Aiding the Educational Transition for Costa Rican Students to Secondary Education

A qualitative study

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Aiding the Educational Transition for Costa Rican Students from Primary Education to Lower Secondary Education

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Abstract

The aim of this study is to examine how students at disadvantaged schools in Costa Rica experience and cope with the educational transition between 6th and 7th grade. Furthermore, to analyse which are the major contributing factors and how to aid this passage for students at risk through the term, Lifelong learning. This study will be conducted through an analysis of Costa Rica’s contemporary education policy documents through OECD’s educational report (2017). Thereafter the empirical data will be collected from seven semi-structured, qualitative interviews. Central findings shows that the school should provide more individual attention, equal career counselling in primary schools, start earlier with topics concerning identity and more engaging with parents or persons that are responsible.

Keywords
Educational transition, school dropout, lifelong learning
1. Introduction

The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) states that the quality of life in Costa Rica has made impressive progress over the last decade. Educational progression and school admittance rates have demonstrated growth surpassing that of other Latin American countries and are catching with the OECD average. Preschools, primary schools and secondary schools have advanced and improved. Upper secondary education is now compulsory and the registration of tertiary education has almost doubled since the year 2000 (2017a, p. 4).

Despite these improvements, the country still underperforms in relation to other OECD countries in the field of education, jobs, income and life satisfaction (OECD, n.d.). Education has a fundamental role in counteracting inequality and poverty. These are major challenges for Costa Rica, where the poverty percentage is double the OECD average (2017a, p. 4). The gap between distinctive social classes is extensive (p. 6). The data informs that a disadvantaged student in Costa Rica has less than a one in ten chance to enrol in university (ibid.). The report also concluded that Costa Rica has 51% of 25–34-year-olds that have upper secondary qualifications, which is much lower than the other Latin American countries, as well as lower than the average percentage of the OECD, which is at 84% (p. 14). Which among other causes emerges from the large number of drop-outs in many disadvantaged secondary schools in Costa Rica (p. 4).

According to the report, a great percentage of school drop-outs occurs more frequently in the educational transition between 6th to 7th grade, due to the shifts between schools, class and curriculum (2017b, p. 150). Thereby will this study target this educational transition. Additionally, with the consideration of its importance and consequences that it further leads to the *bachillerato diploma*—equal to upper secondary education diploma— which have started to become the minimum requirement for job application in Costa Rica (p. 14), thereby the decision in this phase will impact a great part of the student’s life and future.

With the consideration that OECD’s report examines this problem from an objective and political point of view. My interest was raised to analyse this theme from an individual, holistic and narrative perspective. Namely, examine the students’ own experience but also from the school personnel’s perspective who works closely with the children. According to Ecclestone, Birsta and Martin, the best way to understand transition is through the three perspectives: identity, structure and agency (2010, p. 12). With this in mind, I have chosen to use semi-structured interviews. I have conducted interviews with one former student that have completed upper secondary education, two former students that have dropped out of school and three career counsellors and one public official working for Costa Rica’s educational system MEP.
1.2 Projects Aims and Goals
The study aims to examine how students at disadvantaged schools in Costa Rica experience and cope with the transitions between 6th to 7th grade, additionally analyse which are the major contributing factors. The research aims to answer these questions:

- How does the selected group of students experience and cope with the transition between the 6th and 7th grade?
- How does Costa Rica’s present school system work with this group to prepare them for the educational transition in 6th and 7th grade and prevent school dropouts?
- How can the selected group of students better be equipped for the educational transition between 6th and 7th grade and prevent school drop-out?

The study will investigate this aim and research questions through theoretical perspectives of, *Lifelong learning*. 
2. Background

This chapter will briefly introduce Costa Rica and do a summary of their current educational situation. This part is conducted by reviewing OECD’s report “Education in Costa Rica, Reviews of National Policies for Education” (2017). The problem first dealt with is the very theme of this work, after that, the thematisation seeks to identify factors that contribute to unsuccessful transitions as well to drop-outs. Thereafter a thematisation of some of OECD’s recommendations which were considered having a recurrent impact on the target group in this field.

2.1 Costa Rica

Costa Rica is a country located in Central America, with a estimated population of 5.2 million inhabitants (Worldometer, n.d.). In comparison to other Latin American countries, Costa Rica is in many ways considered one of the most developed and progressive countries. For example, Costa Rica is considered as a role-model in the fields of peace and sustainability. In 2019, Costa Rica was declared to be world champions in policy leadership by the United Nation Environment Programme for their climate awareness and for its strong social focus (UNEP, 2019). Just to mention some examples, Costa Rica started to work for a stricter environmental policy over fifty years ago and today more than 98 % of their energy is renewable (ibid.). Regarding the social priorities, Costa Rica has one of the oldest and most substantial democracy in the region (OECD, 2017b, p. 35) and it was over seventy years ago that they abolished the military (UNESCO.org, 2016). Additionally, in comparison to their neighbours, the country is considered to have good safety, low poverty rates, long life expectancy and one of the highest levels of life quality (OECD, 2017b, p. 36). According to OECD, Costa Rica’s good social and economic progression is the result of the country’s early educational development. Costa Rica is additionally known for being the pioneer country concerning education in Latin America; for example, they were one of the first to provide universal primary school, and early made sure that all inhabitants had basic literacy skill (ibid.).

2.2 Current Educational Situation

OECD’s Education Policy review of Costa Rica (2017a) has collected data in relevant fields which thereafter has undergone in-depth analysis summarised as recommendations for their education system. As mentioned, this report concludes that Costa Rica have come far in many areas but is still falling behind in many fields (p. 4). The educational report is comprehensive, and this study does not claim to be complete. The challenges and recommendations which will be mentioned is just a small selection, which according to the report, direct or indirect, underlie the unsuccessful transitions and school drop-out in secondary education.

Secondary education in Costa Rica is divided in two cycles. Lower secondary is three years and starts when the students are 12–13 years old. Thereafter is upper secondary school when the students are between 15–16 which can either be three or four years long. This study focuses mainly on the transition from primary education to lower secondary education.

2.2.1 – School Drop-out and Unsuccessful Transitions

Costa Rica is facing a high dropout rate. OECD’s more recent statistics about secondary graduation rate from 2022 – showing data between 2017–19 – informs us that Costa Rica is one of the worst-performing country (See figure 1). Additionally, according to the data, OECD states that the annual drop-out rate increases in the transition years, when the student needs to face new challenges, like
different environments, new classmates and advanced curricula (See Figure 2; OECD 2017b, pp. 142–3). According to OECD (2017b), Costa Rica is one of the countries with the greatest gaps in secondary enrolment between people from wealthy and poor socioeconomic backgrounds in Latin America. Data shows that students from a non-educated household have a probability of 16% to complete upper secondary school. This is to be contrasted with students from an educated household, where 70% enrol (p. 142).

School dropout can be caused of various factors, especially depending on when in the students life and where culturally and socially. According to studies, contributing factors tends to be related to the students lacking of commitment and support. Commitment may be affected by the student’s personal and familiar attitude in relation to how the educational system work. Background and conditions, as what socio-economic environment and role models in students surrounding may play a part (Antelm-
Lanzat, Cacheiro-González and Pérez-Navío, 2018). External factors as bad peer pressure which can result in gang violence is also a common occurrence (Knesting, 2010). Additionally the support from teachers and classmates are viewed as important component in relation to commit. Furthermore about the students own learnings ability—which often can be connected with upbringing and background—are factors which can cause school dropout. Learning disabilities as dyslexia, language difficulties or attention problems may hinder the students learning process and affect the students school experience. Previous experience, negative life events may also affect the students focus and learning success (Antelm-Lanzat, Cacheiro-González and Pérez-Navío, 2018).

2.2.2 – Grade Repetition
Costa Rica’s educational system allows for students to repeat a year to enhance performance. According to the educational report, students who have repeated a year risk ten times higher to drop-out rates. In 2014, 15% of the students repeated a year. A student needs to pass all 14 subjects to be able to continue to the next year. Additionally, these situations are noted to occur mostly in the transition years. Developments have been made where students can instead repeat the failed subject instead of the entire year’s worth of study. Even so, the field is only slowly progressing (2017b, p. 143).

