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EXPERIENCES OF RURAL LEARNERS IN ACCESSING INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER LEARNING

A report on a research study presented to The Department of Social Work,

School of Human and Community Development,

Faculty of Humanities, University of the Witwatersrand,

in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the degree,

Masters of Arts in Social Development

MUNAKA PHATHUTSHEDZO

June, 2016

DEDICATION

This research report is dedicated to my family my Mother Tshisaphungo Annah Munaka and my grandmother Kutama Munaka, my brother and sister Tendani and Fulufhelo for the love and support, through my academic journey: without your sacrifices I wouldn’t be who I am today.

DECLARATION

I, Munaka Phathutshedzo declare that this research report, entitled *Experiences of Rural Learners in Accessing Institutions of Higher Learning*, is my own unaided work. It is submitted for the degree of Masters of Arts in Social Development at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before for any other degree or examination at any other institution.

…….....

Munaka Phathutshedzo

June 2016

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To the Almighty God for giving me the strength and wisdom to complete this research report.

To my family my Mother Tshisaphungo Annah Munaka and my grandmother Kutama Munaka, my brother and sister Tendani and Fulufhelo for the love and support, through my academic journey: without your sacrifices I wouldn't be who I am today.

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"Munwe muthihi a u tusi mathuthu"

Tshivenda Proverb

ABSTRACT

Prior to 1994, education in South Africa was formally and legally segregated according to race. The post-1994 democratic government had the task of implementing educational policies to promote and facilitate equal access in the educational sector. Twenty-one years later, the expectation is that every citizen should be enjoying equal access, regardless of their socio-economic conditions. However, this is not the case, as most people are still excluded in the education sector by one factor or another.

This study attempts to understand the factors that contribute to the slow transformation and access of rural learners to institutions of higher learning. Ten Grade 12 learners, consisting of five males and five females from the Vhembe District in Limpopo, were interviewed for the study. A qualitative research method was used with data collected using in-depth interviews supported by a question guide, to facilitate a discussion with the participants. From the findings of the research, three themes emerged, which participants indicated were constraints in accessing institutions of higher learning. These included educational factors, economic factors and socio-cultural factors. The research found that these factors cannot be treated in isolation from one another. This is supported by General Systems Theory, which argues that everything is connected to everything else (Dawson, 2006). Therefore, in addressing the issue of access to institutions of higher learning, improving the quality of school teachers will not automatically lead to access, as factors such as poverty and unemployment will still be prevalent. Thus, a broader more purposeful approach to social reform, as well as more comprehensive and equitable strategies of redistribution of wealth and income are required, to empower disadvantaged communities to access institutions of higher learning in South Africa.

Key words: rural learners, constraints, barriers, institutions of higher learning, higher education.

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CHAPTER 1 – INTRODUCTION

1.1 **Introduction**

The focus of this research report is the experiences of rural learners in accessing institutions of higher learning. The study was conducted with ten participants in the Vhembe District in Limpopo province, five of whom were males and five females, in order to have an equal representation of the sexes. In-depth interviews were used in this study to collect data by facilitating discussion on the experiences of rural learners regarding challenges they encounter in accessing institutions of higher learning.

In this study, *rural learner* refers to a learner who resides in areas which were declared to be the domain of black people only, during the apartheid regime. Balfour, Mitchell and Moletsane (2008) state that rurality as a signifier is transformative, capable of changing behavior and affecting the motivation of teachers, community worker and learners. For the purpose of this research, *black people* will refer to all people who experienced racial segregation during the apartheid years. Additionally, institutions of higher learning and higher education will be used interchangeably, to refer to all institutions that offer learning programmes leading to a qualification that meets the requirements of the higher education Qualification Framework (HEQF) (Higher Education Act, 1997). Since the dawn of democracy, South Africa has experienced an increase of black students in universities, colleges and technikons. Participation of black learners from rural areas or disadvantaged areas remains low. This is despite the introduction of opportunities for these learners, by changes in policy at institutional and national level.

In 1991, the Tertiary Education Fund of South Africa (TEFSA) which is now known as the National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS) was established, to help disadvantaged but academically deserving students to study at institutions of higher learning. However, access to institutions of higher learning by disadvantaged rural learners was not adequately addressed (Imenda, 2002). This indicates that the barriers preventing these learners from gaining equal access to institutions of higher learning go beyond financial factors.

This research attempts to identify and understand factors that these learners perceive as barriers in accessing institutions of higher learning, through a qualitative study using in-depth interviews. Data from these interviews are analysed using Thematic Analysis and discussed. Chapter 1 serves to provide background information for this study. The rationale for conducting this research is discussed, the aims of the study are outlined and a concise outline of the structure of the research is presented.

1.2 Statement of the Problem and Rationale for the Study

South Africa suffers from a severe skills crisis; there is no critical mass of qualified people ready to take up available jobs (Kraak, 2006). Previously, the majority of the South African population were excluded from institutions of higher learning. This inequality in accessing institutions of higher learning was as a result of the racial segregation policies which dominated South Africa's socio-political sphere (Fiske & Ladd, 2001).

Apartheid laws ensured white political freedom and the national oppression of black people. Education was used as a tool to ensure this oppression and exclusion (Hale, 2010). Policies on admission, finance and language of instruction, and minimum requirements for accessing institutions of higher learning were used by the apartheid government to exclude black people from gaining access to institutions of higher learning (Van der Berg, 2008). To illustrate this, in 1995, black enrolment was 49%; this increased to 68% in 2011; although there has been an increase of black students, there are still more white people enrolled in institutions of higher learning than black people (CHE, 2013). This means that although the composition of the student body at higher education has changed, access is still for a small elite (Cloete, Pillay, Badat & Moja, 2002).

Post-1994 the government implemented and passed various policies to redress unequal access to institutions of higher learning. However, changes have resulted in a more elite public higher education and inequality between those with and those without education has not decreased (Cloete et al., 2002). Higher education is of paramount importance in the maintenance and development of socio-economic wellbeing of the population who can as a direct result lead economically productive lives (Poole, 2004). Tertiary education is responsible for the production of employable citizens. It is at this level that the creation, proper distribution and application of knowledge occurs. Countries with better-educated

citizens are more equipped to deal with new challenges and technological advances (Scott, Yeld & Hendry, 2007).

Not only did the South African democratic government post-1994 have to overcome the inequality of the past by creating an integrated education system, it further had to develop policies and curricula which would support equal access to education, economic and social development in the country. However, this has proven to be one the greatest challenges to the South African government and its economic development. The economy is not generating sufficient jobs for youth, women, and unskilled people, especially black people. The unemployment rate in the country is currently 25, 6 %, one of the highest unemployment rates in the world (Statistics South Africa, 2015). This means that more people are unable to provide basic human services to their families. As a result, this has become the responsibility of the state.

Currently, there are over 16 million people in South Africa who rely on the *social grant* for survival, and the majority are in rural areas. Further to this, the government is spending over R130 billion on social grants alone every year (Kelly, 2014). This indicates that the reduction of poverty is one of the greatest challenges in South Africa. Poverty is linked to unemployment and unemployment is closely linked to a lack of skills and education. Kraak (2006) states that there is no critical mass of qualified people ready to take up the available jobs, and argues that this is a result of the limited number of people who access institutions of higher learning and possibly the shortage of graduates with the necessary skills (Kraak, 2006). Additionally, the unemployment rate is highest amongst black people. Representation of black people in key positions remains very low, despite their making up the majority of the total working population of South Africa. In 2005, black people were reported to only constitute 2.99 % in top managerial ranks of companies, while white people made up 96.38 % (Nedlac, 2005). This indicates that white people in South Africa still control the economy while black people are still in the same situation they were during the apartheid years, despite policies and laws to redress this inequality.

Evidence shows that constraints on the involvement of young black people in South Africa's economy is not racial injustice, but a shortage of black people with necessary skills and experience (Kraak, 2006). The number of black learners who reach Matriculation has increased over the years, with 49 % in 1994 compared to 0.18 % in 1952 (Statistics SA,

2002). However, in rural areas, there is a high number of persons older than 20 years with no schooling. Limpopo has 17.3%, followed by Mpumalanga with 14 % (Statistics SA, 2011). These statistics do not only show the level of illiteracy in these areas, they further highlight the poverty and unemployment level in these areas. This is so because people with little or no schooling at all are more likely to be unemployed or involved in employment which does not require any skills at all, but the physicality of a person (McWhirter, McWhirter, McWhirter, & McWhirter, 2007).

South Africa needs well-trained innovative young people who will generate jobs, wealth and the development of the country as a whole (Department of Science and Technology., 2002). In order to achieve this, the priority is, therefore, to improve the functioning of basic education, paying attention to rural and other disadvantaged areas. If this is done, institutions of higher learning would need to understand the reasons for the low enrolments of black rural learners at these institutions. Education then becomes the only tool which can be used to move out of deprivation and poverty for these communities. Further to this, education is crucial in building democracy and promoting social inclusion of all South Africans. According to Social Democratic theory inequality is caused by unequal income and unequal opportunities in society (Drake, 2001)

This inequality hinders social inclusion and deprives others from human rights such as the right to education. However, in South Africa, access to education and quality education has been in contestation for decades (NSFAS, 2009). Equal access to education provides a way in which transformation can take place and economic and social development of all South Africans can be achieved.

These circumstances made the researcher choose to interview learners in rural areas. It is assumed that learners in these areas are disadvantaged both economically and socially; therefore, it was argued that interviewing them would bring to light knowledge that might contribute to a greater measure of transformation in South Africa's education system.

Cardak and Givon (2004) indicate that one of the greatest achievements post-1994 has been increased participation rates of black people in the education sector. However, equal access remains the challenge. This is so because learners from poor socio-economic backgrounds continue to be underrepresented in institutions of higher learning. It was hoped that the

changes made post-1994 would provide autonomous and accountable institutions of higher learning accessible to all. However, 21 years after legislative democracy, this has not been realised.

This research study proposed that investigating the lived experiences of rural learners currently in Grade 12 in accessing institutions of higher learning, would contribute greater understanding of their challenges, thereby contributing to improving their access in the future. It is argued that in Africa, one of the reasons policy implementation fails is because of poor understanding of the root causes of the problem. Consequently, engaging the affected party, in this case, rural Grade 12 learners, in conversation could stimulate recognition of the limitations of policy at both institutional and national level.

This study is therefore relevant in the sense that it will attempt to study the perceptions of constraints in accessing institutions of higher learning by rural Grade 12 black learners. The findings of this research have the potential to assist in future inclusion programmes and could enable schools and higher education institutions to break past injustices and empower learners from rural areas to gain access to institutions of higher learning.

1.3 Research Question

The study attempted to explore the experiences of rural learners in the Vhembe District in Limpopo regarding access to institutions of higher learning. The emerging themes were organised around one question which served to guide the study, namely:

> *What are the challenges that rural learners in Vhembe District encounter in accessing institutions of higher learning?*

1.4 Aims of the Study

This research aims to investigate the experiences of rural learners in accessing institutions of higher learning in Limpopo province in the Vhembe district. It focuses on exploring rural learner's perceptions of factors that impact on whether they choose to enter institutions of higher learning after Matriculation. The study focuses on possible educational, financial and socio-cultural factors that could be contributing to their ability to access institutions of higher learning. Through examining their perceptions, this research attempts to provide a deeper

understating based on the perspective of learners in rural areas, of the types of challenges they encounter, in negotiating their future career opportunities and options.
The research has four objectives:

1) explore the perspectives of rural learners in Vhembe District regarding higher education,
2) investigate the reasons why they would want, or not want, to further their education in institutions of higher learning,
3) probe into the challenges they experience or anticipate experiencing if they want to further their education in a higher learning institution, and
4) explore where rural learners think these challenges stem from.

1.5 Research Methodology

The study used a qualitative research method. This method was chosen for this study because it is effective in obtaining culturally specific information about values, opinions, behaviours and social context of a particular population (De Vos, Strydom & Fouche, 2005). Qualitative research offered the possibility of in-depth understanding of the experiences of rural learners in the Vhembe District about factors that they perceive as constraints in accessing institutions of higher learning.

1.6 Definition of Concepts

In this study, the following meanings are attached to the concepts discussed here.

Rural areas is used to describe areas which were declared to be the domain of black people only, during apartheid (Marais, 2005). *Urban areas* refers to areas which were declared to be the domain of white people only, during apartheid regime (Chisholm, 2005). *Black people* refers to all people who experienced racial segregation during the apartheid years (O'Regan, 2000).
Institutions of higher learning or *Higher Education*, refers to all learning programmes leading to a qualification that meets the requirements of the Higher Education Qualification Framework (HEQF), namely universities, colleges and technikons (Higher Education Act, 1997a).

Disadvantaged learners denotes learners placed in unfavourable circumstances. For the purpose of this study the unfavourable circumstances refer to the poor living conditions experienced by those whose family live within a low socio-economic group and reside in rural areas (Ngonini, 2004).

1.7 Structure of the Research Report

This report consists of five chapters, namely the introductory chapter, the literature review, a discussion of the research method used, presentation of the findings, a discussion of the findings with limitations and conclusion. Chapter 1, the current chapter, is an introduction to the report. It gives detail of the rationale and aims of the study. The chapter serves to present the reader with an overall understanding of the focus of the research by giving the reasons for the study and its intentions. Chapter 2 present a literature review associated with enrolment into institutions of higher learning post-1994. The review serves to provide an overview of the existing knowledge, ideas and research related to the challenges that rural learners experience when attempting to access institutions of higher learning. Chapter 3 presents the research methods of the study. It outlines the research questions that guide this study and provides a detailed description of research design. The characteristics of the participants are presented and the in-depth interview process is explored.

The procedure on how the researcher gained access to the participants, and the data analysis method are explained. Ethical issues relating to the study are described and management of the issues is clarified. Chapter 4 presents the findings of the research and discusses them; findings are compared with relevant literature, and linked to General Systems Theory. The data is presented and grouped under broad themes and then interpreted and discussed to facilitate a better understanding thereof. Participants' perceptions of the barriers or challenges in accessing institutions of higher learning are discussed in Chapter 4. Chapter 5 focuses on the main findings of the research, describes limitations of the study, and makes recommendations while offering direction for future research.

This Introduction chapter has outlined the importance of this research in understanding the experiences of rural learners in accessing institutions of higher learning. Further to this, the chapter has outlined the intentions of the study. In the next chapter, the literature pertaining to this issue is discussed.

CHAPTER 2 – LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Introduction

Inequality has dominated the South African education system for many years. After twenty-one years of democracy, most schools still lack basic services, such as clean drinking water, electricity, libraries, laboratories and adequate infrastructure. Several research projects that focus on education since the dawn of democracy have been conducted. Most of these studies focus on communities where poverty, unemployment, social exclusion and inequality are inescapable. Through these studies, discussion about these conditions and their underlying causes has been encouraged, raising consciousness about these issues (Nelson Mandela Foundation, 2005). This research study hopes to meaningfully contribute to the discussions of higher education, by examining how access to higher education institutions by rural learners in Vhembe District in Limpopo province is understood.

This chapter provides a review of selected scholarly literature which talks about access to higher education in South Africa. The chapter further seeks to provide an understanding of factors that act as obstacles or reduce the opportunities of rural learners in accessing higher education institutions. The chapter will also address higher education and its importance to society.

The literature review will, further, examine the education system as a whole under the apartheid regime and post-1994. This includes what it was, how it is now and what impact it had on South Africans. Furthermore, the review will consider higher education prior to 1994. This will provide an understanding of some of the root causes of factors affecting learners from rural areas. In addition, rural education will be discussed, in order to give a full understanding of the differences between a rural learner and an urban learner in post-1994 South Africa. The last section of the literature review will identify gaps in the literature, to inform further research in this field. The chapter closes with working definitions of the concepts being researched.

2.2 Higher Education

There are various words which are used to define tertiary education organisations: they include *institutions of higher learning, institution of higher education*. According to the Higher Education Act of 1997, Higher Education Institution means any institution that provides higher education on a full-time, part-time or distance basis (Higher Education Act (RSA) of 1997).

An Institution of Higher Education is a post-secondary school that awards Bachelor's degrees or programs of not less than two years, providing credits towards a degree; in addition, they may provide not less than one year of training towards gainful employment. Higher Education means all learning programmes leading to a qualification that meets the requirements of the Higher Education Qualification Framework (HEQF) (Higher Education Act of 1997). Furthermore, Higher Education is education provided by universities, colleges and other institutions that award academic degrees. In this chapter, the term Higher Education Institutions will be used to refer to all post-secondary schooling institutions.

Tertiary education is responsible for the production of employable citizens. It is at this level that the creation, proper distribution and application of knowledge occurs. Countries with better educated citizens are more equipped to deal with new challenges and technological advances.

This is because tertiary education emphasises research and new methods of doing things, which are important for the development of a country. Innovation and economic growth mostly depend on tertiary education. UNESCO (2015) argues that South Africa's growth rate is disadvantaged by the unavailability of adequate skills. The lack of qualified human capital hinders growth and further undermines the foundation of sustainable development. Tertiary education provides an opportunity for better paying jobs which increase a person's living standard. This is because he/she will be able to afford basic human needs like housing and health care. Therefore, tertiary education can be regarded as the backbone of society, and a major driver behind economic growth, personal financial freedom and the development of a country as whole (Branson, Leibbrandt & Zuze, 2009). South Africa is a country that has

recently gained its independence: selective education and inequality are still very much present in many areas (UNESCO, 2015).

2.3 Apartheid Regime

One cannot understand the legacy of inequality in South Africa without discussing the apartheid regime in South Africa. The policy of apartheid legally and systematically discriminated against black people in all aspects of social life (O'Regan, 2000). Black people were prevented from becoming property owners and residing in areas which were classified as 'white', which constituted 90 percent of the land mass of South Africa. Access to schools and universities was denied to black people, and public facilities such as transport systems, public parks and libraries were closed to black people. Instead, separate and inferior facilities were provided.

Education is a tool used by societies to either oppress or uplift communities. The scars of these discriminatory policies are still visible in South Africa twenty-one years after democracy. South African society continues to be plagued by social class inequalities imposed through education and the idea of white superiority and black inferiority; in this way, apartheid education divided education privilege and achievement by race (Chisholm, 2005).

2.3.1 Education policies and racially skewed educational expenditure

The education system for black people pre-1948 in South Africa was controlled by missionaries who were considered amateurs by the National Party (Peter, 2002) which won the country's elections in 1948 and consequently transferred education for black people to state "professionals or experts", who used *race* to define the educational system (Moeketsi, 2008). According to the National Party of the time, the education provided for black people was not required for their future employment, who did not have a place in the European world. In fact, little or no education was necessary for employment in the major employment sectors of black people, which were mining, domestic services and agriculture (Fiske & Ladd, 2004). In 1953, Bantu Education was legislated: this Act was designed to promote punctuality, a sense of duty, persistence and reliability in black children. The Act brought racial consciousness to every aspect of the education system. According to Kros (2010), the Bantu Education Act aimed at protecting white workers from the threat of black competition

for skilled jobs, which emerged as a result of economic expansion coupled with black rural-urban migration during the Second World War.

