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The influence of out-of-institution environments on the university schooling project of non-traditional students in Uganda

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ABSTRACT

Participation and integration of non-traditional students (NTS) in university education is influenced by factors within the institution and those external to the institution, including participants' self-perceptions and dispositions. The objective of this qualitative study is to draw from the life-world environment component of Donaldson and Graham's model of college outcomes for adults, to discuss the out-of-institution experiences of NTS participating in university education in Uganda. Findings derive from two elements: first, the social settings of work, family and community including the roles NTS play in these settings. The second element is connected to the first but goes deeper into individual relationships NTS have with important people around them. Both elements were found to be reinforcing and deterring to the NTS' university schooling project. To this end, we argue that to achieve quality-inclusive university education for all learners, the lifelong learning frameworks must be accentuated, even outside the university.

Introduction

> I was performing well in first year first semester, but I think I was disturbed by the job when I went to second semester … first year second semester I had changed the job from the university to the NGO and they needed me – you know it's an NGO and you must be there. I think it hindered my performance; I started declining, I started scoring 50's that's when I thought I had to leave the job. (Esther)

Within the global context of liberalisation of higher education, elite higher education systems have given way to *mass* higher education systems. Consequently, many changes have been observed in the higher education systems of developed countries (Schuetze and Slowey 2000) and developing countries (Mohamedbhai 2008; Mamdani 2007; Sawyerr 2004). In Uganda, among the changes taking place in higher education is a growing diversified student population at universities, including students from non-traditional backgrounds – older and working (Kasozi 2002; Openjuru 2011) who had previously been excluded from participating in university education. Unlike the conventional university students who have studying as their sole obligation (Ford, Bosworth, and Wilson 1995), these 'new' types of students, whom we refer to in this article as non-traditional students (NTS), are more likely to have other life obligations with which they combine study (Kasworm 2003, 2004).

We define NTS as the undergraduate degree students who (a) either did not obtain the standard high school certificate or obtained it, but did not have continuous transition from upper secondary (high school) education to university education; and (b) gained access to university education through either diploma or mature-age entry schemes. Considering this classification, some of

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these students have other major life obligations, such as work and family in addition to studying, which constrain the time they have at their disposal for study.

Until 1988 when the first private university was established in Uganda, funding of university education was fundamentally the responsibility of the state and its provision exclusive to Makerere University. Whereas a number of studies in Uganda have been conducted on the consequences of liberalisation of higher education (e.g. Bisaso 2010; Kasozi 2009a, 2009b; Kwesiga 1993; Mamdani 2007; Mayanja 1998; Musisi and Muwanga 2003), little attention has been given to understanding the changing needs of the diversified student population at universities and how this impacts on the schooling project of the different groups of students to whom access is granted. In the effort of narrowing this gap, this article presents and discusses the out-of-institution experiences of NTS participating in university education in Uganda and their implications for the lifelong learning policy and practice agenda.

Globalisation and the changing dynamics in learning and work

Due to globalisation, many changes are taking place in contemporary society. These changes are not limited to higher education (Mohamedbhai 2008; Schuetze and Slowey 2000) but extend to the labour market terrain as well. The constant changes in technology and scientific progress have not only created an unstable job market that necessitates individuals to become flexible lifelong learners (Jarvis 2007), it has also altered the relationship between higher education and the world of work (Boud 2004). Consequently, the long-held assumption that undergraduate courses are preparation for the world of work is becoming outdated (Boud 2004) as is the assumption of a complementary relationship between formal education credentials and the labour market needs (Walters 2004).

Nevertheless, the societal perceptions about these changes remain locked in the traditional models pertaining to the purpose and relevance of education in development, and the relationship between education and work. Attending and completing school is often translated into getting a (white-collar) job and living a better life (Teferra and Altbach 2004). Such perceptions are inclined towards the personal and collective instrumental economic roles of education leaving out the non-instrumental values of education (Robeyns 2006). In the work domain, dominant perceptions are based on the old instrumental model where school prepared people for work (Boud 2004) and was the only sheltered environment for learning (Kasworm 2004).

