Socio-economic and academic challenges faced by black undergraduate students from disadvantaged backgrounds at the Wits School of Education

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A thesis submitted to the Wits School of Education, Faculty of Humanities, University of the Witwatersrand, in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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ABSTRACT

Efforts to widen access to higher education and promote inclusion of students from marginalised groups in society have seen an increase in admission of students in what were formerly regarded as historically white universities (HWUs) including those from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds. Coming from a background that has less commonalities with the institutions that these students find themselves predisposes these students to challenges that their counterparts from middle class backgrounds may not experience. The aim of this study, therefore, was to explore the socio-economic and academic challenges faced by black undergraduate students from disadvantaged backgrounds at the Wits School of Education (WSoE). The guiding research questions included the characteristics of students from disadvantaged backgrounds. The second question was on the nature that the challenges they faced and the last question related to respondents' perceptions of the effectiveness of the interventions that are put in place at an institutional level to mitigate these challenges. Pierre Bourdieu's theory of cultural capital was used as a lens for guiding the study, focusing on his concepts of cultural capital, habitus, field and agency. Using a qualitative research approach and a case study design, the study collected data through individual interviews with a group of students and members of staff. Focus group interviews were also conducted with students according to year of study (first and second year). Thematic analysis was used to interpret the data collected. Findings from the study showed that most of the characteristics of being a student from disadvantaged background were rooted in the lack of economic resources, which resulted in inadequacy and lack of choice, and exposure to better quality of life. The nature that these characteristics would later manifest themselves in a number of dimensions including academic, social, and cultural dimensions. The institution was perceived, on the one hand, as maintaining 'highbrow' culture that favoured students from advantaged backgrounds. On the other hand, the initiatives by the institution including bursary disbursement, the food parcels initiative, Counselling Careers and Development Unit (CCDU) and Write Up Read Up (WURU) enabled students to manage their situations. The findings also revealed variations in the impact of challenges faced by disadvantaged students according to duration of their stay in the institution, with the first years struggling more than second year students, which in part explained the concept of agency.

Keywords: Disadvantaged backgrounds, Socioeconomic; Academic challenges, Cultural Capital, Undergraduate students; Socio-economic; Black; Wits School of Education,

DECLARATION

I hereby declare that the work contained in this thesis is my own work, and a result of my own original research. It is being submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before for degree purposes to any other university.

Signature: 

Bhekuyise Perfect Zungu

02 day of July in the year 2022

DEDICATION

This PhD is dedicated to the following people.

My Mother, Ncanyana Alphonsina Zungu. It is unfortunate that you would not be here in flesh to celebrate this day with me. Thank you, Mum, for everything. I will always remember you. Love Always.

My Father Mandlenduna Reuben Zungu - I never got to know you since you were taken away from us while we were very young. I am told that you valued education. Thanks to you.
My Grandmother: Mantshingila Nomlomo Mpanza - Thank you for helping mum to raise me and my siblings. You did a stunning job and you will always be appreciated. I will always remember you, "Mawe".

To my sister Zinhle: As an educator yourself, I wish you were here to celebrate this achievement with me. I know how much you valued education. I will always remember you, Zinhle.

To my Sister Simphiwe: "Nano" as you were affectionately called. Knowing you; I know how elated you would be right now. I will always remember you, Simphiwe.

I also dedicate this work to all the students in universities across South Africa and beyond who hail from disadvantaged backgrounds and continue to struggle to get an education. The time will come where you will be rewarded and are free from all sorts of exploitation and different forms of violence while trying to get what is rightfully yours- an education. The struggle is never over.

Aluta Continua!

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ABBREVIATIONS/ ACRONYMS

AISU	Academic Information and Systems Unit
B. ED	Bachelor of Education
CCDU	Counseling Career Development Unit
CHE	Council of Higher Education
CAPS	Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement
DHET	Department of Higher Education and Training
DHoS	Deputy Head of School
EF	Executive Functions
ESC	Education Student Council
ESL	English as Second Language
FGI	Focus Group Interviews
GPA	Grade Point Average
G.O.G	Gift of the Givers
HCT	Human Capital Theory
HBU's	Historically Black Institutions
HEI's	Higher Education Institutions
HWI's	Historically White Institutions
ICT	Information and Communications Technology
IEB	Independent Examination Board
IELTS	International English Language Testing System
IMF	International Monetary Fund
ITE	Initial Teacher Education
LOLT	Language of Learning and Teaching
NSFAS	National Student Financial Aid Scheme
WITS	University of the Witwatersrand
WURU	Write-Up Read-UP
WSoE	Wits School of Education

CHAPTER 1: RESEARCH OVERVIEW

1. Background to the study

Gaining a status of being a student in higher education is considered a notable achievement throughout the world. This is all the more so for students coming from a disadvantaged background. Entering into higher education is a great milestone. Among other reasons for this are the prospects of breaking through the ceiling of poverty and finding their way into a world that affords them opportunities of bettering their lives and attaining upward social mobility. Studies across the world have provided insight into what life is like for students from disadvantaged backgrounds to find themselves in institutions of higher education (Forsyth & Furlong, 2003; Bowers-Brown, 2006; Lourens, 2013)**.** The outcome of these studies has not only highlighted the abovementioned prospects and hope that come with entering into higher education. They also reveal another side of what entering higher education entails for disadvantaged students. The reality involves the higher chances that they face in dropping out of higher education, either as a result of economic inadequacies, or on academic grounds. Such realities have brought to the fore some factors that are related and could be tied to these predicaments faced by these students.

In a country such as South Africa that is considered the most unequal in the world (Posel & Rogan, 2019), the opportunity for higher education is significant. Its peculiar history through the apartheid legacy, contributed to the lines that determined the state of being disadvantaged going deeper than just socioeconomic, to involve intended differentiation of systems of social service provisions based on racial grounds. The abolition of formal apartheid with the advent of formal democracy in 1994 brought with it measures to redress the inequalities that resulted from the system. Some such measures included the obliteration of segregation tendencies that saw some institutions being referred to as predominantly white universities while others were predominantly black universities. Alongside this was widening of access into higher education to include students from disadvantaged backgrounds. This notwithstanding, remnants of the damage caused by this differentiation continue to affect students, especially those coming from disadvantaged backgrounds.

The outcome of these challenges faced by students from disadvantaged backgrounds has been the establishment of various initiatives aimed and mitigating these challenges. Following the

2015/16 #FEESMUSTFALL movement, one of the items on the agenda was the plight of disadvantaged students, with regards to their economic inadequacies in coping with life in higher education. Following the #FEESMUSTFALL movement was the declaration by then-president Jacob Zuma to provide financial support towards fee paying in higher education as well as the introduction of more opportunities to fund students. This was in the effort to ensure that students from disadvantaged background are not excluded on economic grounds. Studies that succeeded the declaration of increased funding to cater for disadvantaged students in higher education have shown little improvement with regards to retaining these students in the system (Carpenter & Roos, 2020; Motsabi, Diale, & Van Zyl, 2020).

1.1 Statement of the problem

In a post-apartheid transformed South Africa, the issue of equalising opportunities has been among the main items in the public agenda. According to the Department of Higher Education (DHET, 2012), the enhancement of access, participation and completion of higher education among disadvantaged students is outlined as a key target. According to the 2019 financial statistics for higher education institutions, between the years 2006-2019, government grants towards higher education have increased almost four-fold from around R11 billion to R42 billion. Part of government's investment towards higher education is to offset the financial burdens encountered by students from disadvantaged backgrounds as part of ensuring their retention.

In spite of the efforts to ensure access and retention of students from disadvantaged backgrounds in South Africa's higher education system, there is little change in the figures of dropout and low throughput among these students. This study, therefore, seeks to focus on the challenges encountered by disadvantaged students from both the socioeconomic as well as academic perspective, as a means to gain a deeper understanding into the phenomenon. By using Bourdieu's concepts of cultural capital, habitus, field and agency, the study hopes to contribute to an in-depth understanding of the challenges that these students face.

1.2 Aims and objectives

The aim of this study, therefore, was to explore the socio-economic and academic challenges faced by black undergraduate students from disadvantaged backgrounds at the WSoE and how they perceive these challenges as affecting their academic performances.

1.2.1 Research objectives

The main objectives of this study were as follows:

i. To identify the specific socioeconomic challenges that black undergraduate students face at the WSoE.
ii. To explore how these socioeconomic challenges affect their academic performance.
iii To explain how the WSoE perceives the effectiveness of institutions in ensuring these students' survival in higher education.

1.3 Research questions

The major research question directing this study is:

How can an understanding of the socio-economic and academic challenges faced by black undergraduate students from disadvantaged backgrounds at the WSoE explain their academic struggles in Higher education?

In examining the above question, the study also explored the following sub-questions:

i. What are the characteristics of students from disadvantaged backgrounds at the WSoE?
ii. What is the nature of challenges faced by black South African undergraduate students from disadvantaged backgrounds at the WSoE?
iii. What is the perceived effectiveness of the interventions that are put in place at institutional level to mitigate these challenges?

The first research question aims to obtain the view of respondents regarding the challenges that they face, by citing indicators of such struggles. In the second phase of the research, the respondents are elicited for the form/s in which they experience these challenges as students at the WSoE. Finally, the last question asked respondents for their thoughts regarding the effectiveness of intervention put in place by the institutions in mitigating these challenges. It called for respondents to identify what the interventions were, and whether or not these were effective enough in addressing both the characteristics of the challenges they faced and nature through which these challenges manifested themselves in their lives as students.

1.4 Rationale

The justification behind the choice of this study would fall into a number of categories experiential as well as theoretical rationales.

1.4.1 Experiential rationale

In my working experience at the WSoE and working with students as student affairs person, I came to appreciate the significance of looking at human needs in a holistic manner as one of the means of ensuring the success of students. One of the encounters that sealed the subject of

my research was what happened when I had just joined the institution.

Two years into my joining WSoE as a staff member, I worked with the Education Student Council (ESC) as their advisor, and established personal relationships with most of its members. Daily encounters with the students indicated that the basic needs of undergraduate students remain unmet. One Monday morning, a student came into my office looking desperate. He described his situation as *nginamahloni*, which in isiZulu means 'very embarrassing'. He was reluctant to share this matter with his peers, but he believed that I would understand. He had come to me because of something I said in my sociology class about the inequalities in the education system, and an example I had given of old and new money.

I offered him my lunch for breakfast but he was hesitant about accepting it and disclosed that this would be his first meal in two days. He had come to inform me that he was quitting the course, because it was becoming unbearable. We scheduled a meeting for later that day.

He later returned and talking to this young, aspiring educator made me realise that there is more that lies behind the financial difficulties of students. He explained how that he was not the only one experiencing the *nginamahloni* syndrome, but that him and many others lacked basic items such as toiletries, clothes, and transport money during teaching experience (in-school teaching practice where tutors observe and critique their lessons).

With regards to scholarship money, there was an indication that part of it would go towards assisting pressing needs at home such as paying for siblings' school fees, leaving the family with nothing to live on. I then asked him to come with other students that he knows to my office on Monday to collect a few items for sustenance. I managed to collect few items from family and friends. The number of students who lined up outside my office the following Monday was shocking, these included both male and female students.

Further interactions with them, particularly concerning their studies, revealed that most of them had missing credits and supplementary examinations almost every year, suggesting that their academic progress was compromised by these *nginamahloni* living conditions. I made it a point of duty to canvas for food and toiletry items that would assist these students. My office is presently filled with these items, and I have been able to help most of these students.

This situation has increased exponentially in the current moment in South Africa. The #FeesMustFall campaign by university students throughout South Africa since 2015 has highlighted the fact that the experiences described above are being shared by most disadvantaged students nationally. As such, the importance of looking at the challenges facing university students is now a matter of national and dire need. This study hopes to contribute to such an understanding by focusing particularly on students' socio-economic and academic

challenges using Bourdieu's theoretical framework, and by using the WSoE as a case study.

1.4.2 Theoretical rationale

The above section 1.1 on the problem statement has highlighted how the prevalence of student struggle in higher education has been conceived, and to a large extent been interpreted in the light of economic hardships that these students encounter. This study's focus goes further into exploring the challenges of disadvantaged students in the light of mainly Pierre Bourdieu's cultural capital and concepts of habitus, field, and agency in interpreting and conceptualising these challenges faced by disadvantaged students at the WSoE as will be further elaborated on in the methodology Chapter 3. As such, the theory would be used as a lens to guide both the collection and analysis data gathered for the study.

1.5 Thesis structure

The thesis is presented in seven chapters.

The first chapter is an overview of the study. It provides the background to this study as well as the statement problem from which this study identified a gap to be addressed. It also lays out the aim of the studies with its supporting objectives as well as the research questions that guide the study. Finally, it provides the rationale of the study that is two-pronged: experiential and theoretical rationales. Chapter 2 provides a review of literature that has been obtained from studies related to the challenges faced by disadvantaged students in higher education. Chapter 3 lays out the theoretical framework underpinning the study that would be used as a guide both in its collection of data as well as its analysis and interpretation of the data collected. Chapter 4 describes systematic procedure that was adhered to, from the decision of which research methodology approach would best fit with the title, aims and research questions guiding the study, to how the data would be collected and from whom the data would be collected. The chapter also explains details of how the data would be collated and analysed, so as to arrive at some form of a conclusion. Chapters 5 presents the findings of the study. These were presented based on the responses obtained in the data collection methods. Chapter 6 presents an analysis of data presented in Chapter 5. This chapter is presented according to themes that emerged from the data, the theoretical framework as well as literature reviewed. Finally, Chapter 7 brings the thesis to a close by first reflecting on the journey from start to end of the study. It later indicates out the contributions that the study has made to knowledge and theory in this area of study. The chapter also explains limitations concerning the research outcomes and identifies areas for further research.

CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

2. Introduction

In the previous chapter, I provided a background to this study, which focused on the socioeconomic and academic challenges faced by black South African undergraduate students from socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds at the WSoE. The context of the study was highlighted, serving to provide the value that this study could bring to understanding the experiences of these students. There have been studies that have been conducted regarding the experiences of students from socioeconomically disadvantaged background. This chapter therefore provides some insight into some of these studies that have been carried out, both at global as well the South African context regarding disadvantaged students and the challenges that they encounter both academically and economically.

Prior to reviewing of literature, the subsequent section 2.1 will focus on some of the key terms in the study and provide meanings to these terms within the parameters of this study. This implies that for purposes of this study, the terms will take on the stipulated meanings in what follows. The terms include socioeconomic challenges; academic challenges; undergraduate students; and disadvantaged backgrounds.

2.1 Clarification of terms

This study adopts the following definitions:

Socio economic challenges: These speak to the hardships that students experience who lack the requisite enabling resources. These are rooted within the class and economic status to which one belongs, which for the most part determine parental income, parental level of education, occupation and proper networking at individual or family level.

Academic challenges: In this study, the concept of academic challenge implies the understanding or lack thereof of content in the context of the curriculum, ability to successfully navigate through the academic system, and the perceived academic responsibilities of students.

Undergraduate students: These are students who are pursuing their first degrees in higher education institutions. For purposes of this study, the focus is on the first and second year students who are pursuing their B. Ed degree at the Wits School of Education (WSoE).

Disadvantaged background: This concept will refer to students that are less privileged owing to their inadequacies economically, culturally as well as in terms of prior schooling experiences and linguistically, which results in their counterparts who have access to such privileges having an upper hand in education resulting from their advantaged background.

Black students: According to the constitution of the Republic of South Africa, black refers to Africans, Indians and Coloured people. However, for this study, black students will refer to

South African, African students only.

2.2 Understanding socioeconomic status

The use of socioeconomic status or background as a means of distinguishing or classifying people into categories goes as far back as the era of feudalism, where individuals in societies were differentiated into what would later be referred to as classes, on the basis of what they owned and what position they occupied in society. Those that had property or wealth were considered lords over those that did not. Weber (1978, p.305-306) defined the concept 'socioeconomic status' as "an effective claim to social esteem in terms of positive or negative privileges…typically founded on style of life; formal education whether empirical training or rational instruction and the corresponding forms of behaviour; hereditary or occupational prestige." From this definition, a number of aspects stand out as elements that constitute socioeconomic status. There is a positive correlation between style of life and socioeconomic status. The higher the lifestyle (in terms of wealth accumulation, occupational prestige, cultural taste, health and wellbeing) that an individual leads, the higher they are in terms of socioeconomic status (Bird & Newport, 2017).

The socioeconomic differentiations based on class have prevailed over the years, with systems of measurements being devised to classify people. Galobardes, Shaw, Lawlor, and Lynch (2006) have outlined five main means of socioeconomic classification. Common indicators in these five measures included aspects such as occupation (manual or non-manual; whether on wage payment or salary; level of control that one had over their job and ability to delegate; one's position either as an exploiter or the exploited), and sphere of social interaction (whom one associates with, also largely based on occupation). In all these classifications, those considered to be of higher socioeconomic status were those in non-manual labour, with a salary and having some level of control, trust, and autonomy in their job, as well as being on the lowest end of being exploited, but rather potentially exploiting others. With regard to social interactions, these are the ones that had a wider sphere of people to interact with that were of similar background.

Based on Weber's definition, socioeconomic status could either be achieved by birth (through inheritance), or acquisition through education, and occupational prestige. Socioeconomic status is therefore a positioning in society that can either be bestowed, or earned. Proponents of human capital theory build on the latter means of achieving socioeconomic status in demonstrating how education has a transformative effect on socioeconomic wellbeing, both at individual level and even at a wider level. This brings to light another concept that appears within the discourse on socioeconomic status, known as social mobility, which refers to the ability to move within

the various levels, either up or down the socioeconomic ladder. Haverman and Smeeding (2006) discuss the role of education, and in particular, higher education, in enhancing social mobility.

This study takes socioeconomic and academic challenges as its focus. There is evidence of a positive relationship between education and socioeconomic mobility (Brand & Yu, 2010; Fan, 2014), while on the other hand, a negative relationship exists between socioeconomic challenges and education, thus limiting the chances for socioeconomic mobility of those considered to be challenged socioeconomically. The subsequent section therefore presents an argument for the nature in which this relationship between socioeconomic status and academic challenges comes about.

2.2.1 Socioeconomic and academic challenges

The positioning of individuals across the socioeconomic continuum has an impact on their potential ability to function in a society, as well as the influence that they would have on decisions that concern their lives. In Amartya Sen's capability approach to human development, he outlines factors that he refers to as capabilities, which he considered as prerequisite for individuals to function (Gandjour, 2008). These include, among others, the economic capital, as well as social capital. With people that come from low socioeconomic status, such prerequisites are a challenge to come by as will be discussed in the course of this chapter. Consequently, the lack of such forms of capital becomes an impediment to their realising their capabilities. The effects of socioeconomic challenges have far-reaching effects on individuals' lives. Finch and Obradović (2017) explain how socioeconomic challenges have far-reaching effects on the development of children, even before entering school. Hackman and Farah (2009) established a correlation between socioeconomic status and children's executive functioning (EF) (self-awareness, inhibition, non-verbal working memory, verbal working memory, emotional self-regulation, self-motivation, planning and problem-solving), all of which have some impact on the academic capabilities of the individual. While children with middle to high socioeconomic status largely exhibited these functions, their counterparts faced with socioeconomic challenges exhibited a deficit in most of these executive functions. It should be mentioned though that some from middle to high socioeconomic status may experience a lack of some of these EFs due to emotional challenges such as instabilities in families that in turn, affected children's development (Finch & Obradović 2017). Further studies on the same point towards the impact of cognitive stimulation that takes place among those from middle to high socioeconomic status, as compared to the counterparts of low

socioeconomic status (Bassok, Finch, Lee, Reardon & Waldfogel, 2016). Such foundational functions have a bearing on students' academic lives later in their academic careers, as will be further elaborated on. It is for this reason that this study conducts an in-depth exploration into these challenges as they are encountered by students from socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds, who fit the profile of those with low socioeconomic status. Finch and Obradović (2017) outlined some of these indicators mentioned in section 2.2, which are: parental education, occupational prestige, and family financial resources. This research explores whether these indicators emerge during the data collection with students and staff participants, as challenges for students from disadvantaged background.

In a world that is highly polarised, with existing disparities in terms of socioeconomic status, the challenges are real to the majority who suffer at the expense of the minority that possess the lion's share of global wealth. According to Crow, Zlatunich, and Fulfrost (2009, p. 1060) "the top 10 per cent of global population has 85 per cent of global wealth (compared to 67 per cent of global income)." South Africa is exemplary of such disparities. With 1% of South Africans owning 70.9% of the country's wealth while only 7% of the country's wealth is shared among 60% of the poorest population, it remains one of the highest inequality rates in the world, according to the World Bank (2018). Such polarisation can be understood in light of the political history of the country.

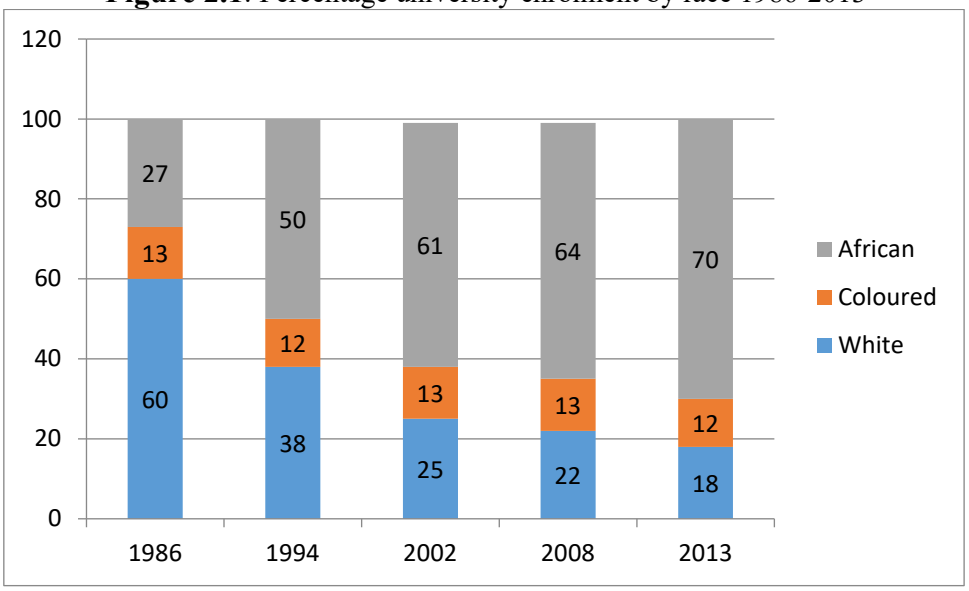
2.3 South Africa's context

The year 1994 marked a historical landmark in South Africa, which heralded the end of formal apartheid and ushered in the birth of formal democracy. A new constitution was drawn up and adopted under the Act 108 of 1996. Among changes that came with the adoption was the need to redress issues of inequalities among races among which were affirmative actions aimed at including formerly marginalised quarters. However, more than two decades after this change, the country's wealth distribution remains hugely skewed, such that 10% of the population, mostly whites, retain control over l 80% of the economy (Murray, 2002). As a result, most black people continue to experience poverty, homelessness, unemployment, and poor education. A cursory overview of the status quo indicates that children growing up in South Africa are exposed to many social risks that can be attributed to apartheid's legacy of social inequality and deprivation (Barbarin, 2003).

Section 29 (ii) of the 1996 Constitution grants inalienable rights for children's education: "Everyone has the right – (a) to a basic education, including adult basic education; and (b) to further education, which the state, through reasonable measures, must make progressively available and accessible." After more than two decades of the adoption of the Constitution,

arguably little has been achieved in terms of the ideals of the Constitution in both basic and tertiary education. Black children are subjected to ill-equipped schools, under-qualified teachers, and general conditions that are not conducive to a healthy learning environment, exacerbated by poverty conditions at home (Lynch & O'Riordan, 1998). These conditions have a knock-on effect on the enrolment and performance of black students in higher education. The following figure gives a picture of enrolment rates in higher education between 1986-2013 by race.

Figure 2.1: Percentage university enrolment by race 1986-2013



Source: Adapted from Taylor, Fleisch, & Shindler. (2008) and CHE (2015)

Figure 2.1 presents statistics of enrolment from the apartheid era, into the post-apartheid. A notable observation is the shifting in numbers of students enrolled based on race between the two eras. In the former, the majority of students enrolled were white students, comprising 60% of the total enrolment rate, while the remaining percentage was shared between black and coloured students. In the latter, black students' enrolment went as high as 70%, with whites at only 18 percent. This could be explained, among other factors, due to initiatives that were adopted post-1994 to provide equal chances of access to services and opportunities for social transformation across the South African population, especially among those previously marginalised. Table 2.1 below serves to confirm the efforts of widening access and participation of the formerly marginalised groups in higher education as it shows trends between 2010 to 2018 at the WSoE.

Table 2.1: Student Enrolment at WSoE (2010-2018)

	Total black students	**Total White Students**	**Total Indian students**	**Total Coloured students**
2010	2768	387	164	99
2011	2153	363	176	94
2012	1784	337	212	95
2013	1453	305	201	89
2014	1535	304	247	98
2015	1345	299	243	95
2016	1555	302	243	98
2017	1660	257	257	97
2018	1608	229	241	83

Table 2.1: Showing student admission between 2010-2018

Source: Academic Information & Systems Unit (AISU)

Table 1 shows how the enrolment of black students into the WSoE has increased over time, from the immediate post-apartheid era to the present. Year 2010 registered the highest number of black students following the intake from the Limpopo Department of Education for the retraining of their teachers. Between 2013 and 2015, there was a slight decrease in enrolment of black students, which then begins to pick up from 2016 to the present.

Despite such statistics, the effects of apartheid, including economic, social, and political inequalities, still has an impact on many black South Africans students entering higher education (Bunting 2004; Webb, 2002). Such effects have manifested themselves through underperformance and dropping out of these very students from the system at an alarming rate, due to what Jansen (2017) has partly attributed to "the growing number of students mainly from academically dysfunctional schools that has led to high dropout and low graduation rates" (p. 28). The statistics in Table 2.2 provide some historical context that is indicative of a problem pertaining to high dropout rates in relation to the numbers enrolled in Higher Education between 2014 and 2018.

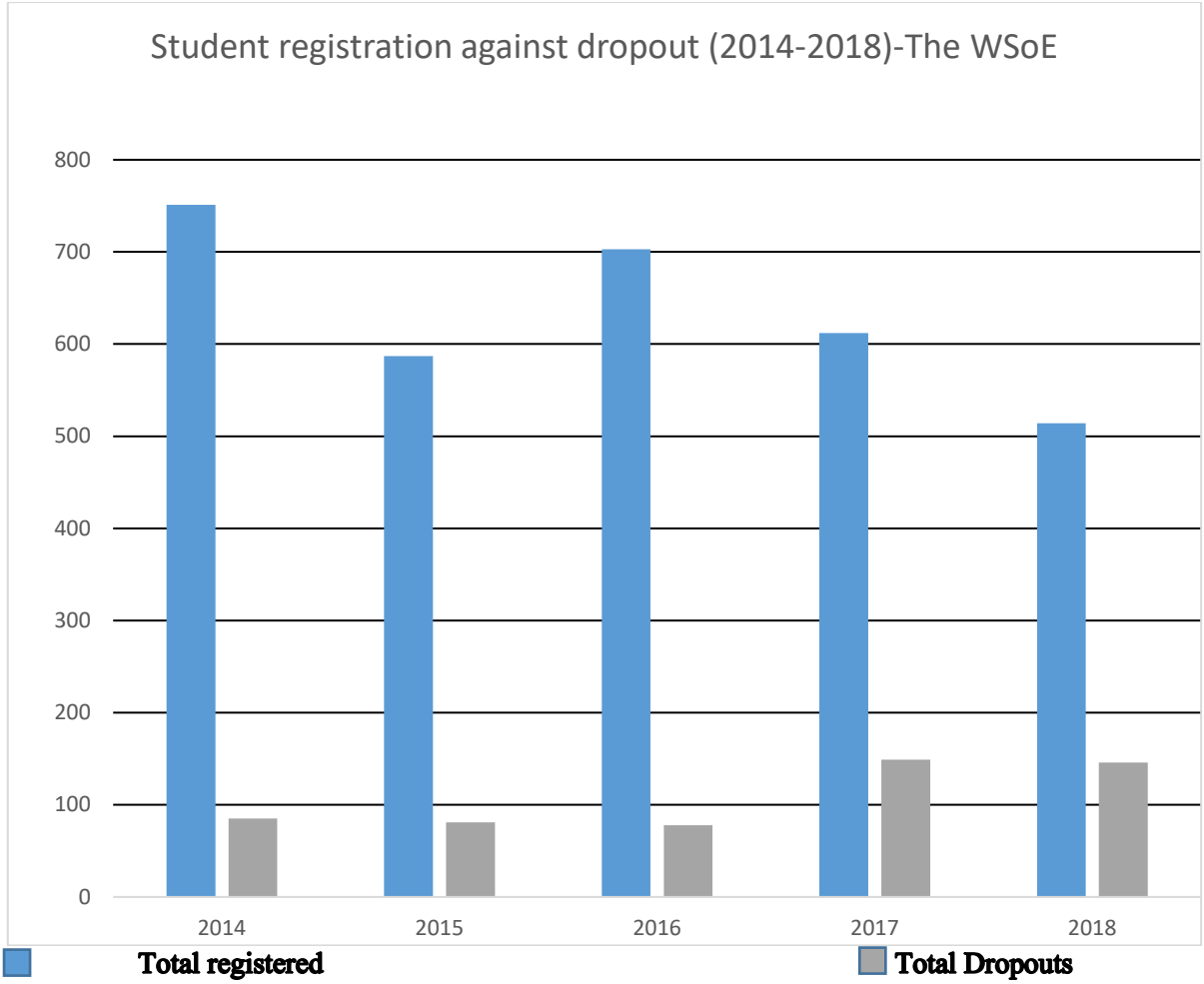


Table 2.2: Performance trend (2014-2018)
Source: Academic Information & Systems Unit (AISU)

The statistics show the curious number of students dropping out, against those enrolled. Although the statistics above have not been presented by race, Letseka and Maile (2008) claim that about 70% of the families of the HE drop-outs surveyed were of low socioeconomic status, with black African parents earning less than R1600.00 per month. Tjønneland (2017) furthers the argument, illustrating how less than 5% of black students with parents earning an annual income of less than R120,000 qualify into university, and barely 50% of these students graduate. The majority constitute those on financial aid schemes, who make up more than 66% of those that drop out.

In this regard, Mokgalong concludes that:

> Since the election of a new democratic government in 1994, Black students have increasingly gained access to universities and constitute the majority of the student population in most universities. However, deeper analysis reveals that although statistics show an increase in Black enrolments at all universities, Black African students have the highest attrition and failure rates. Hence students enter the system,

> fail and remain for many years at the university and eventually drop-out – a phenomenon commonly termed the revolving door syndrome [all sic] (Mokgalong, cited in Nkoana- Mashabane, 2009 p.20).

The discussion above reveals some of the complexity of the effort to widen access and participation of students formerly considered marginalised, in that, while they manage to get a place in university, their chances of surviving to complete the various programmes proves a challenge. This then steers the discussion into looking beyond getting a university place to surviving higher education, which speaks to how students navigate higher education. Over the years, the situation has not changed as far as high dropout is concerned, and among socioeconomically disadvantaged groups, as alluded to by Tanga and Maphosa (2018).

2.4 Access and navigation of university life

A correlation that exists between education and development, encompassing upward social mobility, which has placed a high demand on university education, with the volume of applicants for university places far exceeding the possible university places available (Branson, Leibbrandt, & Zuze, 2009). According to the Human Capital Theory (HCT) "education is an investment, in which the economic productive ability of the human is considered as being most important. The skills and knowledge acquired through education serve as a precursor, as the more skilful and more knowledgeable a person is, the higher their earning wages" (Du Plooy & Zilindile, 2014, p. 191). This conceptualisation of education has resulted in high demand for tertiary education. Education is generally perceived as playing, among the various roles, the role of promoting learning, as well as positioning people to fill up positions within a society (Autin, Batruch, & Butera, 2015). Criticisms of human capital theory point out how education is not a sure guarantee of social mobility (Tan, 2014). In view of human capital theory, it could then be argued that accessing education by those from disadvantaged background plays a vital role in improving their wellbeing.

While accessing higher education itself is a challenge, there is another challenge that those who are disadvantaged that gain access have to grapple with, which is, being able to navigate the system in a way that will push them towards successfully completing the programmes they for which they register. The outcome of this challenge has been an increase in the number of students who drop out, or who fail to complete their studies within the stipulated time, due to repetitions. The processes of registering as a university student and the ability to successfully complete the course of study has been described by Morrow (2007) as the two forms of access to higher education. Morrow looked at the schooling experience as comprising of two forms of access that ensure a student's successful journey and completion. The first is the formal access,

which in the case of this study entails being accepted or admitted into an institution of higher education. This initial step is considered the easier of the two. The second is what Morrow describes as the epistemic access. This entails the ability to acquire the necessary knowledge of navigating the system (Du Ploy & Zilindile, 2014). It is this form of access that distinguishes those that complete tertiary education from those that fail or drop out along the way. Gamede (2005, p.4) describes access as being "both the means of entry in the first step, and post-enrolment access that is reflected in the outcome of schooling." Leibowitz and Bozalek (2014) argue that the South African case is similar, in the sense that the emphasis is more on widening access as a means of addressing social justice issues that have been prevalent over the years, at the expense broader access to knowledge and success of students upon being accepted into university.

The navigation of tertiary education and acquisition of the epistemic access that Morrow (2007) points out and Cross (2018) later touches on are important aspects requiring consideration within the discourse of students' wellbeing in tertiary education. The points that Cross (2018) raised focuses on how the increase or widening of access in higher education was followed by problems related to throughput and retention, which saw many students dropping out and failing to complete their academic programmes. Dawes, Yeld & Smith (1999, p.97) coined this as a 'revolving door syndrome', where those targeted for entry into the system end up being thrown out. They called for a redress to the situation. As has been discussed earlier, the majority of students that fall along the wayside are those from socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds (Blanden & Gregg, 2004; Letseka & Breier, 2008; De Beer & Van Der Merwe, 2006). The struggles encountered by students from disadvantaged backgrounds in navigating university life emanate from a number of factors, some of which will be elaborated on in the subsequent sections. It is against this background that this study seeks to understand the challenges that socioeconomically disadvantaged students encounter in the hope of filling the gap of ensuring that the issues of success of students upon being accepted into university are addressed.

