An exploration of how black, successful university students from low socio-economic backgrounds experience and negotiate the university space

By

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A dissertation submitted in partial fulfilment of the academic requirements for the degree of Master in Education (Social Justice)

Supervisor: Dr Melanie Martin

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ABSTRACT

Legislation and policies developed for the transformation of higher education in South Africa, has led to significant gains for the beneficiaries of the sector. For instance, there has been a significant increase in access to higher education. However, although there has been significant progress, there is still a long way to go. This study sought to explore the experiences of black successful students from low socio-economic backgrounds at university. In essence, the study set out to understand the enabling and constraining factors that the students experienced. The study was a qualitative study, located within the critical research paradigm. Semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions were used to collect the data for the study. Bourdieu's notions of capital, field and habitus were deployed to understand the experiences of the students.

Findings of the study revealed that, while the participants reproduced some aspects of middle-class culture, they resisted its social and political logic and did not assist it to achieve its mission of reproducing and legitimising inequality. That is, the participants used their agency to demand from education what it had committed to, but had not given, in order to achieve academically. For instance, higher education demanded possession of linguistic capital, which basic education had not given. However, in response, students, often with the help of the university, found ways to push against middle class codes framing access to higher education in order to achieve academically. However, in certain cases, the collision of their working-class upbringing with middle-class thinking presented difficulties for some participants. These participants often struggled to maintain positive ties with their family and friends, who began to see them as outsiders. For example, the participants reported estrangement from their families and friends. However, participants' narratives revealed that, for some of their families, this was a product of deprivation, which required all of their attention.

Findings suggests that deficiency and lack of technological and laboratory skills are not a given for students from low socio-economic backgrounds; they must be fought for. However, with the appropriate support, students from these contexts can deploy their agency to push boundaries, navigate the toxic mix of disadvantage and succeed academically.

DECLARATION

I, Nomthandazo Immaculate Khuzwayo, declare that this dissertation, titled: ***An exploration of how black, successful university students from low socio-economic backgrounds experience and negotiate the university space,*** is my own work and that all sources I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references. The dissertation has not been submitted before for any degree or examination at any other university.

17 November 2021

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Nomthandazo Immaculate Khuzwayo **Date**

16 November 2021

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Dr Melanie Martin (Supervisor) **Date**

ETHICAL CLEARANCE

UNIVERSITY OF
KWAZULU-NATAL
INYUVESI
YAKWAZULU-NATALI

09 October 2019

Miss Nomthandazo Immaculate Khuzwayo (214550710)
School Of Education
Pietermaritzburg Campus

Dear Miss Khuzwayo,

Protocol reference number: HSSREC/00000546/2019
Project title: An exploration of how black, successful university students from low socio-economic backgrounds experience and negotiate the university space.

Full Approval – Expedited Application

This letter serves to notify you that your application received on 20 September 2019 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 for one year from 09 October 2019.
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.

Yours sincerely,

[redacted]

Dr Rosemary Sibanda (Chair)

/dd

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Firstly, I would like to thank the students who agreed to participate in this study, for sharing their time and experiences with me. Without your invaluable contributions, which has educated me in many ways, this dissertation would not have been possible. The passionate stories that you shared with me, made me realise the power in each of you.

Secondly, I sincerely thank my class peers for always being there for me and providing encouragement when I felt I was running out of patience. Knowing that you always had my back, got me this far. May God bless you.

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Finally, and most importantly, my heartfelt gratitude goes to my supervisor, Dr. Melanie Martin. Thank you very much for all of your assistance, guidance and patience. Even when I was upset, frustrated and down, your constant kindness and encouragement lifted me up.

DEDICATION

"*I can do all things through Christ who strengthened me*"

Philippians 4:13

This work is dedicated to myself, my siblings, Sihle and Bonke, and the Zuma family. It is also a special dedication to my parents, Mr. and Mrs. Khuzwayo, for always believing in and being patient with me, and supporting me through this bumpy but exciting journey.

LIST OF FIGURES

TABLE OF CONTENT

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

1.1 Introduction

The Government of South Africa has guaranteed access to education for all its citizens (Congress of the People, 1955; Republic of South Africa, 1996; National Commission on Higher Education, 1996; Republic of South Africa, 1997; National Student Financial Aid Scheme [NSFAS], 1999; Department of Education, 2001). Post-apartheid education law and policies, which is supported by principles such as democracy, equity, quality and the extension of education possibilities for all have led to the increase in the number of youth who can access higher education. This has been in response to the fact that the number of students who were previously denied access, such as those from impoverished contexts and learners from minority groupings, has been increasing over the past decades. In order to ensure access to higher education for learners from these categories, government established the Student Financial Aid Scheme, whose aim is to provide assistance to students from low socioeconomic backgrounds (National Student Financial Aid Scheme, 1999). As a result, a growing number of black working-class students have been provided with opportunities to overcome obstacles to pursuing higher education studies.

This study sought to explore the experiences of black, successful working-class students from low socio-economic backgrounds of university life. Globally, poverty levels have been deepening, resulting in the widening gap between the rich and the poor (Chukwuemeka & Ngozi, 2015). This situation must be arrested as access to higher education often presents students from black working-class families with an opportunity to improve the quality of their lives and change the socio-economic circumstances of their families (Machika & Johnson, 2015). Academic access enables black students to function within the university environments, deviate from exposure to social inequalities of “fish out of water” and enables them to be “fish in water” (Wong & Chiu, 2019, p. 870). This study examines how black successful university students from low socioeconomic backgrounds view and experience life at university through using participants’ narratives. The study also sought to investigate how these students navigated experiences of inclusion and exclusion within the university context in order to succeed academically.

The purpose of this chapter is to discuss the background and significance of the study and outline the problem under investigation. In doing this, I will also discuss the rationale for the study, introduce the key research questions and objectives that were used to guide the conduct of the study. Furthermore, the theoretical framework, epistemological and ontological positioning of the researcher, and methodological and design considerations are also discussed. Finally, I provide an outline and summary of the chapters contained in this dissertation.

1.2 Background

For South Africa, 27 April 2021 marked the twenty-seventh year since the advent of democracy. However, despite this time lag, the nation is still battling challenges arising from inequalities resulting from a range of deprivations, which characterised apartheid rule (Congressional Research Service, 2020; Malakoane et al., 2020; Masipa, 2018). The apartheid system generated inequalities amongst different racial groups in respect of service delivery in areas such as housing, education, occupation, and health (Gallo, 2020; Mthembu, 2010; Van der Westhuizen & Swart, 2015). In 1948, in direct contrast with the Declaration of Human Rights (United Nations, 1948), the Government of National Party in South Africa passed and embraced laws that placed school and university education under separate racial authorities, leading to severe inequities in distribution of public resources. In 1948, citizens of South Africa were officially classified into four racial groups, namely, White, Black, Indian, and Coloured, which formed the basis of access to the country's resources (McKeever, 2017). For instance, schools in rural areas and townships, which served children from black communities were severely under-resourced, resulting in depressing academic outcomes, achievement, and success (Seabi et al., 2014).

Seabi et al (2014) reported that, in 1976, Afrikaans was announced as a medium of instruction, which compelled black students to learn their subjects in Afrikaans, barring them from receiving their education through their mother tongue, making learning almost catastrophic (Wills, 2011). This move by the apartheid government branded Afrikaans as the oppressor's language. Afrikaans, which was now one of the country's official languages, together with English, thus occupied more a politicised rather than a linguistic space, as it served as instrument of exclusion.

The introduction of Bantu Education, which referred to the education the apartheid government provided for Black people, came at a period when education for black people had been thrown into turmoil. Bantu education referred specifically to the education that was provided to black people with the intention of ensuring that they received a raw deal from the state, based on their racial categorisation. As a result, under the apartheid government, Bantu Education was deployed as a tool for social control and exclusion (Giliomee, 2009). According to Thobejane (2013), apartheid education did not educate blacks for careers in technology and science but was designed to impede their participation in the market. The consequence of this was depressingly inadequate resourcing for the education of black people, with inadequately trained teachers, impoverished learning conditions and inadequate and limited curriculum offerings. As a consequence, black South Africans who went through this system of education were denied equal access to employment and socioeconomic opportunities (Bauer, 2020). The impact of this configuration of education is still evident in many schools serving black communities, with a considerable proportion of black university students facing difficulties, such as struggling with academic demands of university studies (Pillay, 2019). A significant proportion of students who fall through the cracks come from a socio-economically deprived backgrounds and inadequately resourced schooling contexts.

According to Machika and Johnson (2015), the number of black successful university students who have had access to higher education has increased significantly over the past two decades of democratic South Africa. This implies that these black successful university students have been given the chance to break free from the chains of their poor socioeconomic circumstances. In addition, this may suggest that universities have somewhat moved away from the design that skewed them in ways that configured access to education as a stratifying device and a benefit only accessible to dominants (Bunting, 2006). For instance, this deployment of education was demonstrated through the Extension of the University Education Act of 1959, which served as a device for ensuring racial segregation and inequitable distribution of resources, with provisioning for black students relegated to the lowest rung of the ladder of public concerns (Vandeyar & Mohale, 2017).

With the demise of apartheid in 1994, different institutions had to undergo rebirth and align their practices with the legislative and policy framework that sought to include all persons as legitimate citizens of South Africa (Republic of South Africa, 1996a). This shift called for the transformation of operations within institutions, which suggests that there had to be

a radical change within structures, institutions and practices. For instance, following the founding of the NCHE, the Department of Education (DoE) published *Education White Paper 3: A Programme for the Transformation of Higher Education* in 1997, which outlined the key principles for the formation and operation of higher education institutions (Department of Education, 1997). Within this context, the objective of higher education was to redress the injustices of the country's past and contribute to people-driven development.

For instance, government had to ensure access to higher education for all the categories of students who were excluded under the apartheid system (Vandeyar & Mohale, 2017). This means that all universities had to open doors of learning to all to enable students to exercise their choice in respect of which university they wanted to be enrolled in (McGhie, 2017). As a result, more and more black university students became part of the institutions from which they were previously excluded (Luescher, 2009). The repeal of the Extension of the University Education Act of 1959 (Republic of South Africa, 1959) obliterated the blatant performance of apartheid-generated practices and paved the way towards a higher education that was open to all. The Higher Education Act 101 of 1997 provided a mechanism for redress, and promoting access to higher education institutions for black students from disadvantaged sections of South African society. For instance, this saw government introducing financial assistance programmes for deserving students, especially those from socio-economically deprived circumstances. The National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS) provided financial assistance to eligible undergraduate students with a view to helping them to meet the costs of tertiary education at public higher education institutions (Republic of South Africa, 1999).

1.3 Rationale and purpose of the study

The purpose of this study was to understand the experiences of successful black students from low socioeconomic backgrounds of their university life. That is, the intention was to understand how successful university students from low-income families navigated and negotiated university life. Among other things, the research study sought to understand the impact of black students' low socio-economic backgrounds on their academic success. This was based on the assumption that students from working-class contexts often join higher education with very little symbolic and economic capital (Mallman, 2017). This suggests

that when these black successful students join the university, they must reconfigure themselves in order to adjust to the prevailing survival requirements of higher education.

For instance, when black successful working-class students enter higher education, they often are ill-prepared for the demands of higher education (Lourens, Fourie & Ndlovu, 2014). In contrast to this, students from middle class backgrounds already have the accoutrements necessary to prepare them for university life (Rubin & Wright, 2017). Furthermore, lack of preparation in respect of what will be taught and how this might be learned often becomes a challenge for many black successful working-class students (Crozier & Reay, 2011). This suggests that black successful working-class students are likely to believe that the difficulties that they experience with the transition required to adapt lies in their own individual deficiencies rather than the middle-class configurations of university life (Mallman, 2017). Often, black successful university students experience difficulties in respect of linguistic competence, manifesting in an inability to articulate ideas clearly. In addition, often universities view the difficulties black working-class students experience as located within them rather that the cultural configurations of their systems, procedures and practices, which leads to feels of academic insecurity and where they doubt their own abilities (Mallman, 2017).

One of the questions researchers must answer is: What triggered their interest to pursue a research study? I address this question in the following section. In the first instance, I was motivated to conduct this study by my own personal experiences of my first year of study at the university. When I was doing my first year at university, I encountered a range of challenges, including the fact that I could not meet my financial obligations with the university; and I could not use computers as I did not possess the required computer literacy skills and could not deliver the expected quality of work. Given the fact that I possessed limited knowledge of how to access and use a computer, I could not search for information for my assignments, which had a negative effect on my academic performance during that year. The experience of deficiencies in respect of my academic work was emotionally devastating and made me doubt my abilities. For instance, I began to believe that I could have made a mistake by coming to university, as I was not cut out for it. Therefore, the study emanates from the fact that, as a black successful university student myself, I have experienced some of the challenges encountered by some black successful university students from low-socioeconomic backgrounds.

Secondly, the interest to pursue this study emanated from what I came across when I reviewed literature about black successful working-class students and universities. In particular, my interest was piqued by a study undertaken by Lehmann (2014). The purpose of this study was to examine the fact that black successful working-class students had to acquire a middle-class culture in order to succeed at university (Lehmann, 2014). As a result of this awareness, I modified my study to better reflect my interest of learning how these various kinds of identity are negotiated and related within the South African context. My research, like Lehmann's (2014), focused on successful working-class students who had excelled academically. I have, however, expanded it to include black racial identity in order to better understand how these factors interact and intersect to influence how students navigate university life. However, I have extended my focus to capture the tools and devices that black students have acquired from their working-class contexts, which enabled them to negotiate the university setting, rather than how they have assimilated middle-class culture.

Now, I turn to the significance of this study within the field under investigation. The significance of this study lies in its potential to contribute to the body of scholarship in respect of the experiences of success for black working-class students. In essence, this study provides an opportunity and channel for black working-class students to voice and share their experiences of success through stories about their experiences at university. In this case, it is anticipated that the study presented students who participated in this study with an opportunity to obtain a deeper understanding and appreciation of the agency they possessed and displayed in navigating and negotiating challenges that prevented them from using opportunities for success. In order to make this a reality, I viewed and worked with black students as co-constructors, rather than passive inhabitants, in the processes of knowledge production within the confines of this research study. This was enabled through the adoption of stories as a device for assisting the students to share their experiences.

This study sought to understand how black, working-class students negotiated their identity positioning with the intention of integrating themselves into university life in order to achieve academic success. The literature that I reviewed in this area of scholarship revealed that the experiences of black students from low socio-economic backgrounds who are successful has not been investigated in any great depth. For instance, I found that empirical research from South Africa tended to focus on the experiences of university students and the

challenges they experience. Thus, from my own analysis, this study is a contribution to the understanding of how black, working-class students overcome challenges and become successful in their university life. This implies that this study is a contribution to the body knowledge regarding how black working-class students navigate their social positioning, in respect of class and race, in order to succeed at university. In this study the concepts of working class and low socio-economic backgrounds are used interchangeable. This is because the literature tends to use these concepts in this manner.

1.4 Aim and objectives of the study

The main aim of this study was to explore how successful university students, who are black from low socio-economic backgrounds, experienced university life. Thus, the intention was to understand pathways and the institutional factors working-class students had to navigate and negotiate in order to achieve academic success at university.

The objectives of the study were to:

- Explore life experiences of high performing black students from low socio-economic backgrounds at the university.
- Understand how black students' university experiences were influenced by their social positioning in relation to class and race.
- Understand how black students navigate and negotiated the tensions between their class positioning and the challenges they experienced in pursuit of their academic goals.

1.5 Key research questions

The research problem was investigated through the following key research questions:

- What are the university experiences of high-performing black university students from low socio-economic backgrounds?
- How are the university experiences of high performing black students influenced by their social position in relation to class and race?
- How do high performing black students navigate their class positioning and experiences of success within the university?

1.6 Theoretical framework for the study

I used Bourdieu's theoretical approaches of habitus, field, and capital to examine and understand the experiences of successful black students from low socio-economic background at university. The selected black university students included those who were the first members within their family to study at a university institution. Bourdieu and Passeron (1990) contend that the university field has its own rules and norms, to which successful students from poor backgrounds bring their personal attributes, including knowledge, dispositions and interpretative viewpoints. This transition to a new setting, as well as the necessity to master social and linguistic practices, often presents substantial hurdles for some students (Daddow, Moraitis & Carr, 2013). Any misalignment between the student's past experiences and the institutional field could lead to a feeling of being a fish out of water (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990). For instance, for some black successful university students from low socio-economic backgrounds, university life can be overwhelming, resulting in feelings of isolation, stress and ultimately dropping out of university (Longden, 2004; Patiniotis & Holdsworth, 2005).

Bourdieu's theory of practice, which includes concepts of field, habitus, and capital, informed my ontological positioning (Bourdieu, 1998). Findings of this study suggest that black successful working-class students had agency, but were being prevented from accessing equal opportunities, as the university field distributed power inequitably amongst students who come from a different socio-economic background (Bourdieu, 1989). Individuals within the university context, however, do have access to various forms of capitals that they could use to negotiate their context to become successful (Bourdieu,1998). From an epistemological point of view, the present study believed that successful black working-class students do not possess sufficient amounts of what the university environment may require, because they may lack a particular form of capital that will provide them with the power and influence to negotiate the university field. As a result, the students often get trapped in the challenges they must negotiate, such as using the resources they have from working-class backgrounds to negotiate the university context. According to the findings of this study, black successful university students had the potential and ability to navigate and negotiate university life, despite drawbacks from their low socio-economic backgrounds. Due to the focus on black university students' rights, agency, and their own perspectives and

choices, it was critical in this study to understand the fundamental paradigm of how reality and knowledge are understood and made manifest (Krauss, 2005; Landsdown, et al., 2014).

As indicated in the literature review chapter, students often lack the knowledge of the rules and norms of the university. For example, students often struggle with the selection of relevant courses, registration processes, dress codes and cultural tastes that form part of the field of the university. For this study, the field was important to understand, because there are dynamics that define universities through power and influence that is allocated and used unequally. For instance, students from upper and middle class contexts often have access to power and influence that working class students do not have (Reay, 2018). On the other hand, black successful working classes student may lack a particular form of capital that will provide them with the power and influence to negotiate the university field, but could use the resources they have acquired from working-class backgrounds to negotiate the university context.

1.7 Methodological approach

This study was located within a narrative inquiry, as participants used stories to retell their personal experiences through relating incidents that they had experienced in their university life. Through the narrative inquiry, participants could share their feelings, thoughts and interpretations in respect of the events that they had experienced (Kumar, 2011). In this instance, it was believed that individual personal experiences and history could be better understood using narratives. Within the context of this study, the narrative inquiry served as a device for thinking and writing about the participants' experiences (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

Within a qualitative methodology, narrative inquiry was utilised to investigate and understand the realities of life experienced by the students from low socioeconomic backgrounds. For instance, narratives enabled me to understand how these black students from low socio-economic backgrounds navigated and negotiated the challenges they experienced at university and how they achieved success using their working-class positioning. This was useful for ensuring that the participants' struggles, emotions and thoughts were affirmed and valued, which were captured qualitatively, using in-depth

structured interview and focus group interviews, as suggested by Dakwa (2015) and Longhurst (2003).

1.8 Introducing the participants

The purpose of this section is to briefly present insights into lives of the participants in this study, who were successful black working-class students. The participants were four (4) black males and two (2) black females, whose profiles are shared below. The names used for the participants are pseudonyms, which were chosen by the participants. The criteria used that qualified each of these participants in this study was that they had to successful university students who are black and from low socioeconomic background. In addition, they also had to be recipients of either the Dean's commendation or the Student Excellence Awards at their university. Given that the study focused on black university students who were successful academically, I, therefore, selected students who had achieved 80% and above in each of their modules. I was looking for students who came from rural origins, were the first in their family to attend university, and were in their second year or higher. Students pursuing honours, masters, and PhD degrees were eligible for selection in this study.

a) Luhman

Luhman qualified to participate in this study, because he was from a disadvantaged background and had achieved 11 Dean's Commendation Awards during his undergraduate studies. Luhman is a black male who grew up in the deep rural areas of Nkandla, province of KwaZulu-Natal. Both his parents are deceased. Luhman stays with his grandmother, uncles and younger siblings, who are beneficiaries of government social grants. Within his immediate family "*I am the first person to go the university*" and is currently doing his second year in his master's degree in Agricultural Economics. Luhman's reason for pursuing studies in this area is that "*I feel like God has chosen me to change my family's standard of living and I feel like God has heard their [family] cry's*". Luhman explained that he had had to work hard in order to achieve at university. Luhman began his first year of study in 2014 at the University of KwaZulu-Natal.

b) Summer

Summer comes from a family of seven (7) members. Her father does part-time jobs, while her mother is unemployed and sells packets of chips to help supplement the family's income.