Review of literature on NTS' participation in learning

Non-traditional learners continue being underrepresented in higher education because of the barriers they face compared to traditional students (Schuetze and Slowey 2000). O'Brien and Fathaigh (2007) argue that the complexity of roles between factors at home such as childcare responsibilities and at schools/institutions and the community is one of the reasons NTS group may end up deriving fewer benefits from a formal system. Other studies show that NTS' participation and integration in collegiate/university education is affected by barriers originating from both within and outside the institutional environment (Allen 1993; Kasworm 2004; Tumuheki, Zeelen, and Openjuru 2016); and their self-perceptions and dispositions (Cross 1981). In the contemporary society, the desire by some individuals to develop a meaningful personal career identity (Meijers and Wijers 1998) ought to be recognised.

The external institutional environment includes a diversity of responsibilities ranging from those related to work and family, as well as community roles related to citizenship (Donaldson and Graham 1999; Kasworm 1997). These many responsibilities challenge NTS to balance between academic and external commitments so as to reach an engagement level sufficient for achieving academic success (Gilardi and Guglielmetti 2011). In the African context, family responsibilities are perceived extensive in nature given the African conceptualisation of the notion of family, as extended family (Mbiti 1990). In this arrangement, an individual's responsibilities also spread to his or her extended family

members. The external institutional environment can also be understood to mean what Cross (1981) and Darkenwald and Merriam (1982) call situational barriers: these are an individual's life context at a particular time – the realities of one's social and physical environment, for example, lack of time, cost, lack of transportation, lack of childcare and geographical isolation.

Kasworm (2004) relates external institutional environment to the term Participatory Learner in the World – 'a belief that adult undergraduate students participate in the collegiate environment in tandem and sometimes on an intermittent basis with their larger responsibilities in the world' (14). In this sense, adult undergraduate students are seen to have different learning involvements and communities of learning. Consequently, colleges and universities constitute one of the many environments in the adult student's learning world.

A model of college outcomes for adults

In their model of college outcomes for adults developed in the USA, Donaldson and Graham (1999) presented six major components they considered to have influence on collegiate learning experiences of adult undergraduate students: (a) prior experiences and personal biographies; (b) psychosocial and value orientations; (c) adult cognition; (d) the connecting classroom as the central avenue for social engagement on campus and for negotiating meaning for learning; (e) life-world environment and (f) college outcomes. A further study done in the USA by Philibert, Allen, and Elleven (2008) on the application of model components (a), (d) and (e) above underscored the life-world environment as the most important construct in contributing to the differences between NTS and traditional students.

Subsequently, while recognising the interrelatedness among these components and the importance each holds, we draw from the life-world environment component to discuss the out-of-institution experiences of NTS at Makerere University in Uganda. One may define the term life-world to mean the surroundings and everyday experiences that make up an individual's world. According to Donaldson and Graham (1999), life-world environment refers to 'the different contexts in which adults live, defined by the roles they occupy in their various work, family and community settings in which they learn and develop knowledge structures that differ from the academic knowledge structures of the classroom' (28). The component includes *the social settings* outside the collegiate environment, that is, adults' current work, family and communities in which they participate as citizens and leaders; and *the people* they depend on for support for their collegiate learning activities. The social settings provide context in which adults gain experiences that help them make meaning of what they learn in class; serve as out-of-class contexts for learning; and as substitutes for conventional out-of-class and campus environment for co-curricular activities. Individual agents include family members, co-workers, supervisors and community members with whom adults interact on a regular basis (Donaldson and Graham 1999).

Methodology

This article is part of the larger study being conducted at Makerere University to understand the challenges NTS face when participating in university education in Uganda and find ways of addressing their educational exclusion by recommending appropriate interventions. The study is qualitative in nature with elements of participatory action research (Creswell 2012). The School of Computing and Informatics Technology (CIT) is the unit of focus because the motivation for this research originates from the experiences of the researcher in this very unit as the Faculty Registrar. Aware of the likely influence of this insider position on the conduct of this research, from the onset the researcher focused on putting into practice research ethical guidelines that would enable her to engage objectively in the research process as an outsider. For example, by exercising personal reflexivity (Hennink, Hutter, and Bailey 2011) entry into the field was done in an ethical manner. Through conducting official meetings with the relevant university 'gate keeping' offices, the researcher

systematically sought and obtained approval to conduct the study. The regular meetings with the students and the feedback committee also helped to guide the role of the researcher as an engaged outsider.

