Institutional Factors and Learners' Transition from Secondary to Higher Education in Gulu City

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Declaration

I, Olanya Bosco Innocent, declare that this dissertation titled; “Institutional Factors and Learners Transition from Secondary to Higher Education in Gulu City”, which I hereby submit to the Directorate of Research and Graduate Training, is my original work and has not been previously submitted by me or any other person for any academic award at any university or other institution of learning.

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Approval

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Dedication

I dedicate this research project to my mother Eterina Laruni, my wife Caroline Gladys Apiyo and my children: Silas Rubangakene, Reina Lagum and Thaddeus Mich.

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Abstract

Transition from secondary to higher education (HE) is well known for its pivotal role in aligning students' academic journey to their future professional careers, however little is known about transition of learners from secondary to higher education in Gulu City. The aim of this study was to provide insight into the influence of institutional factors on learners' transition from secondary to higher education in Gulu City. The study employed quantitative approach, utilizing a descriptive cross-sectional research design. The research targeted second year students, academic staff, and administrators in a single higher education setting, Gulu University (GU), northern Uganda. The sample consisted of 260 students selected using convenient sampling, 34 academic staff using simple random sampling and 14 university administrators purposively sampled. Data were collected using a close-ended self-administered questionnaire and analysed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 26.0 through descriptive and inferential statistics. The results reveal that institutional factors positively influence learners' transition. The three elements of institutional factors namely; policies (R = 0.327, P = 0.000), culture (R= 0.371, P = 0.000) and resources (R = 0.603, P = 0.000) had a statistically significant positive relationship with learners' transition from secondary to higher education. The result from multiple regression analysis indicate that institutional culture is the strongest predictor of learners' transition (Beta = 0.423, P = 0.000), followed by institutional policies (Beta = 0.218, P = 0.001), while institutional resources (Beta = 0.063, P = 0.321) had the a minimal influence on learners transition. The findings also reveal that learners' transition from secondary education to higher education is driven more by institutional factors, rendering students' demographic backgrounds statistically insignificant in this process. The study concluded that institutional factors—specifically institutional policies, culture, and resources—are the primary drivers of learners' transitions from secondary to higher education in Gulu City. The study recommended that the management of higher education must prioritize improvements across institutional policies, resources, and campus culture to support all learners equally. By clearly communicating regulations, promoting an inclusive culture, expanding infrastructure, and minimizing programs based on student backgrounds, the university can effectively promote transitions for every student.

CHAPTER ONE:

INTRODUCTION

1.0 Overview

Transition from secondary to higher education (HE) is well known for its pivotal role in aligning students' academic journey to their future professional careers (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD], 2024; Söner & Yilmaz, 2024). Research highlights that learners' transition is shaped by various Institutional factors (IFs) that either facilitate or hinder the transition process. Institutional policies, culture, learning resources, students' support systems and the overall learning environment play a significant role in determining how learners transition into HE (Huguenel & Conley, 2020; Kanyesigye & Ahabyoona, 2024; Sikubwabo et al., 2020).

This study explored the role of IFs in shaping learners' transition from secondary to HE in the context of Gulu City. IFs are considered here as independent variable and the transition of learners from secondary to HE was the dependent variable. Students' demographic characteristics were the moderating variable. Most authors on transition studies such as Coertjens et al., (2017), Kanyesigye & Ahabyoona, (2024), Van Lamoen et al., (2024) have based their studies on one aspect either as crossing over or as settling in HE. Therefore, this study considers learners' transition as settling in HE.

This chapter presents historical, theoretical, conceptual and contextual background to the study; statement of the problem, purpose and objectives of the study, research questions, hypotheses, scope of the study, the significance, justification, and conceptual framework.

1.1 **Background of the Study**.

1.1.1 Historical Background

Worldwide, the journey into higher education has always reflected the institutional priorities of its time across different civilization from medieval Europe to the founding of Makerere university in Uganda (Ssempebwa et al., 2018). Globally, the concept of University education dates back to the 11th and 12th centuries, with Bologna University (1088) and the University of Paris (1150) considered as world's oldest universities (Alemu, 2018). Access to these Ivory towers was reserved for the elites namely the clergy and nobility, creating barriers to broader transition to higher education. With passage of time however, leaners' transition into HE is increasing, though great

disparities remain between world regions (Kyndt et al., 2017; UNESCO, 2022). Most studies such as Alemu (2018), reveal that learners' transition to HE originated and spread all over the world from Europe through colonialism.

In Africa, the idea of HE can be traced back between 1920 to 1960, and these institutions that emerged in the colonial period were considered as clone of universities in Europe (Alemu, 2018). In East Africa, learners' transition to HE started in Uganda during the colonial era with the establishment of Makerere as a technical school in 1922 (Muhwezi-Murari, 2018). Deeply rooted in colonial priorities, the university initially served a privileged few group of people namely the children of aristocrats, clergy, and tribal chiefs (Bazilio, 2020). Therefore, access and learners' transition from secondary to HE was limited until 1980's.

In Uganda, after independence in 1962 todate, the significant education reforms undertaken by the government especially setting up education commissions marked a turning point in learners' transition to HE. The 1987 Education Policy Review Commission (EPRC) led by the late Professor Senteza Kajubi, Uganda expanded public universities, legalized private institutions since 1992, diversified admission schemes, introduced Universal Secondary Education (USE) (Bazilio, 2020). These efforts have widened access, yet the bridge to HE remains narrow and uneven. Learners continue to face academic misalignment, financial hardship, rigid institutional policies, cultural barriers, and inadequate resources (Muhwezi-murari, 2018) that seem to affect transition to HE. However, little scholarly literatures exist to shed light on this matter in respect to IFs. In order to enhance understanding of the study, a theoretical background is highlighted in the next sub-section.

1.1.2 Theoretical Background

This study was guided by Nicholson's transition model (1990) which, over time, has been deepened and expanded to address first-year university experience based on Learner's transition. Nicholson posit that the successful achievement of a transition is determined by four successive stages: preparation, encounter, adjustment and stabilization, each of them characterized by specific tasks and pitfalls (De Clercq et al., 2022; Van Lamoen et al., 2024)

i) Phase one: Preparation. The first stage of Nicholson's cycle is preparation, which takes place before entrance to university. The core tasks of preparation are achieving a state of readiness, developing precise and realistic expectations and being positively motivated to change (De Clercq et al., 2018, 2022). This phase largely speaks to psychological dimension of transition.

ii) Phase two: Encounter. The encounter stage is the students' first confrontation experience with the new learning environment that occurs in the first weeks (Van Lamoen et al., 2024). This stage is dominated by sense making, ability to cope with real conditions and forge link with others as the core task. In the context of university, encounter phase includes reporting to university, registration, medical test, locating lecture rooms, creating student portal, and more. Within the transition cycle, the encounter stage has been identified as a particular vulnerable time that requires support for students (De Clercq et al., 2022; Van Lamoen et al., 2024). This phase aligns with the social element of transition.

iii) Phase three: Adjustment. The adjustment phase refers to the changes learners undergo during transition (Kyndt et al., 2017). The core task of this stage is to reach a consonant relationship between the self and the environment by "melding" the behaviors to fit the requirements of the context (Nicholson, 1990). Students attempt to cope with the new environment and gradually adjust their behaviours to succeed. This phase informs all the three dimensions of transition.

iv) Phase four: Stabilisation. The final phase of the cycle is stabilization, which is a more stable period in which students make only small adjustments to their behaviour. The tasks of this phase are; sustained trust, commitment and effectiveness with tasks and people to realize academic achievement (Nicholson, 1990). This phase aligns more with educational transition.

Nicholson's four phased model is relevant to the three dimensions of transition. The model informed the development of the conceptual framework with institutional factors embedded in Nicholson's concept of the learning environment, while the three dimensions of transition are implied in each of the four phases of the model (Please see conceptual framework, page 8). Indeed, the institutional factors were drawn from elements of the learning environment namely: (a) Institutional policies, (b) Institutional Culture, (c) Institutional resources. Arising from these elements, the research objectives were formulated; the themes for the literature review were formed and the research tools were developed.

1.1.3 Conceptual Background

For a better understanding of the variables in particular and the study as a whole, key concepts were defined namely 'transition', 'higher education', 'secondary education' and 'institutional factors'. The word transition is derived from a Latin word 'transire' which means, "to go across" (Musamali, 2018, p. 246). According to World Bank (2008), transitions in education is defined as

the flow of students between different stages in the school system: from one level to the next, between grades within a given level, and out of and back into schools. Jindal-Snape et al. (2021) define transitions as 'an ongoing process of psychological, social, and educational adaptation occurring due to changes in context, interpersonal relationships and identity, which can be simultaneously exciting and worrying for an individual and others in their lives, and which requires ongoing additional support'. Learners transition to HE is not a one-off event that occurs when students join universities but is an on-going process (Darko, 2020; Gale & Parker, 2014; Tett et al., 2017). In this study the definition of transition by Jindal-Snape et al. (2021) as an ongoing process of psychological, social, and educational transition is adopted. Therefore, the dependent variable—transition, was measured through the three dimensions namely psychological, social, and educational transition.

Higher education refers to institution of higher learning established to provide post-secondary education programs of study leading to the award of certificates, diplomas, degrees, and conducting research (Government of Uganda, 2001). Post-secondary education serves to broaden the knowledge, skills and competencies gained in secondary education to provide students with professional knowledge, skills and competencies to enter the labour market.

Secondary education is the education level that exists between primary education and HE. In Uganda's context, secondary education is a six years cycle (four years at lower secondary and two years at upper secondary) from senior one to senior six having learners with average age between 14 years and 19 years (MoES, 2012).

Institutional factors refer to the elements within educational institutions that influence and shape the student experience (Wimshurst et al., 2006). IFs are the internal elements in the higher educational institutions that either facilitate or hinder learners' adaptation during transition from secondary to HE. The study operationalized IFs in HE to include institutional policies, institutional culture, and institutional resources.

1.1.4 Contextual Background

In Uganda, educational framework is organized into three tiers: Primary, Secondary, and HE. Learners are expected to transition from primary to lower secondary, then to upper secondary. Upon completion of secondary education, learners' transition to Universities and Other Tertiary Institutions (UOTIs), and finally to professional employment market (Kanyesigye & Ahabyoona,

2024). Learners in their final year of secondary schools, sit for a national examination known as Uganda Advanced Certificate of Education and their grades play a crucial role in admission to higher institutions of learning (Aciro et al., 2023). Upon completion of secondary education, learners' transition either to universities for degree courses or join OTIs for diploma and certificate courses.

Gulu City, officially established on 1st July 2020, is home to several HEIs, including Gulu University, University of Sacred Heart, Gulu College of Health Sciences, Unyama-UNITE Gulu Campus, East African Institute of Management Science, among others. The city has a total 34 secondary schools, of which 18 are A' Level Schools (Gulu City Education Department). However, only a small proportion of learners who complete their studies in these A' Level schools successfully transition into HE. This trend raises concerns about the effectiveness of higher education institutional support systems for students transitioning from secondary in the region.

1.2 Statement of The Problem

Transition to higher education marks a pivotal phase in students' academic journey and future professional development. Globally, transition to HE is widely recognized as a challenging period to many students and requires support for psychological, social and educational transition (Huguenel & Conley, 2020; Mulaudzi, 2023). Globally learners' transition to HE is increasing however great disparities remain between world regions (Kyndt et al., 2017). In North America and Europe over 79% of learners transition into HE (UNESCO, 2022). While in Africa, only 6.1% of learners transition to HE out of the 13.9% of learners who complete upper secondary (African Union Commission, 2016). In Uganda, higher education institutions (HEIs) implement transition interventions by setting pre academic programmes especially orientation to enhance transition (Kanyesigye & Ahabyoona, 2024). However, Only about 35% of learners from secondary education transition into HE in Uganda (MoES, 2012). Whereas existing transition studies tend to speak more to percentages of learners transitioning to HE, what remains largely unknown is the extent to which IFs in HEIs influence learners' transition from secondary education in the context of Gulu City.

Indeed, the literature search revealed a dearth of studies focusing on IFs in a local context like Gulu City. This study therefore was intended to investigate and contribute to the limited body of

knowledge regarding the influence of IFs particularly institutional policies, institutional culture and institutional resources on learners' transition from secondary to HE in Gulu City.

1.3 Purpose of The Study

To investigate the influence of institutional factors on learners' transition from secondary to higher education in Gulu City.

1.4 Specific Objectives:

i. To examine the influence of institutional policies on learners' transition from secondary to higher education in Gulu City.
ii. To investigate the influence of institutional culture on learners' transition from secondary to higher education in Gulu City.
iii. To explore the influence of institutional resources on learners' transition from secondary to higher education in Gulu City.
iv. To determine the extent to which institutional factors influence transition from secondary to higher institutions by students' demographics.

1.5 Research Questions

The study attempts to answer the following questions;

i) What is the nature of influence of institutional polices on learners' transition from secondary to higher education?
ii) What is the nature of influence of institutional culture on learners' transition from secondary to higher education?
iii) What is the nature of the influence of institutional resources on learners' transition from secondary to higher education?
iv) How do institutional factors influence learners' transition from secondary to Higher institutions education by students' demographics?

1.6 Significance of the Study

This study hoped to provide insight into the influence of IFs specifically institutional policies, culture, and resources on learners' transition from secondary to HE in Gulu City. The findings from the study may be useful to education planners, policy makers, administrators, parents, students, donors, community, and other stakeholders, to device mechanism that enhance learners'

transition in education. The ministry of education may use findings of this study to address factors that hinder learners' transition, enrolment and retention in HE in Uganda.

This study may contribute to the body of knowledge in learners' transition in education system. Recommendation from the study may be valuable to educators, researchers and organisations promoting development of education in a post conflict context worldwide.

Finally, the research has enriched my knowledge in research field and promoted my career development in teaching profession as well as fulfilment of the award of master degree in education and educational management of Gulu University.

1.7 Scope of the Study

The study was focused on the influence of institutional factors in higher education on learners' transition in Gulu City. The City hosts numerous prestigious universities and colleges, making it an ideal location to investigate learners' transition from secondary to higher education.

Gulu city is found in Northern Uganda within Acholi sub-region approximately 333 kilometers (207 miles) by road, north of Uganda's capital city, Kampala. Administratively, the city consists of two main divisions; Gulu West and Gulu East. Gulu City is bordered by many districts such as Omoro in the South-East, Nwoya in the West, Amuru in the North-West and Gulu district in the North-East.

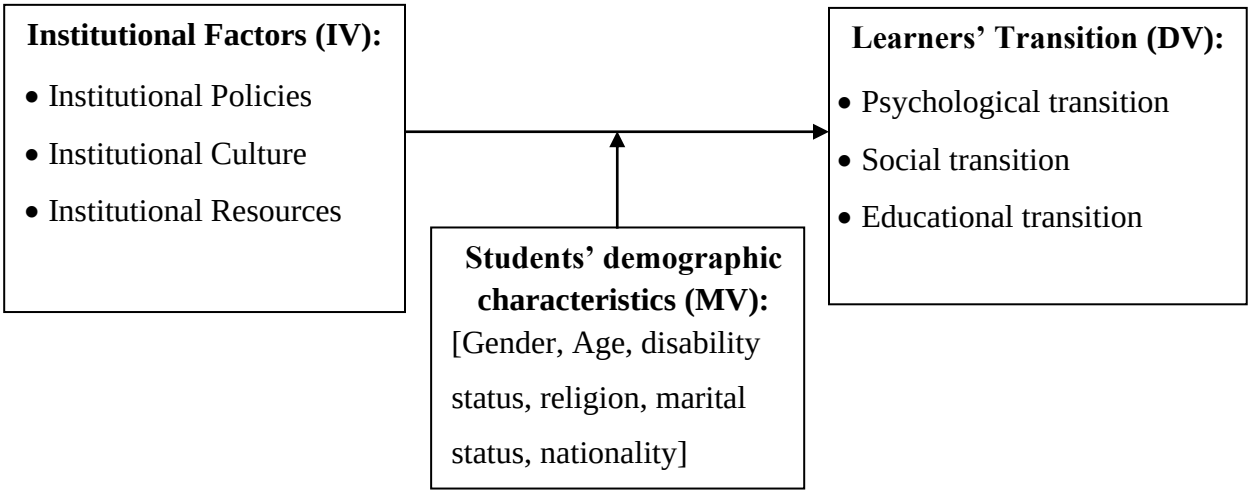
The study investigated the influence of IFs on learners' transition over a period of four years between 2023-2026. This is because successful transition into higher education is determined by four successive stages: preparation, encounter, adjustment and stabilisation which start with preparation in secondary education and upon joining University transition extends up to the end of first year with stabilisation. Therefore, the Second-year university students admitted on Direct Entry Scheme from A' level school have fresh transition experience to inform this study.

