



**PERCEPTIONS OF THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN POVERTY AND  
EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT IN SOUTH AFRICAN  
HIGHER EDUCATION: A CASE STUDY OF THE  
UNIVERSITY OF KWAZULU-NATAL  
HOWARD COLLEGE CAMPUS**

by

**Noxolo Xulu**

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Sociology Programme

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**Thesis Supervisor: Sihle Pretty Lamula**

## DECLARATION

This Master's thesis is submitted in fulfilment of the requirements of the degree of **Master of Social Sciences in Sociology** at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, Howard College, South Africa.

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**Ms. Sihle Pretty Lamula**



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Date

*“I can do all things through Christ who strengthened me”*

**Philippians 4:13**

To

my siblings, and all students in higher education institutions in South Africa and beyond who come from low-income backgrounds, and who continue to face challenges in receiving quality education

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## ABSTRACT

This study highlights the impact of poverty on the educational attainment of Black students in a South African institution of higher education, despite post-apartheid policy measures. Low-income university students from Black households face various challenges, including limited resources and insufficient financial support. The complex relationship between poverty and educational attainment is shaped by socio-economic factors, parental involvement, and institutional support, all of which impede Black students' educational progress.

To investigate cultural capital's influence on educational experiences and prospects for upward social mobility, this study uses Pierre Bourdieu's habitus theory and focuses on cultural capital. The study's qualitative techniques include online semi-structured interviews with 25 students in the College of Humanities at the University of KwaZulu-Natal's Howard College Campus. The findings are valuable in terms of policy and practice interventions aimed at minimizing educational disparities and promoting social mobility in tertiary education.

According to the study, challenges such as poverty, lack of access to resources, and financial constraints result in underperformance and impede academic progress for students from diverse backgrounds. The study argues that a lack of academic support begins at under-resourced rural schools attended by students, demonstrating how the poverty cycle's impact on academic achievement persists. To level the playing field for disadvantaged students, the study recommends increasing support services such as mentorship, financial aid, and tutoring. The study also suggests that more resources and funding should be provided to rural schools to address their unique difficulties.

The study has some limitations, such as a small sample size of 25 students, which may not accurately represent all Black students in South African higher education institutions. Additionally, the research was conducted only within the College of Humanities at the University of KwaZulu-Natal's Howard College Campus, which limits the generalizability of the findings. To address these limitations, future studies should expand the sample size and include multiple institutions.

In conclusion, poverty significantly affects the educational attainment of Black students in South African higher education institutions. Targeted interventions and comprehensive support structures are necessary to address educational disparities and promote social mobility. The study recommends increasing support services and resources for disadvantaged students.

Further research should be conducted, considering the study's limitations, such as expanding the sample size and including multiple institutions to improve its accuracy.

**Keywords:** Poverty, rurality, educational attainment, socioeconomic status (SES), cultural capital, educational capital, social capital.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS.....	xiii
<b>CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION.....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>1.1 Introduction.....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>1.2 Problem statement and rationale.....</b>	<b>2</b>
<i>1.2.1 Education and poverty in South Africa.....</i>	<i>2</i>
<i>1.2.2 The relationship between poverty and educational attainment.....</i>	<i>3</i>
<b>1.3 The purpose of the study.....</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>1.4 Research questions and objectives.....</b>	<b>6</b>
<i>1.4.1 Research questions.....</i>	<i>6</i>
<i>1.4.2 Research objectives.....</i>	<i>7</i>
<b>1.5 Research methodology.....</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>1.6 Theoretical framework.....</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>1.7 Chapter outline.....</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>1.8. Conclusion.....</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>CHAPTER TWO: KEY CONCEPTS, POVERTY IN SOUTH AFRICA – A CONTEXTUAL PERSPECTIVE .....</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>2.1 Introduction.....</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>2.2 Poverty.....</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>2.3 Educational attainment.....</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>2.4 Socio-economic status (SES).....</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>2.5 Cultural, social, and symbolic capital.....</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>2.6 Conceptualisation of poverty.....</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>2.7 Concepts related to poverty.....</b>	<b>17</b>
<i>2.7.1 Inequality and poverty.....</i>	<i>17</i>
<i>2.7.2 Vulnerability and poverty.....</i>	<i>18</i>
<i>2.7.3 Deprivation and poverty.....</i>	<i>18</i>
<b>2.8 Different types of poverty.....</b>	<b>19</b>
<i>2.8.1 Chronic and transitory poverty.....</i>	<i>19</i>
<i>2.8.2 Absolute and relative poverty.....</i>	<i>19</i>
<i>2.8.3 Subjective and objective poverty.....</i>	<i>20</i>
<b>2.9 Approaches to measuring poverty.....</b>	<b>20</b>

2.9.1 Poverty line.....	21
2.9.2 Social exclusion approach.....	22
2.9.3 Monetary approaches.....	23
2.9.4 Capability approach.....	24
2.9.5 Participatory approach.....	25
<b>2.10 Causes of poverty in South Africa.....</b>	<b>26</b>
2.10.1 Unemployment.....	27
2.10.2 Poor education.....	29
<b>2.11 Conclusion.....</b>	<b>30</b>
<b>CHAPTER THREE: LITERATURE REVIEW.....</b>	<b>31</b>
<b>3.1 Introduction.....</b>	<b>31</b>
<b>3.2 What is the relationship between poverty and education? .....</b>	<b>30</b>
<b>3.3 Obstacles faced by low-income household students when they first enrol at the university... ..</b>	<b>32</b>
<b>3.4 Factors impacting students' educational attainment in higher education institutions of South Africa.....</b>	<b>33</b>
3.4.1 The impact of apartheid policies on access to higher education.....	33
3.4.2 The effects of post-apartheid higher education policies on equity and participation.....	35
3.4.3 The Dawn of the democratic dispensation.....	36
3.4.4 The Massification Era in South African higher education.....	37
<b>3.5 The effectiveness of academic assistance programs in improving student outcomes.....</b>	<b>37</b>
<b>3.6 The impact of socio-economic status on higher education access and success.....</b>	<b>39</b>
3.6.1 Students' socio-economic status.....	39
3.6.2 Parental involvement and education.....	41
3.6.3 Lack of financial support.....	43
3.6.3.1 University students' challenges in receiving this financial provision (NSFAS) from the government.....	45
3.6.4 Lack of academic support.....	46
<b>3.7 Effects of poverty on students' mental health and well-being.....</b>	<b>47</b>
3.7.1 Depression.....	47
3.7.2 Low self-esteem.....	48

3.7.3 <i>Criminal behaviour</i> .....	48
<b>3.8 Conclusion</b> .....	<b>49</b>
<b>CHAPTER FOUR: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK</b> .....	<b>50</b>
<b>4.1 Introduction</b> .....	<b>50</b>
<b>4.2 Bourdieu’s concept of habitus</b> .....	<b>50</b>
<b>4.3 Bourdieu’s concept of field</b> .....	<b>54</b>
<b>4.4 Bourdieu’s notion of capital</b> .....	<b>55</b>
4.4.1 <i>Social capital</i> .....	55
4.4.2 <i>Cultural capital</i> .....	56
4.4.3 <i>Economic capital</i> .....	58
4.4.4 <i>Symbolic capital</i> .....	59
<b>4.5 How Bourdieu’s theory is applied in education</b> .....	<b>59</b>
<b>4.6 Conclusion</b> .....	<b>60</b>
<b>CHAPTER FIVE: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND METHODS</b> .....	<b>61</b>
<b>5.1 Introduction</b> .....	<b>61</b>
<b>5.2 Research design</b> .....	<b>61</b>
<b>5.3 Qualitative research methodology</b> .....	<b>61</b>
<b>5.4 Research paradigm</b> .....	<b>63</b>
<b>5.5 Research sampling</b> .....	<b>64</b>
5.5.1 <i>Purposive and snowball sampling</i> .....	64
5.5.2 <i>Sample size and criterion</i> .....	65
<b>5.6 Data collection</b> .....	<b>65</b>
5.6.1 <i>Data recording and transcription</i> .....	66
<b>5.7 Data analysis</b> .....	<b>67</b>
<b>5.8 Ethical considerations</b> .....	<b>67</b>
<b>5.9 Ensuring trustworthiness and credibility</b> .....	<b>68</b>
<b>5.10 Limitations</b> .....	<b>68</b>
<b>5.11 Conclusion</b> .....	<b>69</b>
<b>CHAPTER SIX: PRESENTATION OF RESULTS AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS</b> .....	<b>70</b>
<b>6.1 Introduction</b> .....	<b>70</b>

<b>6.2 Demographic characteristics of participants.....</b>	<b>70</b>
<b>6.3 To establish whether there is a relationship between poverty and the highest level of education that an individual attained.....</b>	<b>71</b>
<b>6.3.1 What is poverty and how do students understand poverty?.....</b>	<b>71</b>
6.3.1.1 <i>Poverty as a lack of financial freedom.....</i>	72
<b>6.3.2 What do students think are the causes of poverty?.....</b>	<b>73</b>
6.3.2.1 <i>Unemployment causes poverty.....</i>	74
6.3.2.2 <i>Poor education causes poverty.....</i>	74
<b>6.3.3 Impact of poverty on students' mental health and well-being.....</b>	<b>75</b>
6.3.3.1 <i>Depression.....</i>	75
6.3.3.2 <i>Low self-esteem.....</i>	77
6.3.3.3 <i>Criminal behaviour.....</i>	78
<b>6.4 To explore the students' insights and understanding of the relationship between poverty and educational attainment.....</b>	<b>79</b>
6.4.1 <i>Students' understanding of the role that education plays in breaking the poverty cycle.....</i>	79
6.4.2 <i>Accessing opportunities through education.....</i>	80
<b>6.5 To determine the different socioeconomic factors and their influence on the educational attainment of students in HEIs.....</b>	<b>81</b>
6.5.1 <i>Family background and student performance.....</i>	81
6.5.2 <i>Obstacles faced by low-income household students when they first enrol at the university.....</i>	83
<b>6.6 To explore what the government and HEIs can do to assist students from disadvantaged backgrounds.....</b>	<b>85</b>
6.6.1 <i>Student support services from UKZN, local communities and government.....</i>	87
6.6.2 <i>Initiatives implemented to provide education to students from disadvantaged backgrounds.....</i>	87
6.6.2.1 <i>Sponsorship and bursaries.....</i>	87

6.6.2.2 <i>Free access to education</i> .....	87
6.6.2.3 <i>NSFAS</i> .....	88
<b>6.6.3 What communities can do to assist students from disadvantaged backgrounds?</b> .....	<b>88</b>
<b>6.6.4 What government and higher education institutions can do to better assist students from disadvantaged backgrounds?</b> .....	<b>90</b>
<b>6.6.5 Discussion</b> .....	<b>94</b>
<b>6.6.6 Understanding students’ insights through theoretical framework</b> .....	<b>96</b>
<b>6.6.7 Conclusion</b> .....	<b>98</b>
<b>CHAPTER SEVEN: CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS</b> .....	<b>100</b>
<b>7.1 Introduction</b> .....	<b>100</b>
<b>7.2 Summary and conclusion</b> .....	<b>100</b>
<i>7.2.1 Impact of poverty on the educational attainment of undergraduate and postgraduate students at the Howard college campus of UKZN</i> .....	<i>101</i>
<i>7.2.2 Experiences and perceptions of students from disadvantaged backgrounds regarding the relationship between poverty and educational attainment</i> .....	<i>102</i>
<i>7.2.3 Financial challenges faced by students from disadvantaged backgrounds, impacting their educational attainment</i> .....	<i>103</i>
<i>7.2.4 Effectiveness of student support services in promoting educational attainment of students from disadvantaged backgrounds</i> .....	<i>103</i>
<i>7.2.5 Effective strategies that can be employed to support the success of students from disadvantaged backgrounds in Higher education institutions</i> .....	<i>104</i>
<b>7.3 Recommendations</b> .....	<b>106</b>
<i>7.3.1 Involvement of communities</i> .....	<i>106</i>
<i>7.3.2 Resources should be relocated to introduce free education</i> .....	<i>106</i>
<i>7.3.3 Generate more employment opportunities</i> .....	<i>107</i>
<i>7.3.4 Training of rural schoolteachers</i> .....	<i>107</i>
<i>7.3.5 Ensuring active involvement of parents</i> .....	<i>107</i>
<i>7.3.6 Increasing funding for students</i> .....	<i>108</i>
<i>7.3.7 Enhancing promotion of student support services</i> .....	<i>109</i>
<b>7.4 Future research</b> .....	<b>109</b>
<b>7.5 Conclusion</b> .....	<b>109</b>
<b>REFERENCES</b> .....	<b>111</b>

<b>APPENDIXES.....</b>	<b>135</b>
<b>APPENDIX 1: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS.....</b>	<b>135</b>
<b>APPENDIX 2: INFORMED CONSENT DOCUMENT.....</b>	<b>138</b>
<b>APPENDIX 3: ETHICAL CLEARANCE APPROVAL LETTER.....</b>	<b>140</b>
<b>APPENDIX 4: GATEKEEPER’S LETTER.....</b>	<b>141</b>
<b>APPENDIX 5: TURNITIN RECEIPT.....</b>	<b>142</b>
<b>LIST OF FIGURES.....</b>	<b>53</b>
<b>Figure 1: Higher education institutions’ success paths for middle- and working-class students</b>	
<b>LIST OF TABLES.....</b>	<b>71</b>
<b>Table. 1: Demographic Characteristics of Participants.....</b>	

## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AMS	Academic Mentoring and Support
CAO	Central Applications Office
CHASU	Campus HIV & AIDS Support Unit
CHE	Council on Higher Education
DFID	Department for International Development
FYE	First-Year Experience
GBV	Gender-Based Violence
HEIs	Higher Education Institutions
NGOs	Non-governmental Organizations
NPOs	Nonprofit Organizations
NSFAS	National Student Financial Aid Scheme
SASSETA	Safety and Security Sector Education and Training Authority
SCF	Student Christian Fellowship
SES	Socio-economic Status
UKZN	University of KwaZulu-Natal

## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1 Introduction

South Africa has a long history of exposure to political violence, oppression, marginalisation, and poverty, which negatively affect the quality of education that many students receive (Naidoo & Schalkwyk, 2021). This is because the apartheid government left a legacy of poverty and inequality. The South African education system changed after the democratic election (in 1994) which put an end to the apartheid era, with the emergence of new policies to address the education inequalities that existed during apartheid. The newly elected democratic government's vision was to transform South Africa's educational system to provide a nonracist, tolerant, and equal education system for all citizens, reflecting the economic, social, and political needs, and the equality of all South Africans. These policies aimed to enhance the accessibility for black students to pursue higher education given that they previously struggled to do so due to a lack of financial resources (Baloyi 2020, p. 2).

Despite changes in the educational system, students from different universities in South Africa still face several challenges when transitioning from high school to university because of their different socio-economic backgrounds (Ajani & Gumede, 2020, p. 15804). Students need to adapt to the demands of higher education, which primarily include the social and academic experiences of higher education life. As stated by Lombard (2020), adapting to higher education is a process with various elements that involve addressing academic changes and demands. The elements of adaptation to higher education require students' time and energy, addressing at least second language demands, financial concerns, inadequate institutional support, and other challenges in the transition to higher education. The failure to adapt to the new environment can lead to high dropout and low graduation rates for underprivileged students, especially in the absence of adequate institutional and parental support.

This study aims to provide insights into the potential interventions to help alleviate the negative impact of poverty on educational attainment and promote greater equity in terms of access to higher education. The findings of this study can inform policies and practices aimed at reducing educational disparities and promoting social mobility. This introductory chapter to the study provides the context and rationale for the research, the problem statement, the aims and

research objectives of the study, the research questions, the research methodology and research techniques, the theoretical framework, and the importance of the study.

## **1.2 Problem statement and rationale**

### ***1.2.1 Education and poverty in South Africa***

Education is widely recognized as one of the most significant tools for overcoming poverty as it opens a wide range of job opportunities and the potential for higher earnings. Individuals with a higher level of education are more likely to be employed in highly profitable jobs and earn higher incomes, reducing their chances of falling into poverty. Education is essential to the development of a socially and economically prosperous society. Education is universally acknowledged to play a critical role in a nation's long-term survival, growth, and development. "Educational attainment is defined as the highest level of education that an individual completed and is usually measured in terms of the highest certificate or degree that the individual possessed" (Schneider 2007, p. 2). Durowaiye (2017, p. 12) asserts that higher education occurs after the secondary education level and is obtained in institutions of higher learning such as universities, institutes, and colleges.

People conceptualise, understand, and interpret poverty differently. Poverty is a widely acknowledged global phenomenon that is viewed in two ways, namely as absolute and relative poverty. Absolute poverty is conceptualised as the inability of the vulnerable to afford basic amenities of life, such as food and shelter. Relative poverty, on the other hand, describes circumstances in which people cannot afford to participate actively in society and benefit from activities and experiences that most people take for granted (Ramphoma 2014, p. 59). Ngcobo (2019, p. 6) argues that poverty is a denial of choices and opportunities, as well as a violation of rights. South Africa continues to have high levels of poverty and income inequality. Poverty remains a persistent problem that has posed political and ethical challenges to South African society.

According to Statistics South Africa (2017, p. 1), there has been a continuous rise in poverty in South Africa, although current (2017) poverty levels are lower than in 1994. The examination of poverty in South Africa between 2006 and 2015 indicates that the proportion of the population living in poverty decreased from 66.6% in 2006 to 53.2% in 2011. In 2015, however, poverty levels increased to 55.5%. These statistics indicate that it is the people from rural areas and those with little or no education who are the main victims of the ongoing

struggle against poverty. According to Mbuli (2008, p. 135), poverty reduction policies that have been implemented in the post-apartheid era have emphasised the need for quality education. South Africa's poor education system unfortunately ends up sustaining the poverty cycle instead of breaking it. This is evident given the continuous inequalities in the availability of infrastructure and services in schools.

Gardiner (2019, p. 1) asserts that poverty and education are linked because people living in poverty stopped going to school so they could work. This situation left them without the literacy and numeracy skills they needed to further their careers. Poverty therefore impedes the academic success of poverty-stricken students. Poverty has become one of the most prevalent indicators of academic achievement in South Africa today (2023). Poverty also contributes to lower achievement and completion rates among black students in South African higher education institutions (HEIs). Although several policy interventions have reduced poverty in South African societies since 1994, poverty still affects the performance of most black students in higher education.

There are many complex and multidimensional factors influencing access and success at HEIs. These are social factors, including schooling and parental educational background, socio-economic status, race, gender, and the social context of learning. According to Lewin and Mawoyo (2014), various interventions have addressed the need to improve students' enrolment in formal education. For instance, despite student funding initiatives, in particular, the National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS), and multiple interventions on academic, psychosocial, and career-oriented support, access to higher education for some South African young people has remained unattainable.

### ***1.2.2 The relationship between poverty and educational attainment***

The democratic government prioritises the provision of equal and quality education for all South Africans. According to the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa Act 108 of 1996, and some policy documents (South African Schools Act 84 of 1996), "all South African learners should have access to the same quality of learning, similar facilities, and equal educational opportunities". According to Ndamane (2018, p. 5), despite efforts to address inequalities in South Africa, little has been done to address inequalities among students in higher education. This can be evident from disparities in resource distribution and the curricula offered, which maintain an apartheid mentality. Given this situation, South African students

took a strong stance between October 2015 and February 2016 against these inequalities and participated in nationwide protests. Protests began as a rebuke of colonial legacies and apartheid statues and symbols in universities, but quickly escalated to address issues of financial exclusion among students. In essence, the students were fighting to make the campuses more accessible to those who were previously marginalised.

One of the most vocally expressed grievances during the protests was the need to address academic exclusion due to a lack of funding or financial hardship. This was made clear nationwide against study fees known as #FeesMustFall (Luescher, Loader & Mugume, 2017). Initially, the students protested against tuition fee increases, and later, they demanded that the payment of tuition fees be abolished entirely (Motala, Vally & Maharajh, 2018). While some students advocated for free education for the poor, the vast majority appeared to support free higher education for all. The fee protests were sparked by widespread student-led demonstrations demanding the removal of colonial statues and symbols (e.g., #RhodesMustFall, #OpenStellenbosch, and #ShutdownUFS), which the students claimed had promoted white supremacy and racial hegemony (Pillay, 2016).

In St. Mary et al's. study (2018), historically, Black, and African American students faced considerable obstacles to attaining an equal and high-quality education. These obstacles included their enrolment in underperforming schools, a lack of community resources, poverty, and a lack of social and economic opportunities. For instance, one of the most significant barriers for prospective university students, particularly African American and other minority students whose families have lower earnings and wealth than whites, was financial difficulty. African American students have lower income profiles than other racial groups such as whites and Asians, and they were more likely to attend low-cost institutions, obtain grants, and enrol part-time.

According to Redd (2018, p. 16), another barrier to Black and African American students' access to equitable and high-quality education included institutional stereotyping, and this barrier was characterised as a restriction to access. A barrier emerged when institutions failed to offer the resources, services, and support needed to satisfy the needs of others in the areas of academic accomplishment, social mobility, and economic advancement. Underrepresented black African college students have historically faced social and academic challenges that other racial and ethnic college student populations have not. According to the United States Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights (Ashkenas, Park & Pearce, 2017), students

coming from elementary and secondary schools with high minority student populations face equity issues due to a lack of experienced teachers, advanced courses, high-quality materials, and adequate facilities before entering college. Underrepresented Black African students suffered as a result of such circumstances. This led to disparities in academic achievement among low-income household African-American students and white students.

An analysis of the international research of Lantz, (2005); Newton & Turale, (2000); and Tuason, (2008) done by Nyewe (2018, p. 5645) has shown that despite financial difficulties, disadvantaged students still use various coping mechanisms to pay for their tertiary education. These strategies include looking for scholarships or loans, taking up part-time jobs, and engaging in sex work. In Australia, part-time work is a common way for students to fund their education, but this often results in added pressures that can affect their quality of life. In contrast to the wealth of research in developed countries, there is little research on the experiences of disadvantaged students in developing countries. Nyewe's (2018) study found that poverty-related experiences cause significant psychological distress in students and motivate them to conceal their poverty. This often leads to a sense of hopelessness and combined with a lack of motivation to change their lives, may lead to a high dropout rate among disadvantaged students.

Early socio-economic disadvantage leads to low academic achievement and limited access to higher education, and this effect is long-lasting. This means that students from lower socio-economic status backgrounds are less likely to achieve the high levels of academic achievement required for successful progression to HEIs. Studies exploring the challenges that students from low-income families faced brought public attention to the issue. For instance, Ngcobo's 2019 study that the UKZN published investigated students' perceptions of growing up in socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds and how their experiences shaped their constructions of resilience to poverty. Another study, that of Baloyi (2020) focused on how socio-economic issues affected the performance of learners in rural schools.

According to Zungu (2018), students from privileged schools have access to more resources as compared to students from disadvantaged rural schools. The lack of funding and poverty among black students have contributed to high dropout rates and poor academic success in South African HEIs. Given this situation, policies and programmes aimed at promoting equal opportunities for students from all backgrounds need to be implemented.

The effectiveness of student support programs in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) has been questioned despite their availability to help students acclimatize to the academic environment and promote academic success. HEIs need to evaluate their student support programs and consider offering academic coaching and mentorship opportunities to enhance their effectiveness. Moreover, parents can contribute significantly to their children's academic success by providing emotional and financial support, setting expectations, and fostering a positive attitude towards learning.

The research discussed underlines the need for additional research into the experiences of economically disadvantaged students in developing countries. There is a significant requirement for the implementation of policies that promote equal opportunities for all students. In summary, HEIs' student support programs can be more effective through program evaluation and other strategies such as academic coaching and mentorship. Parents can also play an essential role in supporting their children's academic success. It is vital to conduct additional research focusing on disadvantaged students' experiences in developing countries and establish policies that ensure equal opportunities for all students.

### **1.3 The purpose of the study**

This study explores the relationship between poverty and educational attainment, and specifically the impact of poverty on people's highest level of education. It focuses on factors such as poverty, socio-economic conditions, parental involvement, and institutional support that may influence the students' educational attainment (Durowaiye, 2017; Moodley, 2015). The study aims to provide insights into the potential interventions that can help alleviate the negative impact of poverty on educational attainment and promote greater equity in higher education access. The findings of this study can inform policy and practice aimed at reducing educational disparities and promoting social mobility.

### **1.4 Research questions and objectives**

#### ***1.4.1 Research questions***

1. Is there a relationship between poverty and the highest level of education that an individual attained?
2. What are the students' insights and understanding of the relationship between poverty and educational attainment?

3. To what extent does the socio-economic status of students and their families affect educational attainment in higher education institutions (HEIs)?
4. What can the government and HEIs of South Africa do to assist students from disadvantaged backgrounds?

#### ***1.4.2 Research objectives***

1. To establish whether there is a relationship between poverty and the highest level of education that an individual attained.
2. To explore the students' insights and understanding of the relationship between poverty and educational attainment.
3. To determine different socio-economic factors and their influence on the educational attainment of students in HEIs.
4. To explore what the government and HEIs can do to assist students from disadvantaged backgrounds.

#### **1.5 Research methods and methodology**

The qualitative research approach was used in this study. According to Creswell (2014), “a qualitative research approach is used to explore and understand the meanings that people assign to the social world and their experiences”. The study aimed to explore the relationship between poverty and educational attainment by investigating students' insights. The key objective of this approach was to understand the lived experiences of a specific group of students. The benefits of using a qualitative research approach were that it produces a detailed description of participants' feelings, opinions, experiences, and meanings of their actions (Rahman, 2017). The qualitative research method requires a limited number of respondents, and it can be carried out with limited resources.

This qualitative research methodology provides a comprehensive representation of social phenomena and illuminates critical incidents specific to their contexts. Nonetheless, qualitative research also has weaknesses including the fact that the results cannot be generalised to a larger population as they may be context-specific. The interpretive research paradigm utilised in this study offers insights into the perspectives held by individuals or groups. The paradigm acknowledges that the participants in this study, as well as the researcher, are situated within a social context, thus rendering social reality meaningful only in the context of the significance attached to it. Interpretive research techniques seek to understand subjective human behaviour

rather than objectively explain it (Neumann, 2014). Non-probability sampling techniques were used in this study. As opposed to randomly selected participants, non-probability samples were chosen selectively, with participants not given an equal chance to participate in the study (du Plooy-Cilliers, Davis & Bezuidenhout, 2014).

The participants were identified using purposive and snowball sampling. Purposive sampling involves selecting samples depending on the researcher's judgment. The researcher used her knowledge of where to recruit undergraduate and postgraduate students in this study, such as the University of KwaZulu-Natal's (UKZN) College of Humanities Sociology tutoring groups, Academic Mentoring and Support (AMS), and First-Year Experience (FYE) mentoring chat groups, and other virtual discussion groups from the College of Humanities. Snowball sampling involves approaching a participant and utilising their knowledge to identify individuals with the characteristics that the researcher desires (Neumann, 2014).

A total of 25 participants were recruited to participate in this research. The sample consisted of 13 undergraduate students and 12 postgraduate students from the College of Humanities. These two groups of students represented different degrees of exposure to academic practice. The participants were selected from UKZN, particularly Howard College. The study utilised in-depth, semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions. Albabsyi et al (2022, p. 24) assert that an in-depth interview is a conversation between a researcher and someone who is perfectly suited to provide insight into the matter under study. Semi-structured interviews give the researcher an outline of questions to ask, as well as the option to deviate from the script to gather new data.