Summer's uncle is a taxi driver. Summer is a black female and started her first year of study in 2015 at University of KwaZulu-Natal. Summer explained that "*within my external family members I am the first member to go to university and there is no other member that has attended university before"*. She grew up in Durban and lives in township in Umlazi. Summer is currently studying towards an Honours degree in Biochemistry and Chemistry. She described her motivation for studying towards this degree as her attempt to improve her quality of life as well that of her family. Summer also highlighted the fact, that, as a first born, it was important that "*I set a very good example for my siblings even though we may come from this [disadvantaged] background and things are possible*".

c) Ben

Ben was born in the East African country of Burundi and lived with his mother and two (2) siblings. His father passed away a few years ago. His mother works as a nurse, his sister a medical doctor and brother an employee at a commercial bank in Burundi. Ben is a black male, who comes from a well-educated and successful family. It must be noted however that Ben does not receive financial support from his family. This is one of the reasons he was chosen for this study. He came to South Africa in 2013 to do his first year at the University of KwaZulu-Natal to relieve the pressure off his mother. Ben is doing a Master's Degree in Chemistry. He described his motivation to study towards this degree as obtaining a scholarship to pay for his studies and that the only way he could get a scholarship was through obtaining good marks. He explained that it was difficult for him to obtain funding for his studies in South Africa, because he is a foreign national and does not qualify for the National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS). Ben explained his uncle was his advisor and source of support. His uncle had said to him "*How can they give a scholarship to someone who is performing on the average level and when there also people who are local who can perform the same way*". Ben finally obtained a scholarship during his second year. Ben's home language was French, and he was unable to communicate in isiZulu or English. He had difficulty expressing himself in English as a means of communication, which made it difficult for him to engage with someone in English.

d) Ephraim

Ephraim was born in the province of Eastern Cape and grew up in a tiny community. He is black male, has ten siblings and his father, who was the sole breadwinner in the family,

passed away. His mother is unemployed and lives off the old-age grant from the government. Ephraim came to KwaZulu-Natal in the year 2013 to do his first year in the Bachelor of Arts in International Studies. Ephraim explained that *"I was the first to do Grade 12, first to finish Grade 12 and the first to graduate from the university"* and obtain a degree in his family. Currently, Ephraim is doing his PhD in International Studies, and his motivation to study has been that his "… *poor background has been the main purpose and maybe that is one positive thing that comes from a life of less wealth and less riches. What it does, it pushes you to always say I have a mission here and the mission is to be better than what I am*".

e) Anele

Anele comes from uMzimkhulu, province of KwaZulu-Natal. She is from a family of five siblings and is the eldest child. Anele stays with her mother. Her father passed away some years ago, leaving her mother with the responsibility of taking care of the children. Like many single parents in South Africa, her mother lives off the social grant as a source of income for the family. She explained that in her family "*I am the first one to attend university*", and this makes her feel she can achieve anything in life and wants to become inspiration to her younger siblings. Anele is a black female and did her first year at university in 2015. Anele has obtained a degree in Bachelor of Social Science with Honours in Criminology and Forensic Studies, and is currently doing her Masters in Educational Psychology. Her motivation for studying originates from her dream "…*of living a better life for myself and for my future children so that they don't live this type of [poor] lifestyle that I am currently living*". Her cousin, who attended an ex-Model C school, taught her the basic computer skills, such as using Microsoft Word.

f) Sandile

Sandile comes from the Vaal Triangle, South of Johannesburg, Gauteng province. However, Sandile was born in Vanderbijlpark, also in Gauteng province. Sandile is a black male and, in 2018, was doing his first year at the university. After his father, who was the sole breadwinner in the family, passed away, the family moved to a Soweto. Sandile's mother had to find employment when his father passed on. Sandile has older siblings and he is the youngest of her siblings. His older brother obtained a bachelor's degree in Fine Arts at the University of Technology in 2005. Sandile was doing a Bachelor of Science and Chemistry and, at the time of the study, was pursuing studies in Chemistry and Chemical Technology.

His reason for studying is "*most of us we are motivated by the situations that we find ourselves in and we never choose to be this situation. If at home you do not have food, and it's not your fault. What hits you hard is the fact that you get there [Home] you cannot actually do something about it, and you can't to change the situation because you are just a child*". Sandile's home language was Sotho, and he would not speak the isiZulu language despite it being the language that the majority of the black students in the province speak. He had to use English as a means of communication and it helped him a lot because he did not experience difficulty in expressing himself in English.

1.9 Structure of the dissertation

This dissertation consists of five chapters. In this section, I present a summary of each of the chapters.

Chapter 1 presents the background, focus, purpose and rationale for the study. The chapter further presents the research problem, significance, the aim and objectives of the study, and outlines the methodological and design considerations.

Chapter 2 presents a review of the literature on the experiences of successful university students. In doing this, the conclusion made in the chapter is that existing literature suggests that the experiences of working-class students at universities, both globally and nationally, are largely negative. The chapter closes off by presenting a theoretical framework, which is based on Bourdieu's concepts of habitus, field and capital (Bourdieu, 1998). This theoretical framework was used to understand how black successful university students from low socio-economic, who participated in the study, engaged with and negotiated their identities as well as the university space.

Chapter 3 presents considerations made in respect of design and methodological issues for the study. In addition, the chapter also discusses methods of data collection, limitations, and ethical considerations for the study.

Chapter 4 presents the data and discusses the findings of the study. The findings are categorised into different themes and subthemes, which are analysed using the theoretical framework and literature.

Chapter 5 concludes the study by summarising the key findings of the study, limitations, recommendations for further research and providing concluding comments.

1.10 Conclusion

In this chapter, I introduced and presented an overview of the study. Secondly, I presented the focus, the purpose and the rationale, methodological and design considerations, theoretical framework and the structure of the dissertation.

In the next chapter, I discuss and analyse the literature that I reviewed with a view to providing the theoretical foundations for this study.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Introduction

As pointed out in preceding chapter, this study is an investigation on how black, successful university students from low socio-economic backgrounds experience and negotiate the university space. This chapter reviews empirical literature, which provides insights into how successful students from low socio-economic background experience life at university. However, it is important to point out that current research reveals that the experiences of successful university students across race categories and from low socioeconomic background, both worldwide and nationally, are largely negative. In this chapter, I provide an overview of South Africa's higher education legislation and policy transformation landscape. Following that, a review of international and national higher education studies on the experiences of successful black students from poor socioeconomic backgrounds is presented. Finally, I present the theoretical framework that underpins and was used to analyse and understand the findings of this research. The theoretical framework made use of the concepts or constructs of Bourdieu's theory of practice, namely, habitus, field, and capital forms.

2.2 Legislation and policy transformation landscape in South Africa

Access to education in South Africa is enshrined in the Bill of Rights of the Constitution (Republic of South Africa, 1996). In particular, Section 29(1) indicates that "everyone has the right to a basic education, including adult basic education; and to further education, which the state, through reasonable measures, must make progressively available and accessible". Within this constitutional provision, the state positions itself as having a legal obligation to make further education available and accessible for all using reasonable measures. To carry out this commitment, the National Commission on Higher Education (NCHE) developed a framework in 1996 that intended to ensure access throughout higher education institutions (National Commission on Higher Education, 1996a).

The recommendations made by the NCHE sought to reverse the damage caused to the higher education landscape by the advent of apartheid (National Commission on Higher Education, 1996). Seabi et al. (2014) assert that the Extension of the University Education Act of 1959,

promulgated during the apartheid era, was based on separate education in which allocation of access was racial (Republic of South Africa, 1959). Not only was education separate, access to university, especially for black people, was extremely difficult (Bunting, 2006). Under the democratic era, the report of the NCHE provided a template for how higher education could desegregate racially and move towards the integration of all racial groups (National Commission on Higher Education, 1996). The NCHE's framework, therefore, provided a script for the transformation structures and institution with a view to ensuring access and participation for all students (McGhie, 2017; Vandeyar & Mohale, 2017).

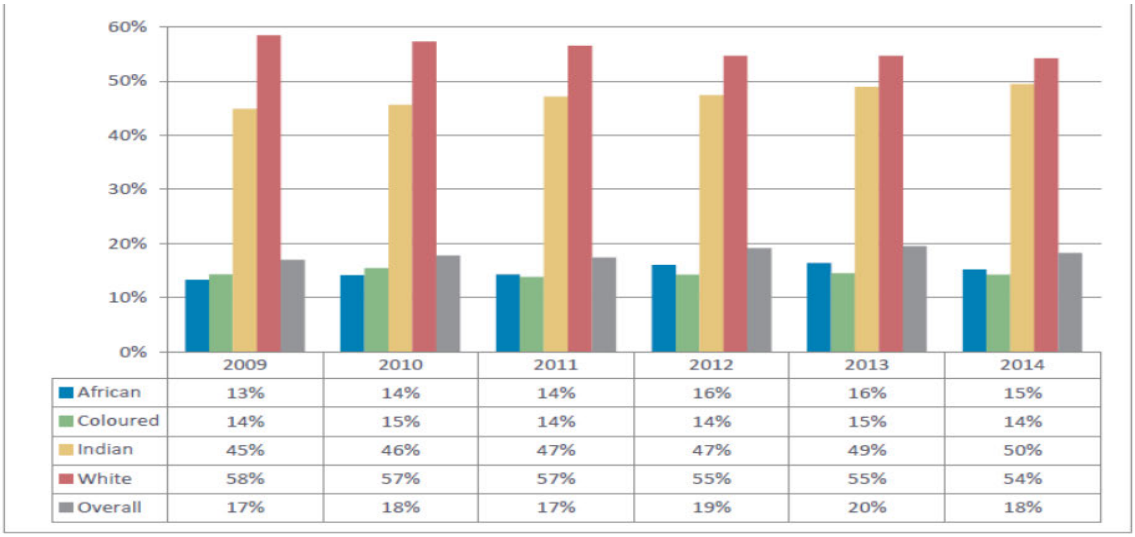
In order for the NCHE to undertake a process of transformation, however, three aspects were formed to ensure change within higher education, namely, expanded engagement, greater responsiveness and stronger cooperation and partnership (National Higher Education Commission, 1996). The first feature, namely, increased participation, sought to enable access to higher education institutions (National Commission on Higher Education, 1996). For instance, in respect of this principle, the NCHE proposed new funding models to address the issue of access to higher education.

The second feature, namely, greater responsiveness, involved making higher education more responsive to the interests and needs of society and students (National Commission on Higher Education, 1996). For this reason, higher education authorities had to establish responsive systems and mechanisms to link universities and society. What this also meant was that higher education institutions had to restructure content and curriculum in alignment with the diverse needs and backgrounds of students as well as to meet the economic, social, political and cultural changes of the country (National Commission on Higher Education, 1996). The third feature elevates the importance of establishing co-operation and partnerships within governance structures in higher education (National Commission on Higher Education, 1996). Here, the government would serve a steering and coordinating role of developing a framework that higher education institutions can use as a template for developing their policies and strategic plans. In essence, such a framework would enable higher education institutions to become participative, democratic, accountable, and transparent (National Commission on Higher Education,1996). The Higher Education Act (Department of Higher Education, 1997) is a legal mandate to redress past inequalities in South Africa, ensure representativeness, fair access to higher education, and promote ideals that underpin an open and democratic society founded on human dignity, equality and

liberty. The Higher Education Act (Department of Higher Education, 1997) also recognises the need to redress past discrimination, ensure representation, equal access to higher education for all students regardless which background they come from.

Subsequent to the above, Education White Paper 3: A Programme for the Transformation of Higher Education was promulgated (Department of Education, 1997). One of the key issues in the White Paper was that universities must align their programmes with efforts to address the needs and aspirations of people through education as the main distribution device of chances for living equitably (Department of Education, 1997). However, in order to ensure that black students can access opportunities in higher education, government had to make resources available. Thus, the Department of Higher Education and Training, through the Independent Development Trust (IDT) and later Tertiary Education Fund of South Africa (TEFSA) (Department of Education, 2010) and, finally, the National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS), made funding in the form of loans available to eligible black students, especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds (Department of Education, 1999). The rationale for the introduction of the National Students Finance Aid Scheme was to address inequities and promote equitable access to higher education for all eligible students, including those who were previously or historically excluded (Department of Education, 1999). This means that black students from low-income families can now apply for financial assistance for their studies through the National Student Financial Aid Scheme (Sader & Gabela, 2017).

Machika and Johnson (2015) and Sader and Gabela (2017) have reported that NSFAS has led to the increase in the number of black students taking studies in higher education institutions, especially students who are poor, female, disabled and black. Machika and Johnson (2015) contend that this growth has mostly been because attending higher education is often seen as a route out of poverty for poor, black students and their families. The table below shows the growing number of black students enrolling at universities, from 2009 to 2014.



	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
African	13%	14%	14%	16%	16%	15%
Coloured	14%	15%	14%	14%	15%	14%
Indian	45%	46%	47%	47%	49%	50%
White	58%	57%	57%	55%	55%	54%
Overall	17%	18%	17%	19%	20%	18%

Figure 1: Student enrolment rates in all South African Higher Education Institutions by race (CHE, 2016)

Figure 1 above shows that the number of black students enrolling in universities has been increasing, with students choosing higher education as a viable option, making up 15% in 2014. Figure 1 also shows that there has been a steady decrease in the number of White students enrolled at university over time. In 2009, for instance, 58% of white students were enrolled at university and in 2014, this percentage went down to 54%, which signals a decrease (Swartz et al., 2018; Council for Higher Education, 2016). However, whilst evidence suggests that black working-class students are now accessing higher education, despite the increase, recent studies have highlighted numerous challenges that black working-class students continue to face in higher education. As a result, despite increasing access for black successful students from low socio-economic, participation has frequently been challenging, as some universities have failed to respond to the diversity of students, particularly black students from previously disadvantaged communities (Swartz et al., 2018). Therefore, while black students may have access to universities, the critical question is whether the ground has been adequately levelled for them to participate actively in higher education.

2.3 Impact of previous schooling experiences on students' university performance

Reay (2018) contends that the school one attends potentially determines not only one's university experiences, but also one's ability to navigate the university environment and achieve success. For instance, black successful students who attend well-resourced schools

often have a much better chance of transitioning to university than students who attended dysfunctional schools (Reay, 2018). That is, the foundation that was established in school is an important factor for the students' ability to successfully navigate and negotiate the university environment. Where this is missing, students often feel alienated and isolated (Reay, 2018). This alienation and isolation have been echoed in a study conducted in the United Kingdom by Thiele et al. (2017), which reported that working-class students often felt ignored by their professors, which negatively influenced their ability to negotiate their new identity at university.

In South Africa, researchers such as Swartz et al. (2018), Spaull (2013), Machika and Johnson (2015) and Hlatshwayo and Fomunyam (2019), have argued that learners who had attended poor, rural schools are often marginalised due to inadequate resourcing. Often, these schools have limited textbooks, no libraries, no computer or science laboratories for conducting experiments. This suggests that black successful university students who went to disadvantaged schools continue to receive inadequate educational provisioning even at university. Often schooling experiences of working-class students disempower and underprepare them for facing the challenges they encounter at university (Swartz et al., 2018). When it comes to typing tasks, for example, these students are expected to use a computer for the first time and have no understanding how it works. Chakanika et al. (2012, p. 12) point to the importance of a school as "… a learning laboratory that provides opportunities for learners to develop information skills and developing commitment to informal decision-making".

Other factors that may exist within the schooling context in black South African communities may be lack of commitment from teachers (Spaull, 2013). This lack of commitment often manifests through high rates of absenteeism rates, which could affect learners negatively, when they fall behind with schoolwork. When this happens, it is likely to impact on learners' future experiences at university. Furthermore, another issue may be lack of teacher preparation and inadequate pedagogical knowledge, which often contributes to the poor quality of teaching and learning in some schools South Africa communities (Jacob, John & Gwany, 2020). However, in South Africa, it must be remembered that educators themselves are products of bad education system (Damons & Cherrington, 2020). Therefore, for learners who are taught by such teachers, the negative impact may be multi-

fold. However, for this study, students found ways of helping themselves to search for information, such as career guidance and how to access financial aid, for themselves.

2.4 Institutional factors affecting students' university experiences

Basic education provided different types of education for black successful working-class students, including a lack of dedication from their teachers, which affected their academic performance, and impacted their university experience. In this section, I discuss some of the institutional factors that both enable and constrain the success of black students from low socioeconomic background at university. Within the discussion, I discuss empirical literature regarding how students use their agency to negotiate a complex network of these factors. In the first section, I discuss factors that constrain black students' experiences, and in the second section, I detail factors that enable students to have a pleasant university experience.

2.4.1 University education as source of opportunities

Access to higher education provides successful black students with privileges, such as the right to information and knowledge, which increase their ability to manage their university life. Access to higher education grants black students benefits such as the right to information and knowledge, about financial aid funding, which improves their ability to manage their university life. The success for poor students does not only have to do with passing modules; it is also about access to financial opportunities, such as NSFAS and other financial aid schemes, and eventually being awarded qualifications as a sign of victory. Successful black students from low socio-economic backgrounds often view the university as a provider of opportunities for social mobility and improvement of the quality of living of their families. However, Alcock and Belluigi (2018, p.1) argue that a university is a "powerful institution, that has conditions for both opportunities and alienation". For instance, in this regard, Alcock and Belluigi (2018) have argued that universities still prioritise and reproduce Western middle-class, masculine, heterosexual ways of life.

The above assertion by Alcock and Belluigi (2018) suggests that universities, in some instances, are still implicated in the persistent marginalisation and exclusion of minority groups. Whilst access to a university is often viewed as a personal, academic achievement, the systemic dynamics involved in becoming part of the university environment requires of students undergoing changes at both the intra- and inter-personal levels. When black

working-class students first start university, they have emotional uncertainty, as they must negotiate the cost of their integration into institutionalised norms. Findings of studies by Crozier, Reay and Clayton (2019) and Wong and Chiu (2019) internationally have reported that black successful students could find the university life alienating, especially when there is inadequate guidance and support to assist them make important decisions. This is further exacerbated by a lack of university knowledge regarding resources and the university language, which is mostly English, which often results in students feeling like a fish out of water. For this study, it was important to interrogate the various dimensions of university life to understand the experiences of the participants.

2.4.2 Choice of academic programmes and institutions

Career guidance can be defined as a form of support, advice, guidance provided to successful black students at school with a view to preparing and assisting them to make informed decisions about their career paths (South African Career Development Association, 2020). Tomaszewski, Perales and Xiang (2017) have argued that the importance of career guidance for black students from low socio-economic backgrounds lies in the fact that it could increase their interest in specific career fields and their chances of being successfully integrated into university life. This is in line with what Harper and Newman (2016) found that students who became university mentors often formed good relationships with successful black working-class students, helping them to, inter alia, select the appropriate programmes and modules. This establishment of positive relationships potentially assists students from socio-economically deprived contexts to successfully navigate university life (Harper & Newman, 2016). When such support is inadequate, students often feel alienated and isolated (Reay, 2018).

According to the findings of a study conducted by McGhie (2017), black students from impoverished backgrounds in Gauteng frequently lacked fundamental knowledge of university admission processes, degree planning and were often unprepared for university life as they were oblivious of the expectations. This often disadvantaged these students, as they did not possess adequate knowledge about the importance of networking with and establishing relationships with their fellow students, mentors and lecturers, who could help them navigate and successfully adjust to university life. Findings of studies conducted in South Africa by Van Zyl (2016) and Swartz et al. (2018) have revealed that successful black

students who do not receive this kind of career guidance often experience difficulty in negotiating their university contexts. However, Van Zyl (2016) contends that successful black students who did not receive this kind of support often found ways of helping themselves to navigate the intricacies of university life.

When successful black students enter university, there is an assumption that they are familiar with specific requirements of university life, such as the use of science laboratories and libraries (Walker & Mathebula, 2020). However, often what is regarded as taken-for-granted aspects of university life poses the greatest impediment for some students, especially those from disadvantaged schooling contexts. For instance, findings of the study by Walker and Mathebula (2020) revealed that successful black students from three provinces in South Africa namely, Limpopo, KwaZulu-Natal and the Eastern Cape, often had trouble performing taken-for-granted tasks, such as printing assignments and using certain technologies, for example, Blackboard platform to access learning materials. The fact that higher education programmes did not include preparation of students in these areas suggest that universities often assumed that schools had covered these areas (Walker & Mathebula, 2020). This disorientation negatively impacted their self-worth and their perceptions of themselves as self-directed and independent students (Walker & Mathebula, 2020). Given these findings, Walker, and Mathebula (2020) have called on universities to offer programmes to prepare successful black students, especially those from socio-economically deprived contexts, for the demands and expectations of university life.

2.4.3 Adapting to academic demands

There are various other ways in which academic barriers emerge and cause students to struggle and doubt their ability. For example, successful black students from low socio-economic backgrounds are not only impeded by being poorly prepared by their schools for university, but many of them also often have unrealistic expectations of the amount of work they have to contend with at university (Harper & Newman, 2016). This could be attributed to the fact that, in most instances, these successful black students have not been assisted to understand the intricacies of the transition from school to university. For instance, Harper and Newman (2016) pointed out that academically successful black students in their study in the United States, initially could not cope with the number of assignments that they were given, match the fast pace of university work or manage time effectively. This caused serious

problems for the students as they often experienced university life as harsh and unsafe, which negatively impacted their academic performance.

In addition to the above, Harper and Newman (2016) further report that although successful black students often studied throughout the night in preparation for examinations or writing an assignment, the efforts they invested did not yield the positive results that the students were expecting. Often, successful black students were shocked and disappointed to learn that the study approaches and methods that had worked for them at high school were no longer effective at university (Harper & Newman, 2016). As a result, these successful black students were compelled go back to the drawing board and seek academic support from tutors to assist them improve their academic performance (Harper & Newman, 2016). Taking remediation action was important for these successful black students, who were always known as higher achievers and were often praised for their excellent academic performance in high school, who were now just like everyone else. Such a realisation led to them feeling out of place and somewhat ordinary.

When entering university, successful black students often experience difficulties with managing the amount of work (Seabi et al., 2014). For instance, students often reported that there were too many assignments, timelines were strict, and there were many classes to attend, which often threatened to push them over the academic edge. (Seabi et al., 2014). For successful black students from disadvantaged schooling contexts, this could lead to feelings and experiences of alienation and helplessness, making it difficult for them to successfully negotiate the transition from high school into university life. However, in another study conducted by McGhie (2017) at the University of Johannesburg, findings revealed that successful black students from working class contexts were aware that university life was more demanding than school, which meant more work than they had ever had. This awareness led to the successful black students realising that they had to empower themselves with skills and knowledge to navigate the university context in order for them to be successful academically (McGhie, 2017). For instance, as part of helping themselves, students created electronic diaries, which were updated regularly, using Excel spreadsheets. The spreadsheets contained information about assignment dates, tests, and tutorials, which enabled successful black students to plan and manage their academic work properly. These black students demonstrated agency and adopted self-help strategies that assisted them to successfully adjust to the demands of university life (McGhie, 2017).

2.4.4 Navigating the maze of financial constraints

The financing of academic studies is a critical component in ensuring black student access to higher education institutions. For instance, a study by Tenriquez (2015) in the United States of America found that students from poor households often struggled to save enough to pay for tuition fees, cost of books, transport, and personal needs. As a result, some of these students, who could not support their studies financially, often had to suspend a significant proportion of time in their studies, sometimes two or three semesters, finding jobs to support their education financially. This is in line with what Brosnan et al. (2016) has found in Australia that students who were studying medicine and confronted with challenges in financing their studies, looked for jobs they would do at night or during weekends. This means that to continue with their academic studies, these students had to work extended hours (Brosnan et al., 2016).

Within South Africa, NSFAS has assisted to provide black students with access to higher education (Department of Education, 1999). NSFAS helps successful black students fund the costs of their education, such as tuition, food, housing, books, and travel. (Machika & Johnson, 2015). In study by Swartz et al. (2018) findings revealed that money was unequivocally the main barrier to academic success, as first-time successful black students enter university, they do not have large sums of money to pay for registration fees up front because they are normally waiting for a response from NSFAS, and some get approved very late during the year. Once students are accepted at a university a number of unanticipated costs often arise, such as having to pay large sums of money for textbooks. Swartz et al. (2018) reported that for some of these successful black students, when they are confronted with such situations, they often devised strategies of raising money, such as selling perfume and other products. Successful black students who are not funded by NSFAS often devise ways to cover the cost of university fees, such as temporary employment, serving as student mentors and tutors or applying for financial aid from other sources (Swartz et al., 2018). In addition, to save money for textbooks, students would also read books online or borrow books from the library and make copies thereof (Swartz et al., 2018).

