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Academic Achievement in ADHD Adolescents Experiencing Barriers to learning: Perceptions of Parents and Learners

Research Report

A research project submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Masters of Education (Educational Psychology)

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DECLARATION

I, Michal Kruger, hereby declare that this research is my own unaided work. It is submitted for the degree of Masters of Education (Educational Psychology) at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted for any other degree or examination at any other university.

Signature: Date:

_____ _____

Michal Callan Kruger

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To my Family you were my source of strength and support through a very strenuous process, and I thank you for always being there for me. I would like to thank my fiancé for always making me smile and providing constant encouragement.

To my supervisors, Zaytoon and Joseph, I truly appreciated all of your guidance, patience and support. Thank You.

To the Attention Deficit and Hyperactivity Support Group of South Africa (ADHASA) for their participation and support, Thank You.

ABSTRACT

The aim of this research was to determine the perceptions of parents and learners are surrounding academic achievement and the factors which contribute to it, taking into consideration barriers to learning. The research also aimed to investigate what their perceptions are on the factors which contribute to academic achievement. There were a total of six dyads, six adolescents (middle to late adolescence) and eight parents. All of the adolescents had been diagnosed with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD). Each of the adolescents took part in an interview and the parents took part in a separate interview. The interviews were semi-structured in nature. The findings of the study indicated that academic achievement was defined as being based on marks or on the ability of the learners to achieve their potential. The factors perceived to influence academic achievement such as peers, educators, school environment and the role of parents were found to be similar between parents and adolescents. The barrier to learning (ADHD) was not perceived as having a greater influence on academic achievement than any other factor.

Attention-Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, Adolescents, Barriers to Learning, Academic Achievement and Parents

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Barriers to learning is a relatively new concept within South Africa. It became an important concept with the introduction of inclusive education. Inclusive education is based on the premise that all learners have the right to be in a mainstream education environment (Green, 2001). With this goal in mind it was decided that there needed to be a deeper understanding of what barriers children face and how to accommodate these in order to create an inclusive education system (Donald, Lazarus & Lolwana, 2010). Thus it is important to determine what factors impact upon the academic achievement of learners in order to create suitable interventions for children who experience barriers to learning. Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) is an example of a barrier to learning experienced by 5.4 % to 8.7% of school going children in Africa (Bakare, 2012).

1.1 Definitions

Inclusive Education

"Inclusive education is the term used to describe educational policies and practices that uphold the right of learners with disabilities to belong and learn in mainstream education" (Green, 2001, p. 4).

Academic Achievement

This concept is not easily definable. Academic achievement refers to scholastic achievement in the areas of numeracy, literacy and scientific knowledge (Sylva, 1994) or can also be described as the way in which learners perform in the realm of academics (Vermunt, 2005).

Barriers to learning

Donald, et al. (2010, p. 3) define a barrier to learning as "any factor that is a hindrance or obstacle to a learner's ability to learn". This definition encompasses a large variety of intrinsic and extrinsic factors that could impact on learning.

Socio-Economic Status (SES)

"SES describes an individual's or a family's ranking on a hierarchy according to access to or control over some combination of valued commodities such as wealth, power, and social status" (Sirin, 2005)

1.2 Research Problem Statement

With the implementation of inclusive education environments in schools, there is a need to know what affects the academic achievement of learners experiencing barriers to learning. The topic of this research is to identify factors which are perceived to affect academic achievement in order to compile areas which could be addressed in order improve the academic achievement of learners with Attention-Deficit Hyperactive Disorder found in inclusive education environments.

1.3 Research Aim

The aim of this research was to investigate the perceptions of parents and learners surrounding academic achievement and the factors which contribute to it, taking into consideration barriers to learning. The research also aimed to investigate what their perceptions were around which factors which contribute to academic achievement. Once the results were determined a comparison between the adolescents' perceptions and the parents' perceptions was conducted.

The study illustrates the differences or similarities between the perceptions. In so doing one is able to gain insight as to what educators, parents and adolescents could do to improve academic achievement. Possible ways this could be done is by addressing the factors which were identified in this study such as intervention in the physical environment or in familial relationships. Locus of control was also under investigation as a factor influencing academic achievement. This study aimed to determine whether an intrinsic or extrinsic locus of control was more prevalent amongst participants. Having determined the factors, possible areas for further research have been identified. It is critical that research is continually conducted in order to further understand concepts, in this case academic achievement. Concepts are continually changing and new developments are being made and thus research needs to be conducted on an ongoing basis.

1.4 Rationale

This research is of vital importance, especially in the South African context. This research has value in relation to inclusive education. Many educators in mainstream schools have not had to interact with learners with barriers to learning and are unsure how to motivate these adolescents. By identifying the influencing factors one would be able to help educators become better mediators between the adolescents and the learning material (Donald, Lazarus & Lolwana, 2010). The schooling enviroment is where learners spend most of their time and thus it has a remarkable impact on them. It is critical to determine how schools can become more effective in allowing learners to achieve their academic potential.

The second reason this research is vital is in relation to the family. The importance of the family in education and learning has always been a key notion. The family is part of the adolescent's external resources. The adolescent is able to use this external resource as a protective factor

(Donald et al., 2010). This study has allowed for a comparison between parents' and adolescents' perceptions. Through this comparison it was determined if they have similar or dissimilar perceptions. Once that had been established the results are able to be used to the parents' and adolescent's advantage. The results can be used to facilitate better academic achievement by targeting the factors that have been identified to decrease academic achievement. The role of the parent is vital when dealing with adolescents who experience barriers to learning (Donald et al., 2010). Studies have indicated that when parents are involved in the academic life of their children the children are more likely to achieve higher results (Desforges & Abouchaar, 2003; Harris & Chrispeels 2006). If parents and adolescents do not know each other's understanding of academic achievement it could make communication and optimal academic achievement challenging.

Previous research in this area has been predominantly quantitative in nature which has not allowed for deeper understanding or an understanding of the nuances of academic achievement to be explored. This study used a qualitative approach. There is also a gap in the literature with regard to the geographic location, previous studies have been conducted internationally however it is imperative that research be conducted in the context of South Africa for it to have the greatest impact in our society. These include: New Zealand, Sydney, the United States of America and Canada (Eisenberg & Schneider, 2007; Pisecco, Wristers, Swank, Silva & Baker, 2001; Stringer & Heath, 2008; Tabassam & Graiger, 2002). The results from these studies are specific to their geographic location. There is a certain level of generalizability of studies however each place is unique. Minimal research has been done in South Africa surrounding the topic of academic achievement and contributing factors (Dass-Brailsford, 2005; Fraser & Killen, 2003; Fraser, Killen & Killen, 2005; Howie, 2003; Mboya & Nesengani, 1999). Another area where this research differed is in relation to the chosen sample. As adolescence

is a critical age with regard to individuals' proximity to finishing their schooling and choosing a career path it is valuable to conduct research with this age group.

1.5 Research Questions

The following were the specific research questions:

1. What do parents and adolescents with barriers to learning understand the term academic achievement to mean?
2. What factors are perceived as having an influence on academic achievement?
3. To what extent do participants feel extrinsic or intrinsic factors influence academic achievement?
4. To what extent do the participants feel that the ADHD diagnosis influences academic achievement?

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

This research looked at the way adolescents with barriers to learning perceive academic achievement. It aimed to determine what factors these adolescents and parents feel influence their academic achievement. In order to achieve this, one must first have a good understanding of what it entails to have a barrier to learning and how it is understood in a developing country like South Africa. In South Africa inclusive education is a goal. It is therefore important to understand how inclusive education may be seen as influencing the academic achievement of South African learners. Thus the first area the literature covers will be inclusive education followed by barriers to learning. Following on from this one must be able to understand what is meant by the term academic achievement. Many factors such as educators, the school environment and the individual learner are said to contribute to academic achievement. Relevant literature regarding academic achievement and the factors which contribute to it is then presented. In order to fully understand which factors influence academic achievement it would be beneficial to understand whether the factors are seen as being part of the internal or external locus of control. One of the areas under investigation is the concept of locus of control. The theory surrounding locus of control will then be discussed as well as how it is going to be used in this study. This research is based on an ecosystemic perspective. The Literature Review will then explain this perspective and its relevance to this study.

2.2 Inclusive Education

Inclusive education is the belief that all learners have the right to be in a mainstream classroom/school and it is the role of planners and educators to recognise this. Inclusive education does not only apply to learners who have barriers to learning or who have disabilities it applies to all learners within the schooling system (Slee & Allan, 2001) and this is emphasised by the Department of Education (2008) as they intend on providing all children with mainstream education opportunities. Ainscow (1999) suggested that inclusive education was not easily definable as it was seen as an on-going struggle against obstacles that prevented certain learners from participating in schooling.

The underlying philosophy of inclusive education can be seen as having been developed from the ecosystemic model. The basic premise of this model is that it provides a holistic vantage point. Systems theory recognises that there are many factors which impact a learner and these factors all interact, factors such as the school climate, the classroom, the educators and the educational policies implemented by government (Green, 2001). Thus by making a change at one level all of the other levels will be impacted. The way this can be seen in South Africa is clear. When the Apartheid era came to an end the notion of democracy and participation became crucial throughout all South African legislatures. This is also true for the education system. Therefore although the education system was not the primary source of change it was impacted upon by change in another level. The result of this change was that there needed to be a shift from segregation (mainstreaming) to inclusive education.

Department of Education (2005) illustrated that there needs to be a shift from "mainstreaming" to "inclusion". The differences between the two can be seen in the Table 1 below.

Table 1: The differences between 'mainstreaming'/'integration' and 'inclusion'

'Mainstreaming' or 'Integration'	'Inclusion'
Mainstreaming is about getting learners to 'fit into' a particular kind of system or integrating them into this existing system.	Inclusion is about recognising and respecting the differences among all learners and building on the similarities.
Mainstreaming is about giving some learners, extra support so that they can 'fit in' or be integrated into the 'normal' classroom routine. Learners are assessed by specialists who diagnose and prescribe technical interventions, such as the placement of learners in programmes.	Inclusion is about supporting all learners, educators and the system as a whole so that the full range of learning needs can be met. The focus is on teaching and learning actors, with the emphasis on the development of good teaching strategies that will be of benefit to all learners.
Mainstreaming and integration focus on changes that need to take place in learners so that they can 'fit in'. Here the focus is on the learner.	Inclusion focuses on overcoming barriers in the system that prevent it from meeting the full range of learning needs. The focus is on the adaptation of and support systems available in the classroom.

Source: Department of Education, 2005, p. 17

As noted by Lomofsky and Lazarus (2001) a breakdown of the Department of Education's goals for the implementation of inclusive education can be found below:

1. Within a single education system a variety of learning contexts need to be developed
2. The creation of a flexible curriculum
3. The development of an accepting and supportive learning environment
4. Development of a holistic support system
5. Improvement of human resources
6. Financial provision
7. The establishment of a practical plan to allow for the transition from mainstream to inclusion

Above one can see the goals that the Department of Education has regarding inclusive education within the South African context. The notion of inclusive education is a positive one. The underlying philosophy is one of participation and equality. It strives for all learners to participate and achieve (Ainscow, 2005).