The researcher conducted individual interviews. The interviews were 20 to 30 minutes long. The interviews were conducted using remote communication methods that do not require face-to-face contact. Zoom meetings, telephone calls, WhatsApp voice, or WhatsApp video calling were options that were offered to the participants. The interviews were conducted both in isiZulu and English. The researcher used audio tapes to record the interviews. The participants were able to listen to the recordings for accuracy after the interview sessions. The data collected from interviews were in the form of recordings and notes. The recorded interviews were transcribed verbatim, and the notes were compiled into a form of text. Data transcription is a method where recorded interviews with research participants are documented in written form (Mondada 2007, p. 1).

“Verbatim transcription refers to the process where the researcher tries to capture the inter-subjective nature of human communication” (Halcomb & Davidson 2006, p. 38). The data are transcribed in a way that highlights the students’ pauses and sounds during the interviews. For participants who expressed themselves in isiZulu, their data were translated into English. The study utilised thematic content analysis for the analysis of the collected data. A full discussion of the methodology and methods used in this study will be in Chapter 4.

## **1.6 Theoretical framework**

The study used Bourdieu’s theory of habitus, specifically his theory of cultural capital. Cultural capital provided an important framework for understanding social inequality in educational outcomes (Nash 1990, p. 436). According to Bourdieu (1977, p. 86), habitus refers to “a subjective but not individual system of internalised structures, schemes of perception, conception, and action common to all members of the same group or class.” These internalised structures and perceptions influence individuals’ (shared) worldviews and their perceptions of the world around them. This implies that different people from diverse backgrounds are endowed with and inherit different categories of perceptions that reflect their social, class, socio-economic, and sociocultural status.

According to Roksa and Robinson (2017, p. 1231), habitus is defined as socialised norms and dispositions that guide behaviour and thinking. These allow individuals to think, act, and make decisions in social circumstances they encounter. Habitus influences an individual’s sense of identity, choices, and actions. Habitus is a collective reality where individuals have joint characters in their lifestyles, and so they will have shared orientation through their shared habitus. This means that an individual has two habitus: their own and those of their social class. A social class is a group of individuals who share a common nature and the same external living conditions. Obtaining habitus is not necessarily done consciously, but individuals occupying the same economic, social, and cultural environments tend to have similar habits or dispositions. Habitus underpins cultural capital, and cultural capital reflects habitus.

Cultural capital consists of skills and dispositions transmitted from one generation to the next (Simon & Ainworth 2012, p. 3). Cultural capital can either be inherited through family or individuals can accumulate this through their interactions with different individuals and environments. Habitus produces a set of expectations and possibilities for individuals, while cultural capital represents the resources an individual can use to obtain their goals and

objectives. This means an individual's habitus will determine how one uses their capital (Roksa & Robinson 2017, pp. 1232–1237).

According to Bourdieu (1986, p. 17), cultural capital exists in three forms. These include the embodied state, the objective state, and the institutionalised state. The long-lasting dispositions of mind and body, such as language proficiency, preferences, and verbal skills, constitute the embodied state of cultural capital. The objectified state of cultural capital is in the form of material resources such as pictures, books, dictionaries, instruments, and machines. Institutionalised cultural capital refers to educational attainment and credentials (certificates and diplomas). Cultural capital in its embodied, objectified, and institutionalised state reflects the social conditions under which it was created. Cultural capital reflects the individual's habitus as well as their class habitus, all of which are contingent on their socio-economic status. The socio-economic status of individuals shapes their habitus and cultural capital.

“Socio-economic status is the position of an individual or group on the socio-economic scale, which is informed by a combination of social and economic factors such as income, amount and type of education, prestige and occupation, place of residence, and in some societies, even ethnic origin, and religious background” (Maswikiti 2008, p. 4). Families that possess high levels of cultural capital possess socio-economic resources that have an impact on their children's educational success. For example, families with high amounts of cultural capital have money to take their children to well-equipped schools, buy their children educational materials not available to other children, and give them access to resources associated with their privileged status. This implies that families from different socio-economic backgrounds transmit different quantities of cultural capital. Working-class families lack the resources to expose their children to objectified forms of capital such as books, dictionaries, and machines (Yu, Liu & Guo, 2022).

These differences in socio-economic status affect the students' career paths, which results in some parents imparting low cultural capital to their children because of their low-income jobs. This contributes to a continuous, never-ending cycle of educational inequality (Lamula 2017, p. 81). This study explains how students with different amounts of cultural capital have different access to resources that influence their educational attainment. It focuses on poverty and socio-economic factors and how they influence young people's access to, and success in, HEIs. The research also highlights the need for policies that address the inequalities in educational opportunities and resources, particularly for those from disadvantaged

backgrounds. It suggests that a more equitable distribution of cultural capital can help bridge the gap in educational attainment between different social groups.

## **1.7 Chapter outline**

**Chapter 1: Introduction** - The first chapter introduced the research topic, the background of the research, and the problem statement. This chapter discussed the motivation for this study, which is to provide a greater understanding of the challenges that South African students encountered in gaining access to HEIs within their specific socio-economic and sociocultural contexts. This chapter outlined the research questions the objectives of the study, and how it sets about achieving the set objectives.

**Chapter 2: Key concepts** - Key concepts are discussed and explained in this chapter to get a better understanding of poverty, educational attainment, and socio-economic status (SES). This chapter explores the literature on different types of poverty (conceptualisation) and the approaches to measuring poverty. Furthermore, the chapter provides an understanding of the concepts that underpin the theoretical framework.

**Chapter 3: Literature review** - Relevant studies were sourced and discussed in this chapter. The chapter critically reviewed existing studies on the various factors and contexts that shaped South African educational attainment in different parts of the HEIs. This review provided the basis for the study and made evident various social and economic factors, and how they may or may not influence the students' opportunities to access higher education in the South African context.

**Chapter 4: Theoretical framework** - Bourdieu's theory of habitus is used to give a conceptual understanding to this study. This chapter analyses the concepts of social capital, cultural capital, and habitus.

**Chapter 5: Description of research methodology** - This chapter focuses on the research methodology of the study. It discusses how the researcher will collect and analyse the data. The chapter also elaborates on the research design that was used in this study. The chapter identified the targeted population and the sample. This chapter also explains the tools that were used to collect data and the methods utilized to present the data.

**Chapter 6: Presentation of results and discussion of findings** - Chapter six focuses on the presentation of the results and a discussion of the findings and is based largely on the data from the semi-structured interviews. Qualitative data were collected and analysed using a thematic-analysis approach. The chapter also identifies and highlights the key themes that were extracted from the participants' interviews. The chapter identifies the key findings of the study and discusses these in light of the literature reviewed in this study and in terms of the theoretical framework that underpins this study.

**Chapter 7: Summary and conclusions** - The chapter contains a summary of the findings emanating from this study. The chapter presents the conclusion of the study, outlines limitations emerging from the findings of the study, and offers recommendations for future research.

## **1.8. Conclusion**

Poverty is a significant challenge in South Africa that affects educational attainment. Despite efforts to address educational inequalities, students from disadvantaged backgrounds still encounter various obstacles when transitioning to higher education, including financial challenges, inadequate institutional support, and academic and social demands. Failure to adapt to higher education often leads to high dropout and low graduation rates. This study aims to provide insights into potential interventions that can reduce such disparities, promote social mobility, and increase access to higher education. The research draws on Bourdieu's theory of habitus and cultural capital to explore the relationship between poverty, socio-economic conditions, parental involvement, institutional support, and educational attainment. Leveraging qualitative research methods, this study aims to understand the students' insights and perspectives on this relationship and to inform policies and practices that can promote greater equity in higher education access. Ultimately, this study emphasises the need for policies and strategies that address educational disparities and promote equal opportunities for all students.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **KEY CONCEPTS, POVERTY IN SOUTH AFRICA – A CONTEXTUAL PERSPECTIVE**

#### **2.1 Introduction**

The main purpose of this chapter is to highlight and discuss the conceptualisation of poverty, different types of poverty, the causes of poverty in South Africa, and different approaches to measuring poverty. It explores our understanding of key concepts such as SES, poor education, and educational attainment. This chapter aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of poverty as a multidimensional concept with different meanings attached to it within the South African education system.

#### **2.2 Poverty**

Poverty is a multifaceted concept that is difficult to define (Gardiner, 2019). Although there is no common definition of poverty, it often refers to monetary or nonmonetary deprivations. In monetary terms, poverty is defined as a lack of sufficient income to acquire necessities for existence, whereas nonmonetary poverty is defined as a lack of access to public services and private asset ownership, social isolation, low educational attainment, poor health, and criminal vulnerability (Jansen et al. 2015, p. 151).

According to Crossman (2021), poverty is a social condition characterised by a lack of resources necessary for basic survival or to meet the expected minimum level of living standards for one's location. This is because the income level that determines poverty varies by location, and social scientists generally believe that the conditions of existence, such as a lack of access to food, clothing, and shelter, are the best way to define it. Poverty is defined by persistent hunger or starvation, insufficient or absent education and healthcare, and social alienation.

According to the Economic and Social Research Council (2016), definitions of poverty are crucial. They establish the criteria by which we determine whether the incomes and living conditions of the poorest members of society are acceptable. The definitions of poverty are important because they also influence how interventions and policies to combat poverty are designed. Despite this, there is ambiguity in how the term poverty is used, resulting in a variety of definitions influenced by various disciplinary approaches, worldviews, and ideologies.

### **2.3 Educational attainment**

“Educational attainment” refers to the highest level of education that a person has completed. The successful completion of a level of education refers to the achievement of that level's learning objectives, which are typically validated through the assessment of acquired knowledge, skills, and competencies” (Stats Can, 2015). Educational attainment can be a better predictor of labour market success than cognitive skills, personality traits, and intra- and interpersonal competencies. Workers with a higher level of education have better abilities to complete a given task, learn more from complex task training, and are more efficient in allocating work resources than workers with a lower level of education” (Pellegrino & Hilton, 2013).

As stated by Baur and Stefaner (2023), educational attainment is used as a measure of human capital and an individual's skill level or as a measure of the skills available in the community and labour force. The percentage of the population who have completed a specific degree of education is known as educational attainment. Higher levels of educational attainment are significantly linked to higher employment rates and are viewed as a gateway to better job prospects and earnings premiums. Individuals have substantial incentives to further their education, and governments have incentives to build on the population's abilities through education, particularly when national economies change from mass production to knowledge economies.

### **2.4 Socio-economic status (SES)**

Socio-economic status is a construct that describes an individual's or household's social and economic background (Villalba 2014). For Lamula (2017, p. 15), an individual's socio-economic status is linked to their parents' or family's socio-economic status. An individual's socio-economic status includes one's educational attainment, financial security, and subjective perceptions of social status and social class. Socio-economic status includes the quality of life as well as the opportunities and privileges available to people in society (American Psychological Association, 2022). In this study, socio-economic status is associated with students' access to educational attainment in HEIs.

Zuma (2020, p. 20) states that socio-economic status influences student's preparedness for school. Low-income families are frequently unable to give financial, social, and educational support to their children. Poor families may have restricted access to resources to help promote

and support their children's development and school preparation because of their economic situation, and such parents may also lack the educational abilities to aid their children's school-related development. Throughout college, SES has an impact on academic success. This is because the parents' SES can affect their ability to purchase and provide resources for their children to ensure a pleasant existence and enhance their academic achievement.

## **2.5 Cultural, social, and symbolic capital**

Cole (2020) defines cultural capital as the accumulation of knowledge, behaviours, and skills that a person uses to demonstrate their cultural competence and social status. Bourdieu classified cultural capital into three categories. First, he stated that it exists in an embodied state, which means that the knowledge that people acquire over time through socialisation and education is contained within them. When people move through the world and interact with others, they frequently act out and display embodied cultural capital. Second, cultural capital is also objectified. This refers to the material objects that people own, which may be related to their educational pursuits (books and computers), jobs (tools and equipment), clothing and accessories, durable goods in their homes (e.g., furniture, appliances, and decorative items), and even the food they buy and prepare. These objectified forms of cultural capital are often used to indicate one's socio-economic class. Third, there is an institutionalised state of cultural capital. This refers to the methods for calculating, certifying, and ranking cultural capital. Academic credentials and degrees, as well as employment titles and social roles such as husband, wife, mother, and father, are examples of this.

“Social capital is the aggregate of actual or potential resources that are linked to the possession of a long-term network of more or less institutionalised mutual acquaintance and recognition relationships” (Bourdieu 1986, p. 21). Social capital is linked to social connections that people can use to advance themselves. According to Bourdieu, social capital manifests itself through the benefits of social networks. The source of social capital stems from social, economic, and cultural structures that create differential power and status for specific individuals, but not others. Power and status produce conventions that are taken for granted, such as social norms that produce an advantage. Consequently, social capital is less about having a vast social network and more about having a social position that allows one to benefit from one's social network (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992).

According to Pret Shaw and Dodd (2016, p. 3), once any of the aforementioned types of capital have been identified, it is possible to generate symbolic capital. This type of capital is particularly effective because it can instil trust in the quality of products as well as legitimise the actions of individuals. Symbolic capital is typically associated with prestige, status, and a positive reputation. It is objectified through awards and recognitions, but its true value to the individual is determined by the importance others place on such capital. By facilitating access to social networks and exclusive education, symbolic capital, such as prestige, can be converted into social and cultural capital. Therefore, a lack of such symbolic resources can have a long-term negative impact on a person's reputation and performance.

For this study, symbolic capital can be explained as the form of capital that is acquired when a student is socialised at home to suit the tastes and preferences of the middle class. Symbolic capital is the foundation of status and school recognition, both of which are considered to be valuable. This enhances respect for those who acquire such capital because they are regarded to be more prestigious and have a higher social position than those who do not possess these qualities. Working-class students' tastes and preferences are often dismissed in schools as worthless and tasteless (Bourdieu, 1986).

## **2.6 Conceptualisation of poverty**

Ramphoma (2014, p. 59) believes that poverty is a vague term with many meanings, leading to debates about its definition. There is consequently no universally accepted definition of poverty as it is a socio-economic term that is contested intrinsically. People's divergent perceptions of poverty determine its meaning. Poverty can manifest in various forms, hence precise definitions and measurements that vary, depending on the society involved, are necessary. Poverty has been an ongoing concern and has posed ethical and political issues for many societies. Poverty is ambiguous, subjective, and multifaceted, and as a normative social term, it encompasses different circumstances and conditions across various times and places.

Letsoalo (2015, p. 11) posits that although no widely accepted definition of poverty exists, knowledge of the concept has grown and progressed over time. Analytical tools are now available to identify and locate the poor, establish their characteristics, and calculate the magnitude of poverty at various levels of aggregation. Poverty is characterised as a condition of living below socially acceptable standards, and it involves deprivation and scarcity of diverse resources. Kgaphola (2015, p. 12) defines poverty as the severe deprivation of

fundamental human necessities such as food, safe drinking water, sanitation facilities, health, shelter, education, and information taking a multidimensional form. Accordingly, poverty is dependent on both income and access to social services. Kgaphola adds that poverty refers to people's means being far below what is required of an average household, which excludes them from customary living practices, customs, and activities.

Department for International Development (DFID) (2001) links poverty to broader forces beyond the poor's control such as "economic trends, technology, financial institutions, the division of labour, political structures, and infrastructure. Poverty results in insecurity, powerlessness, and exclusion for individuals, households, and communities". Mbuli (2008, p. 15) suggests that understanding poverty requires discussing concepts such as vulnerability, inequality, and deprivation that are closely related to poverty, and have their meanings linked to poverty. Although these concepts are not the same they are frequently used interchangeably, necessitating a brief clarification.

## **2.7 Concepts related to poverty**

### *2.7.1 Inequality and poverty*

Inequality is defined as the uneven distribution of resources and opportunities among individuals within a given society. The meaning of inequality may vary depending on the context and the people involved (Koh & Harris 2020, p. 269). Essentially, inequality refers to relational disparities, the unjust denial of the enjoyment of equal rights, and arbitrary differences in the worth, status, dignity, and freedoms of people. Several areas may undergo inequality such as income, education, health, wealth, and nutrition (Rohwerder 2016, p. 4). Although poverty and inequality are distinct entities,

Letsoalo (2015, p. 16) argues that they are intertwined. Inequality pertains to the distribution of assets within a group of people while poverty is about individuals living below a certain standard of living. Rohwerder (2016, p. 40) asserts that inequality worsens poverty because one's relative position in society is considered essential to their well-being. Furthermore, high levels of inequality can hamper efforts to alleviate poverty by jeopardising the sustainability of economic growth. This in turn leads to negative outcomes for human capital, institutional legitimacy, and social coherence.

### *2.7.2 Vulnerability and poverty*

Philip and Rayman (2004) state that “vulnerability is described as the degree of exposure to a variety of threats to one's well-being, as well as the ability of individuals, households, and other social groups to cope with these threats. Vulnerability is defined as a lack of two distinct resources: hard resources such as housing, roads, infrastructure, and public services, and soft resources such as decision-making capacity, employment, education, and information”. Letsoalo (2015, p. 17) states that poverty is not a fixed condition that affects individuals, families, and communities. Some individuals are afflicted with chronic poverty, while others face temporary poverty due to life-cycle changes, specific events such as the breadwinner's illness, or the deterioration in external economic conditions. Chronic poverty is caused by several interlinked factors functioning at several levels ranging from the intra-household to the global, such as a lack of access to markets (for agricultural goods, labour, etc.), debilitating illness, and poor social safety nets. The concept of vulnerability is used in attempts to comprehend these change processes.

According to Philip and Rayman (2004), poverty is a negative result of vulnerability to unfavourable events that reduce access to commodities and resources. The poor may not be as vulnerable if they live in a safe environment with a strong and stable social support system. Similarly, nonpoor people may be extremely vulnerable if they are exposed to threats to which they cannot easily adapt, and for which their assets are ill-equipped. Thus, the relationship between poverty and vulnerability remains contentious, and their causal factors require a thorough understanding of the dynamic contextual conditions in which numerous factors must be considered.

### *2.7.3 Deprivation and poverty*

The words 'deprivation' and 'poverty' are frequently used interchangeably. Deprivation can be defined as a lack of necessities, such as food, clothing, fuel, and shelter (material deprivation), or a lack of social connection (social deprivation). Poverty is broader than deprivation and from a multidimensional perspective, it includes people's economic circumstances as well as their social position. People can be deprived without being poor because a lack of a specific need may amount to something less than poverty (Rowley et al. 2021, p. 3).

Deprivation considers how being poor or living in poverty limits what a person can and cannot do in both their immediate and future actions. Poverty refers to a lack of resources needed to

meet people's needs, whereas deprivation refers to these unmet needs. This implies that deprivation signifies the effect of poverty on the life of an individual. The multidimensional measurement of poverty is intricately linked to deprivation. For instance, multidimensional poverty measurement incorporates a wide range of indicators to capture the complexity of poverty since several factors can contribute to a poor person's experience of deprivation (Letsoalo 2015, p. 18). Determining the precise definition of deprivation is crucial since varying definitions of poverty suggest using various standards for measurement, possibly classifying some people and groups as impoverished, which helps in understanding different types of poverty, and utilizing different approaches to reduce poverty.

## **2.8 Different types of poverty**

### *2.8.1 Chronic and transitory poverty*

Chronic poverty is characterized by numerous instances of constant deprivations, such as poor health, inadequate nutrition, and a lack of access to productive assets. Children born into families living in chronic poverty are more likely to endure the same type of poverty as their adults since it affects different generations. Chronic poverty is a long-term type of poverty, lasting for extended periods. Thus, the chronically poor have a consistently low income and insufficient resources (Kruger 2018, p. 12). The poverty line is a threshold used to define poverty levels in a country. According to Rohwerder (2016, p. 75), chronic poverty is a multifaceted and complicated phenomenon, rooted in a sense of powerlessness. As stated by the Department for International Development (2001, p. 186), individuals living in poverty put in a lot of effort to escape chronic poverty, but with limited possessions, minimal education, and severe illness, their efforts are often in vain. In cases of transitory poverty, there may be a temporary reduction in income or expenditure. Nevertheless, over a longer period, the household resources may become adequate to keep the household above the poverty line.

### *2.8.2 Absolute and relative poverty*

“Absolute poverty is defined as a person's inability to meet their basic needs. These basic needs are frequently listed in international poverty reduction programmes and typically include food, water, shelter, basic education, and basic medical care” (Eskelinen 2011, p. 10). Absolute poverty is a systematic definition of poverty because it focuses on the necessities of life. Consequently, the term ‘absolutely’ poor is used to refer to people who lack the fundamental capacity for long-term economic well-being (Kruger 2018, p. 10). Ramphoma (2014, p. 62)

asserts that the term absolute poverty refers to poverty that exists independently of any reference group. According to this perspective, the definition of absolute poverty does not change in response to a society's current living standards over time, or in response to the needs of diverse groups in society. Poverty in this context refers to a state of deprivation defined as an objective, invariant, and value-free external definition of basic human needs.

Relative poverty, on the other hand, is defined in each society in terms of social norms and living standards. It can therefore encompass a person's ability to participate in activities that society values, even if they are not vital to their existence. The nature of the general distribution of resources can alternatively be defined as relative poverty (Department for International Development (DFID) 2001, p. 184). Relative poverty occurs when a person has less access to income and wealth than other members of society. Relative poverty emerges in socially unequal societies. This inequality can be seen in terms of income, access to resources and social services, such as healthcare and education (Gardiner 2019, p. 10).

### *2.8.3 Subjective and objective poverty*

Subjective poverty refers to a person's impression of his or her financial or material circumstances. Individual feelings are used to define this type of poverty (Kuivalainen 2014, p. 2). In a system characterised by inequality, subjective poverty is defined as the gathering of data on people's self-assessed beliefs about their socio-economic condition. Subjective poverty focuses on issues that are often disregarded, such as the utility received from a specific level of money or the satisfaction with one's area of residence. Consequently, subjective poverty refers to a different technique of measuring poverty that focuses solely on the poor's self-assessed level of poverty. In contrast, objective poverty entails normative observations and judgments about what causes poverty and what should be done to alleviate it. It is primarily concerned with people's access to various resources. The objective view of poverty is sometimes referred to as the welfare approach. The focus of objective poverty is on quantifying factual data, such as income in national currency or housing in square meters.

## **2.9 Approaches to measuring poverty**

Different approaches are used to measure poverty: the poverty line, the social exclusion approach, the monetary approach, the capability approach, and the participatory approach. Poverty can serve as a proxy for society's well-being because it is an evaluative feature of humanity. There is a clear link between a person's well-being and financial situation. Poverty

means a lack of resources, which may negatively impact one's health and well-being. The South African government works hard to reduce poverty, but it is still increasing (Ruswa, 2018). Poverty in South Africa has deep historical roots, such as apartheid-era policies and the persistent structural inequalities in the economy and society (Stats SA, 2017). These policies created structural inequality, with white people receiving better education and employment opportunities than black people. In South Africa, poverty is linked to race and is a result of the pre-1994 racially discriminatory system that defined apartheid. The ill effects of apartheid have contributed historically to why so many people currently live in poverty in South Africa. The apartheid system largely excluded the meaningful participation of the majority black population in the country's economy (Botha, 2021). While poverty has been reduced in the post-apartheid era, it remains a pervasive problem that affects a significant portion of the population. Thus, different approaches have been used to measure the severity of the poverty in the country and to track the progress in mitigating it.

### *2.9.1 Poverty line*

The poverty line approach is the most commonly used method to determine poverty levels in a country. A poverty line serves as a threshold to conditionally distinguish between poor and nonpoor households. The poverty line is typically determined by calculating the cost or value of a basket of basic needs and services, and then comparing that cost or value to household income (Ramphoma 2014, p. 70). The households whose income falls below the poverty line are considered living in poverty. Different countries have different poverty lines that reflect their unique socio-economic conditions. The poverty line approach is based on an absolute definition of poverty and tends to be more in line with the concept of absolute poverty. The poverty line is the official measure of poverty that governments in many countries use. It sets a certain minimum standard of living, below which individuals or households are assumed to be in poverty. In South Africa, the poverty line is calculated using the food poverty line and the total poverty line, which also includes non-food items (Stats SA, 2017).

For Dasgupta (2014, p. 1724), the poverty line is a widely recognised concept that measures the minimum income required for individuals or families to afford necessities, including food, housing, clothing, and medical care. The poverty line varies depending on the country's standard of living and cost of living. In South Africa, it is commonly estimated through income and expenditure surveys. The poverty line serves as a uniform benchmark for assessing poverty and evaluating policies aimed at reducing it. The poverty line's objectivity stems from its ability

to measure the income level required to meet basic needs. Despite this, critics argue that the poverty line neglects the impact of nonmonetary factors like gender and race, as well as regional variations in living expenses.

Poverty is a major issue in South Africa, impacting a huge proportion of the population. To determine poverty levels, the South African government use a multilevel poverty line that includes the food poverty line (FPL), the upper-bound poverty line (UBPL), and the lower-bound poverty line (LBPL). The FPL was set at R624 per person per month in April 2021, indicating the cost of achieving basic daily energy requirements. The LBPL in 2021 was R890, which included the FPL as well as the average expenditure of households spending at least as much as the FPL. The UBPL was R1335 (2021), reflecting the level of deprivation below which people cannot afford the minimum lifestyle that most South Africans desire. Findings of the Living Conditions Survey 2014/15 indicate that almost half of South Africa's population aged 18 years or older live below the UBPL, highlighting the impact of poverty on people's access to basic needs and quality of life (Stats SA, 2017). Madlala (2020, p. 28) noted that poverty levels in South Africa were closely tied to unemployment. Overall, while the poverty line offers a practical way to quantify poverty, its limitations underscore the complexity and contextual nature of poverty. Reducing poverty requires a multifaceted approach that considers a range of social, economic, and political factors.

### *2.9.2 Social exclusion approach*

The social exclusion approach focuses on nonmonetary aspects of poverty, such as the lack of access to social services, inadequate housing, and limited social interaction. This approach recognises that poverty is not just a lack of income and material resources, but it is also the exclusion from social and economic opportunities that act as barriers to social integration. The approach expands on the notion that deprivation is multidimensional and encompasses not only monetary but also social deprivation. The social exclusion approach focuses on identifying and addressing the social and economic factors that contribute to individuals being excluded from society. Poverty is recognised as a factor that can lead to social, political, and economic disadvantage and exclusion. The social exclusion approach emphasises the importance of obtaining the social and material resources that are necessary for full participation in society (Ruswa, 2018).

Chambers (2005) argued that the social exclusion approach recognised the difficulties that excluded individuals faced when attempting to access these nonmonetary resources. Social exclusion also encompasses a lack of participation in decision-making processes, limited social networks and relationships, and limited access to resources and opportunities. The approach sees poverty as an exclusion from mainstream economic and social activities, and it emphasises the significance of addressing the barriers to accessing these.

Bak (2019, p. 429) clarifies that social exclusion involves the denial of goods, services, rights, resources, relationships, and normal activities in society, whether they are economic, social, cultural, or political. Social exclusion is predominantly associated with material hardships and limits the ability of individuals or groups to participate in a broad range of social and cultural activities. The social exclusion approach recognises the importance of addressing broader social contexts and emphasises the significance of social processes and relationships. Gardiner (2019, p. 12) highlights that this approach recognises how power dynamics and discrimination can impoverish and marginalise people. Overall, the social exclusion approach is multifaceted and complex, emphasising the importance of creating a more equitable and inclusive society.

