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Perceptions of factors affecting the pursuit of higher education among disadvantaged Grade 12 learners

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A research report submitted to the Faculty of Humanities, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the degree of Masters of Arts in Educational Psychology.

University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, 2009

DECLARATION

I declare that this thesis, entitled 'Perceptions of factors affecting the pursuit of higher education among disadvantaged Grade 12 learners', is my own unaided work. It is submitted for the degree of Masters of Arts in Educational Psychology, at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before for any other degree or examination at any other university.

Signed this _____ day of _____ 2009

_____

Tasneem Ally Ebrahim

DEDICATION

For my husband Zunaid whose tireless support and sensible advice has helped me complete this research; and to my children, Muhammad and Faatimah, who have patiently motivated me throughout this process.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

To my parents who have always motivated and supported me with their unshakable belief that I "can do it". Without your direction and sacrifice I would not be who I am.

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"One finger cannot lift a pebble."

Anonymous

ABSTRACT

Prior to 1994, education in South Africa was formally and legally segregated according to race and ethnicity. The pre-eminent transformation demand for the educational policies of the post-1994 democratic government was therefore to promote equity in enrolments and staffing across educational sectors, so that equal opportunities can exist for the broader society. Fifteen years after democracy the expectation is that diversity and inclusivity would not be in question. However, it appears that access and participation in higher education still remains reserved for a small elite. Policy gains have therefore been modest. This study attempts to understand the reasons for the slow transformation in equity gains in higher education by interviewing disadvantaged Grade 12 learners in a school south of Johannesburg. The qualitative approach using a semi-structured questionnaire was utilized to facilitate a dialogue about their perceptions of what prevents these learners from accessing higher education. Thematic content analysis of the participants' responses revealed four salient themes: perceptions of the economic, educational, socio-cultural and political constraints to higher education which are discussed using Paulo Freire's theory of conscientisation as a conceptual framework. The results of this research imply that a broader more purposeful approach to social reform and more comprehensive and equitable strategies of redistribution of wealth and income are required to empower disadvantaged communities to access higher learning institutions in South Africa.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

Abbreviation	Full terminology
ANC	African National Congress
CASS	Continuous Assessment
CHE	Council on Higher Education
DoE	Department of Education
GDE	Gauteng Department of Education
HSRC	Human Sciences Research Council
IPA	Interpretive Phenomenological Approach
NCHE	National Commission on Higher Education
Nepi	National Education Policy Institute
NSFAS	National Student Financial Aid Scheme
OBE	Outcomes Based Education
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
SAIRR	South African Institute of Race Relations
SET	Science, Engineering and Technology
SGB	School Governing Body
UJ	University of Johannesburg
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
Wits	University of the Witwatersrand

Education is the great engine to personal development. It is through education that the daughter of a peasant can become a doctor, that the son of a mine worker can become the head of the mine, that the child of farm workers can become the president of a great nation. It is what we make of what we have, not what we are given, that separates one person from another. [Nelson Mandela]

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

The focus of this research report is the perceived barriers to accessing or pursuing higher education for Grade 12 learners from disadvantaged backgrounds. For the purpose of this study, disadvantaged refers to black learners from the low socio-economic group and who reside in an informal settlement. While universities, colleges and technikons are showing an increased enrolment rate of black students since the year 2000, participation of black learners from disadvantaged backgrounds remains low. This despite the introduction of greater opportunities afforded to these learners by changes in policy at both institutional and national level. In 1991, the Tertiary Education Fund of South Africa (TEFSA) was established as an avenue for funding to help historically disadvantaged students with academic ability to study at a tertiary institution. This, however, did not translate to better access for disadvantaged learners (Imenda, Kongolo & Grewal, 2002). This indicates that the barriers preventing these learners from gaining equal access to higher education is more than just financial. This research attempts to identify and understand the barriers learner's perceived to accessing tertiary education institutions, through a qualitative study using semi-structured interviews. Data from these interviews are analysed and discussed.

This introductory chapter serves to provide the background information to this study. The rationale for conducting this research is discussed, the aims are outlined and a brief overview of the structure of the research report is presented.

RATIONALE

Berg and Hoenack (1987, p.280) note that the "economic, social and political features of higher education in South Africa depend heavily upon the enrolments and access of students to these institutions." Historically, the majority of the South African population were excluded from higher education. The major causes for this inequality to access were the socio-political circumstances in South Africa. The laws of apartheid ensured white political freedom and the national oppression of all non-whites. The tool of education was used to ensure this oppression and exclusion. Policies on admission, finance, and language of instruction and minimum requirements for accessing higher education were used by the apartheid government to exclude blacks from gaining access to higher education. Most of those who did access higher education, studied through part-time correspondence studies with UNISA or institutions like Vista University (Bunting, 1994).

Equity is therefore 'the pre-eminent transformation demand' in both the Nepi and White Paper that deals with educational policies (Cloete, Fehnel, Maasen, Moja, Perold & Gibbon, 2002, p.269). To redress this, enrolments at higher education institutions need to 'reflect the social composition of the broader society' so that this resource can be made available to historically disadvantaged learners (Cloete in Cloete et al., 2002). According to the Human Rights Commission (2004), the preliminary enrolment at universities and technikons in 2004 showed that black students made up about 55% of the student population at universities and 72% at technikons. This shows a dramatic increase in higher education access for black students, but the overall participation rates have decreased as the enrolment of white learners have lessened and socio-economically disadvantaged learners are still experiencing difficulty in gaining access. This means that although the composition of the student body at higher education has changed, access is still for a 'small elite' (Cloete et al., 2002). This is of grave concern, as the failure of policy to redress inequalities is being highlighted and the equity objectives in the post-1994 period are not being met. "Instead, changes have resulted in a more elite public higher education system," and "the gap between 'those with' and 'those without' higher education" has not decreased (Cloete et al., 2002, p. 273).

Poole (2004) explains how the role of universities is essential in the maintenance and development of social and economic wellbeing. With this in mind the global building of the higher education sector in the 1980's and 1990's was driven by the belief that the university was a primary tool of modern nation building. Marginson (2002) highlights how UNESCO also recognises the importance of education in personal and social development. In its report *Learning: the Treasure Within*, UNESCO identifies education as one of the primary means for the "development of understanding and more harmonious interaction which facilitates the reduction of poverty, exclusion, ignorance, oppression and war" (1996, p.3) In keeping with global changes in higher education, the democratically elected government of 1994 was left with the arduous task of not only overcoming the inequalities of the past by creating integration in education, but also developing policies and curricula that would support equal access to education and economic and social development in the country. This has proven to be one of the greatest challenges to the government as deep structural flaws, going beyond 1994, constrain South Africa's model of economic development. The economy is not generating sufficient jobs for youth, women, unskilled and black people. As such The The Dinokeng Scenarios (2009) reports that 13 million people in South Africa receive social

grants. This indicates that the reduction of poverty is one of the greatest and most daunting challenges in South Africa. Poverty is linked to unemployment and unemployment is closely linked to a lack of skills and education. The poor coordination between the labour and education departments further exacerbates the problem (The Dinokeng Scenarios, 2009).

In attempting to understand the link between the labour and education departments, a closer look at the relationship between unemployment and education was necessary. An explanation of the Employment Equity Bill of 1997 depicts South Africa as plagued by racial inequality. The South African Institute of Race Relations (SAIRR) (1998) found that the bottom 20% of income earners captured a mere 1.5% of national income, while the wealthiest 10% of households received fully 50% of national income. Further, they found that poverty was overwhelmingly concentrated in the black and coloured population: Of the poor 95% were black, and 65% of blacks were poor. Some 33% of the coloured population lived in poverty as compared to 2.5% of Asians and 0.7% of whites. This commentary further states that a third of all blacks earned below R500 per month and top managerial ranks of companies constituted only 2.99% Africans, 0.43% coloureds, 0.21% Asians and 96.38% whites. Already the ratio of richer to poorer in this context is 29 to 1, and there was an ever-growing gap between the employed and the jobless (SAIRR, 1998). Moreover, this gap of 29:1 was predicted to widen yet further if unemployment was to continue to grow at the projected rate of two percentage points a year.

A decade later The Dinokeng Scenarios (2009) found that in South Africa about 40% of households still live below a poverty line estimated by the Treasury to be about R480 per person per month. The Report also found that there is a close link between poverty, the structural problems of unemployment, and the lack of skills. Unemployment figures measured by the Labour Force Survey (in Government of RSA, 2002) indicated that unemployment in South Africa was at 30.5%. It also showed that of the total 4.8 million officially unemployed people, 4.2 million were black; 2.5 million were women and 3.4 million were under 35 years of age (Socio Economic Report, 2004). This Report further found that unemployment figures continued to rise during the period 2003-2004 and predicted that this trend would continue. The Dinokeng Scenarios then found that unemployment did decline from 31% in 2003 to 23% in 2008, but this unemployment rate is still unacceptably high. Nearly a quarter of the working-age population looking for work is still unsuccessful. The Employment Equity Commission of 2002 further found that of the

6990 reports during this period, which covered 2 605 729 employees, there was a limited improvement in the number of employment activities with respect to race (Nedlac Report, 2005). Representation of blacks in key positions remained low, despite blacks making up the majority of the total workforce. The unemployment rate amongst young, black people in South Africa is highlighted by these statistics.

In an attempt to understand the reasons for the poor economic involvement of young, black people in the South African economy the SAIRR (1998, p. 3) shows evidence that "the most important constraint on black advancement is not racial prejudice but the shortage of black people with the necessary skills and experience. The shortage of skills among people of all colours has long impeded economic growth within the country, while the demand for skilled black people has already far outstripped supply." Although the number of black Matric learners increased over the years, 49% of matriculants in 1994 were black as compared to the 0.18% in 1952, and the enrolment figures of black students at higher education has increased, only 17% of 2002 matriculants secured the exemptions necessary for higher education admission (Statistics South Africa in Government of RSA, 2002) and only 15% of youths between the ages of 18 and 24 years enrolled in higher education in 2001 (Socio Economic Report, 2004). Projected Matric Senior Certificate Endorsement Certificates for 2010 is only 33.8% of the projected 80.5% candidates that will sit for this exam (Simkins, 2002). This means that although policy has changed the racial composition in education, participation and throughput rates of learners from Matric to university remains low, hence the education sector is still not producing the type of skills the economy needs.

According to the National Research and Development Strategy (of the Republic of South Africa, 2002), South Africa needs well-trained innovative young people to generate jobs and wealth. The priority is therefore to improve the functioning of education and training institutions and the single most important goal facing the education system is the improvement of achievement in predominantly black schools. If this is the priority of black schools then tertiary institutions would need to understand the reasons for the low enrolments of black children from these schools. Tertiary institutions would also need to manage this human resource so that the employment and economic needs of the country can be met. The effective management of

human resources (i.e. our youth) becomes imperative in order to sustain our economy. As the gap between supply and demand of skilled black people has already been identified by the SAIRR (1998), it becomes clear why this research is important. Today, education represents a way out of deprivation and poverty and is essential to building a participatory democracy and promoting the social inclusion of all South Africans. "Access to education and the quality of education has therefore been a site of struggle and contestation for decades in South Africa" (NSFAS, 2009, p. 5).

Equal access in education remains an integral element of the transformation of our society so that economic and social upliftment of all South Africans can be achieved. It was with this in mind that the researcher chose to interview learners from an informal settlement. It is assumed that learners from this background would be most disadvantaged both economically and socially so an accurate measure of the success of transformation in South Africa would be gained from interviewing these learners. According to the Department of Home Affairs, 97% of Gauteng is urbanised because of the mass migration of people from rural and other areas looking for jobs (Buanews, 2009). This has resulted in Gauteng being the smallest but most populated region in South Africa (Buanews, 2009). The Department of Education (2006) also documented that Gauteng has a public school enrolment rate, of 154% between 1975 and 1994 of black students, and a school attendance rate of 15-year olds at 98.1%. As such Gauteng was deemed as the most appropriate region to conduct this survey.

An analysis of the available literature indicates that one of the greatest achievements of the post-1994 democratic government has been the increased participation rates of non-white race groups. Equal access, however, remains the challenge, since learners from poor socio-economic backgrounds continue to be underrepresented in tertiary education (Cardak & Givon, 2004). Despite the adoption of cooperative governance between government and higher education institutions to increase consultation, participation and transparency, access to the economically disadvantaged learners remains the concern (Cloete et al., 2002). It was hoped that the changes made in governance would provide an autonomous but accountable higher education system that is accessible to all. This has not been realised. This research intends that by investigating the perceived barriers to higher education among disadvantaged learners who are currently studying for their Matric, a greater understanding and therefore management of this precious resource can be facilitated. Policy failure may be a result of a poor understanding of the barriers that disadvantaged learners face when accessing higher

education. Engaging the affected party, namely disadvantaged Grade 12 learners, in dialogue that can stimulate the recognition of limitations in policy at both an institutional and national level, is deemed important. This study is therefore relevant in that it will attempt to study the perceptions of the constraints to accessing higher education institutions, by disadvantaged learners because it is believed that access and increased participation across all sectors of our community are essential. To fail to recognise this will disenfranchise and alienate whole groups within society, and hinder economic development. The findings of this research therefore has the potential to then assist in future inclusion programs and could enable schools and higher education institutions to break past injustices and empower learners from disadvantaged backgrounds to gain access to higher education and hence, a better standard of living.

AIMS

This research aims to investigate the perceived barriers to accessing or pursuing higher education in a group of Grade 12 learners from disadvantaged backgrounds within the Greater Johannesburg area. In particular, the study focuses on exploring disadvantaged learners' perceptions of the factors that impact on whether they choose to pursue some form of higher education following matriculation. The study focuses on possible financial, social, cultural and educational factors that could be impacting on their ability to access higher learning. Through examining these perceptions, this research attempts to provide an in-depth understanding from the perspective of learners in low-income communities of the types of challenges experienced by young people in negotiating their future career options or academic development in the context of social inequality. This will assist in determining whether the perspectives of these learners are aligned with some of the structural barriers to higher education.

STRUCTURE OF THE RESEARCH REPORT

The following is an outline of the structure of this research report. The report consists of six chapters, namely the introductory chapter, the literature review, the research method used, presentation of the findings, the discussion of the findings and the conclusion of the study.

Chapter 1, the current chapter, is an introduction to the report. The rationale, aims and structure of the report are detailed. This chapter serves to present to the reader an overall

understanding of the focus of the research by providing the reasons for the study and its intentions.

Chapter 2 presents a survey of the literature reviewed related to the transformation process in enrolments within higher education post-1994. The purpose of this review is to provide an overview of the existing knowledge, ideas and research related to the barriers that disadvantaged learners confront when attempting to access higher education.

The literature review attempts to introduce and define the factors affecting disadvantaged learners' pursuit of higher education. It looks at the structural changes made in post-apartheid South Africa and at structural weaknesses that could be central to the ambiguities between the formulation of policy and achievement of its goals.

This chapter then looks at the work of Paulo Freire, who made the term 'critical consciousness' famous, as a theoretical understanding of the education system and how inequalities within the system are perpetuated. The chapter concludes with definitions and identification of gaps within the literature that could be areas of further exploration.

Chapter 3 presents the methodology of the research report. It begins with the research questions that guide this study and then details the research design. The key characteristics of the participants are presented and the semi-structured interview process is explored. The procedure involved in gaining access to the participants is outlined and the data analysis methods are explained with reference to the thematic content analysis that was carried out. The researcher's reflexivity is discussed and finally, ethical issues pertaining to the study are described and management of these issues is clarified.

Chapter 4 presents the findings and discussion of the results of this research. This chapter describes the participants' perceptions of the barriers to accessing higher education through quotations from the interview transcripts. The data is presented under broad themes. These quotations within these themes are then interpreted and discussed to facilitate a better understanding of the findings. Each theme is then further explored and related to existing literature to identify areas of correlation and differences.

In *Chapter 5* the salient themes found are discussed and compared with other relevant research, and then linked with Paulo Freire's theory of conscientisation. The aim is to provide an in-depth understanding of the participants' perceptions and how these relate to policy transformation and nation building.

Chapter 6, the concluding section, makes recommendations for future intervention, as well as discussing the strengths and limitations of the study. Suggestions for future research endeavours are discussed, followed by closing comments.

This chapter has provided an overview of the aims and rationale of the research and an outline of the rest of the report. Chapter 2, which follows, will discuss the existing literature relating to various factors that impact on whether disadvantaged learners choose to pursue some form of higher education following matriculation. It will also look at whether parallels can be drawn between the perspectives of these learners and some of the structural barriers to higher education.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

INTRODUCTION

As South Africa moves further into its democracy, many socially engaged researchers and activists have conducted numerous research projects that focus on education. Much of these studies have focussed on communities where the challenges of poverty, oppressive conditions and social exclusion are pervasive. Through this, discussion about these conditions and their underlying causes has been stimulated so that consciousness about these issues and responses to them can be mobilised. This research hopes to significantly contribute to the discussion on higher education by examining how access to these institutions by members of the informal settlements in Lenasia, south of Johannesburg, is understood by the community.

This chapter provides a review of selected scholarly literature relevant to accessing higher education in South Africa through a system still plagued by social inequalities. Its aim is to provide an understanding and overview of the factors that could prevent or reduce the opportunities of Grade 12 learners from disadvantaged backgrounds in accessing tertiary learning institutions. This literature review will look at the structural changes made in post-apartheid South Africa to address these inequalities. It will also look at the structural weaknesses that could be important to the disjuncture between the formulation of policy and the achievement of its goals which has resulted in the perpetuation of unequal access to higher education.

The literature review will also attempt to introduce and define the factors affecting disadvantaged learners' pursuit of higher education. The argument is that social factors such as poverty, poor living conditions and poorly equipped schools, together with structural policies of the State and of higher learning institutions, may all constrain a learner's ability to access tertiary education. This then guides the focus of the study and determines the research questions.

Paulo Freire's theory of 'critical consciousness' will be explored as a theoretical understanding of the ways in which inequalities within an education system are perpetuated. The theme of critical consciousness is examined mainly with regard to the challenges to education systems and the various institutional processes by which individuals, groups and

societies are constituted in the modern world. The central constructs of Freire's theory are examined in order to provide a framework within which the perceptions of factors affecting the pursuit of higher education among disadvantaged Grade 12 learner can be understood.

Finally a synopsis of the literature will identify gaps in the literature, to inform further research in this field. The chapter closes with the working definitions of the concepts being researched.

THE LEGACY OF INEQUALITY IN SOUTH AFRICA

In order to understand the legacy of inequality in South Africa the policy of apartheid has to be discussed. According to Judge O'Regan (in Jagwanth, 2000) the policy of apartheid legally and systematically discriminated against black people in all aspects of social life. Black people were prevented from becoming owners of property or even residing in areas classified as 'white', which constituted nearly 90% of the land mass of South Africa. Senior jobs and access to schools and universities were denied to them; civic amenities, including transport systems, public parks, libraries and many shops, were also closed to black people. Instead, separate and inferior facilities were provided. The deep scars that these appalling policies have left are still visible in South Africa fifteen years after democracy.

Sociological theories on education expound that education is a tool used by societies to either oppress or uplift communities. The world over, societies have been plagued by social class inequalities in education. "Overlain by an ideology of white superiority and black inferiority, apartheid education divided education privilege and achievement by race," (Chisholm, 2005, p.204). The provision of education in South Africa was made according to strict segregation. Individuals were classified into four racial groups with an education department for each group. The inequalities between black and white education exist therefore as a legacy of apartheid. South African education is consequently not only plagued by social inequalities, but by racial inequalities too.

This could not have been more explicit than when the 1984 constitution was introduced, where higher education institutions were designated for the exclusive use of one of the four race groups: African, coloured, Indian and white. In 1985 a total of 19 higher

education institutions had been designated for whites, 2 for coloureds, 2 for Indians and 6 for Africans. Legal constraints were placed on these institutions to prevent them from enrolling students from another race group. The National Party government maintained that higher education institutions were legally an entity of the State and they further fragmented the system by drawing rigid distinctions between 'universities' and 'technikons'.

Bunting (1994) found that South Africa's higher education system was characterised by "unjustifiable inequalities and often as a consequence by serious inefficiencies" (p. 224). Policy development to reform higher education in the new South Africa was deemed essential to redress these inequalities and inefficiencies. Before even attempting to examine the policy changes made in post-apartheid South Africa therefore, it is important to identify some of the inequalities and inefficiencies inherited by the current higher education system, in order to gain a more insightful understanding of the critical issues that need to be addressed in the transformation of higher education.

Inequalities in higher education

According to Bunting (1994) apartheid had generated some key and totally unjustified inequalities in higher education that needs to be understood, the most important of these being access to higher education. Access has been completely skewed, largely because white students were enrolled to the exclusion of black South African students even though at the time white students constituted less than 13% of the population of South Africa (Bunting, 1994). This was designed to entrench the power and privilege of the ruling white minority.

Another inequality is student outputs, as most graduates from tertiary institutions were white and black students who did graduate did so from less recognised or "favoured institutions" (Bunting 1994, p. 224). The permanent academic posts at tertiary institutions in South Africa were filled mainly by white academics who served the interest of white learners. Gender inequality was extremely noticeable in that women were underrepresented at tertiary institutions and especially within certain fields of study and in the senior academic and administrative ranks.

The final key inequality identified by Bunting (1994) was that of institutional inequalities. He found that higher education institutions in South Africa were grouped either

as Assembly or non-Assembly institutions, which further disadvantaged black learners in that the Assembly institutions received better staffing resources and funding from the government as compared to non-Assembly institutions which were accessible to black learners.

These serious issues highlighted the need for redress of the South African higher education system and the challenges faced by post-apartheid policies. The challenge for the government of national unity was to unwind the legacy of apartheid and create a higher education system in which the principles of equity are satisfied.

Inefficiencies in higher education

Higher education has, according to Bunting (1994), inherited past inefficiencies that still plague them. He highlighted that the legacy of inefficiency left by apartheid in higher education was because the system had not been "fulfilling its objectives in the most cost effective way possible" nor had it been "meeting the goals and objectives which it should as a higher education system" (p. 226). His argument is that a coherent and reasonable theoretical framework underpinning the institutions were lacking, resulting in weak and dubious management and unequal distribution of resources with little accountability.

These concerns highlight the major and central issues that faced the new democratically elected South African government which has been intent on transforming the higher education system. As such, it has been noted that:

> South African education since 1990 has been part of a debate for fundamental change from the apartheid order to a just, non-racial democratic state. Schooling and selection for higher education are being challenged to meet goals of equity and development of the highly disadvantaged black majority of the population. (Herman, 1995, p.261).

Herman (1995) has highlighted the frenzied activities within the education system to effect change. Since the democratic elections of 1994, the restructuring of education and training has been a top priority for education authorities. The government has acknowledged that central to the activities of the South African society is education and training. This is so because education impacts on every family and constitutes the wealth of the country. For

education to fulfil its responsibility of empowering the nation, the government had to create a system that would open the doors of learning to all. However, South Africa had never had a truly national system of education and training and therefore the Department of Education and Training published a number of policy documents aimed at restructuring the education system.

TRANSFORMING THE HIGHER EDUCATION SYSTEM

1994 was undeniably a very important year for the people of South Africa. It saw the demise of the hated apartheid system and the initiation of a process for the establishment of a democratic state secured through the development of a Constitution in which basic civil and socio-economic rights were entrenched. A discussion document on education and training was first published by the African National Congress in January 1994. This discussion document was an attempt to draft a framework for education and training (ANC Policy Framework, 1994). The right to basic education and compulsory schooling was subsequently defined in the South African School Act (The DoE, 2006), making education a key social goal of the new government.

In the period after 1994 educational transformation became explicit in the formulation of new policies. These policies attempted to redress the inequalities in education by focusing on access to educational institutions and being "responsive to the political, social and economic needs of a post-apartheid country" (Cloete et al., 2004, p.270). The goal of these policies, according to Cloete et al. (2002), was to promote "diversification". Goedegebuure (1996) succinctly supports the case for diversity by saying:

> Diversity is seen as a good because it supposedly increases the range of choices for students, it opens higher education up to all of society, it matches education to the needs and the abilities of individual students, it enables and protects specialisation within the system, and it meets the demands of an increasingly complex social order. (Cloete et al., 2002 in p. 340).

