

**BARRIERS TO ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT OF FIRST YEAR AFRICAN  
STUDENTS AT THE UNIVERSITY OF KWAZULU-NATAL**

**BY**

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**A dissertation submitted to the Faculty of Education at the University of KwaZulu-  
Natal in part fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of**

**MASTERS IN EDUCATION (EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGY)**

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**2005**

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

No research is ever written in a vacuum, and I have to thank many people for their time, contributions, patience, understanding, friendship and assistance in completing this mini-thesis.

- First and foremost Glory to God the Almighty who made this study a success.
- My supervisor, Dr. Z Naidoo for her professional expertise in providing me with motivation and guidance.
- My mother, Mrs. Magdeline Malesolo for her unwavering moral support throughout my education life.
- My brother, Dr. Richard Moremi for his financial and moral support. Fanny David and my sisters, Mercy Johanna and Tebogo Joyce for their patience with my separation from the family during this study.
- My uncle, Dr. David Kalantsho Ramushu and my maternal grandmother, Mrs. Baatseba Mogoshadi Ramushu for their moral support throughout my life.
- Lecturer at the University of KwaZulu-Natal (Westville Campus): Mr. H. Maribwathoho, Chair of School of Educational Studies at the University of Pretoria (Groenkloof Campus), Prof. W.J. Fraser and Mr. Thomas Kekana for their support and encouragement.
- My data capturer, Mr. Chandu Dacheppally, students who participated in this research, administrators, editor and friends for their invaluable assistance who patiently listened to my ideas and endured my sorrows and joy throughout this research, many thanks.

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**DECLARATION**

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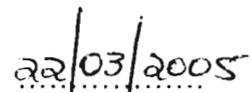
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is the result of my own investigation and research and that it has not been submitted in part or in full for any other degree or to any other University.

  
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## **ABSTRACT**

The present study explores the barriers to academic achievement of first year African students at the University of KwaZulu-Natal.

The sample comprised Howard College and Westville campus students initially but as a result of a poor return rate from Westville campus, only students from the Howard campus were used in the study. Seventy questionnaires were distributed to first year African students at Howard College from the department of Psychology on two consecutive days and the return rate of completed questionnaires was a 100%. The theoretical framework underpinning this study was the social cognitive theory of Bandura. Data were analysed quantitatively and qualitatively. The results from the data indicated that 80% of African students have problems, which affect their academic achievement. The following barriers were identified: financial problems, language difficulties, poor time management, problematic social relationships, personal and psychological problems, lack of accommodation and inability to communicate with lecturers. There were no gender differences between rural students but urban students indicated more males than females experiencing difficulties. Overall more rural students experienced barriers to learning than urban students. A limitation of this study is the small sample size and lack of representation of students from other faculties and therefore generalizations cannot be made. The findings of this study however concur with results of similar studies and suggest some common problems across campuses in South Africa.

## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

#### 1.1 INTRODUCTION

Many African students have moved into tertiary institution since 1994 and have experienced a number of problems affecting their academic achievements. The aim of tertiary study is to develop learners who are independent, confident and self-directed. In South Africa, there is an assumption that learners, who have achieved an above-average performance in their school matriculation examination, will be capable of success at university (Fraser and Killen, 2003). However, this is not always achieved, as first year students experience problems, as secondary education is different from tertiary education. According to Pargetter, Mc Innis and James (1998, p. 1-2) "First year students are likely to make mistakes, not to know 'how to do things', misinterpretation of information which wastes time". Difficulties with access to resources, libraries, and the use of facilities, computers and other elements are experienced.

Chikte and Brand (1996, p.254) assert that "students entering South African universities come from a wide range of social and cultural backgrounds that give them very different life experiences, different educational opportunities and a great variety of expectations, needs and academic potential". Furthermore, first year students have unrealistic expectations about non-academic factors that may reduce their chances of successful study. This study explored barriers, which affect first year African students at the University of KwaZulu-Natal.

Problems experienced by students range from simple economic factors through to personal factors including loss of confidence and in some cases complete or partial withdrawal from the university course chosen, language difficulties, financial difficulties and so on. Farrell and Farrell (2003) contend that first year students are often faced with the situation of being treated as adults at the university and as adolescents at home. According to Barnsley (1999) the factors affecting student's performance include, "Time management, the absence of study groups, financial problems, difficulties in concentration, not consulting lecturers for help and not being sure of why they are not coping".

Pargetter, Mc Innis and James (1998) claim that research done on the differences between students generally enjoying university learning and study and experiencing success and those expressing dissatisfaction, failure or disenchantment, can be largely explained in terms of four sets of factors:

- The perceived quality of teaching, commitment to teaching in different subjects, courses, faculties and universities, the extent of teachers' enthusiasm and interest (including actively welcoming first year students) and a lack of opportunities for questioning or collective discussion. In addition, perceptions that undergraduate students are insignificant and an irritation in particular faculties and departments. The mistakes made by first year students caused the expectations of teacher-student relationships to be often unmet. Student's expectations for independent study and concerns for "low contact hours".
- The absence of clear and effective information about subject and course objectives and assessment methods. These include students often experiencing "good" and "bad" assessment methods in different subjects. Concerns about the frequency and adequacy of feedback, concerns

about “unexplained” assessment, correction or marking in written work, exams and short tests (where work is simply marked without comment which students might learn from on how performance could be improved).

- Whether first year students took advantage of, or had access to a range of transition, orientation or introduction activities and student services after initial orientation. A lack of time management due to peer pressure where alcohol is also an important element. Students who failed to adequately research their preferred courses or who simply followed school advice, parental advice or friendship group advice. Parental pressures concerning course selection also present a major problem in the student’s adjustment to a more independent style of life and learning. Students felt that they had made poor choices based on inadequate or inaccurate information. A failure to overcome fears of isolation and loneliness caused disengagement from the institution.
- The extent to which first year students were able to achieve a successful “social transition”, especially in the first few weeks, leading to academic transition. Additional problems experienced were timetable management, advice about note-taking, subject selection, personal crises, the tendency not to attend lectures, transport problems, the pressure of score-based expectations and identifying independent learning, self-discipline and self-reliance as basic goals of the university. Many students are unsure about how to achieve these goals. Furthermore, the failure or inability to engage with and become part of student-student conversations and a lack of academic motivation, are also problematic.

According to Dassah (2003), language problem affects students in such a way that they spend an average of five years in degree programmes supposed to be completed in three years. Many students in South African tertiary institutions have problems with understanding and using the language of instruction (English) to express their ideas effectively.

In essence, Honikman (1982) stated that black students encounter difficulties in the transition from school to university, compounded by an inadequate educational background leading to feelings of inadequacy in English. Their previous training by rote methods, an ignorance of sociolinguistic conventions (like asking questions in public), their non-participation in group discussions, excessive deference to staff and problems with self-teaching, aggravate the situation. Important problems that black students experience at tertiary institutions include stress, a fear of seeking help, denial of the problem, making mistakes, wasting time, financial issues and the need to be independent. According to Darlaston-Jones, Chen, Drew, Haunold, Pike and Young (2002, p.1), “The transition to university is often associated with stress, anxiety and tension and in many cases can lead to students failing or withdrawing from university”. Black students found themselves struggling academically and underachieving, which resulted in feelings of depression, disillusionment, low self-esteem and guilt, partly the result of not living up to the expectations of their families and communities (Leon, 1987).

The special problems of first year students include preparation, orientation and expectations (Abbott-Chapman, 1999). He further indicates that the main reason for working is financial necessity in order to pay fees.

According to Kantanis (1998), past researchers focusing on transition have concerned themselves primarily with the first year student’s inability to successfully make the transition from the secondary to the tertiary sector. Although other contributory factors to a smooth transition, such as financial, environmental and social have been considered, in reality all four factors are interrelated in such a complex manner that to overlook or dismiss one, devalues the significance

of that particular factor and its influence on the other elements of transition. Wankowski (1969) mentioned boredom and a lack of interest in the course as a result of frustrated tension, which caused difficulties in study.

## **1.2 RATIONALE FOR THE STUDY**

Few studies have been done with regard to the barriers to learning by students at tertiary institutions. In particular there is a gap in research on problems experienced by African students. Achievement, as defined by Straton and Hayes (1993), is “The successful reaching of a goal”. Academic achievement is seen by many as a social passport that provides recipients with economic access, career choices and societal acceptance. This life-long educational journey may require varied resources such as efficacy, inclusively, care, motivation, peer support and an overall culturally relevant and competent learning environment that addresses the whole child, intellectually, spiritually and emotionally (Joseph III, 1998).

According to Krapp (1989), academic achievement involves evaluated outcomes, cognitive structures and interest as characteristics of the achiever. Rodriquez and Magill (1996) assert that, “Achievement motivation, which is a consideration of the individual’s personality and how that personality influences a motivational state given the presence of certain environmental factors. In general, people with a higher need for achievement do better than their counterparts with a low need for achievement”.

Mc Clelland (1953) defined the need to achieve as involving, “Success in competition with some standard of excellence”. Thus, the need to achieve might be considered a differentiated and focused extension of reflectance motivation in which the idea of success in overcoming obstacles or in competing with difficult standards is emphasized. This research will make use of the above-mentioned definitions.

## **1.3 PURPOSE OF THE STUDY**

The purpose of this study is to explore the barriers to learning that first year African students experience at the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN). It is important that factors influencing first year African student’s academic achievement are identified and gender differences in terms of barriers to learning, are established. There is likely to be a difference between rural and urban students and this also needs to be explored.

## **1.4 CRITICAL QUESTIONS**

Critical questions that framed this research were:

- What are the problems or barriers experienced by African students in academic performance at tertiary institution?
- Are there gender differences in terms of barriers to learning of first year African students?
- Are there differences between rural and urban students with regard to academic achievement?

This study has value in the sense that it provides baseline data on the nature of student's barriers to academic achievement in UKZN. Information elicited from this study will encourage further research, and provides recommendations for policy and programmes.

## **1.5 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

This research is informed by the social cognitive theory of Bandura, who regards human beings as agents of their own lives taking into consideration the role of the environment. Lack of role models, self-efficacy and perceptions of students are important. Furthermore, human behaviour is a result of the interaction of personal factors with the environment, redirecting the person to act in certain ways. Cognition plays a critical role in proactively checking the reality of the situation. Coping strategies are also important in the person's environment. According to Feldman (2002) social cognitive theory holds that, "The influence of a person's cognitions - thoughts, feelings, expectations and values, play roles in determining personality. For example, self-efficacy underlies people's faith in their ability to carry out a particular behaviour or produce a desired outcome. People with high self-efficacy have higher aspirations and greater persistence in working to attain goals, and ultimately achieve greater success, than those with lower self-efficacy (Scheier and Carver, 1992, cited in Bandura, 1997, 1999).

Louw and Edwards (1993) emphasized Bandura's theory that "Thinking is important in determining one's behaviour." They further mentioned that a person who has a high score in self-efficacy would be having thoughts like, "This is difficult but I can deal with the situation" or "I can deal with stress effectively".

There are different factors that contribute to student academic achievement and amongst them Stiggins (1997) cited the, "Student satisfaction with overall learning experience, student satisfaction with academic advising, student employment field ration, parents, educators, peers and community exert great influence for students to achieve excellence, student satisfaction with their lecturers and finally, working collaboratively with other students".

