



**Experiences of girl learners in accessing information about Higher Education prospects: Rural and urban comparatives**

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**The Department of Social Work**

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**for the degree Master of Arts in the field of Social Development**

**by**

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**March 2015**

**DECLARATION**

I hereby declare that the work contained herein is my own, and that all works which are not my own, have been cited and referenced accordingly with the original source.

.....

.....

Signature

Date

## **Acknowledgements**

This study is dedicated to the South African girl child who is brave enough to dream, your dreams are valid.

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Lastly, to my mother, you have always been and will always be my hero.

## ABSTRACT

Much effort has been invested in transforming the South African Higher Education landscape since the election of the democratic government in 1994. Although notable achievements have been made, a persisting sentiment is that this system remains largely unequal to the extent that less girl children are enrolling in historically male-dominated fields of study. It is acknowledged that in the South African context where poverty and unemployment are rampant, gender inequality in Higher Education poses a threat to the potential for increased socio-economic development. The aim of the study was to explore the experiences of high school female learners in urban and rural settings concerning accessing information about their Higher Education prospects. The study was informed by the qualitative approach and a case study design was applied. Purposive sampling was used to obtain a sample of 25 participants which was spread between two schools, one in Gauteng and one in Mpumalanga. Two semi-structured interview schedules were used for individual and focus group interviews. Data was collected through audio-taped individual interviews and a focus group in each school; and data was analysed using thematic content analysis. Through their experiences, a better understanding of how access to information aids and informs girl learners' decisions about their post-schooling careers was gained. The findings indicated that the experiences of girl learners in accessing information about their Higher Education prospects are different with a few similarities in rural and urban areas. The research is likely to encourage further research on access and gender inequality in Higher Education.

**Key words:** access, girl learners, information, prospects, Higher Education

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**List of Acronyms**

ANC- African National Congress

CAPS- Curriculum Assessment Policy Statements

CIS- Computer Information Science

ECD- Early Childhood Development

EFA- Education for All

FET- Further Education and Training

GDBE- Gauteng Department of Basic Education

GDP- Gross Domestic Product

HE- Higher Education

HEI- Higher Education Institution

ICT- Information Communication Technology

MDBE- Mpumalanga Department of Basic Education

NCS- National Curriculum Statement

NQF- National Qualifications Framework

NSFAS- National Students Financial Aid Scheme

OBE- Outcomes Based Education

STEM- Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics

UNESCO- United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation

UNMDG- United Nations Millennium Development Goals

UK- United Kingdom

USA- United States of America

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## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **1.1 INTRODUCTION**

The focus of this chapter is to provide brief insight into why and how the study unfolded. The researcher will begin by introducing the problem that necessitated for the undertaking of the study and will accompany it with the rationale. Subsequently, the chapter will give an account of the research question and the strategy that was applied in exploring the responses to this question. Lastly, the limitations of the study, an explanation of key concepts, and the organisation of the research report will be provided.

### **1.2 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM AND RATIONALE FOR THE STUDY**

The Apartheid regime has left a legacy of inequality in the South African education system and as an identified driver of development it has become a priority for the post-1994 democratic government to transform the education system into one which is accessible to all individuals so as to cultivate a stronger and more skilled workforce (Boughey, 2002). Although notable strides have been achieved in an effort to transform the education system, there remain glaring challenges with respect to access, inequality and quality (Teferra & Altbach, 2004; Motala, 2001; Case & Yogo, 1999). This statement rings true for Higher Education in particular, as Johnstone (2004, p.12) confirms that “sub-Saharan Africa [is] beset with fragile economies and tentative democracies that are struggling to maintain Higher Education quality amid conditions of financial austerity and a relentlessly increasing tide of student demand”.

Eccles, Wigfield, Flanagan, Miler, Reuman and Yee (1989) illustrate that the stifled entry of women into science, math and technology programmes is an historical phenomenon. They highlight that during that time (1989), only 13.2% of engineering degrees were received by women, while only 27% received physical science qualifications. Circumstances may have changed in recent years as more young women have opted to pursue science and technology oriented careers however, in comparison to their male counterparts, this shift is still considered to be insignificant. This is more so because currently, the globalised economy has placed increased pressure on countries to produce graduates that will contribute to the natural and physical sciences, mathematics

and technology (Klasen, 2002). An example of this small shift is captured by Bok, Taylor, Phillips and Sun (2013) as they investigated the minor representation of females in the computer science degree. They distinctly point out that although 57% of graduates in South Africa were women in 2010, only 18% managed to receive an undergraduate degree in Computer and Information Science (CIS). Gender inequality in Higher Education persists to the extent that fewer girl learners in comparison to boy learners are enrolling into science and technology subjects (Klasen, 2002), and this has led some authors to argue that girl learners continue to be under-represented in Higher Education (Aikman, Halai & Rubagiza, 2011; Kabeer, 2005; Mama, 2003). To this end it has been asserted that fairness should prevail where more efforts are made to include female learners in the growing global knowledge economy through strides that seek to do away with barriers to access and participation (Aikman & Rao, 2010).

Gender inequality from this perspective has stunted the potential for success in the South African Higher Education system (Kabeer, 2005). The uniqueness of the geographical layout of South Africa must be taken into consideration as it has a bearing on who, amongst young girls, is most likely to enter into the Higher Education stratum. In attempting to grasp the presenting problem, and taking into account the comparative nature of this study, both the disadvantages and advantages that are faced by rural and urban girls in accessing information about Higher Education prospects were considered. This consideration will be looked at in detail in the second chapter.

The researcher's interest in a study of this nature was best described by the old adage that "knowledge is power". The sentiment was that, should female learners be better informed about their Higher Education prospects, they would be more likely to be in a better position to make informed choices. Additionally, in reflection of the position which she assumed as a role model, the researcher believed that she had a role to play in being a source of information to the participants. The study revealed how access to information or lack thereof affects the educational advancements of female learners and influences the career paths that they may wish to pursue. This study has contributed to research which addresses access to Higher Education in South Africa as well as gender inequality in the education system. Additionally, it may also contribute to considerations by relevant stakeholders in the education system on how information

about Higher Education prospects is disseminated appropriately to learners who are enrolled in grade 10 to 12.

### **1.3 RESEARCH QUESTION**

What are the experiences of high school female learners in accessing information about their Higher Education prospects?

### **1.4 THE PRIMARY AIM AND SECONDARY OBJECTIVES OF THIS STUDY**

The primary aim of the study was to explore the experiences of high school female learners with regard to accessing information about their Higher Education prospects. Secondary objectives included an exploration of factors affecting access to higher education, an investigation of the sources of information that are available to girl learners, and an understanding of the ways in which girl learners can be better supported in their Higher Education prospects.

### **1.5 BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY**

The qualitative approach was employed in this study and has assisted the researcher to make interpretations about the subjective experiences of the participants. In making use of this approach, the researcher immersed herself in the unique and subjective experiences of people's daily realities and attempts to make descriptions of the discovered phenomena, rather than providing explanations of them (De Vos, Strydom, Fouche & Delpont, 2011; Brikci & Green, 2007). In light of the constructivist paradigm that informed this study, Creswell (2009) asserts that it thrives on involving the participants in the quest to make sense of and understand the worlds in which they operate. This paradigm also makes a claim that there is no singular, objective reality as individuals who have different experiences of the world are in a better position to provide insightful narratives about these experiences (Mertens, 2010; Guba & Lincoln, 1989). A multiple case study design was applied to this study as it allowed the researcher to engage with the daily experiences of the participants.

The researcher had originally intended to obtain a sample of 30 participants; 15 from each school in Gauteng and Mpumalanga. However; due to sampling constraints and

unforeseen circumstances, the researcher was only able to obtain a total sample of twenty-five participants from a population of grade 10-12 high school female learners at two secondary schools, one in Soweto, Gauteng and another in Delmas, Mpumalanga. Seventeen participants were located in the first mentioned school while eight were from the latter. In Gauteng, eight participants participated in individual interviews while nine were in the focus group. In Mpumalanga, six participants were individually interviewed; three of whom also requested permission to join the focus group discussion. Only two of the original participants who had agreed to participate in the focus group were present. A total sample of eight participants was obtained from this province.

The researcher selected these locations as a result of her familiarity with both areas. The selection criteria for the sample included that the participants had to identify themselves as female and be enrolled in the Further Education and Training (FET) phase (grade 10-12) in their respective high school. Purposive sampling, a type of non-probability sampling was employed in the study. It is stated by Kothari (2004) that under this method of sampling, the researcher applies her own judgement about the characteristics that the sample should possess and uses this to make her selections. *Chapter Three* will provide more detail about the changes in the sampling method that was applied, as it differs from the one which was initially proposed.

The data collected in the interviews and the focus groups was analysed using thematic content analysis. As explained by Marlow and Boone (2005), this method of data analysis allows the researcher to classify the data into identified categories which will subsequently form the themes that will be discussed in the research report. Padgett (1998) asserts that an advantage of thematic content analysis is that it is unobtrusive, while a disadvantage is that the researcher's own judgements have the potential to interfere with the data collected.

## **1.6 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY**

The limitations of the study include the fact that making use of face-to-face individual and focus group interviews may have lead the participants to provide the researcher with answers that they deem desirable. Additionally, the use of focus group interviews may have caused the participants to influence one another's responses. The contexts in

which the study unfolded and the time constraints that were placed on the process of collecting data, may have affected the reliability and validity of the study. Differences in class schedules and negotiations with school authorities may have influenced the decrease in the sample size. It could be inferred that the decrease in sample size might have a bearing on the generalisability and transferability of the results to the larger populations of girl learners in both provinces. It is posited by De Vos et al. (2011) that within qualitative research, the researcher's personal bias cannot be removed; this has the potential to affect the transferability, reliability and validity of the study.

## **1.7 DEFINITIONS OF KEY CONCEPTS**

Four key concepts were identified by the researcher on the basis of their relevance to the study. Although each concept has a general definition, the researcher was encouraged to take these definitions further in making their association to the context of the study.

### *Access*

Atkin and Ebdon (2014) define access as the realisation of all individuals to an equal chance to participate in education wherein their race, gender, religion or social class do not act as a barrier. With respect to this study, access implies that girl learners should be able to physically access institutions of Higher Education; but beyond this, they should also be able to realise the same opportunities of study as their male counterparts. This is especially true where accesses to science and technology courses are concerned (Gough, 2008).

### *Information*

Knowledge communicated or received concerning a particular fact or circumstance or knowledge gained through study, communication, research and instruction ([www.dictionary.com](http://www.dictionary.com)). Information, in the context of this study is considered to be a facilitator of access to Higher Education- and more specifically, science and technology fields of study for girl learners. It is the researcher's understanding that a command of knowledge about different areas of study provides girl learners with the freedom to choose and not be limited to traditional, gender-stereotypical academic careers.

### *Prospects*

Prospects in an educational context, can be understood as the opportunities and options that are made available to girl learners on the basis of numerous factors including their academic achievements, institutional visibility, school support and parental involvement. Prospects are defined by the Free Dictionary (2015) as “the probability or chances for future success, especially as based on present work or aptitude”.

### *Higher Education*

Higher Education can be understood as the pursuit of post-schooling study that requires an individual to enrol in a university or college after where they will qualify in a chosen area of study. Higher Education has been considered as a channel through which socio-economic development can take place (Bligh, McNay & Thomas, 1999). Where young girls are concerned, it is considered to contribute to their empowerment as members of a largely vulnerable and marginalised population.

## **1.8 ORGANISATION OF THE REPORT**

The report has been structured into five chapters which each describe a part of the research process and how it unfolded. *Chapter One* was introductory and discussed in brief detail the statement and the rationale for the study. Subsequent to this was the research question, along with the primary aim and objectives of the study. The last part of the chapter continued to briefly discuss the research methodology and design of the study as well as the limitations therein.

*Chapter Two* contains the review of past and existing literature as well as the theoretical framework that is applicable to the experiences of girl learners in accessing information about Higher Education prospects. *Chapter Three* discusses in detail, the research methodology and design which anchored the study, and *Chapter Four* provides the investigation, analysis and results of the data which was collected. A discussion of results, the conclusions and recommendations are contained within *Chapter Five*.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

#### **2.1 INTRODUCTION**

This chapter contains a review of the literature with which the researcher engaged in an effort to gain a thorough understanding of the subject under study. The chapter will consider, amongst other discussions, the international and local understanding of access to education and in particular, Higher Education. Similarities and differences that exist between the developed North and the developing South will be discussed. Additionally, it will look at gender equality versus equity in education, while also considering the role of information in and the information-seeking behaviours that are employed by girl learners in rural and urban settings. The chapter will also consider the theoretical framework that has underpinned the study.

#### **2.2 ACCESS TO EDUCATION: INTERNATIONAL AND LOCAL REALITIES**

Countries across the globe are in agreement on the fact that as a basic human right, education should be made available to all individuals. An important assertion is made by Johnson (1995) who acknowledges that the concept of access to education is an elusive one to define across the field of education in general, and Higher Education in particular. He notes that in consideration of the possible dimensions of access, there is firstly the obvious physical presence of and entrance to a school, classroom or university by a student or a learner. Physical access to education may also be inclusive of the availability of learning and teaching support materials, school uniforms, health care facilities and nutritious food. Secondly, in its most abstract or philosophical understanding, access is also used to define the availability of services within institutions of learning that may help to promote academic success; these may include amongst others career guidance services, Information and Communication Technology (ICTs) and libraries. Thirdly, between the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries, the demand for a skilled labour force that would respond to the ever-changing market economy, has created a higher demand in the need for more individuals to enrol in some or other form

of formal education. In this sense, access to education has meant widening the pool of students and learners who are enrolled in institutions.

Over the years, access has become a hot topic of debate in both developed and developing countries. Although similarities exist in efforts to define and understand access to education, it is imperative to consider how different contexts and histories have shaped these definitions and understandings. In the United Kingdom for example, access to Higher Education has been negotiated through the maintenance of elite standards and excellence. Access is primarily understood in this country as the efforts that should be invested into growing the Higher Education strata, yet contestation from different socio-political groups prevail.

On the one hand are the academic traditionalists who are of the belief that individuals should prove themselves worthy of being allowed into an institution (Williams, 1997). This group of traditionalists insists that Higher Education should not be made available to everyone, as this exercise may lead to a drop in the high standards of the historically elite British system. For this group the quality of the individuals who are permitted into Higher Education institutions translates into the quality of the outputs that will be gained at the end of the period of study. On the other extreme side is the group that forms the access movement. This group, argues for increased opportunities for every individual. The basis of their case is that through content and the open sharing of knowledge, more individuals will become enlightened (Williams, 1997). Different as these two positions are, they place emphasis on access through numbers. While the first approach emphasises individual agency and capabilities, the latter acknowledges that structural forces sometimes operate to facilitate or hinder access to education.

In America, which is considered to be an economic powerhouse of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, Higher Education has become a tool through which many individuals and families are able to work towards living the 'American Dream' (Erisman & Looney, 2007). The history of the Higher Education system in America and Europe is outlined by Trow (1999). An assertion made in this regard is that the American Higher Education system can best be understood by reflecting on its past, and how the introduction and later the abolishment of the slave trade have impacted on access and the quality of Higher Education in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. In response to the growing demand for Higher Education,

the American system has had to diversify by means of the establishment of new public and private colleges, and more resources have been allocated to traditional universities and historically black universities for their expansion and improvement (Daniel & Greytak, 2012; Trow, 1999).

The struggle for access to Higher Education on the African continent is two-fold. It bears some similarities to the struggles faced in the developed world; however, it can be argued that they are more pronounced (Aina, 2010). Firstly, there are a number of competing but complementary inequalities which have undermined the potential for the expansion of Higher Education systems in many countries. In Nigeria for example, the Higher Education Report (2003) indicated that at that time, two-thirds of the population survived on less than one dollar per day (World Bank as cited in Saint, Hartnett and Strassner, 2003), implying that many could not afford to join the one-third of the population who were working towards obtaining a degree. Poverty has weakened the African Higher Education system and this has been further compounded by the burden of disease. It has been reported that Lesotho, Swaziland and Botswana have some of the highest rates of HIV infections, and non-communicable diseases such as cancer and heart disease are fast becoming a threat to the life expectancy of the African people (Fox, 2012).

As far as the South African case for access to education is concerned, the struggles herein are multifaceted. It is primarily understood that the facilitation of access to formal education means widening the pool of individuals who are enrolled into institutions. It does however go beyond this as the context dictates that access to education is also inclusive of the availability of other necessities that promote learning. This view is supported by Fleisch and Schindler (2009) who note that factors such as lack of transportation, long distances to school, poverty, school fees and inadequate infrastructure all have the potential to hinder access to education. In South Africa, which remains a largely unequal society along gender, race and class lines, the focus has been on redressing the inequalities which have excluded previously disadvantaged groups from participating in the Higher Education system (Le Grange, 2009). Secondly, the Higher Education system has been faced with the arduous task of providing quality education, whilst also providing more opportunities. According to Schafft and

Youghlood-Jackson (2010), rural communities that remain on the periphery of economic activity, financial resources are few. They are supported by Dlodlo (2009) who asserts that this limits the ability of young girls in such locations to access the opportunities being presented by institutions of Higher Education. In the new democracy this has seen the development of new universities, colleges and private institutions in response to the growing demand for access into Higher Education (National Planning Committee, 2010). The youth have been identified as important beneficiaries of an improved and better-functioning system of Higher Education; they constitute a large percentage of the entire population and therefore represent a large portion of the country's future workforce (Makiwane & Kwizera, 2009).

A study by Cloete, Branson, Zuze, Papier, Needham and Nel (2009) indicates that in the year 2008, a total of 62, 7 % of the 18-24 age group were not attending an educational institution and furthermore a total of 700 000 matriculants were unable to continue with their education even though a total of 900 000 were qualified to enrol in an institution of Higher Education. The consensus, given the landscape which the South African Higher Education is negotiating is that an inability to provide the youth, and more specifically, the marginalised groups within this population with opportunities for educational advancement, will reinforce inequalities which exist with the passage of time (Cloete et al. 2009; Makiwane & Kwizera, 2009). This poses a challenge as far as producing more science and technology graduates who will eventually contribute to the growing economy. Additionally, it will increase the vulnerability of young women who are unable to secure their financial independence through Higher Education.

### **2.3 GLOBALISATION**

Globalisation has become a hot topic over the years and continues to attract debate. In its simplest form, globalisation is described by Sabapathy and George (2011) as the quickened exchange of services, goods and information. It has however become more complicated than this, as it is noted that this accelerated exchange has resulted in both positive and negative effects on different aspects of societal life including the economy and education (Sabapathy & George, 2011). Where education in particular is concerned, it is acknowledged that globalisation has caused panic in the developing South. Varma (2006) along with Akoojee and McGrath (2003), outline the various socio-economic

challenges that globalisation has presented. They firstly indicate that in an effort to adjust to the global economy and become legible competitors, the developing countries have been pressured into adopting neoliberal policies. These policies promote decreased government expenditure on basic services and increased market agency. The outcome of adopting policies of this nature is that developing countries have cut their per capita expenditure on education, which has led to lower enrolment rates and school attendance in countries such as Burkina Faso and Malawi (Akoojee and McGrath, 2003).

The opposite is true for South Africa which has one of the largest budgets for education. It spends, on average, 21 % of its national budget and 6 % of its Gross Domestic Product (GDP) on education (Moloi & Strauss, 2005). Additionally, families who are often confronted with poverty have become pressured into paying school fees. The trade-off that is made herein is that of choosing to enter the unskilled labour market in order to survive, over completing school. Although the government has enacted policies such as the National Norms and Standards for School Funding (NNSSF) which, it was hoped would result in the equitable allocation of financial resources to schools in urban and rural settings and ease the burden of paying fees, the landscape currently remains the same. Mestry and Ndhlovu (2014, p. 1) provide evidence of this by stating that: “The scale of changes in policies such as the NNSSF policy has inevitably placed great stress on School Governing Bodies (SGBs), school management teams (SMTs), teachers and district officials, resulting in a significant disjuncture between policy intention and practice, and a growing divide between what government expect schools to do and what schools are in fact able to do”. A phenomenon that has scourged developing countries and continues to do so has been termed the brain drain and it describes the loss of the few, skilled and educated individuals through migration to developed countries in search of better prospects (Akoojee & McGrath, 2003). After 1994, the retention rates of teachers in the teaching profession dropped significantly and this was considered problematic for school outcomes as teachers have the ability to contribute to learner achievements (Arends & Phurutse, 2009). The loss of valuable skills has the potential to cripple developing economies and according to social thinkers, it will deepen the inequality gap between the developed North and the developing South. The ability of girl learners to access information about their higher education

prospects may reverse the deepening of the inequality gap; they may be able to pursue various career paths and add value to the growing economy.

Assertion is given by Varma (2006) that the inequalities that have been introduced by globalisation are thought to be many and are inclusive of the digital divide that exists between the urban and rural settings of a country. The digital divide has become an ever more pressing issue as globalisation has transformed the way in which technology is used and accessed. This divide is especially pertinent to the South African context which maintains large deposits of rural communities. According to scholars such as Christie (1997) and Sungoh (2006), technologies are only useful to those who reside in urban settings, as they are able to physically and financially access them. To this end it is noted that the digital divide leaves those in rural settings disadvantaged as it starves them of information which they need to succeed in their education. It is posited that a common fear among African countries is that globalisation will introduce cultural homogeneity whereby local cultures are eroded and cultural identities are lost. In addition, Christie (1997) and Sungoh (2006) perceive that through globalisation, education systems will become homogenous and lose their ability to transmit local histories. On the other end of the globalisation debate, it is acknowledged that the easy flow of information has allowed individuals to explore prospects that they otherwise would not have accessed. Additionally, education systems across the world have been provided the opportunity to learn from each other. The pro-globalisation proponents argue that this process has proved to be healthy for economic competition. Countries, especially those that are less developed, have come to look at the progress and successes of their counterparts; this has motivated them to strive for the same levels of socio-economic affluence (Sungoh, 2006). As far as the influence of globalisation goes, the idea is that learners in less developed systems of education will acquire the skills that allow them to become global actors. Through the flow of information, education systems can also prepare learners to become better communicators, a skill which will prove important in their job-seeking ventures (Akoojee & McGrath, 2003; Christie, 1997). Beyond this, globalisation can have positive outcomes for education policies in developing countries. The idea herein is that these countries can make use of the best-practice models that have been used by developed states. Caution must however be applied as globalisation seems to have no limits. Should it be left unbridled, it has the

potential to deepen the high levels of socio-economic inequalities that already exist. During the 21<sup>st</sup> century, it has become clearer that the process of globalisation is unstoppable; it can be used by countries to achieve development, or inhibit it through the entrenchment of high inequality (Sabapathy & George, 2011).