2.2.3 - Teacher’s Role and Pedagogy Need to be Strengthen.
Teachers have a key role in the learning outcome of the students and additionally to overcome the high school drop-out rates. According to the report (2017b), a lot of teachers in Costa Rica lack good pedagogical tools, classroom management and assessment strategies (p. 23). There are no extra demands for upper secondary teachers; general secondary teachers can be recruited for the same field (p. 141). The teachers’ educational programme has previously had the philosophy of filtering out students, rather than looking to support and keep as many as possible (p. 155). The new curriculum will demand that the teachers have improved teaching skills, tho the problem is that half of the teachers are on short-term contracts which makes the realisation of professional development slow (p. 147).

2.2.4 - A Need for a more Personalised Assessment from the Whole School.
OECD’s report (2017b) mentions the importance of more personalised implements from the teachers’ side, but which could be expected from the whole school. OECD gives recommendations to create learning portfolios to help the students to focus on their personal goals. The report provides Portugal as an example, which has created a programme to encounter grade repetition by supporting the student’s motivation, self-esteem, tenacity and patience (p. 155). This personalised assessment can also help the school to target and give extra support to students that are at risk of grade repetition.

2.2.5 - Early School Selection
Students in Costa Rica need to choose between an academic or technical school at the end of primary education. This implies making an important decision at the age of 12. A lot of countries often delay the selection until after lower secondary, when adolescents have matured and become more informed of different career paths. Additionally, it prevents younger students from traveling far, especially for the adolescents that live in the rural areas. In this decision, students choose between a technical or academic orientation. The technical orientation results in a technical career in different subjects. The academic orientation results in a general bachillerato, which is more or less equal to a high school or secondary diploma. The choice is often tied to where you live and what the local schools offer (2017b, p. 16).

2.2.6 – Lack of Resources
According to OECD’s data, Costa Rica is showing high percentage of students that lacks educational materials (See Figure 3). Through the Programme of International Student Assessment (PISA), the
statistic stated Costa Rica as the worst country. The resources that they were lacking was 39% of physical infrastructure, 38% educational material and 23% teaching staff (2017b, p. 141).

Figure 4.2. PISA index of shortage of educational materials (2015)

![PISA index of shortage of educational materials (2015)](image)

Note: This figure shows the percentage of students in schools whose principal reported in PISA 2015 that the school's capacity to provide instruction is hindered a lot by a lack of educational material (e.g. textbooks, IT equipment, library or laboratory material).


2.2.7 – Project: *Yo Me Apunto*
Costa Rica created the project, *Yo Me Apunto* [I Am In] 2015, to encounter school failures and school drop-outs. This project aims to prevent these consequences by targeting it early. The project exists on 185 secondary schools which have high drop-out statistics which mostly exist in the poor areas. The project aims to motivate students to understand the value of education, additionally encounter underlying challenges as drugs, absenteeism, violence and crimes. The project also aims to prevent the unsuccessful school transitions between the 6th and 7th grade (2017b, p. 147). The report highlighted this project as a key role to counteract Costa Rica’s educational challenges and emphasised the impact it may result in if the project would become permanent in the curriculum.

2.3 Summary
The summarisation this chapter conducts, is to be viewed as an introduction with a critical perspective of the selected group of students’ school context. This brief background helps the reader to easier get a grasp of some of the challenges and what context the participants which this report collects its data emerge from. According to OECD’s report, Costa Rica is facing many complications in their school system and policy as a whole—as does more or less every country. It is noted that the outcome of the high drop-out rate is not to be blamed for one cause but rather it is a complex problem, interwoven of different factors. The problematisations and recommendations this study have summarised are just a few to be mentioned which are situated in the secondary school. These delineations were made regarding this study’s aim on how these students better can be equipped for the transition to lower secondary education. This do not imply that the greatest contributing factors for the unsuccessful transitions are only to be found in this phase. On the contrary, other factors which are not mentioned may play an active role, maybe one even more relevant. For example, the inadequacy of other educational fields, as primary school and tertiary school. OECD’s report (2017b) mention that Early Childhood and Care (ECEC) is still the most underdeveloped sector in comparison to the rest of Latin America, which may cause future educational and social challenges for the students (p. 20). Additionally, the educational system in tertiary school is also in need of new improvement and should
correspond better to the labour market (p. 203) which may contribute to the lack of motivation. Thenceforth, what is of great importance, but too broad and extensive to be mentioned in detail, are the big policy issues in fields like, healthcare, economics, infrastructure etc. The OECD’s report does not discuss these in depth but rather indirect pointing them out, which tells that this issue is not a quick fix. What the mayor problems which can be encountered by the school is to be investigated in this study. With the aforementioned in mind, the life-course perspective—which will further be explained in next chapter—and the lifelong learning theory was considered relevant to reach the holistic and individual approach to the problem.

What also should be addressed is the relevancy of these data concerning that some of the statistics were collected more than five years ago. Some of these recommendations may have been adapt and developed.
3. Previous Research

This chapter will review the previous research primarily in the field of educational transition with the consideration of this study’s aim and target. This chapter will first conduct educational transition from the chosen life course perspective. Thereafter be thematised a line with Ecclestone, Biesta and Martin (2009, p. 12) interpretation as the best way to understand transition which is through the three perspectives: identity, structure and agency. Integrated in the examination of successful transition is the theme of preventing school drop-out, which also will be targeted but more briefly considered time and resources. The chapter will finally be conducted by a summary and a discussion of the relevance of the studies in relation to the study’s purpose and question.

3.1 Educational Transitions

There exists no agreed comprehensive definition of what constitutes a transition due to the phenomena being wide and taking actions in different fields and contexts (Ecclestone, Biesta & Hughes, 2009, p. 5). According to researchers in the field, transition involves more than ‘movement’ and ‘transfer’. It is the process of transfer when the individual is getting established in a new setting. A comprehensive and identity changing progress. It includes progression of both vertical—within the same time frame—and horizontal—across different time frames—(Lam & Pollard, 2006, as cited in Ecclestone, Biesta & Hughes, 2010, p. 5). Lam and Pollard (2006) add “It is usually a time of intense and accelerated development” (p. 125, as cited in Ecclestone, Biesta & Hughes, 2010, p. 5) However, many ideas exist on how to manage transitions. These depend on what perspective the study emerges from. Different interests, such as political, academic and practical, will generate different theories and conclusions (ibid., p. 10).

Consider the aims and goals of this study—analysing the narrative experience of students’ educational transitions in secondary school—this study will review previous research mainly from a life course perspective of educational transitions. Benner & Graham (2009) highlights that this perspective views life as a course which encounters multiple trajectories—meaning connected pathways across social domains—which often occurs in transitions. Combined with the individual’s previous experiences, skills and attitude, these transitions—or defined as course trajectories—can become life changing turning points (p. 357). Additionally, Ecclestone, Biesta and Martin (2010) have conducted the study Transitions in the Lifecourse - the role of identity, agency and structure, which also emerges from the life course perspective. It furthermore highlights the importance of a comprehensive understanding of the phenomena of transitions by looking cognitively, emotionally and socially during different stages of a person’s life (pp. 6–7). Therefore, it was considered appropriate, due to the chosen perspective, to make the same thematisation: Identity, Structure and Agency, with additional underlines according to my reading of what the references literature wanted to highlight.

3.2 Theme 1: Identity

Identity is a complex and widely defined word. Ecclestone, Biesta and Martin (2010) take on this approach:

Identity is constructed through complex interactions between different forms of capital (cultural, social, economic and emotional), broader social and economic conditions, interactions and relationships in various contexts, and cognitive and psychological strategies.
In this part, identity becomes challenged during the process of an educational transition. Meaning that the individual needs to reconstruct and create a new identity which can cause stress and concerns (ibid., p. 9).

3.4.1 - A cumulative process
The aforementioned definition of identity can also be described as a cumulative process. Benner and Graham (2009) discuss this phenomenon from the lifecourse perspective. They state that earlier transitions will influence the individual’s development in a cumulative fashion, meaning that early success can cultivate advantages and vice versa. Early difficulties may lead to negative consequences for life course trajectories (pp. 357–8). This cumulative process is also mentioned in other studies. J. Allen Queen’s study (2002) about the educational transition from middle school to high school discusses the impact of the students’ earlier school years for the future transition and school adaptations. Those who experienced difficulties in elementary school often had problems later when adjusting to new environments (p. 4). Similarly, learning opportunities can be obstructed if the student is placed outside the realm of the education process; this results in negatively impacting one’s schooling experience (Anderson et al., 2000; Hauser, Simmons & Pager 2001, as cited in Allen, 2002, p. 4).