The main data used in this article are drawn from narratives of unstructured in-depth interviews (Riessman 2008) conducted between March and July 2013 with three cohorts of NTS in CIT: five currently enrolled students, seven graduates and three dropouts. Since we intended to explore individual stories of NTS' realities and experiences, our selection of participants did not aim at achieving representativeness of the sample but at the 'richness of the data' (Liamputtong and Ezzy 2005, 49). Through one-on-one meetings with the researcher, each of the participants was enlightened about the ongoing research and gave their consent for participation (Hennink, Hutter, and Bailey 2011).

All interviewees selected from the current students' cohort were finalists on their respective undergraduate degree programmes. This group of interviewees were purposively recruited (Hennink, Hutter, and Bailey 2011) because they were considered to be information-rich (Creswell 2012) since they had been at the university for longer periods than their counterparts in other years. The selection of interviewees from the graduates' category was also purposively done after interacting with them at the ground-breaking stakeholders workshop held on 9 March 2013. This interaction made it possible to identify information-rich participants for the in-depth interviews, through the shared personal profiles during the introduction session of the workshop. For the dropout category, they were quite a hard group to reach, as even those who were reached through telephone did not show interest to participate. However, through well-established rapport (Hennink, Hutter, and Bailey 2011) with current students, it became possible to eventually reach the study participants in the category of dropouts.

Additionally, we decided to include the 2005/2006 admission cohort (graduates) because this cohort was the last to be admitted through the mature-age entry scheme (although the scheme is still applicable in other units of the university). We also wanted to learn about the coping strategies they deployed to successfully complete their studies. On the other hand, the inclusion of dropouts was done so that we could obtain a complete picture of the realities of NTS, by having an insight into what was contributing to their dropping out or delayed completion of their degrees.

We supplement data from the in-depth interviews of NTS with data from two workshops (23 March 2013 – 29 participants and 25 April 2015 – 21 participants) held exclusively for and with the NTS stakeholder group. This was done to create a safe conversational space (Owens 2006) that would allow them more freedom of speech and interaction as primary research participants. For validation purposes we also use data from interviews with four traditional students. All interviews were conducted in English and lasted between 60 and 90 minutes. Data analysis was conducted with the aid of the qualitative data analysis software called ATLAS.ti (Flick 2009). To illustrate the participants' voices, we use excerpts from interviews and workshops. All names used are pseudonyms.

Findings

NTS in our study were found to be a diverse group based on the parameters of age, gender, time of study, work status, marital status, parenthood status, year of entry, community roles, (extended) family responsibilities and sponsorship. The implication of this diversity is that there were students who were more non-traditional (Horn and Carroll 1996) and thus, more constrained in meeting academic obligations than their traditional counterparts. For instance, a married working mother on an evening programme was found more constrained than a single student enrolled on the evening programme and residing in a student's hostel near the university.

The findings in this article are based on data analysis of two elements of the life-world environment: social settings of work, family and community including the roles NTS play in those settings; and individuals within these out-of-classroom social settings. Because the social settings and individuals whom NTS depend on are complementary, we combine and present our findings under three

themes: work, its agents and studentship; family, its agents and studentship; and community, its agents and studentship.

Work, its agents and studentship

Work in this study was found to be both a social setting and an economic activity for students who combined it with studying. However, regardless of how work was perceived, it was found to be both a positive and negative experience to NTS and consequently, to their schooling project. As an economic activity, work presented itself in different forms of employment: full-time, part-time and self-employment and could be done both during day and night. Employing organisations were both public and private including personal and family businesses. These different settings in conjunction with individual circumstances offered different levels of flexibility to different students.