#### **2.4 THE MDGs AND THE NATIONAL DEVELOPEMENT PLAN VISION 2030**

The year 2000 signalled an era for new beginnings as the country became a signatory to the United Nations Millennium Development Goals (UNMDGs). These goals, it was believed, spoke directly to the work that needs to be done with respect to furthering the development agenda in South Africa post-apartheid era. Furthermore, the goals were believed to be aligned to the development vision that was previously captured in the Freedom Charter; and in some or other way they have recently influenced the publication of the National Development Plan Vision 2030. As a result of being a signatory to the MDGs, the South African government has further identified 10 outcomes and 12 priorities that it hopes to achieve; these key areas that have been identified will speak directly to each MDG. As the deadline for the achievement of the MDGs approaches, the government, along with interested development practitioners, has been prompted to reflect on the progress and challenges that have emerged over the past 15 years. This reflection has encouraged an admission on the part of all parties concerned that much remains to be done, although much has already been achieved (Lehohla , 2013).

Of the eight MDGs that are differently important depending on the context, two of these are particularly relevant to this study. According to North (2010), the goals of achieving universal primary education and promoting gender equality and the empowerment of women are distinct but also intertwined; this statement rings true for all the goals. It is acknowledged that as history accounts, women have often been excluded from participating in formal education. It has been recognised that women are key role players in striving towards socio-economic development, and that their exclusion from education in general, and Higher Education in particular, has detrimental effects on the future of the African continent (Dlodlo, 2009; Mama, 2003). It is stated that women, as a result of the legacy of the colonial era were denied the social equipment to qualify them for work or university entry as these institutions were considered to be suitable

only for men. Furthermore, an illustration of recent years on the African continent indicates that in countries such as Uganda and Congo women began enrolling in the Higher Education Institutions in 1945 and 1962 respectively (Mama, 2003). In Ethiopia, efforts have been made to increase the enrolments of women in institutions of Higher Education as the percentage had remained at only 15% for several years.

It is noted by Kabeer (2005) and Wondimu (2003) that currently, in societies which are deeply rooted in gender inequality, education is not considered to be a tool through which women develop themselves, but a means through which they prepare themselves to assume their 'rightful' places as caregivers and homemakers. As a result of this exclusion, both the academic and labour forces have been stifled. The effects of such exclusion are being felt more so in modern South Africa, as they have translated themselves into far-felt inequalities as far as poverty and unemployment are concerned. The first goal signifies a stepping stone to further and Higher Education which is why according to the MDG country report 2013, the government has chosen to rest its efforts on expanding and ensuring that every child is able to complete a course of primary schooling by the end of 2015. These efforts have included increasing funding towards basic education, improving school infrastructure, and investing in continuous teacher development, to name a few. The hope is that it is more likely for an individual who has completed primary schooling to continue successfully on their path towards educational attainment.

In respect of the MDGs, the country report on the achievement of the goals indicates that currently, South Africa has achieved universal primary education. In 2011, data revealed that 99% of children aged between age 7-13 years were attending primary school. The numbers also reveal that the differences in enrolment between girls and boys have decreased significantly. This shift in the enrolment patterns between the genders is significant as it speaks to the reversal of historical inequalities as far as the learning of boys and girls is concerned. It is stated that although the country was able to achieve universal access to primary education, it would need to use this milestone as a platform to strive for further transformation of the education system. In this respect, the government was urged to look at other issues surrounding access, including efficiency and quality.

In a bid to define education outcomes better, the government has also specified that efforts will be invested towards increasing access to Early Childhood Development (ECD), Higher Education (HE) and Further Education and Training (FET). The targets that have been set in respect of increasing access to Higher Education are less ambitious in comparison to those of universal primary education. In its five year plan which ranges from the years 2010 to 2015, the Department of Higher Education settled on a national target of making Higher Education accessible to at least 20 % of candidates who successfully complete their matric. According to the 2013 MDG report, this national target was met in 2011 as 19% of youth were enrolled in Higher Education Institutions during this time.

In reference to the third MDG of promoting gender equality and empowering women, an important insight is made that states that as far as the two goals are concerned, education is not an end in itself, but a means to achieving the empowerment of women. In current South Africa, the government has realised the historical vulnerability of women and girls, which has resulted in the emergence and perpetuation of various social ills including violence and poverty. UNESCO (2003) asserts that this realisation has provided insight into the fact that gender inequality, if left unattended, may stunt the development goals that the country seeks to achieve. Through the development of policies and programmes, South Africa has attempted to mainstream gender equality. This has meant that gender issues are integrated into all facets of societal life and where necessary, positive discrimination in favour of certain genders (more often women and girls), is permitted. By international and regional standards, it is acknowledged that South Africa is amongst the best-ranking countries in the world as it has managed to realise high levels of gender equality. Although the statistics are something to be proud of, it is necessary to apply caution and consider that they are not representative of the full picture; they do not consider factors such as context and population (Lehohla, 2013).

## **2.5 PRIMARY AND SECONDARY SCHOOLING IN SOUTH AFRICA**

Education for all has not only been viewed as a life-long process of learning but also of personal and communal development. Flowing from this developmental perspective, it is therefore noted by Van der Berg, Taylor, Gustafsson, Spaul and Armstrong (2011)

that the primary and secondary schooling phases in South Africa are considered to be the building blocks of learning in preparation for Higher Education and subsequently the labour market. Yamauchi (2004) points out that differences exist in this regard, as the system is divided into two systems, namely, the public and private schooling system. Although the public schools system is significantly larger than the private schools system, research has indicated that the latter has been successful in affording learners adequate skills for further study, while the former has been bereft with challenges especially with regard to the quality of education (Hanushek & Rivkin, 2008).

The differences that exist in public and private education can be attributed to the availability of resources or the lack thereof, the quality of teachers and curriculum (Gamoran & An, 2005). The perception is that learners who have been through the private school system are in a better position to enrol in science and technology subjects as the quality of education and performance levels of these learners are high. The argument is that in public schooling, learners are unable to meet the entry requirements for study into science and technology fields as most schools fail to provide adequate resources for learning. Kim (2011) notes that language has been a subject of contestation over the last few years as it has been recognised as a tool through which learners come to understand the content which they are being taught; language also has the potential to facilitate improved performance. It has been reported that English as a medium of instruction is limiting, as it has meant that some learners are unable to grasp concepts in the same way as those who speak it as a first or home language. This argument is especially true in South African rural schools where mostly indigenous languages are spoken. Pitt (2013) argues that it is evident that even during early schooling years, structural inequalities caused by racial segregation and socialisation persist and threaten to hinder the progression of some learners.

## **2.6 INEQUALITY, RACE AND QUALITY IN EDUCATION**

Although there is not a pronounced history of racial segregation in the United Kingdom (UK), Watt and Patterson (2000) argue that the majority of students are white, and challenges with access to education stem largely from an individual's socio-economic status. The UK has seen a significant expansion of its Higher Education system in the

past 40 years as student enrolments have risen from an estimated 400 000 to 2 million in the early 2000s. This expansion has introduced with it a plethora of problems wherein economically disadvantaged youth are unable to access institutions due to a lack of funding (Chowndry, Crawford, Dearden, Goodman & Vignoles, 2013; Blanden & Machin, 2004). A survey that was conducted in the UK by Watt and Patterson (2000) sought to investigate other factors that may affect access to Higher Education and the consensus amongst the stakeholders who were interviewed, was that “pre-entry guidance, qualifications frameworks and transfers, structural barriers and flexibility, attitudinal barriers, student finance and institutional finance, were significant in this regard” (p.107).

A fallacy on the part of the American government after the abolishment of the slave trade was that black and whites would be recipients of equal, but separate education. However, this has been disproved as the Higher Education system continues to bear the brunt of racial inequality. Closely linked to this is the way in which race has become and continues to be a determinant of socio-economic status in America. The white majority have experienced a life-time of privilege and quality education which has opened better employment opportunities for them and consequently economic security, in comparison to the black minority who are by and large products of an uneducated ancestry. The implication of this is that many black individuals who wish to enter the Higher Education system have been unable to do so largely due to a lack of financial resources. This is also true for the UK and South Africa wherein race and class inequality has shaped access to financial resources for study. This shows that in some instances, both developed and developing countries experience similar setbacks. The struggle for access into Higher Education can thus be understood from a race and class inequality perspective (Karen, 2002).

The Apartheid era in South Africa has entrenched a culture of inequality in the country's education system which post-1994, continues to struggle to transform itself into an accessible and equitable system for all (Van der Berg, 2007). A reflection of the Higher Education system in predemocratic South Africa is captured by Boughey (2002, p. 65) who states that “during the apartheid era the policy of ‘separate development’ not only ensured that the black majority were denied the sort of learning experiences which

would prepare them for tertiary study, but also that access to well-resourced institutions of Higher Education was largely available to white students". The presence of this deep-rooted inequality in the education system in general and the Higher Education system specifically, has continued and continues to undermine the country's developmental efforts (Le Grange, 2009). Despite being a democratic country for the past 20 years, it is no secret that every aspect of South African social life is still affected by race in different ways. As asserted by Teddy (2004), Higher Education is no exception, as during the Apartheid era, the ruling party established historically black institutions which were intended to groom the black majority for life as servants to the white minority. In addition to this, many black students who were raised in underprivileged households could not afford to continue with their education and were forced to seek employment at a very young age.

According to Gamoran and An (2005), this disadvantage has accounted for the difference in the number of black and white students who have been able to enrol into institutions of Higher Education even in post-Apartheid South Africa. Racial inequality has resulted in an uneven distribution of resources which remains a struggle for the country to overcome. Gamoran and An (2005) further note that the white minority remains advantaged in comparison to the black majority as they are identified as the population group which still has access to most resources which enable them to succeed in Higher Education. In the democratic government, legislation such as the Broad-based Economic Empowerment Act 53 of 2003 has been passed in an attempt to work towards the redistribution of resources and this has not been without controversy as it has been considered by some to be reverse racism (Veloso, 2008).

In recent years, both developing and developed countries have become preoccupied with the notion of quality in education. The fruition of this preoccupation is that countries across the globe have invested efforts to achieve quality (Bertorelli & Brar, 2012). The implications of achieving quality education as they further note, is that higher enrolment and retention rates might be realised. It is however acknowledged that as far as the definition of the concept of quality goes, it has caused much confusion; there is no one way of defining what quality is. It is suggested that the difficulty of settling on a total definition of quality has translated into the development of approaches

to understanding what quality in education entails, and further on ensuring that these approaches are relevant to the contexts to which they are being applied (Tikly, 2011). This sentiment is aptly captured by Alexander (2008, p.1) who says that “As yet, there is less consensus on what ‘quality’ actually entails, especially when we move from the conditions for quality (infrastructure, resources, teacher supply and of course, access, enrolment and retention) to the pedagogy through which educational quality is most directly mediated”. As discussed, the implications of such a statement are multi-faceted and they suggest that different approaches to understanding quality in education exist. Needless to say that even with such approaches, advantages and disadvantages cannot be escaped.

Motala (2001) as well as Case and Yogo (1999) agree that essentially, quality is measured through the outcomes of teaching and learning but more than this, it is measured by what is taught and how it is taught. Factors of enrolment and retention are closely linked to outcomes and are used as criteria for determining whether or not the processes of teaching and learning are complementary and efficient. Alexander (2008) posits that the complexities involved with this approach, comprise that there are contesting ideas of what best practice is- this is to say, there are many formulas to teaching and learning that are assumed to result in positive outcomes.

The complications arise because cognisance must be taken of the fact that many factors that are deemed to potentially determine outcome, interact differently. For this reason, it may not be wise to consider the process of teaching and learning in isolation as a determinant of quality. Furthermore, there is no one way of ascertaining that one factor makes a difference in learning outcomes more than another. Nutrition, the availability of learning and teaching materials, sufficient support, as well as self-determination are some of the factors that may interact to determine whether or not learners are successful in their academics. As this approach suggests, indicators that can be quantified are at the core of the general understanding of quality. The use of indicators in understanding quality has mainly been the activity of policy-makers and funders who are said to be far removed from the classroom experiences of learners and teachers (Motala, 2001).

The South African narrative of school quality points to the absence of schooling resources which are deemed necessary for educational attainment, possible employment

and returns to education. As a consequence, Case and Yogo (1999) assert that the effects of a low-quality education are multiple. The concern with quality in education, especially in developing countries, goes beyond the classroom. Logic follows that where learners are unable to benefit from their education as they should, they will not develop the capacity they require to participate in the formal employment market. In addition to this, the absence of quality in education has the potential to stifle the progress that has been made in other areas of development. Where historically vulnerable groups are involved, a poor-quality education system may reinforce continued marginalisation (Alexander, 2008).

## **2.7 THE RURAL-URBAN DIVIDE AND ITS INFLUENCE ON HIGHER EDUCATION ATTAINMENT**

South Africa's geographical landscape remains unique, as the country continues to witness the development of modern metropolis; while still maintaining pockets of traditional, rural areas. Drawing from this observation, it is noted by Schafft and Youngblood-Jackson (2010) that history was made in the year 2008 when a study revealed that a significant number of the world's population now reside in urban areas as opposed to rural locations. It is further acknowledged that the process of urbanisation has been a long and steady one, characterised by increased participation in the cultural, economic and political spheres of urban life. Although the process of urbanisation reflects the assumed trajectory of development, it is argued by Tyak (as cited in Madigan, 2009) and Kannapel and De Young (1999) that it has also introduced a neglect of the rural locations. The problem herein as highlighted by Tacoli (2003), is that urban and rural areas are invariably interlinked. She notes that these spatial linkages have a bearing on the flow of resources and manufactured goods; including information. It is therefore detrimental to emphasise the perceived 'divide' as it has a bearing on the capacity of rural populations to move out from these locations in search of better opportunities.

Where education is concerned, it is noted that this neglect of rural locations has introduced what has come to be known as the 'rural school problem' (Schafft & Youngblood-Jackson, 2010). The problem, as stated by Schafft and Youngblood-Jackson (2010), is that rural schools are inefficient and incapable of responding to the

demands of a fast-paced, modern and globalised society. They further note that the cause for this inefficiency rests on the incapacity of rural communities to manage their schools and prepare learners for economic independence. In other words, the climate that persists in rural schools can be likened to a situation of the blind leading the blind. It is stated by Groenke and Nesor (2010) that those who have been entrusted with the management of rural schools, themselves do not have the educational capacity to deal with the problems that are inherent in environments of this kind. They add that the more obvious solution to the 'rural school problem' would be to urbanise them. The assumption that is made here is that if rural schools are managed and equipped the same as schools in urban areas, they would become efficient (Groenke & Nesor, 2010). This approach has proved not to be as straightforward as imagined.

A study conducted by Dlodlo (2009) highlights that in South Africa, rural schools in the Kwa-Zulu Natal and Limpopo Provinces continue to operate without the necessary resources that contribute to learner success and progression. Watters (2008) indicates that in rural locations, most schools have poor infrastructure, inadequately qualified teachers, little or no access to Information and Communications Technology (ICTs) and textbooks. The picture that has been painted about the 'rural school problem' is slightly different in metropolitan cities. In urban areas, school-going learners are, in comparison, able to attend better-managed schools that are equipped with the necessary learning and teaching support materials that promote positive education outcomes. To this end, Watters (2008, p. 9) poetically notes that "Youth living in these rural areas aspire to the same things as their urban peers. They would also like to own the latest cell phone, wear hip clothing and arrange their social life via Facebook. Well, maybe, it is certain that they are not as isolated as their parents were from the lure and glamour of urban life, but the chances of their joining it are as slim as it was for previous generations. Only a very small group of determined youngsters 'get out', the rest only dream". It is important however to consider that this view on the implied efficiency of urban schools is stereotypical as the contexts and circumstances in the urban schools of the developed North and the developing South need to be taken into account. For one, schools in the developed North are better resourced due to their thriving economies while the opposite can be said for schools in the developing South where infrastructure and teaching

capacity remain problematic. The former still has much to achieve where both schools in the urban and rural locations are concerned.

It is noted that with the presence of globalisation, education in rural settings has become of great concern (Watters, 2008). In sub-Saharan Africa, statistics from the Education for All (EFA) report revealed that rural school-going children seldom go on to enrol for secondary school and further education (UNESCO, 2003). Groenke and Nesor (2010) provide different theoretical perspectives that have been offered in an attempt to understand or explain the disparities in the urban and rural school patterns of education attainment. On the one hand, the human capital theory suggests that access to and success in education are determined by an individual's characteristics. According to this theory, school outcomes are largely dependent on factors such as IQ, ability and personal aspirations. At the other end of the spectrum, conflict theorists assert that those with privilege and status are more likely to succeed in their education attainment as the bias is in their favour. This group of privileged individuals are mostly located in urban areas. It is noted that through marginalisation, rural children continue to face disadvantage in both their schooling and the labour market. The disadvantage they face is exacerbated by their inability to adjust to urban settings once they attempt integration into such settings. The outcomes of such patterns of the rural-urban divide on Higher Education are that due to their rural identities, learners in such areas experience exclusion and are unable to access institutions of higher learning (Groenke & Nesor, 2010).

## **2.8 GENDER INEQUALITY VERSUS GENDER INEQUITY IN HIGHER EDUCATION**

A significant Millennium Development Goal which has been identified by the United Nations is that of promoting gender equality and empowering women. Countries that have committed themselves to realising this goal are in agreement that historically, females have lagged behind their male counterparts in various aspects of social life, including education. Wolpe, Quinlan and Martinez (1997) assert that it is through schooling that children are socialised and injected with a society's values. It is also the perception of Asmal and James (2001) that the discourse on human and social justice has a firm place in discussions about education, as education in a democratic South

Africa is founded on the principles that are enshrined in the Constitution. They further note that even prior to entering the school system, boys and girls have acquired and, to some extent internalised traditional and gendered behaviours which have been transmitted by the family system.

With regard to schooling, it is further noted by Wolpe et al. (1997, p. 77) that “girls and boys actively learn as they engage with the formal and informal processes of schooling that their sex defines almost everything they do- who they are, their hopes and possibilities, their futures and how they relate to others”. This statement bears an important implication for females in secondary schooling who have aspirations to continue with their education and enter the Higher Education system, however, are unable to do so due to a number of factors, including culture, finances, and minimal or lack of information, amongst others (Kabeer, 2005).

Although there are a number of competing studies that have produced different results with respect to gender inequalities, in recent years, it has emerged that the progression of women’s post-schooling careers remains relatively low in comparison to those of men. It is argued by Wolpe et al. (1997) that access to Higher Education in South Africa was not a problem for women, but rather the problem was found to be the access to specific subjects and degrees. This result is vastly different from Aikman, Halai and Rubagiza (2011) who confirmed that the ratio of males to females participating in Higher Education stood at 53:47.

In Africa, it has also been reported that although more girls than boys are participating in education, girls remain underrepresented in historically male-dominated fields. The implications for this are outlined by Akoojee and McGrath (2003) and Klasen (2002) who confirm that the exclusion of girls from education in general, and Higher Education in particular, directly affect economic development. Klasen and Lamana (2009, p. 93) add that “regarding gender inequality in education, the theoretical literature suggests as a first argument that such gender inequality reduce the average amount of human capital in a society and thus harms economic performance. It does so by artificially restricting the pool of talent from which to draw for education, thereby excluding highly qualified girls”. Aikman and Rao (2010) propose that research on gender inequality in education should begin to focus at the outset on gender dynamics in the classroom, while Aikman

and Rao (2010) suggest that it is important to acknowledge that there is a need to understand the social and educational factors that reinforce gender inequalities; education that is of quality for women should also take into consideration how it is delivered, and whether it serves to promote their human dignity and potential (Figue, Marphatia, Djitrinou & Parkes, 2010).

## **2.9 CURRICULUM REFORM AND SUBJECT CHOICE**

At the helm of educational transformation in South Africa post-1994, was the development of a National Qualifications Framework (NQF) which is commended by Cross, Mungadi and Rouhani (2002, p. 172) as it “harmonises vertical and horizontal mobility of learners throughout the education system”. In support of this Allais (2011, p.345) confirms that “the NQF was established as an emblem and an instrument of the single national high-quality education and training system that democratic South Africa aspired to create”. The NQF has thus paved the way for the current educational landscape which Dlodlo (2009) highlights as comprising of three broad categories which the government has attempted to synchronise; each category serves to prepare individuals for the workplace and participation in the economy. The three categories are the General Education and Training (GET) phase which runs between grades 0-9, the Further Education and Training (FET) phase which covers colleges and grades 10-12 in school, as well as Higher Education and Training (HET) phase which covers university education. It is noted by Teferra and Altbach (2004) that with the increasing need for South Africa and other developing countries to join the growing global economy, the focus has shifted towards the need to create a better-functioning system of Higher Education. One way in which this has been attempted, is through curriculum reform which according to Bantwini (2010), has been an important tool in helping the South African education system to redress past inequalities and ensure that learners are well versed in preparation for post-school life.

