

Black South African professionals' narratives of mobility: Overcoming disadvantaged education backgrounds to achieve professional success

Prepared by: Mandhlovu Gwebu (2495113)

Supervisor: Professor Peace Kiguwa



UNIVERSITY OF THE
WITWATERSRAND,
JOHANNESBURG

**Master of Arts in Social and Psychological Research in the Faculty of Humanities,
University of Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, January 2025.**

Course Code	PSYC7022A
Course Name	MA (Psychology) Research Report
Surname	Gwebu
Student Number	2495113
Date	5 January 2025
Supervisor Name	Professor Peace Kiguwa
DECLARATION – I HEREBY DECLARE THAT:	YES/NO
I understand what plagiarism is (using another's work and presenting it as my own).	Yes
I understand and agree that plagiarism is wrong.	Yes
I am aware of and familiar with the University of the Witwatersrand's policy on plagiarism.	Yes
I understand the importance of clearly and appropriately acknowledging my sources, using the APA referencing style where needed.	Yes
I understand that a proper paraphrase or summary of ideas/claims/content from a particular source should be written in my own words with my own sentence structure and accompanied by an appropriate reference where needed.	Yes
I have correctly acknowledged all direct quotations and paraphrased content by way of appropriate, APA style in-text references where needed.	Yes
I understand that antiplagiarism software (e.g., Turnitin) is a useful resource, but that such software does not provide definitive proof that a document is free of plagiarism.	Yes
I have not allowed, and will not allow anyone to copy my work with the intention of passing it off as his or own work.	Yes
I have not made use of inappropriate sources, such as other students' essays or online essay-sharing sites, in preparing this written work.	Yes
I understand that the University of the Witwatersrand may take disciplinary action against me if there is a belief that this is not my own unaided work, if there is any evidence of inappropriate sharing between colleagues and myself or that I failed to acknowledge the sources of the ideas or words in my writing.	Yes

Declaration of Originality

I, **Mandhlovu Gwebu**, declare that this research report is my own unaided work. It has been submitted for the Masters in Social and Psychological research degree at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted for any other degree or examination at this or any other university.

Signed: Mandhlovu Gwebu

Date: 17 February 2025

Acknowledgements

To my father Thomas Gwebu, who has always encouraged education within the household but never put us under unreasonable pressure. You are the reason I am who I am today, and I will forever be grateful for your abundant love and support. To my dear mother Elizabeth Gwebu, for a lifetime of encouragement and love. You were the blueprint of resilience and fought until the very end. You were a constant source of peace and I will carry you in my heart forever. I know you will be celebrating my wins and attending all my graduations virtually from heaven. To my darling namesake and ancestor, Nomvula Hilda Ntsibande, for telling me to go back to school after dropping out of my first year in tertiary. Your contribution in my life is forever appreciated and I will cherish you in my heart forever. To my Mamcane, for the constant prayers for my success. You pray for me more than I pray for myself. To my siblings, nieces and nephews, thank you for doing life with me and being the fuel I needed through each life stage.

To my supervisor, Professor Peace Kiguwa, I heard many horror stories of what my Masters year would look like through graduates from various local and global institutions. Under your supervision, this has been my most enjoyable school year and I am encouraged to continue my learning journey to PHD. Your guidance, expertise and realistic outlook on research has sharpened my research skills.

To all the participants in this study, you are truly inspirational! Thank you for your rich narratives which will hold a pivotal role in improving the state of education in our nation. I learnt from each of your stories and felt hopeful for the future of learners from rural and township schools.

To the teachers in disadvantaged schools who continue to do their work with diligence despite the challenges and limited resources, this research highlights the pivotal role you play in changing lives.

To the future generation of game changers who will be impacted by the initiatives that will be developed from research papers such as this one. Despite the challenges experienced, stay motivated and focused during your schooling years. Education can increase your access to opportunities for a brighter future.

'South Africa inherited a highly dysfunctional educational system from the apartheid era. It is one of our major tasks of reconstruction to build an educational system that provides quality opportunities for all our people. It is fundamentally important that our children are prepared to compete with confidence in the international arena. We need to ensure that every one of our children has access to a world class, quality education. And the teaching of Maths, Science and English is a major national priority, as more of our children need to excel in these subjects.' -

Nelson Mandela (2003)

Extract from an address by Nelson Mandela at the launch of the 'Mindset Network' in Johannesburg on 16 July 2003.

Abstract

The educational policies implemented during Apartheid resulted in Black people receiving inferior quality education in under resourced schools. The education inequality has continued post apartheid with learners from township and rural schools producing lower academic results than those in urban schools. Bourdieu's Social Reproduction Theory and Garnezy's Resilience theory were the theoretical frameworks that anchored this study. Despite the challenges faced by learners in township and rural schools, some learners manage to disrupt their anticipated trajectories. They develop resilience and work towards achieving success whilst acquiring the social capital required to become successful professionals. The aim of this study was to identify the key factors that influenced the professional success of 13 Black South Africans who attended township and rural high schools. This study was required as Black South Africans have the lowest tertiary qualification rate and account for the majority of South Africa's unemployment rate. This was a qualitative study using a narrative thematic analysis approach to understand the lived experience of each participant. Each participant attended a rural or township school, obtained a degree or a diploma and was working as a professional earning more than R 22 000 (starting salary to be classified as middle class). Data was collected through interviews using a semi structured questionnaire. The participants narratives highlighted the challenges experienced during their schooling years, how they stayed motivated and the factors that contributed to their success. They learnt to navigate the social and cultural differences experienced when transitioning from their disadvantaged education backgrounds to tertiary institutions and then the workplace. The key themes identified were navigating education barriers with the help of protective factors (personal agency, family support and discipline), acquiring cultural capital and social mobility (including English proficiency for social mobility), dreaming beyond reality (aspirations and inspirational figures), and prioritising education equity. These themes captured how attending disadvantaged rural and township schools put the participants at a disadvantage when entering the tertiary and workplace environment. Their resilience was evident throughout the study showing how they overcame barriers which many of their peers from the same high schools did not. Their determination to succeed yielded tertiary qualifications and successful professional careers. Recommendations prioritised the intervention of micro level interventions including community empowerment, mentorship programmes, career guidance in schools, increased use of technology and involvement in extra mural activities. Macro level interventions are more resource and effort intensive however they are still critical. Initiatives such as educational content broadcasts using

mass media, increasing access to tertiary education and addressing structural barriers could positively contribute to learners success after high school. To develop effective interventions to improve the success rate of learners from disadvantaged education backgrounds more research is required on the lived experiences of those individuals who beat the odds and became successful.

Key words: Garnezy, Bourdieu, education, inequality, disadvantaged, township, rural, cultural capital, resilience

Table of contents

Chapter 1	12
Introduction and Literature Review	12
1.1 Introduction.....	12
1.2 Research questions.....	13
1.3 Rationale for the study	14
1.4 Education inequality caused by Apartheid	15
1.5 Definition of success	16
1.6 Learning environment	17
1.7 Personal agency and resilience.....	18
1.8 Adult support and mentorship	19
1.9 Reflections	19
1.10 Dissemination of results.....	20
Chapter 2.....	21
Theoretical Framework.....	21
2.1 Introduction.....	21
2.2 Theoretical framework	21
2.3 Garnezy’s Resilience Theory.....	22
2.4 Bourdieu’s Social Reproduction Theory.....	24
2.5 Conclusion	27
Chapter 3.....	28
Methodology	28
3.1 Introduction.....	28
3.2 Research aim.....	28
3.3 Method.....	28
a. Research design.....	28
b. Sampling approach	29
c. Study participants.....	29
d. Data collection.....	30
e. Data analysis.....	31
3.4 Ethical considerations.....	32
3.5 Limitations for salary criteria verification	33
3.6 Conclusion	33
Chapter 4.....	34
Detailed Narrative Thematic Analysis Process	34

4.1	Introduction	34
4.2	Collecting the data.....	34
4.3	Getting acquainted with the data (phase one).....	34
4.4	Generating initial codes (phase two).....	35
4.5	Searching for themes in the data (phase three).....	38
4.6	Reviewing themes (phase four).....	39
4.7	Defining and naming final themes (phase five)	39
4.8	Producing the report (Phase six).....	40
4.9	Conclusion.....	40
	Chapter Five.....	41
	Results and Discussion	41
5.1	Introduction	41
5.2	Theme one - Navigating educational barriers with the help of protective factors (Garmezy’s Resilience Theory)	41
5.2.1	The narratives of inequality – ‘Sho... it was tough’	41
5.2.2	Narratives of personal agency – ‘...poverty is very much a mindset and that’s why people don’t make it out.’	45
5.2.3	Narratives of family support – ‘... they didn't really go to school, but they understood the value of education’	52
5.2.4	Narratives of community support - ‘Where I lived, there was a university nearby... that environment, it's like, when, when there was a graduation, it would be televised.’	57
5.2.5	Narratives of discipline – ‘... like if you were naughty, it doesn't matter whose parents saw you. They were like your parents’	62
5.3	Theme two - Acquiring cultural capital and social mobility (Bourdieu’s Social Reproduction Theory).....	65
5.3.1	School’s role in building cultural capital and shaping the future – ‘... I would say my school enabled me to have options, like any option.’	65
5.3.2	English proficiency for social mobility – ‘...we listen, but we don't comprehend, you know, and we wanna say something but we're unable to articulate ourselves’	77
5.3.3	Transitioning from disadvantaged schools – ‘Hard, hard, hard, I struggled at varsity, stru-ggled!’	80
5.4	Theme three – Dreaming beyond the current reality.....	91
5.4.1	Dreams of a better future – ‘I was seeing myself... like owning my car, owning my apartment, all those things.’	91
5.4.2	Role models, inspirational figures and mentors – ‘When Sizwe Nxasana was appointed as CEO of Telkom, you know, KZN was rejoicing...’	97
5.5	Conclusion	101
	Chapter 6.....	102

Recommendations, reflexivity and conclusion	102
6.1 Recommendations	102
6.1.1 Micro level interventions.....	102
a. Giving back to disadvantaged schools	102
b. Community empowerment and involvement in learners school journey.....	104
c. Empowering learners with career guidance and funding information to enable them to make more informed decisions	105
d. Sourcing funding opportunities to enhance the quality of education and extra mural activities	107
e. Enhancing the use of technology.....	108
6.1.2 Macro level interventions.....	108
a. Levelling the playing field through addressing structural barriers and resource constraints	108
b. Broadcasting educational content to enhance learning	110
6.1.3 Further research.....	111
6.2 Reflexivity.....	111
6.3 Conclusion.....	111
References.....	114
Appendix A – Participant Information Sheet	122
Appendix B – Informed Consent Form	125
Appendix C – Interview Schedule	126
Appendix D – Interview Schedule.....	127
Appendix E – Participant profiles and interview duration.....	128

Chapter 1

Introduction and Literature Review

1.1 Introduction

In 1954 prominent South African politician, Hendrik Verwoerd, announced in Parliament, “Blacks should never be shown the greener pastures of education, they should be hewers of wood and drawers of water”, (Price, 2023, para. 2). The education policies implemented during Apartheid provided inferior levels of education to Black people in under-resourced schools (McKeever, 2017). These policies played a significant role in the educational inequality experienced today (McKeever, 2017).

Today, long after the demise of Apartheid, learners who attend schools in township and rural areas continue to produce lower academic results than those in urban areas (Sumida & Kawata, 2021). These learners experience multiple learning challenges during their schooling years, including personal and structural barriers, which affect their academic performance (Mouton et al. 2012). Many of these structural barriers such as educational policies, inadequate infrastructure, corruption and access to learning resources, are out of the learner’s control. These barriers often result in poor academic performance, thereby reducing the learners’ chances of accessing tertiary education or securing funding for their studies (Schoon et al., 2021). Access to tertiary education would increase the likelihood of learners accessing sustainable employment, and subsequently increase their ability to improve their socioeconomic status (Schoon et al., 2021).

The purpose of this study is to determine how learners who attended disadvantaged schools, high schools in particular, overcame their circumstances to become successful professionals. Learners in the context of this research report are individuals who are in early childhood education, primary school or high school. The research questions seek to explore the factors (personal and social) that influenced individuals who went to disadvantaged schools to succeed and how they navigated their circumstances to ultimately become successful professionals. With the high unemployment rate for Black people, this research is essential for future generations progress as many Black learners attend township and rural schools with limited resources. Limited research is available to explain how Black learners transition from

disadvantaged schools to becoming successful professionals. In the third quarter of 2024, Statistics South Africa (Statistics SA) published an unemployment rate of 32.1% with Black Africans making up most of the unemployed population, at 36.1%. Of the overall percentage of unemployed South Africans, only 9.8% were graduates (Statistics SA, 2024). In addition, South Africans earning above R22 000, classified as middle class, are likely to have obtained a tertiary education (Lappeman et al., 2021). These statistics were instrumental in defining success for the purposes of this research report, which is herein defined as an individual who attended a disadvantaged high school in a township or rural area, obtained a degree or diploma and is now a professional, earning a monthly income above R22 000.

There are multiple internal and external factors that may positively influence one's ability to become successful. These include a learner's ability to set their own goals and imagine a better life for themselves, which results in educational resilience and increased motivation to succeed (Wills & Hofmeyr, 2019). A supportive learning environment, including teacher support, positively impacts a learner's ability to reach their academic goals (Parker et al., 2021). Parental involvement and support likewise positively influence a learner's success rates (Schoon et al., 2021). Mentorship, guidance and adequate support structures for learners also assist in increasing their school performance (Ndlovu et al. 2019). These factors will be further explored in the context of South Africa's education inequality and how we can improve success of learners from disadvantaged education backgrounds.

1.2 Research questions

This research seeks to address the following research questions:

- What factors (personal and social) influenced individuals who went to disadvantaged schools to succeed?
- How did individuals who attended disadvantaged high schools navigate their circumstances and end up becoming professionals?

1.3 Rationale for the study

This study is important as Black South Africans account for most of the country's unemployment rate, having few prospects of accessing tertiary education and sustainable employment to improve their socioeconomic status (Statistics SA, 2024; Schoon et al., 2021).

There is limited research on the lived experiences of individuals who attended disadvantaged schools and went on to become successful professionals despite the challenges they experienced. The available research focuses on learning barriers affecting progress and unemployment. The gap this research report aims to address in the available literature is how to assist learners in transitioning from a disadvantaged high school into tertiary and then into a successful professional career given the limited resources they have at their disposal. A tertiary education increases their chances of improving their quality of life and socioeconomic status, (Schoon et al., 2021). Post-Apartheid, many township and rural schools remained under-resourced, with poor academic results (McKeever, 2017). The academic success rate of learners attending high school in these areas remains lower than those in urban areas (Sumida & Kawata, 2021). Poor academic results make it harder for these learners to access tertiary education and sustainable employment (Schoon et al., 2021).

When considering the lived experiences of professionals who attended disadvantaged schools, it became evident that effective interventions need to be designed to assist learners in transitioning from disadvantaged school backgrounds to successful professional careers. This research report seeks to contribute to building a body of knowledge that can result in effective micro and macro level interventions being scaled to increase success. Micro level interventions at community and school level which include community empowerment, parental involvement, mentorship and career guidance may be implemented with minimal to no funding (Jagannathan et al., 2022). Their impact was significant towards the study participants development and successful outcomes. Macro level interventions which address structural challenges and educational inequality are critical however they will take longer to resolve as they require more effort and resources (Jagannathan et al., 2022). To increase the success rate of learners, more research is required to develop, prioritise and test these much-needed interventions.

The results of this research also provide valuable insights to stakeholders such as policy makers and Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs). The insights may also provide teachers with ideas on how to help learners improve academically, to qualify for tertiary education. It is hoped that this study will result in further studies being conducted across the African continent in line with the aim of this research. A strong body of knowledge will provide further insights that may assist in designing effective interventions required to increase the success rate of learners from disadvantaged schools and reduce unemployment rates. This success includes obtaining a degree or diploma and becoming a professional earning a middle-class income, thereby improving their socioeconomic status.

1.4 Education inequality caused by Apartheid

The legacy of apartheid has continued to affect Black learners through the ongoing educational inequality experienced in townships and rural areas (McKeever, 2017). During Apartheid, Black people received inferior education as they were expected to occupy 'blue collar' jobs which were manual labour intensive. In contrast, White people received a higher quality of education which facilitated learners' entry into tertiary institutions and increased their opportunities of securing 'white collar' jobs (McKeever, 2017). Opportunities for higher quality education for Black people opened up when the apartheid government began to develop institutions designed for Black people specifically, such as hospitals. These institutions required Black professionals to service the Black population, and selected individuals were given a higher quality education to enable them to work in these institutions. Unfortunately, education inequality continues to be a reality post-apartheid (McKeever, 2017).

Currently, learners attending school in townships and rural areas obtain lower academic results than their counterparts in urban areas (Sumida & Kawata, 2021). This performance gap is impacted by the socioeconomic conditions and a lack of resources in disadvantaged schools (Sumida & Kawata, 2021). Language is another contributing factor to the performance gap. In South Africa, English and Afrikaans are the main languages of instruction (particularly at tertiary level) and this contributes to the poor academic performance as learners sometimes struggle to understand the content in these languages (Sumida & Kawata, 2021).

Educational inequality contributes to high illiteracy and unemployment which results in increased poverty (Kyei & Maboko, 2016). Poverty can continue for generations as a result of the unequal distribution of resources amongst the rich and the poor (Farid et al., 2021). This makes it harder for those in disadvantaged communities to improve their socioeconomic status and cultural capital, as they are kept marginalised (Farid et al., 2021). Cultural capital refers to the desired traits that individuals acquire, (for example behavioural norms in various social settings), from moving across various systems and structures (Claussen & Osborne, 2012). Cultural Capital positively influences one's social and economic status (Dumais, 2002; Farid et al., 2021). Access to tertiary education and employment could improve disadvantaged communities socioeconomic status by increasing their cultural and social capital (Farid et al., 2021).

1.5 Definition of success

Success in the context of this research report, is defined as an individual who attended a disadvantaged high school, went on to obtain a degree or diploma and is now a professional, earning a monthly income above R22 000. In South Africa, the average annual household income generated by Black Africans through employment is R98 326 whilst the average generated by Whites is R457 075 (Statistics SA, 2025). Those earning between R22 000 to R40 000 monthly are considered middle class in South Africa, while those earning between R40 000 to R75 000 monthly are considered upper middle class, and those earning over R75 000 are considered top end earners (Lappeman et al., 2021). Individuals who are classified as middle class, or income categories above middle class, have more access, choices and flexibility in terms of how they spend their income. These groups are more likely to have private vehicles, and account for a large portion of overall consumer spend in South Africa. In these higher income groups, tertiary education was common – over 50% of the middle-income class, over 60% of the upper middle class and over 80% of the top end (Lappeman et al., 2021). This further emphasises that educational credentials help improve employability and socioeconomic status (Farid et al., 2021). Educational inequality disadvantages generations, as inequality and poor socioeconomic conditions continue to be reproduced (Farid et al., 2021).

Many unemployed South Africans are cut off from participating in economic activities due to a lack of resources (Matli & Ngoepe, 2021). South Africa has an unsustainable unemployment

rate of 60.2% for youth aged 15 to 24 years (Statistics SA, 2024). These high levels of youth unemployment pose a threat to the social and economic stability of the country (Matli & Ngoepe, 2021). An assessment of the overall unemployment rate of 32.1% reflected that 9.8% were graduates, 20.8% had other tertiary qualifications, 34.1% had matric and 37.8% had not completed matric (Statistics SA, 2024). The percentage of graduates who are unemployed is still high at 9.8% however graduates are far more likely to secure employment in SA. Increasing academic performance in disadvantaged schools should be a key focus area to afford learners the ability to access tertiary education using the available funding mechanisms such as bursaries and the National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS). Therefore, giving attention to the conditions in disadvantaged high schools is a crucial starting point to help increase academic performance and the success rate of Black learners.

1.6 Learning environment

High school should prepare learners for their next step into tertiary institutions to increase their chances of finding employment (Kyei & Maboko, 2016). Good academic performance in high school is therefore crucial for learners to access tertiary institutions, graduate and become professionals. However, disadvantaged schools experience multiple barriers in the learning environment including a lack of qualified teachers (especially mathematics teachers), overcrowded classrooms, inadequate teaching resources (such as textbooks) and various socioeconomic challenges (Kyei & Maboko, 2016).

Teachers in disadvantaged schools are heavily burdened with a shortage of resources and the socio-economic challenges of their learners (Zulu et al., 2022). They are often required to do more with less and this includes teaching subjects they are not qualified to teach (Muzah, 2011). Classrooms are often overcrowded limiting the teacher's ability to provide learners with individual support (Kyei & Maboko, 2016). Crowded classes make it harder for teachers to maintain discipline and identify learners who are falling behind (Kyei & Maboko, 2016). The teacher's capacity to provide additional learner support over and above their daily challenges may be limited. However, Parker et al., (2021) found that when learners encountered academic difficulties, having a supportive teacher improved their chances of academic success. Teacher support can therefore positively impact a learner's ability to reach their academic goals (Parker et al., 2021).

The poor performance of learners is further influenced by the number of unqualified mathematics and science teachers, and staff members who are not committed to the profession (Kyei & Maboko, 2016). The Apartheid policies contributed to the shortage of qualified black mathematics and science teachers due to the underdevelopment of Black human potential (Kyei & Maboko, 2016). Poor performance of learners in mathematics and science has significantly increased, and this is a great concern because the demand for these subjects continues to accelerate due to the continuous evolution of technology-driven qualifications and employment (Muzah, 2011). Improving the mathematics outcomes should therefore be a key focus area in improving the success rate of learners from disadvantaged schools (Ndlovu et al., 2019). In addition, qualified teachers often seek employment opportunities in urban areas where there is more access to teaching resources and less socioeconomic challenges (Kyei & Maboko, 2016). This leaves the learners in rural and township schools at a further, disadvantage, requiring a higher reliance on their personal agency and resourcefulness to succeed.

1.7 Personal agency and resilience

Despite the challenges learners from disadvantaged schools face, some of these learners still manage to succeed. Garmezy's Resilience Theory looks at how learners' resilience enables them to become successful and to economically surpass their parents, despite their challenges (Garmezy, 1991). Personal agency builds academic resilience in learners and enables them to achieve good academic results (Schoon et al., 2021). Learners with personal agency intentionally influence their life circumstances through being intentional, proactive, self-reflecting and self-regulating (Bandura, 2006). Some learners carry heavy mental burdens associated with their socioeconomic circumstances which result in additional stress and exhaustion (Parker et al., 2021). Learners with personal agency are not completely consumed by their challenges as they can set goals and direct their actions towards these goals (Bandura, 2006). However, even these learners often find it difficult to maintain their personal agency whilst managing their personal challenges. Despite this, they remain determined to succeed (Parker et al., 2021). Personal agency impacts a learner's emotional life and their reaction to stress (Bandura, 2006). A learner with personal agency, and support from adults in their community, could have a higher likelihood of succeeding academically (Schoon et al., 2021).

1.8 Adult support and mentorship

a. Parents and caregivers

Family support is an important contributor to the learner's psychological functioning and personal agency, and empowers the learner to succeed academically (Schoon et al., 2021). The parent or caregiver's exposure, education level and their job play an important role in their academic expectations of the learner and the level of support they provide (Schoon et al., 2021). It can be hard for a learner to surpass their parent's educational level where they experience adverse socioeconomic challenges (Schoon et al., 2021). When parental figures have high educational aspirations for the learner, co-agency with the learner, and high hopes of their success, learners' success rates are positively impacted (Parker et al., 2021). When they are actively involved in a learner's educational journey, they are able to identify areas where the learner may require additional support to reach their academic goals (Schoon et al., 2021).

b. Community support and mentorship

Where learners are not able to receive the necessary support at home, community members may step in and provide the required support and mentorship (Parker et al., 2021). Mentorship positively influences the improvement of learners' academic, social and behavioural functioning (Radlick et al., 2020). Mentors help learners obtain the connection and support they require from an adult figure, define and achieve their goals, obtain guidance and gain a sense of security (Radlick et al., 2020). Aspirational capital (hopes and dreams for the future), social capital (networks) and resistance capital (rejection of oppression) are all influenced by a learner's community (Wills & Hofmeyr, 2019). These three types of capital are all linked to the learner's development of personal agency (Wills & Hofmeyr, 2019). Learners value support from community members who provide motivation and equip them with tools that help towards achieving their goals (Parker et al., 2021).