Thus, the critical questions which frame the research, the survey questionnaire, data analysis and interpretation will be within the context of social cognitive theory.

## **1.6 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

The research approach will be descriptive using the survey method. The data will be analysed quantitatively and qualitatively. The sample will comprise first year students selected from the Faculty of Humanities in the Department of Psychology. Sampling was purposive with 70 first year African students from the Howard College. Face validity and reliability of the questionnaire were tested. The draft questionnaires were given to four experts in research to validate the questionnaire by commenting on the structure and purpose of the questionnaire. A pilot study was also done. There were a few adjustments to the questionnaire after validation and the pilot study. With regard to analyzing data, the questionnaire comprises of quantitative as well as qualitative analysis of the student's responses. The critical questions were analysed step-by-step, in line with the purpose of this study.

## **1.7 ETHNICAL AND ACCESS CONSIDERATIONS**

This research considered ethical issues by the research committee and ethical clearance was given. A letter was written to the course coordinator and lecturers in the Department of Psychology for permission, assistance and the cooperation of their students to help in completing the questionnaire with honesty. The researcher did the survey with 70 first year African students. Confidentiality and legality issues about the research were also discussed with the students.

## **1.8 LIMITATIONS OF THE RESEARCH**

This research worked within three important limitations. Firstly, time constraints. Secondly, the impact of the new merged institution. The research design has been adjusted accordingly as set out in the methodology section. Thirdly, the data collection plan did not go the way it was initially planned because the sample of students from the University of KwaZulu-Natal (Westville Campus) failed to return the questionnaires although several attempts were made to collect them. Thus the sample comprised 70 first year African students, who returned the completed questionnaires from Howard College and formed the sample for this research.

## **1.9 OUTLINE OF THE STUDY**

The chapters are as follows:

### **Chapter One**

This chapter serves as an introduction to the study. It outlines the context within which the study takes place and provides the rationale, purpose, critical questions and value of the study, the theoretical framework and the research methodology. Chapter one provided a synopsis of the study, the next chapter will review literature relevant to this study.

### **Chapter Two**

This chapter reviews relevant literature in international and national perspectives. The barriers or factors, which influence first year African students, are discussed. The next chapter will provide the theoretical framework of this study.

### **Chapter Three**

This chapter outlines the theoretical framework on which this study is based. The social cognitive theory of Albert Bandura serves as the main theory for the purpose of this research. In addition, other contributory theories for this research were by Higgins, Seligman, Festinger, Bem and Weiner. The next chapter will describe the research methodology, research design, and others including the operational process of the study.

### **Chapter Four**

This chapter describes the research method, research design, research instruments, face validity and reliability as well as their administration. Details relating to the operational process of the study are presented in this chapter. The next chapter will outline the analysis of data and discussion of the results.

## **Chapter Five**

This chapter analyses and discusses the results of the responses from students. The final chapter will provide summary, conclusions, recommendations and limitations of this study.

## **Chapter Six**

This chapter presents the limitations of this research, summary, method of intervention and recommendations (for further research) as well as conclusions.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **2.1 INTRODUCTION**

Research has indicated that most students that have moved into tertiary institutions since 1994 have experienced a number of problems affecting their academic achievement. This study will help to explore those barriers that students experienced. There is a gap in the literature in this area of research. Mc Innis, James and Mc Naught (1995) contend that the first year experience is particularly challenging for most students in terms of their expectations of university life and their, sometimes inadequate, study or learning skills.

A review of research studies registered with the HSRC (Human Science Research Council) indicates one research study, which pertains to student's barriers to academic achievement. Mandell and Michelson (1990) stated that academic skills and orientation were important to acquaint students with the academic tools that will be relevant in their future fields of study.

From the limited literature review, the following barriers to learning of first year African students at South African tertiary institutions seemed important - financial problems, psychosocial relationships, issues related to language, time management and ineffective secondary education. The review will address these barriers to learning. The paucity of a research that describes barriers to learning relevant in the South African context requires the examination of international and national perspectives related to this study.

#### **2.2 INTERNATIONAL PERSPECTIVES**

Although the study is focused on South Africa, it was found that the international perspective was relevant in helping to explore the issues in a South African context.

##### **(a) Financial Issues**

Financial problems seem to be a crucial barrier to learning for students. The fact that students experience financial difficulty is supported by Farrell and Farrell (2003); Miller (1970); Summerskill (1962); Kantanis (1998); Worthington and Grant (1971); Furneaux (1961); Richardson (1990); Johnes (1990) and Lecompte, Kaufman and Rousseeuw (1983).

Financial problems affect academic achievement. Miller (1970) mentioned that financial problems constitute a difficulty faced by first year university students worldwide. Higher education is open largely to those who can afford it. The availability of money, whether from family income or from bursaries, is a determining factor. Farrell and Farrell (2003) also stated that first year students are faced with financial difficulties.

Whereas Johnes (1990) mentioned that students experiencing severe financial hardship had to take a job while at university; this may have detrimental effects on studies and social activities. Kantanis (1998) contends that past researchers, focusing on transition, have concerned themselves primarily with the first year student's inability to successfully make the transition from the secondary to the tertiary sector. First year students fail to understand the difference between secondary education and tertiary education. The fact that secondary schooling differs

from independent learning at tertiary level leaves some first years with confusion on how the system of education operates. Although other contributory factors to a smooth transition, such as financial, environmental and social elements have been considered, all factors are interrelated in such a complex manner that to overlook or dismiss one devalues the significance not only of that particular factor but also its influence on the other elements of transition.

### **(b) Language**

Language is a barrier to student academic achievement in international perspectives. Language in all four macro skills includes listening, speaking, reading and writing. Students experience problem of expression. For example one student expressed, "I want to contribute during the tutorial. I got an idea inside me that I want to get through, but the problem is I don't know how to express it in the correct way". She further stated that the problem with (non-English) students from overseas was that they tended to think in their native tongue and when they spoke they can't put their thoughts into words. They wanted to contribute but they didn't know how. That's the problem, I think (student in Briguglio, 1998, p.9). Students who experienced problems with reading indicated they found reading in English time consuming and difficult. Whereas for other students, the problem was the language of different disciplines (jargon). They further reported that it was not just writing, but expression in intellectually mature academic language, which they found it difficult. Students tend to use slang in their writing. Farrell and Farrell (2003).

### **(c) Psychosocial barriers**

#### **• Inability to form good social relationship**

Inability to form good social relationship can affect student's academic achievement. Peer groups help each other in group discussions and this results in a better understanding of academic work. There are various sociological variables that affect student's academic achievement and amongst them are the mother's level of education, family discord and relationships.

According to Brown (1962) researchers have found that students with better educated parents perform better at university than students with parents whose educational levels are lower. Farnsworth (1962) also contends that the greater pressure to succeed (another characteristic of better educated parents) is a further contributing factor which reinforces the already more stimulating home environment.

### **(d) Cultural issues**

Research has shown that cultural factors seemed to have an influence on student's academic achievement at international levels. Furthermore, culture has an influence on the way people learn and express themselves.

A major contributor to the study of the relationship between psychosocial factors and academic performance is Vincent Tinto. According to Mc Kenzie and Schweitzer (2001), students from different social and cultural backgrounds, with different experiences and varying levels of education bring with them different needs and academic potential. They further mentioned that Tinto developed a student integration model, which suggests that a match between the academic ability and motivation of the student with the social and academic qualities of the institution foster academic and social integration into the university system. Commitment, satisfaction and career orientation, resulted.

According to Tinto's model (1975), if the student is not integrated into the university, the student will develop a low commitment to the university. Tinto's model has gained considerable support in the literature. Terenzini and Pasarella found the most significant predictors of student attrition were academic and social integration variables, with previous academic performance and personality variables accounting for only four percent of the variance in attrition status. However, the prediction that social integration is associated with academic achievement is arguable. Research has shown that social integration into the university is not necessarily beneficial for achieving high grades. Mc Innis, James and Mc Naught (1995) found a higher percentage of students achieving average marks worked in social groups to study, while students achieving the highest and lowest marks were less social in their academic work.

Research has also shown that satisfaction with university, financial situations, career orientation, and social support affect academic performance positively. Rickinson and Rutherford (1995) found dissatisfaction with the course of study was the reason most commonly endorsed for leaving university. Lecompte, Kaufman, and Rousseuw (1983) found financial difficulties were also a common reason for leaving university. In terms of career orientation, Himelstein (1992) reported that students with a clear career orientation achieved higher performances and were less likely to withdraw from university than students lacking a clear career orientation. Social support has also been found to influence academic performance. Whereas, Gerdes and Mallinckrodt (1994) found that the presence of a person who provides strong support and support from family or spouse are important predictors of student retention and academic success.

#### **(e) Learning environments**

Conducive learning environments are required to challenge and stimulate students to act as active and self-directed learners (Brown, Collins and Duguid, 1989, De Corte, 1990). Students acquire new knowledge and skills in the context of authentic complex task situations. Students have to direct their own learning routes and ensure that their learning environments are conducive to more positive achievement.

#### **(f) Secondary schooling**

Research has shown support for the relationship between previous academic performance and university performance. Secondary school grades are not good predictors for a mature age student's performance. Pascoe, Mc Clelland, and Mc Gaw (1997) found the method of entry into university and the ease with which entry could be made into university has also been found to affect the predictive capacity of secondary school grades. Study skills have also been found to influence academic performance. Pantages and Creedon (1975) and Abbott Chapman, Hughes, and Wyld (1992) found that students with poor study habits are more likely to withdraw from university or to have academic adjustment problems in the transition from high school to university.

Certain authors attribute a student's level of performance to academic skills and knowledge acquired before entering college. Secondary school grades and verbal mathematics scores on standardized aptitude tests are considered by some authors to be the most valid predictors of academic success at tertiary level (Aitken, 1982, Conseil des Colleges, 1988, Terrill, 1988, Watkins, 1986, Web, 1988).

### **(g) Time management**

The importance of proper time scheduling has been found to influence student's academic achievement. Students have to be aware of how to manage their time for studying and time for socializing hence education is not only about studying but being able to learn from other people. Harding (1974) rightly noted the amount of time spent on university work could be a significant predictor of achievement. The student must allocate time judiciously so that they do not undermine their academic tasks. The amount of study time and use of library are important for success.

Pargetter, Mc Innis and James (1989) mention that first year students are likely to make mistakes, not to know "how to do things" and misinterpret information which wastes time. They further point out that factors affecting student's performance include time management, no study group, financial problems, difficulties in concentration, not consulting lecturers for help and not being sure of why they are not coping.

### **(h) Orientation**

Richardson (1990) identified categories of students and preparation levels.

- Well prepared with high opportunity orientation

These students came from educational families and attended suburban or high performance inner city schools. Their research also indicated that students receiving more support also had more factual information about college.

- Well prepared with low opportunity orientation

This include small group of well-prepared students lacked the conviction that college would make a significant difference in their lives.

He further stated that in order for students to achieve and become successful, the following variables appear to be important,

- Financial support

- Academic skills and support, which include study skills, note taking, test taking and preparing for tests.