It is highlighted by Chisholm (2005) that the development and revision of curriculum post-1994 has occurred in three phases. Firstly, racist language and outdated material were removed from the syllabi, secondly, in March 2007 the Curriculum 2005 (C2005) was launched and it was underpinned by the same principles of Outcomes-Based Education (OBE) which seeks to promote equity and participation with values of peace,

prosperity, non-sexism and non-racialism prevailing. Thirdly, a review of the C2005 was undertaken and it was recommended that curriculum should be free of technical language and should be aligned with the assessment methods in which teachers should be better trained. This process gave birth to the Revised National Curriculum Statement (RNCS) which is deemed to be an improvement of the C2005, and not a complete replacement of it. In recent years with the failure of OBE, the education ministry has revised the curriculum through the adoption of the National Curriculum Statement (NCS) and the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) (Erduran & Msimanga, 2014). Curriculum reform has a bearing on access to Higher Education in the South African context, as it is a medium through which learners can be socially and cognitively prepared for life after school (Kapp & Arend, 2011).

## **2.10 INFORMATION-SEEKING BEHAVIOUR IN ADOLESCENT GIRLS AND THE ROLE OF INFORMATION IN ACCESS TO HIGHER EDUCATION**

### **2.10.1 ACCESS TO INFORMATION**

The ability to access information plays an important role in daily decision-making processes. This statement can be applied to the efforts that are made by girl learners as they begin to plan for their post-schooling careers. McCreadie and Rice (1998, p. 45) support this view as they point out that “access to information affects our lives from economic well-being to privacy rights, from workplace management and monitoring to policy and decision-making, and from daily errands to transnational business”.

In light of this statement, they further assert that the growth of Internet and interactive media communication has significantly altered the ways in which information is acquired around the globe. It is firstly important to note that numerous understandings of information exist across different disciplines and contexts. For the relevance of this study, an assumption is made that in its different forms, information can translate into knowledge. This is knowledge that girl learners can use to make informed decisions about their post-schooling careers.

Firstly, in the most general understanding of what information is, emphasis is placed on the exchange of a message from a sender to a receiver. From this viewpoint, information

is treated as a commodity or a resource with the implication that it can be traded, manipulated or passed along. Secondly, as data in the environment, the assumption is made that information is the presence of natural objects in the environment that are not intentionally placed to transmit messages. These objects may be inclusive of historical artefacts, sounds, activities and natural phenomena. Thirdly, information can be understood as a representation of knowledge which makes the assumption that documents in printed form are the primary sources of information. This conceptualisation is accompanied by an emphasis on scientific and technical knowledge. Lastly, information is seen as part of the everyday processes of human communication wherein individuals interact amongst themselves and their environments in an effort to make meaning of their surroundings. In the field of education, where outcomes and attainment are crucial to building future workforces, each of the assumptions that are made about information is relevant (McCreadie & Rice, 1998).

The concept of what information is, has motivated for a consideration of what access to information implies. As with different concepts of information, at least six common understandings exist of what access to information is (Anderson & Johnnesson, 2006). In his book, Floridi (2010) highlights the various ways. Firstly, access to information is seen as the acquisition of knowledge, and what it represents in respect of providing those who are involved in its dissemination or interpretation with the opportunity for making decisions. Secondly, access to technologies are equated to access to information. This is to say that the presence of multimedia sources represents the acquisition of knowledge. The critique that has been levelled against this conceptualisation by McCreadie and Rice (1998), is that the availability of technologies such as computers, phones or televisions does not necessarily imply that users will be able to access the information they need through them. In order to facilitate access to information through various multimedia, a user must possess the necessary skills and prior-knowledge of how to operate such instruments, or otherwise the information will remain lost to them. In the third instance, Floridi (2010) posits that the processes that characterise communication between different parties are assumed to be at the core of accessing information. In this regard, communication acts as a channel through which an information-seeker is able to gain understanding of events that are relevant to their

lives. The same logic applies to the above-mentioned conceptualisations that require precompetence on the part of the users to enable them to realise the full benefits of the information that they are attempting to access (McCreadie & Rice, 1998).

Midgley (2002) continues to point out that when access to information is being equated to access to control, it is implied that those who are able to acquire the information that they need, are also able to decide what to do with it. Furthermore, the complexity of gaining this access means that those who acquire it are in a position to decide with whom they want to share it, and whether or not it will be advantageous to them. As a commodity or social good, information is viewed as something that can be consumed for value, and which has costs that are attached to it. An assertion is made by Anderson and Johnnesson (2006) that unlike other social goods or commodities, the values of information remains unknown until it is applied.

Lastly, according to Anderson and Johanneson (2006), information is seen as a means of gaining access to participation. In this regard, the possession of knowledge about particular processes allows individuals the platform to share their opinions and engage with the opinions of others. In addition to this, the ability to participate in social processes may mean that individuals are enlightened enough to ask questions where they do not understand something. Insight is gained from understanding what information is, and what possessing it can mean for girl learners who are navigating the path towards Higher Education. Having information implies that girl learners have decision-making powers. Information may also encourage curiosity wherein girl learners are more determined to invest in the thinking and planning around their futures.

### **2.10.2 INFORMATION-SEEKING BEHAVIOURS AMONGST ADOLESCENT GIRLS**

As a commodity that can be exchanged, information is necessary for educational attainment (Ludwig, 1997) because it allows learners to consolidate their schooling and post-schooling career. Zhu, Chen, Chen and Chern (2011, p. 2478) seem to support this as they posit that “information seeking has always been interwoven with learning”. In the same breath, Jaffer, Ng’ambi and Czerniewicz (2007) agree that information has an impact on various aspects of learning and teaching, including the processes that unfold

herein. Although the role of information in schooling may sometimes be overlooked, it is acknowledged by Chowdhury, Gibb and Landoni (2011) that we should be thoughtful of the uncertainty and confusion that often characterise the information-seeking behaviours of young people. They assert that the action of seeking out information is often, if not always, facilitated by an information need. The difficulty that young people and young girls in particular are confronted with is that there now exists a plethora of sources of information. Information-seeking has been made even more difficult with the constant advancements having been made in technology. Young people are confronted with the question of which sources to employ, and which of these are reliable.

Chowdhury et al. (2011) indicate that at the helm of the information-seeking is the realisation by an individual that they have an information need that has to be fulfilled. Flowing from this, it is reported that uncertainty and confusion characterise the duration of most adolescent information-seeking endeavours. Provided that today's youth live in a highly digitalised environment, cognisance must also be taken of the fact that exposure to the plethora of information sources can often explain the presence of anxious and confused feelings. With this consideration in mind, it must also be realised that the action of seeking out information by young people involves an interaction of both cognitive and emotional processes (Chowdhury et al., 2011). The action of seeking out information occurs differently for individuals, and at different stages of this action, the feelings of anxiety, confusion and uncertainty may become more or less pronounced. Figure 2.1 depicts a generic model of information-seeking behaviour that is sometimes applied when a need for information has been identified. A cocktail of factors motivate adolescents' information-seeking behaviours. As Figure 2.1 indicates, specific experiences may push an individual into the realisation that a situation is too complex for them to resolve. They may further realise that they are not cognitively competent to navigate such a situation; this often leads to feelings of stress and anxiety. An assessment of the quality and accessibility of the information needed to fill the gaps may determine whether or not an individual decides to fulfil their information needs. The environment, peer and family relations, and the school interact to determine the information-seeking behaviours of adolescents (Choo, 1999; Ludwig, 1997).

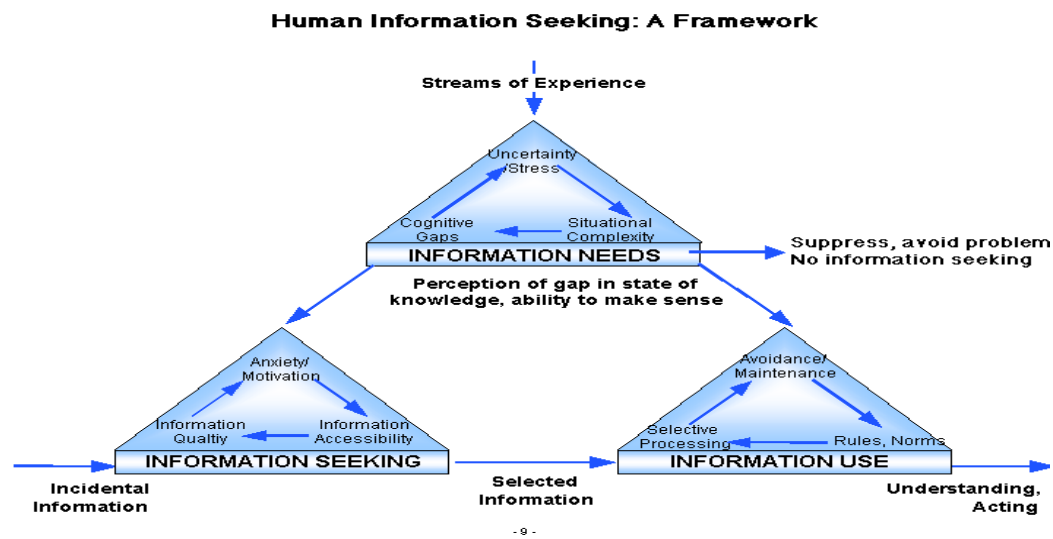


Figure 2.1 Model of information-seeking

Source: Choo (1999)

### 2.10.3 THE ROLE OF INFORMATION IN ACCESSING HIGHER EDUCATION

The role of information as a facilitator of access to education has been overlooked in developing countries (Jaffer et al., 2007). Although this seems to be changing in recent years, it is argued by Watters (2008) that youth (especially those in rural South Africa), remain deprived of the sources of information that they require for educational attainment. To illustrate this, she acknowledges that attention was given in the year 2000 to the various difficulties that are encountered by young people in an effort to “access information on education and training opportunities that might lead to employment”. Amongst the numerous difficulties faced by young people, the first to stand out is that less than 30% had an idea of how to access the information they need. An acknowledgement by Ludwig (1997) is that information, where educational attainment is concerned, has the potential to assist young people in making risk-benefit assessments between choosing to study further and entering the job market. In relation to this, these decisions are also cemented by the possession of information about the financial costs of further study (Bettinger, Long, Oreopoulos & Sanbonmatsu, 2009). At the centre of the discussion on the role of information as an important tool for education success, is the realisation that it can influence the processes of teaching and learning. The implications of this influence may possibly translate into the academic

preparedness of learners who are exiting schooling. Over and above this, information is also considered as a tool that could facilitate equity in education. Where opportunities are made, the knowledge of both young men and women concerning gender disparities in respect of accessing certain fields of study or Higher Education in general, may be lessened (Ludwig, 1997).

Furthermore, it is reported by (Jaffer et al., 2007) that information has a bearing on the educational efficacy of young people; this perceived efficacy can have mitigating effects against negative behaviours such as truancy, teenage pregnancy and substance abuse. Access to information also has the potential to facilitate improved educational performance, which may in turn influence the Higher Education opportunities that are available to young people and young girls in particular and in this instance, particular focus is placed on the role of ICTs (Jaffer et al., 2007). It is acknowledged by Chowdhury et al. (2011) that beyond facilitating entry into Higher Education, information plays an important role in the educational outcomes of individuals at different stages of their schooling career. To some extent, information can be considered as one of the many building blocks to educational attainment.

## **2.11 POST-SCHOOL TRANSITIONS**

The transition between the high school and tertiary period is one of the most important in a learner's life. It is during this time that a learner is required to make decisions about their post-schooling futures which have the potential to impact on the rest of their lives. Kabeer (2005) therefore posits that at the heart of attempting to close the gaps that exist in the education system across all levels, is the recognition that for women to be able to enter these levels rests fundamentally on the ability to make informed choices. To this end, it is also recognised by Billett, Thomas, Hay, Johnson, Sim and Ryan (2012) that there are numerous factors which influence the post-schooling decisions of young people in secondary school education; these are inclusive of the school, family, community, socio-economic status, information and personal aspirations.

The school's role in preparing learners for post-schooling life is paramount. It is firstly through teaching that learners are transmitted with the necessary knowledge to equip them for entry into Higher Education. Therefore, teachers and their knowledge of the

subjects they teach may encourage learners to develop an interest in them and aspire to pursue them further (Khanare, 2012; Marland, 2003). In making a case for how access to information has the potential to influence decisions by female learners, Dlodlo (2009) highlights that, the school acts as a source of information through the provision of resources such as ICTs and print material such as prospectuses provided by different institutions. Maree (2009, p. 437) points out that “far too many learners pass matric without having received career counselling in any form and consequently are denied the opportunity to apply for acceptance in sought-after fields of study in at tertiary training institutions”. Career counselling or the provision of psychosocial support services have therefore been identified as a tool that can assist learners to negotiate the conflicting pressures of making decisions about their post-schooling life. Unfortunately for many learners in the South African schooling system, they have little or no access to the resources they need to prepare them for making these decisions as schools struggle to acquire adequately trained teaching staff and provide resources such as ICTs due to financial strains (Khanare, 2012).

It is noted by Wimberly and Noeth (2004) that the family as a primary unit of socialisation plays an important role in influencing learners’ decisions about post-school educational advancement. It is reported that depending on the cultural values which have been instilled in young women especially, educational advancement may still be considered to be a waste of money as their basic education has done enough to prepare them for the reproductive roles they are meant to assume (Mama, 2003). On the other hand, a family may see the educational advancement of a learner as an investment which may improve their quality of life. It has been reported by Catsambis (2001) and Kandel and Lesser (1969) that families are most likely to be actively involved in a learner’s decision-making if there are members who are educated and have participated in the Higher Education system (Mama, 2003). Additionally, the wider community with whom a learner interacts, plays an important role in providing learners with role models which they can look to and aspire to be like. Poverty has rendered many learners in secondary schooling unable to continue with their schooling; socio-economic status is thus a determinant of whether or not a learner is able to enter into Higher Education or not. Compounding to this determinant is the fact that female learners often have no

knowledge about alternative forms of funding such as financial aid, merit awards, scholarships and bursaries (Dlodlo, 2009).

Over and above the above-mentioned factors which may be determinants in the post-schooling decisions made by young women, their own aspirations are important to consider. There have been cases where even under the most bleak of circumstances, young women have been able to make the transition from secondary school and access higher education. Personal aspirations in young women as well as agency, are thus also important influences on how young women transition from secondary school education to Higher Education (Billett et al., 2012). A study conducted by Levy and Earl (2012) indicates that personal aspirations also have an impact on whether or not a young woman perceives herself to have a successful transition into Higher Education; and once within the system, whether she may be able to realise these aspirations. Furthermore, aspirations are also connected to their perceptions about the cost-benefit ratio of attending university or delaying further study. The authors distinguish that some learners are always certain about their aspirations and are clear about what they wish to accomplish in further education, while others may delay their studies due to uncertain personal aspirations.

## **2.12 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS**

Any endeavour that seeks to understand the lives of young people commits itself whether intentionally or otherwise, to understanding them as a part of whole systems. For this reason the study will be informed by the eco-system model which was proposed by Bronfenbrenner who states that child development occurs within four systems which all interact with the chronosystem. This model as applied to child development, outlines the five systems which affect the learners in their everyday lives; these levels range from the micro-system to the macro-system. The different levels in the ecological model note how the child is affected by the family structure, political structure, and the community amongst other actors (Greene 2011; Hepworth, Rooney, Rooney, Strom-Gottfried & Larsen, 2010). The micro-system describes the individual interaction with units with which they interact daily such as the family, close friends and the school, while the meso-system speaks to the interactions between actors in the micro-system. The third system, the exo-system describes the association between the individuals and

their social conditions which do not directly affect them, such as the local politics and their parents' work. The fourth system which is the macro-system describes the cultural context within which the individual lives (Donald, Lazarus & Lolwana, 2010). A fifth and final system in this model is the chronosystem which describes the changes that occur in an individual's life over a period of time. In their book on social inclusion and higher education, Basit and Tomlinson (2012) describe the chronosystem as the contextual and historical changes that have shaped and continue to shape the life of an individual. The sentiment herein is that both past and present experiences, as encountered over time, culminate to determine the future trajectory of an individual's life. In this instance, the post-schooling decisions of young women would be influenced by their experiences in their schooling careers- from preschool to high school. Additionally, their experiences in preceding systems are also influential (Wyatt-Smith & Cumming, 2009). A model follows that was developed by Berk (2000) that depicts the interaction between the different systems as they affect the individual. This ecological model has been applied to education in previous publications (Seel, 2012; Waddell & McBride, 2008). In the case of this study, the model provides an understanding of the different actors and sources of information with which girl learners interact in their daily. This model can also be linked to the information-seeking behaviours which were discussed in the previous subsection (See Figure 2.1). They influence whether or not a girl learner may choose to fulfil her information needs.

In assuming a developmental stance, an appropriate approach which will inform the study is the developmental-interaction approach which is described by Shapiro and Nager (1999, p. 5) as a philosophy which "focuses on human development, interaction with the world of people and materials, building democratic community, and humanist values". This approach marries a set of beliefs and values about the way in which children learn and about how they are taught. The approach outlines how a holistic approach to the education of children can result in an equitable society. It is outlined by New and Cochran (2007) that the approach views the child as a learner who engages with their environment to make sense of events and phenomena. The teacher is seen as an advocate on behalf of the child and takes time to understand the learner and the community in which they live. In collaboration, the teacher and the learner are able to create a classroom that develops the learner's identity as a member of society while the

school serves to ensure that the learner has available to them all the opportunities they may need to develop knowledge and skills.

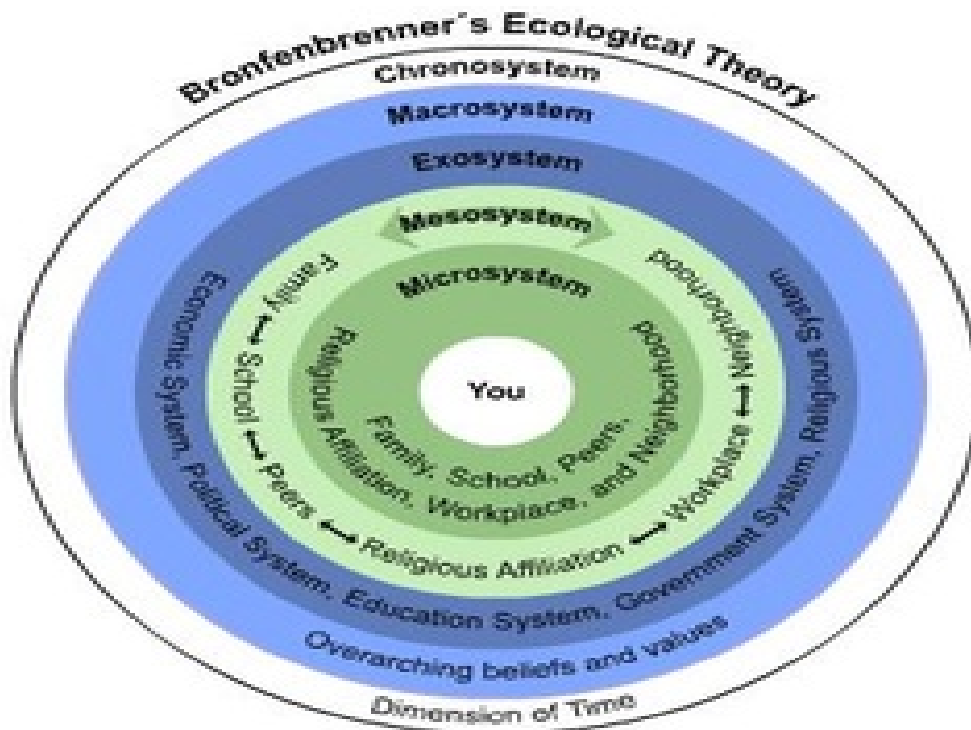


Figure 2.2 Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Model Source: Berk (2000)

### 2.13 SUMMARY

This chapter sought to review previous literature which is pertinent to the study and its objectives. This was done in an effort to gain better insight into the topic being studied. The chapter discussed different sections and subsections including globalisation, information and its role in education, as well as the theoretical framework, amongst others. The following chapter will outline the research methodology and design that were employed to carry out the study.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY**

#### **3.1 INTRODUCTION**

The research design and methodology that underpinned this study are discussed in greater detail within this chapter. The methods of data collection and analysis that were employed are considered. In addition to this, the research questions, aims, objectives, population, sample, sampling procedures and the instruments which guided the researcher in the research process are highlighted. The researcher has also taken into account the ethical considerations which had a bearing on how the study was carried out.

#### **3.2 RESEARCH QUESTION**

The research question that the study sought to explore was: what are the experiences of high school female learners in accessing information about Higher Education prospects?

#### **3.3 PRIMARY RESEARCH AIM AND SECONDARY OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY**

The primary aim of the study was to explore the experiences of high school female learners with regard to accessing information about their Higher Education prospects.

The secondary objectives were:

3.3.1 To explore the factors that affect access to Higher Education amongst high school girl learners, as well as post-school decisions.

3.3.2 To investigate the informational resources which are available to girl learners about Higher Education prospects.

3.3.3 To understand how high school girl learners can be better supported with regard to their Higher Education prospects.

### **3.4 RESEARCH APPROACH AND DESIGN**

The study was informed by the qualitative approach which is interpretive in nature. In making use of this approach, the researcher immersed herself in the unique and subjective experiences of people's daily realities and attempts to make descriptions of the discovered phenomena, rather than providing explanations for them (De Vos et al., 2011; Brikci & Green, 2007).

The ontological position that anchored the qualitative approach makes the assumption that there are as many realities as there are people. In other words, the researcher can only fully understand social reality through the subjective lens of his or her participants. As Brikci and Green (2007) note, the qualitative approach has been criticised on several grounds including that it makes use of small samples, which makes it difficult for the results to be generalised. There is little scientific rigour involved in the method and there is no way of telling to what extent the results have been affected by the researcher's personal bias. Creswell (2009) asserts that the constructivist paradigm which will inform this study, thrives on involving the participants in the quest to make sense of and understand the worlds in which they operate. This paradigm also makes a claim that there is no one objective reality as individuals who have different experiences of the world, are in a better position to provide insightful narratives about these experiences (Mertens, 2010; Guba & Lincoln, 1989). Based on the assumptions that are made by both the approach and the paradigm which informed this study, it is noted by Neuman (as cited in De Vos et al., 2011) that the researcher who operates under them will often make use of interviews, observations and/or personal narratives as a means of collecting data.