1.9 Reflections

There are multiple factors that can influence learners success and these were further explored in this study. Having a tertiary education positively impacts future success rates and earning

potential (Lappeman et al., 2021). Increasing academic success at a high school level increases the likelihood that learners will be able to access tertiary education (Kyei & Maboko, 2016). Increased academic success for future learners from disadvantaged schools will have a positive impact on improving their success rates and socioeconomic status, ultimately reducing the unemployment rate (Gunn, 2005).

1.10 Dissemination of results

This research report will be submitted to the University of the Witwatersrand (WITS), Johannesburg, as part of the requirements to complete the Masters in Social and Psychological Research. The research report will then be published on WIReDSpace, a digital repository retaining WITS University's research and intellectual outputs. The aim is for the research results to be published in academic journals focusing on social change and education. In future, this research may be used for decision making purposes to inform the relevant stakeholders focusing on social change, education and youth unemployment. These stakeholders may use the results of this report to inform their priority initiatives and decide on which initiatives to fund. These stakeholders may include the Department of Basic Education and organisations such as the Youth Employment Agency which focuses on making youth more employable, as well as the Equal Education movement which recognises the socioeconomic challenges and fights for equal education in South Africa.

Chapter 2

Theoretical Framework

2.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines the theoretical framework supporting this research. Garmezy's Resilience Theory and Bourdieu's Social Reproduction Theory are the frameworks that guided the interpretation of the research findings and the development of recommendations.

2.2 Theoretical framework

Educational inequality represents a crucial research area that has profound long-term implications for learners who are deprived of quality education. These implications include the limitation of employment opportunities and the continuation of poverty across generations (Kyei & Maboko, 2016). For this research topic, two theories emerged relevant to encapsulate the experiences of participants who came from disadvantaged education backgrounds and explore how they achieved success despite the challenges they encountered. Garmezy's Resilience Theory and Bourdieu's Social Reproduction Theory not only provide a theoretical framework for this study, but they also encourage broader conversations on strategies to increase the future success of learners attending disadvantaged schools. Garmezy's Resilience Theory provides context on what differentiates learners who become successful from their peers who attended the same disadvantaged schools. This theory explores social, environmental and individual factors which contribute to successful outcomes in adulthood (Zimmerman, 2013). It emphasises that learners who grow up in disadvantaged communities can excel beyond what is expected of them (Garmezy, 1991). Garmezy's Resilience theory defines 'protective factors' that shield learners from the impact of their disadvantaged environments (Garmezy, 1991). These protective factors explain why some learners succeed whilst others do not. Bourdieu's Social Reproduction Theory helps explain the journeys travelled by learners from disadvantaged schools and the role cultural capital plays in navigating each chapter of their lives. Learners experience multiple transitions from school to tertiary educational institutions and ultimately to the workplace. These transitions are generally harder for those coming from disadvantaged schools that lack teaching resources and extra mural activities (Kyei & Maboko, 2016). Despite these challenges, some learners manage to successfully transition through life and adapt to their new environments. Bourdieu's theory explains that

even though cultural capital is generally acquired in the home during childhood it can also be acquired through institutions such as schools and universities (Bourdieu, 1986). Learners from disadvantaged schools can acquire cultural capital from sources beyond their homes.

2.3 Garmezy's Resilience Theory

Norman Garmezy played a critical role in the field of developmental psychopathology focusing on child development, psychology and behaviour genetics (Masten & Cicchetti, 2012). His research on resilience has revolutionised the understanding of what it takes to positively change the trajectories of individuals from disadvantaged backgrounds (Masten & Cicchetti, 2012; Zimmerman, 2013). Learners who are exposed to risk factors within their communities, for example poverty and a lack of resources, are generally negatively impacted (Garmezy, 1991). These risk factors can significantly hamper the learner's development in multiple ways (Garmezy, 1991). Garmezy's resilience theory explores how some individuals disrupt their anticipated trajectories by overcoming the negative risk factors they encountered whilst growing up (Zimmerman, 2013). Garmezy did not discount the stress experienced by learners who grow up in disadvantaged backgrounds with constant risk exposure. In building resilience, his research addressed learner's development of stress resistance as a way of coping (Garmezy et al. 1984). The ability to cope with stress varies significantly across advantaged and disadvantaged households (Garmezy, 1971). Developing stress resistance demonstrated the learner's capacity to develop adaptive behaviours which enabled them to remain productive and ultimately achieve their goals (Garmezy et al., 1984). Garmezy sought to find solutions that prevented the onset of physical, mental and emotional distress instead of only focusing on treatment (Garmezy, 1971). His view was that between government and society there were initiatives that could be implemented and maintained to minimise or prevent distress and disorders from developing. These initiatives included: quality education, support for schools to enhance learners social and cognitive competence and, economic security for citizens which would insure family stability (Garmezy, 1971).

Garmezy's Resilience Theory provides valuable insights on why some learners manage to become healthy, successful adults despite their disadvantaged backgrounds (Zimmerman, 2013). Learners from disadvantaged schools can develop academic resilience despite their circumstances and go on to achieve success and a higher socioeconomic status than their

parents (Garmezy, 1991). The participants in this study attended tertiary educational institutions and succeeded despite the challenges they encountered along their journeys. Many learners from disadvantaged backgrounds are unable to escape the impact of the risk factors they encounter during childhood. Growing up in a disadvantaged environment increases the risk of dropping out of school and ultimately limits one's access to employment opportunities (Garmezy, 1991). Research consistently highlights individual differences and protective factors as key factors in overcoming adversity and stress (Garmezy, 1991; Rutter, 1985; Howard et al., 1999).

Protective factors are described as influences that alter an individual's response to environmental challenges or adversities that can produce unsuccessful or maladaptive outcomes (Rutter, 1985). They include external elements and individual traits that protect an individual from the risk exposure and help them become successful adults (Garmezy, 1991; Rutter, 1985; Howard et al., 1999). Protective factors exist within a child's world internally through their individual traits, and externally within their family, school and community (Garmezy, 1991; Rutter, 1985; Howard et al., 1999). Protective factors include supportive and caring adults (including parents, extended family, teachers, church and community members); institutions (including churches and schools); and individual traits (such as personal agency and stress resistance), (Garmezy, 1991; Rutter, 1985; Zimmerman, 2013).

Key attributes associated with external protective factors are cohesion, care, warmth and support (Garmezy, 1991; Howard et al., 1999). Adults and institutions exhibiting these attributes help shield learners from the adverse effects of the recurring risk factors they experience in their environments. Families play a critical role in protecting learners from risk factors and contributing towards their healthy development (Zimmerman, 2013). Resilient learners' families generally display consistent cohesion, support, care, discipline and a strong belief in their ability to control the outcomes of their futures (Howard et al., 1999). Learners who grow up in homes that do not exhibit these traits receive protection through other caring and supportive adults in the community (Garmezy, 1991). The role of educational institutions should not be underestimated, irrespective of whether a school is disadvantaged or not, the school's culture, discipline, academic performance, dedicated teachers may positively contribute to learners developing resilience (Howard et al., 1999). Learners who do not have

external protective factors such as supportive and caring adults or institutions may still achieve future success. Their individual traits can foster the required resilience to succeed.

Individuals have different responses to stress and adversity and these responses could positively or negatively impact their future success (Rutter, 1985). An individual's traits may help them buffer the effects of the risk factors they are exposed to. An individual's development and traits are impacted by multiple factors including genetics and environment (Rutter, 1985). When in disadvantaged schools, learners need to put in the required effort to achieve their desired outcomes despite the limited resources. Rural and township schools often lack the required teaching resources which negatively impact the learners performance (Sumida & Kawata, 2021). A key individual trait for success is personal agency, individuals with this trait set their own goals to succeed and have a sense of autonomy (Garmezy, 1991). Those with personal agency are intentional towards achieving their goals despite the circumstances (Bandura, 2006). Even in the absence of the other protective factors, having personal agency can lead to successful outcomes as these individuals do not let their disadvantaged circumstances consume them (Bandura, 2006).

This theory is instrumental in unpacking the narratives of each participant and understanding which protective factors influenced their successful outcomes. The development of resilience in learners from disadvantaged education backgrounds could positively influence their success outcomes as their environment may not improve at a desired pace. Understanding the impact of protective factors is crucial to providing input into the development of micro-level interventions to increase resilience and the overall success rate of learners from disadvantaged education backgrounds.

2.4 Bourdieu's Social Reproduction Theory

Pierre Bourdieu's research on social reproduction explores the significance of cultural capital and how it is acquired (Bourdieu, 1986; Willekens & Lievens, 2014). Bourdieu highlighted how the social structure of inequality is impacted by the unequal spreading of resources (Farid et al., 2021). Education and family are both key contributors to the accumulation and transfer of wealth and cultural capital (Gunn, 2005). The theory explains how individuals from diverse

backgrounds can achieve disparate outcomes from conducting the same activities (Claussen & Osborne, 2012). Educational policies implemented during Apartheid put Black learners at a disadvantage due to the limited resources allocated to Black schools (McKeever, 2017). Learners in township and rural schools still experience educational inequality years after the end of Apartheid (McKeever, 2017).

Bourdieu's Social Reproduction Theory unpacks the concepts of 'habitus' and 'cultural capital' in assessing the roles of education and social mobility (Claussen & Osborne, 2012). Habitus refers to social and cultural practices, values and behaviours associated with how members of social groups interact with each other (Claussen & Osborne, 2012). Habitus may also be considered as how individuals view the world and their place in it (Dumais, 2002). Cultural capital is a power resource used by groups to maintain privileged status or enhance their status (Dumais, 2002). Cultural capital comprises of cultural knowledge, cultural competence, cultural assets, language, learnt social behaviours and credentials associated with these groups that influence success and social class in each generation (Dumais, 2002; Farid et al., 2021). Bourdieu classified three types of cultural capital, embodied (cultural socialisation through the family), institutionalised (acquired through institutions such as schools or universities) and objectified (exposure to cultural objects such as pianos, art and books), (Bourdieu, 1986). Institutionalised cultural capital is transmitted through educational institutions and includes formal recognition or qualifications (Edgerton & Roberts, 2014).

Education is considered as a social ladder with the ability to elevate an individual's socioeconomic status to middle or upper class (Gunn, 2005). Over and above the qualifications obtained, educational institutions expose individuals to cultural activities and social capital (Willekens & Lievens, 2014). Educational institutions provide a platform to build networks, shape acceptable behaviours, polish language skills and accents (Gunn, 2005). Tertiary education is even more beneficial as it opens doors to influential and higher paying jobs (DiMaggio & Mohr, 1985). Typically, children from families of a higher social class are sent to well-resourced schools giving them a strong foundation which sets them up for success. These families generally plan their children's activities and experiences in a way that fosters and encourages them to become successful adults (Davies & Rizk, 2017). This theory highlights the importance of education in improving one's socioeconomic and social status.

Access to quality education sets generations up for future success and better opportunities in the workplace (Farid et al., 2021).

Parents education levels and status offer additional benefits such as access to their networks and the ability to guide and mentor their children on their future plans (Bourdieu, 1986; Willekens & Lievens, 2014). Throughout life, family connections help secure jobs and mentorship which positively impact on an individual's socioeconomic status (Gunn, 2005; Farid et al., 2021). Learners from educated families are more likely to experience educational success due to the continuous support from home as their parents understand school requirements and reward systems (Davies & Rizk, 2017). Middle and upper-class households often provide their children with early training on multiple skills such as early reading, language skills, appearance and social etiquette (Gunn, 2005). These skills give their children an advantage in building social capital and mobility (Gunn, 2005). Social capital and mobility refer to the intergenerational movement of individuals through social classes, educational systems, business, and the workplace (Davies & Rizk, 2017). Even with the expansion of tertiary education opportunities, top universities are usually dominated by students from middle-class and upper-class families (Bourdieu, 1996). Students in the context of this study are individuals attending tertiary institutions such as Universities. In SA, Black people have the lowest percentage completion rates for grade 12 across all population groups (Statistics SA, 2024). This reduces the chances of learners from Black families having the home advantage from their parents as they are less likely to have tertiary education.

With family and education being the main sources of accumulating cultural capital (Gunn, 2005), learners from disadvantaged educational backgrounds often have fewer opportunities of exposure compared to their privileged peers. Education has become a crucial component of cultural capital as it maintains a high social class in the future generations to come (Gunn, 2005). Tertiary educational institutions provide individuals with opportunities to accumulate cultural capital beyond their communities by interacting with individuals from diverse backgrounds. With cultural capital, comes status and association with certain groups and opportunities (DiMaggio & Mohr, 1985). The ability to acquire cultural capital from sources such as educational institutions, whilst navigating life's challenges provides hope for those from disadvantaged backgrounds.

This theory is instrumental in unpacking the narratives of each participant and understanding how they navigated their circumstances to achieve success. This includes the participants experiences of transitioning from high school to tertiary and then to the workplace. Participants existed in different worlds prior to attending tertiary institutions with their own set of social rules requiring them to adjust accordingly to succeed. Becoming successful professionals required the participants to learn how to exist outside their disadvantaged backgrounds.

2.5 Conclusion

The theoretical framework enhances the understanding of the factors that shaped the successful outcomes of the research participants. These theories are essential in analysing the data and drawing meaningful conclusions.

Chapter 3

Methodology

3.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines the research methods utilised when conducting this research. It includes the research aim, rationale for the study, research questions, research design, sampling methodology, participant profiles, instruments used for data collection, data analysis process and the ethical considerations.

3.2 Research aim

The aim of this research was to identify the key factors that influenced the professional success of a cohort of Black South Africans who attended township and rural high schools. The study focused on their experiences of navigating disadvantaged educational backgrounds to obtain a tertiary education and become successful professionals. This research provides valuable insights for the development of effective interventions focused on increasing the success rate of learners from disadvantaged schools. These interventions should focus on improving these learners socioeconomic status when they become adults through increasing their high school success rate, increasing their tertiary application and graduation rate, increasing the number of Black professionals entering the workplace and increasing their earning potential to reach middle class and above.

3.3 Method

a. Research design

This was a qualitative study which focused on the lived experiences of Black professionals who attended disadvantaged high schools, obtained degrees or diplomas, and now earn more than R22 000 a month. Qualitative research was the chosen approach as it was the most appropriate to assess the participants' lived experiences holistically (Zelčāne & Pipere, 2023). A narrative thematic analysis approach was selected as it allowed for the capturing of nuanced data which may have been overlooked in a quantitative study. This approach emphasises the importance of meaning and storytelling through data analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2019). Using interviews allowed the researcher to obtain comprehensive data on essential points which allowed for a more thorough analysis to address the research questions. Qualitative research

studies have increased rapidly, with their insights being deemed valuable for psychology and social science studies (Zelčāne & Pipere, 2023).

b. Sampling approach

A purposeful sampling approach was used initially, followed by a snowballing approach, to increase the number of participants for the sample. The snowballing approach involved finding additional participants who met the study criteria through referrals from existing participants (Palinkas et al., 2013). The sample selection criteria for this study was the following: Black African, attended a rural or township high school, obtained a degree or diploma from a tertiary institution, working as a professional, and earning more than R 22 000 per month. A total of 13 participants were recruited through referral from the researchers current and former colleagues, book club and social circles.

c. Study participants

The 13 participants represented five provinces in SA with ages ranging from 33 to 50. There was representation from both rural and township high schools. The table below summarises each participant’s profile.

Table: Participant profiles

Participant pseudo name	Age	High school attended	High school province	Highest tertiary qualification	Current job title	Salary above R22000
1. Akani	42	Rural	Limpopo	Honours	Senior Management	Yes
2. Relebohile	49	Township	North West	Masters	Senior Management	Yes
3. Kutlwano	39	Township	Gauteng	Honours	Senior Engineer	Yes
4. Zakhele	50	Rural	KwaZulu Natal	Masters	Executive	Yes

Participant pseudo name	Age	High school attended	High school province	Highest tertiary qualification	Current job title	Salary above R22000
5. Kgothatso	37	Township	North West	Honours	Middle Management	Yes
6. Buhle	49	Rural	KwaZulu Natal	Degree	Middle Management	Yes
7. Khensani	38	Township & Rural	Limpopo	Diploma	Senior Management	Yes
8. Rhulani	39	Rural	Limpopo	Honours	Middle Management	Yes
9. Sibusiso	48	Township	KwaZulu Natal	Masters	Executive	Yes
10. Kwezi	42	Rural	Eastern Cape	Masters	Senior Lecturer	Yes
11. Asanda	46	Rural	Eastern Cape	Diploma	Management	Yes
12. Phumlani	35	Township	Gauteng	BTech	Specialist	Yes
13. Nkosazana	33	Township	Gauteng	Honours	Middle Management	Yes

d. Data collection

Data was collected through interviews conducted by the primary researcher using a semi-structured interview guide. Participants were allowed to respond in English, Zulu or Sotho to allow them to fully express their experiences in the language they were most comfortable with. Interviews were conducted online or face-to-face in various locations depending on the participants preference. All interviews were recorded with the interview duration varying between 22 and 87 minutes. Refer to the table below for the interview duration per participant and the interview locations.

Table: Interview duration and location

Participant pseudo name	Interview duration in minutes	Interview location
1. Akani	23:26	Online
2. Relebohile (35:41)	35:41	Face to face: Roodepoort
3. Kutlwano (41:09)	41:09	Online
4. Zakhele (35:06)	35:06	Online
5. Kgothatso (31:39)	31:39	Online
6. Buhle (27:22)	27:22	Online
7. Khensani (22:10)	22:10	Face to face: Randburg
8. Rhulani (40:27)	40:27	Online
9. Sibusiso (36:49)	36:49	Online
10. Kwezi (38:35)	38:35	Online
11. Asanda (49:09)	49:09	Online
12. Phumlani (86:31)	86:31	Online
13. Nkosazana (48:58)	48:58	Online

The semi-structured interview guide consisted of the following questions:

- a. Tell me about your experience as a learner in a township or rural high school.
- b. What did you want to be when you were in high school and how did you end up studying your chosen degree or diploma?
- c. What role did your community play in your success (for example family, teachers, role models)? If none, who else influenced you in your career and academic plans?
- d. How did you stay focused and end up achieving what you have today?
- e. What do you feel needs to be done to increase the success rate of learners who attend township or rural high schools?

e. Data analysis

A narrative thematic analysis was conducted to allow for a holistic analysis and understanding of each participant's story (Zelčāne & Pipere, 2023). Participants' narratives were manually reviewed by conducting a narrative thematic analysis to identify the key factors which influenced their success. Narrative inquiry allows individuals the opportunity to tell their

stories, which are then translated into narratives representing meaningful experiences (Weiss & Johnson-Koenke, 2023). A thematic analysis is a flexible approach that acknowledges the researcher's role in selecting the themes and requires critical reflection into biases and privilege (Braun & Clarke, 2019).

A narrative approach to the thematic analysis allows for themes to be explored according to the participants' narratives of their experiences (Weiss & Johnson-Koenke, 2023). An inductive approach was followed for the generation of themes, which meant that the narratives were used to dictate the themes, rather than the researcher's preconceived ideas of the topic (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The narrative thematic analysis followed the 6 phases defined by Braun & Clarke (2006). The first phase was gaining a thorough understanding of the data through review and assessment (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This was followed by codes being generated based on the patterns identified in the data. These codes were then reviewed to extract the key themes that emerged. Once the themes were identified, they were critically reviewed and refined based on the key focus areas. The selected themes were then clearly articulated and appropriately named. Once the themes were finalised, the research report was documented, explaining each theme identified from the data analysed (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

3.4 Ethical considerations

Ethical clearance was obtained from the Human Research Ethics Committee of WITS. Only once approval was obtained from the committee did the data collection and analysis take place. Participation in the study was completely voluntary. Prior to participation, participants were provided with an information participation sheet which explained the purpose of the study and their role as a participant. Before the interviews began, the background and overall aim of the study were explained to each participant. This allowed each participant an opportunity to ask any clarification questions related to the study. Written consent was obtained from each participant before data was collected.

Confidentiality, but not anonymity, was guaranteed. Participants' identity and identifiable data was kept confidential and anonymised throughout the study. Pseudo names were used for each participant and school names were not included. Data was stored on devices which were password protected and only accessible to the researcher throughout the research process.

Data will be retained for a minimum of five years post completion of this study. This retention period is intended to ensure that sufficient evidence is available to address any queries regarding the validity of the research. These queries may arise from various sources throughout the process of disseminating the study's findings across various platforms. Maintaining access to the data during this period supports the ability to respond to any concerns related to the validity or reliability of the results.

3.5 Limitations for salary criteria verification

For the participants identified through the snowballing sample approach, the researcher was unable to verify that the participants' monthly income was above R 22 000 due to salary sensitivity. All participants occupied senior roles in their respective organisations and the researcher therefore relied on their integrity to confirm that they met the research requirements. Despite the limitations stated, there needs to be a starting point in building knowledge aligned to the research aim.

3.6 Conclusion

The methodology outlined in this chapter ensured that a systematic approach was followed in identifying the key factors that contributed to the participants success.

Chapter 4

Detailed Narrative Thematic Analysis Process

4.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines the process followed by the researcher in conducting the narrative thematic analysis. This includes the process of collecting data, reviewing the data, identifying codes and themes.

4.2 Collecting the data

A narrative thematic approach was required to allow each participant the opportunity to present their unique story (Weiss & Johnson-Koenke, 2023). Narrating personal stories comes naturally, as human beings have told and listened to stories their whole lives (Wong & Breheny, 2018). During each interview, the participants fondly told their personal stories of navigating success from their respective disadvantaged primary and high schools. Riessman (2008) described the interview process as a narrative occasion. This process of sharing their stories gave each participant the ability to narrate the series of events highlighting what shaped where they are today (Wong & Breheny, 2018).

The process of identifying the themes post collecting the narratives, followed the six phases defined by Braun & Clarke (2006). The first step is understanding and acquainting oneself with the data. Initial codes are then generated and used for the next phase of searching for initial themes. The initial themes are then reviewed, refined and the final themes are determined. The research report is then documented with the supporting extracts for each theme (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

4.3 Getting acquainted with the data (phase one)

Listening to the narratives, transcribing them and reading through them multiple times allowed for a process of familiarisation with the data. Reading through the interview transcripts several times revealed initial ideas on how to theme the data. There were 13 transcripts in total, each with unique stories. However, common threads of how the individuals navigated their disadvantaged backgrounds kept emerging. Each participants' story was detailed, which

allowed for a meaningful analysis with rich data. Through reading and listening to the interviews, common threads that began to emerge were noted down and continuously refined throughout the process.

4.4 Generating initial codes (phase two)

The initial codes identified were based on what was said in the data. This initial coding was based on the notes taken during the process of the researcher getting acquainted with the data. Reading the interviews and the common threads noted enabled a more seamless process of generating initial codes.

Using an inductive approach to developing themes allowed for multiple reiterations of the ideas identified. The principles of Bourdieu’s Social Reproduction Theory and Garnezy’s Resilience Theory continuously appeared through the data analysis, with the theories often overlapping in the ideas identified. The initial codes are defined in the table below, supported by quotes from the data.

