authors' Contribution:** 1-Data Collection, 2-Study Design, 3-Statistical Analysis, 4-Literature Review, 5- Literature Review, 6- Manuscript Preparation

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