2.4.1 Student adjustments to university life

Upon entering university, the majority of students will be faced with the system shock that calls for adjustment and adaptation. Mortenson (2005), in support of Tinto's concern on retention of university students, has revealed how close to half of students admitted into higher education fail to persist and graduate. Among the areas where the main transition occurs are in the academic, social, and cultural spheres (Aina, Baici, Casalone, & Pastore 2018; Cabrera 2014 and Mabope 2014). According to Wintre and Yaffe (2000), the transition that comes with entry into university brings with it a significant amount of stress. Parker (2003) used the expression 'mind the gap' to highlight the challenge that comes with moving from high school and joining university, where she claims that "no simple orientation or deficit skills package would enable incoming students to engage with university" (Ibid, p. 63). This stress is related to the change that occurs as students move from high school into university. There is a lot of adjustment that students have to make in order to fit into the system and begin navigating it so as to successfully complete their academic journey.

Each of these have a way in which they affect the students' academic achievement and determine the extent to which they would be able to successfully navigate university. Lowe and Cook (2003, p. 53) summarised the transitional experience as follows:

> The abrupt shift from the controlled environment of school, college and family to an environment in which students are expected to accept personal responsibility for both academic and social aspects of their lives [which] creates anxiety and distress, undermining their normal coping mechanisms.

The academic transition is apparent in the way that teaching and learning approaches differ from high school into university. The main adjustment is in the move from a dependent approach of learning in high school, where teaching and learning to a large extent depends on the teacher, to an independent approach that the university expects of students to be self-regulating, capable of independently interpreting situations, and being creative (Briggs, Clark and Hall, 2012). Lowe and Cook (2003) observe how pre-tertiary education does not fully prepare students for university experience, due to its narrow approach to teaching and learning processes, and less emphasis put on independent learning. For most students, the failure to negotiate this transition leads to loss of self-confidence and increased stress, which can in turn lead to them leaving university and dropping out of the system.

Socially, there is a transition that comes with entry into university that also affects students. Mudhovozi (2012) explains the social dimension of adjustment that students in university encounter. He mentions the concept of 'freedom' that comes with entering university. Most of

the students that come from high school into university come from a background where either parents or teachers were observing and regulating their every move. Coming to university brings with it some element and feeling of freedom, where no one is telling them what to do and how to run their lives. Mudhovozi elaborates on how this freedom for some of the students would be the main reason they fail to successfully negotiate university. The failure to plan their time and prioritise their activities results in student drop-out and failure to complete within the stipulated time. Another social aspect affecting university students is the influence of peers. As a university student with little influence from parents and guardians, the remaining major influence is that of peers. Based on Erikson's psychosocial theory, students entering higher education are mostly at the developmental stage where they seek acceptance, and the prominent source of this acceptance comes from their peers. While studies have shown the value of peers on academic achievement in higher education Goguen, Heister and Nordstrom (2010), Brady, Insler and Rahman (2015) show how peer influence can either result in positive or negative outcomes in terms of academic achievement, depending on one's choice of associates.

Culturally, the transition into university exposes students to a new institutional culture that is mostly different from one to which they have become accustomed. Nora (2004) argues how mismatches between students' expectations and the culture of university could result in dropping out of students as a result of the stress that accompanies adapting to the new culture. As was with the academic adjustments, there is some variation between university culture and pre-university culture.

Lowe and Cook (2003) touch on some areas where the expectations of university students misalign with what they had been accustomed to prior to entering university that contribute to the struggle in navigating the system. Amongst these were having to cope with new teaching styles, such as formal lectures, which require prior preparation, note taking, and listening skills. These are some skills in which all students are fully conversant coming out of high school. Roberts and Higgins (1992) have cautioned that higher education takes for granted that students will just acquire these skills through their teaching and learning process, where for some, the struggle ultimately costs them their place in the university.

2.4.2 Adjustments in the context of socioeconomically disadvantaged students

Cross (2018) elaborated how in the case of South Africa, the toppling of the apartheid government brought with it changes in every sector, including higher education, where there was an upsurge in the number of students entering into tertiary institutions. The quest to widen access saw the inclusion of students considered marginalised on economic, racial, disability and other marginalising attributes (Vandeyar, 2010) enrolled in what was previously considered white universities.

While the discussion above has touched on the general struggles faced by students entering university, the extent to which these struggles are experienced varies amongst individuals. The reality in most countries, both in developed and less developed countries, is that the ability to gain access to tertiary education is seen to be more in favour of a particular section of the population. The literature shows how one of the main determining factors of not only access but also survival and completion of tertiary education tends to be socioeconomic status (Blanden & Gregg, 2004; Cross, Shalem, Blackhouse, & Adam, 2009; Carrim & Wangenge-Ouma, 2012; Fan, 2014; Letseka & Breier, 2008). In the midst of the various transformations within HEIs, evidence from statistics so far has shown the changes that have occurred in the post-apartheid era in improving the admission rate of black students in the WSoE, as evidenced in Figure 1.1.

There is also evidence pointing towards the low throughput and high dropout rate within the same period. In his book on *Rebels and Rage*, Habib (2019) discusses how the #FeesMustFall movement's main concern was that of ensuring that black students in South Africa would not be denied access either on economic grounds or cultural grounds for not being able to acclimatise to the South African public universities through provisions of an affordable quality education. These constitute the same group that makes up a large percentage of those considered socioeconomically disadvantaged. According to Ndelu (2017), two of the three main demands made during the Fallist movement had to do with the economic aspect, including free education for all and immediate clearance of historical debts. Both of these demands resonated with the struggles that the majority of black students from disadvantaged backgrounds encountered.

For the most part, students from disadvantaged backgrounds experience economic struggles as they enter university. Prior to the 1980s and 1990s, most universities around the world were highly subsidised by their governments. Following the imposition of the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) advocated for by the World Bank and IMF, African countries were pressured to – amongst other measures – reduce the funding of institutions such as tertiary

education as a means of enabling them to settle their substantial debts (Caffenztis, 2008). Higher education thus moved from being considered a public good, to a commodity that was to be sold to the students, now considered customers. According to Mamdani (2008), the World Bank's push was intended to have beneficiaries of higher education share in the cost of running these institutions, as the states reduced their funding towards higher education. The ongoing decline in funding of higher education around the world has had implications on the burden that students coming from socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds have to bear. Student numbers extracted from the Wits Student Information Management System (SIMS) showed that, of the 2242 teacher trainees enrolled at the Wits School of Education (WSoE) in 2016, and the 2458 enrolled in 2017, more than 60% were dependent on bursaries and handouts for their daily needs (AISU, 2019). The majority consisted of black students from all provinces in South Africa, who were separated from their families and other sources of material and psychological support. Placing their focus solely on their educational goals would therefore prove problematic for many.

It is not surprising, therefore, that, as Maringira and Gukurume (2017, p.37) state, "the #FeesMustFall movement [was] also about being black and poor… #FeesMustFall [was] be seen as a manifestation of deep-seated dissatisfaction with structural racial inequalities and the endemic poverty associated with blackness." The #FeesMustFall movement sheds light on the 'chain reaction' that comes with being disadvantaged that leads to high dropout and low retention among socioeconomically disadvantaged students. Muller (2016) points out what are referred to as the "inconvenient truths" raised by the #FeesMustFall# movement, noting how the education system already fails the disadvantaged students due to the poor preparations they get as they progress from basic education, which then results in their continued struggle in higher education, ultimately leading to the high dropout and repetition rates. In his view, therefore, the #FeesMustFall movement has had a somewhat positive effect to the extent that it raises the needs of the disadvantaged students.

One of the responses to the plight of socioeconomically disadvantaged student was a significant increase in the state's contribution towards higher education through the National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS), aimed at catering for students from low socioeconomic background. Jansen (2017) observed that even with such an increase, only 40% of the intended recipients enjoyed access to funding.

Wangenge-Ouma and Carpentier (2018) point out the challenges being faced by funding of higher education in South Africa, which they attribute to the misalignment of costs of running higher education and the budget allocation from Government. According to the DHET (2015),

net change per capita for student allocation shrunk by 1.35% between 2004 to 2015. In the case of South Africa, Habib (2019) points out the issues that arose with regards to eligibility criteria for financial aid for students. According to Government aid, the National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS), eligibility depended on the family income, whose cut-off point (R600,000, later adjusted to R350,000) proved less than the full cost of tuition fee, inclusive of accommodation and living expenses, especially in situations where more than one child was admitted to university and requiring support. As a result, there still remain pockets of students who fail to qualify for the opportunity to pursue higher education with government aid, due to inadequate financing. Jansen (2017) refers to such as the 'missing middle', whose parents though earning above the cut-off point to qualify for government funding, still find themselves struggling to make ends meet as university students. Additionally, Muller (2016) laments how the lack of prioritising on extent of students' lack results in those most in need of funding missing out. He points to the failure to prioritise students that desperately require financial assistance when disbursing bursaries.

The observations by both Jansen (2017) and Muller (2016) underscore how the efforts of to include students from previously oppressed backgrounds manifest themselves, alongside the challenge of financing them. Such challenges account for students dropping out through lack of funding, thereby failing to adequately deal with what Habib (2019, p.174) later refers to as a "systemic challenge of access to higher education".

2.4.2.1 Family background

Family background encompasses a number of aspects that explain the struggle that students encounter in their navigation of university life, and in particular, the students that receive focus in this study. One is the level of education of their parents. Section 2.2 explicates the link between an individual's socioeconomic status, class that they occupy within society and the availability of resources at their disposal. Students from disadvantaged backgrounds are thus those who, according to Lynch (2006), take on characteristics of manual jobs, lack autonomy, and are dominated by those that are socioeconomically well off. Consequently, the resources at their disposal and the control that they have are inadequate, resulting in their inability to access the levels of education that their counterparts achieve. According to McCoy and Smyth (2011), students that come from families where the parents received little or no exposure to education, or even no exposure to higher education, lack the knowledge of how university systems operate, and therefore do not have much in terms of knowledge and experience that they can pass on to their children. Although some students acquire this information from people outside of their immediate family, the majority of those coming into higher education enter the

system with no idea of what to expect. For some time, the claim existed about disadvantaged families having little or no value of education, as one reason why their children were not achieving more, or participating more in education (Connell, White & Johnston, 1992). Such claims have been countered by more recent research that has attributed this to the lack of experience and exposure of the parents, which inhibits them from providing their children with both the incentives and environment that would foster success in their education (James, 2001). Appadurai (2004) describes these incentives and environment as contributing to one's capacity to aspire, which is likened to a map that guides an individual to an expected end. In the case of students from socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds, this journey is embarked upon without the requisite map, which makes it a distinct challenge for them to fully realise their aspirations. On the other hand, those coming from families with educated parents not only play a role in inspiring their children to aim higher in their education, but are also able to equip them with the necessary information and tools that would enable them to manoeuvre university with reasonable ease. Reisel (2011, p. 263), discusses the 'status maintenance thesis', where "the aspiration of children is to at least reach the social status position of their parents." With this conceptualisation in mind, children coming from socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds that also have parents with low levels of education lack the motivation that their counterparts have in advancing in education. This absence of inspiration from home, according to Reisel (2011), has an effect on the differentiation of access as well as performance in education between the two categories.

The combination of parental level of education, which in part explains the nature jobs that the parents take on, have economic implications that would impact on their lives as university students. In a study conducted on South African students by Czerrniewicz and Brown (2013), they highlight what they termed 'digital strangers', referring to students who, as a result of their disadvantaged backgrounds and resource constraints, lacked both access and the digital know-how with which to navigate digital technology when enrolled in university. Using Bourdieu's concept of habitus, they pointed out how contradictions exist between students' background based on socioeconomic status, the field of higher education, and impact of students, as will be discussed in later sections of this chapter.

2.4.2.2 First generation students

Closely linked to family background is the condition of being a first-generation student. London (1996) describes first generation students as those who are first in the family to have a taste of what the culture of college/university is like. London uses the term 'culture' to emphasise the nature of change and adaptation that is required for these students to get

accustomed to the systems that operate within the university space. According to Gardner and Holley (2011), these students have characteristics that distinguish them from their counterparts who have university graduates in the family, also regarded as continuing-generation students, who are familiar with the culture of higher education. Among these distinguishing factors is that most of these students come from low socioeconomic background, where they receive less support from their families and while in university, due to the lack in navigational skill, do not interact with academic staff. On the other hand, continuing generation students whose family members have an experience of university life have this culture of university life instilled in them, which they are able to pass on to their children. Bills (2000) describes this as an aspect of cultural capital that determines the ease with which one has in adjusting to the dominant culture of a social grouping. This lack of what Lohfink & Paulsen (2005) term 'intergenerational information' on how college or university operates cannot be underestimated for the way in which – for first generation students – university expectations prove problematic. Pascarella, Pierson, Wolniak and Terenzini (2004) attribute the ability of continuing generation students' survival and ease of adapting to university life to both the social as well as cultural capital that they possess by virtue of having their parents or family members harbouring experience of the higher education system. It is this networking and exposure to university culture that first generation students lack, which make a difference in the nature in which the two categories of students navigate through higher education. The unequal access to information regarding university life between the first-generation students and their counterparts who have family members with a history of university life is visible in the manner in which the students settle and find their place in the university space (Pascarella et.al, 2004). They sum up their experience as being: "a more difficult transition from secondary school to college than their peers. [through] confronting all the anxieties, dislocations and difficulties of any college student, their experiences often involve substantial cultural as well as social and academic transition" (Ibid, p.250).

As a result, most of these students struggle in their academic life, resulting in delayed completion, and drop-out.

2.4.2.3 Students' educational background

Leibowitz and Bozalek (2014, p. 94) described the school system in South Africa as being extremely unequal. So stark is the difference that they assign the categories "functional schools (25%) and dysfunctional schools (75%)". The variations in quality of education offered not only applied at primary and high school, but manifest themselves further in higher education. Prior to 1994, Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) were racially divided, and the landscape of the past led to division of institutions in terms of race, such as historically black universities (HBUs) on the one hand and historically white universities (HWUs) on the other (Bunting, 2004). The former nomenclature included 'African', 'Coloured' and 'Indian' institutions. This legacy persists in post-apartheid in the Higher Education landscape and has had an impact on admission of black students, throughput and success rate (ibid.). Over time, with black students taking up places in the previously white universities, comparisons in regard to adjusting to university environment reveals how white students scored significantly higher than black students in adjusting socially, academically, as well as emotionally (Sennett, Finchilescu, Gibson & Strauss 2003).

It is mainly students that come from the latter that are seen to be prone to experiencing adjustment challenges upon gaining admittance into higher education. Cross and Carpentier (2009) attribute the rationale behind these challenges to the adaptation difficulties that come with their lack of the basic elements that are requisites for their survival as university students. They added how students from disadvantaged schools are among those most likely to suffer.

With the coming in of the post-apartheid regime, among other changes that occurred in higher education was the integration of students of different races into the universities that were once considered elite. This development has been viewed as a mixed blessing in that on the one hand, universities saw a leap in enrolment of students, and more specifically those coming from disadvantaged backgrounds. On the other hand, though, most were, "academically weak because of a largely dysfunctional school system…." (Jansen, 2017, p. 34). Coming from a socioeconomically disadvantaged background entails compromises that have to be made in order to meet certain needs. The type of education that families provide to their children is one of those areas where compromises are made. In South Africa, as is the case with most developing countries, there are discrepancies in provision of education within the different levels of education, from early primary, through high school to universities. A report submitted to the British Council by Carrim and Wangenge-Ouma (2012, p. 11) reiterated the challenges that students face as they enter university as a result of the compromised pre-tertiary education that they receive. In one of the points regarding international comparative tests, they are cited

as follows:

> South African students were way below their average for the level they ought to be performing at. [the implication was that] by the time students enter into higher education, they are not equipped with the basic necessary skills to cope with higher education teaching and learning.

The history of South Africa makes these differences more evident. For example, with primary and high school, there is a marked difference between township schools and former Model C schools. The latter date back to pre-1990, when there was a separation of schools by race. In 1990, a declaration was made that allowed for black students to enrol in white schools. White schools were classified into three (Models 'A', 'B' and 'C'). Model A schools were those that converted to private schools, while Model B schools maintained their status as state schools that were open to admitting anyone. Model C, on the other hand, were a blend of Models A and B, where the running of the school was shared by both the State and the school community (Carrim, 1998). Although Model C schools were ultimately dissolved by 1996, there remains a marked difference in terms of infrastructure, resources and character between the former model C schools and their counterparts in rural areas and townships. The exposure and quality of learning that students encounter in these two types of schools is so starkly different it cannot be understated. Huang (2019) observed how individuals that receive their training from a prestigious school or better-quality schools, acquire a taste that reflects the values of education system that leans more towards middle class culture. Steyn and Kamper (2011) studied on disadvantaged students at the university of Pretoria, observing that even among the disadvantaged students, those that attended model C schools outperformed their counterparts from similar socioeconomic background that had attended a rural or township school. Mouton, Louw and Strydom (2013, p.288) distinguished these adequately as follows:

> …unequal schooling of Grade 12 learners complicates the assessment of the potential of learners in South Africa, as many white children and some black children from privileged social strata attend private schools or former Model C schools, which are perceived best schools in the country while learners from underprivileged strata (mostly black children) attend less prestigious institutions, being victims of educational apartheid.

The difference is also pronounced among provinces, with other provinces having better quality Schools than others. A report compiled by Maringe, Masinire and Nkambule (2014) on correlates of school improvement describe how, on the whole, schools in Mpumalanga Province are amongst the poorest in quality in the country. The state of the quality of schools coincided with the socioeconomic status of the majority of people, which was low.

The level of preparation for university education is higher for those students that have had a pre-tertiary educational background of better quality than it is for their counterparts that have had compromised quality education (Terenzini, Cabrera, & Bernal, 2001). De Beer and Van Der Merwe (2006) discuss how additionally, children coming from disadvantaged backgrounds socioeconomically encounter oppressive circumstances that have a negative effect on their academic achievements that their counterparts from middle class families do not. Milne and Plourde (2006) meanwhile argue that children from poor backgrounds are less ready, and lag in education compared to their classmates from affluent backgrounds.

As a result of all of the above, students coming from socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds tend to go to schools that lack resources, including human resources, in terms of teaching and learning material. Consequently, the exposure that these students get from the poorly equipped schools cannot compare with that which their counterparts from middle class backgrounds receive from attending better-equipped schools that offer quality education. The deficits that the poorly equipped schools experience have a tendency to influence the level of knowledge, attitude, and skills that students carry with them as they move along with their education. Some of these skills that they lack but are significant in university life include critical thinking, problem-solving, as well as writing skills.

Students from middle class families displayed higher levels of critical thinking compared to their peers from working class. Some of the explanations for the findings were both family background, and education background. Coming from families where parents had significant level of education entailed the exposure to activities such as reading at an early age. Lareau (2001) explained how middle-class parenting differed from working class parenting in the sense that the former tended to place more emphasis on reasoning and negotiating as well as resorting to conversing as a means of instilling discipline, whereas working class parenting used authoritarian tendencies and physical discipline. As such, children from the middle class tended to be more progressively open to discussing and learning new things compared to their counterparts from the working class. This and the availability of resources that stimulate the mind, manifested themselves in higher levels of critical thinking skills among this section of students and not in the socioeconomically disadvantaged students who lack in resources. The

study by Wright and Slate (2015) confirmed the advantage that students from economically well-off family have with regards to critical thinking skills compared to their counterparts from economically disadvantaged backgrounds. Using reading assessments, they were able to establish a marked difference in critical thinking skills between the two groups. One of the explanations to the findings was the differences in exposure that students from the two socioeconomic backgrounds had, which apportioned the one a greater advantage over the other. The variations with regards to the quality of pre-tertiary education as well as the individual's exposure both from home and within the education system play a role in influencing their ability to cope in university.

2.4.3 Language Barrier

The compromised educational background of students from disadvantaged backgrounds as stipulated in section 2.4.2.3 above manifests itself further into the development of a language barrier. With the case of South Africa, where the main *lingua Franca* in higher education is English, most students that have gone through the compromised education system are highly likely to experience such language barriers. Van Dyk, Zybrands, Cillie & Coetzee, 2010, p. 333 established the relationship between the low levels of literacy in language and the academic struggles that such students experience:

> "Low levels of academic literacy (the ability to successfully engage in the academic discourse, whether it is through reading, writing, listening or speaking) in the language of teaching and learning are widely seen as one of the main reasons for the lack of academic success among South African undergraduate students with high academic potential."

Related to the above discussion on students' educational background, is the issue of language as they enter the university space. Language in university is considered a subset of institutional cultural capital (Hurst, 2015). It comprises of both spoken as well as academic or written language. On entering higher education, these are skills that enable students to navigate with reasonable ease, especially with what Boughey (2002) refers to as the academic discourse of language that differs from non-academic discourse. The former involves critical approach to making claims based on research, but for one to get to the point where they can grasp the academic discourse of language, basic knowledge of the non-academic discourse of language plays an enabling role. Carrim (1994), in writing on academic support and transformation of knowledge systems, discusses how establishments of academic systems established especially

in historically white universities were a way of supporting black students who entered higher education. Most of these students' backgrounds presented a disjuncture with the university culture, where such establishments provided enablers for them to cope with being in a white, English-speaking university. Among such support were skills including English language, logical reasoning, and critical thinking, as well as conceptual skills.

In the above section, one of the areas that is affected by the compromised quality of pre-tertiary education that students from socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds attend, is language. Most students come from backgrounds where English is not their home language. For most, it is their second or third language. Whereas the students' knowledge and fluency in the other languages places them at an advantage elsewhere, in the academic space, the dominance of English as the *lingua franca* places them at a disadvantage, where they have to work harder than their counterparts that are conversant with the language in order to be on par (Jansen, Sehlapelo & Tabane, 2007). Morrow (2007) outlined some of the factors that pose obstacles to students from disadvantaged backgrounds gaining epistemic access. Among these were language, class, and ethnicity. The use of English as a medium of instruction has been critiqued by many who describe it as "an industry that aims at benefiting the 'centre' and the expense of the 'periphery'" (Boughey 2002, p.295). Van Avermaet (2007) has established the relationship between poor language skills to socioeconomic factors that manifest themselves through low literacy, poor proficiency, and a lack of confidence in using the language. Clément, Dörnyei and Schmidt (2001) goes on to discuss how Hispanic students who fit in the category of being in the minority category and socioeconomically disadvantaged, are faced with challenges that prevent them from performing in school. The main obstacle for these students was language, and the fact that most of them, because of their disadvantaged backgrounds, attended schools that were of poor quality with teachers that were inexperienced. The situation is not different in the case of South Africa, where there are 11 languages, with the majority of students entering university from disadvantaged backgrounds, not having English as their first language in an education system that promotes the dominance of English, and coming from pre-tertiary experience whose quality, independent of the question of language, was compromised. Although there is a marked difference between the concepts of academic language and English as a language, Fakeye and Ogunsiji (2009), argue that proficiency in the English language is among the determinants of academic achievement, particularly in communities where English is not the first language, and the medium of instruction in the education system is English. Maleki and Zangani (2007) explore how some cases of failure

among students was the result of poor comprehension of concepts, resulting from a lack of proficiency in the English language. Feast (2002) found that even in Australian universities, the level of proficiency in the English language measured through the IELTS tests was a determinant of achievement as far as Grade-Point Average (GPA) was concerned.

As was reiterated earlier, in a family background characterised by parents lacking educational opportunity and with low income, children do not easily access the opportunities that their counterparts have when it comes to the refinement of their language skills crucial to tertiary education in English. Fan (2014) refers to the availability of resources at the disposal of those from middle to high socioeconomic background that enables them to provide remedial learning opportunities to their children, as well as development of a reading culture in their children through provision of books. All of these have significant effects on language development of individuals. As a concluding remark to the above, she advocated for development of language skills as a necessity to successful outcome in university.

2.5 Conclusion of Reviewed Literature

There have been ongoing debates on the explanations behind the experiences of students from disadvantaged background in higher education as this relates to their academic attainment (Majoribanks, 1996; Hochschild, 2003; Eamon, 2005). Such debates revolve around nature (inherent) factors including natural intelligence as well as the nurture (environmental) factors such as socialisation, and environment in which individuals are brought up. This study focuses on the nurturing aspects to understand how these speak to the challenges that the students encounter in university.

Second, as has been mentioned in earlier sections, through the provision of funding, government invest substantial amounts of money into higher education, the benefits of which are observable through the proportion of students who complete the programmes and graduate. Currently, the South African government is losing money through the high rates of incompletion and dropout. Aina et al. (2018) describe how low incompletion, low throughput, and high dropout rates come at a cost. The University of Johannesburg's director of Centre of Academic technologies lamented on the losses that are incurred with every student that drops out of university. According to her, in 2015, the total of university dropouts were as high as 1,650 students. Cumulatively, this was an equivalence of a loss of R75 million (Van Der Merwe, 2017). Of major concern, according to the same article, was the clogging of students through low throughput that exerted pressure on university space and resources. An example cited was the case of the University of Cape Town, where completion rate, especially among

black students was low (4-14%). This is not an unusual trend in examining what is taking place in all other public universities in South Africa. It is the aim of this study, therefore, to shed more light on the experiences of these at-risk students, in an attempt to provide insight that would form a basis on which strategies would be devised to ensure that challenges faced by socioeconomically disadvantaged students are abated.

The literature reviewed has highlighted the complexity that socioeconomic status has on individuals as well as the effects that South Africa's apartheid history has had on education quality offered to the disadvantaged populations that in turn has impacted on their academic performance in higher education. The issues surrounding widening of access to higher education have been looked at against the ability to navigate the higher education system, emphasising the obstacles that stand in the way of students successfully navigating university life. From the reviewed literature, the gap that this study endeavours to fill is two-fold. First to explore the socioeconomic and academic challenges faced by black South African students from socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds in the context of a prestigious and formally historically white university. Second, while most research and literature in this area has focused on specific factors, mostly economic, adopting only this perspective is too narrow and reductionist for the complexities of the South African circumstance. This study therefore adopts a non-reductionist approach that does not restrict itself to particular explanations with regards to challenges faced by black students. Instead, it opens up to other views of understanding these complexities, in what Carolissen, (2018, p.92) "an approach that resists a valorisation of singular identities, and encourages non-polarisation and non-binaried thinking."

In view of the literature presented within the current chapter, the following chapter will proceed to lay out the theoretical framework from which this study would be approached from.

CHAPTER 3: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

3. Introduction

One of the aspects that emerges from the reviewed literature pertaining to the challenges in navigating higher education experienced by students from disadvantaged backgrounds is the role that socioeconomic status plays in determining the fate of students in the system. While the majority of the literature points towards the economic deficit that exists among the students from socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds, the focus of this study extends beyond mere economic insufficiency to include other elements. It is the extended view of what explains the challenges of students from socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds on which the study places focus. By moving from the overemphasis on economic scarcity as an explanation of challenges faced by this category of students, which is narrow and reductionist in nature, this study goes further, to explore other dynamics that may explain this phenomenon. Challenges faced by students can result from multifaceted sources. A reductionist perspective fails to explain, for example, why some students experiencing similar economic constraints go on and overcome the various challenges.

To better understand the persistent academic and socio-economic challenges faced by WSoE students, as the focus of this study, I draw on Bourdieu's "cultural reproduction" (cultural reproduction theory) as a lens through which the study would be both approached, and analysed. It is important to point out at the very start that Bourdieu's earlier work received criticism on the grounds of being deterministic and structuralist. According to Grenfell (2014), it was only as Bourdieu began interacting with the work of Husserl that there was a shift in his outlook from being over-deterministic and positivist to adopting a more 'rationalist' and constructivist approach. The standpoint adopted from Bourdieu's work will therefore be based on his latter development, that involved a shift from a structuralist and deterministic approach to one that was both non-structuralist and non-reductionist. It is in the context of widening the perspective regarding the academic and economic challenges faced by black students at the WSoE that this study draws upon Bourdieu's cultural capital, habitus, and field, as a theoretical framework to guide the study.

Three main elements from Bourdieu's theory will be the focus of the study's theoretical framing. These are the cultural capital, habitus, and field.

3.1 Bourdieu's theory of Cultural Capital, habitus, and field

Pierre Bourdieu, a French sociologist, born from a working-class family and ascending up the social ladder to become a renowned intellectual, used part of his lived experiences to influence his theories (Robbins, 2005). Influenced by Marx and other theorists before him that forwarded arguments on social reproduction and the way in which social inequalities transmitted from one generation to the next, Bourdieu examined the concept of social reproduction as not being limited to mere economic exploitation by owners of the means of production as a perpetrating factor to reproduction of social inequalities but considered this as a factor of a lacking in four main capitals namely economic, social, human, and cultural capitals (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990). Of the different kinds of capital, Fan (2014) found the family's cultural capital had the greatest effect on access to academic resources. Bourdieu (1977) comments on how the different forms of capital can be converted, but that of all the forms, he later viewed cultural capital as the biggest exchange value in education, over and above economic or social capital (Bourdieu 1997). Consequently, emphasis is placed on cultural capital in this study as a lens for viewing and interpreting findings.

3.1.1 Cultural capital

Bourdieu (1972) describes cultural capital as the collection of symbolic elements such as skills, tastes, postures, clothing, mannerisms, material belongings, credentials, with some forms of these being valued over others in ways that can help or hinder social mobility just as much as income or wealth. Bourdieu argues that these are acquired through being part of a particular social class sharing similar forms of cultural capital with others, creating a sense of collective identity and group positions ('people like us'). He points out that cultural capital is a major source of social inequality.

Cultural capital is transmitted through family and education, and may be institutionalised in the forms of educational qualifications (ibid.). Cultural capital is the primary determinant of status and relative positions within a social field. According to Gaventa (2003, p.6), cultural capital plays a vital role in power distribution within societies by "providing the means for a non-economic form of domination and hierarchy, as classes distinguish themselves through taste".

Bourdieu (2007) points to three forms through which cultural capital manifests: *embodied capital* that is typified through dispositions of the mind and body; *objectified form* that is characterised by possession of cultural goods including books, instruments and machines; and finally, the *institutionalised form* of cultural capital, as evidenced through educational qualifications.

One's accent or dialect is an example of embodied cultural capital, while a luxury car or record collection are examples of cultural capital in its objectified state. Lamont and Lareau (1988) consider cultural capital to be responsible for forming the foundation of one's social life and dictating one's position within the social order. According to Walther (2014), the more cultural capital one has, the more powerful a position that person is likely to occupy in social life. This arguably has greater impact on agency than does economic and academic successes.

The objectified form of cultural capital exists as material objects, e.g. books, paintings, monuments, instruments etc. that are transferable in their physical state. Finally, in the institutionalised form, cultural capital takes the form of a certificate of cultural competence, e.g. a formalised academic qualification (diploma) that is socially sanctioned by an institution. According to Bourdieu (1986), institutions institute cultural capital on a collective basis, enabling a comparison of qualification holders, e.g. two persons having obtained their diploma from different institutions. This emphasises the key role of academic achievement in developing cultural capital.

According to Sullivan (2001), the role of cultural capital lies in the fact that educational institutions promote the type of culture and disposition that middle class people uphold. Bourdieu (1998) considered education institutions as contributing to social and cultural inequalities through their overt legitimising of the relationship between academic excellence and cultural heritage. de Graaf, de Graaf and Kraaykamp (2000) comment on how the dominance of the middle class or 'highbrow' culture constitutes a way of the middle-class maintaining power and protecting their interests in society. Jæger (2009) argues that cultural capital gives a false sense of academic brilliance that yields a real return in the form of educational success to those that possess it, mainly those from advantaged or middle-class backgrounds. Lareau and Weininger (2003) illustrate how aspects related to the middle class, whether cognitive or non-cognitive translates into valuable skills that deserve rewarding in schools. The system that thrives in education ends up leaving students from disadvantaged backgrounds that do not share such aspects at a loss. Edgerton and Roberts (2016, p.197) observed how the "behavioral repertoire (practices) available to middle-class families – via their habitus and cultural capital – has greater currency within formal institutional settings such as the school (field) than does that of working-class families."

In the context of this study, students enter university coming from different social classes and hence will either have the cultural capital that is required to succeed, or will lack such cultural capital, depending on the kind of cultural capital they carry with them. An important dimension of such cultural capital, especially in the case of the South African schooling system, is that

some schools will have provided their learners with the cultural capital that is in keeping with survival within the education system, while others may have done so inadequately. Bourdieu (1976) alludes to the fact that as students enters the education space, there is tension that defines the inequalities with which students will settle and perform in school. For Bourdieu (ibid.), students from privileged backgrounds come to school already equipped with the cultural capital that will enable them to succeed. He refers to them as 'crude privileges' that facilitate their studies, as well as a job.

Bourdieu's theory of cultural capital assists here in exploring the socioeconomic and academic challenges faced by the students at the WSoE. Examining the characteristics that these students from disadvantaged backgrounds carry, which reflect their cultural capital, and exploring how these interact with the expectations, operations, and structure of the education institution, would shed light on these socioeconomic and academic challenges that they encounter. Furthermore, Bourdieu emphasised that cultural capital exists in a system of exchange with economic and social capital, which is one of the key concepts under investigation in this study. Economic capital refers to money and wealth, while social capital refers to the collection of social relations one has at one's disposal (with peers, friends, family, teachers, fellow alumni, employers, colleagues, community members, etc.), including embodied capital. I agree with Yang (2014), who demonstrated how the various capitals (social, economic and institutionalised) can be, and often are, interchangeable. Edgerton and Roberts (2016, p.3) refer to Bourdieu's capitals as being constitutive of how "economic capital affords the time and resources for investment in the development of children's cultural capital which is associated with future educational and occupational success, and in turn also associated social capital through broadening of one's social network." In the case of this study, students from advantaged background possess economic capital that affords them the privilege of acquiring a culture considered highbrow, which is consistent with that which is advanced in educational institutions. This, coupled with the quality education that they get prior to entering university endows them with elite forms or kinds of cultural capital. In turn, both the economic and cultural capital accumulated at an elite university and school such as the WSoE can be exchanged for social connections, knowledge, skills, values and behaviour that help them attain high-paying jobs, for example.

3.1.2 Habitus

Habitus is regarded as one of the central concepts in Bourdieu's sociology (Yang, 2014). Bourdieu (1990) conceived of habitus as "a system of shared dispositions that generates perceptions, appreciations, and actions […] an infinite capacity for generating products - thoughts, perceptions, expressions and actions… habit or unthinkingness in actions which operates below levels of calculation and consciousness without obeying any set of rules" (1990, p. 53 & 55). da Costa (2018), in a presentation on digital education through Bourdieuian theory and practice, described habitus as "mental structures inscribed in the body… represented and externalised by individuals' dispositions." For Bourdieu (1990), habitus is an acquired system of generative schemes that include actions, thoughts, and perceptions that adjust to a particular condition within which it is constituted. It is also considered as a socialised subjectivity that is conditioned by structural circumstances resulting in a shared disposition among people belonging to the same social grouping (Edgerton & Roberts, 2016). Williams notes that "it is formed in the context of people's social locations and inculcates them into a 'world view', which is based upon and reconciled to their position, thus serving to reproduce existing social structures" (1995, p. 585).