1.8 Conceptual Framework

This is the diagrammatical representation of the relationship between variables. Institutional factor was hypothesized to influence learners' transition from secondary to HE in Gulu City. IFs are hereby considered as independent variable defined by dimensions namely institutional policies, culture and resources only. Policy was indicated by clarity, fairness and impact; culture by artefacts, beliefs and values, and basic assumptions; institutional resources was indicated by physical facilities, learning resources, and technology. While, learners' Transition was the

dependent variable and was measured by psychological, social and educational transition. Moderating variables that was expected to affect learners' transition but would not be considered in this study was the student demographic characteristics and was measured by gender, age, marital status, disability status, nationality and religion of a given student. The diagram below is the conceptual framework showing relationship between IFs and learners' transition from secondary to HE.

Figure 1: A Model of Conceptual Framework



Source: Adopted from the literature of (Faria & Almeida, 2021; Jindal-Snape et al., 2021; Manee et al., 2024) and modification from the researcher.

This study relied on psychological, social and education transition to measure how students adjust into new learning environment during transition (Faria & Almeida, 2021). On the other hand, dimensions for IFs included policies, culture and resources. These three elements constitute IFs because; policies direct all the operations in an institution, culture determines how people interact with the system and resources provide the tools for operating university activities. Policies investigated were the documented policies namely Fees policy, undergraduate admission policy, gender policy, examination policy, ICT policy, community engagement policy, semester regulation or credit unit system, sport scholarship policy, games union constitution and the some un documented. Most authors on transition studies have based their studies on one aspect either crossing over or settling in HE. Therefore, this study considered learners' transition as settling in HE.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

The chapter comprehensively discussed the literature related to learners' transition from secondary to HE. It particularly focussed on factors influencing learners' transition and specifically examined the relationship between IFs and learners' transition. This chapter aimed to synthesize existing theoretical perspectives, empirical findings, and scholarly debates to contextualize the research objectives, variables, and hypotheses under investigation.

2.2 Conceptual Review

2.2.1 Transition

The notion of transition lacks a clear-cut definition in the literature because of the variety of ways in which the term 'transition' is used and understood (De Clercq et al., 2022; O'donnell et al., 2016). Anderson, Goodman, and Schlossberg (2011) defined transition as 'turning point' or phase between 'two periods of stability'. Gale and Parker (2014) defined transitions as induction (entering a new role and new environment through pathways), transitions as development (navigating sociocultural norms and expectations), and transitions as becoming (subjective experience of transition as a part of one's life and identity). Nicholson (1990), defined transition as a process of change and instability consisting of four stages: preparation, encounter, adjustment, and stabilization, each of them characterized by specific tasks and pitfalls. Finally, Learners' transition is a process occurring when students move to the unfamiliar while adjusting to multiple changes associated with HE, such as new learning environment, altered finances, social and academic changes (Goldring et al., 2018).

Most Studies for instance by Darko (2020) and Tett et al. (2017) highlight that "learners' transition into tertiary education is a process and not an event". The definitions above confirm that transition is a process involving change experienced due to movement from one condition to another whether marked as a turning point, a series of phases, an identity experience to new conditions. However, the differences emerge in how transition is conceptualized and framed. Anderson et al. (2011) view it as a linear shift between two stable periods, suggesting a clearer beginning and end. In contrast, Gale and Parker (2014) describe transitions as complex, ongoing, and subjective experiences across sociocultural landscapes. Nicholson (1990) offers a structured, sequential model with

clearly defined stages, while Goldring et al. (2018) localize transition within the specific context of HE, focusing on tangible and multifaceted student challenges.

These transition definitions are complementary. Each one offers a different angle on the same big idea that transition is a process of change. Anderson et al. (2011) provide a general overview, Nicholson adds a step-by-step guide, Gale and Parker (2014) explore its emotional and cultural depth, and Goldring et al. (2018) focus on how it plays out in education. They don't contradict each other; instead, they help paint a fuller picture to understand the term transition when combined.

In this study, learners' transition was defined as the process by which learners from secondary education cross over and settle in higher education.

The elements in ensuring successful transition include psychological, social and educational transition. Psychological transition refers the mental, physical problem and emotional pressure experienced by students during transition into university education. Social transition refers to students' success in meeting the interpersonal-social requirements of the university. Education transition refers to students' success in dealing with various educational and academic requirements (Manee et al., 2024). Adaptation into university system during transition is important because it evaluates learners' competence and sense of belonging (Coertjens et al., 2017; Faria & Almeida, 2021)

2.2.2 Higher education

Higher education refers to all types of studies and training at the post-secondary level, provided by universities or other educational establishments that are approved as institutions of HE by the competent State authorities (UNESCO, 1998). The National Council for Higher Education, defines HE as the education offered to post Advance Level certificate or its equivalent (NCHE, 2014). In Uganda, HE is directly controlled by National Council for HE established under "The Universities and Other Tertiary Institutions Act, 2001". HEIs are categorized into three broad types namely Universities, Other Degree Awarding Institutions (ODAIs) and Other Tertiary Institutions (OTIs) (Government of Uganda, 2001; NCHE, 2022).

In Uganda, there are 246 HEIs, Private sector dominates the ownership with 189 institutions (76.8%) while only 57 institutions (23.2%) under public ownership (NCHE, 2022), however, regional distribution vary greatly with central region dominating the largest share of 59% The

other three regions share the remaining 41% and the northern region taking the lowest 10% (NCHE, 2022).

2.2.3 Institutional Factors

Institutional factors are elements inherent in the operating environment that either facilitate or hinder the achievement of organisation objectives (Sikombe & Phiri, 2021). IFs include support programs, requirements that an institution sets as standards, practices for student participation to meet the conditions as established for graduation (Azadeh et al., 2017). This study focused on the most prominent intuitional factors influencing learners' transition namely institutional policies, institutional culture, and institutional resources.

A substantial body of literature underscores the role of IFs in shaping students' academic outcomes. A study by Wai and Tran (2022) reveals that faculty quality, academic infrastructure, and school resources as pivotal in promoting student retention and achievement. Similarly, a study by Akenbor and Ibanichuka (2015) highlights that the IFs affecting students' achievement in principles of accounting in Nigerian universities are class size, entry requirement, access to functional library, semester duration, contact hours, and curriculum contents. These studies therefore affirm that IFs are fundamental drivers of academic success, influencing both students' learning experiences and educational outcomes across diverse contexts.

The broader institutional climate plays a key role in student engagement and performance. A study by Fleming et al (2005) reveals the importance of a supportive physical and psychological college environment, noting that peer interactions, classroom dynamics, and campus accessibility affect students' sense of belonging and academic transition. Frimpong et al. (2016) further demonstrate that the interruption of electricity supply, overcrowded lecture rooms, and incessant (nonstop) strikes and closure of institutions hinder the academic performance of polytechnic students in Ghana. Such findings highlight that the learning atmosphere, both socially and structurally, is instrumental in promoting or constraining education success.

Institutional perceptions and policy frameworks also influence student's decision and outcomes. Rudhumbu et al. (2017), in his study at Botho University in Botswana, found that academic programs, institutional reputation, marketing strategies, career fairs, graduate employability and faculty quality significantly influence students' choice of a university. In Rwanda, Sikubwabo et al. (2020) observed a decrease in student enrolment in private higher institutions, attributing it to

seven IFs namely: rigid and unmarketable programs, high costs, inflexible payment options, poor living conditions, weak internet access, and strict academic regulations. These insights point to the importance of institutional responsiveness to student needs and market dynamics in sustaining both enrolment and institutional relevance.

Finally, while existing literature thoroughly explores how IFs affect academic performance, retention and university selection, notable gaps remain in understanding its influence on learners' transition from secondary to HE.

2.3 Theoretical Review

According to Nicholson's (1990) transition cycle model, the transition is a process of change and instability consisting of four stages: preparation, encounter, adjustment, and stabilization, each of them characterized by specific tasks and pitfalls (Purnell, 2002). This model initially focused on career changes, however, several authors have broadened its scope so as to address first-year university experience by means of this specific framework (De Clercq et al., 2018)

The preparation stage refers to students' experience in secondary education that orient and prepare them for HE. The core tasks of preparation are achieving a state of readiness, developing precise and realistic expectations and being positively motivated to change. The encounter phase concerns students' first experience especially confrontation with the new learning environment, academic culture and try to make sense of it. In the adjustment stage, students attempt to cope with the new environment and gradually adjust their behaviours to succeed. Stabilization is the final transition stage characterized by a feeling of stability and confidence in the ability to succeed in HE. Learners are expected to have created sustained trust, commitment and effectiveness with tasks and people to realize academic achievement (Nicholson, 1990). Within the transition cycle, the encounter stage has been identified as a particular vulnerable time that requires support for students (Coertjens et al., 2017; De Clercq et al., 2018; Ivemark & Ambrose, 2021; Nicholson, 1990; Van Lamoen et al., 2024)

Nicholson's (1990) transition cycle model offers a compelling framework for understanding the dynamic nature of transitions, particularly in educational contexts. The strength lies in its structured, stage-based approach, which breaks transition into four identifiable phases: preparation, encounter, adjustment, and stabilization (De Clercq et al., 2018; Kyndt et al., 2017). Its emphasis on psychological readiness, coping strategies, and integration into new environments

makes it especially useful for exploring learner experiences. According Purnell (2002) "Nicholson's transition cycle appears to provide an excellent framework for this exploration of student experience". Moreover, the model is theoretically endorsed by several recent studies that have sought to go beyond the static consideration of academic transition (Coertjens et al., 2017; De Clercq et al., 2018; Kyndt et al., 2017; Van Lamoen et al., 2024)

Despite its usefulness, Nicholson's model does present some limitations. One key weakness is its limited validation within educational settings, as it was originally developed for work-role transitions. Additionally, its staged, linear structure may oversimplify the complexities of real-life transitions, especially in diverse and unpredictable academic environments. Learners may not experience these stages in an orderly, sequential manner, and may cycle back or skip stages entirely (De Clercq et al., 2018).

Despite these limitations, Nicholson's transition cycle model remains highly relevant in exploring learners' transitions from secondary to HE. Its structured approach provides a valuable lens to examine how students prepare for academic change, confront new realities, adjust to unfamiliar demands, and eventually stabilize within their new learning environments (De Clercq et al., 2018; Purnell, 2002). By integrating this model into the study, researchers would understand the institutional conditions that facilitate or hinder successful transitions, thereby informing policies and practices that support student retention and success (Coertjens et al., 2017; Van Lamoen et al., 2024).

Theoretical gap:

The assumptions of Nicholson transition cycle model 1990 have received criticisms from many scholars. Learners may not experience the four stages in an orderly, sequential manner, and may cycle back or skip stages entirely. A study conducted in Belgium by De Clercq et al., (2018), reveals that the tasks and pitfalls of one stage did not stop at the beginning of the next phase as stipulated by Nicholson that the stages are clearly disjunctive. There was therefore a need for further investigation of this model in order to increase its contextual validity in understanding learners' transition into HE.

2.4 Review of empirical literature

2.4.1 The nature of influence of institutional policies on learners' transition from secondary to higher education.

The transition from secondary to HE is a critical stage in learners' academic journey, significantly influenced by institutional policies. Policy is a basic statement serving as a guide for administrative actions. Institutional policies play a crucial role in shaping academic success and overall student well-being in HE (Otundo, 2024). Various global, continental, regional, and local perspectives provide a comprehensive understanding effectiveness of institutional policies in HE.

Globally, universities and other tertiary institutions (OTI) have adopted various approaches to develop institutional policies that enhance access, engagement and student academic success. In the United States, universities have long focused on data-driven policy-making to enhance access, student retention, support systems, and inclusive learning environments. The integration of academic advising, mentorship, and mental health support systems has proven to be instrumental in addressing challenges faced by diverse student populations (Otundo, 2024; Popescu & Motoi, 2024).

In India, universities align their policies to national education policy that encourages flexibility in course structure, digital learning, allowing students to tailor their academic paths according to their interests and career goals. Indian universities aim to equip students with competencies that meet industry demands while fostering academic excellence (Government of India, 2020).

On African Continent, HE policies have evolved to meet academic and socio-economic challenges due to limited resources, political instability, socio-economic disparities and other. In Angola, HE policies focus on addressing disparities in educational resources, providing equitable opportunities for all students (Pedro & Teixeira, 2020). In Nigeria, policy development in HE has centered on addressing infrastructure challenges, curriculum relevance, and faculty quality. In South Africa, the post-apartheid era is dominated with policies that focus on restoring historical inequalities while promoting inclusivity, transition and retention, academic support and development programs. (Mzangwa, 2019)

In Ghana, a study by Osei (2024) reveals that university policies that emphasize high-quality teaching, adequate resources, equitable access, addressing socioeconomic disparities by offering

targeted support to disadvantaged students demonstrates a long term benefits on student performance. Despite these initiatives, the effectiveness of institutional policies in African universities is often hindered by governance issues and inconsistent funding, leading to disparities in access, retention rates and academic achievement across higher institutions (Otundo, 2024).

Regionally, in East Africa, universities in countries such as Burundi, Rwanda, Kenya, and Tanzania have implemented policies aimed at improving access, well-being and academic performance through competency-based education, students' support systems, and ICT integration. In Rwanda, education policies emphasize the development of skills for economic transformation. The introduction of the Competence-Based Curriculum (CBC) in universities has shifted the focus from rote learning to skills development, thereby enhancing student engagement and academic outcomes (Rwanda Education Board, 2020). In Tanzania, HE policies have increasingly focused on aligning academic programs with national development priorities especially STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) education, and policies promoting student support services (World Bank, 2021). In Kenya, universities have implemented various policies aimed at enhancing student access, social integration and academic achievement. The university's mentorship program, academic advising, and access to learning resources have contributed to improved retention and graduation rates (Otundo, 2024).

Locally, In Uganda, university policies focus on enhancing student access, inclusivity, retention, academic achievement and progression. Makerere and many other universities have developed policies that focus on flexible learning pathways, enabling students to choose between full-time, part-time, online and distance learning options. Ssempebwa et al., (2018) reports that this flexibility has led to improved access, retention rates, particularly among working students and those from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Admission policies and criteria defines eligibility requirements for students entering HE (Aciro et al., 2023) and Flexible admission improves access to HE (Akatwijuka, 2024; Tinto, 2017). However, challenges such as inadequate funding, overcrowded classrooms, socio-economic barriers, inflexible policies continue to limit effectiveness of many policies (Sikubwabo et al., 2020).

Gaps in Institutional Policies: Based on literature review on policies, it is vital to recognize that the effectiveness of institutional policies is context-dependent and varies across different socio-

economic, cultural, and geographical settings (Osei, 2024). Additionally, the study of university policies in most countries have not given much attention on learners' transition therefore to bridge contextual and geographical gap, there was need to understand how institutional policies influence learners transition from secondary and HE in Gulu City.

2.4.2 The nature of influence of institutional culture on learners' transition from secondary to higher education.

The transition of learners from secondary to HE is a pivotal phase determined by institutional culture. The word culture is a complex concept without a single meaning. In this context, Institutional culture refers to a form of culture created, discovered, and developed from long-term teaching management practice, generally accepted, recognized, and followed by teachers and students of the school, college or university (Wang, 2016). College culture is composed of assumptions, beliefs, values, norms, attitudes, language, artifacts or symbols and practices that guide academic and social interactions.

Institutional culture is comprised of three levels: On the surface are artifacts, underneath artifacts lie values, and at the core are basic assumptions (Hatch, 2015; Schein, 2010). Artefacts are the visible, tangible and audible elements of institutional culture, including work processes, workplace setting, organisation structures, and observable features like office layout, technology, and rituals (Turyahikayo et al., 2024). Espoused beliefs and values which represent the collective beliefs of what the organisation stands for, takes pride in, and holds of intrinsic worth. Basic underlying assumptions are the unofficial rules that inform organisation interpretation and responses, shaping perceptions, thoughts, and feelings. These three elements are crucial for maintaining an effective institutional culture (Hatch, 2015).