- Social support, which includes many factors not directly associated with classroom activities, can influence academic performance. Students who feel a part of a university, who are involved, are much more likely to be academically successful than those who do not feel a sense of social support.

- Family and community support

### **2.2.1 Summary**

From the international viewpoint, the following barriers to student's academic achievement have been identified as important - financial problems, language, psychosocial barriers (which include an inability to form good social relationships), cultural issues, psychosocial elements, conducive

learning environments, secondary schooling as a predictor of tertiary achievement, lack of time management and orientation.

It will be of importance to look into the national perspective in order to explore specifically the barriers, which students encounter with regard to their academic achievement.

## **2.3 NATIONAL PERSPECTIVE**

Since this study took place in South Africa, the national perspective seems more relevant and specific with regard to factors that contribute to student's academic achievement. The South African context will give a more focused view about barriers. The following barriers will be discussed under this heading - financial problems, psychosocial barriers (which include an inability to form good social relationships), cultural issues, stress and coping processes, language, time management and ineffective secondary education.

### **(a) Financial**

This seems to be a crucial barrier to learning for students nationally. Studies have revealed that students do experience financial problems, which affect their academic achievement.

According to Barnsley (1999) financial problems are one of the factors affecting student's performance. He further stated that a student's financial worries could not be underestimated. Often students are unaware of financial aid programs and cannot find people to stand as surety for loan applications. This leads to a great deal of anxiety and frustration and is very time consuming for students. Many of them are forced to register late due to a lack of funding.

### **(b) Education**

The government has to review its education system and policies with an idea of the implications it has on students, implementation, time and investment. Cloete (2002) listed the following concerns,

- Access equity

Government should make financial provision for the improvement of equity of access in the higher education system. He further stated, "A new funding framework for higher education in South Africa should be developed which is consistent with the principles of equity including redress, development, democratization, efficiency, effectiveness, financial sustainability and shared costs".

- Equity and redress

Government funding of higher education must be employed to ensure that the South African higher education system becomes an equitable one.

- Development

The higher education system must be responsive to the needs of a developing economy, which is aspiring to become competitive.

- Effectiveness, efficiency and sustainability

Government funding of the higher education system must be directed at ensuring that the system achieves its pre-determined goals at the lowest possible cost. The system must be an affordable one.

### **(c) Language**

There is consensus about language as a barrier to academic achievement. Most researchers said language is an important factor affecting student's performance and this includes Dassah (2003) and Honikman (1982).

Dassah (2003) asserted, "Language problem lead to students spending an average of five years in degree programmes supposed to be completed in three years". Many students in South African tertiary institutions have problems with understanding and using English (the language of instruction) to express their ideas effectively.

Black students encounter difficulties in the transition from school to university. Furthermore, Honikman (1982) mentioned that an inadequate educational background leads to feelings of inadequacy in English.

### **(d) Psychosocial Barriers**

An inability to form good social relationships seems to be an important factor affecting student's academic achievement. A peer group helps each other in group discussions and this results in a better understanding of the work. According to Bojuwoye's study (2002), issues revolved around developmental tasks and identity and intimacy, included issues around demands for new social adjustments and the development of new social skills. He emphasized the cultivation of new friends, especially those of the opposite sex, new values and learning to share with others, as well as the preparation for adult roles, as a worker, a citizen or family member. Social relationships have a great influence on academic achievement. Students who fail to form good social relationships miss the opportunity of experiencing what is meant to be a student at a tertiary institution and to study effectively at the same time. He also mentioned that factors, which manifest as academic problems, are in fact psychosocial in nature. The social cognitive theory of Bandura is based on the premise that social aspects influence thinking.

Other researchers who supported inability to form good social relationship as a barrier to student's academic achievement were Chikte and Brand (1996); Gounden (1977) and Barnsley (1999).

According to Chikte and Brand (1996), students entering South African universities come from a wide range of social and cultural backgrounds and very different life experiences, different educational opportunities and needs. They further contend that to admit students who, for whatever reason, have no chance of academic success would be immoral. First year students may have unrealistic expectations about non-academic factors that could reduce their chances of successful study. Barnsley (1999) found that students, who register late, often suffer with an even greater sense of loneliness, isolation and alienation.

Research evidence indicates that family discord has an adverse affect on academic achievement at university. Gounden (1977) mentioned, "Individuals who seek education at tertiary level come from egalitarian and democratic homes with decision-making not centered on one person".

Studying is encapsulated within the context of social processes. To relate to other people and to have success are important issues.

Bojuwoye (2002) mentioned that the university environment can be a rich source of stress to new students and that the stress-related aspects of the university may be experienced differently by different groups of students, depending on their institutional affiliation, gender or age.

The beginning of university studies represents the first entrance into adult life for many young people, but also corresponds to a long period of suspension as far as social duties and definite choices are concerned.

Social support, coping strategies and locus of control form part of the above. Malefo (2000) mentioned that the 'multidimensional' theories of stress, coping and adaptation in the exploration of factors, influence academic performance. The multidimensional models usually comprise of a consideration of a student's personal background, an investigation of various types and sources of stress and the consideration of different factors that serve as mediators of stress to predict functional and health outcomes.

#### **(e) Culture**

Cultural issues seemed to have an impact on student's academic achievement, culture has an influence on the way students learn and express themselves. Manthe, Smallwood and Eksteen (2003) stated that students do experience academic related problems due to cultural differences in the environment.

#### **(f) Time Management**

A lack of time management affected student's academic achievement. Barnsley's study (1999) of exploring psychological factors of students found that time management has an impact on a student's performance.

#### **(g) Secondary Education**

Manthe, Smallwood and Eksteen (2003) argue that academic problems arise as a result of an ineffective secondary education process.

### **2.3.1 Summary**

From the national perspective, the following barriers were identified as important in affecting student's academic achievement - financial problems (including education system policies), language, psychosocial barriers (which include the inability to form good social relationships), stress, coping processes, cultural issues, a lack of time management and ineffective secondary education.

Student's barriers to academic achievement will be explored further with reference to student's responses to the questionnaire in Appendix 2 (b) - Section C. Social cognitive theory has helped to frame the literature review in this study.

Chapter three focuses on the theoretical framework within which issues related to barriers to first year African student's academic achievement is highlighted.

## CHAPTER THREE

### THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

#### 3.1 INTRODUCTION

A number of theories were considered in order to arrive at a theoretical framework to underpin this study. The social cognitive theory of Albert Bandura seems to be most relevant. Thus, this research is informed by the social cognitive theory postulated by Bandura, who regards human beings as agents of their own lives. The theory takes into consideration the role of the environment, the influence of role models, self-efficacy, beliefs and perceptions. Furthermore, the theory emphasizes that behaviour is a result of the interaction of personal factors and the environment, pre-directing the person to act in certain ways. Social cognitive theory has previously been known as 'social learning theory' in order to encompass Bandura's further developments of the theory (Bandura 1925). His theory also helps clarify various barriers affecting student's achievement at tertiary institutions. In addition to a discussion of Bandura's theory, the theories that have contributed to this framework will also be discussed.

#### 3.2 SOCIAL COGNITIVE THEORY

Coping plays a critical role in checking the reality of a situation. Coping strategies are regarded as important in the person's environment (Feldman, 2002). According to Feldman (2002), social cognitive theory is about the influence of a person's cognitions, thoughts, feelings, expectations and values in determining personality, the role played by self-efficacy, and beliefs in one's own personal capabilities. Self-efficacy includes the person's ability to carry out a particular behaviour or produce a desired outcome. Research has shown that people with high self-efficacy have higher aspirations and greater persistence in working to attain goals, and ultimately achieve greater success, than those with lower self-efficacy (Scheier and Carver, 1992 cited in Bandura, 1997, 1999).

Louw and Edwards (1993) emphasized the importance in Bandura's theory that thinking was important in determining one's behaviour. They further mentioned that a person who has a high score in self-efficacy would be thinking thoughts like "This is difficult but I can deal with the situation" or "I can deal with stress effectively".

Social cognition has its roots in social psychology, which attempts to understand and explain how the thoughts, feelings, and behaviour of individuals are influenced by the actual, imagined, or implied presence of others (Bandura, 1925). It studies the individual within a social or cultural context and focuses on how people perceive and interpret information they generate themselves (intrapersonal) and others (interpersonal).

Whereas Boaler (2000) stated that student's attitudes and their perceptions play a major role in their academic achievement. For example, "It is too hard so I won't learn anything". Other students go to an extent of giving up studying because self-discipline is so difficult.

The sociological models focus on the identification and interaction of variables as students make decisions about entering higher education. According to Cosser and du Toit (2002) there are a number of factors that influence student enrolment decisions, including socio-economic status (especially family background), academic ability, significant other, educational aspirations and

motivation to succeed. This theory will serve to explore factors influencing first year African student's academic achievement and gender differences in terms of barriers to learning.

Parental education and social economic status have an impact on student achievement, although the exact nature is not clear. Research has shown that parental education and family socioeconomic status are not good predictors of student academic achievement. A lack of congruence between home and school culture is another aspect to look at. Congruence between home and school cultures are good predictors of student academic achievement. Students tend to be more successful when their home and school cultures are similar. Conversely, they tend to be less successful when there is a disconnection between the home and the school culture.

Albert Bandura's social cognitive theory provides a theoretical framework for understanding and explaining human behaviour. Social relationships are also important in student's academic achievement where students look to their role models. If an African student is female, role models tend to be in parliament and if an African student is male, role models are in various business sectors. What needs to be explored is urban students associating themselves with urban professionals and rural students associating themselves with rural professionals. Performance accomplishments, in anecdotal evidence, some African students reported that the first year experience was a difficult year for them with regard to their academic performance. Some African students reported that the first year experience was a good teacher. Some students failed their first year whereas others managed to pass. Motivation plays a major role in a student's academic achievement. The highly motivated student tends to achieve better whereas the unmotivated student tends to achieve poorly.

According to Harre' and Lamb (1986), social cognitive theory recognizes processes which explain the fact that observers "abstract common features from seemingly diverse responses and formulate generative rules of behaviour that enable them to go beyond what they have seen or heard". The aim of education is to produce students who are independent, creative and can think about abstract concepts.

Pajares (1941) asserted that Bandura altered the label of his theory from social learning to social 'cognitive' both to distance it from prevalent social learning theories of the day and to emphasize that cognition plays a critical role in people's capability to construct reality, self-regulate, encode information and perform behaviours. For example, in school, teachers have the challenge of improving the learning abilities and confidence of the students in their charge. It is believed that students should develop the desire and initiative to perform better and be dedicated. Using social cognitive theory as a framework, teachers can improve their student's emotional states, correct faulty self perceptions and habits of thinking, improve academic skills and self-regulatory practices and alter the classroom structures that may work to undermine student success.

Mwamwenda (1995) claims that, "Africans have been told by other people of other races that they are inferior and incapable of doing a number of things" and that Africans, when given the opportunity, are incapable. This kind of mindset must be done away with. Lack of self-discipline in students makes them doubt their capabilities. High levels of stress are also related to students having poor self-confidence. Students who are more motivated and self-confident tend to perform better.