The debate around transformation focused on two broad social goals: the achievement of equity in the higher education system, and the strengthening of the role of higher education in achieving national reconstruction and development. This early period of policy-making therefore had to look at redressing the inequalities at both an individual and institutional level in order to address these goals (Cloete et al., 2002).

Transformation at an institutional level

The National Commission on Higher Education (NCHE) was established by President Mandela in 1995 with a view to changing all facets of higher education. According to Mothatha (in Mda & Mothatha, 2000), the issues considered by The Commission were demographics, identities, structure, funding, governance, management, planning, programmes, size, qualification structure, as well as the development of intellectual roles of higher education in a new South Africa. A report, *A Framework for Transformation*, which the Green Paper on Higher Education Transformation (1997) was based and subsequently released in December 1996 on which the extensive investigation and recommendations made by the NCHE in the Green Paper culminated in the publishing of the White Paper 3 entitled *A Programme for the Transformation of Higher Education.* After much discussion and debate at Parliament, the transformation of higher education was promulgated in the Higher Education Act of 1997.

This Higher Education Act is based on the principles of White Paper 3 and aims to establish a single co-ordinated higher education system. According to Mothatha (in Mda & Mothatha, 2000) the Act is also meant to "restructure and transform programmes and institutions to respond better to the human resource, economic and development needs of the country, and to redress past discrimination and ensure representivity and equal access" (Mda & Mothatha, 2000, p.12).

The translation of this Act at an institutional level to redress past inequalities and inefficiencies is unambiguous. In a letter to principals of tertiary institutions in 1995, the former Minister of Education, Prof SME Bengu, articulated that:

> The Ministry had a responsibility to advocate government policy on higher education, to champion reform and transformation of the higher education sector by seeking 'redefinition of institutional missions, and reform of governance structures, admissions and personnel policies', and 'to ensure that the public investment in universities … is properly monitored and audited, so that the government is in a position to assess the effectiveness of such investment… (Pityana, 2002, p. 3).

Cloete et al. (2004) believes that the contention over the policy within the Ministry of Education and between the Ministries of Education and Finance resulted in this policy not being implemented. Hence the imbalances between historically advantaged and historically disadvantaged institutions have not been addressed.

Professor Kader Asmal who then became the Minister of Education in 1999, attempted to change this by incorporating the ex-homeland universities known as 'bush colleges' as regional campuses of the major established universities in South Africa. Chen (2004) notes that consolidation of the country's 36 universities and technikons into 21 has resulted in the loss of top jobs but that the standard of higher education, especially in the technical training institutes, increased.

In support of this, a study by Fuller, Pillay and Surer (1995) which was conducted in 1994 on literacy rates in South Africa, drew attention to the fact that black children suffer from the lowest quality schools and education. The Reconstruction and Development Plan (RDP) of 1994 attributed this 'destruction, distortion or neglect of the human potential of our country' to a system 'fragmented along racial and ethnic lines' (in Chisholm, 2005, p. 205). To address this at higher education level the RDP promoted rationalisation and reorganisation of these institutions. Many colleges in formerly homeland areas were closed and the urban universities, colleges and technikons were merged to address these needs. The RDP document on Higher Education thus contained clauses that affirm the importance of higher education in national development and knowledge advancement in the world. It acknowledged the legacy of apartheid in the structures and criticised the higher education system for its outmoded systems of governance and funding programmes that have led to student and institutional crises. A subsequent clause attempts to address how change should occur. It outlines the need for government to consult with significant stakeholders to appoint a higher education commission whose job would be to investigate and report on: national reconstruction and development; the structure of the system; access/selection and exclusion; the role of open learning and distance education; institutional governance and the governance of the system as a whole.

Although the policy process was in place to try and address the needs of higher education transformation, a number of conditions and developments within higher education represented fundamental challenges to the system and major obstacles to the achievement of policy goals. According to Number 14 (2000), the "higher education system and individual institutions manifest two different though connected kinds of problems and weaknesses" (p.4). These can be characterised as 'structural problems' (fundamental, long-standing, contextual) and 'conjunctural problems' (immediate, contextual).

Structural problems in higher education

An ANC information document, Number 14 (2000), explains that the structural problems faced by higher education institutions include the geographic location of institutions. Keeping the different races separate by the apartheid regime resulted in the establishment of institutions in rural Bantustans, which were not ideally situated. Fragmentation of the higher education system was also identified as a structural problem despite recommendations by the White Paper. Institutions continue to operate without meaningful collaboration with other institutions resulting in public universities and technikons competing with each other in the education market instead of operating as a unified coordinated higher education system. Also identified were major inefficiencies with regards to student throughput rates, graduation rates, student dropout, student repetition and the retention of failing students, and unit costs across the system. Alarming statistics show that 25% of new undergraduate students drop out of universities or technikons by the end of their first year of study and that only 13% of their cohort graduated in 1998 (Number 14, 2000).

Skewed patterns of distribution of students in various fields of study such as Science, Engineering and Technology (SET), Business and Commerce, and the Humanities and Education is another structural problem; as is the distribution of students in the various levels and fields of study - SET, Business and Commerce, and Humanities and Education. It was found that at certain institutions this pattern is skewed in terms of race and gender as well. The representation and distribution of academic and administrative staff also display poor patterns of race and gender which is another structural problem. Most institutions have extremely low research outputs and even the institutions that demonstrate a higher ratio of research outputs relative to other institutions have uneven levels of outputs. In 1998, about 65% of all publications recognised for subsidy purposes were produced by only six of the 21 universities. These same six institutions also produce close to 70% of South Africa's total masters and doctoral graduates. Achievement of policy goals is challenged by these weaknesses (Number 14, 2000).

Conjunctural problems in higher education

Conjunctural problems, according to Number 14 (2000) refer to the immediate and contextualized problems facing higher education. One of the most worrying factors is the decline in student enrolment within the public higher education sector. This decline is further

compounded by poor retention rates from first to later years of study. As a result, the overall participation rate in higher education for the age group 20-24 years stood at only 15% in 1999 (Number 14, 2000). As a direct result of the relationship between enrolment and funding many institutions were unable to fund their activities. The inability of many poor students to pay fees, as well as the institutions lack of capacity to collect fees, has resulted in increases in student debt. This is a problem that affects mainly, but not exclusively, historically disadvantaged institutions (HDIs) such as the University of Transkei (Imenda et al., 2002). Student dissatisfaction with these problems has resulted in many student protests which have disrupted higher learning over the years. This has opened the market for international, small single-purpose, private higher education institutions that are inadequately regulated in terms of registration, accreditation and quality assurance. Another conjunctural problem is the lack of strong governance, which results in the persistence of crises. The final problem identified by Number 14 (2000) is the sorely inadequate information systems at current higher education institutions, especially in relation to information on finance matters. This means that vital information of what and how to access funding for tertiary education is not efficiently disseminated to students. This results in increased student debt and eventually high drop out rates because students cannot afford their education.

The problems and weaknesses of higher education are extensive and varied. They will not disappear on their own or be overcome by the institutions on their own. They must be confronted at a national level and addressed with vigour.

Transformation at an individual level

Dropping racial barriers to admission at all educational institutions was the most significant factor in addressing inequalities at an individual level. It was only after this policy change that students could freely choose to apply at any educational institution they chose, resulting in a dramatic increase in student mobility and in black students in higher education (Chisholm, 2005).

The evidence available supported the belief that student enrolments in South Africa were on a steep upward trajectory. By 1994 the headcount enrolment for the university and technikons sectors had reached a total of more than 600 000, an increase of nearly 206 000 (or 52%) over the total for 1990. The increase in 1997 compared with the enrolment figure in

1993 was 127 000 (or 27%). The average annual increase in headcount enrolments between 1990 and 1997 was 4% (Number 14, 2000). Cloete et al. (2002) also shows that the proportion of black students in the total university enrolment increased from 32% in 1990 to 60% in 2000. According to the Socio Economic Report (2004), most higher education institutions had a majority of black students in 2000. In this year 55% of the students at universities were black, 31% were white, 8 % were Indian and 5% coloured.

The enrolment data available therefore suggests that the public higher education system has moved, in broad overall terms, towards the equity goals set by the 1997 White Paper. The averages show that by 2000, 73% of students in the public higher education system were black and 52% were female, compared with proportions of 52% of black students and 43% for female students in 1993. This shows that the public higher education system has made substantial moves during the 1990's towards the achievement of race and gender equity.

These gains however are not unambiguous. This achievement hides major inequities that persist in the sector. Number 14 (2000) has found that black and female students remain under represented in post-graduate programmes, as well as in all programmes in business and management, and in science, engineering and technology.

A further equity problem, which changing racial patterns seem to hide, is that of a decline in overall participation rates in South Africa's public higher education system. Changes in the racial distribution of student enrolments are found not to be the result of a major increase in the rate of participation among those who were previously excluded from the higher education system. They seem to originate primarily from a sharp decline in the enrolment of white students in the public higher education system. “White enrolments fell from a total of 215 000 in 1995 to 164 000 in 2000, a decline of 41 000 (or 19%) over this period” (Number 14, 2002, p. 5).

A further problem identified by Cardak and Givon (2004) is that many socio-economically disadvantaged learners are still not accessing higher education. Schuetze and Slowey (2002) in their study found that in ten OECD countries increased numbers have not resulted in wider access for all groups. They found that many sectors in communities are still

under-represented in higher education. These include older people without traditional entry qualifications, people from lower socio-economic groups, those living in remote or rural areas, those from ethnic minorities or immigrant groups. Policy goals globally have therefore not been fully realised (Poole, 2004).

Gender equity was another significant aim in addressing inequality at an individual level. A Gender Equity task team report to the Minister of Education in January 1998, recommended that a committee be established, a Gender Equity Unit (GEU), in the National Department of Education (DoE) and the provincial departments. However owing to budgetary constraints, the GEU was not established immediately, but the programme activities were initiated and managed by the directorate. Support by the directorate to the provincial departments on gender equity matters has been provided, and has established a network of provincial gender coordinators.

To ensure that the developments South Africa makes in respect to gender equity are in keeping with trends throughout Africa and the world, there has been coordination between the directorate and the United Nations Children's Fund. This involves networking in the Southern African Development Community countries and study visits to Botswana and Zambia by both provincial and national officials. The directorate has also been involved in conferences held in Washington DC on Girls' Education, in Rustenburg, North West, on Women in Science and Technology, and in Venda, Northern Province, on Eradicating Witchcraft Violence. The directorate has also participated in numerous day workshops held by the Centre for Human Rights at the University of Pretoria (DoE, 2009).

There is ongoing support for the Interbranch Gender Coordinating Committee in the national Department of Education, which was tasked to coordinate the National Women's Day celebrations on August 9. In view of this the directorate has taken initial steps towards formulating a broad equity policy framework, which was presented and discussed with all stakeholders, especially provincial departments, in 1999 (DoE, 2009).

Much effort and resources can be seen to have been invested in making education accessible to all the people of South Africa. Great gains have already been made but accessibility of higher education to socio-economically disadvantaged learners remains

unaddressed. It is therefore the aim of this research to investigate why these learners are still not accessing these institutions despite the leaps made nationally with policy transformation.

This section has provided information about the institutional and individual changes that have been affected by structural change in the hope of transforming higher education in South Africa. We now move to a study of relevant and corresponding research material regarding possible factors that could be preventing disadvantaged learners from accessing higher education. This review is deemed necessary to facilitate the understanding of the slow realisation of policy objectives in South Africa.

BARRIERS TO EQUALITY OF ACCESS AND PARTICIPATION IN HIGHER EDUCATION

There is widespread belief that education is basically a social 'good' and that equality of access, participation and outcome are all desirable. This study focuses on equality of access and participation. The deeper equality objective, notably equality of outcome, is not addressed even though it may be a more stringent measure of equality. It is felt that equality of outcome without equality of access and participation is impossible to achieve and therefore the focus on the more basic issues was decided upon.

Evidence from the literature in Ireland (Equality Studies Centre, UCD, 1995; Lynch & O'Riordan, 1998; O'Neill, 1992); Mozambique (Paraskeva in Hill & Rosskam, 2009); Venezuela (Muhr & Verger, 2008); and other African countries (WENR, 2006) show that precise barriers encountered by low-income working class students in entering higher education institutions are remarkably similar across the world. The literature review demonstrates that there are four groups of obstacles: economic barriers as the overriding obstacle to equality of opportunity defined in terms of equality of access and participation, social and cultural barriers as well as educational constraints.

Economic Barriers to Higher Education

Poverty is a social problem and according to the Marxian perspective is understood as "a system of inequality generated by a capitalist economy" (Haralambos, 1983, p.192). According to The Dinokeng Scenarios (2009), 63% of the African population in South Africa is poor. "The causes of poverty are linked closely to unemployment" (Lynch & O'Riordan,

1998, p. 451) and unemployment in South Africa is said to be growing at two percentage points per year (The Dinokeng Scenarios, 2009). Makiwane and Kwizera (2008) found in their study on the youth and their well being in South Africa, that a paradox between education and employment exists. They found that although a linear relationship generally exists between the level of education and employment, since 1995 the largest growth in unemployment has been among those with matriculation and tertiary education. African graduates have been worst affected and this has been related to the fields of study chosen and perceptions around the quality of education gained from historically disadvantaged institutions. McCord and Bhorat (2003, p. 8), point out, South Africa's unemployment rates are higher than those of "most developing countries in Latin America or Asia, and significantly higher … than those of the middle or higher-income countries". The study of Makiwane and Kwizera (2008) showed that the youth are disproportionately affected by unemployment in South Africa. They found that more than two thirds of youth between the ages of 18 and 35 years are unemployed. The worst affected being young people with low levels of education, women, rural youth and African youth. According to them unemployment has been linked to the inability of the economy to cope with the massive increase in the economically active population, particularly among women.

This inability of the economy to cope with employment demands results in an increase in low-income households whose struggle would be to make 'ends meet'. Paying for higher education would then be impossible, a 'luxury' that, if bought, would be at the expense of other family members and even at the expense of basic needs. The increase in tuition fees at higher education institutions and the "the relative decline of family income in the bottom quartile of the distribution" leads one to conclude that learners from low-income families will be credit constrained and therefore "strapped for cash" to access these institutions (Cardak & Givon, 2004, p. 23).

O'Neill (1992) showed that even the first step of getting the money for an application form for higher education was a barrier for some: "Having money for COA (Central Application Office) form can be a lot of money to ask for at home" (p.21). Lynch and O'Riordan (1998) found that "money is the bottom line on everything", as many households with limited income regarded expenditure on higher education for one child as a "luxury" which could only be bought at the expense of other family members (p.454). Lynch and O'Riordan (1998) further found that low income households view college as an impossibility

for working-class students that day-to-day issues are the priority and college is not a primary consideration. Lynch and O'Riordan (1998), Paraskeva (in Hill and Roskam, 2009) and Muhr and Verger (2008) found that community activists were keenly aware of the role that structural (state-managed) conditions and systems played in perpetuating inequalities across groups. The causes of poverty were linked closely to unemployment, low pay and lack of security.

In South Africa, despite the reduction of unemployment from 31% in 2003 to 23% in 2008, unemployment is still unacceptably high. Nearly a quarter of the working-age population looking for work is unsuccessful (The Dinokeng Scenarios, 2009). The 2008-2009 global economic crisis has further exacerbated unemployment, which has led to a drop in demand for primary exports in the resources sector. The Dinokeng Scenarios Team (2009, p.4) further found that the problem of unemployment in South Africa is mainly concentrated among "the young, among women, among the unskilled and among blacks". They found that there is a very high association between poverty and unemployment and that most of the unemployed are concentrated in the poorest households. Unemployment in the lowest-income quintile (fifth) is 72%, compared with just 7% in the top quintile (The Dinokeng Scenarios, 2009).

The global and local recession has further impacted on these statistics. Making ends meet for families in South Africa, as in other parts of the world, is becoming increasingly difficult. Higher education is a luxury that many homes cannot afford in this financial climate resulting in fewer young people accessing tertiary institutions and more poorly educated youth attempting to gain employment. Makiwane and Kwizera (2008) found that young people spend on average over a year looking for a job. When young people do find work, it is often temporary, poorly paid, under poor working conditions and with limited career prospects. At least a quarter of young people are employed in temporary positions and about two thirds work in the services sector. The Status of the Youth data shows a growing percentage of young people, particularly African and Coloured youth, work in the informal sector (in Makiwane & Kwizera, 2008).

The Dinokeng Scenarios (2009) also found that unemployment is closely linked to a lack of skills and education. The unemployment rate among those with university degrees is only 3%, for those with Matric it is 28%, but for those without Matric it is over 60%. This

shows that there is an extremely high rate of unemployment among the youth in South Africa. Over 50% in the 20-24 age categories are unemployed. The demographic "youth bulge" indicates that it will pose even more severe problems later on, in terms of labour market supply and social cohesion, as the generation of unskilled, unemployed youth grows older (The Dinokeng Scenarios, 2009, p. 2). The report further states that one of the most undesirable outcomes of youth unemployment is the rapid rise of petty crime and drug abuse in South Africa. This is further exacerbated by the high levels of violence inflicted on youth. A study by the HSRC (2007) indicates that 38% of youth have experienced violence at home and 15% at school, and that 57% of youth have considered committing a crime. This is further underscored by the Poverty Hearings conducted by the African Monitor in 2008, which linked youth unemployment and an increase in crime (NSFAS, 2009). Further the WEF Global Competitiveness Index 2008/09 reveals that South Africa ranks 88th in labour market flexibility, 123rd in flexibility of wage determination and 119th in poor labour - employer relations (The Dinokeng Scenarios, 2009). With a university enrolment rate of only 15%, we rate 93rd, placing our innovation potential at risk. Perversely though, there are numerous vacancies in the economy for skilled positions. The Dinokeng Scenarios team conclude that this "is testimony of the failure of our education and skills development systems to provide meaningful opportunities to our burgeoning youth" (The Dinokeng Scenarios, 2009, p. 4).

The second factor in the economic barriers to accessing and participating in higher education is that financially disadvantaged learners at school do not have the money to attend the better resourced schools and therefore may be deprived in the exposure that they get to prepare them for higher education. They would not have the money for tuition fees or extra lessons to assist them in areas of weakness, unlike their wealthier counterparts. This could disadvantage them in their ability to access higher education. Lynch and O'Riordan (1998) found that working-class children were economically disadvantaged and therefore unable to access "grinds" (private tuition), which affected their performance and rate of progression to higher education. She found that these children do not have the financial motivation to expect more educationally and that weekend courses that would assist poorer learners to 'honour' or improve their marks could not be attended due to financial difficulties at home. In South Africa 13 million people are now receiving social grants, hence poverty remains a deep and daunting challenge. The Dinokeng Scenarios (2009) found that about 40% of households still live below the poverty line, which according to the Treasury is estimated to

be about R480 per person per month. Poverty is closely linked to the structural problems of unemployment and the lack of skills; unemployment affects poor households most severely. According to this report hunger remains a common characteristic among poor people in South Africa. Testimonies from the African Monitor's 2008 Poverty Hearings consistently highlight that poor people still struggle with hunger and lack of nutrition. This affects their health and educational prospects, as well as reducing their chances of finding jobs.

Associated with economic constraints to accessing and participating in higher education is the lack of adequate resources for study among the economically disadvantaged. Lynch and O'Riordan (1998) found that living conditions are not amenable to effective studying. These authors found that lack of a quiet place to study, adequate heating, a proper place to work and access to study materials was a huge barrier to achieving the results necessary to progress to higher education (Lynch & O'Riordan, 1998).

The Dinokeng Scenarios (2009) cites a study by the Department of Housing that showed that about one million people a year migrate to the cities. This has resulted in about 3 000 new informal settlements since 1996. Although the government has built about 2.6 million low-cost houses since 1994, the backlog, according to the Department of Housing, currently still stands at about 2 million (The Dinokeng Scenarios, 2009). Compounding this is "the lack of skills at local government level, coupled with political patronage and corruption, which has resulted in poor service and infrastructural delivery. Today, the conditions of peri-urban poverty and squalor, worsened by unchecked migration, have created a powder keg of civil violence and unrest waiting to explode" (The Dinokeng Scenarios, 2009, para. 31). Johannesburg houses 7.74% of the total population in South Africa, the highest in the country, because of the rapid rate of urbanisation in this city. The total unemployment in Johannesburg is also the highest in South Africa at 9.51% (State of the Cities Report, 2006, p. 8). This means that in South Africa the rate of urbanisation is related to higher unemployment and therefore poverty. This level of poverty as reported by the Dinokeng Scenarios team (2009) highlights the extremely harsh living conditions many Matric learners experience, which is bound to impact negatively on the performance of these students at Matric level, making access to higher education even more difficult.

The pressure on students from low income families to leave school and contribute financially to the family budget is an important reality that also needs to be considered.

Lynch and O'Riordan (1998) found that remaining in the educational system places huge financial strain on disadvantaged families, so the sooner the child gets out of the system the less the pressure on the family budget, as school fees, books, materials, transport, etc. are costly and therefore the pressure to leave school is great. Most families prefer that learners attain Matric and then leave school to work so that the family budget can be increased. Chisholm (2005) has identified the feelings of "shame and humiliation imposed by the inability to pay even meagre school fees" as a pervasive feature in the lives of the poor. These feelings could contribute to feelings of apathy and demotivation, making higher education a distant dream. Social exclusion emanating from poverty could result in information gaps and lack of confidence, which could also affect learners in accessing higher education.

Paraskeva (in Hill et al., 2009) and Lynch and O'Riordan (1998) found that economic constraints affect the ambitions and aspirations for the future in students who are from these backgrounds. Lynch and O'Riordan (1998) found that good financial circumstances help learners dream, while for the poor coping is a challenge. Poorer people are pre-occupied with paying bills and making ends meet, which precludes time, money or energy to encourage educational ambitions. Insecure and low incomes impact negatively on people's personal hopes and aspirations through the creation of a sense of inferiority and social exclusion. Community activists are very vocal about how poverty creates a culture in which people lack a sense of ownership of powerful institutions in society like higher education. This lack of belonging lowers people's hopes and aspirations for themselves and their children. Furthermore, the social exclusion that emanates from poverty creates information gaps where people are unaware of how education functions in terms of accessing and participating in higher education (Number 14, 2000).

Social and Cultural Barriers to Higher Education

According to Marx (in Haralambos, 1983) the interest of the ruling class is always promoted and affirmed. This affirmation occurs at the expense of the lower classes by devaluing their "culture, values and mores" (Lynch & O'Riordan, 1998, p. 460). This in turn could be the reason for lowered educational motivation in low-income groups.

Lynch and O'Riordan (1998) suggest that parental attitudes towards education could result in "hostile and indifferent" feelings towards education and that if parents are

unsupportive of education, or becoming educated, then this could result in learners from these homes not accessing higher education. They further found that "institutionalised devaluation" of the working - class culture is partly responsible for lowered educational self-esteem and hence lowered aspirations and expectations for higher education. These researchers also found that higher education was a remote and alien institution to poor families (Lynch & O'Riordan, 1998). Parents knew very little about tertiary institutions, which created fears and anxieties which exacerbated practical difficulties. Many learners in poorly resourced schools do not have access to information about universities and colleges or technikons. This lack of information could result in fear and apprehension about this very foreign institution, which is therefore likely to be avoided. This links to the finding that tertiary institution are so different, foreign and unfamiliar that many learners from poorer backgrounds fear isolation by the "rich, brainy and moneyed students" (Lynch & O' Riordan, 1998). Many working-class learners who do access higher education were found to lack confidence in their own abilities. Lynch and O'Riordan (1998) found that many working-class students felt that they were not bright enough or that they did not belong, resulting in loneliness, separateness and feelings of inferiority and intimidation.