Generally, work was found to be a hindrance to NTS who combined employment and study. All working students reported lack of time as the biggest constraint hindering them from meeting their academic obligations, rendering work to be both a dilemma and a trade-off. However, students who were in full-time jobs expressed more restraints in meeting academic obligations than students who were in part-time, self-employment and family-business work settings. Many of the working NTS were 'employees who study', that is, students who considered employment as their primary activity, and therefore worked full-time and preferred to be enrolled in the evening programme. These students were found more likely to have family obligations and to be more constrained than 'students who work', that is, students whose primary activity was being a student (Berker, Horn, and Carroll 2003). For the 'students who work' it was easier to balance or rather pay more attention to studying than working when it was needed, because they had fewer financial needs and obligations. On the contrary, 'employees who study' failed to receive and to give satisfactory performance both at work and at university. This did not apply to only evening students but also students enrolled on the day programme as Vianne shared:

> I was always late for duty, even here I was also late, so either way I was always a late comer … so when I would come here I remember earliest time could be 8:30/8:40 when the lecture is on. When done in the evening, I am already running, that is around towards five [o'clock], I need to be at work at six. So there was little time with lecturers for interaction … .

The difficulty to balance work and study was especially felt if the employing organisations did not have supportive policies in place. Being aware of their work settings, working NTS intentionally chose to enrol in programmes they considered suitable to their needs so as to increase their chances of successful participation. However, these students reported that hostile work environments often made them resort to studying 'under cover' because of the fear of repercussions such as increased working hours, workload and being transferred to upcountry work stations that would impact their (school) participation. In the excerpts below, we share two different experiences on existing policy environments at work:

> … I asked for evening of course because I had no authorisation [from work], the challenge which was there is that someone will accept yes you are going to be studying but indeed when work is there and he wants you to do something you must do it, so I had a challenge of like; I used to attend, sometimes I don't attend, sometimes you come late like the first lecturer is out or the second lecturer is out –you know, so it was hard. (Edgar)

> When I began studies it became more difficult now in terms of time management, juggling study and work became complicated. Now someone briefed me from work that there is a possibility of being let free during that time of study … when I went to the head [of department] with that request I got a very harsh should I say a very harsh welcome, he told me 'choose one thing, if it is studying I have no problem with that, apply and I will authorise the human resource to give you study leave which comes with repercussions' … it became tight; it is one thing, either choose studies or to leave work but I can't leave work, now cutting the stem yet I am the branch … (Vianne)

For some students, hostile work settings resulted in expulsion from employing organisations or institutions. Yet, for students who took employment as their primary activity, work was also their major source of income to meet costs related to their schooling project or other life obligations such as paying fees for own children, siblings and generally caring for other (extended) family members. For these students, leaving work to concentrate on studies was next to impossible as it literally meant losing their job. For instance, Deo, a two time dropout interviewee was caught between a rock and a hard place, and in the end the schooling project gave way to work:

> The main problem this time round I think was balancing work, okay partly it was finance but to minimal, this time round it was balancing work with studies … like I told you the project that we had at hand at that time it was very critical it was behind schedule and needed to be done, so it came to a point where it was either the job or school and of course I needed the money to finance the school so that was the challenge.

Nevertheless not all students reported gloom about the work policy environments. There were some organisations with flexible arrangements towards participating in education as Esther shared: 'I had to ask to leave earlier, they would allow me to leave at 4:30, then I jump on a *boda boda* [taxi motorbike] to campus, so I would begin with others on time.' However, she was quick to add that carrying out her daily work obligations in tandem with the academic obligations still proved so hectic that she had to resign this job from which she derived tuition in order to save her academic performance: ' … on the way I had to leave the job which was paying my fees because I had started scoring badly'.

Although there were testimonies of students who performed exceptionally well despite their work obligations, many of the working students, like Esther, had so much difficulty with their academic performance that obtaining retakes was a common occurrence among them. For example, at the 23 March 2013 ground-breaking workshop with the NTS, many students indicated by show of hands that they had retakes at the time and attributed it to their unsupportive work environments, for example, Stewart shared:

> … the fact that I had gotten to know my, I will say my heads or the environment in which I was working or I am working, I would tell I mean from their reactions … I have been doing things but I haven't done them the way I've wanted to do them … my performance, I don't like it, yeah because I look at myself I am not this stupid, dull, no. I am not dull but my time of books hasn't been there.