Table: Initial codes

Code	Theoretical framework link	Sample quotations justifying codes
1. The participant’s humble beginnings (schooling environment, career guidance, inequality)	Bourdieu	a. <i>‘So, I moved from a black black township school to a bit of a mixed township school with a slightly different culture... It wasn't a Model C, but it was acted like a Model C.’</i> – Relebohile

Code	Theoretical framework link	Sample quotations justifying codes
2. The role played by the community in their success (family, church, broader community)	Bourdieu and Garnezy	<p>a. <i>'So, they didn't really go to school but they understood the value of education, so they made sure all of us went to school and we didn't miss school. So, I got that from them.'</i> – Rhulani</p> <p>b. <i>'...especially my church community... they really encouraged education. And I remember beginning of every year, like when we are about to leave for school, there will be collections for... kids that are going to tertiaries. So, when you leave, you will have something.'</i> – Buhle</p>
3. Exposure (media, role models, school camps or excursions, extra mural activities)	Bourdieu	<p>a. <i>'And I don't know how to explain it, but once the mind is opened to certain things, it's very difficult to live in, in situations where you feel like your mind is closing up quite a bit. The conversations are different, what people are asking of you...It's like two different worlds, almost.'</i> – Kgothatso</p> <p>b. <i>'When Sizwe Nxasana was appointed as CEO of Telkom, you know, KZN was rejoicing, you know. The guys from the office were like, "Hey, he's from Umlazi," you know. "He's from Umlazi. He's one of the first few CAs in the..." Ss]o there's a black guy who is now running Telkom, you know, and he's from here. Ok, so this thing is doable... You had a glimpse of hope because there were those people...'</i> – Sibusiso</p>

Code	Theoretical framework link	Sample quotations justifying codes
4. Determination (self-agency, aspirations and dreams of a better future, resilience)	Garmezy	<p>a. <i>'...loosely nje, I would say poverty is very much a mindset and that's why people don't make it out. You actually have to have grit far beyond your circumstances to do much better for yourself...'</i> – Nkosazana</p> <p>b. <i>'Once you hit high school, you start to know that the only way out of that place is through education.'</i> – Akani</p>
5. Transitioning (university transition, workplace transition, language barriers, cultural capital, adjustment)	Bourdieu	<p>a. <i>'...now I go to varsity, sho the struggle! Then you go to university, there's computers, you've never seen a computer.'</i> – Khensani</p> <p>b. <i>'I met some friends and (there were a lot of people) that went to marketing. I think they were also like from a rural environment. Because they were also attracted by the name... Yes, we only got to understand the course that we were doing as we, we all... like when we started doing it.'</i> – Asanda</p>
6. How to get more success stories from learners in township and rural schools	Bourdieu and Garmezy	<p>a. <i>'... say, ok, these are the possibilities and then tell our stories.'</i> – Zakhele</p> <p>b. <i>'...the how part... Cause it's one thing to say dream big, but how do I dream big? ... 'Have a goal.' I don't know how to set a goal. How do I set it? ... Now they have got realistic information around them cause the thing is most of us as professionals, we don't share, and then we go, and then those kids they also now have to struggle.'</i> – Phumlani</p>

4.5 Searching for themes in the data (phase three)

Post defining the initial codes, the process of identifying the initial themes commenced. This process required additional analysis to ensure that the themes adequately captured what emerged from the interviews. Each participant’s unique journey to success was supported by a rich narrative and the key goal was not to lose the meaning and spirit of their stories in the themes captured. The table below reflects the initial six themes and their supporting sub-themes.

Table: Initial six themes

Theme	Sub-themes
1. Narratives of their humble beginnings (Years when they were in school.)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. School environment b. Discipline c. Teachers (dedication, overwhelmed) d. Inequality (resource limitations, class size, labs, computers, textbooks) e. Choosing a career
2. Narratives of community (It takes a village to raise a child)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Family (parental education, siblings, support, discipline) b. Church (encouragement) c. Broader community
3. Narratives of exposure (If you can see it, you can dream it)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Smart learners (Opportunities not available for other learners.) b. Media (television, newspapers etc.) c. Role models d. Access (guidance, wealth, cars etc.) e. Extra mural activities (camps, interacting with other schools etc.)
4. Narratives of determination (Knowing there is more out there)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Aspirational capital (hopes and dreams) b. Resilience c. Personal agency

Theme	Sub-themes
5. Narratives of transitioning (A whole new world)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. University b. No longer being the smartest kid c. Workplace d. Social capital (English, confidence, network etc.) e. Adjustment (foundation, technology, adjustment)
6. Narratives of future changes (Paving the road for success)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Focus (Exposure to what is possible.) b. Equalising the playing field c. Giving learners access to opportunities d. Mindset shifts

4.6 Reviewing themes (phase four)

Upon further scrutiny, the themes went through multiple revisions in an attempt to capture what came through from the data in relation to the theoretical framework within which this research is grounded. The refinement of the themes occurred on multiple occasions and eventually the final themes emerged. These were narrowed down to four main themes. There is no guide on the number of refinements required to get to the perfect theme. However, a researcher must not get stuck in endless re-coding (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

4.7 Defining and naming final themes (phase five)

Naming the final themes supported by their sub-themes provided a final opportunity to review whether they truly captured the essence of the participants' narratives of success. The identification of the story told by each theme and ensuring it was aligned to the overall story being told, was of critical importance (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This alignment is what drove the multiple revisions during the process of identifying the initial themes. The final themes identified captured how the participants were able to navigate their disadvantaged backgrounds and become the successful people that they are today. There was also a logical flow to the way the themes were ordered to ensure that the reader has an appreciation of the participants' backgrounds and the various aspects that played a role in their success. The final themes and sub-themes identified are captured in the table below.

Table: Final themes

Themes	Sub-themes
1. Navigating educational barriers with the help of protective factors (Garmezy's Resilience Theory)	a. Inequality b. Personal agency c. Family support d. Community support e. Discipline
2. Acquiring cultural capital and social mobility (Bourdieu's Social Reproduction Theory)	a. School's role in building cultural capital b. English proficiency for social mobility c. Transitioning from disadvantaged schools
3. Dreaming beyond reality (Garmezy's Resilience Theory and Bourdieu's Social Reproduction Theory)	a. Dreams of a better future b. Role models, inspirational figures and mentors

4.8 Producing the report (Phase six)

The data collected was rich with quotations which supported the key themes. The main challenge was selecting the most impactful quotations which would adequately support each theme and the objectives of the research report. The results and discussions have been adequately documented to provide narratives which bring the themes to life.

4.9 Conclusion

Understanding the narrative thematic analysis approach provides the reader with an understanding of how the research findings were identified and interpreted.

Chapter Five

Results and Discussion

5.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines the results identified through assessing the participants narratives and the supporting discussions. The narratives are explored through the three main themes identified in chapter four and the supporting sub-themes.

5.2 Theme one - Navigating educational barriers with the help of protective factors (Garmezy's Resilience Theory)

Protective factors were defined by Garmezy to explain why some adults can progress from disadvantaged backgrounds and lead a better-quality life (Garmezy, 1991). Even in the face of inequality and adversity, protective factors can shield learners from their reality and help them aspire to do more (Garmezy, 1991). Each participant's story reflected the positive role of protective factors in their life, whether internal or external. This theme has five sub-themes which are rooted in Garmezy's Resilience Theory, namely inequality, personal agency, family support, community support and discipline. This theme reflects how the participants' foundations were laid, which later led to them becoming successful adults. It also highlights how the participants managed to navigate their schooling years and steer away from the risk factors which existed in their environments. Protective factors play a key role in the navigation of risk factors (Zimmerman, 2013). Despite the inequality experienced during the participants early schooling years, their personal agency and discipline sustained their drive to succeed. Family and community support guided them past obstacles and steered them towards opportunities for a brighter future.

5.2.1 The narratives of inequality – *'Sho... it was tough'*

The legacy of Apartheid has continued to affect Black learners through the ongoing educational inequality experienced in townships and rural areas (McKeever, 2017). Learners development may be negatively impacted when they are exposed to risk factors, for example inequality, poverty and a lack of resources, (Garmezy, 1991). The participants reflected on their personal experiences of inequality as a result of the ongoing aftereffects of Apartheid, which resulted in them experiencing multiple structural barriers. The inequality in education

has resulted in learners in township and rural schools performing worse academically than their counterparts in urban schools (Sumida & Kawata, 2021). This performance gap is impacted by socioeconomic conditions and a lack of resources in the disadvantaged schools (Sumida & Kawata, 2021). Even though the participants were from different generations, the challenges remained consistent, highlighting that transformation in rural and township schools was not happening at a rapid enough pace. They however did not allow the challenges to deter their ambitions. Instead they persevered knowing that their commitment to education would grant them access to better opportunities and a brighter future.. The participants reflected on some of the challenges experienced in getting to school:

- *'... but then sometimes it would get flooded and so were not allowed to go to school. But now, our school had prize giving, you have your attendance record ... So, you would get a certificate for that. So, we get to the bridge one day, then there's water overflowing and the principal says, 'No, ok we're going to cancel school.' I ran straight to the principal, I said 'Does this affect our attendance record?' – Zakhele*
- *'... on the rainy days at times we would pack uniform and the shoes in the school bag and walk with our normal clothes. Other than that, it will have meant (we will be wet at school).' – Buhle*
- *'The most difficult thing was like walking and then you had to cross a river. So, on the rainy season some days we couldn't go to school because of the river. We couldn't go to school if it was a rainy season.' – Asanda*
- *'...Sho it was, it was tough. Number one, from transport to school. Sometimes one will have to hike to school or walk like almost an hour from home to school, yes by that time you get to school you're tired when you come back as well, you're tired as well and you still have to do house chores on top of that.' – Khensani*

The rain did not deter the participants from going to school, they were determined to get an education. They learnt despite the resource constraints at their respective schools:

- *'If I think about the school before my high school that had nothing, we had classrooms and that was it.' – Kgothatso*

- *'We didn't have the best textbooks. We had to share textbooks, uummm, for the most part.'* – Nkosazana
- *'And then if you are there, to be honest with you, you don't know any better and you pretty much think that you are sorted and... I think it's probably common for people that come from rural areas especially where... you think that you are well off, that you don't need anything, that life is at home. I think you only start seeing the differences and probably the challenges... after you are out of that environment.'* – Kwezi

Learners also deal with socioeconomic challenges in their environments, including parents who are unable to provide for their basic needs such as food, uniform and stationery. This may result in them being vulnerable to bullying and various forms of exploitation (for example young girls being taken advantage of by older men). Garmezy's examined learners ability to manage stress as poor socioeconomic conditions increase their exposure to stressful events (Garmezy et al., 1984). Learners can develop stress resistance despite being exposed to events that can negatively impact them (Garmezy et al., 1984). Participants displayed traits of stress resistance in their ability to overcome their reality. They directly or indirectly experienced stress and inequality but still prioritised their education:

- *'When I started school there was no feeding scheme. A few years later, there was feeding schemes, so it did help a lot in terms of ensuring that there's enough kids coming to school because some people would just not come to school because they were not interested in school, but the feeding scheme would just make sure that kids come to school. Some just come to school to just get food, you know. I think it helped in terms of ensuring that everyone gets food...'* – Rhulani
- *'You only have that OK plastic bag as your school bag, that Tastic bag as your school bag, right, and then another dynamic that was challenging was that ummm... Guys it's break time. I remember my mother gave me pap and morogo, spinach, in a container of Rama. It was pap there and morogo there and it was break time and they said guys take our, your food, your food you put it on the table. Then we prayed. Then it's time to eat. I opened my lunchbox then jeses pap and morogo it's smelling! It's hot phela it's January. Yho, the laugh that I go! They laughed at me in the class,*

so they laughed at me. But anyway, we ate, we ate. That was my last day taking a lunch box to school.’ – Phumlani

- *‘And then ... I am growing up, so these dynamics now are a bit challenging because when I come back later you will find that when I get home, no food. The house is clean. You are so hungry.’* – Phumlani
- *‘...when I reflect and I think about some people that I went to school with, as I said, sometimes teachers cross the line, like if you’re not wearing uniform. Now, as an adult, I understand that it’s not your fault as a child because you have a parent who had to provide... the privilege of just being able to support the bare minimum... it saves you from quite a lot because that bullying has a huge impact. The humiliation of you don’t have school shoes, therefore stand this side...’* – Kgothatso
- *‘That’s where I was introduced to concepts of sugar daddies, looking nice, getting money from all of these people.’* – Nkosazana

Inequality, especially in education, has resulted in high illiteracy and increasing unemployment rates in South Africa (Kyei & Maboko, 2016). Participants provided narratives of inequality as they were burdened with multiple structural and personal challenges during their schooling years. Most of the challenges experienced by learners in disadvantaged schools are beyond their control and negatively affect their academic performance (Mouton et al. 2012). The learners are not always able to address structural barriers such as inadequate resources in their schools, or transport to get them to school daily. Growing up in townships and rural areas, and attending disadvantaged schools, keeps many marginalized, reducing their ability to improve their socioeconomic status in future (Farid et al., 2021).

Even though the participants went through experiences of inequality during their childhood, they carried a strong will to succeed. Research has shown that learners who grow up exposed to inequality and conditions that put them at a disadvantage, do not always repeat these patterns in their adult lives (Garmezy, 1991). The Resilience Theory’s protective factors are some of the key factors that make these learners different and allow them to escape their past and live a better life in their adulthood (Garmezy, 1991). Parents’ socioeconomic status also has an impact on their children as it affects their quality of life. The participants had to build resilience

at an early age to encourage themselves to continue with their schooling in the hope of a better future.

5.2.2 Narratives of personal agency – ‘...poverty is very much a mindset and that’s why people don’t make it out.’

Garmezy’s Resilience Theory highlights how protective factors, including personal agency, help individuals overcome the risk factors in their childhood which may limit their success (Garmezy, 1991). Even though the participants experienced challenges such as inequality they had a strong will to succeed and developed resilience which gave them an ability be productive regardless of the stress factors they were exposed to (Garmezy, 1971). Having personal agency as an individual’s traits helped participants buffer the effects of the risk factors they were exposed to (Rutter, 1985). Personal agency requires individuals to take accountability of their lives and set their own goals (Bandura, 2006). This was a common trait possessed by all the participants. They were intentional about having a better future and were not spectators of their own destinies. Their narratives reflected their unwavering determination to succeed regardless of their limitations. They knew that in order to change their circumstances, they had to be active participants in making it happen. From a young age they seemed to understand that they were the drivers of their success and that they needed to excel in school to secure a better future. The quotations below reflect traits of personal agency:

- ‘...loosely nje, I would say poverty is very much a mindset and that’s why people don’t make it out. You actually have to have grit far beyond your circumstances to do much better for yourself...’ – Nkosazana
- ‘I think this is something that just comes from within. Yes, family and structures around may help but then if it doesn't come from you, then then I don't think it's going to yield any good results.’ – Kwezi
- ‘You know, and it was entirely up to you. You know where you want to go... the biggest hindrance for us at the time, the learners of the time, was that we we did not... we were not exposed to the things that the kids of today are exposed to.’ – Sibusiso

- *“I always believe that like I can do better, I can do better and... even before I knew it, I’ve always believed in myself. Even before I realized that this was internal.” – Zakhele*

And:

- *‘But also, the fact that there were many of us at home, and yet not all of us succeeded, it also shows that individual character, you know, traits that if you're driven you... I mean since I was a child I just wanted to be a doctor, I just wanted to be a doctor, I didn't understand there was a doctor in mathematics or psychologist, I only knew one kind of doctor.’ – Zakhele*
- *‘...majority of my family they are teachers; it's teachers, nurses, police... I was like, uhu, I wanted more. I didn't know what that more is, but I just wanted something different.’ – Khensani*
- *‘...I learnt a lot about being a big dreamer and... being resilient and... being like, how do I put it... ... don't limit yourself.’ – Asanda*

The participants’ personal agency allowed them to set their goals, which in turn motivated them to excel in their education (Wills & Hofmeyr, 2019). They had strong aspirational capital through dreaming big about their prospects (Wills & Hofmeyr, 2019). They developed resilience as they knew that they were destined for greater things and did not belong in their childhood environments. Resilience is a trait that is developed throughout life and enables one to positively adapt and manoeuvre tough situations (Hanson & Gottesman, 2012). Even with the hardships and educational inequality they experienced, the participants did what needed to be done to progress. They had the discipline to keep focused on their schoolwork even in the face of peer pressure. The quotations below reflect how they knew they deserved better and were willing to put in the effort to succeed despite the challenges:

- *‘The reason why now you get these like professionals coming from rural areas. Honestly, there's something different about them. They’re actually the best in their... category.’ – Kwezi*
- *‘I think early on I knew that, you know, I just need to study. I can't be a criminal; I'll probably get killed. There's nothing about me that says I can steal anything, you know, and there were opportunities to be a criminal, but I'm like, no, I don't feel like*

this is what I want to do... it was out of the question for me. And I think, yeah... I was just fortunate that, you know, for some reason there were certain things that were happening around me where I just knew that I'm not going to do this... something as simple as smoking... you hang with friends and they all start smoking cigarette. And you sit there, you all talk and everything, and the cigarette keeps on moving around and then you just say, "No, I'm good." – Sibusiso

- *'I was never afraid to go against the... crowd. I was like... ok, you are going this way, not me.'* – Zakhele
- *'...like I would always go to the library. But I would always make sure I hide the books, so I would put my books underneath my shirt cause I don't want to be seen to be the only one carrying the backpack and going to study when everyone is running, preparing for war, so you can't be that guy. So, you hide your books, and you go.'* – Sibusiso
- *'I remember the one time I was marked and my math teacher gave me 76. I cried the whole week. My mom couldn't understand... 'You don't understand, I worked so hard. I think I need a remark,' and I was probably in Grade 4 and everyone was so confused guti why is my world falling apart.'* – Nkosazana
- *'And then the other part is me being inquisitive as well, wanting to know about things, you know, like most of the time when I watch TV. Like, I learnt most of my English from watching TV. Like paying attention, what is this word, what are they saying here, construction of sentences.'* – Rhulani

At a young age Phumlani had already started problem solving and breadwinning as his parents were struggling to provide for the family. Experiencing very difficult circumstances resulted in Phumlani developing resilience rapidly as his family's socioeconomic status threatened his livelihood (Musiello et al., 2024). He was forced into functioning as an adult and providing for his family from Grade one. Garmezy (1991), credited protective factors (including personal agency), as critical to minimising the transmission of parents lifestyle and socioeconomic status onto the next generation. Research emphasises the role that parents play in helping learners develop resilience (Musiello et al., 2024), and in many aspects, Phumlani became a parent and built his own resilience. Having personal agency is key in overcoming adversity where external

protective factors are lacking (Garmezy, 1991; Zimmerman, 2013). Amid being a breadwinner, he knew that excelling at school was non-negotiable. The quotations below reflect his resilience in his quest to reach his goals whilst juggling work and school from a young age:

- *'It was so much challenging, even you can see for my mother. She was struggling and for some reason I tried to grow up in my mind that, yazini, during weekends let me go and help in one yard, 'Hey guys, can I please clean for you?' Then they give you... it was nothing, man, just for you to survive. On the other hand, I want to be a child but I am unable to be a child because of the situation back home. So, after that, that was my Grade 1, that was me. In Grade 2, I remember in grade 2, January, there was this other older man, just by our home there, he used to sell chicken. And then he used to have spots around the playground, he had about five areas where he used to station chickens and he would put that thing ye chickens and maybe about 20 chickens and he would sell them there So now, this other day he said I want three boys who can do this. Then me and my brothers, there were three of us, so on Saturday we go there. He comes and picks us up around past 6 and then no we going to sell. He used to give us how much, uumm... R5, R5 per day.'* – Phumlani

And:

- *'So, my two older brothers, the big challenge that we faced was that they liked to please people out there instead of taking the money, let it help back home. It was something they were not doing. So then, what I did, I put my money, after I put my money, I think I managed to raise about R100 and then I gave it to my mom to go and buy simbas and sweets so that after school, it was my job to go out and sell and them come back.'* – Phumlani

And:

- *'It was not money that you can... no no no it was money to survive. I want uniform, then you buy, I want this, I want... Then on the other hand I am still pushing school but the life is very tough for me.'* – Phumlani

Phumlani had multiple jobs from when he was in grade one, navigating the adult world of employment. He was an active agent in his success, intentionally influencing and trying to improve his life circumstances (Bandura, 2006). In primary school many learners are sheltered,

protected, guided and supervised by their parents (Musiello et al., 2024). Even though Phumlani had older siblings, they did not have the same drive as he had. Throughout his schooling career, Phumlani was making decisions to ensure that his basic needs, as well as those of his family, were met:

- *'January going to Grade seven, this other lady came... this other guy he's looking for someone that he can hire for him to sell after school and stuff, and I was like, no I'm available.'* – Phumlani

And:

- *'That was Grade 7, now, I used to sell... there it was now Monday to Sunday. So basically, I go to school in the morning, get to school, immediately when the bell rings, I am out, I go home, I change. Get to the taxi, go to Mabopane station and then we used to sell potatoes, tomatoes, carrots, onions. There you find people calling, 'Hey tamati.' I used to do that now. That was my life now and I was earning R60 a week.'* – Phumlani

And:

- *'So now that money, now, I can tell you now that ever since I started working at the railway station the life even at home changed... Having a fulltime job, I can buy 12,5 (referring to maize meal)... I can buy. ... I remember even the first television at home was bought by me. I'm the first person that bought a television at home. My first bed, I bought it when I was doing standard 5, my first bed. I bought myself that... my brother, the one that I am after... I was also buying him uniform. So uniform was not a problem.'* – Phumlani

And:

- *'At home every time whenever it was Christmas, we knew that we would look at each other's eyes, nothing, pots empty, you know... It was the first time at home where we had a proper, decent Christmas. And ever since from then up until today, that was a life changing Christmas because of people even came from outside to help to finish this food.'* – Phumlani

The level of responsibility weighed heavily on him as he reflected on never having been a child. His aspirations of success kept him going even through the tough times:

- *'...there is something that I realised later that there is a trauma that I am having... I am an adult. I am a child at the same time.'* – Phumlani

And:

- *'I used to say, "Mina I don't belong here," ... and I used to tell my mother that... "You and dad chose this place but this is not me who chose to be here."'* – Phumlani

Nkosazana's mother had her as a teenager. She reflects on how she made her own decisions during her schooling years, as her mother was not that much older than she was and was also growing up alongside her. As a child, Nkosazana took initiative for her own future, which led to her success:

- *'...my mom had me when she was really young. So, for most part, we grew up together. So, whilst I was in primary and in middle school, she was also just trying to figure herself out and was working multiple jobs... I feel like most of my childhood, I'd tell them what I want.'* – Nkosazana

The participants did not focus on the challenges in their vicinity, but rather on progressing and doing what needed to be done to succeed. Individual traits such as personal agency and self-efficacy are key assets which influence future outcomes (Zimmerman, 2013). Not all their journeys were straightforward. They did not all attend school, achieve high marks and go straight to varsity and then get a job. They experienced setbacks which negatively affected them, but quitting was just never an option. The reflections below highlight some of the setbacks.

Asanda lost her dad during her matric year and had to upgrade her marks the following year to gain entrance to a higher education institution:

- *'The sad part is that when I was doing my matric my dad passed away. Like, it was in October... So that year, like... I didn't perform well, so I had to go for the*

following year, you know those days we had finishing school to improve your score.'