Habitus can be acquired in one of two ways, either as a primary form of socialisation through family or secondary socialisation later on, through interacting with other institutions such as education. There is a relationship between cultural capital and habitus. The exposure to a particular form of cultural capital determines the dispositions (habitus) that an individual exhibits both from family as they grow up, as well as the exposure they get from institutions such as universities. According to Bourdieu (1990), habitus ranges from the physical embodiment of cultural capital, to the deeply ingrained habits, skills, and dispositions that people possess due to their life experiences. Wacquant (2005, p. 316) defined habitus as "the way society becomes deposited in persons in the form of lasting dispositions, or trained capacities and structured propensities to think, feel and act in determinant ways, which then guide them." For instance, Dumais (2002) explains how habitus plays a role of reproducing social structures as an individual's social class has a way of prescribing what they are capable of and the limitations of their potential.

Furthermore, habitus is the system of dispositions as a product of history that "produces practices in accordance with the schemes engendered by history" (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 82).

As a primary form, the family is the main source of instilling habitus. Habitus passes down from one generation to the next, with parents as the main agents of socialisation. Such primary socialisation occurs in the family and immediate communities during childhood. The resulting

primary habitus is rather stable. The schemes of action and perception that have been transferred during childhood are linked to the parents' social position in the social space (Bonnewitz, 2005). Therefore, the primary habitus is about 'internalising the external' as the parents' modes of thinking, feeling and behaving that are linked to their position in the social space are internalised in the children's own habitus. This is what Bourdieu (1977) also calls class habitus, which reflects the different positions that people have in society and that leads to different lifestyles, tastes, and interests among social classes (Bourdieu, 1984; Bourdieu, Darbel & Beattie, 1997).

Secondary habitus is built on the primary habitus and results from one's education at school and university, but also from other life experiences. The primary habitus as "embodied history, internalized [sic] as second nature and so forgotten as history" never loses its impact and always influences the development of the secondary habitus (Bourdieu, 1990, p. 56). da Costa (2018) considers primary habitus as being durable, but transposable, while the secondary habitus is considered transformative and generative. This gives the primary habitus pre-eminence over secondary habitus. For students coming from disadvantaged backgrounds, therefore, the ingrained dispositions from their upbringing have a greater influence on them over the habitus that comes thereafter from exposure to education and other sources. Chudzikowski and Mayrhofer (2011) argue that over time, the primary and secondary habitus could be summarised into one single habitus that is constantly reinforced and modified by life experience, giving it a dynamic quality. These aspects of habitus point me to examining the impacts of family, community, and the academic backgrounds of students before coming to the WSoE.

Habitus, as characterised by qualities that include its sense of embodiment, implying that habitus is engrained in the individual's being in such a way that the outward manifestation or dispositions serve to reveal what the individual is 'made of'. Bourdieu (1985, p. 113) sums this sense of embodiment by stating that, "habitus as a social aspect is inscribed in the body of the biological individual." He later added how dispositions of habitus are an outcome of opportunities and constraints that individuals encounter from early on in life that make them become what they turn out to be (Bourdieu, 1990). As well as determining what an individual becomes, Swartz (1997, p. 103) regards habitus as not only making up "set structural limits for action but also generating perceptions, aspirations and practices that correspond to the structuring properties of earlier socialisation."

Habitus could therefore be likened to a mirror image of an individual's social context and the roots from which such dispositions were acquired (Reay, 2004). Because of this and applying

this concept to the current study, it is understood that the dispositions exhibited by individuals from different socioeconomic backgrounds will be different based on family upbringing. The second attribute of habitus is that it could be viewed from an individual as well as class perspective. Bourdieu (1977) explains how individuals' habitus is a subset of the wider class habitus. This implies that the manner in which an individual acts out is to a large extent a factor of the class to which that they belong. In the case of this study, the understanding is that students from socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds will have a type of disposition that is distinct from their counterparts from middle class. On the other hand, these dispositions can be related to by their peers from the same socioeconomic background, which motivates the aim of exploring what this category of students faces in relation to their socioeconomic and academic challenges at WSoE. It will be on the basis of the convergent and divergent outcomes that data reveals which element determines more regarding the challenges faced by this category of student.

The third attribute of habitus is what Reay (2004) describes as its permeability and responsiveness to the surrounding or environment. As explained earlier in this section, habitus is primarily acquired through family socialisation, which would be considered the basis on which dispositions are formed. Beyond this and through individuals' encounters with different environments, there appears to be a 'restructuring' of habitus (DiMaggio, 1979), revealing its mutability. One's habitus is durable but evolving and is continually adjusted to the current context and reinforced by further experience (Mayrhofer, Meyer, Steyrer & Langer, 2007). Although there is the mention of the mutability of habitus, Rapoport and Lomsky-Feder (2002) argue the extent to which habitus can accommodate or adjust to change. In their work on the Russian-Jewish intelligentsia, they noted how, even after moving from Russian territory where it was prestigious to identify with them, most of the Jews that migrated back to Israel failed to let go of the feeling of identifying more with Russia than embracing the Jewish way of life, with its traditions and culture. This reveals a dimension of habitus, how though mutable, the process of adjusting or adapting is not straightforward. In the current study, it is of interest how the students' habitus adjusts to the institution's expectations, in what Lehmann (2014, p.1) described as "a complex and complicated mix of allegiances to and dismissal of their working-class roots." The complexity of habitus and its influence on an individual is arrived at when looked at in the context of the concept of 'habitat.'

Habitat has been explained as the environment where individuals live their lives (Carrim, 1994). The unilateral focus on habitus in the absence of the role of habitat provides a simplistic explanation to what this study seeks to explore. As Prabakaran (2013) habitat can either

constrain or facilitate habitus. This implies that, while habitus may be viewed to an extent as immutable, the extent to which structuring of the structured habitus occurs is determined in part to an individual's exposure with habitat and how the negotiations have occurred in this perceived 'field of life politics.' It becomes clearer then to comprehend how though classified as belonging to the same class habitus, individuals may differ in the manner in which they respond to an unfamiliar field (agency). This could be in part based on the type of habitat they have been exposed to a well as the influence of the different fields they occupy at a particular point (as would be elaborated on further in sections 3.1.3). The reductionist and structuralist approach to exploring students' challenges runs the danger of generalising. It would fail to point out how through negotiating with the field of life politics, students may challenge the existing structures and powers thereby exhibiting some sense of agency. Rather than concluding that students from disadvantaged backgrounds are bound to struggle, this study goes beyond that to examine how agency and other factors mediate in explaining their challenges. This sense of agency will be considered in what Willis (1978) in his study described as the resistance in confronting dominant powers in a given circumstance, as well as Nentwich, Ozbilgin, and Tatli (2015) view of the power and influence of actors to challenge their current circumstances.

Following Bourdieu, the students who participate in this study are the product of their past and present experiences. In Bordieu's view, habitus seems to be a never-ending restructuring internal structure (Bourdieu 1977). Indeed, Bourdieu believes the habitus ought to be rather inert or "durable, but not eternal" (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 133), where sometimes, it does not adapt to modified field conditions, resulting in what Bourdieu (1977) calls the 'hysteresis effect'. A famous example of this the generation conflict where the habitus of agents has been developed at different points in time, leading to different understandings of which practice is 'reasonable' for one generation versus 'scandalous' or 'unthinkable' for the other.

The foregoing discussion suggests that, in this study, each of these undergraduate students has an embodied type of 'feel' for the social situations (their relationships, interactions), in which they regularly find themselves. According to Bourdieu, in the right situations (relationships and interactions), this habitus allows them to successfully survive within their environment or avoid violent confrontations. Their interactions and relationship directly and indirectly affect their academic and socio-economic achievements. In his studies of students in France, Bourdieu noted that students from extremely low employment conditions were unable to 'hustle' for jobs and money and unable negotiate life in the way their counterparts from middle class conditions were, due to their poor habitus (Bourdieu, 1990).

Finally, Bourdieu's concept of habitus suggests that a 'system of disposition' generates perceptions, appreciations, and practices (Bourdieu, 1990). If such dispositions are in line with those of an institution, such as a university, it can be argued that the students who have such dispositions will be more successful than those who lack such dispositions. Based on Bourdieu's cultural theory, students who are the focus of this current study will be those whose habitus is not in line with the institution's expected disposition.

One of the areas explored in this study is how the students from disadvantaged backgrounds, associated with a habitus that is widely considered to be misaligned to the system of operation in the education set-up. This will include the ability to use of their agency to navigate their way within the system with regards to the relative ease or difficulty of doing so.

With regards to this study, habitus, either by primary source (family) or secondary (other institutions), has a way of shedding light on the challenges faced by disadvantaged background students at WSoE. Firstly, by virtue of their backgrounds, they acquire a habitus that is incompatible to the habitus of educational institutions as argued earlier (section 3.1.1). As has been discussed in section 2.4.2.3, the majority of students from disadvantaged backgrounds are also those that have had a compromised educational foundation by attending township schools, rather than former model C schools. For these students, the opportunity of acquiring the compatible habitus is also missed, thereby allowing this study to explore how in spite of the seemingly mismatches they navigate higher education as "strangers in paradise" (Reay, Crozier, & Clayton 2009, p. 1104).

3.1.3 Bourdieu's concept of 'field'

Field is Bourdieu's term for "sub-spaces that constitute a social space, taking the form of for instance, intellectual, economic, artistic, economic, bureaucratic" (Bourdieu 2018, p.109). Gaventa (2003) described field as "an institutional arena in which people express and reproduce their dispositions, and where they compete for the distribution of different kinds of capital." It should be stated though that field takes on various forms, as Du Plooy (2015, p.62), is quoted describing it as one that "can be seen as either a socio-historical (material) field or a discursive (implicit) field." Bourdieu points out the way in which each field has its own governing rules that guide agents on expectations and norms (Bourdieu, 1972). In Carrim's (1994) work, he highlights the way in which an individual can occupy more than a single field at the same time, with each influencing the way they would respond in given situations. In the context of this study, the WSoE will be considered the main field and social space within which other sub-fields, including the academic field, exist, and where agents (students) find themselves in and

are competing for the different benefits and opportunities. It is also in this field where rules are predetermined that govern and dictate how the running of the field occurs. The success and thriving of agents in a field depends to a large extent on how endowed they are with specific resources that they bring with them from their background, and which they have at their disposal (Pret, Shaw, & Drakopoulou Dodd 2016). Each field values particular sorts of resources (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992), which Bourdieu named capital. Bourdieu distinguishes between four types of capital, namely economic, cultural, social, and symbolic capital which agents mobilise in order to enter and move in social fields (Bourdieu, 1986). Although all types of capital appear to be distinct, in practice, they are very closely linked to each other and can be converted (Pret et al., 2016).

Bourdieu's concept of 'Field' is important for understanding the WSoE as a particular "social space", which plays a significant role in the academic success of students. Bourdieu also understood the social world as being divided into a variety of distinct arenas or 'fields' of practice like art, education, science, law, etc., each with their own unique set of rules, knowledge, and forms of capital. According to him, while 'fields' can certainly overlap education and religion for example overlap in many religious colleges, Bourdieu sees each field as being relatively autonomous from the others.

Each field has its own set of positions and practices, as well as its struggles for position as people mobilise their capital to stake claims within a particular social domain. In art for example, Bourdieu noticed that each generation of artists sought to overturn the established positions of those who came before them, only to be critiqued by the next generation of "avant-garde" artists, who sought their own powerful positions within the field. Much like a baseball or football field, social fields are places where people struggle for positions and play to win. Lareau (2001) underscores how such rules of the game are closely related to the culture and habitus of the dominant group (middle class). The ability to keep up with the teaching and learning processes in the university space is to be explored and its roles in dealing with the socio-economic and academic challenges of students will be examined using Bourdieu's concept of 'field.'

The position that individuals occupy within the field determines the extent of influence and power that they have in benefiting from the opportunities that avail themselves within the field. The more influence an individual possesses, the more powerful they will emerge, and likewise, the less influence one has, the more powerless they become. The determining factors as to whether one becomes the dominant or dominated within a particular field depends on the possession of both the relevant habitus, as well as the different capitals mentioned earlier. But

as discussed in section 3.1, possession of cultural capital is considered paramount in the field of education as a means of empowering an individual. Sullivan (2001) elaborates on how cultural capital captures the possession or semblance of the dominant culture, thereby giving one an edge over the rest.

The daily life of social agents such as the undergraduates at the WSoE under discussion in this study is determined by their interactions, e.g: their discussions, negotiations, or conflicts. In order to make sense of these interactions, it is important to first understand the circumstances and the place where these are produced. In other words, interactions must be considered in their respective social space that is subdivided into different social fields (Walther, 2014).

According to Lellatchitch, Mayrhofer and Meyer (2003, p. 732), social fields are based on "an historically generated system of shared meaning." Bourdieu (1997) understands these social fields as universes or microcosms in which the agents and institutions are integrated and interact with each other in accordance with field-specific rules, which is why the field represents the more structural part of Bourdieu's theory. Rules are not always formalised, but may be rather tacit in nature (Wacquant, 2011), and need to be internalised by the agents in order to demonstrate appropriate practices and strategies (Bourdieu, 1983). The internalisation of the field-specific rules (such as students understanding the rules and regulations of the WSoE), enables the agents (the students) to anticipate future tendencies and opportunities (which in their case is academic excellence and eventually socioeconomic achievement). This, Bourdieu compares to a good rugby player who anticipates where the ball will fall and who will therefore already be where the ball falls before it does so (Bourdieu, 1983). There is no global rule that applies to all fields. The respective rules and conditions of a social field have to be found out by empirical research (Hillebrandt, 1999 in Walther, 2013).

A social field is a "locus of struggles" (Bourdieu, 1975, p. 19) that represents a network of positions (Bourdieu, 1972). The boundaries of social fields are where their respective effect ends i.e., where the stakes of the game lose their impact and where the effects of another field begin. According to Lellatchitch et al. (2003), these are not pre-defined and have to be discovered empirically. Battles between agents are principally about relative positions within the field, i.e: maximising capital, where individual strategies in conformity with the rules of the game are of necessity (Lellatchitch et al., 2003). It is the structure of objective relations between the agents in a field that defines dominant and dominated positions (Bourdieu, 1997) and that determines what agents can and cannot do. In Bourdieu's earlier work, the position that an agent occupies in a field creates self-evident rules that determine their potential cruising radius, i.e. the limits of social mobility within a social field (Bourdieu, 1972). Later

developments based on his questioning of earlier standpoint resulted in him asking himself the question of how behaviour could be regulated without being the product of obedience to rules (Bourdieu, 1994). Here, the WSoE becomes the field in which the agents enter, having a different form of cultural capital that predispose them to a habitus that does not fit in with the general rules of the game in the field. While the existence of this seemingly misaligned habitus in the field cannot be overlooked, Lakomisk (1984, p.157) sheds more light on Bourdieu and Passeron's (1990) work on the role of structure and agency, by pointing out the means through which an agent would react in the face of the disjuncture between habitus and the field in which they find themselves. These reactions fall into categories, two of which indicate agency on the part of the students:

'(1) "I know what your game is; I will not play it, but rather play my own."

(2) "I know what your game is; I will play, and win!"

With agency comes what Pather and Chetty (2016) described as 'modified habitus', which speaks to the agent's ability to adjust their dispositions in order to fit into the expectation of an unfamiliar field. This, alongside Lakomisk's (1984) reactions quoted above, will enhance the understanding of the dynamics of the challenges that students from disadvantaged backgrounds in this study face.

For the purposes of this study, the focus will be a progression from not just focusing on cultural capital, but will further explore how the students' sense of agency plays a role as they navigate academia as a 'field' in the WSoE. While Bourdieu's initial standpoint could be considered deterministic and narrow, the acknowledgement of individual agency in later years provided a broader perspective beyond the deterministic and reductionist view. It is latter view of Bourdieu that the study will adopt. This changes the perception of the agents of the study (students) from being objects of circumstances, incapable of reacting to the environment to change it, into subjects, possessing the capabilities of adjusting to the particular fields in which they find themselves.

3.2 Cultural capital of the institution

What does the institution, in this case the WSoE, expect from these students, in this case undergraduate B.Ed students? In all education institutions, cultural capital is cast in middle class terms. It assumes fluency in the language of instruction. It assumes academic literacy being able to read and write and to access argument. It assumes that people will be able to argue their own point and be able to meet the assessment criteria used by the university. It requires particular kinds of behaviour from the students. Students that are coming from working class backgrounds struggle with meeting those requirements. Bourdieu (1979, p.22) argued that

> educational differences are frequently misrecognised as resulting from 'individual giftedness' rather than from class-based differences, ignoring the fact that the abilities measured by scholastic criteria often stem not from natural 'gifts' but from the greater or lesser affinity between class cultural habits and the demands of the educational system or the criteria which defines success within it.

As a result of the discrepancies that exist with regard to cultural capital that students bring with them into the WSoE field, one of two reactions occur, depending on the background of the students. Mills (2008) claimed that students would either seek to preserve the status quo if they are from middle class, or transform themselves or the field to fit in. Realising the challenge involved in transforming or conforming, Giroux (2003) called for the institutions to become transformative in a way that ensured that the students from disadvantaged backgrounds adjusted with reasonable ease into the institutions. In arguing the same, Jones-Darlaston, Cohen, Haunold, Pike and Young (2003) consider it an institution's moral obligation to ensure that students are offered the much-needed support for them to adjust, settle down, and succeed in higher education. Years later, Pather and Chetty (2016, p.2) revisited the same argument in introducing their article, echoing that "the need for higher education institutions (HEIs) to appreciate, and adjust to, such diversity is particularly urgent amongst first-year students, considering that many South Africans entering university do so from positions of extreme inequality, in terms of schooling, race, class, and socio-economic resources."

It is against this understanding that this study extended its exploration to interviewing members of staff in order to gain their perspectives on how the misalignments between the institutional culture and the students' dispositions are viewed, interpreted, and whether there are mitigating measures to it.

3.3 The interplay between capital, habitus and field

In this study, the different dimensions of Bourdieu, viz., cultural capital, habitus, and field, will be used to explain the nature of the socio-economic and academic challenges of students from disadvantaged backgrounds at the WSoE.

The students in this study who are from socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds experience insufficient capital deemed requisite in the education space. This has a bearing on the habitus that they possess, which does not align with that of the institution thereby causing them to perceive university as an unfamiliar field (Reay, 2009). Within this field (WSoE) are field-specific norms, rules, and values that lean more towards highbrow or middle-class culture. As these students find themselves in this field, they come with their own culture and dispositions that are class based, and within the social context to which they are accustomed.

As they enter and negotiate this field, there are clashes between the habitus they bring with them and the expectations of the university field. Edgerton and Roberts (2016) note how one's position in a particular field originates from the relationship between their habitus and the capitals that they bring with them, where the students will be considered not as passive players in the game. Through their agency, the study hopes to shed some light on the interplay between the three concepts of capital, habitus, and field in this context.

The idea of cultural capital will be considered through Swidler's (1986) view, from which it is possible to construct strategies for action that determine their worldview (habitus). Similarly, habitus will be used to understand the students' dispositions in relation to them as students at the WSoE. Lastly, field will be used to explain how the students negotiate their position within the WSoE, where they are unfamiliar with the rules of the game.

Figure 3.1 is a diagrammatic presentation of how the various concepts from Bourdieu's theory will be applied in provide a lens through which the study will be both explored and analysed.

Fig 3.1: Diagrammatic Presentation of the Theoretical Framework

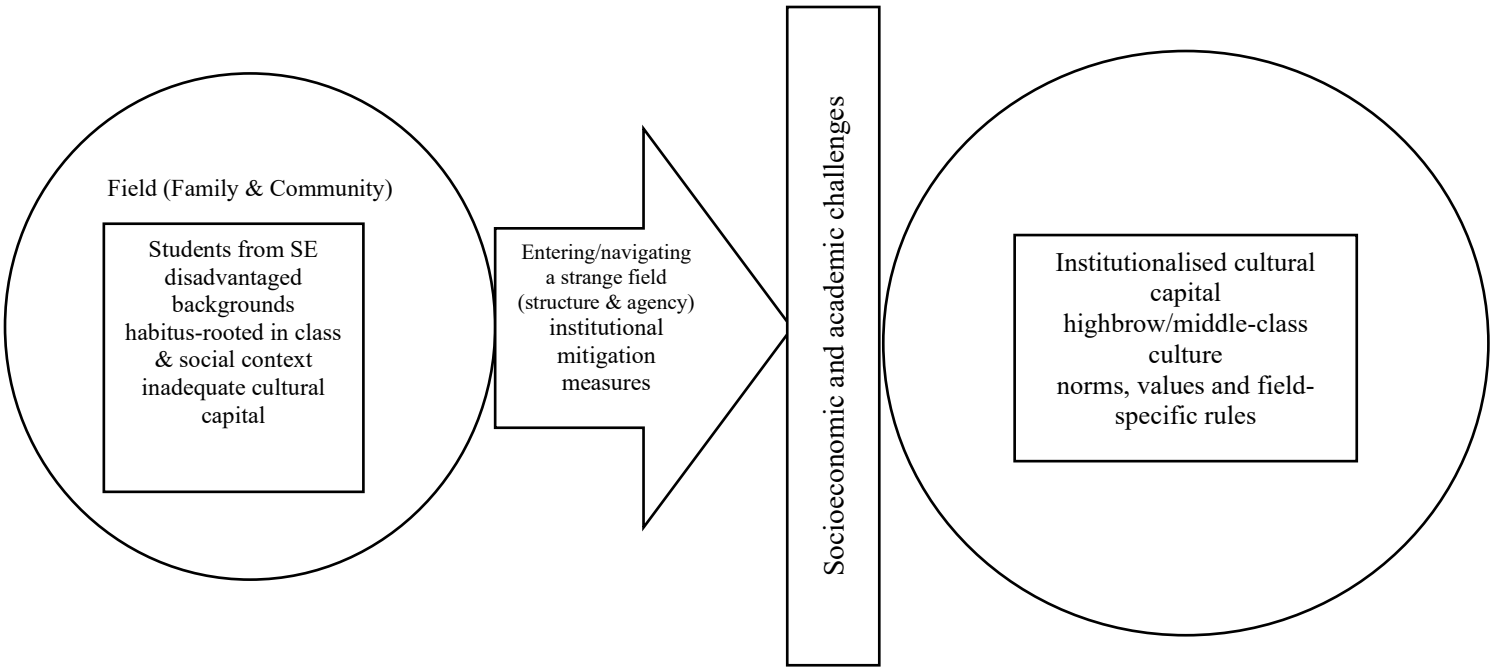


Fig 3.1 above illustrates how students from disadvantaged backgrounds are confronted by two fields in which the rules of the game are to the most part incompatible. As they leave their field (family and communities) that bestowed on them the capital which was recognised and considered beneficial in their particular setup, they enter a field where the capitals they had accumulated over time become less relevant in the new field. The former field and capital

bestowed translates into a habitus alien to the new field. Institutionalised cultural capital is middle class, where this study seeks to define its field-specific rules, alongside the efforts that the institution makes in order to mitigate the challenges faced by these students from disadvantaged backgrounds. The mediating factors of agency and structure will provide insight on how the students encounter the socioeconomic and academic challenges into integrating into this unfamiliar field.

3.4 Conclusion

In this chapter, Bourdieu's cultural capital and its components have been presented as the theoretical framing of this study. Using the various concepts as lenses, the subsequent chapters would be scrutinized in the light of this theoretical framework. The subsequent chapter presents the step-by-step research methodology that guided the study, including the underpinning philosophical assumptions of the study, the research approach and methods of collecting data as well as the analysis processes.

CHAPTER 4: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

4. Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to provide a detailed description of how the process of planning, generating and analysing data was conducted. This study adopted Creswell's use of research methodology concepts, where he provides three main research designs in the social sciences as distinct approaches to research inquiry, namely: quantitative, qualitative and mixed methods research designs. According to Creswell (2009), the researcher's choice regarding which research design to adopt depends on three factors, namely: the philosophical assumption underpinning the study; strategies of inquiry and the methods of collecting data. Based on these three factors as they pertain to this study, qualitative research design was considered suitable. These three factors and their relation to the choice of research design will receive discussion in section 4.2 that provides an account of the choice of research design that this study has adopted. Before the research design discussion, section 4.1 lays down the philosophical assumptions upon which this qualitative study is built on.

4.1 Philosophical assumption of the study

Philosophical assumptions in research have their root in what Kuhn (1962) first coined as research paradigms that speak of a set of beliefs, values, and assumptions that researchers have in common regarding the nature and conduct of research (Kuhn, 1962). Merriam and Tisdell (2015) identify four such paradigms or philosophical perspectives as positivist, interpretivist, critical, and postmodern. Each perspective is distinguished by the way it positions itself in relation to three philosophical elements, namely: the ontological stand (nature of viewing reality); the epistemological (nature of knowledge) as well as methodological (manner in which knowledge is accessed).

The positivist-oriented paradigm assumes that reality exists, is measurable, and can be observed. It is a reductionist approach that seeks to verify or falsify theory and is mainly experimental and scientific in its investigative approaches, where, because of its deterministic outlook, its findings are considered generalisable (Creswell, 2009). The postmodernist paradigm, on the other hand, assumes that there is no absolute truth, but rather multiple truths, and that as such, convictions held by positivists can no longer have sway in a modern world. The critical paradigm challenges the status quo and questions power relations within society. It strives for emancipation of the oppressed. Finally, the interpretivist approach acknowledges the diversity of human beings and their behaviour as well as reaction towards various stimuli. According to Henning, Van Rensburg & Smit (2004), an interpretivist approach does not

concern itself with validating or establishing of laws, but rather in understanding of phenomenon-based experiences of those subjected to the phenomenon. As such, unlike in the positivist approach, a search for objectivity is not the driving force, but rather, provides an understanding of how a particular phenomenon is experienced. The interpretivist view of reality is one that is obtained through social construction. In contrast to the positivists therefore, interpretivists do not believe in a single means of accessing knowledge. As a result, whereas positivists pursue a single form of reality (ontology), interpretivists consider the possibility of multiple realities (Hammersley, 2013). This study is interpretivist. Givens (2008) comments with regards to the positioning of interpretivist on the issue of an agreed on 'truth' by claiming that:

> the idea that there are no special research methods that automatically and inevitably lead to the truth, means that the knowledge claims made by researchers cannot be seen as automatically and inevitably superior to the knowledge claims made by non-researchers (p. 460).

Interpretivists search for those meanings that individual subjects will assign to a seemingly similar stimulus. The search of meaning in interpretivist approach seeks for in-depth understanding of a phenomenon within a particular context and therefore the issue of generalisation of findings does not arise, as it does in positivist approach. Rubin and Rubin (1995) argue that the search for and emphasis on universally applicable social laws, as with the positivist approach, distracts from learning what a particular group of people know, and how they understand their lives. This is what interpretivists look for through examining meanings as they are socially constructed by respondents within a given context.

Based on the research problem being explored, and the research questions laid out, the aim of the study is to make meaning of the socio-economic and academic challenges faced by black undergraduate students from disadvantaged backgrounds at the Wits School of Education. The subsequent section, therefore, provides insight into the research design of the study.

4.2 Qualitative research design

Qualitative design is one of the three main approaches mentioned in section 4.0 above, used in academic research inquiries. Creswell (2009) outlines the characteristics of qualitative research design, which this section will endeavour to show the link between the characteristics and what the study seeks to achieve:

- 'Natural setting'- qualitative research design unlike quantitative design seeks to explore and investigate a phenomenon within its natural occurring environment, while in

quantitative design, for instance, such investigation may occur in a controlled environment such as laboratories. For purposes of this study, therefore, all the inquiries were conducted within the natural setting of the respondents (the WSoE), so as to avoid altering of behaviour that may be a function of the change in natural setting. As such, all the interviews and focus group interviews took place in an environment that respondents were not only familiar with, but also in which they were comfortable.

- In qualitative research design, the notion of the researcher as an instrument is central to data generation on a number of grounds. Firstly, the researcher holds sole responsibility for conducting interviews, observations as well as compiling and analysing documents. Unlike in quantitative design, for instance, researchers would rely on sending out questionnaires or conduct lab experiments that require minimal supervision. As a result of this approach to qualitative design, the researcher has a substantial responsibility to mitigated criticism. The major criticism lies in what Pezalla, Pettigrew, and Miller-Day (2012, p. 167) note as follows: "the researcher's use their sensory organs to grasp the study objects, mirroring them in their consciousness, where they then are converted to some form of interpretation", which if biased, may affect the trustworthiness of the findings. Rubin and Rubin (1995) consider the researcher to be a participant in an interviewing relationship, and as such not a neutral actor. They therefore recommend that the researcher finds means of mitigating their biases and assumptions. Alongside the criticism on bias, is the effect of the relationship that develops between the researcher and the respondents, which critics claim would threaten the integrity of the data generated.

As researcher in this study, I undertook the study cognisant of the pros and cons of the researcher as instrument. The advantages I had in being key in the data collection process are that the interview schedules that I had developed were focused on the central research questions and in the course of conducting the interviews (both individual and focus group); flexibility to probe further towards generating in-depth information; and the ability to seek clarification where responses were unclear. This is further elaborated on in section 4.7 in discussing the data collection process. The establishment of good rapport with respondents in the study, on the other hand, was an advantage, in the sense that it enabled for digging further to access substantial meaning from the responses that respondents provided the interviewer (research assistant), due to the level of trust that had been cultivated.

Mitigating against these criticisms during the study involved thinking through the crafting of the interview schedule using the 'funnel method', which aims at beginning with broad and

general issues than narrowing them to specifics that directly deal with the central aspects of the study. In doing so, as a researcher, I ensured that the interviewer (research assistant) (refer to section 4.7) was able to capture quality data that was not only accurate as far as objectives were concerned but also maintain a clear flow of discussion between them and respondent(s).

While qualitative research design claims not to emphasise objectivity, the accuracy and trustworthiness of findings are components that qualitative researchers strive to achieve. One of the notable means through which this is achieved is by use of more than one means of collecting data, through triangulation. By employing more than one method of collecting data, researchers not only achieve consistency of findings, but are also able to gain clarity where it is lacking.

In the current study, the collection of data was conducted using two methods, namely focus group interviews and individual interviews. Focus group interviews preceded individual interviews. Krathwohl (1998) argues that the use of more than one source of data collection and data source contribute to serving the purpose of cross-checking, confirming, and corroborating facts. In the former, issues were discussed in line with the research questions that guided the study. Although probing was done in the course of the interview, there remained some pockets that needed further exploring. This was achieved during the individual interviews. Besides, some of the areas were revisited during the individual interviews to ensure consistency in the findings as will be discussed in section 4.12. Creswell (2009) explains how qualitative researchers use some form of lens through which a study can be viewed. Such a lens could take the form of concepts from theoretical orientations. As with this study, the lens that had been chosen as a means of viewing and interpreting the study findings was Bourdieu's social reproduction theory. Having discussed the characteristics of qualitative research design as they relate to the current study, the next section looks at how philosophical assumption fits into the study adopted.

4.3 Strategy of inquiry

Strategies of inquiry are specific directions that a researcher chooses, to guide how the research would be conducted. Various authors have described strategies using different terms for instance, Creswell, Hanson, Clark Plano and Morales (2007) and Mertens (2005) have referred to these as approaches to inquiry, and elsewhere as research methodologies. These strategies of inquiry have also been elaborated on differently by different authors, with some generating up to 28 strategies (Tesch, 1990). Over time, these have been reduced to five main approaches that Creswell (2009) outlines as follows: narratives, grounded theory, phenomenology, case study, and ethnography. The current study takes the form of a case study.

4.3.1 Case study

A case study has been described as a strategy of inquiry where one or few phenomena are studied and explored in-depth (Givens, 2008). Creswell, Hanson, W. E., Clark Plano, V. L., &

Morales (2007) considers a case study as a strategy of inquiry that explores a contemporary bounded system over time through detailed in-depth data collection using different sources of data to later report a case description. It is this approach that the current study adopted, as will be further expounded on in the latter sections.

As is the case with the nature of qualitative research design, and in particular case studies, they are not meant for generalization, due to the uniqueness of the context within which the particular phenomenon manifests itself. Stemming from qualitative approach, knowledge from the study is considered both "situational and conditional" (Rubin & Rubin, 1995, p. 38). Yin (2011) however argues that there is some extent to which case studies could be generalisable, and this, he argues, is by conducting multiple case studies and comparing them to the original one and being able to draw parallels that would form generalisations.

One of the justifications for using this particular strategy of inquiry (case study) is its ability to draw out rich and in-depth insights from the respondents as well as its ability to "understand the behavioural conditions through the actor's perspective" Zainal (2007, p. 1) by means of the deep engagement and interaction with respondents. With regards to this study, the identified case were the students from disadvantaged backgrounds at the WSoE (justification of choice of site to be discussed in sections 4.5.1). With regards to sample size, a qualitative case study usually chooses a small number of respondents and in this study, the sample size was a total of 20 respondents, that comprised students and members of staff, as will be discussed in detail in section 4.5.2 and 4.5.3 on sampling.

As is the situation with any of the four other strategies of inquiry, use of a case study has its strengths and weaknesses. Upon weighing the pros and cons of the different strategies, a case study emerged more relevant considering the nature of the current study. The case study approach to an inquiry allows the researcher a degree of specificity in exploring the phenomenon in question. In this study, while it would have been possible to carry out the same study focusing on students in general and in South African universities or the university of Witwatersrand as a whole, a decision was made to confine it to students from disadvantaged backgrounds in the WSoE. This allowed for exploration of certain tendencies that would not have been obvious at a wider scale, without focusing in on particular characteristics of the students in question and within the geographical area with some similar characteristics (Wits School of Education). It is these key features of case identification within set parameters that lend a case study its specificity (Creswell, 2012).

On the contrary, case studies are limited in terms of their generalisability (Zainal, 2007). Advocates of case study inquiry have counter-argued this criticism by stating how, as a single

case study, it could form a starting point from which other referral case studies would be conducted that later would make it not as generalisable, but transferable. One such renowned supporters of case study, in his defense on the transferability of case studies, has stated that since generalisations begin with particular cases, what we learn in a particular case can be transferred to similar situations. It should therefore be left to the reader to determine what they can apply to their context. (Babbie & Mouton, 2001). Having engaged with the philosophical assumptions and strategies of inquiry as they relate to the current study's approach, the next section will focus on the methods of collecting data after establishing the procedures that were followed in delineation of case parameter, and deciding of sample size and sampling techniques.