### *2.9.3 Monetary approaches*

Monetary approaches measure poverty based on income or consumption. The most commonly used measure is the headcount ratio, which captures the percentage of households living below the poverty line. Another measure is the poverty gap index which delineates how far households are living below the line. A third measure is the severity index which denotes how severe poverty is among the poor (Ramphoma 2014, p. 70). The monetary approaches to measuring poverty primarily focus on income as an indicator of poverty. These approaches measure the extent to which a household's income falls below the national or regional poverty line. While this approach is useful in identifying those living in absolute poverty, it fails to account for nonfinancial factors that also contribute to poverty, such as access to education and health care (Kuivalainen 2014, p. 4).

The monetary approach to poverty measurement quantifies poverty by calculating how much money is required for a person or household to attain a minimum standard of living, based on income, consumption, or expenditure. Those who fall below this threshold are classified as living below the poverty line (Klasen 2007, p, 207). Although this approach is relatively

objective as it measures poverty in financial terms, it does not consider social or cultural factors that contribute to poverty, nor does it capture the experiences of those facing poverty.

Kwandzo (2015, p. 411) notes that the monetary approach is commodity- or utility-based, defining poverty in terms of how goods are distributed, used, and owned. It assumes that all relevant differences among individuals can be captured through income or expenditure indicators and that these indicators can act as adequate proxies for consumption. This approach analyses income or consumption data to focus on market-purchased basic items, which reflect the utility of such goods. The approach uses an absolute income threshold, calculated by assigning a monetary value to the minimum goods required for a family or individual to subsist. If a family or individual's total income falls below this threshold, they are considered to be living in poverty. Monetary poverty is therefore defined as a shortfall in income, or expenditure below a certain minimal level of resources, known as the poverty line.

#### *2.9.4 Capability approach*

The capability approach takes into account people's opportunities and capacity to live the lives they value. The approach focuses on the freedom and ability of individuals to engage in the activities they wish, such as improving their health, developing new skills, or participating in social activities (Kuivalainen 2014, p. 3). The approach rests on the belief that an individual's well-being cannot be measured merely by their income or possessions but must also take into account subjective perceptions of their lives. The capability approach measures poverty based on what people can do with the resources available to them. The capability approach focuses on the factors that enable people to live fulfilling lives, and it measures poverty in terms of the capabilities needed to achieve well-being (Kimhur, 2020).

The capability approach recognises that poverty is not just about a lack of resources but also a lack of the ability to use those resources to achieve well-being. The capability approach to poverty measurement considers not only what a person has but also what they can do with what they have. This approach examines the individual's opportunities and the resources they have at their disposal to achieve their goals. The capability approach aims to promote human development by focusing on enhancing people's capabilities to achieve their goals, rather than on income or consumption levels. The approach acknowledges the multidimensional nature of poverty and recognises that poverty is not only a lack of income but also a shortage of resources needed to achieve personal development and fulfilment (Nussbaum 2011, pp. 1-3).

According to Hick (2012, p. 2), the capability approach focuses on what people can do and be, rather than what they have or how they feel. The capability approach refers to the actual opportunities a person has, and their functioning and capabilities. Functioning refers to the various things a person succeeds in "doing or being," such as participating in societal life and being healthy, while "capabilities" refer to a person's real or substantive freedom to achieve such functioning, such as the ability to participate in societal life.

Gardiner (2019, p.13) states that the capacity approach is concerned with human rights and what it takes to live a meaningful life. A person's abilities are deemed inadequate when they fall below a minimally acceptable threshold. This approach emphasizes the importance of money in maximizing an individual's possibilities. Consequently, these individuals can function and prosper in their communities. A person can be poor in terms of money without being poor in terms of capabilities within the context of this approach.

#### *2.9.5 Participatory approach*

The participatory approach involves engaging with poor people themselves to determine their poverty status. This approach recognises that poor people are the best judges of their poverty. This view holds that empowering the poor communities to define the problem and contribute to the solution can lead to more effective anti-poverty interventions (Chambers, 2005). The participatory approach involves listening to the voices of people who live in poverty, to better understand their experiences and needs. This approach recognises the importance of the subjective experience of poverty and involves the participation of poor households in identifying and addressing poverty in their communities. This approach is an important step towards empowering those living in poverty and creating interventions that reflect their needs (Kangas 2006, p. 35). Nevertheless, implementing the participatory approach might pose a challenge due to the time and resources needed to engage with individuals and communities living in poverty.

Gardiner (2019, p.12) states that the participatory approach aims to understand the social, cultural, economic, and political components of poverty within society's context. This approach considers the perspectives of the impoverished themselves by asking them to define poverty. Individuals select the criteria that must be met to be labelled as impoverished. This enables community members to take an active role in any development efforts. In poor countries, this lays the groundwork for community-driven development. This approach tries to see poverty as

a multifaceted issue influenced by elements such as social relationships, helplessness, a lack of voice, low income, and lack of possessions. Poverty is not simply seen as a personal problem but as a problem of relationships between households and social groups.

## **2.10 Causes of poverty in South Africa**

Unemployment and poor education are often regarded as the two primary causes of poverty in South Africa. “Currently (2023), South Africa’s unemployment rate in the first quarter of 2023 was 32.9%, making it one of the highest in the world, this is a 0.2% rise over the fourth quarter of 2022” (Stats SA 2023). In South Africa, a large portion of the employed people have low-paying jobs in the informal sector with minimal job security (Daramola & Etim 2020). Schools in poor areas are under-resourced and lack adequate facilities and qualified teachers. This is evident in a study conducted by Savides (2017) wherein South African schools had a total number of 5,139 teachers who were unqualified or underqualified, and KwaZulu-Natal had the vast majority in its rural areas. This was an improvement from 6,719 teachers in 2014 and 6,030 teachers in 2015. Despite progress in certain areas, there is still cause for concern in rural South Africa with the Department of Education set to employ 2,800 unqualified teachers by 2022. To address this issue, the government must prioritize investment in teacher training and development programs.

A study conducted by Zhai (2019) asserts that the challenge rural schools face in hiring qualified teachers due to their financial, geographic, living, and emotional circumstances is a widespread occurrence worldwide. Research has revealed that pre-service teachers are less motivated to work in rural areas, and that teacher turnover is higher in these types of schools. Many countries have started long-term pre-service professional development programs to assist teachers in absorbing a strong intrinsic desire to address these shortcomings. For example, Australia developed the National Exceptional Teachers for Disadvantaged Schools (NETDS) initiative to encourage top university graduates to work in low socioeconomic status (SES) schools. Following an 18-month theoretical and practical training, more of these participating student teachers were inclined to choose lower SES schools as their initial career path, with the percentage increasing from 35.3% (2007-2010) before the program to 87.9% (2011-2015) after implementation.

Poor education leads to low skills development and this in turn results in reduced job opportunities and low earnings. Students from disadvantaged families are more likely to drop

out of school, perpetuating the cycle of poverty (Letsoalo 2015, p. 19). The South African government has implemented policies to address these issues, such as the National Development Plan (adopted in 2012) and the National Skills Development Strategy (adopted in 2001), and to promote economic growth, create jobs, and improve the education system.

Poverty in South Africa has its roots in a complex set of historical, political, and economic factors. The apartheid system of government, which institutionalised racial segregation and discrimination, created deep structural inequalities in South African society. The legacy of apartheid, including unequal land ownership, limited access to education, and restricted job opportunities, has contributed significantly to poverty in South Africa (Naidoo & Schalkwyk 2021, p. 2). Other factors contributing to poverty in South Africa include high unemployment rates, low levels of education, inadequate infrastructure, and limited access to health care (Mbuli 2008, p. 15).

### *2.10.1 Unemployment*

Unemployment has been identified as one of the main causes of poverty in South Africa. The high unemployment rates (32,9 %) are due to the inadequacies of the education system and structural unemployment (Stats SA, 2023). These relate particularly to the mismatch between the skills of the workforce and the needs of the economy. The high levels of unemployment lead to a lack of income, which in turn leads to poverty (Kruger 2018, p. 10). Unemployment is a significant cause of poverty in South Africa, with approximately 11.4 million people out of a total population of approximately 62 million unemployed in 2020 (Stats SA, 2021). The high unemployment rates in South Africa limit the people's ability to earn an income and contribute to the economy. The high unemployment rate is caused by several factors, including skill deficiencies, economic restructuring, and a lack of job opportunities. Those most affected by unemployment are young people, women, and black South Africans (Naidoo & Schalkwyk 2021, p. 12).

Apartheid legislation, regulations, and practices perpetuated poverty among the black majority in South Africa. Years of overt and covert apartheid measures transformed black people into paupers, resulting in a racially split society based on inequality. The apartheid system contributed to South Africa's black people living in shameful conditions with poor housing, a poor education system, being subject to unfair and discriminatory labour practices, a biased

judicial system, movement restrictions, economic and political exclusion, and racial and ethnic differences and tensions (Mathole 2005, p. 23).

Poor education, poor health, and unemployment are some of the general causes of poverty identified in the literature (Ramnath 2015, p. 23). The high unemployment rate is a high-level national crisis that exacerbates two of the country's other major socio-economic issues - poverty and inequality. Poverty has persisted ever since the country's liberation from apartheid in 1994. Ntshiza (2018, p. 1), for example, states that the apartheid state adopted policies to drive black people out of cities and prohibit them from learning new skills or obtaining high-status jobs. This resulted in an overabundance of low-cost black labour, which benefited the white capitalist class, particularly in agriculture, mining, and manufacturing. These economic sectors have become more mechanised and capital-intensive over time while becoming less labour-intensive. This is a significant historical factor that contributes to South Africa's current unemployment crisis.

Despite the democratic government's election in 1994, household poverty levels in South Africa have seen little improvement. Youth unemployment rates, which have been increasing since 2008, are of particular concern, with an official unemployment rate of 46.3% among young people aged 15 to 34 years in the first quarter of 2021. This rate is high when compared to other African countries. The current economic growth trajectory in South Africa is insufficient in providing the necessary volume and types of jobs to reverse the country's unemployment and inequality trends. Stats SA (2018) reports that youth unemployment is a global concern, but it is particularly prevalent in South Africa. Regardless of their education levels, young people in South Africa have a hard time finding work, which exacerbates their vulnerabilities in the labour market and leads to continuous poverty.

In the fourth quarter of 2021, South Africa's unemployment rate increased to 35.3%, the highest rate since equivalent data was first collected in 2008. Unemployment rates increased by 278,000 to 7.9 million (Madubela, 2022). Kruger (2018, p. 31) argues that unemployment depletes funding bases for welfare services, and increases poverty and inequality. Employment plays a critical role in an individual's economic well-being and is often seen as the most effective means to avoid poverty and social marginalization. Excessive unemployment reduces the purchasing power of poor people, leading to lower standards of living and widening income and welfare gaps between urban and rural families. In these circumstances, the poor have limited access to better education, job prospects, and high wages. Individuals with restricted

educational and career options, poor labour market status, and low incomes are at risk of social exclusion.

### *2.10.2 Poor education*

The quality of education in South Africa has been poor for many years, especially for those in disadvantaged communities. The failure to obtain a quality education limits opportunities for individuals to acquire better-paying jobs, which can lead to poverty and perpetuate the cycle of poverty (Jansen et al., 2015, p. 152). Poor education is another significant cause of poverty in South Africa. Low levels of education limit people's opportunities for employment and career advancement, perpetuating poverty in communities. Although the government has made significant efforts to improve the quality of education, poor infrastructure in schools, teacher shortages, and a lack of resources continue to affect South Africa's education system (Zungu, 2018).

Poverty and education are inherently linked, as individuals living in poverty are more likely to leave school prematurely to work, resulting in a lack of literacy and numeracy skills necessary for career advancement. Additionally, their children are often faced with limited opportunities and financial constraints that may lead to dropping out of school (Child Fund, 2022). As Giovetti (2022) notes, education has been called the "great equalizer" due to its capacity to provide individuals with access to resources, jobs, and skills that allow them to succeed both personally and professionally. Therefore, high-quality education is recognized as a globally significant tool for reducing poverty and addressing other related issues that can perpetuate the cycle of poverty in individuals, families, and communities.

Poverty and education are inseparable because impoverished individuals are more likely to drop out of school to work, leaving them without the literacy and numeracy skills needed to advance their careers. Years later, their children face a similar situation of not having money and having few options other than to drop out of school and work (Child Fund, 2022). According to Giovetti (2022), "Education is known as the great equalizer because it can provide access to jobs, resources, and skills that allow a person to not only survive but thrive. Access to high-quality education is regarded as a globally recognized strategy for reducing poverty. Many other issues that can keep people, families, and even entire communities trapped in the cycle of poverty can be addressed through education."

South Africa has a high rate of unemployment (32.9%) because of inadequate educational standards, which contributes to many people living in abject poverty. In general, the school system in South Africa is in crisis even in 2023. In South Africa's ongoing fight against poverty, children aged 17 and younger, those from rural areas, and those with little or no education are considered the main victims. Poverty is a significant threat to a healthy childhood. According to research on Child Poverty in South Africa conducted by Statistics South Africa (2021), more than six out of ten children (62.1%) are classified as extremely poor. This affects many parts of their lives, including their physical, mental, and emotional development. This is apparent in children from underdeveloped communities. According to Van Gaalen (2023), children living in poverty also suffer later in life because of a lack of access to necessary services. South Africa's public education system fails the vast majority of the country's youth. Despite this, the government contributes a larger portion of its budget to education than many other countries, like France, the United Kingdom, and Australia. The necessity for the private sector to collaborate with the government to develop new approaches to address this challenge is becoming increasingly apparent. Improving teaching is the first step in transforming education.

## **2.11 Conclusion**

This chapter provides an extensive overview of poverty in South Africa, including various ways to measure poverty and its underlying causes. Poverty is seen as a complex problem in South Africa, rooted in historical, political, and economic factors, requiring a comprehensive approach to be resolved. This chapter also emphasizes that some of the primary causes of poverty in South Africa, including social exclusion, limited resources, and unemployment are explored, along with their impact on individuals, communities, and society. Despite government policies to reduce poverty, structural inequalities remain a challenge in eradicating poverty. Thus, ongoing efforts are necessary to address the issue effectively. Overall, this chapter provides a robust and extensive framework for understanding poverty in South Africa. The chapter highlights the importance of education and employment in combating poverty and calls for a more comprehensive approach to poverty eradication. Policymakers, researchers, and practitioners interested in addressing poverty in South Africa can gain valuable insights from this text. The next chapter will detail the relationship between poverty and education, obstacles faced by students when they enrol into HEIs, and factors impacting students' educational attainment in HEIs of South Africa.

## CHAPTER THREE

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### 3.1 Introduction

The main purpose of this literature review chapter is to highlight and discuss the factors that may influence or affect tertiary students' insights and understanding of the relationship between poverty and educational attainment. The chapter examines the existing literature on the obstacles that low-income students faced when they first enrolled in university. This chapter provides an overview of the factors impacting students' educational attainment in the HEIs in South Africa. The literature critically engages with relevant themes for the study under the socio-economic status of students and parents, including students' socio-economic status, parental involvement and education, lack of financial support, and the academic support of students. To guide the literature review, Bourdieu's theory of capital was adopted in this discussion.

#### 3.2 What is the relationship between poverty and education?

Poverty and educational attainment in South African higher education are complex issues that require a multifaceted approach to address. A lack of access to high-quality education, financial constraints, and systemic inequalities contribute to the correlation between poverty and educational attainment. Higher education encompasses all postsecondary educational institutions, such as universities, that state authorities have designated as institutions of higher education (Win, 2015). According to Garrido-Yserte and Gallo-Rivera (2020), higher education can help transform a struggling economy, reduce unemployment, and alleviate poverty. In 2022, the poverty rate was estimated to be 62.6 %, with almost 1.5 million additional individuals living below the upper-middle-class poverty line (Maluleke, 2022).

According to Helmendach (2022), half of Black and coloured South Africans did not finish secondary school in 2018, whereas over 80% of white South Africans did. In 2018, only 4.3% of Black students who completed secondary school enrolled in higher education, and only 4.1% earned a degree as of 2020. Given the country's racially unjust history, access to inclusive and affordable education is a critical means of escaping poverty for many Black South Africans. According to Hogan (2020, p. 1), about 81% of the children in South Africa's rural areas live below the poverty line, and 44% of urban children live in poverty. Rural education suffers only

because of the barriers that this location presents. For example, many schools lack important resources such as water, electricity, books, and technology, which creates barriers for South African children to have a complete educational experience. Poverty is not just a lack of financial resources; it is also a lack of the ability to function effectively in society.

Van der Berg (2008) stated that “absolute poverty can be attributed to a lack of sufficient resources and the lack of education of the parents”. Absolute poverty discourages enrolment and hinders learning in schools. Relative poverty emphasizes alienation from the mainstream in rich countries, which can result in inadequate motivation and ability to fully benefit from educational pursuits.

### **3.3 Obstacles faced by low-income students when they first enrol at university**

Fosnacht and Dong’s (2013) study at Indiana University found that financial stress significantly impacts first-year college students’ academic performances more than academic issues, thus increasing their stress levels. According to Maffea (2020), students from low-income family backgrounds often struggle to find resources, leading to lower grades on standardised tests compared to those students from wealthier families. The lack of resources affects students in various ways, including financial difficulties, adaptability issues, stress from university workload, accommodation issues, and the inability to use technological resources. Students from poor or working-class families also struggle to sustain satisfactory performance in their studies.

Shange (2018) and Kunene (2018) highlight the stress and challenges that university students face during their transition from high school to university. Students are often expected to redirect some of their bursary funds to their families, which can negatively impact their psychological schemas and academic performance. The transition from a familiar environment to a new one with new rules, demands, and responsibilities can be challenging. Some students are not given priority when enrolling at university, making accommodation acquisition a key challenge.

Uleanya and Rugbeer’s (2020) study highlights the challenges that students faced when they first enrolled at university, including adjusting to academic expectations, managing social and cultural diversity, comparing themselves to others, and managing relationships at home and school. Case et al. (2018) suggest that these factors can lead to challenges in academic performance and overall well-being. Research conducted by Mseleku (2022, p. 252-269) in

Durban, KwaZulu-Natal which involved youth people aged between 14 to 35 years indicated that students from underprivileged families face significant financial constraints in postsecondary education, making them vulnerable to financial matters. They struggle to navigate academic documents, financial aid applications, faculty handbooks, and prospectuses. Despite having access to formal and informal information resources, wealthier schools have more formal resources like guidance counsellors, Advanced Placement courses, college handbooks, and university open days.

Njoko's study (2018) which had a sample of 20 learners from high schools in Mbabazane Local Municipality in the uThukela District of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa found that all 20 learners had limited information sources, with the Central Application's Office (CAO) application handbook being the primary source. Teachers in rural schools rely on handbooks as their primary source of information due to limited information technology (IT) infrastructure. The lack of comprehensive and up-to-date information on various career options and higher education options is a significant issue that hinders the learners' abilities to make informed decisions about their future. This lack of guidance can lead to mismatched career choices and missed opportunities for personal growth and success. Additionally, students may not be aware of the various educational pathways available to them, limiting their ability to pursue further education or training that could enhance their career prospects. This problem is more serious than a lack of information sources.

### **3.4 Factors impacting students' educational attainment in higher educational institutions in South Africa**

#### *3.4.1 The impact of apartheid policies on access to higher education*

This poverty rate for 2022 (62.6%) is an indication that higher education in the country is riddled with the disparities left over from the apartheid era and the Bantu Education Act No. 47 of 1953. Gallo (2020) contends that the Bantu Education Act No. 47 of 1953, which led to the implementation of Bantu Education in South Africa, was a set of education regulations enacted in 1953 that legalized racial discrimination in education and established a rigid and specific school curriculum for the majority black population in apartheid South Africa. According to the Oxford Dictionary (2018), the word Bantu means "a member of an extensive group of indigenous people of central and southern Africa". Gallo (2020) argues that the Bantu

Education Act (No. 47) of 1953 widened racial gaps in access to education and was created to educate and train Black South African students for unskilled labour prospects.

Hartshorne (1992) asserts that Bantu education served the interests of white supremacy. It denied black people access to the same educational opportunities and resources that white South Africans enjoyed. Bantu education denigrated black people's history, culture, and identity. It promoted myths and racial stereotypes in its curriculum and textbooks, and some of these were taught to African students in government-run schools, including the idea that there was a distinct “Bantu society” and “Bantu economy”. This so-called “Bantu culture” was presented in a crude and essentialist fashion. African people and communities were portrayed as traditional, rural, and unchanging. Bantu education treated Blacks as perpetual children in need of parental supervision by whites, which greatly limited a student's vision, specifically their place in the broader South African society.

The history of racial discrimination in South African higher education is crucial for understanding institutions of higher education, particularly those that are predominantly white and have some black students. For instance, higher education and learning institutions are part of the colonial project so they serve as a symbol of colonialism (Heleta, 2016). When the National Party came to power in 1948, it decided to provide higher education to Black students in separate educational institutions. For instance, Stellenbosch and Potchefstroom did not accept black students, Rhodes University did the same with exceptions for certain postgraduate classes, while the universities of Cape Town and Witwatersrand accepted black students (Bazana & Mogotsi 2017, p. 8).

According to Bazana and Mogotsi (2017, p. 9), University Education Act No.45 of 1959 was proposed for the creation of separate universities for black and white students. The act made it illegal for white institutions to accept black students. The act was a continuation of the apartheid policy and planned to exclude people based on their race. The promotion of racial equity in the state education system was a major task for South Africa's new democratic government in 1994. Racial equity in educational systems promoted a race-blind system in which there was no exclusion based on race. In short, the South African democratic government made education available to all students regardless of race.

Bojuwoye (2002) stated that the black community's values, rituals, and practices were, and still are, marginalised in educational institutions through institutional cultures that favour a white

culture. Students from disadvantaged backgrounds were more likely to struggle with adjustment issues, especially when the institutional culture differed from their own. This may apply to students whose social, economic, and cultural backgrounds have had little or no direct influence on white culture.

According to Moodley (2015), white students were correlated with privilege. White students were reported to utilize laptops and iPads, while Black students were compelled to use school computer laboratories. Students from underprivileged backgrounds who did not have access to laptops experienced academic challenges. According to Bourdieu (1986), this is because white students came from families with high cultural capital, could afford socio-economic resources (e.g., laptops and iPads), and could afford good quality schools. Black students came from lower socio-economic backgrounds that lacked cultural capital compared to those from higher socio-economic backgrounds. Consequently, families with high cultural capital were able to afford resources that had a good influence on their children's educational attainment.

High tables and the use of forks and knives were noted and questioned at Rhodes University's dining halls in terms of their relevance to Black students from rural areas. This was because Black students from disadvantaged backgrounds felt a sense of alienation and asked themselves, "Why do they need to use a knife and fork, and not use a spoon?" These are some of the issues that made black students from low-income backgrounds feel uncomfortable in the spaces of HEIs. Higher education institutions were required to pay attention to the artwork that decorates their public spaces and consider whether all students can identify themselves and feel free in such spaces. (Macupe 2016, p. 5).

#### *3.4.2 The effects of post-apartheid higher education policies on equity and participation*

Given the historical framework referred to in the previous paragraphs, South Africa's new political leadership and the government decided to modify the status quo of privilege that white South Africans legally enjoyed in the pre-1994 period. Consequently, the new political system had to reassess politically sanctioned racialism and its associated social and monetary structures. The entire political system needed to be reorganised. Student enrolment in historically black universities decreased in the post-1994 period, and students flocked to historically white colleges and universities that had more resources (Xulu 2019, p. 18).

Apartheid perpetuated inequality in higher education and negatively affected the quality of education that many students received. In 1994, the South African democratic government inherited a higher education system marked by dispersion and incoherence, high levels of institutional inequality, an inequitable financial system, inequities in higher learning access, and undemocratic governance structures. (Naidoo & Schalkwyk 2021, p. 2). To address several injustices in the apartheid era's education system, the newly elected democratic government sought to provide a nonracial, tolerant, and equal education system for all citizens (Baloyi 2020, p. 2).

### *3.4.3 The Dawn of the democratic dispensation*

Mzangwa (2019, p. 2) asserts that since 1994, "the South African democratic government attempted to revisit and amend higher education policy, but these policy changes did not result in tangible benefits for most previously disadvantaged black people in South Africa in terms of higher education access, equity, and participation. Instead, the wealthy continued to afford and obtain access to higher education, while the impoverished majority and primarily black people appeared to be unaffected by measures aimed at reforming higher education in the country. This is due to the inadequate policies implemented and lack of monitoring compliance with the current policies, resulting in the lack of success in resolving and altering the higher education system of South Africa. The Council of Higher Education (2020) indicates that the transformation of HEIs in South Africa resulted from South Africa being a diverse country with different racial groups that had diverse socioeconomic status. The transformation of higher education and policy sought to bring about advancements and reforms to the HEIs in South Africa, addressing socioeconomic needs, access, and equity.

The amended South African education policies included allowing black students who did not meet the high admission standards for a degree programme to be accepted without being discriminated against because of their relatively poor matriculation results. These policies are designed to make higher education more accessible to the majority population. Historically white institutions began admitting limited numbers of black students as apartheid regulations were modified in the early 1980s. Academic assistance programs focusing on language and writing, supplemental instruction, and tutoring programs were created to enhance the academic performance of the rising number of students who were accepted into the university from both low and high-socioeconomic backgrounds. (Tanga & Maphosa 2018, p. 2).

#### *3.4.4 The massification era in South African higher education*

Given the history of South Africa, the massification era of higher education has been both a social justice goal and an important milestone. Since the 1990s, South African higher education institutions have become more accessible to a wider range of students. Throughout the history of higher education, students have fought for access to free education. The number of higher education students increased from 420,000 in 1994 to 1.1 million in 2014. Students from marginalized groups during apartheid were encouraged to pursue higher education in South Africa (Msiza, Ndhlovu, & Raseroka, 2020, p.45).

Despite the admirable quest for social fairness and access to information, the rapid growth of the country has impacted the daily operations of institutions. Higher education varies across the 26 universities of South Africa. Institutional massification is influenced by factors such as the social context and financial stability of universities. The University of KwaZulu-Natal is one of the institutions that intentionally diversify its student body by targeting students from Quintiles 1-3 schools (Mtolo, 2022).

Msiza, Ndhlovu, and Raseroka (2020, p.47) assert that as HEIs expand and become more accessible, they need to manage limited resources such as teaching personnel, libraries, and student housing to accommodate growing enrolment. In many HEIs, growing enrolment has surpassed teaching and learning resources, creating a snowball effect. Insufficient efforts to address these statistics undercut the social justice goal. This is especially relevant for teacher educators. Providing students with physical access to institutions without enough support may impede epistemic access and the development of necessary skills for student teaching.

### **3.5 The effectiveness of academic assistance programs in improving student outcomes**

Many students in South Africa enter higher education without the required skills, role models, support structures, and cultural capital to succeed. These students may not engage in self-help-seeking behaviours and may be less inclined to seek help when needed. Higher education has seen the introduction of large-scale student support programs, bridging and foundational programs, counselling and career guidance, more explicit and transparent expectations and assessment criteria, and different pedagogies as student numbers have increased, including non-traditional students such as students from disadvantaged backgrounds and first-generation students (Chetty & Kepkey 2023, p.90).