2.3 Barriers to learning

The Department of Education (2001) has provided guidelines that indicate what would be considered a barrier to learning. Factors that are taken into consideration in the current study are particular individuals (individuals with ADHD), the curriculum, the learning environment, the home environment and the local or wider community (Donald, et al., 2010). These five factors are best understood under the groupings of contextual disadvantages, social problems and disabilities and learning difficulties.

Barriers to learning that are a result of contextual factors are primarily extrinsic in nature, as these barriers are resultant from the context in which the individual is found (Donald et al., 2010). Contextual disadvantages cover a wide array of problems ranging from peers, family, schooling environment, resources and poverty. In the case of poverty many other areas are affected. Although it is considered a contextual issue it affects the cognitive, physical, and psychosocial health of an individual which are all intrinsic factors (Papalia, Olds & Feldman, 2009). Poverty affects children's learning potential and their academic achievement (Evans, 2004). Poverty can have an extrinsic impact upon factors such as parents, parenting abilities and possible unemployment as well as increased exposure to risk factors such as crime (Papalia, et al., 2009). Although contextual disadvantages refer primarily to external factors, they affect the individual on an intrinsic level.

Social Problems are found to cause barriers to learning. Social problems can be intrinsic or extrinsic in nature. Examples of social problems that contribute to barriers to learning are

substance abuse, HIV/AIDS, discrimination and violence (Donald, et al., 2010). These social problems could lead to the development of learning difficulties. For example a learner who has been physically affected by violence and sustained a head injury, could have damaged their brain which would impact on the cognitive ability of the learner.

Within South Africa, 6.55% of the school going population has a disability of some kind however there are only 380 special needs schools in the country (Department of Education, 2001). This led to the creation of the inclusive education strategy. Inclusive education entails creating a schooling system where mainstream schools are equipped to provide education to school going children with disabilities and barriers to learning (Department of Education, 2001). In this study the barrier to learning which is investigated is attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD).

2.4 ADHD as a Barrier to Learning

ADHD is defined as a behavioural disorder. There are three main symptoms of ADHD which are inattention, impulsivity and hyperactivity (American Psychological Association, 2000). According to the DSM-IV-TR there are three sub types of ADHD: a) ADHD combined type, b) ADHD predominantly inattentive type and c) ADHD predominantly hyperactive-impulsive type (American Psychological Association, 2000). Many people who have been diagnosed with ADHD have co-morbid disorders. Some of these include anxiety, depression, oppositional defiant disorder, conduct disorder, learning disabilities and developmental disorders regarding speech and language (Hinshaw, 1994).

Learners with ADHD have been shown to have less academic success than learners without ADHD (Ek, Westerlund, Holmberg & Fernell, 2010; Merrel & Tymms, 2001). Some reasons for poor academic achievement include cognitive abilities, social difficulties, executive

function, age, gender, behaviour and inattention (Clark, Prior & Kinsella, 2002, Daley & Birchwood, 2010, Ek, et al., 2010, Rapport, Scanlan & Denney, 1999). ADHD symptoms influence cognitive abilities, social difficulties, executive function, behaviour and inattention (DuPaul, Volpe, Jitendra, Lutz, Lorah & Gruber, 2004).

2.5 Locus of Control

The concept of locus of control was developed by Rotter (1966) (as cited in Donald, et al., 2010). The idea is that the locus of control can either be found internally or externally (Lefcourt, 1976). An internal locus of control suggests that the individual has control over what happens compared to an external locus of control where the individual would believe that he or she has no control over what happens and an outside force is in control (Donald, et al., 2010). Learners understood locus of control as the relationship between their actions and the outcome of the situation (Bentham, 2002). Locus of control has been found to influence cognitive ability, behaviour, achievement, resilience and psychopathology (Lefcourt, 1976). Sandler, Reese, Spencer and Harpin (1983) found that locus of control was a moderator variable and researched its impact on the class room environment. Chubb and Fertman (1997) conducted a longitudinal quantitative research study on high school learners. Their aim was to determine whether locus of control changed over that period of time. Their results indicated that high school learners experienced an external locus of control throughout their high school careers. Their results suggest that locus of control remains stable. Depending on which locus of control learner's associate with could change their behaviour and understanding of situations.

2.6 Adolescence as a Stage of Life

Adolescence can be broken down into early adolescence (12-14 years old), middle adolescence (14-16 years old) and late adolescence (17-19 years old) (Sadock & Sadock, 2007). Middle and

late adolescents are under investigation in this research. This age group is undergoing a yearning to become independent and develop their own identity (Weiten, 2007). Thus it can be seen that they are being influenced by various factors in developing that identity. A considerable part of their lives still involves schooling and thus the interaction between the stage of life and academic achievement is important. It is also the stage of life where they are close to finishing their schooling career and their academic achievement at the end of matric is influences their future career path. According to Piaget (1972), during adolescence critical cognitive changes occur. Rehberg and Rosenthal (1978) found that during adolescence cognitive ability was seen as factor which had greater influence on academic achievement compared to earlier years where parental background and peer influence were seen as having a greater impact.

Multiple factors can be seen at this stage of development such as a will to become independent, their self-esteem is a key influencing factor with regard to their activities, important emphasis on relationships, they can feel a sense of omnipotence, adolescents try to determine their identity and attempt to do this by identifying with a group of peers to feel a sense of belonging (Crosnoe, Cavanagh, & Elder, 2003; Eccles, Midgley, Wigfield, Buchanan, Reuman, Flanagan, & Mac Iver, 1993; Sadock & Sadock, 2007). Adolescents are faced with multiple challenges. These challenges include sexual behaviour, risk-taking behaviour, drug use and violence all of which can be seen in their environment (Papalia, Olds & Feldman, 2009). Each of these factors plays a vital role during this period of life. It can be understood that each of these factors would also have an impact on their academic achievement depending on how they face each of these influences (Hill, Castellino, Lansford, Nowlin, Dodge, Bates & Pettit, 2004; Mullis, Rathge & Mullis, 2003). It is important to understand what is meant by the term academic achievement.

2.7 Academic Achievement

This research aimed to determine what adolescents with barriers to learning and their parents' perceptions are surrounding academic achievement, how they define it and how much importance is placed on it. Academic achievement has been researched all over the world including New Zealand, Sydney, the United States of America and Canada (Eisenberg & Schneider, 2007; Pisecco, Wristers, Swank, Silva & Baker, 2001; Stringer & Heath, 2008; Tabassam & Graiger, 2002). Research done in Africa has covered a range of topics but it was mainly conducted in the 1980's and the 1990's (Cherian, 1989; Cherian, 1990; Cherian, 1994; Collier, 1989; Lockheed & Komenan, 1989; Maqsud, 1997; Maqsud & Rouhani, 1991; Mbaya & Nesengani, 1999; Mclean, 2001). Factors which have been found to impact academic achievement in Africa include: resiliency, language acquisition, paternal absence and family make-up, teaching quality, metacognition and non-verbal abilities, conceptions of learning, socio-economic status, locus of control, self-concept, family size, divorce and corporal punishment in the home (Cherian, 1989; Cherian, 1990; Cherian, 1994; Collier, 1989; Lockheed & Komenan, 1989; Maqsud, 1997; Maqsud & Rouhani, 1991; Mbaya & Nesengani, 1999; Mclean, 2001). In order to determine how academic achievement can be viewed, this research makes use of Walberg's theory of educational productivity as a theoretical standpoint.

2.8 Theoretical Frameworks

2.8.1 Walberg's Theory of Educational Productivity

The theoretical standpoint of this research project is based on Walberg's theory of educational productivity. In order to gain greater understanding of academic achievement Walberg's (1981) theory of educational productivity is used. Walberg (1981) developed his theory through the empirical analysis of books, research and journal articles in the realm of education, teaching

and learning. Twenty-eight kinds of learning influences were found to exist. The theory states that there are nine central variables that were found to impact academic achievement. These are learner ability, motivation, age/developmental level, quantity of instruction, quality of instruction, classroom climate, home environment, peer group and exposure to mass media outside of school (Walberg, Fraser & Welch, 1986). These nine variables can be further classified into characteristics of the learner (the first three variables), instruction (variables four and five), and psychological environment (the final four variables) (DiPerna, Volpe & Elliot, 2001). Factors which have been found to influence academic achievement are discussed under these three headings.

2.8.1.1 Characteristics of the Learner

Ability, motivation and age are identified under characteristics of the learner. These three variables have been identified by Walberg, et al (1986) to influence the academic achievement of learners. Ability, motivation and age are expanded upon below; social and behavioural, motivational and affective, cognitive, metacognitive and psychomotor (Wang, Haertel & Walberg, 1993).

a) Ability

Each learner has his or her own individual cognitive ability. The learner's cognitive ability impacts upon his or her ability to achieve academically (Jensen, 1998). Dreary, Strand, Smith and Fernandes (2007) found that intellectual ability was one of the best predictors of academic achievement, this was also found by Frey and Detterman (2004). Studies have indicated that learner's ability is positively correlated to the grades which he or she obtained at school; this correlation was stronger for the female samples as compared to the male samples (Jacobs, 1959, Rohde & Thompson, 2007, Sternberg, Grigorenko, & Bundy, 2001). A reciprocal relationship

is seen between ability and academic achievement. Ability can also change depending on what academic opportunities are provided to the individual learner (Brody, 1997).

b) Motivation

One of the major intrinsic influencing factors of academic achievement has been the notion of self-perception. In Walberg's model this would go under the variable of motivation (Zins, Bloodworth, Weissberg & Walberg, 2004). There is much debate as to the amount of influence that self-perception has on an individual's academic achievement. Research has proven that self-perception has a causal role in academic achievement and that a positive self-perception resulted in improved academic achievement (Valentine, Dubois & Cooper, 2004), but there is also research that does not support this causal relationship (Baumeister, Campbell, Krueger & Vohs, 2003). Stringer and Heath (2008) completed a quantitative study to determine whether academic self-perception had a causal relationship to academic achievement. Their sample was on grade four and grade five mainstream learners at various suburban schools. Their findings were that academic self-perception did play a role in academic performance however it was not a causal relationship.

c) Personality

Personality is not easily defined although much has been written about the concept. Personality is seen differently by type theories, trait theories, psychodynamic theories, behaviourism, humanism and social learning theories (Friedman & Schustack, 2006). Studies have been conducted making use of single personality variables as well as multivariate studies in order to determine the exact influence personality has on a person's academic achievement (Blickle,

1996; Cacioppo et al., 1996;; De Raad & Schouwenburg, 1996; Goff & Ackerman, 1992; Hamilton & Freeman, 1971; Rindermann & Neubauer, 2001; Wolfe & Johnson, 1995). Chamorro-Premuzic and Furnham (2003) indicated that the results that they acquired from their study were consistent with the literature. They found that conscientiousness was positively correlated with academic achievement as compared to neuroticism which was negatively correlated to academic achievement. They found that extroversion had marginal impact on academic achievement. Later Chamorro-Premuzic and Furnham (2008) found that personality characteristics can assist in mediating academic achievement. This suggests that a learner's personality can have an influence on their academic achievement. This influence can be positive or negative.