A multiple case study design was applied to this study as it provides a means through which the researcher can immerse herself in the context and daily lives of his/her participants. Yin as cited in Neale, Thapa and Boyce (2006, p. 3) confirms that "a case study is a story about something unique, special or interesting- stories can be about individuals, organisations, processes, programmes, neighbourhoods, institutions and even events". Furthermore, Baxter and Jack (2008) indicate that a multiple case study design is applied when the researcher sets out to investigate the differences that may exist between two locations as the case is between rural and urban. Neale et al. (2006)

indicate that an advantage of the case study design is that the researcher can be able to gather detailed information, unlike with other methods. They note in addition that the disadvantages of such a design are that case studies can be lengthy, have been reported to lack rigour, and are not generalisable.

### **3.5 POPULATION, SAMPLE AND SAMPLING PROCEDURES**

A population is described by Aday, Begley, Lairson and Balkrishnan as cited in Warungi (2013) as a group of individuals who may share the same or similar characteristics. The population of the study was grade 10-12 high school girl learners from two secondary schools, one in Soweto, Gauteng (urban) and the other in Delmas, Mpumalanga (rural). The researcher selected these locations as a result of her familiarity with both areas. The researcher employed purposive sampling, a type of non-probability sampling during the research study. According to Kothari (2004), the researcher's prior judgement and knowledge about the sample are used to determine whether or not the sample will assist in achieving the intended objectives.

Educators who were familiar with the learners assisted the researcher in selecting those who met the selection criteria. The selection criteria for the sample was that the participants had to identify themselves as female and be enrolled in the Further Education and Training (FET) phase (grade 10-12) in their respective high school. In Mpumalanga the researcher was made aware that five participants from Sundra High School would no longer participate in the study. The participant information sheet was shared with selected learners to provide them with the details of the study. At this stage of the process, all participants reported understanding what the study entailed and agreed to participation. Although the researcher had wished to obtain a sample of 30 participants, a total sample of 25 participants was obtained due to the choices of 5 participants who no longer wished to be part of the study. A total of 17 participants were obtained in Gauteng where eight participants took part in individual interviews, and nine participants were involved in the focus group. In Mpumalanga, a total of eight participants took part in the study. Six participants were individually interviewed and four participants who were individually interviewed offered to participate in the focus group as those chosen had decided not to participate. An additional two participants who had already agreed to participate in the study also took part in the focus group.

### **3.6 RESEARCH INSTRUMENTATIONS**

The study employed two separate semi-structured interview schedules to conduct the individual interviews and focus groups. A semi-structured interview schedule provides a guide for the researcher in an attempt to receive in-depth responses from the participants. The semi-structured interview schedule also allows for flexibility as the researcher is provided with the liberty of selecting which questions are applicable to the participants, and also probing further on certain questions (Babbie & Mouton, 2011).

#### **3.6.1 PRETESTING OF THE RESEARCH INSTRUMENTATION**

A pre-test was conducted with one learner from each school and they were not included in the study. The pre-testing revealed that the researcher would not have to alter the schedules, however in some instances, as far as asking questions relating to gather in depth information, the researcher had to probe further. According to Burke and Miller (2001) the pre-test is useful in helping the researcher to decide on what order questions may best be asked, and also to determine how the phrasing of some questions may need to be addressed to provide clarity. The pre-test contributes to the trustworthiness of the study.

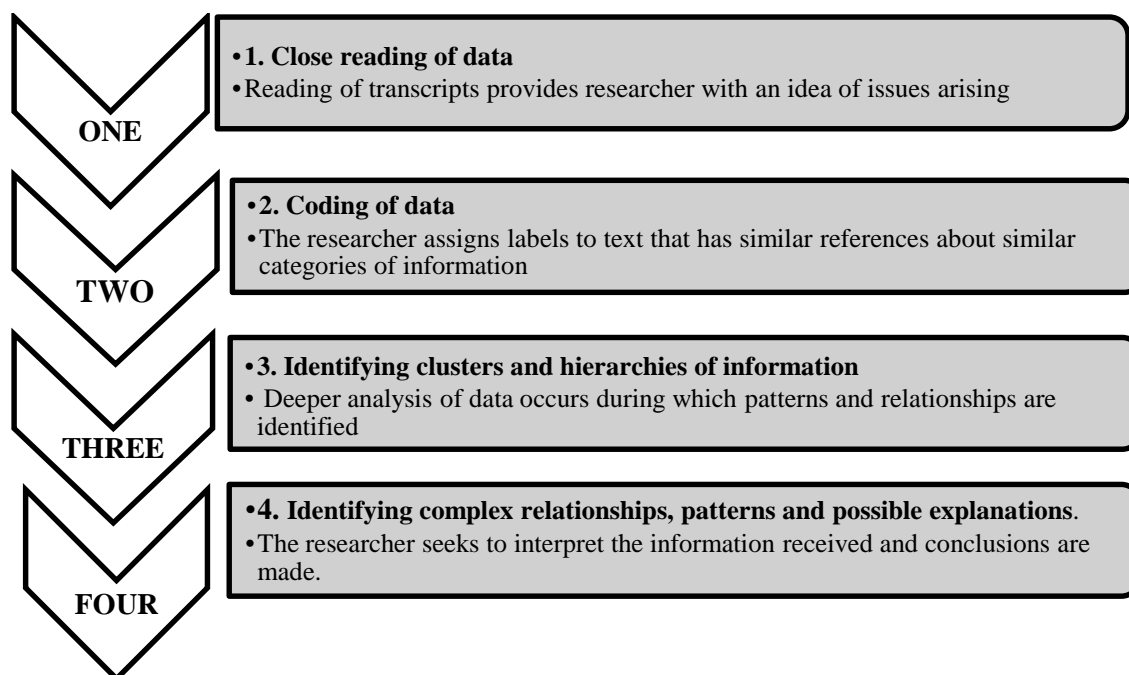
### **3.7 METHODS OF DATA COLLECTION**

The researcher used individual or face-to-face in-depth interviews as well as two focus groups, one in each school, to collect the data. Gill, Stewart, Treasure and Chadwick (2008) confirm that the purpose of a research interview is to probe individuals about their experiences, beliefs or motivations pertaining to a particular topic. Both the individual interviews and the focus groups were audio-taped with the assent and/or consent of all the participants. The researcher did not make use of the services of an assistant at any point during the process of data collection. It is noted by Padgett (1998) that the qualitative interview is goal-directed and the researcher should be careful not to confuse such an interview with a therapeutic interview. Babbie and Mouton (2011) further assert that qualitative researchers must also be aware that the qualitative interview is primarily an interaction between themselves and the participants, and therefore they are not required to ask questions in a specific fashion, or phrase these

questions in a particular manner. Gill et al. (2008) posit that “semi-structured interviews consist of several key questions that help to define the areas to be explored, but also allow the interviewer to diverge in order to pursue an idea or response in more detail” (p. 291). The focus group allows for gathering information on the shared views of participants and is useful for developing rich and thick understandings about the experiences of participants. In making use of the individual interviews and focus groups, the advantage of both these methods of data collection is that the researchers are in a position to receive more responses as they may also be able to clarify any ambiguous questions for their participants (Babbie & Mouton, 2011). A disadvantage of the qualitative interview is that the responses which are provided to the researcher by the participants are subject to be affected by the unique characteristics of both the researcher and the participants including age, gender and ethnicity, amongst others (Marlow & Boone, 2005).

### **3.8 METHOD OF DATA ANALYSIS**

The data collected in the interviews and the focus groups was analysed using thematic content analysis. As explained by Marlow and Boone (2005), this method of data analysis allowed the researcher to classify the data into identified categories which subsequently developed into themes that form part of the chapter on results. Padgett (1998) asserts that an advantage of thematic content analysis is that it is unobtrusive while a disadvantage is that the researcher’s own judgements have the potential to interfere with the data collected. The process of thematic content analysis that was used by the researcher is depicted on page 40 as Figure 3.1. The researcher was guided by de Wet and Erasmus (2005) in carrying out the process of data analysis.



*Figure 3.1 Model depicting the process of thematic context analysis*

*Source: de Wet and Erasmus (2005)*

To begin with, the researcher allocated time to reading the transcribed data in depth as indicated in point one in Figure 3.1. This step provided her with an idea of some of the presenting issues. Following from this, the researcher coded the data and developed different categories under which similar texts were placed as per the second point. As required by the third and fourth steps in Figure 3.1, the next step saw the researcher developing and engaging with the data again, and finally developing the themes which would translate into the interpretation of data.

### **3.9 TRUSTWORTHINESS OF QUALITATIVE RESEARCH**

Qualitative research is required to maintain some level of objectivity; it is able to do so through proving its trustworthiness. The criteria for ensuring trustworthiness are credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability. According to Babbie and Mouton (2011, p. 277), credibility asks the question of whether “there is compatibility between the constructed realities that exist in the minds of the respondents and those that are attributed to them”. For this study, credibility and confirmability were pursued by making use of an inquiry audit. This audit entailed checking the data that was

collected by the researcher and ensuring that it is coherent. Transferability speaks about the extent to which the findings of the study can be applied to another context or with other respondents. Although this ability to generalise is not the qualitative researcher's primary concern, it can be achieved through gathering thick descriptions and using purposive sampling. The researcher was able to achieve the transferability of this study by making use of thick descriptions after having engaged with participants in their school environments and making use of a tape recorder to conduct the interviews. Dependability highlights that a study must be able to convince its reader that if it were repeated with similar respondents in a similar context, it would yield similar results. The use of thick descriptions by the researcher also contributed to the dependability of this study. Finally, the confirmability of a study rests on the premise that the findings should reflect what the study sought to investigate, and not the biases of the researcher (Babbie & Mouton, 2011). Collaboration with the supervisor was also important in ensuring that the study achieved trustworthiness.

### **3.10 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS**

Any research endeavour directs the researcher to look into the ethical implications that are involved. This subsection will provide a discussion of the five main ethical considerations that were applied to the study. These ethical considerations include the risk/benefit ratio, voluntary participation, informed consent, anonymity and confidentiality, and finally, reflexivity.

#### **3.10.1 RISK/BENEFIT RATIO**

It is the duty of the researcher to protect the participants who choose to be part of the study. In this respect it thus becomes the onus of the researcher to firstly consider the risk/benefit ratio involved in the study. A consideration of this ratio implies that the researcher must take stock of the benefits and risks which the participants will be exposed to as a result of taking part in the study (Babbie & Mouton, 2011). The principle of doing no harm guided the researcher in this regard. De Vos et al. (2011) explains that participants can experience physical and/or psychological harm about which they must be fore-warned in order to provide them with the option of withdrawing from the study should they wish to do so. Grinell and Unrau (as cited in De

Vos et al., 2011) point out that the term beneficence is often used to explain the obligation that researchers have towards ensuring that participants are protected, and that the potential benefits of the study are maximised while the possible harm is minimised. Additionally, Monette et al. (as cited in De Vos et al., 2011) posit that a research study may positively affect the participants, however, these effects may take time to be witnessed. In anticipation of the psychological distress that participants may have experienced as a result of taking part in the interviews, the researcher directed them to resources that would be able to offer them debriefing services. Scholars in both provinces were directed to services that would be accessible and affordable for them (See Appendix F).

### **3.10.2 VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION**

Voluntary participation implies that participants may not be coerced by the researcher to take part in the study. To this extent, the researcher explained to the participants that they will not suffer any consequences as a result of taking part or choosing not to take part (Babbie & Mouton, 2011). It is noted however, that the idea of voluntary participation is not always conducive to follow, as participants often perceive that they will incur penalties for choosing not to participate. It is thus the responsibility of the researcher to inform participants that their decision to participate is completely voluntary and that should they later decide to withdraw from the study, they may do so with no consequence (Babbie & Mouton, 2011). As previously explained in section 3.5, the researcher exercised this ethical consideration through addressing the participants in both sites prior to beginning with data collection. During this time, she went through all the necessary forms with each participant and explained what each one entailed. These forms included the participation information sheet, the assent and consent forms (See Appendix F-H).

### **3.10.3 INFORMED CONSENT**

A detailed explanation of what the study sought to achieve and what it entailed was necessary before participants could decide whether or not they would like to take part in the study. This is referred to as informed consent, which is also described by The British Educational Research Association as cited in (Heath, Brooks, Clever & Ireland 2009, p.

23) as “the condition in which participants understand and agree to their participation without any duress, prior to the research getting underway”. To this end, the researcher was obligated to inform the participants of what the study entails, why it was being undertaken and what was required of them as participants (Heath et al., 2009). To this end, the deception of participants by the researcher needed to be avoided at all costs. The researcher did not withhold information or provide participants with information which is incorrect as a means of ensuring that participants choose to be a part of the study when they would have otherwise chosen not to. It was thus the duty of the researcher to inform the participants of the absence of benefits or penalties for participation or non-participation (De Vos et al., 2011; Babbie & Mouton, 2011). The researcher anticipated that some of the participants, who would be involved in the study, would be below 18 years and therefore are still classified as minors. As such the researcher collaborated with gatekeepers such as parents and teachers who are often assigned with the responsibility of deciding whether the researcher should be granted permission to collect data from potential participants (Heath et al., 2009) (See Appendix G, H and K) .

#### **3.10.4 ANONYMITY AND CONFIDENTIALITY**

The researcher acknowledged that in carrying out her study, she would need to protect the identities of the participants. In addition to this, it was the onus of the researcher to ensure that the responses given by the participants were kept private. To support this position, Babbie and Mouton (2011, p. 523) point out that “the clearest concern in the protection of the subjects’ interest and well-being is the protection of their identity...”. The researcher was therefore able to guarantee that participants would not be identifiable by any characteristic in the final research report, any publications arising from it or the audio-taped interviews. Additionally, the audio-tapes were assigned numbers which will be the only way to identify participants. The recorder was stored away in a locked box which only the researcher had access to; any documents that were collected during the course of the study will be stored in a password protected computer. To this end, anonymity was not guaranteed owing to the fact that the researcher was familiar with the participants. The researcher must be able to negotiate confidentiality with the participants in the focus groups, however, this may prove to be

a challenge and whether the participants adhere to the rule is out of the researcher's control (Heath et al., 2009).

### **3.10.5 REFLEXIVITY**

It was important for the researcher to be cognisant of the dual roles which she assumed during the study both as a researcher and as a female who has been through the Higher Education system. Guillemin (2004) notes therefore, that researchers are required to be reflexive in that they are able to consciously consider their own emotions, actions and values and determine how these interact to influence the data collected, as well as the interpretations which arise from the data. In sum, reflexivity denotes that the researcher should remain critically reflective of themselves (Guillemin, 2004).

The researcher achieved reflexivity by keeping a reflective journal throughout the course of the study and furthermore, the nature of the study and the dual role of the researcher may call upon her duty to be a source of information. In assuming her role as a role model, the researcher adhered to her responsibility as a source of information by providing each participant with a resource list containing the contact details of Higher Education Institutions.

### **3.10.6 APPROVAL OF THE STUDY BY THE ETHICS COMMITTEE AND REVIEW BOARDS**

The study was submitted to the Human Research Ethics Committee (Non-Medical) at the University of the Witwatersrand. It was approved for commencement. Approval was also given by the Gauteng Department of Education as well as the Mpumalanga Department of Education. Furthermore, permission to conduct the study on school premises was granted by the principals at Immaculata Secondary School in Gauteng and Sundra High School in Mpumalanga (See Appendices A-E).

### **3.11 SUMMARY**

The chapter has provided an overview of the manner in which the study unfolded. It discusses the methodology and design, the methods of data collection and analysis, as

well as the ethical considerations that were applied during the study. Chapter four will present the reader with the findings of the study.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **DATA ANALYSIS AND PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS**

#### **4.1 INTRODUCTION**

Drawing from the research methodology that the researcher has discussed in the previous chapter, this chapter will provide the findings that have emerged through the processes of data collection and analysis. The findings will be presented as they relate to the three objectives of the study. With respect to the first objective that guided this study, the researcher will comparatively consider various factors that influence post-school decisions and potential access to Higher Education Institutions. Under such considerations, the researcher will touch on subject choice and the perceptions that are held about different subject streams. Additionally, factors that influence post-schooling decisions will be examined in detail, as well as the information that is held about the intended area of study upon the completion of school.

In relation to the second objective, the researcher will discuss the various sources of information that are available to girl learners in both provinces, while also accounting for the information-seeking behaviours of the participants. Lastly, the findings, as they relate to the third objective, will discuss the participants' perceived capacity for success in their future endeavours and the obstacles that they imagine they will encounter. Furthermore, consideration will be taken of how girl learners report that they can be better supported in making their attempts to access the territory of Higher Education. In an attempt to protect the identities of the participants, the researcher has assigned each participant a nom du plume. Those in the focus groups will be referred to generally as "the participant".

#### **4.2 DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE OF THE PARTICIPANTS**

A sample of 25 girl learners was selected by the researcher for the purpose of this study. The sample was divided between two schools, one in the Gauteng Province and the other which is located in Mpumalanga. Of the participants, seventeen were located in the Gauteng Province while eight were from the Mpumalanga Province. All participants identified themselves as female and their ages ranged from 15 years to 18 years. The

participants were dispersed between grades 10, 11 and 12. The rural and urban locations wherein the participants' reside and attend school are assumed to have a bearing on the nature of the findings that have emerged. The demographic profile of participants is presented in Table 4.1.

*Table 4.1 Demographic profile of participants (n=25)*

<b>Demographic factor</b>	<b>Sub-category</b>	<b>No.</b>
<b>Gender</b>	Female	25
<b>Age</b>	15-16 years	12
	17-18 years	12
	Unspecified	1
<b>Grade</b>	10	8
	11	7
	12	9
	Unspecified	1
<b>Province</b>	Gauteng	17
	Mpumalanga	8

Table 4.1 illustrates that a sample of 25 female girl learners was obtained. Of these 17 were obtained from a secondary school in Gauteng while 8 were obtained from a secondary school in Mpumalanga. A total of 12 participants were aged between 15 and

16 years old while an additional 12 participants were aged between 17 and 18 years old. Only one participant's age was unspecified. The participants were clustered across three grades with eight of them being in grade 10, seven in grade 11 and 9 in grade 12. Only one participant's grade was unspecified.

### **4.3 FINDINGS**

In accordance with what the study sought to achieve, the data which was analysed will be presented within six themes. These themes were identified by the researcher based on their frequency during the process of data collection and analysis. The first theme interrogates the adjustment that girl learners go through when entering a new phase. Subsequent themes speak to factors influencing subject choice, perceived capacity for success, sources of information, entry into male-dominated fields of study and finally, the overall experiences of girl learners in accessing information.

#### **4.3.1 ADJUSTING TO THE FURTHER EDUCATION AND TRAINING PHASE**

It is common knowledge that transitioning between grades during one's schooling careers often requires some time for adjustment. The same rings true for the participants in both provinces as they acknowledged that initially, entering the FET is difficult. Those who are in the first year of the FET phase mentioned that it has not been easy, largely due to the fact that they have had to leave behind the playfulness that usually characterises the lower grades. It is noted by Tilleczek and Ferguson (2007) that adjustments in secondary school occur differently, however they are mostly characterised by drops in academic performance and social anxiety. They cite Akos and Galassi (2004) and Kvalsund (2000) who indicate that both parents and learners worry about homework and the pressure to do well.

Thando, who is in grade 10 in the Gauteng province, admitted that: "*well...starting was very tough because you know, you thought that it's just another grade...*", while Palesa who is doing her grade 11 in Mpumalanga expressed that: "*...I adjusted to a new system but then after going to the FET phase, the senior phase, it became a lot difficult*". In both provinces, participants felt that entering into the FET phase signalled a new era in their high school careers but also in their personal lives. A first, significant adjustment as mentioned by three participants in Gauteng and Mpumalanga is learning to cope with

the increasing workload. A participant in Gauteng shared her thoughts about this as she said: *“Well, the workload is...it’s a lot and uhm in everything you do you have to realise that uhm...you have to know that whatever you do, whether class work, homework it...it’s going to result to your final exam. Ja. You have to take everything serious like your class work uhm presentations and stuff...”* (Refilwe, Gauteng Province, p. 1).

As pointed out by one participant, the process of adjusting to the phase often interferes with efforts to maintain marks that were attained in previous, lower grades. She went on to speak for herself by mentioning that in some of her subjects she has maintained good marks although in some she has not managed to do so. In relation to the increasing workload, participants felt that entering the FET phase is overwhelming because there is usually too much to do. Furthermore, one participant noted that she found it difficult to separate with her friends and to learn new things especially when the new CAPS curriculum was introduced. This was indicated by a participant in Gauteng Province as she pointed out that: *“You are going to another grade and stuff but you had to choose things. You had to choose your subjects, your friends. Separating people and stuff so it was hard...Even though it’s tough like you know, you in this particular subject but it seems like you don’t get it and the worst things with CAPS even changing it’s even worse because then we have to adapt new things and in the mean time you have to learn new things for the new subject that you are putting on and stuff”* (Tshepiso, Gauteng Province, p.2).

According to Brown, Mory and Kinney (as cited in Wentzel, 2005) peer relations in an academic context serve various important functions. They facilitate companionship, assist with problem-solving and encourage emotional support while helping the individual to develop their identity. They are supported in their view by Parker, Rubin, Erath, Wojslawowicz and Buskirk (2006) who assert that peer relations during adolescent scholarship are important for at least four reasons. Outside of their influence on the process of socialisation, peer groups allow adolescents to freely interrogate their inner conflicts while respecting the individual’s competencies and providing practical guidance in social situations. It was only in the Gauteng Province that two participants stated that they realised that everything they do in class or in their early grades, has the potential to determine their success or failure in this phase. The senior phase is

associated by participants in both provinces with a heightened sense of seriousness that ultimately forces them to become more responsible for the choices that they make.

