Lifelong learning in practice
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Chapter 5

Participation and the Inside-Of-Institution Environment
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Sustaining educational development at Makerere University in Uganda – Is equality of access provision alone sufficient?

Abstract

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1. Introduction

Makerere University in Kampala is the largest and oldest university in Uganda. Since its inception in 1922 as a public institution, its funding had been solely an obligation of the state (Mamdani, 2007) until the late 1980s and early 1990s when there was a shift in policy on expenditure of public resources both at global and national levels. The policy shift at global level in funding priorities of developing countries in turn necessitated cutting down of state expenditure and changing of state funding priorities (Samoff & Carrol, 2004). In Uganda, two changes took effect in the education sector: minimisation of the role of the state in higher education, and shifting education funding focus from higher education to primary and secondary education. This policy shift made reliance of higher education on state funds become defective, opening doors to such reforms as liberalisation of higher education to the private sector, and cost sharing and privatisation at public universities (Musisi & Muwanga, 2003; Mamdani, 2007).
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As the higher education system in Uganda became open to all those who could afford their own costs of education, the demand and subsequently the student numbers of those joining universities increased (Mamdani, 2007). Consequently, there was a transition from an ‘elite’ to a mass system of higher education in Ugandan universities. At Makerere University the student enrolments grew from 5,597 in 1990/1991 to 30,208 in 2002/2003 academic year (Makerere University, n.d). This massive demand, combined with the university’s desire to improve its financial situation, led to the creation of non-traditional flexible study programmes in the form of evening and external offerings, and expansion of existing access routes bringing on board the diploma entry scheme (Makerere University Senate, 1991). These developments in turn resulted in a dramatic change in the demographic profile of students, characterised by an increasing number of students from non-traditional backgrounds – women (Kwesiga, 2002) and older and working (Kasozi, 2002; Openjuru, 2011) people with prior qualifications, work experiences and other life responsibilities.

The provision of higher education to older and working students has been more associated with postgraduate than undergraduate studies, e.g. see Lynch (2008). However, in this study non-traditional students (NTS) are 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 diploma or mature age entry schemes. As such, NTS tend to have responsibilities beyond their academic obligations, such as those derived from work and family environments (Kasworm, 2003, 2005). Yet, traditionally, higher education systems were designed to serve the traditional students – young people who are dependents and full-time students with only academic obligations (Gallacher, Crossan, Field & Merrill, 2002; Kasoi, 2002; Moore, 2006; Kasworm, 2010; Openjuru, 2011). This makes the undergraduate learning environment antagonistic, inequitable and non-responsive to the needs of NTS, in turn affecting their sense of identity and acceptance in the institution (Kasworm, Sandmann & Sissel, 2000 in Kasworm 2005) and therefore, their educational participation and integration experience.

This article is part of the larger study being conducted at Makerere University to understand the participation experiences of NTS in higher (university) education in Uganda and find ways of addressing their educational exclusion through recommending appropriate interventions. The aim of this article is to unpack the equality of access, equity and inclusivity spaces of non-traditional students at Makerere University so as to contribute to Sustainable Development Goal number four...
(SDG4), specifically target 3 which states: “By 2030, ensure equal access for all women and men to affordable and quality technical, vocational and tertiary education, including university” (United Nations, 2015). The article answers the question: How have the traditionally organised universities such as Makerere University responded to meeting the diverse needs of their changing student populations?

We categorise Makerere University as a traditional university based on two things. One, it is the oldest public university in Uganda that was exclusively funded by the state from its inception in 1922 until the early 1990s when higher education was liberalised. This resulted in reduced government funding and introduction of cost sharing and privatisation (Mayanja, 1998; Muwanga & Musisi, 2003; Mamdani, 2007). Two, prior to privatisation Makerere was a residential university that exclusively admitted government-sponsored students who were studying on only full-time day programmes (Mamdani, 2007). These two features put the other public universities in Uganda at a low scale of ‘traditionally’ organised universities. The private universities in this case become the ‘non-traditionally’ organised universities.

2. Conceptualisation of exclusion and integration of NTS in higher education

The terrain of higher education has undeniably changed. There is sufficient evidence of increased diversity within the student population (Kasozi, 2002; Schuetze & Slowey, 2002; Boud, 2004; Lynch, 2008; Marandet & Wainwright, 2010; Openjuru, 2011). These and more studies show that there are increasing proportions of working and mature part-time students with caring responsibilities, joining higher education. But the efforts for their inclusion are mainly focused on access and recruitment and not on retention and progression (Boud, 2004). Consequently, the construction of university as an inclusive space where different students are comfortable to express their differences and have their diverse needs acknowledged and met, remains speculative (Marandet & Wainwright, 2010). As a matter of fact, non-traditional groups of students continue to face many challenges within the academy that constrain their full participation, including contexts where equal opportunity policies are in place (Schuetze & Slowey, 2002).