On a positive note, however, work as a social setting also presented itself as a place for learning whereby students were able to practice what was taught in class, in the real world. They used their work settings to carry out self-directed learning as a co-curricular activity outside the confines of the classroom. In this case, work served as an out-of-class context for learning. This finding reflected itself especially in the narratives of students whose work was related to their disciplines of study (Hall 2010). For example, Donald who was enrolled on the Bachelor of Information Technology programme and at the same time worked as an IT intern on a full-time basis said:

> … and you see especially when you look at IT related courses there is a little background, practical background that is necessary for you to really understand, and at the same time I had access to resources; I was in a working environment so if I came across something that was new I would go try to apply it the other side.

Work also provided an opportunity for NTS to use experiences derived from their prior hands-on training and qualifications to connect theory and practice during classroom interactions and practical assignments. For instance, Stewart, who worked as an electrical technician in a private organisation, shared how his technical work came in handy during his final year project: ' … now my final project is about electrical systems of which we are relating because now we are doing hardware and software as well, so it's interesting too to embed the two'. Moreover, the experiences NTS gained from work settings were found to enrich learning in the classroom for both NTS and traditional students, as one traditional student interviewee shared:

> There are some lecturers who you find are not good at explaining and when he says something and the class seems not to have understood what he or she is talking about, those specifically who are in the field and they

have gotten experiences to that, they give an explanation and you find the class getting the point very well than when it was explained by the lecturer. (Simon)

NTS also shared experiences where work as a social setting provided them an opportunity for enriching their knowledge base through mentorship of supervisors at their workplaces. This mentorship enhanced their hands-on knowledge at work which in turn enhanced their learning in the classroom. Edgar, who previously worked as a driver in his organisation and got transferred to the IT department during year 2 of his Bachelor study in Information Technology, shared:

> … the first job they gave me was to be in charge of internet but I had someone who was very professional … who is qualified, this person helped me a lot … whenever they gave me that department that section alone to maintain network and I was not good, but I had some knowledge but the knowledge I had was not really … there were things which would challenge me …. so that person helped me and within a short time I was okay and this enriched my knowledge of the things we were studying in class.

The work setting was also found to serve as a motivational ground for participation of NTS in university education. This happened in situations where a degree was pursued in anticipation of enabling better understanding of the technical aspects of their work roles or where lack of a degree had blocked opportunities for promotion at their work places. Joshua shared how his work setting challenged him to want to learn more:

> … as I was going about my work I used to face many challenges and I used to wonder for example viruses and I think its these viruses that really pushed me to do computer science because I realised how to create an anti-virus software you needed more knowledge but I also got to know that you don't need to create a computer virus to be able to create an anti-virus software so that motivated me to go for computer science to see what goes on.

For Edgar, after being mocked by his bosses for lacking a degree and as if incapable of obtaining one so as to earn better like 'studied' people, he went a step further to plan and strategise in a more purposeful and proactive manner for an even greater future and a new life choice of self-employment (Kasworm 2003). His personal faith and perception of a university degree as a means to freedom and empowerment were a strong motivation for enrolment and persistence in his schooling project: 'I wanted something which I can do independently. I never wanted something which is like to be controlled.'

NTS also shared experiences where colleagues at work acted as their source of inspiration and motivation in making decisions for returning to school. Colleagues provided them appropriate guidance with taking part in learning and how they could achieve it, for example, Esther shared how her colleague encouraged and helped her gain confidence to meet her own education financial needs that had been the greatest pre-entry barrier to her schooling project:

> … actually she is the one who encouraged me to apply. She told me 'Esther why don't you enrol? You go and study, I don't want to see you on this photocopier'. I said 'how can I? I don't have money.' She said 'Esther don't be stupid; every day you go home with a bunch of banana for your child, you begin putting that money in a basket and you will tell me how much you will have accumulated one month', … then I told her I would begin. Every time she would be on my neck 'Esther did you do the other thing I told you to do?' I would say I have not started. 'You begin, you begin'. Then they gave me a computer. 'Don't be flattered by this computer, you go you go and study'.

Family, its agents and studentship

The setting of family in this study was found to have features of an extended family (Mbiti 1990). Family members included parents, spouses, children, siblings and other relatives such as cousins, uncles, aunties, grandparents and in-laws. Family also included the departed and the un-born. There was strong interdependence and connectedness of NTS with individuals they perceived as family members and acted accountable to them through different roles. For instance, part of Stewart's motivation for his choice of study was the desire to keep his late grandfather's profession alive in the family line. For Donald, it was the desire to ensure better livelihood for his future children: ' …

even at that age I would think of my future … what would my kids think of me? what can I put before my kids?'