Furthermore, the Act aimed to meet the demands of white farmers for unskilled black labour, by stemming rural-urban migration. All schools had to receive state approval and it became a criminal offence for a school to operate without state approval. Through this Act, the apartheid government was able to control and regulate the quality of education offered to the black majority. The apartheid government ensured that black people not only received inferior education, it made sure that they were under-represented in the education system. In 1975, for every black student at matriculation level, there were forty-four white students, and in 1975-76 the apartheid government was spending R744 million on education for white children and R166 million on education for black children. This meant that R644 was spent on every white scholar and only R41, 80 for every black scholar (Nassan & Samuels, 1990).

In order to ensure that black people did not pursue higher education, the government made sure that black schools were not only of poor condition, but also ensured that most of the schools did not teach at secondary level. In 1970 there were 9 108 schools for black children, but only 515 of the 9 108 taught at secondary level; out of the 515, only 164 went to matriculation level (Pillay, 1990). This was to ensure that black people only received an education which would allow them to be employable as domestic workers, miners and on the farms, which did not require any educational qualifications. The political introduction of the Independent states (commonly known as Bantustans), the Transkei, Bophuthatswana, Venda and Ciskei or from 1963 onwards, was intended to withdraw civil rights from black people in 'white South Africa'. This enabled the apartheid government to further limit the rights of black South Africans to education, land and job opportunities (Davies, 2010). In addition to this, it limited their movement; black people could only move or reside in the allocated states according their ethnic groups, and a place in the 'white South Africa' was only possible if one had formal permission to work in the area (Davies, 2010). To ensure that black people resided in their allocated states, the government maintained 170 black secondary schools in the urban areas and 604 black secondary schools in the homelands (Nassan & Samuels, 1990).

The limited number of black secondary schools in urban areas resulted in two developments planned by the apartheid government. Arising from the limited number of schools for black

scholars in the city, those who were interested in learning had to relocate to the homelands in order to access secondary schooling. This was in line with the apartheid government's strategy of reducing the number of black people in urban areas. The last development, as a result of limited schooling for black people in the urban areas, was the guarantee of thousands of children being forced into the labour market prematurely. This allowed the apartheid government to have a pool of unskilled workers who were ready to be taken either into the mining sector or domestic services (Nassan & Samuels, 1990).

In this way, the apartheid government used education as a tool to destroy the aspirations and ambitions of black people. Education for black people was not mandatory. Schools were of poor quality with poor physical and human infrastructure. Most black people looked to the mining sector for employment since it required little education (Fiske and Ladd, 2004). The government further made sure that not only were the schools of poor quality, but that teachers were not educated enough to offer quality education, it being difficult for those with limited skills to teach someone else, because of their own limited knowledge. To illustrate this strategy: in 1986 only 7 percent of black teachers had university degrees (Pillay, 1990).

2.4 Higher Education Prior to 1994

Higher Education is considered the highest level of learning which can equip individuals with the necessary skills to be employable. These institutions are the hub of knowledge and are where the creation, distribution and application of knowledge occur. Countries with better educated citizens are able to deal with new challenges and technological advances, which are vital for personal wealth accumulation and development of a country as a whole.

Access to higher education was skewed under the apartheid government. Several policies were implemented to make access to these institutions difficult or rather impossible to access for the black majority in South Africa. The introduction of the Bantu Education Act of 1953 was to control the quality of education that black people received. This was to prevent them from competing with white people for skilled jobs, which had emerged in South Africa as a result of economic expansion (Kros, 2010). Prior to 1948, there was no provision of advanced technical education for black people. This was the result of the racial division of labour and institutionalised job reservation, which restricted black people to primarily unskilled roles. In 1948, there were only 950 black students in universities and black students were registered

predominantly in the humanities and education faculties. They were severely under-represented in the scientific and technical fields (Badat, 1999).

This allowed white South Africans to dominate in these fields with no competition and for development and accumulation of wealth in favour of this population group (Peter, 2002). Prior to 1960 the apartheid government did not allow black students to apply to study in the engineering field. It was only in the late 1960s that black people were allowed to apply for engineering courses, and this was mainly because of a shortfall of engineering technicians (Badat, 1999).

In 1960, black universities were established, with the exception of Fort Hare which was founded in 1916, and only assumed university status in 1959 (Fiske & Ladd, 2004). The apartheid government ensured that white and black people could not be taught in the same institutions. The higher education system was then divided into two types, universities and technikons. Historically white universities were divided into two sub-groupings, one of which used Afrikaans and the other English as the medium of communication and instruction. This divide arose mainly because some universities supported the apartheid higher education policies, and others did not (Bunting, 2004). Nineteen higher education institutions were designed for the exclusive use of white people, two for the exclusive use of coloured people, two for the exclusive use of Indians and six for the exclusive use of black people. There were legal constraints to prevent institutions designed for the use of one race group from enrolling students from another race group. For example, an institution designed for Indians could register a student from one of the three race groups only if that institution obtained a permit from the Department of Education (Jansen, 2003a).

There were significant differences between black institutions and white institutions: White institutions were provided with excellent infrastructure, adequate funding, and capacity for teaching and research. On the other hand, black institutions were mainly located in under-developed, impoverished rural areas, with little economic infrastructure for supporting local development, or university expansion (Suransky & Van der Merwe, 2014). These black universities were aimed at meeting the needs of the ‘Homelands’, while creating a small black elite group which would support separate development (Peter, 2004). The government ensured that these institutions produced as little knowledge as possible for black people in those particular areas. To illustrate this point, a black university established in the 1960s had

little to offer with only 67 000 to 84 000 books in their library, while Rand Afrikaans University, established in 1968 had 195 000 volumes. Although Turfloop University had a hundred thousand books in the 1980s, many were obsolete or useless and of poor quality, and had been rejected from other libraries (Badat, 1991).

Universities which used Afrikaans as a medium of communication and instruction were in support of racial segregation. This is shown by the fact that the combined student enrolment in these universities was 96 percent white in 1990 and 89 percent white in 1993. They made few attempts to bring black students to their campuses through the permit system. This system allowed white institutions to apply for government permission to enroll black students in programmes not offered by black institutions (Bunting, 2004). Though the apartheid government established universities for black people, these universities were not aimed at training blacks to become knowledgeable citizens. The aim was to create further inequality amongst black people, while promoting separate development in the Bantustans.

2.5 South African Education Policies Post-1994

The new democratic South Africa brought about significant changes: the newly elected government in 1994 had to change the education system which was designed to serve only the interests of white people. The democratic government inherited an education system which was dominated by inequality, poor physical and human infrastructure and a racially divided and contested education system (Chisholm, 2005). In the light of this, the government came up with a mechanism to integrate higher education (Breier, 2001).

This approach (the introduction of the National Qualifications Framework or NQF) was expected to improve access to education by encouraging providers to adopt a more open and flexible approach to credit and transfer, and the recognition of prior learning. The NQF model failed to follow a bottom up approach, which advocates for local solutions to local problems as recognized in higher education globally. Countries such as Australia and Japan changed higher education based on the context of the country. One can argue that higher education in South Africa is not transforming as expected, because the model being used is not based on the South African context (Seepe, 2004). Seepe (2004) further states that there is a need to change South African higher education into a system that speaks to the challenges that the country is facing. He argues that most of the courses which are offered in universities are of

western standards. For example, a person trained in South Africa as a medical doctor is more capable of practising in the United Kingdom than in South Africa. This is because the context and content of his or her learning were based on and influenced by British norms. The NQF approach further fails to recognize prior learning of students. To maintain the quality of higher education, learners must be well trained at primary and secondary levels. Learners in South Africa can now pass matriculation level with only a 30 percent pass per subject (Jansen, 2005). To tackle this problem, both the education approach and curriculum need to be adapted to contain a stronger applicability to the South African context.

This does not only increase the attrition rate in higher education institutions. It further affects the quality of graduates being produced by institutions of higher learning. The quality of education in South Africa has decreased with the introduction of a 30 percent pass rate. Whereas previously, a learner with seven distinctions was guaranteed entrance into medical school, with this new policy called the National Bench Mark Test, learners are required to write the National Bench Mark exam, to qualify to enter medical school (Jansen, 2012). Jansen (2005) facetiously states that for one to fail the matriculation in South Africa, that person must have missed all the classes or was probably in jail during the examinations.

The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (1996) requires education to be transformed and democratized in accordance with the values of human dignity, equality, human rights, freedom and non-racism. Through the Constitution, every citizen has equal rights and no one is to be treated differently because of his/her skin colour. In 1997 the South African government passed the White Paper on Higher Education, which aimed to transform higher education in South Africa. The purpose of the policy was to promote equity of access and fair chances of success to every South African seeking to realize their potential through higher education (Department of Education, 2001).

The democratic government in South Africa passed the National Education Policy Act (NEPA, 1996). NEPA (1996) provided for the formulation of national policy in education and training as one national policy which governs the whole education system.Through this Act, the government was able to create a single national Department of Education out of the 19 racially and regionally divided departments of education of the apartheid government. The government created a non-discriminatory school environment into which access is gained on the basis of criteria other than race, religion, creed or culture. Furthermore, the government

has been able to create new institutional typologies, including the creation of 50 Further Education and Training Colleges (FETs) out of 150, which are now called Technical Vocational Education and Training Colleges (TVETs). Further to this the government has achieved the incorporation of Colleges of Education into universities and the merging of technikons and universities (Taylor & Bingley, 2003). As a result of these achievements, South Africa has been able to achieve the highest enrollment rates in African education. South Africa spends more money on its education system than most developing countries. However, this has not been accompanied by positive results as had been expected. According to the Southern and Eastern Africa Consortium for Monitoring Educational Quality (SACMEQ, 2007), South Africa's average student reading score placed it tenth out of the fifteen countries scored, while the average student mathematics placed South Africa eighth out of the fifteen countries.

Though it is not easy to compare the education systems of different countries, South Africa spends more money on its education system than Tanzania, which was ranked number one. More than 12 million learners attend schools, with a gross enrollment ratios of nearly 100 percent for primary schooling, and over 70 percent for secondary schools. Further to this, the rate of female participation in schools is one of the highest on the African continent (Jansen, 2003b). During the apartheid period, women were under-represented as stated above. The democratic government has ensured that women in South Africa enjoy equal rights with men in statutory terms. South Africa is one of the first countries in Africa to have a woman as deputy president. Further to this, female employment grew by 33 percent between 1995 and 2002 (Oosthuizen & Bhorat, 2004). This shows that gender equality in post-apartheid South Africa is being addressed. The number of females in higher education institutions has been increasing not only in South Africa but worldwide. According to Morley (2013), worldwide the enrolment of women in higher education now exceeds that of men; he notes that women's participation in higher education as a result of the expansion of capacity and opportunity has increased six fold.

In 1993, women made up 43 percent of all students in South Africa, and by 2002, women constituted 54 percent of all students (Cohen, 2002). The government has increased its expenditure in order to address those areas which were disadvantaged by apartheid. There has been the introduction of school nutrition schemes to deal with hunger in schools, transport subsidies to advance access to schooling and free schooling for the poor (Jansen & Taylor,

2003). Though the government has implemented various policies and initiatives to eradicate the inequalities of apartheid, the inequality in education quality in South Africa is still present. Access to Higher Education institutions in South Africa is now legally open to everyone. All learners, irrespective of their race, religion or creed, are able to participate in Higher Education institutions.

However, although institutions of Higher Education have increased access, the number of graduates is declining. Furthermore, graduates are significantly older; there is a higher percentage of females and more are likely to be married (CHET, 2008). South Africa is a country with a high unemployment rate, poverty and inequality. Because the government was aware that higher education would not be affordable to ordinary South Africans, to provide equal access opportunities to higher education, the South African government established (NSFAS) National Student Financial Aid Scheme. This aid is aimed at learners from poor backgrounds, who have been accepted in various institutions of higher learning but cannot afford it (NSFAS, 2013). Thousands of students have been able to graduate through the National Student Financial Aid Scheme.

However, this scheme has been facing various challenges. One of the obstacles faced by the scheme is the high number of students applying for the aid. As a result, some of the applicants do not get funding. This is the reason why some of the students who passed their Matriculation are not accessing higher education institutions in the new South Africa. Fiske and Ladd (2004) argue that during apartheid years, students who accessed higher education institutions had access to substantial numbers of bursaries, some from government and some from sources outside South Africa. Further to this, one can argue that the availability of these bursaries was, pre-1994, the result of the low number of students who had access to higher education institutions, which was primarily limited to the minority white population. The problems that the National Student Financial Aid Scheme is encountering are the result of open access to every individual with limited resources (NSFAS, 2013). NSFAS in most cases covers only 60 to 70 percent of the total cost of education, and it is often difficult, if not impossible for these students to come up with the balance.

These students use aid mainly because they are from poor backgrounds, and requesting them to pay 30 or 40 percent balance is unreasonable. Substantial numbers of students who are unable to pay their fees, drop out of higher education institutions. Further to this, students do

not receive their results because of their outstanding fees. In 2015, a North-West University student was unable to graduate because he owed the university money, which the NSFAS had failed to pay. In February 2015, the University of the Witwatersrand Student Representative Council launched a campaign called One Million a Month, in order to raise funds to register students that the NSFAS did not agree to pay for, despite having provided aid for the previous two or three years.

The problems faced by the scheme are not new: in 1998, students owed universities and technikons in South Africa R500 million, and R370 million of this total was owed to historically black universities. The reason historically black universities were owed so much is because historically white universities are able to supplement government funds with additional bursaries to cover residential cost and other expenses for black students (Fiske & Ladd, 2004).

During the 1998 period, universities and technikons adopted policies to collect unpaid fees, which included requesting minimum payments at the time of registration and withholding academic results or qualifications. These are policies which universities are using up to now; however, these policies have been shown resistance. In 1998, several former black campuses were burned and the resistance which was shown in 1998 is still heavily present to date. In 2014 students at Tshwane University of Technology burned more than eighteen vehicles belonging to the institution. This led to the closure of the institution for several weeks before classes could recommence.

The democratic government in South Africa has transformed the education system substantially since 1994. This has allowed for equal opportunities for every South African citizen, and schooling is compulsory for every citizen. This shows that the government is fighting for every South African to have access to a schooling opportunity. During the early years of democracy, the South African government introduced the South African School Act of 1996. This Act addressed the divide between private and public schools. According to the Act, with respect to independent schools, it specifies that any person may establish and maintain such a school at his or her own cost (SASA, 1996).

Private or independent schools include all formal schools that are not public, and may be founded, owned, managed and financed by actors other than the state, even in cases where the

state provides most of the funding and has considerable control over these schools (Hofmeyr & Lee, 2004). However, the unintended impact of this Act is to affect the quality of education that poor and rich learners receive. The majority of South Africans are poor and the economy is still largely controlled by the white minority. Wealthy parents are able to send their children to private schools which are well resourced in terms of infrastructure and qualified teachers. These schools are also able to attract the best teachers, because of the salaries they offer. This leaves many public schools with unqualified teachers (Fiske & Ladd, 2004). Further to this, the Act gave schools the authority to set fees, allowing former white schools to retain much of the quality they enjoyed during apartheid, and automatically excluding the majority of black citizens from accessing these schools.

2.6 Rural Education in South Africa

2.6.1 Challenges of rural learners

Rural and urban areas in South Africa can be traced back to the years of apartheid where urban centres, cities and towns were declared to be the domain of white people. While it was insisted that black people belong to one Bantustan (*Homeland*) or another, these were located away from urban areas (Marais, 2005). This segregation paved the way for the apartheid government to promote unequal development in South Africa. This inequality existed in areas such as education, basic service provision such as water and electricity and infrastructure. Post-1994, the democratic government has implemented policies and programmes to eradicate the inequalities of apartheid; however rural schools still lack clean running water, electricity, libraries, computers and laboratories (Department of Education and Training, 2007a).

2.6.2 Unqualified teachers

During the apartheid years, rural areas had more schools than urban areas. Rural areas had 604 secondary schools while there were only 170 secondary schools in urban areas (Nassan & Samuels, 1990). This was in line with the apartheid policy of making urban areas only for white people. However, these schools were of poor quality in terms of infrastructure, and the quality of teachers was very low. Most of the teachers did not have post-secondary schooling qualifications and in 1986, only 7 percent of African teachers had university degrees (Pillay, 1990), although there are a few teachers who volunteer to acquire certificates, diplomas,

degrees and postgraduate education programs with their own funds or using departmental bursaries. Many still have limited skills to master the subjects they are teaching. As a result, the quality of teaching is low, which further affects rural learners' performance.

In the Eastern Cape, the Ministry for Basic Education tried to introduce competency testing for the National Senior Certificate, after it was introduced in the Western Cape. However, the South African Democratic Teachers Union (SADTU) argued that the move would be 'unjust' and the initiative has been put on hold (Lovemore, 2012). One can argue that, though the government is aware of the challenges facing the education system in South Africa, actors such as the unions have a greater voice in terms of what is best of the country. Furthermore, this shows that democracy in South Africa is growing and human rights are protected as stated in the Bill of Rights (SA Government, 1996a).

2.6.3 Maladministration of funds

In 2011 the Eastern Cape budget was overspent by R1, 8 billion (Plaatjie, 2011). The Department of Education had to institute cost-cutting measures to see the department through the start of the new financial year. Among the measures were decision not to reappoint over 4 000 temporary teachers. This move increased staff shortages in many schools in the area. Other measures included suspending scholar transport, termination of school feeding schemes and halting the delivery of textbooks and stationery to schools because of tender irregularities (Plaatjie, 2011). This move which was made four years ago still affects education in the province. The beginning of 2015 saw parents in the Eastern Cape protesting over the shortage of teachers in schools. They demanded the reappointment of teachers who had been not appointed since 2011. In 2014 there were over 135 teaching vacancies in 70 schools in the province (Poti, 2014).

2.6.4 Poor Infrastructure

In 2006 19, 5 percent of the schools in the Eastern Cape had no water supply, while 9, 9 percent of schools had no toilets at all. In 2008, the learner-to-school ratio in the Eastern Cape was 358: 1. In 2010 Mazamanyana Senior Secondary School in Mount Frere district had 549 learners, 18 teachers and nine classrooms (Hendricks, 2012). The Eastern Cape, like most provinces such as Limpopo and KwaZulu-Natal, are facing an educational challenge,

especially for learners in their rural areas. Though there has been an improvement in infrastructure in rural areas since 1994, many rural schools still lack clean running water, electricity, libraries, computers and laboratories (Department of Education & Training, 2007b)

The *new South Africa* is facing various challenges not only in the education sector: unemployment is high, and there is little hope of the government providing services delivery. 92, 77 percent of state schools nationally have no library materials or libraries (Equal Education, 2000).

Schools are inseparable from the communities they serve. When a community goes without water or electricity, the school also suffers. This has been the case in Malamulele district in Limpopo. Learners missed months of schooling because of disputes between the community and the municipal demarcation board. These learners not only missed the first months of the 2015 curriculum, Malamulele Secondary School was also burnt. The implication of these actions meant that the government had to come with catch-up strategies for learners in the area. Further to this, classes become overcrowded as some of the classrooms had been burnt (Tau, 2015). Though violent protests are not only rural phenomena, it is rural areas that suffer the most. This is so because these areas are already under-resourced, not only in terms of infrastructure but in terms of trained skilled teachers.