Bandura's social cognitive theory is rooted in a view of human agency in which individuals are agents engaged in their own development and can make things happen by their actions. Individuals possess a belief in themselves that enable them to exercise a measure of control over

their thoughts, feelings and actions. "Which people think, believe and feel affects how they behave" (Bandura, 1986). Thus, individuals are viewed as products and producers of their own environments and social systems. Because human lives are not lived in isolation, Bandura expanded the conception of human agency to include collective agency. People work together on shared beliefs about their capabilities and common aspirations, to better their lives. Social cognitive theory posits that factors such as economic conditions, socio-economic status, and educational and familial structures do not affect human behaviour directly.

Rooted within Bandura's social cognitive perspective is the understanding that individuals are imbued with certain capabilities that define what it is to be human. Capabilities provide human beings with the cognitive means by which they are influential in determining their own destiny. The way students think and socialize can help them realize their potential. Individuals solve cognitive problems and engage in self-directedness and forethought.

Walker, Posner and Wise (2003) mentioned that, within the theory, confidence and consequences are represented by the constructs of self-efficacy and outcome expectancy, respectively (Bandura, 1986).

### **3.3 SELF-EFFICACY**

Different authors define self-efficacy differently. Self-efficacy as defined by Walker, Posner and Wise (2003) is "...the confidence people have in their abilities to achieve a specified level of achievement in a particular context" (Bandura, 1986, 1977). They further mentioned that people who are more efficacious try new behaviours, expend more effort on those behaviours and persevere longer when they encounter challenges. Perceptions of efficacy are influenced by performance accomplishments, vicarious experiences, verbal persuasive messages and physiological signals. The latter aspects will be explained in detail on the following discussion. Self-efficacy has a strong, positive direct effect on intention and indirectly on outcome expectancy, which, is strongly and positively related to intention.

People will be more likely to attempt behaviours that they expect will lead to desirable outcomes such as rewards, feelings of pride or lowered anxiety rather than behaviours which lead to undesirable outcomes (such as feelings of failure or guilt). With regard to outcome expectations people ask, "Will I like the results if I do it?"

Whereas Corsini (1994) defines self-efficacy as including the beliefs that regulate human functioning through cognitive, motivational, emotional and selection processes. These four processes influence a student's academic achievement and performance standard.

Self-efficacy includes the perception or judgment of one's ability to perform a certain action successfully. According to Magill, Rodriguez and Turner (1996) people can think through different options imagine possible outcomes and guide their behaviour by anticipated consequences. According to Bandura, the most central of all mechanisms to self-regulation is self-efficacy, defined as the belief that one has the ability with one's actions, to bring about a certain outcome. He goes on to claim that self-efficacy in people's beliefs about their capabilities to perform a task successfully cause them to attempt a particular task and they tend to perform better at it than those who do not believe they can perform the task successfully even if they have the same ability. Self-efficacy beliefs function as determinants of behaviour by influencing motivation, thought processes and emotions in ways that may be self-aiding or self-hindering. Self-efficacy appraisals determine the goals people set for themselves, whether they anticipate

and visualize scenarios of success or failure, whether they embark on a course of action, how much effort they expend and how long they persist in the face of obstacles.

Self-efficacy is defined as “a person’s belief in their ability to produce desired results by their own actions”. According to Bandura (1986) there are four ways of developing a strong sense of efficacy,

- Mastery. People achieve goals. Overcoming or managing failures is important.
- Social modeling. People see others like themselves being successful.
- Social persuasion. Peoples are persuaded by others that they can succeed and given experiences that build their abilities and confidence.
- Physical and emotional states. People learn to accurately read their own physical and emotional states.

Self-efficacy is “the belief in one’s capabilities to organize and execute the sources of action required adapting to prospective situations” (Bandura, 1986).

Bandura used the term self-efficacy to refer to a person’s belief that he or she can successfully carry “...courses of action requiring dealing with prospective situations containing many ambiguous, unpredictable, and often stressful elements” (Bandura and Schunk, 1981). Therefore, self-efficacy is a person’s belief that they have behavioural competence in a particular situation.

According to Bandura (1986) ways in which self-efficacy is required include,

- Performance accomplishments. Past experiences of success and failure in attempts to accomplish goals are the most important regulators of self-efficacy. Refer to Appendix 3(b) (questionnaire) to explore student’s performance accomplishments. With regard to past experiences, some African students reported that they repeated their first year whereas others passed their first year.
- Vicarious experience. When individuals witness other’s successes and failures, they are provided with information, which they can use as a basis for comparison for their own personal competence in similar situations. The questionnaire (Appendix 3.b) will help to explore this area.
- Verbal persuasion. Being told by others that one can or cannot completely perform a particular behaviour can lead to increases or decreases in self-efficacy. Questionnaire (refer to Appendix 3.b) will help to explore this area.
- Emotional arousal. Levels of self-efficacy are also influenced by the degree and quality of the emotional arousal an individual experiences when engaging in a particular behaviour in a specific situation. Refer to questionnaire (Appendix 3.b) to explore this area in more depth.

According to Huitt and Hummel (1996) Bandura’s work draws from both behavioural and cognitive views of learning. He believes that mind, behaviour and the environment all play an important role in the learning process. The same applies to student’s experiences of learning difficulties. Refer to questionnaire (Appendix 3.b) section B which will help clarify the role of

the environment in the learning process of students. Also, item 14 will help to explore the contextual factor of the family situation in the learning process.

Albert Bandura viewed an interaction among three things when dealing with social cognitive theory; the environment, behaviour and the person's psychological processes. These psychological processes comprised an ability to entertain images and language in our minds.

In order to understand social cognitive theory better one has to know the cognitive social learning variables that can be distinguished. Mischel (1993) mentioned these social cognitive variables as:

- Encoding strategies. (How do you see it?)
- Expectancies. (What will happen?)
- Values. (What is it worth? What are your goals?)
- Plans. (How can you achieve it?)
- Competencies. (What can you do?)

In addition to Bandura's theory, there are other contributory theories.

### **3.4 CONTRIBUTORY THEORIES**

The important contributory theories towards social cognitive theory were by Higgin, Seligman, together with Festinger, Ben and Weiner. Mischel (1993) quoted Higgin and Seligman.

#### **● Higgin's Theory**

This theory involves cognition and emotion and was postulated by Higgin in 1987. Cognition and emotion affect student's academic achievement. He proposed that each person has multiple mental representations of the self and that a discrepancy between any pair of these representations has emotional consequences. Three big categories of representations are actual, ideal and ought self. The actual self is who one really is. The ideal self is who one would like to be. The ought of self is who one feels it is one's duty to be. His theory is an elaborate way of subdividing personality. Higgin's division of personality into six components might be compared to Freud's division into three (id, ego and superego).

#### **● Seligman's Theory**

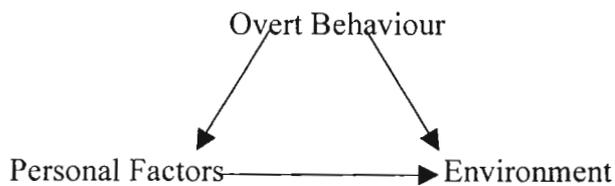
The phenomenon of learned helplessness bears much in common with depression in humans. Learned helplessness results where students find it difficult to grasp the study material or learn. Or, students learn but the content does not help them to achieve in any way. The theory was reformulated in order to take into account the way people explain negative events to themselves.

### ●Festinger, Bem and Weiner’s Theories

Festinger’s cognitive-dissonance theory, postulated in 1957, Bem’s (1972) self-perception theory and Weiner’s (1985) attribution theory, are additional examples of how the perspectives of social cognition have been applied to the study of the learning process. The model in figure 3.1 explains the relationship between personal factors such as cognitive skills or attitudes and behaviour or the environment as an important fact to consider in thinking.

Fig 3.1

#### The model to describe the relationship between three factors affecting thinking and learning.



Two principles of human functioning related to student learning involved the processes of self-efficacy (can this be done? Can I do it?) and self-regulation (goals, plans, perseverance). These issues are sometimes referred to as conative processes. Conation refers to the connection of knowledge and affect to behaviour and is associated with the issue of “why”. It is the personal, intentional, playful, deliberate, goal-oriented, or striving component of motivation, the proactive (as opposed to reactive or habitual aspects of behaviour) (Baumeister, Bratslavsky, Muraven and Tice 1998), Emmons (1986).

One of the most important types of self-reflection is self-efficacy. In fact, self-efficacy has become a central focus of Bandura’s research, as he contends that self-efficacy is a major determinant of self-regulation. Self-efficacy is a type of self-reflective thought that affects one’s behaviour (Bandura, 1977b, 1989). According to the theory, people’s perceptions about their own abilities and characteristics, guide their behaviour by determining what a person tries to achieve and how much effort they put into their performance (Bandura, 1977b).

The empirical research, contributing to the theory of Bandura, follows.

### 3.5 EMPIRICAL RESEARCH

Bandura’s theory is well grounded in research. Its terms are very tightly and clearly defined and lend themselves well to empirical research. Probably the most significant contribution of social cognitive theory is its applied value. In order for people to learn, thinking and social aspects play a major role. Other theorists, such as Festinger, Bem and Weiner, have helped to frame social cognitive theory.

### 3.6 SUMMARY

The critical questions that framed the research, survey, data analysis and interpretation will be within the context of the social cognitive theory. A number of theories were considered in order to arrive at Bandura’s social cognitive theory. Issues that needed to be explored (the functioning of role models, self-fulfilling prophecy and performance accomplishments) were better served

using Bandura's theory as a tool. Seligman's theory of learned helplessness also seemed to play a role in Bandura's theory.

The next chapter deals with research design and methodology. The measuring instrument used to capture data on the nature of the barriers to academic achievement of first year African students at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, was also explored.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND APPROACH

#### 4.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter will explain the research methodology, research design, research instruments, face validity and reliability as well as their administration. Details related to the operational process of this study will also be provided.

This research involves the barriers to learning that first year African students experience at the University of KwaZulu-Natal. To explore barriers to academic achievement of African first year students, a descriptive survey method was chosen as the unit of analysis. A questionnaire was developed covering the purpose and critical questions posed in this study. Data was analysed quantitatively and qualitatively. The sample comprised 70 first year African students from the Department of Psychology. Sampling was purposive.

#### 4.2 METHOD AND APPROACH

The researcher administered a questionnaire developed for the purpose of the study to all participants in the sample. Face validity was determined with four experts and a pilot study was conducted with 10% of the sample comprising an equal number of male and female participants. Male and female participants from both rural and urban areas will participate in this research.

#### 4.3 RESEARCH INSTRUMENT

The information that was required from this sample concerned the barriers to academic achievement of first year African students. In the literature review, the researcher was able to locate an instrument that was related to the objectives of this study and nature of the data required. A questionnaire (Appendix . . .) was developed and constructed based on a review of literature. It was then given to four experts to comment about its structure.

##### 4.3.1 Questionnaire

A covering letter was sent to the course coordinator and lecturers at Department of Psychology at Westville and Howard College clarifying the purpose of the research, issues of confidentiality, time frame for returns and departmental permission was gained by the researcher

- **Section A - biographical details**

This section comprised questions eliciting demographic characteristics and included identification, contact numbers, gender, age, marital status and area of living.