3.4.2 - A cognitive process
The cumulative process is a cognitive process in line with the life course perspective. According to Queen’s study (1999), cognitive development includes what one perceives, interprets and reacts to in relation to one’s surroundings. These interactions allow the individual to create strategies for decision making as well as strategies for handling future situations (cited in Queen, 2002, p. 7). Queen states that adolescents in secondary schools have gained the cognitive ability to self-reflect and often experience better self-consciousness. It is often in these years that they begin to move away from the family and neighbourhood, to interact in a wider and more diverse social group. In this way, they are allowed to explore and experiment different roles and interests, which is crucial for their identification process (pp. 6–7). Queen also points out three important steps in the identification process: developing your own values, developing pride in one’s achievements and developing close relationships with peers in the same age (ibid.).

3.4.3 - Identifications with other
Various studies conclude that it is important for students to feel a sense of belonging (Benner & Graham, 2009, p. 358; Walsh, 2006, p. 125; Queen, 2002, p. 3). Queen (2002) examines the problems faced in educational transition when friendship-circles undergo reconstruction. For a lot of students, this adjustment is difficult and stressful (p. 3). These adaptations can become the students main concern, inhibiting the learning process and affecting the general schooling experience. During this period, many adolescents begin to feel self-conscious, they become concerned with their appearance and how they are perceived by others (p. 8) while trying to establish their own identity and develop connections. This phase of insecurities leads to easier submission to peer pressure, following trends or feeling anxious for not reaching idealised, ungrounded standards (ibid.).

3.3 Theme 2: Structure
Structural factors are integrated with the individual’s identity, and additionally affect the individual’s agency. According to Giddens (1984), structures are “rules and resources, organised as properties of social systems” (p. 25). For example, procedural and moral rules, or resources in form of material or authority (ibid). Different access to these social, symbolic and economic capital will generate more or less restrictions and possibilities (Ecclestone, Biesta & Hughes, 2009, p. 11). Structures such as
expectations, norms and learning cultures are shown to affect students’ educational transitions (Ecclestone, Biesta & Hughes, 2010, p. 12).

3.5.1 - The Socioeconomic and Parental Heritage
Studies show that the students who are most negatively affected by transition are those from low socio-economic households. Queen’s study (2002) concluded that students who live in poverty often lack the extra support from parents, as they do not show sufficient interest or participation in their children’s school activity. Additionally, they lack good learning environments at home (p. 4). Ecclestone, Biesta and Hughes (2009) are additionally talking about how structural factors such as, economic, symbolic and social capital, create” social divisions” which contribute to or restrict certain forms of ideas and actions. For example, according to their study, the choice of dropping out in working-class and middle-class environments was presented as a ‘helpless failure’ which becomes a united “self-perpetuating narrative”. This shows how identity and agency are influenced by structural factors (p. 11). Several studies indicate that the transition phase and general schooling experience is more challenging for students from minority groups. For example, Benner and Graham (2007) studied the experience of Afro-American and Hispanic students transitioning to High School and identified higher rates of stress they also found that drop-out rates were higher and graduation rates were lower. They argue this in connection with being the numerical majority of the numerical minority group. According to this study, the group’s sense of belonging experienced a decrease, therefore decreasing the connection felt to the school (as cited in Benner & Graham, 2009, pp. 359, 371).

3.5.2 - Rural Setting
Geographical settings also influence the school culture and the student’s experience of transition. According to Walsh’s study, rural students make a more comprehensive transition and setting due to the distinctive school cultures between the rural and the centralised schools. The rural community is smaller, has more cultural homogeneity and includes different school practices (2006, p. 125). Walsh mentions other studies that view the problematisation when secondary schools are very academically oriented with a strict structure and receive students from a less academically oriented culture. This transition creates polarisation within the school with subcultures of academic and non-academic camps. The non-academic students create a non-confirming attitude and experience dissatisfaction which can result in the increasing of dropouts (p. 116).

3.5.3 - Curriculum and the Teachers Participation
Queen (2002) is also pointing out the importance of preparation before the next school level. According to the study, students experience a more difficult transition due to the lack of inadequate, academically preparations in the previous levels (p. 4). Another study concerning “uncertain transitions” [Osäkra övergångar]—in the Swedish context—also concludes the lack of support from the school as a cause of students dropout. The study argues that not only should the school give more support, but also earlier. The study mentioned the students’ response about the value when the individual teacher or other personnel saw, encouraged and supported them (Lundahl et al., 2015, p. 6). Queen (2002) is also highlighting this point. According to his study, teachers in larger schools have the tendency to use less individualised teachings and easier makes social comparisons assessments. According to the work, how students experience this transition can be a turning point educationally and socially (p. 6). Benner and Graham (2009) are also mentioning that students in smaller schools have better possibilities to conduct educational transitions than their peers in larger schools (pp. 358, 370).
3.5.3 - Lack of career learning in school
Several studies underpin—although different with expressions—the lack of career learning in school. Career is here defined as learning to deal with issues related to the choice of studies and professions (Skolverket, 2013). If we start from the Swedish context, which has career learning included in the educational system. The study made by Rolfsman (2020) concludes that the majority of students before their big transition in 9th grade do not feel prepared, similar results as Morrison Gutman et al. (2014) and Galliott and Graham (2015, as cited in Rolfsman, 2020, p. 349) This lack of preparation affects their transition choice which can long term result in negative consequences (ibid) — similarly defined through the life-course perspective (Benner & Graham, 2009, p. 357). Rolfsman (2020) argues that before this point “measures in order to broaden the horizons for actions” need to take place, in line with Hodkinson and Sparke’s (1997) careership theory. Taking these measures, the student has greater opportunity to make educational decision based on their views, values and goals, which counteracts uncertainty (p. 350) and help students to become more prepared for the transition. Similar ideas are broached by Queen (2002). He argues that it is crucial to provide the adolescence with more support, through creating a program that can help the students to find their values, ideas, strengths and right attitude (p. 7).

3.4 Theme 3: Agency
The headlines first mentioned can be viewed as ‘inner’ and ‘outer’ factors, where ‘agency’ can be viewed as the ability to put those together and create one’s life-direction, this topic can also be viewed as normative and close related to the philosophical question of humans’ ‘free will’, and the ‘structure–agency debate’, which will not be further discussed here (Ecclestone, Birsta & Martin, 2010, s.10). Looking from the life course perspective, ‘agency’ is of high relevance. How competent is the individual acting during course trajectories?

3.6.1 - Developing Inner Capacities
Ecclestone, Birsta and Martin (2010) further explain with help of Emirbayer and Mische (1998), that ‘agency’ is not a capacity one possesses, but rather the action someone does or achieves (p. 11). Even so Ecclestone, Birsta and Martin argue that the action of ‘agency’ requires capacities such as self-direction, self-efficacy, autonomy and the desire to change. They continue to argue that these abilities should be developed through formal education, which has been a long-lasting idea since the enlightenment (p. 10).

3.6.2 - Developing Motivation and Self-esteem
Like these mentioned qualities, motivation is viewed as a key factor concerning agency. According to a survey responded by Swedish municipalities about the main reason for the students not completing upper secondary. The majority pointed out the student’s lack of motivation (Osäkra övergångar, pp. 6–7). The study of Queen (2002) is additionally confirming this idea to counteract dropout:

Express to students that they are important, what they do in school is important, and that their contributions to society are important (Sternberg 2000). Duke (1999) reminds us that both the middle school and the high school are wonderful networks of advanced learning environments. (p. 9).

The text is directed for educators but is as relevant for everyone in the adolescents surrounding. One study claims that the majority of career learning—which is connected to motivation (skolverket)—occurs mainly outside the school environment (osäkra övergångar).
3.6 Summary and discussion

The previous research presented in this chapter makes a brief overview, with theoretical and empirical explanations of the chosen phenomena. This review is not making the claim to be comprehensive but rather trying to capture a sweeping framework of the phenomena in certain situations with a certain perspective. As mentioned, educational transition is comprehensive and complex, which thereby can be analysed from various angles and aspects (Ecclestone, Biesta & Hughes, 2010, p. 5).

The chosen aspect, life-course perspective, was viewed relevant due to its individualistic and holistic focus which was considered adequate with the aim of the study. However, there are various approaches to capture the phenomena, which would lead to different results and discussions. The life-course approach is multidisciplinary and include different disciplines which can result in a more general outcome, compared if the study would have chosen one disciplinary and thereby been able to go deeper. But in relation to this study’s empirical data with semi-structured interviews, with focus on the participant experience, additionally to the aim of this study – equip students to a better transitioning – a broad research field was considered as a good starting point. Life-course perspective approach the phenomena from a life span perspective which will generate in a more general result due to the larger time sphere but contain the ability to grasp important factors for the individual which would be lost if the study would have a more time specific approach.