2.8.1.2Instruction

Educators are vital in relation to the academic achievement of learners. Educators' impressions of children can affect the way in which they interact with them. Learners who are well liked by educators or who educators have a good impression of were more likely to get increased individual instruction, encouragement and help was more available to these learners (Brophy & Evertson, 1981). The method of instruction is also important. Under the variable of instruction, classroom demographics such as the size of the classroom, the number of learners in the class room and educational resources are included (Wang, Haertel & Walberg, 1993). Resources available to South African schools are limited. A consequence of this is that the amount of learners in the class is large. With an increase in the amount of learners in a class, educators are unable to provide increased individual attention to learners.

2.8.1.3Psychological Environment

Classroom climate, home environment, peer group and exposure to the media make up this sub category of Walberg's theory. Twenty five percent to fifty percent of the variance in academic

achievement was due to home, classroom and social factors (Iverson, Brownlee & Walberg, 1981).

a) Classroom Climate

Classroom climate is defined as "cohesiveness, satisfaction, goal direction and other social psychological properties of the classroom" (Iverson, et al., 1981, p. 394). The behaviour of learners in the classroom has a causal relationship with to learning and cognitive development. Thus should a learner behave irresponsibly it creates disorder and negative interpersonal relationships. Disorder and negative relationships can result in poor academic performance (Wentzel, 1991).

b) Home Environment

Home environment is the "*quality and quantity of educationally stimulating experience afforded the child by parents or other significant adults in the home*" (Iverson, et al., 1981, p. 394).The role of the family is vital when looking at the impact of the home environment on academic achievement. Plunkett, Behnke, Sands and Choi (2009) found that the amount of parental involvement influenced the adolescent's academic results. They found that factors such as academic advice, help, supervision and academic monitoring were all positively correlated to academic engagement and success. These results were supported by a study conducted by Hoover-Dempsey, Battiato, Walker, Reed, DeJong, and Jones, (2001). There are multiple reasons as to whether or not and to what extent parents are involved in their children's education.

Parents of children with ADHD were found to have different views about academic involvement. “Parents of children with ADHD reported lower self-efficacy in their ability to help their children, felt less welcome and supported by their children's schools and educators, and perceived less time and energy for involvement in their children's academic lives” (Rogers, Wiener, Marton & Tannock, 2009, p. 167). It seems that although there is vast research surrounding the importance of parental involvement in children’s education the parents of children with ADHD find it difficult to be involved. The connection between the home environment and the school environment can result in different outcomes. Iverson et al. (1981) found that the benefits of parent-educator contact were not uniform across all ages. Younger children benefited more compared to adolescents. Reasons for this were that adolescents were more likely to be effected by peer perceptions regarding the interaction as well as having more awareness surrounding their academic results.

c) Interpersonal Relationships

Social relationships have two aspects to it. The first is the interpersonal relationships between peers and the second is the relationship that the learner has with the educator. Social relationships amongst peers in the classroom have been found to influence academic achievement for a number of reasons. Wentzel (1991) illustrates this relationship. She found that by constructive relationships being formed between peers, the level of achievement will increase, these results were also found by Crosnoe, Cavanagh and Elder (2003). The reason behind this statement is that peers can be a source of motivation and encouragement. This links back to factors under characteristics of the learner. Some classrooms have rules for interpersonal relationships that need to be followed in order to create an environment which is more conducive to learning (Hargreaves, Hester & Mellor, 1975). Hargreaves, et al. (1975)

determined the most prevalent classroom rules are related to aggression, manners, stealing and loyalty.

c.i) Peers

The role of peers is vitally important to academic achievement. The level of acceptance by peers has been found to either be detrimental or beneficial to learners (Green, Forehand, Beck & Vosk, 1980). Children who have been socially rejected, behave in an aggressive manner and are anti-social are more likely to experience less acceptance from peers which would result in poorer academic achievement (Wentzel, 1991). These results are of great importance seeing as children with ADHD can behave in such a manner due to the disorder (Daley & Birchwood, 2010).

c.ii) Educators

Educators play an important role in diagnosis, referral and treatment of ADHD learners. Although many educators are able to identify the main symptoms of ADHD they are not aware of general information surrounding it and the various ways in which it can be treated. Many educators underestimate their role and to what extent their actions and behaviours affect the child (Sciutto, Terjesen & Bender Frank, 2000). Cornett and Hendricks (1993) illustrate that educators influence the perceptions of many other parties. Cohen (1977) and Jerome, Hamre and Pianta (2009) support this argument as educators were seen as having an influence on parents, peers, colleagues and to the child themselves. The way in which educators perceive the child were found to impact on the way the child's peers saw the child. The peers' reception of the child was guided by the educator's reactions to the child (Foley, 1979). Sherman, Rasmussen and Baydala (2008) did a review on the literature surrounding the impact of educators on academic achievement of ADHD learners. It was found that educators play a fundamental role in the academic achievement of ADHD learners. Educators are the primary point of referral and identification of ADHD symptoms (Saxe & Kautz, 2003). This indicates

that educators need to be interacting with their learners. They also form a primary point of intervention and treatment for ADHD learners (Greene, 1991).

d) Socio-Economic Status (SES)

In South Africa there is a diverse range of socio-economic groups. It is important to determine to what extent a learner's socio-economic status (SES) can have an impact upon their academic achievement. SES is one of the most researched of all ecological and sociological factors impacting academic performance. Research has indicated that there is a positive correlation between SES and academic performance (Sirin, 2005). The literature refers to this correlation as the socio-economic gradient as it shows that with an increase in the family's SES there is an increase in the learner's academic achievement (Willms, 2002). Caro, McDonald and Willms (2009) conducted a study which aimed to determine at what point in a learner's school career the socio-economic gradient is at its most vast. The research results revealed that the gradient is most severe with an increase in the learner's schooling career. Thus as learners move into high school the gradient is well defined.

The factors mentioned in Walberg's theory are of great importance. The reason for their importance is that they give us a greater understanding around what factors have been found to impact on academic achievement. These factors may or may not be found to constitute impacting factors within this study. Walberg's theory of educational productivity recognises that there are many factors which are able to influence academic achievement. The theory also makes it clear that no one variable can work in isolation and that they are all linked. Haertal et al. (1983), found that learning influencing variables would compensate for each other. The results illustrated that should one variable be less prevalent, then other variables would

compensate or substitute for it. Due to the interconnected nature of factors which affect academic achievement an ecosystemic model will be used.

2.8.2 The Ecosystemic Model

The ecosystemic model is based on a holistic understanding of the individual. The ecosystemic perspective combines ecological theory and systems theory. "*Ecological theory is based on the interdependence between different organisms and their environment*" (Donald et al., 2010, p. 36) and systems theory is based on the understanding that the interactions between people and the different levels of society impact the individual and all of these levels interact with each other (Donald et al., 2010). The first level is the Micro level, the micro level consists of the individual and the environments which they interact with on a regular basis, these include places such as schools, homes and work. The meso level consists of a few micro systems that interact such as the home interaction with school or the children and the parents. The exo level consists of systems that affect the meso and micro systems indirectly. The individual and their surrounding environments may have no direct contact with these systems but they still affect the individual and their surrounding micro and meso systems. The fourth level is the macro system and it consists of the social structure which the micro, meso and exo levels fall under and operate within. Examples of macro levels are gender roles and the employment market (Orford, 1993).

The present study makes use of this perspective to better understand the relationship between academic achievement and the factors which influence it. The study aimed to understand where emphasis is placed and what factors are considered to play a greater role in academic achievement whilst keeping in mind that no one factor works in isolation. In order to determine which factors are seen as having the most influence one could determine whether academic

achievement was seen as falling within the internal locus of control or the external locus of control. Walberg's theory links one various levels with the ecosystemic model. Walberg looks at the individual learner (micro level), the family and the school (meso level) and socio-economic status (exo level). This research makes use of these two models as factors which impact upon academic achievement can be found in all levels of the ecosystemic model and there is no focus on a single level in this research.

In summary the literature has covered inclusive education and how it is seen in the South African context. The understanding of barriers to learning as well as ADHD as a specific barrier was then presented. The factors which have been seen as having an influence upon academic achievement were then presented. These factors covered various levels of the ecosystemic model which is the framework used in this research. Clearly it can be seen that there is a vast amount of research on the various factors seen to influence academic achievement, however this research aimed to provide a holistic understanding of what factors are perceived as pertinent in South Africa by adolescents with barriers to learning and their parents.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

This section of the research paper will provide a clear description of the research design as well as the reason for using this design, the sample chosen and how this sample was gathered as well as the procedure. This section will also describe the instruments used and describe the way the data was analysed. Ethical considerations are then explored

3.1 Research design

Certain research lends itself better to certain research methods or designs. This study aimed to determine the perceptions of the participants and gather information surrounding their individual views through the use of qualitative research. Qualitative research is "the interpretative study of a specified issue or problem in which the researcher is central to the sense that is made" (Banister, Burman, Parker, Taylor & Tindall, 1994, p. 2). Qualitative research is of extreme importance within the social sciences. Gathering empirical materials, interviews, a researcher is able to gain further insight into an individual's life (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). All research designs and methods have their strengths and limitations. Through the use of qualitative methods one is able to explore the participants' perceptions in depth. They allow the participant to illustrate how they see the world through their description of it. Qualitative research also allows for new information to emerge and allows the researcher to

delve deeper into the context in which the participant is found (Coyle, 2007). The research design that was used in this study was a qualitative interview design (Turner, 2010). By using this technique the researcher is able to delve into individual perceptions (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006).

By allowing the researcher to delve into the data and the participants' perceptions the researcher becomes immersed within the data (Coyle, 2007). As much as the researcher becomes part of the research process it must be closely monitored. The reflexivity of the researcher and subjectivity are key elements in this process (Flick, 1998). Researchers bring with them their own perceptions, viewpoints and opinions which could impact the findings of the study, to try and circumvent this from happening, precautions such as writing a journal was conducted. Lincoln and Guba (1981) indicate that the rigor of the naturalistic need to be evaluated differently from that in the rationalistic. Within this research verification was used in order to safeguard reliability as well as validity.

3.2 Sample and Sampling

The sample comprised of ADHD adolescent learners with barriers to learning and their parents. The adolescents were between the ages of 15 and 19 years of age (two were 15, two were 16 and two were 18). Both parents were asked to partake in the interview however should only one parent be available they were not excluded. The study consisted of 14 participants (8 parents and 6 adolescents).