4.4 Case Selection, Sampling and Sampling Techniques

4.4.1 Case Selection

The decision to have students from disadvantaged backgrounds within WSoE as the bounded case in which the study was to be conducted was arrived at after careful consideration of the following factors.

4.4.1.1 History of the WSoE

The WSoE was among the predominantly white college of education during the apartheid era, with the majority of students being white females. Following the end of apartheid, it became part of the university, and access to the institution was widened to include non-white students. With reference to the quality of education provided in the historically black and white universities, the former tended to be of lower quality. This was true of the entire education system, where schools that were designated for black people were of poorer quality. While Sennett, Finchilescu, and Gibson (2003) acknowledge the improvements in terms of resource allocations in the post-apartheid era, they still maintain that these inequalities still exist both at tertiary and pre-tertiary levels.

The choice of WSoE as a research site therefore serves to explore how these disadvantaged, or rather, systemically oppressed students, experience academic and socioeconomic challenges within this space that was formerly a historically white university.

4.4.1.2 Students

Student numbers extracted from the Wits Student Information Management System (SIMS) show that of the 2242 teacher trainees enrolled at the Wits School of Education (WSoE) in 2016 and 2458 enrolled in 2017, more than 60% were dependent on bursaries and handouts for their daily needs, the majority of whom are black South Africans (Wits, SIMS, 2016). This

study's focus is on this category of students who are considered disadvantaged, mainly due to their socioeconomic background. The statistics extracted provided an idea of the socioeconomic status of these students, and thereby afford the study with a reasonable pool from which to extract possible respondents from where data would be collected.

4.4.1.3 Convenience

Finally, being a member of staff at the institution, the WSoE provides some convenience with regards to my own inside knowledge in my capacity as an academic at the institution, as well as the process of having to negotiate access. While convenience was not the primary justification of the study, Walford (2001) elaborates the importance of giving precedence of the relevance of the site to the extent to which the site ties in with the aims and objectives of the study as well as the theoretical framework. In the case of the chosen research site, both factors are relevant. Walford (2001) introduces the secondary importance of choosing for convenience, which entails saving on time, as well as distance and access. He cautions, though, that: "however difficult access may be, it is crucial that obtaining access is not seen as the primary consideration in selecting an appropriate site" (Walford, 2001, p. 151).

4.4.2 Selection of sample

The process of selecting a sample or unit of analysis for any study is linked to the establishment of the study problem, aim of research, the research design, resource availability (time, competence, experience and support) and access to sample (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015; Ahrens & Zaščerinska, 2014). The choice of who and what ought to comprise a sample of any given study depends on what that study aims to achieve, which in turn determines the selection criteria laid out. Based on the aim of the study and the research questions that guided it, samples for the study were drawn from students and members of staff. The selection criteria for the student respondents included the following:

- Students in their first and second year of Education at the WSoE, since it is during these years that socioeconomic and academic challenges are more evident (McInnis, 2001). Wintre and Yaffe (2000, p. 9) have observed how, "attending university for the first time entails a transition in young peoples' lives that incorporates a great deal of stress." It is this stress and failure to cope to which Tinto (2001) attributes poor retention of students, especially among those entering university in the initial years.
- Based on the statistics available, Black South African students are those that experience the highest proportions of dropout and low throughput (Letseka & Maile, 2008) compared to the Indian and coloured students who are also categorised as 'black.'

Secondly, as was mentioned in the justification for the research site, the WsoE was predominantly a white university. Studies have been conducted on the issue of race in the universities, and most of which were quantitative in approach (Sennett et al., 2003). This study solely focused on the black South African students and took on a qualitative approach as a means of building on the findings from previous studies that though broad in nature lacked in-depth exploration that this study hoped to achieve through the research design chosen.

- Out of the existing lists obtained from the office of student affairs on recipients of the institution's food parcels, this study uses recipients of financial aid to reflect this category of students from disadvantaged background. Inclusion in the study adheres to research ethics guidelines that rely on the participants' consent and willingness to take part (as will be elaborated on in section 4.13).

With regards to selection of staff to be interviewed, the selection criteria were based on how relevant their job descriptions were with regards to the overall academic wellbeing of students as well the extent to which these members of staff interacted with students on issues to do with their general welfare, which included their academic, social, and economic wellbeing. The interview with members of staff was geared towards extracting information that would both explain and contextualise what emerged from the interview with students. These included the Head of School (HoS), Deputy Head of School (DhoS) who deals with Initial Teacher Education (ITE), and the academic head. Interviews with the HoS focused on economic and political questions, such as the timing of disbursement of funds; and direct and indirect interventions with regards to economically struggling students. The B.Ed coordinator addressed academic related questions that mainly dealt with the curriculum. The DhoS' interview focused on issues of initial teacher education.

A summary of the respondents that took part in the study is represented in Table 4.1. In total, 19 people were interviewed. A list of abbreviations will be provided at the end. FGI stands for Focus Group Interviews, while WsoE stands for Wits School of Education.

Table 4.1 Summary of Respondents

	Number of participants	Male	Female
Students FGI year 1	8	4	4
Students FGI year 2	8	4	4
WsoE Staff Interview	3	1	2
Total individual interviews	19	9	10

Table 4.1: Breakdown of sample of respondents

4.4.3 Sampling techniques

Sampling involves the drawing out of data sources from a given population (Givens, 2008). The sampling process is therefore preceded by the delineation of the population from which the study wishes to draw its sample. This was done during the phase of selecting the research site. The sampling techniques can take on one of two main techniques. According to Merriam and Tisdell (2015), these are the non-probability and probability sampling techniques. The former is used when the aim to produce generalisable findings. As such, selection is usually random, with the hope of having a sample that is as diverse as and representative to the actual population as possible. In the case of qualitative research design, where the aim is not to generalise, the latter sampling technique is more common. There are a number of techniques that can take the form of nonprobability sampling. Some of the common ones in qualitative research include convenience sampling; purposive sampling; snowballing; quota sampling; and expert sampling. For the purposes of the current study, purposive sampling was used in the selection of samples.

Patton (2015) describes purposive sampling, or purposeful sampling, as that which is based on the assumption that the researcher goes out to gain insight into a phenomenon. As such they go in search of a sample that would provide them with the most relevant and rich information concerning the phenomenon under investigation. From the various forms of purposive sampling, this study employed criterion sampling, where selection of sample is closely tied to criteria set out as they relate to the study objectives, as was indicated in section 4.5.2 above (Givens, 2008). Having discussed the sampling and sampling technique used in the study, the subsequent section focuses on the data collection methods used.

4.5 Data collection methods

In an earlier section on qualitative research design, there was a mention of the use of multiple methods of data collection characteristic to a given research design. In qualitative studies, there are various means through which data can be collected to inform a study. Among such are use of individual interviews, which could be structured, semi-structured or unstructured; focus group interviews; observations, and documents and artefacts. This study used focus group interviews and individual semi-structured interviews to collect data that informed the study. The choice of each method will be discussed below. Having the two methods consecutively served the purpose of providing some form of collaboration of the findings and a way of cross-checking facts in ensuring trustworthiness of the study as was elaborated on earlier in section 4.2.

4.5.1 Focus Group Interviews (FGI)

Focus group interviews are a type of data collecting tool that involves a group of individuals selected and brought together by a researcher to discuss and comment on and explore attitudes and perceptions on a subject from their personal experiences. Focus group interview is considered to be one of the naturalistic means of collecting data. It not only allows the researcher access to information in the form of content, but the researcher is able to pick out emotions, tensions, as well as contradictions through body language as the participants relay their experiences (Krueger & Casey, 2015). According to Hennink (2014), focus group interviews provide some level of trustworthiness that point towards important insights about how human beings operate and perceive phenomena. What differentiates these from the rest of the interviews is that, unlike other interviews, the focus group interview involves a facilitated engagement of a group of respondents over a topic about which they are knowledgeable and experiences that may be commonly experienced by all (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015; Rubin & Rubin, 1995). According to Creswell (2009), the recommended size of a focus group interview is between six and ten respondents. For this study, each of the two focus group interviews held had a total of eight respondents.

In this study, the focus group interviews preceded the individual interviews. After conducting the focus group interviews, a follow-up interview was carried out with some of the respondents that participated in the previous interviews. The rationale behind this decision was to collect more in-depth data following the outcome of the focus group interview and based on some of the issues that came up even after probing was done. Secondly, the individual interviews followed to confirm and validate some of the issues that arose in the previous exercise. As was pointed to earlier, one of the ways of ensuring trustworthiness and dependability of findings in

qualitative research is through the use of multiple data collection methods, as will be elaborated in section 4.12.

Focus group interviews in particular were employed in collecting data due to certain advantages. Firstly, focus group interviews allow for extraction of rich data. Bringing a group of respondents together in an interview over a topic with which they are familiar not only assures the researcher will be able to collect relevant data, but also data that is a result of respondents building on each other's experiences. Data collected using this method is socially constructed, and dependent on the expertise of the researcher in moderating the interview, where it is possible to tap into deep and rich data that cannot be obtained through one-on-one interviews (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). It is for this reason that in the process of preparing for the data collection exercise, the research assistant that was entrusted with collection of data (for reasons explained later in section 4.7) had to undergo rigorous training so as to ensure that they were knowledgeable with the techniques that would guarantee generation of quality and in-depth data during the interview exercise.

The focus group interviews aimed at taking on a conversational nature, rather than a question-and-answer session, and where the researcher would talk 'with' rather than 'to' the participants (Krueger & Casey, 2000). The choice, as a complimentary tool to individual interviews was based on the ability to draw on deeper data, as participant information builds, with the ability of gathering more information in one sitting (Hennink, 2014). Focus group interviews have a way, according to Denscombe (2003), of enabling participants who might otherwise not freely express themselves in a one-on-one interview, to open up in such a forum. On the other hand, there is also the fear of some participants failing to open up in a group. The two data collecting tools had therefore been selected in a way that catered for both personalities, i.e. introverts who would show hesitation to expressing themselves in a group, who would do better in individual interviews, and extroverts who would be stimulated by the input of others.

Some of the challenges with focus group interviews include the extent to which as a researcher planned the exercise, and how well one is in managing groups of people. For instance, challenges that have been levelled against this form of collecting data are that it is time-consuming; and being able to balance voices of all participants within the focus group.

With regards to time management, while Rubin and Rubin (1995) acknowledge that there is not enough time to establish trust among participants, for this study, it became the responsibility of the facilitator to ensure that a conducive atmosphere is created, where participants would be free to express themselves and share their experiences. Another means of ensuring participant comfort was the composition of the focus groups. In order to promote

the ease with which participants would freely express themselves, each of the focus groups was composed of participants from the same cohort, which meant that at one point or another, they had interacted with each other before. This also enabled them to participate without being intimidated, for instance if as a first-year participant, one was found in a group where the majority were second year students.

One of the means of overcoming the challenge of time was the manner in which the facilitator steered the interviews. Having had some guiding questions to hand, the facilitator was able to steer the conversations within the parameters of the scope of the study. The presence of the interview schedule did not entail strict adherence, as in some cases, the participants' conversations spilled into the subsequent questions. In that case, the onus was on the facilitator to ensure continuation of the discussion in the necessary direction. On the other hand, where the discussion seemed to go off track or where some participants dominated the discussion without giving opportunity to others, the facilitator had to diplomatically step in and allow for representation of views by all participants, as far as possible. The application of these strategies during the focus group interview played a significant role in managing of time and capturing the most relevant data in an in-depth manner.

The challenges of conducting focus group interviews is also the difficulty in capturing discussions from various participants. One way of overcoming this challenge in the study was by assigning letters or numbers to each participant and allowing for each to introduce themselves using the codes before they responded. In that way, it would be convenient when analysing the data to identify the voices in the focus group interviews. Creswell (2012) suggested participants saying their names out loud, but in keeping with the principle of anonymity, the research employed use of letters or numbers.

Following the focus group interview, key respondents were identified and approached the second time for individual semi-structured interviews.

4.5.2 Individual semi-structured interviews

Of the three kinds of individual interviews mentioned earlier (structured, semi-structured, and unstructured), this study employed semi-structured interviews for both the students and staff. Structured interviews, on the one hand, tend to be restrictive, as far as allowing the researcher to consider the questions deeply. It is therefore better suited for questionnaires and where background literature is highly developed with established understanding of topic. On the other hand, the unstructured interviews are neither a guide nor have predetermined questions and this is suited as a follow up on observations. The choice of semi-structured interviews therefore gives a balance of both extremes, where it operates within the bounds of a guided set of

questions, but is not limited to the set questions, as it allows the researcher to probe and digress where appropriate in search of the information sought.

Having settled for semi-structured interviews, the first step was the planning and crafting of main questions that would be administered to the respondents. During the planning and drafting process, Rubin and Rubin's (1995) checklist for designing interview questions which is focused on: 1. whether the questions cover the overall subject? 2. whether they flow from one question to the next? 3. whether the questions match the research design?

Unlike structured interviews that are closed and restrictive, the semi-structured questions for this study were open enough to allow the respondent express themselves fully, but on the other hand, focused, so as avoid situations where respondents fail to address the essence of the question. Although the study had these as guiding questions for the interviews, the questions were not rigid, as they allowed for flexibility depending on the flow of the interview, for instance, in situations where, while discussing a particular question, the respondent goes on to respond to the next question. This, therefore, called for alertness and attentiveness on the part of the interviewer to be able to steer the conversation accordingly. As such, each interview was different from the others, because of such dynamics. It was the way in which the interview went and manner in which respondents reacted to questions that determined the extent to which the interviewer would probe.

Probing plays a big part in the data collection exercise in qualitative research due to the underlying aim of this kind of research design, which is to obtain in-depth and rich data on a phenomenon. In the case of this study, therefore, probing played an important role of among others: giving the respondents a cue that a longer and more detailed response was sought; it also helped in clearing grey areas within the conversation. Where respondents were ambiguous, probing was used to seek clarity. Rubin and Rubin (1995) also consider probing as a sign that the interviewer is paying attention and following the conversation, which makes the interviewee more enthusiastic about providing more information.

Rubin and Rubin (1995) point out two patterns of structuring interviews: the river-and-channel model, and the tree-and-branch model. The former works well when the researcher is interested in exploring a single theme in-depth, without involving the other themes. In this case, each theme is approached independent of the other. The latter pattern of structuring interviews involves the researcher looking at the topic, including the various themes within them as one. In this case, questions emanate from the topic and branch into the various aspects of the topic. This study followed the latter structuring of interviews, where the main topic formed the trunk of the interviews and branched into the sub-topics that would later reveal emerging themes

from the study. This approach was used because rather than just focusing on either academic or socioeconomic challenges as isolated concepts, the study aimed to explore both aspects in relation to students from disadvantaged backgrounds. As such the central part of the interview focused on the state of students from disadvantaged background as it related to their academic as well as socioeconomic challenges.

4.6 Field experience

As stated earlier regarding my positionality as Student Affairs Liaison Officer at the WSoE, being actively involved in the data collection process posed a challenge of affecting the quality of the data due to the power dynamics existing within the relationship between myself as a member of staff and the students. There was the potential of perceived risk of respondents altering their behaviour and information due to my relative authority. As a way of controlling this, I identified an individual who had experience in data collection and interviews as my research assistant. A significant amount of time was invested in acquainting her with the study and its aims. We also looked at both the research questions as well as the interview schedules that had emanated from the research questions.

As part of inducting the research assistant into the study and a way of testing the interview schedules, we conducted a pilot of the instruments. Since piloting on students would risk the quality of the data as a result of students' awareness of my presence and position, a few of my colleagues agreed to form part of the piloting sample. McLeod (2014) and Ruel, Wagner, and Gillespie (2015) recommend piloting with colleagues as an option. Both schedules for the focus group and individual interviews were piloted. The outcome of the piloting was twofold. Firstly, it gave the research assistant a clearer idea of the kind of data that was required for the study. This exposure to the exercise also gave the research assistant confidence in handling the actual exercises ahead. Secondly, through the piloting exercise, the interview schedules were modified with regard to the wording of some of the questions, as well as the order in which they were laid out, to reflect some level of coherence.

4.7 Data collection process

After access was granted by the institution, the criteria will be discussed later in section 3.5.1.2, where a selection of the sample of students for the study was put into action. Upon identifying the prospective respondents, each student was approached in order to get their consent. The process of obtaining respondents' consent involved introduction by the research assistant and explaining what the study was all about, and what the role of the respondents would be if they accepted to participate (more will be discussed in section 4.13) by signing a consent form. In the event that the student accepted to take part, they were asked to sign a form indicating that

they willfully accepted taking part in the study. Altogether, sixteen (16) students signed the consent forms.

The following step was to draw up a schedule for the interviews. First to be conducted were the focus group interviews with the first-year students, followed by the second years' focus group interviews. By the time of signing the consent forms, the respondents were aware that they would be interviewed as a group, and were comfortable in this regard. As such, in the planning phase, the research assistant organised a short meeting with each group to determine a convenient time for all. In both groups, lunch hours seemed convenient but since all the students were benefiting from the free lunches provided by the institution through the charitable organization, Gift of the Givers, arrangements had to be made to have them receive their lunch earlier on these particular days to have enough time for the focus group interviews. All in all, each focus group interview took almost ninety (90) minutes. The venue for these interviews was jointly agreed upon by both the respondents and the research assistant based on the suitability of the venue as far as minimal interruptions were concerned. As such, one of the boardrooms was booked for the interviews.

Following the outcome of focus group interviews, the research assistant identified two respondents from each focus group interviews with whom she could engage in a more in-depth individual interview. These four, unlike the rest of the respondents in the focus group interviews, had to give extra consent to be individually interviewed. Upon agreeing on the time and venue, the interviews were conducted, and each took approximately forty-five (45) minutes.

A similar procedure was followed during the staff interviews in recruiting members of staff who accepted to participate in the study and three (3) members of staff in all signed the consent forms. Just as with the students, appointments were arranged on the time and venue for the interviews. The staff interviews took not less than sixty (60) minutes each. Unlike the interview with students, which was conducted by a research assistant following the justifications outlined in section 4.7, I, personally interviewed the members of staff.

Each of the interviews began with an introduction by the research assistant in which a brief explanation of the study was reiterated, in which respondents were reminded of their rights as will be discussed in section 4.13. For the focus group interviews, each respondent was assigned a code by which they were to be identified with during transcribing. Following the initial introduction, the interviews began using the interview schedules, which acted as guidelines, depending on the flow of the conversations. Probing was part of the process, where clarity was sought of from the respondents. At the end of the interviews, the respondents were notified and

thanked for accepting to participate.

4.8 Capturing of data

During the student interviews, the research assistant took short notes and all the interviews were audio recorded and transcribed. At the end of the interviews, the notes, recordings and transcriptions were forwarded to me. For the staff interviews, I audio recorded each interview and took short notes in the process of interviewing each of them. Later, I transcribed the audio recordings verbatim. Having to do the transcription myself, helped me to become acquainted with the data, which was advantageous as this enabled me even at such an early stage to observe some patterns and phrases and segments that receive elaboration when discussing the data analysis process. Merriam and Tisdell (2015) recommend the use of special coding system as a means of reminding oneself of the transcriptions, especially after the passage of time following collection of data, where there is a lot of data collected. The transcriptions and notes were typed and stored under a password for confidentiality purposes.

4.9 Analysing of data

Data analysis involves the process of sorting out data with the aim of making meaning of the information collected. It involves consolidation, reducing and interpreting what respondents provided as data. According to the Givens (2008) there are some common features in analysing of qualitative data, including:

- Iterative (back and forth) movement that the researcher makes as they go through the data between the raw data and what Merriam and Tisdell (2015) describe as the abstract concepts. In the case of this study, data was examined, and reference was made to the research questions set out at the beginning of the study.
- Memoing - This involves the researcher taking notes both in and out of the field that enable them to establish a line of thought. These include thoughts about what is happening in the data that would assist during the interpretation of the data. While going through the data, certain points stood out that were linked to some literature or addressing the research questions in a particular way. Such things were memoed to assist establishing links later.
- Coding - involving organising of data into a meaningful systematic way (Maguire & Delahunt, 2017).
- Writing up data - this involves compiling all the data that one has collected so far in a logically sequential manner that provides the reader with coherent information of the intended message.

- Engaging data with literature - having organised the data logically, the patterns and information coming out of the data is then looked at in the light of existing literature. This serves to establish relationships between findings and what is already out there and has been done by other scholars. The relationships may take various forms such as: confirming of existing views, refuting, complimenting, contradicting, or identifying surprising elements between the data and existing literature.

The above process provides the generic steps involved in analysing data. In the case of this study, thematic analysis was specifically used as a means of analysing the data.

4.9.1 Thematic analysis

Braun and Clarke (2006, p.79) define thematic analysis as a "method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns within data sets." In order to explore the socioeconomic and academic challenges faced by undergraduate students at the WSoE, the need to identify such patterns within the various data sets was considered the most suitable way through which the results of the findings would be reported. This was done in a way that provided the reader with systematic patterns through which these challenges manifested themselves. The analysis in this study therefore followed a six-step analysis process, as discussed by Braun and Clarke (2006) and Maguire and Delahunt (2017).

4.9.1.1 Step 1: Familiarisation with data

Maguire and Delahunt (2017) describe this step as one that involves reading and re-reading of data or as Green, Willis, Hughes, Small, Welch, Gibbs and Daly (2007) refer to it, the immersion of oneself in data. During this process, as the researcher, I took time to go through the data over and over again. Using highlighters and making aside notes, I was able to recognise certain parts of the transcriptions that were not only significant, but also was able to identify overlaps among the different transcripts. It was from familiarising and immersing myself in the data that I was able to move on to the next step.

4.9.1.2 Step 2: Generating initial codes

The process of coding according to Savage (2000) is one of reflecting on, interacting with and thinking about data. This is done by grouping data into small chunks that bring about some meaning. Using the information drawn through the highlighted text and notes made in the first step, an attempt was made to generate meaning from these segments. It was the generated meanings that formed the codes for the study. From the two kinds of coding, inductive and deductive, the study adopted the former, where as a researcher, I allowed the data to speak for itself, unlike where I would go into the process with predetermined codes. An example of such

is from the following verbatim extract

Codes	Transcript
	So for first years just coming into a context like a university which is new and foreign for many of them I think the first challenge they face is understanding how things work here. And when I say understanding, I mean how do I access information, who do I go to for support, how do I work with technology and some of them, the issue of technology is a very, very big challenge. For some, it is about understanding and interpreting the time table […] And when I talk about information, I mean accessing the readings and the types of reading and the resource materials that we give them and we expect them to be familiarised with.

The highlighted segments of the transcript formed the basis of the codes that were generated from the transcripts. A compilation of codes generated after going through all the transcripts resulted in numerous codes. In examining the codes, it was evident that some of these were related and would be clustered into a wider grouping. This then led to the third step of the thematic analysis process.

4.9.1.3 Step 3: Creating themes

Themes result from identifying by bringing together components or fragments of ideas or experiences, which often are meaningless when viewed alone (Aronson, 1995). Braun and Clarke (2006) describe a theme as one that captures important aspects about the data in relation to the research question. According to them, the determining factor to a theme is the extent to which it "captures something important in relation to the overall research question" (p.10). These fragments are an outcome of the previous step (codes generated). This step is considered part of the data reduction process, where the bulk of codes are brought together by similarities and overlaps to give a clearer picture of what the data is translating into. Braun and Clarke (2006) argue that, while thematic analysis and especially the generation of themes has been reduced to a passive exercise where themes are seen to be emerging (as if automatically) from the data. Their argument is that themes are actively arrived at through the researcher's effort to identify them from the data, depending on whether they do so inductively or deductively. In

the course of creating these themes, therefore, there was a great deal of back-and-forth movement between what was being identified and what the entire data set presented. Through this iterative process, and using the codes developed in step 2, certain themes were identified. It then remained for the researcher to go through these themes, which led to the next step.

4.9.1.4 Step 4: Reviewing Themes

Having identified some themes, I revisited them to ensure that there is coherence in the flow of the analysis. The process of revisiting the themes enabled me to ensure that the themes provide the intended meaning. During the exercise, there were cases where themes seemed to be related in a way that could allow me to collapse them into a single theme. In the case of overlapping of themes or duplication, I was able to remove those that were unnecessary. And as Braun and Clarke (2006) point out, there were instances where the codes were revisited within the back-and-forth process, and new codes that resulted in new themes were identified.

4.9.1.5 Step 5: Defining and Naming Themes

After revisiting and studying themes from Step 4, I generated what looked like the thematic map that Braun and Clarke (2006) describe (as will be illustrated shortly). This step involved looking back at the themes again and seeing if they portrayed the message intended message. At this point, some of the themes had to be re-named to reflect the unintended message. The following example shows one of the themes that formed my thematic map, broken down into sub themes that came out of generated codes shown in Figure 4.1:

Figure 4.1: Illustration of part of the Thematic map derived from codes

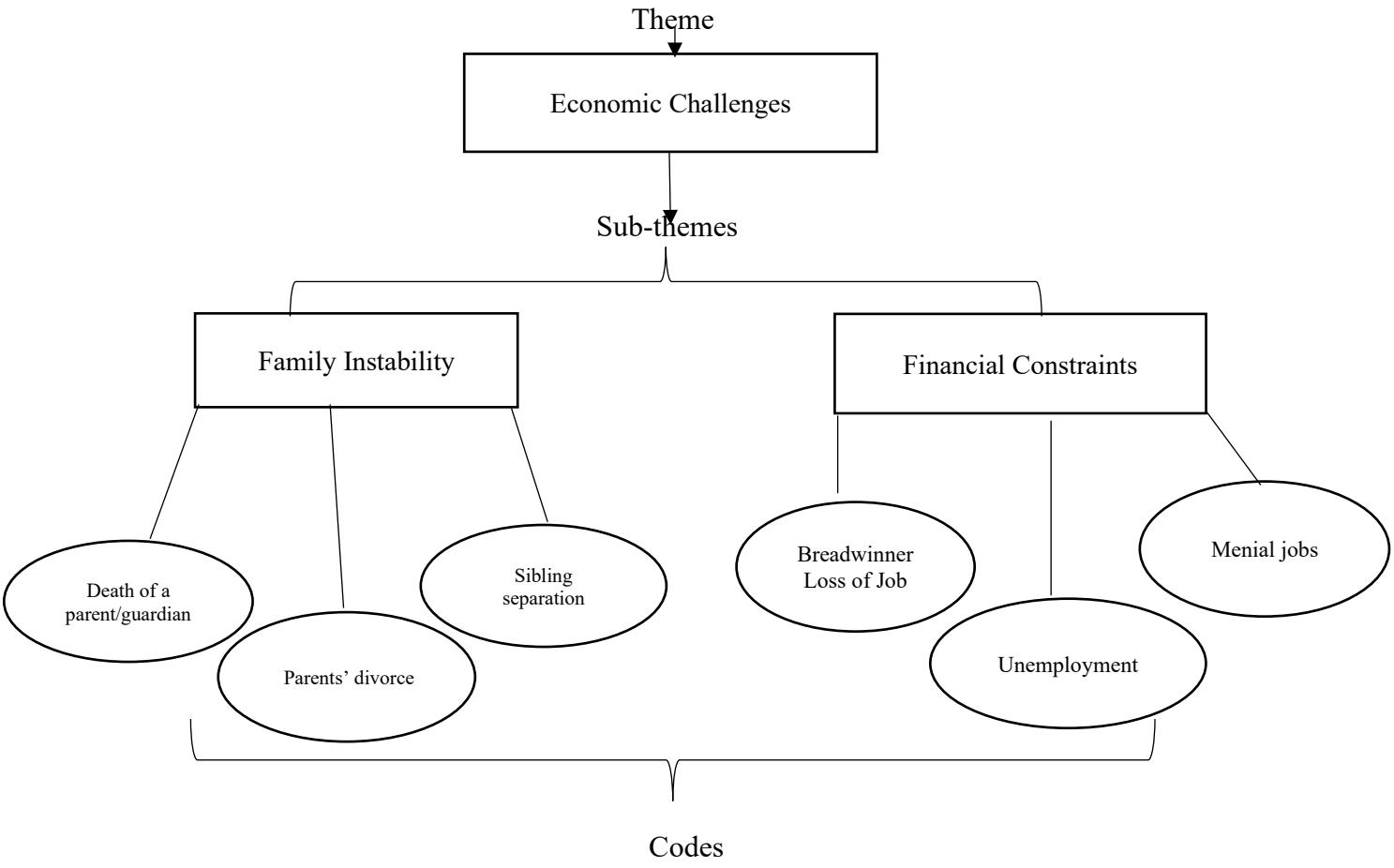


Fig 4.1: illustration of part of the thematic map derived from codes

4.9.1.6 Step 6: Producing a write-up

The final step of the thematic analysis required that I put everything together. According to Braun and Clarke (2006), this step involves coming up with a "concise, coherent, logical, nonrepetitive, and interesting account of the story the data the is telling" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p.23). Step 6 comes out in this study as a separate chapter that wraps up all the thematic analysis steps into a narration of what finally came out of the data collected.

4.10 Trustworthiness of the study

Part of responding to some of the criticisms levelled against qualitative research due to its perceived subjectivity is by measuring the trustworthiness of the study. While quantitative research focuses on validity and reliability of a study, whose focus is on the extent to which a study could be generalized and understood as objective, Guba (1981) coined the concept of trustworthiness with which qualitative researchers would measure the rigour of their work.

Within the concept of trustworthiness, focus was placed on aspects such as credibility, transferability, and confirmability (Givens, 2008). In carrying out this study, therefore, consideration was made to ensure that measures to increase trustworthiness and rigour of the study were incorporated as follows:

4.10.1 Credibility

Guba (1981) defines credibility as the extent to which a researcher achieves congruency of findings to reality. Such congruency is achieved by properly aligning the questions to the main aim the study seeks to address. The wording and structuring of the questions therefore become one of the more important factors in ensuring credibility of the findings (Shenton, 2004). For purposes of this study, the piloting phase enabled me to scrutinise the interview schedules prior to the actual use and as stated earlier in section 4.7. One of the outcomes of the exercise was the alteration of the interview schedules in keeping with the main focus of the study that was being sought for in the study. The piloting through colleagues also enabled peers to scrutinise the interview schedules in a way that contributed to its refinement.

Another means of ensuring credibility of the study is triangulation. Shenton (2004) mentions different forms of triangulation and for this study, I employed two forms of triangulation. First was triangulation of methods of data collection. Through the use of individual interviews, the first year and second year focus group interviews, played a complimentary role. The second triangulation that Shenton mentions is informant triangulation. Krathwohl (1998) referred to this form of triangulation as data triangulation. Using first year students, second year students and staff as different sources of informants enabled me to identify matches and mismatches.

One of the ways that was used in resolving contradicting information and mismatches was through probing and tactical questioning. Probing was discussed earlier in section 4.6. With tactical questioning, Shenton (2004) demonstrates how, as a researcher, if one sees some discrepancies in the responses being offered, one would rephrase the question or revisit it after some time. This serves in resolving or establishing honesty in the interview findings. This tactic worked on a couple of occasions when the research assistant noticed some seemingly contradictory information being offered by respondents, and upon revisiting the question, was able to clarify or resolve these irregularities.

4.10.2 Transferability

As was stated in section 4.3, generalisation is not one of the promises that qualitative research offers due to the processes through which samples are selected and the size of the sample that is usually small and not adequate enough to generalise from. While this is the case, some proponents of qualitative research have argued for the possibility of transferability of findings in qualitative research. For example, Stake (1994) advanced the argument that, although each case in qualitative research is unique, lessons and examples can be drawn from them that could serve in informing other studies elsewhere. In order to ensure the possibility of transferability in the study, a researcher has to provide as much information of the processes and procedures that they underwent to arrive at the findings (Shenton, 2004). It is for this reason that this chapter of the study has gone further to explain in detail how the whole process of deciding on the topic, site, sample, sample size, methods of collecting and analysing data were made. Such detailed information would provide insight into how other researchers would draw insight from the outcome of this study, with an understanding of the rationale behind the study and most importantly, the context within which the study was conducted, and the findings generated.

4.10.3 Confirmability

Confirmability in qualitative research speaks to the extent to which the researcher has minimised control for their own bias. Shenton (2004, p.72) describes confirmability as the effort made by the researcher "to ensure as far as possible that the work's findings are the result of the experiences and ideas of the informants, rather than the characteristics and preferences of the researcher." Such biases could surface either at the data collection phase or analysis phase. In the case of this study, one of the ways in which biases were controlled was through the use of an independent research assistant, who had no prior invested interests in the study. This brought with it some level of objectivity with which the data would be collected. At the analysis phase, rather than allowing my own preconceived assumptions determine the direction of analysing the data, I followed Blair (2015) in 'letting the data speak' for itself through approaching it inductively. In this way, the experiences and ideas of the informant were more prominent that my assumptions as a researcher.

The disclosure of my positionality and drive to embark on this study also was an attempt to lay bare my prejudices and assumptions to the reader, which would get in the way of my own interpretation of the findings. Miles and Huberman (1984) recommend the researcher's admission of their predispositions as one way of ensuring some level of objectivity in a qualitative study.

4.11 Ethical considerations

As discussed in brief earlier in section 3.8 on the importance of observing ethical practices in research, this section will outline the process entailed in the study. According to Givens (2008), ethical issues are to be considered throughout the research processes of recruitment, sampling, data collection, as well as reporting of findings. I therefore applied for ethics clearance and obtained through the university of the Witwatersrand (see Appendix 1). In going into the field, there were several ethical considerations that, together with the research assistant, we had to bear in mind in our interaction with respondents in the field. Such considerations included informed consent, beneficence, anonymity, and confidentiality.

4.11.1 Gaining access

One of the significant processes in conducting research, especially field research, is obtaining the permission to access the research site and prospective respondents for the collection of data. Most qualitative research and its involvement with human subjects demands those proper procedures be adhered to if such access is to be granted. For this study, the first step involved applying for ethical clearance from University of the Witwatersrand. Within the application, a detailed narration of the process of collecting data was produced, including the engagement of the resource person. Since the study was to be conducted in what Gobo (2008) refers to as a closed setting, it was a requirement to formally go through the institution's management at the WSoE and hand them the proof of ethical clearance, as well as a detailed communication on what the study would involve. It was during the same time that I introduced the research assistant and described her role in the exercise.

Following obtaining access from the institution, the identification of prospective respondents followed. One of the recommendations for gaining access to respondents is the establishment of good rapport, and a sense of trust between the researcher and respondents. Weiss (1994) emphasises the importance of establishing good rapport with respondents, where the failure to do so jeopardises the quality of the findings. With this study, winning the respondents' trust involved taking time to explain to them the nature of the study and its aims, as well as having them know what their role was in the exercise.

