

‘Let’s not keep it private’: Schooling background and student preparedness transitioning into university

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Non-government school students have been shown to achieve lower first-year academic success compared to students from government schools (Birch & Miller, 2007; Mills *et al.*, 2009). One possible reason for this discrepancy is that students from non-government schools are less well adapted to the autonomous learning required at university. The current study investigated the relationship between schooling background, students’ perceptions about their preparedness for university, their school’s contributions to this preparedness, and academic achievement.

Participants were first year physiotherapy (n=181) and occupational therapy (n=146) students studying a biomedical science subject. They were asked to describe their schooling background, their levels of preparedness for tertiary study, and how they thought their schooling background prepared them for university. Responses were coded using inductive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Students’ examination marks were compared to schooling background.

Non-government school students reported being well-prepared more frequently than government school students, who were more likely to feel unprepared. Both cohorts acknowledged that their schooling background contributed to the development of their learning approach at university; however, the reasons for this contribution differed between government and non-government school students. Non-government school students were more likely to indicate that school provided a nurturing environment where they were taught learning skills, whereas government school students were more likely to indicate that they learned these skills independently. Government school students received higher examination marks at the end of semester than non-government school students, although these results were not significant.

When students transition to tertiary education, they need to adapt to the autonomous learning environment of university. In the current study, government school students were more likely to indicate that they developed their learning skills independently during school, rather than being taught these skills. These results suggest that government schools may foster independence, which is a valuable attribute when transitioning to university.

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Braun V & Clarke V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology* **3**, 77-101.

Mills C, Heyworth J, Rosenwax L, Carr S & Rosenberg M. (2009). Factors associated with the academic success of first year health science students. *Advances in Health Sciences Education* **14**, 205-217.