The sample was obtained through the use of a purposive sampling technique. This technique was used as the sample needs to meet certain criteria (Huck, 2008). In order to be included in the study, the caregiver/s and the adolescents need to participate, the adolescent needed to have an ADHD diagnosis, adolescents need to be between the ages of 15 and 19 years old and they participants need to be able to converse in English. One out of the six dyads was obtained

through an ADHD 10 day program which is run by a psychiatrist at a private clinic in Johannesburg and the other five participant dyads were obtained through the Attention Deficit and Hyperactivity Support Group of South Africa (ADHASA). Two learners came from mainstream, one was being home schooled and three were in remedial school environments. By having greater diversity in the sample the researcher received a wider variety of perspectives as the participants were from different cultures, religions and races. Participants were invited to participate by the researcher.

3.3 Recruitment

The researcher went to the clinic and explained the study to suitable participants and provided them with the invitation to participate. The researcher contacted ADHASA and they sent an e-mail detailing the research to their data base and participants who were interested were able to contact the researcher via e-mail.

3.4 Procedure

The head of the ADHD ten day program was approached and permission was granted. An e-mail was sent to ADHASA and the relevant application was filled out. Permission was granted by ADHASA. Permission was also obtained from the volunteer participants, parents/guardians and the adolescents. As the interviews were recorded to ensure accuracy permission was gained from each of the participants.

Each participant was contacted initially via e-mail. From there appointments were set up at a time which was suitable for the participants. This study was qualitative in nature which made use of individual interviews. Each interview dyad consisted of one adolescent and their parent/s. A total of six dyads were interviewed for this study. Upon meeting the participants

the researcher went through the consent forms to ensure that they understood the terms. The adolescent was always the first to be interviewed, followed by an interview with the parents. The interviews lasted one hour each. The interviews were held at the ADHD clinic or at a place convenient to the participant.

3.5 Instruments

A semi-structured interview was used to obtain the data. These interviews were recorded using a digital recording device. The interview schedule was created to address the topic under investigation in this research study. The questions were open ended and minimal encouragers were used.

3.6 Data analysis

In order to analyse the data the researcher needed to transcribe the interviews verbatim from the recorded interviews. Once the data had been transcribed it was analysed through thematic content analysis. The purpose of thematic content analysis is to allow for an exploration of the data to find a pattern (Braun & Clarke, 2006). There are many different ways in which to make use of thematic content analysis. This research made use of the method proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006). The first step was to identify patterns, secondly to analyse the patterns and thirdly report the patterns that are found in the data.

The researcher then followed the following steps for analysis as suggested by Braun and Clarke (2006):

1. The researcher read the data several times to acquire a rounded perspective with the data. By reading the transcripts the researcher was also be able to become familiar with the data.
2. The data was then ordered into initial codes.
3. The codes were then assembled into possible themes and the researcher started to search for associations between the emerging themes.
4. The themes were then reviewed. This entailed ascertaining the consistency of the data within themes and identifying what differentiates one theme from another.
5. The themes were then concretised.
6. A final analysis of the findings was performed.

3.7 Ethical considerations

Participation in this research was voluntary. No person was advantaged or disadvantaged in any way depending on their decision to or not to participate. The study was conducted in English and thus only English speaking people were allowed to participate. The participants were allowed to leave the study at any point and did not have to answer any interview questions which they do not wish to however none of the participants utilised this right. Participation in the research was not anonymous as the researcher will know which transcripts belong to which participants. Transcripts were only be seen by the researcher and her two supervisors. The study maintained confidentiality as no identifying information is provided in the research report. The names of the participants have been changed to ensure anonymity in the report. Consent from multiple parties needed to be obtained before conducting the research. Consent to participate was attained from the parents and the adolescent, see appendix C. As the interviews were recorded, recording consent forms were acquired, see appendix D. The recorded interviews will be kept for a period of five years under lock and key should the researcher or supervisor

need the original data. After this five year period the tapes will be destroyed. All of the participants will have access to the results once the study has been completed. Each of the participants will have an executive summary of the findings e-mailed to them.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

The researcher needed to ensure that the research questions were taken into consideration when writing up the results. The researcher made use of an inductive approach as it allowed the themes to emerge from the data and not from previous theoretical knowledge. This research aimed to discover the perceptions of adolescents with barriers to learning and their parents with regard to academic achievement. By exploring the responses given in the interviews one is able to determine the relevant themes and perceptions. Questions were open ended to ensure that the participants were able to express their views without being guided into providing specific answers. The interview questions introduced general areas that may have impacted upon academic achievement in order to allow the participants to determine what elements they felt were most pertinent in these fields.

4.1 Defining Academic Achievement

When the participants were asked to define academic achievement they responded in one of two ways. The first response which seven out of the twelve participants gave was that they saw academic achievement relating to marks.

"the marks or ya, the marks that you achieve like in your school work" (Adolescent)

"Getting 80-90%" (Adolescent)

The second way in which a participant would answer was that they saw academic achievement as the result of a person being able to reach his or her full potential regardless of what mark that might be. Participants felt that as long as the person in question was doing their best this meant that they were achieving. Two adolescents responded by saying

"Well I feel that it is um your ability of what you can achieve"

"I think one has to look at children as individual people every child will attain to his or her individual capacity in other words what an 80% to one child who is absolutely brilliant but could be getting 90 they might not be performing to their full potential but to another child who is uh maybe achieving 60 and is working extremely hard and who's um studying every day and putting everything they have got into it they are achieving um to their potential" (Parent)

There was a clear divide between the two ways of defining academic achievement. Although when the participants were asked about what they saw was strong academic achievement and weak academic achievement it was evident that some of the participants saw this as relating to marks. Each of the participants gave a mark which they believed signified strong or weak academic achievement. Strong academic achievement was characterised by a distinction grade.

"that you can say is getting over maybe 80 % am I right that is distinctions. And if you get like all of your subjects over 80 %" (Adolescent)

and weak academic achievement was seen as a failing grade.

"That I would say would be 30's or 40's, 30 being like what you need to pass" (Adolescent)

However strong and weak academic achievement was also seen as larger than the marks which people achieved and was seen as relating to how far they were able to go with regard to their education. Weak academic achievement was also seen as dropping out of school.

"Look here when we were in school you had to get 50% or higher to pass the standard in the current subjects you can almost fail them and still get through and do it again the next year and the year after. To get a matric in this country it's not that hard anymore I think dropping out of school isn't an option anyone can pass matric now days yea just a normal matric pass would be a weak thing" (Parent)

This was contrasted with strong academic achievement being seen as going far in your academic career and being able to either achieve a tertiary degree or diploma or by acquiring a skill.

"I think being able to get like a BSc degree getting honours and stuff that is a good achievement; there are some jobs that say you have to have honours in a certain thing to even apply for the job, so yes that is what I think. I don't think that getting a matric and getting into varsity is like an amazing achievement, actually finishing that three, four years and doing well that is good" (Parent)

"obviously a degree would be a bonus um but any type of like a diploma, something more than what the average person could possibly have or an artisan skill they can use to get a job" (Parent)

The third way which strong and weak achievement was seen was according to the individual child. Depending on whether the child was achieving well or not was dependent on their capability.

"Weak academic achievement are those who are lazy I don't see a child failing as being necessarily weak academic achievement because that could be a child who just has a learning disability or a learning difficulty or who needs help in a certain area learns in a different way or often you get children who try hard they work there self to a standstill just to pass just to be able to get through and I don't consider that as weak academic achievement at all I consider that as a resigning success weak academic achievement is when people are not performing to their potential" (Parent)

It can be seen that there are varying ways in which to see what strong and weak achievement are and none can be seen as invalid. The way you define academic achievement will influence the way you see weak or strong academic achievement.

4.2 Factors influencing Academic Achievement

4.2.1 The role of the environment

4.2.1.1 The role of the School Environment

There were six factors identified within the school environment as influencing academic achievement. These factors were educators, resources, the culture of the school, peers, discipline and the learner. The first factor which will be discussed is educators.

a) Educators

All of the adolescents and parents saw the role of the educators as the way in which they taught as well as their capacity to encourage the pupils.

"I would say having a really good teacher and learning interesting things as well as teachers that make learning fun, so that you would remember everything" (Adolescent)

"*How that teacher teaches it's very important to be able to um convey or to explain properly coz then otherwise the kids don't understand*" (Parent)

Both parents and adolescents thought that the ability of the educator to convey information correctly was an influencing factor relating to learners' academic achievement. The parents tended to be more concerned with the educator's ability to teach with passion.

"*it also depends on the teacher you get teachers who actually teach and ones who just earn a salary*" *(Parent)*

This thought was echoed by another participant

"the teachers are being paid a salary and everybody must just get on with it, being a teacher is a very specialized job it's a job that requires dedication and that requires a passion and I think that schools should be more aware of the teachers they select and that many teachers just do it as well it's a job and don't think that they very passionate about their subject there pupils and exactly what goes on in pupils lives um I think the reason why I bring up the passion for teaching because when you have a teacher who is passionate about the children they become very aware and interested in each individual in their class they not just interested in the clever ones pushing aside the ones who just dong seem to be coping and sort of just putting them into a category of where of you guys are just lazy they don't take the time out to understand is there a problem" (Parent)

This statement can also be linked to teacher training. All of the parents explained that not few educators are able to identify children who have a more serious problem than being lazy. They also expressed that they perceived this resulted in certain children being ignored as they were not performing to the general class standard.

"*I think they do now a whole um course or a year I don't know on the different problems that kids can have like the ADHD or ADD um to let them know um depression is a huge problem in schools*" *(Parent)*

"I think there is a definite lack in the training of teachers in that field in picking up where children have problems they could perhaps bring in more expert advice … the earlier that it is picked up I think the easier it is to help the child I think in the lower grades in primary school especially the teachers should be trained uh what to look out for instead of saying this child is driving me around the bend perhaps there is a problem uh and they should look at it more closely and even into the home situation because many times what's going on at home starts affecting academic uh achievement … a teacher has to be on top of all these things that's why I say the teacher really needs to be passionate and have the child's best interests at heart and that's not just one child that's every child" *(Parent)*

"we need to get a grip on the attention deficit disorder and need to become aware of it the teachers don't have the patience to deal with those children and push them to become more" (Parent)

b) Resources

Resources were described as funding, class sizes, text books and resources available to the schools. Class size was a factor which participants felt influenced a learner's academic achievement. It was a concern for both parents and adolescents, however parents expressed increased concern with regard to resources.