The family setting was found to be an avenue for co-curricular and out-of-class context learning if there were family members with the knowledge capacity to play this role. For instance, Alon shared his learning experience from private coaching and mentorship of his paternal uncle who had knowledge in his discipline of study: 'I even had a person whom I could call my young dad because he is a brother to my real dad – my uncle but still I could go to him he explains to me … .' However, to a greater extent family provided a fall-back position to the social, economic and moral needs of NTS' schooling project.

Family, as a social setting, was found to support NTS students who had children, by taking on childcare roles on their behalf. Dativa, a single mother of one, partly attributed the success of her schooling project to her parents and siblings, with whom she left her five months child to reside closer to the university. Talking about her family, she said: 'my parents were there always for me and they could always support me in this education … my sisters, they just take him as if he is their own baby'. The parents of Dativa also paid her fees. Payment of fees by members of (extended) family such as parents, spouses, siblings, cousins, uncles, aunties and grandparents was a common topic in the narratives of students who were on a private scholarship.

The influence of family in the schooling project of NTS was also found linked to the role of parents and guardians, especially in the decision-making process for return to school. This was regardless of one's marital status. In the Ugandan society, as it is in many African societies, children have obligations of respect and obedience to their parents and other older people (Mbiti 1975). As such, NTS could hardly attempt to oppose their parents' decisions for them to return to school even when such decisions were not in and of their interest. Those who attempted to resist hardly succeeded:

> When I completed diploma I was like let me, I thought actually I was going to get married but then my parents were like 'no, you people you can't get married'. My parents were like 'at least since you are not going to be able to get married, at least you go and what, and complete the degree' because it was already their plan that at least I complete a degree … I first refused then they were like 'no you have to go back'. (Dativa)

This rendered many NTS to end up in choices of study that were not of their interest sometimes resulting into dropping out:

> … I was not happy about it … I was not interested. My mother said 'but you love studies' but I said I don't want that at least I wanted something rather brief and practical and after I can start working … I studied but things were hard … (Cathy)

Other than parents and guardians, significant others were important agents in the NTS schooling project. Some spouses were reinforcing and others deterring agents. Others took a combination of both roles. For instance, Albert said: 'she is good, she is patient; sincerely she is patient enough, but she didn't want me to come back for studying'. Lack of support from spouses was reported by both genders. Sometimes, the repercussions went beyond the constraining of academic obligations, to long-term impact on the self and family. While Esther shared how lack of support from her spouse resulted in domestic violence with an exhibit of a permanent scar on her body, for Silver the repercussion took the form of a divorce and a re-marriage. Although Esther lives with a permanent scar on her body she, unlike Silver, was lucky to have saved her marriage and persisted through school because of the intervention of (extended) family. This intervention came in the form of marital counselling and shelter provision especially during the examination periods when the spouse would be more obstructive:

> … they had to sit him down … his relatives, I had never reported it to my relatives, but I would report him every day to his relatives and they saw my reason was genuine I wanted to study … so (name of spouse' aunt) would sometimes house me; I would leave that home and [she] gets me where to sleep like most especially examinations time she would say 'aaaaa you leave that man come and sleep here'. (Esther)

However, not all spouses were deterring agents to the NTS schooling project. For Julie, her spouse played quite a big, reinforcing role through moral support, childcare and financial support in form of tuition: ' … I gave birth to another kid, now this is when my husband told me "I found when you were looking for somebody to pay your fees, can we, are you ready to begin?" I was like yes!'