Shabani & Maboe (2021, p.25) states that student support programs aim to assist students with easy access to study material and opportunities to improve their academic journey. Student support services result from the ineffective and inefficient interactions that have been observed in the past between students and the various components of services offered by HEI. Student support services are designed to improve students' academic skills, instil the confidence required for academic success, encourage student involvement and integration into the academic system, and prepare students for active participation in the university environment. Without effective and efficient services, students are unlikely to build the required academic, emotional, and social relationships, making them more likely to drop out and leave their studies.

As stated by Johnson et al. (2022), student support services are the ideal alternative for students who are uncomfortable sharing the issues they have at home. In addition to emotional support, university student support services help students with academic challenges by tutoring and proposing remedial courses. Students can improve their self-regulation and learning outcomes while requesting assistance to acquire independent problem-solving and self-determination. Counsellors in HEIs help students prepare for academic and social obstacles. Counsellors can also help students from both low and high socioeconomic backgrounds to stay motivated and plan their careers.

The University of KwaZulu-Natal is one of the HEIs that offer student support services. In the study conducted by (Warke 2015), which highlighted the perceptions of students on the services offered by the UKZN, it is indicated that in a sample size of 384 participants from five UKZN campuses, 42% of students indicated being aware of student support services. 58% of the participants indicated not know the student support services offered by the University of KwaZulu-Natal. There are numerous services offered by UKZN colleges such as student funding, academic support, student counselling, student residence and catering, career assistance, disability support, alumni support, HIV support, and legal assistance. A survey conducted in this study indicated that 21% of students were aware of funding services, 17% of students were aware of academic support, and 16% of students knew about student counselling services. 67% of students indicated that student support services were not accessible while 33% said services were accessible.

A study conducted by Dlamini (2019) highlighted some of the challenges of student support services from UKZN. Student support services face the challenges of being in a position to

assist students when they have issues. Student support services are not using a preventative model to assist students but adopt a treatment model when the damage has already happened. This results in several students not being aware of these services because they do not face problems that force them to utilize these student support services. Another challenge is that students who utilize these services have to wait longer to get assisted and they get seen for short-term support. This is problematic for students from disadvantaged backgrounds because they might require ongoing support, and being offered short-term support might derail them from utilizing these services.

### **3.6 The impact of socio-economic status on higher education access and success**

#### *3.6.1 Students' socio-economic status*

An individual's background, particularly their socio-economic background, impacts their social views, behaviours, attitudes, perceptions, interpretations, experiences, self-concept, and general aspirations (Chen et al. 2018). Bourdieu's work on capital makes this clear. Cultural, social, and symbolic capital are some of the different types of capital carried from one generation to the next, which influence people's decisions by implanting specific mindsets into their consciousness (Bourdieu, 1989; Swartz, 1997). These attitudes may not be the person's own, and they might occur unknowingly (Bourdieu 1993, pp. 23–24). Understanding how a person's social or historical context influences their decisions and behaviours is crucial.

According to Bourdieu (1993), academic institutions claim to promote equality of opportunity and the eradication of social injustices, but in reality, they do not. Those with poor socio-economic positions are at a disadvantage at these institutions due to the stark contrast between their ideals and those that are expected in HEIs. Students with a high level of cultural capital usually perform well in these institutions because they can absorb academic values, norms, and practices more effectively. The values that students inherit from their families determine their success in higher education. These values align with HEIs or not, leading to either success or failure and a lack of ability to graduate within the required period. Having high levels of cultural capital means having access to greater opportunities and resources, whereas having low levels of cultural capital results in minimum access to these opportunities.

Mofoka (2016, p. 23) states that socio-economic status is a person's entire social standing, which is influenced by their achievements in both the social and economic domains. A person's

socio-economic status is determined by their educational attainment, employment, occupational standing, income, and health. There is widespread agreement that education improves personal and social capital, providing a springboard to a fulfilling and prosperous life. Students from disadvantaged backgrounds may struggle academically due to their complex lack of resources and learning tools, which can pose a significant challenge

Baloyi (2020, p. 29) states that socio-economic status encompasses the quality of life, possibilities, and benefits granted to people within society. Human functionality, including physical and mental health, is influenced by socio-economic class. Low socio-economic status, as well as its consequences, like inferior educational success, poverty, and poor health, impact society. Material resources are a critical component of educational socio-economic inequality. Poverty, income, and wealth all play a role in material resources. Therefore, there is a disparity in student or school performance due to the differing access to material resources.

According to Sumida and Kawata (2021, p. 1), In many Sub-Saharan African countries, students' learning performance in rural areas is worse than that of students in urban areas, resulting in a concerning gap connected to knowledge deficiencies or educational inequality. Czerniewicz and Brown (2014, p. 1) assert that schools situated in high- to middle-class environments have a high level of cultural capital in terms of educational equipment. Schools reproduce inequality by rewarding the cultural capital of the dominant social class. The education system takes advantage of the cultural capital belonging to the high class in society and turns it into academic success.

Dema (2022, p. 202) states that urban schools are situated in an environment in which the dominant group's cultural capital has high expectations of their children, and hence the school is required to meet those expectations. Schools in high-income areas are always socially wealthy and enjoy "first preference" over those from lower socioeconomic backgrounds. Students from affluent communities have more prior knowledge and are better prepared to thrive academically. Students from low-income families, on the other hand, find the school environment unpleasant and unusual. The upper socioeconomic classes have acquired and dominated the resources available for their sole gain, preserving their supremacy over subordinates in HEIs through their high cultural capital.

Another focus is on the importance of social capital which explores how social relationships increase educational performance by making further connections between students, schools,

parents, and the local community. This is seen in terms of parental expectations, and student and teacher commitments. Children do better in school when they are surrounded by a tightly knit community in which parents, teachers, and members of the local community engage and encourage scholastic success (Đurišić & Bunijevac 2017, p. 142).

Maswikiti (2008, p. 6) states that the way parents raise their children, such as how they motivate and push them, is another SES influence that is a stronger indication of children's success. Students from low-income or low, socio-economic status households face challenges in terms of their circumstances. Students from low socio-economic backgrounds frequently come from deprived and stressed circumstances that make learning difficult. Poverty's detrimental effects therefore manifest in academic achievement inequalities between students from privileged and disadvantaged families.

### *3.6.2 Parental involvement and education*

A student's family background is the most critical factor that influences educational outcomes. Poverty is highly correlated with background variables, including the level of parental education, making it difficult to separate the impact of limited financial resources from home backgrounds (Chen et al 2018, p. 3). "Parental involvement is defined as parents' participation in a variety of school and home-based activities that improve their children's educational outcomes" (Maluleke 2014, p. 13). Parental involvement is defined as the relationship between a parent and a child regarding learning skills, and the parent's dedication to providing the child with the resources needed to assist their schooling.

Dick (2019, p. 23) states that parental involvement refers to parents assisting their children in selecting careers, with homework and school projects, encouraging their children to set educational goals, and attending school events. Children's fundamental educational structure is their family. Therefore, parental involvement is necessary to help children improve their educational and social lives. Gwija (2016, p. 19) argues that parental involvement in education enhances academic performance, lowers dropout rates, decreases delinquency, and inspires students to work hard in school. Parental involvement during elementary and secondary school influences academic components in adulthood.

According to Zuma (2020, p. 17), some parents provide their children with ongoing non-academic support, such as financial assistance and encouragement to focus on their studies. Parents' financial support, such as investing financial resources in their children's education,

has a greater influence on academic achievement than types of involvement that demand parents' time investment. Roksa and Robinson (2017) assert that parental participation can be extremely beneficial to a student's academic success and endeavours. Lack of parental involvement may harm a student's academic performance.

Idris et al. (2020, p. 83) assert that “parental education significantly impacts children's knowledge, abilities, and values. Parents who participate in educational activities at home have a favourable impact on their children's educational achievement”. According to Levine et al. (2017, p. 290), children's vocabulary is the gateway to scholarship, as well as other linguistic and social skills, and is strongly influenced by their parents at home. The communication of educated parents at home, through rich vocabulary, fine pronunciation, and logical arguments in conversation, contributes to children's language development. Educated parents may also provide excellent assistance to their children since they have already gone through the educational process and are aware of the highs and lows of educational decisions. Hence, they can share strong educational life experiences.

According to Bakar et al. (2017, p. 297), parental education assists students in moulding their behaviour and properly adjusting to the situation of being in tertiary institutions, resulting in a prosperous and educated life. All these home activities, including parental supervision, reciprocal communication, assisting in educational decisions, and sharing educational experiences with children, have a substantial and favourable association with the student's academic progress. Children's parents make home arrangements based on their understanding, and education has a positive influence on students' academic success. A student's academic achievement is closely related to basic facilities at home, which are linked to parental education. The facilities and environment at home prepare the children for the looming challenges of future educational, social, spiritual, and political elements of life. Besides the home environment and parents' educational status, parents' attitudes toward their children and their development instil permanent values such as honesty, integrity, hard work, and sympathy.

Functionally illiterate parents usually prioritize work beyond education and have fewer expectations for their children, and their children are more likely to follow in their footsteps and do the same. This results in a generational cycle of disadvantage. Parents in rural South Africa often work menial jobs, have a low level of education, and place little value on education. Consequently, parents are unable to obtain additional items (stationary) requested

by teachers, thereby impacting teaching, and learning in their children's education. Strong literacy abilities among parents, on the other hand, benefit their children's lives since they will be better equipped to assist and encourage their children in school and interact efficiently with their children's teachers (Low & Miranda, 2021).

Li and Qiu (2018, p. 3) state that cultural capital emphasises that a family's cultural resources and environment influence their children's educational aspirations and performance. Parents with high cultural capital are more aware of school rules, invest more cultural resources, pay more attention to nurturing their children's educational aspirations and interests, assist children with the school curriculum, and enable them to excel academically. Social capital, on the other hand, emphasises parental involvement in education, and children's learning behaviours and achievement. Parents with higher social and economic status usually participate more intensively in their children's learning activities, pay more attention to communication with teachers, manage the children's absences from school and other risky behaviours, and improve the children's academic performances.

### *3.6.3 Lack of financial support*

According to Mngomezulu et al. (2017, p. 133), the growing count of South African students in higher education indicates that economically and educationally disadvantaged individuals have better access to tertiary education. Nonetheless, though access has improved, it has not resulted in better success rates. Even with financial support from the government and other sources, many students fail to complete their degrees within the stipulated period or abandon them altogether. Some of the primary reasons cited for students' failure and advancement challenges in higher education institutions in South Africa include student poverty and lack of financial support.

Shange (2018, p. 36) states that the South African government has seemingly decided that the cost of sending working-class children to university is too high, given that the low levels of public funding for tertiary education have resulted in higher fees. Consequently, this effectively shuts out the poor and limits the universities' ability to contribute to social and economic development. Poverty is one of the most common sources of financial difficulty and social marginalisation, and some students who are unable to access financial aid rely on their parents for financial assistance. This often results in parents taking out loans to cover their children's school or university expenses.

Wangenge-Ouma and Carpentier (2018, p. 27) state that during apartheid, higher education was purposefully oriented to exclude a substantial segment of the population. Funding schemes were used as tools to carry out the apartheid government's "separate but equal" doctrine. Higher education is essential in the post-apartheid period to alter the legacy of the past, extend access, enhance quality, and respond to South Africa's larger socio-economic and developmental goals. Like in the apartheid period, funding is a major driver for the realisation of post-apartheid public policy objectives, specifically regarding appropriate funding and affordability for universities, particularly for students from lower socio-economic backgrounds.

In the post-apartheid era in South Africa, there was an urgent need to investigate alternate and innovative student finance strategies in higher education. Hence, during the fees much fall protests of 2015-2016 free education was placed on the national agenda. One of the established student finance approaches is the National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS). The NSFAS initiative is a loan and bursary scheme that the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) sponsors and it is intended to support students from low-income households with an annual income of up to R122 000 (one hundred and twenty-two thousand Rand) or less applicable in 2018. The National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS) is meant for people who lack the financial resources to obtain bank loans or any alternative support, such as study loans and bursaries (National Student Financial Aid Scheme, 2018).

The National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS) provides funding to about one million students pursuing higher education in public universities and TVET colleges nationwide for the 2023 academic year. According to Higher Education Minister Blade Nzimande, the scheme has been allocated a budget of R47.6 million for the current academic year. subsequently, the minister further stated that the NSFAS allowance payments for this year have been modified to account for inflation. Nzimande also affirmed that in addition to the existing benefits, NSFAS allowance payments will continue to be issued monthly, but they will now be made directly to the students' NSFAS bank accounts (Maliti, 2023).

According to du Plessis (2023), the NSFAS 'free education' policy initiative seems to have been launched without proper planning, without analysis to establish the best design, and without any attempt to understand the adverse unintended consequences. Consequently, NSFAS has let down students, universities, and the country, because the government has failed to afford the fee-free education scheme. In the 2017/18 financial year, the government allocated R15.4

billion for NSFAS and R31.6 billion (including R3.5 billion for infrastructure) for university subsidies. The NSFAS budget increased to R50.1 billion by 2023–2024, while R44.5 billion (including R673 million for infrastructure) was set aside for university subsidies. While the NSFAS grant increased by 328% over these six years, the department's budget's subsidy component increased by 56%.

According to Banton (2023), the government unilaterally declared that the NSFAS lodging allowance would be covered at R45, 000 per year and the food allowance at R13, 100 per year in 2023 since NSFAS could no longer satisfy the expectations it had set. Students who went to university expecting to have no debts now find themselves with significant debt due to housing fees and lack of ability to buy food. As a result of these issues, thousands of students across the country will face financial exclusion at graduation in 2023 and registration in 2024, bringing the industry back to the specific issue underlying #FeesMustFall.

### *3.6.3.1 University students' challenges in receiving this financial provision (NSFAS) from the government*

NSFAS has significantly improved higher education and the country as a whole by providing access to higher education for many students who could not afford it before. This initiative has helped many students graduate with their first qualification. Since its inception, the scheme has made major reforms to meet its mandate as the number of beneficiaries increases annually. Every year, NSFAS assists an average of 88,122 students. The NSFAS Annual Report (2018/19) shows a large growth in financing for financially qualifying students since the fund's inception, particularly after 2015 (Sokhweba 2022, p.19).

Despite its successes, NSFAS has been facing major challenges. Students pursuing different qualifications in higher education institutions have experienced significant challenges as a result of NSFAS funding deficiencies. This has harmed students' success as it indicates financial shortages in their academic resources. NSFAS receives the majority of its funding from the government, and, in some cases, the scheme receives less than what it requested, forcing it to change its budget to manage shortages (Dibela 2018, p.29).

A difficult challenge for students is not knowing if they have been accepted for financial support due to the delayed application process. Moreover, NSFAS rejects students for bursaries without providing appropriate reasons. Late payment of allowances has negatively impacted students' academic progress and performance in recent years. Most students require allowances

to study well throughout the academic year, placing them at a disadvantage. These are some of the most typical difficulties confronting the NSFAS (Sokhweba 2022, p.20).

#### *3.6.4 Lack of academic support*

According to the Council on Higher Education (CHE) (2020), academic support programmes were implemented in South Africa to aid underprepared students in benefiting from lectures and tutorials. This effort aimed to provide historically disadvantaged students with an equal chance by bridging the gap between their low socio-economic status and university education. Despite the number of intervention programmes that have been implemented, this goal has not been met. It may be argued that making higher education more inclusive entails not just bringing historically underrepresented groups into higher education, but also satisfying their specific requirements (academic support and financial support).

While these students' access to higher education has increased, it is often assumed that students from educationally disadvantaged families continue to lag behind their more advantaged peers in terms of advancement. Such concerns prompted UKZN to develop the Academic Monitoring and Support (AMS) policy framework, which was adopted in 2006 with the primary goal of improving teaching and learning quality. “Beginning in 2009, the four colleges at UKZN (College of Humanities, College of Agriculture, Engineering and Science, College of Health Science, and College of Law and Management Studies) developed new methods for implementing interventions for academic performance, which are primarily funded by the Department of Higher Education and Training's (DHET) Teaching Development Grant” (Bengesai & Paideya 2017, pp. 55-56).

According to Khuzwayo (2021, p. 33), Universities provide students with a variety of services to promote their academic, social, and psychological well-being, such as counselling, writing places, academic monitoring and support, teaching and learning places, supplemental instructors (SI), NSFAS, scholarship centres, open libraries, and computer local-area networks (LAN). Academic literacy is essential to help students improve their academic and linguistic skills. Academic writing is a necessary skill for students to succeed in their studies. For instance, black students require a nurturing environment that promotes personal development. Daily, students benefit from academic advisors and college administrators not only for advice but also for guidance to help them steer in the right direction.

Academic support programmes are available at UKZN to help students whose academic potential has not been realised due to their disadvantaged educational backgrounds. These include access and foundation programmes, revised first-year courses, and supplementary courses in critical skills like communication and academic writing. The AMS focuses on the early identification of students who are underperforming and offers academic counselling, study skills assistance, academic literacy assistance, and mentorship. The AMS focuses on various initiatives, such as Academic Development Officers (ADOs), the Writing Place (WP), the First Year Experience (FYE) mentorship program, and the Tutor Training and Development (TTD) program, which serves as a special system to monitor and support all students' academic progress. (University of KwaZulu-Natal Quality Enhancement Project Report, 2015).

### **3.7 The Effects of Poverty on Students' Mental Health and Well-being**

According to Nyagwencha-Nyamweya (2022, p.17), poverty can significantly impact students' mental health and well-being. These effects are influenced by the social, economic, and environmental conditions that these students grow up in. Mental health issues can occur in all individuals, regardless of their socioeconomic status, and poverty and mental health are interconnected. Access to resources and their quality play a crucial role in determining whether someone develops mental health problems or falls into poverty. Additionally, the dynamic nature of poverty increases the likelihood of mental health and well-being issues for those living in poverty. Compared to their peers from higher socioeconomic status families, students living in poverty are more likely to experience depression, low self-esteem, and engage in criminal behaviour.

#### *3.7.1 Depression*

Depression is a mental health condition characterized by persistent sadness or loss of interest in activities. Depression can severely hinder daily life and may result from a variety of biological, psychological, and social factors. Depressive symptoms are more prevalent among university students, regardless of gender, age, or ethnicity. As per Zondi and Mthembu (2023, p.19), depression is a prominent cause of suicide and substance addiction among university and college students that eventually leads to academic exclusion. A survey of South African university students found that 24.2% experienced mild depression, while 12.4% had moderate to severe depression. Globally, approximately 21% of university students suffer from severe depression (University of Witwatersrand, 2023).

Zondi and Mthembu (2023, p.21) suggest that depression hinders academic performance and, in extreme situations, may lead to suicide. For first-time university students, the transition to university life may be overwhelming. Factors contributing to depression among students include new university life, changes in social demographics, behaviour, and education. Furthermore, living in residences without parental care and a low socioeconomic status can make students depressed as they cannot afford the lifestyle they see on social media or with other students on campus. Students may be overwhelmed by the need for academic self-efficacy, acculturation difficulties, language barriers, and procrastination in completing academic tasks. As noted by Nyagwencha-Nyamweya (2022, p.27), depression can negatively affect learning, academic performance, and overall quality of life, leading to poor academic outcomes and sometimes even module or semester failures.

### *3.7.2 Low Self-Esteem*

Alghamdi et al. (2023) indicate that poverty can lead to low self-esteem, which increases the risk of mental illness, suicide, and poor academic performance. Low self-esteem arises from the competition between different components of one's self, such as the real and ideal selves. Individuals also evaluate their behaviour and abilities in comparison to themselves and those significant to them to measure self-efficacy. Low self-esteem may cause psychological weaknesses and a lack of self-confidence, leading to problems and harmful behaviours. Poor self-esteem is often considered a risk factor for depression, anxiety, eating disorders, violence, marginalization in education, and substance abuse.

### *3.7.3 Criminal Behaviour*

Poverty is a major factor in perpetuating criminal activity, as individuals lacking access to basic resources and opportunities may resort to illegal actions to survive. Poverty may also exacerbate social and economic issues such as unemployment and substance abuse, leading to increased criminal activity. Feelings of hopelessness and despair associated with poverty can also contribute to criminal behaviour. Children exposed to violence and crime may experience long-term trauma, which can hinder their overall development. Witnessing violence, even if not directly participating, can negatively impact a child's development, especially if such exposure is frequent (Faster Capital, 2023).

### **3.8 Conclusion**

This chapter serves to outline the literature on the correlation between poverty and educational attainment in South African higher education institutions. Poverty and educational attainment in South Africa are complex issues that require a multifaceted approach to address. The historical legacy of apartheid and the Bantu Education Act have contributed to the correlation between poverty and educational attainment. Students from low-income and disadvantaged backgrounds often face significant obstacles when they first enrol in university, including financial stress, academic issues, and adjustment challenges. These factors can significantly impact their academic performance and overall well-being. The socio-economic status of students and their parents, lack of financial support, and academic support are some of the critical factors that impact students' educational attainment in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). The National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS) is an initiative meant to support students from low-income households; however, its implementation has faced criticism. Academic support programmes such as the Academic Monitoring and Support (AMS) policy framework have been implemented to improve the quality of teaching and learning and address the specific needs of students from disadvantaged backgrounds. HEIs provide various services, such as counselling, writing centres, academic monitoring and support, and mentorship, to promote students' academic, social, and psychological well-being. The vulnerability of students to poverty and lack of academic and financial support may significantly affect their mental health and well-being, leading to depression, low self-esteem, and even criminal behaviour. Therefore, it is imperative to continue to explore strategies for providing equal access to education, to ensure that every student has an equal opportunity to succeed. The next chapter will detail the theoretical framework for this research, focusing on Bourdieu's theory of habitus as an element to explain the impact of poverty reduction.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

#### 4.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to explain the theoretical assumptions that underpin the issue of students' educational attainment. This study utilises the theory of habitus, specifically Bourdieu's (1977) cultural capital theory. The purpose of this chapter includes an overview of cultural capital theory and its connection to students' educational attainment in South African HEIs. The chapter aims to identify, describe, and explain Bourdieu's theory of Habitus, his concept of field and his notion of capital. This chapter further explains how Bourdieu's theory is applied in education and it also critiques Bourdieu's theory (1977).

#### 4.2 Bourdieu's concept of habitus

Habitus is defined as "a system of dispositions and structured structures that moulds and modifies the daily experiences of individuals" (Ronnie 2008, p. 33). A system of dispositions refers to patterns of thinking, ways of being, and interests instilled in children through socialisation. Habitus contains psychological, linguistic, moral, and physical dimensions (Bourdieu 1990, p. 53). Habitus determines the way people see, perceive, and interact with the world and the people around them. People learn how to speak, think, and act based on the habitus they are born into (Souza et al. 2017).

According to Swartz (2002), habitus is derived from how people are socialized, and it is through social experiences that people acquire certain habits which they internalize, and which guide their thoughts and actions. This implies that dispositions are learned through social interactions and are responsible for how people function because they generate principles that guide their actions. According to Navarro (2006, p.16), habitus can change depending on the social environment. Moreover, individuals can recognize and modify their habitus adapt to changing circumstances and overcome the limitations that their social environment imposes. Unstable social environments, however, can result in unstable systems of disposition that lead to unpredictable patterns of behaviour.

Bourdieu (1990, p. 91) defines habitus as "the accumulation of one's past, present, and future experiences, as well as the collective history of one's family and social class". This suggests

that family socialisation lays the groundwork for structuring habitus. According to Khuzwayo (2021, p. 39), habits and practices formed because of socialisation can be difficult to change or unlearn. Learned habits acquired during socialisation can significantly impact an individual's behaviours, choices, and interactions, shaping their values, beliefs, and personalities as they navigate through different life stages.

Lizardo (2004:17) and Lamula (2017:88) define habitus as a set of “lived experiences” derived from objective structures that constitute a “state of being”. The term "state of being" in this context refers to the process by which people transform objective structures into subjective structures. Objective structures are those that relate to a person's social class and status (for example, family, religion, economy, and law). People develop subjective structures when they absorb and internalize objective structures to the point where their actions, gestures, and language resemble the objective structure. The objective and subjective structures of a society represent an individual's social position and background.

According to Huang (2019, p. 48), Bourdieu's concept of habitus is related to the resource of knowledge. Individuals gain knowledge from their surroundings. A working-class person will have a different understanding of the world than an upper-middle-class or upper-class person. This means that a person from a lower socio-economic background may have different world views and values than someone from a higher socio-economic background. For example, someone from a working-class background may prioritise practical skills and immediate financial stability, while someone from a higher socio-economic background may prioritise education and long-term career prospects. Therefore, habitus not only shapes an individual's worldview but also plays a significant role in shaping their social and economic opportunities. This can lead to perpetuating social inequalities and reinforcing existing hierarchies.

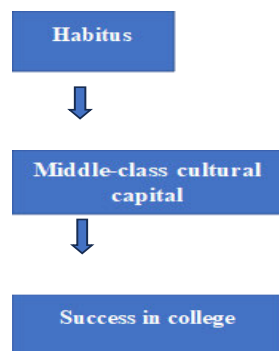
The concept of habitus has been widely applied in education, specifically to investigate how disadvantaged students mediate their educational experiences. Habitus demonstrate students’ “ways of acting, feeling, thinking, and being,” “how they carry their history; how they bring this history into their present circumstances; and how they then make choices to act in certain ways and not others” (Czerniewicz & Brown 2014, p. 4). According to Lamula (2017, p. 93), habitus is passed on to students inadvertently through the transfer of capital from their families. A student’s social class and socio-economic status have an impact on their agency and academic performance. Families have a significant influence on how students perceive their academic environment, employment opportunities, and identity development (Barker &

Hoskins, 2015). Students from economically advantaged, educated, and supportive backgrounds are more likely to achieve academic and overall success (Warin, 2015). This is because these students have access to privileged discourses and vocabularies.

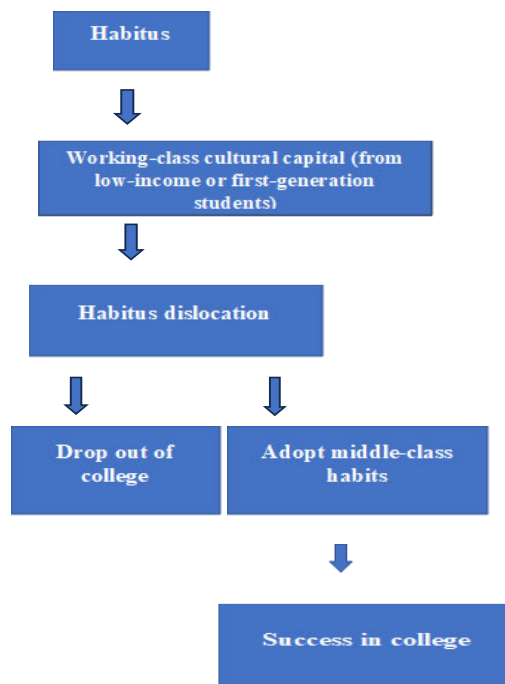
McGinty (2017) states that successful students from low socio-economic backgrounds may experience "habitus dislocation" due to feelings of inferiority. The pressure to conform to a new habitus can be overwhelming and can lead to alienation and disconnection from one's cultural roots. In other words, habitus dislocation is the discomfort or dissatisfaction a student feels about their academic ability, low-income, or first-generation status and lack of family support. Successful students from low socio-economic backgrounds may face pressure to shed or dissociate from their working-class identity for academic success in higher education (Birani & Lehmann 2013, p. 283).