Thus these protests further affected rural learners in a negative way. Vuwani residents in Limpopo have been in dispute with the municipal demarcation board since early August 2015. Their grievances are not different from those of Malamulele residents who wanted their own municipality: Vuwani residents do not want to be part of the same municipality with Malamulele residents. The results have been closure of local schools (Tau, 2015). Learners who do not attend schools in the area are also affected, as there are no buses or taxis allowed in the area. Grade 12 learners are supposed to be preparing for their preliminary examinations. However violent protest has been affecting them negatively. This was not only likely to affect their ability to write exams but affected their ability to access higher education institutions in 2016.

2.6.5 Poverty, unemployment and HIV/AIDS

Poverty and unemployment are very high in rural areas. In Limpopo, KwaZulu-Natal and the Eastern Cape, there is high dependency on social grants provided by the government (Ngonini, 2004). This affects the education system in these areas because when a community is poor, education in the area is also affected. Poverty in rural areas affects learners in various ways. Instead of being concerned with their studies, learners in these areas, are expected to render their labour in cultivating the land or gardens to provide food. They must fetch water and in most cases walk long distances to get water. These are chores which they are expected to perform every day, which gives them less time to concentrate on their homework or extra reading. Livestock and ownership of land provides the basis of life in these areas. As such, children are required to look after their families' livestock. In rural communities, most of the parents did not receive formal education.

According to the Nelson Mandela Foundation (2005) in Limpopo, 23 percent of females and seven percent of males had no formal education. This affects their interaction and involvement in the education of their children. Sixty-five percent of children in Limpopo, KwaZulu-Natal and the Eastern Cape indicated that no one helped them with their homework because no one in the household was educated enough. These responsibilities then fall on older brother or sister. It is argued that parents who are actively involved in their children's education tend to inspire and give ambition to their children (Cosser, 2002). Therefore, one can argue that rural learners' aspirations and ambitions to access higher education institutions is being dampened by poor participation and parents' declining ability to inspire them. Absenteeism and school drop-out tendencies are high in rural areas. One of the contributing factors is that that family responsibility takes precedence over schooling (Nelson Mandela Foundation, 2005). Economically it makes more sense to families for a rural learner to go and cultivate land or take livestock for grazing instead of going to school. This is so because of poverty, making agriculture and domestic chores necessary for survival.

Though the government has introduced feeding schemes in public schools, this system is faced with various challenges. Learners have been sick as a result of the quality of food that they are being offered. In May 2015 in Limpopo, the competition was so fierce that a tender box for the feeding scheme bidding was bombed. Furthermore, food providers tend to abandon hygiene when preparing food. In one school, there was a case where learners found

the cooks urinating in the cooking pots (Raborife, 2014). These tendencies make some of the learners not eat the food, despite the fact that they are starving.

Learners in rural areas are also subjected to various threats and abuses on their way to and from school; because of the long distances they walk to and from school, rural learners can be robbed or raped. Traumatic incidents like these increase the HIV/AIDS spread and learners' inability to learn. As a result, some of the learners drop-out of school. In addition to this, poor roads and infrastructure make services such as clinics, police and taxis difficult to access in rural communities (Brookes & Higson-Smith, 2004).

Fine (2004) argues that dilapidated buildings, coupled with chronic shortages or out of date textbooks cripple teachers' and learners' social aspirations, their ability and sense of self. In the Eastern Cape, some of the classrooms are built from mud. These conditions are not conducive for learning, especially during rainy seasons. In 2009, a fourteen-year-old in Elliotdale was killed when a dilapidated school wall collapsed onto her (Hendricks, 2012). These conditions not only affect learners' ability to learn; some of the parents might see it as necessary for their children to drop out rather than being subjected to these poor conditions.

2.7 Research Studies on Access to Higher Education

2.7.1 Access to higher education

Education is one of the important tools that can be used to free citizens, and to provide them with the opportunity to become masters of their own destinies. The term *access* originated in the 1960s and 1970s: its features were targeted programs, to meet the needs of certain groups of people, young and old, especially minority groups, who wanted to enter into higher education, even though they did not comply with the minimum requirements (Andrews, 2003). Higher education institutions were founded with the goals of pursuing knowledge, and more recently, of providing knowledge to student body representatives in the institution's community and nation (Rhodes University, 2001). Access can be defined as enabling people to study at any level that is appropriate to them. *Inclusion* is a process of addressing and responding to the diversity of needs of all learners, through increasing participation in learning (UNESCO, 2005).

Higher education is expensive, and gives rise to questions of whether it is a right or a privilege. This question might have two opposing answers which are both correct, depending on the perspective that one is looking from. From the view of someone who wants to be educated, it is a right. From an institutional viewpoint, it is a privilege in the sense that unless the individual can afford it, he/she should be excluded (Buckley, 2004). According to the Kgatelopele Project, learners in rural areas, despite their hardship, manage to pass well. However there is little advance information about how they can pursue their studies (Wright, 2012) which limits their possibility of accessing institutions of higher education.

In South Africa there are two critical points at which learners make decisions which will determine whether they access higher education institutions or not. The first is in Grade 9, when learners decide on the combination of subjects they will take for the remainder of their secondary schooling. The second is in Grade 11 or 12: here learners decide whether to enter higher education, and if so, whether to enter university or technikon, and what course of study to pursue in these institutions (Cosser, 2002).

2.7.2 Models of learner's choice in accessing institutions of higher learning

According to Cosser (2002), there are three models which can be used to explain a learner's choice of entering institutions for higher education study. The first model is the economic model; the second model is the sociological model, and the last is the information processing model.

Economic model

The economic model is based on the notion that students maximise utility cost benefit analysis. The costs usually considered include direct and indirect cost; direct costs include tuition, books, opportunities and cost of living, while indirect costs include the cost of leaving home and friends. Cardak and Givon (2004) support the economic model by stating that learners from low-income families where parents are either unemployed or earning very little, would be unable to access institutions of higher learning. Lack of financial resources in South Africa is one of the key reasons that most disadvantaged learners do not access higher education institutions: this is so because poverty is closely linked to unemployment (Ebrahim, 2009). Another financial constraint that learners in rural areas face is finding the application fee to submit forms to universities. However, universities such as University of

Johannesburg do not require any payment when applying online. This method is intended to benefit those from disadvantaged backgrounds and rural areas; however, one can argue that it has failed.

This is so because rural learners do not have access to the internet. Further to this, their schools are under-resourced, and having a computer is luxury not to speak of internet access (Department of Education, 2007b). However, the North-West University has realised that 'tens of thousands of students who qualify for university entrance stumble at the first hurdle, finding the money to apply' (Jansen, 2015). The university is setting an example and challenging all public universities to scrap the application fee, so that many more young people from poor communities can realise their dream of accessing higher education. The university has waived application fees for all prospective undergraduate and post-graduate students, nationally and internationally who want to study at the institution in 2016. This initiative by the university shows that the university is aware of the challenges that many South Africans are facing and the institution is exploring ways to deal with such challenges. Raising application fees is a challenge especially for learners who want to apply to more than one university. Consequently, it becomes easier for these learners when application is free: this will allow for future growth in student intake in universities in South Africa.

The introduction of tablet computers in Gauteng schools has given Gauteng learners a further advantage compared with their rural counterparts in terms of accessing information. Learners in Gauteng have libraries, and are closer to different higher education institutions. Thus one can argue that the government is further widening the information gap that already exists between rural and urban areas of South Africa (Department of Communication, 2015).

Parents from poor backgrounds are not familiar with higher education institutions, mainly because of the apartheid policies which denied them access to these institutions. These affect their ability to inspire their children to study further and to provide guidance on how to access higher education institutions (Kros, 2010). As a result, many learners from poor backgrounds and rural areas are concerned with getting better results, which would enable them to get better jobs than their parents, which would allow them to support their struggling families. However, studying hard to get better results, which would enable them to enroll at higher education institutions, is not their first priority: this is primarily so because they know their families cannot afford to support them through higher education institutions (Ebrahim, 2009).

Sociological model

The sociological model focuses on the identification and interaction of variables as learners make decisions about entering higher education institutions. The model states that factors such as socio-economic status (especially family background), academic ability, secondary school performance, educational aspiration, motivation to succeed and secondary school characteristics, influence learners' enrolment decision (Cosser, 2002). These elements of social capital include not only the learner's ability and parent's income but also preference and attitude transmitted to children, and the ways in which parents shape their children's future (Cosser, 2002). This includes reading to them, modeling reading habits and encouraging critical thinking. However, in South Africa, most parents were unable to get or complete formal education. This limits their knowledge and involvement in their children's studies.

Parental encouragement is important to learners to predict entry to post-secondary education (Mullen, 2010). Such encouragement includes frequent discussions between parents and children about parent's expectations, hopes and dreams for their children. However, in South Africa, fewer learners are likely to be living with their parents or at least both parents. Grade 11 symbols have a strong relation with learners' intentions to enter higher education. The higher the average symbol, the greater the intention to enter higher education. Uncertainty to enter higher education is associated with low average symbols (Cosser, 2002). Favilla and Masi (2000) argue that there is a strong relationship between academic performance, self-image and mood. Learners who do not perform well during their preliminary examinations tend not to do well in their final examination.

As a result of poor performance, this then affects their confidence, installing fear and lack of self-belief. Admission practices of most higher education institutions act as barriers for other learners. This is so because higher education institutions tend to rely heavily on prior educational attainment to select students. Prior attainment is seen as the best available indicator of potential to achieve in higher education institutions (Mullen, 2010). However, this approach fails to recognize the learning potential of some students such as those from low attainment-rated schools and state schools to become successful.

Information processing model

The information processing model describes a variety of economic and social forces that affect individual student decision making, in order to identify appropriate intervention strategies that will influence student choices. This includes preference, economic factors such as location of institutions, cost and academic quality, all of which are used to exclude institutions. It also involves evaluation, where institutions are assessed on the basis of their qualities (Cosser, 2002). Learners who are able to get information about various higher education institutions use this model to determine which institution they prefer.

Though this model is not different from the previous two models, at this stage, learners compare different institutions based on their social backgrounds and family income. Geography plays a vital role in learners' decisions to participate in higher education. Access to higher education in terms of travel distance can be an issue for some learners, especially those in rural areas. As a result of living in isolated areas, learners may choose not to participate in higher education. This is because it would be practically impossible to travel from their areas on a daily basis to higher education institutions (Mullen, 2010). In South Africa, learners' choices to enter into higher education are further influenced by friends. According to a study by Ebrahim (2009), some learners choose not to participate in higher education mainly because their friends will not be with them. Furthermore, Cosser (2002) states that learners in South Africa are influenced by their girlfriends or boyfriends as to whether to participate in higher education or not.

2.8 Theoretical Framework

2.8.1 General Systems Theory

Access to higher education institutions cannot be explained by only looking at school resources: the issue of access to higher education institutions remains complex. Access involves various factors ranging from community stakeholders with which learners interact on a daily basis, to educational policies that govern education of a country, to the government, and different higher education institutions. Thus when dealing with the issue of access to higher education institutions by learners from rural areas, one cannot only focus on one aspect and use it to explain the reasons behind poor access by these learners. General Systems Theory will be explored to provide a theoretical understanding of the different systems that exist in South Africa.

The central ideas of General Systems Theory are examined in order to provide a framework within which the experiences of rural learners can be understood, in their pursuit of accessing higher education in post-apartheid South Africa. There are different definitions which are used in defining this theory. This is so because systems theories focus on the interrelationships of elements in nature, encompassing physics, chemistry, biology and social relationships (Syers & Boisen, 2003). Even Von Bertalanffy (2006) has defined General Systems Theory in a multiplicity of ways in various publications over time. The basic principle of this theory is that everything is connected to everything else. The theory should be used to show relationships, it should provide direction on categories and interactions of business, and should stimulate thinking and conversation (Dawson, 2006). A system is defined as "an organized whole made up of components that interact in a way distinct from their interaction with other entities and which endures over some period of time" (Boulding, 2004, p.26).

There are various systems in the world today such as social systems, which are systems composed of persons or groups who interact and influence each other's' behavior. Higher education organisation is a system, as it is holistic, open, continuously changing, and interactive, and demonstrates embedded features (Mizikaci, 2006). Systems Theory as mentioned above states that everything is connected to everything else (Payne, 2005).

2.8.1.1 Schools and communities

Schools are inseparable from the communities they serve; thus when dealing with problems a school is facing, the community must not be neglected (Gardiner, 2008). One can argue that this is true of South Africa. The government has introduced various policies to address the issue of access through the Constitution, which advocate for equal rights and opportunities to all citizens and one national education department (Jansen & Taylor, 2003). However, the failure of some of these policies is not because they are poorly written or researched; it is because they treat communities in isolation. The government has introduced the National Education Infrastructure Management System which aims to reduce poor infrastructures in rural areas (Department of Education, 2007a).

Though this has improved learning conditions of some of the learners, there are still obstacles which limit enrollment in schools. Rural communities in South Africa are heavily dependent

on the social grant, land cultivation and livestock (Ngonini, 2004). Thus improving learning conditions in these areas, while the majority of people are poor and unemployed will not effectively address the problem. According to the Emerging Voices report on education in South Africa's rural communities by the Nelson Mandela Foundation (2005), learners in rural areas find it more important to wake up and take their livestock for grazing than waking up to go to school. Access to higher education institutions will not be accessible to everyone if some of the factors are not dealt with or taken into consideration.

2.8.1.2 Higher education institutions and school systems

Higher education institutions are a system, therefore this system must consider other systems in the pursuit of providing equal access to every South African (Mizikaci, 2006). The higher education system acts as an obstacle to rural learners in different ways. South Africa is a country that has been dominated by economic, racial, social and information inequality (Nicolson, 2013). Learners in rural areas are not informed about the various higher education institutions that exist, because these institutions do not provide the information to these learners. For example, when the University of the Witwatersrand conducts its career exhibition in Limpopo Venda Vhembe District, it goes to the University of Venda. The problem with this arrangement is the fact that only those who live in the surrounding areas of Thohoyandou will be able to access this information. These are people who are already privileged, because they live in town and have access to the internet and various institutions which are in the area, including the University of Venda. For learners who are far from University of Venda it becomes impossible to attend such career exhibition, first of all because it requires money to get to town. Secondly, even if that money is available at that moment at home, there are often greater needs for which the money will be used, like buying maize meal.

In order to address equal access, opportunities and to transform higher education in South Africa, higher education institutions must be accessible to every citizen. Being the hub of research and knowledge, the challenges facing the country are not new to them. These institutions possess the resources and ability to share information with rural learners on when and how to apply.

One can argue that these institutions are only focusing on making a profit and not changing the country into a better place. This is so because they only target students who can afford to study and not those from rural areas who will be in need of financial assistance through NSFAS and other forms of bursaries. The initiative by the University of the Free State to waive application fees for both local and international students, shows that the institutions understand that everything is connected, as stated by the system's theory. Transforming higher education in South Africa requires a full understanding of other socio-economic factors that face the country (Jansen, 2015).

Mullen (2010) argues that admission practices of some higher education institutions act as barriers for some of the learners. This is so because higher education institutions tend to rely heavily on prior educational attainment to select students. Prior attainment is seen as the best available indicator of potential to achieve, in higher education institutions. However, this approach fails to recognize the learning potential of some students such as those from low attainment-rated schools and state schools, and other characteristics to become successful. The environment is made up of several social, economic and political institutions, which cooperate regularly and are inter-dependent. Everything in an environment is a complete system on its own, but it is also a unit or subsystem of yet a larger system and all are inter-dependent (Dawson, 2006).

The same is true of the school system. Schools are essentially living systems and that without people, they are nothing but concrete and paper. Education is a process involving various forms of inputs, predominant amongst which is human resources such as students, teachers, administrators, catering workers, gardeners and bus drivers. As such, policies being implemented must not only favour a certain group, while compromising the other. This was the case in the Eastern Cape when the Department of Education decided to cut some of its teachers, suspend scholar transport, terminate school feeding schemes and halt the delivery of textbooks and stationery to schools, because of tender irregularities and mismanagement of funds by the department (Plaatjie, 2011).

The consequences of actions taken in 2011 are still being felt in 2015. There has been increased staff shortage in many schools in the area, which has resulted in protests by residents (Plaatjie, 2011). Secondly, material resources such as buildings, desks, books, equipment and pencils must also be seen in terms of being part of a system. Therefore, access

to higher education institutions cannot be separated from these materials. A learning environment plays a vital role in the performance of a learner. When learners are subjected to poor schools, which are overcrowded, and collapsing classrooms, for example, their learning is affected. In some cases, learners might choose not to attend school as it is not safe (Fine, 2004).

The third resource which is critical to the system is financial resources such as money. Money plays a vital role in the learner's ability to access higher education. Higher education institutions are not easily accessed because of the money which is required to apply for entrance, and money which is required for tuition fees and other costs which include: living costs, food costs and textbooks costs. All these factors cannot be treated alone, they must be considered as important factors which affect learner's ability to access higher education institutions (Cardak & Givon, 2004).

The last inputs in education include constraints, such as requirements of the law and policy, expectations of parents, values and goals. Policies in South Africa pre-1994 were based on racial consciousness. As a result, the education that black people received was inferior compared to the education white people were receiving (Marais, 2005). This inequality has persisted in the new democratic South Africa. This is so because of the South African Schools Act of 1996, which allows for the establishment of private schools (SASA, 1996). As a result, white people have maintained the quality of education they enjoyed during apartheid, and excluded the black majority, by setting schools fees which are very high. This is exclusion because the majority of black people in South Africa remain poor after twenty-one years of democracy, with an unemployment rate of 25 percent (Stats SA, 2015).

Further to this, in South Africa, fewer learners are likely to be living with their parents or at least both parents (Mullen, 2010). This affects their performances at schools; additionally, it is argued that parents who are actively involved in the children's education are able to install confidence and inspire their children to do better in their studies (Cosser, 2002). The General Systems Theory states that everything is interrelated (Watson, 2012). For example, one cannot sideline parents' involvement and participation in their children's education through reading to them, modeling reading habits and encouragement of critical thinking.

South Africa is a country that was dominated by years of racial oppression and segregation. The General Systems Theory allows for the application of different factors that contribute to the education system of the country. It is thus impossible to talk about education in South Africa and not highlight the apartheid policies and the impact of policies on it (Van der Berg, 2008).

Access to higher education institutions in South Africa is expensive for the majority of South Africans, because they were denied access to quality education. This affects their children in the sense that parents are not involved in their children's education because some of them do not know how to read or write. Therefore, it becomes difficult for them to inspire their children or to help them with their homework (Gardiner, 2008). Furthermore, one cannot only look at apartheid policies alone.