To conceptualise how an all-inclusive and equitable quality higher education can be constructed, we draw from the feminist approaches to equality and difference (Marandet & Wainwright, 2009) to discuss three discourses of integration and exclusion in relation to social policy provision for NTS. First, the ‘equal opportunity’ discourse postulates that equality is achieved by enabling women to be more like men predominantly through anti-discrimination legislation. In education, this discourse
assumes a student population with similar needs, able to exercise flexibility towards meeting student obligations – perceived solely as academic. Yet NTS’ obligations at university are comprised, in tandem, of both academic and other life obligations, such as those derived from work and familial responsibilities (Lynch, 2008). These ‘other’ needs are in part embedded within the neoliberal policies of increased commodification, marketisation and diversification of higher education (Schuetze & Slowey, 2002; Tett, 2006) and the changing labour market terrain that necessitates individuals to become flexible lifelong learners (Jarvis, 2007). Within the liberal framing, the characteristics of the term ‘other’ – in this case, the non-academic obligations of the NTS – are perceived as the problem (Bacchi, 1999). This approach therefore overlooks NTS’ barriers to participation and favours certain groups of students against others thereby casting the latter as deviants or intruders.

The discourse of exceptionalism or ‘special treatment’ (Marandet & Wainwright, 2009) is a measure of compensation to the derogatory mishaps of the ‘equal opportunity’ discourse. From the gender perspective, this approach is equated to Fraser’s caregiver parity model (Fraser, 2000), which recognises that women have different roles from men and, to honour this difference, recommends compensatory measures. In the education terrain, this model justifies interventions of a special nature for marginalised groups such as affirmative action or what Marandet & Wainwright (2009) call “other types of different treatment” (p. 114). It underscores the notion of fairness/equity through acknowledging the differences within the student population. But its success can only go as far as flexibility is possible and as supported by the institutional policy environment. Therefore, as an integration approach, it is weakened by the fact that it not only depends on the good will of the implementers but also denies the “application of a strict principle of equal treatment” (Young, 1989 p. 268), much to the disadvantage of the ‘other’ group.

The third discourse of transformation (Rees, 1998 in Marandet & Wainwright, 2009), also equated to Fraser’s universal caregiver model (Fraser, 2000), seeks to promote a society where men and women are recognised as both caregivers and workers. In the higher education framing this would translate to recognition of all students as, also, caregivers and workers, so as to transcend the existing model of the young, full-time and flexible student associated with higher education. The major benefit of this discourse is the recognition and integration of the private and public spheres (Lister, 2003) of the student so that the cost and burden of adaptation is shifted from the individual to the institution and the state. By doing so, this discourse seeks to create an inclusive university organised and modelled around the diversity of its
students’ needs, responsibilities and identities. From the lifelong learning perspective this discourse seeks to promote transformation in the lifelong learning agenda where the individual’s right to education gets protected by the state statutes. The above conceptualisations however cannot be understood in isolation of context.

**The Ugandan context**

In most societies in the world, especially former colonies of the west, university education, up to date, is given a higher place over and above other streams of education. For instance, in Uganda a university degree is so highly valued and prestigiously regarded in society that not achieving it renders one to be seen and feel as a failure (Tukundane, Zeelen, Minnaert & Kanyandago, 2014). In such contexts, the societal perceptions of university education have been found to shape the motivations of NTS for university education (Tumuheki, Zeelen & Openjuru, 2016a, 2016b). Going to university is therefore perceived as an empowering and transformative experience for the beneficiaries (Tumuheki et al., 2016b). Such societies are also characterised by pre-held conceptions on who, especially in terms of age, ‘fits’ with study at university. Consequently the perceptions and attitudes held by society, including the university community, tend to give younger and full-time students more entitlement and participation rights than the NTS, which may make such practices as stigmatisation, marginalisation, exclusion and discrimination against the ‘intruding’ students inevitable. Since identity construction is a social process (Lynch, 2008), these societal preconceptions, perceptions and attitudes also impact on the way NTS perceive themselves and construct their identity at university and among their student peers. They may end up exhibiting feelings of shame, alienation, low self-image and low confidence in abilities (Gallacher et al., 2002).

The cultural identity of NTS as a group within the higher education terrain is thus problematic because participation is conceived within the notion of a conventional university student that suits the student identity as opposed to multiple or blended identities of NTS (Lynch, 2008) derived from both the private and public spheres of students (Lister, 2003). In their struggle for empowerment and as a way of fitting within the structures of the current higher education system, NTS may adopt a different but considered ‘fitting’ student identity (Gallacher et al., 2002), which puts their true real life identities at risk (Bowl, 2001). However, especially in the African context, adult students may also distance themselves from the formalised status of the learner such as that of student (Crossan, Field, Gallacher & Merrill, 2003), and expect to be treated with respect (Openjuru, 2011) in consideration of the (superior) power relations (related to age and responsibility) they enjoy at work and at home, generally
as determined culturally in the wider society. Yet this is in direct conflict with the inferior power status accorded to students by lecturers, professors, administrators and supervisors.