The mentioned studies in this chapter is adopted from an international context, which thereby will influence the adaptation for this study, were many influenceable factors as social, cultural, historical and political may differ a lot between the studies and the target sample. Studies in this field of Costa Rica and Latin American was sought for but couldn’t be found. This discretion is also of importance through the perspective of time relevance. Some of the studies are made for over a century ago and today we live in a more modernised and globalised world which also may impact the study’s result in comparison to this target group. Additionally, some of the conducted studies were situated in other transition than primary school to secondary school, which contain different underlying factors as age, maturity, number of options etc. To conclude, these distinctions do not imply that the result may not be applicable, but it will need to be conceived with more caution and reflection.

Moreover, only peer-reviewed articles were conducted to ensure the scientific quality. Additionally, only reports conducted in Swedish and English was reviewed which can be discussed as a limitation considered this study’s international context.
4. Theory

This section follows an account and presentation of the selected theory, Lifelong Learning. The adoption of the term emerge from Bjursell’ report Tre perspektiv på livslångt lärande [Three perspectives on lifelong learning] (2020) which emerge from Jarvis, Illeris and Wenger interpretation that will be summarised. This chapter ends with a short discussion of the chosen theory.

4.1 Lifelong Learning Approaches

The term: Lifelong learning, is broad and can be applicable in various ways and different authors have contributed by defining and highlighting different parts. This study is emanating from the inspiration of Peter Jarvis, Knud Illeris and Etienne Wenger where all three have a common existentialistic and comprehensive approach in relation to the individual to the phenomena, which suited the holistic approach this study aims for. The authors have many common denominators while at the same time they differ in other areas. This study does not have the opportunity to fully delve into all the details in their interpretation, but will rather emphasise the most essential that suits this study’s aim.

4.1.1 – Peter Jarvis’s Philosophical Approach

Jarvis adopts a philosophical approach to the concept of learning. He emphasises that learning is a combination of processes that affect people's knowledge, ability, attitude, feelings, values, assumptions and impressions that together create a learning experience in a social situation. The process of these experiences is added to the individual's narrative, thereby this lifelong process which results in the lifelong learning (Bjursell, 2020, p. 16). This study adopts Jarvis’s explanation for the concept of Lifelong learning which is not only about policy documents or formal institutions that have a mandate for the concept. Jarvis argues that this view is too narrow. Learning takes place in several contexts in life, which is the approach of this study (Jarvis, 2004, cited in Bjursell, 2020, p. 16). Jarvis emphasises the value of not only learning but also living. That it is with these two components together that a person achieves wisdom (Bjursell, 2020, p. 17).

4.1.2 – Knud Illeris’s Psychological Approach

Illeris starts from a psychological perspective and illustrates learning with three dimensions or experiences. The content dimension, the incentive dimension and the interaction dimension. He emphasises that these elements are recurring in all learning activities. The content and incentive together form an acquisition process. This process is individual and takes place within us, while interaction focus on the environment as the social, cultural and material (Bjursell, 2020, p. 17). Competence, on the other hand, is learning in relation to a specific situation, where the individual must function in different contexts. Illeris emphasises the importance of reflection as the core in the learning process in order to process information that you acquire and experience constantly, and that you can develop your competence if you direct it towards something concrete.

"It is through reflection that experience can be turned into potentials for the future" (Illeris, 2011, p. 61, cited in Bjursell, 2020, p. 18).

4.1.3 – Etienne Wenger’s Sociological Approach

Wenger starts from a sociological perspective and has created the concept of community of practice. Based on this concept, he emphasises the man's role as a social being where knowledge means that one is actively engaged in one's surroundings and is the source to be able to act. He mentions meaning as what we strive for, and which requires a learning process to achieve. This learning process is thus active and meaningful, and thus creates the individual's identity. Wenger emphasises the social inter-action which thereby includes belonging, becoming, experience and action as factors in the individual's learning. Authority and boundaries are mentioned as important factors in the learning process (Bjursell, 2020, pp. 18–19).
4.2 Identity, Structure and Agency in Lifelong Learning

In line with the previous research thematisation and this study's aim, the thematisation of identity, structure and agency was considered appropriate for easier adaptation and analysis. These categorising emerge from Jarvis, Illeris and Wenger's lifelong learning definition.

According to Jarvis, Illeris and Wenger, the individual's learning process is what creates the individual’s identity and narrative (Bjursell, 2020, p. 20). Learning must also be understood contextualised in its environment with its existing structures. Every society requires different competencies depending on time, culture, history, surroundings etc, which creates expectations on the individual. Policy initiatives are often based on external motivational forces such as the needs for the labour market, while the purpose based on the concept of lifelong learning is about the internal motivational force (Bjursell, 2020, p. 20). Agency can be linked to Jarvis' interpretation that knowledge is not only reached by learning alone, but integrated into the concept is also acting, living and practicing (Bjursell, 2020, p. 17). Based on a common societal view, learning can only be linked to the formal view of learning that only takes place in the context of school or similar forms of education. This study's approach to lifelong learning stands in contrast to this and highlights that learning can take place in all possible contexts. It is rather according to the individual's commitment that affects where the learning can take place.

4.3 Theory Discussion

The decision of theory emerged through the OECD's educational report where their recommendations and themes were categorised chronologically and concentrated on each problematic group collectively and objectively. This field, educational transition and school dropout is often discussed and examine from external driving forces, rather from the individual point of view. Lifelong learning is also a policy term and adapt in that context. However Bjursell's report offers additionally an individual focus with the comprehensive adaption, including informal learning experience and from the individual’s whole lifespan rather from an objective perspective, centred on one target situation. This reasoning with the consideration of humans complexity, especially in the field of decision and its causes. Thereby the interest for different perspectives were Jarvis, Illeris and Wenger’s offers the philosophical, psychological and sociological approaches.

Lifelong learning is also an international term which suited this study adaptation. However, considering this term’s large practice, it also contains several different interpretations which thereby can complicate this theory’s adaption. For example, when it is more used as a policy term rather than a theory as in this context. Often this term has been used in the context of adults who returns to formal learning or in the situation how individuals can be more competitive on the labour market. Thereby the choice of this term can confuse if the term and adaption have not been fully defined.
5. Method

This chapter will describe the study performance in regards to research design, methodological approaches, data collection methods, choice of sample and performance. Primarily will the scientific theoretical positions regarding ontology and epistemology be presented; additionally, how the data was processed and analysed, what ethics have been considered and evaluated; finally, a discussion where this study reliability, quality and ethics are analysed.

5.1 Scientific theoretical positions

Given that this study wants to examine the individual’s inner experience, involving thoughts and understanding, the study is therefore based on certain ontological and epistemological positions emerging from a social constructivist and postmodern perspective. An example of this is the view that one’s inner sense and conception exists and through interaction we can more or less approach it, as well as produce certain forms of knowledge from it (Kvale & Brinkman, 2021, p. 35). The produced knowledge in human science is dynamic, contextualised and complex and is therefore also arguable if the results can be used cumulatively (Jackobsen, 2015, p. 21–22, 24). Even if this argument leans toward the "relativistic swamp" (Thurén, 2019, p. 63), it does not imply that it is of no use or value. Instead, the choice of method and transparency are key factors for the study’s testability which can result in inspiration or as a new hypothesis in future studies.

5.2 Literature search

The literature search for this study proceeded through the databases: DiVA-portal, Google scholar and Taylor & Francis group. DiVA-portal is Sweden’s most used system for registration and dissemination of academic publication data (DiVA-konsortiet, 2022). However, it only generates articles that are registered and published in Sweden, which results in a local and narrow range of search. Google scholar gives a wider range of search, however it is contained the same as DiVA with a lot of pre-printed material. Therefore, the search work for this study was mainly to proceed through the database Taylor & Francis group which is one of the world’s leading academic publishers and only contains peer-reviewed journals and articles (Taylor & Francis, n.d.)

Considering the study’s aims and purpose, further investigation in previous research was concentrated with the keywords: Transitions, educational transition, school choice, school dropout, school dropout in Latin America. The search work started comprehensively to be able to grasp a wider perspective of the described phenomena from OECD’s report. Later the search work was delimited only to educational transition, to be able to get deeper, rather than wider, data. Thereafter the study applied a chain search strategy through the references in the already selected literature. Even if the specific field of research is the educational transition between primary and secondary schools, the search work also contained educational transitions in other areas such as lower to higher secondary.