The Department of Education's language policy stipulates that pupils have a right to be taught in a language of their choice, and states that they must inform the school which language they wish to be taught in when applying for admission (DoE, 2009). Schools, in turn, are expected to take their requests into account in an effort to promote multilinguism. According to this Language in Education Policy (LiEP) of 1997 only official languages may be used for instruction at schools. The first language of the school and one other approved language have to be studied by all pupils from Grade 3 onwards (DoE, 2009). According to this policy language cannot be used as a barrier to admission. The promotion of multilingualism is compulsory, obliging all school governing bodies to stipulate how multilingualism will be promoted at their school. Finally, failing a language will result in failing a grade (Mda in Mda & Mothatha, 2000).

In light of this, Imenda, Kongolo and Grewal (2002, p. 127) note that "language is an important aspect of the political education discourse in South Africa" and that students who found the language at an institution unfamiliar, would opt not to attend that institution. Many South African learners do not have English as their mother tongue, which is the primary language in higher education institutions, hence an unfamiliar language, and a reason not to

attend. Louw (2002) found in her study at the Technikon Northern Gauteng that students often did not speak in their mother tongue, despite the fact that language problems are offered as an excuse for poor performance. However she did find that the safety and security presented in small groups allowed them to use their mother tongue, while amongst the larger population they used English so as to practise (Louw, 2002). This highlights how foreign, tertiary institutions are, to many South African learners. This shows that it is also important to consider social and cultural factors in the discussion of barriers to accessing higher education for disadvantaged learners.

Educational Constraints to Higher Education

"Community activists perceive educational institutions as being inflexible and unresponsive to the needs of working-class students" (Lynch & O'Riordan, 1998, p.464). They further claim that the ethos of schools and colleges are middle class and that the curriculum did not reflect working-class values, mores and lifestyle. Teachers from middle-class backgrounds did not understand working-class students and this cultural difference can create a clash between the two cultures. This could result in feelings of alienation and an attitude of indifference towards education and particularly higher education.

The fee-paying policy of South Africa has resulted in "richer public schools" that have retained privileged status, and poorer schools struggling to meet their demands (Chisholm, 2005, p.211). Poor performance at school could be the result of a lack of resources as basic as textbooks, which could result in an inability to access higher education. The subjects at poorer schools would also be limited to the resources available to the institution. This could mean that subjects such as Maths and Science may not be offered. These are the subjects needed to access high paying careers, easily available jobs, and easily obtainable bursaries.

The lack of material resources impacts on the quality of education provided to learners as many disadvantaged schools also lack extramural facilities which are deemed vital for the overall development of a learner, especially the development of self - confidence. This lack of confidence could prevent learners from even considering tertiary education.

Lynch and O'Riordan (1998) found in their study that students from disadvantaged schools felt that the quality of the education that they received was not equal to that of other schools. Since the school is a vital mediator in the educational process, due concern for this difference must be given. It was found that subject choices and subject facilities like laboratories differed between advantaged and disadvantaged schools and that there was a higher transfer rate from advantaged schools to tertiary institutions. They also found that disadvantaged schools were regularly disrupted by disciplinary problems, which can become an important obstacle to learning (Lynch and O'Riordan, 1998).

Disadvantaged schools were also found to have a higher turnover rate of teachers than privileged schools (Lynch and O'Riordan, 1998). In South Africa teacher dissatisfaction within the government sector results in teachers taking regular breaks, changing schools and moving into private schools, resulting in disruption of learners' progress (Chisholm, 2005). Lynch and O'Riordan (1998) also found that middle-class teachers' expectations of working - class students were low, and since teacher opinions are important for learners to excel this was seen as a huge barrier to accessing higher education.

Disadvantaged government schools fail to offer information about tertiary institutions and this inaccessibility to such information can develop great anxiety and ungrounded fear (Oreopoulos, 2009). Due to this lack of information many learners do not know how to apply, when to apply, and how to access financial aid. Tertiary learning then becomes insurmountable and beyond the realm of the disadvantaged learner. These factors could therefore also be an important barrier to access higher education by disadvantaged learners.

The possible barriers to equal access to higher education have been reviewed in this section to help facilitate the understanding of factors that impact on progression rates from disadvantaged schools and communities to higher education. In order to contextualise the research reviewed, the theory of Paulo Freire will be discussed in the next section in order to gain an understanding of how education can be used by the State to either generate advancement and social cohesion or oppress communities for economic gain.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

According to Lynch and O'Riordan (1998) a theoretical model that has enduringly tried to explain social-class related inequalities in education is structuralism. Within this paradigm

Marxism is a dominant tradition. Marxism purports that "the role of education in reproducing class inequality is seen as one of structural inevitability" (Bowles & Gintis, 1976, p. 446). But structures are dynamic and this dynamism stems from the active role played by collective agents within structures. These collective actors are visible at State level within the education sector and work actively to determine the form and substance of the educational institution. Gambetta (in Lynch & O'Riordan, 1998, p.470) observed that:

> Educational decisions are the joint result of three main processes: what one can do, … what one wants to do and, indirectly, … the conditions that shape one's preferences and intentions. They are the result partly of causality and partly of intentionality.

In order to understand why only a "relatively few number of young working-class students" gain entry into higher learning institutions, in South Africa, a broadly structuralist approach to the analysis is adopted (Lynch & O'Riordan, 1998, p.450). Paulo Freire (1921 - 1997), a Brazilian educator, developed within this framework a philosophy of education that emphasised the need to provide indigenous populations with an education which was simultaneously new and modern (rather than traditional) and anti-colonial (not simply an extension of the culture of the coloniser) (Hope & Timmel, 2003). Freire's work has been widely used by those who have been involved in the struggle for social justice. This orientation towards changing institutions and systems that precipitate inequality is viewed as being able to identify and name the agents responsible for particular outcomes and focus public attention on the collective bodies and powerful partners in education.

Post-1994, the adoption of co-operative governance as the central principle underpinning the relationship between government and institutions, raised high hopes for increased consultation, participation and transparency for higher education policy processes. The Council on Higher Education (CHE) was accepted by the Minister of Education and is seen as the structure which can mobilize transformative action (Cloete et al., 2002). Freire's theoretical framework allows for the identification of particular structural barriers by relevant community members, and then identifies the relevant state structure so as to effect transformation. This means that the barriers to accessing higher education can be identified by the learners and then be presented to the CHE to effect transformation.

Paulo Freire's theory has been chosen for the purpose of this research because the most important ideas in his work can help understand the struggle to change an unjust situation. The writings and debates of this Brazilian educator became very influential in the field of development education. Development education in Latin America, the Philippines and South Africa is known as "popular education". 'Popular education' is a community effort to acquire existing knowledge and build the new knowledge to reshape society, so that all will have the opportunity to live a full life (Hope & Timmel, 2003).

The Freirian approach to education emphasises popular participation as a form of cultural emancipation. This entails learning about the contexts present in an environment that people need to recognize in order to initiate the specific actions necessary to overcome the oppressive elements of their situation (Freire, 1996). In the context of South Africa, access to higher education has been identified as a major challenge for the country. Government's efforts post-1994 has therefore been to change policy and implement change through this in order to facilitate equal access to all South Africans. The Deputy - Minister of Education in 2006, Enver Surty, reconfirmed that the National Plan for Higher Education (NPHE) has identified as a key objective and goal of transformation, "the restructuring of the higher education landscape to transcend the fragmentation, inequalities and inefficiencies of the apartheid past and to enable the establishment of South African institutions consistent with the vision and values of a non-racial, non-sexist and democratic society" (Surty, 2006, p. 2). This relates to the two broad social goals identified by the National Committee for Higher Education (NCHE) as the achievement of equity in the higher education system, and the strengthening of the role of higher education in achieving national reconstruction and development (Cloete et al.)

Statistics show that although an increase in participation has rapidly occurred it has not been matched by the participation rates of the economically disadvantaged nor has it been matched by "concomitant increased investment in infrastructure and human capacity and improvement in the success and throughput rates of students" (Surty, 2006, p. 1). Achievement of these goals has therefore been proven to be a challenge in itself to the fledgling democracy in South Africa. Freire's theory on radical transformation allows for an effective framework to facilitate the understanding of how these goals can be achieved. Freire

believes that for transformation in education to occur effectively key principles need to be understood by major stakeholders (Surty, 2006). In South Africa this would refer to government, higher education institutions, society and communities.

"Popular education", as Freire explains, is not just an individualistic academic exercise where people try to obtain high qualifications for themselves as promoted by traditional western education. "Popular education" is much more encompassing of the society where the potential and energy of each person in the community is recognised (Hope & Timmel, 2003). People are empowered to make their full contribution to the process of building a new society in which the fundamental human needs of people are met.

Transformative education, according to Freire, is therefore based on *hope*, hope that it is possible that life can change for the better. For the poor people of the world, "the way things are" is not satisfactory and more importantly it is not the only way things can be, therefore transformative education must be based on a vision of a new, more just society (Hope & Timmel, 2003, p.16). Freire believes that for this to occur change must be 'radical', which means that the roots or core values of the society on which structures like tertiary institutions are based must be reviewed. The dominant values of greed and control for material possessions and power over people and things must be transformed by tapping into the much deeper values of cooperation, justice and "concern for the common good" (Hope & Timmel, 2003). The process of transformation therefore includes both action and reflection and Freire contends that development and education cannot be separately processed but must be two sides of the same coin (Freire, 2002).

Torres (1998) asserts that Freire never separated theory from practice. He says that Freire's notion of democracy entails the notion of a democratic citizenship in which agents are active participants in the democratic process. This means that they are able to choose their representatives and monitor their performance. Torres (1998) explains that these are not only political but pedagogical practices too because the construction of the democratic citizen implies the construction of a pedagogic subject. This means that individuals are not, by nature themselves, ready to participate in politics; they have to be educated in democratic politics in order for them to participate. If the masses are not educated in this way then participation will not be equal and imbalance in society will persist. Citizens will not know how or why they should oppose existing structures or reform policies because the "immature are brought to

identify with the principles of the mature members of society" (Torres, 1998, p.2). According to McCowan (2006) awareness of the oppressive nature of contemporary society can only occur when one becomes the victim of unemployment or some other mishap. He explains that people are trained to be oblivious to the plight of others, to fail to see the hundreds of thousands who suffer from homelessness, lack of medical care, and wage slavery. He contends that this age of repression encourages people to pursue their own interests, with no feeling of solidarity and hence no possibility of concerted effort to overcome the oppressive conditions. The rapid development of a two-class society is accepted as perfectly normal with new billionaires being created every year while millions of workers are laid off, denied welfare, and their tax money stolen by wealthy looters in such scams as the savings and loan fraud, the Mexican "loan" scandal, and the IMF repayment to wealthy investors who suffered from the Asian stock market crash (Smith, 2002). This lack of awareness results in apathy and the unwillingness to change the status quo. As Freire (1996, p. 191) explains:

> How can the oppressed, as divided, unauthentic beings, participate in developing the pedagogy of their liberation? Only as they discover themselves to be 'hosts' of the oppressor can they contribute to the midwifery of their liberating pedagogy. The pedagogy of the oppressed is an instrument for their critical discovery that both they and their oppressors are manifestations of dehumanization.

Freire (2002) therefore promoted transformative education which he said can materialise in society through the notion of 'conscientisation' or education for critical consciousness. Freire's work in this is important because it raises issues of how Western education systems impose on ex-colonial societies a pedagogy that he calls anti-dialogic because it views humans as passive and produces a "culture of silence" or "uncultured of silence". In this silence humans are made to feel inferior, dependent and ignorant (Lusted, 1978). No meaningful exchange of ideas is made and instead knowledge is 'banked' in the empty heads of inert recipients. Freire's ideology of educators utilizing this "banking style" to deposit knowledge into subjects without providing meaning to them or considering their contexts can only result in failure. Freire (1996, p.55) identifies that "many political and educational plans have failed because their authors designed them according to their own personal views of reality, never once taking into account the audience to whom it was directed". Freire (1979) argues therefore that most political, educational and communication interventions fail because they are designed by technocrats based on their personal views of reality. He views the target population for whom the interventions are directed as being unheard and not

considered. He claims that this is dehumanising, as the receptacles of these education interventions are seen as empty deposits to be filled with knowledge from the experts (Freire, 1979).

To counteract this oppressive tool, Freire posits his notion of critical consciousness. Education for him is therefore political as he argues that political neutrality in education masks the way education is used in the distribution of power and social allocation in society (McCowan, 2006). Freire holds that dialogic education promotes the process of active transformation of the world and the development of critical thinking. Dialogic thinking is therefore a form of praxis, i.e. a theory of oppression and a practice of liberation (McPeck, 1981).

At a microcosmic level Freire's concept of pedagogy refers to the teaching approach where students are encouraged to question and challenge the ideas that dominate their learning, so that students can then achieve critical consciousness (Freire, 1996). This implies that they are aware of and constantly challenging oppressive factors in their education. An essential feature of Freire's pedagogy of critical consciousness is the necessity to engage oneself in conflict. He actually asserts that "conflict is the midwife of consciousness" and engagement itself is an educative process (Freire, 1979).

In order to further comprehend Freire's argument one needs to look at his theories and perceptions regarding oppression, society and consciousness. Freire (2002) is seen to hold two views of mankind. The first is that human beings are flexible and adjustable objects, while the second view suggests that human beings are independent subjects that can transcend and recreate their world. Human beings in this view are seen as subjects that can think and reflect for themselves, thus Freire proposes "that humans are subjects in and with the world" (Freire, 1979, p. 102). This view proposes that there is a dialectic between subjectivity and objectivity in the interaction of human beings and their world, with consciousness modifying and being modified by external reality. This became the starting point for Freire's theory of 'conscientisation'.

Conscientisation is Freire's theory of how liberation can be achieved in society through the use of political education. He believes that conscientisation is the process of gaining critical awareness as a means of transforming society:

> To surmount the situation of oppression, people must first critically recognize its causes, so that through transforming action they can create a new situation, one which makes possible the pursuit of a fuller humanity. (Freire, 1979, p.29)

Gajardo (1991) further explains this theory by saying that conscientisation is a process of developing a sense of being a subject that can intervene in external reality. The conscientised person, according to Gajardo (1991, p. 40) is "subject of the processes of change, actor in the management and development of the educational process, critical and reflexive, capable of understanding his or her reality in order to transform it." Three stages in this process have been identified by Freire (1979), with the learner moving from magical to naïve and finally to critical consciousness. Roberts (1996) however found that in Freire's later work these three steps were not fixed but seen as an ever-evolving process because the constantly changing world requires a continuous effort to reinterpret reality. The learning process Freire emphasises is one of praxis, a dialectic of reflection and action. Freire maintains that the gaining of critical consciousness will not of itself transform the world: "this discovery cannot be purely intellectual but must involve action; nor can it be limited to mere activism, but involve serious reflection" (Freire, 2002, p. 47). In addition, Freire believes that conscientisation occurs in the context of the collective, in mutually supportive horizontal relationships, not in isolation.

According to McCowan (2006), there are two key pedagogical features in the process of conscientisation: *dialogue* and *problematisation. Dialogue,* in Freire's conception, is much more than verbal interaction. The mono-directional transmission of knowledge from teacher to student, the so-called *banking* education in traditional education, is seen to be ineffective. Freire believes that conscientisation can only be achieved through a dialogical encounter, where the student is fully involved in the educational process. This is the fundamental difference, according to McCowan (2006), between Freire's concept of education and that associated with the state-socialist movements of the twentieth century. The state-socialist movements are an attempt to 'conscientise' the masses, making them aware of their exploitation at the hands of the bourgeoisie, yet this is a transmission of pre-established content with little engagement with the learners' conception of reality. As such, in Freire's view, it cannot fully educate even if the information transmitted is itself 'correct'.

The approach of dialoguing with the target audience in order to raise consciousness of their situation is seen to be empowering, according to Freire (1996), because human beings are not universally aware of their potential to transform the outside world due the fact that they are "immersed" in their reality. This he believes is even truer of 'oppressed' peoples, who believe that their poverty and oppression is inescapable and somehow fated. Freire states:

> In order for the oppressed to be able to wage the struggle for their liberation, they must perceive the reality of oppression not as a closed world from which there is no exit, but as a limiting situation which they can transform. (Freire, 1979, p.31)

Problematisation involves the presentation of learners' reality so as to reveal its problems or contradictions. This allows learners to distance themselves from their immediate situation, and gain a critical perspective on it. Freire emphasises that education must start from learners' own experience of the world. Accordingly, "the point of departure must always be with men and women in the 'here and now', which constitutes the situation within which they are submerged, from which they emerge, and in which they intervene. Only by starting from this situation – which determines their perception of it – can they begin to move" (Freire, 2002, p. 66). This problem posing method of education contrasts the 'banking style' system of education, which has been criticised for viewing individuals as empty receptacles into which information is deposited. Freire therefore suggests a more co-operative approach to educating the individual. In *The Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, he suggests that a shift of power from teacher to student be facilitated within the classroom situation. Freire proposes that the teacher should invite students to "think critically about the subject matter, the learning process itself and their society" (Shor, 1987, p.25). This method is termed "problem posing" which is a form of education where learners develop their power to perceive critically the way they exist in the world. They come to see the world not as a static reality, but as a reality in process and in transformation. Freire (1979) suggests that this method starts from the life situation and the reality of the particular individual or groups of individuals. He suggests that by posing a problem, individuals are able to ask questions regarding different factors that influence their lives. He proposes that their life situation should be turned into a problem - posing situation whereby dialogue is evoked.

In the context of economically disadvantaged learners accessing higher education in South Africa, Freire's theory can be understood in terms of politics and liberation. Students or learners are for Freire key factors in developing critical consciousness. If we look at the

South African tertiary institutions and the policy changes currently being effected, we find that the students referred to by Freire can be likened to the target population of this study. Freire proposes that like academic education, education around accessing higher education also needs to adopt a more participatory approach, whereby students can be considered and heard from when designing and formalising policies around access and participation at tertiary level. Furthermore, Freire argues that a problem-posing method should be adopted in order to help the students to develop meaning around gaining access to tertiary institutions that can be related to themselves and their lives. For example, it would be proposed that tertiary institutions and Matric teachers pose questions to the learners about the difficulties of accessing tertiary institutions to get them to reflect critically on their own beliefs and concerns regarding access. By adopting this approach, it is anticipated that the learners will begin to question their perceptions and ideas with regard to themselves and question whether they do in fact want to be part of tertiary education. This kind of consciousness-raising is created so that debate and discussion can be evoked from the learners.

In facilitating access to higher education by disadvantaged learners in South Africa, the Freirian pedagogy is therefore described as a method that engages participants in problem solving and in so doing, the development of feelings of competence and control over their own behaviour (Dalrymple & Preston-Whyte, 1995). Thus just as a teacher in the classroom poses problems derived from student life, social issues and academic subjects in a mutually created dialogue it is proposed that access to higher education should involve the recipients in a mutually created dialogue too. The aim of adopting this approach is to ensure that the Matric learners be a part of the construction and review of policies that impact on their access to tertiary institutions.

In terms of the context of this research, dialogue can be understood in terms of a conversation between higher learning institutions, policy makers (designers), secondary learning institutions and Matric learners from disadvantaged backgrounds (the target population). In Freirian terms “dialogue” refers to a horizontal interaction between policy designers and the audience (Freire, 1979). This relationship is emphasised as it needs to be interchangeable with both parties learning from each other. The parties enter into dialogue with one another on an equal basis as a way of learning about each others’ realties and contexts. This interaction gives rise to an exchange of information where a general problem can come to the surface (Freire, 1979). In this research if the policy designers act as group

facilitators and the Grade 12 learners who are the target population as group members, a dialogue can emerge with the aim of understanding the problem of unequal access so that effective solutions can be arrived at. Freire (1979) identifies this as an essential method of understanding the needs of a group in society and then developing a policy based on their own reality. This in turn proves to the group members that their contributions have been considered and applied in the designing of an intervention. The target population can then relate to the rules and laws more effectively as it would be more appropriate and appealing. This will in turn diffuse uncertainty and fatalism in the target population. Freire identifies the need to interact with the target population and obtain an understanding into their world. He highlights that through horizontal communication one can achieve praxis (Gadotti, 1994).

Freire's principles appear to address the idea of liberating the target population and empowering them with information. The need for emancipation through education is most relevant in the context of South Africa. The population of South Africa is viewed as oppressed by social constraints such as HIV and AIDS, illiteracy, poverty, crime and little governmental intervention (Parker, 2006). According to Makiwane and Kwizera (2008), of all the health conditions associated with young people, HIV/AIDS is the most critical. HIV/AIDS is of importance not only because young people are most vulnerable to infection, but also because there is growing consensus that the best way to halt the spread of AIDS is to focus on youth and to prevent new infections (UNAIDS, 2002). Abt associates estimated in 2001 that over 60% of HIV infections in South Africa occurred before the age of 25 years (Leclere-Madlala 2002, p. 21), and an extensive international study of HIV/AIDS and youth maintains that more than half of those newly infected with HIV today are between 15 and 24 years old (UNAIDS 2002, p. 5). There is little doubt that HIV is the biggest health challenge currently facing young people in South Africa.

Emancipation from this situation is said to lie in education. Freire (1996) identifies the need for cooperation between policy designers and the target population (disadvantaged communities) so that dialogue is created and a scrutiny of the target population's needs can be effected. Freire proposes that by doing this the policy designers will be able to address the needs of a very large portion of the Matric student population. Freire (1996) also suggests that the policy designers use a problem posing approach to induce a discourse around the topic, in this case, access to higher education by disadvantaged learners. Freire (1996) argues that by creating a discourse the target population is able to reflect on their own lives and

develop their own meanings and understandings of the topic so that their learning can be most effective. Freire (1996) suggests that if these principles are operationalised, praxis can be achieved and a more just, equal and accessible tertiary education sector can be attained so that university and college does not become the luxury of the wealthy and privileged.

A major criticism levelled at Freire's pedagogy is his opposition to the principle of curriculum (Gadotti, 1994; Taylor, 1993). Freire emphasises the importance of the pedagogical features of dialogue and problematisation. Taylor (1993) argues that this becomes difficult when one looks at the need to follow a common curriculum when teaching. Sparks (2007) explains that students to whom "knowledge is not transferred" (Freire's preference) experience a kind of poverty of the mind and spirit, because they do not possess the "shared knowledge," the "cultural literacy" of those who came before them and can therefore not "stand on their intellectual shoulders" (Hirsch, 1987, p.2-5). Secondly, Sparks (2007, p.4) highlights that such learning in a vacuum makes the young and ignorant "easy prey for those who propose interpretations of the world that are shallow and illusory - false ideologies." According to Sparks (2007), the educational method proposed by Freire will leave his students deprived of fundamental learning, which will result in their being unable to raise intelligent objections to the "latest hawkers of poorly formulated ideas" (p. 6). Sparks (2007, p. 4) continues that these learners would have no "pantry of the mind" from which to "withdraw inconvenient facts that do not align themselves with the 'medicine show' explanations of reality that offer a cure-all for every social ill. Thus they are easily led, or rather misled, to embrace the latest political nostrum." Gadotti (1994) also suggests that at times Freire's principles are quite extreme in their approach. He finds that Freire's work can be uncompromising or unchanging and extreme.

Despite the criticisms levelled at Freire's theory it is felt that Freire's ability to link education and transformation in an attempt to overcome oppression and injustice provides greater understanding of how change can be effected in a society carrying a legacy of apartheid. Freire provides important insights relating to the wider pedagogical implications of political education, and the opening of possibilities for radical change. His theory also provides insight into the possible reasons for the slow translation of policy formulation in South Africa into equal access and participation.

SUMMARY

The long road to transforming higher education in South Africa from an apartheid past where segregation, division and separation at all institutional levels was legalised so as to disempower and devalue the largest part of the population in favour of a minority few, has been briefly tracked at the beginning of this review.

The inequalities and inefficiencies relating to higher education inherited from the past regime were looked at to provide basic information for the understanding of the immense task the government of democracy had in order to effect change to this vital institution, vital to the development of the country socially and economically. Literature was then reviewed relating to the transformation made by government at an institutional and individual level so as to track the changes post-1994.