## 3. Methodology

This is a mixed methods study (Hennink, Hutter & Bailey, 2011), with elements of participatory action research (PAR) (Reason & Bradbury, 2001; Creswell, 2012). In PAR, the academic researchers and the research participants collaborate to gain a similar understanding of the research problem and together propose solutions towards solving it. The School of Computing and Informatics Technology (CIT) at Makerere University was chosen as the unit of focus from which to draw the participants with whom to research, because it is from the experiences of the researcher in this very unit as the Faculty Registrar that the motivation for this research was inspired. Participants were therefore drawn from CIT undergraduate degree disciplines of Computer Science, Information Technology, Information Systems and Software Engineering.

By the time of commencement of this study, the researcher was serving in another college. However, giving a reflection here on the benefits and drawbacks to the researcher’s insider position is prudent. One of the benefits was the researcher’s prior knowledge of the institutional structures that played the ‘gate keeping role’ (Hennink et al., 2011). Indeed access to the gate keepers and subsequently to the research participants went quite smoothly. The insider position also helped the researcher know when to withdraw from or manoeuvre through antagonising situations embedded in institutional politics and focus on being accepted as a researcher through acting objectively within the research ethical guidelines. Through exercising personal reflexivity (Hennink et al., 2011), the researcher often stepped back and engaged formally as an outsider to institutionalise the research. The cons of an insider position, however, cannot be underestimated. First, from the primary participating researchers’ (non-traditional students’ stakeholder category) perspective, the researcher was at first perceived more of a registrar than a researcher and was often asked to intervene in resolving registry related issues on their behalf. However, through establishing rapport with the researched subjects, the subject-subject relationship (Boog, 2003) between the researcher and the researched subjects got firmer, waning away the held perceptions. Secondly, having been inspired by experiences from the registrar position, at times subjectivity took a sip-in, compromising objectivity required during interactions with the research participants. Nevertheless, through exercising interpersonal reflexivity (Hennink et al., 2011), objectivity associated with the outsider position would be
restored. The regular meetings with the students and the feedback committee helped to
guide the role of the researcher as an engaged outsider.

Data used in this article are mainly drawn from narratives of 15 unstructured in-
depth interviews (Riessman, 2008) administered between March and July 2013 to
three cohorts of NTS: five current students, seven graduates and three dropouts. Since
we intended to explore individual stories of NTS’ lived realities and experiences, our
selection of the participants did not aim at achieving representativeness of the sample
but at the “richness of the data” (Liamputtong & Ezzy, 2005 p. 49). Although we
categorise them into current students, graduates and dropouts, our analysis did not take
this categorisation into consideration because the aim of this article is to understand
the policy and practice environment available to NTS in university education. As a
way of validating NTS experiences at university, we corroborate their voices with
qualitative data drawn from interviews with other actors in the university: three staff
members involved in policy development, four in administration and five in academia,
as well as four traditional students.

Interviews lasted 60-90 minutes. We supplemented individual interviews with data
from focus groups of a workshop (March 23, 2013) intentionally held for and only
with the NTS stakeholder group. The rationale for this special arrangement was the
creation of a safe conversational space (Owens, 2006) to allow the primary
participants’ group more freedom of speech and interaction. The study is also
supplemented by data from a survey conducted among the NTS in the School of
Computing and IT where our participatory project was based. The survey was
conducted to mainly propel an understanding of the magnitude of the different aspects
of the research problem – the most prevalent among NTS (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2010).
The reporting in this article specifically includes analyses on the theme provision of
and access to services and facilities at the university.

For data generated qualitatively, data analysis was done with the aid of
qualitative data analysis software ATLAS.ti (Flick, 2009) and thematic analysis
(Virginia & Clarke, 2006; Greg, MacQueen & Namey, 2011). For the survey,
analysis was done using descriptive statistics in SPSS (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2010). This
helped us to gain insight of issues that were most prevalent among non-traditional
students. In presenting the findings, we use excerpts from the data sources mentioned
above. All names used are pseudonyms.
4. Policy and practice provisions for NTS: equal opportunity, exceptions or need for transformation?

Since this article seeks to understand the policy and practice provisions of the university in response to the diverse needs of the changing student population, presentation of our findings is organised along three major themes that emerged from the analysis of the data on the inside-of-institution environment: provision of and access to services and facilities, interaction with staff, and interaction with fellow students. However, we situate the analysis and general presentation of the findings within the conceptual framework on the discourses of equal opportunity, exceptionalism and transformation, as theorised earlier on.