McGinty (2017) and London (1992) posit that some low-income households and first-generation university students feel "left out" or "unwanted" in the university community. Consequently, low-income, and first-generation college students experience habitus dislocation because they must deny the working-class values and identity they were raised with to fit in at the university. Souza et al. (2017, p. 78) stated that students from low-income households and first-generation university students understand that they cannot be members of two social groups simultaneously. They must deny their working-class values and gain a middle-class identity to succeed in university. This requires both letting go of one's social identity and taking on a more advantageous identity for success. Given that they feel isolated from their working-class behaviours due to a cultural environment that does not support their backgrounds, low-income households and first-generation university students may lose interest in their studies.

### Middle-class students



### Working-class students



**Figure 1:** Higher education institutions' success paths for middle- and working-class students

*Note.* From 'Uncovering hegemony in higher education: A critical appraisal of the use of "institutional habitus" in empirical scholarship'. (Byrd 2019).

Byrd's (2019, p. 3) assertion is that studies of educational disparities have incorporated Bourdieu's research in a wide range of national and educational contexts, from early childhood to adult education. Byrd identifies habitus as a way in which educational institutions recognise, reward, and influence habits of thought and behaviour. Through habitus, individual choices, experiences, and educational practices are connected to social power structures. According to Gaddis (2013, p. 1), the primary focus in habitus-related education research is on individual habitus, with only a few academics having used institutional habitus in higher education research, investigating how social power interacts with student habitus in institutions of learning.

Institutional habitus accounts for differences in higher education choices between students in the middle and upper classes. Reay, David & Ball (2001) define institutional habitus as the influence of a cultural group or social class on an individual's behaviour as it is mediated through an organisation, making it less adaptable than individual habitus. The concept of

institutional habitus examines how institutional practices shape relationships between individuals and groups, with Reay (1998) pioneering the use of Bourdieu's conceptual tools in the study of higher education choice and the interactions of family history and institutional habitus in decision-making practices.

Institutional habitus can manifest in numerous ways, such as the expectations of schools and teachers, the level of support provided to students, and the choices students are encouraged to make in the school context. Nevertheless, there has been very little research conducted on the institutional practices of higher education in non-Western countries (Ho et al. 2020, p. 1). Reay et al. (2001) identified several components of institutional habitus, including educational status, which pertains to the types of universities that students are trained for. Organizational practices of an institution, such as the curriculum it offers, and expressive order, which is composed of factors related to the institution's culture, expectations, and behaviour, are other considerations.

According to Lamula (2017, p. 90), institutional habitus plays a significant role in determining whether students leave or continue their studies at a particular institution. Different HEIs have different habitus, also referred to as cultures, climates, and ethos. Certain institutional features may be associated with high or low status, or they may be perceived as friendly or welcoming, resulting in student responsiveness or hostility to the habitus or environment of a particular HEI. Institutional habitus practices are deeply ingrained and have an impact on both faculty-student and student-student relationships, reflecting the level of academic, social, and cultural diversity present in the institution.

Habitus, however, has been criticised for its classificatory and deterministic nature which can lead to social exclusion. Social class, gender, race, and age can all impact habitus, making it deterministic in that people cannot avoid the circumstances of their conception or birth. People from disadvantaged backgrounds are also limited and constrained solely by their social class, making transcendence and social mobility impossible (Lizardo 2004, pp. 8-24).

### **4.3 Bourdieu's concept of field**

To grasp Bourdieu's theory, one must first understand his concepts of "field" and "capital." A distinction must also be made between economic, cultural, social, and symbolic capital. A field is defined as a social sphere or distinct social microcosm with its own set of customs, rules, types of authority, and evaluation criteria (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992; Swartz, 2002). According to Bourdieu (2005, p. 30), a field is a set of forces within which an agent occupies

a position that the field determines. Different fields have their own set of "preferred habitus" in accordance with expected behaviours in that field. Swartz (2002, p. 65) states that to be successful in a particular field, one's habitus and dispositions, such as their way of thinking, abilities, style of acting, and so on, must be in line with the various characteristics of that field.

Bourdieu (1990) and Khuzwayo (2021) both use the concept of "field" to understand how social hierarchies are established and maintained in various institutional settings. A field is an arena where individuals or groups compete for power and resources using the "capital" they possess. A field is organised around a specific type of capital, each with its own set of rules and expectations. It is similar to a sportsperson developing a "feel for the game" and having control over it. This occurs when a player begins to invest in the game and develop a strategy to stay ahead of their opponent's life.

Reay (2018) and Lehmann (2014) assert that there is a misalignment between students from low socio-economic backgrounds and the university's field. Students from low socio-economic backgrounds or low-income families may find it difficult to develop a "feel for the game". Thus, they must successfully negotiate and learn the rules of the game by acquiring the necessary knowledge and skills from those who are experienced in navigating university life. At an institutional level, students from the upper and middle classes have a dominating influence on working-class students at universities. This can be explained by firstly understanding the notion of capital.

#### **4.4 Bourdieu's notion of capital**

According to Bourdieu (1986), there are four types of capital: economic, cultural, social, and symbolic capital. Di Giorgio (2009, p. 181) defines capital as "resources that people accumulate and exchange to maintain their power in society. This, for example, refers to certain advantages that the dominant groups enjoy. Individuals from middle-class backgrounds can use the capital at their disposal to gain advantages for themselves and develop critical relationships and networks".

##### ***4.4.1 Social capital***

Bourdieu (1986, pp. 248-249) asserts that social capital is the sum of resources linked to a lasting network of institutionalised relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition. Social capital refers to the social connections among individuals and groups who have access

to the resources and influence needed to improve their quality of life. These can be used to satisfy social desires, but they are not equally distributed. Social capital is a versatile tool that can explain a wide range of social issues, including education. According to Green and Preston (2001), family and environment are the two primary sources of social capital, with parental social capital having a significant impact on children's education, such as examination success, university enrolment, or degree and university selection. Parental efforts to maximise and improve educational opportunities for their children may involve the use of social capital.

Papapolydorou (2011) suggests that not all parents have the same social capital reservoirs and may not always use them in the same way. Parental social capital is a key form of parental influence on students' academic performances. These are determined by parents' expectations and high aspirations, as well as their parents' encouragement and plans to attend university. Erkan (2011, p. 459) suggests that social capital networks, such as schools, peer groups, and communities, can improve academic success and the students' organisational development. This includes lower dropout rates, higher graduation rates, increased college enrolment, higher test scores, and increased participation in extracurricular activities and community organisations.

Khuzwayo (2021, p. 44) asserts that social capital is an important type of capital that can help students from working-class backgrounds adjust to the demands of middle-class environments. It can be developed through relationships with mentors and lecturers, providing them with the knowledge, direction, and emotional support they need to perform well academically. Without social capital, economic and cultural capital will be unavailable, and existing capital will gradually deteriorate.

#### ***4.4.2 Cultural capital***

According to Bourdieu (1993), social and cultural capital are closely linked. One of the most important areas for the emergence of social capital is cultural capital. Cultural capital is made up of three parts: embodied, objectified, and institutionalised. Knowledge or skills acquired through habitus are referred to as embodied cultural capital (Fazilat et al. 2022). Knowledge is embodied in people, and as people progress towards it through communication and education, they become more curious and determined to acquire more of it and other similar things. Embodied cultural capital is inextricably linked to the biological being of an individual.

Using the example of language, the linguistic skills of an individual are influenced by the environment in which they grow up (Hampton-Garland, 2015).

Bourdieu (1986, p. 17) asserts that objectified capital refers to a person's material property or objects, such as education and economic status. Institutionalised cultural capital is the value inherent in being recognised by an elite institution. For example, obtaining a university degree can be a sign of high institutionalised capital. Like other forms of cultural capital, institutionalised cultural capital is not usually directly inherited but is acquired through interaction with one's habitus. Khuzwayo (2021, p. 44) defines cultural capital as the authority within families and cultures that enables people to take advantage of opportunities and improve their social standing.

According to Bourdieu (1986), cultural capital is a resource comparable to economic resources and social networks. Andersen and Jæger (2015) assert that cultural capital is a resource that socio-economically privileged groups use to promote social and cultural reproduction. Tzanakis (2011, p. 76) defines social reproduction as a set of actions by which social classes in an unequal society maintain their status. Social institutions, such as education, politics, and the economy, ensure that university students accept social reproduction. For instance, social reproduction occurs when university students choose careers that are similar to those of their parents.

Social stratification, or disparities between people and social groups, leads to an unequal distribution of resources and results in diverse interactions with social structures and experiences (Jaeger & Karlson, 2018). Lamula (2017) describes cultural capital as inherited in early childhood and passed down through generations, allowing children to learn their parents' dispositions. Cultural capital, which includes knowledge, skills, and exposure to cultural experiences, significantly influences an individual's social mobility and opportunities for success in various aspects of life, including education, employment, and social interactions. Higher-income students tend to have more cultural capital than those from lower-income families, contributing to their academic success and social mobility.

Cultural capital is a key factor in determining the wealth of students from different socio-economic groups. Lower-class families may lack the means to expose their children to objectified forms of cultural capital (Lamula 2017, p. 80). Gaddis (2013) argues that it is believed that students from disadvantaged backgrounds attach less value to their academic

discourses. Additionally, families with a lower socio-economic position are seen as being less supportive of their children's school activities than families with a higher socio-economic status. Moreover, the higher socio-economic families have faith that their children will graduate from university. Due to the disparities made possible by family structures and educational institutions, there is an unending cycle of educational inequity.

According to Lamula (2017, p. 80), apartheid negatively affected the Black population in South Africa, and this contributed to some parents passing on low levels of cultural capital to their children. Andersen and Jaeger (2015) suggest that privileged students have access to resources that less fortunate students do not. Cultural capital is seen as a key factor in the success of university students. The HEIs favour those students who possess cultural capital consistent with their principles and goals rather than those who do not. This is because privileged students are thought to have had wide access to resources that the less fortunate did not have. Andersen & Jaeger 2015, p. 180). Cheng and Kaplowitz (2016) indicate that there exists a close relationship between the cultural capital and economic capital of parents, with both variables impacting the academic success and social background of the family.

#### ***4.4.3 Economic capital***

Economic capital refers to tangible resources that can be "quickly and directly converted into money and institutionalised in the form of property rights" (Bourdieu 1986, p. 242). Economic capital includes all tangible resources (e.g., land and money), including those that can be used to acquire or sustain improved education (Tully 2023). Economic capital can be viewed as a resource allowing people to take advantage of important educational opportunities. Family economic capital can provide students with the material resources they require to achieve their goals. How family wealth is used within the family represents family economic capital. Higher-income families invest a wide range of resources in their children's development. The socio-economic condition of the family has a huge impact on how engaged students are in their education (Khuzwayo 2021, pp. 44-45).

Hee and Shuhan (2022, pp. 2-3) assert that students from low-income families have fewer resources available to them, and financial stress makes it difficult for families to invest in their children's education. Families from low-income families can only spend most of their resources on the family's basic needs and may not have time or the resources to consider the growth and development of future generations. According to Masutha (2020), people with access to high

levels of economic capital can use it to make decisions that maintain their social and cultural dominance.

#### ***4.4.4 Symbolic capital***

According to Ihlen (2018, p. 1), symbolic capital is concerned with reputation and derives from other types of capital that a social actor may possess, such as social, economic, and cultural capital. Bourdieu (1986) defines symbolic capital as a sense of being validated through acknowledgement and access to social status. Some forms of capital are valuable due to the importance of social recognition in society (Khuzwayo 2021, p. 44). Successful students from low socio-economic backgrounds gain more than just a degree in HEIs; they also gain employment and financial security, which improves their social standing. Furthermore, they may form relationships with academically accomplished students to share in the status they enjoy within a university environment (Bourdieu 1986).

#### **4.5 How Bourdieu's theory is applied in education?**

Bourdieu developed the cultural deprivation theory to better understand how the theory of habitus is applied in the educational system. According to this theory, higher-class cultures are considered superior to lower-class cultures, and people from the upper and middle classes believe that people from the working class are to blame for their children's educational failure (Spencer et al. 2013). Bourdieu believed that Marx's theory of inequality had an impact on cultural capital (Bourdieu 1984, 1986). Marx argued that access to the means of production determined economic status. Marx believed society was divided into two groups: the capitalist class (the bourgeoisie) and the working class (the proletariat). Engels argued that capitalism was destructive to the proletariat as it benefited the bourgeoisie (Wright & Perrone, 1977).

Bourdieu (1986) asserted that the dominant classes have a type of "cultural capital" that can be translated into wealth and power through the education system. This theory emphasises the predominance of middle-class culture in society and social institutions (Spencer et al. 2013). Bourdieu (1986), as Sullivan (2002, p. 3) cited, argued that the education systems of industrialised societies legitimise class disparities by providing cultural capital and higher-class habitus to lower-class students. This explains the educational attainment disparities between classes. Bourdieu (1986) believed that educational qualifications contributed to the reproduction and justification of social disparities. Cultural capital refers to the capacity to

integrate into the culture of the upper class, particularly through grasping and understanding the anticipated norms and values of that educational institution.

If a student's habitus corresponds to that of the institution, they will be able to effectively absorb the values of that educational institution and thus be regarded as performing well. Cultural capital is not distributed evenly across social classes, and this contributes to the disparity in educational attainment between classes. According to Bourdieu (1973), the primary function of education is cultural reproduction, which is the social process by which culture is passed down through generations. People from lower-income families, according to Kromydas (2017), are unable to adapt to the dominant culture, making it difficult for them to excel in the educational system. Educational inequalities are at the heart of our society's inequity.

#### **4.6 Conclusion**

The key concepts discussed in this chapter involve habitus and cultural capital and their influence on student's academic success within higher education institutions. According to the habitus theory, students are not equally equipped to adapt to the university environment, and those from low-income backgrounds may encounter additional challenges due to a lack of necessary assets and capital. Similarly, the cultural deprivation theory suggests that certain groups from the lower social classes may possess inferior norms, values, skills, and knowledge that hinder their academic attainment. By examining the theory of cultural reproduction, scholars can gain insight into how cultural capital is transmitted across generations through social institutions, which can result in educational inequality that persists across family lines. These theoretical perspectives underscore the importance of addressing social class-related disparities within the educational system to foster greater equity and inclusivity for all students, irrespective of their background. This chapter has explained in detail Bourdieu's concepts of habitus, field, and capital. The chapter has also explained how Bourdieu's theory can be applied in education. The next chapter will outline the methodology used in conducting this study.

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND METHODS**

#### **5.1 Introduction**

This chapter provides an outline of the research methodology and methods used to understand the students' insights into the relationship between poverty and educational attainment in South African HEIs. Babbie and Mouton (2001) define research methodology as a systematic approach to data collection, analysis, and interpretation. The stages of the research process used in this research are described in this chapter. The research approach, paradigm, and design are discussed, as are the study's target population, participant selection, and data collection processes. The study's ethical considerations, validity, rigour, and limitations are all described in this chapter.

#### **5.2 Research Design**

This study used an exploratory research design to investigate the relationship between poverty and educational attainment in higher education institutions. The researcher explored the perspectives of UKZN students to gain a deeper understanding of the topic and generate new ideas for future research. Qualitative data collection methods such as interviews were used to gather information from participants (Babbie & Mouton 2001). Furthermore, this study examined academic literature and government documentation, conducted virtual interviews with undergraduate and postgraduate students from UKZN, and used open-ended questions to collect the data.

#### **5.3 Qualitative research methodology**

This study used the qualitative research methodology. The qualitative research methodology is defined as a “research method that assists in determining how and why individuals behave and think in certain ways, including their experiences and attitudes” (Neuman 2011, p. 102). According to Creswell (2014), qualitative research methodology is used to explore and fully understand the meanings that people assign to the social world and their experiences. This research studies the relationship between poverty and educational attainment through students' insights.

A qualitative methodology gives meaning to life experiences and situations and is systematic and subjective (Nkwi et al. 2001). Additionally, it enables the researcher to comprehend how the participants' ideas, perceptions, behaviours, feelings, and experiences are influenced by socially constructed meanings and experiences. According to Terre Blanche et al. (2006), qualitative methodology recognises that culture, language, social interactions, and experiences are central to human lives and environments. Researchers can use qualitative and interpretive research techniques to build rapport and trust with participants and produce meaningful results. This methodology also allows researchers to keep a close eye on the study subjects.

According to Rahman (2017), the advantages of using qualitative research studies include the ability to collect rich and comprehensive data. Qualitative research studies provide more than just a picture of phenomena; they also provide insight into the lived experiences within the context of the phenomena. The meanings of the participants are valued in qualitative research methods. They can help with the interpretation of the participants' perspectives and stories, as well as the explanation, illumination, or reinterpretation of qualitative data. Qualitative research methods are not constrained by the same limitations as quantitative methods. There is an opportunity for explanations that reveal more about the data when gathering non-numerical data. Additionally, qualitative research methods allow for a deeper understanding of the context and complexities surrounding the data being collected, which can lead to more nuanced insights. This type of research can also be useful in exploring topics that have not yet been extensively studied or understood.

The chosen data collection methodology (qualitative) has weaknesses or limitations. The findings are not generalisable to a larger population. When conducting qualitative research, the quantity of information that is frequently gathered can be overwhelming. Sorting through the data to find the key points can take time (Babbie & Mouton 2001, pp. 273-277). The quality of the data collected through qualitative research is heavily reliant on the researcher's ability to observe and analyse. A researcher's biased viewpoint will be reflected in the data and will influence the outcome. Controls must be in place to reduce bias and allow the collected data to be reviewed with integrity (Gaille 2017, p. 2).

According to Leedy and Ormrod (2005, p. 133), "Qualitative research collects and examines various types of data from various perspectives to create a rich and meaningful picture of a complex, multifaceted situation. "Qualitative approaches share two characteristics. They begin by focusing on phenomena that occur in natural settings (i.e., the real world). They take into

account people's assumptions about what is important and how the world works. Second, qualitative approaches entail delving into phenomena in their entirety. Qualitative researchers seldom attempt to simplify their findings. A qualitative approach is theoretical in nature (Bogdan & Biklen 1998, p. 33). The investigation of small groups is the focus of qualitative methodology, which aims to generate information that is useful in specific contexts rather than information that can be generalised to the entire population (Terre Blanche et al. 2006, p. 287). The research methodology explains the research process, or how the research will proceed. Choosing a research methodology begins with deciding on the research paradigm that will guide the study.

#### **5.4 Research paradigm**

Terhoeven (2009, p. 45) defines a "paradigm" as a worldview that includes philosophical assumptions about the nature of knowledge. Babbie and Mouton (2001, p. 33) suggest that the interpretive paradigm works best with qualitative research techniques. It assumes that all human action has meaning and must be interpreted and comprehended within the context of social practices. The researcher sought to understand the students' insights and interpretations of their surroundings regarding the impact of poverty on their educational attainment. According to Guba and Lincoln (1988) and Terre Blanche and Durrheim (1999), the interpretive paradigm views people as the source of their thoughts and feelings, and the truths derived from people's subjective experiences are real and should be taken seriously.

This research is based on the interpretivist paradigm. This paradigm is described as a framework for doing qualitative research (Sarantakos 2005). A paradigm is a point of view that guides the application and interpretation of the social world to the sources of information and the appropriate tactics for utilising them (Tolley et al. 2016.). In the mission of gathering social world information, the interpretivist paradigm emphasises the significance of perception and translation. The interpretive paradigm was used in this study to explain the reasons for the impact that poverty has on individuals' higher education attainment. The interpretive paradigm aids in understanding the students' insights into the relationship between poverty and educational attainment.

Interacting with, and listening to, the students allowed the researcher to learn about their realities. Interpretive research paradigm seeks to discover how the subject of the study perceives life, and the subjective reasons and meanings that underpin behaviour (Durrheim &

Terre Blanche 1999). The researcher must be able to establish trust with the participants to obtain meaningful results using qualitative and interpretive research methods. The researcher must be aware of the participants' characteristics, which they may interpret as good or bad. The characteristics of good participants' characteristics include a representative sample, a sufficient sample size, random sampling, an efficient sampling frame, and suitable sampling techniques.

## **5.5 Research sampling**

According to Neuman (2011), "sampling is the process of selecting a subset of cases from a larger pool and generalizing them to the population. There are two types of sampling methods: probability sampling and non-probability sampling. Probability sampling involves simple random sampling, systematic sampling, stratified sampling, cluster sampling, and random digit dialling sampling. Non-probability sampling involves haphazard or convenience sampling, quota sampling, purposive sampling, snowball sampling, deviant case sampling, sequential sampling, and theoretical sampling. Non-probability sampling is not concerned with accurately representing all members of a large population within a smaller sample group of participants.

Purposive sampling and snowball sampling were used in this study, which are non-probability techniques. Purposive and snowball sampling were chosen because they complement exploratory and descriptive studies, which seek to answer questions of "what," "how," "who," and "why" of social phenomena (Palinkas et al, 2015). Mujere (2016) defines non-probability sampling as selecting participants based on subjective judgment rather than random selection.

### *5.5.1 Purposive and snowball sampling*

The study used purposive and snowball sampling techniques to select a research sample. Purposive sampling was chosen using the researcher's judgment and knowledge of where to find the desired research sample. Snowball sampling was used when it was difficult to find a sample due to online learning. According to Babbie and Mouton (2001, p. 166), the snowball sampling method is often used when samples are difficult to locate, as the few members the researcher can locate provide the researcher with the necessary information needed to locate others in their social circles.

The study used both purposive and snowball sampling techniques to recruit students only from UKZN. Researchers relied on these methods of sampling to include participants who were most relevant to the study while excluding those who would not add value to the research. Due to

the small sample size and the subjective nature of the qualitative research methods used, the data were not generalizable. The study's findings apply only to students selected in the College of Humanities at UKZN's Howard Campus, and not to entire student populations within and outside of the institution. Qualitative research methods rely on people's accounts as data, which may be highly subjective and applicable only to specific individuals or small groups. The theory section discussed the habitus concept and how individuals have different "perspectives," which influence how they perceive and interpret social phenomena.

### ***5.5.2 Sample size and criterion***

A sample is a group of people, objects, or items drawn from a larger population for research (Babbie & Mouton 2001). Qualitative studies have fewer participants than quantitative studies, and the principle of data saturation determines the size of the sample (Terre Blanche et al. 2006, p. 288). This allows for a more in-depth analysis of the data collected from a small number of participants. A total of 25 participants were recruited in March 2023 to take part in this research, consisting of 13 undergraduate and 12 postgraduate students from Howard College at UKZN. The study included students from the College of Humanities, and their participation was contingent on their availability.

### **5.6 Data collection**

In-depth, semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions were used in the study. According to Alhabsyi (2022, p. 24), an in-depth interview is a conversation between a researcher and a person who is uniquely positioned to provide insight into the event under study. Semi-structured interviews provide the researcher with a list of questions to ask the respondent, and the freedom to deviate from the script to gather new information. The researcher conducted individual interviews from April 2023 to June 2023 that lasted 20-30 minutes (Appendices will be attached). Remote communication methods such as WhatsApp voice calls, telephone calls and Zoom were used to conduct the interviews, which did not require face-to-face contact. The interviews were conducted both in isiZulu and English. Most of the questions were open-ended, allowing participants to freely respond to them and explain their situations and experiences. There were some limitations to using in-depth interviews, such as the fact that they were time-consuming, and the study was small-scale.

Before the interviews, the research was busy writing all the chapters from May 2022 to March 2023 and the recruited students were given a brief overview of the study virtually in March

2023. They were made aware of the study's goals and objectives. This was done to ease the students' anxieties before the interview process and to maintain an atmosphere of openness and trust between the researcher and the research participants. According to Terre Blanche et al. (2006), transparency encourages research participants to express themselves freely and authentically. The participants' descriptions of their experiences and insights became more detailed as they relaxed. Furthermore, before the interviews began (from April 2023 to June 2023), the interviewees were informed that they would be recorded. No specific area or location was chosen for the interviews because they were conducted virtually. The students chose a location that best suited them and in which they felt at ease. In addition, appointments were scheduled (March 2023) before the virtual or remote interviews.

### ***5.6.1 Data recording and transcription***

The data collected for this study were recorded and transcribed from June 2023 to July 2023. Data transcription is the process of presenting recorded interviews from research participants in written form. Computer software was used to manage and transcribe the data from mid-June to July 2023. The primary goal of transcription was to record the participants' responses and feelings about the questions posed. It was important to record the students' voice tones, feelings, and meanings, as well as their approaches and opinions on the topic of the impact of poverty on educational attainment.

The data was transcribed in such a way that the punctuation, students' pauses and silences while responding, or in the middle of responding, laughs, and sounds they made during the interviews were highlighted. This is referred to as verbatim transcription. Verbatim transcription is often used in qualitative research to provide a detailed and accurate representation of spoken language. Manual transcription resulted in a transcription process duration of 1 to 2 hours. The researcher translated isiZulu responses into English during the virtual interviews. Since the interviews were recorded, there were no challenges encountered while transcribing the gathered data.

The availability of digital recordings allowed for easy access to the data during analysis. This enabled thorough and accurate analysis, leading to more robust findings and conclusions. The researcher saved the recordings to a backup storage device (USB) after each interview, ensuring data security and reducing the risk of loss or damage. The research data was securely stored within the School of Social Science and will stay there for five years (2023-2027).

## **5.7 Data Analysis**

Thematic content analysis was used in this study to identify, analyse, and report themes in the collected data. Thematic content analysis involves scanning all the data for recurring themes and identifying the main themes that summarise all the collected opinions (Clarke & Braun 2013). The thematic analysis involves a six-step process: familiarising oneself with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining, and naming themes, and producing the final report. The thematic approach was suited for the study because qualitative research is a major design of the inquiry, and it includes emergent frameworks to group the data and then look for relationships (Nowell et al. 2017).

The researcher used the following thematic analysis steps: first, familiarizing herself with the data once the data was collected. The researcher re-listened to audio tapes and read transcripts a few times to enhance familiarity. Second, generating initial codes: This involved organizing the data relevant to each code and relating these to the theoretical approach. Third, discovering themes or searching for themes: This resulted in discovering themes linked to the study, reviewing, and naming these themes. Fourth, writing the analysis: In this situation, the researcher provided an analytic narrative based on the data that were collected from the participants. The thematic framework allowed the researcher to identify themes and connections within the data, which helped to answer the research questions. The questions are intended to assist researchers in addressing specific ethical issues relating to participants or data.

## **5.8 Ethical Considerations**

Before conducting the research, the researcher applied for the gatekeepers' letter on the 6<sup>th</sup> of May 2022 from the UKZN office of the register at the School of Social Science and was approved on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of May 2022. An Ethical Clearance Form was completed, submitted on the 15<sup>th</sup> of March 2022, and approved on the 30<sup>th</sup> of May 2022 by the School of Humanities' ethics committee. The information in the study was gathered in such a way that the anonymity and confidentiality of the respondents were maintained. The names, private details, and any other information that could be used to identify the students who were interviewed for this research were removed from the final document (thesis).

The researcher first solicited verbal consent from the research participants and submitted the consent forms to the participants via email for them to sign between April and June 2023 before

partaking in the study which explained the terms and conditions of participation and the contact information for all parties involved, including the researcher, supervisor, and research office. The researcher explained the informed consent letter virtually between April and June 2023 before it was signed to ensure that it was understood. The participants were informed that their participation in the study was voluntary and that refusing to participate or withdrawing from an ongoing interview would result in no negative consequences. A research study requires that the researcher be mindful of prejudices, views, and values that influence decisions during the course of the study to ensure trustworthiness and credibility.