In addition to parents and spouses, the family setting was found to be both reinforcing and deterring to university participation of NTS through the agency of children. As deterring agents, children came with extra roles that put pressure on their parents' student role, causing them emotional torture that affected their concentration in learning:

> … you know being in class and your mind is just home every time … you could be stressed you think about your kid … one time they told me that my kid is sick I was going for an exam but I am telling you, my mind was just as if they poured … I don't know, so I finished that paper so very quickly and I had to go back. (Dativa)

As reinforcing agents, children acted as motivators and persistence drivers of their parents' schooling project. This was especially so when parents came from poor socio-economic backgrounds and perceived further education as a means to a better livelihood. Reflecting on his socio-economic hardships, Albert shared:

> Yeah, my children are going to school, but the problem maybe what is really motivating me to study hard is students, sorry my children, yeah coz they have been tolerant as in they have passed through that hard kind of life so I don't want them to, at least I want them to forget the life they have lived, now you know my kids do not eat meat … the body is allergic to meat as in, they had never eaten it … so when they eat it they develop what, allergy … I want to see them in at least good kind of life.

However, the family setting, as a motivational ground for participation in university education, was not only linked to children, but also to the educational status of their siblings and other (extended) family members with whom they would be compared in society. Another interesting aspect related to family was the motivating role of gender in the schooling project of NTS. Alon, who already had two of his sisters at university, said: 'I didn't want to just sit down at home since my elders were educated and my guardians were educated and I was the only boy at home.'

Community, its agents and studentship

As citizens in their communities, NTS were found to fulfil a diversity of roles. These multiple roles constrained their time for both academic study and participation in campus-based activities. Donald shared how he tried to create a balance between his student life and his other competing roles:

> … I was not a true sportsman although in my high school I was … at that point it was about finding solutions, I had to pay the price; finding solutions in my working environment … I am a Christian, then I had service, at my church I was a minister there so I had that as well, over the weekends I was ministering … .

The community in which NTS lived provided them with an opportunity of meeting other community members who were useful in their schooling project. Joshua shared an experience of how a community leader was his source of encouragement and information about the entry scheme through which he joined university. Jackie shared how the motivation for participation in her study choice was linked to a friend she was living with who had sufficient knowledge in her discipline of study:

> She was like 'Jackie, I am thinking doing a bachelors would be a nice thing, you can do it in any other field you want but if you want to continue with computer science, yes I would help you somehow somewhere'. So I said okey let me go back and do this, when I find it hard she comes in, you can do this like this, you can do this so that was also a motivation.

Like Jackie, Dativa shared how a friend was one of the major contributors to her success in learning: 'I have my friend, that (name of friend) was the one; he has really been the one, he has been so supportive especially my academic work, coz [because] anything I don't understand he can discuss it for me, anything.'

However, community as a social setting also provided a deterring environment for participation through the perceptions people held about the expected age for schooling. Fidel, who enrolled in university 16 years after college shared at a workshop held on 25 April 2015 the deterring efforts friends put towards his schooling project: 'like for me they were telling me, "will you manage, you are already old."' Nevertheless, his personal motivation and determination enabled him to overcome the societal perceptions and enrol for the degree: ' … but because I was determined, I ignored them'.

Discussion and conclusion

The objective of this article was to draw from the life-world environment component of Donaldson and Graham's model on college outcomes for adult undergraduate students, to understand the out-of-institution environments affecting the schooling project of NTS participating in university education in Uganda. On the one hand, we sought to understand the influence of work, family and community settings on participation including NTS roles; and on the other hand. the influence of individual agents with whom NTS interacted in these settings.

Based on experiences of NTS at Makerere University, the study shows that the settings of work, family and community including the roles of NTS, and the individual agents in these settings are important factors in the schooling project of NTS. These factors were found both reinforcing and deterring to the NTS' participation efforts in learning. For the work setting we found the individual agents of co-workers and supervisors; for the family setting – parents, spouses, children and other members of (extended) family; and for the community setting – community leaders, members and friends. In the work setting NTS played the role of worker; in family, such roles as parent, spouse, sibling, child, family member and guardian; and in the community, such roles emanating from their citizenship obligations to community ranging from the generic to more specific roles related to community-based arrangements and activities.

NTS were also found to be a diverse group with different needs depending on the level of engagement in their varied and conflicting roles. The multiple roles of NTS often derived from their multiple identities that made up their day-to-day life. The conflicting roles in the settings where NTS lived and worked constrained them from meeting their academic obligations and generally their participation and integration in the university environment. These findings resonate well with the findings of other studies (e.g. Gilardi and Guglielmetti 2011; Kasworm 2003; Ross-Gordon 2011) and relate to the role conflict perspective suggested by Broadbridge and Swanson (2005) as a means of understanding the conflicting demands working students have due to their conflicting roles of student, worker and social being.