The participants place an emphasis on growing up and becoming independent as processes that occur during entry into the senior phase. Tebogo in Gauteng noted that: *“Ok, from grade 8 until grade 12 the only difference is that you are growing. And then you have responsibilities”*. The difference herein between participants in both provinces is that those in Mpumalanga do not make much mention of growth and independence as something that happens as a result of entering into the senior phase. Entry into the senior phase often places pressure on learners to find a healthy balance between school, home and a social life. On top of the pressures that they face at school, participants in Gauteng pointed out that it is difficult to make time for anything outside of their school work. It is acknowledged that in the quest for academic success, some things will have priority over others; there will be little time for *“parties, boys or shopping”*, as indicated by one participant. Sacrifice is therefore something that learners need to learn to do once they enter this phase and if they want to be successful in it.

The data collected from the focus group in Gauteng confirms the thoughts of the individual participants as far as acknowledging that the senior phase is not easy and presents numerous challenges. In the Mpumalanga Province focus group, nothing relating to issues of adjustment was mentioned, however, the content of the discussion that ensued will be discussed in succeeding sections. Overall, at least two participants in Gauteng felt that the phase does not get easier throughout the three years, but they also acknowledged that it has its positives and negatives. The participants also mentioned that thus far they are enjoying being in the grades that they are in; one of the more important rewards of being a senior is that those in the lower grades become more respectful of them. This was mentioned by Hilda who said: *“well it’s kind of uhhh, its cool, it’s nice. Some learners get to respect you but then some others just don’t. Sometimes they are like friendly”*.

With regard to social status, it is noted by Tilleczek and Ferguson (2007) that the loss of their social standing with peers often causes worry amongst adolescents, and Kvaslund (as cited in Tilleczek and Ferguson, 2007, p. 12) aptly captures this concern as a preoccupation with *“a great fall and a social descent”*. Additionally, some of the

participants related to the researcher that they are enjoying learning new things. A display of this enthusiasm was provided by participant five in the Gauteng Province focus group who commented that: *“What I enjoy is that I am doing different subjects and also I’ve seen that I want to achieve”*. The sentiments that are shared by the participants in both provinces regarding the transitions that occur between phases are captured by Isakson and Jarvis (1999). In their study it was revealed that transitions are characterised by changes in individuals’ sense of agency, and they are also influenced by the perceived level of social support and stressors in the individual’s environment. The authors cite that a sense of school membership and academic performance in comparison to others, characterise these adjustments.

#### **4.3.2 FACTORS INFLUENCING SUBJECT CHOICE**

The interviews in both provinces point to this fact as learners’ responses indicate that their experiences were marred by different influences. In Mpumalanga, of the six individual participants who were interviewed, all were enrolled in the science stream. Only three participants mentioned that they chose their subjects because they believed they would lead them towards the career path that they wanted to pursue while others indicated that they chose their subjects because of their previous performance in the GET phase. In this regard, only one participant in Gauteng points to a similar fact that prior performance and receipt of an award in a particular GET subject, led her to choosing a subject stream. She said: *“I was in grade 9 and then my awards day I got the trophy of science so I mastered like in science in grade 9. So I just knew there’s no need for me to like tick there like commerce or whatever, I’m automatically accepted, there’s no way they can say that I didn’t get into the science stream so I just went there. I didn’t even know what I want to do but I just said ok I am a master of science so let me go to science and see what happens”*.

Cosser and Du Toit (2002) point out that two major decisions characterise the lives of adolescent high school careers. The first one is deciding on which subjects to pursue for the remainder of their upper secondary schooling. The second one is deciding on whether or not to continue into higher education. An important assertion by them is that these decisions are made by adolescence in accordance with the options that they perceive are open to them. These choices are also limited by various personal

circumstances including race, gender and socio-economic background. It is further highlighted by Cosser and Du Toit (2002, p. 22) that “while decision-making is a fairly workable notion for Grade 11 and 12 learners, Grade 9 learners are in many instances constrained by their own ignorance of the consequences of selecting subjects for their upper secondary education, or indeed by their academic performance in the subjects they have taken to date”.

Strong differences existed between the two provinces with Gauteng having a diverse mix of participants in different subject streams. Five of the participants were enrolled in the commerce stream while only one was doing science and two were in the general stream. In Gauteng too, it seemed that participants chose subjects mostly based on their passion and what they imagined they would want to pursue in their future careers. This was illustrated by one participant who related that: *“Oh ok. I’m doing life science, history, geography, life orientation, isiZulu and ja. So I went to these subjects because I wanted History. I really like history, I really love Steve Biko with my whole heart like he inspires me and Malcolm X like those people influence me on seeing what I have and on relying on what I have; like to have pride, a sense of humour. I love politics”*. Only one participant in this Province revealed that she was led to choosing her subjects because of her achievements in grade 9 as she informed the researcher that: *“I chose those particular subjects uhm particularly because I got an award in EMS in grade 9”* (Sihle, Gauteng Province, p. 3).

In both groups, the learners alluded to the fact that the opinions of others (especially family) about their capabilities have influenced their subject choices. This is captured by Sihle in Gauteng who described that when she had chosen to go into the general stream, those around her would ask: *“Oh really? That’s so unlike you! Why?”* Her mother also questioned her decision because she thought she is quite good with numbers. Sihle eventually opted to go into the commerce stream. Palesa in Mpumalanga said that: *“ja, that’s why I chose that and the other reason, was because my mom...she also supported me into the science stream and all of that...”* In both groups, learners indicated that educators’ opinions about their capabilities had a bearing on the subjects they chose to enrol in. Conversely, some of the participants indicated that they were doubtful of their capabilities and became weary of doing certain subjects. They

anticipated that they would not be successful in science and commerce streams so they opted not to do them. This choice for some, has led to great regret as it is now deterring their chances for entry into desired fields of further study. A comment that was made by participant four in the Gauteng Province focus group who disappointedly said: *“I’m regretting it...I’m regretting it, although pure math was hard for me, it was super hard which is why I chose math literacy”*. This revelation was closely associated by the participants in Mpumalanga with the limitations that they experience when choosing subjects because the school has set subjects streams. The researcher was also informed in both provinces that the process of choosing subjects was also characterised by a lot of confusion. Some of the participants admitted that they did not know what they wanted to do at the first instance, and just went with what they perceived would give them more career choices post-schooling. In the focus groups, similar thoughts and experiences emerged.

In Mpumalanga, participants spoke extensively about subject choice being a defining moment in their high school careers, and it is not one that has always been pleasant. Observations by the researcher indicated that although some of the participants were confident in their choices and knew why they had made them, some remained confused about why they had chosen the subjects that they were doing. In this focus group, participants also admitted that educators played a significant role in determining what subjects they would choose. The difference here is that learners did not depend on the opinions of educators, but used their knowledge of how the educator instructed a subject in their GET years to choose certain subjects.

One participant in this group noted that *“I wouldn’t say it’s the teacher but it’s the way the teacher is teaching. Like the reason life science we wanted Ms Raskwete and then we got Ms Mawela. Ms Raskwete I knew her like in grade 9, term 1 and 2 she was teaching us until she and took us to us to another teacher but her energy, I could understand what she was saying but Ms Mawelayoh”*. A study that was conducted by Peart and Campbell (as cited in Kemp, 2007) showed that teachers play an important role in the academic success of learners. Participants in this study reported that they consider teachers to be effective when they demonstrate good interpersonal skills, effective instructional methods, motivational leadership and impartiality. In support of

this, Ford (1996) who is cited in Kemp (2007) identified that the role of the teacher involves ensuring that the classroom environment facilitates learning experiences that assist learners with developing a sense of belonging and self-worth, and the feeling that they can succeed.

The group further stated that they had taken for granted the shift in the content and nature of the various subjects. For most, the idea was that if a subject was easy in grade 9, it would continue to be that way even in later grades. Additionally, the participants mentioned that they were restricted by the set subject streams that forced them to take some subjects and not others. This was highlighted by a participant who said that: *“The basic challenge now in choosing the streams is the way we chose them, you have no choice, you are going to be stuck with that subject”* (Participant two, Mpumalanga Province, p. 2). The results with both the individual participants and the focus groups in the two locations are consistent and resonate with the idea that selecting subjects in preparation for the FET phase can be stressful and are not always well informed. In addition to this, the researcher noticed that young girls are easy to fall prey to the opinions of others, especially those with whom they are close. During adolescents, it is reportedly usual for individuals to consult with those around them in seeking affirmations about their future plans; this is especially true for peer and family relations (Tilleczek & Ferguson, 2007).

This sentiment was held by participant two in the Mpumalanga focus group as she highlighted that: *“What was difficult is what you came across when you started the subjects. We are doing physical science right, you all did technology, you all thought technology was part of physical science but when you came into physical science you found something else. The only thing you have from technology is electric circuits. You don’t have electrostatics, you don’t have geometry. That’s something you didn’t do, so most of the things we did in grade 10 were very new things. I think they should have given us a clue in grade 9 that science is all about this and that, not the basic things that science is about technology and natural science. They should give us a clue or something so that I know what to expect when I arrive in that certain grade”*. The data also points to the fact that the participants do not always choose subjects with the intent of following a particular post-school career but rather they are confronted by structural

limitations as far as the structure of subjects and streams are set by their schools. It became clear through the findings that the exercise of selecting subjects is one that arouses confusion amongst young girls and that it is an exercise that is taken seriously by them. It appears that in this respect, young girls in Mpumalanga Province could do with more guidance before making their decisions.

#### **4.3.2.1 PERCEPTIONS ABOUT DIFFERENT SUBJECTS AND STREAMS**

In Gauteng, Sihle mentioned that she had initially chosen the general stream which in her school, includes history, life science and geography because she had perceived that it would open up more career opportunities for her. On the other hand, her peer in the Mpumalanga focus group expressed *that: “they usually say if you can’t do maths go to the RDP house, go do general. In other words you are dumb if you don’t do science”*. Upon further probing, the researcher was informed that there is status attached to different subjects. Where a learner is doing general subjects, their intelligence is often questioned and they are seen to be weaker than their counterparts in the science and commerce streams. Furthermore, the perception that was held by the learners in Mpumalanga about the different streams is that the sciences and commerce streams will automatically lead to future success in chosen fields. It seemed that this group of young girls maintain the traditional thought that only careers in the sciences and commerce will bring prosperity.

The status that was attached to the different subject streams also seemed to be heavily influenced by the perceptions of close family members. Palesa confirmed this observation when she related that she chose to go into the science stream because it had more career opportunities. Contrastingly, it appeared that participants in Gauteng did not place any emphasis on the status of the subjects that they choose doing, except for Thando who noted that: *“...I chose history, geography and ja those. And then I was called to the office and my principal is like no but you have potential, why are you doing these subjects”*. For most of the participants in Gauteng their choices of what they want to do, were motivated by passion more than status. This was confirmed by Nomsa who went against the wishes of her parents and went into the general stream. She described her experience as follows:

*“Yes. Like they don’t want me to do law, actually they wanted me to do medicine then I didn’t tell them that I am doing history until my mom left me in the book shop [laughs]. I didn’t tell them...ok they gave us letters for our parents to sign. I didn’t give it to my parents and my friend signed for me, I took it to the office and I did history and my parents didn’t know. Uhm and the second week of grade 12...of opening school we went with my mother to the bookshop and it was “ah we are taking books for physics” and I was like I don’t do physics, I do history. She told me I would buy those books and left me in the shop”.*

Nomsa’s colleague displayed the same flare and mentioned that she wants to follow her passion of becoming a fashion designer. However, she also understands that she will need to develop some business acumen which she hopes to accomplish with the completion of a BCom Law qualification. In the focus group, a participant spoke passionately about her desire to pursue food retail management and another participant expressed how her love for music has encouraged her to choose sound engineering as a future career. These two participants respectively said that:

*“Ok, uhm I chose commerce which is accounting, economics and business studies. Uhm I chose it because...I wouldn’t say I haven’t decided yet what I want to do but I feel that my career choice is somewhere along those lines because I told myself that I want to do fashion and then I want to do Bcom Law so ja” (Tebogo, Gauteng Province, p. 3). “I want to do food retail management; I love it with all my heart. I love food” (Participant Four, Gauteng Province, p. 4).*

Between the two groups, it seemed that learners in the Gauteng Province have an awareness of the diverse paths that are open to them upon their completion of school whereas in Mpumalanga the perception that learners hold from those close to them is that only traditional careers in science will lead to stability and financial security.

#### **4.3.3 PERCEIVED CAPACITY FOR SUCCESS POST-SCHOOLING**

Against the backdrop of the different locations within which the study unfolded, the data produced insight into the participants’ perceptions of what would allow them to succeed in their post-schooling careers. In addition to this, it was important for the

participants to reflect on the possible challenges that they might experience in pursuit of their aspirations. These will be highlighted in a different subsection. A pleasant surprise was learning that almost all the participants imagined themselves as being responsible for determining their success. The response of Katlego in Gauteng Province in this regard was: *“Hmmm....maybe I could just say...me. Ja. Because everything is all about me. Ja”*.

By applying themselves and working hard, the individual and focus group participants acknowledged that they had the power to steer their futures in the desired directions. It was participant two in the Gauteng Province focus group who mentioned that: *“I’ve been wanting to get self-meditation because during the past few weeks I’ve been looking at my reports and comparing them to the reports that I got now which is pushing me to work harder so that I’ll get accepted at Wits”*. Belief in oneself and trusting in one’s capabilities emerged as important. Although confident in their own capabilities, admission was made of the fact that constant motivation from loved ones is powerful in reminding them of the goals that they want to achieve. Participant one in the focus group commented on this as she said: *“Everybody, my mom, my friend, my teachers, and my baby. I don’t know if it’s a blessing or what but it seems like even people in the streets will be like you will pass, I don’t even know the person and that motivates me alone to do better and also seeing young kids I’m like I have to do this”*.

At least two participants in Gauteng made mention of the fact that they will try their best to pursue their dreams because they have grown up in average circumstances. They also noted that growing up in the township can provide one with much needed motivation because they have witnessed the levels of poverty and struggle around them for most of their lives. This insight was closely associated with the presence of individuals who are able to act as motivators in the participants’ lives. To this effect, they respectively stated:

*“I believe that my mom, my uncles and my grandmother they have been through thick and hell for me to be where I am right now. Sometimes in my eyes it’s like it was just a thank you to make sure that I don’t end up being a couch potato in the house or I don’t end up being pregnant, I still go to the tuck shop, buying R1 snacks, oh no I don’t want that life”* (Tshepiso, Gauteng Province, p. 5).

*“It’s because for the situation that I’m in, from the poverty that we live in as black people...as girls actually uhm that is the thing that keeps me going because when you look at the situation...a woman lives in a house, she’s working, she has money but she cannot stand on her own. The thing is we have this stereotyped thing that we have on our minds that they are better than us, they can do better than us, they have everything so that’s the thing that keeps me going that I see this happening but if I don’t prevent it on my own before it happens to me that means that it will happen to the generation that is coming after me”* (Nomisa, Gauteng Province, p. 12).

It was acknowledged by both learners in both groups that they often look up to the success stories of celebrated figures in society and of those who are closer to home in their own personal circles. Tiny in Mpumalanga said: *“It definitely has to be my aunt. She has been there for me like...there for me. Even when my parents were still alive, she’s been that one person so she’s more than just an aunt to me. When I need motivation, she’s always there. She’s just that one person that...she’s just a back-up, she’s everything”*. Great emphasis was placed on motivation being important for academic success and in addition to this, participants also informed the researcher they are able to act as their own motivators. In this respect, one participant in the Gauteng Province focus group mentioned that: *“my potential, I just look at myself in the mirror and be like you are going to be something big”*. For most of the participants in Gauteng, it was important to work hard towards the realisation of their dreams because they would like to instil pride in their families as participant three in the focus group related: *“It’s just me and my granny, she makes it a point that I go to school every day with money, does my school fees like I pay R4000 and something here and she makes sure that I get all the books, everything I do, I do it for her just to please her”*.

Two participants in Mpumalanga and two in Gauteng informed the researcher that their passion for their intended careers kept them hopeful about their future success. Sabie in Mpumalanga said: *“Basically I could say in wanting to achieve my career, there is too much competition but I do have the potential to fight for it”*, while participant eight in Gauteng shared that: *“well most of the time I get inspired about the career I want to do there’s a lot of inspiration and stuff and that’s what motivates me and see that this person did this and I can do better”*. One of them mentioned that their passion was also

accompanied by a passion and love for helping people. Participant one in the Gauteng Province focus group stated in this regard that: *“Uhm ok, I love helping people...I’d like to have my own charity foundation, it’s my dream, I like helping people”*. The participants in Gauteng went on to reveal that religion played an important role in grounding them and giving them the strength to work harder on their studies. Katlego commented that; *“I have hope and I pray. I ask God every day that he must make me strong so that I can be able to achieve what I want to do”*, while Tshepiso shared that: *“I’m a [believer]...I believe in God, like that is yes...in everything I do I put prayer first you know and I feel God...that God will help me get through all of these things. Yes”*.

In Mpumalanga, the results show that the participants place emphasis on themselves as their own vessels for realising success. Hilda in Mpumalanga noted in this regard that: *“...Well believing in myself and believing that I will get there. Keep on trusting myself, just believing”*. The data indicates that there are strong similarities between both provinces in the sense that the young girls are confident in themselves as the main drivers of their future prosperity. Seemingly, in both provinces family and loved ones play an important role in motivating girl learners to excel in their studies; this is in addition to public figures whom they have adopted as role models. The only difference herein is that the participants in Mpumalanga do not place an emphasis on religion or spirituality as an important force in encouraging academic success. In this regard, it is noted by Calhoon (2007) that girls’ sense of academic success is often influenced by the feedback they receive from others about themselves as well as the social persuasions that are levelled against them. To some extent, but not as much as with adolescent boys, self-efficacy may also be influenced by mastery in a particular activity. Additionally, resiliency is associated with self-efficacy to the degree that even when circumstances are dire; girl learners who are able to access support and develop trust in others are more likely to feel that they can overcome their challenges.

#### **4.3.3.1 ANTICIPATED CHALLENGES IN ACCESSING HIGHER EDUCATION**

Although most of the participants agree that they will apply themselves accordingly during their FET years, many also agree that they anticipate encountering obstacles. Participants acknowledged that some of the challenges they might encounter have the potential to either prevent them from entering institutions of Higher Education, or they

may threaten their academic success once they are enrolled. In Gauteng, the learners mentioned that accessing financing for further studying is a significant concern as indicated by participant four who said: *“For me its pressure, time and also finances. My granny will have to fund my university which is something that will be impossible”*. Nthabiseng in Mpumalanga shared similar sentiments as she said that: *“For now I’m thinking about financial support, like I don’t really have a very sustainable financial support, so I think financially I would have problems there”*. A reason for this as mentioned by participants is that firstly, bursaries and scholarships are not easily accessible. Secondly, it was acknowledged that the high costs of studying further may hinder their plans for entering Higher Education Institutions. The researcher observed that with regard to this, the matriculants had some idea of how they would negotiate a possible lack of finances, although for many of the participants, these plans were yet to be confirmed. Speaking to this concern, Thelma related that: *“Well I have already applied at Wits, UCT and UJ and then about the bursary, I also have applied for bursaries and now I’m just waiting for feedback. But then I’m hoping that they take me at Wits”*. Confirmation of the high costs involved in accessing education in general and Higher Education in particular, has been shown to act as a barrier to participation by Strassburg, Meny-Gilbert and Russell (2010).

Thando in Gauteng Province mentioned that she had already applied for the National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS) and was waiting for a response. Her schoolmate, Nomsa related that she had approached the company where her father is employed to ask for a bursary. Furthermore, some participants posited that family circumstances weighed heavily on their future plans. Nthabiseng in Mpumalanga informed the researcher that: *“Actually [both my parents] are not employed so that’s why I have to get the loan”*. In this regard, it was related to the researcher that unemployment in the family and especially amongst parents, is something that they deliberate about. As an option, some of the participants such as Tshepiso in the Gauteng Province related that: *“Ok...my plans uhm...going to university for my studies and then hopefully get a temporary job and ja get some income and help at home...if it’s possible though”*. This comment implied that for some participants, finding part-time employment or alternatively taking a gap year to figure out their next move, might be necessary. Although not so significant a challenge as it was only mentioned by one

participant, it was pointed out that the expectations of family members to pursue certain career paths have the potential to cause problems and misunderstanding. Girls from across all three grades provided insight into the pressures that they face as teenagers and as learners in the FET phase. For those in the lower grades, the pressure that they experience is that of obtaining good results that will allow them to progress to succeeding grades. They also make mention of the pressures that they face as far as friends and peers are concerned. Tshepiso illustrated that she has been directly affected by this pressure as she related to the researcher that she has had to lie in order to fit in. She said in this regard: *“And I uhm...you know I...ok I am still a virgin, I have not engaged in sex ever before but I feel that in order for me to fit in I guess I have to lie...”*

The same rings true for the learners in the older grades who asserted that peer pressure presents them with a constant struggle. Hlogi, who is in grade ten related that: *“It’s really hectic because of the work, pressure...you know...uhm and ja there’s a lot of peer pressure going on there and you know a lot of competition”*, while Nomsa related a story about herself wherein her marks dropped because she chose to associate herself with friends who were not focused on excelling at school. For the learners in the higher grades, the pressures they face are imminent as they approach the end of their high school careers. A significant anxiety as reported by these learners is that they might fail to maintain discipline. In their study, Strassburg et al. (2010) highlight that amongst the various pressures that young girls are faced with during their high school careers, coercion to engage in risky sexual behaviour and substance abuse are cited as being the most prominent.