Globally, while specific principles, values and beliefs might vary, depending on the region or country of origin, every university culture must be grounded in a set of principles and values that takes into consideration the expressed needs of students (Ludeman et al., 2009). In USA, a study by Portillo (2023) reveals that a welcoming environment, and creating relationships of care and trust between teachers and students are crucial for students' academic success. Therefore, having a university that brings everyone together is essential in student integration. In Europe, a study conducted in Turkey by Bayar & Karaduman (2021) highlights that culture has a positive and strong effect on the students in terms of motivation, sense of belonging, academic achievement and development in all respects. Similarly in Asia as study conducted by Zaid and Atshan (2023)

in Irag indicates that university culture has a great and important influence on the overall academic performance. Finally in line with study findings in USA, Europe and elsewhere, a study in China by Wang (2016) on college culture recommends that all HEIs should offer workshops to familiarize students with academic expectations to enhance integration as a pillar for academic achievement of new students.

In Africa, like any other continent, institutional culture differs from a university to another. A study conducted in South Africa by Lebelo (2022) reveals that institutional culture have a greater impact on the well-being of students because university is more than just a place but their home. A sound culture offers a base for commitment, sense of belonging and consistency in performance.

In East Africa and Uganda, a study conducted by Turyahikayo et al (2024) underscore the vital role of espoused beliefs and values, and basic underlying assumptions in enhancing Organisational effectiveness in public universities in Uganda. The promotion of espoused beliefs and values such as openness, teamwork, and adherence to rules is crucial in fostering a culture that supports organizational effectiveness. The emphasis on underlying assumptions like mutual responsibility, shared objectives, and inclusive decision-making is essential in creating an institutional culture that fosters learners transition outcomes.

In Uganda, It's vital to note that culture of reliance on the teacher in secondary schools, make it difficult for students to maintain their independence culture in university, therefore educators, administrators and students have to support the new students during transition into HE (Kanyesigye & Ahabyoona, 2024)

Gaps in Institutional culture: Based on the literature a sound culture offers a base for motivation, commitment, sense of belonging and consistency in performance. However culture is a word that encompasses many meanings, therefore, full understanding the impact on students is complicated and more research needs to be done (Portillo, 2023). Based on this gap, this study examined how cultural dimensions in form of artifacts, espoused beliefs and values, and basic underlying assumption of culture influence learners' during transition into higher institutions.

2.4.3 The nature of influence of institutional resources on learners' transition from secondary to higher education.

The transition from secondary to HE is a pivotal phase in a student's academic journey, significantly influenced by the availability of institutional resources. An institution's type, size, and location play an important role in determining the campus environment and the overall feel of the university (Fleming et al., 2005).

Globally well-equipped institution provides a conducive learning environment where students can thrive socially and academically. In USA, a study by Norton (2023) highlights that the availability of essential facilities (e.g., academic, residential life, recreation, libraries, and attractive campus) promote student satisfaction, engagement, and, ultimately academic success and retention. Similarly In Asia, a study conducted in Pakistan by Rafiq & Ayesha (2024) reveal a positive influence of digital tools and online platforms on student engagement, motivation, and academic performance. The advent of digital tools and online learning platforms to combine both physical teaching and online learning is transforming HE operation across the world. However, inadequate infrastructure, technical difficulties, limited access to resources, internet issues and insufficient training opportunities still hinder the effective utilization of digital tools in HE in many countries (UNESCO, 2023).

In Africa, most Studies across the continent indicate that the level of institutional resources in HE determines the level of student satisfaction, engagement and academic performance during learners' transition process. A study conducted in Nigeria by Agbor, Onnoghen, Nwachukwu, & Esu (2022) reveals that the availability and adequacy of physical facilities have a significant influence on academic performance among undergraduate students in Environmental Education. The study recommended that basic facilities should be put in place before commencement of any academic activities; Maintenance culture by the authority is vital so that available physical facilities can stand the test of time. However, In sub-Saharan Africa, universities are faced with shortages of resources, including books, technology equipment and adequate lecture room facilities, which hinder effective teaching and assessment (Bileti et al., 2024).

In East Africa and Uganda, like elsewhere on the continent, institutional resources vary from one learning institution to another. In Uganda, a study by Mugizi (2021) reveals that good lecture rooms' infrastructure and university utilities are significant positive predictors of students' engagement. Therefore, the study recommended that universities emphasize providing quality

classroom infrastructure, improve university-level infrastructure, and establish quality university utilities. Similarly a study by Sserwanja, Nabukeera, Matovu, Bisaso (2024) reveals that classroom, library and technological facilities, have very strong positive and statistically meaningful impact on student academic performance in Vocational institutions in Makindye division, Kampala district. A study by Bileti, Ndawula, Kebirungi, & Rwothumio (2024) highlights that many universities in Uganda, including those in Northern Uganda, lack lecture rooms and facilities like chairs, tables and notice boards. There is also inadequate technology equipment such as computers, projectors, internet and safety devices (Bileti et al., 2024).

Gaps in institutional resources: institutional resources are crucial in determining students' academic performance, engagement, satisfaction, and adaptation across the World. However, a literature search revealed a dearth of studies showing how institutional resources influence learners' transition from secondary to HE in Northern region. Therefore, it was vital to investigate the influence of institutional resources in HE on learners' transition from secondary education in Gulu City.

2.4.4 The extent to which institutional factors influence learners' transition from secondary to higher institutions of learning by student's demographics.

The transition of learners from secondary to HE is pivotal in learners' academic journey, shaped by institutional factors (IFs). These factors influence how students from diverse demographic backgrounds navigate transition to HE. Fleming et al. (2005) emphasize that an institution type, size, and location play an important role in determining the campus environment and the overall feel of the university based on student demographics. Demographic characteristics refer to attributes that describe the status of people or a person such as age, gender, socioeconomic status and origin (Refae et al., 2021). Globally, research shows that learners in HEIs respond differently to similar circumstances due to demographic attributes such as age, gender, origin, socioeconomic status, school attended, extracurricular engagement, and geographical differences.

A study conducted in Australia by Zhang (2021) revealed that higher socioeconomic status (SES) backgrounds, frequent participation in extra-curricular activities, and living in urban areas can positively impact students' academic aspirations and opportunities to acquire HE qualifications. While, learners who come from lower SES families, live in rural areas tend to be vulnerable to education and are most likely to drop out of HE. These findings underscore the need for HEIs

managers to prioritize support for disadvantaged students to foster their psychological, social and academic transition.

Across Africa, studies confirm that student demographic attributes are influenced differently by institutional factors during transition to HE. The study conducted in Junior Tukkie Programme in south Africa by Lombard (2020) highlights that both academic and non-academic factors shape learners transition process. Students demographic attributes such as gender, age, family background, social economic status (SES), prior HE experience and personal abilities significantly influence transition outcomes (Lombard, 2018; Zyl, 2016). Students from the very low SES during transition encounter more barriers, increasing their risk of dropping out than groups with higher SES. These findings advocate for customized interventions in HEIs to identify needs of different groups of learners during transition and avoid the common 'one-size-fits-all approach' to student support (Zyl, 2016).

In Uganda, Akatwijuka,(2024) conducted a study in Kigezi region revealing that 93.5% of respondents agreed that gender affects access to HE, 85.1% cited family background and 75.1% pointed to the school attended. The study concluded that gender is a very essential factor in accessing HE in Kigezi sub-region in western Uganda. However, this research is geographically limited and does not account for institutional dynamics in other regions and urban centers like Gulu City.

Gap: While existing studies provide valuable insights into how student demographics influence their transitions and access to HE as in Kigezi sub-region by Akatwijuka (2024), other regions specifically Northern Uganda and smaller context like Gulu City with unique post-conflict challenges remain under-researched. There is need to investigate the extent to which institutional factors influence learners' transition from secondary to HE by student demographics in Gulu City. Addressing this gap, the study provided localized evidence to inform policy and practices tailored to the needs of different groups of learners transitioning into HE within Gulu City in Acholi sub-region

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOY

3.1 Introduction

This chapter provided an overview of the methods that were used to conduct the study. It focused on the research design, population, sample size determination, sampling technique, data collection methods, data collection tools or instruments, data collection procedure, quality control, data analysis and presentation, ethical considerations, study limitations and delimitations.

3.2 Research Approach

The study was conducted using quantitative approach which is a systematic, objective investigation of phenomena by gathering, measuring, and analysing numerical data using statistical techniques (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Zyoud et al., 2024). Quantitative methods, enabled this study to ensure objectivity in describing and explaining the influence of institutional factors on learners' transition from secondary to higher education in Gulu City.

3.3 Research Design

This study adopted a descriptive cross-sectional survey design to quantitatively examine learners' transition from secondary to higher education in Gulu City. Data was collected from a representative samples at a single point in time, analyzed statistically, and generalized to the wider population (Bougie & Sekaran, 2020). The design was well-suited to this study because it provided a clear snapshot of how institutional factors specifically policies, culture, and resources, influence transition, while remaining cost-effective and time-efficient (Malunda & Atwebembeire, 2021).

3.4 Study Population

This study was conducted among 1,471 HE students, 233 academic staff, and 95 administrators in Gulu University. Gulu University has been chosen because of being a pioneer university in the region and has a number of academic programmes that makes it likely the most popular choice to A level leavers.

3.5 Target Population

The target population consisted of 1,799 respondents, including 1,471 HE students and former A' level students who sat their UACE examination in 2023 and joined university on Direct Entry Scheme. The students are expected to have fresh experience of transition in all the four transition

stages upon joining and completing their first year at the university. 233 Fairly senior academic staff from the rank of lecturer and above. Based on seniority, academic staff are deemed to be better placed to give opinion about students' transition; and 95 administrators, because they were expected to have key information on university policies, culture and resources. These respondents were obtained from three faculties in Gulu University, the Faculty of Education and Humanities, Faculty of Business and Development Studies and Faculty of Agriculture. These specific faculties were selected because they offer the most popular courses for students completing secondary education.

3.6 Sample Size Determination

The sample size was determined using Taro Yamane's calculation formula (1969). According to Yamane, a researcher is good enough to determine the appropriate sample size (n). Given by: $\boldsymbol{n = \frac{N}{1+N(e^2)}}$; Where: **n** = is the desired sample size, **N** = is the study population or accessible population size, **e** = is the margin of error which is 0.05 because the study was conducted at 95% level of significance (Chanuan et al., 2021). Therefore, given expected population (N= 1,799), margin error (0.05), the sample size for the study was:

$$n = \frac{N}{1+N(e^2)} \; ; \; n = \frac{1{,}799}{1+1{,}799(0.05^2)} \; ; n = \mathbf{328.}$$

Table 2: presents the categories and size of the respondents that was part of the study in a sampling frame below.

Table 1: Sampling Frame

Strata	Elements	Proportion	Sample Size	Sampling Techniques
Students	1,471	81.8	268	Convenient
Academic staff	233	13.0	43	Random
Administrators	95	05.2	17	Purposive
Total	**1,799**	**100.0**	**328**	

Source: Researcher (2026)

3.7 Sampling Techniques and Procedures

This study employed quantitative sampling techniques to select learners, lecturers and administrators in their respective Faculties in Gulu University. This enabled researcher to apply different strategies and procedures for specific groups of respondents (Etyang, 2018). Purposive sampling was used to select the administrators in particular because they were expected to have

key information about university policies, culture and resources. Random sampling was used to select lecturers because it enabled every lecturer to have equal change of being selected as they interface with students directly on a day to day basis therefore are presumed to have knowledge of students' educational adaptation, the associated psychological and social dimensions. The students on the other hand are the one who undergo transition experience first-hand and were best suited to provide data for this study therefore they were selected using convenient sampling based on their availability and easy access.

3.8 Data Collection Method

3.8.1 Questionnaire Survey.

The study employed questionnaire survey method because respondents were required to provide personal views, perceptions and feelings in a pre-determined order (Chawla & Sondhi, 2020). Questionnaire was used because it enables obtaining adequate information over a short period of time, protects privacy of respondents, offers greater assurance of anonymity (Bhattacherjee, 2012).

3.9 Data Collection Instruments

3.9.1 Questionnaire

A self-developed questionnaire covered the three domains of the dependent variable namely psychological, social, and educational transition and the three dimensions of Independent variables namely intuitional policies, culture, and resources; and the respondents' demographics. Self-administered questionnaires were used with Likert scale to measure respondents' views, attitude, and preferences about learners' transition. The 5 points-Likert scale included the use of description namely Strongly Disagree (1), Disagree (2), Not Sure (3), Agree (4) and Strongly Agree (5). The 5-point Likert scale provides a clear, balanced range of response options that accurately reflect the respondents' attitudes, opinions and perceptions. Respondents expressed positive and negative sentiments, as well as neutrality, therefore minimized response bias, fatigue and enhanced the reliability of the data collected (Joshi et al., 2015). The widespread scholarly acceptance for cross-group comparability and statistical reliability, made Likert scale an appropriate tool for this study. Questionnaire was suitable because it saved time, good for literate target population (Malunda & Atwebembeire, 2021) as for the case of this study.

3.10 Data Quality Control

Data quality control was ensured through validity and reliability tests of the research instruments.

3.10.1 Validity of Instruments.

Validity is the extent to which an instrument measures what it purports to measure (Kimberlin & Winterstein, 2008; Kothari, 2004). The validity of the instruments was ensured through consultation, rating of items by experts and computing of Content Validity Index which is a measure of validity of instrument. Content Validity Index (CVI) was computed by a formula:

$$CVI = \frac{VR+R}{K}$$ Where VR is for Very Relevant, R for Relevant and K is for total number of items in the instrument.

The value of CVI was found to be 0.96 as shown in Table 2 below. The results from the computation of CVI were interpreted according to Aithal and Aithal (2020) scale (0 – 0.49 = Low; 0.5 – 0.69 = Moderate; 0.7 = Adequate; 0.71 – 0.99 = High; 1= Perfect) to determine the validity of the instrument. The scale states that any instrument to be valid, the value of CVI is expected to be at least 0.7 and above. This implied that validity of the instrument was good and worth being used for data collection.

Table 2: Computation of Validity of Instrument

Category of respondents	Rater 1			Rater 2			Rater 3			CVI per group	CVI
	R	NR	TT	R	NR	TT	R	NR	TT		
Students	49	02	51	47	04	51	51	00	51	0.97	**0.96**
Educators	47	04	51	47	04	51	51	00	51	0.95	
Total	**96**	**06**	**102**	**94**	**08**	**102**	**102**	**00**	**102**		

Source: Field data, 2026

Data validity was achieved through member checking, which involved the sharing of preliminary findings with participants for validation to enhance the credibility of the research because participants' perspectives were incorporated into the analysis.

3.10.2 Reliability of Instruments

The reliability of an instrument refers to its stability and consistency over time (Chhetri & Khanal, 2024). Similarly, Mugenda and Mugenda (2003) define reliability as ‘a measure of the degree to

which a research instrument yields consistent results or data after repeated trials'. Reliability was ensured by conducting a pilot study to pre-test the questionnaire items among few (38) respondents in faculty of Science at Gulu University which was not part of the study. This approach helped in identifying weaknesses in the instruments, refined and enhanced its clarity before actual study (Aithal & Aithal, 2020).

Data from pilot study was analyzed with the help of the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) to determine the internal consistence by calculating Cronbach's Coefficient alpha to be 0.91. The scale of 0.7 and above in the Cronbach's Alpha Coefficient was considered reliable to indicate adequate internal consistency of a given questionnaire (Aithal & Aithal, 2020), therefore the reliability of 0.91 confirmed that the instrument was good for this study and consistently can be used to yield more less same findings when used for future similar studies in different context. This method, unlike the others requires only a single sample for estimating reliability.

3.11 Administration Procedure

Generally, the study strictly adhered to the accepted channels, procedures and sequence of conducting research. Upon defending the proposal successfully, the researcher made some corrections, wrote a compliance report, checked for validity and reliability of instrument and obtained approval of research proposal from Gulu University, Department of Educational Management. The researcher then obtained authorizing letter from the office of Dean Faculty of Education and Humanities to officially grant the permission to proceed and start data collection. The introduction letter was used to seek consent of each and every respondent to provide confidence and authenticate the research process.