2.4.5 Fear and pride as barriers to academic support

Fear and pride do not always encourage successful working-class students to negotiate and conquer their academic challenges (Jury et al., 2015; Wong & Chiu, 2019). This suggests that these two variables could manifest as a barrier to successful student success and prevent them from taking full advantage of available resources and support (Jury et al., 2015). Fear and pride could render the process of seeking support as a difficult and uncomfortable experience for these successful working-class students, especially those who understood themselves as independent while they were at high school. For instance, successful black first-year working class students could experience fear and uncertainty when confronted with tests or assignments (Jury et al., 2015; Wong & Chiu, 2019).

In other instances, black students could avoid asking for help in order to project an independent student identity because of pride. However, Wong and Chiu (2019) explained this as a conflict of identity, in which students were concerned that they were going to be perceived as lacking qualities of self-directed learning by academic staff. For instance, successful working students in the United Kingdom would avoid asking for help with the intention of projecting themselves as mature and independent students (Wong & Chiu, 2019). In these instances, the effectiveness of the support that academic staff provide to the students would be determined by their willingness to accept it. This suggests that the academic support provided for these students would only be effective in so far as the students actively use it (Wong & Chiu, 2019).

However, despite the challenges discussed above, some studies have revealed that successful working-class students would eventually find strategies of coping with their fears and uncertainties (Wong & Chiu, 2019; Jury et al., 2015). In this instance, learning contexts often compelled students to take advantage of the opportunities in order to restore their identity as academically successful (Wong & Chiu, 2019). For instance, successful students would do extra reading and preparation in order to project an academically fit identity and protect their pride (Jury et al., 2015). In addition, students in the United Kingdom would participate actively in study groups and class tutorials in which they felt less likely to be humiliated by lecturers (Wong & Chiu, 2019). Other research has found that successful black students who face these challenges benefit from small classes with a few students because there are often more opportunities for interaction (Potgieter et al., 2015).

2.4.6 Experiences of race and class in higher education

2.4.6.1 Building relationships in mixed race contexts

Kessi and Cornell (2015) and Boonzaier and Mkhize (2018) contend that successful black students in elite universities are often marked by feelings blackness. In these contexts, successful black students are often viewed through a stigmatising gaze, which often result in them questioning their identities and abilities (Boonzaier & Mkhize, 2018). Students from subordinate groups, such as those from black, low socio-economic background, joining historically white, rich universities often feel situated within internalised social labels that have negative consequences for them (Hardiman et al., 2007). For instance, successful black working-class students who enter academic environments where racial identity is a prominent feature often experience a sense of isolation, alienation, low self-esteem and being out of place (Williams, 2012). Subsequently, successful black students from low socio-economic backgrounds often struggle with the reality of the experience of blackness (Magubane, 2019; Simons et al., 2018). Successful black university students are seen as having a second-class status, which often impacts negatively on their academic performance (Kessi & Cornell, 2015).

Kessi and Cornell (2015) contend that racial segregation is the reality of the daily experience of black students. Different forms of segregation happen in lectures, tutorials, residence halls and public places of universities (Kessi & Cornell, 2015). Amongst successful black students, there is often division based on low socio-economic status (Longwell-Grice et al., 2016). The labelling of physical areas based on race sometimes takes place during lectures, tutorials, residence hall meetings and other public spaces across the university. For example, upper middle white students would congregate in a secluded area and the rest of black students would occupy the reminder of the classroom space. Labelling of physical places according to race has sometimes been used to depict the intensity of segregation that characterised apartheid in South Africa (Kessi & Cornell, 2015). This labelling of physical space often has an impact on white students' perceptions about black students, for instance, judging them based on their social identities, which may include culture, heritage, language, and traditions which contribute to the exclusion of black students (Bazana & Mogotsi, 2017). For instance, in academic contexts, some white students still undermine and doubt black students' academic submissions and inputs (Kessi & Cornell, 2015). In some cases, white students still shy away from successful black students as study partners and often react with

surprise when black students outshine them academically (Boonzaier & Mkhize, 2018). In order to protect themselves from the harsh realities of racism, successful black students from low socio-economic backgrounds tend to turn to each other for support, which they cannot find with white students (Boonzaier & Mkhize, 2018).

2.4.7 Language and power

In the past, language was used to legitimise policies of "separate development", which was the key component of the foundations of the apartheid system (Ministerial Committee, 2002, p. 2). The policy of separate development led to the privileging of English and Afrikaans as the main official languages in apartheid system, which resulted in the marginalisation and under-development of African languages (Chimbga, 2014). Despite the new policy dispensation in the democratic South Africa, language remains a key barrier to equitable access and African languages continue to be devalued in higher education (Madadzhe, 2019). That is, policies on the development and improvement of African languages in higher education in South Africa has largely been a symbolic craft, with no real intention to elevate them (Nudelman, 2015).

Whilst policy directs that student must have access to higher education, they still experience a range of challenges in this regard. For example, academic language can be too different from what they have learned in high school, which could marginalise them (Tanga, 2018; Vincent & Hlatshwayo, 2018). Many successful black students enter higher education not sufficiently proficient in the language of teaching and learning used in higher education institutions (Vincent & Hlatshwayo, 2018). To this end, they may not possess appropriate linguistic abilities required in higher education institutions. For instance, in higher education, fluency in the language of power, such as English within the context of South Africa, is a necessary capital required to help students to belong and feel included (Rodriguez, 2009). According to Boonzaier and Mkhize (2018), successful black students who do not speak English fluently typically feel excluded from the university community.

Findings of the research by Seabi et al. (2014) suggests that it takes approximately six years for black students in South Africa for whom English is a second language to acquire academic skills and speak fluently. Where English is used as a language of instruction for non-speaking English students, and black students have not been adequately prepared, this

is likely to impact negatively on their academic performance. Successful black working-class students often struggle to express themselves in the language of instruction in higher education institutions (Steyn, 2016; Tanga, 2018). In a study conducted by Batiha et al., (2018) in Jordan, findings revealed that these black students often experience anxiety resulting from criticism of their usage of the dominant language. In this study, learners often felt shy, lost confidence and were reluctant to participate in discussions, because of fear that their peers would criticise and ridicule them (Batiha et al., 2018). This finding was corroborated by a study by Swartz et al. (2018), who argue that the shaming and marginalisation associated with accent was a dehumanising process that must be challenged. Unfortunately, higher education institutions have not done enough to ensure that language became an enabler, rather than a barrier, to these successful black students (Nudelman, 2015). For instance, although higher education institutions have developed language policies, these have not elevated the status of African languages, but have often emboldened the dominance of English (Nudelman, 2015).

The continued dominance of English and, to a certain degree, Afrikaans, as the sole languages of teaching and learning in higher education, somewhat contributes to the linguistic marginalisation of those whose mother tongue is neither (Department of Higher Education and Training, 2015). Successful black working-class students who struggle with English language often make use of on-campus services to improve their academic, linguistic capability (Swartz et al., 2018). This includes academic writing centres that have been established to assist students to improve their proficiency in English as a language of academic discourse (Swartz et al., 2018). Without such proficiency, successful black students are often afraid of "making mistakes" and they limit their exposure to instances that require them to use English (Hlatshwayo & Fomunyam, 2019, p. 9). Language has also been found to be a major obstacle in the fields of sports, cultural clubs, lecture theatres, and houses (Vincent & Hlatshwayo, 2018, p. 122).

According to the findings of a study done by Van der Walt and Dornbrack (2011), successful black students face significant emotional and physical strain when studying in a language that is not their native tongue. For instance, students reference pointed to difficulty, irritation, fear and concern when studying for exams, taking notes in class and understanding readings (Van der Walt & Dornbrack, 2011). From this study, findings suggested that rather than spending time trying to understand academic texts, working-class students often worried

about finishing tests and examinations on time and forgetting what they had learned (Van der Walt & Dornbrack, 2011). This suggests that the use of English often manifested as an additional barrier for these black students.

2.5 Sources of support for students

2.5.1 Motivation to become a better person

Motivation can be defined as willingness to invest time, energy, and determination to achieve one's goals (Spiegler, 2018). In their study of successful black working-class students at the University of California, Moschetti and Hudley (2015) found that students used specific values, such as self-discipline, hard work and perseverance as a motivation to pursue their personal goals and achieve success. Often, successful black working students used as their starting point the expectation that university would be different from school and that they would be required to work harder (Moschetti & Hudley, 2015). In this instance, motivation to become a better person was deployed as an orienting factor that steered the towards success (Petersen et al., 2009).

According to the findings of the above study, motivation played a significant role in encouraging black working-class students at the University of Johannesburg to accept and adapt to university life (Petersen et al., 2009). That is, for these successful black students, motivation to work hard to become a better person, propelled students to do everything they could to improve their academic achievement. From this perspective, motivation to become a better person could be linked to the students' dedication to develop their resilience and agency to adjust to the demands of university life, with a view to achieving academically. From the findings of this study, it could be deduced that successful black working-class students who possess resilience to develop a sense of belonging in higher education, tend to develop ways of helping themselves.

2.5.2 Recognition of achievements, role models and support groups

A study conducted in New Zealand by Garret and Rubie-Davies (2014, p. 82) argued that extrinsic motivation is important for the development of high level of achievements. This study investigated a faculty within the university and findings revealed that recognition for talented students served as a strong source of extrinsic motivation. This type of recognising achievement was visibly acknowledged through certificates, congratulatory letters,

department invitations to “afternoon lunch or even tea” and personal invitations to participate in seminars (Garret & Rubie-Davies, 2014, p. 82). Successful Black students appreciated personal invitations as it provided opportunities for them to initiate friendships with like-minded people and establish subject clubs (Garret & Rubie-Davies, 2014).

In addition to the above, other departments at the university used competitions and annual awards to recognise outstanding performances in their different programmes as source of motivation (Garret & Rubie-Davies, 2014). Jin and Ball (2020) contend that recognition of academic performance in higher education has an additional benefit of improving student confidence. Recognition, including scholarships, praise from parents, popularity, encouragement and extra care from lecturers, potentially improves students’ self-identification, which strengthens an achievement identity. This motivates successful working-class students to devote more time and energy to improve themselves in order to maintain their status as high achieving students. Successful black students from low socio-economic backgrounds also derive motivation from looking up to older students, siblings, friends and peers as role models (Spiegler, 2018). Role models provide students with guidance and information to assist them to achieve their personal and academic goals. Role models motivate students to set goals, learn that certain things are possible and achievable and work hard to achieve them (Morgenroth, Ryan & Peters, 2015).

Another source of support was through peers and friends. Swartz, et. al. (2018) found that academic peer network is important for student’s educational development and can be in form of a study group. The study group produced collective learning opportunities where students can be involved in variety of issues like studying for upcoming assignments and tests and exams and managing individual/ personal academic challenges. Study groups met after class, at times convenient to all members and where subject-specific discussions which were led by the strongest performing students. The authors further explained that the study group had a positive influence on successful black students’ academic achievement, mostly resulting in better marks and accomplishment (Swartz et. al., 2018).

2.5.3 Support from family and friends

Support and encouragement of family and friends potentially contributed to students’ success and assisted them to remain focused and motivated to work hard (McGhie1, 2016;

Sandoval-Lucero, Maes & Klingsmith, 2014). For instance, findings of a study by Roksa and Deutschlander (2018) across various universities in the United States of America revealed that successful black students from different social economic backgrounds may benefit from family support in the form of social and cultural resources. Moschetti and Hudley (2015) contend that working class black students who were new in the university environment often did not understand their needs and, as a result, could not access appropriate institutional guidance.

Supportive family and parents, where applicable, served as a source of emotional support to successful black students, when they provide advice, listen to and support students with the necessary resources to achieve their academic goals (Đurišić & Bunijevac, 2017). Parents who want their children to do better, support their children at university to the best of their ability and would motivate them to enhance work towards the achievement of their aspirations (Swartz et al., 2018). Spiegler (2018) and Swartz et al. (2018) contend that working-class parents often invest their meagre resources in the education of their children. This is despite the fact that the financial cost of university education remains a heavy burden for many working-class parents and that they often have to rely on the assistance from aunts, uncles and siblings.

Findings of a study by Moschetti and Hudley (2015) revealed that siblings often replace parents as a source of social capital in the form of information about university, where parents have limited knowledge. Successful black working-class student often display tremendous agency in that they can develop social capital to ensure that they are supported, encouraged, and assisted academically (McGhiel, 2016). It's important for successful black working-class students to surround themselves with people who have positive contributions to their lives and who will motivate them to reach their goals (Spiegler, 2018). Having supportive family and friends can assist working class student to stay focused and work harder to achieve academically (McGhiel, 2016).

2.5.4 Support from the university

Literature suggests that these successful black working-class students would seek academic support from their lecturers (Swartz et al., 2018). Among other things, successful black students make use of consultation times with their lecturers to discuss the issues with which

they are struggling, and lecturers provide them with guidance and encouragement (Swartz et al., 2018). Successful black students who receive adequate support often feel more connected to university (Sandoval-Lucero, Maes & Klingsmith, 2014). In this instance, support provided by lecturers positively affected successful black students' academic identities (Norodien-Fataar, 2016).

In McGhie's (2017) study, conducted in South Africa, findings revealed that some black working-class students made a conscious effort to find solutions to their challenges. For instance, students were not shy or afraid to ask questions or request assistance with their academic work or university life, where this was necessary (McGhie, 2017). Often, students reported that consultation sessions, which largely happened during the students' spare time, helped them to clarify and resolve the work the academic hurdles that they were experiencing (McGhie, 2017). It could be concluded from this finding that these agentic and proactive actions helped students to overcome their academic challenges and navigate university life, which ensured that black students could transition and integrate successfully into the university culture and environment.

In addition to the above, a study by Brosnan et al. (2016) found that mentors played a role in helping successful black students to make social connections with other students, which contributed positively to the students' academic success. From this study, findings suggested that successful black students tended to respond well to mentors from similar backgrounds and who had experienced similar challenges (Brosnan et al., 2016). For Moschetti and Hudley (2015), black successful students participated in mentoring relationships because they believed that these had benefits for them academically.

In addition to the above, Longwell-Grice et al. (2016) found that black successful working-class students could work through issues with mentors, which was critical for their successful navigation of the academic landscape. The students' connection with mentors helped them to manage the unfamiliar amount work that they experienced during their first year in the university environment (Longwell-Grice et al., 2016). Thus, university mentors helped students to recognise and reconcile their worlds with the new world, which often had many unwritten rules that they often had to figure out. However, some successful black students were comfortable more with mentors because they were approachable and accessible to them than their lecturers (Longwell-Grice et al., 2016). For Swartz et. al. (2018), this connection

was possible because university mentors were mostly one or two years ahead of the students and studying in the same fields.

Universities provide a basket of services to students to promote their academic social and psychological wellbeing, included: counselling, Writing Centre, Academic Monitoring and Support, Teaching and Learning Centres, Supplemental Instructor [SI], NSFAS, Scholarship Centre, open library and computer Local-Area Network (LAN) (Swartz, et al., 2018). Steyn (2016) reported that it was compulsory for black successful students to undergo academic literacy as a mechanism to assist students to improve their academic linguistic skills. Academic writing is a crucial skill that students need to do well in their studies. Abraham, et al. (2021) contend that successful black students require a supportive environment that encourages personal growth. Moschetti and Hudley (2015) suggested that successful black working-class students benefit from academic advisors and college administrators, not only for advice, but guidance to help them steer in the right direction on a daily base.

2.6 Adapting to university culture

2.6.1 Shaping and reshaping of identity

According to Jury et al. (2015), successful working-class students who attend university begin to undergo social identity shifts. Successful working-class students transform their identities in order to belong, adopting and adapting middle-class class standards and becoming middle-class impersonators (Jury et al., 2015). Reay et al. (2013), in the United States of America, contend that a successful working-class student who shift their working-class identity and adopts to a middle-class identity often experiences adverse effects, as it often leads to feelings of being ashamed, embarrassed, and humiliated. As a consequence, such a student often develops feelings of not belonging in neither working-class nor middle-class environment, no matter how much they desire to be accepted (Brosnan et al., 2016).

Jin and Ball (2020) argue that this new identity often separates them from their fellow successful working-class students. Often, students experience discomfort, and even hatred towards their working-class origins and their fellow students from working class background. This emanates from the fact that working-class students are often compelled to abandon their social identity in order to succeed in an academic environment that is defined by middle-class standards (Reay, 2018). Lehmann (2014) uses a Bourdieu lens to highlight

how these successful students struggle to embrace this new habit and the importance for them to collude in order to be affirmed and appreciated. Thus, adopting this new identity and habitus suggests that successful working-class students often have to pay a painful price.

For instance, the struggles that these students must experience include participating in complicated relationships to obtain the required cultural and social capital (Reay, 2018). Part of this package is that successful working-class students would distance themselves from their friends and families (Reay, 2018). Successful students must then rely on academic performance in order to obtain and achieve self-worth and recognition, especially when tension arises between the old and new identity (Crozier, Reay & Clayton, 2019). These two identities can be confusing, which often results in uncertainty. For instance, when a student enters a new environment, it is important for them to balance the two social worlds, the new and old habitus, a phenomenon referred to as a hybrid identity (Crozier, Reay & Clayton, 2019).

Only once tensions from successful working-class habitus and university have been managed can a sense of belonging be achieved (Crozier, Reay & Clayton, 2019). Class identity plays a crucial role in how successful working-class students experience a sense of belonging. For instance, Soria and Stebleton (2013) argue that the sense of belonging is linked to the social class, which is associated to their social and academic performance and how they experience university life. In their daily interactions, students' identities are often shaped by how they are viewed by their fellow university students. For instance, in a study by Crozier, Reay and Clayton (2019), findings revealed that successful working-class students often adopt a hybrid identity by resisting the pressure of changing themselves. These students frequently embrace a hybrid identity, which means they maintain their home life while seeking new information and experience as a form of agency (Crozier, Reay & Clayton, 2019). Successful working-class students with these fluid, contradictory and ambiguous identities often experience the pain of identity shifts as well as the fear of losing their identity (Crozier, Reay & Clayton, 2019). Crozier, Reay, and Clayton (2019) discovered that students' sense of agency manifested itself in their refusal to succumb to the pressure to change and surrender to hegemonic norms. At the same time, a dominant language linguistic style is negotiated. For example, a successful working-class student might outsmart existing social class inequities, by conforming to and adopting white, middle-class norms. However, this is not

about fitting in, but it is their way of ensuring that they are heard, not dismissed and have some control over the situation (Crozier, Reay & Clayton, 2019).

2.6.2 Assimilation, resistance and agency

Crozier, Reay and Clayton (2019) contend that successful working-class students either blend in or stand out academically or socially in order to fit in. Often, black students use their social identity to stand out and escape from alienation by engaging in campus activities (Xie & Reay, 2019). In addition, working class students often escape these stereotypes by participating in university activities, such as student unions, management work, learning how play a piano or dancing (Xie & Reay, 2019).

In the study by Xie and Reay (2019), successful working-class student often imitated middle and upper classes. However, inadequate access to resources, such as money, often manifested as a constraint that prevented them from full participation in the middle-class culture. Furthermore, successful students coming from rural backgrounds often understood academic success as an important for achieving recognition and personal success (Xie & Reay, 2019). Students who were academically successful and actively participated in campus activities could reap benefits in the form of, for example, scholarships. These benefits encouraged successful working class students to maintain a high academic standard and avoided academic failure at all costs (Xie & Reay, 2019). In addition, Xie and Reay (2019) reported that when students could not do this successfully, they then focused on their earlier academic performance, often investing their energy on their studies and shying away from participation in social activities (Xie & Reay, 2019). In addition, Xie and Reay (2019) reported that successful students who shied away from taking part in social activities often missed out on opportunities, such as academic awards.

2.7 Factors affecting successful students from working-class contexts

2.7.1 Parental involvement

Longwell-Grice et. al. (2016), in a study with first generation Latino students, reported that family support was inadequate, as parents did not understand their roles in respect of the education of their children at university. Often, parents believed that it was sufficient to encourage students and provide financial support in respect of tuition and other needs (Longwell-Grice et al., 2016). Their inadequate understanding of their role in respect of the education of their children often led to academic and social difficulties for some students

(Longwell-Grice et al., 2016). When successful students from working-class backgrounds reach the university setting, they undergo radical change, including the experience of leaving their family, which is often a painful emotional experience of loneliness, alienation, and isolation (Lehmann, 2014). When successful black working-class students went to university, they had to undergo radical transformation, such as changing their lifestyle as a result of being exposed to a diverse range of cultures, but also as a result of making new friends. Relationships with past friends begin to drift away after joining university because their old habits were no longer appropriate at university.

In addition, Longwell-Grice et al. (2016) reported that when students returned home from university, heads buzzing with ideas, they were often confronted with complete indifference from their parents, owing to the fact that they did not have the language or vocabulary to share their experiences with their families. In some cases, successful black students were not keen to share their experiences, fearing that this would upset their parents (Longwell-Grice et al., 2016). This suggests that, for these students, the belief was that bringing their bad university experiences home would cause problems (Longwell-Grice et al., 2016). However, these students often shared their passionate stories about their university experiences, enjoying instances of sharing big ideas with their families (Longwell-Grice et al., 2016). However, when sharing stories about issues that they loved at university, this sometimes resulted in an unwanted distance with their families, who now perceived them differently (Longwell-Grice et al., 2016).

Broson et al. (2016) contend that successful black students from working class background often experience isolation within their families, especially where they are among the first people to go to university. However, in addition to these challenges, students often found that they could not ask for assistance from their families because of a range of issues, including university processes such as registration, difficulties they were experiencing in respect of developing their academic language competence and managing their work load (Broson et al., 2016). This suggests that their working-class habitus was so deeply engrained and entrenched such that attempting to challenge often resulted in tensions with their families and friends. The result was a situation where the students received inadequate support from their families and friends, which made it difficult for them to transition successfully into university life (Broson et al., 2016). One of the ingredients of this toxic mix was that their

parents had not been to university and had no reference from which they could draw resources to assist and support their children with university life (Broson et al., 2016).