- **Section B**

This section comprised a checklist of about fourteen items where a student had to give a “yes” or “no” response and expand on the choice of their response.

- **Section C**

This section comprised two open-ended questions, which require open answers and two optional open questions, which again require open answers.

#### **4.4 FACE VALIDITY AND RELIABILITY**

The validity and reliability of this questionnaire were established. Face validity was established by submitting the draft questionnaires to four experts in research to validate the questionnaire by commenting on the structure and purpose of the questionnaire. The following were comments and suggestions from the experts;

- **Section A**

It was indicated that perhaps students who want a follow-up interview should state it in Section A. Furthermore, information should be collected by both interviewing and filling in the questionnaire at the same time. For example, name and contact details are requested for follow-up interviews. This was changed to, “Please furnish your name and contact details for follow-up interviews”.

- **Section B**

All the experts were satisfied with the items. There were additional statements added and these included – ‘Do the lecturers respond favourably? (Yes/No)’ and ‘Should you form part of a study group? (Yes/No)’.

- **Section C**

Suggestions made included,

More space should be provided for student’s responses, “factors” should be clarified by giving an example and “personal” should be clarified by giving an example.

Changes made included,

C.1 “What difficulties do you experience in your studies?” was changed to “List difficulties that you experience in your studies”.

C.2 “What are the factors that you consider have contributed to your problems?” was changed to “What do you consider as the contributing factors to the problems you face at university”?

C.3 “Are there personal issues that might hinder you to achieve better at university”? was changed to “Are there personal issues that might hinder your higher achievement at university?”

C.4 “Mention any suggestions or strategies that you think can help you to achieve better at university” was changed to “Mention any suggestions or strategies that you think could assist you to obtain better results at university”.

## 4.5 PILOT STUDY

A pilot study was conducted with first year African students comprising of 5 females and 5 males from both rural and urban areas. There were no changes made to the questions/statements from the questionnaire.

### ● **First year African urban student's comments**

These were the comments from both males and females.

Section A

No comments caused changes to be made.

Section B

Problems identified were experiencing difficulty in adjusting to different teaching styles, do not contact lecturers if experiencing difficulty and not been sure whether time is managed appropriately.

Section C

Overload of work and lack of facilities, for example, computers.

### ● **Suggestions**

Library visit, appropriate time management and getting more assistance.

### ● **First year African rural student's comments**

Section A

No comments caused changes to be made.

Section B

Problems identified were problems with their studies, difficulty in adjusting to different teaching styles and do not feel comfortable in group discussions.

Section C

Problems identified were losing concentration during lecturer periods because of disturbance, (cell phone rings and lack of discipline), not having enough information, over crowdedness, financial problems, lack of facilities (computers), language problem and time management.

### ● **Suggestions:**

Paying more visits to mentors, studying everyday, finding help to get computers, managing time appropriately, visiting library, attending all lecturer periods, focusing on studies and the university should organize extra lessons for disadvantaged students.

#### **4.5.1 First year African student's problems**

These include difficulty in adjusting to different teaching styles, time management, work overload, lack of facilities (computers), losing concentration during lecture periods, lack of discipline, overcrowding, lack of information, financial problems, language problems, inability to form good social relationships (no friends at campus, feelings of loneliness), poor performance and poor high school education.

##### **(a) Data Analysis**

All the experts made suggestions for changes to the questionnaire.

##### **(i) Analysis of the results of the pilot study**

All first year students both males and females did not make any changes to the statements or questions as they did not experience problems with the questionnaire. Eighty percent of first year African students were from rural areas. They seemed to have experienced more problems than those from urban areas. Twenty percent of first year African students were from urban areas. They still experienced some problems. A general statement is that all first year African students experienced problems.

##### **(ii) Integration of Results**

From the first year African female students, the themes that emerged were difficulty in adjusting to different teaching styles, time management, work overload, lack of facilities (computers), losing concentration during lecturer periods (noise, discipline), lack of information, overcrowding, financial problems and language problems.

From the first year African male students, the themes that emerged were language problems, difficulty in adjusting to different teaching styles and environments, an inability to form good social relationships (loneliness), poor performance, and time management and poor high school education.

#### **4.6 SUMMARY**

The research methodology (quantitative and qualitative methods) highlighted the problems that first year African students experienced with regard to their academic achievement. Face validity and a pilot study of the questionnaire helped to clarify the relevancy of the questions. This gave a better idea of how to go about a big sample. The first and final questionnaires have been attached at Appendix (a) and (b).

Chapter Five deals with data collection, analysis of data and discussion of results.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

#### 5.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter looks at the return rate of questionnaires, analysis and discussion of results. The sample comprised 70 first year African students selected from the Department of Psychology at the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN). The students from Westville campus did not respond with regard to returning questionnaires but students from Howard College responded with a 100% return of completed questionnaires and this limitation reduced the analysis of data and interpretation to a smaller but manageable population of 70 first year African students. Data will be analyzed according to the purpose of this study. The purpose of this study was to explore the barriers to learning that first year African students experience at the University of KwaZulu-Natal. It is important that factors influencing first year African student's academic achievement are identified and gender differences in terms of barriers to learning are established. In essence, the critical questions have provided with insight in analysis data and these included:

- What are the problems or barriers experienced by African students in academic performance at tertiary institution?
- Are there gender differences in terms of barriers to learning of first year African students?
- Are there differences between rural and urban students with regard to academic achievement?

#### 5.2 PROCESS

##### • Questionnaire

Questionnaires were distributed to first year African students from the Department of Psychology at Westville campus. Students were given two weeks to return the questionnaires on the Westville Campus but did not return the questionnaires. The number of questionnaires handed out to Westville students was 100 with 0% of return rate. On the other hand, questionnaires were distributed to first year African students at Howard College from the Department of Psychology on two consecutive days and the return rate of completed questionnaires was done on same days with a 100% return rate.

##### • Sample

The sample thus comprised first year students from Howard College campus. The number of questionnaires handed out to Howard College students was 70 with a 100% return rate.

#### 5.3 DATA ANALYSIS

In order to get more in-depth analysis of student responses, the researcher analyzed student's responses in terms of quantitative and qualitative analysis.

### 5.3.1 Quantitative Analysis

According to Mc Millan and Schumacher (2001) quantitative data analysis refers to the data that use numbers to describe or measure the results. Data is tabulated and described statistically. Data was analyzed using the SPSS program and spreadsheet attached. (Refer to Appendix ). Results are reported in frequencies and percentages.

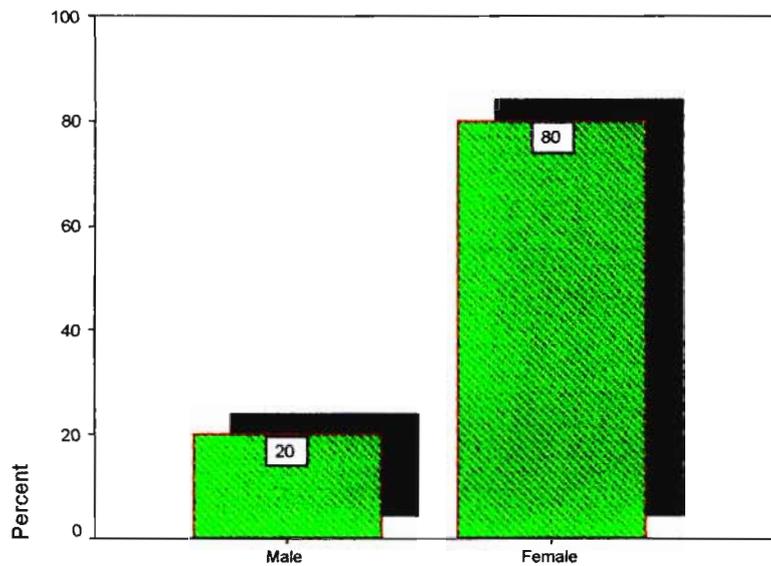
#### Section A

Sample was 70 students with 14 (20%) male and 56 (80%) female.

**Table 5.1: Gender**

MALE		FEMALE		TOTAL
No.	Percent	No.	Percent	
14	20%	56	80%	70 (100%)

**Figure 5.1: Gender Differences**



**Table 5.2: Age**

<b>AGE</b>	<b>No. of students</b>	<b>Percent</b>
17	3	4,3
18	19	27,1
19	21	30
20	4	5,7
21	5	7,1
22	4	5,7
23	3	4,3
25	1	1,4
26	2	2,9
29	1	1,4
30	2	2,9
39	1	1,4
42	2	2,9
<b>Missing</b>	2	2,9
<b>Total</b>	70	100%

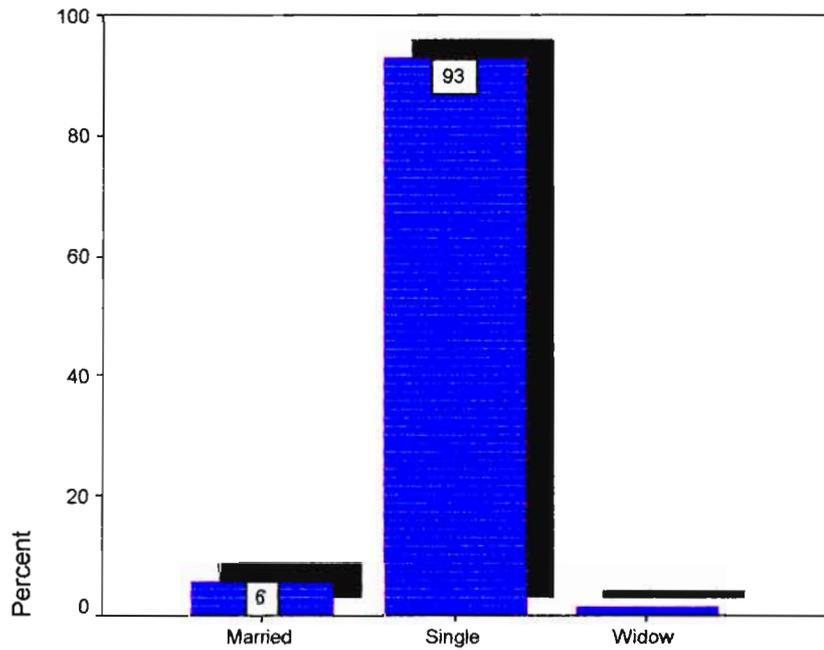
The ages ranged from 17 years to 42 years. The majority of students were between 18 and 19 years old.

**Table 5.3: Marital status**

<b>MARRIED</b>		<b>SINGLE</b>		<b>WIDOW</b>		<b>TOTAL</b>	
<b>No.</b>	<b>Percent</b>	<b>No.</b>	<b>Percent</b>	<b>No.</b>	<b>Percent</b>	<b>No.</b>	<b>Percent</b>
4	5,7	65	92,9	1	1,4	70	100%

The majority of students in the sample were single.