"It can be big classes um I don't like big classes um I can't focus in big classes" (Adolescent)

"sizes of the classes, 10 years ago the teachers wouldn't say out of a class of 30 I can't focus on only your child but guess what I know my child is one of 400 in the grade and I would like them to treat my child properly but the reality is that that doesn't happen" (Parent)

"*The classroom enviroment and the number of kids in the class and some kids achieve very well and if the teacher focuses on one child and not the rest… You are in a class with 40 kids with a range of kids from smart and the ones who learn slow the class goes at the pace of the slow learner unless the teacher leaves them behind*" *(Parent)*

The availability of text books as well as technology to some schools is seen as affecting academic achievement. Children who are unable to have access to resources are perceived as having greater difficulty achieving academically, as less information is available to them. This was identified by two adolescents and all of the parents.

"The schools sometimes don't have text books because the teachers are burning them" (Adolescent)

"*technology isn't available to help those children and information as your wealthier family do so from that level yes also in those areas there is a lot of problems with the text books they don't have computers unlike the wealthier or more urban schools" (Parent)*

Availability of textbooks and technology was also linked to parent education level as should the parents be unable to assist the learner, they are unable to go look in their text books or on the internet for assistance. This emphasises the need for an ecosystemic approach as these two

factors are in the same level and have an impact on each other, and thus they cannot be seen in isolation.

Participants perceived the schools as having minimal access to assessment and psychological resources. The result of this reduced access was seen as learners not being correctly identified as having problems with learning. Parents also felt that schools did not have the resources or expertise to deal with learners who have difficulties in learning.

"*lack in the training of teachers in that field in picking up where children have problems they could perhaps bring in more expert advice but then again it goes down to the money that is available to the school the money that is available for children to be assessed and looked at I know through expenses on a private level to have your child assessed and to get down to the specifics of where the problem areas are*" (Parent)

Access to services (such as assessments and therapeutic interventions) was only identified by parents and not the adolescents. Parents are the ones that are responsible for getting their children assessed and are responsible for paying the resultant fees. It can be seen that this is the reason for them being the participants that identified this as an influencing factor.

c) Culture of the School

In the context of this paper the, the culture of the school refers to the what the school prioritises and awards but also the type of school (mainstream, remedial, home schooling or skills based schooling). Examples of what the school would prioritise would be academic achievements, sporting activities or cultural activities. The school's classification as a mainstream, remedial, home schooling or skills based school, would impact upon the school culture.

"*Well if a school is well known for sports, athletics and all of that and most of the people in the school are top achievers, so the school's reputation affects whether or not the students want to achieve*" *(Adolescent)*

"the school gives rewards to the children that did well and achieved they don't really concentrate on the ones who are not clever but they want to become clever and achieve and that child also becomes a problem to the class and the school the school only wants the ones that achieve" (Parent)

"*if they putting their child into a school that is extremely uh focused on sports and not so focused on academic achievement they have gotta be aware that ther child has got to fit in to that sector because if your child is extremely academic and the school is focusing on the sporting side they don't get that recognition that they need and that's where I say every child has their strong point there needs to be a good balance in the school*" *(Parent)*

What the school acknowledges as an achievement was identified by both parents and adolescents. The difference between the two perceptions was that the adolescents saw the school's reputation as being a positive influence. Reasoning behind this could be that the learners feel part of that community and want to identify with the school's reputation. Parents felt that the schools valued their reputation more than the individual learners. Schools were seen as encouraging learners that were already achieving and not encouraging learners that were not performing to the school's standard of excellence.

Type of school is also seen as an influencing factor. All of the parents felt that different types of schools affected their child's academic achievement in various ways.

"*the remedial schools that are specialized to help with the children that need the extra learning or who learn in different ways the classrooms are far smaller they still have distractions they still have the children who are not behaving who are not conforming but because of the classroom size and teacher training they are more aware of how to help that child and to get more out of them" (Parent)*

d) Peers

Peer influences were equally important to the parents and the adolescents. Peers were primarily seen as having a negative impact on a learner's academic achievement. Peers in the adolescents class were described as being distracting and could influence the individual learner in a negative way.

"When I was in my other school um it was more friends, friends distracted me I couldn't work cause everybody is talking, writing letters to each other or and they always distracted me" (Adolescent)

Parents also identified peers as being the source of encouragement when it came to negative activities such as drugs and alcohol.

"*peer pressure another thing, drugs uh drinking um children that go off … from fifteen to sixteen seventeen eighteen very very very important years and that is where all that peer pressure comes and children will do things to get maybe into the wrong groups and um that also influences their work coz then they neglect that*" *(Parent)*

"*Peer pressure that you gonna find across the board I know they do drug testing at the main stream it is a sad fact that you will find even in the special needs school as well it is a sad fact that the special needs children are more susceptible to peer pressure they find it harder to maintain friendships to their*

social skills um at normal levels they battle to hold groups of friends together um and because of that in order to fit in they say ok I'll try that with you ill drink with you will have a bit of this or a bit of that they feel they might be more acceptable to the peer group by joining in these activities that may not be as important to one who is more independent and who has a better self-esteem and self-image" *(Parent)*

However peer influence was also seen as a positive point. Peers can provide the individual learner with security, support as well as acceptance. One participant had moved to a remedial school, his mother stated

"*one day he came home and said mom do you know how nice it is because I'm friends with everyone… he said it's so nice because in a remedial school he is the same as everybody else everyone has the learning problems or the dyslexia problems or the reading problems*" *(Parent)*

Peers were seen as exerting both positive and negative influences. Peers can distract learners as well as encourage them to partake in activities such as drugs and alcohol, however they can also be supportive and encouraging. This supports the literature on peer influences as the findings in this study support the current literature on peer impacts. Peers can influence the way in which the learner sees him or herself and what groups he or she joins can mould their identity and shape their future.

e) Discipline

Discipline was seen as, the ways in which educators or schools are able to impact their learners' academic achievement. The discipline methods used or provided by educators or schools can have a significant impact upon a learners academic achievement.

"teachers don't really know what they are doing they can't keep the class quiet um they not worried about what the children are doing the children just run riot … um I am sure lots of children are even on their phones while the teacher is explaining something um also not doing homework um the children didn't listen in class and that impacts their homework when it comes to attention misbehaving it is not taken care of like people say if your homework is not done you are going to get detention but then they don't do it. The children are just naughty and they are not worried about anything" (Adolescent)

"Discipline at school as well, like when you don't do your homework and the teachers give you detention, so it makes you do your homework which helps you learn" (Adolescent)

When a learner is being disruptive there is not always a good understanding as to why the child is being disruptive. The result is that the child could be disciplined without the cause for the behaviour being understood. This impacts the learner's academic achievement in a negative way as the child could feel belittled as well as the behaviour may not change as there is a deeper cause than the child just being naughty.

"*In mainstream schools in a bigger class he talked a lot and that he would get into trouble*" *(Parent)*

"*Um discipline at school I know quite a lot of teachers who wow its becoming more and more of a problem is and is one of the things that saddens me is that often there are children who are pushed to one side because they are not achieving and become a distraction in class and become naughty rebellious inattentive and they get pushed to one side and the teachers don't really want to help them they actually more of an annoyance than anything else and unfortunately a lot of these children have other problems that went picked up when they were in primary school um learning difficulties and stuff like that*" *(Parent)*

f) The Learner

The learner was impacted by the grade the learner was in as well as their individual subject preferences. It was suggested that depending on the grade the learner was in his or her academic achievement might change.

"And you don't realise when you are still in grade 10 or 8 or 9 that your work is important. They think when you get to matric and grade eleven then it is important but the person doesn't realise that when you start" (Adolescent)

"*They normally get to that place as they are getting to matric and it's not many who strive for that excellence when they are still in grade 8 um because of peer pressure and things like that they tend to become more socially interactive and that becomes more important than the academic side of things" (Parent)*

It was also seen that depending on your career aspirations your academic achievement could be influenced.

"I don't know what I wanna study yet but it will definitely not be a maths teacher or an accounting teacher or anything so I am not saying to myself I am gonna get 90 % for accounting cause I want to become an accountant I am just trying my hardest" (Adolescent)

4.2.1.2 The role of the Home Environment

a) The role of the Parent

All parents and adolescents found that the role of the parents was vital in moulding the learner's academic achievement. There were various ways the parents were seen as having an impact on the learners academic achievement. The first was their ability to encourage and support their children in their academic endeavours.

"Having parents that are involved and supportive makes a huge difference as they kids need to know that their parents are happy with what they can achieve, if they get 60 they know their parents will be proud of them cause they tried their best" (Adolescent)

Parents who were perceived as being involved and interested were assumed as having a positive impact on academic achievement

"*Getting my parents to test me and the parent's involvement and my family also helps me and encouragement and support*" *(Adolescent)*

When parents were speaking about themselves being a source of support many reflected on the relationship they had with their own parents and how this had impacted the way they assisted their children. It must be noted that parents were also perceived as not always having a positive impact on their child's academic achievement.

"So if you have a bad parent then you school work is going to be bad and stuff. Because you are thinking about your mom" (Adolescent)

"*I think stability in the family's circle I think that's very important um general stable life or family life especially if there's abuse or um broken families but all those can be a huge influence*" *(Parent)*

Throughout the interviews it was evident that the expectations held by parents was vital in their child's academic achievement. Many parents have high expectations. The expectations differed between parents. Some parents felt that their children needed to achieve in order to survive

"Well if you want a good job one day you are going to have to achieve, they told me this in grade 1, they always tell me that if you want a job you have to do well" (Adolescent)

"it's basically all to do with responsibility for your own actions if you don't you know if you don't study then you suffer the consequences um don't come to me in matric and say ooh I should have studied harder coz now I can't get into I want to study this and I can't get in because of that I said well that's up to you that's from grade eight already" (Parent)

Some parents wanted their child to reach their individual potential irrespective of where that potential is. Parents indicated that they did not have a specified level which their children had to meet however their children did have to try their best and reach their individual potential.

"We've had to adapt that expectation on our children to fit the individual abilities of our kids" (Parent)

"I think stereo typing occurs because people compare individuals one to another they forget that each person has their own strengths and weaknesses and they forget that were language might be one person's strength or maths might be one person's strength not necessarily the other persons strengths and they tend to compare and compete within a single area as opposed to being encouraging in the area in which each individual is strong and then adding help where the individual needs extra input" (Parent)

"They just want us to achieve our best. And our parents know where our points are and where our strong points are and they know that we can be lazy... it is just that they know what we can achieve and if we don't achieve it then they will put their foot down" (Adolescent)

The reasoning behind these expectations was primarily based on their past academic experiences and beliefs around what happens to people who do not have academic achievements

"For me um my own failure to go forward at work you struggle to go into other positions because you don't have the qualifications and stuff although you know the work but you don't have the qualification you can't get the position… 90 percent of parents will tell their children if you don't achieve academically you won't get a job you know and academic achievement is long term sustainability it's not short term where in 5 years you won't survive no no no that's your ticket to survive in life your equipping yourself" (Parent)

"The perception is that child will become a responsible adult and get an excellent job and in general have a successful life not just financially, you know but overall and if you go back in the early seventies in my time, anybody that didn't achieve at school was perceived that they will not survive after that… if you are uneducated you have a bigger chance of doing crime or not surviving there is a lot of unemployment in south Africa the basic thing is education" (Parent)

"It affects one thing the way you live and what you do that's all it does people with less academic achievement have less choices" (Parent)

Parent education level was mentioned by half of the participants. Despite this there was also an understanding that parent support and expectations played a role, these are mentioned in the following paragraphs. Parents felt that they are unable to assist their children as the work has

become too difficult and that they are not equipped to assist. They felt that this affects their child's academic achievement as they are unable to help their child understand.