On provision of and access to services and facilities

Enrolment of NTS into university was characterised by limited intake capacities allotted to alternative entry routes on both fulltime and part-time study programmes, making entry through both diploma and mature age entry schemes very competitive. In some units, e.g. CIT, the mature age entry scheme did not have any intake allocations. As if this was not limiting enough, the application form for non-traditional applicants had only one choice slot compared to up to six choices for the direct (mainstream) entry applicants, who also have the opportunity to apply online:

…since when we are applying we are many and we have to choose only one course on our form, the diploma applicants – you choose a programme whereby…you stand high chances of giving you what?, that course. (Alon)

This finding not only challenges the core ethos of ‘equal opportunity’ provision aimed at widening access opportunities for the marginalised groups, but also portrays the university’s unpreparedness for equity and inclusion. In a bid to secure a fall-back position, NTS bought and filled as many application forms as possible:

…I bought three forms…I applied for BRAM first choice, I applied for Office and Information Management…then I had no any other choice I am like any way let me just put IT…Do you know the reason why I made more than one choice? We were more people who were applying for records…[yet] only one place, so I am like, will I stand a chance? (Naome)

These findings were corroborated by an administrative staff member involved in policy development:
…at the time of application we expect non-traditional students to indicate one choice because we assume that they know what they want, and the rest put six choices, the traditional...[also] for the non-traditional students they don’t qualify to apply online because we don’t have the information in the system that we want, online application covers only traditional students. (Christian)

Whereas buying many forms increased chances for admission, it also acted as a tool for social exclusion of diploma holder applicants who sought to join on government sponsorship and got admitted on ‘wrong’ programmes, as was the case with Naome. Yet the change of programme policy that would provide a window for equity, was also reported to be exclusionary and in need of transformation:

I went and inquired; is there chance of changing a course? They were like no. Actually they should at least give a chance of changing a course using diploma because you people, you feel you don’t want to lose it, as in you don’t want to lose that offer but again you have to go in for that. (Naome)

And so was the university’s policy on guidance and information provision. In general, information availability and dissemination were discriminatory to NTS, e.g. whereas direct entry applicants received career guidance from formal university structures while at school, non-traditional applicants reported social networks of siblings already at university, friends and parents as their sources of guidance. Subsequently, some participants made study choices that did not suit their interests, sometimes resulting into dropping out due to failure to connect the offered study programmes with dreams and aspirations:

…the course I was doing, okay, I was not expecting it to be as hard as I found it, but since it was not part of my future as in future aspirations, dreams, I had this in mind that however much I do it I will cross to business… (Alon)

Such findings underscore a weak policy framework for ensuring retention and progression of these students. One of the student interviewees suggested the need to have in place an arrangement through which they could access information and guidance before and during their studies:

…at least I needed before maybe I applied for this course, before I start doing, maybe before a student starts a course, I would expect to have some kind of guidance about what someone is going to do…when you complain about that they say that they put it on the net …but at least we need some careers, career guidance office or something in the department... (Albert)
Because non-traditional students are a highly diverse group and located in non-definite locations (Sissel, Hansman & Kasworm, 2001), it creates the challenge of how to reach them and with what kind of information (Darkenwald & Merriam, 1982). In this study, the communication channels and practices of the university were indeed found incognisant of and therefore exclusionary to the communication needs of NTS who combined studies with work, especially those enrolled on the evening programme with full-time day employment:

We, the working students, we have very many things that we find are going on here but we don’t know how, where to go, the communication channels are so poor, you find that tests and timetables are changed but you don’t know how, what’s going on, you just get it from the colleagues… (Group 1 – Workshop March 23, 2013).

In the survey, lack of proper and effective communication channels was ranked third out of the six major challenges in university study for NTS. Being aware of their circumstances, NTS intentionally chose to apply and study on the evening programme knowing it would suit their situation. However, they were disappointed that the university expected them to be more flexible with their work schedules to fit into the university schedules for lectures, tests, examinations and course works. The most outstanding challenge reported in the survey was that of too much coursework/too little time to do the coursework. To be able to meet these obligations, both the participants and the lecturers shared that students improvise through hiring of mercenaries to do their work. Moreover, sometimes lecturers made impromptu changes in class timetables, bringing lecture time even earlier than the approved start time of 5:00 pm. These issues were elaborated at the workshops thus:

We experience a lot of problems when it comes to that area…we always find lectures have already started. We get also problems with submitting course works in time because most lecturers say course works are supposed to be submitted at five o’clock, so you come and course works have already been taken. (Group 1 – Workshop March 23, 2013).