Lehmann (2014) contend that working class families often inculcate working class ideas, behaviours and practice, which entrench their positioning and location in the world. Often, any attempt to challenge this situation was difficult for students from working class background (Lehmann, 2014). This suggests that successful black students from working-class contexts often could not rely on their families or friends for assistance to acquire the necessary cultural and social capital, which children from middle class contexts already possessed. When this happened, students from working class struggled to successfully negotiate the maze of university life (Lehmann, 2014). In addition, these black students also experienced a growing social distance between themselves and their families and friends, which led to a growing isolation and challenges in maintaining crucial relationships and experiencing a disconnect with their next of kin (Lehmann, 2014). This is a critical issue because there is often a need for strong support systems when home and university worlds collide to ensure success for the first-generation of students from working-class contexts (Lehmann, 2014).

2.7.2 Relationships with lecturers

Literature by Garret and Rubie-Davies (2014) suggests that successful black students from low socioeconomic backgrounds in New Zealand did not have a strong support system at home from their parents, and lecturers at university did not provide the academic support they needed to succeed. Therefore, these successful black students had to find other ways to meet their academic needs. Depending on how successful black working-class students position themselves, university instructors can function as both enablers and barriers for successful black students. For example, according to Garret and Rubie-Davis (2014), a one-size-fits-all pedagogic approach, which was used by some lecturers, did not work since high-achieving students were frequently excluded due to their lecturers' lack of awareness of their social and emotional requirements. High-achieving students from working-class backgrounds claimed that course content was often difficult and that assessments did not fully measure their talents (Garret & Rubie-Davis, 2014). This limited their capacities, cognitive development, and creativity because they were rarely encouraged to think critically and analytically (Garret & Rubie-Davis, 2014). High-achieving black students from

working-class backgrounds, on the other hand, discovered strategies to address their requirements in this study, such as reading beyond module readings, investigating potential research fields, and participating in study groups with like-minded students (Garret & Rubie-Davis, 2014).

Successful black students from low socioeconomic background, who had a negative relationship with some of their lecturers, often missed out on opportunities for the recognition and expansion of their abilities and capabilities (Garret & Rubie-Davis, 2014). However, in some cases, these unhealthy relationships emerged from the attitudes of lecturers towards their interactions with students. For instance, during lectures, students often went beyond surface understandings, challenged ideas and asked difficult, thought-provoking questions (Garret & Rubie-Davis, 2014). However, this often resulted in lecturers feeling threatened (Garret & Rubie-Davis, 2014). For instance, in a particular point in the study, successful black students expressed their personal opinions about what was being learned, and were consequently labelled as aggressive students by lecturers (Garret & Rubie-Davis, 2014). This may point to the significance of equipping lecturers with the skills required to become rigorous in their thinking and navigate such situations.

2.8 Theoretical framework

The notions of habitus, field, and capital, as proposed by Bourdieu (1986), was used to understand how black students from working-class contexts connected with and negotiated their identities as well as the university space in this study. Bourdieu's concepts of habitus, field and capital, according to Norodien-Fataar (2018), provide a useful account of people's relationships with their daily lives. Bourdieu (1986) contend that the manner in which contemporary education systems and institutions operate tends to reproduce class inequalities. Colleges and universities, as part of the education system, must serve as a vehicle for providing and making opportunities accessible to success black students, especially those from low socioeconomic background. However, as the findings of this study revealed, rather than challenging and eliminating social inequality, these tend to reproduce social injustices (Soria, Weiner & Lu, 2014).

In the section below, I provide a deconstruction of Bourdieu’s (1986) constructs, namely, habitus, field and capital, and possible ways in which these are deployed within this study.

2.8.1 Bourdieu's notion of habitus

The notion of habitus is central to Bourdieu's idea of social, power and practice (Bourdieu, 1986; 1989; 1990). Bourdieu (1990, p. 53) defines habitus as "a system of dispositions", and a "structuring structure", and argues that habitus moulds and modifies daily experiences of individuals.

Reay et al. (2009) contend that our experiences comprise historical and cultural connections, which over time, develop into taken for granted constructs. As such, habitus could be regarded as a consequence of socialisation processes, in which an individual, who may be a student, for instance, may have been trained into and away from particular norms and values governing their conduct and roles in society. Xiu and Reay (2019) argued that the habitus and practices developed through socialization processes may be difficult to change or unlearn. This suggests that some of these may manifest in the later lives of individuals. This notion was critical for the understanding of how these influenced the ways in which students, who participated in this study, navigated and negotiated university life.

A study done by McGinty (2017, p. 11) found that successful black students who are first in their families to attend university often experience "habitus dislocation", when they are unclear about their academic abilities, are often embarrassed by their low socio-economic status and are fully alert to the fact that they do not have family support, compared to their peers from middle-class contexts. Habitus dislocation can be established in various ways for students from working-class contexts. According to Baxter and Britton (2001), dislocation could be a painful experience between the old and the newly developed habitus. The old and the new habitus often carry with them the understanding of inferiority and superiority. For example, successful black students from low socio-economic background would, for instance, feel the need to lose or dislocate from their working-class identity and adopt a middle-class identity that is essential for success within the university (Britton, 2001).

Successful black students from low socio-economic background would try to establish a social network with authority figures, such as lecturers, only to notice they cannot build strong relationships with their lecturers or superiors. As a result, successful students from low socio-economic backgrounds would feel 'left out' and that they 'don't belong' in the

same social class with students from middle and upper classes (Britton, 2001). This implies that, for these students, the route to success does not always follow a straight-line, especially for successful black students from low socio-economic background, unlike their peers from middle-class contexts (McGinty, 2017).

The route to success within a university is also informed by the social conditions that could enable the transformation of the habitus (Bourdieu, 1990). Leaving the schooling system and going into university, for example, calls for a different kind of habitus, which often involves people leaving behind their old habitus and adapting to a new habitus. Xie and Reay (2019) explained the notion of a 'cleft habitus', whereby when a student from a working-class context enters university, the new and old habitus exist, but results in confusion. Students from working class backgrounds often experience university life like fish out of the water, which could lead to failure, owing to the inadequate ability to manage the two (Xie & Reay, 2019). The dislocation of new and old habitus often leads to high levels of uncertainty (Xie & Reay, 2019). Therefore, to transition socially and academically students from working-class contexts must adapt to more than one identity in order to succeed academically.

With habitus transformation comes the notion of hidden injuries (Xie & Reay, 2019). This is evidenced in Lehmann's (2014) study, where in trying to manage the cleft habitus (Xie & Reay, 2019), students from working class contexts associated strongly with the terms of their peers from middle-class contexts, namely, dress, food type and friends, and often found employment on campus. By doing this, black successful students from working-class contexts could overcome the fear of academic failure, which would mean that they are positioned as cultural outsiders (Lehmann, 2014). On the other hand, adjusting to a new identity and habitus generated fragmentation as they began to detach themselves from their working-class habitus and identities. For example, they were cut off from their peers, family, and friends. Their old class identity was no longer acceptable, and they were forced to give it up to succeed academically. As a result, successful students from low socio-economic often have strained relationships with their families and friends. They can no longer relate to their families' and friends' ways of life, especially those who have not participated in university education and are, thus, unfamiliar with university rules, norms and ideals (Lehmann, 2014). However, a study conducted by Ingram (2011) reveals students' struggles in trying to manage processes of adapting or assimilating, which results in them feeling alienated from both working- and middle-class worlds. Thus, it could be deduced that habitus

is a power-laden space that is informed by rules and regulations, and that can force people to collude with as well as challenge their oppression (Hardiman & Jackson, 1997). Thus, in this context, the rules and regulations constitute a structuring system that informs the required habitus (Bourdieu, 1986).

The notion of habitus comprises social norms, which guide the way in which we behave, think and speak. This potentially affects identities and actions of individuals and the choices that they make in life. For instance, habitus could serve as a determining factor of whether students, especially those from low socioeconomic backgrounds, can attend university and achieve social mobility (McGinty, 2017). For instance, within the education system, an individual's social class could affect the growth of their habitus and, as a result, affect their insights into educational opportunities, structures and strategies that could assist them navigate pathways to their success (Nuñez & Sansone, 2016).

O'Shea (2016) contend that a student's habitus could prevent them from achieving educational success, depending on their ability to learn the rules of the game within a middle-class context, such as a university. A student from a working class background comes into higher education with a particular kind of knowledge. However, their working-class knowledge is not often recognised or valued within the higher education, which is likely a middle-class context. For instance, a study done by O'Shea (2016) found that successful students from low socio-economic background had inadequate or limited knowledge about university choices, financial decisions, and timetabling. This resulted in them feeling isolated and lonely, which feelings were often worsened by uncertainties regarding language, academic expectations, and rules of behaviour (O'Shea, 2016). Given the probability that successful black students from low socio-economic backgrounds lack the 'right kind' of middle-class cultural capital, they often feel unprepared for university life (McGinty, 2017). Such feelings of unpreparedness often induce feelings of powerlessness and worthlessness in students, as the notion of success in these spaces is often grounded within a middle-class discourse, by which their identity is often challenged and alienated (Nash, 1990; Stahl, 2016).

2.8.2 Bourdieu's notion of field

Bourdieu (1990) deploys the notion of field to understand institutional and human social spaces, within which interactions between individuals often takes place. Given the status of our social identity, our field may be a school field, university field, art history and literacy, etcetera. As Bourdieu (1990) contend, we could occupy particular areas or positions within our field. For this study, the university's educational environment, courses offered and education and learning support for successful black students (Norodien-Fataar, 2018). Given the fact that a field is a social space comprising shared rules and relationships, it is organised around a specific form of capital (O'Shea, 2015). Within a university context, the field has its own rules and norms.

When successful students from low socio-economic backgrounds enter a university as a field, there is often a mismatch between their habitus and the cultural field at the university. A cultural field, according to Bourdieu (1990, p. 66), is comparable to a sportsperson getting a "feel for the game". The "feel for the game" refers to learning ways of mastering the game, as well as knowing the history of the game and enjoying some power over it (Bourdieu, 1990, p. 66). This criterion is often met when a player begins to invest in the game and develops a strategy to always keep themselves one step ahead of their competition (Webb et. al., 2002). Successful students from low socio-economic backgrounds, who experience university as something different to what they have previously encountered, may find it difficult to develop a "feel for the game" (Bourdieu, 1990, p. 66), unless they have negotiated themselves in significant ways and learned the rules of the game, through acquiring appropriate knowledge and skills from those who are competent in navigating university life (Reay, 2018, p. 530).

It is in this instance that successful black students who lack the knowledge of the rules governing the university context often feel excluded. Adapting to the rules, norms and ideological configurations of the university suggests that this must be learned, which could be challenging when students lack the necessary tools to do this. It is on this basis that Meulemana et al. (2015) argue that the university experience of a successful black student from a socio-economic background may be overwhelming. Meulemana et al.'s (2015) argument has been supported by Swartz et al. (2018), who found that successful black

students suffered from mental health problems, such as depression and anxiety, due to the negative feedback that they often received from their academic experiences.

For Bourdieu (1990), each field value has a unique resource, which is shared unequally among individuals. Given the fact that the field is a symbolic space where power exists, it may result in inequity, marginalisation, and isolation (Bourdieu, 1990). That is, a field could manifest as a place in which individuals are expected to observe and abide by certain rules of conduct. As a result, for this study, I deploy the notion of field to understand how successful students adjust to the university's educational environment. This is a relevant given the fact that students often lack awareness of the regulations and norms and cultural preferences that constitute university life (Lehmann, 2014).

Hlatshwayo and Fomunyam (2019) contend that a field can be understood as space, in which individuals compete for access to resources. This conflict is a consequence of social stratification (Power, 1999). Thus, the use of the notion of field is useful for purposes of this study, as it provides a device for interrogating power dynamics within the context of a university. On an institutional level, individuals from upper- and middle-class backgrounds often always have authority and influence over the university experiences of black working-class students (Reay, 2018). For example, successful students from low socio-economic background often lack appropriate forms of capital required to negotiate the university field, making it difficult for them to negotiate university life (Lehmann, 2014).

2.8.3 Bourdieu’s notion of capital

The third concept that I will deploy in this study is Bourdieu's (1986) notion of capital. Bourdieu (1986) identifies four forms of capital, which may be economic, cultural, social and symbolic. Di Giorgio (2009, p.181) defines capital as the “resources that people accumulate and exchange to maintain their power within the field of society”. For instance, this speaks to certain benefits that accrue to dominant groups. For example, individuals from middle-class groups can deploy capital at their disposal, through establishing critical relationships and networks to access benefits for themselves. However, successful students from low socio-economic contexts often do not have access to the forms of capital required to successfully navigate university life (Di Giorgio, 2009).

In the section below, I discuss Bourdieu's (1986) forms of capital appropriate for this study.

2.8.3.1 Social capital

Social capital can be defined as social connections to persons and groups with access to the required resources and influence, which an individual could use to improve the quality of their life (Bourdieu,1986). Access to these resources and influences can be acquired through social interactions. Networks can be shared within, and among group and individuals for whom they are accessible (Lee & Bowen, 2006). According to Lee and Bowen (2006), Bourdieu's (1986) social capital provides a means of fulfilling social desires, although access to such resources is inequitably allocated.

Brosnan et al. (2016) contend that social capital can assist students from working-class context to develop mechanisms to cope with the demands of middle-class contexts. For example, within the context of a university, successful black students could achieve this through establishing relationships with mentors and lecturers who can help them build connections and access to information, guidance and emotional support required to perform well academically. Earlier in this chapter, a point was made those students from working class backgrounds tend to work well with mentors who come from similar backgrounds and have experiences that are similar to theirs. This supports Waterfield et al's. (2019) theory, which emphasises the importance of making connections with the right people in order to achieve academic success.

2.8.3.2 Economic capital

Economic capital can be understood as access to riches, inheritance, properties and other means of acquiring economic control (Bourdieu, 1986). This suggests that, within an educational context, economic capital could be regarded as resources, which enable individuals to access and utilise critical educational opportunities. An example here could be a person who is born into an affluent family and, as such, has the means to send their child to an expensive university. According to Masutha (2020), those who have access to economic capital can allocate it in a way that perpetuates their social and cultural dominance within society. This means that, just like all social good in an unequal society, economic capital is unequally shared. To this end, a successful student from a low socio-economic background may not have access to the required economic capital to utilise opportunities

that have been allocated within a middle-class context, such as a university, whose institutional culture supports bias towards dominant social groups (Soria, Weiner & Lu, 2014).

2.8.3.3 Symbolic capital

Symbolic capital can be defined as a sense of being validated through acknowledgment and access to social status (Bourdieu, 1986). As such, symbolic capital could help generate a respectable image and honour for an individual who has access to it and, within a university context, can help students to achieve honours and distinctions, and access more opportunities in programmes that require such (Siisiäinen, 2003). Given the importance of social recognition in society, certain types of capital are extremely valuable (Bourdieu, 1986). For instance, black successful students from low socio-economic backgrounds, who go to a university, do not only obtain a degree (social capital) as an end, but this leads to other benefits, such as getting a job and receiving an income (economic capital), which boosts their status (symbolic capital) in their community. To achieve symbolic capital within a university context, successful black students, from low socio-economic backgrounds, may establish relationships with academically achieving students, in order to benefit from their intelligence and, in the process, receive a share in the status that they enjoy.

2.8.3.4 Cultural capital

Bourdieu (1993) contends that social and cultural forms of capital are linked. According to Dladla (2021), cultural capital must be understood as power that resides in certain cultures and families. For instance, if an individual possesses cultural capital, they can access advantage and, as a consequence, have their social status improved. Therefore, cultural capital could be considered as a cultural background, passed from one generation to the next, that provides individuals who are part of a specific cultural group with the resources for social advantage (Macbeth et al., 2004). For instance, within a middle-class background, families have access to certain accoutrements, what Bourdieu (1989) refers to as embodied cultural capital, such as highly regarded forms of knowledge, education, social tastes, sporting activities, which benefit and are passed down through generations.

The above argument suggests that only individuals and groups from particular backgrounds can have access to cultural capital. For instance, the culture of working class, from which

disadvantaged students emerge, will be out of sync with the middle-class capital, which guarantees success at university (Larey, 2018). This suggests that without access to the appropriate kind of cultural capital, successful students from low socio-economic backgrounds may be faced with difficulty successfully navigating university life. When this happens, some may retreat into their working-class spaces, placing them at risk of struggling academically. However, the notion of successful black working-class does not neatly lead to a consequence (Quinn, 2004), as individuals, such as students, are not victims and have agency to shift their habitus and gain access to cultural capital required for university success (Kapp & Bangeni, 2020). For example, although black students from low socio-economic background do not have access to all the accoutrements that students from middle-class contexts have, they have agency required to establish beneficial connections and networks that could provide them with access to the resources that guarantee success at university.

2.9 Conclusion

In this chapter, I examined higher education legislation and policy in relation to access and participation of successful black working students. In addition, I reviewed and discussed literature on the experiences of successful black students from low socio-economic backgrounds. The chapter also discussed factors that enable and constrain the success of black students from low socio-economic backgrounds in higher education. The chapter also presented and discussed the theoretical framework for the study, through which the arguments and analyses must be understood. In this instance, Bourdieu's (1990) concepts of habitus, field and forms of capital and how these were relevant for the study, were discussed. The literature reviewed suggests that there is a disconnect between students' habitus and university field. Consequently, successful black students from low socio-economic backgrounds, who do not have the accoutrements that students from middle class backgrounds have, may struggle to succeed at higher education. However, it is also argued that working-class status does not automatically imply a lack of agency; successful black students from low socio-economic backgrounds have agency to acquire the forms of capital that would enable them to successfully navigate university life.

The following chapter discusses and analyses the methodological and design considerations and justifications that I made and provided in respect of the conduct of this study.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND DESIGN

3.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter, literature reviewed provided insights into the experiences of successful black university students and presented and discussed the theoretical framework, namely, Bourdieu's (1977) theory of practice, which provided a lens through which the arguments and findings of this study must be understood. In this chapter, I provide details of the research methodology and design followed in the conduct of the study. In doing this, I begin by discussing the research paradigm that informs my epistemological and ontological positioning within the study. Secondly, the different methodological approaches and choices that were implemented to support this study are explained and discussed. Thirdly, the chapter discusses the choices and justifications made and provided regarding appropriate sampling designs and data collection methods used to produce data and knowledge for this study. Fourthly, I discuss how data generated was analysed, with a view to generating the themes that organised the discussion of findings in the next chapter. Fifthly, I discuss the issues that I considered to ensure that the conduct of the study was ethical and that the rights of the participants are respected, upheld and protected. Lastly, I consider and discuss the mechanisms that were put in place to ensure that the principles of trustworthiness and credibility were upheld in the study.

3.2 Research paradigm

A well quoted definition of a paradigm has been provided by Fossey et al. (2002, p. 718), who defines it as a "system that includes set of assumptions, or ideas, research approaches that had been verified by research community and criteria for rigor that are shared by the specific community". Along similar lines, Wilson (2001) describes a research paradigm as a belief system about the social world and how information can be attained that is used to guide research. According to Mackenzie and Knipe (2006) and Rehman and Alharthi (2016), a research paradigm must be clearly articulated by the researcher because it represents their worldview and provides insight into the choices they make, allowing others to make decisions about the credibility of the research conduct and practice within a specific study.

This study adopted the critical research paradigm, as it offered ways of reflecting on the participants' beliefs and ideologies, which informed their worldviews and ways in which they described their experiences. For this study, the critical paradigm provided a useful device for troubling and challenging the status quo, with a view to contributing to the building of a balanced and democratic society (Asghar, 2013). Given the fact that the critical paradigm is concerned with the workings of power relations within society, it provided me with a device for not only pointing out oppressive practices, but also contributing to entrenching principles that advance equality for all.

Understanding of power relations is an important factor in any kind of research. As a result, as a critical researcher, I was constantly aware of how power dynamics played out in my interactions with the participants. The critical paradigm, drawn from Freire's (1970) approach, is aimed at empowering, and accommodating those that are marginalised and excluded (Scotland, 2012). For this study, this was achieved through, inter alia, the use of semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions, in which self-reflection became a significant aspect in the research process. In essence, this enabled participants to reflect on the ways in which their experiences were inclusionary or exclusionary and recognised, for example, that they possessed agency to succeed, despite the barriers that they were experiencing (Scotland, 2012). As guided by Scotland (2012), I endeavoured to ensure that my relationship with the participants was driven by participation as a key principle. I attempted to achieve this by sharing the research space with the participants such that they participated as co-constructors of knowledge in the conduct of the research. For example, the interview transcripts were sent to the participants for verification and suggesting changes to ensure that their voices and stories had been captured properly. This suggests that, within this study, participants were positioned as possessing agency, possibly enabling them to deploy their voices to foreground their experiences of success.

The above consideration was extremely important given the fact that universities are often set up as middle-class institutions, which imposes and reproduces middle-class cultures and values and constructs success around these. This suggests that acceptable ways of knowing in universities are often intertwined with power and social positioning (Crozier, Reay & Clayton, 2019). For this reason, I adopted a critical epistemological position, which enabled me to explore how successful university students, who are black and from low socio-economic backgrounds, navigated and experienced university life. This enabled me to

trouble my understandings of deficiency and lack as an inherent consequence of working class. For example, in this study, black students working class identified and worked out and implemented solutions to the factors that presented as barriers to their success, instead of positioning themselves as objects of their situations (Cornwall & Jewkes, 1995).

3.3 Methodological approach

Qualitative research is a naturalistic approach, which offers a useful lens for understanding and interpreting participants' real-world settings (Golafshani, 2003; Johnson & Christensen, 2008). This study seeks to understand how black, successful students from low socio-economic backgrounds, experienced university life. The adoption of a qualitative research approach allowed me to gain an understanding of participants and their views, ideas, perspectives and experiences about their social and academic life at university. In essence, the qualitative research approach enabled me to obtain a rich, deeply textured understanding of the experiences of the participants (Jackson et al., 2007). Through the qualitative research approach, I could listen to participants' personal stories about their challenges, struggles and successes. This implies that using qualitative research enabled and required me to collaborate with the participants to create spaces for them to tell their stories and have their voices heard in the study.

Qualitative research is described as a naturalistic, interpretative approach, which concerns the exploration phenomena. In this instance, qualitative research helped me to gain an in-depth understanding of the social world of the participants how they made sense of their experiences, perspectives and histories (Ormston, Snaper & Spencer, 2014). Obtaining such a view was made possible by the fact that qualitative research permitted me to use various methods, namely, narrative interviews and focus group discussions, to generate data. This was important for a study that sought to obtain in-depth information about the participants' experiences.