5.3 Research Strategy, Research Design and Methodological Approaches

Consider the aims and goals of this study—analysing the narrative experience of students transitions in secondary school and examine how to aid this passage—the qualitative research strategy was considered suitable, due its approach to focusing on the respondent’s thinking, learning, knowing and acting (Kvale & Brinkman, 2021, p. 27). The semi-structured interview method additionally gives the opportunity to ask follow-up questions based on what the interviewee tells which was considered appropriate to even get closer to the participants narrative. This approach was especially suitable for the former students. The interviews with the participants with working experience was also formed semi-structured but with different interview guide. These questions was more facts pursuing about
their role and the educational system as whole, which was considering necessarily in this situation when me as a researcher is encountering a new cultural context. Interview guide 1, can be found in annex 1, was adapted for the participants for work experience in relation to the students. The questions touched on their previous work experiences, their own reflections on meetings with students and their own reflections on improvements in the field. Interview guide 2, can be found in annex 2. This was adapted for participants who dropped out of school. The questions ascertain the participants' upbringing, previous schooling experiences, current employment, thoughts on their decision to drop out and thoughts about school as a whole. Interview guide 3, can be found in annex 3. This was adapted for participants who made the decision to continue their studies. The questions are structured similar to interview guide 2 regarding thoughts about growing up, previous schooling experiences, current employment and reflections on the school as a whole. In addition, there are further questions regarding the decision to maintain their studies through lower secondary. Considered the study’s research questions, the phenomenological approach—focusing on the respondent's consciousness and lifeworld (Kvale & Brinkman, 2021. p. 75) – and a hermeneutic interpretation focusing on the respondent's "meaning" in a larger context (p.74) – was viewed as relevant. This approach is argued to require proximity. That the interviewer acquired an empathetic openness and understanding (Jackobsen, 2015, p. 21).

5.4 Selection
Given the purpose of the study, to investigate students' transition experience. The selection of participants were first discussed to only be students who made the transition, as well as students who had dropped out, to obtain their narrative experience. Subsequently, the selection of participants with work experience was considered by order to obtain a greater range of students' experience. There are advantages and disadvantages to both sample groups. The ideal would have been to get enough participants from both selection groups. The period in which this study collected i ts material was during the long school holidays in Costa Rica before the start of a new class which resulted in delayed data collection and limitation in the scope of participants to meet the deadline.

According to the OECD’s report, the selected problem occurs more frequently in the most vulnerable schools in Costa Rica. The Ministry Education Public (MEP) in Costa Rica made a list by region about the schools that needed extra support, through a project to prevent school dropouts, which became a criterion in the selection. After that, the choice of sample proceed through snowball effect, which means that the participants recommend next participant. I got in touch with the principal of the school Diurno colegio Limon, who recommended me to an orientadora, which is similar to the Swedish profession Studie och yrkesvägledare or the international term career counsellor—which is the term that will be conducted in this study. Thereafter the first participant recommended another career counsellor at the same school. They raised the interest to include another career counsellor from primary school. I got a contact with a career counsellor in one primary school which also were in a rural area. In order to get a more comprehensive and national perspective, a participant working for MEP was also requested. This contact was assigned by emailing various administrations on the MEP website. The selection of former students was by random sampling. Through contacts, I got an interview with someone who dropped out in 8th grade, which was considered appropriate for having experienced transitions to secondary school. Thereafter this participant recommended one former student who finished his studies, additionally one participant that had dropout many years ago and have kids in both primary and secondary school.

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<td>Participen 4</td>
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5.5 Implementation
The interviews were planned to last approximately 60 minutes so that the interviewees would have enough time to be able to answer the questions in detail and time for follow-up questions. The interview guides were planned according to relevant themes according to previous research and background and in dialogue with the supervisor. Given that the participants are from three different selection groups, three different interview guides with similar themes were created. See Appendix.

Six out of seven interviews were conducted through face-to-face meetings and one interview was conducted via Zoom. All interviews were recorded after the approval of the participants. The interview began with a presentation of the study and the purpose of the interview and that the participant's information and data would be handled confidentially.

5.6 Data analysis and Result Presentation
Given that the participants are from different selection groups, different analysis methods have been conducted. The four participants with working experience was approach with questions concerning their experiences and reflections on cause and effects concerning the target phenomena, additionally a secondary hand narrative approach. Using accounts provided by career counsellors of students that they themselves have counselled. The three former students were approached with a more of a narrative method and were analysed in the same way. The narrative method has its focus on the participant's storytelling which can be viewed from the perspective of meaning and identity (Johansson, 2007).

The data will be presented in the result chapter together with the analysis. Certain data have been selected and presented with relevance to the research questions and analysed in relation to the chosen theory, lifelong learning.

5.4 Reliability
According to scholars in the field, reliability as a concept can be viewed through four requirements, credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability (Bryman, 2011, p. 354). In order to study the requirement of credibility, the researchers should adhere to current regulations and the results should also be confirmed by participants (ibid.). Proceeding this requirement, a part of the interviews was transcribed verbatim without adding own comments, due to time shortage the whole part of the interviews couldn’t be transcript, but those part which was considered most important. Thereafter, the participants will receive the results and be given the opportunity to comment on the results. Following the requirement Transferability, which is about how transferable the research results are to new contexts (ibid.). This was taking into account by encourage the participants to respond with "thick descriptions" (Geertz, 1973a, as cited in Bryman, 2011, p. 354) to easier be able to judge how applicable this data is to other settings (ibid.). Dependability is acquired by different ways, one of them through accessing a complete account of all the phases in the research process. For example, this study in general have strived to be transparent and detailed in its descriptions of the target situation, choice of methods, selection etc. To proceed confirmability, the most importance is the objective approach to the study as whole. This follows that the researcher’s personal values and preferences should be noticed and excluded as much as possible (ibid.).

5.5 Ethical considerations
This study has been based on the ethical guidelines: information, consent, confidentiality and use requirement. The information requirement is characterised by contributing essential information to research participants and rests on an understanding that all participation is voluntary. In this study, all

| Participen 5 | Former student 1 - Dropout | Interview guide 2 |
| Participen 6 | Former student 2 - Graduate | Interview guide 2 |
| Participen 7 | Former student 3 –Graduate  | Interview guide 3 |
participants were informed about the purpose of the study and what their participation entailed. In order to take into account the consent requirement, the participants were asked if they wanted to endorse after they were aware of the purpose of the interview. The interviews rested on a voluntary basis and could refrain from answering questions or end the interview whenever they wanted. In order to act in accordance with the confidentiality requirement, all of the participant's personal information were treated de-identified, and special taxation has been put in place so that no unauthorised persons have access to the recorded material. The last-mentioned requirement is the use requirement, which is about collecting empirical data that has been collected through interviews will only be used for this research purpose (Byman, 2011).

5.6 Method Discussion

During the course of the work, several challenges have been encountered. The first thing that can be discussed, based on the design of the method itself, is the work's delimitation of the phenomena. The study’s aim is to aiding students in the transition to secondary school, which entails a focus on both transitions and school dropouts. These themes are major current debates which are difficult to summarise and grasp, which results in broader and more superficial background descriptions. Thus, perhaps a delimitation to one of the phenomena or delimiting its selection would give better validity to the study. Then, as mentioned above, getting participants for the interviews was a challenge concerning the bad timing of data collection in relation to the school year. This means that the participants that were interviewed can be said to have been selected out of convenience, in a way that would not have been the case if we did a targeted selection, which would result in a more up-to-date collection of data based on their ongoing experience with the school system, which affect this study’s validity. Another difficulty has been the language. I as the interviewer, speak and understand Spanish at an intermediate level which has been the main language during the interviews. This affects the data and the results, when there is a great risk that I cannot capture all the nuances in the participants responses. To avoid this problem, I have recorded and received translation help from native Spanish speakers. But the problem remains that, for example, during the course of the interview, not being able to ask more precise follow-up questions given the situation. As the interviewer, I had to ask more confirmation questions to make sure we were on the same track. This thus takes time from the interviewee which thereby took more time than planned.
6. Results and Analysis

This chapter will go through the collected data from the seven semi-structured interviews and will present the results in relation to the research questions. The analysis will reflect the previous research and the chosen theory, lifelong learning.

6.1 Experience of Transitions Between the 6th and 7th Grade

This part will present the participants’ answers to the first research question: How does the selected group of students experience and cope with the transition between the 6th and 7th grade? According to the collected data, students experience significant changes between different school forms; some students experience difficulties with school transportation, some experience a lack of motivation and the participants emphasised about the importance of family involvement during the transition.