– Asanda

Relebohile dropped out of varsity but reflected on how he knew he had to get a masters. He did his qualification part time and obtained his masters:

- *'So, I went back to school for a period of eight years, studying, doing part time... Then I did a diploma in marketing... then I did my masters... because I was always going to have a master's, right.'* – Relebohile

Sibusiso's parents did not have the funds to send him to university when he finished high school. When funding became available later that year, he enrolled for a short course which is where he discovered his love for computers. He also ran out of funding when he started his degree at university, he then found work and continued studying part-time:

- *'...they had a bit of money around July and obviously by then the varsities are already running and you can't register mid-year. So, I took a course, public administration, because I just couldn't sit down. I didn't see myself sitting down.'* – Sibusiso

And:

- *'...and I did very well, you know. Unfortunately, I did not complete my national diploma. I had to go and work. I continued though, a year later, start off like, you know, part time studies for my, for my national diploma. But the beauty or the advantage was that I was already working in the computer space, so I knew exactly what was happening. So, it did help because now I have context on the work front. I understand exactly what programming is about and I could bring that knowledge to the classroom. So, it was quite interesting. And I was also in a class with people who were working. So, you know, you work with, you in the class with people who are working in some, but they were in different fields.'* – Sibusiso

Garnezy (1971) referred to learners who exhibited the participants characteristics as ‘keepers of the dream’ as they developed resilience and continues to adapt behaviours to reach their goals. These learners have goals and exhibit commitment to education, academic achievement (Garnezy, 1971). Garnezy (1991) highlighted key characteristics that stemmed from personal agency as a protective factor which included: the ability to set goals, reason, seek support and opportunities. The participants personal agency pushed them to see past their disadvantages, achieve academically and end up completing their tertiary qualifications. Individual traits such as personal agency helped learners buffer the effects of the disadvantaged environments they grow up in (Rutter, 1985). The participants personal agency was reflected through their internal drive and accountability for their own futures. Having this trait comes with a sense of autonomy where one takes responsibility for their life and does what is required to succeed (Garnezy, 1991). Bandura (2006) refers to individuals with agency as being proactive and able to self-organise, self-regulate, and self-reflect. Agency enables individuals to continuously evaluate their situation and, where required, identify alternative courses of action to reach their goals. Intentionality is a core building block of agency, whereby one devises plans to reach their goals (Bandura, 2006). Personal agency could be the most important of the protective factors as even with the external factors one may still not succeed. From a young age an individual can decide that they will do better than what they are exposed to in their environment. Their strong will to do better is fueled by hopes and dreams of success (aspirational capital) which strengthens their personal agency and their ability to succeed (Wills & Hofmeyr, 2019). Personal agency as a protective factor is one of the reasons why individuals can overcome their adversities and go on to have successful and progressive lives, regardless of where they started (Hanson & Gottesman, 2012). Personal agency does not exempt individuals from experiencing negative psychological effects through their exposure to risk factors but they find ways to continue moving forward towards their goals. Having a supportive family, however, may help cushion some of the psychological effects.

5.2.3 Narratives of family support – ‘... they didn't really go to school, but they understood the value of education’

Supportive, cohesive, and caring families are a vital protective factor (Garnezy, 1991). Family support emerged as a critical protective factor, buffering participants from the adverse effects of their environments and reinforcing their focus on education and their goals from an early age. Growing up in a supportive family environment increases positive attributes in learners

and helps maintain stability (Garmezy, 1991). Most participants described their families as advocates for education who supported them throughout their schooling years. The participants' parents valued education and provided the required support which disciplined participants to pursue their educational goals. High educational aspirations and hopes from caregivers create a co-agency with learners, increasing their success rates (Parker et al., 2021). The narratives below reflect the positive impact family support had on participants' pursuing their goals and achieving success:

- *'My mom worked night day. So, whatever she wanted, I was willing to give. So, she valued education. She wanted to see me do well, so I had a very, very big element of giving Mama what she wants. Like, so if my mom wants me to be in a certain level, I will be that because she was just, like, a crazy hard worker.'* – Kutlwano
- *'...but I think what drove us, maybe having parents who really believed in education, (because) there are so many people who dropped out, and in the rural areas (you know that) especially amantombazane (girls, as they go) dropping out after iprimary school (Standard 5) dropping out, dropping out to do whatever they want to do. Others go and get married, but having parents who believed in education...'* – Buhle
- *'I think my parents, especially my mother, was very involved. So, she would want to see your books, if you did your homework, how you're doing at school, that kind of stuff. So, like, a lot of us attended the same school, but I guess the level of support that you got from your parents and your siblings made a difference.'* – Zakhele
- *'And also, my father in particular, my father was supportive of I mean, it wasn't like in a way go to school type of thing... but whenever he saw that I had an interest in something, he would actively try to encourage it.'* – Kgothatso
- *'My goal was always studying, and towards the end of the year, the little that they had, they would reward when you're passing very well. So that also was motivating, you know, those Christmas clothes.'* – Khensani
- *'...she had always been a person who valued education and valued reading, uyabona.'* – Nkosazana (Reflecting on her grandmother's role in her success.)

And:

- *'...the thing that helped me is by the time I was... like I was six years old, my grandmother had already introduced newspapers to me... so I started reading uyabona like even read like stuff I don't understand. And then I'd ask like, "Yini irape (what is rape)?"'* – Nkosazana
- *'No, the family played a huge role, I think for me, even for me to have that confidence.'* – Kwezi

And:

- *'So, I think that culture of learning was just promoted within the household.'* – Kwezi
- *'But one of the biggest contributors of my success in my life ever since I grew up, up until today, was that I still live with... my mom she taught us to pray a lot! My mother she doesn't... like she'll tell you no matter how difficult it is, she'll tell you in the morning pray, at night she calls us as a family together, we pray all of us.'* – Phumlani

And:

- *'I think one of the biggest benefits that I got from my mother, she taught us to have so much kind hearts, as her kids.'* – Phumlani
- *'So, they didn't really go to school, but they understood the value of education, so they made sure all of us went to school and we didn't miss school. So, I got that from them.'* – Rhulani (Reflecting on his parents.)
- Having graduates in the family, or family who has been exposed to tertiary education is beneficial as guidance and support on tertiary related matters is available at home (Bourdieu, 1986; Willekens & Lievens, 2014). Some participants had family members who had been exposed to tertiary education. This strengthened the participants' educational aspirations, making their goals more attainable through the ongoing guidance and encouragement from family members: *'I really loved problem solving. The other thing is my uncle, he's late now, but he's he's one of the smartest people I've ever met and growing up, I always wanted to be like him and he was very innovative. I didn't have*

a word for it at the time... oh this is engineering or whatever... but he would do stuff like he would use (cardboard boxes) for eggs to block out noise... so he went to varsity but he didn't finish... When I went to varsity I'd come back with a problem like (thermodynamics and be like chapter 5 is difficult) and he would read it overnight and explain it to me the next day.' – Nkosazana

- *'What was interesting is that I think also what helped is that just having people around you that might have gone through the same experience, like I said, like for example, my siblings, even though they were in a different field, but at least they could guide, tell you about, "Ok, this is how you apply this and that."'* – Kwezi
- *'So, it was the thing with me and my siblings, my siblings, three of them they are older than me, all went to tertiary. And I think they had in a way set the bar that you also have to go to varsity. And also, my, my, my parents, it was a diploma back in the days but then they had also graduated. I would see the gowns there gathering dust in the wardrobe... at least that was a motivation for us. And it was also an expectation from home to say that if you get a decent pass... you go to tertiary, you don't have any other choice.'* – Kwezi
- *'...where I lived, there was a university nearby. Both my parents were professors at the university, so raised by academics.'* – Relebohile

The narratives below highlighted how the families made the necessary sacrifices for education:

- *'So luckily my family are very supportive, so my aunts, my uncles... So, when I finished matric, they saw my results as a family. They put their heads together; they were like, "No, we can't let our brilliant child just stay."'* – Khensani
- *'My mom was just like, "Ok, you wanna study, go to school. I'll figure it out." I don't know how she was gonna figure it out.'* – Kutlwano
- *'...I didn't have to worry about anything else, like food... knowing where I'm going to get food where I'm going to sleep. I was ok. I think that helped a lot because I was only focused on education...'* – Rhulani (Reflecting on his time at varsity living in his parents' house.)

Phumlani did not experience support from his father however he leveraged other protective factors. His family struggled financially after his father left, and this negatively impacted his childhood:

- *'So, my dad, it was this other day and he said, "Guys, ngiyabuya," (I'm coming back) and he was wearing a nice suit with a brown bag and then that was the day my dad was gone, left, and then we were left with my mother. So now that was primary (school)...'* – Phumlani

And:

- *'But now... the challenge that I realised at an early age was there was a lot of trauma, you know, being neglected. But I was not aware that this is a psychological effect. Because my dad is not around, my mother used to do this. And then also when I walk out before I even started school... now other kids they have a well-structured family, you know. They've got their clothes, us we are surviving with... if you have a trouser and a T-shirt... shoes are a luxury, you know. And on the other hand, when you look at it, my mom also the only thing she cares about is, "As long these kids will sleep at night having eaten something, I'm ok with it."'* – Phumlani

Family support positively influences learners' development and success, both in school-related and non-school-related aspects (Parker et al., 2021; Kantova, 2024). Garnezy's research on vulnerability and resilience describes how learners demonstrate the capacity to diverge from the socioeconomic trajectories of their families, with a significant number avoiding the repetition of their parent's patterns in adulthood (Garnezy, 1991). Growing up in disorderly families with ineffective methods of interaction contribute to dysfunctional behaviour in adulthood (Garnezy, 1971). Active parental involvement sends positive signals to learners about their future (Hango, 2007). Current literature highlights the importance of parents' tertiary education credentials for learners success (Davis-Kean, 2005; Eccles, 2005; Kantova, 2024). This research highlighted the benefits of family support regardless of education credentials. In 2022, only 11% of the South African working age population (age 15 to 64) had a tertiary qualification (Statistics SA, 2022). The education challenges in South Africa make family support a key protective factor to promote for learners' success.

Caregiver involvement in a learners' life positively impacts academic success, provides stability and minimises the negative effects of financial challenges (Schoon et al., 2021; Davis-Kean, 2005). Support from caregivers helps learners, especially those facing economic hardships, to develop resilience and to succeed (Hango, 2007; Garnezy et al., 1984; Garnezy, 1991). Support from caring adults outside the family also positively benefits learners and serves as a protective factor where there is no family support (Garnezy, 1991).

5.2.4 Narratives of community support - *'Where I lived, there was a university nearby... that environment, it's like, when, when there was a graduation, it would be televised.'*

Garnezy's resilience theory acknowledges external support from communities, including institutions such as churches, as a protective factor which helps learners in overcoming challenges (Garnezy, 1991). Communities offer learners extra support and motivation to achieve their goals (Parker et al., 2021). Participants highlighted the community's influence during their childhood, including the church, neighbours, and other supportive individuals. The concept of ubuntu, where there is interdependency with others, was felt through communities displaying care for the wellbeing and success of the participants (Etiyibo, 2017). Garnezy's Resilience Theory highlights that 'caring adults' (such as community members) function as protective factors through offering learners support and care during childhood (Garnezy, 1991). The community support experienced by the participants either strengthened the positive impact of already supportive families or filled the void where familial support was inadequate. This support included encouragement, mentorship and practical assistance providing a crucial buffer which enabled participants to navigate the challenges associated with their disadvantaged backgrounds. Khensani, Buhle and Phumlani acknowledged the role of their church communities specifically:

- *'I will say also, coming from a Christian background as well, that kept me grounded. I was always involved Sunday School right through, so the church as well played a big role. I think they helped to also shape where I am today because then they will tell us that God has bigger plans for us and it's not plans to, to break us. It's plans to make us prosper. So, I always heard that, although you like, they're talking about this God that you don't even see.'* – Khensani

Buhle's church collected and distributed funds to university students annually to help with their expenses. These funds helped her in tertiary:

- *'... especially my church community... my father was a church minister, but he was not placed in our community. He was working somewhere else. But the church that I went to, they really encouraged education. And I remember beginning of every year, like when we are about to leave for school, there will be collections for ... kids that are going to tertiaries. So, when you leave, you will have something.'* – Buhle

And:

- *'So the church ... really played a big role in, in helping us with our education.'* – Buhle

Switching churches benefited Phumlani by connecting him with professionals who inspired and mentored him:

- *'So, in my church at home, bona (they), there is no one who is educated there at all!'* – Phumlani

And:

- *'I went there and then when I got to that church, I discovered there that there are a couple of people that are professionals.'* – Phumlani

The participants' narratives clearly reflected community involvement. Due to their school performance and parents' good reputation, the community held the participants to higher standards than other learners. They were expected to succeed and were held accountable to do well by individuals outside their families:

- *'... you know, when your parents are (church goers and they work) people they always look ... expect the best things from you in the community.'* – Asanda

And:

- *'...community we were like, I think... we were put under a pressure, that we need to be like... bring change in the community.'* – Asanda (Reflecting on her community's expectations of her and her siblings.)

And:

- *'They expected a lot from us.'* – Asanda
- *'I think the one that came and said, "Ok, they need someone at railway, 'ne, ummm, I forgot her name, man. That lady for me, 100% she played a big role!"* – Phumlani (Reflecting on his neighbour who got him a job selling vegetables at the railway station.)
- *'The neighbours as well... based on the type of child that I was and stuff like that. So, I think I had gotten a lot of support, yeah, growing up.'* – Nkosazana

And:

- *'And then through my community I didn't have like a solid, I could say, ok, I wanna be like the teacher or whatever. But they were very supportive of me. To a point when I think on TV for something it was debate or whatever, there were squads of people that used to watch me. And then like when I come back it's a huge thing like, 'Oh, (Nkosazana) was on TV,'yadi yadi yada... even when I got my matric results, I will never forget that day... my dad didn't live far from my mom. He was like friends with taxi drivers or whatever. I passed and I was like, "Hey, I got so many distinctions." He made sure like that whole comradery nje!'* – Nkosazana (Reflecting on the community support she received for her achievements.)

Kwezi acknowledged his community but was also very realistic in the type of support they could give as they had limited knowledge on the field he wanted to pursue, accounting:

- *'So... you understand that even if the community wants to assist... we were venturing into an unknown, unchartered waters...'* - Kwezi

Relebohile grew up in a township with a university, making tertiary education non-negotiable. The community encouraged and celebrated educational milestones and this made him want to go to university. The quotes below capture his conversation with the researcher about his community's influence on his desire to study further:

- Relebohile: *'So firstly, university was not an option, like I had to go to university, it's not... that I didn't apply my mind and then decide that I'm going to university.'*
- Researcher: *'It was something that you always knew you had to do?'*

- Relebohile: *'Yes, so you do you do matric. After matric you go to university.'*
- Researcher: *'Is this based on family or based on your surroundings?'*
- Relebohile: *'I would say surroundings.'*
- Researcher: *'Surroundings in terms of the community?'*
- Relebohile: *'Yes. Where I lived, there was a university nearby... that environment, it's like, when, when there was a graduation, it would be televised.'*
- Researcher: *'Ok. So, the whole community is involved. That is so beautiful!'*
- Relebohile: *'The whole community, everybody's watching the graduations live.'*
- Researcher: *'That is so beautiful!'*
- Relebohile: *'Yeah. And then after that, every fourth house has a tent in front, celebrating whoever was graduating.'*
- Researcher: *'That is such an amazing community.'*
- Relebohile: *'Ja. So, graduation season was... So, you grow up with people who are graduating from university. It's just a thing that is going to happen. You don't have to even have to think...'*

The community's support extended beyond the participants' immediate neighbourhood. A stranger assisted Phumlani with his tertiary funding application. The funding enabled him to attend tertiary as his parents could not afford to fund him:

- *'I was so so so fortunate when I was in Grade 12. I went to enquire about NSFAS. Now this lady, her name is (name of lady at funding office.) This lady said, "No, I will help you. Take my numbers. I will definitely help you. Where you from?" I told her the whole background. She was like touched and she was like, "Bona (look) dude, come rain or shine, me I'm going to... make sure that... the university accepts you. I am going to take your file and make sure that wena (you) you get funded.'* – Phumlani

And:

- *'She was working at NSFAS offices as one of the administrators and she really did help me a lot.'* – Phumlani

Buhle bumped into her neighbour whilst trying to secure a spot in a tertiary institution. He assisted with her application by helping her to choose an engineering qualification and provided her with support in tertiary:

- *'...when I got there, as I was fumbling around, I just met one, one guy from my neighbourhood who happened to be doing second year there.'* – Buhle

And:

- *As I was talking about (neighbour), he was just another student. But (his influence) even now when I look back... even us students, we can play a role by (lifting someone who is behind me) even just checking up on them and motivating. So, I think those are maybe some of the small things that can be crucial in shifting up and encouraging the young ones (from the)... rural and township schools... – Buhle*

Communities are essential to raising resilient learners as they provide the opportunities to interact with others who serve as advisors, role models and friends (Seccombe, 2002). Support from adult community members outside the family contributes positively to learners wellbeing and serves as a protective factor which fosters learners success in life (Garmezy, 1991). In the absence of family support, community support can be a substitute which shields the child from the risk factors in their environment (Garmezy, 1991). A learner's community influences their aspirational, social and resistance capital (Wills & Hofmeyr, 2019). Participants' narratives demonstrate the positive impact of their communities. They experienced care, warmth and support from their communities which are key attributes for protective factors (Garmezy, 1991; Howard et al., 1999). The participants benefited from participating in community activities, obtaining guidance from community members and benefiting from community members actions. The community members held learners to a high standard and expected them to excel. There was therefore added pressure for the learners to achieve academically and not disappoint those who believed in them. Learners with no family or community support are at greater risk of not achieving success (Hanson & Gottesman, 2012). The church community, frequently mentioned in the narratives, positively influences academic achievement and builds social capital by encouraging discipline and respect (Horowitz, 2021). Church is a place where

networks are created and where individuals build up their social capital (Horowitz, 2021). Church involvement fosters optimism and hope for better outcomes (Horowitz, 2021). Communities often expected learners raised in respected families to be disciplined.

5.2.5 Narratives of discipline – ‘... like if you were naughty, it doesn't matter whose parents saw you. They were like your parents’

Caregivers who maintain discipline at home positively impact learners' success (Garnezy, 1991). Learners outcomes are improved where there is discipline at home and in their surrounding environments. This discipline often extended to the school environment, where adherence to rules was expected (Garnezy, 1991). Discipline is carried throughout one's life and is required to achieve set goals, the participants remained disciplined throughout schooling and adulthood regardless of peer pressure. Garnezy defined family activity differentiators that effectively impacted and shaped learners including the development of clear rules, boundaries and dominant authorities in the household (Garnezy, 1991). Participants like Khensani, Zakhele, Rhulani and Buhle recalled strict discipline throughout their childhood:

- *‘I come from a very staunch Christian family, so the discipline, yhu! At some point I thought I'm being punished. Like, what the hell? Other kids are living their best life, whereas my family, it was always ... even friends that I had, I'll just see them at school.’ – Khensani*

And:

- *‘Yho, yho, yho, it's like my entire family, the way they, they were wired, the way they were thinking, they were all aligned. Like those fancy things of having cell phones, having that freedom, they will tell you, you will get there. But right now, the main thing is your studies. So, the discipline it was in that perspective, even parties... was not allowed to go to parties. If I go to events, it's church events. And I go with family because then they know that it's a safe space. Yho!’ – Khensani*

- *‘They were like, we're one of those families, we were known, you had to behave in a certain way if you, you know, whether at home or out there. Obviously as a child, you still do naughty stuff but you knew that if you get home and you did something wrong, there would be consequences. So that helped me.’ – Zakhele*

And:

- *'...it was one of those places, like if you were naughty, it doesn't matter whose parents saw you. They were like your parents, so they will discipline you the same way...'* – Zakhele
- *'Yeah, so I think they instilled good discipline in all of us. Go to school, even though they didn't go to school, but they understood the importance of education.'* – Rhulani (Reflecting on his parents.)

Buhle's mother kept her children out of trouble by making them plough the fields. This kept Buhle and her siblings out of trouble as they were either ploughing the fields, at church or engaged in schoolwork. Freedom for her meant going to a tertiary institution far from home:

- *'... it was not negotiable, you will have to go to the fields ploughing mielie meal and whatever. I remember, even when I was writing my matric before I go and write, we will go to the fields. And when you come back, you go to the things to work, weekends, weekends, we never had life. It was the field, the field, work the field, work! Ploughing, whether it's maize meal, spinach, sweet potato or whatever! So, so the only way, the only way to escape that was not staying at home... And the only way of leaving the house was when you are going to school to tertiary.'* – Buhle

For a school to be productive, there needs to be an effective discipline system (Friaes et al., 2023). Educational institutions educate learners on acceptable social behaviours (Gunn, 2005). The participants' narratives highlighted the strict schools they came from, to stay out of trouble they ensured they excelled in their school work:

- *'But the teachers, in our days, ube shaywa umuntu esikoleni (we used to get a hiding at school) Yho!'* – Asanda
And:
- *'I feel when I compare it with the current education system, we were more well-disciplined.'* – Asanda
And:
- *'Because we didn't have any rights... if you are late there are consequences, you will be punished, your parents will be called to school.'* – Asanda

- *'Bebashaya yho, bebashaya and not kancane. (They used to beat us a lot.) Like, they really used to really give us a beating, too much. But only if you are naughty, only if you are not listening, uyabona (you see).'* – Phumlani
- *'...but I think my grade... what was she... Grade 1 teacher, used to hit us a lot. So, if you got, actually, she'd hit you more if you got one thing incorrect. More than the child that has gotten like 50%, you who had gotten 98% (or) whatever you would actually get 10, I don't know, 10 strokes or something like.'* – Nkosazana

And:

- *'Grade 7 to Grade 9, I went to a different school. So that was further down the road and that was ok. And we had very strict teachers, strict to the core! Ummm our principal also was very much like that. He ran that school like a military, pretty much.'* – Nkosazana

Kutlwano's principal did not want learners hanging out after school in their school uniform:

- *'I think he actually patrolled (he didn't want uniform in the square). Like, you can't be dressed in the school's uniform at some dodgy place; you will be stopped by the principal... He is actually the reason I got my bursary with Eskom.'* – Kutlwano

Discipline is a protective factor with lifelong benefits for learners, aiding their development into responsible adults (Garmezy, 1991). Personal agency helps learners set and achieve goals through discipline and self-regulation (Bandura, 2006). Discipline helped participants set goals and stay focused without getting involved in activities which could detract them from achieving success. Both home and school environments contribute to developing discipline, and learners benefit from it beyond their educational years (Konstantinou et al., 2022). Discipline fosters a positive learning environment by addressing misbehaviour (Friaes et al., 2023). Teachers should create effective learning cultures, without the use of excessive authority and corporal punishment, as these may harm learners' development (Konstantinou et al., 2022). Disadvantaged schools face higher risks of delinquency, leading to lower academic performance (Garmezy, 1991). With active caregiver involvement in school activities, misconduct may be reduced (Farid et al., 2021). Caregivers often have conflicting priorities, for example work, which limit the time available to participate in school activities. Displaying

desired social behaviour also enhances cultural capital and improves learners' success (Farid et al., 2021).

5.3 Theme two - Acquiring cultural capital and social mobility (Bourdieu's Social Reproduction Theory)

This theme examines the role of cultural capital and social mobility in empowering learners from disadvantaged backgrounds to become successful Black professionals. Cultural capital influences success and helps maintain a desirable social class across generations (Farid et al., 2021). This theme encompasses two of the types of cultural capital articulated by Bourdieu: embodied - acquired from family and institutionalised - acquired from institutions (Bourdieu, 1986). Education and family credentials are key contributors to the accumulation and transfer of wealth and cultural capital (Gunn, 2005), while access to tertiary education further enhances cultural and social capital by providing better job opportunities (Farid et al., 2021). Access to broader forms of social and cultural capital is often limited by learners' restricted opportunities to form relationships with individuals of higher socioeconomic status and to engage with their extended networks (Simpson, 2021). The participants high school and tertiary environments enabled them to accelerate their acquisition of cultural capital and this positively contributed to their social mobility. .

Under this theme, there are three sub-themes influenced by Bourdieu's Social Reproduction Theory: school's role in building cultural capital, English proficiency for social mobility, and transitioning from disadvantaged schools.

5.3.1 School's role in building cultural capital and shaping the future – ‘... *I would say my school enabled me to have options, like any option.*’

When it comes to accumulating and transferring cultural capital, education is crucial (Gunn, 2005). Education is deemed as a social ladder as it increases opportunities to professional jobs and higher income (Gunn, 2005). School is therefore an important avenue through which cultural capital can be acquired (Bourdieu, 1986; Claussen & Osborne, 2012). The participants in this study had limited or no career guidance in high school. Through their determination they chose career paths with little knowledge of their prospects post completion of their tertiary education. Participants cherished their school experiences, attributing their success to dedicated teachers. Even though the schools had limited resources, they helped the participants cultivate

the participants behaviours, skills, dreams and aspirations. Learners in disadvantaged areas often rely on natural growth with limited guidance (Simpson, 2020), however the participants schools helped cultivate their growth and empower them for the future.