3.4 Narrative inquiry

Narrative inquiry was adopted in this study. According to Conle (2000, p.50), narrative is used to communicate and understand people and events. Narrative is defined as a crucial way of thinking and method of organizing knowledge. Clandinin and Rosiek (2007) and Bold (2012) have explained narrative inquiry as a mechanism or device for experiencing the

world and seeking ways of enriching and transforming that experience for themselves and others. Therefore, narrative inquiry studies the experiences of individuals within the social world, whose main aim is to transform the self and others. Using narrative inquiry allows for individual experiences to be understood through retelling of personal experiences, stories about incidents and situations, which have happened in their lives. For Kumar (2011), narrative research allows individuals to narrate what happens, using stories that allow them to convey their feelings, thoughts as well as to interpret their experiences.

Thus, narrative inquiry was used in this study because of its ability to mix perspectives from participants' lives with those from the researcher's life in a joint narrative (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). For example, in this study, I could get participants to express their feelings, thoughts and ideas because I effectively used the stage provided by narrative inquiry, namely, getting to know the participants. In addition, using the narrative inquiry also provided an opportunity for participants' voices to be heard (Conle, 2000). To achieve this, participants participated as co-constructors of knowledge in the study, using the stories they choose to tell. In this way, participants' narratives were carried out with them, rather than about them (Johnson & Christensen, 2017). This suggests that participants were central to the conduct of the research study, which assisted in having their narratives foregrounded. For purposes of this study, it was important for me to provide a platform for successful black students from low socio-economic backgrounds to voice their stories. This enabled me to obtain a deep, personal understanding of their experiences, get into their personal spaces and access their stories first-hand, which is not possible through other mechanisms.

3.5 Research design

3.5.1 Context of the study

The research was carried out at the Pietermaritzburg campus of the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN). Originally, the university only accepted white students, but later, Indian, Coloured, and African students were admitted. UKZN is the result of the merging of two institutions, the University of Durban-Westville, and the University of Natal, in 2004 as part of the South African government's reorganisation of higher education. Since the end of apartheid in 1994, the success of black students has been a key source of concern for higher education. The change from apartheid to democracy paved the way to higher education institutions like UKZN for many Black students.

Built on the transformation objective and the necessity to remedy it, post-apartheid university institutions created many initiatives to enhance access to and involvement of African students (Department of Higher Education and Training, 2008). According to a 2017 report, published by UKZN, the university has implemented measures to ensure equal entrance into each of its programmes. The 2017 report further states that the university offers a diverse range of academic programs in the fields of Science and Agriculture, Education, Law, Human and Management Sciences. Only the Pietermaritzburg Campus offers agriculture, theology and fine art. (University of KwaZulu-Natal, 2017).

As a result of the foregoing, there has been a major growth in the enrolment of black students in recent years. In 2016, for example, UKZN had roughly 46 520 registered students (University of KwaZulu-Natal, 2016). There are 13064 postgraduate students among them, with a total of 33292 African students throughout all campuses (University of KwaZulu-Natal, 2017). This number is increasing, and black students now constitute the majority on campus and are gaining access to higher education. Despite this population, English is the main language on campus. According to a 2016 report provided by UKZN, 343 students obtained degrees *cum laude*, and 123 *summa cum laude* were awarded to disadvantaged students from the South Coast of KwaZulu-Natal, who excelled in their studies. By providing awards to leading graduate and postgraduate students, the University has invested in excellence. UKZN continues to assist, support and recognize students' success at all levels of development (University of KwaZulu-Natal, 2016).

3.6 Selection of research participants

Sampling is defined by Dawnson (2007, p. 49) as the process of "choosing a smaller, more manageable number of people to be of the study". For a qualitative researcher, it is important to choose a sample that will provide answers or responses to the key research questions. Often, the sample size of the study is determined by the research purpose, questions and design of the study (Cohen et al., 2018). Thus, selecting research participants involves choosing a particular group of people and individuals, who represent a target population or required group with the intention of collecting data to respond to the research questions. For this study, for instance, a sample of successful black students from low socio-economic backgrounds were chosen based on the knowledge they possessed about life at university, including their experiences, the challenges they encountered issues of powers within the

unequal university field, issues of access to networks within university, and strategies used to overcome challenges encountered at university.

This study adopted purposive sampling to select participants. This means that, for this study, participants were selected based on the specific criteria or characteristics, decided upon in line with the focus and key research questions of the study (Creswell, 2014). Purposive sampling means a sample that is chosen for a specific purpose. For this study, participants had to be "knowledgeable people" (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2018, p. 219) about the phenomenon under investigation. To this end, participants had to be black, academically achieving and come from a low socio-economic background, which was in sync with the focus and key research questions of the study. For purposes of this study, participants were students who were or had:

- Recipients of either the Dean's commendation or the Student Excellence Awards. This was a measure of academic success.
- Had to be black, academically successful from low socio-economic background and had obtained 80% and above in the modules they had completed. This is the manner in which the study determines who is academically successful.
- Obtained their National Senior Certificate (NSC) from a Quintile 1, no-fee paying school.
- Funded from the National Students Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS) during their first year of study, and who came from households whose combined income did not exceed R350 000 per annum according to tax tables as provided by the South African Receiver of Revenue Services.
- Municipalities have declared them as the most deprived in respect of revenue.

3.7 Finding and recruiting participants

In this study, snowball sampling was used, because it was difficult to access successful, black students from working-class backgrounds who came from a low socio-economic background, through university processes. Thus, snowball sampling was the most appropriate for this purpose. Snowball sampling is used when a researcher wants to recruit a small group of individuals who display specific characteristics that are required to ensure the success of the study (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2018). In other words, once I had

found the first participant, I asked them to point me to the next participant, who met the criteria specified above. Three of the six students, who expressed an interest in participating in the study, were chosen since they were the only ones who met the five criteria specified above. The three participants initially recruited were sourced through lecturers and my fellow students, who provided me with names of possible participants. These were black, academically achieving from low socio-economic backgrounds and who had achieved 80% and above in the modules they had taught.

I also used a Facebook page, which was used as a platform to invite potential participants, who met the specified criteria (Shere, Zhao & Koren, 2014). A detailed poster about the study was created and posted on Facebook. Participants who were showing interest were then contacted via WhatsApp, Messenger and by telephone follow-up. Upon contact, I share the nature, focus and purpose of the study and allowed prospective participants an opportunity to ask questions and raise concerns about their discomforts about the study. Interested and eligible participants were then contacted again for an initial meeting, where I presented detailed information about the study and formally asked them to participate in the study. Upon agreeing to participate, ethical considerations were presented, and when participants were interested, they were asked to sign consent forms to formalise their willingness to participate in the study. This will be discussed in more detail in the section on ethical considerations

3.8 Data collection methods

Semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions were used to collect qualitative narrative data for this research study.

3.8.1 Semi-structured interviews

For the purpose of collecting in-depth data, semi-structured individual interviews were used as the key research instrument. Semi-structured interviews allowed participants space to discuss their experiences and understandings of the world and express their perspectives of their situations (Cohen et al., 2018). This is in line with what Harrell and Bradley (2009) who contend that semi-structured interviews allow participants to express their worldviews in a face-to-face conversation with the researcher about a phenomenon under investigation. In this study, I focused intently on the participants' experiences and perspectives of

university life. As a result, it is my view that the interviews provided me with a glimpse into how the participants felt and thought about the phenomenon under investigation (Henning, Van Rensburg & Smit, 2004). The interviews provided me with a device which I used to listen to and obtain an understanding of the participants' narratives.

One-on-one semi-structured interviews were held with the participants, which lasted no more than sixty (60) minutes. Conducting interviews one-on-one enabled me to engage and connect without the possible interference for others, intentionally or inadvertently. The interview further enabled me to delve into and explore participants' personal lives, including issues that could be considered sensitive and private about their experiences of university life. For instance, the semi-structured nature of the interview enabled me to probe and seek clarification, where this was necessary. However, this was done with due consideration of not unethically intruding into their private spaces. The open nature of the interview enabled me to follow the participants' train of thought and explore "tangential area[s]" that they raised (Bolderston, 2012, p. 67).

There were challenges in having chosen semi-structured interviews as a method of generating the data for this study. For instance, the very freedom and space that the semi-structured nature of the interviews provided for the participants to express themselves manifested as a barrier as it allowed me a degree of control of the interviewing process (Henning, 2004). This suggests that, if not careful, I could take over the space in ways that allocate a significant proportion to me. Therefore, although some freedom, control and space over the interview process was afforded to the participants, such depended on how much I was prepared to share. To this end, in order to moderate the effect of my presence in the interview situation, I ensured that the majority of the questions were open-ended and allowed participants to freely tell their stories on their own terms.

In the section below, I share how I went about with the interviewing process.

3.8.2 Interviewing process

It was important to be aware of the weakness of semi structured interview like personal biases, avoiding being judgmental towards participants when sharing their stories with me. To address this issue, I had to form a good relationship with the participants before the

interview, such as establishing trust, communicating with them on a daily basis about what was expected from them. Establishing a relationship before the interview enabled participants an opportunity to ask questions, raise concerns and obtain clarity on the purpose of the interview. To have an effective interview, it was essential for me to be knowledgeable about the subject matter and requirements for effective interaction and communication.

According to Dakwa (2015), the interview should be meticulously arranged because the main goal is to establish rapport with the participants so that the questions can be freely addressed and examined. Questions need therefore to be properly framed so that participants are not threatened. For this study, I met with participants on campus, introduced myself explained the purpose of the study and invited those who were interested. The process of building rapport involves trust about privacy, honesty, non-traceability, and respecting participants and the information they share (Cohen et al., 2018). It was important, before the beginning of the interview, to build trust with the participants to create a safe, comfortable environment for the participants to share their experiences and perceptions of issues they felt comfortable sharing. I reassured the participants that the information they shared would be kept confidential and that their responses would be valued for the study's good intentions (Di Cicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). The fact that I was a student at the UKZN made them somewhat comfortable around me.

The venue that was most suitable for the interview to be conducted was the library, where I had booked a discussion room for the duration of the interview. I chose the discussion room for its potential to provide the privacy that was required for the interviewing process. Adam (2010) points out that a good interview is one that allows for privacy, creates a pleasant environment and makes participants feel relaxed. Sometimes when the library was closed due to protest action, I used other spaces, such as the lecture rooms that were not occupied. However, each time, when this happened, I chose a venue that was far from the outside noise that could disrupt the interview.

During the interviews, I introduced myself, explained what was required of the interviewee and reminded them of the nature and purpose of the study. I also requested permission from the participants to audio-record the interview and I explained that the purpose was to ensure that I capture every aspect of their story accurately so that I did not miss any of the key details. I then proceeded with the interview once participants had responded. All participants

gave me permission to audio-record the interviews. For the interview to proceed smoothly, I endeavoured to guide the interview without imposing my personal biases. Once I had switched on the voice recording device, I started with the small talk whose intention was to put participants at ease. I then opened the interview with a request for the participants to "*please tell me about yourself*". I explained to the participants that I may repeat questions by providing more detailed explanations. When asking questions, I ensured that I afforded participants some time to think about their responses.

At the end of the interview, I explained the process of transcribing from audio- to written text in preparation of the analysis. I further explained that once the interview had been transcribed, they would be given an opportunity to go through interview transcripts, with the purpose of verifying, adding, or deleting information, where necessary. In conclusion, I thanked the participants for their time, offered them refreshments and told them that the next meeting would be for focus group discussions. However, there were a few cases where my supervisor suggested that I probe further as details had been left out. Due to COVID-19 protocols, I conducted these follow-up sessions using the WhatsApp voice conversations. However, for one of the participants, who did not have WhatsApp, we communicated through email.

All the interviews were audio-recorded with prior permission from the participants, and then transcribed verbatim.

3.8.3 Focus group discussions

Focus group discussions were used to complement semi-structured interviews in this research. Since the country was under the national lockdown (Department of International Relations and Cooperation, 2020) at the time of the research, I could not hold a focus group discussion. Further, participants had gone home. I had to find an alternative mechanism of conducting the focus group discussions. I therefore organised a virtual videoconference through the Zoom platform. The data from focus group discussions was linked to the third research, namely, "*How do they navigate their class positioning and challenges they experience*?".

To enable participants to participate in the virtual conference, I had to provide them with data, schedule a time and date and send them the link to join. According to Longhurst (2003), a focus group could be constituted by six (6) participants. Unfortunately, I could not get hold of all the six participants, due to signal problems in their areas and had to do two individuals at a time, which was time consuming. Focus group discussions allowed me to bring together participants with the purpose of discussing a specific subject. During the focus group discussion, participants could share experiences and information that they could not disclose during the individual interviews (Longhurst, 2003). Even though at times there were only two participants in the discussion, the discussion went smoothly, and participants could feed into each other's responses.

Conducting focus group discussions through the Zoom platform. Two key logistical issues had to be addressed. Firstly, the technology that was used had to be simple and easy to use for the participants. Secondly, participants had to be encouraged to take part and there had to be a solid plan to ensure that this happened. To address the first one, I chose the Zoom platform as it provides a simple technology, that is easy to use for video conferencing, and would allow the participants to easily connect to the meeting using their smartphones and laptops. To ensure the information conveyed during each session was consistent and achieved the purpose, a PowerPoint presentation was prepared, which included the introduction, purpose of the focus group, main and probing questions. This was read out aloud to participants at the start of each session. However, before I could commence with the questions, I requested participants for permission to record the session and told participants that I would also be taking notes. I assured participants that the intention of recording the session was to ensure that I captured everything they said accurately and for the identification of the responses. I then assured the participants that their responses in the recording would be kept confidential. At the end of the focus group discussion, I conveyed gratitude to the participants, sending each of them a data bundle as a gesture of appreciation for their time in the study. I then closed off the session and disengaged.

3.9 Data analysis

The aim of conducting a research study is to produce findings about a phenomenon under investigation. Osman (2009) explains that the process of data analysis involves taking data collected, analysing it so that it has order, structure and meaning. For Cohen et al. (2018),

data analysis involves not only organising the data, but explaining the data by making sense of participant's definitions of a situation, patterns, themes and categories. Thematic analysis was adopted to analyse the data obtained in this study.

During the interviews and focus group discussion, only two of the participants requested for the interview and focus group discussions to be conducted in isiZulu, which was agreed to. This interview was then translated and transcribed into English. This translation process was time-consuming, I had to consider the use of the different terminologies, grammatical rules, punctuation, and metaphoric structures that could influence meaning. During the translation process, I captured the data verbatim to ensure that the meanings that the participants intended to convey were preserved. To ensure the accuracy of the messages between the two languages, I avoided any temptation to use my own interpretations of the recordings. In some cases, where I was not certain of the accurate translation, I asked the language editor to assist me to come up with equivalent English words that would produce the same or similar meanings of the notions being conveyed, without tampering with the intended or original meanings. However, in doing this, I was careful not to share the details that could breach the confidentiality principles agreed upon with the participants. Further, the transcripts were verified by the participants for accurate reading.

To begin the process of narrative analysis, I began with reading the transcriptions several times to familiarise myself with key ideas emerging from the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). I then began attaching codes to particular datasets with the purpose of not only describing but the data, but findings meanings and making sense of the data in order to address the research problem (Simon, 2011). The narrative analysis process involved inductively taking data apart into segments to search for ideas, thoughts, and meanings (Reissman, 1993). At this early stage, I could identify patterns comprising similarities and dissimilarities emerging from the data. These were in keeping with narrative analysis strategies of taking into account sociality and temporality for example. The next stage was to search for words, phrases and events that were similar across the data, after which I grouped the codes together to form categories. As part of the analysis process, I re-examined categories to identify connections between them, with the intention of developing themes. The themes that emerged from data had to be in line with the key research questions of the study. In analysing the data, I was guided by Bourdieu's (1977; 1986; 1990) theoretical concepts and foundations created through the review of relevant literature.

The results of the analysis will be discussed in Chapter Four.

3.10 Trustworthiness and credibility

In this study, issues of trustworthiness and credibility were taken into account. According to Cohen et al. (2018), trustworthiness within qualitative research is often questioned by positivists in terms of its validity and reliability that is said not to be easy to address, owing to the individual interpretations of reality. Therefore, in addressing these issues within a qualitative framework, naturalistic researchers have used different terminologies to distance themselves from positivist assumptions. Casey, Dyson and Campbell (2009, p. 414) contend that within qualitative research, the notion of trustworthiness is used and can be achieved by determining if "the finding was dependable, credible and transferable".

Shenton (2004) contends that four criteria must be considered in qualitative research, namely, credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability, in order to achieve trustworthiness. In addressing credibility, the researcher must ensure that the research is accurate and suitable and that the measures meet what the study intends to achieve. To achieve credibility, I used triangulation where the two methods of collecting data, namely, focus groups discussions and semi-structured interviews, were used to strengthen the study (Rule & John, 2011). To be exact, the ideas and issues that emerged from the semi-structured interviews were further explored in the focus group discussions.

Member checking, which involves verifying the accuracy of the data with the participants, was used. To achieve member checking I shared the findings with participants by sending to the participants a copy of the interview transcript for them to review, verify and send comments to me via email or WhatsApp. This afforded the participants the opportunity to provide additional information, review and edit the responses captured and confirm if they were satisfied with how their responses had been captured.

All the participants accepted the interview transcriptions as a fair reflection of their stories and approved the English translation as accurate. The participants, however, requested me to change some of the wording, as they felt it did not capture the essence of what was intended. I gratefully changed the words to what the participant indicated was appropriate.

In addition to the above-mentioned measures, I used the process of peer checking, which involved having my supervisor critically read the work. In doing this, I followed Shenton's (2004) guidance who has underlined the need of having peers, colleagues, or academics to examine the analysis and interpretations from time to time to bring a fresh perspective and challenge assumption made in the dissertation. In this regard, I requested my supervisor to examine data analysis documents and provide feedback and raise questions to assist me to improve and strengthen the credibility and trustworthiness of the research process and product.

Transferability is concerned with whether the findings of a study can be generalised. This is often difficult to achieve in this research study, as the sample comprised a small group of participants, six to be exact. Within qualitative research, the researcher must ensure that there is sufficient information about the research context to assist other researchers and readers in general to make decisions about the transferability of findings and determine how to apply them to their own situations (Lincoln & Guba,1985). Achieving dependability, especially in a qualitative study is a challenging task. However, for this research study, the intention was to enable researchers to replicate study.

For this study, dependability was accomplished by combining, overlapping, and complementing research methods, namely, semi-structured interview and focus group discussions. Finally, to accomplish confirmability in the study, I ensured that the findings generated from the data collected reflected the experiences and views of the participants, instead of displaying the character and preferences of the researcher (Shenton, 2004).

3.11 Ethical considerations

According to Cohen et al. (2018), research ethics involve what the researcher must do in the conduct of the research study to ensure that the rights of the participants are respected, upheld and protected. Research ethics provide guidance to researchers in respect of ethical issues and requires individuals to take responsibility for their decisions and actions. Ethical clearance for this research was obtained from the University of KwaZulu-Natal Research Ethics Committee.

Secondly, the nature, focus and purpose of the study was shared with the participants, after which they were requested to participate. Upon consenting to participation, each participant was requested to formalise their consent to participate by signing the form for this purpose (See Annexure A). Participants were also informed that their decision to withdraw from the study at any point or stage of the study would not be held against them. The consent letter was issued to the participants to provide them with a record of what the research nature, focus, purpose and expectations of the study were for future reference. The interviews with the participants were only audio-recorded where the participants had provided such in the consent form.

Thirdly, I also considered the notion of non-maleficence in the study. Non-maleficence requires of the researcher to ensure that no harm arising from the research is attended to participants. To ensure anonymity and to protect the participants from harm, the confidentiality of their responses and identities was ensured through the use of pseudonyms, which were chosen by the participants. In addition to this, the participants were informed that information they provided would only be used for research purposes

Fourthly, I took into account the fact that all research must lead to positive changes and consequences (Cohen et al., 2018). The use of narrative inquiry in the study enabled the participants' voices to be foregrounded and provided a space for them to tell their stories in their own terms.

Lastly, the policy of the University of KwaZulu-Natal regarding research data states that all data collected must be given to the supervisor to store safely for a period of five years. To this end, copies of all the data collected were sent to my supervisor for safe storage in line with the policy.

3.12 Limitations

The most challenging part of the study was finding relevant participants, using purposive sampling, which involved selecting participants using specific criteria. For the participants to be selected to participate in the study, they had to meet specific criteria or characteristics. At the beginning of the study, I could not find students who met the criteria for participation. Due to the difficulties, to recruit the participants, I conducted purposive and snowball

sampling strategies using social media platforms, such as Facebook. I managed to recruit eight participants but as time went by, participants started withdrawing from participating in the study and I ended up with 6 participants who were interested in being part of the study. I then decided to use snowball sampling in order to locate eligible participants. This was extremely time-consuming. In the end, I decided to communicate with the lecturers from the School of Education to assist me to identify students who met the criteria for selection.

While I was collecting data, the plan was to conduct interviews in one of library discussion rooms, because industrial action had occurred in the beginning of the year, which led to the closure of the library. This had compelled me to look for alternative, suitable venues, such as an empty lecture theatre that I could use in the campus. For example, at some point I had to use the kitchen in the chemistry laboratory as a venue to conduct interviews due to a lack of available classes. In addition, after I had sent my supervisor interview transcripts, she felt that I had to conduct follow-up sessions with the participants in order to probe for more information in the areas that she had identified. This meant I had to set up interviews with the participants for the second time. However, due to the nationwide lockdown imposed to prevent the spread of the COVID-19 virus, I was forced to find alternate methods of interviewing the participants. For this reason, I had to rely on the WhatsApp and Zoom platforms for the follow-up sessions. This was time-consuming, because I had to work with two participants at a time. In addition, I had to work within the participants' schedules and had to teach myself and participants how to use the Zoom platform, which put additional pressure on me in terms of the timeline of the study. Using the Zoom platform was costly, as I had to provide data bundles for the participants in order for the focus groups discussions to be held.

3.13 Conclusion

In this chapter, the research methodology and design of the research study was presented and discussed. In addition, the reasons and justifications for pursuing particular methodological and design avenues were provided. Next, the chapter presented and discussed the approach and manner in which the data generated was analysed. Issues of and measures that were put in place to ensure trustworthiness and credibility were then discussed. In conclusion, ethical issues that were considered to ensure the respect, upholding and protection of the rights of the participants were discussed. The next chapter will present and discuss the findings of the study.