The democratic government's policies have to be addressed in order to explain the poor access to higher education institutions by learners from rural areas. The poor allocation of resources in the education sector might be cited as one of the factors why fewer rural learners are accessing higher education institutions. In 2012, Limpopo province learners suffered when the Department of Basic Education failed to deliver books at the beginning of the year. Some of the schools received books eight months into the calendar year while some did not receive books at all (Variava, 2013). Limpopo is one of the poorest provinces in South Africa with over 80 percent of the population dependent on the social grant. Most of the schools do not have proper infrastructure such as classrooms, laboratories and libraries (Mandela Foundation, 2005). The department's failure to provide textbooks not only undermines the Constitution of the country, it further puts learners in positions where learning becomes extremely difficult.

2.9 Gaps in the Literature

The changes that the new democratic government made post-1994 are well documented in the literature, from the discussion document of the ANC in 1994 to the government of national unity White Paper of 1996. Access to higher education institutions relating to race, gender and disability is also well documented. Very little is, however, written about access to higher education institutions by economically disadvantaged learners, in this case rural learners. Further to this, statistics on student profiles at universities, colleges and technikons

is available. However, little literature exists on what and how these learners or communities feel about higher education institutions.

Freire argues that for radical transformation to take place and be effective, members of marginalised communities must be part of the process (Freire, 2002). Therefore, understanding how these communities think and feel about higher education institutions may help provide further knowledge of the needs that rural or poor communities have in accessing higher education institutions. In this way, policy makers and relevant structures can be informed and make changes necessary to make access to higher education equal and fair to all South Africans.

2.10 Conclusion

In conclusion, access to higher education institutions is important for the development of any country. When access to higher education is limited or accessed only by a certain group of people in society, the consequences may include increased unemployment and perpetuation of the poverty cycle, a high crime rate, and lack of skilled labour. The literature review has shown that South Africa is attempting to break away from the shackles of apartheid, especially in education, and providing equal opportunities for all citizens. Government has invested a lot of money through policies to make changes in the education sector. This is true of the growing access by black students to higher education institutions post-1994.

Little progress has, however, been made with regard to access to higher education institutions by learners from rural and disadvantaged communities. Therefore, until marginalised people are fully recognized and involved in decision making, South Africa cannot talk about change. As a result, this research aims to find out what challenges rural learners experience in accessing higher education institutions, with the hope that this will help inform change in the education system, which will ultimately lead to meaningful transformation.

CHAPTER 3 – METHODS

3.1 Research Question

Broadly, the study attempted to explore the experiences of rural learners in the Vhembe district in Limpopo province of South Africa, regarding access to institutions of higher learning. The emerging themes were organised around one question that served to guide the study, namely:

What are the experiences of rural learners in Vhembe District in accessing institutions of higher learning?

3.2 Research Design

This study used a qualitative research method. This method aims to understand a given research problem from the perspective of the local population it involves. The qualitative research method is effective in obtaining culturally specific information about values, opinions, behaviors and social context of a particular population (De Vos, Strydom & Fouche, 2005). The qualitative method involves trying to understand a particular event of interest without formulating a hypothesis (Devlin, 2006). The aim of using this method in this study is to gain an in-depth understanding of the experiences of rural learners in the Vhembe District and the factors that they perceive to be constraints in accessing institutions of higher learning. Greenstein (2003) states that the qualitative research method is Interpretive, which is helpful in uncovering in-depth attitudes, opinions, participants' perspectives and their different ways of making sense of the world.

3.3 Participants

The study utilised a non-probability sampling method to select participants. This method was used so that readily-accessible participants could be included. This method may limit the generalisability of the findings. However, it is a feasible and convenient way of locating participants (Babbie & Mouton, 2004).

A 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 in Grade 12, having been

born and grown up in the Vhembe District. These criteria were necessary to achieve the aims of this research. Ten participants, five male and five female were chosen for the study. The participants were 18 years or older. For the purpose of this research, learners from a Secondary School in Vhembe District Nzhelele West Circuit were selected. This school is attended by learners from Nzhelele area. This school was chosen because it is one of the schools in Nzhelele where students do not pay school fees. The demographic information presented below was gathered through the biographical questions asked at the beginning of the interviews.

Table 1: Sample Description

Learner	Gender	Age	Residential area	Family structure
1	Female	18	Dopeni Village	Mother, father and siblings
2	Female	18	Vhutuwangadzebu Village	Mother, father and siblings
3	Male	18	Tshikota Village	Single parent
4	Female	18	Siloam Village	Mother and father
5	Male	19	Mandiwana Village	Grandmother, uncle and siblings
6	Female	18	Zwikhophani Village	Mother and father
7	Female	19	Mandiwana Village	Mother and father
8	Male	18	Mandiwana Village	Mother and father
9	Male	19	Vhutuwangadzebu Village	Alone
10	Male	18	Vhutuwangadzebu Village	Grandmother

Information received from the participants indicates that only 30% of the parents of these learners work; amongst another 30%, only one parent is employed, while 40% indicated that their parents were not employed.

3.4 Procedure

This section outlines 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 (Devlin, 2006).

3.4.1 Data collection tool

The most commonly used methods of data collection in qualitative research are interviews and focus group discussions. The interview method is the most widely employed as it affords the researcher flexibility (Devlin, 2006). This flexibility is also supported by the semi-structured interview. For this reason, semi-structured interviews were used in this study, as this research attempts to gain insight into what the learners or interviewees see as relevant and important, in order to truly understand factors that rural learners perceive as constraints in accessing institutions of higher learning. The semi-structured interview allows for this, in that the questions reflect the concerns of the researcher, at the same time giving value to the views of the interviewee. This is supported by Welman and Kruger (2001), who state that a semi-structured interview merely suggests themes for discussion, and further questioning is largely determined by what the interviewee brings to the interview.

The questions for the interviews were organised according to themes relating to barriers or challenges in accessing institutions of higher learning. The literature review informed the themes, which included educational factors, economic factors and socio-cultural factors, which prevent learners in rural areas from accessing institutions of higher learning.

3.4.2 Gaining access to participants

The research was conducted at a Secondary School in Vhembe District in Limpopo province. This school services the community of the Nzhelele area.

3.4.3 Gaining permission from the Department of Education

Permission to conduct the interviews at this school was acquired from the Department of Education, Vhembe District. This was done in person and by letter. The letter outlined the rationale and aims of the research, assured confidentiality, and requested written consent to continue with the research; this was personally delivered, together with the research proposal, to Thohoyandou Civic Centre, Old Agriven Building. A letter of permission was then sent to the researcher by the Head of Department (HOD). (See Appendix B.)

3.4.4 Gaining permission from the principal of the secondary school

Permission from the school principal was gained through personal contact with the principal. A letter outlining the rationale and aims of the research, and seeking written consent to conduct the research at the school, was given to the principal. A letter of permission was given to the researcher by the principal.

3.4.5 Gaining Permission from the Participants

Once permission from the Department of Education Vhembe District and the principal was obtained, the learners were approached through the help of the principal. The principal asked learners who were interested in the study to participate. A meeting with the learners was arranged at a time convenient to the school and learners. At this meeting, the researcher explained to the learners the purpose of the research through a Participation Information Sheet. This Information Sheet informed the potential 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 precisely captured; c) the voluntary nature of participation; d) anonymity, assuring them that participants' details would not be disclosed. Volunteers were then invited, and the first ten learners that responded were interviewed in the research. (See Appendix D.)

All learners were provided with Informed Consent Forms to grant their permission to participate in the study and to being audio recorded. Once the signed Consent Forms were returned to the school, the principal contacted the researcher, and a date to conduct the research was negotiated. (See Appendix E and Appendix F.)

3.5 Data Collection

The sample of the study consisted of ten participants, five female and five male, between the ages of 18 and 19. The ten participants were born and raised in a rural area called Nzhelele in the Vhembe District in Limpopo province. The data was collected by interviewing the participants for an hour, using the semi-structured interview format, facilitated by the use of questions (Appendix G) which in turn generated more discussion. This gave participants the opportunity to speak broadly and openly about the topic. The interviews were audio recorded to ensure accuracy and were then transcribed. The use of the audio recorder enabled the

researcher to freely engage with participants, rather than being occupied with note taking. The interview consisted of closed and open-ended questions to generate the data and facilitate the sharing of perceptions about factors that were perceived as affecting their ability to access institutions of higher learning. The interviews were conducted in English; however, in some cases participants used Tshivenda to emphasis their points.

3.6 Data Analysis

Thematic Analysis was used as the method of data analysis in order to stimulate and explore the themes from the data collected. Braun and Clarke (2006) state that Thematic Analysis is a method of identifying, analysing and reporting patterns within data. This method helps organise and describe data in detail. The recorded interviews were transcribed by the researcher himself, to protect the anonymity of the participants and to allow the researcher to enhance his understanding of the data which was required for analysis. The interviews were transcribed without omissions, or additions to the text. Short answers and poor grammar indicates that English is not the first language of participants.

The questions asked were based on the themes that were identified in the literature review. The process of analysis of the themes that developed in this research is outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006): the first step is familiarisation with the data, which occurred when the researcher was transcribing the data. Potential themes were identified from words, phrases and ideas that emerged from the transcription of the interviews and the literature review. These were coded systematically across the data set. The codes were then organised into potential themes by gathering the data relevant to the theme. When this was done, the themes were reviewed to recheck whether the codes from the data linked with these themes.

3.7 Researcher Reflexivity

Reflexivity is an important part of qualitative research and, if used correctly, has the ability to facilitate understanding of both the occurrence under study and the research process as a whole (Watt, 2007). The qualitative research design was chosen for this research because the researcher had a strong interest in the learners' point of view. The qualitative interviewing enabled flexibility and an ability to respond to the direction in which the participants took the interview. This approach focuses on understanding the subjective experiences of the participants' social realities, which included their culture and context. According to Breuer et

al. (2002) research and its outcomes depend on characteristics of the persons involved, including their biological, mental, social, cultural and historical background (Breuer et al., 2002).

The researcher's own subjective experiences, culture and social context will impact on the interview. In this study, the researcher had been in the same position as the participants, this is because a researcher is from a rural area in the Limpopo province and attended a public school like the participants.

Maso (2003) encourages the reflexivity acknowledgment of the researcher's own subjective realities. The experiences that the researcher brings are of equal importance to those of the participants and must be recognised as an important element in the research process (Watt, 2007).

3.8 Ethical Considerations

Ethical clearance was requested and granted by the University of the Witwatersrand Human Research Ethics Committee (Medical) Sub-Committee. The following ethics clearance protocol number was issued, H15/07/41. Once clearance was obtained, the research study commenced. Permission was obtained from the Department of Education (DoE) and from the Principal of the selected school through the Information Sheet which outlines the nature of the research and the role of the learners. Permission from the learners was obtained using the Participation Information Sheet. All participants were required to sign a letter of informed consent.

The study involves human beings as participants, therefore, to ensure ethical research practice, participants were informed that they were not obliged to participate in the study and that, having agreed to participate, they would still be able to withdraw from the study at any time without providing a reason. All the data and personal information will be kept confidential as no identifying information is required in the interview. Participants were not forced to answer questions; they could refuse to answer any question they found disturbing. Participants were asked to sign an informed consent form for audio-recording of the interview and were informed that their responses would be transcribed. All tapes and transcripts are safely kept by the researcher's supervisor Dr T Nkomo, at the university. A

summary of the findings of the research will be made available to the Department of Education and to the school, to display on their student notice boards.

Ethical requirements for research with human subjects according to the University of the Witwatersrand were obeyed. These requirements are: that the researcher must reflect on any foreseeable effects of the research and publication of the study findings; that the participants in the research must be the researcher's responsibility and should be protected against any physical, social or psychological harm. Participants' dignity and privacy were honoured. The researcher confirmed that participants were clear on the aims of the research and on the maintenance of anonymity. All monitoring devices such as the tape recorder used in the research were explained and visible for transparency, and participants were given the right to reject such monitoring. Participants were not promised anything for participating in the study and their privacy was respected at all times.

3.9 Credibility and Trustworthiness

Credibility and trustworthiness of this research report was achieved by the researcher when he familiarized himself with the participants, through consultation with the participants. the prolonged engagement between the researcher and the participants is vital as it builds a relationship of trust between the parties (Shenton, 2004).

3.10 Conclusion

This chapter has provided a description of the research methodology and procedures used in this research. The chapter outlined the procedure followed, method of analysis, researcher's experiences and the ethical considerations that were taken into account for this research study.

CHAPTER 4 - PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the research findings that were acquired during in-depth interviews conducted with Grade 12 learners in a rural school in the Vhembe District in Limpopo province. The research was conducted with participants from a public school in Vhembe District, who consisted of five male and five female learners between eighteen and nineteen years of age.

The findings of the research will be analysed, interpreted and related to the relevant existing literature. The chapter will include a theoretical discussion of the findings and the conclusions from this research. Thematic analysis was utilized as a method of data analysis. The analysis resulted in themes that were further explored and will be discussed in depth in Section 4.4. The dominant themes have been categorized into three broad content areas as indicated in the table below:

Themes	**Sub-themes**
Perceptions of educational factors as constraints to higher education	*Resources at schools* *Teachers' skills* *Computers* *Access to information* *Admission requirements*
Perceptions of economic factors as constraints to higher education	*Basic resources at home* *Privacy and quiet* *Inadequate family income* *Urban privileged schools* *Free education* *Parental expectations* *Aspiration and ambition*
Perceptions of socio-cultural factors as a constraint to higher education	*Institutional culture* *Parental encouragement*

This is followed by the discussion section and the conclusion section.

4.2 Recalling the Aim and Objectives

The aim of the research is to investigate the experiences of rural learners in the Vhembe District in accessing institutions of higher learning in Limpopo province. The research focuses on exploring rural learners' perceptions of factors that impact on whether they choose to enter institutions of higher learning after matriculation. The research had four objectives:

5) explore the perspectives of rural learners in Vhembe District regarding higher education,
6) investigate the reasons why they would want, or not want, to further their education in institutions of higher learning,
7) probe into the challenges they experience or anticipate experiencing if they want to further their education in a higher learning institution, and
8) explore where rural learners think these challenges stem from.

4.3 Demographic Information

Table 2: Demographics

Learner*	Gender	Age	Residential area	Grade
1	Female	18	Dopeni Village	12
2	Female	18	Vhutuwangadzebu Village	12
3	Male	18	Tshikota Village	12
4	Female	18	Siloam Village	12
5	Male	19	Mandiwana Village	12
6	Female	18	Zwikhophani Village	12
7	Female	19	Mandiwana Village	12
8	Male	18	Mandiwana Village	12
9	Male	19	Vhutuwangadzebu Village	12
10	Male	18	Vhutuwangadzebu Village	12

***** These learners are referred to as participants in the discussion of the findings.

4.4 Main Themes Arising from the Collected Data

The following part of the chapter outlines different themes that arose from the research findings. There are three themes that emerged from the research; these are perceptions regarding educational, economic and socio-cultural factors. These themes will be looked at in detail below to gain an in-depth understanding of the factors that affect the ability of rural learners in the Vhembe District to access institutions of higher learning.

4.4.1 Perceptions of educational factors as constraints to higher education

Socio-economic factors affect education outcomes in numerous ways; they can disadvantage an individual's access to better schools, and at the same time can empower access to a good schooling system (Poole, 2004). Participants in this study were found to be profoundly aware that their school is one of the poorer and more disadvantaged schools. All participants in this study did not pay school fees because their school is one of the public schools at which learners do not pay fees under the universal provision of free education for all in South Africa. Participant 1 declares that her school is of poor quality:

> *"I know something free won't be worth something you pay for. So I know I won't want my children to live in this situation. Most of the people will be like it's free, even university will be free. Assuming that everything will be for free with no need to worry. I think I have a reason to worry, because free stuff is not worth what you pay for and it's better to get something that you know your kids will be in a better place."* (Participant 1)

The South African Schools Act of 1996 declares that those who can afford to can establish private or independent schools (SASA, 1996). However, this system has led to a situation where state schools have either retained a "privileged" status or a poor status and in rural areas, most of the schools have retained the latter status (Chisholm, 2005). This is so because those who can afford to do so send their children to schools that are better resourced in terms of teachers, infrastructure and other educational facilities that are vital for the production of knowledge. Regarding poor resourcing in the school at which this study was based, it was found that participants were split in their responses as to whether they thought their school had prepared them adequately for tertiary education. Three of the participants felt that the school did not prepare them enough at all, while the other seven participants felt that in some

ways they were adequately prepared. The response below shows how participant 1 felt about poor delivery by her school:

> *"Our science teacher is not that good, sometimes he doesn't even come to class, so I have to do extra work. I did not pass it very well in the previous years, but this year I am good."* (Participant 1)

From this, it can be concluded that some participants feel that their school acts as a barrier in accessing institutions of higher learning, although others feel that the school is trying to assist them. It may be argued that this is true of South Africa more generally, because most of the rural schools are of poor standard, lacking facilities such as qualified teachers, libraries and proper infrastructure (Nelson Mandela Foundation, 2005).

Resources at schools

Resources at schools can be constraints for learners in accessing higher education. Participants in this study identified the poor allocation of resources at their school as a constraint in accessing institutions of higher learning. Like most rural schools, the participants' school does not have a library; however, this is the least of their concerns when it comes to resources that would enable them to access institutions of higher learning.

Teachers' skills

Participants in this study identified their teachers as the most valuable resource to enable them to access institutions of higher learning. When participants were asked how they thought their school had prepared them for further education, there was a split in their answers. Participant 1 said:

> *"Our science teacher is not that good; sometimes he doesn't even come to class, so I have to do extra work. I did not pass it very well in the previous years, but this year I am good."* (Participant 1)

When asked how she had managed to improve, Participant 1 identified an outside facility as being responsible for her improvement:

> *"There is a programme from Kotlwanong, at least 22 of us; they are the one that help us because our science teacher is not that good."* (Participant1)

However, Participant 3 identified the teachers in the school as instrumental in preparing him to further his studies:

> *"I had teachers who care, the moment they see that you're getting out of hand they call you, they talk to you, and they try to discipline you to make sure you're in the right path. So that's what they have done with me. They have corrected me, there are loads of mistakes that I have made along the way, but then I had teachers who saw me as their child, who brought me in and taught me, let's say they disciplined me."* (Participant 3)

Unqualified and unskilled teachers can serve as a barrier for learners in accessing institutions of higher learning. In South Africa, most of the teachers are not skilled because most of them were trained by the apartheid government, which advocated for inferior education for black people (Cosser, 2002).

Computers

Access to technological facilities was also viewed as an important resource for participants to receive better marks and access institutions of higher learning. Participants 1 and 7 said that having access to computers to do research and apply to universities was a good thing that the school was doing for them. However, there was a challenge when it came to accessing these computers at school:

> *"We don't have computers and stuff for research, we do have laptops, but we do not use them most of the time. They are for us, but most of the time they say we are busy, so they have to set a date for you to come and use them, I think they are 7 or 11."* (Participant 1)

> *"Sometimes the school gives us laptops to do research about universities and applying."* (Participant 7)

There were 150 learners in Grade 12 at this school and the school only had 7 or 11 laptops that could only be accessed by appointment. One can argue that having 150 learners with access to 11 laptops by appointment is a barrier in accessing institutions of higher learning. However, though the government is trying to provide facilities to underprivileged learners, the bureaucracy that exists in public schools further hinders access to these facilities.