**Figure 5.2: Marital Status Differences**

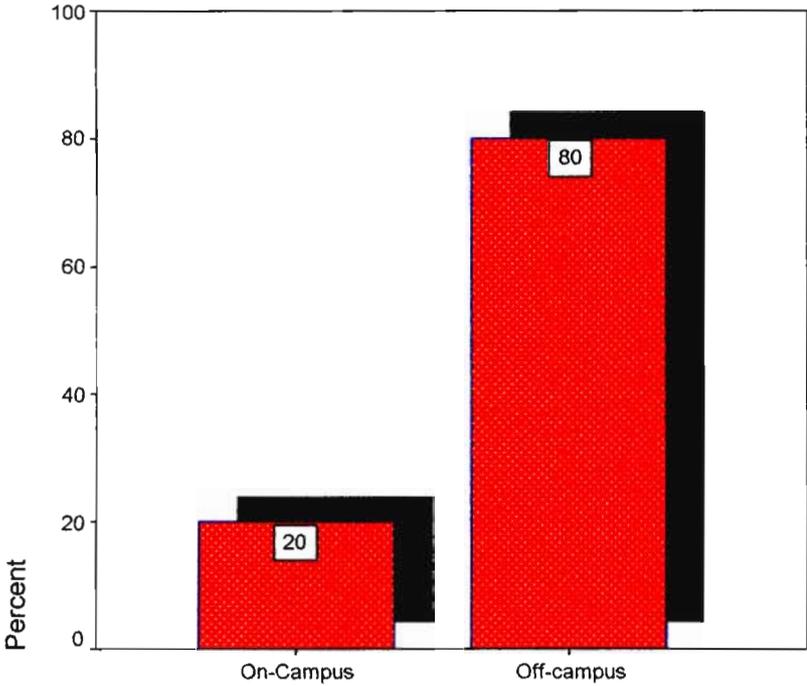


**Table 5.4 Accommodation**

ON-CAMPUS		OFF-CAMPUS		TOTAL	
No.	Percent	No.	Percent	No.	Percent
14	20	56	80	70	100

The majority of students lived off-campus (80%) with only 20% living on-campus.

**Figure 5.3: Accommodation (on-campus or off-campus students)**

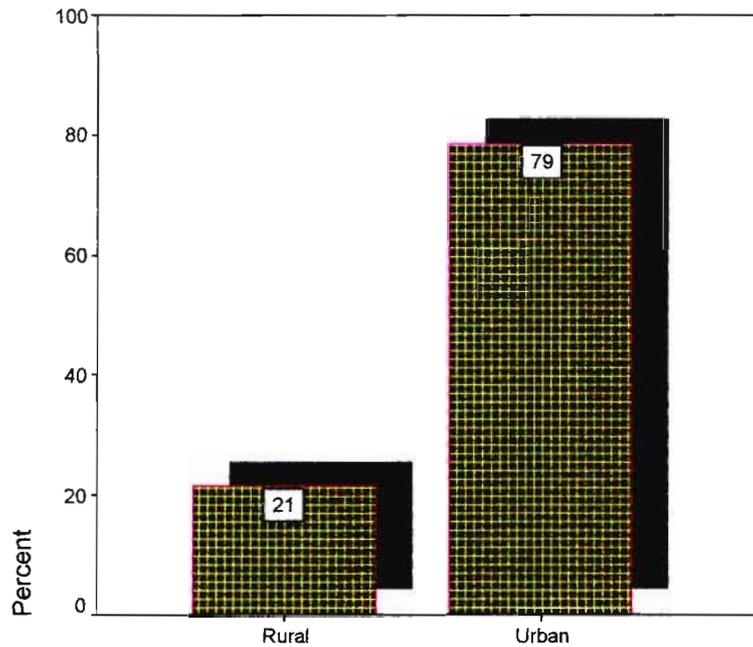


The majority of students were from urban areas indicated in 5.4

**Table 5.5: Area**

RURAL		URBAN		TOTAL	
No.	Percent	No.	Percent	No.	Percent
15	21	55	78,6	70	100

**Figure 5.4: Rural and Urban student Differences.**



The majority of students were from urban areas.

## Section B

**TABLE 5.6: ITEMS FROM CHECKLIST (QUESTIONNAIRE)**

ITEMS FROM CHECKLIST (QUESTIONNAIRE)	YES			NO			MISSING	
	Freq.	Yes	%	Freq.	No	%	Freq.	%
1. Do you enjoy your studies?	68	68	97.1	1	1	1.4	1	1.4
2. Have you experienced problems with your studies?	40	40	57.1	28	28	40	2	2.9
3. Do you experience difficulty in adjusting to different teaching styles?	28	28	40	42	42	60	-	-
4. Do you contact lecturers if you experience difficulty?	37	37	52.9	32	32	45.7	1	1.4
5. Do lecturers respond favorably	50	50	71.4	13	13	18.6	7	10
6. Do you feel comfortable in group discussions?	54	54	77.1	15	15	21.4	1	1.4
7. Are you part of a study group?	28	28	40	42	42	60	-	-
8. Do you have confidence in yourself?	62	62	88.6	7	7	10	1	1.4
9. Is your environment conducive to learning?	52	52	74.3	16	16	22.9	2	2.9
10. Do you have friends on campus?	65	65	92.9	5	5	7.1	-	-
11. Do your friends help you with work	54	54	77.1	15	15	21.4	1	1.4

that you do not understand?								
12. Do you have role models in your life?	59	59	84.3	11	11	15.7	-	-
13. Are you able to manage your time appropriately?	38	38	54.3	31	31	44.3	1	1.4
14. Do you have a good relationship with your family?	66	66	94.3	4	4	5.7	-	-

## Comments

Refer to (Appendix -questionnaire). Sections B (checklist). These were general responses of the whole sample.

In item 1, 68 students (97, 1%) responded that they enjoyed their studies whereas 1(1, 4%) student responded that he does not enjoy his studies. One (1, 4%) response was missing.

In item 5, 50 of students (71, 4%) responded that lecturers do respond favorably, whereas 13 (18, 6%) of students responded that lecturers do not respond favorably. Seven (10%) of students did not respond.

In item 6, 54 of students (77, 1%) mentioned that they do feel comfortable in group discussions, whereas 15 (21, 4%) of students responded that they do not feel comfortable in group discussions. 1 (1, 4%) of students did not respond.

In item 8, 62 students (88, 6%) responded that they do have confidence in themselves whereas 7 students (10%) responded that they do not have confidence in themselves. One student did not respond.

In item 9, 52 students (74, 3 %) responded that their environment is conducive to learning, whereas 16 students (22, 9%) responded that their environment is not conducive to learning. Only 2 students did not respond.

In item 10, 65 students (92, 9%) mentioned that they do have friends at campus, whereas 5 students (7, 1) mentioned that they do not have friends at campus.

In item 11, 54 students (77, 1%) mentioned that they their friends help them with work that they do not understand, whereas 15 (21%) mentioned that their friends do not help them with work that they do not understand. Only 1 student did not respond.

In item 12, 59 students (84, 3%) mentioned that they do have role models in their lives, whereas 11 students (15, 7%) mentioned that they do not have role models in their lives.

In item 14, 66 students (94, 3%) mentioned that they have good relationship with their families, whereas 4 students (5, 7) mentioned that they do not have good relationship with their families.

### 5.3.1.1 Detailed analysis of items considered more important

Five items were selected from the checklist to provide a detailed analysis and this required more focus (Refer to Appendix questionnaire - Section B).

- Item 2 - Have you experienced problems with your studies?
- Item 3 - Do you experience difficulty in adjusting to different teaching styles?
- Item 4 - Do you contact lecturers if you experience difficulty?
- Item 7 - Are you part of a study group?
- Item 13 - Are you able to manage your time appropriately?

These questions helped to clarify the various barriers that students experienced with regard to their academic achievement.

### 5.3.1.2 Discussion

**TABLE 5.7: Problems with studies**

Gender	Total		Location					
			Rural			Urban		
	No. of Students	% of Total sample	No. of Students	YES (Problems experience)	%	No. of Students	YES (Problems experience)	%
<b>Male</b>	14	20	3	2	67	11	7	64
<b>Female</b>	56	80	12	8	67	44	23	52
<b>Total</b>	70	100	15	10	67	55	30	55

Table 5.7 refers to analysis of students having problems with their studies. There were 14 male students, which comprise 20%, from rural and urban areas. Two students from rural areas responded that they had problems with their studies. The percentage was 67%. Only 1 student responded that he did not have a problem with his studies. Eleven students were from urban

areas. Seven of them responded that they had problems with their studies. The percentage was 64%. Only 4 students responded that they did not have problems with their studies. The total number of both males from rural and urban areas who were experiencing problems with their studies was 9. The percentage was 64%.

There were 56 female students (80%) from rural and urban areas. Twelve students were from rural areas. Eight of them responded that they had experienced problems with their studies. This means that 4 students had not experienced problems with their studies. The percentage of those experiencing problems with their studies was 67%. Those from urban areas were 44 students. Twenty-three of them responded that they experienced problems with their studies. This means that 21 students did not experience problems with their studies. The percentage of those students who were experiencing problems with their studies was 52%. The total number of students who experienced problems with their studies was 31 (55%).

### Total Sample Analysis

The total sample of both male and female was 70 (100%). Fifteen students were from rural areas. Ten responded that they had problems with their studies (67%). Fifty-five students were from urban areas. Thirty of them responded that they had experienced problems with their studies (55%). The total number of students who experienced problems with their studies was 57%.

### Conclusion

There were no differences between males and females from rural areas with 67% reporting problems with their studies. There was a difference between male and female students from urban areas, with a greater percentage of males (64%) indicating problems than females (52%). Overall more rural students reported difficulties (67%) than urban students (55%).

**TABLE 5.8: Adapting To Teaching Styles**

Gender	Total		Location					
			Rural			Urban		
	No. of Students	% of Total sample	No. of Students	YES (Problems experienced)	%	No. of Students	YES (Problems experienced)	%
Male	14	20	3	1	33	11	8	73
Female	56	80	12	4	33	44	15	34
Total	70	100	15	5	33	55	23	42
			33					



Table 5.8 explains the analysis of student's problems in adjusting to teaching styles. This includes the analysis of males, females and the total sample.

There were 14 male students (20%) from both rural and urban areas. One student responded that he had problems with adjusting to teaching styles, while 2 students responded that they do not have problems adjusting to teaching styles. The percentage of students from rural areas experiencing problems in adjusting to teaching styles was 33%. The number of students from urban areas was 11 and those who experienced problems with adjusting were 8 (73%). The total percentage of students who experienced problems was 64% from rural and urban areas.

The total number of students was 56 (80%). The total number of students from rural area was 12 and those who experienced problems with adjusting to teaching styles were 4 (33%). This means that 8 students did not experience problems with adjusting to teaching styles. The total number of students from urban areas was 44. Those who experienced problems with adjusting to teaching styles were 15 (34%). Those who did not experience problems adjusting were 29. The total percentage of students who experienced problems adjusting was 33%.

### **Total Sample Analysis**

The total number of students from rural and urban area was 70 (100%). Fifteen students were from rural areas. Five students (33%) responded that they experienced problems in adjusting to teaching styles. Fifty-five students were from urban areas and 23 (42%) responded that they had problems with adjusting to teaching styles. The total percentage of students experiencing problems with adjusting to teaching styles was 40%.

### **Conclusion**

There were no gender differences between males and females from rural areas in adjusting to teaching styles. A third (33%) experienced problems but the majority had no problems in this regard. Urban males experienced most problems with 73% fewer urban students reporting difficulties whereas females had adjustment problems (34%). A greater percentage of urban students reported problems with adjusting to teaching styles than rural students.