These findings were corroborated by the policy makers in the university who expressed ambivalence about the policy on working hours within which members of staff were expected to be at university to teach or provide administrative services to evening students:

Originally when we were introducing this [evening programme], we thought government would be the one to come up with policy…I remember the Ministry of Education’s answer was that let’s have the thief first then the law will come in…I
know there was a strike by members of staff of [name of academic unit]; I think I have a letter from one of them that ‘are they also supposed to teach in the evening? Is that a requirement?’ So you can see even the staff themselves are querying …the evening students are treated like a by the way. (Josephat)

Scheduling challenges have been reported widely in many studies on integration of NTS in university education (e.g. Moss, 2004; Lynch, 2008; Marandet & Wainwright, 2009). In this study these challenges were not limited to academic activities but also extended to key administrative functions of the university due to lack of an inclusionary policy on working hours. Not being able to access administrative services because of unfavourable opening hours was the second most mentioned challenge in the survey. Accordingly, access to administrative services such as orientation, registration and examination clearance, was reported difficult, especially for the evening working students, often resulting in unsolicited behaviours:

…[examination] permits are always issued during day time and some of us cannot be here at that time, so when you come in the evening to pick, sometimes the offices are closed, key offices are always closed during what, during the evening time so we cannot access the service…last semester I even missed like an hour to the exam trying to chase out for the examination permit and I still ended without but I had to enter the examination room with force. (Albert)

Many other participants identified with Albert’s experience. The policy makers too made a confirmation on these findings:

…there are a lot of encumbrances or hindrances which we need to address and which students have mentioned. One of them of course is, we open these offices from eight, at five we should be going home, now when this non-traditional group majority of whom study during evening come in, they will find all this under padlock… (Josephat)

The ambiguity surrounding the policy on working hours also mirrored the limited and unequal opportunities evening working NTS had towards accessing learning facilities, such as computer laboratories and libraries. Moreover, the curricula for both full-time and part-time study programmes were designed with the same duration period within which to complete, making it more constraining for the ‘part-time’ students, as acknowledged by a staff member involved in scheduling and administration of academic programmes:

…the biggest thing I see with the non-traditional students, the time we give them for their activities is short. All activities from five to nine, these other are given from
eight to five [o’clock] and that very time again we expect them to do all the things: go to the library and read, go to the labs and do practicals, attend lectures, register, attend to the lecturers queries, in four hours that is doing too much… (Timothy)

Nevertheless, some NTS who joined through the diploma holder scheme benefited from exemptions, such as gaining admission straight to year two through the university’s credit transfer policy. Although being treated special may sound an inclusive strategy it can be a form of exclusion through denying the so-called ‘special’ ones an equal chance of participation, or what Young (1989, p. 268) calls denial of “application of a strict principle of equal treatment”:

…those who joined in year two, we are having a problem of registration, for us we don’t register online, we register manually so you find the long queue, like the first years have come, they are so many, you also have to register manually... (Jackie)

The quote above shows that the ‘special treatment’ accorded at admission was neither reflected nor sustained in the provision of access to administrative services. Other than the discriminatory environment surrounding registration, these students also felt marginalised when it came to the inclusion of their records in the information management systems. Their encumbrances derived from carrying the same student numbers used at diploma study programme and being allocated registration numbers similar to those of first year students. Subsequently their records always went missing in the registration and examination processing systems, as Jackie further shared:

…then like last sem [semester] I had a problem; I registered, then when it came to the time of getting the examination permits, my permit was missing for like three times…then also another problem we’re having, like I am having missing marks for last semester, not only me but also colleagues that joined in year two.

NTS who combined study with caring responsibilities felt that the university did not appreciate their situation since it did not have provisions for their caring responsibilities. The financial constraints notwithstanding, the need to establish a child care facility at the university was acknowledged by both students and staff as an important intervention in enabling transformation. One NTS interviewee retorted:

…[its] the best thing that can happen to everyone coz [because] at least when you know that your kid is here…when you know that your kid is safe and you can always go and see that kid at least and you know, breastfeed and all that, at least things can be okay, because for me I left my kid and I was too too stressed. (Dativa)
Interestingly, although NTS were aware of these exclusionary discourses some still portioned the blame onto themselves for failing to adapt and ‘fit’ in, thereby sustaining and conforming to the perceptions that university is for the younger students admitted straight from high school with only academic obligations. For such students, access to university was more of a privilege than an opportunity for their right to education. On the side of the university, despite acknowledging that the existing policy framework for provision of and access to services and facilities was discriminatory, staff attitudes remained largely inclined to demanding flexibility on the side of NTS and not from the university, as Timothy concluded: “however, we should also understand that as an institution we can’t fit in the student’s programme.”

**On interaction with staff**

Participants shared narratives that showed that they were neither known nor expected to be part of the university student population by their lecturers. This made them feel that the lecturers’ perceptions of university student identity and therefore their attitudes were more in favour of students who joined university straight from high school rather than those who joined through alternative entry routes:

Those lecturers, I don’t even think they know that there are people who are upgrading; they don’t all that expect it. It’s like for them they know they are dealing with people from A level –first year, second, third year. (Dativa)

One of the lecturers corroborated on their lack of awareness of what constitutes their student population:

I would like to thank you for this research because they [NTS] were a silent group that was more or less unknown. You would get to know them when they probably came to you and they may not necessarily tell you their background…but maybe when you go on to probe them why they haven’t done their assignments in time, that’s when they start telling you how they have to fend for themselves. (Anna)