Access to information

Learners are prevented from accessing institutions of higher learning by poor guidance and information (Cosser, 2002). The absence of information can create great anxiety amongst learners and lead them to view higher education as a foreign scary world.

Poor information distribution can result in learners not knowing when and how to apply to universities and, especially, how to access financial aid or bursaries. The absence of information can create for learners the impression that institutions of higher learning are unachievable and beyond their reach. All the participants in this study had applied to one or two universities. However, they did not have enough information on how they could fund their studies, even though they indicated that they knew what National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS) was. Participant 3 indicated that the only information he had about universities was information related to the universities he had managed to get prospectuses for, while Participant 6 indicated that she knew about entrance requirements:

> *"Most of the information I have is from these prospectuses thing that we get from our LO* [Life Orientation] *teacher and our phones; I use my phone to browse the net, to get to know more about the degrees my career. Yah so the information I can say I have my phone."* (Participant 3)

> *"Entrance requirement I do, but about bursaries no, all the people around me they don't know anything about bursaries."* (Participant 6)

Furthermore, Participant 3 indicated that he knew about various bursaries but had not applied for NSFAS:

> *"Its requirements are really, really different from other bursaries, let's say I am applying for Nedbank and NSFAS at the same time, the standards they are not equal, NSFAS settles for far less than those other ones. This is why they undermine it because they know it settles for less."* (Participant 3)

Based on this, one can conclude that there is stigmatization of NSFAS amongst learners. The stigma of the NSFAS is that if one uses the NSFAS, he/she is not smart because the aid does not have a threshold exclusion criterion when it comes to student pass marks. Rather, students would receive aid from the fund even if they had a pass mark of 50 percent.

Admission requirements

Prior to 1994, South Africa was defined by laws and policies that excluded the mass of people from equal participation in institutions of higher learning (O'Regan, 2000). This meant that the white minority dominated institutions of higher learning. Though there was a small proportion of black people who accessed institutions of higher learning, they were mostly enrolled at teaching colleges (O'Regan, 2000).

In the new South Africa (post-1994), not everyone has access to information about the admission requirements, but especially so those in rural areas. As a result, admission requirements become a barrier in accessing institutions of higher learning. Participants in this study indicated that they were not sure about bursaries although they knew the admission requirements. Participant 5 gave a detailed answer about the points requirement in the admissions criteria:

> *"I know that at Wits* [University of the Witwatersrand] *they want 41 points Bachelor of Accounting and at UJ* [University of Johannesburg] *they want 38 points and there is that other one that you do for 4 years they require 35 points."* (Participant 5)

Participant 10 said that:

> *"Yes I used my phone to google about the requirements, then I googled about the SASOL bursary then I applied."* (Participant 10)

Access to universities in South Africa is now open to everyone irrespective of their colour, creed or culture. However, institutions have increased their admission requirements.
One can argue that this is so because now that access is open to everyone, institutions of higher learning in South Africa cannot enroll the high number of learners. This is so because a learner can get 33 per cent in Matric (Grade 12 Matriculation) and still get a bachelor's certificate to study at any university. Jansen (2012) argues that the 33 percent pass rate is further affecting the quality of graduates being produced in South Africa.

4.4.2 Perceptions of economic factors as constraints to higher education

The primary aim of this research was to investigate factors that the participants identify as barriers to accessing institutions of higher learning. In South Africa, poverty is a social problem that perpetuates inequality in society (Breier, 2010). The causes of poverty are

linked closely to unemployment, which is at 25.6 percent at the present moment (Statistics SA, 2015). Of the 10 participants interviewed, there were only three cases in which both parents were employed; in three other cases, one parent was employed, while in the four remaining cases both parents were not employed. Participants interviewed in this study face the harsh reality of having to cope financially when parents are unemployed; this was shown in their responses in which economic factors were perceived as an important barrier to accessing institutions of higher learning. According to the economic model used by the learners in determining their ability to access institutions of higher learning, learners looked at direct and indirect costs and decided whether they would be able to access institutions of higher learning.

Cardak and Givon (2004) support this economic model by stating that learners from low-income families, where parents were either unemployed or earning very little, would be unable to access institutions of higher learning.

Participants in this study indicated financial reasons as a barrier in accessing institutions of higher learning. However, finances as a barrier was not only voiced by participants whose parents were unemployed; Participant 1, of whom both parents are employed, indicated that:

> *"Maybe, am not sure what to say, but most of us live in poor communities this might affect most of us, so when we move to those schools we don't have anyone to finance us, even though we might get someone to finance us I don't think it will be enough because life out there is very expensive especially education and other social stuff, so I think it's the financial part that will prevent us."* (Participant 1)

The research supports these conclusions, as participants spoke about how the lack of finance in their families and community was a factor preventing them from accessing institutions of higher learning. The data collected was coded and reviewed against the corresponding theme. The sub-themes for this category are presented below.

Basic resources at home

Basic resources at home that allow a learner to effectively engage in their studies are important. In this research, most of the participants stated that the environment in which they lived in was not conducive to studying.

Privacy and quiet

A quiet place to study in their homes was identified as a luxury not available to all the participants. Some described their homes as too small to allow them a private, quiet place to study. Some of the participants spoke about the numbers of people in the homes and the noise around their environment. Learners can encounter challenges at home when it comes to their studies; this can be a barrier in accessing institutions of higher learning. Participant 7 indicated that:

> *"At home there are challenges because there is no study room, my family is big and the rooms are small. So there is no space to study I have to wait for everyone to sleep so that I can study."* (Participant 7)

This participant showed that it is difficult to study at home, even though they have the option to wait for everyone to sleep so that they can continue with their studies. The only option for many would have been studying at school, where they were allowed to study. Some of the participants, however, indicated that they could not access the school after school hours as they lived far from the school. Others showed that there were challenges they encountered when studying at school. Participant 4 showed that at home it was difficult to study because of the chores that she had to do after school, while Participant 5 indicated challenges he encountered at school. Learners in rural areas face different challenges from those their urban counterparts face, because of the chores they have to do such as fetching water and firewood, or taking livestock for grazing (Nelson Mandela Foundation, 2005). In this study, participants indicated that:

> *"At home I have to perform various chores, cleaning, washing dishes and cooking. So here at school, I can't come and study here because I live far."* (Participant 4)

> *"People here at school it's like they are not serious. They distract you; they just come and start talking to you. Another thing here at school is the construction that is taking place. It distracts you when you're studying. At home are parents, even siblings, so you have to wait until they finish watching TV, so you have to study while they are sleeping when it is quiet."* (Participant 5)

The challenges at school were major obstacles to most of the participants in this study. Participant 9 went on to explain how the community and other learners can act as a barrier in accessing institutions of higher education:

> *"At home, I don't meet any challenges but here at school during the morning studies or afternoon studies there are those learners, I don't know if it's a good thing to point out, but there are those learners with a bad attitude it's like they don't know their end goal. They don't want to study, they make noise, and they take all the concentration it's so difficult to study in such a noise. Those challenges they are the ones that can hinder me in my studies. At home I think we live by the community, it's the community that decides, they can decide to play their radio all night with speakers outside and that affects us especially me. I live next to a tavern, so if there is a bash or something that means I will have to sacrifice my time for them, maybe I will have to rest or go to sleep, just because I can't concentrate from that noise as it is disturbing."*
> (Participant 9)

Anxiety and stress in achievement situations lowers school performance and this challenge could further disadvantage these participants from gaining access to institutions of higher learning (Masi et al., 2000). According to research by the Nelson Mandela Foundation (2005) rural learners were found to give priority to their house chore duties than to their schoolwork. This was mostly because most of the rural families are unemployed and rely on livestock and farming for survival. In this study, it has been found that these chores can be an obstacle in accessing institutions of higher learning.

Schools are inseparable from the communities they serve; what happens in the community also affect the schools (Gardiner, 2008). This is further supported by Participant 9 in the study who indicated that activities by the communities can affect his ability to do his school work. The systems theory further states that, when dealing with the issue of access to institutions of higher learning, attention must not only be given to the learners and their schools but to everything that surrounds learners, including their communities, societal behavior and religious beliefs. All of these, therefore, must be looked at when addressing this challenge (Dawson, 2006).

Inadequate family income

Poverty is one of the factors that are associated with rural areas, therefore, poverty or the lack of adequate income was found to have various effects on accessing institutions of higher learning among participants in this study. It has been shown that the first phase of gaining access to institutions of higher learning, getting the money for an application form for institutions of higher learning, was a barrier for some learners (Ebrahim, 2009). Participant 10 indicated that the application fee was a barrier in accessing institutions of higher learning:

> *"Just because of the application fees, because some institutions want R100 and R300 and our backgrounds are different."* (Participant 10)

Participants have shown that the first phase of getting the application fee was important in accessing institutions of higher learning. Further to this, the inability to get the application fee had a negative impact on participants' overall achievement. Participant 9 stated that:

> *"Some are living with these guardians, who are not educated so there could be a denial to give them advice, if our parents are not employed that means I won't have access to those things that will help me pass well to get to university or even maybe having the money to apply. So that can contribute to my studies, I can't even study well having the stress that some children have applied and their letters have been responded. If my friends share with me that we have received letters from Univen* [University of Venda] *or Wits* [University of the Witwatersrand] *and they are just waiting for final results and if didn't apply and now we are going to write finals I might be stressed out that why am I writing the final because even if I get good marks I won't go anywhere. So I won't even know that information that there are bursaries. If I am stressed at home by guardians that there is no more for me to go to school I won't do well."* (Participant 9)

Institutions of higher learning are expensive. Participants indicated that not having adequate funds would be a barrier for them to access institutions of higher learning. Participant 8 indicated that:

> *"Lack of funds, because not all of us will be able to meet the criteria needed for bursaries so it will hard for some of them to study further."* (Participant 8)

Poverty, as indicated above, is a reality in South Africa, especially in rural areas. Participant 3 indicated that poverty was the number one barrier in accessing institutions of higher learning:

> *"Number one I think is poverty, I myself for one my mom is …ehm, okay let me put it in this way. Most of the information is found in internet cafes, so my mom can't afford at the moment. So if I wasn't serious as I am I don't think I would make it, so poverty becomes a barrier in that way. Most of the time our poverty closes our eyes, it's like this donkey thing. We don't see that they are people out there who can help us. Most of the time you find a learner focusing in his/ her home situation and that ends up bringing her back."* (Participant 3)

Poverty becomes a barrier in the sense that even when they have performed well in their Matriculation examinations, the learners are unable to access institutions of higher learning because of not having the money for the application fee, even though they might have received a bursary or financial aid had they applied. Though participants indicated poverty as being a barrier in accessing institutions of higher learning, they also indicated that the high fees at institutions of higher learning did not affect them. Instead, this motivated them to study even harder. Participant 3 stated that:

> *"I do, through the prospectus. For instance, I have a Wits prospectus at home and I can see the rates there are very high. This motivates me in that sense that I have to study hard so that I can get a bursary which is going to cover everything because I know my mom can't afford it."* (Participant 3)

This view was also shared by Participant 5, who said that:

> *"The costs are high especially at Wits. So I know my parents cannot afford it so it's up to me to work hard in order to get a bursary in order to pay for my studies."* (Participant 5)

The neoliberalism regime is of the view that inequality and poverty are necessary for society; they argue that inequality creates innovation (Alcock, 2009). Based on this present research, it is evident that poverty has influenced these participants to work hard in order to safeguard their futures. Participants 6 and 8 stated that:

> *"All I know is that they are very expensive and I know my parents cannot afford to take me to university but, all I hope for is that I pass with very good*

> *marks so that I can get a bursary that will help me pursue my career."* (Participant 6)

> *"All I know is that it is expensive to further your studies and it motivates me even further to study harder so that I can get a bursary to secure a future."* (Participant 8)

Participant 4 indicated that poverty could produce better results, saying:

> *"When one is suffering, some get the spirit to motivate them so that they can work hard to change the situation so that in future I don't suffer and the next generation does not suffer too. However others take the situation and wear it and live by it and they don't care and think that this is the end of life and they don't see any other thing which is good."* (Participant 4)

Based on this research, one can conclude that although poverty is a challenge to the majority of South Africans, in some cases it guides individuals to strive for better opportunities in order to break away from the shackles of poverty.

Urban privileged schools

Rural schools are not privileged; they are too far from urban centers and this affects the ability to access institutions of higher learning. This is indicated by some of the responses from the participants.

For some of the participants, living in rural areas was not an advantage. Participants 2 and 5 indicated that their schools were far from universities and this was a barrier to them:

> *"I think they have access to universities because they live near them, which makes them have more information than us."* (Participant 2)

> *"At least, the government gave us Wi-Fi access to apply online. People who do not live in rural areas have more access to universities to go and apply personally."* (Participant 5)

Participants felt that living in rural areas affected them negatively in the sense that information about institutions of higher learning was not easily available. Rural areas are

mostly in isolated areas where transport services are difficult to get. Additionally, basic human rights such as health services are not available due to the remoteness of the area (Gardiner, 2008).

Furthermore, for some of the participants, living in a rural area did not provide motivation. Participant 4 stated that:

> *"Those who are in urban areas have things that motivate them that they see. Even when they have a motivational speaker is someone who is educated. They see nice things even their environment is nice. As for me is a matter of coming to school and on the way back home just seeing shacks, nothing motivating like one day I want to stay in such a house, one day I want to drive such a car."* (Participant 4)

> *"In places like those, information, … lets me use a recent example. Children there were given tablets to use as textbooks, here our kids have to carry backpacks. So I cannot say there is a lack of access to information there."* (Participant 3)

Participant 9 felt that those in urban areas not only enjoyed access to universities, but further, had access to funding opportunities:

> *"Here in rural areas is difficult to have more information. Let's say access to computer, access to more information we don't have that. We don't have people who are well experienced and skilled to guide us all year around, so there in Joburg* [Johannesburg] *or Pretoria, they are next to institutions that can fund them. They can easily access those institutions and ask for let's say for bursaries. Here in rural areas, we don't have such things, we only depend on bursaries we can apply let's say* Anglo. *Let's say it takes even 3 weeks to get that reply via mailbox, so if I don't have an email address or cell phone I won't be able to get their response, which means I'll have to wait for a letter. So those in Joburg or Pretoria they have those things so they are not facing the same challenges as us. The challenges they face are very easy to them, they are not facing those circumstances."* (Participant 9)

Furthermore, participants felt that people who lived in urban areas had money:

> *"Living in urban areas means that they can support themselves whereas here in rural areas most of us can't because our parents are mostly unemployed. It is almost impossible to live in urban areas if you don't have an income."* (Participant 8)

> *"People who stay in Gauteng they know how to manage because they work well, they are able to afford the life in Gauteng they have already adapted to the life in Gauteng. But here in rural areas if I go to my parents and say papa can I please have R1000 to buy* Carvella [a popular and expensive shoe brand] *but they will say ah* Carvella *it's too much but there at Gauteng they will take R3000 just for a person to go and buy some clothes. People who live in urban areas most of them are not stingy, but here in rural areas most of them are stingy, our parents are stingy."* (Participant 10)

It is evident that participants in this study feel that living in rural areas is a barrier because they cannot access information from universities. Further to this, the ability to apply in person is an advantage for urban learners, instead of having to wait for a letter that might come late or not come at all. One can argue that this is true, because learners from schools such as Park Town Boys and Rand Girls high schools can easily walk to Wits University and get all the information they require.

Free education

South Africa is in pursuit of the goal of universalizing education. This policy intends to provide free schooling for every South African. However, when one looks at the South African Schools Act, it gives power to people to establish their own schools, provided that they are able to provide resources for their functioning (SASA, 1996). As a result, schools which enjoyed better quality during the apartheid years have managed to maintain that privilege by setting high fees and attracting the best teachers (Fiske & Ladd, 2004).

Participants in this study showed their dissatisfaction with the free education policy and how it affected their ability to access institutions of higher learning:

> *"I think for me it does because I know something free won't be worth something you pay for. So I know I won't want my children to live in this situation. Most of the people will be like it's free, even university will be free.*

> *Assuming that everything will be for free with no need to worry. I think I have a reason to worry because free stuff is not worth what you pay for and it's better to get something that you know your kids will be in a better place."* (Participant 1)

Participant 1's view is supported by Fiske and Ladd's (2004) argument that schools that require payment of school fees are better resourced than the free public schools, and in most cases these latter schools have unqualified teachers and poor infrastructure for conducive learning. Therefore, free education becomes a barrier to most of the learners at such schools.

The majority of the participants in this study were in support of free education. Not paying school fees was, furthermore, a motivating factor to perform better in order to secure sponsors:

> *"It motivates me a lot because I know I can change my home situation for free and I know that the only way to change my home situation is to go to school. So this motivates me to study hard so that I can be able to get a bursary next year."* (Participant 3)

> *"Nowadays it's not a problem whether you have money or not, because there are bursaries that can help you to further your education. Just like here the government is helping us to study and all we have to do is to study that's all."* (Participant 6)

> *"No, it doesn't, because I get everything for free. So there are no difficulties on things that I want to achieve. The government is providing everything for us, so even when am poor you cannot see it."* (Participant 7)

Participants 8 and 10 indicated that whether one pays school fees or not, accessing institutions of higher learning was only dependent on the marks that one obtained:

> *"It doesn't because whether or not you pay school fees in order for us to be at university it all depends on our hard work."* (Participant 8)

> *"Not paying school fees is a good thing; because we are different, some parents cannot afford school fees. So if we pass our matric* [Matriculation]

> *with flying colors we might end up getting a bursary and that will result in us not paying any fees in university."* (Participant 10)

The aim of the free education policy is to reduce the burden on poor people, while providing opportunities for them to better their situations. This point was highlighted by Participant 9, who felt that free education, for him, meant fewer things to worry about and offered him the opportunity to concentrate more on his education:

> *"To me not able to pay school fees means I have more opportunity to study, I don't have to worry about money. If my parents are not having school fees money it means I have to stay at home and those who have school fees money they are the ones who will get more information and pass well. So to me it encourages me not paying school fees, so that helps me a lot coming to school to learn."* (Participant 9)

Participant 4 viewed free education as discouraging. Not paying fees for her meant that she could relax and not stress too much about her studies even if she failed:

> *"I know that even if I am not studying I am not wasting my parents' money it's government's money. I don't feel any pain because everything is free, textbooks free and get food for free and attend school for free. However, if I paid I would feel that I have to work hard so the money that my parents are paying is not for nothing."* (Participant 4)

Participants in this study were mainly of the view that free education was a good initiative; out of the ten participants, only two felt that not paying school fees affected their motivation to access institutions of higher learning. However, the remaining eight felt that this initiative reduced some of the stress associated with poor people, such as worrying about education. This is a human right under the South African Constitution (SA Government, 1996a). One can conclude that although universal education is not widely provided in South Africa, in its current phase, it addresses some of the challenges it intended to tackle, such as reduction of stress for poor people.

Parental expectations

Ebrahim (2009) states that economic demands on families, especially in the current global economic climate, have resulted in many low-income families putting pressure on their high school children to contribute to the family budget.