Drawing from what they have heard, participants related to the researcher that university or college is riddled with various temptations that interfere with one’s studies. All three individual participants in Gauteng Province who are currently in matric pointed out that in high school the pressures include those of choosing friends who are not involved in drugs or who promote risky sexual behaviour. They further asserted that pressures of this sort continue into university and college; they may be even more pronounced there than in high school. In addition to this it was noted that finding a balance between socialising and studying arouses anxiety. Thando related her own anxieties to the researcher: *“Mmmm...It’s not easy. Uhm well from friends’*

*experiences it's the responsibility, the independence when you get to varsity especially if you're not going to be at home. If you're going to be living alone it's going to be...now you have to really prioritise between your studies and parties and your boyfriend, your girlfriend, your...whatever, your friends and your social life. Ja. So I think that would be the hardest thing, like prioritising and the responsibility. Ja*". From what participants have heard, it is difficult to keep focused on one's academic work in university or college primarily because of the environment. This anxiety is also accompanied by the fear of being away from loved ones for long periods of time. In the focus group, the discussion that presented itself spoke to the pressures that they experience around sexual behaviour. From the younger girls, it was related that they face constant pressure to engage in risky sexual behaviour while the older girls admitted that their sexual curiosity would peak once they were in university or college.

The trick, as they pointed out, will be applying caution and exploring this aspect of their student lives carefully. Participant one in the focus group captured her personal thoughts around risky sexual behaviour as she commented: *"When I say the answer that comes to my mind, what I think about sex because I'm going to varsity next year and when I get there obviously hot guys, no small boys, no more ben10. It will be bigger guys and I will be exposed to be able to have sex because obviously I will be at Res, no parents so I will be able to have sex and the dangers that come with sex might stand in the way of my dreams because I might get pregnant, I don't want to get pregnant but I might get pregnant, I might get HIV. I'm not gonna act like I'm immune to HIV, I might get HIV and another thing, I might get gonorrhoea and I might enjoy it and do it every weekend and get gonorrhoea"*.

For the participants in Mpumalanga, the challenges that participants anticipate coming across are similar for all individuals. Thelma and Julia related that accessing money to study further remained a concern. Between the three of them, it was acknowledged that although their parents have tried to put money aside towards their studies, they face increased pressure to excel in university or college because they cannot afford to repeat courses. Along with this insight, other participants informed the researcher that their anxiety was caused by the thought of being away from home and loved ones. Hilda shared her concern over being separated from her parents when she said: *"I think*

*there'll be like...I think loss of my parents*". Additionally, it was related that peer pressure- including dating, socialising and sexual behaviour, will present as obstacles which need to be negotiated. These anticipated challenges were captured by Tshegofatso who asserted that: *"Mmmmm....money. At the moment I don't think it will be a problem because my mom has been saving and stuff so the challenge might be if next year I become tempted by weird things like boyfriends and what then I drop because obviously the things I want to do require high marks so if I drop or things like that...that's the challenge I think I might face. That's the challenge that I think might be big now"*. The focus group participants in this Province did not make mention of any challenges that they anticipate experiencing on their individual journeys towards the pursuit for success.

From the data, it is indicated that in both provinces, there are significant challenges that can possibly act as barriers to entry into Higher Education or to the realisation of Higher Education attainment. The results show that in both provinces, participants' thoughts are similar as they perceive that issues of financing and peer pressure might threaten their chances of entering into, or succeeding in an institution of Higher Education. In both locations, participants also admitted to experiencing anxiety over the thought of gaining independence and living away from loved ones. Considering all the challenges that participants anticipated encountering, peer pressure, social behaviour and risky sexual behaviour seemed to be the most pronounced in both schools. It was the researcher's own understanding that through their social interactions, learners sometimes rely on each other as sources of information- whether or not it is related to academics.

Insight into how learners sometimes depend on one another was provided by Thando in Gauteng Province who informed the researcher about the guidance group that was started by matriculants: *"Here at school...ok matrics I don't know if it's going to happen but we like kind of started with something. Like us as matrics we're going to give the grade 9s before they choose subjects the taste of what it's going to be like. Like whoever is doing accounting will talk about how accounting is in grade 10, 11 and 12. I think that will help them make...like lead them to making the right decisions"*. The interdependence on their peers as sources of information is congruent with the stage of development that they are in. During adolescents, peer relations can have both negative

and positive effects on educational outcomes. When adolescents surround themselves with similarly motivated peers, academic outcomes are likely to be positive (Berndt, Laychak & Park, 1990). The following section will thus continue along this trajectory by reporting on the various sources of information that were employed by the participants.

#### 4.3.4 SOURCES OF INFORMATION

Through the individual and focus group interviews with the participants in two provinces, insight was given into the various sources of information that learners rely on in search of a better understanding about the Higher Education opportunities that are available to them. It was shown that the struggle for most of the participants emerged not from the lack of availability of informational resources, but from the decisions that need to be made about the reliability of such sources. It was evident that in both schools, learners relied more on verbal information that they received from those who are close to them including friends and family. This was indicated by Hlogi in Gauteng Province who said: *“Ok it would be my uncle number one because my uncle is a financial broker and most of the time I speak to him about such things because I’m always getting advice and he told me that it’s chilled. I can just go overseas but then I should work hard ja”*. Although electronic resources were reported to play a role in relaying information, learners did not speak about them unless probed by the researcher through specific questioning. An example of this can be taken from the researcher’s conversation with Hilda in Mpumalanga:

Researcher: *“And when you did your own research, what sources did you access in terms of getting information about the course?”*

H: *“Well basically and the kind of structures so I live drawing, I do know how to draw, so I kind of saw myself with civil engineering. It’s basically what I want to do”*.

Researcher: *“Ok, but now what I’m interested in, so you said you did the research. When you did the research what sources did you use? I mean did you ask people when you did your own research, did you go to the library, and did you Google? What was the process in conducting your own research with that?”*

H: *“At first I went to the library and then just got some information and then got to go to the Internet and then ask questions of what civil engineers do on the internet. So I first went to the library and then the internet.”*

The researcher observed that as a first port of call when seeking information, participants are most likely to consult with those who are close to them including parents, caregivers, extended family and friends first, before engaging with other sources. Although these sources of information are not utilised in similar ways by the participants in both provinces, the results point to the fact that at any given stage, each or some of them are employed by girl learners. Pelgrum (2001) and Dlodlo (2009) note that although the current information climate encourages for the easy access to ICTs, the reality is that many communities who are still on the periphery of economic participation are without these resources. This has impacted how girl learners in rural areas specifically perceive and use such tools as sources of information.

#### **4.3.4.1 GAUTENG PROVINCE**

Family members were cited by at least four of the eight participants as reliable sources of information as participants mentioned that those who are close to them often act as consultants. In this regard, family members who are approached for information are usually those who have some knowledge about the intended area of study or they are practising in the identified field at present. As far as family members who lack knowledge or experience in a learner’s field of interest are concerned, they are able to link them to secondary resources that may be in a better position to provide the desired knowledge. Hlogi gave insight into her own experience as she mentioned that: *“They advise me...like...yho, in the best way they can you know. Uhm every challenge that I’m facing they help me, uhm when I have researches...my mom even bought a pc you know for me to be able to research all my stuff that I need. Uhm she’s just there for me...”* Although Catsambis (2001) does not explicitly speak about the role of parents or family members as direct sources of information, she infers that they play an important role in the educational aspirations of their children. This role becomes more pronounced as children enter their adolescent years because they begin to negotiate their capacity for self-independence. As a result, it is posited that instead of seeking to monitor their children, parents who support their children in their quests for independence are more

likely to be successful. Catsambis (2001) therefore notes that parental involvement in a child's life can be broad but can be dialled down to several things including participation in school activities, parental aspirations and involvement in learning activities outside of the home.

In reference to Epstein's typology of parental involvement (as cited in Catsambis, 2001, p.150), six different types are summed up. They include: 1) parent practices that establish a positive learning environment at home, 2) parent-school communications about school programmes and student progress, 3) parent participation and volunteering to school, 4) parent and school communications regarding learning activities at home, 5) parent involvement in school decision-making and governance, and 6) parent access to resources that increase students' learning opportunities. An association is made by Choy (2001) between parental involvement and the level of education they possess. It is noted that the children of parents who have been through college are more likely to enrol into institutions of Higher Education immediately after they have completed their secondary schooling. The opposite can be said for those whose parents have not received a college education as they end up pursuing their Higher Education opportunities at a later stage.

Lerato confirmed the importance of having family members who are either knowledgeable about, or experienced in their chosen areas of study as she related that *"you know when you have family members that are also chartered accountants and you get to ask them how their work is..."*, while Tshepiso pointed out that: *"Ok, whenever I am using my uncle's ipad I just go to [www.economist](http://www.economist) and it gives me all the information..."*. Participant one also spoke about her aunt: *"For me someone who gave me my edge is my aunt, Elizabeth Thobejane. She works at the department of higher education; she is the one who gave me advice to study harder and stuff"*. This statement alluded to another relied source of information which was employed by six of the participants who were interviewed. It was acknowledged that the Internet is used to seek out the finer details about their chosen careers. Interestingly, it was only one of the eight participants who informed the researcher that she had used the Internet to find out about the length of study years and what the course they will choose entails.

She related in this regard: *"Well uhm I Googled it. I know...film and production I know is about 4 years and then afterwards you can...depending on whichever place you went*

*to some uhm colleges give like experience and....because I have a friend who did production...music production at Boston. Ja they give like you know...they have practicals and stuff like that. But with me because I went to UJ and Wits and all of that I'm only going to get the theory part and for me I'll have to go out there looking for internships or whatever in order for me to get my ja, to get my practicals and practice on whatever studies that I'll be doing. Ja".* At least two participants revealed that they used the Internet to find out about the financial benefits that are associated with their intended careers. The participants in the focus group spoke in-depth about the Internet as a reliable source of information. However, they also mentioned that teachers and peers are important sources too. Participant three illustrated this when she said: *"I don't know what Wits wants from me, I know it because I've searched the Internet but it's just something that the school didn't do"*.

One participant also confirmed the idea that institutional visibility is important as she related that: *"I wanted to go to UCT but I didn't have a plan and UCT came to me"*. School tours that are conducted by institutions such as the University of the Witwatersrand and the University of Cape Town were reported by participants as being useful for relaying important information about the career paths that are open to them, as it was captured by Nomsa: *"the information that I got was from all those schools that came here...like those institutions such as UJ, Wits, Rhodes and UCT..."*. She further mentioned that prior to the involvement of these institutions, she was somewhat misinformed about what she wants to pursue. This statement was significant in relaying to the researcher that the visibility of Higher Education Institutions is important in facilitating access to further learning through the provision of accurate information. The provision of prospectuses and brochures was also cited by participants as a useful source of information.

In school, teachers were considered to be reliable in facilitating the availability of reliable sources of information. Additionally, it was noted by participants that through sharing their own experiences as former and current scholars, teachers are able to assume the role of guiders. In this regard, one participant acknowledged that her teacher is always encouraging them to study. It was said by Lerato in this regard that: *"Well uhm because we have teachers here at school and they all have qualifications to be*

*teachers so I think that just as much as we are here to be taught, we are also here to get an experience just before we get to the ugly world. So with them just sharing with us and telling us even more just as much as we read the prospectus and everything else but then it would be much better. It would be much better that way”.*

Closely related to this, participants informed the researcher that they find motivational talks from esteemed and celebrated people that they look up to informative and inspiring. It was the expectation of most of the participants that the school would facilitate visits from such individuals and they viewed it as something that could be organised for those in the lower grades. A participant in the Gauteng Province focus group stated that: *“They started late because they started doing this year in grade nine. I know that they give grade nine career guidance. I was in one of their sessions and then I was like ok that’s cool, you should’ve done that in grade eight”.*

It is confirmed by Carroll, Houghton and Lynn (2013) that both formal and informal role models have an influence on how young people perceive their futures. The search for a role model is usually inspired by the similarities in socio-economic background, ethnicity, gender and race. They assert that essentially, the provision of such role models lies squarely in the hands of the communities in which young people live and attend school. In addition to this, the researcher learned that through a close network of peers who are academically like-minded, learners would turn to each other for advice and information. The participants who were in matric explained that they realised that if the senior phase learners could have a platform to share their struggles and future desires, they would be able to support each other and learn from one another. Two participants informed the researcher about their mentorship programme that was started by the matriculants in an effort to be of help to each other and to those who are remaining behind.

As far as peers are concerned, the focus group participants related that peer support through mentorship programmes is important especially for those who are in the lower grades. Nomsa related that she is in the leadership of this mentorship group: *“Even my colleagues, my classmates we support each other, we talk to each other. We even have in the school...we have a motivational group which helps us to motivate ourselves to know that we can do it and we have every support that we need”.*

To the researcher's surprise, only two participants referred to broadcast media as sources of information. Refilwe for example related that: *"I read a lot of books. As I said I like TV...I watch TV a lot and sometimes I listen to the radio"*. Two participants also mentioned that attending career exhibitions was helpful in providing them with an idea of what they want to pursue once they complete school.

Overall, the results indicate that learners employ similar sources of information when attempting to make decisions about their post-school careers. Additionally, the results collected from both the individual and focus group interviews indicate that participants consider some sources more reliable than others and this was confirmed by a focus group member who stated that: *"firstly allowing universities to come into school, that's like the best thing I like about this school because this year was like an eye opener"*.

#### **4.3.4.2 MPUMALANGA PROVINCE**

The participants in Mpumalanga asserted that the Internet was the most useful tool for accessing information. It appeared that in this province, the Internet acted as a primary source of information and other sources assumed a secondary position. One participant admitted that she made significant use of the Internet because there are no family members who possess knowledge about her chosen career choice. Close friends and peers were cited by some participants as being reliable sources of information, especially where they have either demonstrated prior knowledge about the field, or have shown to benefit financially from practising in that field. In this regard, Ryan (2000) points out that teachers, parents and peers offer learners with various suggestions and ideas about how to navigate their academic lives however, not much attention has been afforded to the influence of peers on academic success. A study that he conducted with learners in high school showed that learners who surrounded themselves with high-achieving peers are bound to improve in their academic achievements too. A participant mentioned that the attendance of career exhibitions provided her with some of the information she needed, but that she had to combine it with a trip to the various institutions she would like to attend.

One participant related that she made use of a prospectus, although it lacked some of the information that she was looking for; this was due to her sister being unable to obtain

the full document. She related that: *“There was this UNISA book my sister gave me, she showed me careers, the only thing I saw about communication science were the subjects required and the levels required which was languages and 40% and above for diploma. She didn’t have one for a degree because she did a diploma”*. Traditional sources of information such as the library were mentioned for the first time in this location. The findings from the focus group suggest that learners rely on the Internet because of the unavailability of sources that they perceive as being reliable. They mentioned that the school does not play its part in providing them with opportunities to gain information because they are unable to access their computer lab if they are not enrolled in certain subjects such as Computer Applied Technology (CAT). Two participants expanded on this fact as they related: *“It has done nothing. What can it do, it can help us bring pamphlets, get us people to talk to us, give us valid information that we can actually use that can help us get where we want to”* and *“we don’t really have access to information because we can’t even use our computers”*.

Additionally, the researcher observed that institutions of Higher Education are out of reach for students in this location. The institutional visibility is almost non-existent to the extent where learners have to make time out of school hours to visit such places. When speaking about their teachers, the focus group interviewees were quick to ask the researcher to: *“please exclude the teachers”*, and *“I would say personally we get information but then teachers I didn’t find any information from any teacher in this school”*. Upon further questioning, they related that their teachers seldom motivate them and more often than not, they choose to address them rudely while also insulting them. The learners expressed that the school could invest more into introducing them to people who can guide them as they feel that they could learn more from them and more than this, they could be motivated to perform better in their academics. To this effect, it was noted by participant one that: *“Last year there was this time especially during June exams, there was this time where we got new people like mama G. people from...they are lecturers they were teaching us”*.

The individual interview results from both schools indicate that although learners may look to the same sources for information, the experiences of accessing these sources are quite different. While in Gauteng participants did not mention struggling with the

availability or shortage of any type of source, in Mpumalanga the opposite is true. In this regard, it appeared that the learners in Mpumalanga struggled to physically access informational resources; the implications of this on learners is that they have had to make individual efforts to locate the resources that they need. The learners in this Province highlighted that the same sources used to gain information about their Higher Education opportunities were the same as those mentioned in Gauteng, although they stressed that they would like these resources to be availed to them. The school was especially considered to be too relaxed in its role as a medium for providing learners with such resources. The comments collected by the researcher further implied that learners in this area were not receiving the adequate support from their school that they needed in order to receive access to the sources that facilitate information gaining.

#### **4.3.5 ENTRY INTO MALE-DOMINATED FIELDS OF STUDY**

An important milestone that characterises many individuals' high school careers is often realised when they begin to develop a sense of what they would like to pursue once they complete their schooling. More than being able to physically access the institutions of Higher Education, access beyond this also relates to the ability to study towards a career in any field (Strassburg et al., 2010). Historically, the choice of career that individuals make, rested on their gender. Males, who are considered to be stronger and more intellectually capable, have been trusted with pursuing careers that are highly technical and analytical. Females, who are often viewed as caregivers, nurturers and homemakers, have been assigned to careers that are perceived to be less stressful and that make the most of their caring personalities (Fleuhr-Lobban & Billson, 2005).

Females have therefore been found to pursue nursing, social work and teaching. In this regard, Fleuhr-Lobban and Billson (2005, p. 377) confidently note that "education has been used to promulgate assumptions about females as inferior citizens or to prepare girls for home-making and child-rearing roles". The increased emphasis on and need for science and technology graduates in the twentieth and twenty first centuries has forced for a reassessment of these patterns. Efforts have been invested into facilitating increased access to previously male-dominated fields of study for female scholars, despite historical inequality. In recent years, some shifts have been made in this regard. It is however realised that young women still experience discrimination as far as entry

into these highly skilled careers is concerned. Pillozi-Edmonds (2012) confirms this thought as she purports that even in developed countries where there are more women than men entering into Higher Education, female enrolment into the Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) remains problematic. The findings that were collected for this study as far as entry into these fields was concerned were positive although they also revealed that in some instances, girl learners choose to follow these careers for the wrong reasons. They additionally revealed that access to previously male-dominated fields of study can be facilitated through accessing the relevant information. This possession of information may facilitate future success in a chosen area of study, or may translate into higher rates of retention in these courses. A participant in the focus group provided an example of how choices are influenced, and in turn influence academic success: *“I’ve got a friend who did that like their mother. Like the older sister she was doing chemical engineering, her twin sister is also doing science then her mother literally forced her to go and do science and she didn’t make it”*.

#### **4.3.5.1 CHOSEN CAREER PATHS IN GAUTENG PROVINCE**

In this province, the researcher was alerted to the diversity of choices that existed amongst the individual participants. The careers of choice that were highlighted by the participants included accountancy, fashion design, nursing, occupational therapy, film and production, economics and political sciences. The more popular careers that were chosen by participants fell under the commerce sector and the media sector. For some of the participants, it was revealed that they made their career choices based on the influences of their families and close friends. It was also acknowledged that future financial affluence and stability also had a bearing on the career choices that were made. It was Tebogo and Hlogi who noted that they would love to pursue their passions which are in media and fashion respectively, but they also acknowledged that they need to have a formal education that they can lean on should their initial plans fail. Tebogo highlighted that: *“No I’m going to delay a bit. I’m going to do occupational therapy because like I need a stable job because acting and presenting and stuff they aren’t stable for now”*. The learners in this Province seemed to display a thorough understanding of what their choices were inspired by, but further than this, they also

seemed to possess some useful information about what their chosen careers would entail. It was only one participant who seemed to lack this understanding however, she made mention of the fact that she has begun to engage more with sources of information that will provide her with more knowledge. She stated that: *“I’m going to use the Internet to Google again because last time I just entered ‘foot technology’ and looked at what does this person do and things like that. So from now on I will want to know how many years, what are the disadvantages and another thing I need to check is how many people do it. I don’t want to do a career that has a lot of people doing it because then there are possibilities that it won’t be successful”* (Lerato, Gauteng Province, p.6). The participants’ career choices also indicated to the researcher that they were in line with current trends and needs in the global knowledge economy.

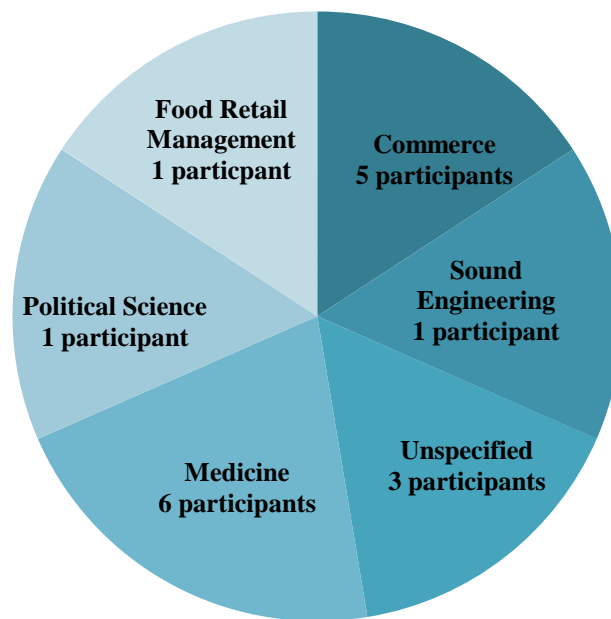
For example, in the ever expanding information technology age, young people are leaning towards careers in media which have proved to be lucrative and in demand. It is also an interesting time for politics both in South Africa and the rest of the world; for this reason, following a career in such a field would prove to be profitable. Interestingly, none of the participants made any connection to their choice of career and their gender. It was the perception of the researcher that they did not consider their gender a disadvantage with respect to following their chosen careers. Nomisa was the only participant to raise her thoughts around the disadvantage that young girls face in comparison to their male counterparts. She mentioned that: *“...Firstly, I want to open my school...for girls. I don’t want boys. Girls only. Because I noticed that girls don’t have confidence in themselves. We believe that boys are better than us, they are superior, they can do anything and they can do everything and they have money”*. From the researcher’s deductions, it appeared that encouragement from family and loved ones to pursue careers that are historically male-dominated has also provided participants with the confidence they need in their capabilities.