Getting a quality education from a good institution can set learners and their future generations up for success (Farid et al., 2021). Relebohile and the researcher discussed his transition from one township school to another school with a different culture:

- Relebohile: *'So I moved from a Black Black township school to a bit of a mixed township school with a slightly different culture. So, I think that's what I battled with.'*
- Researcher: *'What is a "mixed township school"? What is a "Black Black township school" and what is a "mixed township school?"'*
- Relebohile: *'A Black Black township school is 100% Black students, 100% black teachers. Proper, proper government school in the hood. And then the high school was slightly different in the sense that it was mixed. It had, it had teachers from different, you know, backgrounds. So, the students were a bit mixed in terms of race and background and teachers mixed.'*
- Researcher: *'But it was in the township, classified as a township school?'*
- Relebohile: *'It was still a township school, but just with a slightly different culture and a slightly different performance culture. Yes, then I struggled a bit.'*

Kwezi acknowledged that his school was better than the other rural schools in his area and this contributed to him getting a good education:

- *'...so my school, even though it was rural, it was not poorly resourced. It was not as bad as other schools in the in the area.'* – Kwezi

Adolescent's participation in cultural activities used to be mostly determined by a family's background (Willekens & Lievens, 2014). Schools can however expose learners to a variety of cultural activities which contribute to the accumulation of cultural capital (Willekens & Lievens, 2014). Nkosazana was spotted by a teacher from another school at a debating tournament. The teacher offered her an opportunity to go on an overseas if she transferred to

her school. Nkosazana changed high schools to pursue the overseas opportunity however she felt the drop in education standards at the new school in comparison to her previous school. The overseas opportunity materialised, and she spent her grade 11 year in Australia where she initially struggled to keep up at school but then found her feet. This opportunity shifted how she saw life after having been exposed to quality education in Australia. The exchange programme helped improve her English and academic performance:

- *'So they, they have no regard for school. So, the teachers also were also like 'ngifundisa ofundayo, ongafuni akungihlupi (I teach those who want to learn and don't bother with the others)... So, there we were a lot and you could feel it and you could see it. So, there's a whole lot of noise and people are not paying attention and she's just like, "You know what, I get paid. You guys will figure yourselves out."' She's done for the day, she's out. So, you that wants to study whatever you have to go beg, beg the class. Ya, so there was a lot of that... So, I did my Grade 10 there. It was a bit of an adjustment and like that other teacher had promised uGrade 11, I did in Australia, so I then went to Australia. That was great! You guys are 10 in a class!'* – Nkosazana

And:

- *'...me and this other girl in my grade got into the exchange program. Uummm so spent Grade 11 there and that was nice. The classes were smaller. I think for the first time in my life I actually struggled with maths, but... and there was also an English thing... I don't know how to explain it. So extra lessons and classes and then from there I found my feet again and I was ok. Then I came back for matric.'* – Nkosazana

'Model C' public schools, historically associated with white privilege, generally have more resources than rural and township schools (Christie & McKinney, 2017). This means that teachers in disadvantaged schools must do more with less (Muzah, 2011). The participants had teachers who were invested in their wellbeing and their narratives reflected the active role that their teachers played in their academic success and enhancing their cultural capital:

- *'I think the schools they were really, really of great standard. Even though... some of the resources were not there, but the teachers were really committed and it helped.'* – Buhle

- *'...those guys were quite passionate... I look at the teachers back then and I compare them to the teachers of today; not to say the current teachers are not passionate, they are passionate in their own right because obviously the system has evolved. But if I look at those guys, they were really passionate, you know. They would explain things at a granular level...' – Sibusiso*
- *'So, Grade 12 for me was the best year of my schooling years because I had good teachers at Grade 12. I had a good mathematics teacher who... I think without that teacher, I don't think I would have done well enough to get into university. So, he... that teacher basically make mathematics easy for me. And then business economics; I studied commerce, business economics, and economics teachers were so good as well.'* – Rhulani
- *'So, we still had like decent teachers and teachers that we had back then they had honours. They had like proper qualifications and then we also had a decent pass rate overall compared to the schools nearby.'* – Kwezi
- *'...what she would do she would be like, "Ok, here's a question, whoever is going to answer this right I'm going to give that person R1..." So, I used to win all those monies all the time... Then that money is the money I will use for my lunch box... at the break time.'* – Phumlani
- *'But I think they also tried their best with what we had. I really enjoyed being in that school and then the other thing that they tried to do was expose us as much as possible.'* – Nkosazana
- *'And it was like the school... we had a white principal, white teachers, black teachers... disciplined schedule, everything, and it was during the time when South Africa was changing. So, a lot of riots, people would stay away from school getting involved... But we were those kids...' – Zakhele*
- *'He was like, very good. The other teachers could miss their lectures... but he never missed his. He was always there... I don't remember missing my homework, not even once... He really inspired me... He knew his stuff, like, and he knew how to deliver it.'* – Zakhele (Reflecting on his mathematics teacher.)
- *'...they had created such a big standard for themselves in terms of performance, and as a result, they attracted quite a number of companies to partner with... There*

was pride in doing well, not just on a personal level, it was also the school level. There was a sense of, you know, we want another, it wasn't 100% pass rate, it was like an 80 something percent, but they always, they always wanted to do better and they, they took pride in that.' – Kgothatso

Phumlani's Grade 1 teacher made a significant impact in his life, affirming him and believing in him. This gave him the encouragement he needed to excel academically as she was invested in his success:

- *'But the biggest person that played a significant role is my Grade 1 teacher, hence even till today, we still in talks... That lady, she believed in me, so much she like, she believed in me. Yho! I got this confidence every time when I am at school. She used to give me that thing of, "You are doing well. Well done!" You see that affirmation... she used to affirm me so much, that lady... It really kept me going... She played a very significant role in my life.'* – Phumlani

The participants were high-performers academically and this enabled them to gain access to tertiary institutions:

- *'So, I'm not gonna lie, I think I was one of the smartest kids in, in, in the entire school.'* – Kwezi
- *'I was one of like the top five students, like in my primary school times.'* – Asanda
- *'You know, during those days, one thing that I discovered in my family is that we were all given... like, smart, in terms of school, right, to navigate the school, understanding things, you know.'* – Phumlani (Reflecting on his family being smart.)
- *'Remember when they used to divide you on to... ok, these are the smart kids, this is group A, B, group C. So, I, I think pretty much all my life, I was always in group A.'* – Nkosazana

Parents with higher social status and qualifications are available to advise and influence their children's career and social paths by participating in certain cultural activities and networking (Willekens & Lievens, 2014). These parents generally have access to networks who can provide mentorship and guidance on topics such as careers (Bourdieu, 1986; Willekens & Lievens,

2014). The participants' narratives varied in terms of the extent of career guidance they received. They were not fully aware of their career options post high school but as academic performers, most of them leaned towards commerce and engineering. This was mainly due to funding availability and future earning potential. Furthering their studies after high school was non-negotiable and they knew that they had to go to tertiary to become successful, regardless of the qualification. The narratives below reflect their experiences in choosing high school subjects and degrees to pursue at tertiary:

- *'My career choice was driven mostly by the fact that I secured funding for my varsity.'* – Akani
- *'...I think it was, Grade 11 or Grade 12, we started getting these study guides. I don't think they hand them out anymore... about different educational institutions... you were already aware of what was the difference between varsity and Technikons and... you have an awareness of the different fields of study. For whatever subject you're doing, you kind of can see where you can belong... It was such a good study guide.'* – Kutlwano

And:

- *'Let's say, I would say my school enabled me to have options, like any option. So much so I could indulge in what I prefer in my hobby.'* – Kutlwano

And:

- *'I'm smart, I knew I wouldn't make money in fashion design... For me, my options were wide open... I like drawing, so let me pick something that has drawing. Let me pick something that has mathematics, which I love, and let me pick something that will make me money. I had that luxury because my grades were good and most of the kids in class did.'* – Kutlwano
- *'... from Grade 10 you must decide, basically from Grade 9. (Grade) 10 you decide commerce or science, so I went with commerce. It was mainly guidance from my brothers and sisters that I just went into commerce. I didn't really know what commerce was, the difference between commerce and science to be honest... I just knew the basics, ok, if you study commerce, you can work at a bank, work as an accountant, commerce accounting. Science you can become a doctor, nurse and stuff or engineering... basics... I didn't really understand those differences like what*

is the main difference between those two apart from those professions ... My brother studied science and then my family just said, "Ok, this one is doing science. You can go into commerce..." I wouldn't say it was a decision that was based on knowledge... If I knew what I was doing at that time I would have done science. I think I would have enjoyed science more than commerce. Because I like working with my hands, practical things and being outside. So, engineering for me would have been enjoyable profession. I was good at mathematics, I liked solving problems. I think I would have excelled in science as well.' – Rhulani

- *'...to be fair, they were punting engineering the whole time. Everyone was going to be an engineer... I mean, I wanted to be a singer, for example.'* – Kgothatso

And:

- *'But that wasn't going to happen. So, because engineering was punted so much, especially for those of us who are doing maths and science, it was almost... it was like a no-brainer. You didn't think about it, you didn't consider your passions, your likes. It was like that is the path you are going to take and that is the path that I took and I got the shock of my life because I did not end up being an engineer. But but it was punted so much that I don't think, I thought of anything else outside of engineering. And that's why when, after matric, that's what I did. In fact, even when I applied for university, I only applied for engineering, nothing else, not any other faculty or anything. First option, I think, was electrical engineering, second option, chemical engineer, all the engineerings (laughter).'* – Kgothatso

Kwezi's principal made the decision for him to study commerce when there were not enough learners in the commerce class. He was not happy with the decision at the time however it worked out favourably for him in the long run as he became a chartered accountant. The quotations below explain how that impacted him:

- Kwezi: *So, what happened at that time was that learners that wanted to do physics and maths, they were quite a lot. I would say maybe out of 100 you'd have like 80 kids that wanted to do maths and physics. They wanted to be, wanted to become doctors and engineers and all those other fancy qualifications. And then on the other side, you had then about 20% or 20 kids that wanted to do accounting... So now the... principal is faced with that conundrum, to say 80% of your kids want to*

do physics then that other stream is going to have like 20 kids, it's gonna fail. And therefore, he wanted to find a way to balance these things. In fact, he just decided that you know what, he's gonna look for half of the guys that are smart in that maths and physics class and then move them over to accounting. I hated that guy from that day because what happened with that, I think so... he considered, he just thought, ok maybe the guys that are good in accounting would also be... good in mathematics... Chances are they won't struggle with accounting. So, he just decided...'

- Researcher: *'So you couldn't be a doctor anymore?'*
- Kwezi: *'Yes, exactly.'*

And:

- Kwezi: *'Yeah. So, so yeah, some of the decisions would just be taken in that environment. Some of them would be for your own good, others might actually work against you.'*

Buhle's mother gave her a career guidance book which helped her research her options. This book exposed her to various career paths that were available and what subjects were needed for each qualification. She chose her desired qualification from that book:

- *'I remember in high school my mother bought us a career guide. It was a nice fancy book telling us about careers, what careers are available, because those things were not available in high school. Unfortunately, a career guide nani nani they were not there. But my mother bought this book, telling us about different careers, what are their requirements and what are all that. So, I was caught up, I'm not sure whether it was the name, but I wanted to be Sister Tutor.'* – Buhle

Due to there being no space in her desired course, Buhle took her neighbour's guidance and studied engineering:

- *'There are a lot of queues... department by department. You choose where you going... First they have to check your statement, if you qualify and all that.'* – Buhle

And:

- *'... I was so excited, then I want to do public health. He takes me, we go to public health. Public health is full... and I was like, ok, I want to do anything, anything where they can take me (laughter) and then... he was like I am doing engineering and engineering is nice and they are encouraging more ladies to come to engineering. I never thought of engineering in my life. "They're encouraging more, more women to come into engineering because it's normally the guys, the ladies are not doing engineering. You stand a good chance there," and so, ok. I did not even ask which engineering is there or what will I be doing. I was like, ok.'* – Buhle

Relebohile chose architecture because he liked drawing. At the time of selecting the degree he had not been exposed to an architect and ended up dropping out as it was not what he wanted to do:

- *'When I was in high school, I didn't have any reference of what a firm of architects actually does...'* - Relebohile

And:

- *'You don't go into architecture because you know how to draw... And if you don't have a reference point, you don't know what you don't know.'* – Relebohile (Reflecting on his choice to go into architecture.)

Asanda chose to study marketing because she liked the fancy name, she had no context of what marketing entailed:

- *'...primary school teachers, like, they used to encourage us, they used to encourage us, but they were taking you to, towards mainstream like courses. Like, they were looking at you going being a nurse, being a teacher, at least being a doctor, those things. And then when I got to high school and then ... I was ... actually ... I did marketing, but it was through a friend. As we were talking (she was like my sister is) doing marketing and I was like, ooooo, this is the fancy name. I'm definitely doing marketing!'* – Asanda

And:

- *'I met some friends... that went to marketing. I think they were also like from a rural environment because they were also attracted by the name... Yes, we only got to understand the course that we were doing... like when we started doing it.'* – Asanda

Sibusiso registered for a short course which exposed him to computers. He was able to make a more informed career decision after his exposure and subsequently registered for information technology:

- *'...I took a course, public administration... That's when I discovered my passion or love for computers. So, it had a computer module but it was purely just about public administration, the most boring thing ever! Learning about the Parliament, House of Assembly, House of Delegates... But the computer part I was loving it and I was so good at it... Writing a program, for me it just came naturally. So, I knew there and then that when I go to Technikon the following year, I'm going to do computers. I'm gonna do information technology. That's exactly what I went and registered for.'*
– Sibusiso

Zakhele had only seen a computer at the Post Office when he decided to pursue computer science:

- *'How did I decide? It was more like, ok, I'm good in mathematics. So, with this, what can I do? And it's like, ok, we can do engineering, you can do computer science... I like computer science; what does it involve? But like, at that time, I remember the only place I had seen a computer was at the Post Office.'* – Zakhele

Phumlani asked different people what they had studied to enable him to make a more informed choice on what to study. He later pursued accounting after conducting his own research at banks and attending multiple open days at various tertiary institutions:

- *'Then they would tell me, "Take my numbers. On this day we got an open day.'* – Phumlani (Reflecting on advice from students he met.)

And:

- *'On this day we have an open day, ok. You can come... On this day we have...' 'Ok, where? How do I get there?' and they will tell me.'* – Phumlani

And:

- *'I also used to bother people that are working at banks. Cause you know when you get into the bank these people are dressed well...' – Phumlani*

And:

- *'...you know, you can tell these people are different. "Hey, how did you...?" ... "Ok, no I studied that..." ... "Oh, ok." ... "What did you study?" ... "I studied this..." So one of the biggest things that I bumped into a lot was accounting; accounting this, accounting this, accounting this. And then school I was also doing the accounting subjects, you know. Now I started... after I visited... So, I did that journey from Grade 10, 11 up until 12 I was doing that, whenever there's a open day I go...' – Phumlani*

Parental influence in their career choice was limited, with some participants venturing into fields that were unfamiliar to their parents:

- *'I remember when I told my father I want to do IT. ... My father worked at (Factory name). They made tyres. ... He was very unhappy... So, when I said I wanna do IT, he's like, "No, no, no, no, no." And then he started comparing. He's like, "You know so and so's, son, he's gonna do management. Why can't you do management, team management, you know, you're gonna manage people..." He's like, "No, no, it doesn't make sense. You're going to fix machines, you're gonna fix computers," because at his factory if a machine breaks down, you call IT and they come wearing overalls and they come with spanners to come and fix the machine and he didn't see it from, you know, computer programming and all of those things. So, he was not pleased at all. I think he only got it later, later in life. So, this IT thing does really work.'* – Sibusiso
- *'I never knew of anyone that was in accounting or a qualified CA and I think even in town I'm probably one of the early people to become CAs.'* – Kwezi

- *'My mom has a crèche, shame, I don't blame her. ... Her mindset was always once I'm done studying, I'll come and help her with the crèche.'* – Khensani
- *'My parents didn't really go to school. I'm a last born at home. ... They grew up more rural than me. At their time it was that time when they were living far from each other, one family living there, the other one living far. Those farming days, the only thing you can do is become a farmer or go to Joburg and work in a mine or something.'* – Rhulani

Cultural capital refers to the desired traits acquired by individuals through their movement across various systems and structures (Claussen & Osborne, 2012). Bourdieu's classification of institutionalised cultural capital (acquired through educational institutions), provides a theory of how individuals from disadvantaged backgrounds can move up the social ladder through acquired cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986; Farid et al., 2021). Learners from privileged backgrounds acquire cultural capital easily due to their families' exposure to various networks, cultural events and activities (Bourdieu, 1986; Davies & Rizk, 2017; Willekens & Lievens, 2014) which broaden their worldview. Educational institutions help develop cultural capital by transmitting cultural knowledge and acceptable behaviours through various cultural activities (Gunn, 2005). Available literature links poor performance in disadvantaged schools to unqualified teachers and a lack of dedicated staff (Kyei & Maboko, 2016; Muzah, 2011). However, most participants in this study praised their teachers for their dedication and contribution to their development. Supportive teachers have been shown to enhance academic achievement, even within disadvantaged school settings (Parker et al., 2021). Despite having limited career guidance, participants bravely made decisions on the qualifications they would pursue. The participants were focused on progress and they needed a qualification to move forward. This was motivated by the understanding that pursuing tertiary education could significantly improve their socioeconomic prospects.

Educational inequality perpetuates poverty across generations (Farid et al., 2021). Learners from different socioeconomic backgrounds have unequal access to career and tertiary education information (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1979). The participants wanted a better future for themselves and they utilised available tertiary funding mechanisms to steer towards progress. They did not let their limited career guidance hinder them from making decisions to go to

tertiary. This lack of resources excludes many South Africans from educational and employment opportunities (Matli & Ngoepe, 2021). In 1996, only 16.8% of youth aged 15 to 24 had completed high school (Statistics SA, 2022). This increased to 37.3% in 2022 (Statistics SA, 2022), indicating significant interventions are still required to boost high school completion rates. Additionally, English proficiency remains a hurdle for students transitioning from rural or township high school to tertiary institutions.

5.3.2 English proficiency for social mobility – ‘...we listen, but we don't comprehend, you know, and we wanna say something but we're unable to articulate ourselves’

Language proficiency and accents are an essential component of cultural capital and social class (Gunn, 2005). Learners from privileged households usually receive early training in language skills. These skills give them an advantage in building social capital and mobility (Gunn, 2005). English proficiency is essential for accessing opportunities and comprehending tertiary course content (Claussen & Osborne, 2012). Participants struggled with English when transitioning from high school to tertiary education, as lectures were in English without subsequent explanations in their home language:

- *‘In primary school I was taught English nge siZulu. In high school I was taught English via my Pedi teacher nge Sipedi...’* – Nkosazana
- *‘You can imagine how tough it, it must have been for them to take a concept that was conceived and was structured in English to try and bring it back into the ethnic Zulu language so that a Zulu learner can understand, comprehend and then translate it back into English because everything has to be marked in English. Now that is tough, that is tough because at the time, remember everything was taught in Zulu. So, but now the book is written in English and you, you trying to, you know. So, the teacher has to sort of like, kind of bring it closer to home so that, you know, it's relatable. And then, but when you answer, you have to answer back in English again.’* – Sibusiso
- *‘...most of the teaching was done in vernac. I can't say I learnt much English then, it was just basic ABC, maybe a few songs.’* – Rhulani

And:

- *'...coming from a school where they were teaching you English Sepedi or maths in Sepedi.'* – Rhulani

And:

- *'But I would say I learnt a lot from watching TV. I was lucky to have TV at home at that time. Most of the time TV is in English so you quickly pick up some words in English and start understanding how people speak in English and stuff like that.'* – Rhulani

- *'...environment it's changing a bit from the primary school where Xhosa was dominant. But here bayazama ke ngoku (they are trying now) to introduce you to English ...'* – Asanda (Reflecting on her move from a rural to township school.)

And:

- *'Some of the teachers were from... were Indians... they spoke English ...As much as there was a bit of English, it was more Xhosa.'* – Asanda

The English gap became more evident for participants at their tertiary institutions and in their workplaces. Their confidence was affected but they soldiered on through their frustrations and did not let the language barrier deter them from achieving success:

- *'You get there, you even scared to ask questions, the English, construction of words at that time in English is not that good. So I just wait for the other students to ask and then... ok!'* – Rhulani

And:

- *'... most people speak well, speak good English. Then nna I get there from a rural school, my English is not that good. The confidence level is lower compared to other kids who went to like township schools or private schools. When you get to class, the lecturers only lecture in English, proper English, and then you have to like follow.'* – Rhulani

- *'And you're sitting in the lecture room, you know, with the different people from different races. And you, you just listen to how fluid and you know, they're firing on all cylinders. And, you know, you're still stuck, you know, cause you still don't fully,*

fully understand or comprehend the debit and credit, you know. At what stage do you debit, at what stage do you credit, you know? And you know, you kind of limp along and you pass, you know, you know you, you get the mark that you need to get for you to move, you know?’ – Sibusiso

- *‘...it was a bit challenging for us especially in terms of language because we were not... English was good but ... not really at the level.’ – Akani*
- *‘So, like, the first semester was tough because ... (And you are still mixing your English with Xhosa when you go to group discussions, we actually properly learned English) on your first job.’ – Asanda*
- *‘...basic things, you know, we listen, but we don't comprehend, you know, and we wanna say something but we're unable to articulate ourselves and that is why you see a lot of us, Black professionals, you drive home, you like I should have said this, should have... should have that! It's not that you didn't want to say it, you just could not, you did not know how to articulate yourself, you know, so you always come short.’ – Sibusiso*

Linguistic competence is a form of embodied cultural capital (Farid et al., 2021), which can impact success. For decades, language (including grammar and accents) have been key components to improving social status and employment prospects (Gunn, 2005). During the twentieth century, being educated at grammar school was the most important element of cultural capital as it meant one could enter the world of ‘mental work’ and escape ‘manual work’ (Gunn, 2005). The participants acknowledged their challenges with the English language but did not refer to quitting as an option, they constantly lived in solution mode and persevered through their challenges. Even in this generation, proficiency in English creates multiple opportunities including the ability to pursue global education and employment opportunities (Salie et al., 2020). The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (1996) emphasises the right for learners to be educated in their language of choice, where practical. The reality is that lectures in most South African tertiary institutions are conducted in English using technical vocabulary which creates a barrier to comprehension for those who do not understand English (Claussen & Osborne, 2012). Language barriers negatively impact the students’ performance, causing many to drop out (Salie et al., 2020). The English academic material results in many memorising content instead of actually understanding it (Christie & McKinney, 2017). The

participants highlighted their comprehension challenges which may be experienced by many learners coming from rural and township schools. Some of their marks were negatively impacted, but they found ways to get through the content. Anxiety and insecurity are emotions commonly experienced by students who struggle with comprehending English in classrooms (Blease & Condy, 2015).