However, in this study all ten of the participants were eager to get good marks and further their education, and their parents were found to be involved in funding and career choice discussions:

> *"They do ask me what I want to do after matric* [Matriculation]*, they even told me that its fine if you don't get a bursary, at the first year you can still get it in the second year. When it comes to career choices they only ask me what is it that I want to study, for me to study petroleum engineering I want to do mining first year and they understand it's what I want and want to do, so they support me."* (Participant 9)

> *"When I passed grade 9, my parents sat me down and asked me what my dream is, I told them I want to be a civil engineer and they asked me 'do you know the requirements of a civil engineer'. I said 'yes I have to study physical science and mathematics' and they said 'is it your real choice' and I said 'yes'. They said 'okay if it's your real choice is fine because if I force you to do history or agriculture you will end up failing because it is not your dream'."* (Participant 10)

The discussions with parents were found to be helpful by the participants. Participant 7 reported that her discussion with her parents was helpful:

> *"Because they give me confidence, they give me hope that I can be able to achieve and sometimes they tell me how they behaved when they were still young so it gives me courage."* (Participant 7)

Participant 5 said:

> *"They help me because they tell me how to behave in order for me to achieve those things that I desire. They also encourage me not to panic or feel sidelined or threatened by my peers. At university there is lot of children with attitudes, positive and negative, so they advise me, 'please be responsible'. I*

> *know university is individual independent life, so you're able to choose friends and you're able to choose the lifestyle you want. Most of those conversations they help me figure out what I want and how to be responsible."* (Participant 5)

Participant 8 indicated that his parents did not discuss funding or career choices with him because they are not educated. However, he stated that if they had been educated they would have been able to give him guidance:

> *"Because they would be able to provide me with all the resources or information that I need for a certain career that I set myself."* (Participant 8)

Aspiration and ambition

The ten participants indicated various fields that they were interested in pursuing after Grade 12. This shows that these participants have the ability to aspire and be ambitious. However, Participant 6 indicated lack of ambition amongst his peers as a factor that would act as a barrier in accessing institutions of higher learning:

> *"Most people do not desire to become anything at all; we are not that very ambitious and so. Actually, we have that habit of just having fun; all we think about is just fun and fun, but school work no."* (Participant 6)

Financial status, whether personal or family, plays an important role in feelings of wellbeing. When the feeling of wellbeing is absent, it becomes difficult to motivate oneself towards achievement. Ambition and aspiration to successful careers are then replaced with the concerns of survival (Goldman, 2005). One can conclude that the participants in this study are resilient despite their economic conditions. This point is made because all ten participants indicated that getting good results was their only ticket to a better future, which would allow them to secure bursaries to pay their fees.

4.4.3 Perceptions of socio-cultural factors as constraints to higher education

The environment in which children grow up has an impact on their attitude, their perception of the world and their motivation to succeed (Cosser, 2002). In this study, it was found that the environment that learners grow up in not only affected their view of the world but further

affected their motivation to access institutions of higher learning. Participant 10 clearly stated that:

> *"I am used to just sitting around and there at urban areas they have adapted to the living standard, this crime. I am adapted to just working with my tablet touching it like this but when I go to varsity it will give me stress that this place is not mine I am not used to this place. I must not walk holding my tablet like this because here in rural areas I can even walk at 12 o'clock with my tablet like this with my R 1000 in my pocket. But in urban areas even if it's 12 pm I cannot walk with my tablet and R1000 on my hand because they will take it away from me, that's my challenges."* (Participant 10)

Participant 5 indicated that living in rural areas for him was an encouragement to work hard at his schoolwork and receive good results, which would enable him to break away from the rural areas:

> *"Everyone here wants to get out of here out of rural areas, to go and live somewhere where there is a better life. Somewhere you have access to everything. So I think staying here at rural areas motivates me if you look at the leaders of businesses, politics they are people from rural areas."* (Participant 5)

Based on this research, one can conclude that the environment in which learners grow up can either inspire one to do better or cause one to adapt to one's environment and not look forward to other challenges beyond one's environment, which then acts as a barrier in accessing institutions of higher learning.

Institutional culture

According to Seepe (2004), the current institutional culture of institutions of higher learning in South Africa needs to change, in order to facilitate more access to the previously disadvantaged. He further states that the curriculum of higher institutions in South Africa does not represent South African contexts and problems. This does not only make access difficult, but further contributes to the high drop-out rate in South African universities, and additionally, that students do not have a sense of belonging. Participants in this study felt that previously disadvantaged universities were still marginalized, not only in terms of resources,

but also in the courses offered. Participant 2 said that the government ought to change this current situation:

> *"Universities which are found in rural areas such as Univen* [University of Venda] *have little information or resources, therefore, you won't be able to pursue what you need. Like Geology, they do not have Geology courses. They have courses which fell under Geology, but it's not Geology it's in the lower level. So the government should do something about it."* (Participant 2)

Participant 3 felt the same as participant 2 about the inequality amongst institutions of higher learning:

> *"I don't think I can answer that accurately because they are rated according to their standards. I think they are very good; the only difference I see is in terms of the standards. Apparently when you're a student from UNISA* [University of South Africa] *and a student from the University of Limpopo you are not ranked at the same rank. Apparently a student from the University of Limpopo does not stand a chance when competing with a student from UNISA. The standards are not the same there should be on the same league."* (Participant 3)

Participant 1 felt that institutions of higher learning did not treat learners the same. She stated that if one passed well, he/she was able to access institutions of higher learning. However, if one did not do well, he/she was treated differently:

> *"I mean it is what it is, you don't pass well you get labeled names and you pass well you are taken to the world. They don't say them, but you know you are not part of certain people."* (Participant 1)

The Reitz incident that occurred at the University of the Free State shows the racial divisions that still exist in South Africa's institutions of higher learning, particularly the former white universities (Suransky & van der Merwe, 2014). This becomes a barrier to learners, as they do not want to be part of a racist institution. Participant 8 indicated that institutions of higher learning in South Africa are good. However, this participant indicated a problem with these institutions:

> *"I think they are not pretty bad, but the ones in the Cape I have heard that there is still a lot of racism, I just want to live in a democratic environment."* (Participant 8)

According to this research, the institutional culture in institutions of higher learning in South Africa acts as a barrier for learners. This is further supported by Seepe's (2004) argument that institutions in South Africa do not represent African values and beliefs, which affects the intentions of learners to access these institutions.

Parental encouragement

Parents who are actively involved in their children's education are able to set goals and inspire their children to do better (Fiske & Ladd, 2004). Participants in this study felt that their parents' involvement in their education helped them do better. Participant 3 explained how encouraging and supportive his mother was towards his education:

> *"I think my mom is being very much supportive. She even had to work as a maid. Someone with a degree working as a maid. She swallowed her pride so that she can get my application fees and all that. So yes I think my mom is very supportive."* (Participant 3)

> *"They are very supportive, they make sure to reward me if I pass very well with distinctions, they always motivate me. They always call the teachers and ask about my performance."* (Participant 5)

Participant 6 felt that the support she received from her parents was because they did not want her to end up like them:

> *"They are very supportive, especially because they are not educated so they don't want their children to be like them."* (Participant 6)

From this participant's response, one can conclude that parents' involvement in their children's education is more inspiring and encouraging than teachers or career guidance counselors. This is clearly laid out by Participant 4:

> *"I think my parents' encouragement is the best because they tell me facts about things that they are seeing in me. So career guidance counselors they don't know me, they don't know my weaknesses. Even when am seating I am*

> *hiding behind others so they are not really talking to me, but my parents tell me straight up if you do this you will get this."* (Participant 4)

The aim of this research was to gain a deeper understanding of what Grade 12 rural learners perceive as barriers in accessing institutions of higher learning through gathering an understanding of their daily experiences. This section of the chapter attempted to present these perceptions under three themes. Based on these themes, it appears that participants are aware of the factors that prevent them from accessing institutions of higher learning. Participants' perceptions revealed a range of barriers, such as unskilled teachers. This indicates that the government might need to conduct skills tests of the teachers that it appoints. Participants further indicated that they had limited information available to them about institutions of higher learning, suggesting that this might be another barrier.

4.5 Discussion

This section of the chapter attempts to enhance the understanding of the experiences that rural learners encounter when attempting to access institutions of higher learning. The section will discuss different themes identified by participants in order to understand the perceptions of factors that are perceived as barriers in accessing institutions of higher learning. In conclusion, the section will analyse their struggles in accessing institutions of higher learning through the lens of Systems Theory.

4.5.1 Educational barriers

The quality of schooling in South Africa can be traced back to the apartheid years. The quality of schooling was one of the themes that emerged from the research.
The participants felt that the quality of the education that they had received was not as good as that offered at private schools; this was especially felt to be because they were not paying for their education. Participant 1 stated that: *"I know something free won't be worth something you pay for. So I know I won't want my children to live in this situation."* One can argue that this is true because, in most cases, services that are offered for free are usually of low quality or standard, especially when the same kind of service is offered for a certain amount by other agencies. Thus, free education for poor children does not necessarily result in better quality.

One of the objectives of the research was to probe what challenges the participants experienced or anticipated experiencing if they wanted to further their education in a higher learning institution. The participants identified poor resources at their schools, such as lack of skilled teachers and computers, as barriers that prevent them from achieving good results, which would allow them to access institutions of higher learning. One can argue that this is particularly true in rural areas; this researcher is from a rural area, and the poor resourcing mentioned by the participants is something that the researcher has experience of. Research conducted by the Nelson Mandela Foundation in rural areas in KwaZulu-Natal, Limpopo and the Eastern Cape supports this, stating that rural schools are poorly resourced, and this affects the ability of the learners in these areas to excel in their studies (Nelson Mandela Foundation, 2005). The skills, dedication, and commitment of teachers were viewed by participants as factors that affected their ability to achieve good results.

The attitudes of teachers were also found to affect the quality of teaching, the learning within a class and the attitudes of learners towards a subject. Participants felt that this affected their ability to achieve the kinds of results required by institutions of higher learning and bursary providers. Participant 1 said: *"our science teacher is not that good; sometimes he doesn't even come to class, so I have to do extra work; I did not pass it very well in the previous years."* It can be argued that teachers who are qualified and skilled are able to offer subjects in a way that is understandable to learners, and this can result in learners achieving better results which would allow them to access institutions of higher learning.

Most of the participants' parents had no experience and little knowledge of institutions of higher learning. Therefore, participants relied heavily on information and guidance from their Life Orientation (LO) teacher, career guidance counselors and the little information that they could find for themselves.

This acts as a barrier to the learners as, additionally, parents who are not educated are not aware of funding opportunities that might be available to their children if they achieve good results. When asked whether parents had discussed possible funding opportunities with them, one of the participants, Participant 8, indicated that his parents had not discussed any funding opportunity with him, *"because they are not that much educated."*

Jacob and Ludwig (2009) maintain that educational success seems available only to those with access to valued resources because they are positioned to be major beneficiaries of educational investment. They found that extra services such as early childhood education and private schooling boost confidence in learners, which is vital in facilitating the process of accessing institutions of higher learning. According to Kingston (2001), parents who have access to knowledge and information are able to pass that knowledge to their children, which in turn stimulates ambition and inspiration. Thus, one can conclude that parents' involvement in their children's education is vital in providing guidance and information about funding opportunities that might be available.
However, although the parents of the participants in this study were not all educated, this did not entirely affect the participants' ambitions to aspire to access institutions of higher learning. Participants felt that their parents wanted them to succeed in their studies so as to break away from the cycle of poverty.

Various authors have indicated that language acts as a barrier in accessing institutions of higher learning (Bohlmann & Pretorius, 2002). In this study, participants felt that language was not a factor in determining whether they accessed institutions of higher learning or not, even though English was their second language.

Libraries play an important role in learners' educational progress as it is through books that learners acquire knowledge. In this research, participants indicated that there was no library at their school or around their community. However, this was never presented as challenge or barrier in accessing institutions of higher learning. Research conducted by the Nelson Mandela Foundation (2005) indicates that rural learners tend to perform better than learners in urban areas despite having no access to resources such as libraries.

4.5.2 Economic barriers

One of the objectives of the research was to explore where rural learners think these challenges stem from. Participants indicated that poverty was one of the obstacles that would prevent them from accessing institutions of higher learning, as Participant 8 noted: *"Lack of funds, because not all of us will be able to meet the criteria needed for bursaries."*

Table 3 below shows the number of employed parents amongst the participants.

Table 3: Employment level amongst participants' parents

Both parents employed	One parent employed	None of the parents employed
3	3	4

Poverty and inadequate access to finance within families had direct and indirect impacts on participants' ability to access institutions of higher learning. Poverty and a high unemployment rate in the participants' families resulted in families spending money on basic needs such as food rather than on educational needs. Most of the participants' parents were found to be unemployed and therefore unable to provide resources such as money for the application fees to institutions of higher learning. This is a major obstacle as all institutions of higher learning have as a first requirement to access the institution, the payment of an application fee. A learner might achieve outstanding marks but without applying, he or she would not be able to access an institution of higher learning.

One can, however, argue that poverty can be both an obstacle and an inspiration for learners to access institutions of higher learning. In this research, poverty was identified as an obstacle; however, it was also further identified as an inspiration to break away from the cycle of poverty. Participant 3 said that: *"I know that the only way to change my home situation is to go to school."* This indicates that although poverty can be an obstacle in accessing institutions of higher learning, it is education that can provide a ticket away from the poverty.

The participants felt that their schools were underprivileged because they were in the rural areas, which are far from resources such as institutions of higher learning and other institutions that could offer financial assistance. The participants felt that learners in urban areas were privileged because they could go to universities and apply in person and, further, had access to institutions that could fund their studies. This was highlighted by Participant 9 who said: *"… in Joburg or Pretoria they are next to institutions that can fund them they can easily access those institutions and ask for let's say for bursaries. Here in rural areas, we don't have such things."* One can argue that being far away from institutions of higher learning and funding institutions can be an obstacle in accessing institutions of higher

learning. For example, a learner in Park Town Boys High School is next to Wits University, for easy access to an institution of higher learning, and Transnet, for easy access to funding opportunity. It is a walking distance for this particular learner to access these institutions; however, a learner in a rural area in the Vhembe District does not have such easy access to these vital institutions.

Further to this, participants felt that people in urban areas were better off because they had good jobs, which meant that they could also afford institutions of higher learning. This was felt to be so, because the standard of living in urban areas required one to be financially stable. The participants indicated that because of poverty, in their households, privacy for study was a luxury they did not have as their houses were too small. The participants indicated that studying at home was difficult. For them, to study they had to wait for everyone else to go sleep so that they could have the space and privacy to do so. This is an obstacle that affects their ability to get good grades that would enable them to access institutions of higher learning. This is so because people often go to bed late, leaving these learners little time for their studies after school and, in cases where they use the whole night to study, they would go to school having not rested enough. This would then affect their ability to concentrate during the course of the day.

Participant 7 stated that *"at home there are challenges because there is no study room, my family is big and the rooms are small. So there is no space to study, I have to wait for everyone to sleep so that I can study."* A place that is conducive to study is important to enable one to concentrate on their studies; however, the lack of privacy can lead to stress and depression, which further lead to poor performance. Therefore, one can argue that rural learners worry about the conditions in which how they are to study. As a result, these factors must not be ignored or sidelined when looking at the experiences of rural learners.

Vally, Motala and Ramadiro (2007, p191) confirm in their study that high unemployment and poverty excludes many children from schools, let alone institutions of higher learning. They argue that this is the result of the "unbending resolve of policy makers to pursue conservative macroeconomic policies in which the choices of austerity outweigh the imprimatur of the rights enshrined in the Constitution". They further state that this implies that the rural poor and working class children's right to education will remain unrealized. Participants indicated poverty to be one of the factors that had a detrimental impact on their ability to access

institutions of higher learning. Despite their poor backgrounds, all of the participants indicated that they had applied to one or two institutions of higher learning. They felt that achieving good results would enable them to access institutions of higher learning through bursaries and study loans. This indicates that though poverty can be an obstacle in accessing institutions of higher learning, there are other available alternatives that afford the opportunity to study for the less privileged.

4.5.3 Socio-cultural barriers

One of the objectives of the research was to investigate reasons why rural learners would or would not want to further their education in institutions of higher learning. Participants felt that socio-cultural factors such as the environment, institutional culture, and parental encouragement affected their ability to access institutions of higher learning. Cosser (2002) argues that the environment in which children grow up has an impact on their attitudes, perception of the world and motivation to succeed. Participants indicated that urban areas were not safe and this acts as a barrier as participants become reluctant about accessing institutions of higher learning in urban areas. Participant 10 indicated that

> *"I must not walk holding my tablet like this because here in rural areas I can even walk at 12 o'clock with my tablet like this with my R 1000 in my pocket. But in urban areas even if it's 12 pm I cannot walk with my tablet and R1000 on my hand because they will take it away from me, that's my challenges."* (Participant 10)

Participants indicated that because of the fear they had of institutions in other areas, they might end up taking courses they did not love at a local institution of higher learning, rather than leave for other areas. Participants further indicated that there was racism at some of the institutions of higher learning. One can argue that the Reitz event at the University of Free State is one of the incidents that have contributed to such feelings towards institutions of higher learning, especially the former "white" institutions.

Participants also indicated that they lived by the community and if the community decided to play loud music and host parties, this could have a severe impact on their chances of accessing institutions of higher learning. One of the participants indicated that he had had to sacrifice his studying time because of the noise he endured from the local tavern. This is a barrier as participants cannot focus on their studies, which would enable them to achieve better grades and allow them access to institutions of higher learning.

One might also argue that communities are important in the values and goals that they set for their children. If children grow up in an environment that values education, this can have a positive result in children's aspirations and ambitions. Additionally, if a community is dominated by criminal activities, members of the community end up normalizing such

activities. Participants felt that their parents' poor understanding of institutions of higher learning was a barrier in accessing institutions of higher learning.

They felt that had their parents received formal education and been persuaded to stay in school until they got a degree or a certificate, they would have been able to provide them with better encouragement. Fiske and Ladd (2004) support this, saying that parents who are actively involved in their children's education are able to instill discipline and set goals and aspirations. Furthermore, although being in poverty was indicated as a motivational factor on its own, participants in this study felt that their surroundings acted as a barrier in the sense that there were not enough motivational factors around them to inspire them. Participant 4 highlighted this by saying:

> *"Those who are in urban areas have things that motivate them that they see. Even when they have a motivational speaker is someone who is educated. They see nice things even their environment is nice. As for me is a matter of coming to school and on the way back home just seeing shacks, nothing motivating like one day I want to stay in such a house, one day I want to drive such a car."* (Participant 4)

Ebrahim (2009), in her study, found out that peer pressure was an obstacle in accessing institutions of higher learning. Participants in the present study indicated that one had to be associated with people who shared the same values and dreams in order to succeed. This indicates that participants were aware that peer pressure can be an obstacle in accessing institutions of higher learning. Thomas and Quinn (2006) state that regional cultures and local job markets have a strong influence on learners' ambitions to attend institutions of higher learning. Participants in the present study felt that if they achieved good grades they would be able to escape from the rural area. From this, one can argue that local cultures and job markets have an influence on the learner's choice to access an institution of higher education.