4.11.2 Informed consent

Armiger (1997) describes informed consent as the researchers' ability to allow an individual to agree to participating in a study that they have full knowledge of and have voluntarily and done so with full awareness. During this study, the respondents were given a full description of the study and its aim. They were made aware of their rights, including the right to accept or decline

the offer to participate. They retained the right to withdraw at any point in the course of the study when they felt disinterested or uncomfortable. They were told that the interviews would be both audio-recorded and have some field notes taken. They were also informed of how the findings would be handled, and later reported. Having been equipped with this information, the respondents had to make a decision as to whether or not to participate. Those that chose to take part, had to sign the consent form indicating that they were willingly doing so.

4.11.3 Beneficence

Considerations of beneficence entail the researcher's commitment to not subject the participants to any form of harm. This is more prominent within health-related research. But considering that some harm could involve psychological trauma through narrations provided by respondents that would trigger painful memories of the past, the study set systems in place to cater for this. In the course of gaining consent, prospective respondents were informed of the Counselling and Careers Development Unit (CCDU) person that was on stand-by in case they needed to gain some form of support as a result of issues that may have arisen during the course of the interviews.

4.11.4 Anonymity and confidentiality

Anonymity refers to the protection of the respondents' identities and the inability to link the respondents to responses given. Respondents were assured of this, and as a way of ensuring anonymity, each respondent was assigned a pseudonym, and only the research assistant was able to know the source of any given response. The same applied to the members of staff that were interviewed. This was coupled with a well-built rapport with respondents, bringing about a level of trust and confidence in respondents to freely discuss.

While anonymity concerns the identity of the respondent, confidentiality refers to the manner in which the information obtained would be treated so as to ensure that no information escapes that would link the respondents to the material. Respondents in the study were told how the data collected would be securely kept from the reach of the public, having only the researcher and supervisor gain access to it. They were also informed about how the data would be reported, in a way that would neither give their identities away, nor implicate them.

Table 4.2 that follows provides the main events that summarise the procedures that were involved in the development of the study, from its inception to presentation of findings.

Table 4.2: Summary of methodological procedures

Pre-Field Procedures	**Field Procedures**	**Post Field Procedures**
Obtain Ethical Clearance from the WSoE	Identification of respondents, signing of consent forms	Collect recordings of interviews (audio and textual)
Prepare data collection tools (interview schedules for students and staff)	Contact and scheduling of interviews	Transcribe and convert audio data into textual
Training research assistant who would conduct interviews with students	Execute the actual interviews (Focus group interviews as well as individual semi-structured) with student and staff	Analyse data
Pilot of the tools as a way to refine the tools as well as inducting the research assistant in the exercise. Altering data collection tools based on outcome of pilot exercise.		Present findings and analyse data to constitute the compiled report making up the thesis of this study

4.12 Conclusion

This chapter has provided a detailed description of the processes and procedures that were undertaken in order to conduct the study. The choice of research design and the philosophical and methodological justifications for the choices made, the strategy of inquiry that the study adopted, with the methods that were employed in collecting the data. A description of the choice of research site and sample, sample size and technique of sampling has also been covered. These were followed by a step-by-step narration of the analysis process that took place. Finally, quality assurance measures that were taken to ensure the trustworthiness of the findings and adherence to ethical considerations were provided. The next chapter presents the findings that came out of the data collection process through both individual and focus group interviews. The findings have been presented based on the research questions that were set out in Chapter 1.

CHAPTER 5: FINDINGS

5 Introduction

The aim of Chapter 5 is to present the findings of the data collection that was conducted for this study, which aimed to explore the socio-economic and academic challenges faced by undergraduate students from disadvantaged backgrounds at the Wits School of Education (WSoE). As outlined in Chapter 1, this study sought to determine how an understanding of the socioeconomic challenges faced by black disadvantaged students from the WSoE may explain their academic struggles in higher education, thereby helping to position the kinds of mechanisms that would both ameliorate and ballast the way in which students materially experience university, as well as how they interact pedagogically with the adverse effects they encounter. Some research and literature that has been documented on the relationship between socioeconomic status and academic achievement shows how coming from low socioeconomic background has the potential to adversely affect one's academic achievement (Akessa & Dhufera, 2015). In order to find this relationship between students' socioeconomic status and their academic wellbeing, particularly as this pertains to the WSoE, the following research questions were used as a guide in the collection of data:

- What are the characteristics of students from the disadvantaged backgrounds at the WSoE?
- What is the nature of challenges faced by black South African undergraduate students from disadvantaged backgrounds at the WSoE?
- How do the socioeconomic challenges speak to the academic challenges encountered by these students?
- What is the perceived effectiveness of the interventions that are put in place at institutional level to mitigate these challenges?

In the quest to address these guiding questions, two data collection methods were employed as mentioned in Chapter 4. Individual semi-structured interviews were conducted with both students, and members of staff. Focus group interviews were also conducted with students to generate the data that will be presented in this chapter. The sample was drawn from first- and second-year cohorts in light of literature detailing how most instances of dropping out and failure occur during this period of students' lives in higher education (Bettinger & Long, 2006; Bui, 2002; Corrigan, 2003; Letseka, 2007; Letseka & Maile, 2008).

The following section provides findings of this study, based on the set-out research questions.

5.1 Characteristics of students from disadvantaged backgrounds at the WSoE

The first research question asked, "What are the characteristics of students from the disadvantaged backgrounds at the WSoE?", aiming to extract elements and features that characterised students from disadvantaged backgrounds at the WSoE. Following the individual interviews with both students and members of staff, as well as the focus group interviews, a number of aspects surfaced. Some of these were convergent, while others were divergent with regards to students' status in terms of coming from disadvantaged backgrounds.

5.1.1 Economic challenges

The study revealed aspects about the respondents that characterised them as being disadvantaged, and financially unstable. Prominent among them was a needs-oriented life and upbringing. This was considered a condition triggered by a number of factors, including the (un)employment status of guardians, survival strategies, and family instability.

5.1.1.1 (Un)Employment status of guardians

The findings showed that most of the respondents came from family backgrounds where the parents/guardians were unemployed. As such, fending for their needs while growing up proved to be a big challenge. For most of the respondents, accessing basic needs was not an easy thing to do. One of the respondents gave the following response in explaining the effects that this had on him growing up:

> *Both my parents were not employed. My mother would try to sell small items to provide for the home, but this was not enough. For us to survive, we depended on well-wishers and sometimes people from church would assist. We had a small garden at the back of our house where we grew vegetable and on days when there was literally nothing to eat, we would use these as food.* (Focus group interview, 2nd year student, 2019)

A similar sentiment came out in the individual interview that pointed to the limitations that respondents had as a result of the unemployment status of their parents and guardians:

> *Life for me was not easy growing up. I learned to be satisfied with whatever I was given. With both of my parents being unemployed, I had to think before making demands which for others were legitimate because they had the means. I, on the other hand had to weigh my wish list.* (Individual interview, 1st year student, 2019)

For some, it was the challenges manifested through having only a single source of income that was based on menial work to provide for a large sized family. This, to a large extent, affected

the students' lives as they grew up, including their state of mind as learners. One of the respondents is quoted as saying:

> *Having to go to school on an empty stomach and not knowing whether there would be food when you get back home was a big distraction to learning, unlike if you fully well know that there is at least food ready for you when you get home.* (Individual interview, 2nd year student, 2019)

Most of the respondents admitted to staying away from school due to inadequate or complete lack of food. The introduction of school feeding programmes therefore not only meant combating child hunger and malnutrition, but also acted as an incentive for children to attend school. According to the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) (2018) report on the state of food security and nutrition in the world, food insecurity affects close to 10% of the global population, where, out of that, 30% is experienced in Africa, corresponding with Africa's economic standing in relation to global economic outlook. According to Du Plessis (2018), close to 50% of the South African population is food insecure, or at risk of food insecurity.

There is some resonance with what Fan (2014) reported in a study on the impact of economic capital, social and cultural capital on Chinese families' access to educational resources. The study established the way in which the family's economic background has an influence on the educational resources to which one has access. Dominguez-Whitehead (2017) alluded to the struggles that students from disadvantaged backgrounds encountered, that affected their ability to secure food, and in turn, affected their academic performance. For most of the respondents in this study, the inadequacy of resources, including basic needs, was what characterised their lives as they grew up. One of the members of staff explained how the struggles that students from disadvantaged backgrounds face was not due to any form of inferiority in their intellectual capabilities, but rather, due to the constraining effects of not having the necessary resources:

> *Issues of poverty impact negatively on academics. Research tells us that poor kids do not do generally as well as children from middle class families. And it is not that poor kids are less intelligent, but it is because they do not have access to the resources and they do not have the capital to engage with those resources*. (Individual interview with staff, 2019)

Based on the interview findings and literature, the economic challenges that students face appeared to have been limiting their capabilities to perform and achieve better as a result of

among other factors, the lack of exposure to certain knowledge, skills and attitudes that they felt their counterparts from middle class possessed. For instance, there was a general consensus regarding the way in which prior knowledge on how to navigate technology played a significant role in the academic lives of students with regards to sourcing information, processing and submission of assignments. The following are extracts that emerged from the both the individual interviews with staff and students, as well as the focus group interview.

> *I also came from a rural area so coming here to Wits for the first time was so difficult for me because at school we were not used to computers. When I came to the orientation week, we had to do an ICT test which was so difficult and I was so slow as I did not know where to start.* (Focus group interview, 1st year student, 2019)

Similar sentiments were echoed in the focus group interview with second years, as one of the respondents made the following remark:

> *...where I come from there's no technology nor internet so here you have to know how to use a computer, how to type fast so those are the things that I had to adapt on in terms of computer. It was so challenging in many ways. I was beginning to despair.* (Focus group interview, 2nd year student, 2019)

For most of the respondents, there was a technological knowledge gap that they had to fill while studying especially in the first year. While their counterparts from middle class backgrounds were well acquainted with this type of knowledge, and seemed to have been sailing through with ease, respondents indicated wasting time to learn ICT and other technological aspects, and as such, indicated how their academic work suffered as a result. As one of the respondents in the individual interviews indicated:

> *...when I came, I did not know how to use a computer, so I had to first learn how to use a computer I had to learn how to switch it on. I had to learn, because I didn't even know how to type, and remember, in university you have to be able to type, cause you're expected to type your assignment, so I had to take my time, sit down and teach my fingers how to work fast, 'cause if you type slow, you finish late. So that's the thing that I had to adjust myself.* (Individual interview, 2nd year student, 2019)

During the interviews with members of staff, there was an acknowledgement of the challenge that students coming from socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds encounter in relation to ICT, as the following quote stated:

> *For first years just coming into a context like a university which is new and foreign for many of them, I think the first challenge they face is understanding how things work here. And when I say understanding, I mean how do I access information, who do I go to for support, how do I work with technology and some of them, the issue of technology is a very, very big challenge*. (Individual interview, Staff, 2019)

5.1.1.2 Survival strategies

The dire conditions under which most of the respondents found themselves in due to economic hardships caused them to seek or generate some means of mitigating these challenges. Among the survival strategies that these respondents reported included depending on extended family members, most of whom were recipients of government grants. Out of the respondents that took part in both the individual interviews and focus group interviews, the majority reported being raised by grandparents, uncles, or aunts, due to either loss of their biological parents, or their parents having to have the extended family raise their children. As a result of low socioeconomic status, the only source of income to support the families was the grants from government, as some of the respondents put it:

> *I grew up in a town called Kwahlazakazi in KZN. We were four of us before my mother passed away in 2010. My father had already passed away in 1998, when I was young. Life was tough. My mum was a domestic worker in Durban to support us. With her passing away, my sister took over as a breadwinner, and my brother later got a job as a garage assistant. My sister is on government grant, and that is how we survive.* (Individual interview, 1st year student, 2019)

Another respondent during the focus group interviews with second year students expressed the hardship of living with relatives in an overcrowded environment:

> *We were a poor family. I grew up with lots of sisters and brothers. Most of us came from different families. I had my sister with me from the same mother, but the two of us were being ill-treated. My sister died at an early age. and I was left to do all the work around the house like a servant.* (Focus group interview, 2nd year student, 2019)

For some of the respondents, the most reliable caretaker was the grandparent. With some of their parents either absent due to work or death, grandparents are those that shoulder the burden of raising children, in spite of the meagre resources they had. Examples of such instances were as follows:

> *Using two words to describe my family background, I would say 'poor' and 'illiterate'. I grew up without both my parents, and when I go home, I live with my grandmother and her children. I have two siblings a brother who has matric, and a sister who was the first one to go to university, but didn't finish her degree. When I start working, I have to take care of my whole family-there are 12 of us living in three rooms.* (Individual interview, 1st year student, 2019)

In a separate interview, another first-year respondent spoke of how, as a young man, he shared a room with his grandmother and extended family.

I grew up in a township with my grandmother, two aunts, and their children. We were poor and it was over-crowded. It was a three-roomed house, and I slept in a room with my grandmother and cousins. (Individual interview, 1st year student, 2019)

The pressure that comes with raising and providing for large family sizes on a meagre source of income was one aspect that most of the respondents attributed to the struggles that they experienced in growing up.

While literature regarding effects of family size on quality of life of children gives seemingly conflicting views, the majority of such literature indicates the negative correlation between large family size and quality of life, especially in less-developed countries, and among low socioeconomic status families (Andrabi & Jabeen, 2016). On the other hand, Black, Devereux, and Salvanes (2005) argue about the benefits of large family sizes on quality of life. The findings from this study are discussed within the context of an industrialised Norway, where birth rate is low, and resources are in abundance, which differ markedly from the South African circumstance. The findings from this current study instead resonate with the 'resource dilution hypothesis', where with each addition to the family, the resources for each member decreases (Lu & Treiman, 2008; Maralani, 2004). As is case of the respondents in this study, especially those that had to be moved to stay with grandparents or extended families, the challenges in meeting their needs were negatively affected with each addition.

One of the staff interviews revealed the following:

> *Most of our students from disadvantaged background are coming from homes where everything is shared and they cannot even claim any privacy because of the overcrowded living conditions. As such, it is sometimes unfair to have the same expectations you would have from the student from the suburbs from them.* (Individual

Interview, Staff, 2019)

Due to the resource challenges experienced at home, respondents indicated having to take initiatives to devise ways of mitigating such challenges. For some, the break came when they joined primary school, and were provided with free meals. For most of the respondents, the school meals served as both their breakfast and lunch. As was the case with some of the respondents:

> *Attending school was one thing that I looked forward to while growing up as it was there that I was guaranteed a meal. The school where I was, was not providing meals for everyone, but only the neediest ones, and I was picked among them, because I fitted the criteria. It also meant my grandmother not having to stress a lot about what I would eat as long as it was a school day.* (Individual interview, 2nd year student, 2019)

For most of the respondents, now in university, not much has changed with regards to their survival. There was a general consensus among them regarding how they found some relief through the lunch that is provided on campus through the Gift of the Givers (GoG), as well as the Masidleni food packs from WCCO that they received every fortnight. To many of them, the following quote was one that they identified with:

> *Things like food that others take for granted are things we don't. I am so grateful to Gift of the Givers and the food parcels… at least I am assured of a decent lunch during school term and from the food parcel, I have breakfast. It helps in that one can concentrate well after a meal.* (Individual interview, 1st year student, 2019)

For these respondents, school was their only hope of getting a reasonable meal. Jomaa, McDonnell and Probart (2011), in their study on the impact of school feeding programmes on developing countries, make a similar claim to the respondents' sentiments on the benefits of school feeding programmes. Among such benefits are the improvement in school enrolment and attendance.

5.1.1.3 Family instability

One of the aspects that was echoed by the majority was the ever-changing state of the family structures. These changes were a result of natural, as well as social factors. For most of the respondents, the changes had a destabilising effect to their lives growing up, such as volatility in the family; deaths of either one or both parents; separations and divorces between parents; or relocation of parents in search of job opportunities. For most of the respondents, such changes took place more than a few times, and they admitted to having been affected psychologically by such changes, as respondents explained:

> *I never got to see my father, as I was told he had left when I was still young. My mother raised me and my brother before remarrying when I was around six years old. I had two half siblings on top of the other one I had. Later, they separated and my mother sent me and my brother to live my grandparents. Life was not as easy there, because my grandparents were struggling to fend for us.* (Focus group interview, 1st year student, 2019)

Another respondent lamented the lack of male role models or father figures among most young men that had detrimental effects on them, which were not only economic, but also social.

> *There were no father figures in most of the homes - they were either in Joburg, or divorced. Growing up with women was not the same. In my case, I expected women to be more caring than men but I was wrong. I experienced more love from men and developed a phobia for women*. (Individual interview, 2nd year student, 2019)

Sandstrom and Huerta (2013) elaborated on how such instabilities in family structure affect various dimensions of the child's life. Family instability affects an individual's chance to develop their full potential and in referring to low-income families, the authors outline some of the basic needs that every child needs to properly develop that may be affected by volatility in the family, including: the feeling of security; adequacy of nutrition; secure relationships; and responsive parenting. In examining the findings from the data, Sandstrom and Huerta (2013) claims seem to resonate with the sentiments raised by the majority of respondents in this study, where they narrated that, due to the changes that occurred in the family structures as a result either of the loss of parent(s), or separation from divorce or need, part of their lives was affected. The visible change for most was the adjusting to academic work, which they attributed to a lack of concentration. As such, the instability in the families tended to have a knock-on effect on the other areas of their lives, including academic and social aspects. As has been

outlined by theories such as Maslow's hierarchy of needs, until the basic needs such as the physiological, safety, love and belonging needs, which are also referred to as deficiency needs have been met, the higher needs cannot be fully realised. Among these higher needs, also called the growth needs, are the cognitive needs that comprise academic endeavours (McLeod, 2007).

5.2 Nature of challenges faced by disadvantaged students at WSoE

The second research question asked, "how do the socioeconomic challenges speak to the academic challenges encountered by these students?" While the first research question focused on aspects that characterised students from disadvantaged backgrounds, the second question focuses on how these characteristics manifested themselves in the various dimensions of the students' lives. The study revealed three dimensions according to which these challenges manifest themselves, namely: academic; financial; and social-cultural. This aspect of the study was considered important to explore, and in the context of first- and second-year students because, according to McInnis (2001), these are the students that stand the highest chance of failing academically, owing to the vulnerability in which they find themselves as a result of problems ranging from social, economic, and financial. As such, each of these will be examined in closer detail.

5.2.1 Academic dimension

The findings from this study reflect the extent and depth of academic challenges that are experienced by undergraduate students from disadvantaged backgrounds at the WSoE. Whilst academic challenges may be considered a general problem among students, the findings presented academic challenges that manifested themselves as being related in some way to the characteristics presented in section 5.2, which included unemployment of parents or guardians, and family instability. These included challenges in academic adjustment and skills deficiency.

5.2.1.1 Academic adjustment

The findings of this study reveal that some of the respondents experienced struggles coping with their academic work. While this may have been the case across the student body, studies point to the way in which students from disadvantaged backgrounds show a lack of skills necessary for enabling them to successfully handle their academic work. Cross et al. (2009) elaborated on this point as they emphasised how such adjustments, although affecting students in general, tended to be felt more by disadvantaged students:

> Transition between school and university is associated with stress, anxiety, and tension, which, in the case of students who come from socio-economic and cultural backgrounds

> that are radically different from the learning culture of the university they seek access to, leads to students failing or withdrawing from the university. (Cross, Shalem, Blackhouse, & Adam, 2009, p. 22)

Instances of challenges that contributed to academic adjustment for the respondents in the study included management of time, workload, communication, and approaches to studying. As a result, some of the respondents admitted to losing confidence and adopting a resigned mentality. Some of such sentiments included the following:

> *"When we opened for block 2, I did not want to be here anymore. It was difficult to be here. The workload, assignments were just too much to do, and I did not know where to start from… I just didn't want to be here..."* (Individual interview, 1st year student, 2019)

While explaining their experiences as first years, one of the second-year respondents narrated how intimidated they felt, after attending their lecture:

> *I had one lecturer who left a very bad impression. It was the first year, because I remember getting into the lecture and he started talking about things that I did not understand. I just felt like I don't belong, because of the language being used. I didn't think I would make it. The language was intimidating, and the assumption was that we all came from Model C schools, where we knew everything.* (Focus group interview, 2nd year student, 2019)

Such outcomes to the study have been found not to be in isolation to what literature has documented regarding the academic hardships that students especially from disadvantaged backgrounds encounter upon entering higher education institutions. Mudhovozi (2012), in his study on the adjustments that first year students encounter in higher education, also highlighted some of the challenges that are associated with being in the first year. These seem to resonate with what transpired from the respondents' interview responses. Among these were the issue of workload, which was reported as negatively affecting the self-confidence of the students.

Another point that arose as a manifestation of the challenges that the respondents faced was having to attend large classes. Most of the respondents, especially from the rural areas, explained how in both primary and high school, they had been used to classroom situation, where everyone knew everyone and the relationship between the students and the teacher was

close, where, in some cases, teachers even knew the students' families, as one of the respondents commented:

> *I felt like I was lost as there was a lot of transformation - social and academic. Back in high school, I knew everyone and we interacted in a common language (Isizulu). Coming here was totally different, the classes were so big and you had to struggle to communicate. There were times when I had questions to ask in lectures. but because of the language barrier and the big class, I would just hope someone would ask.* (Focus group interview, 1st year student, 2019)

While this may have not been unique only to students from low socioeconomic backgrounds, for most of these respondents, the extra barriers of language and the feeling of inadequacy experienced by these students based on their humble backgrounds seemed to compound the struggle of adjusting. Cross et al (2009) observed the struggles that students come to experience as they enter higher education, which are associated with independent learning that involves, among other things, having to manage their own time and self-discipline. Most of the respondents commented on having not been familiar with this kind of circumstance, coming from one where there was interdependence between students and teachers and among students themselves. Coming to WSoE, therefore, demanded a huge shift from being known as an individual, to what they perceived as just being a statistic. When probed as to how this impacted their academic life, one of the respondents was quoted as saying:

> *When I got here, I felt lost - you don't know where to start. Back in high school, if you wanted to see the teacher, you could go right up to them but here, it is different. And because of the big classes, there isn't that closeness in terms of relationship, both with lecturers and students, so even if the lecturers allow us to ask questions during lecture time, I lack the confidence to ask, and that affects how I progress with my studies. I end up missing out and being confused.* (Focus group interview, 1st year student, 2019)

The above quote resonated with the observation that was made by one of the members of staff his/her opinion on what students, especially those just joining the institution went through:

> *The impersonal nature in which university institutions are set up make it problematic for some of our students to cope. The lack the confidence to seek for help. For some, it is about reading and interpreting the timetable, how do I make sense of the timetable, which period do I go to? How do things like tutorials work?* (Individual interview, Staff,

2019)

The sense of being lost that both the student and staff member report creates some level of vulnerability in these students from disadvantaged backgrounds. Due to the lack of confidence they face, finding themselves in this unfamiliar space is reflected in what Batchelor (2006) refers to as the effects that vulnerability of students has on suppressing their voices within a learning set-up. Even among students themselves, the power relations manifest through the exposure of students. First year students find that, at university, competition is more acute, classes are larger, there is a greater volume of work, lecturers use different teaching styles, the volume and frequency of written work is overly complex, and standards are higher. These challenges are not only unique to disadvantaged students, but tend to manifest more among this category of student, where resource constraints make them more vulnerable, and there is a lack of mediators to cushion their experience. For instance, in the course of the focus group interviews, respondents cited examples regarding how the lack of laptops and absence of wi-fi where they reside places them at a disadvantage compared to their counterparts, who have these resources to hand, and have the flexibility of working at convenient times.

> *Most of us students who come from poor backgrounds cannot compete on the same level as our friends from middle class families. They have access to devices that enable them to work more flexibly than we do. They have their own laptops, internet connection where they stay, and for some, even cars that make it easy to travel at night. With us, we can only depend on the school's ICT lab, and cannot even stay late on campus for fear of our own safety.* Focus group interview, 1st year student, 2019

For these respondents, especially the female students, a lack of access to these resources placed them in inherent bodily danger when taking measures to fulfil their course workload.

5.2.1.2 Skills deficiency

Respondents in the study in both the individual interviews as well as focus group interviews mentioned realising the lack of, and sheer ignorance of those skills that were considered basic and requisite to functioning successfully as a university student. Among the skills that received mention were communication skills, study skills; writing skills; critical thinking skills; time management skills; and information and communication technology (ICT) skills. In interviewing one of the members of staff, this challenge was also highlighted in relation to students that come especially from low socioeconomic background families when it comes to acquisition of requisite skills for a higher education that upholds middle class dispositions and culture. The point made was that:

> *Oftentimes, it is possible to tell the difference between work submitted by students coming from the less resourced high schools based on the language, grammar, as well as line of thought. It is a painful truth that students from well-off families will have skills that their counterparts from less privileged backgrounds do not have.* (Individual interview, staff, 2019)

In both focus group interviews, respondents unanimously confessed to being '*clueless'* on what skills such as academic writing were all about. They explained how aspects of writing, such as referencing and structuring of essays, were alien to them, and yet they were expected to produce a piece of writing that would be part of their assessment. Some such sentiments included the following:

> *As I told you I was not used to speaking English, let alone writing, so coming here and being expected to write essays became a bit of a problem, because I did not know how to reference, because learners who came from model C schools already knew what APA referencing is, how to write these references. We were never taught while in high school.* (Focus group interview, 2nd year student, 2019)

In the concluding remarks, when asked about what their main concerns were regarding their academics, almost all eight respondents in the first-year focus group interviews, indicated writing of essays with referencing as a major concern. A large part of the struggle was communication skills. The requirement of English as the main medium of instruction was most problematic for the respondents. Coming from rural or township schools, the respondents were used to having teachers codeswitching when teaching, in order for them to have a deeper understanding of concepts being taught. Having been admitted into university, respondents reported struggling to cope with a '*whole two hours*' of lecturing in English on novel concepts, unless if translated or further elaborated in their vernacular language. One respondent commented in one of the focus group interviews, stating that:

> *When I went to lectures, because lectures were in English, back where I come from learning was in IsiZulu and English, so language of teaching was different; and I had to adjust and do a lot of consultation what they mean by what, and even that small vocabulary of English, it was not easy for me.* (Focus group interview, 1st year student, 2019)

A similar sentiment was echoed by a second-year respondent in the individual interviews:

The challenges that I have been facing so far are communication and the use of money. As for communication, English is more of a barrier to me. I have been taught in my home language, Siswati. When I am engaging with you and you say something, I first have to transform it at the back of my mind to English and then I respond. I therefore find it difficult to communicate with lecturers and other students from previously model C schools." (Individual interview, 2nd year student, 2019)

This sentiment was re-echoed during the interview with one of the members of staff who registered awareness of the challenges that students from disadvantaged backgrounds in particular experienced upon entering university, as observed below:

I have also become very conscious about the issue of accessing my language, and my pronunciation, and my whole personality. I even notice that over the years, I even look at their faces and I can see some of them are just not following me and following what I am saying, so I have just become conscious about. (Individual interview, Staff, 2019)

Probyn (2009) made a similar observation in her study on the conflicts and tensions of codeswitching in rural/township schools in South Africa. While English is considered the medium of instruction, there still exists a debate as to whether other languages can intercept during the course delivering instruction, in an effort to bring about clarification, and if so, to what extent could the inclusion of a vernacular into the delivery of instruction assist students for whom English may not be their first language?

In his PhD thesis on effects of learning styles of English as a second language (ESL) students, Yassin (2012) observed the shock and stress that comes with use of English as a medium of instruction for students whom English is not their first language, as this entails time spent exclusively trying to adapt to the culture of the language that takes away from the acquisition of the intended knowledge. As a result, those students struggling with language tend to lag behind their counterparts that are well conversant in the language.

Apart from the issue of comprehension of medium of instruction, respondents pointed to the challenges that came with the institution's requirement to submit typed work. Most of the respondents, especially those coming from rural backgrounds, indicated not being conversant with the skill in the initial days and for some, months. One respondent's comment was:

I am from a rural area where we weren't used to computers but here, you have to type your essay and submit on Sakai. It was so difficult during my first assignment because,

> *I was so slow, as I did not know where to start. All these things were tough for me. The experience wasn't very nice – it was tough.* (Individual interview, 1st year student, 2019)

A member of staff made a similar observation regarding the struggle encountered by students from socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds, stating that:

> *...challenged with submission of typed work is one that is common especially towards the beginning of the academic year with most first years. The challenge is more pronounced among students that have not had experience with computers. Having to learn everything they need to know about computers, at the same time being asked to type out their assignments, exerts pressure on most of them. More time is wasted trying to come up with a well-typed essay than providing one with substance.* (Individual interview, Staff, 2019)

According to most of the respondents, these struggles resulted in them performing less satisfactorily in their first piece of work. The situation was worsened by the respondents' perceptions regarding the amount of workload to which they were subjected. For most of the respondents, the general feeling was that they were overloaded with large amounts of work including assignments, presentations, and other tasks that all demanded their attention and were to be submitted within the same period.

Some felt that this was a result of the high ranking of the university both at national and continental level. During both the individual and focus group interviews, the respondents felt that, unlike other universities, their workload was huge, and work was more intense. Among the sentiments that respondents had were the following:

> *Sometimes I kind of regret having applied to this university. Unlike other universities such as university 'X' (anonymised name of university), I don't think I would have been failing the way I am here. School is easier there than it is here.* (Individual interview, 2nd year student, 2019)

A similar comment was made regarding the ranking of the university as relevant to workload:

> University *life is complicated- more especially at Wits because you need to adjust to the most difficult content on the whole continent. Wits is the top university on the continent of Africa and therefore has the most difficult and abstract study material*. (Focus Group Interview, 2nd year student)

Petersen, Louw, and Kitty (2009) explain how students coming from disadvantaged backgrounds were more likely to grapple with managing the academic workload in university. They argue that it is this perception that students have regarding workload that overwhelms them and influence the level of effort they put into their academic work, which in some cases falls short of the expectations, resulting in their academic failure.

When asked what they felt about lacking these skills, most respondents attributed these deficiencies to the absence of preparedness they experienced in years of education prior to entering higher education, as one of the respondents commented:

> *I think most of the problems we face as we enter uni would have been sorted out if we had been prepared and groomed while in secondary school. I find that some of my classmates, especially those that came from better resourced schools or private ones at an advantage over some of us that were in township or rural schools.* (Individual interview, 1st year student, 2019)

This citation above resonates with the observation made by Peske and Haycock (2006, p. 1) in a compiled a report on how unequal allocation of resources in schools result in disadvantaging effects on students from poor background and their being perceived as underachievers:

> Poor and minority children do not underachieve in school just because they often enter behind; but, also because the schools that are supposed to serve them actually short-change them in the one resource they most need to reach their potential – high-quality teachers (Peske & Haycock 2006, p. 1).

The report above focused mainly on the calibre of teachers that students from poor backgrounds encounter as well as other resources that result in the deficiency of skills among students from poor background include teaching and learning resources such as ICT facilities; well-resourced laboratories, and libraries (Onwu & Stoffels, 2005). In Probyn's (2009) study on the under-resourced state of schools in Limpopo, regarded as one of the poorest provinces in South Africa noted that "the absence of intellectually stimulating activities, which promote higher order thinking skills such as investigation, curiosity…" (Probyn, 2009, p. 8) came as a result of schools being under-resourced, resulting in a gap in skills acquisition.

Similarly, in this study, most respondents expressed the struggle that they went through, especially during their first year, and attributed this to the unsatisfactory quality of their schools of origin, which were not adequately resourced.

Public schools do not prepare you at all for the university like the IEB schools. Some schools use 'turn it in' which we only learned about at university. IEB has more of an international recognition. (Focus Group Interview, 2nd year student)

A first-year respondent echoed similar observation:

In high school they tell you about university for example, the volume of work, but they don't prepare you for it. In high school you are babied. (Individual interview, 1st year student, 2019)

Interestingly, one of the respondents in the second-year focus group interviews countered the colleague with regards to prior preparation for university by high school:

I didn't find the transition from school to university too bad, although I came from a similar background to all of you, having poorly resourced schools. My majors are Maths and Physics and we did some of the work at school. (Focus Group Interview, 2nd year student)

Another respondent went further in criticising the CAPS curriculum relevant to these schools, for not allowing for teacher creativity. This, they attributed to students' struggle in university, as life in university has a lot to do with creativity.

I believe that no meaningful learning took and takes place at school. CAPS put teachers in a cage and doesn't allow for creativity and for teachers to think for themselves. They are told how and when to think. It is a contradiction as at university we are taught to go out and change the system but when we get to the schools to teach we have to fall in line with the CAPS document which spoon feeds. (Individual interview, 2nd year student, 2019)

For the respondents, this transition from rote learning to creative independence entailed a lot of adjusting. There were sentiments expressed that pointed to how, coming from a disadvantaged background entailed them having to put in double the effort in order to succeed, as compared to their counterparts from middle class backgrounds. In this study, the respondents that were still in their first year at the time of the interviews, indicated a lack of these skills, which, as a result, created some sense of uncertainty with regards to their survival as university students, as one student was quoted saying:

I feel excluded, in the sense that I feel and believe that the content and expectations here are meant to accommodate certain people, for example people from private

schools who have already had a taste. In public schools, a pass is 30%, while in private schools, it is 50% so those from private schools are used to a pass rate of 50 % which we have here at university. (Focus group interview, 2nd year student, 2019)

5.2.2 Economic dimension

Having discussed the academic dimension to the challenges that disadvantaged students face at the WSoE, the next dimension to be discussed is the economic dimension. The findings revealed that the economic factor almost took the central place in determining both the academic and social dimensions. While most respondents reported the excitement that came with being accepted into the university to continue their studies, the anxiety of sourcing funds overshadowed the feeling of achievement and success. One of the respondents explained how, upon qualifying amongst the best ten students at high school, were entitled to funding, but that requirement for continued access to these funds led to their inability to acquire it:

I did qualify for funding from my school having performed outstandingly and because of my needy status. The irony of this funding though was that I had to pay registration fee, which I did not have, so I failed to secure funding and did not go to 'varsity in 2017. (Focus group interview, 1st year student, 2019)

Some of the respondents indicated almost giving up hope of entering university, while others refused to succumb to their fate, due to financial constraints, as the respondents below put it:

Getting the news that I had been offered a university place was a bitter-sweet for me. Firstly, being the first person in my family, both maternal and paternal side to go to university was a source of pride. The other side of it was the concern about where I would source money to fund my education. Having parents that were both unemployed and extended family that were mere farmers at most was a reality that hit me. I thought at some point of just giving up on the offer. (Individual interview, 1st year student, 2019)

During the focus group interviews, similar conversation emerged, and while respondents agreed on the pressure they faced in considering the economic aspect of their degree, other views were as follows

My whole family was excited that I would become a Witsie and after all the excitement, came the big question, "so how will we afford to get you there from here, in Mpumalanga?" The concern was genuine, my family is poor and if they were worried about me getting from Mpumalanga to Johannesburg, how would we even begin

discussing fees and all. They were almost giving up, but I assured them that I would fight and do whatever it took to make sure I get into university and finish my studies. (Focus group interview, 2nd year student, 2019)

For some of the respondents, there was evidence of that fighting spirit, of doing whatever it took to beat the odds and break the family record by getting a university education with the hope of being able to afford a life they had always dreamt of and hoped for.