The researcher collected data from all the respondents himself and the research assistant as a mechanism to uphold the originality of research findings. Primary and secondary data on transition were collected from respondents in the second semester of 2025/2026 academic year using questionnaire. Questionnaires was administered to respondents and immediately collected upon completion. Finally, the data was analyzed, interpreted and reported accordingly for presentation.

3.12 Ethical Consideration

The researcher in line with acceptable regulations in the discipline of research, adhered to the ethical guidelines to protect respondents (Ibbett & Brittain, 2020). Before the actual data collection, the researcher acquired introduction letter from the Dean Faculty of Education and

Humanities in Gulu University to make research process official. Consent of the respondents for voluntary and confidential participation were requested, participant identities were anonymized and replaced with pseudo codes or symbols to ensure confidentiality (Bhattacherjee, 2012). Finally, the researcher paid keen attention to all ethical principles and considerations to enhance subject's trust and confidence.

3.13 Assumption

The assumption was that other than the IFs (Independent Variable), the students' demographic characteristics (Moderating Variables) was expected to also influence learners' transition (Dependent Variable). Students' demographic was controlled by strictly following the instrument with carefully selected items. It was therefore assumed that despite the influence of other factors, to a greater extent, student transition to HE is determined by institutional policies, culture and resources referred herein as institution factors.

3.14 Anticipated limitations and Delimitation of the study

Several limitations were anticipated during the planning phase of this study, primarily concerning participant engagement and data collection. The researcher anticipated that some respondents might fear participating in the study. To mitigate this and ensure confidentiality, informed consent was obtained from participants, identities were anonymized using codes, the study's purpose and procedures were clearly explained to encourage honest participation. There was an anticipated risk of losing distributed questionnaires, particularly when dealing with student respondents. To counter this, the researcher collected all completed questionnaires immediately upon execution, which minimized data loss and optimized response rates among willing participants.

3.15 Data Analysis

The study employed quantitative data analysis to understand the influence of institutional factors on learners' transition. Data from questionnaires was analysed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 26.0.

Descriptive statistical analysis tool comprising of the mean and standard deviation was used to determine the perceived levels of institutional factors and learners' transition. This analysis served as an essential first step to summarize, organize, and present raw data meaningfully before conducting inferential testing (Pallant, 2020). The mean value was interpreted as between 1.00 – 2.33 (Low), 2.34 – 3.67 (Moderate), 3.68 – 5.00 (High) (Alkharusi, 2022).

Inferential data analysis, specifically Linear regression model coefficient (r) and Multiple regression analysis were used. Linear regression model coefficient (r) was used to evaluate the strength and direction of the linear influence of individual institutional factors on learners' transition for objectives 1, 2 and 3. This analysis determines if, how, and to what level of statistical significance these variables relate (Pallant, 2007, 2020). The P value of less or equal to (0.05) is significant while the P value above (0.05) is insignificant. While, multiple regression analysis was used to determine the combined and individual influence of institutional factors on learners' transition. This was used to determine the extent to which institutional factors influence transition from secondary to higher institutions by students' demographics (Objective 4). This method is ideal as it evaluates the simultaneous overall influence of institutional factors on learners' transition, revealing how much unique variance each predictor explains (Pallant, 2020).

3.16 Dissemination of Study Findings

Dissemination of the study findings has been planned but these are yet to be implemented. Therefore, the study findings will be disseminated through diverse strategies tailored to key stakeholders to promote educational transition within Gulu City and beyond. A stakeholder's workshop will be convened, bringing together education policy makers, school administrators, university representatives and community leaders to foster collaborative dialogue to enhance institutional support for learners transitioning to HE. A public lecture will be organized at a central venue in Gulu City, targeting students, parents, educators, and the general public to raise public awareness and stimulate community-driven advocacy for smoother learners' transitions.

A focused meeting will be held with key university officials including the Academic Registrar, Dean of Students, and University Secretary to present findings and data-driven recommendations to enhance institutional responsiveness to learners' during transition process. The research will be defended in a formal Viva Voce session to explain academic rigor and validate the scholarly merit of the study and open academic dialogue on transition dynamics in Northern Uganda. Findings will be submitted to peer-reviewed journals in education to contribute to global academic discourse and a book chapter will be developed for inclusion in an edited volume on African education systems to reach audiences and policy makers seeking comparative insights across African context and inform future research.

This dissemination strategy is designed not only to inform and influence local educational stakeholders but also to position the research within broader scholarly and policy conversations on educational transition in Africa and beyond.

CHAPTER FOUR

PRESENTATION AND INTERPRETATION OF FINDINGS

4.0 Introduction

This section presents findings of the study. Its focused on (a) influence of institutional policies on learners' transition from secondary to higher education, (b) influence of institutional culture on learners' transition from secondary to higher education, (c) influence of institutional resources on learners' transition from secondary to higher education in Gulu City, and lastly (d) the extent to which institutional factors influence learners' transition from secondary to higher institutions by students' demographics.

4.1 Response rate

An assessment of the response rate was done to quantify the level of participation and estimate the representativeness of data collected before delving into data analysis. The response rate in Table 3 below was computed by dividing the number of the respondents who participated by the targeted categories of respondents in each case. The high response rate typically suggests that the findings can be more reliably generalized to the target population (Dolinski et al., 2024). Table 3 below presents response rate results.

Table 3: Response Rate

Respondents	Sample size	Frequency of response rate	Percent of response rate	Overall response rate
Students	268	260	79.3	**93.9**
Academic staff	43	34	79.1	
Administrators	17	14	82.4	
Total	**328**	**308**	**93.9**	

Source: Field data 2026

4.2 Demographic characteristics of respondents

The demographic characteristics in Table 4 below indicate that the study sample was fairly representative of respondents involved in learners' transition from secondary to higher education. The almost equal representation of males (50.2%) and females (49.8%) minimized gender bias and demonstrates that the study was gender mainstreamed. The majority of respondents were aged 23-

25 years (65.8%), implying that most students had recently competed upper secondary education and experienced transition into higher education therefore they were suitable for the study. The low proportion of persons with disabilities (4.6%) may reflect limited inclusion of such learners in higher education, highlighting the need for more inclusive institutional support systems. The religious and nationality distributions reflected the social composition of Northern Uganda, while the high proportion of single respondents (90.4%) suggests that most learners who are still pursuing education tend to delay marriage. The balanced representation across the Faculties of Agriculture and Environment (32.7%), Business and Development Studies (33.8%), and Education and Humanities (33.5%) was aimed at achieving representativeness of findings across academic disciplines. These are also the faculties with the highest student population in Gulu University (Gulu University, 2020), and were expected to have more students transitioning from secondary schools. Furthermore, the dominance of privately sponsored students (84.6%) it depicts the reality of higher education funding in Uganda where government sponsorship is limited to 4,000 students spread across all the ten public Universities (Ministry of Education and Sports, 2026), leaving the rest of the students to be privately sponsored. Lastly, the inclusion of students (84.4%), academic staff (11.4%), and administrators (4.2%) enabled the study to capture both learner and institutional perspectives regarding how institutional policies, institutional culture, and institutional resources influence successful transition from secondary to higher education.

Table 4: Student Demographic Characteristics

Item	Category	Frequency	percentage
Gender	Female	129	49.8%
	Male	130	50.2%
Age	Below 20 years	1	0.4%
	20 to 22 years	54	20.8%
	23 to 25 years	171	65.8%
	Above 25 Years	34	13.1%
Disability status	No Disability	248	95.4%
	Person with Disability	12	4.6%
Religion of Students	Catholic	110	42.3%
	Anglican	62	23.8%
	Moslem	13	5.0%
	Born Again	64	24.6%
	Others	11	4.2%

Marital status	Single	235	90.4%
	Married	21	8.1%
	Divorced	4	1.5%
	Widow	0	0.0%
	Widower	0	0.0%
Nationality	Ugandan	254	97.7%
	Non-Ugandan	6	2.3%
Faculty	Agriculture	85	32.7%
	Business	88	33.8%
	Education	87	33.5%
Sponsorship	Government	33	12.7%
	Private	220	84.6%
	Scholarship	3	1.2%
	Loan Scheme	4	1.5%
Respondents Category	Student	260	84.4%
	Academic Staff	34	11.0%
	University Administrator	14	4.6%

Source: Field Data, 2026

4.3 Institutional factors in Gulu University

Descriptive statistical analysis tool comprising of the mean and standard deviation was used to determine the perceived levels of institutional factors. This analysis served as an essential first step to summarize, organize, and present raw data meaningfully before conducting inferential testing

4.3.1 Perceptions of the students on institutional factors in Gulu University

Findings on the perceptions of the students on institutional factors in Gulu University is presented in Table 5 below. Finding showed moderate institutional culture (Mean=3.62, SD= 1.26), followed moderate institutional policies (Mean= 3.59, SD= 1.22), and lastly moderate institutional resources (Mean= 2.82, SD= 1.34). This implies that students generally agreed with most of the statements on institutional culture, policies and resources as supportive of students' transition. Items analysis revealed that orientation programmes were highly rated under both institutional policies (Mean= 4.41) and institutional culture (Mean= 4.13), suggesting that orientation plays a significant role in helping new students adapt to university life. Students also highly agreed that the enrolment policy accurately assigns students to programmes (Mean=4.18) and the students take personal responsibility for their academic success (Mean=4.09). However, there is low adequacy of campus facilities (Mean=2.04), moderate reliability of campus Wi-Fi and computer laboratories

(Mean=2.45), moderate adequacy of study spaces (Mean= 2.55), and moderate accessibility of university digital platforms (Mean=2.70), suggesting moderate resources in relation to learners' transition.

Table 5: Perceptions of the students on institutional factors in higher education

Dimensions			
Institutional Policies	**N**	**Mean**	**Stdev.**
Gulu University clearly communicates its policies to all new students.	260	3.5308	1.33378
The undergraduate admission policy is consistently applied to every applicant.	260	3.8231	1.08315
The university provides clear guidelines on steps new students must take when reporting to campus	260	3.8000	1.30872
Gulu University conducts a comprehensive orientation program for new students.	260	4.4115	.94023
The university fees policy is clearly communicated and consistently applied to all students	260	3.4192	1.35752
The attendance policy is consistently enforced across all departments.	260	3.6500	1.22577
The enrolment policy ensures that students are accurately assigned to their programmes.	260	4.1808	1.04808
The registration policy ensures straightforward process for selecting semester modules	260	3.8423	1.18637
The continuous assessment policy ensures timely feedback on academic performance	260	3.5538	1.28286
The examination policy ensures that all students are treated fairly during assessments.	260	3.1846	1.44278
The semester regulations clearly outline the requirements for moving to the next year.	260	3.5962	1.15012
Information about the student welfare policy is easily accessible to new students.	260	2.6885	1.30305
The entertainment policy clearly outlines procedures for organizing inclusive student	260	3.0462	1.26651
Total Averages for Institution Policies	**260**	**3.5944**	**1.2253**
Institutional Culture	**N**	**Mean**	**Stdev**
The university publicity channels provide clear image of the campus life.	260	3.1462	1.33911
The university actively promotes culture of inclusion, being accommodative to all	260	3.9538	1.10710
University symbols (logos and signs) are visible throughout the campus.	260	3.9385	1.18715

The physical arrangement of classrooms & libraries reflects student-centered learning.	260	3.3385	1.41996
Orientation program clearly explains university rules and campus layout	260	4.1269	1.06690
The university's mission statement is easily accessible and known to student population.	260	3.2962	1.42536
The university motto is well publicized and known to students	260	3.8769	1.28559
Most students at Gulu university believe in seeking academic help from lecturers.	260	3.0538	1.30524
Students at Gulu university take personal responsibility for their academic success.	260	4.0885	1.07797
The overall campus environment is conducive for learning	260	3.4077	1.40158
Total Averages for Institution Culture	**260**	**3.6227**	**1.2616**
Institutional Resources	**N**	**Mean**	**St.dv**
Information to locate campus facilities is available to the new students.	260	3.3192	1.39843
Library service guides are accessible to the new students.	260	3.3923	1.29744
The capacity of campus facilities is sufficient to accommodate students' enrollment	260	2.0423	1.33057
University digital platforms are accessible and user friendly to students	260	2.7000	1.29239
Campus Wi-Fi and computer laboratories are reliable for daily academic demands.	260	2.4462	1.35031
Core textbooks and journals are available / accessible when needed.	260	2.7962	1.30072
The library's online databases provide the required study materials for students to study	260	2.8731	1.24400
Recreational areas and activities are adequate to meet student needs.	260	2.7346	1.30145
Study spaces are adequate to meet student learning needs.	260	2.5462	1.44987
Students receive adequate support whenever there is trouble in using the university's student portal	260	3.3731	1.40437
Total Averages for Institution Resources	**260**	**2.8223**	**1.33696**

Source: Field Data, 2026

4.3.2 Perceptions of the University Academic Staff and Administrators on the institutional factors and learners' transition.

Findings on the perceptions of the university academic staff and administrators on the institutional factors on learners' in Gulu City were revealed in Table 6 below. Finding revealed high institutional policies (Mean=4.07, SD= 0.95), followed by high institutional culture (Mean=3.86, SD= 1.05). Institutional resources were moderate (Mean=3.24, SD= 1.15). Items analysis revealed that orientation programmes were rated high (Mean=4.42), suggesting that orientation is accorded

high priority in Gulu University institutional life. However, there is moderate adequacy of campus facilities (Mean=2.50), moderate study spaces (Mean=2.75), moderate reliability of Wi-Fi and computer laboratories (Mean=2.92), suggesting moderate adequacy of institutional resources.

Table 6: Perceptions of the University Academic Staff and Administrators on the institutional factors and learners' transition

Dimensions			
Institutional Policies	**N**	**Mean**	**Std**
Gulu University clearly communicates its policies to all new students.	48	4.2083	.92157
The undergraduate admission policy is consistently applied to every applicant.	48	4.3125	.97099
The university provides clear guidelines on how new students take when reporting to campus	48	4.1667	.97486
Gulu University conducts a comprehensive orientation program for new students.	48	4.4167	.82083
The university fees policy is clearly communicated and consistently applied to all students	48	4.2083	1.05100
The attendance policy is consistently enforced across all departments.	48	3.8333	1.03827
The enrolment policy ensures that students are accurately assigned to their specific programmes.	48	4.1667	.83369
The registration policy ensures a straightforward process for selecting modules.	48	4.1042	.77842
The continuous assessment policy ensures timely feedback on academic performance of students.	48	3.8958	.88100
The examination policy ensures that all students are treated fairly during assessments.	48	4.2708	.98369
The semester regulations clearly outline the requirements for moving to the next academic year.	48	4.2708	.91651
Information about the student welfare policy is easily accessible to new students.	48	3.4792	1.14835
The entertainment policy clearly outlines the procedures for organizing inclusive student activities.	48	3.5625	1.02949
Total Averages for Institutional Policies	**48**	**4.0689**	**0.9499**
Institutional Culture	**N**	**Mean**	**St.dv**
The university publicity channels provide clear image of the campus life.	48	3.5208	1.11068
The university actively promotes a culture of inclusion, being accommodative to all students.	48	4.1667	.93019
University symbols (logos and signs) are visible throughout the campus.	48	3.9167	1.10768
The physical arrangement of classrooms and libraries reflects a priority for student-centered learning.	48	3.4375	1.21876
Orientation program clearly explains university rules and campus layout	48	4.4167	.79448

The university's mission statement is easily accessible and known to student population.	48	3.7292	1.34859
The university motto is well publicized and known to students	48	4.2708	.93943
Most students at Gulu university believe in seeking academic help from lecturers.	48	3.5417	1.07106
Students at Gulu university take personal responsibility for their academic success.	48	3.7708	.99444
The overall campus environment is conducive for learning	48	3.8750	1.02366
Total Averages for Institutional Culture	**48**	**3.8646**	**1.0539**
Institutional Resources	**N**	**Mean**	**St.dv**
Information to locate campus facilities (offices, lecture rooms, library, laboratories) is available to the new students.	48	3.8125	1.12337
Library service guides are accessible to the new students.	48	3.8750	.91384
The capacity of campus facilities is sufficient to accommodate the number of students enrolled	48	2.5000	1.28824
University digital platforms are accessible and user friendly to students	48	3.2708	1.21585
Campus Wi-Fi and computer laboratories are reliable for daily academic demands.	48	2.9167	1.28549
Core textbooks and journals are available / accessible when needed.	48	3.3333	1.01758
The library's online databases provide the required study materials for students' study programme.	48	3.3125	1.18781
Recreational areas and activities are adequate to meet student needs.	48	2.9375	1.15604
Study spaces are adequate to meet student learning needs.	48	2.7500	1.26323
Students receive adequate support whenever there is trouble in using the university's student portal	48	3.6667	1.09803
Total Averages for Institutional Resources	**48**	**3.2375**	**1.15495**

Source: Field Data, 2026

4.4 Perceptions on learners' transition from secondary to higher education at Gulu University

Descriptive statistical analysis tool comprising of the mean and standard deviation was used to determine the perceived levels of learners' transition. This analysis served as an essential first step to summarize, organize, and present raw data meaningfully before conducting inferential testing

4.4.1 Perceptions of the students on transition from secondary to higher education.

Findings on the perceptions of the students on learners' transition from secondary to higher education at Gulu University was presented in the Table 7 below. Findings revealed that educational transition had the high mean score (Mean=3.99, SD= 1.08), followed by high psychological transition (Mean=3.90, SD= 1.13) and lastly transition also had high mean score

(Mean=3.89, SD= 1.05). This implies that students generally agreed that they were adapting well educationally, psychologically, and socially to university life. Items analysis for educational transition that were rated highly include consistent improvement on learners' academic performance as they progress from semester one to another (Mean=4.26), having a clear understanding of academic requirements (Mean=4.09), successfully adapted to university teaching methods (Mean=4.01) and being able to manage time effectively to meet assignment deadline (Mean=4.02), most students have developed effective study habits that suit university-level learning (Mean=3.91). Items analysis for social transition rated highly by students include building meaningful friendship with other students (Mean=4.34), feeling of a strong sense of belonging (Mean=4.15), and having confidence that Gulu university is the right institution for their studies (Mean=4.12), feel like a valued member of the university community (Mean=3.79). Psychological transition rated highly on the following items were: feeling academically prepared to start university education (Mean=4.08), students are certain that they will graduate with the results they want (Mean=4.08), and maintain the study routine despite personal challenges. However, interaction with lecturers regarding academic needs (Mean=3.08), knowledge of where to find academic support when facing challenges (Mean=3.61), and satisfaction that examination results reflect academic effort (Mean=3.65) were rate moderate, suggesting moderate academic support and lecturer-student interaction.