CHAPTER 4

PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the findings that emerged from the data produced through semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions, outlined, and discussed in the previous chapter. Drawing from Bourdieu's theoretical concepts, I analyse the research data in relation to the following key research questions, which guided the conduct of this study:

- What are the university experiences of high-performing black university students from low socio-economic backgrounds?
- How are the university experiences of high performing black students influenced by their social position in relation to class and race?
- How do high performing black students navigate their class positioning and experiences of success within the university?
-

To understand the experiences of black high-performing university students from low socio-economic backgrounds, I begin the chapter by looking at their past experiences of schooling, which influenced the way they navigated university life. The chapter is further organised into two main sections. The first and second major research questions are addressed in the first section (i.e., section 4.2). The theme in this section suggests that high-performing black students experienced university life differently compared to their middle and upper socioeconomic-class counterparts. Thus, could be attributed to the fact that contemporary universities have not addressed the various needs and struggles that successful black student, particularly those from previously disadvantaged sections of society, face. This related largely to those who were poor and black. In this section, the following themes are presented: *The past schooling experiences that influenced students' performance in university*; *Institutional factors that influence student's experience*; *Language barrier and its effect on learning*; and *Racial incidents on campus*.

The second section responds to the third key research question. In this section, I explore the various ways in which students negotiate the challenges that they encounter within the

university context in their attempts to access knowledge and learning. The broad theme, titled: *Students' strategies to negotiate the university context*, discusses the various ways in which the students who participated in this study navigated and negotiated their academic and social lives.

4.2 Impact of schooling on students' academic performance

This section addresses the first and second key research questions and focuses on the students' experiences of basic education and the influence this had on their experiences of university life.

4.2.1 Commitment from teachers: "*We would teach ourselves*"

Participants spoke of the various challenges that that they had experienced in basic education, the consequence of which was limited access to quality education. Participants also reported a lack of commitment from their teachers, that had a detrimental effect on their academic performance and negatively impacted their university experience. The following excerpts point to some of these experiences:

> Summer: "*Our Math's teacher also went for maternity leave, and we also did not have our Zulu teacher because she wasn't that committed to her work. What we did as the learners, we came as a group. We said, "what are we going to do since we don't have a teacher"? We decided that we would teach ourselves sometimes; we would go to other classes to ask what they have done? We would go back and sit down to read that section. If somebody understands the section better, they would come to class and explain it to us. Other times we ask teachers for other classes to come and teach us if they had a free period*".

> Anele: "*In terms of teachers, the whole term would end without having teachers in the classrooms. The teacher never finished the syllabus, and no one took disciplinary action. That is why students were failing because teachers never taught us, and no one uses to care about that. What use to help us is that we would go to other schools, to ask leaners where did they end with the syllabus for each of the subject. We would take information from the leaners of what they*

have been taught in class and we should start to study where these leaners from different school ended with the syllabus".

Ephraim: *"When teacher was absent, we had to ask teachers from other schools to come and help us. As learners, we had to make that the initiative, ask the teachers to stay behind after school, and teach us. For example, we did not have a geography teacher, and we did not have good math teachers. Sometimes we had to go to those other schools, and sometimes we didn't even have money to travel at all".*

What the narratives reveal is that, for the participants, various factors impacted their opportunities to access quality learning. Firstly, teachers were often absent for long periods, for instance, the "*whole term would end without having teachers in the classes room*", which resulted in them being unable to "*finished the syllabus*" (Anele). This seemed endemic in their schools and across specialisations. Secondly, teachers lacked commitment to teach learners. For example, Summer had a "*Zulu teacher [who] wasn't that committed to her work*", whilst Ephraim's Mathematics teacher was not a "*good math teachers"*. This had major implications for their academic performance, as teachers did not complete the syllabus, causing many of them to "*struggle with [Mathematics]".* For Ephraim, this led to him losing hope in performing well in the subject, which means that he ended up "*getting very low marks [in] mathematics*".

Anele pointed to experiencing being betrayed by authorities, as "*no one took disciplinary action*" against teachers who were not doing the work. This suggests that, for Anele, a culture of lack of commitment and accountability was supported on an institutional level. Research has consistently revealed that schools in rural areas often face numerous challenges that are unique to these contexts, such as lack of teacher discipline, commitment, inadequate teacher preparation and inadequate academic knowledge, which contributes to poor teaching and learning

According to research, schools in rural areas frequently confront various issues that are unique to these environments, such as a lack of teacher discipline and dedication, insufficient teacher preparation, and insufficient academic understanding, all of which lead to poor teaching and learning (Modisaotsile, 2012). Calitz (2015) has suggested that apart from

being poorly resourced, many schools often experience a lack of professionalism from teachers and school management structure, which has detrimental consequences for teaching and learning. For schools in socio-economically disadvantaged areas, this is a problem that is often coupled with absenteeism, low teacher morale and late coming by teachers, which has eroded the status of the teaching profession in South Africa (Calitz, 2015). This has implications especially for learners from low socio-economic backgrounds. According to Van Zyl (2016), students who have not had access to quality education in their previous schooling years are often condemned to poverty and social deprivation, resulting in them experiences challenges with the transition required to achieve academically at university. The absence of teachers can affect learners in negative ways, as they fall behind and struggle to cope with their work.

However, the data also pointed to the importance of resilience and agency for these participants. For instance, the participants could negotiate the factors mentioned above to achieve academically, which suggests that they possessed a degree of agency, as they did not wait for the assistance that was not going to come but established relationships with learners and "*teachers from other schools*". This supports Bourdieu's (1986) understanding of social capital in which resources such as information that can be accessed within one's social networks can be a useful source of advantage. Anele and Summer reported doing various things to help themselves, such as "*teach[ing] ourselves*" and requesting learners from other schools to assist them with schoolwork. Working class students were assisted by their institutional agents, who were their peers with knowledge and information (Barrett & Martina, 2012).

Participants in this study acquired and obtained cultural capital through establishing networks with other those who were more knowledgeable and experienced. For instance, Ephraim and Summer used cultural resources in the form of other teachers, "*asking the teachers to stay behind after school to teach them*". Thus, whilst they may not have had committed or quality teachers, teachers from other schools served as a source of capital for these students. Teachers, according to Barret and Martina (2012), are more likely to positively influence and serve as sources of social and cultural forms of capital for students. What is also notable in this instance is that it could be discerned that the participants had developed and internalised an agentic character, which influenced their habitus, enabling them to constantly '*take the initiative*' and responsibility for their own learning.

Luhman had a supportive teacher and principal, who helped shape his future through their inspiring actions and advice. The teacher and principal would emphasise the importance of hard work and dedication, which positively influenced Luhman as illustrated in the excerpt below:

> Luhman: "*The teachers were so dedicated; they were giving more of their time to make us fully understand the concepts without doing experiments. The motivation the principal gave us, I believe that why it was one of the key reasons the school produced lots of doctors and engineers. The principal was always telling us about getting distinctions and his goal for us to get many distinctions as we can. That made us even motivated when we studying and we make sure we get distinction not just pass. Anything less than a distinction to most of us was like fail. Teachers and principle were putting more effort in us and they were encouraging us to perform better."*

For Luhman, despite his previous school having inadequate access to the important resources such as "*laboratory facilities*", which made it difficult for practical work to be conducted, were compensated for by having "*dedicated teachers and a principal who set very high standards and encouraged us to perform better*". For Luhman, these teachers became the conduit for passing on the relevant resources for building cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986; Barret & Martina, 2012), which was required for their university education, career paths and future. For instance, Luhman reported that his high school teachers would advise him, saying that "*you won't have a problem in university if you study in this school because you will get use to studying frequently*". The principal would encourage them to take advantage of the available educational opportunities and to "[*get] distinctions*", which resulted in their "*school [producing] lots of doctors and engineers*". For Luhman, this was made possible by the fact that students were "*motivated when we studying and make sure we get distinction not just pass*".

In this study, the teachers and principal could change students' perceptions of their educational trajectories and offered new possibilities for them to rise above their marginalising experiences (Barrett & Martina, 2012). Luhman's school, for example, produced high-achieving students who could qualify as doctors and engineers, putting the

school ahead of the competition. This suggests that this orientation had become part of the teachers and principals' dispositions and habitus. For these students, studying and achieving meant nothing less than a distinction, which was part of the embodied practice of the school (Bourdieu, 1990). In addition, setting high standards for students' academic achievement meant that students took their studies seriously and "*put more effort... dedication towards their studies*". This supports the argument that teachers who are passionate about their work understand that it is their responsibility to encourage students to actively engage in their learning and become dedicated to their intellectual development (Mart, 2013; Czerniewics & Brown, 2014). From this, it could be deduced that there was a concerted drive to push learners out of their habitus towards a new habitus of a better life.

4.2.2 Resourcing of schools: " *You're not prepared enough*"

Most participants in the study had attended poor, rural schools, which served black learners only. In their narratives, participants often pointed out to their experiences of marginalisation and inadequate resourcing of the schools that they attended. For instance, participants reported that often their schools had limited textbooks, no libraries and no computer or science laboratories. Participants described different ways in which their school experiences led to them being marginalised, disempowered and underprepared for dealing with the challenges they would encounter at university. One of the key factors was of the inadequate resourcing of their schools, as expressed in the following excerpts:

> Summer: "*We didn't have laboratories; we were never exposed to what is really happening outside the classroom. The teacher would teach only the theory section associated with the practical's because we couldn't actually do the practical's. For the physics lab, we didn't have one we just read the textbook only*".

> Sandile: "*Back in 2011, I was doing grade 10 the school received donation from Telkom so we had a fully computer lab and we also had science labs but they were not functional. You would find students breaking all of the equipment's so we did not have proper facilities and even textbooks we had a shortage of textbooks. Even some of textbooks were outdated, our teacher used to teach what*

was on the year plan. The computers were stolen. There were no practical's so our school work was based on theory and we never had the proper bases of it".

Ephraim: "*Secondary and primary education obviously is of under resourced schools, poor teaching, poor learning, and no access to libraries. You're not prepared enough to writing Grade 12 exams and you do not have the textbooks. Since the school does not have all the resources to give all learners print outs. It was a very big problem, even when those print outs were done and teacher would print pages from a textbook especially for Geography. It becomes a problem because sometimes the pages are printed in black and white but it's not very clear such as the diagram in a textbook. I'll take that textbook go home and write everything from that text book from the first page until the last page".*

The above excerpts suggest that participants experienced inadequate access to the necessary educational resources in their schools, which was a key challenge manifesting as a barrier to learning. According to Summer and Sandile, there were no laboratory in their schools. In other words, none of the participants were equipped with relevant skills required to pursue courses in advanced science in higher education. This posed a threat to their successful learning, as science subjects were taught based on theory only, with little or no practical investigations involved to consolidate and make real those understandings. None of the participants attended a school that performed practical investigations in the subjects that required such. This was largely because their schools were "*not well resourced or had science labs but they were not functional*". Therefore, in these situations, teachers often resorted to teaching "*only the theory section associated with the practical's*". For instance, the teacher would focus on "*using the textbook, past papers and that is how we were prepared for the exam*". Makgato (2007) and Dhururmrja (2013) contend that practical investigations are important for simplifying and strengthening the learning of scientific concepts. In addition, practical investigations enhance interest in science, improve learners' investigative skills and knowledge, and makes the subject relevant (Makgato, 2007; Dhururmrja, 2013). In a broader scheme of things, this equips learners with skills required to participate in and contribute to science and solve problems facing society (Department of Basic Education, 2011).

However, for these participants, often science subjects were teacher-centred, taught through a talk-and-chalk method, which would potentially lead to declining interest, leading to students performing poorly in these subjects (Onwu, 1999; Lebata, 2014). Based on this observation, Chetty (2014) asserts that in poorly resourced schools, there is a deepening social stratification, which is gradually diminishing the prospects of learners accessing and participating in higher education. In fact, Chetty (2014, p. 92) argues, obtaining matric "credentials are simply an endurance test [with] …no [prospect] of receiving a critical education". Thus, for many black learners from socio-economically deprived contexts, achieving academically and succeeding in life is a utopian possibility.

Ephraim's high school was "*under resourced*" and there was "*no access to libraries*". This situation is problematic as libraries play an important role in development literacy skills in learners (Chakanika et al., 2012). For instance, the importance of a school library lies in the fact that it "…is a learning laboratory that provides opportunities for pupils to develop information skills and developing commitment to informal decision-making" (Chakanika et al., 2012, p. 12). Because Ephraim's school did not have a library, including textbooks, this suggests that learners were often inadequately prepared for Grade 12 and higher education. Often, learners had to "*share one book sometimes amongst five students and you only get this book once a month*".

According to Ephraim, his school did not have textbooks, despite the promise of adequate provisioning promised by the Department of Education (Department of Basic Education, 2014), which had a negative effect on student learning, given the fact that learners had to share a textbook (Onwu, 1999). For Chetty (2014), schools characterised by the absence of basic schooling resources, evident in the participants' narratives above, such as lack of committed teachers, libraries, textbooks, and laboratories have catastrophic consequences for the role of education in the lives of students. For instance, from Bourdieu's (1986) perspective, this may lead to inadequate transference of cultural capital and social 'stock' or resources, which children obtain from accessing basic schooling resources. Therefore, schooling often reproduces and reinforces the marginalisation of and class inequalities among learners (Bourdieu, 1990).

4.3 Impact of institutional factors on students

In this section, I discuss factors that constrained participants' abilities to negotiate the university context, followed by factors that enabled experiences to do so. In this study, participants described the struggles they faced when joining the university, which hindered their abilities for a smooth transition from school to university. The following section presents and discusses the factors as described by the participants.

4.3.1 Access to learning technologies: "*You are seeing foreign things*"

Most of the participants in this study came from low socio-economic backgrounds, attended rural and township schools and as indicated in the previous section, had inadequate or no access to resources, such as computers and laboratory equipment. When students joined the university, with limited exposure to computers and laboratories, it confronted them with potential humiliation, as suggested in the following excerpts.

> Summer: "*The practical part did not really help, since in high school we only read in the textbook and we've never seen these things with our eyes such as equipment's (Glassware's, chemicals etc.), instrument used in the labs like analytical HPLC system. We've never touched it and we've never operated it. You are even afraid to touch something because it's like you're going to break it and you have never seen it before. You are seeing foreign things and you don't know what is happening? In university for the practical's the marks were not good, for the first few weeks you are doing something you don't* even know".

> Luhman: "*Even in university I struggled to do practicals for a very long time and not doing practical at high school had a negative impact in varsity because I was getting average marks for the practical*".

> Sandile: "*A student from private school who already knows some of the concepts we are doing in class because they have already done it. These people already know how to use an instrument such as microscope. We never had that back in high school and it is your first time having an experience of the lab when you get to university. It's going to be a struggle too because you don't know how to use these instruments. So, there are people who get here knowing how to do these*

things and you would find them getting A's and you are struggling, you are getting 50's. The situation you are in actually push to you into adaption and really accepting that you are really here".

Ephraim: "*I don't have a good background and it is very embarrassing sometimes such as one could expect you to know easy things. I remember the first time we did an orientation program here. It was in the library, and the guy showed us how the university web system worked then I was expected to show that I understand what is being said by pressing a computer. I couldn't do anything because I had never pressed any computer in my life. I have seen a computer in my life but I had never touched a computer or a laptop before. You're not confident about your abilities, self-esteem is low because you don't think you can do it*".

Participants' narratives above suggest that experiences of basic education disempowered them as learners and prevented them from acquiring the required cultural and social forms of capital required to successfully negotiate learning. Summer experiences in high school was based on access to textbooks and she was awestruck with the kinds of equipment at the university: "…*we've never seen these things with our own eyes (glassware, chemicals, etcetera)*". When coming to university, participants were only "*seeing foreign things, and ... [didn't] know what [was] happening*". This experience of feeling disoriented is similar to what Lehman's (2014) study found, where students from low socio-economic background felt like 'foreigner[s]' in the university environment, because their previous schools were so dysfunctional that they could not provide them with the necessary cultural capital required for success at university.

Sandile's experiences are even more disturbing, because he juxtaposes his experiences to those of his fellow students from private schools, who "*already know how to use an instrument such as microscope*". This again points to the historical inequality that has a major influence on the performance of students (Chetty, 2014), where bimodal schooling is evident and the contrast between advantage and disadvantage is there for everyone to get shocked. As a result, Luhman, Summer and Sandile struggled during lectures on practical investigations as they "*...[didn't] know how to use these instruments*" (Sandile). As result, the participants "[*ended] up getting 50's, average marks for practical's*". Ephraim lack of

awareness and skills in one of the crucial technologies, namely, a simple computer, is an illustration of the depth of deficiency and inadequacy in educational service provisioning. For instance, when the four participants joined the university, the experiences made them develop feelings of uncertainty and inadequacy, which influenced their habitus. Bourdieu (1990) points out that adapting to a new habitus in unfamiliar environment may result in fragmented identity construction, which seems to have been the case with the students who participated in this study.

Given the fact that their class identity did not provide them with adequate cultural capital to navigate the university space, they tended to feel like foreigners or outsiders in their own lives (Lehmann, 2014, p. 2). For instance, the fact that the participants were from disadvantaged families means that they may not have had the resources required to buy access in highly resourced middle-class schools. Their lack of knowledge of taken for granted ideas in respect of simple equipment suggests a class of fields, where, for instance, simple things, such as switching on a computer may invite multiple disadvantages for them. It could be concluded in this study that, due to limited access to resources, such as computer literacy and laboratory experience, understanding simple university rules presented as a challenge for the participants, who were often uninformed of university practice (Reay et al., 2010). The participants, especially, Sandile, Ephraim and Anele, were emotionally affected because they lacked awareness of university standards and norms, which led to feelings of self-doubt, insecurity, uneasiness, and alienation. This suggests that their "*self-esteem* [was] *low because* [they didn't] *think* [they could] *do it*" (Ephraim).

4.3.2 Access to financial resources: "*Will I be here next year?*"

Entry into higher education for students from socio-economically deprived backgrounds provides an opportunity for them to change their economic situation at a personal and family levels. Financial obstacles were the most common factors that hindered participants' access to learning in higher education. The views shared by the participants suggests that access to money was unequivocally the main barrier to academic success, as reflected in the excerpts below:

> Summer: "*My first year at university was harder because I didn't have money to buy everything's that I needed. I don't have funding such as NSFAS in my first*

year, in other times I would receive R600 from my parents to buy groceries such as food and cosmetics and need to add clothes. That money is too small to buy toiletries and enough food but I was able to manage. What I did since the money was not enough to buy everything, I talked to my roommate about buying grocery together and she agreed. That helped a lot because I was able to buy toiletries and have money to buy bread for the whole month".

Ben: "*One thing that I knew was that there was no money back home I knew there was no way my mother was going to pay for my studies in South Africa and my uncle is a student with no job. After my first year I remember I was owing R26 000 and I had two certificates in merits. I went to different organization such as Gift of Givers, Catholic Church in PMB. It was unsuccessful and no one was willing to help. I was feeling down and I questioned myself why did I come to this country? Will I be there next year? It was never granted, throughout me degree I lived in fear will I be able to pay off the debt because it was always increasing. I remember my uncle going the next morning to the school of physic and chemistry and he was asking to see the Dean. My uncle told the Dean that I don't have money to register and the Dean check the system and told my uncle I have received a scholarship worth R20 000 because I did well in my first year".*

The stories told by the participants revealed that access to financial resources is one of the key criteria for entrance to higher education institutions, but also one of the key hindrances to managing life at university. When Summer entered the university field, she did not have NSFAS funding. As result, she struggled to provide herself with basic needs, such as food and toiletries. Her mother, who is a single-parent and unemployed, could afford to give her R600 that she would use to buy these essentials. Thus, whatever she received from her mother was not "*enough for me to buy all those things – toiletries*". According to Walker and Mathebula (2020), low-income students do not always have families who can provide them with the support required to succeed at university. These students are often exposed to hardship and stress arising from getting into university and not having what is required to navigate life. When this happens, students often feel deserted and stranded in these struggles for survival, as they often have no cover from their families, who are often struggling for cover themselves. For the students who participated in this study, this was the biggest

inequality they had ever faced, it is historical, contextual and intergenerational – a case for being in a situation that is none of your creation.

However, Summer's narrative suggests a promising semblance of initiative and a sense of agency. For instance, Summer devised a strategy to overcome her financial challenges by collaborating with her fellow roommate to share expenses. This relationship was fruitful and enabled her some space to negotiate the financial crisis that she was experiencing in her life. Summer, for instance, successfully negotiated her struggle of not affording basic needs". This is in line with Bourdieu (1986) understanding of social capital. For Summer, establishing a supportive relationship with her roommate enabled them to manage their money in a manner that enabled them to "*buy toiletries… bread for the whole month*". Summer learned that to navigate university space, she needed friends, which was her applying her agency to navigate her situation. Forming such relationships, although not an ideal one, may be useful and valuable for students who may be in a similar situation to that of Summer, as a means to university life (Walker & Mathebula, 2020).

Ben was from a well-educated and successful family, but he did not receive financial support from them. Further, he states that *"there was no money back home."* This is one of the reasons he was chosen as a participant for this study. Ben was faced with problems of not having money to pay his first-year debt. He could not rely on his mother, who was single, and his uncle who was also "*… a student with no job…*". Despite receiving "*two certificates in merits*" for his modules, Ben could not obtain funding from outside organisations. He reports that he had tried the "*Gift of Givers and the Catholic Church*", all in vain. This suggests that despite having the required academic capital of two merit certificates, this was not sufficient to resolve Ben's challenge of access to economic capital, which threatened his cultural capital in respect of his university studies.

Furthermore, Ben did not have access economic capital (money) to pay the outstanding debt, which caused him to start questioning himself on his reasons for coming to "*this country* [South Africa]", in which he constantly "*lived in fear will I be there next year*". According to Soria et al. (2014), working class students may be stunned by the financial challenges they would experience after gaining entry at a university, and may often not sufficiently resources or capital to face the situation. In other words, what they believed was a breakthrough could be followed by regret. For instance, Summer and Ben's financial troubles, instead of getting

better, were exacerbated by the fact that they could not receive funding from the NSFAS. Thus, they experienced a difficult transition from school to higher education. Ben's situation illustrates the fact that being admitted to university may not necessarily translate to access to higher education for students from socio-economically deprived sections of society.