### **5.9 Ensuring trustworthiness and credibility**

Trustworthiness is a measure of confidence in the data, methods, and interpretations used to assess the quality of the study and whether other readers consider it worthy (Stahl & King 2020). To establish trustworthiness, the study focused on credibility, dependability, transferability, and confirmability. In this study, credibility was ensured through prolonged engagement with data (Maree 2014). Transferability was ensured by documenting and providing a detailed description of how data were collected, as well as describing what was planned and how it was implemented. Dependability was established when the study processes were made available and accessible to the supervisor and any other researcher to complete an audit trail, allowing future researchers to replicate the work. Conformability was ensured by the researcher analysing data, and the supervisor who audited the verbatim descriptions, categories, and themes. To reduce subjectivity, when reporting on the research, the researcher used direct quotes to support the themes and categories presented.

### **5.10 Limitations**

In this study, the researcher encountered limitations while undertaking this research. Limitations refer to the characteristics of the effects of the study, or the impact on the understanding of the findings from the research (Ross & Zaidi 2019). One of the challenges the researcher encountered was the time spent, close to 2 months awaiting a response from the college ethics committee after the researcher submitted the research proposal. The researcher had to wait an extended period of about 3 months to get full approval for undertaking the study. Another problem encountered during the research was that some of the participants postponed the time for interviews while others pulled out from participating in the study. These matters unfortunately caused delays in data collection. Some of the participants therefore had to be

replaced with other participants. Dealing with students during examination time was also challenging because most of them had busy study schedules. Furthermore, financial constraints for purchasing stationery such as a tape recorder and the money for a language editor were challenging to the researcher. This study was also not representative of all students but only College of Humanities students who were undergraduate and postgraduate students and who were selected. Recruited students impacted the findings of the study and these cannot be generalized to the whole population of UKZN.

### **5.11 Conclusion**

This chapter describes the methods and processes used in this research for data collection and analysis. To provide detailed explanations of the students' insights and understandings of the relationship between poverty and educational attainment in higher education, the researcher used online, semi-structured interviews as data collection tools. This chapter outlines the methodological and research design for this study. The qualitative approach adopted for the study was considered the most suitable methodologically for meeting the study's aims and objectives. The choice of the purposive sampling technique was rigorous enough to obtain the necessary information from the UKZN Howard College students. The chapter also emphasizes that ethical considerations were crucial in ensuring the principles of confidentiality, anonymity, and informed consent were upheld throughout the study. The chapter highlights the challenges encountered during the course of the study and how they were overcome. Furthermore, this chapter considers the issue of reflexivity to enhance the credibility, dependability, and trustworthiness of the findings. The research design and method, population and sampling, ethical considerations, data collection approach and instrument, data analysis, and demonstration of trustworthiness of the research data are described. In the following chapter, the collected data will be analysed.

## **CHAPTER SIX**

### **PRESENTATION OF RESULTS AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS**

#### **6.1 Introduction**

The chapter discusses the results of online, semi-structured interviews conducted (April-June 2023) with 12 undergraduate and 13 postgraduate students at the UKZN Howard College campus. This study aimed to determine the relationship between poverty and an individual's highest educational attainment, explore students' perspectives on this relationship, investigate socio-economic factors influencing educational attainment in higher education institutions (HEIs), and explore the government's and HEIs' assistance to disadvantaged students. The study sampled postgraduate and undergraduate students from the UKZN Howard College campus to understand the challenges that disadvantaged students faced in accessing and succeeding in higher education. The data were collected through one-on-one interviews and analysed using thematic analysis. A framework of analysis was presented that reflected the themes that emerged from the study. The participants' insights and experiences were transcribed, and common ideas were grouped and compared with previously reviewed studies. The participants' responses were represented using pseudonyms to protect the confidentiality of the respondents.

#### **6.2 Demographic characteristics of research participants**

According to the demographic breakdown in Table 1, the average age of the participants was 23 years, ranging from 20 to 29 years. A larger portion of students (72%) were female students while only 28% of participants were males. The majority of the participants (52%) were from the lower-middle class. Only 44% of the participants were from the upper-middle class, and 4% of students were from the lower class. Most of the participants (52%) were from the villages, while 32% came from the suburbs/cities. A total of 16% of students came from the townships.

**Table. 1**

## Demographic Characteristics of Participants

	<b>Undergraduates (n=12)</b>	<b>Postgraduates (n=13)</b>	<b>Total (n=25)</b>
Age (average)	21	24	23
Gender (Female)	67% (n=8)	77% (n=10)	72% (n=18)
(Male)	33% (n=4)	23% (n=3)	28% (n=7)
Area (Village)	42% (n=5)	62% (n=8)	52% (n=13)
(Township)	17% (n=2)	15% (n=2)	16% (n=4)
(Suburb)/ (City)	42% (n=5)	23% (n=3)	32% (n=8)
Socio-economic class (Lower-Middle Class)	33% (n=4)	69% (n=9)	52% (n=13)
(Upper-Middle Class)	58% (n=7)	31% (n=4)	44% (n=11)
(Lower Class)	8% (n=1)	0% (n=0)	4% (n=1)
Note: n = sample total			

### **6.3 To establish whether there is a relationship between poverty and the highest level of education that an individual attained.**

#### **6.3.1 What is poverty and how do students understand poverty?**

Van der Berg (2008) describes two types of poverty that have adverse effects on education. These are absolute and relative poverty. Absolute poverty, according to Van der Berg, implies the absence of the financial resources required to maintain a certain standard of living. Absolute poverty results in poor home circumstances for learning (for example, no books and no technological equipment), and it affects children's physical well-being and ability to learn. These effects are associated with low parental education and limited resources for investing in

education. Children from low socio-economic status (SES) families do not perform as well as they potentially could at school compared to children from high SES families.

According to Gardiner (2019, p.10), relative poverty emerges in socially unequal societies. This inequality can be observed in terms of income, access to resources, and social services, such as healthcare and education. Relative poverty affects education by marginalizing the disadvantaged, hindering their full participation in the social and economic processes of the country. Moreover, disadvantaged individuals have limited parental support as a result of relative poverty, and they may not enjoy the potential positive effects of being in schools with more advantaged peers since they often remain socially isolated from them.

#### *6.3.1.1 Poverty as a lack of financial freedom*

Fifty percent (50%) of the 12 undergraduates and 54% of the 13 postgraduate students had a similar definition of poverty as a lack of financial freedom that prevented individuals from meeting their basic needs and pursuing opportunities for personal and professional growth. These students defined poverty in various ways including extreme poverty, a lack of income, and as a multidimensional concept encompassing social, economic, and political aspects. This included limited access to quality education, health care, housing, and employment opportunities, perpetuating the cycle of poverty. The 13 students' definition of poverty is crucial for developing effective strategies to alleviate it, as it helps to understand their perspective on poverty. One of these students stated, "Poverty is a state or condition in which one lacks the financial resources and essentials for a certain standard of living" (Undergraduate Participant 1, 2023). Some of the participants commented as follows.

So, I think poverty is a poor or bad living condition where you do not have things like financial freedom, you don't have access to resources, you don't have access to needs that you need to survive and live a healthy life. So, you have poor access to resources that will enable you to have a good standard of living that is how I would define poverty (Postgraduate Participant 2 2023, pers. Comm., 20 May).

I think poverty is when you are poor like you have low standard of living, financially you do not have money or you do not have enough money to do important things, like basic things. So, I think that is what poverty is (Postgraduate Participant 11 2023, pers. Comm., 09 May).

It's not having money or being able to meet the basic needs, food, and shelter, like everything that is a basic need. Things that you cannot afford, such as food, clothes (Undergraduate participant 8 2023, pers. Comm., 06 June).

According to Participant 12, poverty can affect opportunities for social mobility and decision-making. It can also contribute to social exclusion by restricting social support networks and marginalising individuals within the society.

Poverty could be a state whereby you are deprived of a lack of access to basic amenities and resources that you require, ... or for people or community to meet their essential needs so that they can enjoy their minimal standard of living. So, it's a multidimensional concept that encompasses various aspects including social, economic, and political. One can say poverty contributes to social exclusion ... to social support network. Marginalisation within the society can also contribute to the lack of opportunities for social mobility or people to be taught about participating in decision-making processes..... I would like to think that it is a complex issue (Postgraduate participant 12 2023, pers. Comm., 08 May).

In summary, the interviewed students referred to above considered poverty as a limiting situation because it was described as a "lack of," "shortage of," and "limitation of." Some of the students who were interviewed mentioned that poverty restricts access to necessities, such as food, health care, and education. Additionally, they expressed concerns about the long-term consequences of poverty, including limited opportunities for upward mobility and the perpetuation of inequality.

### ***6.3.2 What do students think are the causes of poverty?***

According to Ramnath (2015), poor education, a lack of marketable skills, poor health, and unemployment are major causes of poverty. Education is crucial for individuals to function effectively in society as it may limit their ability to enter the labour force, earn a living, communicate effectively, share ideas, be innovative, and achieve a higher standard of living. Similarly, the UKZN students who were interviewed in this study identified various causes of poverty, including unemployment, lack of education, health care, unskilled individuals, inequality, population growth, underdevelopment, rising living costs, and an inability to think outside the box.

### *6.3.2.1 Unemployment causes poverty*

Out of the 25 students who were interviewed in this study, 18 students comprising 9 postgraduate students and 9 undergraduate students regarded unemployment as a major cause of poverty. The students' responses showed that they had similar views to this study's literature on the causes of poverty. These responses supported the findings of the literature reviewed in this study. For instance, Kruger (2018, p. 31) asserted that unemployment was mostly viewed as an economic phenomenon that depleted the funding basis for welfare services while also increasing poverty and inequality. Employment has a critical role in an individual's economic well-being, and it is sometimes seen as the most effective means to avoid poverty and social marginalisation. This is evident from the students' responses.

Unemployment and being uneducated, not getting higher education because most of the time if you are not educated, even if you did not finish matric you will not get good jobs; it will only be temporarily jobs. So, it's not being educated and being unemployed (Postgraduate Participant 11 2023, pers. Comm, 09 May).

### *6.3.2.2 Poor education causes poverty*

Ten of the 25 students who were interviewed in this study referred to the lack of education as a cause of poverty. The responses indicated that there were similar views among postgraduate and undergraduate students, with 54% of the 13 postgraduate students and 25% out of 12 undergraduate students reporting that the lack of education was one of the causes of poverty in South Africa. The lack of education leads to poverty and low-income jobs which result in people being unable to afford basic needs and meet the basic standards of living. The participants' responses were consistent with the literature that was reviewed. For example, Nortje (2017, p. 51) stated that education is a tool for poverty reduction and empowerment; however, South Africa's poor public education system is currently (i.e., in 2023) perpetuating the poverty cycle. Some of the respondents in this study reflected as follows on education and poverty.

The first thing is ... it's the lack of quality education because now (2023) it is unlikely to get a place where there is no education... The level of education we get in deep rural areas and that from the township or suburbs is not the same. Education ... in rural areas is very poor compared to the education of students in the township ... (or) from the suburbs ... I feel ... the person who is poor is the one who suffers ... most because of the quality of education they get. People in rural areas should be receiving quality education because they are already poor, and they do

not afford most of the things. Instead, it is the rich people who get or afford high-quality education. Another thing is unemployment ... some ... get quality education but ... people do not get jobs; unemployment is very high. Another thing ... is population, most of the time people who come from poor backgrounds usually have many children which then goes back to a lack of education or poor education in rural areas because it is very rare to find a person who comes from suburbs having seven children. They know that having many children create poverty. Those from the rural areas ... if they have a matriculation certificate, they can work after that (Postgraduate Participant 6 2023, pers. Comm., 06 May).

### ***6.3.3 The Impact of Poverty on Students' Mental Health and Well-being***

Poverty has a profound effect on students' emotional and social development, leading to emotional and behavioural issues, difficulty in forming social connections, and a reduced likelihood of achieving their full potential. Children from lower socio-economic backgrounds are more prone to act aggressively and experience low self-esteem, which can result in violent behaviour. Unstable living conditions hinder social and emotional growth and increase insecurity among students.

Among 25 interviewees, 22 agreed that poverty affects education by creating a lack of resources, hunger, malnutrition, stress, anxiety, and depression, which negatively impact learning. The absence of essential elements, such as food and daily meals, also contributes to students dropping out of school or university, reinforcing feelings of hopelessness and despair, and increasing the risk of developing bad habits like drug use and criminal behaviour.

Poverty is linked to various mental health issues, including depression, anxiety, schizophrenia, and substance abuse. These challenges can further affect students' performance in academics, social interactions, and overall well-being. Addressing poverty and providing support to students from low-income households is crucial in promoting mental health and academic success among students.

#### ***6.3.3.1 Depression***

Zondi & Mthembu (2023, p.19) define depression as a mental health condition marked by persistently low mood or loss of interest in activities. Depression has been recognized in university students due to symptoms that impede their academic performance. For instance, life can be overwhelming for students who are moving to university for the first time. Factors that contribute to depression amongst university students include social demographic, behavioural, and educational changes. Poverty and depression symptoms are risk factors for

suicidal behaviour. Students may find it difficult to stay in residences without their parental care and find it hard to cope with their low socio-economic status because they cannot afford the materialistic things they see in their peers from higher socioeconomic backgrounds. This depression can negatively affect students' academic performance. Four students, including two out of 12 undergraduate students and two out of 13 postgraduates, referred to poverty as a factor causing depression as a mental health issue in the education of students from lower SES. Some of the students who participated in this study reflected as follows on depression as an effect of poverty on students' mental health and well-being.

Well, it affects mental health when you experience poverty at the young age and when it becomes something you grow up with. Even if you have grown up it comes back, all the traumatic experiences because if you are poor, you will experience things that a child should not go through and as you grow up these traumatic experiences of poverty come back as depression sometimes, or as anxiety. So, it affects you mentally, emotionally, and psychologically ... It really affects you not just as a child, but when you grow up it comes back as something that needs therapy and psychological attention (Postgraduate Participant 3 2023, pers. Comm., 04 June).

Poverty causes depression and leads children not to think, to be demotivated in life and then to be depressed and suicidal. It makes them feel like everything they are doing in life is not going anywhere ... as people, as students. They do not prosper in life because they believe that ... even if they do something, they are indeed poor and it's not like they will be recognised (Postgraduate Participant 9 2023, pers. Comm., 21 May).

Growing up in poverty often exposes children to chronic stress; there may be unstable living conditions, poor nutrition, limited access to health care, and most importantly increased exposure to crime and violence. So, these challenges can lead to higher levels of anxiety and depression even with the way the students behave. It also changes and lowers the psychological well-being of children who lack the necessities of life due to poverty. So, I think those are the effects of living in poverty (Postgraduate Participant 12 2023, pers. Comm., 08 May).

I am a student like this facing poverty. I won't be able to accomplish everything I want, like my studies. If there is poverty, I won't afford to feed myself. In that case, I will be depressed (Undergraduate Participant 7 2023, pers. Comm., 07 May).

Students who tend to face depression are more likely to also have lower self-esteem.

### 6.3.3.2 *Low self-esteem*

Poverty has several negative effects including low self-esteem which increases the risk of poor mental health, suicide and poor academic performance. Low self-esteem is seen as the risk factor for depression (Alghamdi et al, 2023). Disadvantaged university students face pressure from their wealthier peers and are disproportionately subject to social isolation and neglect, which can significantly impact their sense of self-worth, confidence, and mental health. These university students are less likely to experience love and appreciation, which can lead to a variety of mental health issues. They may feel constantly threatened, extremely vulnerable, unsafe, and marginalised, causing them to struggle with forming healthy relationships and withdrawing from social interactions. Some of the participants from this study (2 undergraduates and 2 postgraduates) reported low self-esteem as a mental health issue that poverty caused in the education of students from the lower SES. Some of the respondents in this study reflected as follows.

If you are coming from poverty or a poor family and are not able to afford some of the things that others are able to, especially if you see them, that can have a big effect in the way you view things as a person. So, self-esteem becomes a bit low, and sometimes you feel as if ... there are things that do not suit you because your family has been poor. ... The poor students are unable to concentrate and study, so it is a bit difficult even for students who had to go back home during COVID-19. One would say they are sick; they have schizophrenia; I don't know how true that is. They struggle with anxiety, so it is a lot (Postgraduate Participant 5 2023, pers. Comm., 23 April).

It is peer pressure .... when I arrived here at school (university) and seeing other students wearing nice clothes, low self-esteem affected my mental health because when I looked at the other students, I saw myself as nothing; I saw myself different from others (Undergraduate Participant 2 2023, pers. Comm., 30 May).

If poverty does not keep you awake, then you stay poor forever. ... Let us say I am in poverty right now. It is up to me because I can see I am not coping., ... Poverty either motivates you to get out of it or to do better. It lights you or you become poorer. Poverty affects a child's mental health in a way that others want to move from their poverty and never come back. Poverty also has this tendency of making you see yourself as not good enough, it makes you look down on yourself when you get to see other people out there. It lowers your self-esteem. In other times you get obsessed with things. Poverty does a lot of things, basically, it shapes you. Poverty teaches you to do better ... (Undergraduate Participant 4 2023, pers. Comm., 13 May).

Poverty not only teaches people to do better, but others also engage in criminal activities as a result of being exposed to toxic environments.

#### *6.3.3.3 Criminal behaviour*

Children who live in poverty have a higher chance of being exposed to environmental toxins and other dangers, such as crime and violence. For example, growing up in a slum with poor water and sanitation where drug use, gang violence, and alcoholism are common can negatively impact the physical and psychological health of children. The lack of access to sanitary facilities and clean water raises the risk of contracting diseases. Additionally, being exposed to crime and violence can cause trauma that lasts a lifetime and can impede a child's overall development. Witnessing violence, especially regularly, can be damaging to a child's development, even if they are not directly involved (Faster Capital 2023). These perspectives are highlighted in the following quotes from some of the participants.

If I come from a family where we are poor, we are nine living in a one-room house, there are no means for us to get enough attention. One can have anger issues, and we would not pay attention to that and say the person is performing or looking for unnecessary attention. Good mental health is therefore destroyed, and one can also commit crime for us to have something to eat at night. Others start at an early age to support themselves and their families (Undergraduate Participant 6 2023, pers. Comm., 09 June).

The first thing I believe is that if you come from a low-income family, you will lack self-esteem and will not trust yourself. ... if you grow up in poor homes with a poor background, the environment you grow up in will be bad as well. If you come from a violent household where people shout, there is noise, and possibly violence, that will influence you because there is an increased likelihood of violence ... violence ... will affect children because they will not eat nutritious food, they will go to school hungry, and not perform well at school. Their development as children will be inadequate in comparison to someone from a good background. Therefore, poverty has an effect on children's mental health since it deprives them of the resources they need to grow, achieve the proper things, and perform well in school. Sometimes you find that children will not engage in school activities because they can't afford to pay for them, or they can't afford to buy a uniform. As a result, the child will be at a disadvantage, which may have an impact on their mental health because they are still young and developing, and they may grow up with a mindset that is inappropriate for someone their age (Postgraduate Participant 8 2023, pers. Comm., 21 May).

Growing up in poverty often exposes children to chronic stress. There may be unstable living conditions, poor nutrition, limited access to health care, and there is increased exposure to crime and violence. I think these are the most important things, being exposed to violence and crime. These challenges can lead to higher level of anxiety and depression, and even the way they behave. It also changes and lowers the psychological well-being of children who lack the basic necessities at the result of poverty. So, I think those are the effects of living in poverty (Postgraduate Participant 12 2023, pers. Comm., 08 May).

#### **6.4 To explore the students' insights and understanding of the relationship between poverty and educational attainment.**

##### ***6.4.1 Students' understanding of the role that education plays in breaking the poverty cycle***

The poverty cycle begins when a child is born into a poor family with limited resources and often lasts for at least three generations. Education is identified as a key remedy for breaking this cycle, as it provides knowledge and skills that can improve lives. Generational poverty traps families in a cycle of limited resources and opportunities. Providing access to education can help break this cycle and empower individuals to create a brighter future for themselves and their families. Education equips individuals with the knowledge and skills to secure stable employment, increase earning potential, and improve their quality of life. Education also fosters critical thinking, problem-solving, and creativity, enabling individuals to become active contributors to their communities. Furthermore, education instils confidence and self-belief, empowering individuals to overcome challenges and strive for success. In addition, education fosters a sense of lifelong learning and personal growth. This is why access to quality education is an internationally recognised remedy for poverty (Giovetti 2022).

Twenty out of 25 participants agreed with the study's literature which describes how education gives people access to the skills they need to succeed. One of the most empowering forces in the world is education. Education generates knowledge, boosts self-assurance, and removes obstacles to opportunity. Thus, for example, one of the postgraduate students stated, "I think education gives people knowledge and skills they can use to better their lives and that of their families" (Postgraduate Participant 1, 2023). Some of the students responded as follows:

Education does break the cycle of poverty ... education allows you to gain knowledge, ... to be a critical thinker, ... to gain skills, so in that way you have an opportunity to change your situation or the situation at home because you have gained things or skills that you did not know, and you were not exposed to. So, in that way you are able to create your own businesses,

... find jobs, ... invest, raise whatever it is at home, and fix your home... sometimes it is difficult to say education battles the cycle of poverty, but it does improve your life as a person, whether through getting temporary jobs... A matriculation qualification on its own assists you to get opportunities that people who are not educated do not get (Postgraduate Participant 5 2023, pers. Comm., 23 April).

Education plays a huge role in breaking the poverty cycle. Education and poverty are inextricably linked; if parents are unable to earn a reasonable income a child is less likely to receive an education. Without education, a child is less likely to be able to support themselves in the future and so the cycle of poverty continues. If a parent is able to earn a reasonable income, then a child is more likely to receive an education, and with education and the parent's income a child is more likely to be able to support themselves in the future and break the poverty cycle (Undergraduate Participant 1 2023, pers. Comm., 28 April).

#### ***6.4.2 Accessing opportunities through education***

Empowering people can help eradicate poverty because those who have been empowered can think outside the box and develop the means to start their businesses. This research at the University of KwaZulu-Natal resonates with 10 out of 25 participants who stated that if people are educated they can start a business, even if they don't get jobs based on their degrees. These participants contended that education opens the doors to more job opportunities. These perspectives are highlighted in the following quotes from some of the students.

The role that education plays is that it gives the educated the right vision to have faith that after studying they will be hired. For example, for one to obtain junior-level jobs, they need a degree or qualification. If they are educated, they will be able to think outside of the box and start businesses. Even if they do not get jobs based on their degree, then it points them to have something outside their qualification (Postgraduate Participant 9 2023, pers. Comm., 21 May).

Education open lots of doors; education is key to success. We all rush to get a qualification because when you are out there for a job, they will need your qualifications and certificates, so education is very important. However, it also happens that when you are educated you do not get a job (Undergraduate Participant 2 2023, pers. Comm., 30 May).

## **6.5 To determine different socio-economic factors and their influence on the educational attainment of students in HEIs.**

### ***6.5.1 Family background and student performance***

The University of KwaZulu-Natal students who participated in this research held different perspectives on the relationship between students' performance and their backgrounds. Family backgrounds significantly impact children's learning behaviours and academic achievements since these are the primary environments to which they are exposed. Li and Qiu's (2018) research suggest that the socio-economic status of the family may have a greater impact on the children's academic achievements than on schools. Low-income families often lack financial support due to poverty levels, affecting their children's academic achievement. Some of the students who participated in this research have friends who juggle work and studies out of necessity to supplement their parents' financial resources, highlighting the importance of understanding the connection between family background and academic performance.

Of the 12 undergraduate and 13 postgraduate students interviewed, all of the undergraduate students (12) and 92% (n=12) of the postgraduate students agreed that there is a connection between academic performance and family background. One of the postgraduates interviewed commented as follows.

Yes, definitely there is a connection because, for example, I have friends and university colleagues whom I know have to go to work because they have to pay for their own studies. Sometimes they do not have money for groceries and other things they need. Sometimes they cannot submit their work on time because they have to go to work since their background is poor and they do not have financial support or someone to depend on for funding. Some of them do not have funding, like NSFAS, or a bursary or anything like that. There is definitely a connection between a student's performance and one's family background because if the student can't just focus on their university studies, their studies suffer because they have to focus on earning an income in order to survive. Thus, there is a big connection between student performance and family background (Postgraduate Participant 2 2023, pers. Comm., 20 May).

In terms of the above, Shange's (2018) research indicates that the majority of students enrolling at South African universities come from low-income families and that these students also constitute most of the dropouts at universities. Financial access at the university is important for students to meet their needs. When students do not have any financial support from home or financial schemes, it is difficult for them to attend university. Students with limited financial

support, therefore, tend to seek employment and try to manage their time between work and academics. These outside work responsibilities are known to influence the time spent on their academic work. One of the student participant's responses was as follows.

Yes, students face depression because of their education standards and given that they do not have financial support. Lots of people come from different backgrounds to university, so it puts real pressure on one as an individual. Lots of students come from disadvantaged backgrounds, so they feel pressure when they get to university and meet a lot of different people. Some of them are like them, and some are not. So, our backgrounds do contribute to our academic performance (Postgraduate Participant 3 2023, pers. Comm., 04 June).

Yes, there is a connection between student performance and family background because some children actually come from very poor backgrounds which contribute to a student's challenges because sometimes you have to take care of the home and balance it with university studies. Others are very unfortunate in that they come from a poor family, but NSFAS is not assisting them, and they have to look for jobs. This means that they have to take care of their families and balance it with their university studies (Undergraduate Participant 6 2023, pers. Comm., 09 June).

Out of the 25 participants, only 1 postgraduate student believed that a student's family background did not influence their academic performance. This student stated, "I can say no because I haven't had any problem with failing or getting lower marks" (Postgraduate Participant 1, 2023).

The lack of family motivation is a critical factor in students' academic performance. Family motivation often comes from parental involvement in their children's education. Zuma's (2020) study indicated that emotional support from parents, such as encouraging children to study, stimulated their children to put more effort into their academic work. The emotional support from parents thus supports and strengthens the children during academic obstacles and challenges, such as during examinations or when a student feels like giving up. Hence, parental support benefits students in their ability to cope with stress related to their academic work. One of the postgraduates interviewed commented as follows.

..... During covid ... when we did not receive laptops, when the University was still distributing laptops, my parents did allow me to use their cell phones to communicate with other students who were staying around campus and always attending. Family background influences student performance somehow ... when your family is supportive and acknowledges what you want to do, what you want to become. For example, ... some families can let you

down when you register for a study programme at university that parents did not originally approve. ... Your family might also tell you that you are doing a useless degree if you did not choose or study medicine, law, or engineering. ... if the student comes from a poor background their families depend on them. However, parents might discourage ... their children's achievement because they wanted them to do things their way. There are job opportunities for all degrees if a person applies himself (or herself) and works hard for it (Postgraduate Participant 13 2023, pers. Comm., 12 May).

The findings from the students' responses demonstrate that children from affluent homes may not prioritise education since they feel secure given that they come from stable backgrounds and high incomes. On the other hand, students from working-class families tend to strive harder in their academic work to eventually improve their family situations. This is evident in the following quote from one of the undergraduate students who was interviewed in this study.