Table 7: Perceptions of the students on transition from secondary to higher education.

Dimensions			
Psychological Transition	**N**	**Mean**	**Std. Dev**
I felt academically prepared to start my degree at Gulu University	260	4.0772	1.13857
I am confident in my ability to use the digital tools required for my studies	260	3.8115	1.10416
I am able to maintain my study routine despite personal challenges	260	4.0000	1.05083
I know where to find the right academic support when I face a challenge	260	3.6077	1.18873
I am certain I will graduate with the results I want.	260	4.0769	1.11234
I feel equipped with the necessary skills to complete my academic assignments	260	3.8077	1.16311
Total Averages for psychological Transition	**260**	**3.8968**	**1.12629**
Social Transition	**N**	**Mean**	**Std. Dev**
I have built meaningful friendships with other students at this university	260	4.3423	.88430
I feel like a valued member of the university community.	260	3.7962	1.05486
I have a reliable support network of peers on campus	260	3.8308	1.07365

I feel a strong sense of belonging within my student group	260	4.1538	.94613
I find it easy to interact with lecturers regarding my academic needs	260	3.0808	1.36885
I am confident that Gulu University is the right institution for me	260	4.1231	1.00205
Total Averages for Social Transition	**260**	**3.8878**	**1.05497**
Educational Transition	**N**	**Mean**	**Std. Dev**
I have a clear understanding of the academic requirements for my course.	260	4.0885	.98828
I have successfully adapted to the university teaching methods.	260	4.0115	1.01906
I am able to manage my time effectively to meet all assignment deadlines.	260	4.0231	1.09025
I have developed effective study habits that suit university-level learning.	260	3.9115	1.03783
I am satisfied that my examination results reflect my academic efforts.	260	3.6500	1.37707
I am consistently improving my academic performance as I progress in my studies from one semester to another.	260	4.2577	.98195
Total Averages for Educational Transition	**260**	**3.9904**	**1.08241**

Source: Field Data, 2026

4.4.2 Perceptions of the University Academic Staff and Administrators on learners' transition from secondary to higher education.

Generally, findings on the perceptions of the university academic staff and administrators on learners' transition from secondary to higher education at Gulu University are shown in Table 8 below. Finding shows that social transition had the high mean score (Mean=3.95, SD= 0.87), followed by education transition with high mean score (Mean=3.86, SD= 0.95). While, psychological transition had moderate mean score (Mean=3.62, SD= 1.01). This implies that University staff generally agreed that learners are highly and moderately adapting to university life socially, educationally and psychologically respectively. Items analysis for educational transition rated highly include assessment outcomes aligning with academic effort and level of student participation (Mean=4.02), student demonstrate clear understanding of academic requirements of their courses (Mean=3.93), students successfully adapt to the diverse teaching methods and assignment deadlines (Mean=3.89), these items contributed to the high average mean score achieved for the educational transition. Social transition rated highly include; most students are confident that Gulu University is the right institution for their studies (Mean=4.15), university fosters a culture where everyone feel respected (Mean=4.00), students establish effective peer support network (Mean=3.97), and students demonstrate high degree of unity and belonging within their cohort (Mean=3.89). Psychological transition rated highly were most students are optimistic to graduate with better results (Mean=3.97), most students possess skills necessary to complete

their academic assignments (Mean=3.73) and most students know where to find academic support (Mean=3.58). However, the use of digital tools for studies were rated moderate mean score (Mean=3.33), and moderate academic readiness upon joining university (Mean=3.52). This suggests moderate challenges in psychological adjustments among students.

Table 8: Perceptions of the University Academic Staff and Administrators on learners' transition from secondary to higher education.

Dimensions			
Psychological Transition	**N**	**Mean**	**St.dv**
Most students demonstrate academic readiness upon starting their studies at the University	48	3.5208	1.16673
Most students are confident in using digital tools required for their studies	48	3.3333	1.05857
Students demonstrate the resilience necessary to maintain academic consistency despite personal challenges.	48	3.5833	.98571
Students know where to find the right academic support when faced with a challenge.	48	3.5833	1.04847
Most students are optimistic to graduate with better results.	48	3.9792	.95627
Students possess the necessary skills to complete their academic assignments	48	3.7292	.84399
Total Averages for psychological Transition	**48**	**3.6215**	**1.00996**
Social Transition	**N**	**Mean**	**St.dv**
There is evidence of strong peer-to-peer social integration within the student population.	48	3.8542	.96733
The university environment fosters a culture where students feel respected and valued.	48	4.0000	.82514
Students establish effective peer support networks that enhance their campus experience.	48	3.9792	.72902
Students demonstrate a high degree of unity and belonging within their respective cohorts	48	3.8958	.90482
Students engage comfortably with academic staff regarding their learning needs	48	3.8542	.92229
Most students are confident that Gulu University is the right institution for their studies.	48	4.1458	.87494
Total Averages for Social Transition	**48**	**3.9549**	**0.87059**
Education Transition	**N**	**Mean**	**St.dv**

Students demonstrate clear understanding of the specific academic requirements of their courses.	48	3.9375	.86063
Students successfully adapt to diverse teaching & learning methodologies used at the university.	48	3.8750	.95928
Students demonstrate effective time management in meeting strict academic & assignment deadlines.	48	3.6042	1.04657
Students transition effectively from secondary-level study habits to independent university learning.	48	3.8125	.93754
Assessment outcomes generally align with the academic effort and participation levels of the students.	48	4.0208	.88701
Students show consistent improvement in their academic performance as they progress in a semester	48	3.9167	1.00707
Total Averages for Education Transition	**48**	**3.8611**	**0.94968**

Source: Field Data, 2026

4.5 The influence of institutional policies on learners' transition from secondary to higher education

Inferential statistics, specifically Linear regression model coefficient(r) was used to evaluate the strength and direction of the linear influence of the individual institutional policy on learners' transition are presented in the section that follow.

4.5.1 Influence of institutional policies on learners' transition based on students' views.

The influence of institutional policies on learners' transition from secondary to higher education is indicated in Table 9. Findings from regression revealed that orientation policy for new students (r= 0.10, P = 0.006), enforcement of attendance policy across departments (r= 0.06, P = 0.038), registration policy for selecting semester modules (r= 0.08, P = 0.003), continuous assessment policy providing timely feedback (r= 0.11, P = 0.000), and entertainment policy for organizing inclusive student activities (P = 0.000) had a significant positive influence on learners' transition process. This means that the more the university strengthens orientation programmes, enforces attendance policies, simplifies registration processes, provides timely academic feedback, and promotes inclusive student activities, the better the learners' transition into higher education. However, other institutional policy factors such as communication of university policies to new students (r= 0.20, P = 0.440), undergraduate admission policy (r= 0.00, P = 0.888), providing guidelines for new students (r= 0.04, P = 0.148), university fees policy (r= -0.00, P = 0.897), enrolment policy (r= 0.01, P = 0.766), examination policy (r= -0.04, P = 0.101), semester

regulations (r= -0.19, P = 0.197), and accessibility of student welfare policy information (r= -0.24, P- 0.376) did not have a statistically significant influence on learners' transition process. Overall, the regression model revealed that institutional policies explained 32.7% (R^2 = 0.327, P=0.000) of the variation in learners' transition, implying that institutional policies moderately contribute to learners' successful transition from secondary to higher education.

Table 9: Influence of institutional policies on learners' transition from secondary to higher education based on students' views.

Coefficients[a]					
	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		Collinearity Statistics
Independent variable (Institutional Policies)	B	Std. Error	Beta	P-value	VIF
Gulu University clearly communicates its policies to all new students.	.020	.026	.045	.440	1.245
The undergraduate admission policy is consistently applied to every applicant.	.004	.032	.008	.888	1.223
The university provides clear guidelines on the steps new students must take when reporting to campus for the first time	.039	.027	.086	.148	1.296
Gulu University conducts a comprehensive orientation program for new students.	.104	.038	.164	.006	1.292
The university fees policy is clearly communicated and consistently applied to all students	-.003	.026	-.008	.897	1.271
The attendance policy is consistently enforced across all departments.	.060	.029	.124	.038	1.291
The enrolment policy ensures that students are accurately assigned to their specific programmes.	.011	.036	.019	.766	1.459
The registration policy ensures a straightforward process for selecting modules every semester.	.089	.030	.177	.003	1.282
The continuous assessment policy ensures timely feedback on academic performance of students.	.116	.028	.249	.000	1.295
The examination policy ensures that all students are treated fairly during assessments.	-.039	.024	-.096	.101	1.232
The semester regulations clearly outline the requirements for moving to the next academic year.	.038	.030	.074	.197	1.202
Information about the student welfare policy is easily accessible to new students.	-.024	.027	-.053	.376	1.315
The entertainment policy clearly outlines the procedures for organizing inclusive student activities.	.106	.028	.226	.000	1.280
(Constant)	1.950	.206		.000	

R Square	.327				
The standard error of the estimate	.502				
The regression significance	.000				

Dependent Variable: Learners Transition

Source: Field Data, 2026

4.5.2 Influence of institutional policies on learners' transition based on academic staff and administrators' views.

The influence of institutional policies on learners' transition from secondary to higher education is indicated in Table 10 below. Findings from regression revealed that semester regulations clearly outlining the requirements for moving to the next academic year (r= 0.28, P = 0.043) had a significant positive influence on learners' transition process. This means that when semester regulations are clearly communicated and understood, learners are more likely to adjust successfully to higher education. Conversely institutional policy factors such as communication of university policies to new students (r= 0.02, P = 0.890), undergraduate admission policy (r= 0.05, P = 0.692), providing clear guidelines for new students (r= 0.04, P = 0.791), orientation policy (r= -0.08, P = 0.557), university fees policy (r= -0.17, P = 0.067), attendance policy (r= -0.04, P = 0.630), enrolment policy (r= 0.23, P = 0.061), registration policy (r= 0.02, P = 0.857), continuous assessment policy (r= 0.11, P = 0.234), examination policy (r= 0.03, P = 0.779), accessibility of student welfare policy information (r= 0.04, P = 0.713), and entertainment policy (r= -0.04, P = 0.717) did not have a statistically significant influence on learners' transition process. Overall, the regression model revealed that institutional policies explains 48.9% (R^2= 0.489, P=0.016) of the variation in learners' transition, implying that institutional policies substantially contribute to learners' successful transition from secondary to higher education.

Table 10: Influence of institutional policies on learners' transition from secondary to higher education based on academic and administrators' views.

Independent variable (Institutional Policies)	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	P-Value	Collinearity Statistics
	B	Std. Error	Beta		VIF
Gulu University clearly communicates its policies to all new students.	.023	.163	.035	.890	4.284
The undergraduate admission policy is consistently applied to every applicant.	.048	.120	.079	.692	2.586
The university provides clear guidelines on the steps new students must take when reporting to campus for the first time	.036	.135	.060	.791	3.320
Gulu University conducts a comprehensive orientation program for new students.	-.083	.139	-.115	.557	2.487
The university fees policy is clearly communicated & consistently applied to all	-.174	.092	-.310	.067	1.784
The attendance policy is consistently enforced across all departments.	-.041	.083	-.071	.630	1.428
The enrolment policy ensures that students are accurately assigned to their specific programmes.	.232	.120	.327	.061	1.902
The registration policy ensures a straightforward process for selecting modules.	.023	.128	.031	.857	1.903
The continuous assessment policy ensures timely feedback on academic performance of students.	.112	.092	.167	.234	1.264
The examination policy ensures that all students are treated fairly during assessments.	.031	.111	.052	.779	2.270
The semester regulations clearly outline the requirements for moving to the next academic year.	.284	.135	.440	.043	2.932
Information about the student welfare policy is easily accessible to new students.	.035	.093	.067	.713	2.189
The entertainment policy clearly outlines the procedures for organizing inclusive student activities.	-.036	.099	-.063	.717	1.983
(Constant)	1.776	.662		.011	
R Square	.489				
The standard error of the estimate	.497				
The regression significance	.016				

Dependent Variable: Learners' Transition$_a$

Source: Field Data, 2026

4.6 Influence of Institutional culture on learners' transition from secondary to higher education

Inferential statistics, specifically Linear regression model coefficient(r), that was used to evaluate the strength and direction of the linear influence of individual institutional culture on learners' transition are presented in the section that follow.

4.6.1 The influence of institutional culture on learners' transition from secondary to higher education based on student views.

The influence of institutional culture on learners' transition from secondary to higher education is indicated in Table 11 below. Findings from the regression revealed that promotion of a culture of inclusion and accommodation of students (r= 0.09, P = 0.003), orientation programmes explaining university rules and campus layout (r= 0.010, P = 0.002), publicity of the university motto (r= 0.05, P = 0.038), students seeking academic help from lecturers (r= 0.08, P = 0.002), and students taking personal responsibility for their academic success (r= 0.10, P = 0.001) had a significant positive influence on learners' transition process. This means that the more the university promotes inclusion, strengthens orientation programmes, encourages lecturer-student academic interaction, and nurtures personal responsibility among students, the better the learners' transition into higher education. However, other institutional culture elements such as university publicity channels providing a clear image of the campus life (r= 0.04, P = 0.162), visibility of university symbols and signs (r= 0.03, P = 0.337), classroom and library arrangements reflecting student-centered learning (r= 0.02, P = 0.344), accessibility of the university mission statement (r= -0.00, P = 0.966), and the conduciveness of the overall campus environment for learning (r- 0.04, P = 0.141) did not have a statistically significant influence on learners' transition from secondary to higher education. Overall, the regression model revealed that institutional culture explains 37.1% (R^2= 0.371, P= 0.000) of the variation in learners' transition.