"I don't know the work today I look at the work I can't help him" (Parent)

"my parents aren't very academically strong so I mean if I go and take my maths to them my dad can get to the answer but he can't tell me how so they will try and help me as much as they can" (Adolescent)

A participant felt that the parents' education level was not that influential in a learners' academic achievement. It was understood that it is important for parents' to continually assist their children irrespective of their education level. This suggests that parents who support their children were having a positive impact on their academic achievement. Parents were seen as needing to provide assistance through their children's schooling careers

"Parents education level I'd have to say in very extreme cases in rural areas where parents had no education because of apartheid era, children are now getting the opportunity to have education that the parents didn't I'd say yes it does give problems because the parents can't help their children the technology isn't available to help those children … but I think when it comes to families you have your child's best interests at heart it doesn't really matter and I'm talking in terms of your average urban family whether you've got a matric or a doctorate I think if you're a good parent you are going to allow your child to perform to his best ability" (Parent)

Discipline was indicated as having an impact on a learner's academic achievement. It is understood that the parents or guardians decide the means of discipline. Thus it falls under the subsection of parents. It was only suggested by five of the participants. The adolescents

indicated that if they do not achieve to their potential it is likely that they will get punished in some way or another.

"*let's say if you achieve in something you get promised maybe something and then their parents give it to them, I think that is what influences people" (Adolescent)*

However this is not always seen as a positive influence

"They know if we have tried our best and if we have not then they will take something away from us which I feel is right but sometimes I feel it doesn't work…the thing is with my parents is they say something they going to disconnect the internet and then they don't it is also that they don't follow up with what they say. and then it is like they are not going to do it so why must we do it so that is also an influence cause if our marks are bad then they say they are going to do things but they don't" (Adolescent)

"*you have to you have to put your foot down and that's the two things I've found is discipline and love you've got to give discipline but it can't be to children that are bipolar um you you've got to understand them or borderline personalities so you've got to understand so once you understand how you've got to deal with them then you'll have results so it won't happen immediately*" *(Parent)*

b) Socio-Economic Status

The participants came from different socio-economic backgrounds. This means that not all of the participants had the same amount of money available to them. They viewed this factor as having an impact on the learner's academic achievement. The initial way in which this was approached was the presence of items such as televisions, access to a computer and cellular phones. These items were identified as a distraction.

"It can be TV as it can attract lots of children and you don't even worry about your work you just wanna watch TV. Or um your phone like socialising um certainly I was like that I always wanna be on my phone I didn't focus on my work I always focus what is on my phone. And I think a phone is one of the biggest reasons why children don't do so well. They could do better if they were off their phones especially a blackberry." *(Adolescent)*

"I also think TV and cell phones affect your ability to concentrate as you need to be in a quiet silent room when you need to study, away from the influence of TV and noise" (Adolescent)

One of the parents noted that they were unable to provide their child with a cell phone and this was beneficial as it allowed him to be free of distraction. Another way in which socio-economic status was seen as an influencing factor was that some parents were capable of sending their children for extra lessons or various therapies which allowed them to improve the possibility of the child doing well.

"*From a financial point of view um that can also influence coz then um always afford to pay for those extras or whatever you'd like a child to do*" *(Parent)*

"To put your child into the different therapies is a very expensive exercise" (Parent)

The lower the socio-economic status of an individual the less assistance and support the parents would be able to provide. This is indicated by parents not being able to purchase the relevant equipment (such as computers or internet) or not being able to provide the appropriate supportive therapies needed by the child.

4.2.2 The role of the Individual Learner

The individual learner was seen as influencing academic achievement through their personality, individual intrinsic barriers to learning, their life stage (adolescence) and individual expectations of themselves. The first sub division to be discussed is personality.

a) Personality

The personality and determination of the individual learner was seen as a critical factor. Parents and adolescents both felt that it was their responsibility to be organised and determined to do well.

Also the learner has to be responsible and determined as it will encourage them to do better and that will make them feel proud of what they have accomplished." (Adolescent)

"If you believe you can do it, it doesn't matter where you are you can do it you will find a way to learn" (Parent)

Personality was linked to self-esteem. It was seen that learners that had greater self-esteem were able to perform better in the arena of academics.

b) Intrinsic Barriers to learning

The role of intrinsic barriers to learning was identified as a factor affecting academic achievement. Intrinsic barriers to learning are understood as "factors that are essentially or inherently 'within' the person (e.g. intellectual disability)" (Donald et al., 2010, p. 20)

"I would say that they would need to take everything into consideration and use methods that suits their lengths of concentration and their distractibility." (Adolescent)

"The individual child may have something like ADHD or um might be bipolar and this could affect their abilities" (Parent)

"I see ADHD not as a problem but as a challenge and how it makes you stronger as an individual" (Parent)

Intrinsic barriers to learning were viewed differently. To some it meant that they will be unable to achieve past a certain point due to their intrinsic barriers to learning. To others it was seen as something that can be accommodated. It was clear that intrinsic barriers to learning were perceived as impacting academic achievement. Although it is unclear as to whether it is seen as a negative or positive influence.

c) Adolescence

Being at the stage of adolescence was seen as a factor. Adolescence was seen as influencing a learners' academic achievement as at this life stage there are unique situations which learners face.

"the stage that the child is at because as the child goes through the teenage years they go through ups and downs and um mature at different rates and they become aware of how important the working to your potential is" (parent)

Other participants also acknowledged the role of life stage however it was in an indirect way, such as talking about peer pressure and the importance of peer relationships.

d) Individual Expectations

Each of the adolescent participants had their own expectations of themselves. Whether their expectations have developed as a result of their parent's expectations of them is beyond the scope of this research.

"I think education comes first in life. I mean if you are not academic if you haven't been taught anything then you are really not going to be clever. You are not going to be able to get far in life. So I think academics are very very important" (Adolescent)

"If I don't do well the I know that I won't get a job one day or so if you do your homework and everything then you can get a good achievement and get far in life" (Adolescent)

The expectations they exhibit for themselves was seen as a goal they wanted to achieve. Whether or not the adolescent reached their own expectation would determine if they felt that they had achieved academically or not.

4.2 An Ecosystemic view of Academic Achievement

The ecosystemic nature of academic achievement was clearly explained by one of the participants. The participant explained that none of the factors can be seen in isolation but needs to be understood in the wider context.

"Well it's all about the individual learner they are the ones that are at the centre of the whole process however I think that it's the nucleus around the individual that plays an even bigger role for one individual to be responsible for his or her own achievement and leave every other factor out is asking a lot of a child a child has to be surrounded by love by acceptant nurturing the boosting of self-confidence and self-esteem and offering of opportunity to show where they excel and where they don't I think it's the nucleus around that individual that is going to bring the child to the point where they can um proceed to the level where they can perform to the best of their abilities" (Parent)

Each of the participants perceived academic achievement as being impacted upon equally by intrinsic and extrinsic factors.

The findings above indicate that there are multiple factors which are understood as influencing academic achievement. Each factor was seen differently by each participant and at times differently by parents as compared to adolescents. The discussion section which will follow will attempt to debate and deliberate over the findings.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

The discussion section attempts to answer the research questions by making use of the themes that arose from the findings obtained. It will also explore the theoretical and practical implications of the findings achieved. The findings of this research will be discussed in relation to the literature reviewed in Chapter 2.

Revisiting the research questions

5.1 What do parents and adolescents with barriers to learning understand the term academic achievement to mean?

Academic achievement was understood in two ways. It was either understood as relating to the marks achieved by an individual or as the ability of an individual to reach his or her potential. There are various reasons as to why academic achievement is seen as relating to marks. The findings indicate that schools and society in general award and recognise learners who achieve higher grades thus making high marks a desirable academic achievement. It was observed that there was consensus that learners who were unable to or had difficulty achieving high marks were not recognised as achieving academically and were at times discouraged or ignored. This supports Boekerts (1996) research which illustrated that due to the fact that most schools are achievement orientated, this moulds "student's concepts of academic ability and their achievement related cognitions and feelings" (pp. 384). The second meaning of academic achievement that was described was the ability of a learner to reach their individual potential. This definition is developed from the understanding that each learner is an individual and thus he or she will each have areas of strength and areas of weakness.

It was evident that the definitions which were developed had an impact upon what was seen as strong and weak academic achievement. Yet again marks came into the discussion as defining

strong and weak academic achievement. Distinctions were seen as strong achievements and failure was seen as weak achievement. This was in contrast to the understanding that strong or weak academic achievement was specific to the individual learner and thus a general definition of strong or weak achievement was unable to be given. However the underlying assumption was that strong achievement would be the learner reaching his or her potential and weak achievement would occur if the learner did not attempt to achieve his or her potential. The third way strong and weak academic achievement was viewed was according to how far one was able to go academically. Strong academic achievement was understood as being able to complete tertiary education or gain a skill or a diploma. Thus weak academic achievement was seen as a learner not completing matric or even completing matric. The reasoning behind this was that the education system in South Africa is poor and thus every learner should at least be able to achieve a matric.

5.2 Factors perceived as having an influence on Academic Achievement

Various factors were perceived as influencing academic achievement. The two overarching factors which were identified were the role of the environment and the role of the individual learner. The role of the environment was subdivided into two main sections namely the school environment and the home environment. Factors which are found in each of these environments were then identified. The role of the individual learner was also subdivided into factors according to the findings from the interviews. It must be noted that each of the factors can be seen as being impacted by another factor and thus this research is understood by making use of an ecosystemic perspective. Each of the participants commented on various levels of the ecosystemic model. Each of these factors will now be discussed.

5.2.1 The role of the environment

The role of the environment is subdivided into the role of the school environment and the role of the home environment.