NTS believed that lack of awareness on the part of the lecturers impacted negatively on their responsiveness to their learning needs, most especially linking theory to practice. Yet using knowledge and skills from previous qualifications was mentioned in the survey as the most important way in which non-traditional students made use of their previous experience and qualifications in the degree programme (Van Brink, 2015). The lecturers indeed acknowledged their inability to include the learning needs of NTS in teaching:
Failure of staff to recognise both the private and public spheres of students (Lister, 2003) gave NTS feelings of having unequal rights to participation, being the ‘other’ students in the university (Sissel et al., 2001) – what Bacchi (1999) terms ‘the problem’ to the institution – resulting in feelings of neglect, exclusion and intrusion:

…and you know when you are, like you are not a normal student, things are hard (…) the lecturers would mark our tests, those course works…they would always misplace them, may be they thought maybe we are lost…the people they communicate [with] is those normal students. (Dativa)

The perceptions NTS held of themselves as not normal students derived mainly from two identity features that differentiated them from the ‘normal’ university students: age and avenue of entry. These gave them doubts about their potential for equal participation and capabilities for knowledge acquisition, as shared by Julie: “I was like 20, around 25, around that time, these are freshers who are so fresh from A level and I am like; will I compete with these people?” Failure to recognise the varied identities and needs of NTS made some lecturers ignite feelings of stigmatisation and victimisation among them, further bringing down their already shattered images from the past, as illustrated in the story of Silver:

I could come late [but] I would sit in front of my lecturer…reason being that whenever I could want to ask a question; I am asking a question, someone who is old, who is older than the students in the class, so I just wanted to talk to him closely that’s why I was seating in front that whenever I was asking a question I could say ‘but sir’ not putting up the hand then I would ask a question otherwise people would be laughing at me and start looking at me naye (but) that gentleman has [he] also come to study?

…I remember one time there was a lecturer called [name of lecturer]. I asked a question in class and then he said ‘but you see, you people, most people do not understand at the spot, others understand in the morning, others understand at midnight; now this one is asking me an obvious question’. Now people started laughing at me…and after that they realised that I was the one who was asking such a question. (Silver)
On the one hand, Silver’s experience was humiliating but also showed that NTS experienced feelings of shame and held preconceptions about old age as a barrier to participation. Silver’s act of fearing to be ashamed is partly informed by the conventional perceptions held in Ugandan society that university is best suited for the young and dependant students who join straight after high school, rendering those who do not follow this protocol to be seen as losers (Openjuru, 2010) and outliers in an education system that places university education over and above all other forms of education (National Council for Higher Education [NCHE], 2014; Tukundane et al., 2014). In this study, the term ‘mature’ was reported to be used as a mockery to those who come to university through avenues other than direct entry.

Accordingly, some NTS shared narratives that showed that despite lecturers being aware that their student population also comprised of students from non-traditional backgrounds, they still made stigmatising acts that portrayed NTS more as intruders:

…one day he [lecturer] came in class and said ‘you people, some of you people, you take time to study you know, because of, you want to hurry in marriages…you boys be careful…some of those girls actually they are women, they are here with kids, they aim at some people who have something in their pockets…that’s why they are here and old like that’. (Naome)

Consequently some students conveyed their disappointment on the way lecturers failed to comprehend and appreciate their multitasking demands and responsibilities:

I really feel so bad about the lecturers who chase us out of class. He says ‘when you find I have already entered class you don’t enter’…You’ve struggled to get here, you have been taking care of other responsibilities and then you rush get to campus and may be the lecturer is 20 minutes into the lecture and he says ‘where have you been? just go out’. I don’t think that’s okay because we go through a lot; one looking for the money, taking care of other responsibilities and someone thinks you are just walking out of may be this Mitchel hall. (Group 2 – Workshop March 23, 2013)

Although NTS generally reported a discriminatory and exclusionary relationship with members of staff, they also acknowledged that some staff understood the complexity of their situation, and some of them sometimes took a proactive stance to assist wherever they could, such as allowing them to submit their assignments late if they had genuine reasons, as shared by Albert: “…some lecturers are understanding if you go and you are on evening session, talk to them and say please we had problems at home, they can listen to you.” This was also corroborated by members of staff, albeit reservedly:
…personally I have been encouraging the students to see me, like in case they are not able to meet deadlines they are free either to give me a call or to send me an email, but again I wasn’t encouraging it so much because like it would be giving students lee way to compromise, so you have to use a lot of judgment in particular instances and you try to help where you can. (Anna)

Anna’s act demonstrates the power available to lecturers to assist students and the impact of recognising differences within the student population. However, for some lecturers this power was used to keep a distance from students perceived to have ‘stretching’ needs. Such behavioural attitudes, especially in the African context, could be explained by the superior power status lecturers have in relation to their students. This is in sharp contrast to the power status that older, working or parenting students expect to be treated with (Openjuru, 2011). Staff members who hold such attitudes were found reluctant to make exceptions:

…they have to arrange either they come from work and come and see me, that’s the problem they have, I cannot see students past 6 pm…[after evening class] I close and go…it’s not fair to them but I just feel like after 6 pm I don’t have to listen to students’ calls like that …You just have to understand that once you have enrolled for a degree you don’t say I don’t have time because you are supposed to know that you have come to the degree and not work. (Josh)

Asked about how best the university could serve NTS, a senior administrator suggested the need for transformation of staff attitudes: “... our own attitude towards them; may be, that’s the starting point; do we regard these guys also equally highly”? The issue of negative attitudes cut across members of staff and students.