All three career counsellors commented that the large differences between the two school forms—primary education to lower secondary education—effect the students’ ability to make a successfully transition. Differences like, the number of teachers, expectations of responsibility and curriculum create more obstacles which make students with difficulties more prone to dropout. According to career counsellors two, the problem lies in the fact that primary school does not prepare the students for the changes to come.

- It is an issue that the primary schools should work on, because there is a lot of change. In the primary school there is one teacher, then they come to the secondary school and receive 15 teachers. So, the change is very grave. There are many students who are flexible and can adapt but there are many who are not and cannot.
  (Career Counsellor 2)

- They have to develop from mom and dad. The secondary school is something else (…) It is required that they have more autonomy and maturity.
  (Career Counsellor 3)

Additionally in this educational transition, students are also required to change school and travel further away. This point was considered, according to the participants’ disclosure, to be a major contributing factor for the great school dropouts during the transitions—just as in OECD’s report. According to them, primary-schools exist in many areas, even the most rural ones, but the change to secondary school which exist generally in the centralised areas creates a barricade for students who live far away. It is often these students, who live rural, that additionally have a weaker socioeconomic position that are most affected. They are required to pay the transport to school which they cannot afford and in many situations the bus is not even offered.

- Why do you think this school has a high number of school drop-outs?
- For economic reasons. We have a population that economically do not have enough to pay for transport. Because they live very far away, they can't walk to school. (…) We have buses that the government pays for, but there are few who can take advantages of them. Let’s say that there are 200 students in a remote area. Only about a hundred of them can actually benefit from the bus! The remaining 100 have get to school on their own.
  (Career Counsellor 1)

- There are students with parents who do not work and have five children in school. They let the children in primary school walk there, because the primary school is closer. But the children in secondary school need to be able to pay for the transport. Maybe 1000 colones per day. So, per month it is 20,000 colones [1000 colones are approximately equal to 1.7 euro].
  (Career Counsellor 1)
The former student who continued his studies continually mentioned the help he received from the teachers and the headmaster, who assisted him in applying for *Veca*—which is equal to a scholarship or economic support for transport and general expenditure. According to him, the individual support he received was thanks to his family contacts, that his sister went to the same school and the teachers knew his mum. He said that the application needs to go through the school personnel. My interpretation thereby is that it is more beneficial to have been in a smaller school where support and contact with personnel easier can be attained. Additionally, a question of family involvement. How much parents know and engage to reach the existing benefits.

- If we want a good education, we also need the support of the family. I believe that the system of MEP needs to start in some way giving more responsibility to the parents about the kids’ educational process. If the parents don't feel responsible for his child, then it won’t continue well. (Career Counsellor 3)

Motivation was indirect viewed as a key factor during the transition process. This was interesting to distinguish and compare between the students who dropped out and the student who continued the program. Both of them had money and job as prior motivation in their decision. But the confidence and expectations of what the school could offer them differed.

- The school doesn't work. Maybe for some but not for me. I won't get anything from there. (Former Student 1)

- If you get a *bachillerato* [equal to upper secondary diploma], you get a job, and if you don’t, you don’t get a job. All people know that getting the diploma is important. (Former Student 2)

In conclusion, based on the participants' responses, a large number of students experience difficulties through the educational transition such as new teachers, a new curriculum and a new school. The collected data also showed the importance of parents' influence. Not only their economic and geographic position but also their attitude. All three career counsellors emphasised the work of disengaging parents as a solution to consolidate educational transition and prevent school drop-outs. They commented that the motivation and information to understand the value of education needs to emerge from the parents, especially in these early ages when the students are more dependent upon them. Motivation was also viewed as a main factor concerning the students’ educational transition. There was a connection between students’ knowledge about education and what it may result in, and their motivation. The knowledge part could be traced to their surrounding which is in line with Wenger (2020) who highlights learning as something interactive and social (pp. 18–19). The collected data showed that students and parents who have good relationships and an open communication with school personnel gained more support and received more information to the student’s benefit.

### 6.2 The School’s Current Work for Successful Transitions

This section will treat the participants’ answers to the second research question: How does Costa Rica’s present school system work with this group to prepare them for the educational transition in 6th and 7th grade and to prevent school drop-outs? The participants’ answers highlight the impact of *Orientadoras* [similar to career counsellors or the Swedish profession *studie- och yrkesvägledare*], the impact of individual attention and the impact to make school an inspiring place.

The educational system in Costa Rica has an career counsellor programme plan which includes self-knowledge, interests, personal strengths, and vocational learning. Participant four, who works for
MEP in the field of permanence and educational success mentioned the importance of career counsellors in schools

- Concerning counsellors, they are fundamental figures in the topic of preventing school dropout. MEP’s progress always includes contemplated work concerning counselling.

(MEP employee)

One of the career counsellors explains that even though they have a career guidance plan for every grade of which the counsellor is in charge, few primary schools actually have a career counsellor. From this I conclude that the large differences between students is mainly due to what school and area they come from. On the other hand, almost every secondary school has a career counsellor, which focuses mainly on vocational and university decisions. This fact, however, does not make up for the glaring of lack of counselling in primary schools, which, according to the career counsellors, are the years where the teachers and counsellors are focusing on self-knowledge, self-love, and motivation. Which the student miss if the school do not view this as a priority. All three career counsellors emphasise the importance of starting early with these topics, because they know that many of the students have rough backgrounds.

- They are lacking a lot of love from parts of their families. In many cases they only live with one of their parents or sometimes they don't even live with neither of them but with their aunt or grandmother. And let's continue, when you start listening to them you notice they are scarred because they say things like, “because my mom didn't want to be with me” or “my dad is in prison” or similar cases. Family is very important. So if they don't feel the support of the family, at least they can feel the support here at school. The kids have a lot of distress, depression and it is because they have family problems.
- Is this very common?
- Yes, I would say the majority.

(Career Counsellor 2; my questions are in italics)

- We talk a lot about themselves. Due to the economic situation, parents never formally go to school, they don't know how to deal with their children, so they mistreat them. They call them fools if they don't bring money and that they are useless and things like that. So, they have a very low self-esteem, which can result in bulimia or anorexia. There are girls who have been mistreated, because of the family situation, the mother “works for anything” [i.e., she is a prostitute] … and don’t think ahead how the situation can end up, because the most important objective is to earn money.

(Career Counsellor 1)

Two out of three career counsellors commented that the administrative work takes to much time which can take away the focus around their main target. A lot of different projects, inclusive Yo Me Apunto—which is mentioned in the background chapter— have a great objective, goal and plan, but includes a lot of paperwork which drive the focus and priorities away from the students.

- Where the educational system fails is that it is a lot of paperwork. There is a lot of administrative work, there is a lot of form. Having a group of children and trying to give them lessons, but at the same time we have a lot of paperwork to do. Lots of time solving papers and thereby putting aside what we really are educated for.

(Career Counsellor 3)

At secondary school, career counsellors have 35 minutes lectures every week in each class. One of the career counsellors commented that those 35 minutes are not enough. You just have time to introduce yourselves and let them get to know you, and hopefully build a confidence that you can work further with. But the content is impossible to cover in such a short time. The career counsellor had to work a line with the already existing aims of the course but had some flexibility to create the content more specific depending on the student’s need. One of the career counsellors commented the need for greater flexibility, saying that the aims of the course is good but not enough. For example, the person saw in the students a great need for better economy knowledge, how to save money and make a
budget etc. And that this is of high importance specially in these targeted areas were economy has influenced a large part of the students' lives and thoughts.

- We as counsellors try to work with these topics during the lesson but the problem is to little time, so we can't embark everything we want. And sometimes we are also very overloaded with work and with other kinds of things and can't get time with the students.

(Career Counsellor 2)

The employee for MEP talked about the success of preventing school dropout could partly be the result of the new initiatives for better registration of each student. Similar to what the career counsellor were mentioning in their daily tasks. They work tight with the teachers and administration to be able to have better overview over the students. They receive a list of students with high absence which they thereafter make home visits to or calls. But even if they have good structure and administration to keep track of the students, that do not automatically implies that the student change attitude and motivation to stay. Career Counsellor 2 shared her tactics when visiting a student who were at risk of dropping out. She emphasised the importance of genuine interest in each student.

- I use to say, you are important to me. That they feel that a teacher support them, and if more students felt that confirmation, then it would be less probability that they dropout. (...) I am like a mother who wants to see her son continue forward.