5.2.1.1 The role of the School Environment

When reflecting on the school environment as an influencing factor many segments of the school were identified as playing an integral role. Both parents and adolescents found that the school was a key determining factor of academic achievement. Iverson, Brownlee and Walberg (1981) support that the school environment can be influential in academic achievement, the factors which they looked at were classroom climate, educators and peers. This research also identified that school resources as well as the culture of the school play an integral role in learner's academic achievement. Studies around school resources have had varying results with regard to the impact this factor has on achievement. Rivkin, Hanushek and Kain (2005), suggest that this could be due to the difficulty one has when controlling for all the other possible factors which would affect achievement. The culture of a school has been researched in South Africa. Vos, Van der Westhuizen, Mentz, and Ellis (2012) found that in the North West Province academic achievement was found to impact academic achievement.

a) Educators

It was evident that the parents were more concerned with educator training and their ability to identify children with barriers to learning than the adolescents were. Educators were seen as being a critical factor relating to a learners capacity to achieve academically. Educators were seen as having the ability to encourage and create a passion for learning. Educators that are

able to complete these two tasks were perceived as having a positive effect on learners' capacity to achieve. In this respect educators have the capacity to create a feeling within each learner whether they are able to achieve and affect the learner's self-concept (Brophy, 1986; Sylva, 1994). Educators have a role of providing the learners with instruction and conveying information. The ability of an educator to pass on his or her knowledge and the relevant information is the determining characteristic as to whether they will be a positive or negative influence on learners' academic achievement. Educators who are able to complete this task were perceived as having a supportive role in a learner's academic achievement. Educator training was identified as a factor which could influence academic achievement. Primarily parents saw educators as being under equipped to identify and deal with barriers to learning. An educator's inability to identify a learner with barriers to learning was seen as the possible beginning of the learner becoming neglected and misunderstood. Educators who were seen as being unable to deal with leaners who have already been identified as having a barrier to learning were perceived as negative influences.

b) Resources

The perceptions of class size have not only been seen in this study or in this country. Galton (1998) wrote a critical paper on the effects on class size where the findings of multiple studies were reviewed. It was seen that performance was optimal when the class size was no larger than twenty and as it increased from there more negative results were seen. These findings were supported by Nye, Hedges and Konstantopoulos (2000) who conducted a similar study in Tennessee. They found that the impact of class size was great enough for it to be considered when making educational policies. Class size was linked to educator availability. Parents felt that their child would receive more attention in a smaller class compared to adolescents who

felt that they were able to concentrate better with fewer learners in the class. Class size was understood as being connected to the government and their policies. More specifically it was related to the policies which the government had implemented regarding the amount of students that can be taught in a single class. It was evident that generational differences were seen. Many parents reflected on their school years and how there had never been so many children in the class.

c) Culture of the School

The culture of the school was brought up in the interviews. It was perceived that certain schools were known for their high academic standard or their sporting teams. Participants felt that this affected the learner's academic achievement. The participants believed that if a school is known for their high academic standard they were more likely to push learners in that sphere. However this was not seen as having a solely positive impact as it was understood that children who were not capable of reaching this standard were left behind and not encouraged.

Multiple research studies have indicated that the school plays a pivotal role in determining the level of academic achievement the learners are expected to reach (Rutter, 1983 and Sylva, 1994). The school is seen as having an influence on learner motivation, learner attitudes and behaviour as well as learner self-concept. This factor (the culture of the school) can be seen as impacting upon other factors. Parents and adolescents felt that the type of school was an influencing factor. Adolescents felt that they were surrounded by other learners who were like them as well as having educators that understood them and their individual needs. Mainstream schools were seen as not providing the amount of support needed for learners with barriers to learning. Parents perceived mainstream schools as not understanding their children's needs and

being unlikely to implement practices which would assist these learners. These perceptions can be seen as having a vital impact on the implementation of inclusive education. Parents that do not perceive a school as being willing to assist and support their child are unlikely to send their child there. All parents had this perception regardless of the school their child was currently at. Van der Westhuizen, Mosoge, Swanepoel and Coetsee (2005) point out that the culture of the school can either assist or hinder the level of academic achievement. Their research looked at school climate in terms of the way it impacted upon the teacher's efficacy to teach. They found that this had an impact upon the achievement of students.

d) Peers

Peer influence was identified by both parents and adolescents as being the primary negative influence on academic achievement. Peers were seen as being the source of distraction not only in class but also in regard to social networking after school. Peers were seen as having an impact on the adolescents' identity as they can be swayed by peer pressure to partake in activities such as drinking, smoking or taking drugs. It was also seen that learners with barriers to learning have a more difficult time fitting in at school, thus they might be more likely to be influenced by their peers. Nelson and Debacker (2008) indicated that learners' academic aspirations and achievements were affected by the nature of the interactions which the learner had with his or her peers. Peers form part of the learners micro system, thus they are seen as being close to the learner and have the potential to have a large impact on the learner (Muuss, 2006). Although there has been research indicating that peers have a negative influence on a learners academic aspirations and achievement research has also shown that peers can have a positive influence (Crosnoe, Cavanagh & Elder, 2003). The findings of this research suggest

that the participants view peers as potentially having a negative influence on academic achievement.

e) Discipline

Discipline was acknowledged by both parents and adolescents. It was seen as being both effective and ineffective with regard to academic achievement. Discipline was seen as being ineffective as learners did not listen to the educator and the consequences were not followed through. However there was an understanding that discipline could have a positive effect on academic achievement as it made the learners complete their work and this increased the possibility that the learners would learn. Rumberger and Palardy (2005) found that should discipline be unfair and excessive there is an increased likelihood that students will drop out as compared to appropriate discipline.

The parents expressed a different response when it came to discipline. Parents felt that learners who had barriers to learning were disciplined prematurely by teachers. They felt that the teachers did not take the time to understand the behaviour. Thus learners who have behavioural difficulties are disciplined without their difficulties being taken into consideration. Flay, Allred and Ordway (2001) illustrate that behavioural difficulties are multi-dimensional and need to be explored within the context in order to provide the appropriate discipline.

5.2.1.2 The role of the Home Environment

The home environment was identified as the second environment influencing a learner's academic achievement. The home environment is the second place that adolescents spend most

of their time. Schroeder and Kelley (2009) conducted a study in the United States of America which found that the family environment was an influential factor when concerned with learners' academic achievement. The two main factors identified in this environment were parents and socio-economic status. Parents have been identified as playing a role in a learner's academic achievement in the literature (Park & Bauer, 2002). Parental influences which have been identified in the literature include parenting style, parental expectations and parental education level.

a) The role of the Parent

The role of the parent can further be broken down into encouragement and support, parental expectations, parent education level and discipline.

Parents were primarily seen as a source of encouragement and support. Adolescents felt that the amount of support and encouragement which they received was crucial to their academic achievements this is consistent with the findings of Hara and Burke (1998). Their results indicate that with an increase of parental involvement there is an increase in learners' academic achievement. Parental involvement was seen by participants as being connected to the possibility of disappointing their parents. Previous research is conflicting as to whether parental involvement has an overall positive or negative effect on Academic Achievement (Domina, 2005). It was suggested that when learners did not want to let their parents down, this would became a motivating factor. Parents were also seen as a negative influence depending on their behaviour. Parents who did not provide a stable living environment or were seen as a distraction were understood as being a negative influence on academic achievement.

Parent expectation was identified by both parents and adolescents. This can be seen as linking to the adolescents not wanting to disappoint their parents. Expectations were divided into two sub-groups. One group of parents had standard expectations which all of their children had to meet and the other group had expectations for each individual child depending on his or her individual capacity to achieve. It was not clear as to which of the two was more influential however they were both seen as having an impact. Parents expressed that the reason for their expectations was principally based on their past academic careers and secondarily based on their own life experience. Sanders, Field and Diego (2001) suggest that parental expectations can influence the expectations which the learner places on him or herself. Bornholt and Goodnow (1999) suggest that there is greater congruence between the mothers' expectations and the child's expectations as compared to the fathers' expectations.

Parent education level was seen as a negative influence on learner's academic achievement by the majority of the participants. Parents felt that they were unable to assist their children and adolescents felt that they could not ask their parents to assist them. It must be understood that this does not mean that the parents are unwilling to help but were merely unsure that they would be of any assistance. Some participants felt that parent education level was irrelevant. These participants suggested that if the parents were willing to assist their child it was irrelevant what the parent's education level was. Research indicates that parent education level does have an impact upon the academic achievement of the learner (Smith, Brooks-Gunn, & Klebanov, 1997). Parent education level has been found to link back to parental expectations. Davis-Kean's (2005) findings suggest that parents that have a higher level of education have more accurate expectations of their adolescents' ability when compared to parents with lower education levels, who expect their adolescents to achieve more than they are able to.

Discipline was seen as having an influence on academic achievement. The consequences set out by parents should the learner not achieve was also seen as having an impact. Consequences would be rewards or punishments. It was suggested that parents need to follow through on these consequences. If parents do not follow through on the consequences the learners do not take it seriously. Thus discipline can be seen as having an influence however the impact is affected by the parents' ability to follow through as well as the child's personality. Walker, Stieber, Ramsey and O'Neill (1991) determined that the consistency of the discipline was integral in an adolescents academic achievement. The key point to understand here is the parenting style adopted by the parents. Authoritative parenting styles have been highly correlated with stronger academic achievement (Jeynes, 2005) as compared to authoritarian which has been seen controlling and has been connected with negative outcomes in adolescents (Kaufmann, Gesten, & Santa-Lucia, 2000).

b) Socio-Economic Status

Socio-economic status was broken down into two components. The first was the provision of technological tools such as cellular phones, televisions, the internet and gaming toys such as the X-Box. There is both a positive and a negative consequence to the provision of these objects. They were seen as creating a distraction and thus drawing learners away from their studies. They were also seen as positive as the internet and computer access allows learners to have access to information which could assist them in their studies. And the second component of socio-economic status was seen as the ability of parents to pay for relevant therapies or extra lessons. It was proposed that the ability of parents to provide their children with these classes or therapies would have a positive influence on academic achievement as compared to parents who were unable to provide this. Sirin (2005), conducted a meta-analysis on the literature

published around socio-economic status and academic achievement from 1990 until 2000. The findings suggested that socio-economic status and academic achievement were directly proportionate. Despite there being a directly proportionate relationship there are moderator variables which can negate the effects of socio-economic status. School location, minority status and grade level are examples of moderator variables (Sirin, 2005). Socio-economic status was found to influence the academic achievement of adolescents more than it influences the academic achievement of children below the age of twelve (Caro, McDonald & Willms, 2009)

5.2.2 The role of the Individual Learner

The role of the individual learner was seen to be subdivided into personality, intrinsic barriers to learning, the stage of adolescence and individual expectations. Each of these can be seen as being influenced by the other. Personality was primarily linked to motivation, determination, responsibility and self-esteem. These traits were understood as having an impact on the learner's academic achievement.

Intrinsic barriers to learning were understood as issues with attention, concentration, distractibility, level of intelligence and the capacity to learn and study. However literature has indicated that learners with ADHD have normally distributed intelligence quotients and their academic difficulties can be better explained by looking at other factors such as behavioural difficulties (Kaplan, Crawford, Dewey & Fisher, 2000). Some participants saw the symptoms as a problem when speaking about academic achievement whilst other saw it as a challenge. Parents and adolescents alike found that internal barriers to learning are a hindrance and had a negative impact upon academic achievement.