5.3.3 Transitioning from disadvantaged schools – ‘*Hard, hard, hard, I struggled at varsity, stru-ggled!*’

Participants experienced challenges when transitioning from high school to tertiary institutions, and then into the workplace. The transition experience is generally harder for learners coming from environments where they had limited resources (Kyei & Maboko, 2016). These experiences are also influenced by what Bourdieu refers to as ‘habitus’, how the learners view the world and their place in it (Dumais, 2002). Mobility within privileged families (middle and upper class) is common as there is frequent movement of individuals through educational and employment systems (Davies & Rizk, 2017). Learners from privileged families are overrepresented in the top performing universities (Davies & Rizk, 2017), and they abide by certain cultural and social standards which may be intimidating for those coming from disadvantaged backgrounds. Resilience is something that can be developed and applied at any point in one’s lifetime (Seccombe, 2022). The participants resilience gave them the ability to look past their challenges and find ways to adapt and thrive in the new environments (Seccombe, 2002). There is currently a gap in literature on transition experiences when coming from a disadvantaged high school into a tertiary institution. The challenges experienced by participants’ were highlighted in their narratives:

- *‘Hard, hard, hard, I struggled at varsity, stru-ggled! My first year was one (of the) worst years of my life. I actually didn't even think I was gonna make it. First for me, the pace was fast... And the other thing is, I wasn't used to asking for help.’* – Nkosazana

And:

- *‘Most of my life, I could do my own homework, I could, you know. So for the first six months, or even longer, I could not say, “I don't understand,” or “Please help me.” Instead, I spent hours and hours elibrary, hours and hours not sleeping.’* – Nkosazana

And:

- *'... Ya, so I struggled a lot in that first year and then also the language thing really affected me because I was hearing, but I wasn't quite understanding... I was panicking cause I was like, yho, if these marks don't pick up, it's over for me, like everyone... it's over for me, for home. So the transition for me was really, really tough, really hard.'* – Nkosazana

And:

- *'...grit is so important, grit and resilience is so important... I could have easily quit that first year and been like, "Yho, I can't do this!" But then I kind of knew I only had me... That's important as well for exposure to the things that can help, but also your personal grit and wanting for things to change.'* – Nkosazana
- *'...there's a lot of catching up which meant that one had to work extra hours just to be on par, just to catch up and do basics and I'm guilty of not always wanting to do that because remember, in high school I was smart, so I understood things and I did very well. So now this is foreign ... all of a sudden ... people from different parts of the country that are very smart, some are smarter than you.'* – Zakhele

And:

- *'I really battled, also socially as well. That was the first time you studying with different races and people from different parts of the country. ... So that transition was not a joke. That was tough. That was really, really tough.'* – Zakhele

And:

- *'...when you then go to varsity, that gap became very clear. ... Some of the things that I learnt for the first time at varsity, some of my colleagues had learned in high school. So, I remember the day I went to the computer lab and that was the first time I sat in front of a computer. And then they said switch on the computer, you look around you and see what they do. Other people are doing and then you press the button.'* – Zakhele

And:

- *'If you decided that I'm not going to class on a Monday morning, no one's gonna check. No one's gonna care whether you went or not. ... You missed one or two days,*

you have a lot of catching up to do because a lot of stuff was foreign. But the most important thing that I learned was... the education system then was not good. It was education for Black people and education for White people.’ – Zakhele

- *‘And you're sitting in the lecture room, you know, with the different people from different races. And you, you just listen to how fluid and, you know, they're firing on all cylinders. And, you know, you're still stuck, you know, cause you still don't fully, fully understand or comprehend the debit and credit, you know. At what stage do you debit, at what stage do you credit, you know? And you know, you kind of limp along and you pass, you know, you know. You, you get the mark that you need to get for you to move, you know.’* – Sibusiso
- *‘... when I started, we used to have an orientation program and I think it would go for... two weeks or so, right at the beginning of the year. So I think that helped a great deal because at least you don't get there day one and then it's classes. You don't even know where to go and how to read the timetable and so on. So, so we went on the program and then that's where you established strong relationships as well a strong connection with people... But then you would normally see that for wena you are a bit slow in catching these things, where everyone else just seems to be like, they just hit the ground running.’* – Kwezi

And:

- *‘What normally happens is that there are things that we were learning. But subconsciously I think most of them, like managing your time, being independent, the fact that you don't throw junk anywhere, you don't litter, all those things. So those are things that were not, like what's the word I am looking for, they were not like, ok, you don't do this, do this... but by just being in that environment, it somehow changes you and, and, and makes you to, to conform and be like everyone else.’* – Kwezi

And:

- *‘So you get into this environment and you see things that you're never exposed to, you know, and you go all out. And I think for me that's, that's probably the reason why even like academically I struggled in my first year. I cancelled a number of modules, didn't show up for exams for some of them and, and then also I was or I*

was coming of age and I was allowed to drink obviously, you know, I was 18 or something like that. Happy days, every day, you know! So, so, so for me that was my setback, honestly.’ – Kwezi

And:

- *‘Wits for me was a serious culture shock. Let me start... Well Soweto, I knew Soweto a bit from my parents having a house but I didn't know the culture because I was not there fulltime. I just came during holidays. The lifestyle of township people was different from the lifestyle of rural people. Rural is quite slow paced. You know everyone in the rural area. It's slow and it's, ya... it's almost like an innocent lifestyle, while the township is fast. There's a lot happening there. There's like a lot of criminal elements there, pantsulas. There's a lot that can happen in kasi, kasi (township). So I didn't really know the culture, to be honest, so when I got there, I was like shocked that people live such a fast life.’* – Rhulani

- *It was just a big transition from like where I was to tertiary. It was quite interesting, you meeting abantu (people) like different ages, abantu from different backgrounds, different provinces and like all those things, umm. And remember we... by that time there was ... what do you call it... where there were borders between the provinces ...’*
– Asanda

And:

- *‘So now you were trying to navigate, then trying to also fit in because there's fashion now, there is this... So you had to sacrifice your small pocket money to buy clothes, like, so that you fit in as well. There was just too much pressure. There was just too much pressure.’* – Asanda
- *‘The University of Kwazulu-Natal catered for the transition gap by extending the degree period for learners coming from disadvantaged schools. This extended period included extra lessons for the students which helped close the knowledge gaps.’* – Akani

And:

- *‘The extra classes, remember I didn't do accounting at all, I just did maths and science, so we had to learn. We had to work twice as hard, so those extra classes*

will help teach you. You do questions, they teach you exam techniques, explain concepts...' – Akani

Sibusiso began as a full-time student but switched to part-time in his second year due to financial issues. This setback did not deter him from completing his studies and he worked to fund his education whilst studying part-time. His work experience allowed him to better grasp his studies through workplace exposure:

- *'Unfortunately, I did not complete my national diploma. I had to go and work. I continued though, a year later ... part time studies for my for my national diploma. But the beauty or the advantage was that I was already working in the computer space. So I knew exactly what was happening. So it did help because now I have contacts on the work front. I understand exactly what programming is about and I could bring that knowledge to the classroom... and I was also in a class with people who were working... They were in different fields.'* – Sibusiso

Kgothatso, Relebohile and Khensani initially dropped out of their courses but later returned to pursue different qualifications better suited to them. Even after dropping out, their desire to obtain a qualification remained alive. Kgothatso's initial degree was engineering:

- *'You have so many resources in university, but you are not used to having a lot of resources. I don't know if that makes sense, such that you don't know how to access them.'* – Kgothatso

And:

- *'I remembered in my third year when I made the decision to drop out, it was the first time I reached out to the counselling thing, the student counselling thing, just to try to figure out, because I was so overwhelmed. ... I remember... thinking had I done this in first year, I probably would have had a better experience.'* – Kgothatso

Kgothatso reflected on the disconnection with the lecturers:

- *'...and in university, the lecturer is like theeeeerrreee. It's not like in high school where like the teacher is here, here. I don't know if I'm making sense.'* – Kgothatso

And:

- *'...they feel, they feel so far away. They, they just feel so far away.'* – Kgothatso

The acquisition of cultural capital comes with status and association with certain groups (DiMaggio & Mohr, 1985). This was evident with Kgothatso who spent a year at home after dropping out, and decided to return to tertiary as her mindset had shifted from the township conversations. Even though she had not completed her degree, she had acquired cultural capital during her time at university and her cultural competence, language and credentials now associated her with a different group (Dumais, 2002):

- *'And I don't know how to explain it, but once the mind is opened to certain things, it's very difficult to live in, in situations where you feel like your mind is closing up quite a bit. The conversations are different, what people are asking of you... it's like two different worlds, almost.'* – Kgothatso

Kgothatso explained how she ended up studying informatics:

- Kgothatso: *'...I had been this achiever for... up until that point, for the entire existence of my life, and now I had to deal with failure and I just don't know how to deal with it. It was a difficult time, but I knew that the only thing I know is school, is academics. It's, it's the thing that I had been good at for so, so long, so I decided to re-apply, and I did. I went back to university and this time around, because I had sort of understood where the gaps were in terms of why, why I ended up in the situation that I was in, I, I went back and I worked quite a bit. Yeah, I worked hard and I did well. It, it was, it almost felt like high school again in terms of performance and, you know, in terms of me going back into it and doing what I needed to do.'*
- Researcher: *'What did you study the second time around and how did you decide on that degree?'*
- Kgothatso: *'Ok this is embarrassing (laughter). Ahhh, well, I studied informatics, but how I decided that's the embarrassing part. I was going to do teaching and I think at the time I was beaten to the bone, you know, that I wanted easy course in my head. I'm not saying because I've never done teaching but in, in my mind it was going to be easy. I wasn't going to struggle as much as I did with engineering. So I*

applied for teaching and also I'm like, no one was going to tell me my money, this my money, that, because at the time (Institution A) was just dishing out funding, so I was like, that's what I'm going to do. But then on, on the, on the day when I was supposed to register, I was like, you know what, you're better than this. Go and apply for something that makes sense. So I went to the Faculty of Commerce and I spoke to them and asked them what courses do you have available, shared my background when I did electrical engineering, I did quite a bit of programming but not a lot of programming. So they then said this is what we have available, informatics and not a lot of people do it. So there was space, fortunately, and yeah, that's how I ended up doing it.'

Relebohile dropped out of architecture after a brief holiday work experience in his fourth year at university. His white classmates had earlier exposure to the field due to family connections which are a common way for finding employment opportunities (Gunn, 2005). After dropping out, he worked while studying Marketing part-time and eventually completed his degree:

- *'During the holidays, they go work in architecture firms. What they also do is that they also go overseas. And so the buildings that were, that were studying in school, they have actually seen them in Paris or wherever. I've only seen them in a textbook. And when they go to architecture firms, I go to (Township name) and my break is hanging out le majita (with the guys) drinking beer. They are doing all of these progressive things...'* – Relebohile

And:

- *'And then at some point later in my varsity studies, I then go to a firm of architects for vacation. When I get there, it's now a shock to the system. It's completely different from what I have learnt. ... It's a conveyor belt of mundane designs that are very uninspiring. And at that point I decided, I don't want to do this for a living. ... From architecture I moved to music.'* – Relebohile

Khensani moved from a historically Black university to a private institution. She felt the socioeconomic pressure as most students were from wealthy families:

- *'Here it's rich kids. Out of the entire school I think it was just the two of us (from a less privileged university) that were there. Our parents had to get a loan.'* – Khensani

Computer literacy was another challenge with most participants accessing computers for the first time at a tertiary institution:

- *'...and you have to go to tertiary, where you sit in a class with kids who learnt typing in standard 9, and you don't even know how to work the keyboard.'* – Sibusiso
- *'So before I went to varsity, I had seen, worked on a computer, maybe once or twice.'* – Kwezi
- *'...now I go to varsity, sho the struggle! Then you go to university, there's computers, you've never seen a computer.'* – Khensani
- *'When I got there, I had never used a computer, also, and then assignments must be submitted. ... You have to type an assignment and submit it. So all those things contributed to me, like, adjusting slower and then struggling a bit in first year.'* – Rhulani

The transition to the workplace presented more challenges for the participants:

- *'iSelf-confidence it's a big thing ... from our background.'* – Asanda

And:

- *'Like, sometimes you might excel on your career but social, because... you fail on the other aspects. Like, I don't know how to introduce that so that they can find ibalance at an early stage.'* – Asanda
- *'...that was another beast! They had matric, so I walk in with an attitude like, you know, I know I got this... They had to teach me work, I had no experience, and then I come in and then I earn more than them. It was just very uncomfortable. But I also had like an attitude... until I sit down with my team leader and he said to me, 'You need to change your attitude.' ...and then I found another job which was in the day shift, which was in the data space and that just set me up. From there, going forward was like... life was just great!'* – Zakhele

- *'I can tell you now for free, the most intimidating thing, you know, as a black person, even in the corporate world, you sit across a white person immediately when you walk in the room. You have to constantly tell your brain, you know, 'He's just a man. He's just a man. He's just a man.' You know what I mean? And then, and then you pick up the conversation that this guy is usually mediocre... But you walked in with this perception because he's white, he knows it, oh boy, you know, he knows it.'* – Sibusiso

Asanda moved to Johannesburg after getting married to a man who was financially stable and lived in Johannesburg. Her career accelerated after moving:

- *'Until I met my now ex-husband (laughter)... he was already in Joburg... He had already, made it. (He was in Joburg and had an apartment there.). He's got a car, all those things, you know. ... I saw a bit of stability.'* – Asanda (Reflecting about how she transitioned to Johannesburg.)

And:

- *'I started as a service administrator. I enjoyed it. Like, it's like I enjoyed it and then when I was with the company that I was like, ok, actually, I've got a diploma in marketing, in between some short courses in customer services, all those things. ... So I grew with the company, like, from that sales administrator, service administrator for years. And then I said, you know what I think for the love of money, I wanna go to sales!'* – Asanda
- *And:*
- *'Yes, because I met, like, people that were from better backgrounds, from town, multi-racial schools, all those things. So now we have to sort of, like, try to be level up.'* – Asanda

Cultural capital is associated with status, networks and opportunities (DiMaggio & Mohr, 1985). Relebohile had no feelings of inferiority in the workplace as his parents were both professionals and had equipped him with the required social capital:

- *'When I sit with my mother or when I sit with my father, I sit with people... who also sit in boardrooms, anywhere in the world. ... There's no expectation of inferiority, wherever they are.'* – Relebohile

And:

- *'I am very comfortable in my own skin and I don't have a sense of imposter syndrome.'* – Relebohile

Parents networks and connections help privileged learners secure mentors and employment (Bourdieu, 1986; Willekens & Lievens, 2014). Phumlani started visiting companies whilst he was a student to build his own network as he had no family connections to rely on. His perseverance paid off as his first job was at one of the companies he used to visit through a chance encounter with an executive who had seen him in her organisation's corridors:

- *'...says, "Who is this guy?" and (he tells her that) "This is a friend of mine," and she says, "I love this guy. I don't know, I love this guy." ... And then she said, "I love this boy! And then always ... the last time I saw you, you were well dressed and look at yourself today." And she said, "What are you doing now?" I said, "I am doing my BTech and (I am finishing soon)" (Then she said), "Ok, send your CV to this guy. Wena you send it to so and so, this CV. Next year I want him to join us, this one.'* – Phumlani

Nkosazana's tertiary experience affected her self-confidence in the workplace, until a mentor helped her successfully manage the transition:

- *'The transition wasn't great because I wasn't confident cause of the varsity experience. ... But it wasn't like that, So, like, I come into work, I wanna sit in my corner, I just wanna get to work done.'* – Nkosazana

And:

- *'That transition was bad, and then by the end of the first year I think I had found my voice.'* – Nkosazana

And:

- *'I could say varsity to corporate, corporate is tough for people of colour. It's just not designed for people of colour. And I think then what helps in, in, in corporate and what needs to happen is for us to learn quickly, basic things; how to be assertive and speak up for yourself when people are being, you know, silly, how to build confidence, how to be confident, because i-corporate, you know, the white guy is already built to be confident and the time they are raised, that's how they are. You are coming from a background where you have to be humble.'* – Nkosazana

Educational institutions continuously transmit cultural capital through various activities including helping learners adopt acceptable behaviours, polish their language skills and accents (Gunn, 2005). As the participants transitioned into tertiary education and the professional workplace, their inherited habitus often proved misaligned with the dominant norms, practices, and expectations of these new environments. The narratives revealed that participants faced significant challenges in acclimatising. Their familiar patterns of behaviour, forms of social interaction, and English proficiency seemed to be insufficient for advancement within these unfamiliar social arenas. The participants struggled with transitioning due to the educational inequality they had experienced in high school and the limitations they experienced in tertiary. This highlighted how despite post-apartheid initiatives, education inequality still persists (Ladbrook, 2009). Educational inequality negatively impacts learners at the tertiary level, often leading them to dropout due to academic, psychological and financial challenges (Machika & Johnson, 2016). To succeed, the participants had to adapt their social norms, behaviours and language skills, whilst navigating and reconstructing aspects of their habitus to meet the demands of the tertiary education and corporate world. Education is seen as a means to climb the social ladder (Gunn, 2005). Gunn (2005) described the transition as 'social reincarnation' and a 'passport to middle-class status'. Tertiary education is seen as the 'great equaliser' in relation to economic and social mobility (Jagannathan et al., 2022). Tertiary education is common among higher income groups, improving their employability and socioeconomic status (Farid et al., 2021; Lappeman et al., 2021). Tertiary qualifications provide access to influential and higher paying jobs (DiMaggio & Mohr, 1985).

Participants' success can be attributed to resilience as they 'beat the odds' (Jagannathan et al., 2022). Upon completing their studies, all participants secured employment, leveraging their

educational qualifications. They advanced to senior roles including specialist, management, and executive. South Africa's unemployment rate by education level for quarter 2 of 2024 highlighted significant differences based on education level: 37.8% for those with less than matric, 34.1% with matric, 20.8% with other tertiary education, and 9.8% for graduates (Statistics SA, 2024). Tertiary education benefits both individuals and the country by building an educated workforce (Nagaoka et al., 2015). The participants' aspirations for success remained undeterred by the difficulties they faced during their transitions.

5.4 Theme three – Dreaming beyond the current reality

Hopes and dreams for the future (aspirational capital), access to networks (social capital) and resilience (resistance capital) are influenced by one's community and their individual traits (Wills & Hofmeyr, 2019). Participants proved that a disadvantaged educational background does not disqualify one from success. Having individual traits which drive autonomy and goal setting serve as factors which contribute towards building resilience and ultimately achieving success (Garmezy, 1991; Rutter, 1985). Setting goals, being productive, and navigating challenges (Nagaoka et al., 2015) are critical to success. The participants were determined to obtain tertiary qualifications and improve their socioeconomic status. Through hard work and resilience, participants realised their dreams and became successful. They were also inspired by family, community members and role models who showed them success was possible.

This theme includes two sub-themes: 'dreams of a better future' and 'role models, inspirational figures and mentors'.

5.4.1 Dreams of a better future – *'I was seeing myself... like owning my car, owning my apartment, all those things.'*

Individuals' aspirations are often shaped by their community (Wills & Hofmeyr, 2019). Developing stress resistance allows learners to continue achieving academically even when exposed to stressful events (Garmezy et al., 1984). They understood the impact a qualification had on improving their socioeconomic status and gaining access to privileged groups and opportunities (Dumais, 2002). The participants' dreams of a better future were driven by their surroundings and exposure to different possibilities. This gave them hope for life beyond their immediate environment, including aspirations of owning cars and houses:

- *'And the nice thing, the high school where I went to, they had a lot of teachers who were not from the neighbourhood. ...the school premises, it was a very nice school with a fence. Then they had the teacher cottages. They even had water before everyone else had, they had water, they had electricity. So you could see that if you are educated like them, they were educated, that they were living a certain, a certain standard.'* – Buhle
- *'... I was seeing myself... like owning my car, owning my apartment, all those things. Those were the things like (getting out of the poverty situation) ... that's why teaching was never an option because I felt (like the teachers they teach in the rural areas). No, I'm not gonna do that. I'm not going back to (work) where there is no running water.'* – Asanda
- *'...there was this weird thing I would do on Saturdays like during month end at home, they would send me to go pay the, like the, the clothing account, furniture account, and I'll go and do that and pay, and then I'll just walk around town and just look at cars, window shop. I was that window shopper and I'll just go and sit in the car and ... back then, you know, it was the Polos and the Golfs and Toyota Tazze, and they were very beautiful cars. Then I'll just sit there and be, like, you know, you know, "What must I do?" And that was always a driver for me, like, you know, I want to drive the car, I want to do the thing, but what must I do?'* – Sibusiso
- *'...so I love cars. "I wanna own that car..."* – Zakhele

Sibusiso was inspired by the nice houses he saw when the taxi drove from his township to town:

- *'So, the interesting thing we, you know, when you stay in the township, you know, if you look at the way our townships, our town planning and the demarcation. So if you move from any township and you going to town, you tend to drive through few communities. You normally drive through the Indian community, the Coloured community, the industrial area, the suburbs and then town. So in KZN and (name of township) it was the same setup, so you move from (name of township), you pass the Phoenix, which is the Indian township, you passed the Newlands West, which is the Coloured township. It starts to look a bit affluent, you know. They have those double story... you know, you live in a four room and someone lives in a double*

story, it looks very attractive, you know. And then from there you pass Umhlanga and that's now where you see the nice houses and it was quite inspiring. Every time I passed there I would be like one day, one day, you know, I would love to stay here. So that for me was really an influence. It really shaped my thinking.' – Sibusiso

Phumlani, who sold chickens in primary school, always aspired to a better life. He vividly remembered a cold day when, while selling chickens, he saw a man in a car and aspired to reach that level:

- *'I remember this other day, it was so, so cold. I was hiding behind that thing, but I could see my chickens there. It was so, so cold and I still have that picture in me. ... Then this other guy passed with his car, but you could see that this person, man, is so comfortable. I don't know what they are doing but they are so comfortable and relaxed. I was like, eish, I want to see myself like this one day.'* – Phumlani

And:

- *'Where I can have a car and drive and be free, you know, and relaxed like this guy? But I'm just hanging in there...'* – Phumlani

Exposure to life beyond their usual surroundings inspired the participants' aspirations. Buhle reflected on visiting her family outside the rural area where she grew up:

- *'And also were (my father was a priest) so we deployed there. It was not a place where my parents grew up, so most of our relatives were out in the city, in Durban, in the, some of the places. So I think it was another driver to say, "I do not want to end up here, and if school is what will get me out of here, so I will do whatever I need to do." So just getting that motivation of seeing the other world when we go on holidays, I think it was the biggest driver to us to say where we are, it might look like this is the end of everything ... but having an experience of the other world drove us to focus.'* – Buhle

Asanda's exposure to independent women and running water at boarding school made her realise there was more beyond her rural background:

- ‘...there's life, there's running water. You ladies can drive cars. ... I wanted my independence *and I wanted to change my siblings, my siblings' lives. I wanted to bring change at home.*’ – Asanda

Educational institutions expose learners to extramural activities which help them acquire cultural capital and social mobility (Bourdieu, 1986; Willekens & Lievens, 2014). Engagement with other schools through camps and extra mural activities provided valuable exposure for the participants:

- ‘...*the system kuti they will go on holidays and have those camps in the places where they are better resourced, it really helped in us achieving what we achieved.*’ – Buhle
- ‘*I used to be a top performer and you get privileges because of that, right. ... I performed and then what would happen is whenever there was something, whenever there was, anything, gymnastics camp, Olympiads you know...*’ – Kgothatso
- ‘*So I went to a lot of camps with other schools. I could call them Model C schools. So I got to do that a lot.*’ – Nkosazana

And:

- ‘*...some of them is they've chosen the best speakers from the Soweto league and now we go and compete against other kids from other Model C schools.*’ – Nkosazana

And:

- ‘*So that exposure was also good and then the others ... yes, I think I went to one science one... science and ... I was the school president so I also went to a lot of SGB stuff. So whenever they wanted, like, the president and the principal, then I would go.*’ – Nkosazana

Nkosazana reflected on a sponsored camp that changed her life:

- ‘*...I'll never forget, I will never forget this because it changed my life. ... I once went to another camp called ‘Business woman of tomorrow.’ ... It changed my life! I'm sure the people that even did it forgot that they once did that! But that camp was teaching us to be business women.*’ – Nkosazana

And:

- *'So we were there for two weeks. We were taught to exercise, to pray, to, like, to a point where thina siphuma elokshin (those of us who are from the township) so when you go to like a company or whatever, they give you food... we want to take food home uyabona (you see). Like, "Nope, that's not what a business woman does. Shiya lokhu (leave this behind)." The little habits, the nuances, we had CEO's come speak to us every day. So every single day we would go to class, we go there, then there's staff from that company ... on what they do. It changed my life! That one encounter changed my life...' – Nkosazana*

Television was another means of exposure through which the participants got to experience the world:

- *'But more than anything, like whenever I watched TV and I'd see things and I'd be excited and I'll be curious, "How does this work?"' – Zakhele*
- *'And then TV will also show you the world. Most of our TV was US TV and some SA TV, so you can see what's happening in the rest of the world. There's so much happening out there, you know. You can dream bigger than the village or the province. For me, information, like everything that I see, I'm like, this is interesting. What is this? Although I didn't have internet then but it stays with me. When they talk about US, what is USA? It's like it always stayed with me. What is this, what is this ... England? ... Like ummm ... anything that is mentioned that is interesting, I was always interested in and knowing more about it. That made me want to learn and want to be someone in life as well.' – Rhulani*

Phumlani sold vegetables at the railway station and was exposed to students who took the train to school. The students gave him information which helped him shape his future:

- *'Because these people that I have access to now, they are not there where I am from. But they are here every day cause in (train station name)... there's people from (township name), there's people from (township name). There's different people. So now I have access to them, now, these people. The students will be like, "No, I go to UJ...' – Phumlani*

Whilst in tertiary, Phumlani visited companies to start building his network. The narratives below between him and the researcher reflect the process he followed:

- Phumlani: *'...something in me again came and said ok but now after varsity where to?'*

And:

- Phumlani: *'That's when I started a journey of visiting companies. So on the days that I am free during the week at school, I used to then take (the) railway, railway train to... maybe stop here in Bosman. Get off, yho, get to Reserve Bank...'*
- Researcher: *'So (when you get to Reserve Bank what are you saying)? You are getting there and you are saying?'*
- Phumlani: *"Good Morning. How are you? Fine. I've got an assignment. In this assignment I am looking for this kind of a person that must help me..." Obviously... (when you look, I am holding a file).'*
- Researcher: *'Yeah, you look like a student.'*
- Phumlani: *'Exactly! Then they like, "Ey, ok," ...cause remember there are two things, rejection was there, as well acceptance was there. And I used to pray about it to say, you know what, God allow me, help me to understand when I am rejected, help me to also accept when I am accepted inside. But my strategy then, when I get there, I wanted to create the network from people who are in the corporate space. So that now, that dream that I had, that vision that I had when I was a boy seeing people well dressed and what what, now I want to be around those people now. I want to be around those people. Reserve Bank, I went to Reserve Bank, ummm SARS, PWC when it was still in Menlyn, PIC when it was still in Atterbury, uuuummm. AG, AG was one of them, I knew a lot of people that worked at the AG before I came to the AG when I was still in varsity. ... I still have some of the emails. Sometimes I laugh about it, you know, cause now I meet you and then after meeting you, then in the evening after I get to campus I am like, "Good day Mr so and so. Thank you so much for allowing to see me... and look I've been in... today I went to this kind of a place..." to keep the momentum going, you understand, so that they can see as well.'*

Personal agency contributed to the participants envisioning success and having aspirations instead of being a product of their circumstances (Nagoaka et al., 2015). Through participating in diverse activities, the participants experienced progressive environments outside of their everyday lives. Their exposure to alternative ways of living inspired and empowered them to dream of lives beyond their socioeconomic statuses. Personal agency is a key protective factor which positively contributes to individuals building resilience and achieving success (Garmezy, 1991). The provinces and cities where learners grow up shape their worldview (Jagannathan et al., 2022). Being exposed to cultural activities and objects through school activities helps in transmitting cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986; Willekens & Lievens, 2014).