The focus group results were slightly different in that most of the participants were leaning towards pursuing careers in the sciences. Of the eight participants in the focus group, at least five mentioned that they would like to pursue a career in science. Two participants mentioned that they would like to pursue careers in commerce, while one did not specify which career path she is looking to follow. The focus group provided

confirmation for some of the researcher's observations. Although the focus group participants were more uniform and traditional in their career choices, they displayed similar levels of confidence in their abilities. The participants in the group also did not make mention of their gender as a factor that would prohibit their success. It was also observed that participants relied on their passion to guide their career choices. Tebogo informed the researcher that: *"Knowing that I love fashion and I love talking I felt that ok uhm law will help me with all of this so fashion"*.

Through this insight, the researcher was made aware of the fact that the participants' passions did not necessarily translate into the possession of thorough knowledge about the chosen field of study. One participant admitted to such as she noted that: *"I don't know anything about neurosurgery. I'm just interested in something that has to do with medicine. And I have my best friend, she is the current head girl now and she was like since you are just in how people think and how you saw that helps people and to change people's perceptions, why not be a brain surgeon"*. The results that emerged from both the individual and focus group interviews can be considered to be positive to the extent that there seems to be a shift in the gender stereotyping has been transmitted as far as career choice is concerned. This was demonstrated as most girls in the focus group and the individual interviews confidently shared their career choices, which are all in male-dominated fields.

### Intended areas of study by participants in Gauteng Province



*Figure 4.1 Types of intended study by participants in Gauteng (n=17)*

*Source: Researcher's own construct*

Figure 4.1 represents the choice of careers which were reported by the participants in Gauteng Province. As compared to those in Mpumalanga Province, this Province displayed an awareness of different types of careers which would all yield desired success. Furthermore, the participants in this Province seemed to understand that although they wish to pursue their passions in traditional careers, they can also pursue their artistic passions. At least three participants who chose careers in commerce-related fields, commented and expressed the wish that they would also like to pursue fashion design, media and events management. Furthermore, the results in this Province are positive to the extent that most participants have chosen to pursue careers in male-dominated fields; they believe they will be successful in these fields.

#### 4.3.5.2 CHOSEN CAREER PATHS IN MPUMALANGA

The interviews in Mpumalanga indicated that the individual participants wished to gain entry into science-related fields of study although for some, this was only because of the pressure being placed on them by family members. Martha was one such participant and she tearfully informed the researcher that: *“I actually chose my career this year like I have passion for talking and debate so let me do communication science after matric but everyone is like I have to be a doctor and there is nothing I can do so I’m still stuck and it’s not something I want to do”*. From the researcher’s observation, it appeared that Martha was not alone in such a predicament as most participants revealed that they were either still confused or had been advised by loved ones to pursue what are perceived to be more affluent careers. Julia who was interviewed individually in this Province pointed out that: *“Ok the confusion when it comes to cardiology...Like I was doing my research and all of that and only to find that it takes fifteen years so I’m like wow...I don’t want to be in school for another fifteen years...no no no and then like also people like you know when you work with people’s organs and then you mess up you’ll go to jail so you get all this discouragement...”* She added that *“Ja that’s why I chose that and the other reason was because my mom...she also supported me into the science stream and all of that...my elder sister she’s in Durban, she’s also in the stream of science so I just kind of tried to follow her, ja”*. A confirmation of this fact could be that the learners in this Province seemed not to possess much information about their intended areas of study.

There was a strong sense that parents and close family members in this Province wished to live out their dreams vicariously through their children. The participants from this Province further placed an emphasis on the fact that they would like to make their families and especially their parents, proud. A participant in the focus group shared that: *“I’m sixteen years of age, I’m in grade 11, I live with my granny, church is actually what describes me and I’m passionate about debate and I just hope one day I make my granny proud. And that’s me”*. In addition to this, an association was made to the type of career chosen and the poor circumstances in which they have been raised or have witnessed others growing up.

The sentiment herein is that by following a more traditional career path, financial stability is guaranteed and they would be able to change their familial circumstances. The chosen career paths were also attached to the communal status that will be earned not only by the individual learner, but also by the family. This status was emphasised more in cases where learners had witnessed previous school mates or community members earning it. The acquisition of material possessions such as cars or houses was seen in this Province as indicators of financial success and it was referred to by two participants:

*“Mmmmm, because again she gets money and I don’t understand where that money is from and she’s still studying and that’s how I liked it too because I was like ahhh if you can paid while studying then why not. So now I started considering medicine, like I wish to be like her. She’s successful and stuff...and she’s driving her own car”* (Mpho, Mpumalanga Province, p.6) and *“Uhm she was studying electrical engineering at UCT and she has completed her degree and she’s now working. She’s just travelling the world, as we are speaking she was out of the country”* (Tshepo, Mpumalanga Province, p.4).

The above statements also suggested the fact that the learners in this area were not inclined to the opportunities that are available in other fields of study. There seemed to be a lack of understanding of the fact that traditional careers can co-exist with other, less esteemed careers. Positively so, the results indicated that almost all of the individual girls in this area were planning to enter into male-dominated fields of study. Although the participants sounded hopeful about achieving their future dreams, the researcher sensed that they were fantasising in their thinking about what they could achieve in a given time-frame. The dexterity of such thinking is that on the one hand, participants could be said to lack a sense of reality while on the other, they could be credited with being able to display the capacity to dream.

In this province, it was one learner who alluded to her awareness of the vulnerability that young girls like herself experience. In this regard, the participant was quoted as saying *“I think the first thing to do is to tell girls the truth. They should be told the truth and they should be honest with them because of the girls my age and younger than me believe that they cannot be if they do not have boyfriends or anything. They believe that*

*they are not independent but they are dependent on somebody else and at this point in time that somebody has to be a boy because you know the times we are living in right now”.*

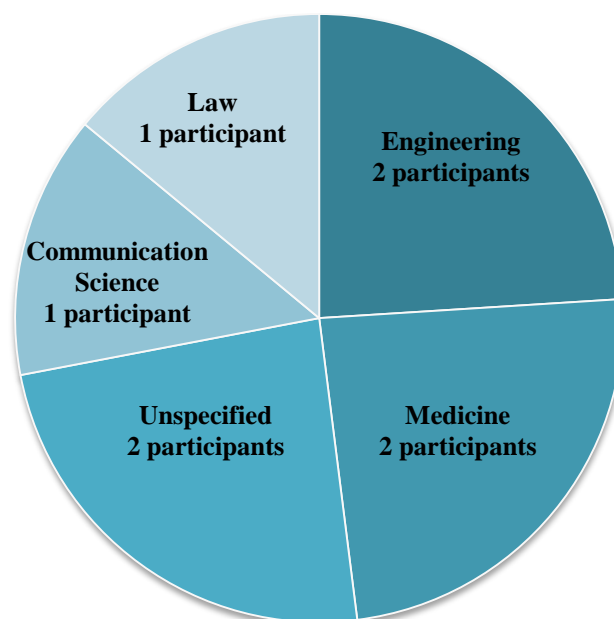
The results show that differences exist in between both provinces as far as making choices about future careers is concerned. It is also important to note that even where differences exist, both groups shared what may be considered usual experiences in this stage of their high-school careers. The learners in Gauteng seemed to have a better command and understanding of their future endeavours. In addition to this, they were aware of the possible diverse paths that they may be able to pursue in an effort to fulfil their passions and realise financial stability. More than this, the participants in this location made use of the opinions and advices of close family and friends to guide their decisions; they did not take them as fact.

The high levels of confidence in their future careers appeared to be steered by passion and not necessarily financial stability. This confidence also translated in the ability for some participants to overlook the pressures that are being leveraged by those close to them. In addition to this, the participants in this location made reference to being proactive as far as making plans for their post-school careers. This was demonstrated by a participant who informed the researcher that through her mother, she was due to meet two top fashion designers with the hopes that she could receive mentoring. She spoke about this with the researcher as she said: *“Yes, yes that is one of the ways and my mom also tried to hook me up with a fashion designer...Uhm David Tlatle and Ole Ledimo”.*

In Gauteng, learners related to the researcher that most times they were easily able to access the information that they need regarding their future studies. The school and teachers were considered to be playing their part in this regard, as they often facilitate access to informational resources. For some participants, they experienced confusion and did not possess a full understanding of what they wanted to pursue after school. Lerato related in this regard that: *“And then the teachers too sometimes they tell about careers and you too can see that this might be good for me. Ja, things like that”.* This similarity could be observed in Mpumalanga as well, however in this province, it seemed to be more pronounced. Learners seemed to be restricted by their circumstances as far as career choice was concerned.

Besides the pressures that learners in this location are faced with, they also struggle to locate the resources they need to gain the information they need. Furthermore, the participants emphasised that they did not have the support they needed from the school or their teachers, which made it difficult to access the informational resources that they require. In comparing the choices of future study and career paths, it emerged that in both provinces, girl learners were planning to pursue historically male-dominated fields of study. Although in both provinces there were instances of uncertainty regarding whether or not they would succeed in their chosen areas of study. Participants in both provinces did not consider their gender as being a limitation to their potential entry into institutions of higher education.

#### **Intended areas of study by participants in Mpumalanga**



*Figure 4.2 Types of intended areas of study by participants in Mpumalanga (n=8)*

*Source: Researcher's own construct*

The figure above depicts the career choices that were identified by the participants in Mpumalanga. The results show that most of the participants wish to pursue careers in male-dominated fields of study. This is positive, however, it appeared that the participants in this Province made their choices on the basis of the opinions of those around them. As a result, the participants seemed to be of the opinion that only

traditional careers would lead them to success. The choices that were made by these participants may also be attributed to their socio-economic backgrounds. Pressure from parents to pursue careers that would ensure financial security was significant in this province, even where the participant did not have a passion for such a career. The participants were similar to those in Gauteng Province as far as the sources of information that they employed were concerned.

#### **4.3.6 OVERALL EXPERIENCES OF GIRL LEARNERS IN ACCESSING INFORMATION**

The study has revealed that the experiences of girl learners in rural and urban setting are different, however, with a tinge of similarities. Findings have also demonstrated that perhaps information has been neglected as far as entry into Higher Education, but more specifically, into previously male-dominated fields of study are concerned. In Mpumalanga, the researcher learned that information was necessary to facilitate an understanding of what participants wished to study post-school. In addition to this, insight was provided into the fact that girls in rural locations often lack the support that they need in order to access the information that they need. The absence of such resources and support often results in the development of a low confidence in their future endeavours. A compounding factor in this regard is the fact that the participants are geographically disadvantaged. Learners in this Province are often pressurised by those who are close to them to pursue historically male-dominated careers and although this is not necessarily a bad thing, it shows that pressure can have the potential to stunt passion. To this extent, many participants from this group reported wishing to pursue science-oriented studies and careers, however, most of them did not know what these futures or careers entailed.

For the girls in this province, institutional visibility seemed to be problematic to the extent that they did not receive visits from the institutions that they might want to study at. It appears that in such a setting, ICTs would be the most reliable source of information, however, learners reported being prohibited from making use of the ICTs that are available in the school. A statement made by a focus group participant revealed that: *“And it’s so weird because around Delmas , Vodacom gave each school...I think it’s 50 computers for each school for everyone. In Swartlap, every learner, from each*

*grade, it's a combined school...from grade 1 up until grade 12 they have computer periods but here they don't care, they don't even allow us to use the Internet unless its exam session".* Fleuhr-Lobban and Billson (2005) speak about the importance of realising access to information for the development of young girls, but they also assert that it is equally important to provide them with the equipment and the skills needed to make efficient use of this information. From analysing the data collected in both the individual and focus group interviews in this province, the researcher felt a deep confusion and misinformation on the part of the girls in this area. Their experiences of seeking information could perhaps be likened to walking through a maze; confused, and without much certainty of where one wishes to go.

In Gauteng Province, a different picture could be painted for the participants as their experiences of accessing information seem less stressful in comparison to their counterparts. In this province, girls did not struggle to access sources of information including ICTs. This access was facilitated mainly through the support of important actors in the girls' lives, including the school, teachers and the family. This view was supported by Tebogo, an individual participant who said: *"I look at the other children who attend school in eMdeni for example, we...with them, our school is in the suburbs and they are in the rural areas because of the things that we have so to speak. But then now we all have computer rooms and everything else but then I don't know the education system is the same but then I just think that with them they are not so exposed to things...many things about university and other careers ja"*. Much responsibility was assigned to role models as transmitters of information through their own life experiences.

As a motivating factor, participants also looked to their environments as encouragement to pursue their studies further with the hopes that they can improve their circumstances and those of their families. The guidance and support of those who are close to the participants appeared to be important in facilitating access to valuable information as indicated by Lerato who said: *"And then the teachers too sometimes they tell about careers and you too can see that this might be good for me. Ja, things like that"*. This province, unlike the previous, seemed to possess wealth in the form of support from family and loved ones. It appeared that the presence of this support motivated the

participants to go further in their search for information. They seemed to apply extra effort into exploring their chosen careers.

Further than this, the group in this Province reported using each other as support, but also as reliable sources of information. They further made collective efforts to pursue information through the development of groups. The implications of these reports should not mislead readers to perceive that the experiences of accessing information by learners in this Province are straightforward. As in any other context, those in the focus group especially made mention of the confusion that surrounds them in their decision-making. Additionally, their experiences at some stage, were marked by uncertainty. For some participants in the lower grades, even though they have access to informational sources, they did not seem to possess information about their intended course of study.

An important insight is given by Choy (2001) who confirms that participation in post-secondary school has multiple benefits for both individuals and society. She adds that research has shown that the educational history of parents or caregivers plays a significant role in the aspirations of young people who wish to continue with their studies. Her study showed that young people whose parents had participated in Higher Education, were more likely to enrol in similar institutions immediately after high school. The opposite was true for those whose parents only completed high school. This may translate into minimal involvement in their children's schooling and may result in parents remaining oblivious about their children's information needs regarding their future (Catsambis, 2001).

In both provinces, the results show that accessing information is essential for facilitating access to Higher Education, but more specifically, access to historically male-dominated fields of study. In both provinces, the positive can be found in the observation that many of the young girls in the study are hoping to pursue Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM)-related careers. However, caution needs to be applied to the extent that many seem to be choosing these areas of study for the wrong reasons. The results may imply that perhaps with more information about what their areas of intended study entail, future academic success and retention rates post-school may be realised.

#### **4.4 SUMMARY**

The chapter reported back on the findings that emerged from the data that was collected. The findings showed that subject choice, peers and family members, educators, ICTs and Higher Education Institutions all facilitate access to information for girl learners in unique ways. It was also shown that the experiences of girl learners in this regard are similar at some points, and different at others. As far as access to Higher Education is understood regarding entry into historically male-dominated fields of study, the findings indicated that girl learners are aware of their ability to pursue such careers. This can be closely associated to the high levels of perceived academic efficacy. Chapter Five will conclude the paper by summarising the findings and making recommendations for future research efforts.

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

#### **5.1 INTRODUCTION**

This chapter contains a discussion on the main findings, conclusions and recommendations that have emerged throughout the study. The researcher will summarise and report back on the experiences of girl learners in accessing information about their Higher Education prospects. Additionally, the researcher will make recommendations for future research and practice before concluding.

#### **5.2 MAIN FINDINGS**

Through the collection of data, the researcher sought to explore the experiences of girl learners in accessing information about their Higher Education prospects. A sample of 25 girl learners in two schools in Gauteng and Mpumalanga was selected. As far as accessing information was concerned, insight was provided through the data collected that the experiences of learners are similar, but also different. In accordance with the secondary objective which sought to explore the informational resources which are available to girl learners, the results indicated that information is accessed through both conventional and unconventional means. For example, it was deduced by the researcher that the Internet and ICTs were considered to be traditional, straightforward sources of information. On the other hand, less traditional sources for providing more information on the process of choosing subjects were given much significance. An important process for all the participants who were interviewed was that of choosing subjects in their ninth grade. The participants in both locations revealed that the school and their teachers could support them in their aspiration to enter into Higher Education institutions by providing motivational speakers, access to ICT equipment and sharing details of their own experiences in the pursuit of Higher Education attainment. This was explored in relation to the third secondary objective which sought to understand how girl learners can be better supported with regards to their Higher Education prospects. An exploration of the first secondary objective which sought to explore the factors that

affect access to Higher Education and post-school decisions revealed that family, peers, finances and subject choice played an important role herein.

The researcher found that choosing subjects signalled an important stepping stone in their high school careers. For most participants in both provinces, they chose their subjects with the intent of pursuing post-school careers that are closely related. As with the 2 participants in Mpumalanga who were interested in pursuing medicine, they had chosen to follow the science stream with the knowledge that it is a prerequisite for entry into the course. In Gauteng, the same awareness was displayed by the participants who mentioned that they would want to pursue their studies in commerce-related fields, and so they have opted to follow the accounting and economics streams. The results that were collected in Mpumalanga indicated a different level of awareness as learners, who were mostly interested in pursuing science-related careers, were led to choose subjects that were not necessarily aligned with their post-school aspirations. This group gave the researcher insight into the status that is adhered to certain subjects and streams as a result of what they hope it will lead to. Science was considered to be a more esteemed subject stream to follow because it was perceived that it would lead to the pursuit of prominent courses of study, and later, a stable career with financial benefits. The belief in both provinces was that subjects that are taken in high school have the potential to determine post-school studies. Participants in both sites also reported that subjects are also important in facilitating access to institutions of Higher Education, but more especially to specific courses of study. From the data collected in both locations, it was apparent that girl learners choose their subjects with the perception that they would provide them with some information and preparation for their intended courses of study.

Participants in both schools referred to the fact that the support of family members was encouraging and the researcher found that family members are often approached first in the quest for seeking information. As far as facilitating the process of accessing information is concerned, in both provinces it was reported that the family acts both as motivators and as facilitators. The family is able to link learners with resources that they otherwise would not be able to access, but they also serve to reassure learners about the decisions that they wish to make. Family and peer relations were highlighted as platforms for accessing information as participants informed the researcher that they

often consult with their loved ones about their future plans. Congruence with the developmental stage that the participants are in was indicated, as they placed great value on their friendships and their status amongst their peers.

The pressures that are levelled against the participants by their loved ones to pursue certain careers also showed the influence that these relationships have on participants' post-schooling decisions. In Mpumalanga, this influence seemed to be more pronounced as at least three participants mentioned that their families were placing pressure on them to pursue careers that would lead to financial security. One participant spoke emotionally as she revealed that she did not want to pursue the course of study and eventually the career that her parents want, and this has put strain on her relationship with them. For participants in Mpumalanga, this pressure from loved ones was also related with their socio-economic backgrounds. It appeared that families encouraged the pursuit of Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM)-related subjects and fields because of their perceived potential to yield monetary success. The reference to following financially rewarding courses of study was also mentioned in Gauteng by two participants. The difference here is that this choice was self-motivated and absent of the pressure from family members.

Peer relations in both provinces were evidently important in shaping the informational experiences of young girls. The peer relationships in Gauteng were seemingly stronger than those in Mpumalanga, to the extent that the learners realised an informational gap in the phase, they were able to develop strategies amongst themselves wherein these gaps could be filled. The learners in the former province, for example chose to establish a mentor group where those who are in the higher grades could be of support to those in the lower grades. The relationships that were developed as a result have been positive influences on the processes of acquiring information. With the learners in the higher grades, these peer relationships cemented their sense of mastery and they also reported feeling an obligation to those who are coming after them. The learners in the higher grades felt that it was important for them to shape the informational experiences of those in the younger grades as a way of showing the school how to improve on its efforts to make information available. The peer relations in Mpumalanga were almost non-existent and they did not make mention of them as positive influencers on their

attempts to access information. In both locations, peer pressure was mentioned as being problematic especially to the extent where misinformation is transmitted. The misinformation, as reported by both groups, was mostly fed during the time of choosing subjects or streams in grade 9. The family was cited by participants in both provinces as being important in the participants' efforts to acquire information.

In Gauteng, the learners presented with an ease of physically accessing the information that they require, while the opposite seemed true for those in Mpumalanga. While the learners in Gauteng reported being able to access ICTs such as computers and cell phones in both their school and home environments, those in Mpumalanga mentioned that in some instances they struggle to do so. The challenges faced by these learners in accessing ICTs include restrictions from the school as far as disallowing the use of computer labs. Although, the participants in this Province mentioned that in some situations, they are able to make use of their cell phones for academic purposes, they had to make noise to eventually be allowed this privilege. The Internet was mentioned in both Gauteng and Mpumalanga as a source of information that is used, however these were mentioned secondary to parents, peers, role models and teachers. Unlike their counterparts in Gauteng, at least one participant in Mpumalanga stressed the financial implications that are connected to accessing ICTs.

The participant particularly spoke about the high costs of airtime that is needed to make use of the Internet outside of the school premises. The socio-economic circumstances of these girl learners do not always allow for them to have or acquire these funds. This was indicated when two participants mentioned that both their parents are unemployed. Another member mentioned that the everyday costs of travelling to and from her previous school were becoming too high; this caused her to move to her current school. In respect of accessing information it was shown that institutional visibility plays an important role. In this regard, the different institutions of Higher Education which the participants are looking to attend, are considered to be vital sources of information. In Gauteng, it seemed that the experiences of girl learners in receiving information from such institutions were fairly straightforward. Geographically, the participants in this location seemed to have an advantage over their rural counterparts who reported that they are not privy to the presence of their desired institutions. One participant in

Mpumalanga spoke about the fact that where they are able to receive information from these institutions, it is often not of the best quality.