Different studies were then reviewed to gain insight into the barriers that could prevent disadvantaged learners from gaining access to higher education. Interestingly the barriers to accessing higher learning by low income learners in different parts of the world were found to be similar and in agreement. The economic, socio-cultural and educational constraints were reviewed for clarification and understanding.

Paulo Freire's theory of the pedagogy of the oppressed was used to try and conceptualise and provide a framework of understanding for how transformation can be more equitably achieved so that all members of the South African society can have access and participate in higher learning.

This review of the literature made it evident that the government is continuously attempting to equalise access to higher education but their efforts seem to fall short of their goals. The reason for this may be the lack of research conducted with the target population who would be best suited to inform the policies of change.

GAPS IN THE LITERATURE

Institutional changes are well documented in the literature showing the progress made from the discussion document of the ANC in 1994 to the changes affected by the Blade Nzimande's Department for Higher Education of the new 2009 Government of National Unity. Access to higher education is also well documented when relating to racial, gender

and disability yet very little is found on access by economically disadvantaged learners to higher learning. Statistics on the changes in student profiles at university, college and technikon are available and to a certain extent poor learners accessing such institutions are shown, yet very little literature exists on what and how these learners and communities feel about tertiary institutions. As Freire expounds, for radical transformation to occur and be effective the members of the community that are marginalised must be part of the process of change. Dialogue with them needs to be opened and they need to be engaged in the issues and changes so that meaningful amendments can be made. Understanding of how these communities feel and think may help to provide increased knowledge of the needs that poorer communities have in accessing higher education and in this way the relevant structures in society can be informed and mobilised to make the changes necessary to make access to higher education free and fair to all in South Africa.

WORKING DEFINITIONS

It now becomes important to define the constructs being investigated in this research.

Perception according to Roediger, Rushton, Capaldi and Paris (1984) is the process of interpreting and understanding information. Webster (1992) concurs with this definition saying that it is an interpretation or impression based on one's understanding of something.

Higher education refers to all post - Matric educational institutions, namely university, college and technikon.

Disadvantaged learners refer to learners being placed in unfavourable circumstances. For the purpose of this study the unfavourable circumstances refer to the poor living conditions i.e. whose family live within the low socio - economic group and reside in an informal settlement.

Barrier is defined in this research as an obstacle or constraint that would prevent these learners from gaining access to institutions of higher education.

Black in this research refers to the apartheid category 'African' because access to education for African people during the apartheid era was very restricted and educational policies post-1994 have tried to address these inequalities.

CONCLUSION

The literature points to the critical importance of attempting to discover the barriers that disadvantaged Matric learners have in preventing them from accessing higher education. The consequences of our youth from disadvantaged backgrounds not accessing higher education are far reaching. Unemployment, increased abject poverty or perpetuation of the cycle of poverty, crime, lack of skilled black labour and therefore a depressed economy are some of the areas that would be impacted if South Africa's disadvantaged Matric learners do not access higher education. It can be seen from the literature review that South Africa is attempting to shake off past injustices, especially in education, and to provide equal opportunity for all. Much effort and money has been invested in this by way of policy formulation. With reference to accessing higher education, policy has to some extent been successful, resulting in greater enrolment of black students into higher learning institutions. However the continued lowered participation rates of disadvantaged learners in these institutions are concerning. The 'elitism' of higher education continues to perpetuate past injustices and until the reasons for this are known, the struggle for change cannot occur. Until we dialogue with the affected people the process of transformation cannot occur. This research will therefore aim to "generate" the perceptions disadvantaged learners have about the barriers to accessing higher education (Freire, 2002). It is hoped that this will inform change and policy review within the education system so that meaningful transformation can occur.

CHAPTER 3: METHOD

This chapter is devoted to the details of the research design and method that was used in the present study. Emerging from the literature reviewed on the topic are research questions that give direction and focus to the study. An interpretive social science approach and qualitative research design was adopted in order to answer these questions. The research methodology employed is discussed in terms of the interpretive social science approach and qualitative research design. Sample selection, the research instrument, the method of data collection and the techniques used to analyse the data are also discussed. Due consideration for researcher reflexivity is given and finally the management of the ethical considerations are addressed. According to Larkin, Watts and Clifton (2006, p. 102) a careful and systematic methodology will provide reliability and validity to interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA), which according to these theorists 'gives voice' to the concerns of participants; and "the interpretative requirement to contextualise and 'make sense' of these claims and concerns from a psychological perspective."

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Broadly, the study attempted to explore the perceptions of Grade 12 learners from disadvantaged background regarding access to institutions of higher learning. With the unfolding of the research, the emerging themes were organised around four questions which served to guide the current study:

1. What do South African Grade 12 learners from disadvantaged racial and socio-economic backgrounds in the Greater Johannesburg area identify as factors affecting their pursuit of higher education?

2. In what ways do these factors impact on these learners' choice to pursuing higher education in contemporary South Africa?

RESEARCH DESIGN

According to Payne and Payne (2004, p.175), social research methods are conventionally divided into two types: a) qualitative or 'soft', and b) quantitative or 'hard', which makes it easier to differentiate between the approaches to research. The design of this research is located within the interpretive phenomenological approach (IPA) to social science. Larkin et al. (2006, p. 103) explain that students and researchers interested in qualitative research for the first time are "rightly attracted to IPA for its accessibility, flexibility and applicability". Within the social sciences the focus of research is on people and social phenomena. This focus lends itself better to the IPA because underpinning the IPA is the belief that internal, subjective experiences of reality are crucial (Neuman, 1997). This, according to McLoed (2001) is in opposition to the positivistic approach employed in the biological and physical sciences that focuses on hypothesis testing.

IPA is based at an ideographic level, which means that it is the study of individual persons or a specific situation as compared to a more general study of things (Lamiell, 1998). Methodologically it involves "a highly intensive and detailed analysis of the accounts produced by a comparatively small number of participants" (Larkin et al., 2006, 106). These verbatim accounts are generally captured via interviews in order to gain an empathic understanding of the individuals or social phenomena with the hope of generating new conceptual and theoretical understandings (Pope, May & Popay, 2007). The task of the researcher is therefore to uncover the categories, concepts and systems of explanation in order to gain this understanding. This method is particularly relevant to this study, which aims not simply to gather a list of factors that prevent disadvantaged learners from attending tertiary institutions, but to gain insight into the factors that disadvantaged Grade 12 learners *perceive* as barriers to their accessing higher education. It is the meaning that these learners attribute to these factors that will inform our understanding of unequal access to higher education in South Africa despite the great strides made in policy reformulation.

Yin (1991) defines research design as the logic that links the data to be collected and the conclusions to be drawn with the initial questions to be researched. To meet the aims of this study a qualitative research design was chosen, which is in keeping with the IPA to social science research (Babbie & Mouton, 2004). Payne et al. (2004) state that the qualitative method is able to produce detailed and non-quantitative accounts of small groups.

It also allows for the interpretation of the meanings that people make of their lives in their natural settings, because "social interactions form an integrated set of relationships best understood by inductive procedures" (Payne et al., 2004, p.175).

The point of departure for the qualitative design is to study the perspectives of disadvantaged Grade 12 learners, within a unique and meaningful human situation or interaction. Devlin (2006) states that the qualitative method involves trying to understand a particular event of interest without formulating a hypothesis. The aim of this method is to gain an in-depth understanding of the perceptions that Grade 12 learners in disadvantaged communities have towards gaining access to higher education. This method is used by the researcher to discover how disadvantaged Grade 12 learners describe their perceptions of factors that hinder them from studying further at tertiary institutions. It is interpretative, which is helpful in uncovering in-depth attitudes, opinions, participant perspectives and their different ways of making sense of the world (Greenstein, 2003).

PARTICIPANTS

This study utilised the non-probability convenience sampling method of participant selection. This method was employed so that readily accessible participants could be included. While this may limit the generalisability of the findings it is a feasible and convenient way of locating participants (Babbie et al., 2004). According to Saunders, Lewis and Thornton (1997), the research population is the total number of subjects that are chosen in correspondence with a set of specifications. In this study participants were required to be 18 yeas or older, in Grade 12 at the GDE school chosen, black, and living in the informal settlement of Thembelihle. These criteria were necessary to achieve the aims of this research. Hence, elements of purposive sampling were employed (Babbie et al., 2004). The weakness of this method is that not every element in the population has an equal opportunity of being included in the sample. However, according to Saunders, Lewis and Thornton (1997, p. 124), purposive sampling "enables you to use your judgement to select cases which will best enable you to answer your research question and your objectives".

Ten participants, six male and four female, were chosen. The participants were 18 or older. They were extracted from the Grade 12 classes at a GDE school. For the purpose of

this research, learners from a secondary school in Extension 9, Lenasia were used. This school is attended by learners from the informal settlements, Thembelihle and Lawley, as well as from the low-cost resettlement housing zone of Lehae which borders Extensions 9 and 10 in Lenasia. This school was specifically chosen because it is located within a township that was developed to house a community that was forcibly removed from central Johannesburg during the apartheid time and relocated in this area. This school has a population of approximately 1 200 learners, of which almost 80% are black and from Thembelihle, Lawley or Lehae. This secondary school was chosen as an appropriate site because the majority of its learners are from disadvantaged backgrounds and the school has four Grade 12 classes from which the participant group were drawn.

The participant group was a purposive, convenience group in that these learners were chosen in particular for a non-statistical purpose, because "the *who* of 'who are picked' inevitably plays into the *what* of 'what is discovered' (Payne & Payne, 2004, p.210). This sub-set of learners was deliberately selected because they were more suitable for the purpose of this research as the perceptions of learners who are disadvantaged both racially and economically was investigated.

The demographic information presented below was gathered through the biographical questions asked at the outset of the interview.

Table 1: Sample Description

Interviewees	**Gender**	**Age**	**Residential area**	**Family structure**
I 1	Male	20	Thembelihle	Single parent
I 2	Male	18	Thembelihle	Mother, father and siblings
I 3	Male	19	Thembelihle	Mother, father and siblings
I 4	Female	21	Thembelihle	Single parent
I 5	Female	18	Thembelihle	Grandparents
I 6	Female	18	Thembelihle	Mother, father and siblings
I 7	Female	18	Thembelihle	Single parent

I 8	Male	18	Thembelihle	Mother, father and siblings
I 9	Male	18	Vlakfontein	Mother, father and siblings
I 10	Male	18	Thembelihle	Mother, father and siblings

The information received from the participants also indicated that only 24% of their parents were employed as compared to the 76% that were unemployed.

PROCEDURES

Devlin (2006) explains that the procedure section should outline the steps taken in the collection of data. This is an important section because procedural details have a bearing on the validity of the study.

Data Collection Tool

According to Van der Colff (in Devlin, 2006), the two most commonly used methods of data collection employed in qualitative research are the questionnaire and the interview. Of the two methods the interview is probably the most widely employed method in qualitative research as it affords the researcher a great deal of flexibility (Malbon, 1999). This flexibility is further supported by the semi-structured interview. For this reason the semi-structured interview was used in this study. Welman and Kruger (2001) explain that in interpretive research the area to be researched is generally so unfamiliar that a structured interview is very difficult to devise. Malbon (1999, p.309) points out that the structured interview has "a clearly specified set of questions that are to be investigated". To maximise the reliability and validity of this measurement of key concepts, the researchers need to distance themselves from the interviewees. In contrast, according to Welman & Kruger (2001) with semi-structured interviews the researcher is required to interact with the interviewee to enrich the responses and gain insight into what the interviewee sees as relevant and important. This method was used by the researcher to enhance the understanding of the responses by the interviewees. The literature review has attempted to highlight how new policies in post-apartheid South Africa have attempted to redress inequalities in accessing higher education. These policies are an ongoing, work-in-progress attempt by the government to address these

inequalities, which is a relatively new area in South African history. The literature reviewed also revealed that transformation at South African higher education institutions is slow, hence, the semi-structured interview facilitated the formulation of research questions for further investigation best.

This research attempts to gain insight into what the interviewee sees as "relevant and important" so that "rich, detailed answers" can be obtained (Malbon, 1999, p. 313) in order to truly understand what the perceptions of the disadvantaged learners are regarding access to higher education in South Africa. The semi-structured interview allows for this in that the "questions reflect the concerns of the researcher" but it also "values the point of view of the interviewee" (Malbon, 1999, p.315) which differentiates this technique from that of the structured interview. Welman and Kruger (2001) support this, in that they propose that the semi-structured interview merely suggests themes of discussion and further questioning is then largely determined by what the interviewee brings to the interview. According to Malbon (1999), the semi-structured interview allows the interviewer to depart from the schedule or guide that is being used. It allows the interviewer to ask new questions that follow up on the interviewee's replies and also allows the order of questions to be varied and to be reworded so that the area being explored can be more richly understood.

The schedule of questions used in this study was developed based on the existing literature (see Appendix A). The questions were arranged according to themes relating to barriers to accessing higher education. The literature review informed the themes included in the schedule, namely educational factors, economic factors and socio-cultural factors that prevent learners from disadvantaged backgrounds from accessing higher education. Each interview differed slightly from the next in the wording or order of the questions. Each interview developed in a manner that allowed the interviewer the opportunity to probe the perceptions of that interviewee and to simplify the schedule if so needed. Language usage was considered in the development of the interview according to the level of understanding of the different learners.

Gaining Access to Participants

This research was conducted at a Secondary School in Lenasia, south of Johannesburg. This is a GDE school servicing the community of Extension 9, 10 and the informal settlements of Thembelihle, Lehae and Lawley.

Gaining permission from the Department of Education

Firstly, permission to conduct the interviews at this school was sought from the Department of Education. This was done telephonically and by letter. The letter which outlined the rationale and aims of the research, assured confidentiality and requested written consent to continue with the research, together with the research proposal, was personally delivered to 111 Commissioner Street, Johannesburg (see Appendix B for the information sheet and Appendix C and D for consent forms). A letter of permission was then forwarded by the GDE to the researcher (see Appendix E).

Gaining permission from the Principal of the Secondary School

Permission from the principal was then gained through telephonic contact after which the principal interviewed the researcher. A letter that outlined the rationale and aims of the research, assured confidentiality and requested written consent to conduct the research at the school was then given to the Principal (see Appendix B for the information sheet and Appendix C and D for consent forms). A letter of permission was given to the researcher.

Gaining permission from participants

Once permission from the GDE and principal was obtained, the learners were approached through the help of the deputy principal, who was asked to identify black learners from the informal settlements and the low cost housing area of Lehae in the Grade 12 classes. A meeting with the learners was then arranged at a time convenient to the school and learners. At this meeting the researcher then explained to the learners the purpose of the research through a subject information sheet (see Appendix B). This information sheet informed the prospective participants of: a) the duration of the planned interview; b) the fact that the interview would be tape recorded to ensure that the details of the conversations were accurately captured; c) that participation was completely voluntary; d) that confidentiality would be maintained. Volunteers were then requested, and the first ten learners that responded were used in the research. All learners were provided with consent forms to grant their permission to participate in the study and be audio recorded (Appendix C and D). Once these signed consent forms were returned to the school, the principal contacted the researcher and a date to conduct the research was negotiated.

Data Collection

The sample consisted of 10 male and female black learners between the ages of 18 and 21. Nine of the participants lived in Thembelihle and one lived in Vlakfontein, another informal settlement close to Lenasia. Data was collected by interviewing the participants for approximately one hour. The semi-structured interview was facilitated by the use of a list of questions that were answered and probes that facilitated discussion. This enabled the participants to speak broadly and openly about the topic. The researcher made limited hand notes during the interview, and audio-taped the interviews to ensure accuracy. These tape-recordings were subsequently transcribed. The use of the digital audio recorder enabled the researcher to freely engage with the participants rather than be pre-occupied with note taking (Minichiello, Aroni, Timewell & Alexander, 1991)

Devlin (2006) notes that the qualitative approach which is adopted in this research "usually involves open-ended or semi-structured interviews which are typically tape-recorded and then transcribed." (p.54). The interview comprised closed- and open-ended questions to generate the data and facilitate the sharing of perceptions, so as to gain insight into how the participants understand the factors affecting their pursuit of higher education. The semi-structured interview using questions prearranged in themes and consisting of broad areas to be covered has allowed the researcher the opportunity to probe and pursue other areas that emerged (Milward in Breakwell, Hammond & Fife-Schaw, 2002).

DATA ANALYSIS

Achievement of the aims of this study necessitated careful analysis of the data collected during the interviews. Thematic content analysis was employed as a method of data analysis in order to elicit and explore the themes from the data collected. According to Braune and Clarke (2006) thematic content analysis is a method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data. This method minimally organises and describes data sets in (rich) detail. The recorded interviews were transcribed by the researcher herself to protect the confidentiality of the data and to allow the researcher to engage with the data in an attempt to enhance the understanding and analysis required. This necessitated rigour and dedication as Neuman (1997) cautioned.

Many definitions of content analysis exist. Walizer and Wienir (1978) define it as the

systematic procedure developed to examine the content of recorded information (in Wimmer & Dominick, 1987). Kerlinger's definition (in Wimmer & Dominick, 1987) is more typical. He explains that content analysis is a method of studying and analysing communication in a "systematic, objective and quantitative manner for the purpose of measuring variables" (in Wimmer & Dominick, 1987, p. 166). Devlin (2006) defines content analysis as a "reductive systematic analysis of written responses that leads to some thematic categorisation" (p.196).

Thematic content analysis, according to Terre Blanche, Durheim and Painter (2006), fall within the interpretive method of analysis. This method assumes that people's subjective experiences are real and should be regarded seriously. When participants are interacted with and listened to, a better understanding of their experiences is facilitated. For the purpose of this research the researcher found this method of analysis most appropriate as the perceptions of these Grade 12 learners were required.

The interviews of these Grade 12 learners were recorded on The Digital Voice Recorder. The recorder was then connected to a PC so that a CD of the interviews could be cut. This CD was then transcribed by the researcher. The interviews were transcribed verbatim without omissions or additions to the text. Monosyllabic, short answers and poor grammar comprised the narratives of these learners as English is not their mother-tongue. Despite this, their narratives were transcribed verbatim. The questions that were asked were created based on themes that were identified in the literature review. Probing through open ended questions was used to illicit information beyond the identified themes.

To process responses and analyse the content, Devlin (2006) suggests that certain steps be followed in the content analysis approach. The first requirement is to read through all the transcribed responses. Then the responses must be condensed into a list, which is an organised raw data structure known as the data set. This list or set is then coded or categorised. According to Holsti (in Bailey, 1982) the categories should reflect the purposes of the research. The next step is to give a brief operational definition to the coded or categorized information. Lyons (in Breakwell et al., 2002) explains that the coding and categorizing of data is the breaking down of data into meaningful pieces. Wimmer and Dominick (1987) outlined similar steps to be followed, as did Terre Blanche and Durrheim (1999).

The process of analysis of the themes that emerged in this research is outlined by Braune et al. (2006). First familiarisation with the data was required, which occurred by the researcher transcribing the data. Potential themes were identified from the words, phrases and ideas that emerged from the transcription of the interviews. These were coded systematically across the data set (Van Manen, 1990). The codes were then collated into potential themes by gathering the data relevant to each theme. Once this was completed the themes were reviewed to check whether the codes from the data set corresponded with the themes. This allowed for relationships, contradictions and sub-themes to be checked (Van Manen, 1990). When the themes and codes were found to correspond across the data set the themes were then defined and named. Ongoing analysis allowed for selected extracts from the transcripts to be included to substantiate the themes. Finally the analysis was completed by interpreting the thematic categories in relation to the research questions and then supported with the literature reviewed. Freire's theory of conscientisation grounded the findings in that the findings were discussed in relation to this theoretical framework (Braun et al., 2006).

The study focused on exploring disadvantaged learners' perceptions of various factors that impact on whether they choose to pursue some form of higher education following matriculation, hence the emphasis is on meaning rather than on an amount or quantity. For this reason the method of content analysis facilitated the identification and analysis of common themes (Berelson, 1952).

This detailed account of the process of analysis of the transcriptions of the data from the interviews confirms that the data was "subjected to a series of analyses, beginning with the raw data and, step by step, moving to relevant text, repeating ideas, themes, theoretical constructs, theoretical narratives, and research concerns" (Averbach & Silverstein, 2003, p. 54). This is the method of thematic content analysis.

RESEARCHER REFLEXIVITY

Watt (2007) proposes that reflexivity is an essential component of qualitative research and if used correctly has the potential to facilitate understanding of both the phenomenon under study and the research process itself. The qualitative research design was chosen for this research because the researcher had a great interest in the interviewee's point of view. The

qualitative interviewing allowed flexibility and responded to the direction in which interviewees took the interview, which allowed for the adjusting of the emphases in the research as a result of significant issues that emerged in the course of the interviews. This interaction between researcher and interviewee is grounded in the anti-positivistic framework which according to Larkin et al. (2006) fits well with the IPA employed in this research. This interpretive approach focuses on the understanding of the subjective experiences of the participants' social realities, which includes their culture and context. This approach acknowledges, "the view of the human individual as an inclusive part of reality - as an entity that is essentially embedded, intertwined and which is otherwise immersed in the world that it inhabits" (Heidegger, 1985, p. 201). Breuer, Mruck and Roth (2002) point out that the research and its outcomes depend on characteristics of the persons involved, including their biological, mental, social, cultural and historical makeup. Maso (2003) therefore encourages the reflexive acknowledgement of the researcher's own subjective realities. The researcher's own subjective experiences, culture and social context will impact on all aspects of the interview relationship. This means that the researcher's own experiences also influence the interview process. Watt (2007) state that these experiences which the researcher brings are of equal importance to that of the interviewees, and must be recognised as an important contributor to the research process.

The interviewer–interviewee relationship is a form of hierarchical or power relationship. Interviewers arrogate to themselves the right to ask questions, implicitly placing their interviewees in a position of subservience or inferiority. The element of power is also revealed by the fact that the semi-structured interview seeks out information from the perspective of the researcher (Breuer et al., 2002). The participants in the research were Grade 12 learners while the researcher is a former teacher and Master's student, which could have affected the power relations in the interviews.

The race and cultural differences between the researcher, who is Indian and English speaking, and the participants, who are black with English as their second or third language, may also have affected the research. Eagle, Hayes and Sibanda (2006) postulate that the researcher's identification or disidentification with participants can have an influence on the research results. The researcher's educational and historical background may also have influenced the analysis and interpretation of the results.

Maso (2003) explains that neutrality in the interview schedule and research process itself is also extremely difficult if not impossible. Bias can be contained in the interview schedule as attempts to elicit certain responses can be made. The researcher's responses to the participants during the interview could have influenced the results despite attempts to minimise these factors. As Malacridia (2007) points out, researcher responses can provide covert support or disapproval to participants, which will then influence subsequent responses.

When the researcher noticed the limited number of students from Grade 12, who passed the Matric exam but never accessed universities, colleges or technikons especially if they were from disadvantaged backgrounds, she developed an interest in the topic and literature relating to the access of Grade 12 disadvantaged learners to higher education institutions. The controversy regarding policy versus transformation within these institutions post-1994 stimulated the decision to investigate the perceptions of these learners regarding gaining access to tertiary education. As found in the literature review, evaluations of policy and reworking of these policies to facilitate transformation has not translated into equal access for all students. The increased numbers of black students at universities are very noticeable yet the researcher was left feeling uneasy about this ambiguity as many black socio-economically disadvantaged learners are still not accessing higher education. She thus became interested in the learners' perceptions in order to understand the reasons or barriers that prevent them from accessing higher education. With this level of interest in the topic the researcher may have unwittingly influenced the interview process.

The researcher's experience as a Grade 12 educator and Head of Department of Humanities at a disadvantaged school in Johannesburg heightened her passion to understand the barriers and challenges that these learners face when completing Grade 12 and planning their future. The researcher's desire is to contribute to any changes that can translate the policies written by government and higher learning institutions into complete transformation. It is hoped that more disadvantaged learners can gain access to higher education and in this way effect change in the socio-economic fibre of South African society. This desire may have affected the analysis of the data. Alvesson and Skoldberg (2005) highlight that data analysis is never entirely neutral because the researcher's perspective will inevitably influence the interpretation of the results.