Positive childhood experiences (including school activities and mentorship), also contribute to learners' academic performance (Crouch et al., 2021). Learners who participated in extra mural activities had lower absenteeism and grade repetition (Crouch et al., 2021). Participating in extra mural activities took the participants outside their comfort zones and provided good exposure. These activities contribute towards building cultural capital and developing skills required for success such as critical thinking, agility, decision making, and collaboration (Nagoaka et al., 2015). Participants used these experiences and exposure as motivation for achieving their dreams.

5.4.2 Role models, inspirational figures and mentors – *‘When Sizwe Nxasana was appointed as CEO of Telkom, you know, KZN was rejoicing...’*

Privileged learners grow up with the advantage of their parents networks allowing access to professionals and influential social circles, where they receive mentorship and guidance (Davies & Rizk, 2017). The participants' inspiration came from various sources including admired role models, chance encounters, and successful individuals modelling desirable behaviours. Sibusiso and Nkosazana were inspired by famous Black professionals, Sizwe Nxasana and Khanyi Dlomo:

- *‘When Sizwe Nxasana was appointed as CEO of Telkom, you know, KZN was rejoicing, you know. The guys from the office were like, “Hey, he’s from Umlazi,” you know. “He’s from Umlazi. He’s one of the first few CAs in the country,” and those who knew, you know, now people start claiming, You know, we know his family, the families, you know, you know, like people are claiming, ‘I know!’ you*

know. But those people were inspirational because it's like, oh, so there's a Black guy who is now running Telkom, you know, and he's from here. Ok, so this thing is doable. ... You had a glimpse of hope because there were those people you know, they were not close. It's not someone you could just walk up to and say, "Hey, look, Buti Sizwe, I'm trying to do 123." But the fact that you knew they were there was quite motivating. ' – Sibusiso

- *'I was very obsessed with Khanyi Dlomo growing up, yhu, who! Because she was the first person that looked like me and I considered her a businesswoman. I had posters of her everywhere in my room ... and kind of be like I can be this I can be that'.* – Nkosazana

Family and community members contributed to some of the participants' inspirations:

- *'I need to acknowledge my parents. They were very good role models in my life. They taught me how to be grounded, how to be, how to respect myself, how to respect other people. Yeah, but they also, there were a few, like, teachers that did... They were good positive role models.'* – Zakhele
- *'Like, education was salvation. Like, you had to. So, like, as you grow (you find like the (family name)) that is in on the other side of Eastern Cape when you go there, they are in town and they are doing so well and it's always about like, ok, you need to study, you need to study, you need to study.'* – Asanda
- *'I am still in touch with him, and luckily he was doing engineering. ... We ended up following the same field. ... In a way, he was my mentor because he was ahead of me. Even with the books and everything, he would pass down. That one was a God sent!'* – Buhle (Reflecting on her neighbor.)

Akani reflected on the professionals from his community who would visit his home during the festive season:

- *'And also now (name of the rural area) has a lot of professionals, so the environment pushes you to do something.'* – Akani

And:

- *'You want to get out, explore. You see people like in December, if you go there you see everyone. All the people you know coming back in nice cars. People are building nice houses, people are doing this... there's just so many role models.'* – Akani

Phumlani and Zakhele admired individuals they did not know personally:

- *So, I used to admire and see ... when I see those people ... you see when someone is well dressed, clean and smelling good and then having good life. It used to come closer to my heart to say I want to see myself like this person. Even if that person did not say anything to me, it had so much impact in me because in my community we did not have those kind of people.'* – Phumlani
- *'...people that owned cars...'* – Zakhele

Kutlwano and Rhulani did not have role models but were driven by their future aspirations:

- *'... didn't have some TV role model ... Well, I just decided on what I wanted to do based on my own wishes, because I was enabled that and I think that enablement comes from environment at home, environment at school...'* – Kutlwano
- *'Yeah, well, my community at that time, I wouldn't say we had a lot of role models. Luckily from my side I had my brothers and sisters who went to tertiary school.'* – Rhulani

And:

- *'I think I pushed myself to be where I am. My parents did what they did but after that it was me pushing myself.'* – Rhulani

Participants highlighted the influential role of mentors in their lives who guided them and helped them ascend the social ladder. These formal and informal mentors were instrumental in helping them define and achieve their goals (Radlick et al., 2020):

- *'But I had a very good mentor who yanked me out of that and he was like, "You need to be visible. You are in corporate now. Corporate is a game and you need to play.'* – Nkosazana (Reflecting on how her mentor helped her navigate the workplace.)

- *'Ya, ya, I had a mentor. ...maybe we used to meet once or twice in two months, once or twice in two months, he ...one thing that he said to me, "You see what you have done that day at (company name), nobody has ever done it. People were shocked about you that you just came and knocked on the door and request a meeting. It's something that we are not used to, but you came." So he liked that, he liked it so much that I respect it, so hence he chose (that you know what), "Let me put you by my side. Let me expose you..."'* – Phumlani (Reflecting how he gained a mentor through visiting companies.)

And:

- *'I remember this other time when I was still studying, (mentor name)... invites me and (friend name). So let's go and join him for lunch in Menlyn, right. So remember that era, we are still these young boys who don't know how to use fork and knives, you know. ...he educated us in that thing'* – Phumlani (Reflecting on his mentor teaching him to use a fork and knife.)

Phumlani got a job through a church member, and this helped him with transport money and his family responsibilities:

- *'... a friend of mine attends that church and then we went together. Then we went together, then I started to go with them and that is where I met this guy. So I worked with this guy, first year, second year, I used to work with him. First year, my whole first year and second year and that money I used it, it used to help me for transport also.'* – Phumlani

Asanda and Phumlani acknowledged the role played by their teachers:

- *'So there was a new school principal who was trying to prove himself because of like the previous one ... he's the one who made me believe in myself that I can go beyond my background, like, I'm destined for better things.'* – Asanda (reflecting on how the new school principal made her believe in herself)
- *'...even my Grade 1 teacher at the time... I am still in contact with till now.'* – Phumlani

Role models significantly shape futures by influencing professional and social identities (Kurt et al., 2023), and the participants credited various role models, inspirational figures, and mentors for their success. Mentors help build social and cultural capital by helping their mentees understand ‘the games of society’ which play an influential role in success (Bourdieu, 1986). External support from caring adults and mentors help learners overcome life's challenges and improve social and academic outcomes (Garmezy, 1991; Radlick et al., 2020). Mentorship (whether formal or informal) builds hope and enhances psychological wellbeing (Werntz et al., 2023).

5.5 Conclusion

The results reflected that learners journeys to success were impacted by internal and external factors. These themes provide valuable insights that could support the development of effective interventions required to increase the success rate of learners from disadvantaged schools.

Chapter 6

Recommendations, reflexivity and conclusion

6.1 Recommendations

Providing quality education is a global agenda and SA's commitment to the United Nations SDGs ensures progress is tracked against SDG4 which focuses on providing quality education for all (Statistics South Africa, 2023). In SA, progress on SDG4 (quality education for all) is being hampered by educational inequality, low completion rates in high school and low participation rates in tertiary education (Statistics South Africa, 2023). Black schools remain deeply impacted by Apartheid policies and limited resources (McKeever, 2017). Black Africans have the lowest completion rates for grade 12 with drop out rates increasing sharply after grade nine (Statistics South Africa, 2023). Bourdieu highlighted that the social structure of inequality within society continues to be impacted by the unequal spreading of the available resources (Farid et al., 2021).. All the participants agreed that advancing educational equity is essential for improving achievement in disadvantaged schools and expanding access to tertiary education and professional careers.

Whilst the Government focuses on macro level interventions, schools and parents should focus on micro level community driven interventions to improve learners' academic success. Micro level interventions require less resources and focus on the family, school, direct community and the learners (Jagannathan et al., 2022). Interventions at the micro level can influence academic performance and yield quicker positive outcomes. Macro level interventions influence the city, province or country and include policy changes, building schools, defining education priorities and budgets. Macro level interventions demand more resources and effort, making them harder to implement (Jagannathan et al., 2022). Interventions in disadvantaged schools must be intentional and effectively aid learner development (Nagaoka et al., 2015).

6.1.1 Micro level interventions

a. Giving back to disadvantaged schools

Professionals that learners can relate to can significantly influence society (Kurt et al., 2023). Successful alumni from disadvantaged schools should share their stories, mentor and provide

career guidance to inspire learners' aspirations. Principals should regularly invite diverse professionals to address learners and they should facilitate partnerships with local companies who can advise learners on career paths. These sessions should include question-and-answer opportunities. Participants believed that sharing personal stories on resilience, the role of tertiary education and their journey to success could inspire learners in disadvantaged schools. Giving back could shape learners' dreams, academic performance, career choices, and identities:

- *'Your job should be to uplift where you come from, then you'll make tons of money. I think Black people don't realise that. Black people think that success is running away from Blackness and where they come from. Meanwhile there's tons of money in addressing those challenges.'* – Relebohile
- *'...say, ok these are the possibilities and then tell our stories.'* – Zakhele
- *'...this NGO, they will get funds from other companies for us just to go there as role models, tell those kids our history and then tell them like they also can be where we are because we also coming from the same environment as them.'* – Khensani
- *'I think firstly, at a younger age, is like trying to expose them to different career choices. Expose them at a younger age.'* – Asanda
- *'But now, if we are ten professionals, if there are ten professionals where you come from, you adopt even one or two schools. Just make it a point that every professional to just adopt one school to say you know what information, access to networks, and people. And then, then information that is out there, how do I bring it to this school? So when it's time for registration or open day, and also encouraging them because there is one thing that I realised as I was growing in this thing of talking to school kids, that one thing or what they don't get from so called motivational speakers... hence I am not saying motivational speakers speaking to the kids ... is the how part... Cause it's one thing to say, "Dream big," but how do I dream big? ... "Have a goal." I don't know how to set a goal. How do I set it? ... Now they have got realistic information around them. Cause the thing is most of us as professionals (we don't share) and then we go, and then those kids they also now have to struggle.'* – Phumlani

- *'Because I think sometimes the two things that can help you, you either have to do very well so that you have access to opportunities or you need to have money so you can have access. And without the money, really you can't...' – Kgothatso*

The value of education should not be underestimated, and learners should understand that it increases their likelihood of success in future (Jagannathan et al., 2022). Schools can provide positive experiences that shape learners futures (Crouch et al., 2021). Partnerships with successful alumni from disadvantaged schools would be beneficial to learners. Exposure to opportunities helps learners reflect and build self-regulation to access these opportunities (Nagaoka et al., 2015). The 2022 Census showed higher percentages of Black Africans aged 20 and older who had not completed high school (Statistics SA, 2022). Only 8.2% of Black African males and 9.9% of Black African females had post high school qualifications. In contrast, 40.4% of White males and 38.5% of White females had post high school qualifications. Educational inequality contributes to high illiteracy and unemployment rates, trapping many Black people in poverty (Kyei & Maboko, 2016). Success stories from professionals coming from similar backgrounds can inspire learners to prioritise education.

b. Community empowerment and involvement in learners school journey

Protective factors which help produce positive outcomes through support and resilience (Rutter, 1985), should be emphasised in communities to ensure that parents understand their role in driving their children's academic success. Educating communities on the benefits of protective factors should occur across multiple channels including churches, community meetings and community radio stations. This includes adult support during the learners' academic journey and discipline in the home to ensure school is prioritised. Communities must understand the value of education and its potential impact on their children's future. Participants reflected on the community:

- *'I think the community as well has a bigger role to play. I mean as a community, I think giving back to the school in community if you are a professional, maybe, but it's difficult, you know. I've never went back to my school to like say anything to those learners, but I think if we could do something like that, just go back and give back to the school. You don't have to give back money, but the knowledge is important.'* – Rhulani

- *'I was like, "Parents, I'm very disappointed in you because now the root cause of why they remain as kids the way we are. This lady just shared information about how your kids can be given funds next year. None of you went and engaged her further, you, the kids, same thing, same thing. This lady is saying if you want more information come here. The whole 10 minutes she was there, no one approached her. So now how do we ummm impact ... that's when I realised it's not only about the kids that we need to impact, It's about the parents.'* – Phumlani *'I think family support, and I say this because as an adult I can reflect and I can see what could have made life better for a lot of people. And families are not supportive. You'll be writing exams and we have to clean, we have to cook, you have to... It's like people think these things are automatic...'* – Kgothatso
- *'I think, if family support is very crucial, your family support is very crucial, your family support, if it is there. And also ama networks, because I might have been lucky that my parents were at least educated and they were advocates of education but also, for people who do not have those advocates, I think that's where the community plays a role, to say, even if your parents, maybe they are not really big into school, but if in the community there are some role models or some networks...'*
– Buhle

Education is crucial to accessing better employment opportunities and improving socioeconomic status across generations (Gunn, 2005); Farid et al., 2021). The community needs to understand the benefits of completing grade 12 and obtaining tertiary qualifications. Graduates have more employment opportunities with their qualifications giving them access to more senior and higher paying jobs (DiMaggio & Mohr, 1985).

c. Empowering learners with career guidance and funding information to enable them to make more informed decisions

Empowering learners with the tools and practical steps to access opportunities can alter their anticipated paths, as suggested by Garmezy's Resilience Theory (1991). Career guidance should start in primary schools and intensify in high school. Informing learners of possible career paths and the available funding opportunities may motivate them to perform better academically. The SDG Country Report South Africa tracks the participation in tertiary

education breaking it down per cluster (Statistics South Africa, 2023). The Business, Public Management and Communications cluster in Universities currently produces the highest number of graduates (26.7%) followed by Education, Philosophy and Languages (12.4%), (Statistics South Africa, 2023). The Mathematics, Science and Computing cluster and the Engineering, Architecture and Built Environment cluster each produce 12.2% of graduates (Statistics South Africa, 2023). More emphasis should be placed on the Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics fields aligned to SA's critical skills requirements. While universities host open days on their respective campuses, they should consider having roadshows in other provinces to increase awareness on tertiary education options. Entry requirements should be incorporated into the roadshows to assist learners in setting their performance targets. NSFAS should be part of the university roadshows, explaining the requirements to attain funding. These roadshows should be widely publicised across multiple platforms including community radio stations and target learners and their caregivers.

The participants narratives supported the need for career guidance interventions to help learners understand what careers were available:

- *'I think what I would have needed, I think children from rural or township schools, need to get, to be given support in terms of taking them to those universities, while even while they are at primary school so that they can be exposed to, ok, this is what a university looks like. This is what a lecture hall looks like. This is what engineering students do at school ... the labs you know, just to get them exposed to. I think when they go for school trips at least once a year they should go to like an educational trip. I didn't have that from my rural school, to be honest.'* – Rhulani

And:

- *'I think those career, career fairs as well. I think those are important because from primary school, basically career fairs. There is a lot of professions that people don't even know, even at high school. You even finish school, you don't even know that there's certain professions that you could have tapped into. So those career fairs are needed.'* – Rhulani
- *'I'll say from rural areas or high school township, if you give them career guidance, we link them with bursaries or funding and also institutions where they get accepted to study.'* – Akani

- *'But they need to be more knowledgeable if maybe someone was to say, "I want to be an engineer," they need to know, because now there's maths literacy, maths literacy. Yho, it's killing our youth!' – Khensani*

'Tell them about what accountants do, what engineers do, what doctors do. What does it take to become a doctor? What do actuarial scientists do? I mean, I only knew about an actuarial scientist when I was at varsity because there were actuarial science students there.' – Rhulani

d. Sourcing funding opportunities to enhance the quality of education and extra mural activities

The Department of Basic Education, school principals and school governing bodies should work together to actively seek and generate funding opportunities to enhance learning in disadvantaged schools. Sourcing funding includes sponsorships, fundraising initiatives and donations. Funding may be used to enhance the school's resources, source qualified teachers and enable learners to participate in extra mural activities. Rural and township schools stand to benefit greatly from integrating with 'Model C' schools through various initiatives such as extra mural activities and inter-school competitions. Sponsorships towards these activities would encourage knowledge sharing and enrich the learning experience and worldview of learners in disadvantaged schools. Participants spoke about exposure as a critical component to success:

- *'So there's exposure to the world, but appreciation of your context. So let's start with exposure.'* – Relebohile
- *'I feel like when you're exposed, you kind of know what's out there, even if it's not close enough, but at least you have a view of what is out there. And I even see it with my cousins, right, cause mina I am the first time of a lot of things ekhaya (at home).'* – Nkosazana

And:

- *'...and I think throughout my life, I had pockets of exposure. From primary, middle school, high school, even at varsity, you know. Helped me shape what I at least wanted my life to be like. I think that's super underrated... especially for rural and township schools ne. A lot of the kids are mothers, they are the second parents, they not kids uyabona (you see)... So I wish, and this is out of their control, because I wish we had more local psychologists, who just check in with them... Cause some*

kids don't make it, because there's that one guy who promised them the world. But that's because, ku (it's) rough.' – Nkosazana

- *'Rugby has to be a sport. The kids have to go and play with the kids from all these St Stithians, you know...'* – Sibusiso

e. Enhancing the use of technology

Where possible, teachers should take advantage of technology such as YouTube, which offers limitless content to assist learners with mathematics. Technology can help educators and learners bridge the resourcing and skills gaps. In addition, schools should utilise their district's network for virtual classes taught by top-performing teachers. Technology can also be used to connect current learners with successful alumni from similar backgrounds. The use of technology may not always be feasible in disadvantaged schools due to the limited availability of smart devices and internet across Sub-Saharan Africa, where only 27% of the population is connected (GSMA, 2024). Further to this, internet usage in rural areas is even lower than in urban areas, with only 28% of adults in rural areas using the internet (GSMA, 2024). Technology can be used where possible to support learners.

6.1.2 Macro level interventions

a. Levelling the playing field through addressing structural barriers and resource constraints

Many learners in township and rural schools experience education inequality and learn without the necessary resources in poor conditions (for example under trees). Government should prioritise providing quality education to all learners in SA, classrooms that are conducive to learning, competent teachers, continuous teacher upskilling opportunities which all contribute positively to academic achievement (Crouch et al., 2021). Participants knew that their quality of education was inferior to those in urban schools, which made their navigation to success challenging. The participants emphasised the urgent need for dignity, educational equality, support (including tertiary funding), and greater exposure to opportunities. Participants emphasised the need to address inequality:

- *'I think we need to, number one, balance the playing field, so much so that it becomes pointless for people to take their children to private schools. ... We need to balance the playing field so that a township school is as good as a school in the suburbs, and the curriculum is exactly the same, so that when these kids meet at the varsity, at the lecture hall, the conversation is fluid on all sides.'* – Sibusiso

And:

- *'I don't think building a new school will... will make any difference. We just need to make sure that the education system is the same wherever you go. Our teachers are given the same tools, are equipped with the same tools so that when they teach...'* – Sibusiso
- *'...just give people self-dignity. Give them back their sense of dignity, their respect, and give them sense of purpose but also show them what, what can happen, what is possible. People grow up idolising wrong people, idolising people that drive cars, ... that didn't buy those cars, have stolen those cars... People live in conditions that ... are not conducive for children to grow up in. So if we can do that, give them the sense of dignity...'* – Zakhele
- *'I think we need to actually teach ... because we were taught...'* – Kutlwano
- *I think in Grade 12 that was my first small class elokshi (in the township) and there was 30 of us. So even the teachers get super overwhelmed, right, cause there's not enough ... so like that capacity ... demand ratio per teacher ... I think it needs to be looked at because honestly, we don't learn the same, all of us. Some people are doers, some people are listeners, some people, you know, and I feel some people don't make it because they just never got the right attention, not because they not smart... not because they can't get into varsity but it's almost like you have to be super exceptional to...'* – Nkosazana
- *'... if they can just get the right foundation. Things like literacy, numeracy skills and and all these soft skills that they need, it starts there. That's the only way you can fix this issue. You're not going to fix it by providing more classes during school holidays. It's too late by then.'* – Kwezi

Annual assessments should be conducted of all primary and high schools in rural areas and townships against a defined list of minimum criteria for effective learning. Government should prioritise addressing structural barriers in low performing schools. School governing bodies, principals and teachers should be involved in the development of recommendations for their respective schools. Recommendations for each assessment should prioritise the implementation of low and no cost initiatives with high impact towards improving academic achievement. These assessments should be conducted annually to track progress against achieving the minimum criteria for effective learning.

b. Broadcasting educational content to enhance learning

Addressing barriers like teachers' competency and the availability of teaching resources can significantly benefit learners (Kyei & Maboko, 2016). Not all schools have the required competencies and resources to effectively teach subjects such as English, mathematics and science. Platforms such as the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC) should be used to air basic educational content across all grades covering the primary and high school curriculum on weekend mornings. This would ensure that learners are not competing with adults for the television during sports time in the afternoons. As the national broadcaster, the SABC has a wider reach, particularly in disadvantaged communities, versus paid television channels which may not be widely accessible in those communities. Educational content was aired in the nineties on the SABC where William Smith educated SA learners for free on a programme called '*Learning Channel*' (Rukanga & Simelane, 2024). William Smith was voted as one of the top three presenters for his educational show teaching mathematics, science, biology and English.