Not having a guaranteed source of income to fund my university education was a reality I had to face. On the other hand though, the possibilities that came with me successfully completing my education drove me to try all available avenues to make it into university, even if it meant sleeping under a bridge. (Individual interview, 2nd year student, 2019)

The absence of funding, as well as affecting the students' prospects and timing of joining the university also influenced their wellbeing upon joining the university. One of the prominent areas where this was visible was in the area of accommodation and transportation. The respondents pointed out how the closer the accommodation was to campus, the more unaffordable it became for them. For students coming from disadvantaged backgrounds, the failure to secure funding from the available sources therefore entailed a level of stress that came with identifying where to stay. The study revealed three ways through which disadvantaged students encountered the issue of accommodation. One of the respondents made the following observation:

When I could not secure funding from NSFAS and FUNDZA I was told about the discretionary funds that benefitted students like me. Unfortunately, I failed to get that one too. My biggest worry was where to stay. (Focus group interview, 1st year, 2019)

The second category were of those that did not have steady accommodation and relied on friends to offer them shelter, and as a result, kept moving from place to place. These were mostly those that originally were from provinces outside of Gauteng and had no relative or anyone they knew around Johannesburg.

...I even cried everyday when I went back to the place where I was squatting as I didn't have accommodation. I had a friend (a kind of rich kid) who let me stay with him but after about four days I could see that he was not happy with me staying there so, I looked for and got accommodation in Doornfontein. The place was so bad. There was a prostitutes club opposite. On first day I slept in the security room; the lady forgot to leave the key for me. (Focus group interview, 1st year student, 2019).

Third were those students who like the second group, came from outside Gauteng but sought shelter with relatives or friends living in Johannesburg. With both the second and third category, respondents explained the challenges that they faced. One of them pointed out how having to stay very far from campus affected them.

> *I stay with relatives in Thembisa and have to travel every day to and from university. It takes me about an hour to get home, so I can't get home and just relax, as I have already wasted an hour. I need to get home, get something to eat and then help out with a few chores around the house, as it is expected of me. Then, I can get on to my books. But by then, I am already tired.* (Individual interviews, 2nd year student, 2019)

Closely associated with the above experience was the outcry by respondents staying away from campus and with either friends or relatives of the environment not being conducive for a life of a student. A number of respondents touched on how living with relatives that either did not value education or never had the experience of being in university, made it hard for them to appreciate the level of pressure and workload that the students were up against, which required their time and focus. Among them was a respondent that commented on the following:

> *My home is in the Eastern Cape. It is in a quite working-class area. Because I am at university and I wasn't with my family, I had to stay with a distant relative here in Dobsonville, Soweto. There I wasn't treated well at all. I had to do most of the chores and that did not sit well with me... It is not that I was staying in the outside backroom by myself. I was staying in the same house with everybody. Those people did not care about education. It's like going to university was a foreign thing for them. I could not wait to get out of that place.* (Focus Group Interview, 2nd year student, 2019)

As a result, the dilemma of working from home or staying on late at campus was one thing that the students had to face. Although the latter was more reasonable, the concern of the students' safety came to play, as most of these respondents indicated that they travelled from township areas, where safety was compromised. As a drastic measure, the study showed how resulting from this challenge, especially as examination time was drawing close, some students resorted to spending their nights in classrooms on campus.

> *I do not have accommodation. I was travelling every day from Sebokeng in the West Rand. Sometimes due to lack of money for transport, I end up staying in the library or computer lab. I would sleep there sometimes or would try to cross-night, especially*

during exam time. It makes varsity even more challenging with a lot of problems to solve all at the same time. (Focus group interview, 2nd year student, 2019)

The economic dimension of challenges in the study also revealed how students from disadvantaged backgrounds had limited or restricted choices in what they really would have wanted to achieve in their lives. The majority, when asked how they found themselves at the WSoE, pointed out that this was one of the few choices they had:

I applied for Chemical Engineering and was offered a place at another university, but because there was no funding available, although I was passionate about engineering, I had to forego it and opt for Education, because of the possibility of securing either FUNDZA or NSFAS. If funding was not an issue for me, pursuing education would not have been an option. (Individual interview, 2nd year student, 2019)

The findings agree with Fan's (2014) observation of how the choice and diversity of options in higher education was more in favour of middle-class students, who had the capital that Bourdieu referred to in his theory (referred to in Chapter 2), unlike those from disadvantaged backgrounds. In their article on 'capacity to aspire', Brand and Yu (2010) reveal how literature has represented students from low socioeconomic background lacking the 'capacity to aspire', which Appadurai (2004, p. 76) describes as "the ability to read a map of a journey in the future." While the focus in both Brand and Yu, as well as Appadurai were on the cultural provisions that made it possible for an individual to possess the capacity to aspire, the economic aspect plays an integral part in determining how far one can go in aspiring for greater goals in life. In the case of the study, respondent's capacity to aspire was restricted by the prospects of funding available for the pursuit of a career, as was the case in the above quote of a respondent who, upon securing a place to study Engineering, had to settle for the degree for which funding was available, choosing Education instead.

5.2.3 Social-cultural dimension

In the same way that challenges faced by the respondents in the study had academic and economic dimensions to them, the findings also uncovered a social-cultural dimension to the challenges as described. This dimension speaks to both how students have dealt with settling in and adjusting to an environment that was all too alien to that to which they had been accustomed, based on their upbringing, as well as pre-tertiary experiences. One of the respondents commented on the following, in a focus group interview:

> *My experience coming to Wits was rather 'different' and one thing that was difficult was adapting to the different races, because the only race that I saw was my race, which is black. Also the environment, We were never really computer literate, we were never used to using the website or the internet for any academic purposes in our schools and it is a fact of life. Even the ones who are not saying anything now, they know what I am talking about. It is also a very fast life and you need to adapt. Last year, I was not coping at first, and it is only because of the people that surrounded me that I adapted to it and came up with different methods to cope in the fast and confusing environment*. (Focus group interview, 2nd year student, 2019)

This resonated with the views of a staff member:

> *Most of our kids you know, are coming from working class background and so immediately the first time they are in a middle-class environment, they've got to perform, they've got to think, they've got to act, to behave in middle class yet they do not have the capital to do so. So everything is actually foreign and that is one of the biggest challenge they face.* (Individual interview, Staff, 2019)

Navigating the campus environment as a new student in university calls for, among other factors, the social as well as cultural endowments to act as enhancements in easing the transition process. Student networks contribute to or hold them back from fully and speedily integrating into the system.

The majority of respondents in the study were either from rural areas or township backgrounds. They admitted having been exposed to primary and high school education that was of lesser quality than the urban and former model C schools. As a result, coming to Wits School of Education was a major leap for them. There were a lot of new things that they had to become accustomed to. Among these was teaching style, as an aspect that they were not used to. As one of the respondents put it:

> *Coming from a rural village in KwaZulu-Natal to WSoE was an exciting thought at the start but when I arrived here, I realised that this place was not for me. During the first lecture, I went in not knowing what was expected of us. While in high school, teachers stood in front and taught, gave notes. Here, a lecturer just talked, and it was after some minutes that I figured out we were supposed to come up with our own notes.* (Focus group interview, 1st year student, 2019)

For most of the students, entering university meant breaking away from the social networks that they had always known and related to and finding themselves in this space where they are were required to establish new networks. This was especially the case for respondents that had come from remote rural areas where, in the particular school community, they happened to be the only ones going to a university campus in the city. The initial reaction that accompanied this situation for most of the respondents was a feeling of panic and despair. One respondent summarised their experience as follows:

> *When I arrived at the WSoE, reality hit me, that I had no friends to consult and share my fears with. I felt so lost as there was a lot of transformation, back in my high school, I knew everyone but here, I had to acclimatise to the environment that did not look as friendly especially for a person like me that had nothing. It is easier finding friends when you are rich but for us poor, it is double or even more times the effort to make friends.* (Individual interview, 1st year student, 2019)

The ability to form networks and operate through them is what is referred to as social capital (Bourdieu, 1986; Coleman, 1988). Social capital plays an important role in the academic wellbeing of an individual. Depending on the strength and nature of social capital an individual has, they could either negotiate life, including, in the case of this study, academics with more ease than those in lack. Terrion (2006) went a step further in clarifying the forms of social capital as she differentiated the bridging and bonding social capitals. According to her, people from disadvantaged or marginalised backgrounds are associated more with the bonding kind of networking, which is restrictive as it associates with people belonging to homogenous backgrounds. This holds them back, according to Putman (2000), from extending beyond their familiar environment. This seemed to be the case with most of the respondents who, as a result of being habituated to a particular environment and specific way of life, found it a struggle adjusting to this unfamiliar set-up. The literature shows how the struggle of settling in the university environment, while common among students from various backgrounds, is more complex for students from disadvantaged backgrounds. This is among other factors that result from a lack of prior knowledge of navigating university, as most of them are first-generation students (Terenzini, Springer, Yaeger, Pascarella, & Nora 1996; Thayer, 2000). Petersen et al. (2009) further summarised the issues of adjustment that students, particularly those coming from disadvantaged backgrounds, encounter upon entering university. Among these factors is the self-esteem that is more prevalent among students from disadvantaged background. The experience of finding themselves in an environment that is alien and having peers that they

consider better than them based on socioeconomic background and educational background has a way of damping their confidence. It is this feeling of inferiority that affects their adjustment. Petersen et al. (ibid.) continue to argue that the feeling of low self-esteem prevents students from engaging with others freely, as a way of familiarising themselves with the university environment. In the course of the interviews, respondents alluded to feeling more comfortable associating with people from similar background as them, although both of them did not know much about the operations of the university, as the following quotes confirm:

> *As a newcomer here, I felt so intimidated by other students, especially those who looked like they knew their way around the place. Most of these were the well-to-do ones. I knew that they were more knowledgeable than most of us from rural areas, but we just could not get ourselves to talk or ask them. We felt more comfortable being among each other's company as poor students. This did not help us in settling into university that much.* (Individual interview, 1st year student, 2019)

A similar comment was made during the interviews with one of the staff members:

> *It is easy to identify these students when they just arrive on campus as first years. They will be in their own cliques, looking lost, but not having the courage to ask or seek assistance. On the most part, it is the feeling of being inferior to their peers from middle class. There has to be a way of cultivating some self confidence in them as it is this lack of it that sometimes has a psychological effect on them affecting their performance.* (Individual interview, Staff, 2019)

The social dimension further manifested in students' admission of making a conscious effort to identify students who were closely associated to them with respect to socioeconomic status, with whom they could try to strike up a friendship. The feeling of being alienated was an aspect of the social dimension through which respondents experienced challenges. The alienation encompassed the difficulty with which they integrated into the university environment, as well as the operations of the environment itself, which then brings in the institutional cultural aspect. In the words of one of the respondents, which resonated with the sentiments of the majority of them:

> *The challenge is that we feel like we do not belong here because of our background. We feel like aliens… The way the things like lifestyle are like every day, alienate us. For example, the food that they eat, the prices, for us it is meant for people that have*

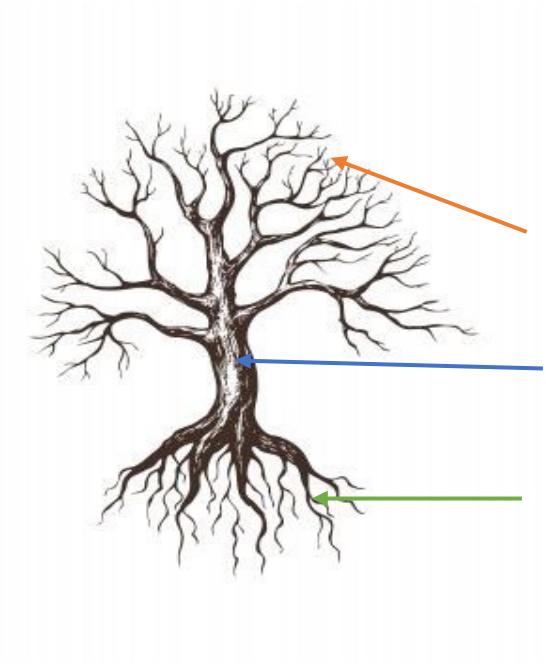
money or can afford. The formal places where people eat in university are so expensive and we feel excluded and it is more comfortable for those who can afford. (Focus group interview, 2nd year student, 2019)

It is this misfit between students' backgrounds (economic, social and cultural) and the institutional culture that Christie, Munro, and Fisher (2004) attributed to the challenges facing university students from disadvantaged backgrounds. Based on the respondents' perceptions, resource constraints that they experienced, attributed to their being denied access to both knowledge, skills, and dispositions that would be considered requisite to comfortably settle in and integrate into the system. As was pointed out during the focus group interviews, there was a gap in knowledge and skills on the part of respondents, which they attributed to their pre-tertiary experience through high school, that did not provide them with such. This was either due to the compromised delivery of knowledge and skills, or because of the under-resourced nature of these schools. For some, coming from a background where there was no history of a university graduate, meant that the prior knowledge one needed to have as the entered university was lacking, leading to a sense of feeling like a stranger in the university environment. In the Christie, Munro and Fisher's (2004) study, they pointed to the pressure resource constraints exerts on the students are among the causes of students feeling alienated, leading to them leaving university and failing to complete their cycle of study.

5.3 Interaction between socioeconomic challenges and academic challenges

This section of the chapter aims to address the third research question. This question focuses on how the socioeconomic challenges faced by the disadvantaged students at the WSoE speak to their academic challenges. The question sought to determine whether the respondents looked at the challenges in isolation of each other, or if they saw an interaction between and among the challenges.

The findings revealed a general consensus from the respondents on how the challenges though presenting themselves seemingly in isolation, spoke to each other. The findings in two of the focus group interviews were explained using an analogy of a tree.



Academic challenges
Socio-cultural challenges
Economic challenges

According to the above analogy, there was a general consensus among the respondents on the main cause of their struggles, which they identified as the economic challenges. Just like in a tree, the roots are considered the base and source of livelihood of the whole, in the lives of the respondents, the economic challenges that they were faced with resulted in the socio-cultural as well as academic challenges. According to one of the respondents: *academic challenges are only a manifestation of the deeper and underlying problem of economic challenge.* (Focus group interview, 2nd year student, 2019).

The feeling that most of the respondents especially in the focus group interviews shared was that the only factor that differentiated them from other students from middle-class families in terms of academic achievement was that their counterparts had access to support structures and resources that enhanced their learning. This gave them an advantage over those that did not have such access, thus considering academic challenges as a tip of an underlying deeper problem. One of the 2nd year students made the following remarks:

> *Coming from a rural background and a poorly resourced educational background robbed me of the confidence that I had in my intelligence. Most of the difficulties that I faced academically in the first year, were not because I was not bright enough but*

> *because of the trouble of getting to know how things work here. Now, as a second-year student, I am able to compete neck-to-neck with the very same students that I was threatened by in first year… whom I thought knew everything just because they spoke a bit of English and had that accent.* (Individual interview, 2nd year student, 2019)

For these respondents, economic challenges denied them the ability to acquire both the culture required by the institution, which in their words *"was not matching with township culture."* This was further aggravated by the inability to establish meaningful social networks like that of their counterparts, owing to their lack of resources that are a necessary prerequisite for establishing meaningful networks. In the end, according to the respondents, these academic challenges were only the end-products of a combination of economic constraints and a failure to acquire the ideal culture and secure meaningful networks that could foster their academic endeavour.

It was noted however by some of the respondents that, while they considered themselves lacking in certain areas as well as possessing insufficient knowledge of the culture of the university, that these would not hold them back from pursuing their dreams. Such responses included the following:

> *The fact that I came here regardless of my inadequacies financially and otherwise means that I have what it takes to survive university just like any student and I will do just that.* (Focus group interview, 1st year)

5.3.1 Economic and academic challenges

From the above representation, respondents in the two focus group interviews viewed the relationship as emanating from economic challenges that they considered to lie the root cause of the challenges they faced as students coming from disadvantaged backgrounds. One of the respondents summarised the interaction in the following words:

> *Obviously finances are the root of the problems that we from poor families face. For the rich, everything is sorted out for them. They go to fancy schools where they are groomed for university both academically and the way university life goes. For us, because we do not have the money, our education in primary and high school is of poor quality as a result, we struggle more, academically that our rich friends* (Individual interview, 2nd year student, 2019)

For these respondents, having access to financial resources (Economic capital) was the key to

unlocking the academic and socio-cultural obstacles that they were encountering. There was a strong sense that the reason why most of them and others from similar backgrounds seemed to struggle academically was not because they were somehow intellectually challenged. As a result, they had to wade through their circumstances in order to get to compete with the middle class. The issue of economic struggles that students faced was also reiterated in an interview with a member of staff that explained how the lack of funding for most of the students affected them adversely, especially in the first year and at the beginning of the school year. They stated that:

> *Instead of being in class getting the foundational courses, concepts and routines and academic literacy activities and so on, instead of these students being in class, they are queuing at fees office and missing out on the rounding concepts at the start of the year.* (Individual interview, Staff, 2019)

In one of the interviews, this was re-echoed when a respondent explained how, on top of stressing about academic issues, disadvantaged students had other unresolved issues:

> *Besides worrying about whether or not I will be able to pay up my tuition fee, I have to factor in what my next meal will be. And all these things are going on in my mind while the lecture is in progress. The person sitting next to me does not have such worries because they were born with a silver spoon in their mouth and their life is all planned out for them. How then do you expect us to compete as equals?* (Focus group interview, 2nd year student, 2019)

It was such anxieties that affected their academics, which in some cases demotivated them from working as hard as they could, knowing there was a slim chance of them coming back in the following year.

There was a contrasting view, though, from other respondents with regards to how their economic challenges were affecting their academic and sociocultural challenges. This view was that the economic challenges were a motivating factor for them to work hard on two counts. First, was that one of the conditions for increasing the chances of accessing funding or bursaries was one's performance. As such, working harder and aiming for 'above average' performance was not an option for them, if they were to stand a chance of accessing funding opportunities.

> *Although I know how the worrying about my survival here as a student has the potential of distracting me from my studies, I have to remind myself that if I am to stand a chance*

of being considered for funding, then my grades need to speak on my behalf. So, I try to separate my financial problems from my school. It is not easy, but I hope I will manage. (Focus group interview, 1st year student, 2019)

The second count on which financial hardships were a motivating factor to the students working harder and overcoming the academic challenges was the aspiration that some of the respondents had. For this category, they considered being found in university as a one-time opportunity through which they could break out of poverty. As such, they would not let the concerns over lack of resources to stand in the way of their access to upward mobility.

University for me is the only way of achieving my dream. I have a dream of being a somebody someday, driving, and being able to help my family. Education is the only way to get rich 'cause business-wise and otherwise are not things I feel I am good at. That is why I will not focus on what I don't have now. (Focus group interview, 2nd year student, 2019)

In both scenarios, there is agreement regarding how economic challenges are a springboard from which the other challenges manifest themselves, although the reaction to such is divergent. The debate in literature on the relationship between socioeconomic status and educational attainment has, to a large extent, also pointed to the positive correlation and how in most instances, this relationship gives economic wellbeing the upper hand in determining academic performance (Blanden & Gregg, 2004; Fan, 2014; Letseka & Breier, 2008; Tinto, 1993). Blanden and Gregg (2004, p.245) for instance, make a bold claim in their article on how, "it is widely recognised that on average, children from poorer background have worse educational outcomes than their better-off peers." While this could be perceived as being reductionist in nature, most of the respondents in the study held on to this view as they compared themselves with their peers from middle-class families. On the other hand, though, Some students had a way of looking at their disadvantaged state as an incentive to work hard and overcome poverty for themselves and their families.This spoke to the sense of agency in them, against the odds of them not succeeding.

5.3.2 Economic and sociocultural challenges

As was discussed earlier in section 5.3.3, sociocultural challenges manifested themselves through the struggles to adjust to the university environment, as well as the challenge with which respondents integrated into the system to establish friendships. As with section 5.3.1, respondents considered economic challenges as being responsible for sociocultural challenges. On the social plane, there was a general sense that money attracts friendships, and because

these were students that were struggling financially, no one wanted to associate with them. The findings revealed the perception that most friendships and networks sprung from existence of material wealth and the findings revealed pressure that students have to be seen as being in possession of material resources in order to secure some form of friendship or be part of a network. As such, the majority of respondents felt that they stood no chance of establishing social network, not being able to barter their way in. Most of the respondents admitted to finding friends that were in the same category as them and who could relate to the struggles that they were experiencing.

> *I cannot have anyone I need as a friend because of not having what they have. It is embarrassing, for example when during lunch, others are going to buy fancy foods and you are heading towards Wozani to get the (Gift of the Givers) free meals. Even during study time, because I do not have my own laptop, I cannot have the luxury of choosing where to work. It is either library or IT lab. This is why, I go for friends that are struggling just as I am otherwise it just embarrasses you.* (Individual interview, 2nd year student, 2019)

The role of forming social networks had an influence on the respondents' perception of how well they could fare in their academics. Most of the respondents expressed how, having a circle of friends, especially hardworking ones, provided extra motivation for them in their lives as students. Wilcox, Winn, and Fyvie-Gauld (2005) advance the argument regarding the vital role that friendships play in a life of a students as they work towards finding their footing in an academic institution. They observed that the disconnect that most students face when they arrive at university results from the struggle to negotiate between their old life (prior to entering university) and the new life as university students. This new life entails a number of demands, including having to thrive academically. As such, the stress of adjusting and reconciling the old life and the new university life has an effect on their academics. This observation was alluded to by some of the respondents in comparing what their lives were like prior to entering university, and how things had changed resulting in some major shifts in their lives:

> *Growing up in my community in the township set-up, I was an outgoing person, one that could relate with people around me. I noticed myself change from being what I would call an extrovert into an introvert. This was mainly because of the change that took place in how my way of life was before and what it was, coming into university. The fear of failing to adjust to the new culture made me to just close up. To a large extent, I feel that this change did affect my academics as I was unable to seek for help even if I very well knew that I badly needed it.*

For some of the respondents, the sociocultural impact was experienced in the form of the perception that they felt others (family members, fellow students, and lecturers) had of them as students from disadvantaged backgrounds:

> *Sometimes you have the feeling that just because you are poor, people do not have any confidence in you achieving much. This is not just from our fellow peers but also from teaching staff. Some of them, especially in the first days made you feel you are misplaced and would not survive university. This, coming from the people that you expect to help you through university made some lose hope of even going beyond the first year. Luckily, some of us did, though not all.* (Focus group interview, 2nd year)

In this regard, Wilcox, Winn and Fyvie-Gauld (2005) recommend the establishment and maintenance of social support, with peer and staff, as a means of mitigating this challenge. And for respondents in this study, such friendships and networks played an important role and acted as a safety net for them in different ways, including academically supporting one another, financially assisting each other, and simply being there for each other. This resonates with what Stephens, Fryberg, Markus, Johnson and Covarrubias (2012) highlighted, as one of the sources of academic strength of students from disadvantaged background which was in networking and the sense of interdependence that they had benefitted from amongst one another.

Another factor that emerged which respondents pointed out as a reason of finding it hard as a student in the institution was the difficulty in adapting to the culture of the university. The findings revealed that respondents considered students from rich backgrounds as being both quick to adjust to the university culture, as well as having an insight into the expectations of university prior to entry, due to their rich backgrounds and exposure. For them, on the other hand, their exposure both to the pre-tertiary education as well as general information on university was hard to come by, due to their financial constraints. This for them made the difference as to how quickly and easily the students adapted that were integrated into the university environment. One of the members of staff also alluded to this challenge when they admitted the gap, noting that as an institution, they had not adequately addressed this issue:

> *Where we are not doing adequately well in my view is to help students to make an adequate transition to the middle-class way of learning and thinking. That's where they ought to get, but we ordinarily do not have sufficient capacity, not even the time perhaps to do such things. In my view, I think we need some bridging courses for some of the students to enable them make the transition.* (Individual interview, Staff, 2019)

Peske and Haycock (2006) report on the feeling that students from disadvantaged backgrounds

had of being societally short-changed when comparing to their counterparts from middle class background, who possessed the requisite resources for easing their adaptation and integration in the university environment.

Respondents generally felt that there was an interaction between the socioeconomic and academic challenges, with economic challenges being to a large extent the root from which the other challenges manifested themselves.

5.4 Effectiveness of perceived institutional interventions

Having looked at the findings of the first three research questions that deal with the disadvantaged students and the challenges that they encounter, the fourth research question sought to inquire as to the perception of both students and staff that were interviewed on the role that they perceived the institution as playing in intervening in the matter, and whether such interventions were effective enough. This section followed a three-step approach.

The first step in assessing this was to inquire as to whether both the students and staff interviewed acknowledged the existence of these challenges, and second step was inquiring as to whether they were aware of any interventions that the institution had in place to help mitigate these challenges. Finally, based on the respondents' perceptions, the study asks how effective these interventions were in helping to address their challenges.

For the first part, both students and staff that had been interviewed did acknowledge and were aware of the challenges that were being experienced by the students.

One of the members of staff shared the following sentiment:

> *Many of the students who are coming to the university, especially in the time when Wits and other universities are emphasising widening of participation, come with inadequate intellectual capital that would enable them deal with issues at Wits… coming from working class background, the first have to learn how to perform, think and behave in a middle class way (which is the type of culture that the institutions uphold). Everything is foreign to them and this is one of the biggest challenges that they face.* (Individual interview, staff, 2019)

The above quote speaks to the academic challenges that students experience, and especially those from working class or disadvantaged background, lacking the relevant exposure in their pre-tertiary education. Alongside the academic challenge, the findings from interviewing staff also revealed an acknowledgement of the resource constraints that students coming from disadvantaged backgrounds have:

> *…On the one hand, we have kids that come to us complaining about not having space to park their cars and on the other hand, there are those that come to us to say I do not*

have food to eat tonight. And these kids are sitting next to each other in the same class. Err… we cannot expect the kind of focus in the class, the kind of persistence that kids might actually take out of the class to go and do their assignments after class when they are hungry. So I think that is a very important issue of concern. (Individual interview, Staff, 2019)

The acknowledgements summarise what was uncovered through the student interviews regarding the challenges they faced. With this in mind and well documented in studies, Castillo and Coloney (2006) and Kirst and Venezia (2001) observed how the intervention [or lack of] by institutions in addressing these challenges faced by disadvantaged students had a great impact on the students' holistic wellbeing. In a study by Castillo and Coloney (2006), for instance, they established a link between the negative perception of the academic environment that marginalised students had due to their struggle to belong and the low commitment they developed towards completing their studies. On the other hand, once this negative perception was resolved through institutional intervention, there was some development of persistence on the part of these students.

In the second step, the findings in this study revealed a number of perceived interventions that the WSoE introduced as mitigating factors. The ones that prominently featured during the interviews and Focus group interviews were the Student Affairs division at the WSoE, Write Up Read Up (WURU), which assist students with their writing skills; the Counselling and Careers Development Unit (CCDU); Gift of the Givers, which is responsible for provision of student lunch; and accommodation provision through Discretionary Funds and Food parcels.

These mentioned interventions offered a holistic form of support for the students body within the institution, with the WURU offering academic support that incorporates programmes that mainly target students that need to be equipped with skills that will enable them cope with their academics; CCDU offering psychological and emotional support; and the Gift of the Givers offering lunch provisions and food parcels (fortnightly provisions of foodstuff packs), together with the discretionary funds assisting students with their daily physical needs.

During the focus group interviews, respondents acknowledged the institution's efforts in providing a form of relief from some of the challenges that they were experiencing. One instance revealed how the student affairs division acted as mediation between students and the institution, students, and staff, as well as handling general concerns over student wellbeing. As one of the respondents commented:

As a first year I had no one to talk to and no idea of how to get information regarding funding, accommodation and transport. While walking along the corridors, I saw a sign

about student affairs person. I went and knocked and expressed my concerns. At the end of the conversation, I got all the information I needed together with the confidence that things would be better after getting some encouragement and reassurance. It was a big load off my shoulders. (Focus group interview, 2nd year student, 2019)

In light of the third step on the effectiveness of the institutional interventions, on the whole, respondents acknowledged the provision of student lunches and food parcels as playing a significant role in assisting in mitigating their main challenge. One of respondents made the following comment:

The lunch that we receive everyday as well as the food parcels we get every two weeks keep us going. We are sufficiently covered in that area and are so grateful. (Individual interview, 1st year student)

While they had no choice on what food they received, some revealed strategies that they employed to still manage to acquire those foods that they craved:

Since there is a food bank at the school, my roommate and I usually take food. There is some food that we don't usually eat, so we sell it for money to get food that we eat. (Focus group interview, 1st year student)

Similarly, with regards to the distribution of food parcels and student lunches, one of the members of staff expressed satisfaction with the effectiveness of the institution in offering the same as a way of mitigating some of the needs that students were facing:

I think as a nation, we are doing enough to fill the gap where it involves finding food for those who do not have food and helping students to find accommodation for those that do not have accommodation. I think we are doing reasonably well (Individual Interview, Staff, 2019)

While there was a feeling that as an institution, there was some commendable effort in form of intervention that went towards mitigating some of the challenges faced by students, members of staff generally felt that the institution needed to do more than what was being done. This was in relation to interventions that would ensure that as many students coming from disadvantaged background transitioned more smoothly into the university environment. This was considered to be one of the factors that would contribute positively to their academic achievement once they were able to catch up with the rest. In their words, the member of staff stated that:

Unlike the students that we have coming from private and Model C school backgrounds, those coming from rural and township schools lack information and some form of mentoring that would enable them adjust into the university environment. If such

arrangements would be put in place, this would cater for a large percentage of the problems that these students encounter, which in turn affect their academic performance. (Individual Interview, staff, 2019)

In expressing their views on the effectiveness of the institutional interventions, a respondent in one of the focus group interviews stated that:

Coming from a township school, I was actually scared to come to university. I soon realised others were in the same boat as me. During Orientation Week, people spoke about the help offered by the Writing Centre, CCDU, SRC and Student Affairs, I felt better already because I realised that there was help. (Focus group interview, 2nd year, 2019)

So, while in the interviews with the students, their concerns were more on the physical and economic needs that they sought intervention, some of the members of staff perceived the need for academic stimulation for these students that did not have the same exposure and opportunity as their counterparts from middle class. They considered such intervention to be important in bridging the performance gap between those from working class and those from middle class.

So far, the perception of respondents on effectiveness of the various interventions by the institutions were viewed as positive. Despite the positive perception of the majority, some respondents had reservations regarding the same. Some of these reservations sprung from the insufficient information to which students had access regarding these interventions, especially during the very first days that they arrived in first year. One respondent said, regarding his experience:

When I arrived at Wits, not having a place to stay, enough money for accommodation and no one I knew of, I was so desperate, I regretted having been selected to come to this place. I had to find ways of surviving, sometimes sleeping in classrooms or if I was lucky, having to put up at a friend's room. It was after some weeks that I got to know about the discretionary funding for accommodation. Unfortunately, I was not successful, perhaps because I was late, but if I had known on time, I may have been lucky. (Focus group interview, 2nd year student, 2019)

Access to information was for the respondents a major downside on the effectiveness of interventions. There was a general feeling that the limited nature in which information about interventions was handled worked to the disadvantage of those from poor backgrounds.

5.5 Summary of chapter

This chapter set out to present the findings from the data that was collected based on the research questions that guided this study. Through the focus group interviews and individual interviews with students and members of staff at the WSoE. The study revealed aspects that characterised students from disadvantaged backgrounds at WSoE, which were mainly economic, the characteristics of which included: unemployment status of parents/guardians; struggles to find means of survival and family instabilities. The chapter went further to present the nature in which the above characteristics of being disadvantaged manifested themselves in the lives of the respondents as students at the WSoE. The manifestation was witnessed within the academic dimension, with respondents reportedly expressing their struggles in adjusting to university environment, while admitting to a perceived lack of skills that would have enabled them to progress with reasonable ease through their studies. There was also the economic dimension, where respondents could not afford basic necessities of life, such as meals and even academic enabling resources, such as tuition fees and accommodation provisions. Lastly, regarding the nature with which the economic characteristics affected the respondents, there was a sociocultural dimension. In this regard, respondents articulated their struggles negotiating university life, due to the fact that it entailed a different culture from what they had been accustomed to, and besides this, they struggled with establishing networks that would enable them greater ease in adjusting to university life. Respondents viewed the above three dimensions as being related through an analogy of a tree, where the economic challenge was viewed as a root from which the sociocultural and academic challenges sprung up. Finally, the chapter presented the respondents' acknowledgement of the challenges, their knowledge of existing interventions within the institution, and their perceptions of the effectiveness of such interventions.

CHAPTER 6: ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

6. Introduction

This study explores the socioeconomic and academic challenges faced by black South African undergraduate students from socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds at the WSoE. The main research question set out at the beginning of the study concerned how an understanding of the socioeconomic challenges faced by black disadvantaged students from the WSoE explain their academic struggles in higher education. Through a qualitative research approach and a case study design, data was collected via individual interviews with students and members of staff and focus group interviews were held with students. Findings from the data collected were presented in the previous chapter.

The current chapter discusses the findings that were presented using Bourdieu's concepts of cultural capital, habitus, field and agency discussed in Chapter 3 that forms the theoretical framework for the study. Most literature has focused more on the economic aspect of disadvantaged students' challenges, which have been linked to their experiences in higher education (Callender, 2003; Forsyth & Furlong, 2003; McCoy, Byrne, O'Connell, Kelly & Doherty (2010). This study goes a step further from this rather reductionist outlook to examining how the above-mentioned concepts of Bourdieu further explain the academic struggles of these students. The analysis will thus follow a thematic approach as outlined in Chapter 4, where each theme is aligned to the research questions presented in Chapter 1 as follows:

- What are the characteristics of students from the disadvantaged backgrounds at the WSoE?
- What is the nature of challenges faced by black South African undergraduate students from disadvantaged backgrounds at the WSoE?
- What is the perceived effectiveness of the interventions that are put in place at institutional level to mitigate these challenges?