The researcher's experience as a Master's educational psychology student meant that the researcher brought to each interview the experience of basic counselling skills which allowed her to access the feelings and concerns that these learners had regarding access to higher education. It was felt that the researcher's relaxed and natural interaction with the interviewees was one of unconditional positive regard that facilitated rapport building, thus allowing the participants to openly share their experiences and perceptions with the researcher. This could have been true for some participants and not for others, which may have affected the type of responses collected.

ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Ethical clearance was requested and granted from the University of the Witwatersrand Human Research Ethics Committee (see Appendix F). The following ethics clearance protocol number was issued, MEDP/07/001 IH. Once this was obtained the research study then proceeded.

As described above, permission was obtained from the DoE and the Principal of the school through the information sheet which outlines the nature of the study and the role of the learners (see Appendix B for the information sheet). Permission from the learners was then obtained using the same information sheet (see Appendix B for the information sheet). All the participants were then required to sign a letter of informed consent (see Appendix C and D for consent forms). The nature of the study involves human beings as participants, hence to ensure ethical research practice the participants were informed that they were not obliged to participate in the study and moreover having agreed to participate, may still withdraw their consent at any time.

All data and personal information is kept confidential as no identifying information is required in the interview. Participants could choose not to answer any questions that they found intrusive. Participants were asked to sign a consent form for the tape-recording of the interview and were informed that their responses were to be transcribed. All tapes and transcripts are safely kept by the supervisor, Ms T. Swart, at the university. Once the final research report is completed and marked the tapes and transcripts will be destroyed.

A summary of the findings of the research will be made available to the school to

display on their student notice board, and to the Department of Education. The researcher is equipped with counselling skills to contain difficult issues that could have emerged during the interview process, but a contact list for counsellors and psychologists and organisations offering free counselling within the area was also left with the school secretary and the Life Orientation teacher in case any learner required career or personal counselling.

The ethical requirements for research with human subjects according to the University of the Witwatersrand were adhered to. These requirements are: that the researcher must reflect on the foreseeable repercussions of the research and publication on the study; that the participants in the research be the researcher's paramount responsibility and be protected against any physical, social or psychological harm. The participants' dignity and privacy were honoured. The researcher ensured that the participants were clear on the aims of the research and the maintenance of confidentiality. The researcher did not ask any embarrassing or insulting questions. All monitoring devices such as the tape recorder that was used in this research were fully explained and plainly visible for transparency, and the participants were given the right to reject it. The participants were not exploited for personal gain. Returns were not given for services. Privacy and wishes of the participants were respected at all times.

CONCLUSION

This chapter examines the research methodology and procedures in this research. The research design locates the research within the interpretive phenomenological approach. The procedure followed, method of analysis, researcher's experiences and ethical considerations are presented in accordance with the interpretive paradigm. The following chapter, Chapter 4, presents the analyses and discusses the outcomes of the research.

CHAPTER 4: PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS

This chapter presents the findings of the research that was obtained using semi-structured interviews conducted with disadvantaged Grade 12 learners from a GDE school. In this chapter the findings are analysed, interpreted and related to the relevant existing literature. As explained in the previous chapter, thematic content analysis was employed as the method of data analysis. The findings from this analysis elicited salient themes that have been explored. These dominant themes have been categorised into four broad content areas: 1) perceptions of the economic constraints to higher education; 2) perceptions of the educational constraints to higher education; 3) perceptions of the social and cultural constraints to higher education; and 4) perceptions of the political constraints to higher education. These broad categories are discussed below, with quotes included to support and illustrate the conclusions reached. As Minister Blade Nzimande in his Budget Speech (2009) has said, "with regard to higher education, we need to consolidate and deepen the transformation gains made over the last fifteen years, while continuously improving the access and success, particularly of black students at all levels of the system" (Nzimande, 2009).

PERCEPTIONS OF THE ECONOMIC CONSTRAINTS TO HIGHER EDUCATION

The primary aim of this research was to determine the factors that the participants perceive as barriers to accessing higher education. What became evident is that young people in South Africa that are from disadvantaged backgrounds are not in a position to avail themselves of any tertiary institutions in South Africa because of a lack of financial resources. Participant 5 succinctly explained that:

> Money is hard to get for most of the children in my school, like some can't even afford to pay their school fees so to get money for tertiary is so hard. (Participant 5)

Haralambos (1983) identifies poverty as a social problem that perpetuates inequality in a society and since the South African Institute of Race Relations (1998) found that 65% of the African population in South Africa is poor, inequality for this group within the South African society will remain a challenge. "The causes of poverty are linked closely to unemployment" (Lynch &

O'Riordan, 1998, p. 451) and unemployment in South Africa is said to be growing at two percent age points per year (SAIRR, 1998).

Of the 10 participants interviewed, only in three cases was a parent employed, and in each case only one of the two parents was employed. For participants interviewed in this study, this harsh reality of having to cope financially when parents are unemployed was evident in their responses which is perceived as an important barrier to accessing higher education. Cardak and Givon (2004) found that learners from low-income families where parents are either unemployed or earning very little would be unable to access these higher learning institutions. The research supports this finding, as participants spoke about how the lack of finance within their families and community was a factor preventing them from accessing tertiary education. Participant 10, after considering what the main constraints would be, said:

> I think it's about finance and ja maybe ja I do hear learners complaining like there is one learner that I know his mother is not working and he is an average learner who does his work and is passing well but he says that the problem will be money. (Participant 10)

The data collected was coded systematically and then reviewed against the corresponding theme. When the theme and code corresponded across the data set then it was defined and named. Selected extracts from the transcripts were included to substantiate the theme. The sub-themes for this category are presented below.

Insufficient disposable income

The salient barrier to equality of access and participation for disadvantaged learners is regarded as relative poverty. Poverty or the lack of sufficient income was found to have a diverse effect on accessing higher education. O'Neill (1992) showed that even the first phase of getting the money for an application form for higher education was a barrier for some. It emerged in this study that the learners experienced a similar problem as participants do not seem to have the money for even the most basic step of getting the money for the application form to be submitted, which Participant 6 highlighted:

> The only problem is trying to get the fee that you have to send with the forms. (Participant 6)

For a student to be considered for placement at a tertiary institution he or she must submit an application form with the relevant documentation and required fee. Participants showed an awareness of this and also expressed how this requirement was also a barrier as families do not have sufficient disposable income. So just the initial cost of applying to a university added to the family budget was perceived as a factor that would prevent them from applying to university and therefore from accessing higher education. Participant 2 explained how this had impacted on his family when he said:

> Ja I've got enough time to do that but the problem is uuh entrance fee is where I am struggling to get right now, so my father is trying to organise that money for me to put in the entry, the application form. (Participant 2)

It was found that within these low-income households, survival on a day-to-day basis and making ends meet has to take precedence over 'luxuries', including higher education. These learners felt that because their families had limited financial resources the cost of higher education was a luxury that they could not afford and that the money that would be spent on higher education for one child could be used for the expenses and upliftment of the family as a whole. Participants showed a strong awareness of the deprivation within their homes and how money was needed for more basic needs, and that hence their parents did not have the financial resources to send them for tertiary education. When discussing how motivation could be affected by the lack of finance Participant 3 explained:

> I would say yes because maybe you are living in a shack, living without electricity then maybe let say it is 70 000 for that course maybe the parents could build a house with that money rather than let you go to university. (Participant 3)

The study showed that although all participants identified the insufficiency of disposable income in their homes as a factor that could prevent them from accessing higher education, there was disagreement about its importance as a factor preventing them from gaining access. Two participants felt that the lack of finance is not the deciding factor. They believed that if a learner worked hard enough to achieve good results then bursaries or student loans would be made available to them to study further. They were therefore highlighting an avenue open to them that would assist them in gaining access even though they were struggling financially. Participant 7 explained how he thought that the marks that learners achieved at Matric were a far greater barrier than money:

> I really think that they would go because if you have the marks then you can get the bursaries out there, then you can go to university so I think it is just the marks. (Participant 7)

Participant 9 showed an awareness of the difficulty in accessing bursaries for further study but explained that there were student loans available for learners who performed well at Matric level. For him the greatest barrier to accessing higher education is the lack of finance:

> Firstly financial status that is the biggest problem in our society. (Participant 9)

He then goes on to explain:

> Actually there aren't many bursaries but I want to take a student loan for the first two years and then we'll see after that. (Participant 9)

In response to a query about the information he had available about the loans he explained that:

> Actually I do qualify seeing that I come from like a disadvantaged background and speaking English and wanting to study. And the repayments on the student loan are quite reasonable like they don't expect everything at once so I think I'll go for the student loan. (Participant 9)

Although lack of finance is perceived as the greatest factor in excluding these learners from higher education, there seems to be an awareness with those learners who have better information that there are financial options available to them that could assist them, but that the responsibility of achieving the marks required for them to qualify for these options, rests with them. Participants did not show any awareness of the implications that failing an academic year or being able to only complete a partial degree would have on them accessing financial aid again. This seems to show that participants are not fully informed about financial aid but that those who do have some information are more motivated to pass well to access the loans available. Thus, there seems to be a link between performance motivation and the amount of information learners have available to them.

The participants therefore identified the economic factor as a barrier to accessing higher education, were able to explain the effect this has on them and were then also keenly

aware of the role of government in creating and maintaining this poverty cycle within their communities. Participants spoke of the lack of service delivery in their areas and were very vocal about how the government did not follow through on promises about service delivery. Job creation is one of the key promises made to the South African community which has not been adequately addressed by government. Without jobs communities like this cannot address academic needs when more basic needs like shelter and food remain priorities. As Participant 9 asserts:

> You know they must follow up on the promises they make at election time. (Participant 9)

This alludes to the structural changes in society that are needed in order to bring about change in gaining equality of access in society. Further, The Dinokeng Scenarios team (2009) found that unemployment is closely linked to the lack of skills and education, yet participants were notably not able to identify unemployment as a key factor in the perpetuation of the poverty cycle within their communities.

Basic resources at home

The ten participants interviewed all identified the lack of adequate resources at home as a major barrier to their learning and therefore their ability to access higher education. The study of Lynch and O'Riordan (1998) found the conditions that disadvantaged learners lived in were not amenable to effective studying. This finding supports the assertion that economic constraints are notably associated with the lack of adequate resources for study in the homes of the disadvantaged. Participants were immediately able to identify their living conditions as a factor that impacts on their studying.

> First and first is the environment that we come from, that's the problem. (Participant 1)

> I find it difficult to study where I live so situational problems ja. (Participant 7)

In this study all participants are residents of the informal settlement of Thembelihle, Lenasia. People first settled in Thembelihle in 1984 and it became the fastest growing informal settlement in Johannesburg during 1989 and 1992. According to Variava, 2006 there were approximately 27 000 people living in Thembelihle which is a poverty-stricken area that lacks electricity, drainage and basic services. The local government has supplied street lights

and running water but little else. Residents are expected to move into the low-cost housing scheme of Lehae, which has been developed nearby, but many have not been able to secure homes there. The community of Thembelihle therefore continues to reside in a poorly serviced area. Participant 3 expressed how very dissatisfied he is with the conditions he lives in:

> Actually in our community there's actually nothing there. If they do something then for example there was elections they give us lights then after the elections it went off. So if they need something then they do for us but otherwise aahh… (Participant 3)

He further expressed his frustration with the local council in allocating homes for them in Lehae:

> Actually they built Lehae but most of the people that are there they are not there legally. Because maybe the counselors give them the houses because they got money because like me at home they have registered for a house there but we still didn't get it. So there's a lot of corruption there yes. (Participant 3)

The Dinokeng Scenarios (2009, p. 3) cites that "the lack of skills at local government level, coupled with political patronage and corruption, which has resulted in poor service and infrastructural delivery" is part of the perpetuation of the cycle of poverty that highlights the harsh conditions that Matric learners like these have to endure while studying towards furthering their education. The participants have identified the lack of four important resources that impact on their studying.

1. Food

Article 25 in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights is that "Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care…." (Bradley, 2001). This most basic human right is also found in the world's most comprehensive constitution, the South African Constitution. Brandt (2000) explains that when this basic human right is ignored then people become worried about their next meal rather than the rights of others or the need to be educated. Participants were hesitant to identify food as a resource that was lacking in their homes and community but alluded to how difficult it was at home and rather spoke about the lack of candles. Participants may have felt embarrassed to admit that they lack such basic resources like food which they may have seen as a reflection on their parents, but were

willing to talk about the lack of lighting because this can be attributed to poor service delivery which is a problem outside of their scope. Participant 1 however was vocal about this need not being fulfilled:

> Some where some how, some where some how I sometimes don't have something to eat before I come to school or money to buy something that will fulfil my needs and I don't have that thing that will get me what I want and need… (Participant 1)

It seemed that the most pressing need for Participant 1 and his family was food. He was concerned and anxious about this and further explained that when money was available in the home that the choice of how to spend it was obvious:

> Yes, yes it is exactly like that because you can't live without food that's the first thing so it is obvious. Even if I had that money I would use it on something else like food and such things. (Participant 1)

The research shows that when a basic need like the right to food is disregarded in a community then the focus of that community is less on education and more on survival. According to Cloete et al. (2002) transformation in higher education has focused on achieving equity, and on strengthening the role of higher education in achieving national reconstruction and development. The rationale behind this is to increase economic participation by all sectors of society and to develop the economy of South Africa. This barrier identified by the participants alludes to the failure of government in addressing the more fundamental needs of communities which will perpetuate the exclusion of the disadvantaged from economic participation. Feeding schemes by NGO's like the Sanzaf and Crescent of Hope feeding projects in Thembelihle, organisations that emerged from Lenasia, attempt to alleviate some of the food shortages in this area. Although these projects are ongoing the need seems too great for the organisations to cope with. This means that many families are still going to bed and sending children hungry to school. Structural changes like addressing unemployment within this community or creating self-help programmes within Thembelihle so that people can learn skills that can be used to generate income for their families will require initiation. In this way the community would then be enabled to become more self sufficient and open to the possibilities of higher education.

2. Electricity

The realisation that education especially at tertiary level is a privilege or 'gift' and not a right is expressed. Bunting (1994) explained how changes in policy about access to education only stipulates that basic education up to and including Grade 9 is compulsory and free. Further Education and Training namely: Grade 10 to 12 as well as higher education becomes the responsibility of the parent. Financing of these studies is through bursaries, loans or parental support. To access these bursaries and loans learners must attain the grades necessary for them to qualify. Financing studies is therefore a privilege that learners must strive for. It was found that the living conditions of these learners were such that none of them have the luxury of electricity never mind money for further education. This means that these learners rely on candles as a means of light to study.

> Money is a big problem. Financing studies is like a how you say gift or….
> *Privilege?*
> Yes, privilege. (silence) it's tough because we like live in Thembelihle where we don't have lights and there's no place that we can actually go and study or get like tuition or anything. And now that it is so cold and it gets dark so early we can only study for a short time. (Participant 6)

Participants expressed how this lack of lighting was a barrier for them as their families did not have the money to buy many candles which limits the time they have to study during dark days or at night. For all 10 participants, the lack of electricity to provide artificial light was perceived as a major factor affecting their studying. For Participant 5 the cost of candles to the family was a worry:

> No sometimes ja it's not that good because sometimes maybe there's no money to buy candles and stuff and I have to study till late and my granny will tell me to put the candle off because it will get finish and she got no money to buy another one ja so that is a problem. (Participant 5)

Other participants also explained how they were forced to study during the day in winter, mainly after school but before sunset so that candles would not be wasted. This meant that many of them were not studying effectively as they were too tired to study immediately after school and homework took preference over studying in the afternoon, further limiting the time they had to study. This they felt impacted on their levels of confidence when writing an exam as they felt ill prepared.

> Mmm and then it is difficult to sometimes to study at home because where we live is very noisy and we don't have electricity so like now when its cold and it gets dark early than it is a problem because I have to study early like when I just come from school and then you like tired so you don't learn so fast and then what I can't finish at home I have to study in the morning at school. (Participant 10)

The impact that the lack of this resource has on the participants is far reaching because not only does it make studying difficult but it impacts on their motivation, their feelings of guilt for consuming an important commodity in the home, candles. Further, their confidence levels in their ability to prepare themselves adequately for exams prevent them from seriously considering tertiary learning. Government's inability to deliver on their promise of electrifying Thembelihle points to the structural change that has to occur at local government level so that effective service delivery can be instituted.

3. Privacy and quiet

A quiet place to study in their homes was identified as another luxurious resource not available to participants. Their homes are described as too small to allow them a private, quiet place to study. Participants identified two aspects to high noise levels. Some participants spoke of the smallness of their homes and the number of people in their homes, which results in noise and a lack of privacy, but also of how the dense population of their area results in homes built close to each other therefore creating noise from the outside. Participant 9 explains how his environment is not conducive to studying:

> …. the houses are very close to each other and they are small so many people live in one house. That makes it difficult to study because then there's a lot of noise and people talking that does distract you. (Participant 9)

A key barrier identified by the participants is the lack of resources. All participants spoke about this lack and differed only on what they expressed as more difficult for them. Participant 7 not only referred to the lack of electricity and noise in her area but also to lack of safety she feels within her area resulting in her being unable to study with a group or walk to a friends home to study:

> It's hard to study where I live because the house is small and then there is a lot of noise from outside so I become distracted and then I have to study early so that I can see otherwise at night it's too dark and there's no electricity. And then you have to make sure you study alone because you can't walk around at night its too dangerous so you must study on your own, like I said self study, and then what you don't

> understand then you can ask a friend or a teacher the next day at school. (Participant 7)

The research therefore shows that the lack of a proper place to work is a barrier for these learners who are unable to concentrate and continue undisturbed with the goal of studying to achieve good Matric results. They are also unable to leave their homes to find another quiet place to study in their community which can be frustrating. This lack of privacy to study would impact on their levels of preparedness and therefore their confidence levels when writing an exam, which create strong exam anxiety. Participant 4 spoke about her struggle to concentrate on studying, which impacts on her performance:

> …. our houses are so small so then you can't study till late because then you are disturbing someone and then it gets noisy and you can't concentrate. Like me ja I can't concentrate and then the noise disturbs me and then I leave my studying and go to see what's happening. Then when I have to go and write the next day I don't feel prepared which makes me anxious and then I forget everything like I didn't study at all. (Participant 4)

Etkin (1993, p. 21) states that "almost all available evidence shows a negative correlation between anxiety and level of academic achievement". Masi et al. (2000, p. 166 - 167) support this by saying "…anxiety, [and] stress in achievement situations, lowers school performances." The criteria for a Matric Endorsement Certificate to enter university are high so this barrier could further disadvantage these participants from gaining access to tertiary institutions.

4. Heating

The lack of heating in their homes was a predominant theme in participants' narratives. Participants explained that the weather during winter in Gauteng is severely cold and without electricity, keeping warm was a challenge. Participants therefore explained that during winter they are forced to go to bed early in order to stay warm. This then impacted on their anxiety levels for the exam as they would then arrive for an exam at school incompletely prepared. As Participant 3 explained:

> Uh for an example for now I have to study and it's winter. The shack is very cold, we cannot study. For an example, Monday was very cold you cannot study, you have to sleep to get warm. Then the next day you go to write. You wake up early in the morning study little bit and then go and write. And then you go to write but your

> mind is not there like it is not at ease because you know that you did not study or study enough and then already you doubt yourself and that's not good. (Participant 3)

Participants therefore explained how the lack of proper heating in their homes left them too cold to finish studying at night because they went to bed to stay warm. The plan would then be to study at school the following morning. This would then leave them feeling unprepared and apprehensive for the paper that they were to write. Participant 5 explained how the lack of heating impacts on her stress levels before exams:

> Ja it difficult in Thembelihle for students because there's nowhere to go and study at night. And when it's winter it's worse ja because then it's cold and there's not enough money to buy more candles and it becomes so cold that you can't study so you have to go to bed early then sometimes ja you don't get all the work done that you wanted to. Ja and then you feel stressed when you go to school because you didn't do everything that you were supposed to. (Participant 5)

According to Goetz, Pekrun, Perry and Titz (2002) learners either internalise or externalise these feelings resulting in emotional or physical strain that could impede their ability to perform well in their final examinations. Goleman (1996, p. 84) and Morse and Furst (1979, p. 9) explain that although stress is a natural and necessary reaction to challenging situations because it causes the mind and body to become alert and endeavours to overcome the challenge it is faced with, it can have negative effects. They further explain that the problem occurs when the stress causes such high levels of anxiety that the emotional, physical and intellectual abilities of the learner are affected. This is related to structural weaknesses in society.

The lack of service delivery to communities like Thembelihle perpetuates the cycle of poverty within the South African context. For real transformation to occur, communities like these need to be empowered so that they can access the institutions and organisations that would help uplift the community i.e. universities, colleges, technikons so that a transfer of knowledge and skills to communities like Thembelihle can occur. The Dinokeng Scenarios (2009, p. 4) has already found that our government is failing our youth by not providing "meaningful opportunities" through "education and skills development". The potential of these communities is overlooked in the spiral of poor service delivery.

It can be concluded from this that deficiencies in material resources for the participants can result in learners performing inadequately in their Matric exams, which would make access to higher education even more difficult. Already South Africa is rated 93rd in the world in relation to university enrolment rates which according to The Dinokeng Scenarios (2009) does put South Africa's innovation potential at risk. This means that a shortage of skilled labour could potentially become a problem for the South African economy. South Africa would then need to hire skilled labour from other parts of the world while our own youth become part of the unemployable masses.

Privileges of wealthier schools

Relative poverty was not only seen to affect access to higher education but was also seen as affecting access to private or "better" government schools, which would translate to the ex - Model C schools in South Africa. Enrolment at these schools were seen by participants as advantageous, but for different reasons.

Participants showed a keen awareness of the advantage that could be gained from ex - Model C or private education in terms of performance. They were very aware of how this impacted on the rate of progression to higher education. Lynch and O'Riordan (1998) found in their study in Ireland that teachers and school principals were very aware of how disadvantaged learners' performance and rate of progression to universities was affected by being unable to afford attendance at the better schools.

Varaiava (2006) found that overcrowding in schools in Lenasia impacts on the quality of education offered. She found that one principal stated that his school was established to accommodate 850 learners but had 1111 enrolled learners. Another school principal stated that his school was established to accommodate 720 learners but had 905 learners. While classes are generally meant to accommodate a maximum of 35 learners, most of the schools have classes with an average of between 40 and 43 learners. The response of Participant 8 to the comparison between his school and the "better" schools showed that he was aware of the overcrowding at his school and he showed an awareness that the teacher - pupil ratio was smaller at the better resourced schools which he felt impacted on the quality of education received and therefore the learners' performance and progression to tertiary institutions:

> In the class I don't think that there is a big difference because in a class you will get students who don't understand the work and they will be the same anywhere but in those schools they can get individual attention.
> *Are you saying that the class sizes are smaller in these schools and therefore learners can then get individual attention?*
> Yes they can, so they can then be better prepared for their exams and so they will get higher marks and so they will get into university easily. (Participant 8)

For Participant 5 the availability of financial resources at the ex - Model C and private schools was seen to be key to the higher quality of education that she felt learners received at these schools:

> Their schools like maybe they have private schools, they have higher education and there's like many differences like compared to us. Ja its …. no I'm not saying that its not that high but its not like at private schools. They're just better. Yes much better than at public schools. (Participant 5)

Although participants were aware of the advantages of attending the better resourced schools they did not show any feelings of their education they were receiving being inferior. They were keenly aware that learners at those schools were financially privileged meaning that they were able to access resources that they themselves would not be able to access. The accessibility of better resources seemed to be the factor that the participants conceived as favourable or advantageous. Participant 6 simply says:

> Ja like those who are not poor like us. For them finance is not a problem and then they have more like lights and computers and libraries so it's easy for them. Maybe their marks, getting the points they need for university but it wouldn't be so difficult like for us. (Participant 6)

The transformation of education in South Africa post-1994 attempted to address the inequalities of the past by changing to the Outcomes Based curriculum; basic education and compulsory schooling, and equal access at all schools were all put into the policy. According to the South Africa Schools Act (SASA) of 1996, schools are either Section 20 or Section 21 schools in order to promote school-based management and administration including finance, so that the burden of funding education could be shared with parents and the private sector. However this policy allowed the wealthier schools the privilege of becoming wealthier while the poorer schools remained under-resourced. This has perpetuated the cycle of disadvantaging the disadvantaged, which translates to poorer performance and low transfer

ratios from these poorly resourced schools to tertiary institutions. The need therefore is that changes need to be effected at policy level for structural changes to occur at these schools.