Adolescence was principally mentioned by parents however adolescents had mentioned factors (peer group) which are primarily experienced and are of major importance during adolescence. This can be seen by looking at the adolescents' response to how their peers influenced their academic achievement. This supports the literature (Sadock & Sadock, 2007), as adolescents are seen as being strongly influenced by their peers during adolescence.

Individual expectations are seen as the expectation the learner has of him or herself, what does he or she believe he or she needs to or can achieve. Individual expectations can be linked to parental expectations, parental support and personality (Sanders, Field & Diego, 2001). Each of these factors can be seen as influencing the learner's expectations he or she has for him or herself. Clearly it is imperative to look at these factors, not in isolation, but as a system. When these factors are understood in terms of a system it becomes clear that each of the factors are connected and have an impact upon each other, this influence can be either positive or negative. For example should the support provided by parents be negligible the impact upon the learners motivation could be that he or she feels that it is irrelevant what marks they receive as no-one will notice or it could encourage the learner and increase their motivation in order to try and grasp his or her parents attention.

5.3 To what extent do participants feel extrinsic or intrinsic factors influence academic achievement

Participants felt that intrinsic and extrinsic factors had equal contribution to the academic achievement of learners. The findings indicated that both intrinsic and extrinsic factors were perceived as having an impact on academic achievement. Both parents and adolescents understood that intrinsic had an impact on extrinsic and vice versa. An ecosystemic framework was seen throughout the findings as each factor was impacted upon by another factor. Participants were able to recognize that each factor that they spoke about was linked to another factor. These links support the need for an ecosystemic view point when determining which

factors influence academic achievement. Multiple research has indicated that each of the factors can be seen as a moderator between other factors such as the socio-economic status can moderate the relationship between parental involvement and academic achievement (Park & Bauer, 2002). Multiple studies have indicated that intrinsic factors influence academic achievement (Daley & Birchwood, 2010; Donald, et al., 2010; Frey & Detterman, 2004; Rindermann & Neubauer, 2001) and there are also numerous studies that suggest extrinsic factors impact academic achievement (Plunkett, et al., 2009; Crosnoe, et al., 2003; Sherman, et al., 2008; Sirin, 2005) however there has been no conclusive evidence to suggest that intrinsic or extrinsic factors play a greater role. The results from this study are congruent with this statement.

5.4 To what extent do the participants feel that the ADHD diagnosis influences academic achievement

Throughout the interviews only a few participants mentioned that the ADHD diagnosis had an extensive influence on academic achievement. However the symptoms of ADHD had been mentioned such as concentration and distractibility. This poses an interesting point. As few parents and adolescents spoke of the ADHD diagnosis, it is important to determine how this can be understood.

Could it be due to the parents being able to see past this label? This could be possible however this does not support the literature found on this subject. The literature suggests that parents and teachers see learners with ADHD differently to how they see other learners (Cornett-Ruiz & Hendricks, 1993). Eisenberg and Schneider (2007) found that parents and educators perceived the academic ability of children with ADHD more negatively than of other children. This can be linked to learner's self-esteem as his or her self-esteem is affected by the perceptions of parents and teachers. The result is that their academic achievement is negatively

impacted. Thus from this stand point the label of being ADHD may be more detrimental than the ADHD symptoms.

5.5 Implications of Current Research

The aim of this research was to determine the perceptions of parents and adolescents with regard to academic achievement. The findings indicate that the factors identified by the sample in this research are supported by literature.

There were few factors which were seen as being uniquely South African. One of the South African identified factors was the quality of education and the education system within this country. This can be extended to teachers and the training of teachers in this country.

It is important to note that few participants identified ADHD as a direct factor influencing academic achievement however symptoms of the disorder were identified such as concentration and distractibility. These results are not prevalent in the literature as the literature indicates that being diagnosed with ADHD has been identified as negatively impacting academic achievement. The findings of this research are in contrast to this. Possible reasons for this could be that parents are able to see their adolescents as individuals and see past the label of ADHD. A second reason could be that parents are not amply educated on what impact ADHD can have on academic achievement.

5.6 Limitations of the current research

Volunteer characteristics are seen as a limitation to this research. The reason behind this limitation is that the study allowed for voluntary participation and it was not mandatory in any way. This could have resulted in a particular type of participant partaking in the research. Voluntary participation also results in an unevenly distributed sample. The sample is not representative of the entire South African ADHD population.

Demand characteristics are also understood as a possible limitation. The participants are able to formulate their own individual ideas of what is expected of them and what they should say. It is possible that they were able to frame what they believed the possible hypothesis of the study was and thus answer the questions with that framework in mind.

5.7 Suggestions for future research

There are multiple areas where further research can be conducted. The first area to be investigated could be the reasons behind parental views on academic achievement as well as why they feel academics is such an important venture for their children. In this study possible reasons were implied however it is suggested that further investigation is conducted in order to gain greater understanding. The second subject suggested for future research is the impact of parent expectations on their children's academic achievement and whether it is seen as a motivator or hindrance. Parental expectations were briefly discussed in this paper yet it did not fully explore how these parental expectations directly influenced learners and how the learners perceive these expectations.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A : Invitation to Participate (Parents).

School of Human & Community Development

University of the Witwatersrand

Private Bag 3, WITS, 2050

Tel: (011) 717 4500 Fax: (011) 717 4559

Dear Parents

Good day

My name is Michal Kruger and I am studying towards a Masters in Educational Psychology at the University of the Witwatersrand. As a partial requirement for the completion of this degree I have to complete a research project. My supervisors are Dr. Amod and Mr. Seabi. My proposed research project will focus specifically on the perceptions surrounding academic achievement and the factors which contribute to it. The information will be gathered in the form of an interview. These interviews will be held at the University of the Witwatersrand.

I would like to invite you to participate in my study. This would entail being part of a one hour interview at a time and place that is convenient for you. With your permission this interview will be recorded to ensure accuracy. Participation is voluntary, and no person will be advantaged or disadvantaged in any way for choosing to participate or not participate in the study. All of your responses will be kept confidential and no information that could identify you would be included in the research report. You may choose to withdraw from the study at any point. The interview material (tapes and transcripts) will not be seen or heard by any person at this clinic at any time, and will only be processed by myself. The tapes will be kept under lock and key for a period of 2 years. The results from the study will be made available to you on completion of the research. Should you choose to participate in the study please fill in your details on the form below and hand it to me. Should you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me on 084 825 3222.

Your participation in this study would be greatly appreciated. This research will contribute to a larger body of knowledge on the perceptions surrounding ADHD and barriers to learning.

Thank you,

Michal Kruger Dr. Zaytoon Amod Joseph Seabi

084 825 3222 Zaytoon.Amod@wits.ac.za Joseph.seabi@wits.ac.za
Michal.c.kruger@gmail.com

Please complete this slip should you want to participate in the above mentioned study

I _____ would like to be involved in the above mentioned study.

My contact details are

Work Phone number: _____

Cell phone number: _____

E-mail address: _____

Signed: _____ Date: _____

_____

Please cut off and keep should there be any problems after participation in the research project

ADD/ADHD Support Groups SA

011 425 1308

Appendix B: Invitation to Participate (Adolescent)

School of Human & Community Development

University of the Witwatersrand

Private Bag 3, WITS, 2050

Tel: (011) 717 4500 Fax: (011) 717 4559

Dear Adolescents

Hello my name is Michal Kruger and I am studying towards a Masters in Educational Psychology at the University of the Witwatersrand. As a partial requirement for the completion of this degree I have to complete a research project. My supervisors are Dr. Amod and Mr. Seabi. My proposed research project will focus specifically on the perceptions surrounding academic achievement and the factors which contribute to it. The information will be gathered in the form of an interview. These interviews will be held at the University of the Witwatersrand.

I would like to invite you to participate in my study. This would entail being part of a one hour interview at a time and place that is convenient for you. With your permission this interview will be recorded to ensure accuracy. Participation is voluntary, and no person will be advantaged or disadvantaged in any way for choosing to participate or not participate in the study. All of your responses will be kept confidential and no information that could identify you would be included in the research report. You may choose to withdraw from the study at any point. The interview material (tapes and transcripts) will not be seen or heard by any person at this clinic at any time, and will only be processed by myself. The tapes will be kept under lock and key for a period of 2 years. The results from the study will be made available to you on completion of the research. Should you choose to participate in the study please fill in your details on the form below and hand it to me. Should you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me on 084 825 3222.

Your participation in this study would be greatly appreciated. This research will contribute to a larger body of knowledge on the perceptions surrounding ADHD and barriers to learning.

Thank you,

Michal Kruger Dr. Zaytoon Amod Joseph Seabi

084 825 3222 Zaytoon.Amod@wits.ac.za Joseph.seabi@wits.ac.za

Michal.c.kruger@gmail.com

Please complete this slip should you want to participate in the above mentioned study

I _____ would like to be involved in the above mentioned study.

My contact details are

Work Phone number: _____

Cell phone number: _____

E-mail address: _____

Signed: _____ Date: _____

_____

Please cut off and keep should there be any problems after participation in the research project

ADD/ADHD Support Groups SA

011 425 1308

Child Line

0800 1111

Appendix C: Informed consent

School of Human & Community Development

University of the Witwatersrand

Private Bag 3, WITS, 2050

Tel: (011) 717 4500 Fax: (011) 717 4559

I _____ agree to take part in the study lead by Michal Kruger. I agree to complete the one hour interview that is based on perceptions of academic achievement and the factors which contribute to it. I understand that:

My input in this study is as a volunteer and is not forced.

I can stop participating in the study at any time.

The results of the study will be confidential.

There are no individual risks or benefits.

No information that could identify me would be included in the research report.

The findings of this study may be published in a journal at some stage.

I do not have to answer any questions that I do not wish to answer.

Direct quotes may be used in the report however anonymity will be guaranteed.

Signed _____

Date_____

Appendix D: Consent to Record

School of Human & Community Development

University of the Witwatersrand

Private Bag 3, WITS, 2050

Tel: (011) 717 4500 Fax: (011) 717 4559

I _____ consent to my interview with Michal Kruger for her study on academic achievement being tape recorded. I understand that:

The tapes and transcripts will only be heard and processed by the researcher for data analysis.

The tapes will be securely stored and locked away in a safe place agreed by my supervisor and myself for a period of two years after which they will be destroyed.

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

Signed _____

Date_____

Appendix E: Interview Schedule

1. What does the term Academic Achievement mean to you?
2. What would be classified as strong academic achievement?
3. What would be classified as weak academic achievement?
4. In your opinion what factors influence academic achievement?
5. Which factors do you believe are the most influential?
6. In what way would you think the school environment influences academic achievement?
7. In the home environment, what do you believe affects academic achievement?
8. To what extent do you believe the individual learner plays a role in academic achievement?
9. Do you believe that internal or external factors play a greater role in academic achievement?

Other perceived internal factors are for example learners own perception that they have reading, comprehension, spelling or studying difficulties.

External factors for example are parental conflict and teacher variables.

Appendix F: Student Supervisor Contract