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2011-03-28
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LEARNED HELPLESSNESS, DEPRESSION AND ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT: A COMPARATIVE STUDY

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A research report presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Education in Educational Psychology by Coursework and Research Dissertation (Full-Time) to the Faculty of Humanities, the University of the Witwatersrand.

Johannesburg, November 2009

DECLARATION

I declare that this research report is my own, unaided work. It is being submitted for the degree of Master of Education in Educational Psychology at the University of the Witwatersrand. It has not been submitted for any degree or examination at any other university.

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Daelle Fainstein

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I wish to express my gratitude to the following people, whose contributions made the writing of this research report possible:

My supervisor, Ms Sue Thompson, for her continued patience, guidance, support, and invaluable expertise throughout the writing of this report.

Mr Yohannes Regassa, for his time, patience and knowledge in conducting the statistical analyses.

Annelet Liebenberg and her team of teachers, for their continued assistance and commitment, and willingness to help at all times.

To the participants of the study, and their parents/guardians, without whom this study would not have been possible.

Also, my heartfelt thanks is extended to the following people, for their unwavering support and love:

My wonderful family, who believes in me, and is with me every step of the way.

My friends, who made sure I didn't stop laughing.

ABSTRACT

Against a backdrop of transformation within the South African context at present, this quantitative study comprised a comparative analysis of the prevalence of learned helplessness, depression and academic achievement across two differing samples within a single school- a sample of learners in a mainstream class, and a sample of learners presenting with barriers to learning. Moreover, in line with current literature in the field, this study investigated the correlation between learned helplessness, depression and academic achievement, both within and between the sample groups.

The Children's Attributional Style Questionnaire (CASQ) and Children's Depression Inventory (CDI) were administered on a group basis to a total sample of 57 learners in Grades four, five, and six in a private school in Johannesburg. Results of the statistical analyses indicate a significant difference in the overall academic achievement of the sample groups, as hypothesised. However, no significant differences in the prevalence of learned helplessness and depression were found. Further to this, the results highlight a weak-to-moderate negative correlation between learned helplessness and depression; and academic achievement and depression. Analysis of the results alludes to a range of extraneous factors that may have successfully ameliorated the development and manifestation of learned helplessness and depression within the sample groups, and thus affected the results of this study. In light of this, limitations and strengths of this study are delineated, and recommendations for further research are suggested.

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