Expectations of parents

Financial demands on families especially in the current global financial climate have resulted in many low-income families putting pressure on their high school children to contribute to the family budget. It was therefore found that although all participants were eager to entertain the idea of studying for future careers at tertiary institutions, only four of the participants were clear on how they would secure funding for their studies. Six of the participants had no idea to how they could afford tertiary education. The responses from these participants reveal that their parents are not expecting them to attend tertiary education and therefore do not discuss financing at all with them. The expense of tertiary education for Participant 4 for instance was completely staggering:

> Ok let me just say the amount like the money that they want.
> *So it's very expensive.*
> Ja it very expensive like 30 000 if I'm not mistaken. It's a lot of money. We here don't have money for candles so we definitely won't have money for college and stuff. Ja and then it's also far for us so again we will need money for transport and the taxis are expensive. And I hear that they don't give text books so that means we must buy them so it's just too much money. Yoh it really affects me because how can I even afford it when I can't even afford my school fees of 1000, how am I going to get the 30 000. (Participant 4)

Participant 6 was equally overwhelmed by the cost. His response shows the lack of parental mediation around attending tertiary education and therefore financing of such studies. He instead chose to shelter his parents from the cost:

> I don't even tell my parents how much it costs because eish they'll have a shock. (Participant 6)

The responses of the participants reveal that their parents are not discussing either the idea of attending tertiary education or the question of funding further studies. Only three participants said that their parents have discussed ways and means of securing finance for further studies. Participant 7 explained how her granny with whom she resides is very encouraging and open to discussions around finance for her:

> Ja that's why I have to work really hard so that my marks can be good so that I can go get a bursary. Then the others my granny will help but for me getting a bursary is important so I have to study hard for that. (Participant 7)

This research illustrated that there could be a direct correlation between the openness of parents to the idea of tertiary education, discussions around funding it and participants' motivation to study hard to achieve good results for the procurement of bursaries or loans. The motivation of Participant 10 to study well and achieve good results is supported by the interest and advice of her parents:

> Ja it is motivating me a lot because they did advise me to study really hard so that I can get a bursary because they can't like pay for my entire career. Like let say next year for the whole of my first year I can get a bursary and they are helping by finding out how you apply and what you must have so like that it is motivating. (Participant 10)

In contrast, some of the participants felt that to even want to go to tertiary education was selfish as younger siblings needed to pass Matric as well and that the financial strain that the family had already experienced putting them through Matric, was reason enough to get a job and help the family out, instead of studying further. In her tragic account of her younger sister's attempt at suicide, Participant 4 further explained that the financial pressure on the family is a recurring thought that burdens her with thoughts of how she could assist her mother in making ends meet. Her response also highlights how some of the participants are unable to relate educational achievement and employment:

> If I'm able to improve… I would like to get a job a right job and then earn some money so that I can support my family and buy them a house so that they can leave here and set them up in nice house ja. And have a nice life like.
> …. Ja they are hoping that I will get a good job and then better their lives and mine.
> *Do you feel pressured?*
> No it's fine I want to help and get my family out of here where we live now. You know, better our lives. Have lights and water and a bigger house ja…(Participant 4)

Most parents' expectations are that once Matric has been completed their children would then be able to get a good job and assist with the family budget. Participant 3 expressed how his parents were very proud of him having reached Matric, which was the ultimate educational goal that his parents had for him, and that they were very encouraging of him passing Matric but their expectation was that he should be able to secure a much better job than them, who have no Matric, and therefore contribute handsomely to the family budget:

> Ai actually I've tried the areas of my friends and others to try and assist me with this. You see most of our parents they want us to finish Matric and then go work because they think that with the Matric we will get jobs easy and earn more money. That's why we like talk to our friends and peers to get the motivation because they also want to study but their parents are also putting pressure in them to go work. But some are happy specially those who don't like to study. (Participant 3)

Participant 10 verified Participant 3's view of the pressure and attitude parents in her community have by explaining how the expectations of many parents in her community are that successful Matriculants must secure good jobs to support the family budgets:

> …. Mmm and I can say also the pressure from the family to go and work. Like many families expect their kids to go and work after Matric. Most parents think that Matric is the highest that their children can go because they themselves never finished school so then they want their children to finish Matric and then go straight to work. It's like an achievement to pass Matric but then they must also help the family because they think that the Matric will help them to get a better job than them, so ja, I think that is the problems. (Participant 10)

Participant 6 explained how his parents, especially his father, were pressuring him to get a job after Matric instead of looking at further education. This he found demotivating, leaving him feeling apathetic about Matric, a sense of "what's the use" of studying for good results when he would not be going to further his studies.

> Our parents are just happy that we got to Matric because like they never did. Now they just want us to start working. It's like Matric is the end of studying. We are better off than them so now we must start working and helping out with the family. (Participant 6)

Yet The Dinokeng Scenarios (2009) found that 28% of Matriculants remain unemployed and that 50% of the 20-24 age categories are unemployed in South Africa. This is a worrying statistic, because as Lynch and O'Riordan (1998) found, that parents expectations strongly affect the educational achievement of their children, hence the lower the expectation of educational achievement of parents the poorer the learners will do at Matric level, which will translate to exclusion from the competitive labour market and a growing youth unemployment rate. This will exacerbate another social evil in the South African community, crime. The Poverty Hearings, conducted by the African Monitor in 2008, linked youth unemployment and an increase in crime (The Dinokeng Scenarios, 2009). The HSRC (2007) confirms this by indicating that 57% of youth have considered committing a crime.

Participant 4 in her explanation of the benefits of education alluded to the fact that the youth in her area turn to crime:

> You see education it's nice it makes us as youth to have a brighter future and forget about doing drugs and hijacking and breaking into peoples' houses, it's like it gives us hope to better living ja, so we, the youth must stay in school but college and that I don't think is for me. (Participant 4)

Aspirations and ambitions

All the participants spoke about the careers that they would like to enter into post-Matric. This showed that these learners have the ability to aspire and be ambitious, but it was found that only four were focused and maintaining good grades at school. It appears that the economic conditions of most of the participants were preventing them from focusing their energies on excelling at Matric as they knew that they would not be able to afford their educational ambitions. Participant 9 in his account on motivation explains how many of his classmates do not perform well at school because they have already decided that they will not be attending tertiary learning due to finance:

> Definitely. That's why most of our learners just work to pass, they don't stress themselves out over getting good marks because they have already decided that they can't go to university because of finance. (Participant 9)

Participant 1, who speaks very openly about the level of deprivation in his family, explains how he is underperforming but still trying:

> My marks … they are not really that good because the first term I failed Biology which I am trying hard to study but now it's Science which I am trying to handle and pick up on my socks so I'm sure that I will do better now this term as we are writing exams in June and I really don't want that …. I really don't have that confidence that I will do better but still I am trying.

Etkin (1993, p. 24) explains how motivation and achievement are affected by finance: "financial status, whether personal or family, plays an important role in feelings of well-being or otherwise generated by the ability to possess the material basics of the group." When this feeling of well-being is absent then the ability to motivate oneself to achieve what the group identifies as important becomes difficult. Ambition and aspiration to successful careers are then replaced with concerns of survival. This points to Lynch and O'Riordan's (1998, p. 458) finding that "good financial circumstances help you to dream" and that "people think not in

terms of college but rather about where their next meal is coming from", which then impacts on the levels of educational ambition and achievement.

PERCEPTIONS OF THE EDUCATIONAL CONSTRAINTS TO HIGHER EDUCATION

Poole (2004, p. 4) in her address at a conference on "diversity of the student body and social cohesion" stated that "it is a truism that socioeconomic circumstances are a precursor to education outcomes" hence, "disadvantage begets further disadvantage for individuals, communities and regions." Participants were found to be keenly aware that their school is regarded as one of the poorer or more disadvantaged schools. Participant 6 declares that his school is a poor school and that many learners were unable to pay school fees, which impacted on the school's service delivery:

> Like I said my community is different we don't have lots of things that other kids have like lights and facilities and then our school is not a rich school. I managed to pay my fees this year but not every year and there are many kids who don't even pay their fees… (Participant 6)

According to Chisholm (2005), this is the result of the fee-paying policy in South Africa. Chisholm further explains that due to this system, state schools have either retained a "privileged" status or a poor status. Now public education systems have always been strongly linked to the political ends of the State. According to Lynch and O'Riordan (1998) educational institutions have been "inflexible an unresponsive to working - class students" or to those whom Freire (1996) would refer to as the oppressed. Participants noted how difficult it was for some of the learners at their school to pay the school fees. This they felt further disadvantaged their school, which was then unable to improve the resources available to them. Participant 5 identified the difficulties of paying school fees which she thinks impacts on the resources at her school compared to the more advantaged schools:

> They have better facilities then at public schools because they got more money. They got like computers and libraries and internet and ….. they just have more. Then their classes are smaller than at public schools and ja so they are better prepared. You see it's the money, only few people at our school can afford the fees. Most of us don't pay. So the school does not have the money for all these. (Participant 5)

Linked to the lack of resources, it was found that participants were very split in their responses to whether they thought that their school prepared them adequately for tertiary

education. Two participants felt that the school did not prepare them adequately at all and the eight remaining participants felt that in some ways they were adequately prepared but in others the school had disappointed them. The responses below illustrate how strongly Participant 5 felt about the lack of delivery by her school while Participant 3's response is more typical of the responses by the other participants:

> Nothing, I don't think they have done anything for us like the principal and the teachers and things I don't think that they have done anything for us. Nothing. (Participant 5)

> Maybe I can say not from the computers and that. The school doesn't have good, how can I say, things for us to use that can make our studying easier, but from the teachers support and all that ja. They do some impact that they put in, and they push us ja. (Participant 3)

From this it can be concluded that these participants feel that their school and what it offers them is a barrier to accessing higher education.

Resources at school

Variava (2006) in her study in Lenasia found that most of the schools interviewed stated that they had resource constraints that impacted on the efficient running of their schools. Participants identified weaknesses within their school that would prevent them from optimally passing Matric and therefore achieving their full potential. They identified resources at the different schools as a key factor that contributes to the poorer results gained by learners like themselves who attend state schools that are not well funded and therefore not well resourced.

1. Libraries

Participants expressed that the lack of material resources at their school seriously impacted on the quality of education that they received. Due to the fact that these learners cannot afford to pay for facilities and services outside of school, learners are totally reliant on what the school can provide for them. Participants identified the lack of a properly functioning library at school where they could do their research for the many portfolio assignments they receive as a barrier for them. Participant 3 explained that these assignment marks contributed to their overall portfolio mark which was used to calculate their final mark. They felt disadvantaged

that they were not given access to libraries and computers so that they could excel at their assignments:

> they give you the research to go to like Lenasia to the library to get the information and maybe use the library to get to the internet…
> Those marks count for your year mark and then we are disadvantaged because now we can't even get the proper information and most of this research needs us to have the internet and the computer. Ai but I just try very hard to study for my test so that it can make up for that. (Participant 3)

Participant 6 explained how he would visit the town library in Lenasia at the 'top shops' in order to compete his assignments but that it was far from his home and taxis were expensive. This resulted in him not using the town library as much as he would have liked in order to improve his year marks:

> We have to go right there to the top shops where the Lenz library is and that's so far then we don't have transport or taxi money. And then some of us have like big families so like then the others also need to do their assignments for their portfolios. (Participant 6)

This response not only highlights how the lack of resources at school is a barrier for these learners but that their family backgrounds are an additional stressor. Families of learners like Participant 6 would not be able to finance and adequately support the learning of these children with what they have available to them. The research therefore illustrates the necessity for policy, a structural change, to be instituted where the resourcing and maintenance of libraries at disadvantaged schools becomes compulsory. This would not only alleviate the pressure on learners when completing assignments but would provide a safe and convenient place for the community to empower themselves.

2. Computers

Technological access was also viewed by the participants as an important requirement for them to achieve good results. Participant 2 identified that their school did not have computers or internet access for them to do their research. This he felt did have an impact on his results as the information that they were able to access with the limited resources offered to them did not lend itself to good or high marks. As these assignments are part of the CASS (Continuous Assessment) approach adopted by the GDE to calculate the learner's year mark, which contributes to their final mark, it was seen as an important barrier to accessing higher education:

> Uuuh in the learning facilities we like don't have access to maybe computers or the internet to do our researches like maybe we got to go to maybe like Lenasia Civic Centre and get information from computers there in the libraries so ja… that makes it difficult. Sometimes we can't get the information then we don't get the good marks that we would like which worries me because then it has an effect on my year mark because we work on continuous assessment at Matric also. (Participant 2)

Participants compared themselves to learners at more advantaged schools and identified the access to computers and the internet as a salient factor that differentiated between their educations. Participant 4's response illustrates her frustration with the lack of resources she feels they experience as compared to learners from the more privileged schools:

> … they can get information from computers and that and ja and so we can't have like the same thing like them that's why it's like we can't win and we can't be the same. (Participant 4)

There was a computer project in Lenasia during 2000, a millennium initiative, which saw computer rooms being identified, secured and equipped with computers and printers at different schools including this school. Internet access was also planned for these classes. The project was not sustainable as cost of the website and upkeep by the provider was not sanctioned by the GDE. The school was then also robbed of the computers by a gang of armed thieves. This raises issues of technical delivery and security at schools in disadvantaged communities. These issues need to be addressed at policy level so that schools can be supported and guided towards best practice for their learners.

3. Laboratories

Unlike the findings of Lynch and O'Riordan (1998), most participants from the school did not view the quality of the education that they received at school as inferior to that at the more privileged schools, but expressed that the lack of material resources impacted on their education. Participant 8, who is interested in the Maths and Science field, identified the poorly equipped laboratories at his school for both Science and Biology as a factor that prevented them from achieving good results, as many of the experiments that needed to be taught practically were not, due to the inadequacies of the laboratories:

> Well… my teacher doesn't do all of the experiments with us because we don't have like a proper lab so he just explains to us. This is a problem because part of our

> Science paper is on experiments and part of our Biology year mark is our practicals which are the experiments that we have to complete. Both these labs are like not well stocked so it's a problem for us. (Participant 8)

Although the other participants identified many other resources lacking at their school, Participant 8 seemed to be the only one who was concerned about the laboratories. Since Maths and Science are critical subjects and are a requirement for many university courses and therefore careers, it was deemed necessary to report the comment. Participant 8 is very interested in the Engineering field which the labour market demands and where many of the bursaries are offered. Poor performance in these subjects would exclude these learners from these bursaries, and therefore these careers, which would be a barrier for these students as they most need these bursaries. This could be a reason why the transfer rate from privileged schools to tertiary institutions is higher than from disadvantaged schools.

Turnover rates of teachers

In the Irish study by Lynch and O'Riordan (1998), the turnover rates of teachers at disadvantaged schools were high. In South Africa the appointments of teachers at all state schools are done by the School's Governing Body (SGB) but are confirmed by the GDE. A vacancy list from the gazette of the GDE is circulated to schools and many teachers who are dissatisfied with teaching at the disadvantaged schools apply, and if successful, transfer to the 'better' schools. Participants found the change of teachers at their school very disruptive and counter-productive to their results. Participant 4 found that her English teacher, whom she found to be a very good teacher, left the school for another, leaving them without a teacher for a while. The participant felt that this had impacted on her results of English:

> Private tuition. Ja I needed it but no I didn't get that because that teacher went away this year. The English teacher ja she went to another school and she was a good teacher because then I was passing but now I don't know this time how am I doing because I just don't know. Ja.
> *Does your school change teachers often?*
> Not so often but we lost some of our good teachers who went to other schools.
> *Do you think that this affects you learners?*
> Ja like I started to fail when my English teacher left because she was such a good teacher and I could understand her and now to get use to someone else and ….(Participant 4)

As English was only offered as a first language at the school, learners have to pass English first language in order to pass Matric, which can be a major contributor to poor performance and hence the inability to access higher education.

Asked whether he thought the school had prepared him adequately for further studying Participant 2 replied that they hadn't and discussed how when a teacher left at Matric level then it meant adjusting or "getting used to" another teacher's style which he found to be disruptive and disadvantageous to his academic achievement:

> No it hasn't because mmm uuh each and every term they change their time tables and teachers, like maybe in Accounting we had this teacher she was a very good teacher and then when the school reopened their was a new teacher and this new teacher we are not use to his style of teaching so its difficult for us to adjust and so time is running out so we were suppose to complete the syllabus before writing our June exam but we haven't. (Participant 2)

The change of the Maths teacher appeared to be a difficult and challenging adjustment for the participants as well. All the participants who do Maths explained how difficult it was to have lost their Maths teacher. The school was then forced to appoint one of the other teachers as the Maths teacher. According to the participants he did not want to teach Maths resulting in the teacher presenting a very poor attitude to his teaching of the class. Participant 9 felt that the Maths teacher was completely disinterested in teaching them, which impacts on the class:

> I think that when a teacher is not interested in the subject, like I know this teacher did not want to teach Maths to us this year but he was forced to so then he just was not interested. And Maths is such an important subject and when you don't have the right teacher then it really impacts on the class. (Participant 9)

Participant 10, responding to how she felt the teachers had prepared her for further education, explained how this Maths teacher did not even complete all the sections necessary for the final exam and that if she had not had private tuition she would not have known any better.

> I can say it depends on the subjects. There are some subjects where there are like dedicated teachers but a certain subject which is a major subject which is like Maths, the teacher was not dedicated. Subjects like English, Afrikaans, Science, Accounting, Biology the teachers were dedicated, they really tried their best, that's why I will also do my best. But Maths the teacher was not dedicated and he was not like supposed to teach Maths but he was forced to teach it. (Participant 10)

Participant 10 agreed that she was fortunate in that her tutor prepared her in those sections, but that the rest of her class who were unable to access private tuition would be left poorly prepared for the final exam.

> …there were like sections in Maths like there's a geometry section in Maths which the teacher never even attempted that section but in the tuitions we did cover that. Some students were like shocked to see a section on geometry like that in the June exam but I was fortunate enough that I did that in tuitions so I was prepared. (Participant 10)

Again, Maths is an important subject for accessing good careers and generous bursaries. This would then be another important barrier to accessing higher education. Louw (2002, p. 2), in her study at the Technikon Northern Gauteng, found that there was a 32,73 % pass rate in MTHS1 (Math 1), after a 35,45 % of enrolled students were not admitted to the exam as they had not reached the sub-minimum mark of 40% for admission to the examination. This was of grave concern to the institution and one of the findings cited is "that students are often under-prepared for tertiary education" (Louw, 2002, p. 6). On review of the responses of the participants it can be concluded that under-qualified or inexperienced teachers at Matric level negatively affect the performance of learners. The GDE and SGB would need to be more cautious in their appointments of teachers at this level so as to adequately prepare learners for the Matric examination and hence further study. Furthermore stability of staff at schools should be paramount for the DoE and therefore policy around staffing and transfer of staff needs to be reviewed in the interest of learners especially at Grade 12 level.

Information dissemination

Lynch and O'Riordan (1998) found that another access barrier to higher education was the lack of guidance and information to the learners. This lack of information can create great anxiety as higher education is a foreign sometimes scary world for learners who are unable to even afford a taxi to the local library. Lack of information can result in learners not knowing when or how to apply to universities and especially how to access financial aid. This lack of information can then create an impression that tertiary education is unattainable and beyond the realms of their experience. Participant 4 expressed her frustration with her lack of information. She is one of the participants who is not planning to study further because she thinks that it is not for her. Her response illustrates that her lack of understanding of the process due to the lack of information is proving to be a barrier:

> Maybe let me just say maybe if we can get someone that can really tell us more like who will give us more information that would tell us that if you wanna study like this, you will be this in the future, and things like that and obviously you will experience good and bad things but you have to be positive all the time so that you can go and do all of those things. So ja more people talking to us about what we need, to study further. (Participant 4)

Participants did however admit that the school had attempted to motivate them for tertiary education. According to participants the Principal firstly attempted to motivate them by telling stories of people from their backgrounds who have managed to transcend their difficulties and access tertiary education and, most importantly, become successful.

> I would also say yes because our principal come to our classes and talks to us and how he gives us the guides about how to get into universities mmm he would even tell us the stories about mmm about the past and what happened in the past. (Participant 1)

Secondly the Principal had organised weekly visits of representatives from different colleges to the school to inform them of what was offered by the college, closing dates, how to apply, etc. This, the participants seemed to appreciate but as Participant 6 clarifies, the information was a little too late:

> Our school was like every Wednesdays (thinks) ja they use to bring like people from different universities to come and tell us everything about them but I felt that it was too late because we needed that information long ago. Now there's like no way that I can get the marks I need, we already going to write our trials soon. (Participant 6)

The staff at this school seems to be very supportive of the learners but tertiary education information should be discussed and disseminated as early as Grade 9. This will prepare learners for appropriate subject choice which will prepare and therefore empower them to make considered career choices at Grade 12 level. Participant 4 explains how information is only beneficial if disseminated at an opportune time:

> Ja I think so because we like just choose any subjects in Grade 10 and we don't actually ja like start thinking then of what we want to study and then we just like carry on and then in Matric it's too late. So if we can like get someone ja like in Grade 9 to tell us and show us ja maybe like our Grade 9 LO teachers must like tell us and not just call a meeting and say you have to choose take this form home and fill it out. Our parents don't know and then we just choose ourselves like that ja and maybe it's the wrong subjects for what we want to study. (Participant 4)

Participants also explained how they lacked information from universities that were not amongst the institutions that visited their school, forcing them to rely on family members and friends to bring information to them as they did not have access to computers. Their responses also indicate how reliant they are on brochures distributed by tertiary institutions hence it would be crucial for universities to engage with schools like the participants' school to disseminate information to these learners. Participants also lacked the admission requirements for university courses, which they felt is a barrier as they would not be able to achieve the points needed for admission:

> I have got information from colleges that have come to our school but I don't have from any universities. And I read about it from those pamphlets and I liked it so I know that it is what I would want to do. (Participant 5)

> Yes I just wish I knew long ago what the requirements for the different degrees are because this M score story is hard. ….Yes! I would have worked much harder and I would have chosen my subjects more carefully in Grade 9. (Participant 6)

Participants who had a clear goal in mind and who had access to information like Participant 2 seemed better prepared and motivated to access higher education:

> Ja I got the information ja. I've got to obtain a 60 in Accounting and I think a 59 and above in Maths and 40 in the 2 languages that I'm doing and the other subjects 30 and that.
> *So you would be able to get in for the course?*
> Ja I would be able to get in. (Participant 2)

This was in striking contrast to those participants who were not clear on their career paths or who had very little information about how to access higher education. They seemed to have unrealistic ideas about the cost and expressed how they would not be able to access these institutions.

> Uhhh for Travel and Tourism at College Campus ja last time they said studying there would be R1 000 for Travel and Tourism. (Participant 5)

The lack of relevant, complete and clear information seemed to be a barrier to participants understanding and entertaining the idea of accessing higher education. Oreopoulos (2009) in his study at the University of Toronto found that students who are impeded by a lack of information about programmes at the university and who are uncertain as to how to apply for

them refrain from applying and accessing higher education. Participation rates improved by 20% when students were assisted with information and the ways of applying. Curriculum policy changes on the content for Life Orientation can assist in the dissemination of information to learners from the early years of their schooling. This early intervention at school level, according to Oreopoulos (2009), would aid in demystifying higher education thus making it accessible to all.

Admission requirements

South Africa's past was riddled with laws and policies that excluded the masses from equal participation in tertiary institutions. Bunting (1994, p. 75) found that the proportion of white students in the university system in 1992 was almost four times higher than their share of the total population of South Africa. This means that at that time 75% of white pupils entering primary school were likely to pass Matric and 66% of these would enter into higher learning. The average for black students at that time was 20% that would get to Matric, 8% who would pass Matric and 55% of those who passed would enter tertiary education but mainly into teacher training colleges. Access to higher learning was completely skewed in favour of white students.