**On interaction with fellow students**

NTS narrated mixed stories on their interaction with fellow students. Their interactions were shaped mainly by the attitudes and perceptions the latter held against them. On the one hand NTS expressed exclusionary experiences with especially day class traditional students based on two related issues: age and avenue of entry:

Traditional students…some of them behave like kids, some of them see us as failures in life, when someone gets to know you are 32 years and you are still studying, he thinks that you are a failure. (Albert)

I don’t talk to everyone in class because some people see you as someone strange; you joined them in year two, they are wondering where you came from, so some under look you. (Jackie)
On the other hand however, they reported that the traditional students had high expectations of them derived from their prior experiences and practical orientation. This, they said, usually came into effect through socialisation during group work assignments and class presentations. Although participants took pride in such a perception, some nevertheless preferred not to identify themselves to fellow students as NTS because it would be more ridiculing in case they were not able to excel as expected, as shared by group three participants at the March 23, 2013 workshop: “at times we intend not to tell people how we entered into campus, because people will start judging according to how you perform.”

From the narratives above, it is evident that there is stigma attached to being a non-traditional student, which is mainly felt in contact with fellow classmates (see also Van Brink, 2015). Corroborating on the issue of identity, Maudah, a traditional student shared the experience she had with an NTS friend: “…she told me ‘don’t tell anyone about it, people will start undermining me’…most are scared, they say people will look at them in a bad way…” Identity is a very pertinent issue because youth-oriented universities tend to limit the power, privilege and advocacy of older students, which pushes them towards alienated and marginalised identities (Kasworm, 2010). In some situations NTS may experience what Erikson (1968) terms ‘identity crisis’ since they have to reconfigure their identities to fit into a system that largely supports student identity over other identities such as worker, husband and father, wife and mother. Such identities were sometimes used by traditional students as justification for exclusion of NTS:

…when I was in first year that’s what I did; I would make sure that the people who are in my group are people who come here by 4 [pm]…I told him I know it’s hard but you try as much as possible to come on time but he never made it. Well, green as I was, I had to make him quit…I told him we can’t continue with him because we want to benefit from all the members. (Rodney)

Nevertheless, some NTS shared narratives where their classmates admired them because of being knowledgeable as a result of prior qualifications and practical orientations. Jackie shared: “…some see you as a different person; they expect you know everything so they always come approach you; how do you go about this, how do you go about this?” Traditional students corroborated this finding, recognising that the knowledge and skills NTS derive from their other identities enriched learning and promoted mutual interaction with them:

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
5. Discussion

The fundamental principle of equitable education is valuing of diversity within the student population – understanding that individual learners and different groups of learners are unique; recognising and appreciating that students have different needs and require different targeted supports to ensure that their rights are respected (UNESCO, 2005). Inclusive education, on the other hand, means securing all learners’ rights to, within and through education so they can realise their potential and aspirations (Wilson, 2003); and so it goes beyond improving access to supporting wider processes that reduce inequalities among different people and groups of people through correcting those things that act as barriers to participation (UNESCO, 2008). It is therefore pertinent that, in discussing the inclusion agenda for previously excluded and underrepresented students, both policy and practice environments at universities should embrace the different facets of lifelong learning. Focus should go beyond getting in, to assessing the quality of the educational experiences and outcomes of the entrants (Boud, 2004), reflecting on such questions as access to what, for whom, for how long, and for what success (Du Plooy & Zilindile, 2014).

From the narratives shared above by the participants of this study, it is evident that the university does not have in place (yet) the appropriate culture and support mechanisms for the heterogeneous needs of non-traditional students. Those which are there seem to work only at the entry point (point of increasing access) without sustainability in the later processes of participation. Therefore, through the findings of this article, Makerere University is called upon to reflect, plan and strategise effectively for the growing presence of NTS at university. For instance, there is need to invest in new forms of advisory support services, academic support, mentorship and pedagogical approaches, e.g. andragogy (Knowles, 1984) that takes into consideration the time constraint needs of the students and which also promotes professional
development for university lecturers to handle appropriately the learning needs of NTS. There is need for more flexibility in classroom schedules, and adoption of modular systems of academic provision (Baptista, 2011), such as course staggering so as to reduce the volume of workload at any given moment in time. These suggestions, however, would work more effectively if they are implemented in an environment that recognises and appreciates that NTS are not the ‘other’ students.