According to Masutha (2020), economic capital is passed down from one generation to the next, and Ben, in his situation, could not access wealth that is not there. As such, he began to question the possibility of a better future, if he cannot pay off his historical debt. However, his academic performance and the cultural resources, through the intervention by his uncle allowed him to access institutional resources in the form of a scholarship. Waterfield et al. (2019) have pointed out that successful black students, who come from poor backgrounds, may not have sufficient economic capital immediately when they enter university, but may gradually build this as they become recipients of bursaries and scholarship because of their academic achievements. This suggests that universities and governments must make bursary and scholarship opportunities available for this category of students.

4.3.3 Intersections of race and class: "… *led to me feeling black*"

Participants reported that the issue of race relations was difficult to understand and manage. They reported that some members of other racial groups were unwelcoming, which subjected them to experiences of rejection. When this happened, participants often viewed themselves as different and inadequate, based on their race and low socio-economic status. This had repercussions for them and the relationships they had or wanted to have with their fellow students, impacting negatively on their opportunities to build the required capital.

The excerpts from the participants' narratives below illustrates that the nature of the intersection of race and class and the influence this had on the participants. For the participants, these experiences served as a constant reminder of the meaning of the experience of being black and poor in a higher education. The following excerpts provides a glimpse into this complex mix of toxicity:

> Summer: "*The only time I feel black is when people who are still racist distributed, assignment notes, textbook material by only giving people who are their races and we[black] wouldn't get what is being distributed. It makes me*

sad to witness such things because I only heard about that kind of behavior from other people never once have, I thought I would see it happening to me or people close to me".

Luhman: "*I felt those differences, it did have an impact to see other students who were the same age as you driving cars and others wearing nice clothes are more privileged than Black students. Those who are driving nice cars are students from better backgrounds especially the Indians and White students. While I was wearing very bad clothes it something that was very painful in my heart. I like wearing nice clothes and be more presentable because we as black we have challenges by trying to cover our backgrounds and looking like you coming from better affording families".*

Sandile: "*Indians they're just tolerating us blacks you could see that they have a problem with us. Here at this institution, I did experience that. Well, last semester we were actually racially divided into groups, when it comes to the science practical's that we did and I had five Indians in my group. I was the only black person in the room but at some point, Indians would be with themselves. For example, during practical's I felt left out and to some* degree *excluded because these Indian students got along with each other led to me feeling black*".

Luhman and Summer's words suggest that they might have felt that a sense of otherness, when comparing themselves to individual from other race groups who, they believed, were more privileged compared to them. What they saw, they suggest, was not possible for them, because their class and racial was nurtured by its deep historical roots. For them, because of apartheid, they continued to be subjected to inequality and lack of access to the forms of capital required to become a better person (Khunou, 2015).

Summer and Sandile speak to another important issue of "*feel*[ing] *black*". This was experienced even when things were distributed to students, but black students were excluded. This sense of feeling black was not something they had thought that they would experience at university. The experience left Summer feeling "*sad*" as she never imagined that this would happen to her. Sandile's first encounter with the Indian students, during the lecture on the practical component for his subject left him uneasy and feeling excluded. For

Sandile and Summer, "*feeling black*" was a negative experience society's way of foregrounding and elevating their displacement in their own lives (Kessi & Cornell, 2015).

The awareness of "*being black*" led to them feeling that, even whilst their difference may also have been class-related, being black was even more salient (Kessi & Cornell, 2015). For them, this was compounded by the fact that their schooling experiences had not exposed them to other races (Boonzaier & Mkhize, 2018; Vincent & Hlatshwayo, 2018). These participants' experiences are similar to what Lehmann (2014, p. 7) has pointed out about the experiences of students from low socio-economic backgrounds, that when entering an unfamiliar field, such as a university, they may feel like "fish out of water", with no safety or chance of survival.

For Luhman, the experience could be regarded as an illustration of the impact of class-based inequality, in which the privileged white and Indian students are used as a standard of a good life and a template of self-critique. This finding is similar to that of Steyn's (2016), which posits that inequality based on class may be more pronounced in the lives of students at university. For Luhman, his clothes are a symbolic representation of who he is in terms of his class and racial background, which he described as "*painful in my heart*". This induces a sense of wanting to be somewhere, not in his body and life, a place where he can wear "*nice clothes and be more presentable*". However, his reality reminds him of the hard-to-break ties that he has with his current situation.

> Ben: "*I like to wear a clothing brand call Lacoste and here in South Africa student don't like to wear that brand. Other times you can just see it your choice of clothing is different and Yeah obviously I would buy some SA brands that student wear".*

Ben, who was an international student, however, seemed to have already adapted to wearing the famous brands, such Lacoste, which suggests his middle-class background but in South Africa he is poor. However, whilst this may have signalled a new habitus from his home country, he had realised that this brand did not symbolise any real access to economic power here, as most "*South African students don't like to wear that brand*". To this end, he had to begin a process of adapting to suit middle-class standards in South Africa, buying "*SA brands that student wear*". Whilst Luhman did not have the financial resources to do this, he

was aware that wearing the right kind of clothes or the accoutrements of wealth was one way to feel a sense of belonging. This adaptive process is explained by Lehman (2014), where he points out that black students often have to shift their habitus to acquire cultural capital through developing new dispositions and tastes regarding food, cars, clothes, and their outlook on life. This form of cultural capital is often reflected in the way students talk, dress, and entertain themselves, as evidenced in the case of Ben (Bourdieu, 1986). The narrative of the participants, for this study, suggests a complex mixture of experiences of race and class, often leading to toxicity and dizziness, a sort of cultural divide, in the lives of students from disadvantaged sections of society (Torres, 2009).

4.3.4 Effects of language on learning

During individual interviews, participants were asked about the challenges they experienced. Participants reported one's learning could be traced back to their years of schooling, where foundations for future learning were not properly established.

The following sections presents and discusses findings in respect of the participants' experiences of language at university.

4.3.4.1 Fractured learning, sinking foundations: "*It is easy for them*"

Participants reported the various ways in which their experiences regarding language had often left them disempowered and underprepared for the demands of life at university. These are described in the excerpts below:

> Anele: "*When it comes to English, I did not understand it compared to isiZulu. Back in high school, all our subjects were taught in isiZulu, including the English subject, and I would understand it much better if explained in isiZulu"*.

> Ephraim: "In *high school, I was not in an English-speaking environment, but English is what I need to pass every other subject expect isiXhosa. I had to do my best to understand English, and some people speak English but are not very good writers".*

Ben: "*My whole life, I have been learning in French, and It is a French education system just like here you guys study English. Everything was taught in French; English was only used in English subject since there was an English curriculum. The teachers taught us basic grammar, and the English subject was taught a little bit. It was never serious because no one could speak English anywhere in high school, and English language was challenging*".

Summer: "*For students [White, Indian, Coloured, Black students] who come from model C high schools where they speak English in class with their peers, it is easy for them, but it is not the same for someone like me who speaks isiZulu most of the time in class. English is their home language, and they speak this language even at home. I speak Zulu now. I am forced to speak English, and my English is not that great*".

The excerpts from the participants' narratives above suggest their schooling did not provide them with the required cultural/linguistic and social capital to negotiate learning in higher education. None of the participants were in high schools that were "*English-speaking environments*". Many also experienced disempowerments, which prevented them from learning, as their teachers' taught subjects in isiZulu, "*including the English subject*", and where English was the subject, they were taught "*basic grammar*". According to Janks (2004, p.1), when schools fail to provide learners with access to a dominant language, this perpetuates their "marginalization in a society that continues to recognize this language as a mark of distinction". This marginalisation can be detected in the participants' narratives. For them, no one in their schools took English "*serious*[ly] *because no one could speak English anywhere in high school*". However, teachers' refusal or unwillingness to speak or teach in English could be understood as their own lack of preparation in the language.

Language has symbolic value and power (Bourdieu, 1991, p. 170) and teachers, as reported by participants in this study, may not "recognize its legitimacy", which means that its teaching for them may have been camouflaged, and their use of mother tongue a cry for help. However, Janks (2004) indicates that there has to be an intricate balance between these two positions. Failing to manage the positions properly may result in the "access paradox" (cited in Janks, 2004), as learners may be excluded. For this study, there is no balance, as the consequence of a teacher's inability to provide learners with the requisite expertise in

English resulted in serious deficiencies in the foundations for future learning and impacted negatively on the participants' abilities to navigate university life, as they were "*not very good writers*". When this happened, they, thus, lost their "chance of access" (Bourdieu, 1991, p. 56) and their inability to acquire the language meant that "*English language was challenging*" and "*my English is not that great*". Participants' experiences in high schools influenced their habitus, because they had learned that English was not important, which had repercussion for them at university. Deficiencies in the foundations in English had implications for their experiences of learning in English at higher education. The following excerpts suggests deficiencies in the participants' linguistic capital.

> Ephraim: "*In terms of academic performance, I did not grasp everything in class because of my language barrier, and I do not understand the words that lecturers were using*".

> Anele: "*In university, it does have an impact [language barriers]; sometimes, I find myself not understanding and resulted in having to cram certain things. If I have to explain the concept, I just see that I will not be able to explain it*".

> Ben: "*When I came to university, I was able to handle the course, but the only issue was the language not understanding when my teacher is explaining during my first year*".

> Luhman: "*In university, it has happened that I stayed with students from deep rural areas and never used English as a means of communication. It became a problem because I did not have the confidence to speak English, and I was not used to speaking English in high school. That is why it was a challenge to express myself in English at the university*".

It was difficult for the four participants to transition from high school, where they were supposed to be taught in English, to university, where modules were delivered in English. Bourdieu (1990, p.53) contends that habitus is a "structuring structure", which is shaped by one's past experiences. This suggests that, for this study, participants' experiences had a ripple effect in that they also shaped their current practices and experiences. It is for this reason that the inability of basic education schooling to provide participants with the

linguistic capital required for success at university resulted in them "*not understanding when "my teacher is explaining*", not "*grasp*[ing] *everything in class…not understand the word that they were using*" The consequence of lack of access to linguistic resources or capital affected them negatively, academically and emotionally, as they lacked the "*confidence to speak English*" and had to rote-learn and end up unable to "*explain the concepts*". Rodriguez (2009) contends that language and the ability to communicate is key to one's sense of belonging. Thus, the continuous privileging of English within institutions of higher learning, at the expense of indigenous languages, may have disempowered the participants and contributed to their academic deficiencies. There was, therefore, dissonance between the participants' habitus and that of the institutional field of the university, in which English was valued highly (Meuleman et al., 2015).

4.3.4.2 Fear of derision: "*I feel that my opinion is not important*"

Participants also spoke of the emotional pain that they experienced because of their inability to express themselves properly in English. Swartz et al. (2018, p. 69) contend that the "ability to communicate effectively in English is linked to intelligence and academic capacity". This is suggested in the narratives of Anele and Luhman below:

> Anele: "*I saw that it is better to study by myself, in study groups if you do not speak proper English, they belittle you. Someone would say things wrong; they would try to correct them, and sometimes I would feel my opinion is not important because my English is so bad when I speak. They [black students] would listen to people's opinions who speak better English than me and who went to model C high schools*" …… "*Indian and White students never use to help with improving my English. People who use to laugh were black students if you spoke not so good English, but White and Indian students never use to mind if you cannot speak proper English based on my experiences*".

> Luhman: "*Well, others may laugh at you because you are failing to speak English and found that even themselves [black students] are not even good in English, but they laugh. I would make sure that I speak properly in class so that nobody would laugh at me when speaking*".

Anele experienced fear of being negatively evaluated and criticised by her peers, as she could not express herself correctly in English. Being corrected in her study groups, during which she could not "*speak proper English*" resulted in her feeling "*belittle*[ed]". This supports Batiha et al.'s (2018) contention that, in such a case, the experience of English for the participants may have served to expose their weaknesses, more than providing them with a support mechanism for learning. As could discerned from Anele's experience, instead, the experience of English made her feel ashamed and swallow her opinions: "*my opinion is not important because my English is so bad when I speak*". For her, the fear of being ridiculed compelled her to focus on trying to protect herself from ridicule, where she feels that it is "*it is better to study by myself*".

However, Anele also reported that, whilst Indian and White students did not help her to improve her English, the people who mocked and laughed at her most were her fellow "*black students*". This is similar to Luhman's experience. According to Bourdieu (1986), successful black students who spoke correct or standard English, considered themselves as the proper carriers of colonial linguistic habitus, even though what they spoke was not their home language (Lan, 2003). By laughing, correcting, and not listening to black students who are struggling with English, this may be their way of expressing their disgust or hatred again themselves and their attempt to acquire some cultural superiority. In Luhman's case, although he did not experience difficulties with speaking English, he almost always policed his usage of the language in order to ensure that "*I speak properly in class*" and there is no "*mispronunciation*" of words in his participation and engagement with his fellow students.

Habitus moulds and shapes one's experiences growing up. Consequently, one does not acquire only language, but also a sense of potential value in the field they inhabit. Participants who had grown up not being exposed to English, felt that they had less value. Unlike Luhman, Anele decided to isolate herself and stop participating in study groups. In this instance, Anele suffers as a victim of target to target discrimination or horizontal oppression (Hardiman & Jackson, 1997). This delegitimises black accent and associates any divergent accent with a lack of intelligence and ability. This finding is supported by Swartz et al. (2018), who argue that the shaming and marginalisation associated with accent is a dehumanising process that must be challenged. Anele had internalised being inferior and had begun to accept the shaming experience as legitimate. For Bourdieu (1984), it is this acceptance of this configuration of distinction that led to Luhman and Anele seeing

themselves as inferior. Hargreaves (2004) has argued that no matter how successful black and poor students are, they may still curiously feel as if they do not belong.

While Luhman and Anele responded in ways that caused them fear and shame, Summer, instead, used different racial groups' English-speaking abilities as a source of support to improve her own competence.

> Summer: "*I would say yes. When you speak English with other racial groups [Whites, Indians, Coloured and Black students] you pay attention and listen to the way they pronounce words. Also, you listen to how they structure words when saying something, and you can see what you said was wrong. I can see how they say it, and this is how it is said and see where I went wrong. Therefore, I'm able to see where I need to fix; I would go and practice to make sure I become better in speaking English. I would come across another student, listen to how they pronounce words, listen to where I went wrong, and go back to practice. If they are saying something, you do not understand you go back and look up that word. I would ask when they say something I do not understand, and I ask what does that word mean*".

Here, Summer displays sense of agency, instead of feeling ashamed for the way she speaks English. Summer used "*other racial groups* [Whites, Indian, Coloured and Black *students*]" English-speaking abilities as a device to support in her efforts to improve her English. Summer was conscious of the way she spoke; it was important for her to "*listen to how they structure words when saying something…….and I can see how they say it……. and where I went wrong*". Summer acquired social, linguistic and cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986) from the networks that she had established in order to improve her English competence and academic performance. This was important for Summer as without working knowledge of English, she could not function socially and academically (Staubhaar, 2013).

4.3.5 Establishing friendships: "*There was going to be a cultural clash…*"

Participants reported that they tended to form stronger relationship with their fellow black students more than with students from other racial groups. Participants cite a range of reasons for their preference of intra-racial friendships. To this end, participants reported that:

Luhman: "*I did not make friends with other racial groups Indians and White, it is not easy to ask help from them, they are the last option because they are racist. Some of them don't want even to talk with you and that is why I would rather ask help form the Black students. Another Black student may be rich but it's easier to interact with them because they are Black and it's easier to understand each other better than a white person. It's not harder to interact with rich blacks because we are the same race*".

Ephraim: "*Both social and racial backgrounds matter. I had White friends who could have become my best friends, but I still had to push them away, because I felt that I was not going to be a very good friend. I felt that there was going to be a cultural clash and I wasn't going to be able to interact. I felt like language was going to be issue, the love of social status was going to be an issue and cultural as well. it was also easy for me to be friends with a Zulu person who shared some of my beliefs and the same struggles. Some were Black like me and good people (white people) who really cared about me. I was not able to reciprocate that care because I felt I was at a lower class than them". I felt like they were at a higher level than me*".

Anele: "*In honours that was when I started having friends who were Indian and whites and we would help each other. The Indians and White never use to have this stigma that they are whites so they know more and we use to struggle together. I feel like since the class was small, we needed each other as a class member and I felt like if I have done it on my own, I would have struggled especially when it come tutorial*".

The above excerpts from participants' narratives suggest that intersections of class and race were key determinants of friendships in this study. For Luhman and Ephraim, preference was socialising with students from their own race groups. Participants cited a range of reasons for these preferences. Firstly, Luhman believed that Indian and White students were 'racist', which made it difficult for him to develop friendships with them. For him, developing friendships with them was difficult, because they "*don't want to talk to you*". Researchers have found that inadequate communication and preconceived ideas in

establishing relationships may be problematic. In the instance of this study, the inadequacies to communicate well in English and racial stereotypes that Luhman and Ephraim harboured, tended to impact on them socially, which resulted in them distancing themselves from their peers on racial grounds (Vincent and Hlatshwayo, 2018, p. 122). Thus, even in instances where they needed help, they would approach students in their own racial groups. This is despite for example Luhman finding his own racial group sometimes difficult to negotiate as indicated previously. For them, class differences within black students did not matter, as they would still help and support him. Being from the same race group felt safe for them, they believed, they shared the same interests and could understand one another, and class often was not an issue. Contrary to this, their preconceived ideas about those from a different race, made them lose the potential benefits of those friendships. Especially for Ephraim "*both social and racial background* [mattered]". For instance, he would avoid initiating friendships with White students, as he believed he "*was not going to be a very good friend*". His reasoning is based on a cultural clashes and racial stereotypes, which, he believed, would make establishing and maintaining relationships difficult. This suggests that Ephraim has, for instance, had internalised normative notions about individuals who come from a racial group that was different from his own, even "[pushing] *them away*". For instance, Ephraim reported that he often found it "*easy to be friends*" with "*Zulu people who 'shared some of my beliefs and same struggles*".

Using Bourdieu's (1986) notion of social capital, participants developed social capital through establishing same-race networks. This is not surprising as students often form bonds with students who share similar cultural background and or experiences (Carter, 2007). However, contrary to what Ephraim did, Anele could leave her comfort zone such that during her "*Honours… [she found] friends that were Indians and Whites*". Her White and Indian friends became her source of social capital (Bourdieu, 1986), which enabled her access to the knowledge that was important for her achieving in her honours degree. From this instance, it could be discerned that Anele was willing to push boundaries and establish meaningful relationships with students from other race groups.

4.4 Relationships with family and friends

Successful black students who participated in this study reported challenges with relationships with their families and friends. For the participants, this was a disconcerting

space, because, for various reasons, they were no longer recognised and accepted by their families and friends.

4.4.1 Intellectual distance from friends: "*It feels as if I'm lecturing them*"

A significant proportion of the participants reported that they were dislocated from their friends immediately after going to university. Participants reported that they had unsuccessfully made several attempts to reconnect with their friends and had begun developing a sense of disconnection and could not relate to their friends anymore. Their explanation was often that they were not the same anymore; they were now a changed person. This is how they described their experiences of their relationships with their friends:

> Anele: "*My relationship with my friends from rural area has changed, my friends would always find something negative to say, it was like there is competition and I did not understand where it come from. All my friends from the rural areas has never been to university. Obviously since I go university, I wore better clothes than them. I would see them, try their best to dress like me*".

> Sandile: *"Yeah it has changed drastically, it has changed so much. We actually had some sort of get together with my high school friends and I felt like the connection wasn't here at all, because these people actually distance themselves from me. My friends actually got a head of me when it comes to university, because it was the time, I actually took a gap year and my friends were actually doing their first year. I am different person, I'm not the same person that they used to hang out with back at high school*".

> Luhman: "*Yeah, it has changed like we don't have anything in common because most of them are more on drugs. I don't use drugs so we don't have anything in common, since I have come to university and some of them did not feel comfortable when they were with me. I feel like that makes my friends not be comfortable around me, it feels as if I'm lecturing them, to see how bad they are and I think that why most of them ended up distancing themselves from me. It no longer the same. That is why don't want to be caught up in those kinds of activities as such using drugs since I'm concerned about having a good future*".

As indicated above, participants noticed a growing intellectual distance between themselves and their old friends at home. Participants spoke of friendships that were no longer the same. For Anele, her friendships had changed, because there seemed to be competition in the minds of her friends, which she could not understand. She attributed this distance to the differences in clothing, as she now wore better clothes than them. For her, this had created competition among them, where her friends would "*try their best to dress*" like her. Using Bourdieu's (1986) notion of cultural capital, when students from working class contexts enter a new elite environment, they often must adapt to the demands of the new environment. Often, these successful black students do this by copying ways of life from their privileged peers, which suggests that they gradually becoming more like them both in taste and disposition. In the instance of this study, when Anele began to attend at university, she developed a new form of cultural capital, which often manifested in the change in how she went about life.

Since Anele was exposed to the way privileged student dressed, she had developed a new disposition or habitus. The problem was that, like her peers from middle- and upper-class, when she went back home, she could no longer relate to her old friends anymore. According to Lehmann (2014), fading relationships with friends at home is one of the challenges that students from working class context must face when they get to university and begin to acquire new forms of capital. Sandile described similar experiences, which made him realised recognised that the "*connection was [no longer] here*" with his friends. For instance, when he went out with them, he felt he was "*not the same person that they used to hang out with back at high school*". In Bourdieu's (1986) terms, Sandile and Anele have outgrown their old habitus that had become foreign, while the new habitus was gradually becoming familiar and reassuring for them.

Luhman experienced disparity in social relationship with friends and started distancing himself from his friends since we "*don't have anything in common*". In this instance, there is a clash of disparate fields. Luhman's new habitus was more in keeping with that of the university, which was closer to his life goals and aspirations for the future. Instead, he was seen by his friends as arrogant and had become a person they could not relate to because he "*lectures them*". However, Luhman was unconcerned about losing friends who did not want a "*better life*". This suggests that Anele, Sandile and Luhman had undergone what may be called habitus transformation: "*I am a different person*".

4.4.2 Support from family: "*They have never showed any interest*"

Being at university often led to some participants feeling as though their families did not support them. This often left them alienated and disconnected from their parents, as illustrated in the excerpts:

> Sandile: "*No, I don't talk to my family about my experiences at university Um, its none of their business, the fact that they have never showed any form of interest in the first place and its simple means that they don't want anything to do with it. There are times when you just need to talk to someone, not a stranger but, someone really close to you and someone whom you can relate too." A call from home or a message or an SMS or a WhatsApp text from home could really make a difference. We do have moments where we break down, it's difficult above all of that we still make it*".