**TABLE 5.9: Contacting lecturers if experiencing difficulty**

Gender	Total		Location					
			Rural			Urban		
	No. of Students	% of Total sample	No. of Students	YES (Problems experienced)	%	No. of Students	YES (Problems experienced)	%
<b>Male</b>	14	20	3	2	67	11	4	36
<b>Female</b>	56	80	12	4	33	44	27	61
<b>Total</b>	70	100	15	6	40	55	31	56

Table 5.9 explains the analysis of students who have experienced problems with contacting lecturers if experiencing difficulty. The total number of students was 14 (20%). Three students were from rural areas. One student responded that he did not contact lecturers if experiencing difficulty. Two students (67%) responded that they experienced problems with contacting lecturers if experiencing difficulty. The total number of students from urban areas was 11 and 4 (36%) responded that they experienced problems with contacting lecturers. The total percentage of students experiencing problems with contacting lecturers was 43%.

The total number of students was 56 (80%). The number of students from rural areas was 12 of which 4 (33%) responded that they experienced problems with contacting lecturers. The total number of students from urban areas were 44 and 27 (61%) responded that they experienced problems with contacting lecturers. Seventeen students did not experience problems with contacting lecturers. The total percentage of students experiencing problems with contacting lecturers was 55%.

#### **Total Sample Analysis**

The total number of students from rural and urban areas was 70 (100%). The total number of students from rural areas was 15 and 6 (56%) responded that they experienced difficulty with contacting lecturers. The total percentage of students who experienced problems with contacting lecturers if experiencing difficulty was 53%.

## Conclusion

There were no differences between males and females from rural and urban area. The percentage of males from rural areas who experienced problems with contacting lecturers if experiencing difficulty was 67%. Thirty-six percent (36%) from urban areas experienced problems with contacting lecturers. The females (33%) from rural areas experienced problems with contacting lecturers and females (61%) from urban area experienced problems with contacting lecturers. A greater percentage of rural male students reported problems with contacting lecturers than urban students.

**TABLE 5.10: Study Groups**

Gender	Total		Location					
			Rural			Urban		
	No. of Students	% of Total sample	No. of Students	No (Problems not experienced)	%	No. of Students	No (Problems not experienced)	%
<b>Male</b>	14	20	3	1	33	11	4	36
<b>Female</b>	56	80	12	5	42	44	32	73
<b>Total</b>	70	100	15	6	40	55	36	65

Table 5.10 explains the analysis of students who did not experience problems with forming part of a study group. The total number of students was 14 (20%). Three students were from rural areas. Two students responded that they had problems with forming part of a study group. One student responded that he did not experience problem with forming part of a study group (33%). The total number of students from urban area was 11. Seven responded that they experienced problems with forming part of a study group, while 4 responded that they did not experience problems (36%). The total percentage of students, who did not experience problems with forming part of a study group, was 35, 7%.

The total number of students was 56 (80%). Twelve students were from rural areas. Seven students responded that they have experienced problems with forming part of a study group; while 5 students responded that they did not experience problems with forming part of a study group (42%). Forty-four students were from urban areas. Twelve students experienced problems

with forming part of a study group, while 32 students responded that they did not experience problems with forming part of a study group (73%). The total percentage of students who experienced problems with forming part of a study group was 66%.

### Total sample analysis

The total number of students was 70 (100%). Fifteen students were from rural areas. Nine students responded that they experienced problems with forming part of a study group. Six students responded that they did not experience problems with forming part of a study group (40%). The total number of students from urban area was 55. Nineteen students responded that they experienced problems with forming part of a study group, while 36 students responded that they did not experience problems with forming part of a study group (65%). The total percentage of students who did not experience problems with forming part of a study group was 60%.

### Conclusion

There were no gender differences between males and females from rural and urban areas. The lesser percentage (33%) of male students from rural areas did not experience problems with forming part of a study group. A lesser percentage (36%) of males from urban areas did not experience problems with forming part of a study group. Females (42%) from rural areas did not experience problem with forming part of a study group. A greater percentage (73%) of females from urban areas did not experience problems with forming part of study group.

**TABLE 5.11: Managing Time**

Gender	Total		Location					
			Rural			Urban		
	No. of Students	% of Total sample	No. of Students	No (Problems not experienced)	%	No. of Students	No (Problems not experienced)	%
<b>Male</b>	14	20	3	1	33	11	5	45
<b>Female</b>	56	80	12	8	67	44	17	39
<b>Total</b>	70	100	15	9	60	55	22	40

## **Discussion of results in table 5.11**

Table 5.11 explains the analysis of student's problems concerning managing time appropriately. The total number of students was 14 (20%). Three students were from rural areas. Two responded that they managed their time appropriately, while 1 student responded that he had difficulty in managing time appropriately (33%). Eleven students were from urban areas. Six students mentioned that they were able to manage their time appropriately, while 5 students mentioned that they did not manage their time appropriately (45%). The total percentage of students who were not able to manage their time appropriately was 43%.

The total number of students was 56 (80%). Twelve students were from rural areas. Four students responded that they had problems managing their time appropriately, while 8 students responded that they did not experience problems with managing their time appropriately (67%). The total number of students from urban areas was 44. Twenty-seven students responded that they did experience problems with managing their time appropriately, while 17 students did not experience problems with managing their time appropriately (39%). The total percentage of students who experienced problems with managing their time appropriately was 45%.

## **Total sample analysis**

The total number of students was 70 (100%). Fifteen students were from rural areas. Six students responded that they experienced problems with managing their time appropriately, while 9 students responded that they did not experience problems with managing their time appropriately (60%). The total number of students from urban area was 55. Thirty-three students responded that they experienced problems with managing their time appropriately, while 22 students responded that they did not experience problems with managing their time appropriately (40%). The total percentage of students who did not experience problems with managing their time appropriately was 44%.

## **Conclusion**

There was no difference in gender between males and females from rural and urban areas. The lesser percentage (33%) of males from rural areas had difficulty managing time appropriately. Males from urban areas (45%) did not manage their time appropriately. A greater percentage (67%) was females from rural areas who responded and had no problem with managing time appropriately. A lesser percentage (39%) of female students did not experience problems with managing their time appropriately.

### **5.3.2 Qualitative Analysis**

Qualitative analysis refers to a relatively systematic process of selecting, categorizing, comparing, synthesizing, and interpreting to provide explanations of the single phenomenon of interest. This data is in the form of words (Mc Millan and Schumacher, 2001).

The analysis in this study focused on problems or barriers to learning of first year African students. (Refer to questionnaire-Appendix , Section C). Barriers or problems had been identified as internal and or external factors. Internal factors refer to those barriers that affect the student within the institution whereas external factors refer to barriers that affect the students outside the institution.

## • Section B

Barriers identified as 'internal factors' within the institution were the fact that students were identifying themselves with slow learners (3%). Sixty percent (60%) of students mentioned lots of noise at the residence and during lectures, which interfered with effective learning. Eighty percent (80%) of students responded that they had too much work to be done within a short time. Furthermore, they were not happy with their marks; they studied hard and were not getting the expected results. Language problem was another issue (90% of student's responses). One student said, "I do not participate in group discussions, because I am afraid of talking. I do not want people to laugh at me. My English is not good enough and the language is complex". Another issue that students (about 25%) raised was confusion (they get confused when working in groups and prefer to work individually. They do not have problems complex enough to discuss with lecturers (30%). They do not ask for help from lecturers and found difficulty in adjusting to a change of lecturers between semesters. Too many unnecessary meetings and if one misses a meeting she is fined a fee of R50-00, which they find to be unfair (2%). Only 65% of students do not have study groups and 60% of students prefer to study alone at their own pace. 40% of students have problems adjusting to teaching styles. Most of the students (about 80%) mentioned that they experienced racism in tutorials because they are black and do not participate in class discussions.

Barriers identified as 'external factors' within the institution were wasting time, not managing time appropriately (90% of student's responses). Wasting time on public transport and sometimes, when writing tests in the late evening, they get robbed. Students also mentioned extra responsibility (80%), excessive study work (they have to learn and do home chores), multiple activities on campus add to their burden and poor self-esteem (30% of student's responses) cause a lack confidence because they felt the marking strategy is too strict. Twenty-five percent (25%) mentioned that they have poor living environments outside campus. Ten percent (10%) claimed family problems. One student said that he was an orphan child and had taken his girlfriend to be part of his extended family. The student said that, "She had a problematic relationship with her father and said she didn't like him".

## • Section C.1

Barriers or themes that came up from student's responses were identified in terms of internal and external factors. Internal factors (factors within the institution that affect student's academic achievement) cited were language (90% of student's responses). They mentioned that English is complicated. One student said that he was unable to communicate with lecturers and other students, he did not understand the reading material, and he was not able to answer questions in tests well or understand tutors. All the students (100%) mentioned that they had financial problems and a work overload. They studied hard, got poor results and were unable to cope with academic work as there were too many assignments and they had problems coping (100% of student's responses). Eighty percent of students cited racial discrimination. A few students (about 30%) said they did not have enough mentors. Forty percent of student responses indicated that they have difficulty adjusting to new teaching styles and testing styles. They also contended that they had difficulty learning as a result of having no handouts supplied for the courses and were expected to listen during the lecture for which they come unprepared. They further mentioned that the time table is hectic, with no breaks in between, there is overcrowding and no control. According to them, lecturers treat first year students with no respect.

External factors (factors that are outside of the institution that affect student's academic achievement). The percentage of student's responses varied and included a lack of computers (40%), a lack of commitment (48%), students perceiving themselves as slow learners (3%) and finally wasting time (90%).

### ●Section C.3

Barriers were identified as internal and external factors affecting student's academic achievement. Internal factors (factors within the institution that affect student's academic achievement). All the students (100%) mentioned that they have financial problems and are performing badly. A few responses cited a lack of self-confidence (30%) and fear of failure (1%). Students wanted to impress parents by performing.

External factors (factors that are outside the institution that affect student's academic achievement). All the students (100%) mentioned that they had financial problems. One student stated, "I still don't know my examination results from last semester because my fees are still outstanding. I also live far, having to take two taxis to get to varsity and sometimes I get home in the dark and is dangerous for me. This becomes a problem for me as I am usually late for early lectures". Twenty percent (20%) of students mentioned that they have psychological issues, which need to be addressed with professional help. Bereavement was another issue, which they need help to deal with. Fifty percent (50%) of students mentioned that they have transport problems, traveling long distance to and from campus using public transport, accommodation problems and family problems. The latter was expanded upon by one student "I have a problematic relationship with my stepmother. She stays with her stepmother and two younger brothers and sister. The stepmother dominates them. She and her sister are at varsity and their brothers are still in primary school. Dad is in jail, charged with the attempted murder of their stepmother and is struggling to deal with it".