The themes that emerged from the analysis serve to present the interpretation of these findings in the light of literature and using the theoretical framework described earlier in Chapter Two as a lens to interpret the findings.

6.1 Characteristics of disadvantaged students at WSoE

6.1.1 Deprivation

The findings from Chapter 5 revealed a sense in which respondents considered themselves deprived in various aspects, concerning their ability to thrive in their academic work, that will be elaborated on below. As with Gopaul (2015), the absence of capitals (economic, social, and

cultural) or enablers to propel individuals in a particular field entailed struggles that they would experience in negotiating an unfamiliar social space. This in part was a result of unequal distribution in society of all three forms of capital mentioned above. These inequalities render societies polarised between the disadvantaged and the advantaged. In discussing the concept of being a disadvantaged student, unlike their counterparts, these students to do not have sufficient means with which to promote their individual access to educational resources, thereby rendering them deprived (Fan, 2014). Such educational resources necessary for academic success comprise of what Bourdieu has described as capital, as well as habitus (Bourdieu 1990). Bourdieu made reference to three major forms of capital, namely economic, social, and cultural. While economic and social capital are among the determining factors in students' experiences of higher education, the focus of this study was on cultural capital. This focus shifts away from the reductionist approach, whose central argument about the disadvantaged nature of students is in their lack of economic capital. The following themes emerged from the first question as to the characteristics of students from disadvantaged backgrounds at the WSoE.

6.1.2 Evident inadequacies

In this study, a large part of the findings to the first research question that explored the characteristics of disadvantaged students at the WSoE, focused on their lack of economic capital. The pressing and manifest impact that economic deficiency had on the respondents compelled them to speak on and emphasise this. Respondents in the 2nd year focus groups alluded to this inadequacy of economic capital in describing their lives and upbringing. For most of the respondents, scarcity of economic capital had a direct impact on their lives in relation to priority of needs, as they appear in Maslow's hierarchy of needs, also known as physiological needs, which among others comprise of food, shelter, and clothing (McLeod, 2007). As a result, the lack of economic capital appeared to have concealed the presence and influence (long or short term) of the other forms of capital, viz. social, as well as the cultural. In comparing the responses from the students to that of the members of the staff, the latter would allude to characteristics of disadvantaged students as being a combination of both the lack of economic capital, as well as that of cultural capital. From the students' side, the idea of how cultural capital would play a role in their lives later on as higher education students did not register more than that in a deficiency of economic capital, where subsequently, this perception of being disadvantaged is mainly conceptualised as economic capital by the students themselves.

It is these overt inadequacies of economic means that manifest through the lack of necessities

of life such as food, clothes, and good schooling that respondents experienced and pointed out. As with Bourdieu's description of capital, they all have their roots in the families from which students arrive, and this is evident in the respondents' explanation of their characteristics that directly link with the kind of background they face. The association of the parental status was among the determining factors of economic challenges. Just as in most of research on socioeconomic conditions, parental employment status was a determining feature, characterising the classification of being disadvantaged by the respondents (Ule, Živoder & Du Bois-Reymond 2015). The majority of the respondents reported either coming from families where parents or guardians were either unemployed, or surviving on benefits. There was also a link to the family structure that included coming from broken families, and loss of parents, resulting in their moving in with extended family. Although not seemingly considered to be directly related to the economic element, studies point to a link between financial well-being and instability of the family structure (Dew, Britt, & Huston, 2012; Killewald, 2016; Hadebe, 2017). Killeward (2016) argues, regarding how instabilities through divorce or separation renders families vulnerable to poverty, especially where the man is the breadwinner. On the other hand, Dew, Britt and Huston (2012) show how vulnerability to poverty predisposes families to various instabilities in the family structure. This link between family structure or status with economic challenges is well captured by Dalziel, Saunders, and Saunders (2018) when they make a claim regarding how lifelong wellbeing has a lot to do with family circumstances. They note how family circumstances have a bearing on the extent of disadvantage experienced by individuals. For the students, coming from broken families entails economic challenges, as the money coming into the house tends to decrease with the separation of parents. In the case of the findings to the first research question regarding the characteristics of students from disadvantaged background at WSoE, the experiences of broken families, loss of parent(s), moving in with relatives, which in a way has a disturbing effect on the family structure, and results in a form of economic disadvantage. It is this overemphasis of economic aspects as solely characterising a state of disadvantage that Bourdieu (1986) criticised when he conceptualised the three forms of capital (economic, social, and cultural). He demonstrated how the state of being advantaged or disadvantaged is a function of the interactions among the three forms of capital as well as the influence of habitus and habitat. According to Pinxten and Lievens (2014, p.1097) consideration has to be made on "the amount and composition of three forms of capital to determine an individual's position." The evidence of such balance of the three forms becomes more evident when progressing from research Question One to the next, where moving from the manifest or overt challenges experienced by the respondents. The

second research question asked “What is the nature of challenges faced by black South African undergraduate students from disadvantaged backgrounds at the WSoE?”

6.2 Nature of challenges

6.2.1 The unseen cost of higher education

In the previous section focusing on the characteristics of students from disadvantaged background, emphasis was placed on the visible attributes of it that largely pointed more towards the economic inadequacies, and the inability to access and afford. While these inadequacies are valid and justifiable in rendering a person disadvantaged, the reality of the respondents’ situation became apparent through attributes that are not measurable in monetary or economic terms. Upon scrutiny, they all point towards the third of Bourdieu’s forms of capital, namely cultural capital. The uncovering of this finding steps beyond the simplistic, reductionist, and deterministic view of looking at challenges of disadvantaged students and their experience in education, as owing to simply economic insufficiency. Sullivan (2002) challenged this obsession with economic inadequacy as chief amongst the challenges encountered by students from disadvantaged backgrounds. She argues that even with economic enablers provided to these students, there would still be academic challenges experienced. True to her argument, a majority of the respondents, though pointing to economic characteristics of being disadvantaged, upon entering higher education, became beneficiaries of the different bursaries offered by the institution. Regardless of the mitigation of their economic lack, they still expressed that they faced concrete challenges. For instance, in spite of being recipients of bursaries such as FUNDZA or NSFAS, the non-academic struggles became more visible, such as the failure in adjusting with university life, managing to sit through lectures, and being able to capture information, as referred to in Chapter 5. Sullivan’s argument is therefore justified in emphasising the role that cultural capital plays in the experiences of disadvantaged students in higher education.

To this end then, the argument that points to a deficit in cultural capital and its impact on disadvantaged students’ academic challenge goes beyond the economic. The case of South Africa where declaration of free non-tertiary education while appearing to have offset the economic burden of education, has resulted in more visible differences between education for the middle class and low class evident in the quality of education offered. Rural and township schools that are mostly non-free paying failing prey to compromised quality education over the former model C and private schools that require fee payment and thus delivering better quality education (Huang, 2019). This has manifested as a result of the larger learner, teacher ratio in schools, and the discrepancies in resource allocation between schools in poor communities and

their counterparts in wealthy communities. Vally (2015, p.156) observed that "a school based in a poor community will struggle with its children, while one that is based in a more affluent area will prosper". In the case of this study, respondents came from high schools that were either rural, or located in townships. Although they attributed their success in entering this prestigious institution in part to these high schools, most felt that the education they received only took them as far as gaining admission into higher education. Beyond admission, the education they received could not sustain them, due to the lack of preparation regarding what to expect, and how to navigate the system.

Bourdieu, (1977, p.494) supported the argument that the education system tended to hold back what it implicitly expected of students, based on the assumption that they would have already acquired it through socialisation at home. He argued that, "by doing away with giving explicitly to everyone what it implicitly demands of everyone, the educational system demands of everyone alike, that they have what it does not give. This consists mainly of linguistic and cultural competence and that relationship of familiarity with culture which can only be produced by family upbringing when it transmits the dominant culture." It is the presupposition of the possession of this cultural capital by the education systems that would explain part of the challenges encountered by students from disadvantaged backgrounds, where the institutional culture is alien to them as a form of dominant middle-class culture. Watson, Nind, Humphris and Borthwick (2009) observed similar struggles that non-traditional students who enter higher education face when trying to understand how the institutions operates, for instance, taking sole responsibility for their own learning and adjusting to the pedagogic style used in higher education, to which they had not been previously accustomed. According to their study, students from disadvantaged backgrounds experienced the type of education that was mainly dependent on teachers, rather than allowing students to conduct their education. During the 1st year focus group interviews, the inability of students to take full control of their learning was partly ascribed to the insufficient resources like textbooks, which did not allow much individual work, but rather, group work, and over-reliance on teachers. Upon entering higher education, the rules changed, and much of the learning responsibility was placed in the students' hands. Such overwhelming responsibility presented an unsettling environment for students, who had not been accustomed to independent learning.

Bourdieu (1977) makes the claim that such low economic capital increases the need for cultural capital. The claim applies to this study as, although much of the focus of respondents was on financial difficulties upon entering higher education, they later realised how the challenge to

align themselves to the institutional culture that was alien to their own was a more serious challenge. Respondents in both the 1st and 2nd year focus groups noted that the failure to align to the institution's expectation had a direct implication to their survival as higher education students. The acknowledgement of the importance of cultural capital through the admission of both students and staff resonated with how DiMaggio and Mohr (1985) and Zweigenhaft (1993) considered cultural capital to play a greater role in upward mobility. To these authors, the possession of cultural capital endows individuals with the necessary [but classified] resources that are needed in navigating educational institutions, whose culture is middle-class compliant. As such, having this privileged knowledge offers an advantage that increases the probability of securing the institutionalised form of cultural capital. Chapter 2 showed regarding certification that the acquisition of university certifications through degrees offers them an entry opportunity into a class above their original disadvantaged one. It is this institutionalised cultural capital that would see them begin their mobility towards the top, thereby breaking out of their original disadvantaged background.

6.2.2 Cultural capital possession and epistemic access

Morrow (2007) mentions two forms of access, viz. formal access and epistemic access. On closely examining the data collected from both the students and staff, the challenges faced by disadvantaged students centred on their ability to gain epistemic access, namely access to "knowledge that would bring about successful schooling outcome" (Du Plooy & Zilindile, 2014, p. 194). It is the challenge to access such knowledge that is closely tied to the cultural capital than any of the other capitals mentioned by Bourdieu, when he argues that the education system's assumption of the possession of cultural capital by all students results in inefficient pedagogic transmission, one that does not register with students coming from disadvantaged backgrounds. This was echoed during the interviews, where one of the staff members commented on the need for a different pedagogic outreach that was designed to meet their needs. This point is further acknowledged in Carrim's (1994) article on academic support and transforming knowledge systems, where the author cites the example of a student that he was working with, who struggled with his academic work in spite of the effort and sacrifices made that he made to catch up with the institution's expectations. The incompatibility in student's cultural experiences among other causes pointed to the misaligned knowledge systems between student and institution. This study makes clear that this concern is systemic, rather than anecdotal.

It could therefore be argued that a lack of cultural capital on the part of disadvantaged students directly infringes on their ability to thrive in higher education. It is along these lines that

Sullivan (2002) contests the way in which the perpetration of middle-class culture in educational institutions gave students from middle to high class families the ability to gain educational credentials in what Bourdieu (1967, p.335) refers to as "a tendency to prefer eloquence to truth, style to content." Carrim (1994) further underscores how the educational disadvantage owing to deficiency of cultural capital cannot be reflective of inherent deficit within students (p. 279). These claims do not imply that students from disadvantaged backgrounds are incapable of achieving. Instead, as Brown and Licker (2003) observed, the challenges facing disadvantaged students result from a system that intentionally undermines the advantages of higher education for traditionally disadvantaged groups, by assuming that they can still survive although the cultural capital they possess is such that is not valued in the system. An example that frequently arises during the interviews of a cultural capital whose deficiency was visibly felt was the linguistic capital. Respondents' lack of negotiating the English language as both a medium of communication and of academic instruction proved a challenge to them. This affected how they interpreted what was expected of the courses they were taking, as well as what and how they were to present their work. During the focus group interviews, there was a general feeling about language, where respondents felt institutions overemphasised language over the fundamentals of education. As a result of their lack of linguistic skills, they seemed to be pushed back academically. Earlier in Chapter 2 it was Van Dyk, Zybrands, Cillie and Coetzee (2010) were cited describing how language literacy, which comprised of one's ability to successfully engage in the academic discourse, whether this is through reading, writing, listening, or speaking was among the factors that affected students' academic experience. One of the staff members confirmed this when they expressed the frustration that they had in trying to package the course in a manner that even those not well conversant with the language would understand. They expressed the feeling of betrayal that came with knowing that, while they taught, a good proportion of the students were left behind. This feeling of being left behind may sometimes be confused with a lack in cognitive abilities. It is this misconception that Dhunpath and Dhunpath (2013, p.111) argue against, claiming that the "exclusive and exclusionary language policies of higher education institutions (de-facto and de-jure) cultivates deficits by promoting monolingual environments that sidelines the wealth of cognitive and linguistic skills that students come with from their first language." As discussed earlier in Chapter 2, Boughey (2002) made a differentiation between academic language and spoken language, describing the former as the ability to critically approach issues and ability to make claims based on research. The latter referred to the eloquence and ability to communicate. Needless to say, though viewed differently, the latter has a bearing on the

former, due to the fact that, in order to apply a critical outlook and analyse research to draw out claims, one requires a good grip of the spoken language and ability to understand the rules of a given language. The eloquence and communicative skills that students from disadvantaged background in the study reported having, as evident in both staff and student interviews, in turn affected their ability to negotiate the academic language that required deeper engagement with concepts presented in a language in which they were deficient.

The emphasis on a particular language to the exclusion of others is part of the rules of the field of education that holds the middle-class culture (language included) in high regard, which Sullivan (2002) has argued tends to offer the middle-class a significant advantage within the education system.

6.2.3 Role of habitus

Having examined cultural capital and its impact on students from disadvantaged backgrounds through these interviews, discussion turns towards habitus. There is a significant link among an individual's background, the cultural capital they possess and the habitus or predispositions that they exhibit. Bourdieu's (1990, p.53) description of habitus is as follows: "the system of durable and transposable dispositions" through which individuals perceive, judge and behave within and think about the world. As was with the case of cultural capital, lower class habitus is incompatible with middle class habitus, which by default, then, makes it incompatible with institutional habitus. This was confirmed by a member of staff, who claimed that most of these students enter higher education without the knowledge capital to enable them to survive the higher education environment, including how they think and view things, as well as how they act. These, according to Bourdieu, are part and parcel of what constitutes habitus.

The connection between habitus and cultural capital has been illustrated by Bourdieu (1997, p. 495) in referring to it as "the system of disposition towards school, understood as a propensity to consent to the investments in time and money necessary to conserve and to increase cultural capital." Here, he alludes to the positive attitude with which those from middle class view education, which to some extent is attributed to the cultural capital that they have acquired over time while growing up. On the other hand, there was a notable negative disposition towards school from those disadvantaged background students interviewed as part of this study, owing to the gaps in cultural capital accumulation that would enable them navigate the education system with ease. This resonates with the sentiments put forward during the staff and students' interviews that point to a defeatist outlook that attends students from disadvantaged backgrounds, though academically, they would be considered to be strong. The first years also worryingly doubted their ability to finish their degree programme, and felt demotivated. This

was attributed more towards institutional culture than academic content. The struggles of 'how to do things' over 'what to do' constituted the major concern for most of the respondents. As such, having to juggle the adjustments to the environment with academic demands was a daunting factor.

On the concept of habitus, the findings in Chapter 5 confirmed what Bourdieu (1977) referred to regarding the mutability of habitus. DiMaggio (1979) referred to the mutability of habitus as its restructuring when encountering an environment that differs from one's own. This resulted in some adaptation or adjustment. In the case of these findings, there was some semblance of such restructuring in the attitudes that some of the respondents came with initially that resulted in a change in outlook about their prospects of surviving higher education. For instance, during the 2nd year's focus group interviews, respondents showed how they found it difficult to relate with conversations in which other students from middle class backgrounds would engage. Even the jokes that they made did not resonate with them, although they developed the ability to adapt to this culture. They were quick to point out though that when back home, such conversations or jokes would not be used, as people in their communities would not relate to them. In one of the fist-year individual interviews, a respondent admitted to changing from a personality that was submissive and obliging to one that was critical and questioning after observing that their initial disposition, though highly regarded in their home environment, did not assist in them in the university domain. In this case, the values and prospects of them completing higher education and thereby being likely to improve their social status resulted in this restructuring and mutating of habitus. To some extent then, it could be argued that the ease with which mutation of habitus occurred depended on the result of such a mutation. Paulson's (2018) maintains that the prospects of an upward mobility had a higher probability of habitus adjustments and mutation than was likely with a downward mobility. The rationale lies in the level of incentive that comes with each. For the 2nd year focus group respondents, the prospects of completing and attaining upward mobility resulted in a change of attitude towards them being in higher education. For example, they discussed how, being able to achieve their Bachelor's degree in itself would fundamentally change their lives, and were willing to make the necessary adjustments to comply with the prerequisites in terms of altering their habitus.

Furthermore, the study revealed another element that largely explained the structuring of some of the respondents' habitus in both the 1st and 2nd year individual interviews. This was earlier referred to in Chapter 3 as the role played by habitat or the environment. The findings in Chapter 5 then revealed how exposure to city life for most of the respondents, although coming

from backgrounds considered disadvantaged, helped them in navigating some of the fields. An example was negotiating the field of Information Communication and Technology (ICT). The exposure to environments where respondents had access to libraries and internet cafes reported less struggles in using computers in universities, although their disadvantaged backgrounds did not afford them such access in their homes. On the other hand, those that reported coming from typically rural remote places without such an environment, experienced struggles in this field. These struggles had a way of manifesting themselves in a loss of self confidence among the respondents. Almost all the respondents in 1st and 2nd year found themselves in a set-up that was unlike any they had ever inhabited. The majority coming from rural and township backgrounds that were characterised by a relative homogeneity of culture, language and race, arrived daunted at the WSoE. Finding themselves among people different from them by race, culture and language resulted in the feeling of helpless as far as finding their bearings. Lehmann (2007, p.91) stated how, "working class background forces students into positions of cultural outsiders with problems connecting to their wealthy peers and integrating into the higher education life, leading to crises in competency and fear of academic inadequacy." It is this sense of feeling like an outsider for respondents in the study, especially those in both 1st and 2nd year focus group interviews, that resulted in a reported lack of confidence. Staff interviews also hinted at the failure disadvantaged background students to find entry points in discussions, or lacking the ability to connect with students who differed from themselves, both in status and in terms of culture and race, where they quickly withdrew within their own cocoons, and felt inadequate to make any meaningful contributions.

With some of the respondents admitting to coming from a background where the practice of taking instructions without asking questions was considered as a positive attribute, mixing and integrating into the WSoE community was challenging for them. Such passivity, linked to both the cultural capital and habitus, where most of these disadvantaged students come with had other knock-on effects. There were reported negative effects on academic endeavour that called for their participation, where they reported feeling comparatively unaccomplished. Reay, Crozier and Clayton (2009) describe how the disjuncture created by the meeting of working-class habitus and elite (the 'middle class field') produces a dearth of self-affirmation opportunities and a feeling of unease among those from disadvantaged backgrounds. The confirmation came from respondents who claimed how excited they were to have gained admission into higher education, only to be shocked and traumatised by what being a higher education student meant for someone coming from rural and township areas. This was even more complicated when it came to becoming accustomed to the culture of the institution, which

preferred active learning over passive one.

To this end, the observation made in Chapter 3 by Prabakaran (2013) resonates with the findings as to how focusing on habitus to the exclusion of habitat could result in a simplistic and reductionist narrative.

6.3 Interaction of socioeconomic challenges on academic challenges

6.3.1 Field negotiation

The analysis of data so far has revealed how more than simply the possession of economic capital for students from disadvantaged background, cultural capital is a significant determinant of the way in which these students would experience a higher educational life. The link between the different forms of capitals and capabilities discussed in Chapter 3 and conceived by Amartya Sen revealed how one's limitations are not only restricted to a lacking in economic capital, but a combination of other forms of capital, including cultural capital (Gandjour, 2008). This was evident in the admission of students in both 1st and 2nd year focus group interviews and staff interviews of how not only did the economic deficit of the students result in their failure to realise their fullest potential, but also the cultural capital aspects, including ability to critically engage with eloquence in a novel language. The disjuncture of cultures between classes results in significant challenges for these students. Closely linked to the idea of lack of cultural capital was the misalignment of habitus, which, like cultural capital, places the students some steps behind their counterparts, who had been socialised in and were conversant with the operations and expectations of higher educational life. Such socialisation caused them to exhibit the type of disposition that was befitting the institution.

In terms of the concept of field, Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992, p. 97) described field as, "a network or a configuration of objective relations between positions." They likened it to a game that is governed by rules and guidelines, some of which are implicit and not written in black and white. They lay out three properties of a field to include the established positions that prescribe ways in which participants should conduct themselves. The second property being the struggle that is prevalent in each field. Just like in a game, participants are engaged in constant struggle and contestation to accrue full benefits from the field. According to Thomson, (2008) the analogy of the game entails the concept of field being situated within a bounded site, with players having set positions with set rules that newcomers have to learn if they are to survive. At the centre of the struggle is the accumulation of capital. The third property is the notion of maintenance of the originality of the field and its rules, by protecting it from external and undermining forces.

All three properties of field cannot be understood outside of the context of cultural capital as

Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992, p.101) attest, by stating that, “a capital cannot exist and function except in relationship to a field.” This relationship was noted by both students and staff during the data collection exercise as they narrated how certain elements of who they were became of less value in one set up, and more valuable in a different set up. One of the staff members pointed to the requisite humility and laid-back personalities as characterising some students, especially from disadvantaged backgrounds, which constitute their upbringing and is considered a form of cultural capital in the social field in which they were raised. When these were brought into the academic field, such temperaments would not be of help in bringing about academic success, especially considering that the dominant form of the institution, namely argumentation, requires mastery of the art of justification.

Dick (2008) mentions the existence of fields within other broader fields and this study, focusing mainly on the WSoE, there was an interplay of other fields within the broader fields, which together built up to answer the following research questions set out in the study:

- What are the characteristics of students from the disadvantaged backgrounds at the WSoE?
- What is the nature of challenges faced by black South African undergraduate students from disadvantaged backgrounds at the WSoE?
- What is the perceived effectiveness of the interventions that are put in place at institutional level to mitigate these challenges?

From the data analysed, there was an indication regarding the way in which individuals fared (well or badly) in one field, influenced the experience they would have in the broader field. Dick (2008) continues to explain how any of the given fields have their own logic and autonomy, which influence or may be influenced by the broader field. Carrim (1994) also noted how the dispositions in different fields support or frustrate the cause in the broader field. Among the fields that were identified and would be analysed are the fields of food parcel, disadvantaged home and community, alienation, and the broader field of academia.

6.3.1.1 Field of food parcels recipients

One of the fields that was common to all the respondents in the study was their being recipients of food parcels and the daily hot meals through Gift of the Givers. This field had implicit connotations, regarding to who would be part of this field and what being part of this field entailed. Survival was at stake for those recipients of food parcels. As was mentioned in the earlier section, one of the aspects of field is in accumulation of certain capital. The respondents in the study were mostly characterised by inability to make ends meet about their daily needs, notably sustenance. The findings from this study were consistent with what Dominguez-

Whitehead (2015) reported in her study on students' food acquisition struggles, where respondents, especially in the 1st year focus group interviewees, reported lack of food as one of the main obstacles that they encountered as students. As with Domenguez-Whitehead's study, the cost of having a nutritionally balanced food was beyond the means of most of the respondents in the 1st year focus group interviews. As a result, subscribing to being recipients of food parcels ensured that they accumulate or make up for the gap of inadequate food that resulted from lack of economic capital. The food insecurity experienced by students from disadvantaged backgrounds has also been reported in studies conducted in developed countries. A study conducted in universities in the United States of America by Broton, and Goldrick-Rab (2018) reported that students up to 20% of students in their study of 3,000 participants reported experiencing food insecurity, with some going without a decent meal for up to two days at a time. The desperation of students in such situation in this study is what drove them to be part of this field. Belonging to this field meant respondents developing a dependency attitude, where their survival was at the mercy of well-wishers. There was also an element of helplessness that came with belonging to this field. The fact that they were unable to fend for themselves, unlike their counterparts from middle class backgrounds, had a way of affecting the way they thought about themselves. It is this sense of helplessness and dependency that would emerge from the interviews where, by virtue of their background, respondents felt that it was the responsibility of the institution to do more to ensure that they succeeded both in their general welfare, as well as their academics. Similar sentiments were noted in Dominguez-Whitehead (2015)'s study, where students that were interviewed felt strongly that the priorities of the institutions as far as addressing the needs of disadvantaged students in the area of food acquisition were misplaced. The students studied by Dominguez-Whitehead (2015, p.303), for example, felt that institutions "were acting irresponsibly by wasting a lot of money on activities such as entertainment" when there were students that were struggling to access basic essentials such as food.

6.3.1.2 Disadvantaged family/ community field

The second field that respondents belonged to was the field of being from a disadvantaged background. This field brought with it cultures and dispositions that would either push them on in their academic pursuit, or draw them away from it. One of the common elements of this field was the culture of hard work and resilience. It was evident in the interviews both with students as well as staff that most of the respondents came from a background where hard work was considered a virtue. This was confirmed by students themselves when attesting to the effort they put into their studies, including at times foregoing sleep at. Staff also testified to how they

would see how hard some of these students were working in the attempt to succeed. Smit (2012), in problematising the deficit perspective with which students from disadvantaged backgrounds are viewed in higher education proceeds to acknowledge the culture of hard work that most of them carry from home. In the face of discrepancies in quality of pre-tertiary education between the disadvantaged students and those from privileged backgrounds, part of the explanation that earns them a place in institutions of higher learning is the hard work and resilience that Erberber, Stephens, Mamedova, Ferguson, and Kroeger (2015, p. 3) allude to in their work with disadvantaged students. They describe resilient students as "those who are academically successful despite their disadvantaged circumstances."

The apparent feature in the context of respondents in this study was the imbalance between such disposition and the institutional culture and expectation that were not in sync. So, while the respondents invested their energy into getting to comprehend the 'what' of their studies, they missed out on the 'how,' a component that one of the staff members mentioned as being the cause of much of the struggle that these students from disadvantaged backgrounds faced. This relates to the discussion in section 6.2, on the role of cultural capital in epistemic access.

Alongside the aspect of hard work that characterised the field of disadvantaged family/ community was the tendency of unquestioning compliance. For most of the respondents, growing up, they were socialised into not questioning obedience, where anything told to them was considered as gospel truth not to be disputed against. Unlike their counterparts from a middle-class background, questioning and critiquing formed part and parcel of their upbringing. Lareau (2001) drew a distinction between the working-class upbringing of children and culture as opposed to the middle-class families. She observed how, instead of demanding complete and unquestionable compliance in children, the middle class use rationality, where children are allowed room to question and critique authority. When looked at in the context of the school or education field, this practice aligns with the institutional culture for which these children are being prepared, thereby, working to their advantage over those from disadvantaged backgrounds. The same was found to be the case in this study. The inability to question and critique became a contributing factor to the challenges that respondents encountered in the academic field, which required them to, rather than accept everything as truth, question and critique. The extent to which they exhibited the ability to do so determined their success.

6.3.1.3 Academic field

The academic field, which forms the central part of the study, just like the other fields examined at above, has its own rules of the game and elements that are at stake. In this field, academic progression, manifested through successful completion of the course of study, as well as

throughput, are at stake, as these provide some form of guarantee to accumulation of capitals that Bourdieu refers to (economic, social and cultural). However, as Bourdieu expounds on his conceptualisation of field, the dominant groups in the various fields are conservative about inclusion of others. This is evident to the strict adherence to rules of the game that are particular to their status and cultural capital. It is this adherence to the dominant culture that contributes to the loss of confidence and challenges experienced by disadvantaged students, who in essence would be regarded as outsiders. From the outcome of the interviews conducted with the two-year group cohorts, their experiences of academia would be grouped separately, as has been done below.

- Academic field for first years

As has been observed in previous sections, the cultural elements valued in the education system are such that disadvantaged groups are less conversant with, for instance, the language both of communication and academic language, skills that are valued in higher education including problem-solving, critical analysis, technological know-how, and reading and writing skills. The frustration of respondents from the 1st year focus group interview as well as individual interviews was more pronounced because of feeling deficient in these skills. Rusznyak, Dison, Moosa and Poo (2017) point out some of the sources of challenges faced. They highlight the discrepancies in pedagogic approaches between high school and higher education. For the majority of schools especially in disadvantaged areas, as a result of inadequate access to resources, teaching and learning follows rote learning, where students are expected to store knowledge as is and reproduce it with little or no critiquing. As a result, "many students enter higher education institutions with a mistaken belief that university-based coursework consists of a stream of factual information to be memorised" (Rusznyak et.al, 2017, p. 210). Upon entering higher education, the expectation from students' changes drastically as they no longer rely on mere memorisation, but actual engagement with reading material and the ability to interpret text individually. As was alluded to earlier in Chapter 2, Lareau (2001) identified most of the critical skills deemed relevant in higher education, such as reasoning and problem-solving, which are more prevalent among middle class families and expected of middle-class children by their parents. For instance, regarding their academic work and especially reading, some of the respondents, especially in 1st year focus group interviews, admitted to feeling that the institution was not doing enough in assigning a lot of reading to them, when they could not comprehend what they were to do with the readings. Their suggestion was for the readings to be paraphrased or simplified in a way that they could understand. As students in higher education, the expectation was for students to work independently and engage with their work

without the level of support that respondents preferred for them to make progress in their studies. From the interviews with individual 1st year students as well as the focus group interviews, there was an explicit indication of how students felt in order for them to succeed, there was need for the same attention that they received from their teachers in high school, which during the 1st year focus group interviews was referred to pejoratively as 'spoon-feeding.' This was also the experience of 2nd year students as they joined the institution, but reported having had to learn quickly to not heavily rely on lecturers, but rather, to go on and attempt to determine how to work within the system by themselves, or with the support of fellow students.

In one of the staff interviews, the respondent described the experience of most first-year students from disadvantaged backgrounds as being an uphill battle, where some students are lost and confused during the first year of higher education in their struggle to find their footing. To a large extent, this was attributed to them not knowing how the institution operated (rules of the game) resulting in them wandering blindly through their studies, hoping to make some sense out of what it all meant being a higher education student. Rules of the game such as managing their learning, technology and computer awareness, submission of work, referencing, language, and seeking assistance were things that, while their counterparts could have taken for granted as given know-hows, most of the respondents admitted struggling with. Part of the struggle was due to the interplay with the other fields that they found themselves in, including their background as well as the food parcel recipient field. Just as was observed by Domenguez-Whitehead (2015) on how students' academic wellbeing is affected by other concerns, including food and accommodation, in this study, respondents were able to establish that link. By belonging to the field for food parcels the 1st year individual interviews revealed how this negatively affected their level of concentration and motivation to work on their studies.

The consequences of finding themselves in the fields discussed above, in sections 6.3.1.1 to 6.3.1.3 alongside the insufficient knowledge of the rules of the game, and inadequate tools to play the game, in part denied them the stake in higher education and the prospect of accumulating capital through failure and dropout. Due to the nature of the field, and rules governing it as Dorling (2010, p.33) observed, "particular groups are increasingly seen as 'not fit' for advanced education, as being limited in their abilities… than supposedly more gifted and talented." Here, giftedness and talent refer to how aligned one is to middle class institutional culture.

It should be mentioned, however, that there is a close link between Bourdieu's concepts of

cultural capital, habitus, and field that have a way of explaining the challenges that students from disadvantaged background face in higher education. Watson et al. (2009) explain how habitus and field could be viewed as two sides of the same coin, as has been witnessed here, noting how the field and its rules of the game are closely linked to habitus. Also, in the restructuring of habitus, the adjustments are made with the aim to align oneself with the new rules of the game, that may have been different from what shaped one's dispositions and outlook. On the other hand, the cultural capital with which an individual is endowed is the one that largely determined the sort of disposition and taste that they have. Bourdieu (1990) also refers to capitals as those currencies with which to transact within a given field, if they are such that are valued within that field. Watson et al. (2009. p.672), in differentiating students from middle class as those that fit into the system from their counterparts who struggled fitting in, summarise it this way: "Participants within the 'fitting in' cluster is evidently endowed with capital relevant to the HE field as a result the habitus developed prior to entry conferring an advantage over others whose habitus is less congruent with the new field."

- Academic field for second year students

Negotiating the academic field as a second-year student brought to light certain developments that related to Di Maggio's (1979) concept of restructuring of habitus as a means of fitting into the field of academics for most of the respondents. In the 2nd year focus group interviews, respondents were able to differentiate their academic experience between first year and second year. The general feeling was as to how they made transitions from feeling like outsiders within the academic field, due to being less familiar to the expectations or rules of the field, as they just entered higher education from high schools, and particularly coming from either rural or township school. The passage of time resulted in them having to adjust the way they perceived academics to be like in higher education based on their backgrounds, to learning the rules of the game in this new academic field. All three staff members interviewed agreed that the easiness with which students from disadvantaged background were able to manoeuvre the academic terrain became more pronounced with the passage of time, in terms of their ability as students to adapt to the field and comply with the seemingly new expectations for success. Part of the restructuring process was attributed to the supporting structures within the institution including the Write Up-Read Up (WURU) Writing Centre. Respondents in the 2nd year focus group interview attested to how, upon engaging with the writing centre, their reading, comprehension and study skills were enhanced, thereby allowing them to engage with content better than they had done while in their first year. In their attempt to negotiate this field, there was some evidence of what Bourdieu (1990) referred to as agency.

6.3.2 Beating the system – Agency

From the study, Bourdieu's concept of agency emerged, which shifts the discourse from a deterministic one, to one that shows the role of disadvantaged students amidst these challenges as active agents. An explanation of what agency entails lies in Bourdieu's (1990, p.116) description of how "habitus will produce different practices in different social fields, and [how the habitus can be changed by changed circumstances]." Agency would therefore include an element of compliance. This speaks to the ability to adjust one's habitus to fit in to the expected or approved dispositions. Other aspect of agency, as alluded to in Chapter 3 by Willis (1978) involve resistance to and confrontation with dominant powers within a given field.

In the context of the study, there was more of manifestation of agency by compliance than it by rebellion to *status quo*. From the outcome of the analysis, much of agency was a factor of the habitus mutating to align with the field, in what Grenfell (2004) depicted as malleability and changeability of habitus, that reflects the influence of the social milieu in which an individual immerses themselves. The first step towards agency by compliance was when both students and staff admitted to the misalignment that was prevalent among disadvantaged students as they entered the higher education space. As discussed earlier, this lack of confidence in some resulted in their giving up all hope of completing the journey to graduate. On the other hand, there was some sense of hope in others, who, rather than giving up, challenged themselves to make an effort in understanding the language, culture, and skills that would propel them towards achieving the goal.