(Career Counsellor 2)

As previously mentioned, one career counsellor empathised not only the importance for the kids to learn about economy, but of life in general. For example, she noticed the need for the students to learn more about sexual education and safety, due to the experience that a lot of the students face these difficulties which affect their education and decision to drop out of school. Similar to two of the former students that also felt that the content of school was unnecessary and felt lack of knowledge that you really need.

- The school needs to target topics about life in general, and not only address school issues.

(Former student 3)

- School is stupid. Not for everyone, but it is stupid for me. I won't get anything from there.

(Former student 1)

All three students comment that the school is too general and has no individual adaptation. More interest in each student would lead to greater motivation. Additionally see their strengths and interests and boost these qualities. One of the career counsellor mentions that the most successful thing about the school system in general has been their initiative to make the school to an inspiring place that the students want to come to. According to the career counsellor, priority is to have the students as presents in school as much as possible even if it is not only lecture time. Thereby, the school arranges school festivals with art, music and football tournaments just to mention some examples.

- The school should give the support to strengthen your strong points.

(Former student 3)

- The school creates robots. You go to school just to get a job. Wishful thinking does not exist there.

(Former student 1)

In conclusion, according to the participants, Costa Rica’s present school system is well aware of this problem concerning unsuccessful transition between primary and lower secondary education. The schools have made several insertions as a way to prevent this phenomenon, such as starting different projects, having career guidance plans and inserting better student registrations. According to the
collected empirical data, the school still lacks resources and the right aim to fully reach out and aid the students. Costa Rica’s school system is centralised (OECD 2017a, p. 10) which may be the cause that the schools face difficulties implement efforts at a local level. The career counsellors mentioned badly prioritised projects and tasks which take time and resources from the main issue, which according to them were more individual attention from the school personnel, more lesson time about "life topics", earlier career counselling about topics concerning identity and self-worth.

6.3 Suggestion of How the School Can Aid Students in Educational transition between 6th and 7th grade

In this section I will use the presented results and this thesis theoretical perspective in order to answer the third research question: How can the selected group of students better be equipped for the educational transition between 6th and 7th grade and prevent school drop-out?

With the mention problem concerning new changes between the different school forms. The difficulty that the students might experience can be linked to the cumulative process mentioned by Benner and Graham (2009, p. 357) which is also in line with Jarvis, Illeris and Wenger’s (2020) learning interpretation that all experiences and learning outcomes creates the individual’s identity (p.20), which in this situation becomes more challenged. One career counsellor suggested to take advantage of spreading out the introduction of new changes and getting the students to deal with smaller changes early on, which can result in a better learning experience with a higher chance of a successful adaptation to new situations. My reflection in relation to lifelong theory is that this would help the student understand that it is okay to not succeed sometimes, as well as sever the imagined connection between academic performance and identity. Help the students to take advantage of the learning concept, encourage them to reflection—which Wenger (in Bjusell, 2020) emphasises as a key part—and strengthen their identity separate from unsuccessful performance which often results in a lowering of their self-worth. Encourage the student to broaden their perspective and try again. If this gets introduced at younger ages, such abilities as flexibility, patience, and self-respect can become an integrated characteristic of the student, based on Jarvis’s (2020) learning perspective (in Bjursell).

Additionally start earlier with career counselling in the topic of self-love and self-knowledge. This study conclude that a big part of the problem of unsuccessful transition and school dropout can be traced back to the students’ home environment and parents’ attitude. Some of the participants stories show that there are many children who do not receive love or acceptance from home. Jarvis, Illeris and Wenger (2020) claim through Lifelong learning that this is essential for the students’ identity narrative and self-esteem (Bjursell, p.20). Thereby would more focus concerning these topics be introduced both earlier and equal for all the primary school. Additionally the importance to provide each student with more individual attention and guidance. The interviews have emphasised the uniqueness of every situation and through contextualised work the school could make a big difference disregarding the student’ home situation. One arrangement in school could, and arguably should be to ensure that there are enough resources in terms of staff with the competence and attitude required for the students to feel seen and confirmed.

Furthermore, according to the collective data. From the students’ perspective the school seems to be too instrumental and narrow. According to Jarvis (2020), wisdom is not only reached by learning the formal way, but also by living (also Bjursell, 2020, p. 18). From this perspective, the school should support the students’ learning in a wider sense. All students are different, and while some have an aptitude for the traditional school subjects, other students have an aptitude for different ones. Unfortunately, they are often not allowed to explore their subjects of interest, and confined to the school environment. Lifelong learning highlights the fact that the individual is constantly learning, and not only in the formal and transitional way. A main issue in relation to lifelong learning is to teach the students to take responsibility of their own learning. A key factor according to Illeris is
reflection (2020, p. 18). And it is here the role as career counsellor may have an impact by supporting the students to become more aware and reflective. Give the students tools for future learning.

The mentioned problem concerning lack of transport or money to transport was noticed and often treated by the career counsellors. For example, the interviewed career counsellors worked with practical solutions which many times were linked to their contacts and network. In the same way as Former Student 2 mentioned supported him in his transition with contacts that helped him succeed with the municipal financially support. It can be argued as being similar with Ecclestone, Biesta and Hughes’ (2009) view that the social capital creates some forms of ideas and actions (p. 11). The social capital does not necessary implies giving materialistic benefits but rather inspiration and learning. This is in agreement with Wenger’s (2020) sociological approach to learning which emphasises learning as to be engaged with one’s surroundings. His social interactive view of knowledge is an embodied knowledge and works as a chain reaction and includes community, identity and meaning (Bjursell, p. 18, 19). My suggestion is applying this to the target group, the school should emphasise social exchange and create more platforms where the individual have more opportunities to learn through their surroundings. The data from the interviews and previous research have pointed out school personnel as being a key role. Additionally concerning the importance of parents influence and power; this way of learning should be addressed towards parents or other important figures in the student’s life. The mentioned problems, as lack of transport derives from a miss-priority of the parent caused of a lot of factors. But eventually could be addressed through information about the educational importance, preferable with a futuristic perspective of what kind of benefits or consequences the student’s decision can result in. This would emphasise a learning process for the parent to be able to understand and act. According to two of the career counsellors, home visit and calls which they have in their plan in preventing school dropout seems to work but maybe could this social interactive learning be emphasise even more at a continuous basis. Maybe new platforms and more social gatherings for parents and kids.
7. Discussion

This chapter initially intends to recap the main features of the study in order to draw attention to the study’s aim and target. After this, an ethical examination of the work will be made according to scientific requirements for quality. This is proceed through a critical reflection on one’s own involvement. Furthermore, this chapter will discuss the results of the study and empathising the gaps for future research.

As mentioned, educational transition and school drop-out is an important topic in order to counteract inequity and poverty. This study has analysed some potential factors behind Costa Rica’s low statistics of secondary gradations, by reviewing OECD’s educational report (2017), and collecting qualitative data from participants from diverging standing in the targeted field. The target situation—unsuccessful transition—is a complex problem built on many different but integrated factors. The main findings of this study have shown that these have their origin in more complicated political and economic issues that cannot possibly be solved based on this initiative only. However, simpler measures by the school can be discussed based on the theory Lifelong learning presented by Bjursell (2020) which emerge from Jarvis, Illeris and Wenger holistic perspective on the individual as a constant learner in all its’ environments (p.20).

The results show that some students may experience the educational transitions difficult concerning the big changes between different school forms, difficulties with school transportation, lack of motivation, lack of self-esteem and lack of family involvement which was coherent with the background of OECD’s report as well as the previous research. According to the empirical data, the current school system has taken measures to prevent unsuccessful transitioning, for example creating aimed projects, having career guidance plans and better routines, such as home calling and class attendance registration. According to the participants, the schools still lack the right aim to fully reach out and aid the students. My interpretation according to the collected data and the theoretical perspective is to create initiatives in more prevention work before the transition, equal career counselling in primary school, an earlier start with topics concerning identity, more individual attention and more parents' engagement. Thus, according to the empirical data, the career counsellors experience a lack of time and resources. Of course, on the school’s part, this is due to the difficulties involved in prioritising limited resources, as of the majority of problems. Furthermore, the question of prioritisation and management of resources for the individual school appears even harder in the centralised educational system in Costa Rica. Hopefully, by discussing and considering different measures more awareness can arise.