### ● Section C.4

All the students (100%) suggested living on campus or closer to the varsity as a solution to their academic achievement problems. They all wished to acquire bursaries and learn to manage their time appropriately by socializing less. Ninety percent (90%) of students suggested developing self-confidence by overcoming the fear of talking in class and will learn to communicate and be better organized. They suggested being responsible as students, actively attending sessions, tutorials and discussions as well as making contacts with lecturers. Only 50% of students suggested that they need to stay focused and work consistently and be self-disciplined. A few suggested that the current structure was adequate (1%). Five percent (5%) of students suggested that they need to go for counseling before exams commence and 90% of students made the suggestion that the university is playing an important role in helping them to engage in their studies by promoting 'helping sessions' where the students can explore their courses.

There was a correlation between the quantitative and qualitative analysis of data.

## 5.4 INTEGRATING LITERATURE AND ANALYSIS

From the literature review, the barriers that were identified on international and national levels included the following:

- **International**

Financial problems, language, psychological barriers (which include the inability to form good social relationships), cultural issues, psychological predictors of academic performance, conducive learning environments, secondary schooling as a predictor of tertiary achievement, time management and orientation and preparation.

- **National**

Financial problems, language, psychological barriers (which include the inability to form good social relationships), stress/coping processes as psychosocial factors, cultural issues, time management and ineffective secondary education.

### **5.5 RELEVANCY OF SOCIAL COGNITIVE THEORY**

From the theoretical framework of Bandura, the relevancy of this framework was demonstrated as data analysis has outlined student's role models, the way students perceive themselves, the role of the environment in affecting their academic achievement and coping strategies. It was clearly indicated by students how their thoughts, feelings, expectations and values impact on their personality. Self-efficacy was also an important factor that emerged from the data analysis. Personal and psychological issues of students also emerged.

### **5.6 SUMMARY**

Results of this study indicated a number of problems in common with studies conducted both nationally and internationally.

## CHAPTER SIX

### CONCLUSIONS

#### 6.1 INTRODUCTION

This study was an attempt to explore the barriers to academic achievement of first year African students at the University of KwaZulu-Natal (Howard College). The critical questions, which defined this study, were related to the purpose and data analysis. The literature review on barriers to student's academic achievement, both national and international, emphasised that students do experience problems, which affect their academic achievement (refer to chapter two). This study was focused on exploring student barriers to academic achievement within the social cognitive theory of Bandura.

#### 6.2 FINDINGS

Research data indicated that 80% of African students have problems affecting academic achievement at the University of KwaZulu-Natal. The following barriers were identified as influencing students. Financial problems, language, appropriate time management, an inability to form good social relationships, personal and psychological problems, lack of accommodation, lack of facilities and communication with lecturers and others (refer to chapter five). The discussion of the results revealed the following. There were no gender differences between males and females from rural areas. Sixty-seven percent reported problems with their studies. There was a difference between male and female students from urban areas with a greater percentage of males (64%) indicating problems, than females (52%). Overall more rural students reported difficulties (67%) than urban students (55%). With regard to adapting to different teaching styles, there were no gender differences between males and females from rural areas, a third (33%) experienced problems but the majority had no problems in this regard. Urban males experienced most problems (73%). Fewer urban students reporting difficulties whereas females had adjustment problems (34%). A greater percentage of urban students reported problems with adjusting to teaching styles than rural students.

With regard to contacting lecturers when experiencing difficulty, there was no gender difference between males and females from rural and urban areas. The percentage of males from rural areas who experienced problems with contacting lecturers was 67%. Those from urban areas (36%) experienced problems with contacting lecturers. Females (33%) from rural areas experienced problems with contacting lecturers and 61% of females from urban areas experienced problems with contacting lecturers. A greater percentage of rural male students reported problems with contacting lecturers, than urban students. With regard to forming part of a study group, the lesser percentage (33%) of male students from rural areas did not experience problems with forming part of study group. Thirty-six percent of males from urban areas did not experience problems with forming part of study group. Females (42%) from rural areas did not experience problems with forming part of study group. A greater percentage (73%) of females from urban areas did not experience problems with forming part of study group. With regard to managing time appropriately, 33% of males from rural area had difficulty. Males from urban areas (45%) did not manage their time appropriately. A greater percentage (67%) of females from rural areas had no problem with managing time appropriately. A lesser percentage (38%) of female students did not experience problems with managing their time appropriately.

First year African student's problems included difficulty in adjusting to different teaching styles, time management, work overload, lack of facilities (computers), losing concentration during lecture periods, lack of discipline, overcrowding, lack of information, financial problems, language problems, inability to form good social relationships (no friends at campus, feelings of loneliness), poor performance and poor high school education.

Furthermore, results were integrated and the themes that emerged from the first year African female students were language problems, difficulty in adjusting to different teaching styles, time management, work overload, lack of facilities (computers), losing concentration during lecturer periods (noise, discipline), lack of information, overcrowding, financial problems and language problems.

From the first year African male students, the themes that emerged were language problems, difficulty in adjusting to different teaching styles and environments, an inability to form good social relationships (loneliness), poor performance, and time management and poor high school education.

### **6.3 VALUE OF THE STUDY**

This study has provided a baseline data on the nature of student's barriers to academic achievement at the University of KwaZulu-Natal. Information elicited from the exploration of the critical questions would serve to inform guidelines and recommendations for intervention.

### **6.4 LIMITATIONS**

While the sample size of first year African students was adequate for the purpose of this study, care must be taken about generalizations from the sample of students from Howard College.

The research design has been adjusted accordingly as set out in the methodology section. This research on barriers to academic achievement of first year African students, worked within three important limitations. Firstly, time and financial constraints have impacted on the response of the questionnaire. Secondly, the impact of the new merged institution has caused some delay in this study. Thirdly, the data collection plan did not go the way it was initially planned. The sample of students from the University of KwaZulu-Natal (Westville campus) did not respond well with regard to returning completed questionnaires but Howard College students responded well with 100% return of completed questionnaires, which was the sample population of this research. The ideal situation would be for the researcher to administer the survey on the same day and try to get the completed questionnaires on the same day.

### **6.5 RECOMMENDATIONS**

From the exploration of student's barriers to academic achievement in this study, students have to be motivated, encouraged and self-disciplined. The issue of language is important as well. Students should be encouraged to mix with other races to gain confidence in expressing themselves. Lecturers should help students understand the learning material but students also need to learn independently. One important issue is that it is not a firm predictor that if a student has passed their secondary schooling, they will perform well at tertiary institutions. Research has proved that, in general, higher university entry scores and high self-efficacy are related to higher academic achievement at university.

Perhaps government policy should be revisited in order to prepare grade 11 and 12 learners for the transition process into tertiary education. Extra aid for students should continue to operate, as they seem to help students improve their academic achievement. Financial problems are a major concern to first year students, more especially students from high school who do not yet possess any sponsors or financial security. The reality of the situation is that nearly all students are affected by financial constraints, which affect their academic performance. There are number of options that might help students to obtain financial support, like bursaries/loans, financial aid, getting discount in fees if a student achieved a higher percentage in a particular course. This will motivate them to achieve and receive some form of financial aid. A number of issues cause financial constraints, which are sometimes beyond the capacity of the student to handle. For example, a single parent, the death of a breadwinner parent and so on. Financial issues should be addressed by the government and higher education in order to come up with options that might help both the university and students, rather than aggravating the financial position.

The issue of extra responsibility is important to consider. Students should learn to prioritize. A lack of facilities at the university should be looked into. If facilities are provided to students, they have to make sure that they take full responsibility and not abuse the universities resources. The university should cater for enough residences in the future in order to cater for those who are staying off-campus or in private accommodation. Students should be encouraged to visit student counsellors or psychologists at the campus to help them maintain a healthy psychological status. Specialised enhancement programs need to be introduced and evaluated to provide students with additional skills.

## **6.6 CONCLUSION**

This study, with all its limitations, should be able to promote an improved research profile in South Africa. Further research into student barriers to academic achievement will be interesting and useful. Using the information elicited from international literature, student's responses have helped to explore the South African situation, to shape it and to address issues, which are uniquely South African. For students to achieve and improve their academic work will require massive commitment and resources.

Specialised enhancement programs need to be introduced and evaluated to provide students with additional skills. Interventions could be aimed at promoting academic achievement as an important part of integration into the university. It may be necessary to rethink the activities promoted in orientation week and put an increased emphasis on study skills and academic achievement as integral parts of university life. The promotion and encouragement of study groups, as opposed to social groups, and high academic achievement as socially acceptable, may help to change the negative view of academic achievement that appears to be promoted in orientation week. With regard to personal issues, students have to be encouraged to visit student counselors or psychologists at the campus to help them maintain a healthy psychological status. It is important to recognize how various factors intertwine in affecting student's academic achievement.

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# APPENDIXES



RESEARCH OFFICE (FRANCIS STOCK BUILDING)  
HOWARD COLLEGE  
TELEPHONE NO.: 031 – 2603587

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6 DECEMBER 2004

MS. MY MATLALA  
EDUCATIONAL STUDIES

Dear Ms. Matlala

ETHICAL CLEARANCE

I wish to confirm that ethical clearance has been granted for the following project:

“Barriers to academic achievement of African First Year Students at a Tertiary Institution in KZN”

Yours faithfully

MS. PHUMELELE XIMBA  
(FOR) MANAGER: RESEARCH OFFICE

PS: The following general condition is applicable to all projects that have been granted ethical clearance:

THE RELEVANT AUTHORITIES SHOULD BE CONTACTED IN ORDER TO OBTAIN THE NECESSARY APPROVAL SHOULD THE RESEARCH INVOLVE UTILIZATION OF SPACE AND/OR FACILITIES AT OTHER INSTITUTIONS/ORGANISATIONS. WHERE QUESTIONNAIRES ARE USED IN THE PROJECT, THE RESEARCHER SHOULD ENSURE THAT THE QUESTIONNAIRE INCLUDES A SECTION AT THE END WHICH SHOULD BE COMPLETED BY THE PARTICIPANT (PRIOR TO THE COMPLETION OF THE QUESTIONNAIRE) INDICATING THAT HE/SHE WAS INFORMED OF THE NATURE AND PURPOSE OF THE PROJECT AND THAT THE INFORMATION GIVEN WILL BE KEPT CONFIDENTIAL.

cc. Director of School  
cc. Supervisor

APPENDIX 2

QUESTIONNAIRE

**SURVEY ON BARRIERS TO ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT OF 1<sup>st</sup> YEAR AFRICAN STUDENTS**

*Thank you for participating in my survey. I am researching barriers or problems experienced by African first year students at tertiary institution. The information obtained from the survey will be for the purposes of the research and will be treated confidentially and issues of anonymity. Subjects are free to withdraw from the study at any stage and they fully understand the nature and purpose of this study. Please help me in filling in this questionnaire. Your cooperation will be highly appreciated.*

*Researcher's contact details: Ms Yvonne Matlala (cell-082 4837766 Email- [mymatlala@webmail.co.za](mailto:mymatlala@webmail.co.za))*

*Supervisor's contact details: University of KwaZulu-Natal (Westville campus)*

*Tel (Office) 031 260 7255 Email- [naidooz1@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:naidooz1@ukzn.ac.za)*

**SECTION A**

*Please furnish your surname, reg. no. and contact details for follow-up interviews.*

First 3 letters of surname:

Last 3 digits of REG. No.

Contact number (cell): .....

**Please tick (✓) the appropriate box:**

Gender : Male  Female

Age : .....