Concerning culture and habitus, misalignment that was confirmed through the admission of both individual and focus group interviewed respondents, there was some effort made to go beyond their means in order to identify with the dominant group. One of the first such manifestations of agency for respondents was in the area of language. In both first- and second-year interviews, one of the noticeable differences that respondents noted as soon as they arrived as first year students was the dominance of English as a medium of communication. Coming from backgrounds where English was not the home language and may be not even a second or third language, one of the resolutions that respondents made was to improve their language skills, both in terms of eloquence and accent, as a way of fitting into the new field.

With the second-year respondents, like with the academic field experience, with the passage of time, they learnt more about the middle-class way of operating, which was closely aligned to the institution's culture. They soon began to mimic the middle-class culture, including through mode of dress. On an academic level, they acquainted themselves with the art of persuasion and critical analysis of situations, which to them was novel, coming from a background that

demanded submission and acceptance of views, and the avoidance of asking questions of authority. One of the 2nd year respondents alluded to how such critical outlook to life and studies make a difference in their performance compared to the first-year performance, when they were not accustomed to these expectations and the rules of academic argumentation.

Examples of such were through their adoption of an accent that identified with middle class, the dressing that changed in compliance with the dominant group. Respondents confirmed this sense of agency in academia gained by befriending those from middle class with the sole aim of benefitting from the resources that they had. This was further verified during the staff interviews, when there was mention of success stories of those who took a bold step out of their comfort zones to learn how the field operated. By this, they referred to lessons they received on navigating higher education from those that had prior experience, either due to the heritage from home, or exposure. By mimicking their middle-class peers while downplaying their own backgrounds, respondents were able to overcome the fear and feeling of inadequacy that came with the lacking in culture and habitus. Some felt that in order to attain higher levels of education, one had to reject and devalue their working-class background (Jackson & Marsden, 1962). This study, however, showed how respondents would carry themselves in one way when in higher education, but still revert to their original way of doing things once they returned to their working-class environments during the holidays, in a way indicating the convenience with which agency was applied (if and when circumstances called for it).

While there was more evidence of the agency by compliance, the analysis also revealed some agency on the part of the respondents that emerged from challenging or rebelling against the rules of the field. This group of respondents are those that Watson et al. (2009) label 'resisters'. One such instance was on the idea of independent learning that characterises higher education life. For most of the respondents that came from a background typified by communalism and being there for each other, seeing others struggling with their academic or even in the other fields mentioned above triggered in them the communal instinct, forcing them to go against the 'individualistic' approach that they perceived the higher education as advancing. In both the 1st and 2nd year focus group interviews, and two of the 2nd year individual interviews, respondents admitted working as teams on tasks that required independent effort so as to avoid seeing 'one of their's' falter. They maintained the 'all-for-one and one-for-all' slogan in their approach to academic field to ensure that none of them fell along the way. As a response to such a threat, they organised themselves and chose to work as a group, aiming to help each other in order to succeed. By challenging the rules of the game in opting to work in groups rather than independently, they indicated being able to get around and still achieving what was

at stake in the field. This strategy of resisting the field's *modus operandi* is what Stephens, Fryberg, Markus, Johnson and Covarrubias (2012) lament when they argue on how the overemphasis of independent learning in higher education undermines academic performance of disadvantaged students, whose cultural capital values the opposite (interdependence) that does not receive similar value in formal education, and especially in higher education.

6.3.3 Institutional interventions

The last research question sought to address the measures that institution were perceived to have taken in mitigating the challenges faced by disadvantaged students at the WSoE. Having looked at the characteristics of disadvantaged students, the nature that the challenges they face take and how these speak to their academic challenges, the last question focused on the respondent's perceptions of how effective the institution's efforts were in mitigating these challenges.

What emerged from the interviews was how the WSoE as an institution stuck to its conservative means of running the institution that remained culturally biased towards the middle class. While over the years there have been changes in the institution, with regards to what is taught (curriculum), what remained unchanged was how the teaching and formalities remained intact, agreeing with Carrim's (1994) observation of how the curriculum reinforces and strengthens knowledge systems that are embedded in the predominant middle-class culture. The general view was that in spite of the widening access policy that entailed inclusiveness of people from diverse backgrounds and socioeconomic statuses, the institution maintained the elite culture, resulting in a backlash against the intended goal.

The role of the institution then was considered more as performing partiality, where, while there were provisions of bursaries and grants to disadvantaged students, this only addressed part of the bigger problem that had far-reaching implications in their survival academically as students. The embodiment of the dominant cultural capital in institutions challenged students that do not subscribe to this form of culture in a subtle and/or invisible way (Doyle & Keane, 2018). As noted, even after resolving economic problems, academic challenges would still prevail. For some of the respondents in both the 1st and 2nd year focus group interviews, the institution played the role in preserving the conservative culture of the institution at the expense of those from disadvantaged backgrounds whose history had little in common with the dominant culture of the institution. This, in a way, concurred with the observation of Dick (2008) who noted that the rules of the game centred around securing dominant positions, and in a way preserving the elitist and exclusive membership of those subscribing to middle class culture.

Against such a background then, the views of respondents were divided between those that felt the institution was doing what it could to address the situation. Of those that held onto this view, including most members of staff, was the mention of structures within the institution including the 'Write Up Read Up' (WURU), whose mandate it was to assist students with writing skills and study skills. There was also the mention of the role of food parcels and Counselling and Career Development Unit (CCDU) as initiatives by the institution in looking into their physical and psychological beings. To this end, there were positive feeling towards the institution maintaining its conservative stand, instead lending out a helping hand to assist struggling students.

From one of the staff members, there was a sentiment regarding how as an institution, there was a need to be flexible in adopting means of doing things, with which those from disadvantaged backgrounds would relate. This was mentioned in the context of adoption of more group assignments and group assessments, where students from disadvantaged backgrounds would be made more comfortable. Alongside such sentiments was the realisation that such changes would only be ideal as the structure and system itself was crafted in a way that it advanced the culture of 'the other end of the spectrum', referring to the middle class. On that note, the general feeling was that as long as the system maintained the conservative rules of the game that assumed that entrants into the system were well-equipped with what it took for them to survive, the institution would continue failing those most in need for this opportunity of accumulating capital and ensuring upward mobility. In other words, the university would fail its political mandate.

The one area that registered a lacking with regards to institutional support and also documented in other studies was the challenge of accommodation (Dominguez-Whitehead, 2015; Xulu-Gama, 2019). Respondents in 1st year focus group interviews expressed the desperation of coming into a new environment where they had to search out places to stay ad hoc. Some of the respondents that had family in Johannesburg had to decide to move in with their relatives. One of the students in particular in the 1st year individual interview explained how they were almost on the verge of quitting their degree due to being destitute, and missing out on bursaries. Dominguez-Whitehead (2015) highlights the challenges associated with lack of accommodation, especially for students from disadvantaged backgrounds. One such challenge that was also alluded to by two respondents in the 2nd year individual interviews was the cost of commuting to campus, in terms of both money and time. The inability to stay on campus until late as a result of security reasons had implications on their studies. Most of the respondents reported coming from home environments that were not conducive for studying,

either due to overcrowding or chores that they were expected to take on as residents. On the other hand, students that resided on campus, whether from middle class background or disadvantaged background, had the benefit of operating in a conducive environment where access to resources such as the library, ICT labs (if they did not have personal laptops) was readily available. To this, Xulu-Gama (2019) argues how residing in institutional accommodation plays a role in conditioning students for academic success. Tinto (2014) attributes access to institutional accommodation as a privilege, where only a few students that benefit from interaction with other students. In the context of students from disadvantaged backgrounds, the opportunity to reside on institutional accommodation would allow them to become better and more rapidly accustomed to the campus environment. One of the 2nd year individuals interviewed responded owed their ability to adjust quicker to the university life to being able to live in university residence. According to Dominguez-Whitehead (2015), the challenges experienced in accommodating students are not new. In the 2011 DHET's report, the University of Witwatersrand was only capable of accommodating 15% of its students. Majority of those accommodated were those that could afford, with a few whose bursaries afforded them accommodation by the institution.

6.4 Relevance of Bourdieu's theoretical approach

This study has endeavoured to look at the challenges faced by black undergraduate students from disadvantaged background at the WSoE. The explanations generated from this study made use of Pierre Bourdieu's concepts of cultural capital, habitus, field and agency to interpret the raw data from interviews with staff and students. An exploration of these challenges based on the respondents' explanations and staff members' observation and interaction with the student revealed some understanding of how students' academic challenges could be traced beyond their lack of economic capital.

6.4.1 The interwoven nature of disadvantaged students' status

One of the points that has come out of using Bourdieu's theoretical lens is the appreciation of moving beyond a simplistic and reductionist view of the plight of disadvantaged students in higher education. Such a view would not only frustrate the cause but also result in wastage of resources by institutions and government, as more and more students from this section of society end up falling through the system, in what Dawes, Yeld and Smith (1999) have referred to as the 'revolving door syndrome.' While governments and institutions put in place initiatives to ensure that disadvantaged students benefit from higher education, the same students that are targeted end up struggling, and falling out of the system in spite of the financial support invested in them.

Through the research questions that were formulated, at the start, the responses gave an impression that has dominated most studies in this area, namely, is the lack of economic enablers posing a major challenge to academic progress of disadvantaged students? While on the face of it this appeared to be the case, a deeper look prompts the question, 'What is the nature of challenges faced by black South African undergraduate students from disadvantaged backgrounds at the WSoE?'

There is a noticeable shift in the respondents' reactions from the material goods to which economic capital would respond, towards embracing their own cultural capital.

When the students brought these along with them into the higher education, where they found themselves operating between and among various fields, this heritage did not contribute much in supporting their cause as students. The fact that there were incongruencies in the institution's culture and that of the students already raised concerns that then had an impact on the academic wellbeing of these students.

Alongside the cultural capital that these students brought with them were the dispositions and worldviews that they harboured, which in some ways, had a bearing on the cultural heritage or capital they possessed. Just like with the cultural capital, their dispositions or habitus made them to feel like misfits in the academic space. Nevertheless, using Bourdieu's arguments, as others have attested, the ability of habitus to mutate and restructure as a result of encounters in a strange field saw most of the respondent admit to having to change their outlook to life in order to fit into the academic space. This shift or adaptation that occurred in some of the respondents enabled them to thrive, as was pointed out during the individual interviews, where respondents indicated having to change in some way that fitted with the institution's expectations. As a result, they experienced some positive outcome in their academic life (also exemplified in section 5.3.4 above). Authors such as Dick (2008) and Gale and Parker (2017) have stated that the mutation in habitus entails discarding one's original habitus (the habitus of the working class or disadvantaged). Respondents in this study explained how this change or adjustment in disposition was a temporal one, only when the particular field required them to do so. For most of them, the primary habitus, which was what they grew up with was what would be considered permanent, which to an extent, corroborates the findings of Reay (2004), DiMaggio (1979), Mayrhofer, Meyer, Steyrer and Langer, (2007).

Concerning fields, the use of Bourdieu's conceptualisations of what encompasses a field[s] sheds light on how complex it is to determine causality. Each of the fields that one finds themselves in, though operating as separate entities, have a bearing on each other, reiterating the observation of Ignatow and Robinson (2017) that the porous nature of fields makes them

influence one another. The study revealed the various fields that the respondents found themselves in, which in part contributed to explaining their experiences as students from disadvantaged backgrounds in the field of academia in view of their socioeconomic and academic challenges.

With agency, came the moment where respondents, out of their own convictions had to decide whether they would settle for the *status quo* that relegated them to being on the negative end of the spectrum with regards to benefiting and accumulating as much capital as possible in the field of academia.

Finally, the perception of respondents on the efforts of the institution in mitigation has also in some way confirmed Bourdieu's stand on how as fields, education institutions would always uphold the culture of the dominant middle class, where whatever changes are made within the system, the dominant knowledge systems remain unassailed (Carrim, 1994).

To this end then, and in the context of this study and what it set out to find, the use of Bourdieu's concepts as a theoretical lens fitted in well and brought out a picture of how the somewhat holistic understanding of disadvantaged students' encounters in WSoE helps to explain some of the academic challenges that they face.

CHAPTER 7: CONCLUDING THOUGHTS AND IMPLICATIONS OF THE STUDY

7. Introduction

This study set out to explore the socio-economic and academic challenges faced by black undergraduate students from disadvantaged backgrounds at the Wits School of Education. Chapter 1 has provided a comprehensive description of the background to the study which included the statement of the problem, the aim of the study, accompanied by the guiding research questions and followed by the rationale of the study. In Chapter 2, a review of relevant literature was conducted. Socio-economic and academic challenges faced by students in higher education were explored both in the global context, as well as the South African context. Chapter 3 then provided a theoretical framework to act as a lens to the study that the gap that this study sought to fill. Chapter 4 provided a detailed and methodical process of how the study was conducted from the decisions on the research approach and design to utilise in order to adequately address the research questions including the data collection methods and analysis of data collected. In Chapter 5, findings from the data collected were presented. Individual interviews were conducted with first year and second year students, as well as three members of staff. There were also two focus group interviews that were conducted with students based on year of study cohorts. Chapter 6 provided the analysis of the findings generated in Chapter 5, based on themes that emerged from the interaction between the theoretical framework, literature and data collected from the findings.

In this chapter, which is also the last chapter, a reflection of the study's journey is presented. This is followed by a summarised look at the research questions that guided the study, and out of this, the contribution that this study has made would be presented, from which implications of the study would be set out. Finally, the chapter would outline the limitations of the study, and recommendations for future studies.

7.1 Reflection of the study's journey

In the first chapter, a section was devoted to discussing the rationale behind the decision to embark on this study. As one that works closely with students in the Office of Student Affairs, what students reported to the Office warranted a deeper look at how logistical challenges interacted with the academic challenges that a particular section of students from disadvantaged background were encountering. The choice of Bourdieu's theory as a lens to approaching and interpreting the study resulted from the concepts that he argues on that speak to the experiences

of students in an educational set up, including the cultural capital, habitus, and field. All of these shed light on the research questions for the study. Additionally, Bourdieu's concept of agency, moving away from a reductionist and deterministic view, allowed for the rendering of the way in which students respond to their circumstances. Looking at these concepts in their totality provided a meaningful interpretation of the data generated, and in addressing the research questions.

7.2 Addressing the research questions

The main research question for this study was: how can an understanding of the socioeconomic challenges faced by black disadvantaged students from WSoE explain their academic struggles in higher education? The question sprung from firstly from an oppressive apartheid regime that continues to bear its effects upon the livelihoods of black South Africans. Despite the end of apartheid post-1994, the residues of the system continue to be felt. In the education system for example, as a result of the differentiated provision of education services based on race, black South Africans received a compromised education resulting from poorly resourced schools both in terms of material resources and manpower. With the call to widening of access in higher education and initiative to include students from disadvantaged background into what were once historically white universities, studies have revealed an increase in dropout and retention, as well as low throughput rates. This study was therefore set to address the question of the socio-economic challenges that black students face and how these explain their academic challenges. The main research question was examined according to three dimensions. The first considered the characteristics of students from disadvantaged backgrounds at WSoE. The second considered the nature of the challenges faced by black South African undergraduate students from disadvantaged backgrounds at the WSoE and how they manifested themselves. Finally, the study considered perceived effectiveness of the interventions that are put in place at institutional level to mitigate these challenges.

The findings from data collected in the first research question on 'What are the characteristics of students from disadvantaged backgrounds at the WSoE?' revealed the dominance of economic inadequacies among the respondents. Such economic deficits were a result of employment statuses of their parents or guardians, with the majority of respondents reporting coming from families with unemployed guardians or employed in lowly paid jobs. The scarcity of jobs in some cases resulted in families being split, where the head of the household would end up relocating to a different province and only send support to the family. In some instances, this arrangement would result in dissolution of marriages, as the breadwinner would end up starting a new family elsewhere. This left the family in dire economically circumstances, and

where the level of disadvantage was more visible through the lack of basic necessities, according to Maslow's hierarch of needs, such as three-square meals and decent shelter (McLeod, 2007).

Characteristics such as these led to disadvantaged students devising strategies for survival. In the face of the economic inadequacies, most of the respondents' sought refuge among extended family members that were better off socioeconomically. The dependence on social grants was also characteristic of students from disadvantaged backgrounds, with some admitting to relying on extended family members that were eligible to receiving social grants, mostly their grandparents. Such arrangements brought with them other challenges including overcrowded households, where conflicts were a common occurrence. Part of these survival strategies meant learning to be tolerant.

Upon entering higher education, the common characteristics of disadvantaged students were found in their failure to sustain themselves, especially with regards to food and accommodation. This challenge was confirmed in the sense that all of the respondents in the study were recipients of food parcels that were distributed by WWCO every fortnight to students in need. Apart from that, they were also beneficiaries of the free lunches provided by the Gift of the Givers. While some of the respondents complained of the lack of variety in the foodstuffs that they received, they admitted having no alternative. The accommodation situation for disadvantaged students from the study was such that, unless they were recipients of bursaries, finding accommodation conducive for a student was a challenge. This saw some students out of desperation spending nights in classrooms, with others reporting instances of being destitute, especially with those from provinces outside of Gauteng and without relatives in the province. While this was explained more in the context of first year respondents and as a past experience for those which were then in their second year, as time went on, students would use their social capital and develop friendships. It was through these networks that they would benefit from each other in addressing the challenges they faced, particularly with regards to food and accommodation.

The characteristics of disadvantaged students at WSoE were further engaged so as to explore the nature through which these challenges manifested themselves. While the characteristics presented a way in which the characteristics linked to challenges that were closely linked to their academic experiences as students coming from disadvantaged backgrounds. Among these was the challenge encountered in adjusting to the academic environment in higher education. The study findings showed that, as most of the respondents had come from either township schools of rural schools, these schools when compared to schools in towns and suburbs were

found to be lacking in terms of resources. The result was that the respondents felt that their educational background prior to entering WSoE inadequately prepared them for higher education. This scenario was linked to their disadvantaged background, where, if they could afford it, they would have choice of better schools. Some of the academic struggles that were encountered included negotiating language of communication as well as academic language, writing and reading skills, including critical, analytical and ICT skills. When looked at in the lens of the theoretical framework that the study adopted, Bourdieu (1990) notes that possession of the relevant cultural capital and habitus contributes to academic adjustment. It is this relevant cultural capital and habitus that those students from middle class are endowed with, enabling them to navigate higher education with relative ease. As pointed out in section 6.3.1, the gravity of the problem tended to lessen with the passing of time. This was attributed to Bourdieu's concept of agency that explains human beings as not being passive players that accept whatever is thrown in their way but as agents of change who as Greener (2002, p. 689) notes "are prepared to continually modify their actions as a result of interactions with their environment." In this study, the level of struggle experienced by students from disadvantaged backgrounds tended to lessen as they progressed through the years of study from modification of their actions and behaviour, which Bourdieu (1977) called the mutability of habitus, and DiMaggio (1979) later referred to as the restructuring of habitus. In this study, the challenges experienced by both first and second year respondents were similar, where the latter focus group interviews reported an improvement in their situations. Most of their improvement had to do with their change in attitude and mindset of being in the higher education environment, which entailed adaptations on their part.

The discussion regarding characteristics and nature of challenges faced by students from disadvantaged background was then followed by the perception of how effective interventions put in place at institution level might mitigate the challenges. To this, the response was mixed. There were areas where both students and staff agreed on the institutions coming in to mitigate the challenges faced by disadvantaged students. The general feeling was that the institution maintained its middle-class conservative culture, despite policies of inclusivity that only addressed the formal access through the admission into higher education. Most of the respondents held the view that, as an institution, what Morrow (2007) describes as epistemic access was not adequately addressed as the students struggled to access the knowledge on how to navigate the environment. Subsequently, disadvantaged students who had little or no exposure to middle class culture struggled with the assumption that all students were familiar with the operations and expectation of being a student in higher education. The gravity of

struggling in navigating the institution became more pronounced, with others losing self-confidence and feeling like strangers. On the other hand, there was another section of respondents that attributed their acquisition of epistemological access as far as learning to navigate the academic terrain at WSoE to the role played by tutorials. The main support referred to was the WURU Writing Centre assisted the students in acquiring skills that they had not attained through their high school experiences, including study skills.

Both the student and staff respondents agreed on the role that bursaries played in alleviating the economic burden of disadvantaged students. The gravity of such burden was manifest in students who initially missed out on bursary eligibility in their first year, and were later awarded them. Such respondents, in their second year were able to notice how the level of concentration on their studies increased with the knowledge of having their fees paid and accommodation and food taken care of. This observation aligned with Xulu-Gama (2019), who note how the fulfilment of basic needs of disadvantaged students has positive effects on their academic wellbeing. The third perception from respondents was regarding institutional intervention on student accommodation. The study's focus was on students from disadvantaged backgrounds, where one of the prominent issues that emerged was how this section of student's experience destitution as they come into the institution as first year students. With most of them coming from either province outside of Gauteng, or on the outskirts of Johannesburg in the townships, the challenge of accommodation is central. Uleanya and Rugbeer (2020) attest to how the lack of accommodation and desperation that accompanies it, especially among first year students from rural areas entering university, distracts them from focusing on their academic work.

7.3 Insights through the theoretical framework lens

The findings brought to light the relationship of aspects of the socio-economic and academic challenges encountered by black undergraduate students at the WSoE when examined in the light of Pierre Bourdieu's theoretical concepts of cultural capital, habitus, field, and agency.

The WSoE, like other institutions of higher education, is governed by principles and a culture of the middle class, that excludes a social majority. This lack was initially characterised by lack of material resources, including failure to meet what Maslow describes as the physiological needs such as food, shelter, and clothing (McLeod, 2007). Economic deficits give way, under scrutiny, to deficits in cultural capital, and the two sustain each other. Such challenges included struggles to adjust to the WSoE environment from the lack of familiarity with cultural aspects such as language, infrastructure, technology among others. The institution caters instead

towards those middle-class students in possession of these resources.

Closely tied to the cultural deficit for students from disadvantaged backgrounds was the concept of habitus, referring to the dispositions that individuals possess that determine the level of ease or difficulty with which they find their place in a new place (field). While students from disadvantaged backgrounds admitted to knowing what was expected of them in an education set-up, but lacking the dispositions to enable them meet these expectations, which resulted in the academic struggles that experienced.

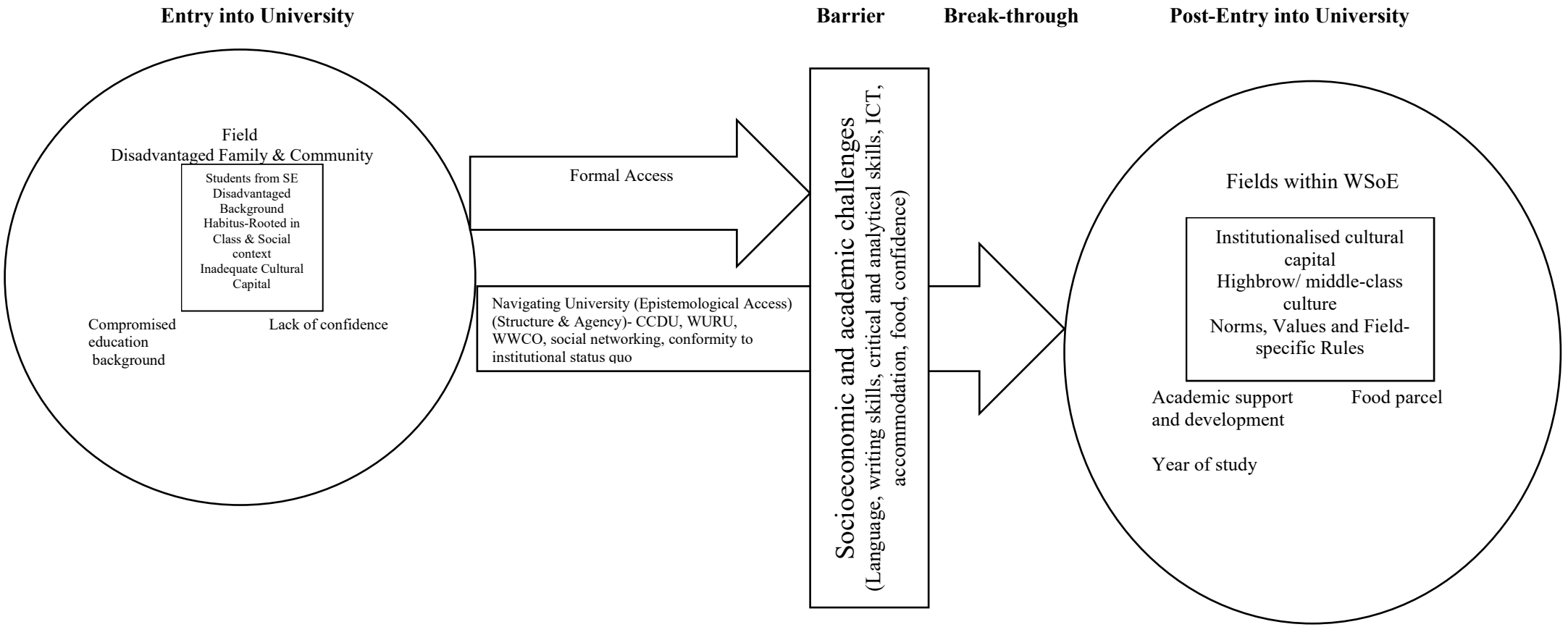
The new social space that students from disadvantaged background find themselves in, also referred to as field, is where habitus and cultural capital come into play to determine who would benefit the most. As students from disadvantaged backgrounds, WSoE presents multiple new fields that had to be negotiated simultaneously if these students were to survive. Among these were the field of food parcel recipients; the field of disadvantaged family and community, and the academic field. These fields come to bear upon one another, where the way in which students from disadvantaged backgrounds negotiated any one of these fields ultimately affected how they fared in the others. For instance, the ability to overcome the field of lack manifested through food parcel recipients had a way of boosting their chances of fighting for survival in the academic field, as was pointed out in the study by Dominguez-Whitehead (2017). Another insight was in how the academic fields were experienced differently by the respondents based on year of study.

The difference in maneuvering of the academic fields according to year of study was explained in the light of Bourdieu's last concept of agency, where, odds remain stacked against the students from disadvantaged background. These were based on misaligned cultural capitals and habitus and alien field, where students had to play an active role in ensuring that they survive the experience of the various fields. Such adjustments included altering their outlook and worldview to fit in with the institutional status quo including language acquisition, mannerisms, and skills acquisition.

7.4 Review of the socio-economic and academic challenges faced by black undergraduate students from disadvantaged backgrounds at the Wits School of Education

The study set out in Chapter 1 with the problem statement and research questions to guide the study. In Chapter 3 following the literature review presented in Chapter 2 in this area of research, a theoretical framework was determined. This framework has been used as a lens of data collection as well as data analysis. Coming this far, the framework that was initially presented has been modified to reflect the findings from the study as illustrated in Figure 7.1.

Figure 7.1: Socio-economic and Academic Challenges of Disadvantaged Students at WSoE



Looking back on the process that was embarked on from the inception of the study, from the planning stage to implementation of field data collection and analysis, the outlook to the socio-economic and academic challenges faced by black undergraduate students at WSoE resulted in the representation in Fig 7.1. The students from disadvantaged background start off in life characterised with lack resulting from their low socio-economic status. Alongside the visible act manifested through food insecurity, poor living conditions and failure to access basic needs, students are positioned in fields or social spaces of disadvantaged families and communities where survival is the *modus operandi.* Scarcity of resources does not grant them a lot of choices, but they are obliged to accept and make the best of what is there if they are to survive. The field of compromised educational background manifested through the schools that they attended, where the quality was average, and in some cases, below average, exposed them to another field when comparing themselves with others who came from better resourced families and background. The lack of confidence as was discussed regarding the students from disadvantaged background having found themselves in the WSoE space was a considerable struggle, as for some of them, it was their first encounter with higher education institution, where the language of transaction, diversity of culture and race, as well as infrastructure were alien, and made them feel disempowered. The field of academics that they concurrently found themselves in upon entering WSoE resulted in a further encounter with a space whose rules were unfamiliar. These included writing skills, critical analytical skills, time management, as well as ICT skills. For most of the students, it was the first time that they were required to engage with computers at the level of producing assignments. The lack of skills and insufficient knowledge of the rules of the game further reinforced their lack of confidence.

The feeling of despair coming from a background whose culture and disposition were different from that of the institution varied, depending on the other field that the students identified with according to year of study. The gravity of challenges appeared to subside with the length of time that students spent in the institution. Despite their conditions socioeconomically showing little or no improvement, the students were able to find a means of coping with the environment, in what Bourdieu referred to as agency. This included the initiative to learn the rules of the various fields and acquainting themselves with adaptive strategies in order to fit in. These included sharpening their language skills, which for some included learning an accent. For the respondents, making use of the institutional structures in place, including the WURU, ICT support, enabled them to gain the epistemological access that Morrow (2007) referred to as

being was a step beyond the formal access that they had gained, by gaining admission into the institution.

7.5 Contribution to methodology

The study's methodological approach required impartiality as a researcher and interested party. As a way of overcoming these methodological challenges, a research assistant was used to do what the researcher would ordinarily have done. By bringing in a neutral person to handle the interviews, the study made strides towards achieving the confirmability standard put forth by Shenton (2004) so as to secure trustworthiness. As a result of prior preparation and orientation of the research assistant into the study, data collected was rigorous enough to address the research questions of the study, while at the same time having controlled for researcher bias resulting from researcher's position and power dynamics between student and lecturer.

7.6 Contribution to knowledge and theory

The study contributes to existing body of knowledge in the area of higher education and disadvantaged students in the context of South Africa and in particular, black South Africans at the WSoE. By focusing on the interplay between socioeconomic challenges and academic challenges experienced by undergraduate students from disadvantaged backgrounds, and using Bourdieu's theory of cultural capital as a lens, the study has highlighted the following. First, the challenges that are faced by students in higher education extend back to their homes as children growing up.

The compromised quality of primary and high school entails limited acquisition of prior knowledge, attitude and skills, including the use of English as both a language of communication, and for academic writing, resulting in difficulties in maneuvering higher education. Other skills including study skills, critical and analytical skills, and ICT knowledge positions students in social spaces (fields) within the institution, which threaten their existence and survival as students.

Coming from disadvantaged families and communities is another field that they already negotiate as they join higher education. Within this field comes challenges of accessing necessities including food and shelter.

The outcome of these economic struggles is that these students encounter failure to access resources that would enable them gain the culture and habitus that would propel them to navigate higher education with reasonable ease. Through provision of conducive institutional accommodation, these students would be able to acquire these academic skills, as well as

gaining more exposure to the institutional culture and habitus. The study also brought to light the interplay of various fields in which students find themselves, coming from disadvantaged backgrounds. It also unveils how agency increases, helping students to progress from one year to the next, as they go into higher years. Finally, the study has been able to show that though the economic impediments remain an important factor in the lives of students from disadvantaged backgrounds in higher education, where other factors also play a role including the social, cultural, and technological support, and exposure that students need.

The seriousness of the challenges referred to by students in the study pointed to the differentiation of fields based of years of study. The study revealed how the length of time spent in the institution allowed for ease of the effects of these challenges on students. The shorter the time that students were exposed to the field of WSoE, the greater the stress and gravity of challenges. This underscores the importance of more institutional support for students as they enter into higher education as a means of easing the process of adjusting both culture and habitus to align with that of the institution.

7.7 Contribution to policy

An understanding of the interplay between socio-economic and academic challenges faced by students from disadvantaged backgrounds provides insight, which if considered would contribute to policies aimed at improving the wellbeing of disadvantaged backgrounds in institutions of higher education. Government policies aspire for both widening of access to higher education to include students from disadvantaged backgrounds, and at the same time ensure their timely completion (DHET, 2012), where efforts to implement these policies successfully require an understanding of the obstacles to the realisation. This study raises awareness of such obstacles, as well as the nature in which these challenges are intertwined. A redress to ensure realisation of the policies thus calls for a multi-faceted approach, one that speaks to the various fields that students find themselves. For instance, while initiatives to address the access to food for disadvantaged students through food parcels relieves them from one of the burdens, accommodation becomes another pressing challenge, which if not resolved, would result in similar repercussions on the students' academic lives.

As the study revealed, the need for more focus on the first-year students as a result of their lack of exposure and experience of life in higher education institutions is a strategy that would mitigate their challenges.

7.8 Implications of the study

The findings of this research have a number of important implications. First, while it is appreciated that institutions play a role in ensuring that students are retained in higher education, more needs to be done in the form of inducting students into the higher education space. The general feeling is the assumption that students who find their way into higher education are aware of the expectations, both academic and cultural, this assumption requires revisiting. While other universities outside of South Africa provide rigorous programmes for first year students, there is a need for South African students to innovate customised programmes that will initiate students into what being a student in South African higher education entails. Alongside the provision of bursaries that mainly address the socio-economic challenges of disadvantaged students, more need to be done to address the cultural shock experienced by these students resulting from the misalignment of their cultural capital and habitus with that of the institutions of higher education in which they find themselves.

7.9 Limitations of the study and areas of further research

The study was designed to explore socio-economic and academic challenges of students from disadvantaged backgrounds. While South Africa is considered a rainbow nation represented by various races, the current study excluded representation of the coloured, Asian or white communities. Anecdotal evidence shows that while socioeconomic struggles are chiefly experienced by black students, the Office of Student Affairs receive cases from across a diversity of races, from students suffering similar hardships. A recommendation for further studies would therefore be of one that would focus on students from other races to determine how the cultural factors play into their being students from disadvantaged backgrounds in institutions of higher education.

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Appendix 1

Research Office

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

CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE	**PROTOCOL NUMBER: H19/02/34**
PROJECT TITLE	Socio-economic and academic challenges faced by undergraduate students from disadvantaged backgrounds at the Wits School of Education
INVESTIGATOR(S)	Mr B Zungu
SCHOOL/DEPARTMENT	Education/
DATE CONSIDERED	15 February 2019
DECISION OF THE COMMITTEE	Approved
EXPIRY DATE	27 February 2022

DATE 28 February 2019 **CHAIRPERSON** J - Wright
(Professor J Knight)

cc: Supervisor : Professor N Carrim

DECLARATION OF INVESTIGATOR(S)

To be completed in duplicate and **ONE COPY** returned to the Secretary at Room 10004, 10th Floor, Senate House, University. Unreported changes to the application may invalidate the clearance given by the HREC (Non-Medical)

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

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

PLEASE QUOTE THE PROTOCOL NUMBER ON ALL ENQUIRIES