Participants in this study did not wish to be part of that same cycle. The participants indicated career paths that were not widely practised in rural areas.

4.6 Theoretical understanding of the constraints to accessing institutions of higher learning

This part of the chapter attempts to gain a deeper understanding of the themes in the constraints in accessing institutions of higher learning that were acknowledged by the participants.

Inequality maneuvers through a series of economic, social and cultural relationships that impact the educational progression of people in society. Relative poverty, just like educational inequality in society, can only be understood in relation to the advantage enjoyed by others in that particular society. Inequality in society is created when some in the society have an access to resources, income, wealth and power that is different to others in that society, and which enables them to benefit from the opportunities presented in education in a relatively successful manner. According to the General Systems Theory, everything is connected to everything else (Payne, 2005). Therefore, the educational constraints identified by the participants cannot be treated in isolation from their schools, institutions of higher learning and government policies towards education.

Participants indicated poor access to information regarding institutions of higher learning. This is not a new challenge. Prior to 1994 majority of rural people in South Africa did not have information about institutions of higher learning. Twenty-one years later, this phenomenon has not changed. According to this study, information about institutions is still preserved for the few minorities. The participants in this research did not have adequate information about the admission requirements of higher education, or which courses were offered, or what took place in those courses. During the apartheid years, black people could not have access to this information because they were legally not permitted in these institutions. Information is the most important factor in accessing institutions of higher learning. This is so because when one has information, he/she will know which subjects to choose in high school, they will know which courses they can apply for which correspond with their subjects. Furthermore, they will know the entrance requirements for that particular course and, most importantly, will know when and how to apply to institutions of higher learning. However, that information is not equally shared, and this has continued to be a constraint to rural learners. This researcher is of the view that only the racial admission barriers have been dropped in all educational institutions, as these participants would not

have been able to apply to different institutions of higher learning in South Africa during the apartheid years.

There have been key shifts in policy that have facilitated the changing of demographics and increased participation rates at institutions of higher learning. However, these changes, according to this study, have not translated to equal representation of all sectors of our communities. People from rural areas or low socio-economic groups, such as the participants in this study, remain under-represented in institutions of higher learning. It is the responsibility of institutions of higher learning to provide equal opportunities to every South African. Schools have a role to play as well; participants indicated that it was only during their Life Orientation learning period that they could discuss various institutions of higher learning and how to access them. Therefore, a discussion about institutions of higher learning is only partially covered in the whole curriculum. Since 1994, the government has implemented various policies to facilitate access to institutions of higher learning, especially of previously disadvantaged groups (Chisholm, 2005).

However, as stated above, certain groups of people have not been benefiting from these policies. The question then becomes: what went wrong? With all the various policies implemented, what really went wrong? The General Systems Theory is premised on the idea that an effective system is based on individual need, rewards and organization members are directly involved in solving a problem even if it is one affecting only individuals (Watson, 2012). Thus, constraints of accessing institutions of higher learning cannot be solved by looking at a household or a particular school alone. Furthermore, schools and School Governing Bodies must make sure that teachers who are appointed are skilled enough to offer the subjected they are appointed for. The participants in this research indicated that some of their teachers were not qualified to offer critical subjects such as Science and Mathematics.

This is a barrier as learners end up not learning anything at school. This was the case in Marude Secondary School in the Vhembe District where learners indicated that they had not been taught Life Sciences since the beginning of 2015 (Tshikudo, 2015).

he participants in this study indicated poverty as a constraint in accessing institutions of higher learning. Poverty is mainly caused by unemployment and, in South Africa, the unemployment rate is currently at 25.6 percent (Statistics SA, 2005). The majority of

unemployed people are found in rural areas and most of them rely for an income on the social grant provided by the state (Nelson Mandela Foundation, 2005). It has been argued that unemployment in South Africa is caused by the government's failure to create jobs. Other scholars argue that cadre deployment is the cause of the high unemployment rate, as most people who are employed are not qualified or competent. Yet others argue that South Africa suffers from a severe skills crisis and that there is no critical mass of qualified people ready to take up the available jobs (Kraak, 2006).

One can argue that the shortage of skilled people is the result of inadequate intake of rural learners into institutions of higher learning. Further to this, the minority that manages to get access into institutions of higher learning often do not complete their programmes of study, with most ending up excluded financially and academically; this increases the drop-out rate in a country already producing few graduates. The impact of the drop-out rate is severe as these learners return to their poor households, and the cycle of poverty continues (McWhirter et al., 2007).

The systems theory shows that different systems interact with one another in complex ways (Payne, 2005). In this regard, the experiences of rural learners in accessing institutions of higher learning can be linked to different systems that these learners are part of, for example, upbringing, socialization and access to information. The participants indicated that they were part of a community and as such lived by that community.

In this research, it was found that the activities and beliefs of a community can act as constraints to accessing institutions of higher learning. Thus, it is important for community members to support learners and not promote lifestyles that can have a negative impact on learners. The participants indicated that the abuse of drugs and other substances was a constraint in accessing higher education. The abuse of drugs and other substances in South Africa is a crisis that has to be addressed; not only does it act as a barrier for learners, but it is also responsible for the deaths of many young people in South Africa. According to the World Health Organisation (2015), South Africa has the highest rate of alcohol-related deaths, where as much as 15% of mortality can be attributed to alcohol consumption. Therefore, access to higher education can be constrained by various activities taking place within a community.

In South Africa, most of the institutions of higher learning are located in urban areas. Those that are in rural areas such as the University of Venda have limited resources (Marais, 2005). The participants indicated that rural areas were safe compared to urban areas; one of the participants gave an example of having the luxury to walk anywhere at any time in a rural area without fear of being robbed. This acts as a constraint as learners become reluctant to go outside their comfort zones. In South Africa today, Gauteng and the Western Cape have the highest rates of criminal activity (Statistics SA, 2015). These are provinces that have some of the best institutions of higher learning, not only in South Africa but in Africa. However, the criminal activity associated with these provinces acts as an obstacle to access to those institutions for the participants in this research.

4.7 Conclusion

In conclusion, from the three themes that emerged from the research one can conclude that access to institutions of higher learning depends on more than a learner's overall performance at school. Access to information about institutions of higher learning – ranging from how to apply, to when to apply and to the entrance requirements of different institutions of higher learning – is important. This information enables learners to know what to do and how to do it, when considering access to institutions of higher learning. One can conclude that the absence of this vital information amongst rural communities such as the Vhembe District in Limpopo acts as a constraint to accessing higher education.

Learning is an emotional process, or what psychologists refer to as a psychodynamic process involving psychological energy, transmitted by feelings, emotions, attitudes and motivations (Illeris, 2002). The present research found that the environment in which learning takes place had an impact on learner's ambitions and inspiration. Therefore, access to institutions of higher learning is further affected by the community, teachers and parents of the learners. Furthermore, poverty and economic background have an impact on how learners view institutions of higher learning. It was found that poverty, which is caused by the high unemployment rate in South Africa, affected learners' ambition, and their attitudes towards higher education. Tertiary education is expensive and in South Africa, as a result of poverty, learners are not concerned only about how they are going to fund their tuition. They also have worries about how they will pay the application fee to facilitate application to institutions of higher learning and, should they be accepted into the universities, where are they going to

stay, what will they be eating and generally how they will maintain themselves while they are at the institutions of higher learning. It is not only in South Africa that studying at institutions of higher learning is expensive; the inability to afford these institutions is a global problem. However, Breier (2010) points out that what is often called “financial considerations” includes real “poverty” and “socio-economic deprivation” in the South African context. This is different from the situation of students in many other countries who often struggle only to pay the high costs of education but generally have their most basic needs met.

All these factors cannot be treated in isolation from each other. In order to facilitate equal access to institutions of higher learning, these factors must be tackled together.

CHAPTER 5 - CONCLUSIONS, LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Conclusions

The aim of this research was to investigate what rural learners in the Vhembe District in the Limpopo province perceived as the barriers in accessing institutions of higher learning. In this chapter, the findings that arose out of the research will be summarised and appropriate recommendations proposed. The chapter will also discuss some of the limitations of the study. Lastly, the chapter will highlight the need for further research on the perceptions of barriers to accessing institutions of higher learning in South Africa.

The research study hoped that through the investigation of the experiences of rural learners, a better understanding could be secured of the challenges that young rural learners face when deciding their academic futures and their career paths. It was hoped that this study would assist in determining whether the perspectives of these learners are linked to some of the barriers highlighted in the literature review.

Interviews for the study were conducted with Grade 12 learners from a Secondary School in the Vhembe District in Limpopo. These learners were born and raised in the Vhembe District. From the interviews, three central themes emerged relating to their perceptions of the factors and barriers or obstacles to accessing institutions of higher learning. It was found that educational, economic and socio-cultural factors interacted with one another to promote inequality in accessing institutions of higher learning. Communities, schools, families, government and institutions of higher learning all contribute to the inequalities that exist in society by stipulating the parameters in which decisions are made. It was found that although access to and participation in institutions of higher learning were open to everyone in South Africa, the unequal economic and social development between rural and urban areas further contributed to unequal access and participation of rural learners in institutions of higher learning.

South Africa's economy is growing; however, there is also a high growth of unemployment. Currently, the unemployment rate in South Africa is 25.6 percent, one of the highest unemployment rates in the world (Statistics SA, 2015). Unemployment is very high in rural

areas in South Africa. As a result of the high unemployment rate, there are over 16 million people on the social grant and the majority of those are in the rural areas (Kelly, 2014). One might argue that this emphasises the necessity for the government fund and provide resources for communities and schools in the rural areas so that these learners can receive a better education that will in turn lead to increased participation in institutions of higher learning and which will, in its turn, lead to changing the socio-economic conditions of these communities. The research found out that financing higher education was an obstacle for the participants as most of the parents were unemployed as indicated by Table 2 in Chapter 4.

Information is important in accessing institutions of higher learning. The research found that information regarding entrance requirements and point requirements was not easily available to the participants. Furthermore, the participants did not have adequate information regarding possible funding opportunities. Although participants indicated that they aimed to achieve good results that would allow them to receive bursaries, none of the participants had applied for bursaries, including the NSFAS.

5.2 Recommendations

5.2.1 Educational recommendations

The involvement of the community is important, as it is their responsibility to see to it that their schools are functioning accordingly. Access to information was indicated as one of the factors that acted as an obstacle to these participants accessing higher learning. Thus, the government, since it is responsible to the education of the country, must invest in outreach programmes that provide information to rural learners, in order to break the information gap that exists between urban and rural areas. Furthermore, these projects must include all institutions of higher learning in South Africa. The government must also build libraries in rural areas, since, for example, in Vhembe District in Nzhelele East circuit there is not a single library. These learners are not only disadvantaged in terms of the information regarding access to institutions of higher learning, but also do not have any source of information in their community. Therefore, the government must build libraries in rural communities which must be open to all members of the community.

It is further recommended that the ggovernment and institutions of higher learning need intense dialogue with these communities, in order to develop effective transformation through the knowledge and lived experience of these communities.

Furthermore, teachers' progress in completing the curriculum requirements must be monitored in order to maintain quality, and so limit the inequalities that exist between rural and urban schools.

5.2.2 Economical recommendations

Poverty is a major problem in rural areas of South Africa. In this research, poverty was indicated as an obstacle in accessing institutions of higher learning. Poverty is caused by unemployment. Thus, the state must eradicate the economic inequalities that exist by creating jobs for the majority of South Africans. The creation of jobs in rural areas would reduce the number of people who rely on the social grant, leading to the state having more resources available to invest in education. Furthermore, these communities would be able to afford higher education.

5.2.3 Socio-cultural recommendations

Participants indicated a fear of leaving their communities for new environments. As a result of this fear, the participants indicated that they were most likely to take courses they had no passion for at a local institution such as the University of Venda, than to leave for institutions further afield to pursue more desirable courses. Thus, the government must invest more resources in historically black universities, especially those in rural areas. This will enable them to compete with formerly white universities.

5.3 Limitations of the Study

In attempting to gain a full understanding of the experiences of rural learners in accessing institutions of higher learning, it was found that although the participants had indicated that they were comfortable with English as the medium of communication, a lack of clear understanding and poor interpretation of questions prevented in-depth answering of interview questions. Another limitation was that the interviews were conducted at the school while

construction was taking place at the school. The noise level from the construction and the other participants to be interviewed for this study were distracting for the researcher and the current interviewee. A small sample was used in the study, which is in line with qualitative research, but this prevents the results from being generalised beyond the sample studied. Participants were all between 18 and 19 years, from the same class at school. This creates homogeneity within the group, which further restricts the research from being generalisable.

5.4 Directions for Future Research

The research has highlighted the progress that has been made post-1994 in transforming access to institutions of higher learning, and has also emphasised how rural learners in South Africa are still disadvantaged in gaining access to these institutions. It can be concluded that the failure to access institutions by rural learners can be viewed as a failure to address the socio-economic challenges facing the country, which can be related to the lack of dialogue between government officials and communities like the Vhembe District. Policies are made by a few individuals and this is a complex matter regarding service delivery, inequality and poverty which, as this research shows, directly and indirectly affects equal access and participation in institutions of higher learning. Therefore, in future, qualitative research engaging not only learners but also community members, parents and teachers in different rural areas of South Africa would be a stronger study and could be used to inform and guide policy development in South Africa. It might be argued that engaging and involving community members is important because these are people who have the knowledge and experience of their own daily lives. Access to institutions of higher learning cannot be addressed by looking at one aspect of the problem. Rather, it is an issue that requires a holistic socio-economic and societal approach in order to get everyone involved. For democratic development to occur, solutions to problems need to come from the affected communities and thus, a bottom-up approach to this problem would be useful in the future.

5.5 Concluding Comment

This research attempted to understand the experiences of rural learners in accessing institutions of higher learning by looking at factors that were identified in the literature review that might act as obstacles. Post-1994, the government and institutions of higher learning have implemented policies to facilitate access. However, many people, especially those in the rural areas have not been able to participate effectively in higher education.

Access to information about institutions of higher learning is preserved for a minority, while the majority in the rural areas have very little information and, in most cases, no information at all. This has resulted in low participation in higher education amongst rural communities. South Africa is still facing inequality in almost all aspects of life. Economic inequality, educational inequality, social inequality, all these factors have an impact on society and the opportunities people of different classes enjoy.

Unemployment in rural communities is high in South Africa, with the majority of households relying on the social grant for survival (Kelly, 2014). This indicates that being able to afford higher education would be impossible for these communities. Job creation could reduce the unemployment levels and ultimately reduce the poverty levels in these communities. Thus, reducing the social inequality that affects communities such as the Vhembe District could result in equal access to institutions of higher learning. The barriers identified by the participants need to be recognised, in order for institutions of higher learning to fulfil their role of producing competent and skilled graduates, who would build and support the development and maintenance of the social and economic wellbeing of South Africa.

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APPENDIXES

APPENDIX A: ETHICS CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE

Research Office

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

CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE	**PROTOCOL NUMBER: H15/07/41**
PROJECT TITLE	Experiences of rural learners in accessing institutions of higher learning
INVESTIGATOR(S)	Mr P Munaka
SCHOOL/DEPARTMENT	Human and Community Development/
DATE CONSIDERED	24 July 2015
DECISION OF THE COMMITTEE	Approved unconditionally This protocol has been approved by the HREC (Medical) Sub-Committee
EXPIRY DATE	24 August 2018

DATE 25 August 2015 **CHAIRPERSON** _____
(Professor J Knight)

cc: Supervisor : Dr T Nkomo

DECLARATION OF INVESTIGATOR(S)

To be completed in duplicate and **ONE COPY** returned to the Secretary at Room 10005, 10th Floor, Senate House, University.

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

_____ _____/_____/_____
Signature **Date**

PLEASE QUOTE THE PROTOCOL NUMBER ON ALL ENQUIRIES

APPENDIX B: APPROVAL LETTER FROM THE DOE

LIMPOPO
PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENT
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

DEPARTMENT OF
EDUCATION
VHEMBE DISTRICT

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
VHEMBE DISTRICT
2015 -08- 05
PRIVATE BAG X2250 SIBASA 0970
LIMPOPO PROVINCE

REF: 14/7/R
ENQ: MATIBE M.S
TEL: 015 962 1029

MR MUNAKA PHATHUTSHEDZO
P.O BOX 1932
NZHELELE
0993

REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO CONDUCT A RESEARCH IN THE DISTRICT

1. The above matter refers.
2. This serves to inform you that your request to conduct research on the topic "***EXPERIENCE OF RURAL LEARNERS IN ACCESSING ISTITUTIONS OF HIGHER LEARNING***" has been granted.
3. You are expected to adhere to research ethical considerations, particularly those relating to confidentiality, anonymity and informed consent of your research subjects.
4. Please ensure that your visits do not disrupt the normal teaching and learning activities.
5. Kindly inform the Circuit Manager and Principals of selected schools prior to your visits.
6. Wishing you success in your intellectual journey.

DISTRICT SENIOR MANAGER **DATE** 2015-08-05

Thohoyandou Government Building, Old Parliament, Block D, Private Bag X2250, SIBASA, 0970
Tel: (015) 962 1313 or (015) 962 1331, Fax: (015) 962 6039 or (015) 962 2288

APPENDIX C: PARTICIPATION INFORMATION SHEET



Private Bag 3, Wits, 2050 • Tel: 011 717 4472 • Fax: 011 717 4473 • E-mail: socialwork.SHCD@wits.ac.za

PARTICIPATION INFORMATION SHEET (Leaners)

Good day,

My name is Munaka Phathutshedzo, and I am conducting a research for the purpose of obtaining a Master's degree at the University of the Witwatersrand. My area of focus is that of the experiences of rural learners in accessing institutions of higher learning. After 1994 South African government has attempted to change institutions of higher learning, however many people in our society find it difficult to access institutions of higher learning. This research aims to find out what learners view as obstacles or challenges in accessing institutions of higher learning.

I would like to invite you to participate in this study. The reason I have chosen you is because you are learners from a rural area which is the interest of the study. 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. Participation in this study will entail being interviewed by me, at school at a time that is suitable for you.

The interview will last for one hour. With your permission this interview will be tape-recorded in order to ensure accuracy. The interview material (tapes and transcripts) will not be seen or heard by any person in this organization 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. 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 assent forms. I will contact you within two weeks in order to discuss your participation. Alternatively I can be contacted telephonically at 072 672 2391 and by email at munakaphathu@gmail.com or my supervisor Dr Thobeka Nkomo on 011 717 4481 and by email at Thobeka.Nkomo@wits.ac.za

Participating in this study has no individual risks or benefits. This research will contribute by helping to understand the perceptions of barriers to accessing higher education. Your school and the Department of Education can understand the reasons behind the poor enrolments of learners from schools like yours in higher education. This can help to inform their development policies and procedures to assist learners to access higher education.