Regarding the reliability and validity of this study, one’s own involvement also must be discussed. This study is influenced by my view, based in part on my education as a study and career guidance student from Sweden. Whereas certain values, topics and debates receive more attention, the selection of background, previous research, theory and analysis might be somewhat partial. Thus, it is likely that someone else, with other educational and sociocultural experiences would look at it from a different angle, and by that arrive at a different conclusion. Similar can be discussed concerning the study’s selection of participants. With consideration that this study aims to understand the individual’s own holistic experience, the ideal and first idea was to only have students as participants and analyse the data only from their narrative perspective. But due to the circumstances, four participants was based from the secondary hand narrative approach which results to different data. The participant with work experience in relation to the phenomena are more informed of the school's impact for the individuals and are biased in the decision what is best for the students. Whereas if I only had students as interviewers, the agenda would be simpler based on the individual’s own perception of what is best for them.

In accordance with that discussed above, it appears normative to assume that the transition to secondary school provides more individual success than the dropping out of school would do. After
analysing the results of this study this assumption needs to be questioned. In reality, successful transition as a term used in this field, relates to the individual’s best interest which varies broadly. On this note, Ecclestone, Biesta and Hughes (2010) write that while life transitions could be unsettling, unproductive and difficult for some, it could generate positive results for others, be a so-called successful transition. This, possibly not in spite but because of the challenging circumstances (p. 2).

Thus, the phenomenon of transition is a multifaceted issue and to label it successful respectively unsuccessful can hardly be made without looking closely into the case of each student. In this study, however, this is done based on the societal view; with higher education you will have more options to progress in society. Studies show that effective educational and career transition is of importance to prevent social and economic disadvantages (2010, p. 4). OECD and the Word Bank made a review of career guidance policies in 37 countries were they saw social exclusion and disadvantage as a result of ineffective transitions through education and labour markets (OECD 2004; Watts and Sultana 2004; referred in 2010, p. 4). This is just to name a few examples. However, although we have these statistics, it does not mean that it is applicable or most beneficial for everyone. Each situation is unique. Thus, further investigation from an individual point of view is encouraged, as was the original thought of this study. To do this, the cases of the dropout students that did not choose the formal path of learning could be examined to analyse what informal learning have filled its place. By doing this, hopefully, understanding of what learning carries most value for the individual as for society can increase and be developed also in the institutional setting of school. Consequently, truly successful transitions can be made as is promoted lifelong learning for each and every student.
References


Annex 1

Interview guide – Selection 1

**Introduction and background**
- What is your profession?
- What is your job title? What are your responsibilities and what tasks do you do?
- Tell me about what a typical day looks like for you?
- For how long have you worked here and in this position?
- Have you always worked in this field?

**The school system in Costa Rica**
- In general, do you think the school system in Costa Rica works? (Including, primary, secondary and tertiary)
- In your opinion, what is the most successful aspect of the school system in Costa Rica, why do you think this is the case?
- In your opinion, where does the Costa Rican school system fall short, and how can this be improved?

**Specific about the colegio**
- Can you explain more as to what kind of secondary school this is: what grades, technical, academical and carreras are offered?
- Why do you think students choose to study at this school?
- How many students go here?
- How big are the classes?
- How many teachers per student?
- What is your observation on how students experience the transition to a new school?
- Do you know the dropout statistics for this school?

**Yo Me Apunto**
- According to some data, this school is on the list for the project, ´Yo Me Apunto´, can you explain more about this project?
- Can you explain more how it was proceeded in the school, what worked and what did not?
- How did you find introducing the project in the school, what improvements have you noticed since its introduction?

**Dropout**
- Why do you think this school has a lot of dropouts?
- Why do you think the number of dropouts per year in Costa Rica is so high?
- Do you have your own experience talking to / helping a student who is about to dropout? If so, would you like to share that experience?
• What grade is the most common that students choose to drop out, and do you have any thoughts as to why this is the case?
• Have you noticed if it is a specific group of students that are at more at risk of dropping out? (For example, gender, socioeconomic, ethnic etc) And if so, why do you think the reason for this is?

Preventions

• Do you know how the educational system works to prevent these high dropouts rates?
• What solutions, if any, has this school put in Place to reduce the high dropout rate?
• Is this a big topic of concern for the school?
• What do you think will be the most effective way to reduce the high dropout rates?
• Do students have the opportunity at school to learn about different career paths?
• Do students have the opportunity at school to learn about themselves, their interests, their strengths and opportunities?
• If yes, how and in what way? Who is/are in charge of this? If no, what do you think this results in?
• Who in the school is in charge of these fields – dropouts, transition?
• Any other thoughts, experiences, information that you think would be of interest to this interview?
Annex 2

Interview guide – Selection 2

**Introduction and background**
- How old are you?
- Do you work? What field?
- If you work, how did you get the job?
- What do you do for recreation?
- Where do you live?
- Do you live with your family?
- Who are your family members?
- Are your parents working? What kind of work do they do?
- Has anyone in your family, or any of your friends or neighbours, studied at secondary or university before?
- Was it common for you to talk about school at home?
- Did you receive help with homework at home?
  - Yes all the time.
- What was your parents view regarding school and continuing your studies?

**Experience of school choice and drop out**
- Which grade did you drop out of school at?
- What was your specific in colegio – academia or technical? If carrera, what?
- Why did you choose the colegio or carrera?
- Was there someone in your environment who influenced your decision – Who and how?
- What support did you receive from school when you made your choice of schooling?
- Would you say that your choice of carrera was based in your interests or strengths? If not, would you have choosen differently?
- Why did you choose to drop out?
- Are you content with your decision?
- Do you feel that you had sufficient knowledge of your different options and what their end result entailed?
- Was there someone in your environment who influenced your choice to drop out? - Who and how?
- Did you get any support from the school when you were thinking about dropping out?
- Would you have chosen differently if you based your choice on your interests and strengths?
- What could the school have Done to influence your decision to stay in education?
- Is it common to drop out of school in your area?
- Do you know more people who have dropped out?
- What do you think are the biggest reasons for students dropping out?

**School**
- What did you think about the school? Both escuela and colegio.
• Did you enjoy going to school?
• Did you live far from the school? - Is it difficult or easy to get to school?
• Did you feel that the school was a safe environment?
• Did you learn a lot in school? Why, or why not?
• What were the teachers like?
• Were you motivated to study?
• Did you have friends in your class or at school in general?
• Were there lots of cliques (groups)?
• Do you have friends outside of school, if so, how did you get to know each other?

**Previous school experience**
• Did you go to primary school? What was that like?
• Did you enjoy elementary and primary school? Why?”
• Do you think that your previous schooling experiences have affected you? In what way?

**Future:**
• What are your future plans?
• What are the factors that have influenced that decision?
Annex 3
Interview guide – Selection 3

**Introduktion and background**
- How old are you?
- Do you work? What field?
- If you work, how did you get the job?
- What do you do for recreation?
- Where do you live?
- Do you live with your family?
- Who are your family members?
- Are your parents working? What kind of work do they do?
- Has anyone in your family, or any of you friends or neighbours, studied at secondary or university before?
- Was it common for you to talk about school at home?
- Did you receive help with homework at home?
  Yes all the time.
- What was your parents view regarding school and continuing your studies?

**Experience of school choice**
- What was your specific in colegio – academia or technical?
- What were you reasons for choosing this?
- Are you content with your decision?
- Tell me about your experience transitioning to 7th grade.
- Did you feel that you had sufficient knowledge of your different options and what their end result entailed?
- Was there someone in your environment who influenced your decision to continue studying? – Who and in what way?
- Was there someone in your environment who influenced your choice of subject? - Who and in what way?
- Is your choice of specific linked to your interests or strengths?
- Would you have chosen differently if you based your choice on interests and strengths?
- What support did you get from the school when you made your choice of schooling?
- In what ways could the school have helped you made a better decision

**School**
- What do you think about the school?
- Do you enjoy going to school?
- Did you live far from school? - Is it difficult or easy to get to school?
- Did you feel that the school is a safe environment?
- Do you get to learn a lot in school? Why or why not?
- What are the teachers like?
- Were you motivated to study? Have you always been?
• Do you have friends in class or at school?
• Were there lots of clicks (groups)?
• What do you usually like to do together?
• Did you have friends outside of school? If so, how did you get to know each other?
• What do you do for recreation?
• How common is it to drop out of school?
• Do you know people who have dropped out?
• What do you think are the biggest reasons for students dropping out?

**Previous school experience**
• Did you go to primary school? What was that like for you
• How was elementary and primary school for you?
• Do you think that your previous schooling experiences have affected you and in what way?

**Future:**
• What are your future plans?
• What are the factors that have influenced that decision?