Table 11: Influence of institutional culture on learners' transition based on students' views

Independent variable (Institutional Culture)	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	Sig.	Collinearity Statistics (VIF)
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
The university publicity channels provide clear image of the campus life.	.037	.026	.083	.162	1.384
The university actively promotes culture of inclusion, being accommodative to us	.090	.030	.167	.003	1.226
University symbols (logos and signs) are visible throughout the campus.	.028	.029	.056	.337	1.321
The classrooms arrangement, libraries reflect priority for student-centered learning.	.023	.024	.055	.344	1.343
Orientation program clearly explains university rules and campus layout	.097	.032	.174	.002	1.266
The university's mission statement is easily accessible & known to student population.	-.001	.026	-.003	.966	1.480
The university motto is well publicized and known to students	.058	.028	.124	.038	1.405
Most students at Gulu university believe in seeking academic help from lecturers.	.080	.026	.175	.002	1.263
Students at Gulu university take personal responsibility for their academic success.	.102	.030	.185	.001	1.182
The overall campus environment is conducive for learning	.036	.025	.085	.141	1.325
(Constant)	1.859				
R Square	.371				
The standard error of the estimate	.482				
The regression significance	.000				

Dependent Variable: Learners_Transition[a]

Source: Field Data, 2026

4.6.2 The influence of institutional culture on learners' transition from secondary to higher education based on Academic staff and university administrators' views.

The influence of institutional culture on learners' transition from secondary to higher education is indicated in Table 12. Findings from the regression revealed that orientation programmes clearly explaining university rules and campus layout (r= 0.25, P = 0.020) and students taking personal responsibility for their academic success (r= 0.25, P = 0.005) had a significant positive influence

on learners' transition process. This means that effective orientation programmes and students' personal commitment to academic success greatly enhance learners' adjustment and transition into higher education. However, other institutional culture factors such as university publicity channels providing a clear image of campus life (r= -0.08, P = 0.326), promotion of a culture of inclusion (r= 0.16, P = 0.112), visibility of university symbols and signs (r= -0.01, P = 0.897), classroom arrangement reflecting student-centered learning (r= 0.01, P = 0.929), accessibility of the university mission statement (r= -0.04, P = 0.577), publicity of the university motto (r= -0.02, P = 0.797), students seeking academic help from lecturers (r= -0.01, P = 0.890), and the conduciveness of the overall campus environment for learning (r= 0.08, P = 0.223) did not have a statistically significant influence on learners' transition process. Overall, regression model revealed that institutional culture explained 60.3% (R^2= 0.603) of the variation in learners' transition, implying that institutional culture strongly contributes to learners' successful transition from secondary to higher education, although only orientation programmes and students' personal responsibility showed statistically significant individual effects.

Table 12: Influence of institutional culture on learners' transition based on academic staff and administrators' views.

	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		
Independent variable (Institutional Culture)	B	Std. Error	Beta	P-Value	Collinearity Statistics (VIF)
The university publicity channels provide clear image of the campus life.	-.078	.078	-.147	.326	2.029
The university actively promotes a culture of inclusion, being accommodative to all	.155	.095	.243	.112	2.082
University symbols (logos and signs) are visible throughout the campus.	-.009	.068	-.017	.897	1.506
The classrooms arrangement reflects priority for student-centered learning.	.006	.068	.012	.929	1.827
Orientation program clearly explains university rules and campus layout	.249	.102	.335	.020	1.766

The university's mission statement is easily accessible and known to all students	-.036	.063	-.081	.577	1.943
The university motto is well publicized and known to students	-.023	.087	-.036	.797	1.791
Most students at Gulu university believe in seeking academic help from lecturers.	-.011	.078	-.020	.890	1.872
Students at Gulu university take personal responsibility for their academic success.	.245	.081	.413	.005	1.755
The overall campus environment is conducive for learning	.085	.068	.147	.223	1.307
(Constant)	1.373				
R Square	.603				
The standard error of the estimate	.419				
The regression significance	.000				

Dependent Variable: Learners_Transition[a]

Source: Field Data, 2026

4.7 Influence of institutional resources on learners' transition from secondary to higher education

Inferential statistics, specifically Linear regression model coefficient(r), that was used to evaluate the strength and direction of the influence of the individual institutional resources and learners' transition are presented in the section that follow.

4.7.1 Influence of institutional resources on learners' transition based on students' views.

The influence of institutional resources on learners' transition is indicated in Table 13. Findings from regression revealed that availability of information to help new students locate campus facilities (r= 0.08, P = 0.007), accessibility of library service guides (r= 0.06, P = 0.045), and adequate support whenever students face challenges using the university student portal (r= 0.10, P = 0.000) had a significant positive influence on learners' transition process. This means that the more students are guided on campus facilities, supported in accessing library services, and assisted in using online systems, the better their transition into higher education. However, other institutional resource elements such as adequacy of campus facilities (r= 0.00, P = 0.988), accessibility and user-friendliness of university digital platforms (r= -0.01, P = 0.814), reliability of campus Wi-Fi and computer laboratories (r= 0.01, P = 0.770), availability of textbooks and journals (r= 0.01, P = 0.618), accessibility of library online databases (r= 0.03, P = 0.404), adequacy of recreational areas and activities (r= 0.05, P = 0.150), and adequacy of study spaces

(r= -0.02, P = 0.599) did not have a statistically significant influence on learners' transition process. Overall, regression model revealed that institutional resources explained 60.3% (R^2 = 0.603) of the variation in learners' transition, implying that institutional resources strongly contribute to learners' transition from secondary to higher education, although only campus guidance information, library service accessibility, and support for using the student portal showed statistically significant individual effects.

Table 13: Influence of institutional resources on learners' transition based on students' views.

Independent variable (Institutional Resources)	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	P. Value	Collinearity Statistics (VIF)
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
Information to locate campus facilities are available to the new students.	.077	.028	.180	.007	1.415
Library service guides are accessible to the new students.	.060	.030	.130	.045	1.335
The capacity of campus facilities is sufficient to accommodate all the students enrolled	.000	.029	.001	.988	1.345
University digital platforms are accessible and user friendly to students	-.007	.031	-.016	.814	1.476
Campus Wi-Fi and computer laboratories are reliable for daily academic demands.	.009	.029	.019	.770	1.409
Core textbooks and journals are available / accessible when needed.	.014	.029	.031	.618	1.253
The library's online databases provide required study materials for students' study programme.	.025	.030	.053	.404	1.297
Recreational areas and activities are adequate to meet student needs.	.047	.032	.102	.150	1.595
Study spaces are adequate to meet student learning needs.	-.016	.030	-.038	.599	1.659
Students receive adequate support whenever there is trouble in using the university's student portal	.098	.027	.231	.000	1.341
(Constant)	2.934				
R Square	.603				
The standard error of the estimate	.534				
The regression significance	.000				

Dependent Variable: Learners_Transition[a]

Source: Field Data, 2026

4.7.2 Influence of institutional resources on learners' transition from secondary to higher education based on academic staff and administrators' views.

The influence of institutional resources on learners' transition from secondary to higher education is indicated in Table 14. Findings from the perceptions of university academic staff and administrators revealed that accessibility of library service guides to new students (r= 0.22, P = 0.027), availability and accessibility of core textbooks and journals when needed (r= 0.25, P = 0.003), and adequate support whenever students face challenges using the university student portal or online system (r= 0.15, P = 0.039) had a significant positive influence on learners' transition process. This means that the more students are supported through accessible library services, adequate learning materials, and assistance in using online systems, the better their transition into higher education. However, other institutional resource factors such as availability of information to locate campus facilities (r= -0.07, P = 0.426), adequacy of campus facilities to accommodate students (r= -0.04, P = 0.542), accessibility and user-friendliness of university digital platforms (r= -0.05, P = 0.565), reliability of campus Wi-Fi and computer laboratories (r= 0.02, P = 0.848), accessibility of library online databases (r= -0.15, P = 0.845), adequacy of recreational areas and activities (r= 0.05, P = 0.576), and adequacy of study spaces (r= 0.06, P = 0.385) did not have a statistically significant influence on learners' transition process. Overall, regression model revealed that institutional resources explained 47.3% (R^2= 0.473) of the variation in learners' transition, implying that institutional resources moderately contribute to learners' successful adjustment from secondary to higher education, although only library services, availability of learning materials, and support for using online systems showed statistically significant individual effects.

Table 14: Influence of institutional resources on learners' transition based on academic staff and administrators' views.

Independent variable (Institutional Resources)	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		
	B	Std. Error	Beta	Sig.	Collinearity Statistics (VIF)
(Constant)	1.772	.411		.000	
Information to locate campus facilities (offices, lecture rooms, library, laboratories) is available to the new students.	-.066	.082	-.126	.426	1.725
Library service guides are accessible to the new students.	.216	.094	.334	.027	1.487
The capacity of campus facilities (lecture halls, etc.) are sufficient to accommodate the number of students enrolled	-.043	.070	-.094	.542	1.646
University digital platforms are accessible and user friendly to students	-.049	.085	-.102	.565	2.165
Campus Wi-Fi and computer laboratories are reliable for daily academic demands.	.015	.077	.032	.848	1.959
Core textbooks and journals are available / accessible when needed.	.254	.081	.438	.003	1.353
The library's online databases provide required study materials for students' study programme.	-.015	.078	-.031	.845	1.741
Recreational areas and activities are adequate to meet student needs.	.049	.088	.097	.576	2.065
Study spaces are adequate to meet student learning needs.	.063	.072	.136	.385	1.671
Students receive adequate support whenever there is trouble in using the university's student portal or online system.	.155	.072	.288	.039	1.274
(Constant)	1.772				
R Square	.473				
The standard error of the estimate	.483				
The regression significance	.004				

Dependent Variable: Learners _Transition[a]

Source: Field Data, 2026

4.8 Influence of Institutional factors on learners' transition by students' demographics.

Multiple regression analysis was used to determine the extent to which institutional factors influence transition from secondary to higher institutions by students' demographics. This method was ideal as it evaluated the simultaneous overall influence of institutional factors on learners' transition based on students' demographics (model 1), revealing how much unique variance each predictor explains upon introducing demographic variables (model 2).

4.8.1 The extent to which institutional factors influence learners' transition from secondary to higher institutions by students' demographics

The extent to which institutional factors influence learners' transition from secondary to higher institutions by students' demographics was investigated and illustrated in Table 15. Findings from the multiple regression revealed that institutional policies (r= 0.216, P = 0.000) and institutional culture (0.336, P = 0.000) had a significant positive influence on learners' transition from secondary to higher education. This means that effective institutional policies and a supportive institutional culture greatly enhance learners' transition into higher education. However, institutional resources (r= 0.053, P = 0.243) did not have a statistically significant influence on learners' transition in Model 1.

When students' demographic characteristics were introduced in Model 2, institutional policies (r= 0.213, P = 0.001) and institutional culture (r= 0.352, P = 0.000) remained statistically significant predictors of learners' transition, while institutional resources (r= 0.046, P = 0.321) remained insignificant. This implies that even after controlling for demographic factors, institutional policies and culture continued to play a major role in influencing learners' transition process.

Findings also revealed that demographic characteristics such as gender (P > 0.05), age (P >0.05), disability status (P > 0.05), religion (P > 0.05), marital status (P > 0.05) and country of origin (P > 0.05) did not have a statistically significant influence on learners' transition process. This suggests that learners' transition at Gulu University is influenced to a greater extent by institutional factors but not students' demographic characteristics.

Table 15: Influence of institutional factors on learners' transition from secondary to higher institutions by students' demographics.

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	P Values	Collinearity Statistics (VIF)
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	1.778	.186		.000	
	Institutional Policies	.216	.061	.221	.000	1.581
	Institutional Culture	.336	.059	.404	.000	2.012
	Institutional Resources	.053	.045	.073	.243	1.593
2	(Constant)	1.654	.244		.000	
	Institutional Policies	.213	.063	.218	.001	1.650
	Institutional Culture	.352	.060	.423	.000	2.097
	Institutional Resources	.046	.046	.063	.321	1.621
	Gender of students	.071	.063	.060	.258	1.123
	Age of the students	-.039	.055	-.039	.475	1.178
	Disability status	-.050	.147	-.018	.733	1.081
	Religion of Students	.029	.021	.069	.173	1.042
	student marital status	.040	.087	.024	.651	1.129
	Country of origin	.007	.210	.002	.974	1.138

Dependent Variable: Learners Transition
Source: Field Data, 2026

4.9 Summary of Major Findings

This section presents the major findings based on the four specific objectives and research questions of the study.

4.9.1 Institutional policies have a highly significant, positive influence on learners' transitions. Policies explain transition success by 32.7% (R^2 = 0.327, P = 0.000) for students, and 48.9% (R^2 = 0.489, P = 0.016) for academic staff and university administrators. Students identified five policy areas that positively influence learners' transition: Orientation policy (P = 0.006), Attendance enforcement (P = 0.038), Module registration (P = 0.003), Continuous Assessment (CA) feedback (P = 0.000), and Inclusive entertainment (P = 0.000). Conversely, university staff and administrators identified semester progression regulations (P = 0.043) as the only predictor of learners' transition from secondary to higher education.

4.9.2 Institutional culture is a highly powerful predictor of student transition success. Culture explains 37.1 % of transition variance (R^2= 0.371, P = 0.000) for students and 60.3% (R^2

= 0.603, P = 0.000) for academic staff and administrators. The students data identified five vital cultural aspects that actively promoted their transition such as the inclusive culture (P = 0.003), orientation program (P = 0.002), publicity of the university motto (P = 0.038), proactive help-seeking from lecturers (P = 0.002), and taking personal responsibility for academic success (P = 0.001). while academic staff and administrators identified only two cultural practices with statistical significance specifically orientation program (P = 0.020) and student personal responsibility (P = 0.005).

4.9.3 Institutional resources have positive and significant influence on learners' transition success. Resources explains 60.3% of learners' transition success for students (R^2 = 0.603, P = 0.000) and 47.3% for academic staff and administrators (R^2 = 0.473, P = 0.004). Importantly, both students and university staff revealed that capacity of campus facilities, Wi-Fi reliability, and computer laboratories were statistical insignificant. However, the two groups diverged in opinion; Students agreed that information to locate campus facilities is a significant predictor of their transition (P = 0.007). Contrarily, the university staff disagreed (P = 0.426).

4.9.4 The result from multiple regression analysis indicate that institutional culture is the strongest predictor of learners' transition (Beta = 0.423, P = 0.000), followed by institutional policies (Beta = 0.218, P = 0.001), while institutional resources (Beta = 0.063, P = 0.321) had the a minimal influence on learners transition. The findings also reveal that learners' transition from secondary education to Gulu University is driven more by institutional factors, rendering students' demographic backgrounds statistically insignificant in this process.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMMENDATIONS

5.0: Introduction

This chapter presents the discussion of findings, conclusions, and recommendations drawn from the study regarding how institutional factors influence the transition of learners from secondary to higher education in Gulu City. Section 5.1 discusses the empirical results based specific objectives. Finally, Sections 5.2 and 5.3 present the conclusions and recommendations aimed at enhancing learners' transition to higher level of education.

5.1 Discussion of findings

This section presents the discussion of study findings based on the objectives of the study (a) to examine the influence of institutional policies on learners' transition from secondary to higher education in Gulu City, (b) to investigate the influence of institutional culture on learners' transition from secondary to higher education in Gulu City, (c) to explore the influence of institutional resources on learners' transition from secondary to higher education in Gulu City, and lastly (c) to determine the extent to which institutional factors influence learners' transition from secondary to higher institutions of learning by students' demographics.

5.1.1 Influence of institutional policies on learners' transition from secondary to higher education

The study findings reveal that institutional policies have a statistically significant, positive influence on learners' transition from secondary to higher education. This collective policy influence is clearly evident in both students and university staff perceptions. However, the data reveals a sharp divergence between how students and university staff perceive policy effectiveness. Students identified daily operational and social policies as the top drivers of transition outcome, specifically highlighting continuous assessment feedback, inclusive entertainment, registration policy, orientation policy, and attendance enforcement policy. In contrast, university staff and administrators dismissed the above policy factors pointed by students but pointed semester regulation policy ($P = 0.043$) as the only predictor of transition success. This divergence exposes a critical policy gap within the university's policy framework.

Academic staff evaluate transition success through long-term semester regulations, while new students are focused more on policies that support their psychological, social and educational

transition. For instance, when a university consistently enforces a continuous assessment policy that ensures timely feedback, it provides psychological support by allowing students to understand their academic progress early, a clear registration policy eliminates administrative frustration, comprehensive orientation serve as critical policies that minimize social differences, transforming an intimidating institution into an approachable learning environment.