I feel ... there is a very big connection between a person's performance at school and their background because when you look at it, children who are rich and come from middle- or high-income residential areas or families tend not to take care about their schoolwork because they know money is always there to sustain them. On the other hand, when it comes to the lower and poor working-class students, we have to push hard at our studies because we have ... to change the situation at home. So, there is a huge connection between student performance and family background (Undergraduate Participant 9 2023, pers. Comm., 16 May).

### ***6.5.2 Obstacles faced by low-income household students when they first enrol at university***

According to the literature presented, students face different obstacles when they first enrol at university. These obstacles include financial difficulties, adaptability issues, stress from university workload, accommodation issues, and the inability to use technological resources. Shange's (2018) and Kunene's (2018) studies resonate with some of the responses from the undergraduate and postgraduate participants. Students at university experience a significant difference between the teaching and workload at high schools and those at tertiary institutions. Moreover, Kunene (2018) established that some students find higher education more demanding than anticipated. This is confirmed in the responses of some of the students who were interviewed during this research. For example, one postgraduate student reported as follows, "The challenge I had was that I did not know how to use a computer" (Postgraduate Participant 1, 2023).

Another postgraduate student reflected as follows on the obstacles low-income household students experience when they first enrol at university.

I struggled to find accommodation in residence, and then I was placed in town ... but I hated the surrounding because it was such a bad place. I had no choice because I stayed there for about 2 years. I then moved to another place until finally now I am on campus. So, I think the challenge for me was residence (Postgraduate Participant 2 2023, pers. Comm., 20 May).

Another postgraduate student responded as follows:

I think the first thing that is a problem is access to information and resources, and that people who come from underprivileged backgrounds are not exposed to some of the things like cell phones to access information. Even their schools do not give their students enough information in order for them to do this. Students at school have to do things on their own, and when making applications to universities they have documents missing not because they lack information. Other students do not know how to use a computer; they only start using it when they must apply for NSFAS. They make mistakes because they have no proper guidance on how to complete their applications using a computer. Other students sometimes have challenges of not being able to register or having debts that they cannot settle so they end up not being able to enrol for the following year.... Some students do not stay at university residence; they may stay in informal settlements, and they will have funding challenges coming to campus on daily basis. They won't be able to access local network areas (LANS) after school hours. Also, if extra classes are conducted to help students during examination times, they won't be able to attend because they live away from university. These students also face issues of poverty (Postgraduate Participant 8 2023, pers. Comm., 12 June).

An undergraduate student responded as follows:

Yes, I faced a lot of challenges. Firstly, online classes were a huge struggle I had to adapt to, secondly, I registered late and had to catch up on a lot of work by myself; and thirdly, I had no friend when I came to university, and I am kind of person who likes communicating with others. It was hard for me to adapt to university life. These were the challenges I encountered at university (Undergraduate Participant 1 2023, pers. Comm., 28 May).

Responses from the study participants indicated that students face numerous challenges when they first enrol at the HEIs despite the student support services from the national government, local communities and UKZN.

## **6.6 To explore what the government and HEIs can do to assist students from disadvantaged backgrounds.**

### ***6.6.1 Student support services from UKZN, local communities, and government***

The findings from the UKZN Howard College participants in this research highlighted that there were several UKZN student support structures. These student support services were designed for students from disadvantaged backgrounds and all other socio-economic backgrounds. The support structures included the Psychology Department which offered therapy sessions, First Year Experience (FYE) and Academic Mentoring and Support (AMS) mentorship programmes, food parcels that the Students Representative Council (SRC) organised, Campus HIV & AIDS Support Unit (CHASU) which offers HIV/AIDS awareness programmes, career guidance programmes, tutoring programmes, religious churches such as Student Christian Fellowship (SCF), Nazareth and Zion, Fundza Lushaka bursary, and NSFAS student support structures.

Not much research has been done on UKZN student support services; however, research indicates severe attrition rates for previously disadvantaged students at universities (Cloete 2016; Paideya & Bengesai 2017; Scott, Yeld & Hendry 2007). Notwithstanding, disadvantaged students have experienced an amelioration in their access to higher education. In 2006, the Academic Mentoring and Support (AMS) policy framework was instituted by UKZN to augment the standard of teaching and learning.

The UKZN Howard College campus has the College of Humanities which has student support services that cater to students' well-being, personal growth, and development. These student support services offer a range of free, professional, and confidential services designed to meet the needs of students at HEIs. The services offered to students include psychotherapy, structured student retention and throughput programmes, life skills development, academic orientation and integration, peer wellness mentoring, academic mentoring, and living and learning communities.

Council on Higher Education (2020) highlights that the primary mission of student support services is to provide developmental opportunities to academically disadvantaged students to enhance their level of engagement with their higher education studies. University students in higher education face numerous challenges that make achieving their goals difficult or impossible. These challenges normally include secondary/high school systems that

underprepared them for their education, a higher degree of alienation, and language barriers that make it difficult for students from certain backgrounds to adjust to university life. Some responses from the study participants included the following:

The quality of education for those disadvantaged students was not the best in the schools they are coming from. So, now the university has a programme whereby it offers an augmented programme where basic subjects such as mathematics and English are offered (Postgraduate Participant 2 2023, pers. Comm., 20 May).

If I could look back at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, I would say CHASU that's one of the organizations that tries to assist students. This organisation supports the students with awareness programmes on careers, the provision of food packages. HIV/AIDS awareness campaigns, information about, sexual and physical health, and Gender Based Violence (GBV) awareness campaigns. Another support structure is student services with assistance from psychologists to students and career advice, counselling. There are also departments that provide different support, for example, the Department of Criminology tries to source stakeholders' support for students. For example, Safety and Security Sector Education and Training Authority (SASSETA) has funded many criminology students. If students have finished their degrees and they were funded by SASSETA, they are most likely to get internships. Their internships are normally for 2 years. So, if you can get that kind of opportunity, you are able to get some money (Postgraduate Participant 5 2023, pers. Comm., 23 April).

Yes, I know about students support services. It actually helps students in their writings, with all aspects of students' assignments. Then the clinic is there, they give you tablets, and these are free. This service helps students who do not have medical aid or who do not have money to go to hospital in case of emergencies. Also, when the year begins and if you do not have funding food parcels are made available to you. There are also psychologists who help if you have a problem. In short, there are many structures and activities to help students at university (Undergraduate Participant 4 2023, pers. Comm., 13 May).

I am aware of NSFAS.... There are also mentorship programmes that have been implemented for students who have not been doing too well in their academic programmes and these programmes help us find a way of studying and doing well (Undergraduate Participant 11 2023, pers. Comm., 29 May).

Six out of 25 participants indicated that they were not aware of any student support structures designed for disadvantaged students at UKZN. This implies that there is a need to enhance the promotion of student support services, for all students to be aware and be accommodated.

### ***6.6.2 Initiatives implemented to provide education to students from disadvantaged backgrounds***

Among the participants interviewed, 15% were not aware of initiatives that provide education to underprivileged students. Specifically, 3 out of 25 respondents reported not knowing about such programs. It is essential to improve the dissemination of information regarding initiatives that target disadvantaged students to address educational inequalities and establish a fair and inclusive education system that provides equal opportunities for all students to succeed.

#### ***6.6.2.1 Sponsorship and bursaries***

Sponsorship and bursaries are initiatives that the government implemented to provide education to children from disadvantaged backgrounds. Out of 25 participants, only 3 out of 13 postgraduate participants stated that sponsorships and bursaries are initiatives that were implemented to provide education to children from disadvantaged backgrounds. One of the postgraduate participants asserted that “student aid has always been there for those who cannot afford to pay their fees” (Postgraduate Participant 11, 2023).

Another student commented as follows:

I think the initiatives that are being implemented include targeted scholarships, grants, and financial aid programmes to help students register, and overcome the financial barriers in education. Also, non-profit organisations, nonprofit organizations (NPOs) and government can often collaborate to establish schools or learning centres for those in areas that are struggling. So, community outreach programmes or mentorship initiatives especially in rural areas can also be established. There are often after school programmes that are designed to provide support, resources and guidance to children who are from disadvantaged backgrounds (Postgraduate Participant 12 2023, pers. Comm., 08 May).

#### ***6.6.2.2 Free access to education***

One undergraduate participant and 3 postgraduate participants out of 25 participants contended that the government’s implementation of free access to education is an important initiative for people in rural or township schools, especially for those who are unable to pay school fees. The students’ responses are as follows:

Education was made free for people in rural areas and townships so that residents in these areas do not to pay school fees because they cannot afford these fees. Government also implemented food schemes in schools for children because some of these children go to school on empty stomachs (Postgraduate Participant 6 2023, pers. Comm., 06 May).

I think government implements free access to education in some nonfee payment schools. There are also campaigns that government and NGOs have implemented which help children with school uniforms (Postgraduate Participant 7 2023, pers. Comm., 17 May).

The government is trying by all means to give children who cannot afford education, the free education (Undergraduate Participant 6 2023, pers. Comm., 09 June).

### **6.6.2.3 NSFAS**

Eight out of 12 undergraduate participants and 2 out of 13 postgraduate students mentioned NSFAS as an initiative of the government.

NSFAS which is a national student financial aid scheme in SA provides financial aid to undergraduate students to help pay for the cost of tertiary education after finishing school. That is the only initiative I know (Undergraduate Participant 11 2023, pers. Comm., 29 May).

We get data, we have NSFAS, there is also Wi-Fi in malls in case school pupil do not have data. They have introduced Central Applications Office (CAOs) in schools for school pupil to apply and the teachers to assist them (Undergraduate Participant 2 2023, pers. Comm., 30 May).

Well, firstly it's NSFAS. NSFAS is for students who cannot afford to pay for themselves at universities. Government has also established an initiative to provide learners in primary and secondary school with free education and textbooks. Some schools also get sponsors to provide uniforms for learners who do not have school uniforms (Postgraduate Participant 3 2023, pers. Comm., 04 June).

### **6.6.3 *What communities can do to assist students from disadvantaged backgrounds?***

Relief from poverty, access to healthcare, education, and a safe environment are issues that millions of children face in South Africa every day. Despite significant progress in improving the well-being of children, the implementation of laws, policies, and programs remains uneven, and millions of the country's most disadvantaged, vulnerable, and marginalized children still get left behind. Parents, the government, and people in local communities must work together to invest in the education of disadvantaged students. Many organizations in South Africa have been created for people to provide and give back various resources to their communities. These

organizations include the Kwanisa Foundation, Motsepe Foundation, and Siyabonga Africa. Giving back to the community is one of the findings from participants in this study on how communities can assist students from disadvantaged backgrounds. One of the students stated, “I think that communities and individuals need to give back to the community” (Postgraduate 7, 2023). Some of the participants commented as follows.

I think ... that it always helps that those who have gone through the same situations and became successful give back to their communities. They must be encouraged early to give back. ... This is the culture that we need to instil ... that is supposed to be normal. When you are out of university there are others that are going to face the same challenges as you, so ... it is important for people to give back to their institutions. ... NSFAS has helped many people from poor backgrounds. ... Universities get donations ... It is important ... to know how this process is running at universities in terms of assisting students. There are also drives for food donations ..... it is all about money, it is all about delivering information ... I think at the universities ... everyone should be involved in, and encourage students, to donate food and encourage students who need help to ask for assistance (Postgraduate Participant 5 2023, pers. Comm., 23 April).

Giving back to the community may include donating food, books, and school uniforms to the disadvantaged. One of the students reflected as follows.

Communities can make sure that children have all their needs. Communities can come together and create feeding schemes for children, provide school uniforms to children, make sure that they have access to smartphones and the internet to undertake their research, and that school children can easily apply to universities. Communities can help create a safe and secure environment ... and join community policing forums to help eliminate crime (Postgraduate Participant 13 2023, pers. Comm., 12 May).

People in local communities can also invest in trust fund accounts for disadvantaged students to cover university registration and other costs (Postgraduate Participant 9, 2023). On the other hand, Undergraduate Participant 12 contends that communities can assist with fund-raising for students going to universities and also provide opportunities for educational workshops for students (Undergraduate Participant 12, 2023).

People who have studied and succeeded at the higher education level can interact with disadvantaged students, provide free tutoring and mentoring sessions, and create organisations to support students from underprivileged backgrounds.

It takes a village and a community to assist students from vulnerable homes. They can do that by establishing mentoring services although it does not have to be that formal, but they can establish mentoring programmes where individuals from communities including professionals are involved. These professionals can provide guidance and support to students on a voluntary basis. Mentors can also advise and share their experiences to ensure they help children in developing their skills and the skills that are necessary for educational and career opportunities. There can also be after school programmes that focus on academic enrichment and skills development. They can also provide a safe and supportive environment for children even during critical hours when they are unsupervised and facing challenging situations at home. Also, parental involvement and support are very crucial for the children's education. This is because community engagement efforts encourage and empower people to participate in the academic journeys of their students. Also, organising workshops to help parents on how they can go about supporting their children who are still studying is important. The communities can like create supportive and inclusive environments that can help students, learners or children from backgrounds that are disadvantaged to overcome the challenges of poverty and also achieve their full potential in education and career opportunities (Postgraduate Participant 12 2023, pers. Comm., 08 May).

Communities need to encourage people to have faith in their skills because even though they have finished their degrees and may not have a job (Undergraduate Participant 9 2023, pers. Comm., 16 May).

Community engagement in the education of students from disadvantaged can increase student participation in education and enhance their skills and development.

#### ***6.6.4 What can the government and higher education institutions do to better assist Students from disadvantaged backgrounds?***

The previous years (2022-2016) have seen considerable improvement in access to higher education but not in disadvantaged student success, as retention and degree completion rates have indicated (Khumalo 2018). Despite substantial financial support from the South African government, several legislatives in education (National Education Policy Act 27 of 1996 & South African Schools Act 84 of 1996), and well-meaning institutional efforts, retention and success rates continue to be low. This implies that the government and higher education institutions have more work to do to increase the retention and success rates of students in South Africa. Given this situation, the UKZN student participants in this study were asked what the government and higher education institutions can do to better assist students who come

from disadvantaged backgrounds. Six out of 25 students highlighted the need for the government to increase the NSFAS budget.

I think that as much as NSFAS covers most of the students, there are those who are left out. I believe that maybe they (the national government and HEIs) need to improve, or increase their budget in terms of providing NSFAS, ... so that everybody gets it. The NSFAS processes are too long for students who are not familiar with smartphones or laptops during applications. So, either they reduce the processes, or they send people to high schools to assist students to apply for grants like NSFAS (Postgraduate Participant 8 2023, pers. Comm., 12 June).

Maybe National Government and HEIs can raise NSFAS money... maybe they should not make students pay lots of money because sometimes you end up not understanding what exactly is it that you are paying for. That becomes a challenge for disadvantaged students to pay money, for example, paying for one's academic record. This should be free (Undergraduate Participant 11 2023, pers. Comm., 29 May).

Government can increase its money to students because inflation in South Africa is very high. The money we get is very little even though there are many people whom the government assists financially. However, government funding to students needs to increase because it's not enough and items such as food are costly (Undergraduate Participant 10 2023, pers. Comm., 09 May).

In Chapter 3 of the literature, it was noted that the government needed to increase the budget for the National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS) due to the high demand for financial assistance from students. Despite this need, the government has increased the NSFAS budget by 328% from R15.4bn in 2017/18 to R50.1bn in 2023/2024. Nevertheless, there have been reports of monthly allowances being paid to 157,980 ghost students, which raises questions about corruption in the government.

To better assist students from disadvantaged backgrounds, the South African government and Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) need to reassess the university education system. Some of the students shared their thoughts on the matter.

The government needs to do a better job of appointing people to take responsibility and care of the different institutions, and it needs to appoint individuals who will be oversee every single institution, for example, at Durban University of Technology (DUT) or UKZN. They need to pay attention to the infrastructure ... and re-assess the system ... to make it better. When children arrive at the university and they do not have enough points for admission to particular programmes, they do not understand that at school one is only taught the bare minimum while

at university one has to perform at more demanding levels (Postgraduate Participant 2 2023, pers. Comm., 20 May).

Government needs to change syllabus because what we are taught in schools and/or universities does not assist students to get jobs. They really need to focus on practical aspects rather than theory in an effort to impart skills... Higher education institutions should also invest in technology so that students are not left behind (Undergraduate Participant 3 2023, pers. Comm., 16 May).

The participants who were interviewed in this research also contended that the government and HEIs need to implement programmes in conjunction with business and the private sector that are inclusive of students from disadvantaged backgrounds. For example, one student reported as follows:

Everyone should work together at the universities to highlight to the business stakeholders the challenges universities face. Universities have a tendency of not wanting exposure, but they need to meet with the business institutions. Universities need to be more transparent with issues and the challenges they face. Government and the private institutions and stakeholders can assist universities in providing the necessary structures that universities need. The engagement of the private sector and government in a transparent university can assist in various ways to work in conjunction with HEIs to address (Postgraduate Participant 5 2023, pers. Comm., 23 April)

Here at school (or university), they have a first-year mentorship programme which started years ago. It is in its third or fourth year in 2022 and it works with the Academic Mentoring Support (AMS) mentorship programme of which there two programmes. I work in the First Year Experience (FYE) programme, and we help students most of whom are from disadvantaged backgrounds. These students were not familiar with the internet, and we had to be patient with them. The government and the higher education department therefore should, right after November when the matriculants are over with their final examinations, be taught the use of the Internet in libraries for free. In addition, children can be taught how to use a computer, to access the Internet, how to check their status via Central Applications Office (CAO) and how apply for NSFAS funding. The NSFAS application is free, but people end up paying for it. Also, there should be assistance for students from the rural areas as they settle down in the cities where they are attending universities for the first time. Also, there should be people who are assist students during the busy registration periods in January and February. So, I think those are things that the government and the HEIs should do to assist students who are in higher education for the first time (Postgraduate Participant 7 2023, pers. Comm., 17 May).

Postgraduate participant 6 proposed that both the government and the HEIs should set up donation programmes to support students from disadvantaged backgrounds.

The government and the HEIs should make sure that all students coming from disadvantaged backgrounds gets accommodation. They have tried accommodating everyone in HEIs by providing funding for fees to those who cannot afford paying them. Unfortunately, not all students who deserve funding gets it. The government and the HEIs should also have donations for students coming from disadvantaged backgrounds (Postgraduate Participant 6 2023, pers. Comm., 06 May).

The government should provide more and equal resources to all schools, regardless of their backgrounds. One of the students commented, “They have to provide more resources to schools, especially for those students in the sciences” (Undergraduate Participant 8, 2023). This statement aligns with the responses of two participants. Another student stated, “I think the government and the HEIs should help by making sure there is an equal distribution of education resources to every child despite their backgrounds” (Postgraduate Participant 10, 2023).

Some of the participants may not be aware of the student support services offered that the higher education institutions offer. Therefore, institutions of higher learning should disseminate more information and advertise their services to students.

For me, I will be happy if student services are advertised more to people because some of the students are not even aware that these support services are available. It would be better if these services become more available, via advertising, for example, using posters to advertise these services or sending emails to students. Such initiatives will help overcome student depression and/or anxiety (Undergraduate Participant 5 2023, pers. Comm., 07 May).

I think the government and the HEIS should introduce more documentation regarding the services they offer. They should introduce themselves and be more available to the students through greater advertising and more often so that students get to know about them and their services. This will help considerably. (Undergraduate Participant 11 2023, pers. Comm., 29 May).

The national government and HEIs should review the effectiveness and efficiency of student support services to improve disadvantaged students' academic skills, instil the confidence required for academic success, promote student participation and integration into the academic system, and prepare students for active lives in society.

## 6.7 Discussion

Although the definitions of poverty are subjective, from the research findings one concludes that the individuals who were interviewed in this research came from similar backgrounds. Most students define poverty as a lack of financial freedom to meet one's basic needs. For instance, a majority of the students who participated in this study were from the middle- to lower-middle class, and their definitions of poverty were very similar. Therefore, socio-economic status played a significant role in shaping each individual's perspectives on poverty.

According to both the postgraduate and the undergraduate students, poor education, unemployment, teenage pregnancies, parental disengagement, and a lack of innovation and creativity on the part of people were some of the causes of poverty. For instance, young people in rural areas with limited access to high-quality education were unable to acquire the skills and knowledge required to land well-paying jobs, trapping them in a cycle of poverty. In addition, the high rate of teenage pregnancies in underprivileged groups frequently resulted in early parenthood, impeding educational success, and sustaining financial instability for both the young parents and their children. The lack of parental involvement also impedes a child's growth and opportunities for success, aggravating the poverty cycle.

The students who were interviewed in this study believed that although it did not always happen, education is crucial for ending the cycle of poverty. Students suggested that low-income individuals can improve their situation by obtaining degrees from universities and HEIs but acknowledged the potential challenges that inadequate infrastructure and resources posed. While education can lead to employment and financial security, it might not break the cycle of poverty but can help students access different opportunities.

The study revealed a strong link between education and poverty, with parents' financial constraints limiting their children's access to quality education, reducing their chances to achieve education, securing good jobs, and breaking the poverty cycle. Education can help address these issues, and poverty can also negatively impact children's mental health and well-being, leading to higher levels of stress, anxiety, and depression. This can result in insecurities in school, pressure, loss of self-esteem, and a potential to resort to crime and violence.

According to the study participants, university students faced pressure from their wealthy peers and as a result of cultural diversity which conflicted with their upbringing when they enrolled at university for the first time. While students navigated unfamiliar social norms and customs,

this clash of cultures caused confusion and discomfort. Furthermore, the pressure to succeed academically in a competitive environment added a layer of stress for first-year university students. Additionally, the lack of familiar support systems and the overwhelming workload exacerbated their feelings of isolation and anxiety.

The study revealed that students from low socio-economic backgrounds faced numerous challenges when they enrolled at university, including poverty, unemployed and illiterate parents, poor access to basic resources, and financial constraints. These factors contributed to students' underperformance and negatively impacted their academic performances at HEIs. Rural schools also faced challenges due to challenges associated with government service delivery and a lack of resources. Disadvantaged students struggled with technological resources, access to suitable university accommodation, funding, and cultural differences, leading to feelings of inferiority and pressure. The study also highlighted the connection between family backgrounds and the interviewed students' performances at the University of KwaZulu-Natal. Without financial support, the interviewed students struggled to focus on their school and university work, their mental health was affected, and many of them sought jobs. Understanding these factors is crucial for establishing the students' academic success.

Although many of the respondents in this study suggested in their responses on how to make education more accessible to the poorer communities in society, that greater funding needed to be spent on education in general and on NSFAS in particular, these students seem not to understand the magnitude of South Africa's national government on education in general and higher education in particular. For example, in News 24 (31 October 2023) Koko reported that "NSFAS pays 157,980 'ghost students' monthly allowances. (Koko was reporting on a media briefing that the NSFAS board chairperson, Ernest Khosa, made at the Ronnie Mamoepa Media Centre in Pretoria (Koko, 2023). Second, the South African Government had allocated billions which has ballooned from R15.4 billion for NSFAS and R31.6 billion (including R3.5 billion for infrastructure) for university subsidies in the 2017/2018 Fiscal Year to R50.1 billion, while the allocation for university subsidies rose to R44.5-billion (including R673 million for infrastructure) (du Plessis, 2023). (See Chapter 3).

To date, the total tuition disbursements to all universities amount to R1, 602,289,873.00 and NSFAS is funding 80% of university students in South Africa. It is therefore difficult to see how the South African national government can fund NSFAS to a greater extent. Following the 2023 Medium Term Expenditure Budget in November 2023, it has been reported that the

South African Government is paying a total amount of R366 billion per annum on the interest of the debt on its loans. This translates to approximately R1 billion per day on the payment of the interest on the loans that the South African government has accumulated (Department of National Treasury, 2023).

In this present financial situation in which the country finds itself, it is therefore very difficult to accept the respondents' perspective in this study that the South African government's funding support to NSFAS needs to be increased. Reference can also be made to the damage to buildings that students at tertiary institutions cause. For example, in Sunday Times (22 August 2023) Nxumalo reported that students at the PMB campus of UKZN burnt the Allan Webb building which is often used for hosting examinations. This therefore implies that the government resources need to be spent on refurbishing burnt buildings. The effect of this is that there is less money for other educational expenses (such as for NSFAS) (Nxumalo, 2023).

The study also suggests that the government and the HEIs needed to reassess the education system and adapt the syllabus to accommodate technological advancements. The universities should engage with stakeholders, be transparent about their issues, and provide the necessary structures to help students. Additionally, the study recommends the development of outreach programmes targeting schools and communities with a high population of students from disadvantaged backgrounds.

## **6.8 Understanding student insights through the theoretical framework**

When considering the circumstances of disadvantaged students, it is important to note that, unlike their counterparts, the students who were interviewed did not have the means to enhance their educational resources, thus placing them at a disadvantage. This is because for them to enrol as university students, they use financial aid from the government and HEIs, including NSFAS, and bursaries. In contrast, their counterparts from privileged backgrounds come from high socio-economic families who can afford to pay for their education. Despite some of the students having financial support from the government and HEIs, it is sometimes not enough because they send some of their allowances to their families, which serves as remittances that their families can use to escape the brutality of poverty. Disadvantaged students in higher education sometimes struggle to sustain themselves, particularly in terms of food and accommodation. This challenge is confirmed in the sense that the study found that some of the participants received food packs from UKZN SRC for students in need. This can have adverse

effects on their educational performance because they will not be able to support themselves for the rest of the month, therefore affecting their concentration in class and academic performance.

NSFAS is one of the government funding schemes established to provide financial support to disadvantaged students in South Africa, ensuring they have access to higher education. Students, however, still face challenges in accessing and utilizing the NSFAS, including delays in the release of funds, inadequate and unclear communication, and bureaucratic hurdles that hinder the smooth process of receiving financial aid. These issues can have a significant impact on the success and well-being of the students, potentially hindering their performance and progression in their academic journey. In addition to the challenges of receiving financial provisions from the government, students of higher education also experience challenges related to teaching and learning. Learning challenges of students from disadvantaged backgrounds include inadequate preparation, inability to use resources, insufficient teaching and learning space, and poor academic writing and study skills. Vulnerable students from historically underprivileged households may experience epistemic exclusion due to a lack of resources, like computers and internet connectivity. Additionally, despite disadvantaged students coming from rural schools, rural schools have a very good pass rate.

The educational resources required for good academic performance include capital, as well as habitus (Bourdieu, 1990). Bourdieu identified three types of capital: economic, social, and cultural capital. In comparing the students' responses based on the interviews that were conducted with them, it was clear that the characteristics of the low-income household students comprised both a lack of economic and cultural capital. From the students' insights and understanding, the idea of how cultural capital played a role in their lives as higher education students was of little significance, as was the lack of economic capital. Also, the students primarily conceptualized the notion of being disadvantaged as economic capital.

In keeping with Bourdieu's definition of capital, all the resources the students had were grounded in their families' backgrounds. This was indicated in the participants' explanations of their characteristics, which were closely entwined with the type of background they had come from and had encountered. The relationship between parental status and economic challenges was one of the influencing factors. In keeping with other studies on socio-economic situations, a student's parental employment and status are determining factors in the participants classifying themselves as being disadvantaged.

Following the exploration of cultural capital's concept and its impact on students from low-income families through these interviews, the subject moves to habitus. There was a considerable relationship between an individual's background, cultural capital, and the habitus or predispositions that they exhibited. According to Bourdieu (1990, p. 53), habitus is "the system of durable and transposable dispositions" through which individuals perceive, judge, and behave within and think about the world. Lower-class habitus is incompatible with middle-class habitus, as was the case with cultural capital, which was also incompatible with institutional habitus. The participants in this study noted that the majority of low-income students entered higher education institutions without the intellectual capital necessary to survive there, including the way they think and perceive the world, as well as how they behave.