Kind Regards

Munaka Phathutshedzo

APPENDIX D: INFORMED CONSENT FORM FOR PARTICIPATION IN THE STUDY

SOCIAL WORK
THE SCHOOL OF HUMAN AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT (SHCD)

Private Bag 3, Wits, 2050 • Tel: 011 717 4472 • Fax: 011 717 4473 • E-mail: socialwork.SHCD@wits.ac.zaen

CONSENT FORM FOR PARTICIPATION IN THE STUDY

I _____ consent to being interviewed by Munaka Phathutshedzo for his study on Experiences of rural learners in accessing institutions of higher learning. 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.

_____ _____

Signature Date

APPENDIX E: INFORMED CONSENT FORM FOR AUDIO RECORDING

SOCIAL WORK
THE SCHOOL OF HUMAN AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT (SHCD)

Private Bag 3, Wits, 2050 • Tel: 011 717 4472 • Fax: 011 717 4473 • E-mail: socialwork.SHCD@wits.ac.zaen

CONSENT FORM FOR AUDIO-TAPING OF THE INTERVIEW

I _____Consent to my interview with Munaka Phathutshedzo for his study on Experiences of rural learners in accessing institutions of higher learning.

-The tapes and transcripts will not be seen or heard by any person in this organization 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

- My identity will be protected and no identifying information will be used in the transcripts or the research report.

_____ _____

Child's Signature Date

APPENDIX F: 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 parents' education?

B. Educational factors

* Which subjects are you doing and why did you choose these subjects?

* Do you have any plans to further your studies after matric?

* Do you know the way that you have to follow in order to access universities or colleges?

* If you do have plans for further study, where and what is it that you are interested in studying?

* Do you think your subjects will allow you to enrol in the field you are interested in? Explain.

* If you are not planning to study further, can you explain why not?

* If you are interested in studying further, have you applied to universities or college?

* Do you have access to information about universities, bursaries, entrance requirements?

* How do you think this school has 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 institutions of higher learning compared to other children?

* Do you think that children who do not live in rural areas 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?

* 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 at institutions of higher learning? Explain.

* What would you say about the encouragement you receive from parents and career guidance counsellors to study further at institutions of higher learning?

* 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?

* Do you think being in a rural area affects your chances of accessing institutions of higher learning? Explain.

* How do you feel about institutions of higher learning in South Africa?

* Are there any other perceptions that you would like to share about obstacles to higher education?

APPENDIX G: TRANSCRIBED RECORDINGS

Biographical data

Interviewer: My name is Munaka Phathutshedzo, I am doing my research on the experiences of rural learners, rights? Am, can you confirm your age how old are you?

Learner: Am 18 years old

Interviewer: where do you reside?

Learner: Dopeni village

Interviewer: Dopeni village?

Learner: yes

Interviewer: are you living alone or are you living with your family?

Learner: I live with my family

Interviewer: are you parents employed?

Learner: yes

Interviewer: what occupation do your father and mother have?

Learner: My father is a traffic officer and my mother is a nurse

Interviewer: what is the level of your parent's education, did they go to university or college?

Learner: college

Interviewer: college?

Learner: yes

EDUCATIONAL FACTORS

Interviewer: Which subjects are you doing now and why did you choose those subjects

Learner: I do Math and Sciences just because I thought I was capable

Interviewer: you just thought that you were capable?

Learner: yes

Interviewer: so there is no, you are not thinking of any career path or anything?
Learner: no at that time I did not know anything about that

Interviewer: but now how is it?

Learner: now I know an idea

Interviewer: you have an idea?

Learner: yes

Interviewer: so what do you want to study when you matriculate?

Learner: I want to study pharmacy

Interviewer: You want to do pharmacy?

Learner: yes

Interviewer: where did you, did you apply anywhere?

Learner: yes

Interviewer: where did you apply?

Learner: I applied university of Kwa Zulu natal, Turf, Medunsa, Rhodes and

Interviewer: have they accepted you yet?

Learner: three or two, I think at turf and Kwa Zulu natal those are the ones I still remember

Interviewer: mmm, how did you find out about these universities?

Learner: mmm, most of them my siblings helped me with the application, but university of Kwa Zulu natal I just did my research to find out about it?

Interviewer: so you are not the first one to go to university from your family?

Learner: yes

Interviewer: how many siblings do you have?

Learner: from my parents?

Interviewer: yes

Learner: only one

Interviewer: only one?

Learner: yes

Interviewer: but who informed you about all these other universities?

Learner: my siblings from my aunts

Interviewer: so from your aunts?

Learner: yes

Interviewer: so they are older?

Learner: not all of them

Interviewer: which universities are they in?

Learner: am, the other one is in UJ and Turf

Interviewer: so they are the ones who gave you an idea of all these things?

Learner: yes

Interviewer: am that's interesting, how do you think this school has prepared you to further your education and choosing a career, am do you think this school prepared you enough in terms of the career that you want to pursue Pharmacy?

Learner: Not enough

Interviewer: why?

Learner: because our science teacher is not that good, sometimes he doesn't even come to class, so I have to do extra work. I did not pass it very well in the previous years, but this year am good.

Interviewer: so are there any support structures that you receive except for the teachers from the school?

Learner: there is a programme from Kotlwanong least 22 of us, they are the one that help us because our science teacher is not that good.

Interviewer: how did you find out about them?

Learner: They came here

Interviewer: so do you think because of them your performance has improved?

Learner: yes

Interviewer: so do you think that the 22 students that they have its enough at the moment?

Learner: yes it's enough because we are 27 in our science class

Interviewer: so what about the remaining students in your class?

Learner: some of them do extra classes somewhere else

ECONOMIC FACTORS

Interviewer: mmm okay that's interesting, so what do you think are the reasons that you think will prevent you and your classmate from studying at university, college or technikon?

Learner: maybe, am not sure what to say, but most of us live in poor communities this might affect most of us, so when we move to those schools we don't have any one to finance us, even though we might get someone to finance us I don't think it will be enough because life out there is very expensive especially education and other social stuff, so I think it's the financial part that will prevent us

Interviewer: besides that what do you think are other challenges in terms of accessing institutions of higher learning compared to other children let's say maybe from Gauteng or Western Cape?

Learner: the problem is we have to use the internet to access stuff, and those in Gauteng can just go to the university to get help, but me here you have to have a parent or sibling who is familiar with those kind of things. So if I don't I don't have a sibling or a guardian it will be hard, like me I did not know how to use a laptop I learned during the process of application

and it was because my parents are educated. What about someone who lives with their grandma?

Interviewer: oh yah, I understand, so you think if you guys were maybe closer to universities your chances will be higher compared to other students?

Learner: yes

Interviewer: mmm, do you think that children who do not live in rural areas face the same challenges as you guys in the rural areas?

Learner: mmm yah, I think so because most of our schools are not that good and it affect how we, the outlook that we have when we go to universities, some of us did not apply to some universities because we cannot go them if you look at where we are and where we want to go yes I think there is a barrier. So it does affect the children in rural areas who feel like they do not belong.

Interviewer: so what happens, after matric you just think of finding a job or what?

Learner: or places near you. Like university of Venda, some courses are not there but because that's where I feel comfortable am going to force to do something that is not for me because I know I can survive there, so am not sure if I will survive at Wits therefore I will go to university of Venda

Interviewer: so you are not comfortable at Wits, it makes more sense to go there. So is it because of friends or family what is it all about or is it just fear?

Learner: fear, its fear

Interviewer: so this decision that you will make or you think you might make its not based on friends or family members?

Learner: No it's not based on friends

Interviewer: do you guys pay fees?

Learner: no

Interviewer: its free?

Learner: yes

Interviewer: because it's free, do you think that it affects your motivation or inspiration to pursue higher education?

Learner: yes I think for me I does, because I know something free won't be worth something you pay for. So I know I won't want my children to live in this situation. Most of the people we be like it's free, even university will be free. Assuming that everything will be for free with no need to worry. I think I have a reason to worry, because free stuff is not worth what you pay for and it's better to get something that you know your kids will be in a better place.

Interviewer: mmm do your parents discuss funding career choices with you?

Learner: yes

Interviewer: they do?

Learner: yes

Interviewer: that's interesting. What challenges do you experience while you're studying here at school?

Learner: I think the environment, I don't think it's good studying here, I love to study at home. I don't know about others but I just think it's not right.

Interviewer: what makes this place not right?

Learner: first of all I think I think we are too many in a class, while studying here I won't be able to use my tablet here because they don't allow them and that's the most effective way to study. we don't have computers and stuff for research, we do have laptops but we do not use them most of the time.

Interviewer: who uses the laptops?

Learner: they are for us, but most of the time they say we are busy, so they have to set a date for you to come and use them.

Interviewer: mmm, but are they many, the laptops?

Learner: I think they are 7 or 11

Interviewer: 7 or 11?

Learner: yes

Interviewer: and how many are you in grade 12?

Learner: we are 150

Interviewer: 150?

Learner: yah

Interviewer: do you have any information about the cost of higher education and how does this affect you?

Learner: am I don't know, I have a rough estimate of first semester or first year. I think it's quite a lot of money. Even if I afford to go through the first year, I think the going further will be difficult. I think I need to work hard to get a better bursary, that's the only way am guaranteed to finish.

SOCIO-CULTURAL FACTORS

Interviewer: how supportive are your parents of studying at any university or college, do they give you enough support?

Learner: yes they do. My father manages all my things, I used his email address to apply so every time when they are changes his the one who let me know.

Interviewer: so do you think that what your parents are doing is enough for you?

Learner: yes

Interviewer: you don't think that there is anything you would love them to do to support you at this current moment?

Learner: I think that is enough.

Interviewer: do you think they give you enough encouragement about career guidance or even let's say how you will access these institutions of learning?

Learner: yes they do

Interviewer: do you think the motivation you get from career guidance counselors is enough?

Learner: No

Interviewer: why do you say so?

Leaner: the only time we went to career guidance we were given pamphlets, that's all.

Interviewer: you were not given anything else except pamphlets?

Learner: No

Interviewer: no application forms?

Learner: we did get the application forms, but only quarter of the class received them?

Interviewer: only quarter?

Learner: yes

Interviewer: so there was no other information let's say about bursaries,

Learner: there were only those stuff that say if you obtain these marks you will be suitable for this bursary that's all they really said. They didn't tell us about the fields, explaining anything further they didn't say anything.

Interviewer: so do you know what NSFAS is?

Learner: yes, most of the things we do our research.

Interviewer: oh okay. Am which institutions would you consider studying at if you had a choice and why?

Learner: if I had a choice I'd go to Free State

Interviewer: why would you want to go to Free State?

Leaner: I just love the place, I visited it once and I loved it and I just think that it will be a nice place to go.

Interviewer: have you experienced any language difficulties at school and how has this impacted you're choices?

Learner: No

Interviewer: do you think that you being in a rural area affect your chances of accessing institutions of higher learning?

Leaner: No. I think to some people it does but I think I was fortunate enough to have educated parents who knew something about universities.

Interviewer: how do you feel about institutions of higher learning in general in South Africa?

Learner: am I really have no idea what to say about that.

Interviewer: like there is nothing you can about it?

Learner: I mean it is what it is, you don't pass well you get labeled names and you pass well you are taken to the world.

Interviewer: what kind of names do they label you when you don't pass well?

Learner: they don't say them but you know you are not part of certain people.

Interviewer: besides all this things that we shared do you that there are any other barriers that you have experienced that you would love to share with me?

Learner: nothing

Interviewer: are you sure?

Learner: yes

Interviewer: thank you very much for your time.

Biographical data

Interviewer: My name is Munaka Phathutshedzo, how old are you?

Learner: I am 18 years

Interviewer: where do you reside?

Learner: Ha Tshikota

Interviewer: are you living alone or with your family?

Learner: am living with my mom and my siblings

Interviewer: is your mum employed?

Learner: currently she isn't, she was, but then she got retrenched

Interviewer: retrenched?

Learner: yes

Interviewer: what occupation did she occupy then?

Learner: she was a student social worker

Interviewer: oh that's interesting. What is the level of your mom's education, did she matriculate or?

Learner: she has a degree in social work

Interviewer: which university did she attend?

Learner: UNISA

Educational Factors

Interviewer: which subjects are you doing now?

Learner: am commercial subjects, math, English, commerce

Interviewer: wy are doing those subjects, why did you choose them?

Learner: am it's kind of funny, back then in grade 4 we used to do this correct mark counting in our books, my ems book at the end of the year it didn't even have one single wrong. From January to December I had scored total in everything classwork, class test everything that's where my interest in commerce came from. From back then I knew I was more interested in commerce, when I was in grade 9 my natural science was behind my EMS. My EMS was top

Interviewer: oh okay. So do you have any plans to study after matric?

Learner: I have loads of plans.

Interviewer: do you know the way that you have to follower in order to access universities of colleges?

Learner: yah, yah.

Interviewer: you do have plans to study, so where and what is that you're interested in studying?

Learner: Wits education, Bachelor of accounting.

Interviewer: so you want to study Bachelor of accounting at Wits?

Learner: yes

Interviewer: do you think you're subjects will allow you to enrol in the field that you're interested in?

Learner: yes

Interviewer: why do you think so?

Learner: because now in my subjects I have accounting, math and economics. Bachelor of accounting is actually you can say those three.

Interviewer: so have you applied to university?

Learner: yes I have applied

Interviewer: you applied to?

Learner: Wits University

Interviewer: have they accepted you?

Learner: no they sent back a letter

Interviewer: what was the letter saying?

Learner: the things is last year my math was not that good. I used to undermine math, the teacher, I didn't like the teacher so I undermined the subject and then come end of the year my percentage was 49 and then they are actually looking for 60. So when I applied I used my grade 11 results so when they replied they said we cannot assure you, we cannot guarantee you a place in the university but we have made a provisional offer. So if you work hard now you can get through.

Interviewer: do you have access to information about universities, bursaries and entrance requirements?

Learner: I have information, but I can't say complete information.

Interviewer: which information do you have about universities?

Learner: most of the information I have is from these prospectors thing that we get from our LO teacher and our phones, I use my phone to browse the net, to get to know more about the degrees my career. Yah so information I can say I have my phone.

Interviewer: so you do have information about university entrance requirements?

Learner: not completely, I can't say I have complete information.

Interviewer: and then in terms of bursaries do you have any information about bursaries?

Learner: yes

Interviewer: which bursary do you know that can come to your head right now?

Learner: Nedbank, am Old mutual, yah this one that people don't like most much.

Interviewer: which one?

Learner: NSFAS

Interviewer: Why do people not like it?

Learner: because the benefits are not the way they take learners?

Interviewer: how? Because they need poor students is that the reason why people do not like it?

Learner: no, no, that's not the reason because its requirements are really really different from other bursaries, let's say I am applying for Nedbank and NSFAS at the same time, the standards they are not equal, NSFAS settles for far less than those other ones. Which is why they undermine it because they know it settles for less.

Interviewer: so did you apply for NSFAS?

Learner: no I wanted to but I didn't get the time.

Interviewer: you didn't get the time or you just undermined it?

Learner: no I didn't get the time.

Interviewer: so how do you think the school had prepared you, do you think the school has prepared you enough in terms of the career that you want to follow?

Learner: yes I think the school has prepared me

Interviewer: can you explain further on that how?

Learner: I had teachers who care, the moment they see that you're getting out of hand they call you, they talk to you, and they try to discipline you to make sure you're in the right path. So that's what they have done with me. They have corrected me, there are loads of mistakes that I have made along the way but then I had teachers who saw me as their child, who brought me in and taught me, let's say they disciplined me.

Interviewer: so you wouldn't wish to be in another school except this one, do you wish you were in another school at matric?

Learner: no

Economic factors

Interviewer: that's interesting, what are the other reasons that you think can prevent you or your classmates from accessing institutions of higher learning?

Learner: the barriers?

Interviewer: yes barriers or challenges

Learner: number one I think is poverty, I myself for one my mom is am okay let me put it in this way. Most of the information is found in internet cafes, so my mom can't afford at the moment. So if I wasn't serious as I am I don't think I would make it, so poverty becomes a barrier in that way. Most of the time our poverty closes our eyes, it's like this donkey things. We don't see that they are people out there who can help us. Most of the time you find a learner focusing in his/ her home situation and that ends up bringing her back.

Interviewer: do you think children who live in rural areas face the same challenges in accessing higher education as you do?

Learner: no

Interviewer: why do you say that?

Learner: because rural areas, you can say they can be classified into categories. There are those modern rural and there are those rural rural. Where the rural rural ones are like far away from information, places like Masisi, Folovhodwe, and those places are too far. I think the other barrier is access to information.

Interviewer: and in this case which information are you referring to?

Learner: things like the internet, because it has become this major part of our lives.

Interviewer: do you think that rural learners face the same challenges as those who do not live in rural areas let's say Gauteng or the Western Cape?

Learner: no I don't think so.

Interviewer: why do you say so?

Learner: because in places like those information, lets me use a recent example. Children there were given tablets to use as textbooks here our kids have to carry backpacks. So I cannot say there is lack of access to information there.

Interviewer: do you guys pay school fees?

Learner: no.

Interviewer: how does this affect your motivation to attend university of college?

Learner: it motivates me a lot because I know I can change my home situation for free and I know that the only way to change my home situation is to go to school. So this motivates me to study hard so that I can be able to get a bursary next year.

Interviewer: do your parents discuss funding and career choices with you?

Learner: my mom does my dad when he was still alive he used. My mom stresses a lot.

Socio-cultural factors

Interviewer: do you think she is being supportive enough?

Learner: very much. I think my mom is being very much supportive, she even had to work as a maid. Someone with a degree working as a maid. She swallowed her pride so that she can get my application fees and all that. So yes I think my mom is very supportive.

Interviewer: do you have any information about the cost of higher education and how does this affect you?

Learner: I do, through the prospectors. For instance I have a Wits prospectus at home and I can see the rates there are very high. This motivates me in that sense that I have to study hard so that I can get a bursary which is going to cover everything because I know my mom can't afford it.

Interviewer: which tertiary institution would you consider studying at if you had a choice and why?

Learner: Wits.

Interviewer: why Wits University?

Learner: they are the best in the country.

Interviewer: where did you get that information that they are the best?

Learner: the prospectors itself it shows that it is the best.

Interviewer: have you experienced any languages at school and how has this affected you?

Learner: no

Interviewer: do you think being in rural areas affect you changes of accessing institution of higher learning?

Learner: yes I think it does.

Interviewer: why do you say so?

Learner: for instance let's say Masisi far far Masisi, the trip from Masisi to Thohoyandou I think you pay R45. So for me to access the University of Venda it will be difficult.

Interviewer: how do you feel about institutions of higher learning in general in South Africa?

Learner: I don’t think I can answer that accurately because they are rated according to their standards. I think they are very good, the only difference I see is in terms of the standards. Apparently when you’re a student from UNISA and a student from university of Limpopo you are not ranked at the same rank. Apparently a student from the University of Limpopo does not stand a chance when competing with a student from UNISA. The standards are not the same there should be on the same league.

Interviewer: Besides all these challenges that we have spoken about are the any perceptions or experiences that you would like to share with me in terms of accessing institutions of higher learning?

Learner: access to information, poverty, because to me those are the ones I can say I have experienced.

Interviewer: thank you.