The findings are consistent with Otundo (2024), who found that institutional policies significantly influence student retention, engagement, and academic success in Kenyan universities. Similarly, Osei (2024) revealed that universities in Ghana with clear and supportive policies create environments that promote students' adaptation and achievement. This view is supported by Ssempebwa et al (2018) who indicated that flexible and well-implemented institutional policies improve students' access, retention, and progression within higher education institutions, a study conducted in Makerere University.

The findings further mirror contextual realities as reflected in Gulu University Strategic Plan 2020/21-2024/25 (Gulu University, 2020), which emphasizes equitable access to quality higher education, effective student support services, policy development, and improved teaching and learning systems. The strategic plan identifies guidance and counselling, student welfare, policy review, and academic quality assurance as important interventions aimed at enhancing students' educational experiences and outcomes. These institutional commitments of Gulu University appear to explain why students of Gulu University generally reported positive transition experiences. The findings also align with the Gulu University ICT Policy (2023), which emphasizes accessible ICT services, continuous technical support, integrated information systems, and efficient service delivery. Such policy frameworks facilitate access to academic information and support services, thereby easing learners' transition into higher education.

Although this study did not aim to test the theory, the elements of the Nicholson transition model (1990) is supported and embedded in the study. The findings support how institutional policies act as the primary condition that guide students structurally through Nicholson transition stages, during psychological, social and educational transition. Orientation policy rated highly in the findings serves as a tool to mitigate psychological challenges during encounter phase while Registration systems, semester regulations, and attendance policies guide students on how to adjust their behaviours to fit educational and social expectations during adjustment stage. The wide acceptance among students that their results are continuously improving since year one indicates

that Gulu university policies effectively facilitate a smoother progression toward the final stage of Stabilization in Nicholson transition model (De Clercq et al., 2022; Van Lamoen et al., 2024).

5.1.2 Influence of institutional culture on learners' transition from secondary to higher education

The empirical results of this study establish that institutional culture is the highest statistically significant determinant of learners' transition from secondary to higher education. Notably, cultural dimension is highly valued by university staff than students. The transition from secondary school requires entering a completely different institutional culture; how academic staff and administrators shape this environment directly determines whether a student successfully transition or experiences transition shock.

The students agreed on many aspects of institutional that actively promote their transition: an inclusive culture, orientation program, publicity of the university motto, seeking help from lecturers, and taking personal responsibility for academic success. Meanwhile the University staff agreed on two cultural aspect specifically orientation program and student personal responsibility which are significant to learners' transition. A critical analysis of the data reveals strong points of convergence between students and university staff on orientation programs and student personal responsibility. This alignment confirms that successful transition of learners from secondary to university education requires a dual effort in the sense that the university provides early cultural socialization through orientation, and learners themselves must quickly change from dependent learning habits in secondary school to independent academic accountability.

Despite these shared views, a critical divergence emerged regarding university culture, for instance, while students proved that actively seeking academic help from lecturers is significant, university staff completely disagreed that most students at Gulu university do not believe in seeking academic help from the lecturers may be due to psychological anxiety. To promote learner transition, higher education managers must encourage an inclusive university culture that actively welcomes and support new learners transitioning into higher education.

The findings aligns with a study conducted by Portillo (2023) which revealed that a welcoming environment, and creating relationships of care and trust between teachers and students are crucial for students' academic success in California State University, Monterey Bay in USA. In Turkey a study by Bayar & Karaduman (2021) also highlights that culture has a positive and strong influence on the students in terms of motivation, sense of belonging, academic achievement and

development in all respects. Lebelo (2022) revealed similar findings that institutional culture has a greater impact on the well-being of students because university is more than just a place but their home and a sound culture offer a base for commitment, sense of belonging and consistency in performance in Nelson Mandela University at Port Elizabeth in South Africa. Similarly, Wang (2016) argued that institutional culture shapes students' attitudes, behaviours, and adaptation to university life through shared values, beliefs, and expectations at Shandong University in China. Turyahikayo et al (2024) also observed that positive institutional culture promotes student commitment, participation, and educational success in selected public universities in Uganda.

Within the context of Gulu University, these findings are consistent with the university's mission of widening access to higher education. The Gulu University Strategic Plan (2020/21-2024/25) (Gulu University, 2020, p. 25) on inclusiveness, 'ensure that the university creates an environment in which any student or group of students can be and feel welcomed, respected, supported, and valued to fully participate in the attainment of university objectives'. Such institutional priorities promote social integration and support learners throughout their transition journey from secondary to higher education. The findings further align with the university's motto of "For Community Transformation," which encourages collaboration, participation, inclusiveness, and collective responsibility (Gulu University, 2020). These values appear to contribute significantly to learners' positive psychological and social transition.

These findings provide support for Nigel Nicholson's (1990) Transition Model specifically during encounter, adjustment and stabilisation stages, which embody the three dimensions of transition, that is, psychological, social, and educational. By creating an inclusive culture, the university lowers the cultural and social barriers to entry during encounter phase for instance such a time when year one students report for their first semester. The fact that students developed honest sense of belonging proves that the institutional culture successfully facilitate adjustment stage where the student's identity aligns with the new institutional environment. The university encourages student responsibility therefore helps students build confidence belongingness, commitment in the institution and maximize their learning potential in stabilisation stage. Basically, Gulu University's culture minimizes the culture shock of the transition, moving students smoothly from newcomers to fully integrated members of the academic community through orientation activities organized by the dean of students and facilitated by relevant departments and units (Gulu University, 2020). Therefore, institutional culture significantly enhances learners' psychological, social, and

educational transition by creating a supportive environment characterized by inclusiveness, belongingness, positive relationships, and shared institutional values.

5.1.3 Influence of institutional resources on learners' transition from secondary to higher education

The regression model demonstrated that institutional resources have a statistically significant influence on learners' transition from secondary to higher education. Importantly, both students and university staff reveal moderate resource adequacy in Gulu university. Resources such as capacity of campus facilities, Wi-Fi reliability, and computer laboratories were statistically not significant which confirms that resource limitation continue to hinder successful learners' transition. In addition, both students and staff converged strongly on the critical importance of student portal support, and accessible library guides which requires digital support for services such as self-enrolment, self-registration and payments. Student's successful transition depends heavily on whether the institution provides real-time portal support.

However, the divergence in opinion between students and university staff emerged. While students agreed that information to locate campus facilities as significant predictor of transition success, university staff completely disagreed. Taking the view of the student as the primary respondents, this indicates that the physical environment of higher education is intimidating to new university entrants. Therefore, simple directional guidance such as sign posts and building labels reduce anxiety that arise from being in a new learning environment, paving the way for psychological, social and educational transition. In addition, staff agreed on the availability of core textbooks and journals when needed while students disagreed. This indicates that learners during entry to the University concentrate on figuring out where their lecture rooms are located and learning how to use online registration portal.

In support, a study by Norton (2023) reveals that the availability of essential facilities (e.g., academic, residential life, athletics, recreation, student unions, libraries, and attractive campus) play a great role in promoting student satisfaction, engagement, and, ultimately academic success and retention, St. Cloud State University, Minnesota, USA. Similarly, Akenbor and Ibanichuka (2015) also found that access to libraries, learning materials, and technological resources positively affects educational outcomes in higher education institutions in Federal University, Otuoke, Nigeria. Similarly a study by Sserwanja, Nabukeera, Matovu, Bisaso (2024) reveals that classroom, library and technological facilities, have very strong positive and statistically

meaningful impact on student academic performance in Vocational institutions in Makindye division, Kampala, Uganda.

The findings about resource inadequacy in Gulu University is consistent with global education monitoring report by UNESCO (2023) which highlights that inadequate infrastructure, technical difficulties, limited access to resources, internet issues and insufficient training opportunities still hinder the effective utilization of digital tools in HE in many countries. Similarly, A study by Bileti et al (2024) highlights that many universities in Uganda, including those in Northern Uganda, lack lecture rooms and facilities like chairs, tables and notice boards; and there is also inadequate technology equipment such as computers, projectors, internet and safety devices. Frimpong et al. (2016), also found that inadequate infrastructure, overcrowded learning facilities, and limited educational resources negatively affect students' academic experiences and performance in Ghana.

The findings correspond closely with the Gulu University Strategic Plan (2020/21-2024/25) (Gulu University, 2020), which acknowledges challenges related to infrastructure development, ICT services, and growing student enrolment. The Strategic Plan specifically prioritizes expansion of lecture rooms, computer laboratories, library facilities, and ICT infrastructure to improve the quality of teaching and learning. This indicates that the resource constraints identified by respondents are challenges already recognized and being worked upon by the university. Similarly, the Gulu University ICT Policy (2023) emphasizes expansion of ICT infrastructure, improved bandwidth, enhanced digital services, user support systems, and increased accessibility of ICT resources. The policy acknowledges the importance of ICT in supporting teaching, learning, research, and administrative operations. Consequently, the concerns raised by students regarding internet connectivity, digital platforms, and access to technological resources reflect institutional challenges that the university is actively working to address.

The findings on resources availability supports Nicholson transition model (1990) specifically adjustment Stage, where learners attempt to cope with the demands of a new environment. Adequate resources facilitate successful adjustment by providing students with the tools required to learn effectively. Conversely, inadequate resources prolong adjustment difficulties and hinder successful transition (Huguenel & Conley, 2020).

Therefore, institutional resources are critical determinants of successful transition. Although learners generally adapt well due to strong inclusive university culture, improvements in

infrastructure, ICT services, libraries, study spaces, and learning facilities in higher institutions is necessary to promote learners' transition from secondary to higher education in Gulu city.

5.1.4 Influence of institutional factors on learners' transition from secondary to higher education by students' demographic characteristics

This finding reveals that learners' transition from secondary to higher education is influenced more by institutional factors rather than student demographic characteristics. When institutional variables are evaluated simultaneously, culture emerges as the highest predictor of learners' transition, followed closely by institutional policies. However, institutional resources did not have a statistically significant influence on learners' transition.

When students' demographic characteristics were introduced, institutional policies and institutional culture remained statistically significant predictors of learners' transition, while institutional resources remained insignificant. This implies that demographic characteristics did not have any influence on institutional factors and learners' transition. The absolute statistical insignificance of every demographic characteristic reveals that learners' transition into Gulu University is only influenced by institutional factors. Whether a student is male or female, young or mature, disabled or abled, local or international, the institutional factors influence their transition uniformly.

This finding is consistent with a study by Schuster (2019) which indicate that the transition from secondary to higher education is deeply governed by the institutional factors, which directs and guides student behaviour through administrative norms, values, and beliefs, creating an equalizing "bubble" that shapes the transition experience in University of Pittsburgh, USA. Similarly, Pozo-Burgos et al (2022) reveals that the demographic factors do not influence on academic success, while variables such as the educational level of the student's parents, the student's grade on university entrance exams and work status are significant, Ecuador, South America. In Netherlands, a study by Cornelia & Rooij (2018) reveals that structural peer collaboration and deliberate teacher mentoring frameworks accelerate student adaptation to the university, independent of personal student demographics. Stokoe et al (2024) also reveals that difficulties in transitioning to a university are largely due to "inadequate support from the university" and structural challenges, University of Calgary in Canada.

However, some studies dispute the findings and emphasize that students' demographic characteristics (such as gender, disability, age, and nationality) often create significant, unequal disparities in transition success. Aderi et al (2013) found significant gender-based variations in student adjustment patterns, noting that male students possessed harshly different adjustment levels and transition success compared to female students Yarmouk university and Jadara University, North Jordan. Similarly, Akatwijuka (2024) highlights that gender is a very essential factor in accessing higher education and Females were more disadvantaged than their male counterparts in accessing public higher education institutions in Kigezi Sub Region in western Uganda.

The non-significance of student demographics is a confirmation of the deliberate institutional planning tailored by the Gulu University Strategic Plan (2020/2021–2024/2025). The university's strategic plan clearly mandates the mainstreaming of gender, equity, and inclusivity across all its departments. The statistical value of gender, age, disability, religion, marital status, and country of origin indicates that these strategic interventions are successfully protecting students from all kinds of discrimination based on their identity or demographic characteristics (Gulu University, 2013). The daily collaborative culture built by the university completely overrides demographic differences, creating a uniform and inclusive environment for all categories of learners.

Theoretically, the finding is supportive to Nicholson transition model (1990). Nicholson argues that transitions are defined by the interplay between the "person" and the "system." When the system's role requirements are highly structured, clear, and culturally effective, the system absorbs individual, regardless of their background traits (Purnell, 2002). During the Encounter phase, the university Policies create stable, standardized regulations that smoothly promote learners' transition into university processes, preventing demographic characteristics from dictating the difficulty of learner's entry. During the Adjustment phase, where students alter their behaviour to fit their new learning environment, the university's main Institutional Culture provides a unifying social framework powerful enough to integrate students equally, neutralizing any unique transitional challenges to learners.

5.2 Conclusion

This section presents the conclusions from the study findings based on the four specific objectives of this study.

The study concludes that institutional policies serve as a significant driver of learners' transition from secondary to higher education in Gulu City, accounting for a substantial proportion of variance in transition outcomes across both student and institutional staff perspectives ($R^2 = 0.327$ and $R^2 = 0.489$, respectively). Institutional policies are not merely administrative frameworks; when executed effectively, they actively facilitate the academic, psychological, and social adjustments required during Learners' transition into higher education.

The study also concludes that institutional culture is a vital and statistically significant determinant of learners' transition from secondary to higher education in Gulu City, accounting for a substantial proportion of variance in transition outcomes across both student and institutional staff perspectives (R2 = 0.371 and R2 = 0.603, respectively). Campus culture serves as an active, foundational environment that shapes how effectively students adapt socially, psychologically, and academically during this critical adjustment period of transition.

The study concludes that institutional resources serve as a critical and statistically significant determinant of learners' transition from secondary to higher education in Gulu City, accounting for a substantial proportion of variance in transition outcomes across both student and institutional staff perspectives (R2 = 0.603 and R2 = 0.473, respectively). Beyond physical infrastructure, the functional accessibility and operational usability of institutional resources dictate how smoothly new entrants adjust to the academic and spatial demands of higher education.

The study concludes that institutional factors serve as the primary drivers of learners' transition from secondary to higher education in Gulu City, overriding the effects of student demographics. A hierarchical linear regression analysis reveals that when controlling for student demographic variables (Model 2), institutional culture stands out as the most powerful overall predictor of transition success (beta = 0.423, p = 0.000), followed by institutional policies (beta = 0.218, p = 0.001). Conversely, institutional resources (beta = 0.063, p = 0.321) do not exert a statistically significant independent influence in the overall comparative model. Thus, demographic characteristics has no moderating influence on institutional factors and learners' transition.

5.3 Recommendations

This section presents the recommendations of the study as per the specific study objectives.

To enhance the learners' transition from secondary to higher education in Gulu City, University leadership should align institutional policy implementation with student-centered operational practices and ensure that broader administrative regulations are complemented by comprehensive orientation, efficient registration, and prompt academic feedback.

To optimize higher education transition in Gulu City, university management should intentionally cultivate enabling campus environment that balances expectations of student personal needs with proactive academic support, approachable faculty engagement, and clear orientation frameworks.

To enhance learners' transition to higher education in Gulu City, university management must prioritize resource accessibility alongside physical development. Institutions should focus on strengthening practical support mechanisms such as comprehensive campus wayfinding guides, user-friendly digital library services, and responsive portal technical support to ensure incoming students effectively navigate both the physical and digital university environments.

University leadership, for effective transition management must concentrate administrative resources on fostering an inclusive campus culture and enforcing clear transition policies for all student cohorts regardless of demographic background. This is essential because the study reveals that student demographic characteristics do not change how institutional factors specifically 'institutional culture and policies' influence learners' transition to higher education.

Suggestions for future research:

This study focused on the influence of institutional factors on learners' transition from secondary to higher education in Gulu City. Future studies should be conducted in public and private universities in other regions in Uganda to establish whether similar findings can be obtained in different institutional contexts.

Future research based on mixed-method approach should be conducted for an in-depth investigation of specific dimensions of institutional factors especially university culture. This is because culture is a word that encompasses many meanings and uniquely vary greatly in terms of people, places and practice (3Ps), therefore full understanding of its impact requires more research in different higher institutions.