Participants felt that universities are using the Minimum Score requirement for admission, i.e. the M-score, to control admission to these institutions. Participants further felt that successful applicants were those who achieved a certain level of performance in their matriculation examination which they feel is inherently unfair as education and resources at State schools in South Africa are not on a par. Participant 10 expressed how she thought that the M-scores were excluding many learners from universities and referred to the inequality in education as a possible reason for their being unable to achieve the results to reach the M-score requirements.

> Mmm ok they are quite good like the standards and all that are really good but they should like start catering for kids that can't like reach the M - scores because there are many kids now that can't reach the M - scores, so it is becoming a big problem because you find that they can't reach like the M - scores because their high school education was not good, because maybe because of teachers or something. So it might be different when they go to varsity because then they may do something that they really enjoy and get good grooming ….(Participant 10)

Participants also seemed confused about the system that universities used for admission. Four participants spoke about how the point requirements differed at the different universities, as did the method of calculating those M scores. Participants found the requirements at the University of Johannesburg (UJ) more achievable than at the University of the Witwatersrand (Wits), thus feeling excluded from Wits:

> I feel that, what do you call this? The entry requirements ja, are a bit harsh you know. Like Wits wants 29 points for B.Com Accounting and most others require like 26 or 24 points, so they are harsh. (Participant 9)
> Ja. The number of points at UJ are not lower than the others but they give more points for the different symbols so it's easier to get those points at UJ. The worst is Wits so I won't even try to get in there. (Participant 7)

The shape of higher education in South Africa has changed in accordance with the vision of the legislation regarding equal access. Part of the changing system is the emphasis on assuring quality, as institutions under the new policy will be audited and therefore held accountable (Bunting, 1994). Universities have therefore developed admission policies that will uphold the quality of education that they deliver. In this way the failure rate at universities can be contained as lowered admission requirements may increase the number of failures at university which would translate to increased drop-out rates. Participants have however mentioned that there needs to be uniformity between institutions and an acknowledgement that schools vary in the quality of education delivered. The DoE and Department of Higher Learning need to review the policies about this and provide guidelines to universities so that admissions policies can be fair to all.

Educator expectations

Research in Ireland where Lynch and O'Riordan (1998) worked found that in the schools around Dublin, middle-class teachers who taught working class pupils lacked commitment and understanding of these pupils and somehow had lower expectations of these pupils which they found to be a barrier to successfully passing and entering into tertiary education. In contrast to these findings, the participants of the current research found that their principal and many of their teachers were extremely supportive and encouraging. As Participant 1 simply says:

> ….. we have good teachers and I am happy with them. (Participant 1)

Participants however did find the levels of dedication and commitment of some of their teachers to be a barrier rather than an attitude of poor expectation. Participant 5 differentiates between the dedicated teachers and those who are uncommitted:

> … I don't know maybe the teachers could have pushed us more. Like some are very nice and they talk to us and even the principal sometimes will come and tell us that we must set goals and work for them and we can get to them. But then there are some teachers who like don't care. It's like they just come to school to get their job done but don't really care for us. (Participant 5)

Participants found that the uncommitted teachers impacted on their understanding and achievement in those subjects leaving them feeling uncertain and anxious when writing the examinations. Participant 3 felt very strongly about this and felt that the quality of education that they received at the school was poor:

> aah not that great, aah like they teach but aah sometimes like they finish the syllabus then that educator no more comes to the class so now if you not sure of something then you have to ask a friend to help you or something. So you don't feel at ease because what if your friend is telling you the wrong answer so aah I don't think so. (Participant 3)

The importance of teachers and the impact that they have on their learners is highlighted in the responses. It is therefore vital for the DoE and SGBs to become proactive in the management, development and support of educators so that educator motivation and commitment can be fostered and improved for the sake of the learners.

PERCEPTIONS OF THE SOCIAL AND CULTURAL CONSTRAINTS TO HIGHER EDUCATION

According to Marx the interest of the ruling class is always promoted and affirmed at the expense of the lower class by devaluing their "culture, values and mores" (in Haralambos, 1983, p. 179). In this way they are oppressed and prevented from being subjects of history but rather become the mere objects determined by other people's intentions and without real agency (Freire, 1979). Freire's belief though is that society can be organised in the best interest of all, and that individual citizens can and will act for the common good. According to Freire, educational institutions are the vehicle used by the ruling class to perpetuate their ideologies and therefore he believes that for any change to occur, education needs to transform. Participants identified the need to transform the higher education system in order

to make it more accessible to them. In expressing his feelings about higher education institutions in South Africa, Participant 8 explained that:

> I don't know, ahh I think they are fine, but I can't compare them to those internationally, but I think that they are still facing some challenges themselves because you know 80% of the students are disadvantaged in this country so they have to change this so ja. (Participant 8)

The sentiments of the participants support what Bunting (1994) believes, which is that for the higher education sector to provide the skilled professionals required by a modern economy and by a rapidly changing society, transformation is essential. For the higher education system to fulfil its key role in the reconstruction and development of the South African society, the legacies of apartheid and "the massive and unjustifiable inequalities" which characterised South Africa's higher education system would require reform.

Parental outsider status

The parents of these participants were all victims of the apartheid era when education was segregated and strongly used to oppress the masses. Many black learners during that time therefore dropped out of the Bantu education schools to find work. The interviews revealed that only three parents were educated to Matric level. This oppressive system could have resulted in these parents' lowered educational motivation and a hostile or indifferent attitude towards education, particularly higher education. Participant 1 explained how confused about his future he is as the people in his environment including his mother were unable to guide and inspire him to access higher education and succeed:

> The confusion? (clears throat) first on first the environment that you come from will determine who you are. So where I live I get no inspiration from someone who can say here I am a sound technician or something like that you know, I don't have anyone to talk to me like that. To say what they feel inside and talk to me about how it is to be a sound technician or a professional musician. So that is the problem that I have. I don't get any inspiration from someone that I can talk to about this thing. So like even my mother is too busy trying to make us survive so I don't have that terms or that person to guide me or to give me inspiration and encourage me to do that. (Participant 1)

Participant 3 plainly says:

> Yes because there is no parent support because of money and that's the main thing. (Participant 3)

Participant 9 explains how learners at his school feel excluded from universities just as their parents do:

> The other thing I can say is that they undermine themselves like they think that they are not the kind of people who go to university.
> *What kind of people do they think go there?*
> Rich people, clever people, people from other smarter areas. (Participant 9)

Parents' disinterest in further study and rather on the employment of their children after Matric was also seen to be a barrier that demotivated them from further studying:

> . So I think most of them will just start looking for jobs and if they really want to study then they will pay from what they earn. For others the parents just want them to get Matric and then start working. (Participant 5)

This would lead to feelings of being unsupported which in turn could result in these learners not wanting to access higher education. Lynch and O'Riordan (1998) found in their study that few learners from such homes accessed higher education institutions.

Poor self esteem

The experience of strong negative feelings like hopelessness, lack of self – belief, and fear, in Matric learners after writing their preliminary examinations, was documented in a study by Botha (2002). She found that the stress created by failing the preliminary examinations, the purpose of which is to prepare the learners for the finals, negatively affected learners. Participants experienced similar negative feelings based on their poor performance, not in the preliminary examinations, but in their exams in Grade 11 and Term 1 of Grade 12.

According to Masi, Sbrana, Tomaiuolo, Favilla and Marcheschi (2000, p. 166) and Biehler and Snowman (1997, p. 412) there is a significant relationship between "academic performance, self-image and moods." Negative effects on learners can influence their behaviour in an educational situation to produce a tendency to "give up" or experience hopelessness (Masi et al., 2000). Chen and Craske (1998, p 146) support this by saying that some learners "become overwhelmed by the upcoming stressor, and experience depression, resignation, or emotional detachment rather than anxiety". Participant 1's confidence was

badly shaken by his first term results, leaving him feeling inadequate and desperate to improve:

> My marks … they are not really that good because the first term I failed Biology which I am trying hard to study but now its Science which I am trying to handle and pick up on my socks, so I'm sure that I will do better now this term as we are writing exams in June and I really don't want that …. I really don't have that confidence that I will do better but till I am trying. (Participant 1)

The lack of self-confidence that they would succeed in the Matric exam was a strong theme amongst participants. Participant 6's ambition was to become a doctor but when she realised how many points she would need for Medicine she was forced to change her mind, leaving her feeling disillusioned:

> I just feel a bit confused now though because I really wanted to become a doctor so it was like hard to change my mind. And then sometimes I like worry whether I am actually going to make it. …. I know I will pass Matric but not with the marks that I need for medicine. I worry about becoming an actress. I know there is a lot of competition so like how far is this choice going to take me, what is it going to do for me, and where will it get me. (Participant 6)

Participant 4 spoke of how she felt that she was not intelligent enough to attend university but could possibly be accepted at a college. Her belief is that she is not intelligent enough for university and would therefore be excluded, this before even attempting her preliminary examinations:

> Uhhh I don't know by now because like I am not that good, for me to go to like a higher university or maybe college I can, ja. Let me just say that. (Participant 4)

These findings support Lynch and O'Riordan's (1998) findings that showed that when poorer, working-class people do not achieve in the mainstream institutions, a sense of failure to achieve the values and culture of the greater society results in them losing confidence and their educational self esteem is lowered.

Unfamiliarity breeds contempt

A surprising finding of the research was the strongly positive attitude towards UJ and an equally strong negative feeling towards Wits. Participants were attempting to access information from UJ through friends and family but not from Wits, as the participants were

keener on attending UJ if it were financially feasible for their families. It was revealed that participants were acquainted with students at UJ but not at Wits, hence the security of knowing someone who is already attending an institution creates a sense of familiarity which seems to influence the choice of a tertiary institution. Responses point out the significance of group identity as participants felt better able to identify with the student population at UJ than at Wits. As Participant 3 explains:

> Most of them think that Wits is for highly intelligent people. And so do I think so. Ja I think that mostly intelligent people go there more especially the people who do Science and that. So we prefer going to UJ. … Not that I am undermining myself but maybe like there is someone you know there at UJ so it's better. Yes when you know someone than it is better because eish it is so different to what we used to which for some can be a little bit scary. (Participant 3)

This response also highlights how the experience of fear can be the result of the unfamiliarity of situations. Disadvantaged learners who are curbed by finance seem to require the comfort of a smaller, more intimate environment or the familiarity of knowing someone at an institution to feel comfortable. Participant 9 explained how he found the campus of Monarch friendlier than Wits:

> I first wanted to go to Wits, after reading and seeing Monash I think that they are a better choice.
> *Because the requirement are easier?*
> Ja but also because it's a smaller campus and they seem more what can I say, approachable. I felt comfortable when I went there.

Universities and colleges should encourage disadvantaged schools to visit the institutions to demystify them and familiarise learners with tertiary institutions. Fear and anxiety about attending such a place could then be reduced and instead a desire to transfer to tertiary institutions can be encouraged.

Peer pressure

Participants expressed a range of anxieties about attending tertiary institutions. They presented beliefs that such institutions are very different and are very unfamiliar and therefore they would be isolated or ostracised because they were not of the same financial class as the other students. This fear seems to be capitalised on by peers who attempt to influence friends with their career choice, choice of institution and even whether they should

study further or not. Participant 2 identified peer pressure as a barrier for him as he explained that friends at school pressured each other to make the same career choices to prevent isolation and rally support:

> It was kind of difficult because you know peer pressure, my friends kind of like said let us do this or let us do that so I had to sit and decide for myself, you know which course do I really want to do next year.

Participant 2 went on to explain:

> … because you see if we study the same thing then we will all have the same time table and we will all be together because we don't know what university will be like, so if we are together then we at least won't feel like lost or strange or anything. It will make it easier for us. (Participant 2)

This indicates the high level of anxiety that these learners feel about accessing higher learning institutions. They were afraid that they would not be able to make friends at college or university and that this would make them feel isolated and out of place.

Participant 8 explained how his friends attempted to distract him from his studies and from attending university:

> I think like friends, friends is the initial barrier to overcome which can keep you back from entering tertiary institutions, and the lack of information.
> *Let's talk about these two problems that you have identified.*
> Friends, friends hah friends can influence you like can really keep you back because they are your support at school and then if they are not so interested in studying and going to university they can like discourage you and change your focus.
> *Meaning?*
> Well they can get you involved in like other stuff like for example soccer. They know I love soccer and that I am good at it so they will play and call me for the games. Now that is hard to resist so you have to be really strong to be able to continue to do what you want to and stay focused. (Participant 8)

Participant 9 referred to a different type of peer pressure. In his case peers were attempting to pressure him into conformity with the group by ostracizing him:

> (laughs) my attitude I can't say much about my attitude because those people (points to people in his class) don't like my attitude because they think it's all bad but that's the way I am I cannot change.
> *Bad?*

> Ja like they think I think that I am better or something than them, but I just want to get where I want to and I don't want to hang out and waste time. Also I'm straight forward and they don't like that. (Participant 9)

According to Stevens (1994), group cohesion has long been a demand and requirement of society and when this cohesion is threatened by the individuality of a unit, pressure is placed on it to force conformity. Participants' responses have demonstrated how peer pressure can be the force to ensure conformity towards or against studying further.

Language

The use of language as a tool of oppression is woven into the history of South Africa (Mda, in Mda & Mothatha, 2000). The 1976 Soweto uprising against the use of Afrikaans as the medium of instruction at schools bears testament to this. According to Bunting (1994) the Assembly universities,

which were the "privileged" universities that received the bulk of the funding and resources from the apartheid government, used Afrikaans as the medium of instruction. This excluded the masses even further from entering tertiary education as most non-whites were not Afrikaans speaking. Transformation post-1994 has resulted in English being the medium of instruction at all universities. English is not the mother tongue of any of the participants interviewed but the research found that nine of the ten participants were comfortable and unintimidated by this as they felt that their schooling at an English medium school had prepared them sufficiently for this. Participant 5's response is a typical response:

> Mmm no problems. I don't have a problem with English or Afrikaans. No. I do pass Afrikaans not that good but I do pass it. (Participant 5)

In contrast Participant 4 felt that language was a barrier for her in accessing higher education as she struggled with both English and Afrikaans:

> Ja English I am not good at English I am not a good speaker in English even Afrikaans, Afrikaans is worst. I do know how to speak English so it's not affecting me but then my writing and reading is not so good which affects my understanding so it makes studying harder.
> *Does this affect your motivation to study further?*
> It does what if when I go there they are high class and others speak high and I don't understand. I find it difficult to concentrate then if they are high class English then I will just give up and it's too much money to go and waste my time there.

The research shows that the language policy change made in the attempt to transform higher education was beneficial and acceptable to learners who are not English first-language speakers. South Africa's history of white minority oppression was fought by the black majority. In 1976 the political uprising was against the use of Afrikaans as the medium of instruction in schools. Afrikaans became the hated language of the oppressors and therefore black people were more amenable to accepting English as the medium of instruction and as the common language in South Africa. Today even though there are eleven official languages in South Africa, English is still accepted as the lingua franca (Mothatha in Mda & Mothatha, 2000). This supports the finding of this research.

PERCEPTIONS OF THE POLITICAL CONSTRAINTS TO HIGHER EDUCATION

While the primary barriers to accessing higher education as identified by the participants were economic, educational and socio-cultural, these were compounded either directly or indirectly by the failure of government to address the needs of this community. Participants showed a keen understanding of how the government plays a part in constraining their access to higher education.

Government's role in poor service delivery

At the Round Table Youth Initiative, Maile (2007) said that the "lack of coherence between service delivery departments was a major challenge" given that learner retention at school and at tertiary education related to "multi-faceted social problems". Richter (2007) supported this by adding that the "context for many barriers to completing education was pervasive and chronic poverty". Participant 9 clearly described how change should occur in order to make access to higher education easier for his community:

> I think that change has to occur at many levels. First parents need to be more supportive of their kids and plan better. Matric must not be the end of studying. Then the government needs to service our community better. Like we have been promised electricity they must deliver on this. They must make libraries for us which has internet and computers. You know, they must follow up on the promises they make at election time. (Participant 9)

Participant 6's frustration with the lack of service delivery is obvious when she explains:

> I just think that the government needs to do something especially for communities like mine. It's like so many years after apartheid but it's like nothing has really changed for us. (Participant 6)

The frustration with the lack of service delivery to the area was noticeable in Participant 2's response as well:

> Uuuh the new government I think like they have neglected their duty of helping those who are previously disadvantaged. Because like we have been living here since like I don't know when and there are no like changes here that could encourage young people to do better in schools and to encourage them like to learn.
> *What would you like to see the government doing in your area?*
> Like uuuh building uuuh facilities that will encourage learners to go to school and like make them not to do those wrong things like smoking, drinking ja and maybe like sports facilities like they should build soccer grounds, basketball courts, things like that and get the kids off the streets ja. (Participant 2)

According to the responses of the participants, physical changes to Thembelihle are required. This would necessitate structural changes within local government so that the needs of this community can be addressed. This would in turn translate to upliftment of the community so that social exclusion that emanates from poverty can be eradicated. The result would be the reduction of the information gaps within this community and hence the raising of educational objectives so that higher learning can become a reachable goal.

Poor curriculum policy

Botha (2002) explains how outcomes based education (OBE) was chosen in 1997 as the most likely educational model to address the crisis in South African education; the most likely system to operate at all educational levels; and the most likely model to address the issue of quality (and inequality) in South African education. The OBE policy was launch in 1997 as Curriculum 2005 in an attempt at changing the evils of a humiliating discriminatory system to a just and fair curriculum that could see to the needs of all learners. The DoE attempted to increase the retention rates at school that were dismally low pre-1994 for black children. It was found by the HSRC in 2007 that of the 15 million people aged 5 - 19 years, some 12.2 million are in school (excluding FET colleges). 90% of 16-year-olds are in some form of education, but that this figure drops to around 56% for 19-year-olds. Hence the enrolment falls significantly from Grade 10. With this in mind the DoE reviewed the promotion requirements for the different grades and has moved away from the mark - based assessment to achievement or performance indicators. Promotion requirements within this new system

have been reduced to allow the most disadvantaged learner the opportunity to progress. Participants found that this was one of the factors that created a barrier to accessing higher education because progression through school has become easier, yet the requirements to access higher education has become more stringent with the use of the M- scores. Participant 2 explains clearly:

> Uuh firstly like looking at the teaching system that is used now, the percentage that they use for promotion at the end of the year it's kind of low so it's not encouraging us to do better. Ja and mmm ja
> *So what you're saying to me is that kids are passing and going to the next grade like grade 12 not knowing a lot.*
> Not knowing a lot exactly. Like now you've got to pass your languages at 40% and other subjects at 30%. That's kind of low so you just passing for the sake of it, not knowing like what you doing there. I mean you hardly have to work and you can get those marks. Then when you get to Matric then you have been passing with those low marks and then you have to sit for this external exam and get high marks to go to university. Then you wake up but it's too late because I mean how can you fix that at Matric level.
> *Now how does this impact on university?*
> Because like if you can take a further look at what is required for entrance at university then it's kind of high like you got to obtain a 60 or 80 in Maths and most pupils get about 40 to 50 and so it makes it kind of hard to go to university. So they end up in colleges and technikons or just sitting at home. (Participant 2)

If any change is to be effected in improving the access of disadvantaged learners to higher education institutions, it would have to come from policy changes that guide promotion requirements. Participants explained how insecure they felt about the amount of knowledge they needed to write the external Matric exam. This speaks for a change in policy regarding promotional requirements.

Deficient student financial aid from government

Participants complained about the cost of tertiary education and were all very vocal about the lack of financial aid made available to disadvantaged learners. They also highlighted the inadequate dissemination of information from tertiary education institutions and from the DoE regarding bursaries and financial aid. Participant 10 referred to the involvement needed from the Education Department as the representatives of the government:

> Mmm nooo ja but maybe the government can like get involved and like the Department of Education can like do something for learners like us. Like come and talk to us about

> bursaries and try and get bursaries for kids like us and then upgrade our schools and our teachers so that we get good education. Ja and then they must also upgrade our communities with lights and stuff. Ja I think that's all. (Participant 10)

Participant 6 refers to the unequal access to higher education and not only identifies the reasons for it but ascribes the role that government should play in equalising access:

> I don't think so because if everyone who could go to university had that opportunity then I would say yes but it's still so hard to get in. It's as if things haven't really changed since that time. I mean the opportunities are still not the same for every one. And it's like some universities are using the fees and the M scores to stop kids like me from going there. Then there aren't enough bursaries for students and we don't have information of how to even get those bursaries that are out there. I just think that the government needs to do something especially for communities like mine. It's like so many years after apartheid but it's like nothing has really changed for us. (Participant 6)

Participant 8 refers to the teaching colleges which he feels have transformed to accommodate more students:

> I think that the teaching institutions now are more like considering like us because now there are many students who are now going to study there, but like us we just need the opportunity so the other campuses must try and do what the teaching ones did so that more of us learners can go. (Participant 8)

In her frustration with the lack of financial aid available to learners, Participant 4 opts out of studying in favour of a job:

> … It's too much money to go and waste my time there. So I think maybe that I must rather find a good job like go to the Metro Police. I think that will help me more. (Participant 4)

Deprivation can widen the divide between the haves and the have nots, which Participant 3 shows in his response about resources and ex-Model C schools:

> Eh the government they are not actually, they are focusing on higher the higher like the Model C schools, and they forget about the lower level schools. Ja they concentrate more on the higher level. Like if you see the bursaries are all going to the Model C schools and for us at the lower level it is very hard to get the bursary ja.
> *What makes you say that they are not looking at your schools.*
> They are not maybe coming to visit our schools and tell us one, two, three about the information. They are more concentrating on others. Like we don't have computers where we can maybe get our information but there, there is computers. (Participant 3)

According to Bunting (1994), the new government remains the major provider of the current and fixed asset funds by the higher education system. This is because higher education will remain for public benefit, but participants who use this service will be levied with a charge. However due to social and economic imbalances that exist, those who cannot afford these charges will not be denied access but will be assisted to meet those charges. Financial aid for learners must therefore be made available to students like these research participants but information about accessing these funds also need to be disseminated to them. Participants pointed out that the DoE can be used as a vehicle to inform them of the financial options available to them.

The findings in this part of the research explain how important it is for government to deliver on promises made to communities like Thembelihle so that the needs of such communities can be more adequately addressed. It also identifies weaknesses and areas within policy which needs to be revisited so that equal access in education becomes a reality for all South Africans

The rationale for this research was to develop a deeper understanding of what disadvantaged Grade 12 learners perceive as the barriers to accessing higher education. This Chapter attempted to present these perceptions of the participants which, fell into four broad but salient themes, namely, perceptions of the economic constraints to higher education, perceptions of the educational constraints to higher education, perceptions of the social and cultural constraints to higher education, and perceptions of the political constraints to higher education. In consideration of these themes it appears that participants are strongly aware of the factors that prevent them from accessing higher education. Participants' perceptions are mainly aligned with structural barriers to higher education. This indicates that governmental and tertiary institutions require intense dialogue with these communities because their experiences and knowledge "lie deep in the reservoirs of the lived reality and reflection of these societies", which can inform and direct effective transformation (Vally et al., 2007, p. 192).

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

The purpose of this chapter is to enhance the understanding of the barriers that economically disadvantage Grade 12 learners experience when attempting to enter and participate in higher education. This chapter will attempt to flash out the major themes that were identified by the participants in order to understand their perceptions of the barriers and in this way decide what structural changes need to be effected to support the transformation process. Finally their struggle for equity in accessing education post-Matric will be analysed through Paulo Freire's theory of Dialogue, Praxis and Conscientisation.

ECONOMIC BARRIERS

Financial insecurity and poverty within families have a direct and indirect effect on participants' ability to access higher education. Limited economic resources prescribe that families spend on basic needs like food and candles rather than on optional goods like higher education. Most of the participants' parents were found to be unemployed and therefore unable to provide the resources needed such as fees, books and transport, a major obstacle blocking access to higher education. This lack of a viable family budget was also found to impact on participants' plans after Matric as the family expectation was for them to find employment and contribute to the family budget.