Accordingly, there is need for a dedicated effort towards changing the mind-sets of people within universities and the larger society about the global changes taking place in society. People must know that the constant changes in technology and scientific progress have created an unstable job environment that necessitates individuals to become flexible lifelong learners so as to keep up with the changing needs of the labour market (Jarvis, 2007). This has altered the relationship between higher education and the world of work (Boud, 2004). Consequently, the long held assumption that undergraduate courses are a preparation for the world of work is steadily becoming challenged. As a result, learning can no longer be confined to the conventional means of initial education (Zeelen, 2015). A lot of learning takes place outside this framework in non-formal learning environments. At universities, it is becoming increasingly difficult to say who a (non) traditional student is or is not. Combining learning and work and other life responsibilities, therefore, ought to be given a place in higher education and be accepted as a norm rather than an anomaly. Subsequently, recognising and accepting identities other than the student identity becomes pertinent to the inclusion agenda.

This study has given detailed insights into the policy and practice provisions for NTS at Makerere University, a traditionally organised university that for a long time depended fully on government subvention for funding. Although we acknowledge that higher education in Uganda is greatly underfunded, it would be interesting to conduct a comparative study of Makerere University and any other (less) ‘traditionally’ organised university or better still a ‘non-traditionally’ organised university. Secondly, although we draw on feminist approaches to equality and difference to theoretically understand the equality of access for NTS in higher education, we nonetheless do not include analyses and results that bring out the (unfair/unequal) situation of the women participants. Another study that fills this gap would be helpful. Thirdly, although the study includes voices of other stakeholders, these have only been used for verification purposes of the experiences of the major research subjects group. A study that goes deeper into giving more room to these voices in a way that reports opposing responses, if any, would suffice. Moreover, the analyses did not put into consideration the NTS experiences as analysed from their categorisation as current students, graduates and
dropout. A study that goes deeper into understanding the institutional provisions based on this categorisation would be helpful in highlighting insights on the improvements that have been made over time.

6. Conclusion: The need for transformation

The aim of the study was to unpack the equality of access, equity and inclusivity spaces of non-traditional students at Makerere University so as to contribute to the agenda for achieving SDGs. The article sought to answer the question: How have the traditionally organised universities such as Makerere University responded to meeting the diverse needs of their changing student populations? To a larger extent Makerere University was found unprepared and therefore unresponsive to the needs of students perceived as the ‘other’ (Sissel et al., 2001) or ‘the problem’ (Bacchi, 1999). Although, the ‘equal opportunity’ provision has opened and widened access for NTS, their equity and inclusivity spaces remain inadequately filled. The policy and practice environments have largely remained more traditionally inclined and in favour of traditional students, giving NTS low quality educational and integration experience. The NTS narratives also showed that they are not a uniform group. Some students are more non-traditional than others and as such experience more and sometimes other barriers. Because of time constraints, NTS who combine studies with other life obligations, such as full-time employment, are the most affected (Darkenwald & Merriam, 1982).

This study has explored the policy and practice provisions available to NTS at Makerere University through the lenses of: provision of and access to services and facilities, interaction with staff, and interaction with fellow students. The provision of and access to services and facilities was found problematic mainly because inclusive policies were not in place. There were quite a number of contradictions between the desired policy environment and realities, including access spaces that are core to the ethos of equal opportunity. The lack of a clear policy on working hours for staff not only inhibited efficient service provision and delivery but also underscored the rhetoric stance of the ‘equal opportunity’ discourse. It became difficult to understand the purpose for which, and the target group for whom, the evening programme was established. Subsequently, the university’s efforts are seen to be more directed at creating and sustaining a system of generating funds, possibly turning students into cash-cow boons (Richardson & King, 1998) without paying attention to their academic and psycho-social needs, and therefore their retention and progression. The interaction gaps identified between NTS and staff, on one hand, and with fellow students, on the other, also mirrored unequal opportunities for NTS in an education system anchored
on the traditions of selective education (Sissel et al., 2001). Although exceptions were administered to enhance their inclusion, the chances of sustainability were limited and unscrupulous. By not adapting adequately to the diverse needs of its student population, Makerere University falls short of being categorised among responsive universities (Meuleman, Garrett, Wrench & King, 2014).

To conclude, failure of the ‘equal opportunity’ discourse to adequately accommodate both the private and public spheres of NTS makes it a grandiloquence provision with limited chances of substantiating claims of egalitarian ideals. Also, surviving on the discourse of exceptionalism is risky and far from realising the tenets of equitable and inclusive participation. Thus, the lifelong learning agenda ought to be focused on the transformation discourse, which aims at creating an inclusive university organised and modelled around a diverse student population. More so, this discourse promotes sharing of the cost and burden of adaptation between the individual, the institution and the state.
Chapter 6
Participation and the Out-Of-Institution Environments