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APPENDICES:

APPENDIX 1: QUESTIONNAIRE FOR SECOND YEAR STUDENTS.

PART A: Preamble

Dear Respondent,

I am Olanya Bosco Innocent, a student of Gulu university pursuing a course leading to the award of a Master of Education in Educational Mangement. I am conducting research on "**Institutional Factors and Learners' Transition from Secondary to Higher Education in Gulu City**". I kindly request your participation in this study by providing your opinions. Your honest and detailed responses are highly valued and will significantly contribute to the success of this research. Your responses will be treated with utmost confidentiality and shall be solely used for academic purpose only.

Please take a moment to reflect on each item to help this study generate meaningful and reliable research findings.

Yours sincerely

_____

Olanya Bosco Innocent

PART B: Respondent's background

For each of the items in this section, kindly **tick** in the box that represents the right option and where necessary, specify accordingly.

SB1	Gender	Female ☐ Male ☐
SB2	Age	Below 20 ☐ 20-22 ☐ 23-25 ☐ above 25 years ☐
SB3	Disability status	No disability ☐ Person with disability ☐
SB4	Religion	Catholic ☐ Anglican ☐ Muslem ☐ Born Again ☐ Others (Specify) …….
SB5	Marital status	Single ☐ Married ☐ Divorced ☐ Widow ☐ Widower ☐
SB6	Nationality	Ugandan ☐ Non Ugandan ☐
SB7	Faculty of study	Agriculture ☐ Business ☐ Education ☐
SB8	Sponsor	Government ☐ Private ☐ Scholarship (specify) _____

PART **C:** INFLUENCE OF INSTITUTIONAL FACTORS ON LEARNERS TRANSITION.

Please respond by **ticking** whether you "Strongly Agree" (SA), "Agree" (A), Not Sure (NS), "Disagree" (D) or "Strongly Disagree" (SD) with each of the statements below.

Code	**Policies** (clarity, fairness and practicality)	**Responses**				
		SD	**D**	**NS**	**A**	**SA**
SP1	Gulu University clearly communicates its policies to all new students.					
SP2	The undergraduate admission policy is consistently applied to every applicant.					
SP3	The university provides clear guidelines on the steps new students must take when reporting to campus for the first time					
SP4	Gulu University conducts a comprehensive orientation program for new students.					
SP5	The university fees policy is clearly communicated and consistently applied to all students					
SP6	The attendance policy is consistently enforced across all departments.					
SP7	The enrolment policy ensures that students are accurately assigned to their specific programmes.					
SP8	The registration policy ensures a straightforward process for selecting modules every semester.					
SP9	The continuous assessment policy ensures timely feedback on academic performance of students.					
SP10	The examination policy ensures that all students are treated fairly during assessments.					
SP11	The semester regulations clearly outline the requirements for moving to the next academic year.					
SP12	Information about the student welfare policy is easily accessible to new students.					
SP13	The entertainment policy clearly outlines the procedures for organizing inclusive student activities.					
Code	**Culture** (artefacts, espoused values, and basic assumptions)	**SD**	**D**	**NS**	**A**	**SA**
SC1	The university publicity channels like websites, brochures provide clear image of the campus life.					
SC2	The university actively promotes a culture of inclusion, being accommodative to all students.					
SC3	University symbols (logos and signs) are visible throughout the campus.					
SC4	The physical arrangement of classrooms and libraries reflects a priority for student-centered learning.					

SC5	Orientation program clearly explains university rules and campus layout					
SC6	The university's mission statement is easily accessible and known to student population.					
SC7	The university motto is well publicized and known to students					
SC8	Most students at Gulu university believe in seeking academic help from lecturers.					
SC9	Students at Gulu university take personal responsibility for their academic success.					
SC10	The overall campus environment is conducive for learning					
Code	**Resources** (Physical facilities, learning resources and technology)	**SD**	**D**	**NS**	**A**	**SA**
SR1	Information to locate campus facilities (offices, lecture rooms, library, laboratories) is available to the new students.					
SR2	Library service guides are accessible to the new students.					
SR3	The capacity of campus facilities (lecture halls, etc.) are sufficient to accommodate the number of students enrolled					
SR4	University digital platforms are accessible and user friendly to students					
SR5	Campus Wi-Fi and computer laboratories are reliable for daily academic demands.					
SR6	Core textbooks and journals are available / accessible when needed.					
SR7	The library's online databases provide the required study materials for students' study programme.					
SR8	Recreational areas and activities are adequate to meet student needs.					
SR9	Study spaces are adequate to meet student learning needs.					
SR10	Students receive adequate support whenever there is trouble in using the university's student portal or online system.					

PART D: LEARNERS' TRANSITION.

Please respond by **ticking** whether you "Strongly Agree" (SA), "Agree" (A), Not Sure (NS), "Disagree" (D) or "Strongly Disagree" (SD) with each of the statements below.

Code	**Psychological Transition** (Confidence & Persistence).	**Responses**				
		SD	**D**	**NS**	**A**	**SA**
ST1	I felt academically prepared to start my degree at Gulu University					
ST2	I am confident in my ability to use the digital tools required for my studies					

ST3	I am able to maintain my study routine despite personal challenges					
ST4	I know where to find the right academic support when I face a challenge					
ST5	I am certain I will graduate with the results I want.					
ST6	I feel equipped with the necessary skills to complete my academic assignments					
Code	**Social Transition** (Connection & Belonging)	**SD**	**D**	**NS**	**A**	**SA**
ST7	I have built meaningful friendships with other students at this university					
ST8	I feel like a valued member of the university community.					
ST9	I have a reliable support network of peers on campus					
ST10	I feel a strong sense of belonging within my student group					
ST11	I find it easy to interact with lecturers regarding my academic needs					
ST12	I am confident that Gulu University is the right institution for me					
Code	**Education Transition** (Self-regulated learning and Performance)	**SD**	**D**	**NS**	**A**	**SA**
ST13	I have a clear understanding of the academic requirements for my course.					
ST14	I have successfully adapted to the university teaching methods.					
ST15	I am able to manage my time effectively to meet all assignment deadlines.					
ST16	I have developed effective study habits that suit university-level learning.					
ST17	I am satisfied that my examination results reflect my academic efforts.					
ST18	I am consistently improving my academic performance as I progress in my studies from one semester to another.					

Thanks so much for your time and participating in this study.

APPENDIX 2: QUESTIONNAIRE FOR UNIVERSITY ACADEMIC STAFF AND ADMINISTRATORS

PART A: Preamble

Dear Respondent,

I am Olanya Bosco Innocent, a student of Gulu university pursuing a course leading to the award of a Master of Education in Educational Mangement. I am conducting research on "**Institutional Factors and Learners' Transition from Secondary to Higher Education in Gulu City**". I kindly request your participation in this study by providing your opinions. Your honest and detailed responses are highly valued and will significantly contribute to the success of this research. Your responses will be treated with utmost confidentiality and shall be solely used for academic purpose only.

Please take a moment to reflect on each item to help this study generate meaningful and reliable research findings.

Yours sincerely

_____

Olanya Bosco Innocent

PART B: Respondent's Background

For each of the items in this section, kindly **tick** in the box that represents the right option and where necessary, specify accordingly.

EB1	Gender	Male ☐ Female ☐
EB2	Age	Below 40 ☐ 41 – 50 ☐ 51- 60 ☐ above 60 years ☐
EB3	Education Level	Doctorial Degree ☐ Master Degree ☐ Bachelor Degree ☐ Diploma ☐ Others (Specify) …….
EB4	Title	Administrator ☐ Academic staff ☐
EB5	Years taken at Gulu University	Below 5 year ☐, 5-10 years ☐, above 10 years ☐
EB6	Faculty	Education ☐, Business ☐, Agriculture ☐
EB7	Work experience	Below 5 year ☐, 5-10 years ☐, above 10 years ☐
EB8	Employemnt status	Permanent ☐, Contract ☐

PART **C:** INFLUENCE OF INSTITUTIONAL FACTORS ON LEARNERS TRANSITION.

Please respond by **ticking** whether you "Strongly Agree" (SA), "Agree" (A), Not Sure (NS), "Disagree" (D) or "Strongly Disagree" (SD) with each of the statements below.

Code	**Policies** (clarity, fairness and practicality)	**Responses**				
		SD	**D**	**NS**	**A**	**SA**
EP1	Gulu University clearly communicates its policies to all new students.					
EP2	The undergraduate admission policy is consistently applied to every applicant.					
EP3	The university provides clear guidelines on the steps new students must take when reporting to campus for the first time					
EP4	Gulu University conducts a comprehensive orientation program for new students.					
EP5	The university fees policy is clearly communicated and consistently applied to all students					
EP6	The attendance policy is consistently enforced across all departments.					
EP7	The enrolment policy ensures that students are accurately assigned to their specific programmes.					
EP8	The registration policy ensures a straightforward process for selecting modules.					
EP9	The continuous assessment policy ensures timely feedback on academic performance of students.					
EP10	The examination policy ensures that all students are treated fairly during assessments.					
EP11	The semester regulations clearly outline the requirements for moving to the next academic year.					
EP12	Information about the student welfare policy is easily accessible to new students.					
EP13	The entertainment policy clearly outlines the procedures for organizing inclusive student activities.					
Code	**Culture** (artefacts, espoused values, and basic assumptions)	**SD**	**D**	**NS**	**A**	**SA**
EC1	The university publicity channels like websites, brochures provide clear image of the campus life.					
EC2	The university actively promotes a culture of inclusion, being accommodative to all students.					
EC3	University symbols (logos and signs) are visible throughout the campus.					
EC4	The physical arrangement of classrooms and libraries reflects a priority for student-centered learning.					

EC5	Orientation program clearly explains university rules and campus layout					
EC6	The university's mission statement is easily accessible and known to student population.					
EC7	The university motto is well publicized and known to students					
EC8	Most students at Gulu university believe in seeking academic help from lecturers.					
EC9	Students at Gulu university take personal responsibility for their academic success.					
EC10	The overall campus environment is conducive for learning					
Code	**Resources** (Physical facilities, learning resources and technology)	**SD**	**D**	**NS**	**A**	**SA**
ER1	Information to locate campus facilities (offices, lecture rooms, library, laboratories) is available to the new students.					
ER2	Library service guides are accessible to the new students.					
ER3	The capacity of campus facilities (lecture halls, etc.) are sufficient to accommodate the number of students enrolled					
ER4	University digital platforms are accessible and user friendly to students					
ER5	Campus Wi-Fi and computer laboratories are reliable for daily academic demands.					
ER6	Core textbooks and journals are available / accessible when needed.					
ER7	The library's online databases provide the required study materials for students' study programme.					
ER8	Recreational areas and activities are adequate to meet student needs.					
ER9	Study spaces are adequate to meet student learning needs.					
ER10	Students receive adequate support whenever there is trouble in using the university's student portal or online system.					

PART D: LEARNERS TRANSITION.

Please respond by **ticking** whether you "Strongly Agree" (SA), "Agree" (A), Not Sure (NS), "Disagree" (D) or "Strongly Disagree" (SD) with each of the statements below.

Code	**Psychological Transition** (Confidence & Persistence).	**Responses**				
		SD	**D**	**NS**	**A**	**SA**
ET1	Most students demonstrate academic readiness upon starting their studies at the University					

ET2	Most students are confident in using digital tools required for their studies					
ET3	Students demonstrate the resilience necessary to maintain academic consistency despite personal challenges.					
ET4	Students know where to find the right academic support when faced with a challenge.					
ET5	Most students are optimistic to graduate with better results.					
ET6	Students possess the necessary skills to complete their academic assignments					
Code	**Social Transition** (Connection & Belonging)	**SD**	**D**	**NS**	**A**	**SA**
ET7	There is evidence of strong peer-to-peer social integration within the student population.					
ET8	The university environment fosters a culture where students feel respected and valued.					
ET9	Students establish effective peer support networks that enhance their campus experience.					
ET10	Students demonstrate a high degree of unity and belonging within their respective cohorts					
ET11	Students engage comfortably with academic staff regarding their learning needs					
ET12	Most students are confident that Gulu University is the right institution for their studies.					
Code	**Education Transition** (Self-regulated learning and Performance)	**SD**	**D**	**NS**	**A**	**SA**
ET13	Students demonstrate a clear understanding of the specific academic requirements of their courses.					
ET14	Students successfully adapt to the diverse teaching and learning methodologies used at the university.					
ET15	Students demonstrate effective time management in meeting strict academic and assignment deadlines.					
ET16	Students transition effectively from secondary-level study habits to independent university learning.					
ET17	Assessment outcomes generally align with the academic effort and participation levels of the students.					
ET18	Students show consistent improvement in their academic performance as they progress from one semester to another.					

Thanks so much for your time and participating in this study.

APPENDIX 3: WORK PLAN AND TIME FRAME

Activity	Feb to Oct 2025	Nov 2025	Dec 2025 to March 2026	April 2026	May 2026	June 2026	July 2026
Proposal writing with guidance from supervisors							
Approval of proposal by the supervisors for presentation							
Presentation and amendments of proposal							
Data Collection							
Data Entry and analysis							
Report writing							
Submission of final report for defense							

APPENDIX 4: BUDGET ESTIMATE

SN	Items	Quantity	Unit cost (UGX)	Amount (UGX)
1	Pens	1 box	50,000	50,000
2	Printing papers	2 reams	20,000	40,000
3	Printer	1 P1102	300,000	300,000
4	Photocopying	Estimate	200,000	200,000
5	Toner	2	20,000	40,000
6	Transport fuel	10 litters	5,000	50,000
7	Airtime	estimation	100,000	100,000
8	Internet data	40GB	100,000	100,000
9	Map of Gulu City	1	100,000	100,000
10	Data Analysis	Estimation	200,000	200,000
	TOTAL			**1,180,000**

One million one hundred eighty thousand shillings only

APPENDIX 5: INTRODUCTION LETTER FROM GULU UNIVERSITY

GULU UNIVERSITY

P.O. BOX 166 GULU

TEL: +256471432922

OFFICE OF THE DEAN, FACULTY OF EDUCATION AND HUMANITIES

13th, April 2026

TO : WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

This is to introduce to you Mr. Olanya Bosco Innocent (Reg No. 23/U/0669/MED/PS) a student pursuing a programme of study leading to an award of Master of Education in Education Management of Gulu University, Master of Gulu University.

He is undertaking research on the Topic:

INSTITUTIONAL FACTORS AND LEARNERS' TRANSITION FROM SECONDARY TO HIGHER EDUCATION IN GULU CITY

Which is in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award.

Any assistance rendered to him in relation to this research work will be highly appreciated.

Yours faithfully,

GULU UNIVERSITY
13 APR 2026
FACULTY OF EDUCATION AND HUMANITIES

Dr. Denis Thaddeus Ofoyuru

Dean, Faculty of Education and Humanities

APPENDIX 6: INFORMED CONSENT LETTER

STUDY TITLE: **Institutional Factors and Learners' Transition from Secondary to Higher Education in Gulu City**

Dear Participant,

I am Olanya Bosco Innocent, a graduate student of Gulu university pursuing a Master of Education in Educational Mangement. This research investigates how institutional factors influence the transition of learners from secondary schools to higher education. The study is being conducted among the students, academic staff, and administrators in Gulu University.

Study Value & Benefits: By participating, you provide critical empirical data that will directly inform educational policymakers, administrators, and academic staff. Your insights will help shape targeted interventions, optimize institutional resources, and improve student support frameworks to enhance learners' transition. There is no direct financial compensation, but your contribution to education management policy is highly invaluable.

Voluntary Participation: Joining this study is entirely voluntary. You reserve the absolute right to decline in taking part in this research. If you choose to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time without providing a reason.

Risks & Confidentiality: This study poses no risks to you. Your identity will remain strictly anonymized with pseudo codes, and all shared information will be treated with utmost confidentiality, and solely for academic purposes.

For queries, concerns, or clarifications, please contact the principal investigator: Olanya Bosco Innocent on phone number 0782379425 or email olabosc1@gmail.com.

STATEMENT OF CONSENT

I have read and understood the details regarding the study titled Institutional Factors and Learners' Transition from Secondary to Higher Education in Gulu City. All my questions and concerns have been answered to my satisfaction. I voluntarily agree to participate in this study.

Participant's Name: .....

Signature: ..... Date: .....

Contact (Phone/Email): .....