The realities in the NTS social environments imply that the needs of the student population at universities have changed. With the opening of access to higher education, the cloistered learner in the academy (Kasworm 2004) perspective that has for long dominated the perceptions of higher education is being challenged. Additionally, the university is no longer the only learning environment as the environments of work, family and community are also proven important communities of learning. This also applies to the expanded realm of agents through whom learning can be acquired. These developments require universities to become responsive to diversity through rethinking and widening both policy and practice. There is need for reflection on pedagogies used in the classroom environments; the provision and administration of part-time programmes and the relationship between university and other learning environments. Collaborative targeted supports such as workplace learning (Boud 2004), career guidance and sensitisation programmes targeting family and the community at large might serve as innovative measures for responsiveness towards addressing widening access challenges.

Given the changing dynamics in the labour market and the funding crisis in higher education due to global capitalism, there is need to recognise that combining work and study is a substantial reality and will continue to be a booming activity for those students already in employment, and generally for many other university students (Hall 2010). Consequently, it is no longer appropriate to divide

education and work (Boud 2004; Lucas and Lammont 1998) nor to suppress the *real* diverse identities of university students in the name of saving the predominant 'student' identity, that is, there is a need to redefine the university student. This requires us to challenge the conventional means of initial education (Zeelen 2015) and other traditional structures so that lifelong learning is given its deserved place in educational development. To this end, achieving quality-inclusive university education for all requires that the lifelong learning frameworks, both within and outside the institutional environments of the learner, are equally accentuated to enable multi-role students achieve success in their schooling project.

Considering the changing labour market terrain (Jarvis 2007) and the relationship between education and work (Boud 2004), it is also important that universities look beyond training for economic purposes of education and direct their efforts to preparing learners for life rather than only for work. In the lifelong learning context, these efforts would involve understanding and appreciating the different learning forms, processes and environments; and the learners' capabilities. To gain deeper insights into this proposition, we recommend further research into the capability approach (Robeyns 2006; Sen 2001) and the concept of learning organisations (Jarvis 2007) as a step towards fostering development of other (non-economic) functions of higher education such as active citizenship.

Although the findings of this study were in general found similar to those of other studies done on NTS in the USA (e.g. Berker, Horn, and Carroll 2003; Horn and Carroll 1996; Kasworm 2003), and other studies done in Australia and UK on the relationship between work and study (e.g. Ford, Bosworth, and Wilson 1995; Hall 2010; Lucas and Lammont 1998; Polidano and Zakirova 2011), it is important to note its distinctiveness derived from the socio-cultural context of the historically collective-oriented cultures. In this study, (see also Tumuheki, Zeelen, and Openjuru 2016) it has been established that in Uganda, the cultural aspects of kinship, (extended) family, age and gender have impact on NTS decisions to participate in university education. Specifically the influence of parents and guardians on the study choices of their children is an important aspect for reflection because it denies them the opportunity to pursue careers of their choice based on their talents, interest and passion. This in turn may have an impact not only on the students' engagement, adjustment, persistence and performance within the academy, but also on their career development and work relationships related to quality and craftsmanship (Sennett 2008; Zeelen 2015).

Yet, through the power of consumerism and global capitalism on contemporary society (Jarvis 2007), individuals are increasingly getting challenged to develop a personal career identity (Meijers and Wijers 1998) or what Zeelen (2015) frames a meaningful learn-and-work biography (see also Meijers and Wijers 1998; Sennett 2012). To be able to achieve this, individuals must exhibit distinctive qualities such as creativity, innovativeness and quality output – all innate qualities of intrinsically motivated decisions and uptakes. It is for such reasons that personal motivations need to be encouraged so that individuals have opportunities to develop their career identities based on personal choices. In this study, both Edgar and Fidel drew from the strength of their personal choices and motivations to overcome the structural barriers to their participation. This evidence points to the diminishing individual obligations to (extended) family and socio-cultural influence, allowing for development of new patterns of identity (Giddens 2009). In the end is an emerging hybrid system defining the relationship between individuals and their social world.

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Disclosure statement

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