The learning of participants was also found to be affected by economic constraints. Participants found that the lack of basic facilities like electricity for lighting, a quiet, private place to study and the lack of heating had the effect of making the participants less educationally competitive for access to higher education. Participants levels of anxiety, un-preparedness and lack of confidence to write the examination due to the lack of resources was found to be impacting on their achievement, and hence on their ability to access higher learning. Also participants were not in the financial position to access the more 'privileged' or ex-Model C schools that might equip them with the skills to access tertiary institutions.

While the educational effects of economic marginality are visible, the more indirect effect found was on the psychology of these participants, whose personal motivation and achievement became depressed. Low levels of maintenance and support were shown to

influence the plans and priorities of these participants, resulting in poor academic achievement. This directly translates to poor progression rates to higher learning.

Vally et al. (2007) confirm from their study that high unemployment and poverty excludes many children from schools, let alone universities. The reason they suggest is "the unbending resolve of policy makers to pursue conservative macroeconomic policies in which the choice of austerity measures outweigh the imprimatur of the rights enshrined in the Constitution" (Vally et al., 2007, p. 191). They further explain that this implies that the rural poor and working class children's right to education will remain unrealised.

EDUCATIONAL BARRIERS

The quality of schooling was another salient theme that emerged from the research. Participants did not think that the quality of their schooling was as good as that in the ex-Model C or more privileged schools. They identified the lack of resources at their schools, such as a fully functioning library, computers and laboratories, as barriers that prevent them from achieving good results, which in turn thwarts their attempts at accessing tertiary education.

The high teacher turnover rates, which results in participants having to adjust to new teaching styles and expectations, as well as the poor dedication and commitment of some of their teachers, were also felt by the participants to impact on their achievement of good results in Matric. Teacher attitudes were found to affect the quality of teaching and learning within the class, which participants felt was counterproductive to the achievement of the kind of results required for entrance requirements and bursaries. These are added barriers to their accessing higher education.

It was found that participants and their parents had no experience and little knowledge of higher education, resulting in the participants being heavily reliant on information and guidance from their school. Participants felt that their school had failed them with regard to adequate and timeous information dissemination about subject choice at Grade 9 level and tertiary requirements like the M-scores. These were deemed crucial for adequate preparation for tertiary education.

Lynch and O'Riordan (1998, p. 471) maintain that in market terms, educational success seems only available to "those with access to valued resources" because they "are strongly positioned to be the major beneficiaries of educational investment." They found that extra services like being able to afford private schooling, private tuition and technological resources boost examination performance and confidence, which facilitates the process of accessing higher education. This study showed that a lack of resources both at home and at school deprives the participants of good examination performance and self-confidence to write the exam and therefore deprives them of strong leverage to access higher learning.

SOCIO-CULTURAL BARRIERS

Gambetta's report (in Lynch & O'Riodan, 1998) suggested that socio-cultural constraints were of little significance to accessing higher education, but this was not the finding in this research or that of Lynch and O'Riordan (1998). Socio-cultural barriers were deemed to be of considerable significance by the participants. They found that the lack of exposure to higher education for their parents has resulted in a negative and unsupportive attitude towards studying further. The consequence has been the adoption of a fatalistic attitude by some participants towards accessing higher education.

A further barrier to accessing higher education is poor self-esteem and the experience of not belonging or being alienated by higher Learning Institutions. Some participants, who had either failed in Grade 11 or failed in the first term of Grade 12, felt that their poor performance had reduced their confidence to excel and gain entrance to universities. Those participants, who were attempting to access university, did not want to apply to Wits because they perceived Wits as an institution beyond their frame of reference, a university for richer, cleverer, smarter people, which excluded them.

The influence of peers was also a barrier that participants needed to learn to deal with. It was found that within this community the lack of confidence experienced by individuals translated into a strong need for group cohesion so that confidence and fearlessness could be fostered. Participants either experienced peer pressure to engage with the group or ostracisation to alienate and in this way force the participant to agree with the group.

Language in education policy in South Africa has been significantly and positively

influenced by the Constitution, allowing learners the choice to study in their mother tongue or language of choice. It was found that all the participants chose to school at an English medium school and that learning in a language other than their mother tongue was not considered a barrier to accessing higher education. So even though historically, language has been used to segregate and belittle or minimise black people in South Africa, participants did not feel inadequate or threatened by the prospect of studying at a tertiary institution in English.

POLITICAL BARRIERS

This research is consistent with the findings of the case studies by Vally et al. (2007) and findings of other studies that "confirm the reality that poverty and poor public services provision in poor communities are inextricably linked" (Vally et al., 2007, p. 191). Participants identified the lack of service delivery to their community and school as a significant barrier to accessing higher education. This confirms Lynch and O'Riordan.'s (1998) finding that poor infrastructure resulting from poor service delivery prevents learners from accessing higher education. This suggests that the role of government in developing and empowering this community needs to be strengthened with effective management so that the youth of this community have a more equitable chance of accessing higher education.

The lowered promotion requirements that allow learners to pass the preceding grades to Matric were also viewed as a barrier to higher education. It was felt that requirements to pass and progress through school were so low that when the learners arrived in Matric, participants lacked the confidence, knowledge and skills to achieve the requirements for a Matriculation Endorsement Certificate and the necessary marks to attain the M-scores necessary for entrance to higher education.

The Higher Education Act, sections 40 (g) and (h), place fees payable by students as one of the main ways by which public higher education institutions are to be funded (Government Gazette 1997). The Act does not provide for free tertiary education. The challenge therefore is to act within the Act, but still offer incentives that will make public education institutions financially viable. Student loans such as the National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS) available at all tertiary institutions in the country is how the government has made it possible for students from historically disadvantaged backgrounds to

attend these institutions. Participants who would qualify complained of how poorly informed they were of financial aid incentives like the NSFAS. Participants suggested that the Department of Education together with their Life Orientation learning area be used to disseminate valuable information like this so that they would be able to consider applying for higher education.

In summary, participants were very critical of the government's service delivery, policies and economic policies which advantaged some groups at the expense of others. There was agreement that the economic policies of the country did not support the participants' entry into higher education as they were disadvantaged by the lack of resources both at home and in their schools. This did not allow them to compete for the academic places at the universities because they would not be able to achieve the M-scores necessary to gain the advantage over other more fortunate learners.

A THEORETICAL UNDERSTANDING OF THE BARRIERS TO ACCESSING HIGHER EDUCATION

This section attempts to gain an understanding of the central themes of barriers to higher education as identified by the participants. This research shows that class inequalities operate through a series of economic, social, cultural and political relationships that impact on the education and progression in education of people in a society. The educational disadvantage of any given person or group in a society can only be understood in relation to the advantage of others. The participants' financial, cultural and educational experiences need not create educational inequality. The inequality is created "when others have differential access to resources, income, wealth and power which enables them to avail of the opportunities presented in education in a relatively more successful manner" (Lynch & O'Riordan, 1998, p. 470).

Freire (2002, p. 103) maintains that the "fundamental theme" of the modern era is "domination". He asserts that human social life is a struggle between the "oppressor and the oppressed". For him when the behaviour of men and women is prescribed and their pursuit for self-affirmation as a responsible person is hindered, than these people are oppressed. The dawning of the new South Africa heralded the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa,

1996. This comprehensive document ensures that the oppressive laws of the apartheid era remain in the past. However, the conservative and measured fiscal discourses of agencies like the World Bank, which inform economic and social policy formulation and revision, "trump all considerations regardless of history and context", again oppressing the economically disadvantaged masses in South Africa (Vally et al., 2007, p. 191).

This oppression according to Freire (2002), dehumanises them. According to Taylor (1993, p. 67), the oppressed that Freire refers to are "the peasants, the illiterates, the colonized and the poor". Freire (2002) further argues that only when these oppressed people are liberated can they be restored to being truly human. For Freire, education is the key to liberating people but the education institutions themselves need to reform and provide adequately for the learners, in order to liberate them.

Much has changed in education in South Africa during the last fifteen years. It has been a time where the institutionalised injustices of apartheid were erased and new directions were charted. Not an area in education has been left untouched in the drive to overcome the legacy of apartheid. Yet an all powerful perception is left that not much has changed, and that things may have become worse in some areas. This research attests at least to the dropping of racial barriers to admission at all educational institutions, as these participants would not have been able to attend school in Lenasia during the era of apartheid.

Major shifts in policy have facilitated the changing demographics and increased participation rates at higher learning institutions, yet these changes, according to the research, have not translated to equal representation of all sectors of our community. People from low socio-economic groups, like the participants interviewed, remain underrepresented in higher education. Schuetze and Slowey (2002; p. 315) conclude from their study that "high participation rates do not therefore automatically translate into equality of access. On the contrary, the massification of higher education has assuredly not led to the elimination of disadvantage and inequality." The question therefore remains: where has the system gone wrong? With such comprehensive policies and lively debates by the different committees around access to higher education, where has it all gone wrong?

Freire (1979) believes that this inequality is a symptom of injustice, exploitation and a

lack of critical consciousness, which will only be lessened as society moves away from relations of oppression and towards humanisation. He believes that the process of humanisation and the transformation of society are only possible through overcoming the barriers between people. Freire (1979), proposed his theory of *conscientisation*. Conscientisation is a theory that proposes a "process through which marginalized groups could move from a naïve to a critical consciousness, thereby creating the conditions for the transformation of society in accordance with social justice" (McCowan, 2006, p. 58). The participants of the study together with their communities need to be engaged in a process whereby they can be empowered to become part of the changing higher education arena. In this way they can have access to the global environment where "higher education and research have become central to the health and sustainability of the economy, to social well-being and to cultural life in every nation" (Unesco, 1996, p. 62).

According to Freire (1979), there are two key features to the process of conscientisation: dialogue and problematisation. By engaging the participants and their communities in this two-fold process conscientisation and humanisation can then occur. Freire (1979) believes that conscientisation can only be achieved through a dialogical encounter where the student is fully involved in the educational process. It should not involve one person acting on another, but rather people working with each other. Too much education, Paulo Freire argues, involves 'banking' the educator making 'deposits' in the educatee. The process of engaging the participants in the study to think and verbalise their perceptions of the barriers to accessing higher education is the first part of the process of Conscientisation – engaging in dialogue.

Problematisation involves the presentation of learners' reality so as to reveal its problems or contradictions. This allows the learners to distance themselves from their immediate situation and gain a critical perspective on it. Freire emphasises that education must start from the learners' own experience of the world.

This may explain why policy changes have not been as effective as anticipated by government. Policy formulation should be an inclusive process whereby the relevant stakeholders are involved and given the opportunity to discuss what they feel are vital to the process of change. This will provide motivation and a sense of involvement which will give

the process of change a high chance of success. It will also facilitate adaptation and ownership of the changes. The research found that the participants and their communities have been completely ignored in the process of transformation. The lack of information that they have proves that neither the school nor local government has engaged with this community to empower them.

Freire was also concerned with praxis action that is informed (and linked to certain values). According to him dialogue was not just about deepening understanding - but was part of making a difference in the world. Dialogue in itself is a co-operative activity involving respect. The process is important and can be seen as enhancing community and building social capital and to leading society to act in ways that make for justice and human flourishing.

When asked to suggest strategies for change and ways to overcome the inequalities to accessing higher education, participants clearly stated that they saw the government as having the primary responsibility for addressing economic inequality. To gain greater educational equality, greater economic equality needs to be promoted. The barriers, especially the economic barriers, need to be addressed by the State. The conclusion is therefore that structural changes need to be effected by the State so that institutions of higher learning can be guided by policy to enable access to higher education for the disadvantaged.

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION

This chapter first reminds the reader of the aims of the research. The findings that emerged out of the research questions are summarised and appropriate recommendations proposed. Some of the limitations of this study are then discussed. The chapter concludes by highlighting the need for further research on the perceptions of barriers to accessing higher education in South Africa.

The primary aim of this research was to investigate what economically disadvantaged learners in Grade 12 at a school in Lenasia, Johannesburg, perceived as the barriers to accessing higher education. It was hoped that through identification of these perceptions, a better understanding can be secured of the challenges that young, economically challenged people face when negotiating their future academic or career paths in the context of social inequality. This, it was hoped, would assist in determining whether the perspectives of these learners are aligned with some of the structural barriers to higher education

Interviews were conducted with Grade 12 learners from a Secondary School in Lenasia. The learners were identified by the school as residents of the informal settlement of Thembelihle. Four central themes emerged relating to their perception of the factors and identification of the barriers to accessing higher education. It was found that the economic, educational, socio-cultural and political factors interact with each other to promote inequality to accessing higher education.

Families, communities, schools, higher education institutions and government agencies are all structures that engage in processes and procedures that create and uphold inequalities in society by specifying the parameters in which decisions are made. It was found that although co-operative governance became the central principle underpinning the relationships within institutions, which has increased consultation, participation and transparency, and hence has led to the massification of education, the lack of economic and social upliftment of communities like Thembelihle has resulted in the manifestation of serious strains on this open and co-operative relationship as these communities are continuing to be excluded from higher education.

In economic terms when communities are excluded from the education system they are not able to keep pace with the changing economy and fall further behind. In South Africa the gap between the middle and working class is growing, which this is supported by the findings of The Dinokeng Scenarios, which found that unemployment in the lowest-income quintile (fifth) is 72% as compared with just 7% in the top quintile. This emphasises the necessity for the State to be funding and resourcing communities and schools that are disadvantaged so that these learners can be supported to receive a good education that will transfer to increased progression rates to tertiary institutions, consequently changing the economic viability of this community.

Unemployment, poor service delivery, the lack of information dissemination that could assist communities, poor policy formulation, the lack of social upliftment programmes and insufficient financial aid to families and students are factors that prevent low income learners from being able to participate in higher education. The research shows that the State has identified structural agents that have been targeted for action within communities. The challenge is for communities like Thembelihle to engage with these agents so that co-operative decision making can occur to facilitate policy planning at national, regional and local levels. The dialogue which has been undertaken in this research illustrates that action from State institutions to individual classroom practice is necessary if access to higher education in South Africa is to be equalised.

In relation to the findings of the study it is recommended that a broader more purposeful approach to social reform and more comprehensive strategies of redistribution are required. A pressing need for the South African society is a more equitable distribution of wealth and income so that social empowerment can be fostered. Vally et al. (2007, p. 191) recommend that educational intervention must remain important, "but are partial in relation to the social outcomes of education and the goal of social transformation – i.e., the transformation of South African society from among the most unequal societies to a more equal society and ultimately a challenge to capitalism itself." The previous Minister of Education Kader Asmal linked the social security and education systems, but his plan was never implemented and this has perpetuated the problems of equal access to disadvantaged learners in South Africa. The relationship between a purposeful State and civil society is paramount for achieving the educational goals of the Constitution, which this research shows

can only occur if decision-makers dialogue with the target audience. Community participation in structural reform is vital for any sustained changes to be effected.

LIMITATIONS

In attempting to gain insight into the perceptions of factors affecting the pursuit of higher education among disadvantaged Grade 12 learners it was found that even though participants were comfortable with English as the medium of communication, and perceived themselves as competent in spoken English a clear understanding and interpretation of questions prevented in-depth answering. Even though the semi-structured interview was used, which enabled the researcher to focus fairly clearly on the topic of investigation; the language barrier was found to disallow genuine access to the world views of the participants. The researcher was left feeling that participants were alluding to issues and not clearly referring to them. Lapadat and Lindsay (1999) explain how language allows the understanding of a culture, not only the formal language but also the 'argots' – the special use of words and slang that are important in penetrating and understanding a culture.

A further limitation with the participants' responses was that the participants were not very vocal at times. It is felt that the participants' hesitancy might have stemmed from anxiety related to criticizing structures that they are associated with.

Interviews were conducted at the school in a classroom identified by the school. Participants were all sent to this classroom at the same time making recording and privacy difficult. Even though a quiet corner where participants were interviewed was available, the noise level from the other participants and from the playground at school was distracting for both the researcher and participants.

There were other limitations to the method employed in this research. A small sample of participants was used in the study, which is in line with qualitative research, but this prevents the results from being generalized beyond the sample studied. Participants were all between the ages of 18 and 21, from the same area and in the same class at school. This provided homogeneity within the group, which further restricts the research from being generalized.

As the semi-structured interview was used, slight variations in the interviews with participants are evident. These variations may have affected the results by introducing a slight bias to the findings. Leidner (1993) suggests that the flexibility afforded by qualitative research allows the understanding of the interviewee, frame but Barriball and White (1994) point to the bias that may be introduced through the variations in the interviews.

DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

This research has highlighted the individual and institutional progress made by government in transforming access to higher education but has also emphasised how disadvantaged learners in South Africa are still not gaining access. The failure to access higher education by the disadvantaged can be viewed as a failure of policies, which can be related to the lack of dialogue and transparency with communities like Thembelihle. Decision-makers seem to be unable to engage in a proper dialogue about "the complex relationship between the delivery of services and the persistence of poverty", which, this research shows, directly and indirectly affects equal access and participation in higher education (Vally et al., 2007, p. 191). Qualitative research engaging not only learners but parents, teachers and community members from disadvantaged backgrounds in different parts of the country would lend itself to a stronger more generalisable study, which could then be used to inform and guide policy development in South Africa. For democratic development to occur, solutions to problems need to come from the voices of the communities affected, hence participatory research that is carefully conceptualised and carried out so that the voices are engaged in a dialogical relationship would be potentially useful.

CONCLUDING COMMENT

It can be concluded from this study that disadvantaged Grade 12 learners' perceptions about the factors that affect their pursuit of higher education are aligned with economic, educational, socio-cultural and political barriers. The interplay of these factors is greatly impeding effective inclusive praxis. Although it was found that the transformational agenda for South Africa is based on social inclusiveness and capacity building, these barriers are preventing the translation of reformed policy into equal access and participation. While there are methodological weaknesses in this study related to sample size and subjectivity, the barriers that have been identified to accessing higher education by the participants in the study need to be recognised in order for universities to fulfil their role of building cohesion

and supporting the development and maintenance of the social and economic wellbeing of the country. This research has shown that further participatory research that will engage the communities like Thembelihle to dialogue and reach conscientisation in order to effect change for themselves is recommended because as Paulo Freire explains, when oppressed people identify the origins of their oppression and through dialogue end by readying themselves to take revolutionary action intended to transform all aspects of the oppressive society, then this is the "pedagogy of the oppressed" (Sparks, p. 2007).

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Appendix A: Preliminary Interview Questions

A. Biographical data

- Can you confirm that you are a learner in Grade 12 at ***** Secondary school?
- How old are you?
- Where do you reside?
- Are you living alone or with your family?
- Are your parents employed?
- What occupation do your mother and father have?
- What is the level of your parent's education?

B. Educational factors

- Are you writing for an exemption or senior certificate in the Matric exam?
- If you are writing for a Senior Certificate can you give some reasons for your choice?
- Do you have any plans for further study at a higher education institution?
- If you do have plans for further study, where and what is it that you are interested in studying?
- If you are not planning to study further, can you explain why not?
- Did you experience any difficulty when making this decision?
- What are some of the aspects that you had to consider to make this choice?
- How did you overcome initial or specific problems/barriers that you experienced?
- If you are interested in studying further, have you applied to universities, etc or have you made enquiries about applications to these institutions? Please explain.
- Do you have access to information about universities, bursaries, requirements etc?
- How do you think, has this school prepared you for further education and for choosing a suitable career? Explain.

C. Economic factors

- What are the reasons that you can think that would prevent you or your classmates from studying further at a university, college or technikon?
- What do you think are the challenges/barriers in accessing higher education compared to other children?

- Do you think that children who do not live in informal settlements face the same challenges to further study at higher education institutions as you do?
- Can you afford your school fees? Please explain if this affects your motivation to attend higher education?
- Explain if your parents discuss funding and career choice with you?
- Have you ever needed private tuition and have you been able to receive it? Explain.
- What challenges do you experience while studying?
- Do you have any information about the cost of higher education? How does this affect you?

D. Socio-cultural factors

- How supportive are your parents of studying further at higher education institutions? Explain.
- What would you say about the encouragement you receive to study further at a university, etc?
- Which tertiary institution would you consider studying at if you did have a choice and why?
- Have you experienced any language difficulties at school and how has this impacted on your choices after Matric?
- How do you feel about higher education institutions?
- Are there any other perceptions that you would like to share about barriers to higher education?

Appendix B: Subject Information Sheet (Qualitative/Interview Based Research)



UNIVERSITY OF THE WITWATERSRAND, JOHANNESBURG

School of Human and Community Development

Private Bag 3, Wits 2050, Johannesburg, South Africa
Tel: (011) 717-4500 Fax: (011) 717-4559
Email: 018lucy@muse.wits.ac.za

Hello,

My name is Tasneem Ally Ebrahim, and I am conducting research for the purposes of obtaining a Masters degree at the University of the Witwatersrand. My area of focus is that of the perceptions of factors that could affect the pursuit of higher education among disadvantaged Grade 12 learners. Many people in our society find it difficult to attend tertiary education institutions after matric. Our government has attempted to change this after 1994 but access still remains difficult for most learners. This research aims to find out what learners see as the barriers to accessing higher education. In addition to this, it will attempt to understand the types of challenges experienced by young people in negotiating their future career options or academic development. We would like to invite you to participate in this study.

Participation in this research will entail being interviewed by me, at school at a time that is convenient for you. The interview will last for approximately one hour. With your permission this interview will be recorded in order to ensure accuracy. Participation is voluntary, and no person will be advantaged or disadvantaged in any way for choosing to participate or not participate in the study. All of your responses will be kept confidential, and no information that could identify you would be included in the research report. The interview material (tapes and transcripts) will not be seen or heard by any person in this organisation at any time, and will only be processed by myself. You may refuse to answer any questions you would prefer not to, and you may choose to withdraw from the study at any point. Interview tapes will be kept in a secure location during the research process and destroyed when the research is complete. Results of the study will be written up in the form of a research report and your school will also be provided with a summary of the findings. These findings can then be displayed by your Principal on the school's student notice board.

If you choose to participate in the study please fill in your details on the consent forms below. I will contact you within two weeks in order to discuss your participation. Alternatively I can be contacted telephonically at 082 453 1639 or my supervisor Ms. Tanya Swart, may be contacted on (011) 717-4586.

Your participation in this study would be greatly appreciated. Participating in this study has no individual risks or benefits. If you would like to receive any career counselling or should you need to speak to a counsellor, contact names and numbers will be left with the secretary and Life Orientation teacher at your school. This research will contribute by helping to understand the perceptions of barriers to accessing higher education. Your school, the Department of Education and institutions of higher education can understand the reasons for the poor enrolments of learners from schools like yours in higher education systems. This can help to inform their development of policies and procedures to assist learners to access higher education.

Kind Regards

Tasneem Ally Ebrahim

Appendix C: Consent Form (Interview)

I _____ consent to being interviewed by Tasneem Ally Ebrahim for her study on learner's perceptions of barriers to pursuing higher education. I understand that:

- Participation in this interview is voluntary.
- That I may refuse to answer any questions I would prefer not to.
- I may withdraw from the study at any time without any penalty.
- No information that may identify me will be included in the research report, and my responses will remain confidential.
- There are no individual risks or benefits.
- My direct quotes could be used in the written report.

Signed _____

Appendix D: Consent Form (Recording)

I _____ consent to my interview with Tasneem Ally Ebrahim for her study on learner's perceptions of barriers to pursuing higher education being tape-recorded. I understand that:

- The tapes and transcripts will not be seen or heard by any person in this organisation at any time, and will only be processed by the researcher.
- The tapes will be securely stored at the University of the Witwatersrand by the researcher's supervisor.
- All tape recordings will be destroyed after the final research report is complete.
- My identity will be protected and no identifying information will be used in the transcripts or the research report.

Signed:

_____

Appendix E: Consent form Gauteng Department of Education

Appendix F: Ethics clearance certificate