The findings brought to light the relationship between aspects of the socio-economic and academic challenges that the interviewed UKZN Howard College students encountered when examined in light of Bourdieu's theoretical concepts of cultural capital, habitus, and field. The UKZN Howard College, like other institutions of higher education, is generally geared towards the principles and culture of the middle class, and to a lesser degree, the values and culture of the lower class. In this UKZN study, this was characterized in terms of a lack of material resources to meet basic needs such as food, shelter, and clothing for disadvantaged students. This study points to the fact that the higher education institutions (in this case, the UKZN) catered principally to middle-class students who were reasonably well-endowed in terms of their possession of material resources.

The concept of habitus, which refers to the dispositions that individuals possess that determine the ease or difficulty with which they find themselves in an unfamiliar environment (field), is closely related to the cultural deficit that students from underprivileged backgrounds exhibit. While students from impoverished backgrounds claimed to know what was expected of them in an educational setting, they lacked the disposition to satisfy these expectations, resulting in academic challenges.

## **6.9 Conclusion**

The study of selected UKZN students revealed a link between poverty and educational attainment. This case study research allowed UKZN students to reflect on their past educational experiences while narrating current experiences they encounter as they pursue higher education. Factors such as financial constraints, poverty, unemployment, illiterate parents, and

poor access to basic resources were identified as the experiences of many school learners and university students, which negatively impact their educational outcomes. The government and UKZN's student support services did not adequately address the challenges disadvantaged students faced. The study suggests that the government and HEIs should implement more support services, such as financial aid programs, mentorship programs, and access to tutoring and academic resources designed specifically for disadvantaged students. This will help level the playing field for students from disadvantaged backgrounds and increase their chances of success. An inclusive environment can also improve the retention rates of disadvantaged students and overall student satisfaction within HEIs regardless of students' socio-economic statuses. This chapter has presented the study participants' demographics and different definitions of poverty according to the findings from the participants of this study. This chapter has presented data reflecting the study participants' causes of poverty, family background and student performance, effects of poverty on students' mental health and well-being, and the role that poverty plays in breaking the poverty cycle. This chapter also discussed findings from data collected from UKZN students on the obstacles low-income students encounter when they first enrol at university, the support services from UKZN, national government, and local communities, and the initiatives implemented to provide education to students from disadvantaged backgrounds. The next chapter will include the study's conclusion, recommendations, and future research suggestions.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION

#### 7.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the conclusion, the recommendations for further research, and the final remarks. The study focused on selected undergraduate and postgraduate students who were registered at the University of KwaZulu-Natal's Howard College campus, and who came from diverse socio-economic backgrounds. The research that was undertaken studied the relationship between poverty and educational attainment amongst the respondents (students) in a HEI in South Africa.

#### 7.2 Summary and conclusion

The impact of poverty on education at the tertiary level in South Africa is a critical issue that needs to be addressed. It is essential to understand the relationship between poverty and educational attainment, particularly during the transition from high school to tertiary education. It should be noted that the key findings obtained in this research were influenced by the students' backgrounds and contexts, as well as their insights on the issues they responded to. Therefore, it is important to exercise caution when generalizing how students at UKZN's Howard College campus understand the relationship between poverty and educational attainment to a wider population of students at other higher education institutions in South Africa.

In addition, students' experiences vary significantly in terms of access to school resources, overcrowded classrooms, low academic attainment, and underqualified teachers in the school environment. These experiences can have a significant impact on educational attainment and, ultimately, students' transition to tertiary education. These challenges, along with financial struggles and the absence of parental and academic support, among other issues, can hinder students' ability to succeed academically and contribute to the cycle of poverty.

Nonetheless, it is crucial to address the root causes of poverty and provide targeted support to students from disadvantaged backgrounds to improve their chances of success in higher education. One key way to do this is through financial assistance, such as scholarships, bursaries, and other forms of financial aid, to cover tuition fees, accommodation costs, and other educational expenses. Additionally, it is important to address the systemic nature of poverty and the unequal distribution of resources and opportunities in society. This could

involve policies and programs aimed at reducing income inequality, improving access to education and job opportunities, and providing social services and safety nets to those in need.

In conclusion, poverty has a significant impact on tertiary education in South Africa and poses unique challenges to students from disadvantaged backgrounds. Addressing this issue requires providing financial assistance and tackling the systemic nature of poverty. These measures can break the cycle of poverty and improve the educational attainment and prospects of all South African students. It is important to acknowledge that research on this topic has limitations, and generalizing the findings to a broader population of students should be done with caution. Therefore, continued research is essential to identify effective strategies to mitigate the impact of poverty on educational attainment. Collaboratively, we can create a more equitable and just society for all South Africans.

### ***7.2.1 Impact of poverty on the educational attainment of undergraduate and postgraduate students at the Howard college campus of UKZN***

Postgraduate and undergraduate students who participated in this study had the same insights and understanding of the topic of poverty and its impact on education. Furthermore, the findings emanating from this research revealed that students had similar experiences of how poverty influenced their educational attainment. Students from disadvantaged or low-income backgrounds struggled with technological resources, accommodation, funding, and cultural differences, leading to feelings of inferiority and pressure.

Amidst the range of socio-economic factors that were highlighted in the literature affecting students' performances were poverty, unemployed parents, illiterate parents, poor access to basic resources and information, and financial constraints. The argument is advanced that students from low socio-economic backgrounds are most likely to underperform in HEIs because of the effect of their family's low socio-economic status. Other than families, schools that are located in rural areas appear to be disadvantaged as they struggle with service delivery from the government and lack access to basic resources and educational materials that the students need. The low socio-economic status and lack of access to adequate resources in rural areas, therefore, have a detrimental impact on students' academic performances in HEIs.

### ***7.2.2 Experiences and perceptions of students from disadvantaged backgrounds regarding the relationship between poverty and educational attainment***

The students' background has a connection with the way students perform in HEIs. The findings of this study reveal that students have different experiences and perceptions regarding the relationship between poverty and educational attainment. The data collected in this research among selected students at the UKZN Howard College Campus show that inadequate financial support has effects on students' mental health and well-being, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds. These effects negatively impact students' ability to learn and attain a good education.

The findings of this research indicate that growing up in poverty, being exposed to unstable living conditions, poor nutrition, and limited access to health care affect children's development. This leads to higher levels of stress, anxiety, and depression. If a student's mental health is affected, this may cause insecurities in HEIs. Students may feel pressured and have a loss of self-esteem if they compare themselves to students coming from privileged backgrounds. The study also indicated that children exposed to poverty may resort to crime and violence because of their mental health problems and their inability to cope, given their socio-economic backgrounds.

The findings emanating from this study assert that the students from low-income families received a lower quality education compared to their counterparts from middle-income families. Students from low SES families did not perform as well as they potentially could in HEIs compared to students from higher SES families. The findings of this study complemented the literature review. The students' insights and understanding of the relationship between poverty and educational attainment were determined by their responses on the role that education plays in breaking the poverty cycle, and the effects of poverty on a child's mental health and well-being. According to the literature reviewed in this study (see Chapter 2), poverty is seen as one of the key issues confronting not just individuals and communities but also a nation. It is well-recognised that education is the tool that lays the groundwork for the growth of people, communities, and the entire nation.

### ***7.2.3 Financial challenges faced by students from disadvantaged backgrounds, impacting their educational attainment***

Findings from this study indicate that some students from disadvantaged backgrounds did not receive any financial support from their families, which made it difficult for them to focus on school, ultimately affecting their mental health. For instance, the study indicated that students who rely on NSFAS face the most challenging circumstances. These challenges include being rejected without valid reasons and receiving their allowances late, which could harm their educational attainment. Some study participants also indicated that they send their NSFAS monthly allowances home, thereby leaving them unable to sustain themselves throughout the month. This, in turn, affected their academic performances, as they were unable to focus on their studies due to the stress related to their domestic situations.

The findings of this study at UKZN also revealed that if students received support from their parents, they were better able to cope with the stress related to the challenges they faced. In short, this study confirmed that financial challenges were more prevalent among students coming from disadvantaged backgrounds.

### ***7.2.4 Effectiveness of student support services in promoting educational attainment of students from disadvantaged backgrounds***

Postgraduate and undergraduate students who participated in this study indicated that there are student support programmes available at UKZN to help students whose academic potential has not been realised due to their disadvantaged educational backgrounds. These student support services include student funding, academic support, student counselling, student residence and catering, career assistance, disability support, alumni support, HIV support and legal assistance. Students who participated in this study indicated that the student support services have many challenges and are not effective for some of the students. Some of these challenges included not being aware of the student support services, and not receiving enough support.

The literature reviewed in this study demonstrated that the HEIs support services (i.e., habitus) and resources (i.e., capital) socialize the students. This was, however, not the case for some participants in this study who had little, or no knowledge of the students' support services that were available to support them to progress well academically. This resulted in a range of challenges for the participants, such as a lack of a sense of belonging, and culture. The research revealed that African students from low socio-economic backgrounds in South Africa were

often disempowered, marginalised, and isolated due to the inequitable distribution of educational resources.

### ***7.2.5 Effective strategies that can be employed to support the success of students from disadvantaged backgrounds in Higher education institutions***

The findings of this study point out that the government and HEIs need to strengthen or build more support services to create a more inclusive and supportive environment for students from disadvantaged backgrounds. Some students indicated that they were not aware of the support services that the UKZN offered, and they therefore highlighted that the HEIs should advertise their support services more often. The study also discovered that the government and HEIs should have donations specifically for students from disadvantaged backgrounds because not every student who deserves funding gets it.

The last objective of this study was to explore what the government and HEIs can do to assist students from disadvantaged backgrounds. The findings from the study revealed that the government and HEIs can address the problem of ghost students who are paid NSFAS monthly allowances because the money students receive is not enough to sustain them. Some of the students sent some of their NSFAS money to their families. This study's findings also revealed that the government and HEIs need to re-assess the education system and restructure some of the elements affecting the students. The students pointed out that in the future, technology will be more advanced, so the government and HEIs needed to change the educational landscape in keeping with advances in technological changes and updates.

Some participants highlighted that universities must meet with different stakeholders, get exposure and be transparent on issues they are facing as institutions of higher education. The government and private organisations can then assist with those issues and provide the necessary and improved structures. The findings of this study also indicated that government and HEIs can develop and implement outreach programmes and target schools and communities with a high population of students from disadvantaged backgrounds. These programmes can provide students with guidance on university applications, funding, and the use of the Internet. Government and HEIs need to make sure that students from disadvantaged backgrounds have access to necessary educational resources like computers, libraries, and study materials. The government needs to make sure that there is equal access to educational resources, regardless of the backgrounds of communities and schools.

While this study offers findings and insights from the selected group of students at the Howard College campus at UKZN, there are still gaps that require further exploration. While the study presented adequate findings and insights from the selected students at the Howard College campus at UKZN, there are still gaps that require further exploration. Educational attainment is influenced by various factors such as socioeconomic status, race, cultural background, and individual differences. The impact of poverty on educational attainment may vary depending on these factors, as well as the geographical location of the HEI.

Therefore, it is recommended that further research should be conducted to understand how poverty impacts educational attainment in different HEIs in South Africa. This will provide a more comprehensive understanding of the issue and enable the government and HEIs to develop targeted interventions to address the problem. Furthermore, the research should explore the perspectives of various stakeholders such as students, staff, and administrators to understand their experiences and identify effective strategies to mitigate the impact of poverty on educational attainment. The findings from this research can inform policymakers and HEIs in developing more effective and targeted policies and interventions to promote access, retention, and success for students from disadvantaged backgrounds.

In conclusion, the insights and understanding of the relationship between poverty and educational attainment at HEIs, as obtained in this study, made it almost impossible to cover every aspect of the impact of poverty on education. Numerous detailed and contextual studies have to be conducted to make efforts to understand the relationship between poverty and educational attainment in higher education. Due to these reasons, this study could only touch on a few contributing ideas on how poverty impacted the educational attainment of students in higher education, and the ways of implementing better student support services to cater increasingly for students from diverse backgrounds. In addition, this study contributes to the existing data on understanding students' insights into the relationship between poverty and educational attainment at HEIs. It also aims to encourage more research on the topic to provide more insights into the interventions that can help alleviate the negative impact of poverty on educational attainment, as well as promote greater equity in access to higher education. The findings of this study will inform policy and practice aimed at reducing educational disparities and promoting social mobility in South African universities.

### **7.3 Recommendations**

This section recommends various strategies that the government, HEIs, and universities can use to reduce educational disparities and promote social mobility at South African universities. The HEIs can supplement some of the recommended strategies emanating from this study with other recommendations from other similar studies. In addition, it is highly recommended that the HEIs create a space where local communities are included in these conversations. This is because, as stated in parts of this study, dialogue amongst different parties is required to tackle this issue of the relationship between poverty and education. Providing insights into potential interventions that can help alleviate the negative impact of poverty on educational attainment, therefore, requires multiple stakeholders to address it.

#### *7.3.1 Involvement of communities*

The communities where schools are located can help via the sponsoring of schools or donating items such as books, educational materials, and stationery to students in need. From an examination of the literature, it is evident that poverty is a crisis in South Africa. A recommendation that might be given is for the local community to come together and support the schools in their areas, given that the students at such schools represent the future of their communities in the first instance, and the country at large.

#### *7.3.2 Resources should be reallocated to introduce free education*

Considering the significance of financial difficulties among students, policymakers and other stakeholders must focus their efforts on reallocating resources into the educational sector and instituting free education at institutions of higher education, or at the very least institute a significant financial aid programme to ensure that candidates from low-income backgrounds have equal access to education, especially at the tertiary level. Furthermore, given the importance of university education in developing a competent workforce and contributing to national development through high-level training, private universities should be encouraged to lower school (or tuition) fees to make it more affordable for young people from low-income families to attend.

### *7.3.3 Generate more employment opportunities*

One of the findings of this study revealed that many students who come from families where there is no source of income depended only on government grants. There is, therefore, a need for the South African government to look more into strategies to create employment opportunities and alleviate poverty, to accommodate the student's educational attainment at HEIs. South Africa has a high rate of unemployment (32,9%) as a result of the low education levels of the majority of its people and this contributes to the extreme poverty that many South Africans face. Given the perspective that South Africa's education system is in crisis, there is an increased need for the public sector to engage in training programmes and mentorships that are likely to assist in rectifying the problems at hand.

### *7.3.4 Training of rural schoolteachers*

Several rural schools in South Africa have teachers who lack the necessary qualifications for the positions to which they are assigned (see literature review). It is suggested that the government use more of its resources to provide financial assistance to schools, particularly public schools and those in rural areas, to enable them to employ qualified teachers. Additional funding will enable schools to employ and compensate teachers with appropriate qualifications. Schools can be asked to develop seminars for new teachers in which they can be introduced to a diverse group of classes and students and share ideas on how to best support different learners. These training programs will equip students with techniques and modern pedagogy strategies to help them better connect with, manage, and teach students in rural areas.

Investing in teachers is vital, as they are the catalysts for change. Teachers must be prepared to create "learning," as they are the primary force driving social change in our society. Every child's future is largely impacted by their wisdom and intellect, which also contributes to the development of the leaders who will be critical in reinventing the destiny of the nation. Teachers serve as mentors and learning facilitators for all students during their early development, enabling them to learn a range of skills from training institutions and stay current with the latest developments in their field of study.

### *7.3.5 Ensuring the active involvement of parents in education*

Some study participants reported that the lack of parental involvement in their children's education was a result of parents not valuing higher education or not approving of the student's

chosen career path. This study highlighted the need for parental involvement for a significant impact on a student's academic performance. Future research should therefore focus on strategies that can provide support mechanisms for working with parents to support university students to attain high academic achievements. Furthermore, academic research exploring how institutions of higher education can assist in instilling the values of education and assisting students who do not receive academic support at home, especially in families with low socio-economic status, is urgently needed.

#### *7.3.6 Increasing funding for students at universities*

The study found that low-income students often experience financial constraints that negatively impact their mental health and well-being. The government and HEIs should expand financial assistance programmes and customise them to adequately support students from low-income families. Although most study participants had benefited from NSFAS financial aid, the financial aid did not cover all their expenses, and some students even had to send money home to support their families. NSFAS must ensure that they encourage the process of realignment of this funding scheme and fulfil modernisation requirements to meet the expectations of the more than 1 million students they currently serve. NSFAS should examine and adopt policies that provide guidance, consistency, reliability, effectiveness, and transparency in operations management. NSFAS funding scheme can also increase the amount of funding they offer students, expand the eligibility criteria, and streamline the application process. These improvements can have a potential impact on student outcomes such as increased retention rates, improved academic performance and increased graduation rates.

Policymakers and NGOs advocating for greater participation of low-income students in higher education can provide regular financial support in the form of scholarships, bursaries, and different forms of aid that can encourage low-income student enrolment in higher education. Educational institutions also need to address the cultural shock that these students experienced as a result of their cultural capital.

#### *7.3.7 Raising more awareness of student support services to UKZN students*

This study highlights a lack of awareness about university student support services. The university can encourage students to use its services by raising awareness about them. The UKZN student services department organizes programs to promote student support services. The data collected shows that the majority of the participants did not attend or make use of

these services. The student support services should revamp their services to attract more students to utilize them.

It is also important to consider the accessibility of student support services at UKZN. Most student support services are advertised on the UKZN website, social media, and emails. Investing in a more appealing and simpler sign and directions is therefore recommended because students will be able to quickly access these university student support services. Inaccessible services are ineffective and frequently neglected by their intended audience. Displaying signs and directions might help students identify the support services departments. Standardizing the design of support service signs across all UKZN campuses might help students understand the institution's commitment to meeting their needs.

#### **7.4 Future Research**

To gain a more thorough understanding of the correlation between poverty and educational achievement in South African HEIs, it is necessary to conduct additional research that examines the perspectives of academics. This research could be expanded to include a greater number of universities, which would contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the subject. Additionally, evaluating the viewpoints of students from diverse backgrounds and ethnicities could help to assess how socioeconomic factors impact underprivileged students. The results of such studies could inform the development of policies that support both students and institutions and contribute to narrowing the educational gap between rural and urban schools. To achieve this goal, research could employ various methods such as surveys, interviews, or focus groups. Possible policies that could be developed to support students and institutions include financial aid programs, mentorship initiatives, and curriculum adaptations. Therefore, it is recommended that researchers actively engage in exploring these topics to inform policymaking that will benefit students and institutions.

#### **7.5 Conclusion**

This study contributed to the knowledge about poverty's impact on students' educational attainment from underprivileged backgrounds. Bourdieu's sociological theory provided valuable insights in analysing the literature and empirical data collected from the sample of University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN) undergraduate and postgraduate students who were from the Howard College campus. Importantly, students from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds faced various challenges that hindered their personal and academic development,

including financial insecurity, cultural barriers, and academic limitations. Effective interventions aimed at empowering these students should incorporate strategies to enhance parental involvement, increase financial assistance, and build robust student support systems. Future studies should focus on identifying practical approaches to facilitate proactive measures catering to the diverse needs of these students, and to inform policy reforms in the education sector with particular reference to the HEIs.

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## APPENDICES

### APPENDIX 1: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

#### **1. Student background**

1.1 Age:

1.2 Sex:

1.3 Where did you grow up?

a) Was it a suburb, village, or city?

#### **2. Family background**

2.1 How would you describe your family?

a) Rich, poor, or middle class?

2.2. How many people in your family have gone to university?

2.2. What prompted you to pursue higher education?

2.3 When you first enrolled in university, did you encounter any challenges? Explain.

a) Do you think your background contributed to these challenges? Explain.

2.4 Do you feel that your family's background contributes to your academic achievements?

Explain

2.5 Do you think there is a connection between the student's academic performance and their background? Explain

2.5 What obstacles do you feel low-income students or students from low-income families face in obtaining a quality education?

2.6 In your own opinion, do you think higher education institutions favour students from privileged backgrounds? Explain.

### **3. Poverty and educational attainment**

3.1 What is poverty?

3.2 What do you think are some of the causes of poverty?

3.3 What effect does poverty have on a child's mental health and well-being?

3.4 Do you believe that poverty has an impact on one's education? Explain.

a) What effect, if any, does poverty have on a child's ability to learn? Explain.

3.5 In your opinion, how does unequal access to education contribute to poverty?

3.6 What role do you feel education plays in breaking the poverty cycle?

3.7 To your knowledge, what initiatives are being implemented to provide education to students from disadvantaged backgrounds?

3.8 What do you think should be done to ensure that every child, regardless of background, has access to a high-quality education?

3.9 What do you believe are the long-term effects of poverty on education and career opportunities?

3.10 How do you think communities can work together to provide assistance and support to students from disadvantaged backgrounds?

### **4. Student support services at the University of KwaZulu-Natal**

4.1 Are you aware of any structures that assist students from disadvantaged backgrounds in the University?

a) How did you become aware of these structures?

b) Have you ever used any of these structures?

c) Are you aware of any students who have used these structures?

d) Did you or any other students you are aware of receive satisfactory assistance from these structures?

4.2 What opinions do you have about the University of KwaZulu-Natal's student support services? Explain.

a) Would you recommend the available student support services to other students? Explain.

4.3 In your opinion, what do you think the government and higher education institutions can do to better assist students from disadvantaged backgrounds?

## APPENDIX 2: INFORMED CONSENT DOCUMENT

Dear Participant,

My name is Noxolo Xulu (216002947). I am a Master's candidate studying at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, Howard College Campus. The title of my research is *The Relationship Between Poverty and Educational Attainment in South African Higher Education: A Case Study of the University of KwaZulu-Natal's Howard College Campus*. The study aims to provide insights into potential interventions that can help alleviate the negative impact of poverty on educational attainment and promote greater equity in access to higher education. The findings of this study can inform policy and practice aimed at reducing educational disparities and promoting social mobility.

Please note that:

- The information that you provide will be used for scholarly research only.
- Your participation is entirely voluntary. You have a choice to participate, not to participate or stop participating in the research. You will not be penalized for taking such an action.
- Your views in this interview will be presented anonymously. Neither your name nor identity will be disclosed in any form in the study.
- The interview will take about *(20-30 minutes)*.
- The record as well as other items associated with the interview will be held in a password-protected file accessible only to myself and my supervisors. After a period of 5 years, in line with the rules of the university, it will be disposed of by shredding and burning.
- If you agree to participate, please sign the declaration attached to this statement (a separate sheet will be provided for signatures)

I can be contacted at: the School of Social Sciences, University of KwaZulu-Natal, Pietermaritzburg Campus, Scottsville, Pietermaritzburg. / Howard College Campus, Durban. Email: 216002947@stu.ukzn.ac.za, Cell: (078)-929-4733

My supervisor is Miss Sihle Pretty Lamula who is located at the School of Social Sciences, Pietermaritzburg Campus / Howard College Campus, Durban of the University of KwaZulu-Natal. Contact details: email: lamulas@ukzn.ac.za, Phone number: 033-260-5097

The Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee contact details are as follows: Ms Phumelele Ximba, University of KwaZulu-Natal, Research Office, Email: ximbap@ukzn.ac.za, Phone number: 031-260-3587

Thank you for your contribution to this research.

**DECLARATION**

I \_\_\_\_\_ (*full names of participant*) hereby confirm that I understand the contents of this document and the nature of the research project, and I consent to participating in the research project.

I understand that I am at liberty to withdraw from the project at any time, should I so desire. I understand the intention of the research. I hereby agree to participate.

I consent/do not consent to have this interview recorded (if applicable)

SIGNATURE OF PARTICIPANT

DATE

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

## APPENDIX 3: ETHICAL CLEARANCE APPROVAL LETTER



30 May 2022

Noxolo Xulu (216002947)  
School Of Social Sciences  
Howard College

Dear N Xulu,

**Protocol reference number:** HSSREC/00003956/2022

**Project title:** A study into the relationship between poverty and educational attainment in higher education institutions of South Africa: A case study of student's insights in the University of KwaZulu-Natal, Howard College campus

**Degree:** Masters

### Approval Notification – Expedited Application

This letter serves to notify you that your application received on 15 March 2022 in connection with the above, was reviewed by the Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee (HSSREC) and the protocol has been granted **FULL APPROVAL**.

**Any alteration/s to the approved research protocol i.e. Questionnaire/Interview Schedule, Informed Consent Form, Title of the Project, Location of the Study, Research Approach and Methods must be reviewed and approved through the amendment/modification prior to its implementation. In case you have further queries, please quote the above reference number. PLEASE NOTE: Research data should be securely stored in the discipline/department for a period of 5 years.**

This approval is valid until 30 May 2023.

To ensure uninterrupted approval of this study beyond the approval expiry date, a progress report must be submitted to the Research Office on the appropriate form 2 - 3 months before the expiry date. A close-out report to be submitted when study is finished.

All research conducted during the COVID-19 period must adhere to the national and UKZN guidelines.

HSSREC is registered with the South African National Research Ethics Council (REC-040414-040).

Yours sincerely,



-----  
Professor Dipane Hlalele (Chair)

/dd

### Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee

Postal Address: Private Bag X54001, Durban, 4000, South Africa

Telephone: +27 (0)31 260 8350/4557/3587 Email: hssrec@ukzn.ac.za Website: <http://research.ukzn.ac.za/Research-Ethics>

Founding Campuses: Edgewood Howard College Medical School Pietermaritzburg Westville

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## APPENDIX 4: GATEKEEPER LETTER



23 May 2022

Ms Noxolo Xulu (SN 216002947)  
School of Social Sciences  
College of Humanities  
Howard College Campus  
UKZN  
Email: [216002947@stu.ukzn.ac.za](mailto:216002947@stu.ukzn.ac.za)

Dear Ms Xulu

**RE: PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH**

Gatekeeper's permission is hereby granted for you to conduct research at the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN) towards your postgraduate studies, provided Ethical clearance has been obtained. We note the title of your research project is:


*"A study into the relationship between poverty and educational attainment in higher education institutions of South Africa: A case study of student's insights in the University of KwaZulu-Natal, Howard College campus."*

It is noted that you will be constituting your sample by conducting Zoom meetings, telephone calls, WhatsApp voice or WhatsApp video calling with students from UKZN.

Please ensure that the following appears on your notice/questionnaire:

- Ethical clearance approval letter;
- Research title and details of the research, the researcher and the supervisor;
- Consent form is attached to the notice/questionnaire and to be signed by user before he/she fills in questionnaire;
- gatekeepers approval by the Registrar.

You are not authorized to contact staff and students using the 'Microsoft Outlook' address book. Identity numbers and email addresses of individuals are not a matter of public record and are protected according to Section 14 of the South African Constitution, as well as the PAIA and POPI Act. For the release of such information over to yourself for research purposes, the University of KwaZulu-Natal will need express consent from the relevant data subjects. Data collected must be treated with due confidentiality and anonymity.

  
Dr K Cleland  
Registrar

**Office of the Registrar**

Postal Address: Private Bag X54001, Durban, 4000, South Africa

Telephone: +27 (0)31 260 7971 Email: [registrar@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:registrar@ukzn.ac.za) Website: [www.ukzn.ac.za](http://www.ukzn.ac.za)

Founding Campuses:  Edgewood  Howard College  Medical School  Pietermaritzburg  Westville

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**APPENDIX 5: TURNITIN RECEIPT**

Masters Dissertation 2023 ?

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