Effective and ongoing learning interventions are key as learners may experience learning challenges at various points of their schooling journey. Provision of extra lessons in Grade 12 to address learning gaps may not provide sufficient time to ensure academic success and entrance to tertiary institutions.

6.1.3 Further research

To develop effective interventions, more research is required on successful individuals from disadvantaged backgrounds. The researchers should study successful professionals and entrepreneurs. The research should contribute to developing effective initiatives to increase the success rate of learners from disadvantaged schools.

6.2 Reflexivity

Having never attended school in a township or rural area, the researcher was fully reliant on the participants' narratives for this research. The researcher's understanding of disadvantaged educational environments was enhanced by the lived experiences shared by participants. Whilst the researcher's schooling journey followed a different path, she was aware of the enduring economic impact her family members and friends experienced due to educational inequality. The participants in this study had resilience and managed to navigate themselves to success. In South Africa we regularly encounter the impact of educational inequality for Black Africans in and out of the workplace.

The researchers proximity to the impact of educational inequality has instilled a deep desire to contribute meaningfully to creating awareness and driving change. Learners dealing with stressful socioeconomic issues may not have the capacity to dream and set goals beyond their circumstances. Their problems and responsibilities may consume them and leave them with little capacity to focus on their education or their future. There is however hope for learners from disadvantaged schools as reflected through the participants narratives. Too many Black people have been left behind in the township and rural areas, with little hope of securing employment which pays them enough to elevate their socioeconomic status. This research not only create awareness, but it is also a call to action to address educational inequality. The future of this country is dependent on the resolution of crucial social issues such as educational inequality.

6.3 Conclusion

As is evident from the narratives of the participants involved in this study, educational inequality continues to severely impact SA's Black population. Learners in disadvantaged

schools face significant challenges during their school years, and this is particularly evident when they transition from high school to tertiary institutions, and then into the workplace. This research demonstrated the impact educational inequality has on learners through understanding the participants' journeys to success.

For each participant in this study, obtaining a tertiary qualification proved immensely beneficial, supporting the claim that education can indeed be helpful in climbing the social ladder (Gunn, 2005). Their journeys to success were far from smooth with their determination to succeed being fuelled by the participants' resilience. Key to shaping each participant's journey to success were the protective factors as defined in Garmezy's Resilience Theory, including personal agency, family support, community support and discipline (Garmezy, 1991). It is evident from the study that parents who valued education, regardless of their own education credentials, significantly contributed to the academic performance of learners. The dedication and support of teachers positively influenced the participants' academic success and helped them qualify for tertiary institutions. These factors all played a vital role in shielding the participants from their circumstances and motivating them to strive for more (Garmezy, 1991). Educational institutions such as high schools and tertiary institutions contribute towards the development and enhancement of learners' cultural and social capital (Farid et al., 2021). Learners can acquire cultural capital through institutions even where it was not acquired at home as it is crucial in facilitating social mobility (Bourdieu, 1986; Claussen & Osborne, 2012). The participants' cultural capital was mainly acquired through institutions as they learnt what was required to succeed and adapted accordingly.

Educational inequality requires urgent intervention to ensure that learners across South Africa receive quality education, enabling them to access educational and employment opportunities. The participants were aligned in emphasising the need for change and transformation to eradicate educational inequality. Providing learners in disadvantaged schools with the required resources for effective learning can positively impact their life trajectories (Garmezy, 1991). A greater emphasis on improving English proficiency in disadvantaged schools; is a key dynamic in helping learners access educational and employment opportunities (Claussen & Osborne, 2012). English proficiency was a key challenge that the participants had to overcome in tertiary and the workplace.

With the right interventions, many more successful professionals may emerge from township and rural schools. However, if educational inequality is not addressed, Black Africans will continue to struggle with poverty, illiteracy, and unemployment (Kyei & Maboko, 2016). Among other interventions highlighted by participants, career guidance, access to professionals, mentors and role models could positively impact learners' aspirations and lead to successful outcomes. Ultimately, dreams and aspirations will keep learners motivated as they navigate the multiple challenges encountered on their journey to success.

It is hoped that this study will inspire further research on how learners transition from a disadvantaged educational background to becoming a successful professional.

References

- Bandura, A. (2006). Toward a psychology of human agency. *Perspectives on Psychological Science, 1*(2), 164–180. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1745-6916.2006.00011.x>
- Blease, B., & Condy, J. (2015). Teaching of writing in two rural multigrade classes in the Western Cape. *Reading & Writing, 6*(1). <https://doi.org/10.4102/rw.v6i1.58>
- Bourdieu, P. (1996). The state nobility. In *Stanford University Press eBooks*. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9781503615427>
- Bourdieu, P. (1986). The forms of capital. In J. Richardson (Ed.). *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education*, 241–258.
- Bourdieu, P., & Passeron, J. (1979). Reproduction in Education, Society and Culture. *Pedagogy Culture and Society*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0022027790110405>
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology, 3*(2), 77–101. <https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa>
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2019). Reflecting on reflexive thematic analysis. *Qualitative Research in Sport, Exercise and Health, 11*(4), 589–597. <https://doi.org/10.1080/2159676x.2019.1628806>
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2022). Toward good practice in thematic analysis: Avoiding common problems and be(com)ing a knowing researcher. *International Journal of Transgender Health, 24*(1), 1–6. <https://doi.org/10.1080/26895269.2022.2129597>
- Christie, P., & McKinney, C. (2017). Decoloniality and “Model C” schools: ethos, language and the protests of 2016. *Education as Change, 21*(3), 1–21. <https://doi.org/10.17159/1947-9417/2017/2332>
- Claussen, S., & Osborne, J. (2012). Bourdieu’s notion of cultural capital and its implications for the science curriculum. *Science Education, 97*(1), 58–79. <https://doi.org/10.1002/sce.21040>

- Crouch, E., Radcliff, E., Merrell, M. A., Hung, P., & Bennett, K. J. (2021). Positive childhood experiences promote school success. *Maternal and Child Health Journal*, 25(10), 1646–1654. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10995-021-03206-3>
- Davies, S., & Rizk, J. (2017). The Three Generations of Cultural Capital Research: A Narrative Review. *Review of Educational Research*, 88(3). <https://doi.org/10.3102/0034654317748423>
- DiMaggio, P., & Mohr, J. (1985). Cultural capital, educational attainment, and marital selection. *American Journal of Sociology*, 90(6), 1231–1261. <https://doi.org/10.1086/228209>
- Dumais, S. A. (2002). Cultural Capital, Gender, and School Success: The role of Habitus. *Sociology of Education*, 75(1), 44. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3090253>
- Edgerton, J. D., & Roberts, L. W. (2014). Cultural capital or habitus? Bourdieu and beyond in the explanation of enduring educational inequality. *Theory and Research in Education*, 12(2), 193–220. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1477878514530231>
- Etieyibo, E. (2017). Moral education, ubuntu and ubuntu-inspired communities. *South African Journal of Philosophy*, 36(3), 311–325. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02580136.2017.1269995>
- Farid, S., Abbasi, S. U. R. S., & Mahmood, Q. K. (2021). Modelling Bourdieusian social reproduction Theory. *Social Indicators Research*, 157(1), 297–333. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11205-021-02649-z>
- Friales, W. C., Nana, A. B., Alo, L. V., Tajo, W. R., & Pescuela, J. F. (2023). School discipline: Its Impact as Perceived by the Basic Education Learners. *Psychology and Education: A Multidisciplinary Journal*, 15, 260–267. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.10199024>

- Garnezy, N. (1991). Resiliency and vulnerability to adverse developmental outcomes associated with poverty. *American Behavioral Scientist*, 34(4), 416–430.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0002764291034004003>
- Garnezy, N. (1971). Vulnerability research and the issue of primary prevention. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, 41(1), 101–116. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1939-0025.1971.tb01111.x>
- Garnezy, N., Masten, A. S., & Tellegen, A. (1984). The Study of Stress and Competence in Children: A Building Block for Developmental Psychopathology. *Child Development*, 55(1), 97. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1129837>
- Gunn, S. (2005). Translating Bourdieu: cultural capital and the English middle class in historical perspective. *The British Journal of Sociology*, 56(1), 49–64.
<https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-4446.2005.00046.x>
- Howard, S., Dryden, J., & Johnson, B. (1999). Childhood Resilience: Review and critique of literature. *Oxford Review of Education*, 25(3), 307–323.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/030549899104008>
- Jagannathan, R., Donnelly, L., McLanahan, S., Camasso, M. J., & Yang, Y. (2022). Growing up poor but doing well: Contextual factors that predict academic success. *The Journal of Economic Inequality*. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10888-022-09549-3>
- Kantova, K. (2024). Parental involvement and education outcomes of their children. *Applied Economics*, 56(48), 5683–5698. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00036846.2024.2314569>
- Kurt, Y., Turhal, E., & Batmaz, F. (2023). Nursing students' processes of taking role models and being role models: A descriptive phenomenological study. *Nurse Education Today*, 132, 106015. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.nedt.2023.106015>

- Kyei, K. A., & Maboko, T. (2016). Performance of high school students in Vhembe District. *Journal of Economics and Behavioral Studies*, 8(1(J)), 50–57.
[https://doi.org/10.22610/jebbs.v8i1\(j\).1205](https://doi.org/10.22610/jebbs.v8i1(j).1205)
- Ladbrook, M. W. (2009). *Challenges experienced by educators in the implementation of inclusive education in primary schools in South Africa*.
https://uir.unisa.ac.za/bitstream/10500/3038/1/dissertation_landbrook_m.pdf
- Lappeman, J., Egan, P., Rightford, G., & Ramogase, T. (2021). *Marketing to South African Consumers*. Cape Town: UCT Liberty Institute of Strategic Marketing & UCT Libraries. <https://doi.org/10.15641/0-7992-2548-8>
- Machika, P., & Johnson, B. (2016). Postgraduate students experience of poverty and academic success at a university of technology in South Africa. *South African Journal of Higher Education*, 29(6). <https://doi.org/10.20853/29-6-542>
- Masten, A. S., & Cicchetti, D. (2012). Risk and resilience in development and psychopathology: The legacy of Norman Garmezy. *Development and Psychopathology*, 24(2), 333–334. <https://doi.org/10.1017/s0954579412000016>
- Matli, W., & Ngoepe, M. (2021). Life situations and lived experiences of young people who are not in education, employment, or training in South Africa. *Journal of Education and Training*, 63(9), 1242–1257. <https://doi.org/10.1108/et-10-2019-0231>
- McKeever, M. (2017). Educational inequality in Apartheid South Africa. *American Behavioral Scientist*, 61(1), 114–131. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0002764216682988>
- Mouton, N., Louw, G., & Strydom, G. (2012). Critical challenges of the South African school system. *International Business & Economics Research Journal (IBER)*, 12(1), 31.
<https://doi.org/10.19030/iber.v12i1.7510>

- Musiello, F., Essack, Z., & Van Heerden, A. (2024). Exploring upbringing styles of highly resilient students in South Africa: A mixed methods study. *Journal of Psychology in Africa*, 34(2), 141–146. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14330237.2024.2335860>
- Muzah, P. (2011). *An exploration into the school related factors that causes high matriculation failure rates in Physical Science in public high schools of Alexandra Township*. https://uir.unisa.ac.za/bitstream/10500/5299/1/dissertation_muzah_p.pdf
- Nagaoka, J., Farrington, C. A., Ehrlich, S. B., Heath, R. D., Johnson, D. W., Dickson, S., Turner, A. C., Mayo, A., & Hayes, K. (2015). *Foundations for Young Adult Success: A Developmental framework*. <https://doi.org/10.59656/yd-g1389.001>
- Ndlovu, W. C., Pournara, C., & Mwakapenda, W. (2019). Changes in learners' perspectives on the nature of mathematics after participating in a mentorship programme. *African Journal of Research in Mathematics Science and Technology Education*, 23(1), 111–121. <https://doi.org/10.1080/18117295.2019.1601930>
- Palinkas, L. A., Horwitz, S. M., Green, C. A., Wisdom, J. P., Duan, N., & Hoagwood, K. (2015). Purposeful sampling for qualitative data collection and analysis in mixed method implementation research. *Administration and Policy in Mental Health and Mental Health Services Research*, 42(5), 533–544.
- Parker, J. S., Marano, E., Manson, D., Ruja, E., Manigo, C., Sarathy, A., Rees, B., & Shin, E. (2021). “This school helps a lot”: Personal agency among Black youth within a supportive school environment. *The Urban Review*, 54(3), 367–389. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11256-021-00626-x>
- Price, G. (2023, November 20). *Achievements in Education*. Retrieved November 25, 2024, from <https://www.gcis.gov.za/achievements-in-education>
- Quayle, A. F., & Sonn, C. (2019). Amplifying the Voices of Indigenous Elders through Community Arts and Narrative Inquiry: Stories of Oppression, Psychosocial

- Suffering, and Survival. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 64(1–2), 46–58. <https://doi.org/10.1002/ajcp.12367>
- Radlick, R. L., Mirković, J., Przedpelska, S., Brendmo, E. H., & Gammon, D. (2020). Experiences and needs of multicultural youth and their mentors, and Implications for digital Mentoring Platforms: Qualitative Exploratory study. *JMIR Formative Research*, 4(2), e15500. <https://doi.org/10.2196/15500>
- Rukanga, B., & Simelane, N. (2024). South Africa’s “favourite teacher” dies aged 85. *BBC News*. <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c93590vwyxko>
- Rutter, M. (1985). Resilience in the face of adversity. *The British Journal of Psychiatry*, 147(6), 598–611. <https://doi.org/10.1192/bjp.147.6.598>
- Salie, M., Moletsane, M., & Mukuna, R. K. (2020). Case study of isiXhosa-speaking Foundation Phase learners who experience barriers to learning in an English-medium disadvantaged Western Cape school. *South African Journal of Education*, 40(2), 1–9. <https://doi.org/10.15700/saje.v40n2a1455>
- Secombe, K. (2002). “Beating the odds” versus “Changing the odds”: Poverty, resilience, and family policy. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 64(2), 384–394. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-3737.2002.00384.x>
- Schoon, I., Burger, K., & Cook, R. (2021). Making it against the odds: How individual and parental co-agency predict educational mobility. *Journal of Adolescence*, 89(1), 74–83. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.adolescence.2021.04.004>
- Simpson, D. (2020). Parenting high achieving boys in poverty – critiquing ‘active cultivation’ as an explanation for ‘beating the odds’ in the early years. *International Journal of Early Years Education*, 29(2), 211–224. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09669760.2020.1733940>

- Statistics South Africa. (2022). *CENSUS 2022 A profile of education enrolment, attainment and progression in South Africa*. Retrieved November 26, 2022, from https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=&ved=2ahUKewjr_pKNlt-KAxWqSWwGHW99PGIQFnoECBkQAQ&url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.statssa.gov.za%2Fpublications%2FReport-03-01-81%2FReport-03-01-812022.pdf&usg=AOvVaw3RSsKd490F6axqF-KHXvY5&opi=89978449
- Statistics South Africa. (2024). *Quarterly Labour Force Survey (QLFS) Q3:2024*. www.statssa.gov.za.
- Statistics South Africa. (2023). *Sustainable Development Goals Country Report 2023 South Africa*.
- Sumida, S., & Kawata, K. (2021). An analysis of the learning performance gap between urban and rural areas in sub-Saharan Africa. *South African Journal of Education*, 41(2), 1–17. <https://doi.org/10.15700/saje.v41n2a1779>
- The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa*. (1996).
- Weiss, C. R., & Johnson-Koenke, R. (2023). Narrative Inquiry as a caring and relational research approach: Adopting an evolving paradigm. *Qualitative Health Research*, 33(5), 388–399. <https://doi.org/10.1177/10497323231158619>
- Werntz, A., Poon, C. Y. S., & Rhodes, J. E. (2023). Striking the balance: the relative benefits of goal- and Youth-Focused approaches to youth mentoring relationships. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, 52(7), 1448–1458. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10964-023-01751-4>
- Willekens, M., & Lievens, J. (2014). Family (and) culture: The effect of cultural capital within the family on the cultural participation of adolescents. *Poetics*, 42, 98–113. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.poetic.2013.11.003>

- Wills, G., & Hofmeyr, H. (2019). Academic resilience in challenging contexts: Evidence from township and rural primary schools in South Africa. *International Journal of Educational Research*, 98, 192–205. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijer.2019.08.001>
- Zelčāne, E., & Pipere, A. (2023). Finding a path in a methodological jungle: a qualitative research of resilience. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies on Health and Well-being*, 18(1). <https://doi.org/10.1080/17482631.2023.2164948>
- Zimmerman, M. A. (2013). Resiliency theory. *Health Education & Behavior*, 40(4), 381–383. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1090198113493782>

Appendices

Appendix A – Participant Information Sheet

Good day

My name is Mandhlovu Gwebu and I am a Masters in Social and Psychological Research at the University of the Witwatersrand in Johannesburg. As part of the requirements of my postgraduate degree, I have to undertake a research project. My research project is titled, '*Black professionals' narratives of mobility: Narrating success from disadvantaged education backgrounds*'. This research project will be conducted under the supervision of Professor Peace Kiguwa.

Research Aim

The aim of this research is to identify the key factors that influenced the professional success of a cohort of Black Africans who attended township and rural high schools. This research will provide valuable insights for the development of effective interventions focused on increasing the success rate of learners attending township and rural schools. For the purposes of this study, 'increasing the success rate' includes increasing the number of learners who graduate from a tertiary institution and become professionals earning more than R 22 000. A salary of above R22 000 would mean the individual falls within the middle class income group and has increased access to economic resources.

Participation Terms and Conditions

As part of this project, I would like to invite you to take part in an interview that should take between 60 to 90 minutes. Depending on your availability, the interview may be face-to-face or online using Google Meet or Teams. I request your permission to audio record this interview for transcription purposes.

Participation in this study is completely voluntary and there will be no penalties should you wish to withdraw from participating in the study. If you experience any distress or discomfort at any point during the interview, we will stop the interview, and with your consent, resume it at another time.

There will be no personal costs to you as a participant of this research project. You will not receive any direct benefits from participating in this study. However, your participation will contribute to creating a body of knowledge that could provide useful information to various stakeholders.

Protection of Personal Information

Your personal identifiable information (name and surname) will be completely confidential and will not be shared. The interview recording will only commence post stating your personally identifiable information. The name of your high school will be anonymised in the research report. I will only state information on whether the school was in a township or a rural area. Within the research report, I will be using letters from the alphabet to represent your participation (for example, participant A).

Dissemination of Research Report

The research report will be published on WIREDSpace, which is a digital repository retaining WITS University's research and intellectual outputs. Should you require a summary or a detailed overview of the research results, please contact me to share the required information. In future, the results of this research may be published in an academic journal and presented at conferences. Your personally identifiable information will not be included in any of the results published or presented.

Ethical Concerns

If you have any concerns or complaints regarding the ethical procedures of this study, please contact the university's Human Research Ethics Committee (Non-Medical), at +27 11 717 1408 or via email hrecnon-medical@wits.ac.za.

Contact Details

If you have any research related questions during or after the interview process, please feel free to contact me using the details listed below:

Researcher: Mandhlovu Gwebu

2495113@student.wits.ac.za

+27 83 222 6804

Supervisor: Prof Peace Kiguwa

Peace.Kiguwa@wits.ac.za

+27 11 717 4537

Appendix B – Informed Consent Form

Research Information		
Title of the research study	Black professionals’ narratives of mobility: Narrating success from disadvantaged education backgrounds	
Name of the researcher	Mandhlovu Gwebu	
Consent		
I,, agree to participate in this research project. The research has been explained to me and I understand what my participation will involve. I agree to the following (please select the relevant options (YES/NO) for the statements below):		
• I agree that the purpose of this study has been explained to me and my participation is voluntary.	YES	NO
• I agree that my personally identifiable data will remain anonymous.	YES	NO
• I agree that the researcher may use anonymised quotes in the research report.	YES	NO
• I agree that the interview may be audio recorded with my personally identifiable information excluded from the recording.	YES	NO
• I agree that the information I provide may be used in an anonymised format after this project has ended, for academic purposes by other researchers, subject to their own ethics clearance being obtained.	YES	NO
Participant Information		
Name		
Signature		
Date		
Researcher Information		
Name		
Signature		
Date		

Appendix C – Interview Schedule

The interview will begin with introductions and an overview of the purpose of the study. The participant will be asked if they have any questions related to the information participation sheet prior to commencing with the questions below.

Interview Questions:

- a. Tell me about your experience as a learner in a township or rural high school.
- b. What did you want to be when you were in high school and how did you end up studying your chosen degree or diploma?
- c. What role did your community play in your success (for example family, teachers, role models)? If none, who else influenced you in your career and academic plans?
- d. How did you stay focused and end up achieving what you have today?
- e. What do you feel needs to be done to increase the success rate of learners who go to township or rural high schools?

Appendix D – Interview Schedule



SCHOOL OF HUMAN AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT ETHICS COMMITTEE
CONSTITUTED UNDER THE UNIVERSITY HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE (NON-MEDICAL)

CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE

PROTOCOL NUMBER: MASPR-24-01

PROJECT TITLE:

Black professionals' narratives of mobility: Narrating success from disadvantaged education backgrounds

INVESTIGATOR

Gwebu Mandhlovu

SCHOOL/DEPARTMENT OF INVESTIGATOR

SHCD/Psychology

DATE CONSIDERED

07 June 2024

DECISION OF THE COMMITTEE

Approved unconditionally

RISK LEVEL

Minimal Risk

EXPIRY DATE

31 December 2026

ISSUE DATE OF CERTIFICATE

08 July 2024

CHAIRPERSON

Aline Ferreira Correia
(Prof. Aline Ferreira Correia)

cc: Prof. Peace Kiguwa (Supervisor)

DECLARATION OF INVESTIGATOR

To be completed in duplicate and ONE COPY returned to the Chairperson of the School/Department ethics committee.

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 be contemplated from the research procedure as approved, I/we undertake to submit an amendment of the protocol to the Committee.

Signature

_____/_____/_____
Date

PLEASE QUOTE THE PROTOCOL NUMBER ON ALL ENQUIRIES

Appendix E – Participant profiles and interview duration

Participant pseudo name and interview duration in minutes	Age	High school attended	High school province	Highest tertiary qualification	Current job title	Salary above R22000
1. Akani (23:26)	42	Rural	Limpopo	Honours	Senior Management	Yes
2. Relebohile (35:41)	49	Township	North West	Masters	Senior Management	Yes
3. Kutlwano (41:09)	39	Township	Gauteng	Honours	Senior Engineer	Yes
4. Zakhele (35:06)	50	Rural	KwaZulu Natal	Masters	Executive	Yes
5. Kgothatso (31:39)	37	Township	North West	Honours	Middle Management	Yes
6. Buhle (27:22)	49	Rural	KwaZulu Natal	Degree	Middle Management	Yes
7. Khensani (22:10)	38	Township & Rural	Limpopo	Diploma	Senior Management	Yes
8. Rhulani (40:27)	39	Rural	Limpopo	Honours	Middle Management	Yes
9. Sibusiso (36:49)	48	Township	KwaZulu Natal	Masters	Executive	Yes
10. Kwezi (38:35)	42	Rural	Eastern Cape	Masters	Senior Lecturer	Yes
11. Asanda (49:09)	46	Rural	Eastern Cape	Diploma	Management	Yes
12. Phumlani (86:31)	35	Township	Gauteng	BTech	Specialist	Yes
13. Nkosazana (48:58)	33	Township	Gauteng	Honours	Middle Management	Yes