In this province, learners have had to make personal efforts to reach these institutions in pursuit of the information that they need. The participants in both schools informed the researcher that they see the school as an important actor in facilitating access to information however, evidence was provided of the fact that the two schools assumed this role differently. In Gauteng, the school was reported as being supportive of the learners' future aspirations to the extent that it made other resources available to the participants. Within the school, the support and guidance of the teachers were considered to be an additional source of information. Teachers, through their encouragement and motivating words, were considered to be influential in learners' quests for information regarding Higher Education prospects. The sentiment surrounding teachers was not reported by the participants in Mpumalanga as they noted that the school is not very involved in facilitating their access to information about Higher Education prospects. In this province, it was noted that sometimes, teachers are act to discourage instead of motivate; this was seen as problematic for realising academic success, but also for the aspirations that learners have post-schooling.

Overall, participants from both provinces showed that they believe in themselves to achieve their aspirations. For participants, the realisation of academic success and possible entry into Higher Education are internally located. The belief for most of them was that they are responsible for determining their futures. Religion came secondary to individual agency as at least two participants referred to their faith as being important in their later success. Anxieties persisted wherein the participants took stock of the possible challenges that they may encounter in their efforts. These challenges were both internally and externally located. Participants considered the separation from loved ones to be unnerving, and they also noted that the environment in Higher Education Institutions is quite different from the one that they are accustomed to in high school. Fears persist about learning to be independent and responsible, and this was closely related to fears about being exposed to risky sexual behaviour. These challenges were mentioned to be present even in high school, although the perception was that they would be more pronounced in university or college. It appeared that in both provinces at

least four participants had been given reports by those who had already experienced Higher Education; to this extent they acted as useful sources of information.

As far as access to Higher Education is translated to enrolment in male-dominated fields of study, the findings indicated that the majority of participants wished to study towards STEM-related fields including medicine, accounting, economics and engineering. Although this is a positive insight, it was also apparent that some participants (especially in the rural location) did not hold much information about what they intended to pursue. For some of the participants in Mpumalanga, their decisions were based on the information and opinions of loved ones. The opposite seemed to apply in Gauteng wherein passion and interests motivated the intended area of study.

Adjusting to the FET phase was highlighted as a significant time in the participants' academic careers. In both provinces the participants mentioned that entering this phase was overwhelming and filled with pressure. It was highlighted by participants that negotiating balance between their social and academic lives, has proven to be difficult. The increase in workload was mentioned in both provinces as being too much. One participant in Mpumalanga admitted that she had taken the transition lightly; she had imagined that it would be as carefree as the General Education and Training phase.

The experiences of girl learners in accessing information between the two provinces of Gauteng and Mpumalanga proved to be similar and different. The similarities apply to the extent that learners looked to the same resources for information; however, it appeared that the way in which these sources were accessed, is different. In Gauteng (urban), girl learners seemed to have straightforward, physical access to their sources. In Mpumalanga (rural), the opposite seemed to be true as participants related that the sources of information which they rely on are either out of reach or not supportive enough; this was in reference to institutional visibility and the school. Issues around negotiating a social and academic balance once enrolled into the FET phase and eventually Higher Education were apparent sources of anxiety for girls in both provinces. It is noted by Schafft and Youngblood-Jackson (2010) that girl learners continue to be disadvantaged as far as opportunities in education are concerned. As a result of their rural identities and geographical locations, these girls are often neglected

and remain on the periphery of educational activity. It is thus not surprising that their experiences would differ slightly from those of their counterparts.

### **5.3 CONCLUSION OF FINDINGS**

In concluding the findings, it is apparent that information plays an important role in facilitating access to Higher Education for girl learners. Girl learners look to many different sources for their informational needs. Some of these resources have been identified as more or less reliable in comparison to other sources. The availability or non-availability of resources has, to some extent, caused confusion for girl learners who are beginning to think about their post-schooling careers. It was found that decisions about post-school careers were influenced by various factors including interests, passion, and the opinions of loved ones and peers. In Mpumalanga, it seemed that learners did not possess the information they need to make decisions about their intended areas of study. In Gauteng too, where learners seemed to have easy access to sources of information, learners seemed to hold little information about what their areas of intended study entail.

It is clear that although learners in urban areas have easier access to sources of information, those in rural Mpumalanga seem to struggle in this regard. This calls for more support to be given to learners in rural areas. Additionally, this increased access to sources of information should ideally be accompanied by support from peers, family members and the school. According to Catsambis (2001), all these actors play a key role in facilitating access to information and therefore shaping the post-schooling decisions made by girl learners. In both provinces, exposure to role models was emphasised and perhaps this form of imparting information could be utilised more by schools.

The efforts by schools to invite Higher Education Institutions to address learners are commendable, although the results showed that in Mpumalanga, the school does not exercise this enough to feed the information needs of learners. In this province, access to information sources is also limited by their geographical placement. As far as entry into male-dominated fields is concerned, the results show that participants have a positive capacity for success, however, it may be necessary to help them introspect on what motivated their choices and what these areas of study entail. This goes hand-in-

hand with accessing information about Higher Education prospects. In this regard, it is acknowledged that academic self-efficacy plays a crucial role, not only with respect to how girl learners evaluate themselves as suitable candidates to pursue male-dominated fields of study (Berndt et al., 1990).

#### **5.4 RECOMMENDATIONS**

The findings in this study have culminated into recommendations which have the potential to inform future research into how information acts as a conduit for Higher Education access. The recommendations also have practical implications for those who are responsible in assisting young girls to access information.

##### **1. The Gauteng and Mpumalanga Department of Basic Education:**

- Develop policies that emphasise ICTs as an important aspect of teaching and learning.
- Partner with institutions of Higher Education to increase institutional visibility, especially in rural schools.
- Provide financial support with respect to obtaining ICTs in schools.

##### **2. For schools:**

- Develop the capacity of teachers to act as reliable sources of information and support.
- Involve parents in the processing of supporting learners in their post-school decisions.
- Establish platforms for sharing about academic and social concerns.
- Engage with community members who are seen as role models.

##### **3. For Higher Education Institutions**

- Increase visibility in schools, especially those that remain geographically disadvantaged.
- Partner with local schools in the dissemination of information through school tours and brochures.

Further research should be undertaken with learners in urban and rural schools once the recommendations have been considered and implemented.

## **5.5 CONCLUDING COMMENTS**

Access to information is important in facilitating enrolment into institutions of Higher Education for girl learners. Furthermore, it can facilitate access to fields of study that have remained male-dominated. In order for girls in rural and urban settings to fulfil their information needs, cognisance must be taken about how they access information and from whom they receive this information. This has the potential to shape the post-schooling decisions of young women.

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## APPENDIX A

### ETHICS COMMITTEE CERTIFICATE



Research Office

**HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE (NON-MEDICAL)**  
R14/49 Matoane

**CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE**

**PROTOCOL NUMBER H14/05/24**

**PROJECT TITLE**

Experiences of girl learners in accessing information about higher education prospects: Rural and urban comparatives

**INVESTIGATOR(S)**

Ms R Matoane

**SCHOOL/DEPARTMENT**

Human and Community Development/Social Work

**DATE CONSIDERED**

23 May 2014

**DECISION OF THE COMMITTEE**

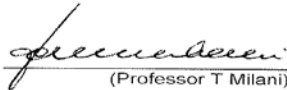
Approved Unconditionally

**EXPIRY DATE**

19/06/2016

**DATE**            20/06/2014

**CHAIRPERSON**

  
(Professor T Milani)

cc: Supervisor : Dr E Pretorius

**DECLARATION OF INVESTIGATOR(S)**

To be completed in duplicate and **ONE COPY** returned to the Secretary at Room 10000, 10th Floor, Senate House, University.

I/We fully understand the conditions under which I am/we are authorized to carry out the abovementioned research and I/we guarantee to ensure compliance with these conditions. Should any departure to be contemplated from the research procedure as approved I/we undertake to resubmit the protocol to the Committee. **I agree to completion of a yearly progress report.**

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

PLEASE QUOTE THE PROTOCOL NUMBER ON ALL ENQUIRIES

## APPENDIX B

## GAUTENG DEPARTMENT OF BASIC EDUCATION APPROVAL LETTER

**GAUTENG PROVINCE**
 Department: Education  
 REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

 For administrative use:  
 Reference no: D2015 / 083
**GDE RESEARCH APPROVAL LETTER**

Date:	30 May 2014
Validity of Research Approval:	30 May 2014 to 3 October 2014
Name of Researcher:	Matoane R.
Address of Researcher:	P.O. Box 834
	Sundra
	Delmas
	Mpumalanga
	2200
Telephone Number:	083 998 5141
Email address:	rmatoane@gmail.com
Research Topic:	Experiences of girl learners in accessing information about higher education prospects: Rural and Urban comparatives
Number and type of schools:	ONE Secondary School
District/s/HO	Johannesburg South

**Re: Approval in Respect of Request to Conduct Research**

*H. Makhado*  
*2014/06/02*

This letter serves to indicate that approval is hereby granted to the above-mentioned researcher to proceed with research in respect of the study indicated above. The onus rests with the researcher to negotiate appropriate and relevant time schedules with the school/s and/or offices involved to conduct the research. A separate copy of this letter must be presented to both the School (both Principal and SGB) and the District/Head Office Senior Manager confirming that permission has been granted for the research to be conducted.

The following conditions apply to GDE research. The researcher may proceed with the

1

*Making education a societal priority*

**Office of the Director: Knowledge Management and Research**
 9<sup>th</sup> Floor, 111 Commissioner Street, Johannesburg, 2001  
 P.O. Box 7710, Johannesburg, 2000 Tel: (011) 355 0505  
 Email: David.Makhado@gauteng.gov.za  
 Website: www.education.gpg.gov.za

## APPENDIX C

## MPUMALANGA DEPARTMENT OF BASIC EDUCATION APPROVAL LETTER

APPROVAL TO CONDUCT RESEARCH FOR MS. REBOTILE MATOANE: M.ED DEGREE  
REQUEST FOR YOUR APPROVAL

**education**  
DEPARTMENT: EDUCATION  
MPUMALANGA PROVINCE

Private Bag X 11341  
Nelspruit 1200  
Government Boulevard  
Riverside Park  
Building 5  
Mpumalanga Province  
Republic of South Africa

*Litlho leTemfundvo Umyango weFundo Departement van Onderwys Umyango wezefundo*  
*Enquites: H.A. Baloyi (013) 766 6478*

Ms. Rebotile Matoane  
51 Juba Street  
Broadway Flats  
Unit 307  
Braamfontein  
Johannesburg  
2001

**RE: APPLICATION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH: MS. REBOTILE MATOANE**

Your application to conduct research was received on the on the 08 May 2014. The title of your study is: *"Experiences of girl learners in accessing information about higher education prospects: Rural and urban comparatives."* The aims, objectives, the questions and the overall design of your study give an impression that the outcomes of the study will help the department to develop strategies for disseminating information to learners in a more efficient and effective way. Your request is approved subject to you observing the content of the departmental research manual which is attached. You are required to discuss with the principals of the sampled schools regarding the approach to your observation and data collection as no disruption of tuition will be allowed. You are also requested to adhere to your University's research ethics as spelt out in your research ethics document.

In terms of the attached manual (2.2. bullet number 4 & 6) data or any research activity can only be conducted after school hours as per appointment. You are also requested to share your findings with the relevant sections of the department so that we may consider implementing your findings if that will be in the best interest of department.

Sisonke Sifundzisa Sive



*[Handwritten signature]*

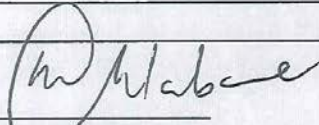
**APPROVAL TO CONDUCT RESEARCH FOR MS. REBOTILE MATOANE: M.ED DEGREE  
REQUEST FOR YOUR APPROVAL**

For more information kindly liaise with the department's research unit @ 013 766 5476 or [a.baloyi@education.mpu.gov.za](mailto:a.baloyi@education.mpu.gov.za). The department wishes you well in this important project and pledges to give you the necessary support you may need.

APPROVED/NOTAPPROVED:

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_



MRS. MOC MHLABANE  
HEAD OF DEPARTMENT

14, 5, 14  
DATE

\_\_\_\_\_

Sisonke Sifundzisa Slve

## APPENDIX D

### IMMACULATA SECONDARY SCHOOL PERMISISON LETTER



## IMMACULATA SECONDARY SCHOOL

2063a ZONE 2 DIEPKLOOF SOWETO (PO BOX 1134 MONDEOR 2110)

Telephone: (011) 985-1149/1202 OR 082 558- 9364

Fax: 086 503 3049

E-mail: principal@immaculata.org.za

**N.B All correspondence from the school must be signed and have an official stamp.**

6 June 2014

#### TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

This is to confirm that Rebotile Matoane has been given permission to conduct her Masters Research study with our learners on the following topic:

#### **Experiences of Girl Learners in accessing information about Higher Education Prospects: Rural and Urban Comparatives**

Rebotile will be allowed to conduct this research when schools open in July for the third term.

For more information, please do not hesitate to contact the school.

Yours Faithfully

  
Df MMR Dube  
(Principal)

IMMACULATA SEC SCHOOL  
2063A ZONE 2  
DIEPKLOOF SOWETO  
PO BOX 1134, MONDEOR 2110

## APPENDIX E

### SUNDRA HIGH SCHOOL PERMISSION LETTER

#### SUNDRA SECONDARY SCHOOL

PO BOX 445  
SUNDRA  
2200



NESTAD AVENUE  
TEL: 0136615029  
CELL: 078 403 2554

13 / 06 / 2014

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

Sir / Madam

This is to confirm that Ms. Matoane Rebotile has been given permission to conduct her MA Social Development Research at the above mentioned school. She has provided the details of the research to the school management. We therefore promise to avail the required number of girls to her whenever need arises.

Hoping you will find this in order.

Yours faithfully

*Rkhumalo*  
Khumalo R.(Mrs.)  
(PRINCIPAL)



## **APPENDIX F**

### **PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET**

Good Day

My name is Rebotile Matoane and I am a postgraduate student registered for the degree MA in Social Development at the University of the Witwatersrand. In order to pass my degree I need to do research and my topic is: Experiences of female learners in accessing information, about their Higher Education prospects. It is hoped that with this information, female learners may be better assisted to enter into Higher Education Institutions such as university. I therefore wish to invite you to participate in my study; you may either choose to be interviewed individually or take part in a focus group with 7 other schoolmates who have chosen to be part of the study. It is entirely up to you whether or not you choose to be a part of the study. If you agree to take part, I will arrange to interview you in a safe place at a time that suits you. The interview or the focus group will be an hour long and you can decide that you do not want to be in the study at any point. You will not be punished or rewarded if you decide to be a part of the study, or choose to refrain. With your permission, the interview will be tape-recorded. No one other than my supervisor will be able to listen to our conversation. The tapes and interview schedules will be kept for two years following any publications or for six years if no publications emanate from the study. Please be assured that your name and personal details will be kept confidential and no identifying information will be included in the final research report.

I also ask your permission to use the information you give me for publications or conferences that may come out of the study. As the interview may include sensitive issues, there is the possibility that you may experience some saddening feelings. Should you therefore feel the need for supportive counselling following the interview, I have arranged for this service to be provided free of charge by the Born to Care for the Community Centre(083 315 9249/083 282 6646) in Delmas, Mpumalanga and the Family Life Centre(011 984 0266) in Soweto. Please feel free to ask any questions regarding the study. I shall answer them to the best of my ability. I may be contacted on tel no. 083 998 5141, or my supervisor, Dr Edmarie Pretorius on tel no. 011 717 4476.

Should you wish to receive a summary of the results of the study, an abstract will be made available on request.

Thank you for taking part in the study.

**APPENDIX G****CONSENT FORM FOR PARTICPATION IN THE STUDY**

I \_\_\_\_\_ hereby consent to my participation in the research project titled: **Experiences of girl learners in accessing information about Higher Education prospects.** The purpose and procedures of the study have been explained to me. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I may refuse to answer any particular items or withdraw from the study at any time without any negative consequences. I understand that my responses will be kept confidential.

I agree/ do not agree to the interview being tape-recorded.

Name of Participant:

Date: .....

Signature: .....

## **APPENDIX H**

### **ASSENT FORM**

**Research title:** Experiences of girl learners about accessing information regarding Higher Education prospects: Rural and urban comparatives.

**Researcher's name:** Rebotile Matoane

I am conducting a research study which I would like to tell you about. I am trying to find out more about your experiences with accessing information about what you wish to do when you finish school. You are suitable for this study because you are female and in grade 10, 11 or 12. If you decide that you want to be in this study, you will only be required to talk about your experiences in an interview or a focus group. A focus group means that you will share your experiences with me and a few of your peers in a private setting where no one else may hear what we are discussing. In an interview you will share your experiences with just me.

#### **Can anything bad happen to me?**

You will not be physically harmed by being in the study, but it might happen that we talk about some things that are upsetting to you. If this does happen, I will arrange for you to talk to someone who is trained and can help you move away from those upsetting feelings.

#### **Can anything good happen to me?**

I cannot guarantee that anything good will happen to you, but perhaps the information you give may prove helpful for someone in the future and the information pack which you receive from me might be beneficial to you.

#### **Do I have other choices?**

Yes, you are not forced to be part of the study.

**Will anyone know I am in the study?**

No one except my supervisor and I at school will know that you took part in the study. When I have completed the study I will write a report about the information I have collected, but your name will not appear in it. You will not receive any gifts or money for being in the study, and you will also not be punished for choosing not to be in the study.

Before you say 'yes' to be in this study, be sure to ask me, the researcher to give you more information about anything that you don't understand.

**What if I do not want to do this?**

You don't have to be in this study. It's up to you. If you agree now, but you change your mind later, that's okay too. All you have to do is tell us.

If you want to be in this study, please sign or print your name. Please mark the appropriate box with a tick.

Yes, I will be in this research study.       No, I don't want to do this.

_____	_____	_____
Participant's name	Signature	Date
_____	_____	_____
Researcher	Signature	Date

## **APPENDIX I**

### **SEMI-STRUCTURAL INTERVIEW SCHEDULE FOR INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEWS**

#### **1. Opening**

The researcher will begin by introducing herself to the participant and informing them of the purpose and motivation for the research as well as the length of the interview.

#### **2. Interview questions**

- a. Could you tell me more about yourself?
- b. Describe your experiences as a senior learner (Grade 10 to 12) in the school?
- c. What subjects do you study and why?
- d. If you had unlimited resources, tell me about where you see yourself in five years.
- e. What are your thoughts and plans for your future once you have completed your schooling?
- f. Who in particular supported and guided you in your decisions about your future plans?
- g. What information do you have about what you plan for your future?
- j. Could you share with me your thoughts on any challenges that you think you might experience in achieving your future dreams?
- k. What makes you believe that you will be able to realise your dreams after completing school?
- l. What do you think schools should do to assist learners in making decisions about their futures?

The researcher will conclude the interview by summarising some of the points discussed in the interview and will extend her appreciation to the participant and a resource list will be provided to the participants. The participants will be reminded that they may go to the identified organisations for counselling should they experience emotional distress.

## **APPENDIX J**

### **FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION GUIDE**

#### **1. Opening**

The researcher will begin by informing the participants about the purpose and motivation for the study as well as the length of the interview.

#### **2. Focus group questions**

- a. Please tell me more about who you are and what you enjoy about being in your grade.
- b. Choosing subjects in Grade 10 is important for your future, share with the group why you chose your subjects.
- c. If you had unlimited resources tell me about where you see yourself in five years.
- d. Who has been supportive in assisting you to realise your dreams?
- e. What information do you have about what you plan to do after you have completed your schooling?
- f. What are the challenges that you think you might experience which will prevent you from doing what you want to after you have completed your schooling?
- i. What makes you believe that you will be able to realise your aspirations after completing school?
- j. What do you think schools should do to assist learners in making decisions about their futures?

The researcher will close the interview by summarising important points and extending her appreciation to the participants. The researcher will also remind the participants that they may approach the identified organisations for counselling should they experience emotional distress.

## **APPENDIX K**

### **PARENT PERMISSION FORM**

#### **Dear Parent/ Guardian**

My name is Rebotile Matoane and I am a postgraduate student registered for the degree MA in Social Development at the University of the Witwatersrand. As part of the requirements for the degree, I am conducting research on the experiences of high school female learner regarding their access to information about Higher Education prospects. I am requesting your permission to allow your child to participate in the study. It is hoped that with this information female learners may be better assisted to enter into Higher Education Institutions. Her participation is entirely voluntary and refusal to participate will not be held against her in any way. Should you grant her permission, I shall arrange to interview her in a location that is safe for both of us at a time that will not interfere with her schedule. The interview will be an hour in length. She may withdraw from the study at any time and may also refuse to answer any questions that are uncomfortable for her. There will be no benefits or penalties associated with choosing to participate or not participate in the study. With your permission, the interview will be tape-recorded. No one other than my supervisor will have access to the tapes. The tapes and interview schedules will be kept for two years following any publications or for six years if no publications, emanate from the study.

Please be assured that your child's name and personal details will be kept confidential and no identifying information will be included in the final research report. Your permission to use the data obtained in the study is sought for the purpose of any publications or conferences that may arise from it. As the interview may include sensitive issues, there is the possibility that your child may experience some feelings of emotional distress. Should the need arise, supportive counselling will be arranged for this service to be provided free of charge by the Born to Care for the Community Centre in Delmas, Mpumalanga and the Family Life Centre in Soweto. Please feel free to ask any questions regarding the study. I shall answer them to the best of my ability. I may be contacted on tel no. 083 998 5141, or my supervisor, Dr. Edmarie Pretorius on tel no.

011 717 4476. Should you wish to receive a summary of the results of the study, an abstract will be made available on request.

My child may be part of the study / my child may NOT be part of the study. Please delete what is not applicable.

Parent's signature & Date..... Researcher's Signature    Date.....