> Summer: "*When I came to university, I was alone, I did not have anyone to turn to, when I was faced with difficulties, and I and no one closer to me to give me advice. It's not that I could not talk with my parents, I did talk with them it just that they were not close to me since I moved to PMB and it` wasn't not the same anymore because we talked on the phone most of the time. I had no one to go to so that I could talk about my problems and therefore I was forced to make decision on my own*".

> Anele: "*When first got accommodation at the university, I asked them if I could have money to pay for rent for the first few months while waiting for NSFAS to pay. My parents would say they don't have money because at home there are lots of children and I must understand. I just did not understand if my parents even cared about me because they knew I am at the university. My parents did not motivate me in anywhere in terms of financial, emotional and physical support. It is hurtful, you may find that you have received a certificate of merit and the person who are showing the certificate too does not seem to be happy for you because, you expect them to be happy for you. This has always made me*

sad; I would see other students on campus who are struggling financial but their parents would support them".

The above excerpts from the participants' narratives paint instances of deep pain, isolation and disconnection with people who they loved and trusted. Participants reported lack of emotional and financial support from their families affected them negatively and exacerbated feelings of being stranded. Sandile's parents lack of interest affected him negatively emotionally and had caused him to distance himself from his family, not informing them of his experiences. He felt that this caused him to break down, when a "*call from home or a message via SMS or WhatsApp*" would have helped. Similarly, Summer reported a similar situation with her family, feeling disconnected from them.

Whilst Sandile and Summer's disconnection caused them distress on an emotional level, for Anele, lack of care and support from her parents was financial. Whilst she was alert to the fact that her family's financial situation was dire, having to support "*lots of children*", she had hoped that they would want to be part of celebrating her achievements. In addition, it was hard knowing that did have anyone to turn to when she needed assistance to "*pay for rent for the few months while waiting for NSFAS*. She was frustrated even by the fact that her "*certificate of merit*" did not make them happy and felt envious of other students whose parents were with them.

The participants' experiences are similar to Lehmann's (2014, p. 2) understanding of experiences of students from working-class who often undergo a habitus dislocation, a "painful dislocation between the old and newly developed habitus". Anele, Sandile, Summer had developed a new habitus, one of independence from their parents, which had compelled them to "*make decisions on [their] own*".

Whilst Summer, Anele and Sandile reported lack of support from their families, Luhman, Ephraim and Ben's family supported them. Support from their families helped them in several ways, as reflected in the extracts below:

Luhman: "*My achievements, I tell my parents everything, because they put more effort in me being in varsity. I feel like it highly essential that I tell them. They were giving me money for food because I got NSFAS, they supported me for few*

months while I was still waiting for NSFAS. The support was during the first few months of my university. When run out food I would call them so they gave me money".

Ephraim: "*I do, I talked to them about everything that takes place at varsity tell them about my struggles and I tell them about the good things as well. I do small jobs at varsity and so they are part of my university experiences. They (father, mother) were helpful in paying for registration, accommodation, new clothes and my groceries. My family's financial and emotional support was there and it was strong and consistence. My father was here with all of the everyday motivation, warning, directions and instructions. Don't do this son, do this. My mother was here with all of the concerns, saying how are they treating you? Where are the bullies? What is going on there*? *My parents don't have education and not even primary education*".

Ben: "*My uncle knew what was going on in my life mostly on a daily basis. I was staying with him and when I was home, we talked about how the day was and what challenges I encounter. We would try to come up with ways to figure it out, and in term of lunch I was sorted because he would buy me lunch. Basically, my life was about get home, eat, studying and sleep. That really helped a lot just to focus mainly on school stuff. I Remembered asking he how I'm going to pay for my fees, he told me if I work hard, you could get scholarships that could pay for my fees. I think it helped me to be focused, having no distraction, not going out and mainly my time was all about studying*".

Whilst disadvantaged families may lack economic capital, they support their children in various other ways (Roksa & Kinsley, 2019). Family support appears to be mostly important especially during the first year at university. Contrary to Anele's experiences with her family, Luhman's parents supported him financially while he "*was still waiting for university*". This support was not once-off as they supported him each time when he ran out of food. Ben was an international student from another country and the financial and support was there. Ben experienced a similar kind of support from his uncle, who would "*sort*" out his lunch. Ephraim, a student from Eastern Cape, was also supported by his family. His parents placed significant value in higher education, despite the fact that they did not "*have*

education and not even primary education". Spiegler (2018) has pointed out that parents from working class contexts who value education often want their children to do better at university or school and would support them to the best of their ability, as it happened in Luhman and Ephraim's case. Care and concern were shown in other ways by Ephraim's mother in helping her know more about her son's life in relation to social interactions. All these actions contributed to ensuring that participants told their families everything about their university life. Mothers play a significant role in their children's lives, providing what Gillies (2006) calls emotional capital required to succeed.

Similarly, Ben's uncle would convey messages like work hard. Ben's uncle always underlined the importance of education and supported him in his academic pursuits. In this instance, Ben's uncle served as valuable source of motivation for him, encouraging him to work hard, which helped Ben to stay "*focused, having no distraction, not going out and his time was all about studying*". This in line with what literature has revealed. For instance, Roksa and Deutschlander (2018) reported that students may benefit from the support of their families. Family could be a source of cultural capital. Disadvantaged students often do not have cultural capital to engage successfully in education. In this study, participants drew cultural resources from their families which supported them in their university life. Norodien-Fataar (2016), explained successful black working students use the cultural capital and resources from their families and communities to help them to gain admission to and succeed at university. According to Bourdieu (1986), even though poor families have limited access to social capital, they can use other ways, for instance, providing guidance, to invest in their children's education. During these interactions, families pass down dispositions to act in certain ways, understand experiences in certain ways, think in certain ways.

4.5 Students' strategies of negotiating university life

Under this theme, findings suggest that success at university was not only connected to academic performance; it also depended on a range of other systemic factors, such as peers, mentors, lecturers, religion, opportunities and recognition, and family influence. This section addresses the third key research question. In this section, I therefore discuss the strategies that students used to overcome challenges and how these helped them to achieve their academic goals.

4.5.1 Support from lecturers: "*I'm very sensitive when it comes to my studies*"

The following excerpts from the participants' narratives point to students sharing their experiences about support from their lecturers.

> Luhman: "*If the lecturers are free and open, I have no problem coming back and knocking. They know my name because I keep coming back seeking for help. I formed relationship with the lecturers, during my undergrad I used to consult them a lot and I used to ask for meetings so that I could have better clarification where I didn't understand particular exam or test questions and even module content or practical's*".

> Sandile: "*I remember in my second year, there was this question that was difficult and I went there to my lecturer with my script. I asked for the lecturer to explain the question to me and when I did extremely bad in my test or my exam. It's more like a moment of agency, it's an emergency sometimes, and I had to attend to it quickly. I'm very sensitive when it comes to my studies*".

> Ephraim: "*Yes, I did do a lot of consultation, whenever I get a script and comments. Sometimes some comments are not clear, sometimes I don't agree with the comments and sometimes I still wanted to be told how to address that shortcoming. I used to consult and say please, "What did you mean by this"? Even when I didn't get comments, I used to go to the lecturers and say why did you mark me and not give comments? Some lectures got tired because they wanted an easy job and they did not want lot of people to ask lots of questions. I wish I have done more consultation honestly, as first year students think sometimes, you're over nagging people and you're just being too invasive in their space*".

Participants confirmed the importance of seeking academic support from their lecturers. The students in the study asked for consultations where they asked questions for "*better clarification… about exam, test question and module content or practical*" (Luhman). For Sandile, coming across "*difficult*" questions were important and failing was a moment of agency and emergency. Whilst Sandile regarded failure as a moment of agency and

emergency, continued failure was not an option for him, which encouraged him to ask lecturers for clarity and explanation where he could not understand. Often, when successful black students enter a university field, they are expected to be independent. However, for some students, such as Ephraim, this may be intimidating and may cause them anxiety, as life at university is often different from that of a school (Meuleman et al., 2015).

When student uses this support mechanism, they develop the required academic disposition or habitus that is valued by the university. The support offered by lecturers potentially has a positive impact on successful black students' capacity to improve their academic engagement, which plays an important role in shaping students habitus within the university field (Norodien-Fataar, 2016). Participants in this study acquired cultural capital by obtaining knowledge from their lecturers, who were knowledgeable persons in their programmes. However, sometimes, as in the case of Ephraim, some lecturers felt that their students were nagging and obsessing over minor issues. Above, it could be concluded that Ephraim was not afraid to consult his lecturers, even when they sometimes tired of him. However, the process of seeking support appeared difficult and even uncomfortable for Summer and Anele:

> Summer: "*It was difficult for me to ask for help and I never consulted with my lectures. Yes, I do think not asking for help disadvantaged me because now that I've learned the importance of consulting, I can say that I missed on a lot of opportunities to get better marks. I am afraid of elderly people; The reason why I am afraid of elderly people, I could say it something that is in me because ever since growing up, what I did when I see a problem, I tackle it first on my own. If fail, I asked my peers and If they fail and then we would have to go to consult*".

> Anele: "*During my undergrad, I never use to go lectures and tutors to discuss feedback on my own because I was afraid of the lecturers. I would say most of the time I was an independent learner. My friend who had experience of being at university would say let's go and consult. She would be the one who will do all the talking, I use to keep quiet and the information she received is the one that I need but I would just listen. I started consulting when I was doing my honours degree last year, I saw it was very important to consulate especially*

when you are doing assignments and to ask the lectures to break down the question so that you would have idea about what is expected in the assignment".

Summer and Anele recognised the availability of support, even if they themselves rarely met with their lecturers. Both of them confessed to the fear of asking for help, which made it difficult for them to ask for support, often opting to study independently. For example, Summer reported that she was "*afraid of elderly people*" and thus "*never consulted*" with her lecturers. Similar to Anele, asking for help from "*lecturer, tutors to discuss feedback*" made her "*afraid*". As a result, she avoided one-one consultations with her lecturers. What is important in this narrative is the way there is power differentials between the lecture and students. A lecture room is sometimes an arena were power relations manifest between lecturers and students. The power that lecturers command sometimes makes some students intimidated, fearful, uncertain, and vulnerable. For this reason, Summer and Anele avoided consultations. Their fear was often based on the students' cultures and traditions, in which elders are accorded a higher degree of social control, especially people who are younger than them.

For the reason above, Summer would tackle problems "*first on my own*". If she could not, then she "*would ask my peers and if they fail, we would have to consult*". This suggests that she was reluctant to ask for help, even when she needed it. Anele would rather turn to a friend for company to consultation sessions, who would do "*all the talking*" while she "*keeps quiet*" and imbibed the "*information*". It was only when she was doing her honours degree that she began to ask for help from her lecturers. This suggests that Anele had renegotiated and reconstructed her understandings (Wong & Chiu, 2019) of what it meant being a university student and could then rework her identity to accept and exercise agency to seek help where she needed it.

4.5.2 Support from peers and mentors: "*Their doors are always open*"

Mentors are students who are one or two years ahead of the students who are in the same field of study (Swartz et. al., 2018). In the extracts below, participants describe how mentors and peers supported them in dealing with academic challenges:

Ephraim*:* "*If there's one thing I must say about both French and Media Studies, it was group work. I joined only the best people. I was able to address my lack of consultation by doing a lot of work and ask questions within a group context. I was doing French for the first time; I didn't even understand the content which it was a big issue and French was very difficult. For the French module, I ended up getting 85%, in the French exam my lecturer was surprised I had performed well during the semester*".

Summer: "*For second semester I received merit for Math's and my Statistics was in my 80s, I was lucky enough to find a group of students who come together, after classes to study. I joined that group of students; we would stay in school once class end and we would go to our rooms around three o'clock in the morning. We made sure that we never missed classes, and we do the work beforehand. We did our submission earlier and if someone does not understand we would help them. Joining a study group really helped me lot*".

Anele: "*I would follow my peers who were clever than me, I would become their friends so that they can help me whenever I was stuck. I would also try to get help when I am stuck by from tutors and mentors because their doors are always open. The tutor and mentors would provide guidance on how to write an assignment*"[1].

Findings from focus group discussions suggest that successful black students joined study groups when they realised that they were struggling in a particular module or aspect of it. The study group for which Ephraim and Summer were members met "*after class, at time*" that was suitable for all members. Ephraim joined the study group in order for him to address his "*lack of consultation*" and "*ask questions within the group context*". Joining a study group helped Ephraim to "*understand*" French "*content*", as he found "*French …very difficult*", but "*achieve 85% in the French exam*". Summer, during the second semester of her first year, received "*merit for Math's and Statistics…"* in which he was assisted by a

[1] Data from focus group interviews

"*…a group of students who come together after classes to study*". The study group provided participants with a sense of belonging and recognition, that they were "*…the best people…*".

To attain academic success, these students had mastered ways for obtaining access to knowledge and resources at the university. Bourdieu (1990, p. 66) compares the field of culture to that of an athlete who acquires "a feeling for the game". The notion of the "feel for the game" involves learning how to master the game, knowing the history of the game and having a degree of control over the game (Bourdieu, 1990, p. 66). For this study, participants had become good players and had invested in the game of success. Successful students relied on mentors and classmates to stay one step ahead of the competition (Webb et al., 2002, p. 38). That is, the participants had learned the "rules of the game" in significant ways, attaining information and skills from others who were knowledgeable about how the university works (Reay, 2018, p. 530).

4.5.3 Institutional support from the university: "*They are always there*"

In addition to the resources mentioned above, participants reported that the university provided them with services that assisted them with their academic, psychosocial issues. The services mentioned by the participants included Student Counselling Services; Writing Centre; Academic Monitoring and Support; Teaching and Learning Centres; Supplemental Instructor [SI]; NSFAS; Scholarship Centre; library access and computer LAN. The following excerpts about support from the university were extracted the focus group discussions held with the participants:

> Ephraim: "*In my college of Humanities there is the Academic Monitoring and Support program it's exactly for this to support students to be able to cope with the university standards and curriculum. For students to do better, that program currently support lot of underperforming students, support students who need mentors and who are struggling academically. I think the institution does have university Psychologist and Counsellors. When it comes to curriculum the psychologist is the best, they give lot of advice and including career. They are always there to make sure that the students emotional, mentality wellbeing are good to ensure the students is able to cope and deal with the challenges in the institution. The funding has been there; university has been providing funding,*

and internal bursaries. The fact that NSFAS doesn't necessarily disqualify student because student has not passed everything [Module]".

Luhman**: "***I can say the university support on my side and it is enough for me because the university has provided us with resources. For example, there are computer LANs where we can go and study. There are even libraries and extended time for the library so now they operate 24/7 hours. That was another support for us to excel. Especially my college of Agriculture, there is plenty of programs the university has brought to place. For example, it's a Supplementary Instructor [SI] and I was one of the SI leaders last year*".

Anele: "*There are tutors and Writing Centres if you struggle with academic writing. In the Writing Centre they taught us how to even write a sentence. In the library there is a computer programs if you don't know how to use computer, they teach you how to reference, search for information. Problem that students lack knowledge of these programs available within the institution, students don't pay attention to the posters, and notice board around campus. During my first year in the agricultural course, I realized I wasn't going to fit in because when I have to work is not something that I would enjoy waking up in the morning going to work. Finding a degree that will help me get a job was really important to me. I tried to consultant with Psychologist and Counsellors to help me find a suitable degree course that I would love*".

Sandile: "*The teaching and learning have many programs such as mentorship and writing centre where they try to help students who are struggling. It sorts of provide student support and alternative academic support that is the supporting structure towards academia. Whereby students can bring their assignments, are taught academic of writing and being able to critique in assignment. Mentorship is one of the biggest programs that I think is supported outside the university and it is very important program that fall under the school of Humanities under teaching and learning*"[2].

[2] Data from focus group discussions

During focus group discussions, students confirmed the availability of universities services on campus Anele and Ephraim reported that they had used the services of the psychologists and counsellor and reported favourable outcomes. For Anele, the psychologist had helped her to "*find a suitable degree course that I would love*". These findings are similar to those of Moschetti and Hudley (2015), who found that successful black students from low socio-economic backgrounds depended on academic advisors and college administrators for advice and guidance. Mahatey et al. (1994) state that successful black students require an environment which provides support and promotes personal well-being. Academic writing is an important skill in higher education and held currency for the participants who were using the Writing Centre. The Writing Centre assisted students to acquire the necessary cultural capital required to navigate academic life: "*writing a paragraph*" [Anele] or "*even write a sentence, to read an article and to write an article*". This suggests that the university may have been aware of the academic gaps in basic schooling and had found a way to assist students to address gaps. Chetty (2014) contends that schools are implicated in reproducing inequality through their failure to properly equip and prepare learners for higher education. The Writing Centre, designated by the College of Humanities, thus served as a resource for students. In this study, participants pointed to the role that the Centre played in equipping students with academic writing and critical thinking skills.

4.5.4 Recognition of student achievement: "*The greatest thing is the honour… you are recognised*

Spiegler (2018) defines motivation as the willingness to invest time and energy and determination toward education. Motivation was of utmost importance for the participants' academic success. Findings of this study revealed that wanting a better life was a source for motivation for the participants. However, for the participants, motivation came from various sources, which are discussed in the section below.

Participants explained that being recognised for their academic achievement opened more opportunities for them to gain academic prestige and status, as illustrated in the excerpts below.

> Ephraim: "*I am part of the Graduate Development programme from UKZN, that program is for people who are future academics and the institution gives them*

scholarships for research grants. The program provided some training assistances to make sure that there are people that can be part of the academic staff in the future. The greatest milestone is the honour of my life I was able to accomplish, receive the Distinguished student award and meaning in that award recognizing three things. Getting that award, that represent three things leadership as student and in organization, university service and also for academic performance. Also, you get scholarships, awards and recognition".

Luhman: "*There are many opportunities that I have been receiving since my first year. Every year I was getting a scholarship assistance me in paying my tuition fees. If you get average that is above 70% you get a scholarship, I even got an opportunity to compete in the first ever Old Mutual student of the year competition, opportunity was on academic merits and was for those students who have an average over 70%. I was part of that competition and I even went to the finals at Free State.*" *"I am person who like to be recognized in terms of excellences and that motivate me to keep pushing harder. The first award I think I got 6 awards excluding merits and certificate just awards*".

Ben: "*I have received many scholarships and I'm very grateful for that and being able to represent my class and you are always a preferred choice. At the end of the year after submitting a report, doing presentation the academic picks the best one who had a good representation and there like symposia [conference or seminar] where you meet students from different universities. You come together, you present your work, and you are most likely to be picked for that. I represented my class and I think which was good. I think there are some scholarships that I did not even know but I would see an email from lecturer that say I think you would be eligible for this, and you end up getting the scholarship*".

Sandile: "The *element of recognition you feel confidence and feel that you are part of the academic system. No matter how we are looked down upon once you are in the university you are recognized, and the university doesn't look at which background you come from. I have got scholarships throughout, and I would get a pay check just for studying and those are some of the opportunities that have*

happened. You do very well it tends to open up some opportunities and for example, getting a better job or being identified as a future lecturer through your talent"[3].

Participants, when entering university field, had little or no cultural capital to assist them navigate university life. Through focusing on their academic goals, participants received recognition through awards and university opportunities, what Bourdieu (1989) refers to as institutionalised capital. This is in line with what Garret and Rubie-Davies (2014) have pointed out about the fact that certification and scholarships demonstrate to successful black students that they are valued. During focus group discussions, participants regarded receiving recognition for their academic performance as important for their personal and academic worth. For Sandile, for instance, being recognised made him feel confident and provided him with a sense of belonging.

Jinn and Ball (2020, p. 68) contend that recognition of academic performance in universities has the additional benefit of building students' confidence and providing them with symbolic capital. Participants reported recognition of outstanding academic achievement came in the form of "*scholarships, bursaries, personal invitations to participate in seminars, getting better jobs, and identifying as future lecturers*". Also, they received "*Distinguished Student Awards*" and participated in competitions, such as the "*Old Mutual Student of the Year*". According to Mukovhe (2020), being socially recognised assists students to acquire different forms of capital. For instance, Ephraim and Sandile received not only a university degree, but opportunities to be part of the "*Graduate Development programme*" and employed as "*future lecturers*", which raised their capital.

4.6 Conclusion

The purpose of this chapter was to present and discuss data and findings in relation to the three key research questions of the study. In this chapter, I used participants' narratives understand and gain insights into the participants' experiences of university life. Both negative and positive experiences were discussed and how these affected the participants. Findings suggest that participants possessed a sense of agency, which enabled them to navigate and negotiate the university context to achieve academic success.

[3] Data from Focus group discussion

In the next chapter, I present my conclusions in relation to the key findings that have emerged in this chapter.

CHAPTER 5

IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the findings and their implications for black students from working class backgrounds to successfully navigate university life. The chapter begins with an overview of the study's objective and significance, followed by a summary of the major findings. I then reflect on the theoretical and methodological issues that emerged in the conduct of this study. The final section of the chapter discusses the limitations of the study and concludes with the implications and recommendations for further research.

5.2 Purpose and significance of the study

The purpose of the study was to investigate the experiences of successful university students, who were black and from low socio-economic backgrounds. Within this, the intention was to understand how the students' low socio-economic backgrounds affected their experiences of university life and how they navigated their experiences in order to achieve academically. It is hoped that the findings for this study contributed to the body of knowledge on the experiences, agency, and vulnerabilities of successful black students from low socio-economic backgrounds in higher education. Participants' voices are centralised in this study, and their experiences were regarded as critical if their needs were to be satisfied; and they were also positioned as having a sense of agency, which was influenced by the adoption of the critical paradigm. To this end, the study investigated how the social positioning of the participants, in respect to class and race, affected their academic success.

The study sought to address its objectives, guided by the following three research questions:

- What are the university experiences of high-performing black university students from low socio-economic backgrounds?
- How are the university experiences of high performing black students influenced by their social position in relation to class and race?
- How do high performing black students navigate their class positioning and experiences of success within the university?

The study contributed to the body knowledge about how successful black students from low socio-economic backgrounds negotiate success and their social positioning in the following important ways: Firstly, there is limited research in South Africa that provides black students from working-class backgrounds with an opportunity to voice their experiences of success through telling their stories and experience at university. In addition, in South Africa, there are few research studies on successful black working-class students and how their university experience affects their social status in respect to their class, identity, and race. Foregrounding students' voices in this study enabled me to understand their world from their perspectives. The research methods that were used to generate the data for this study, namely, semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions, provided participants with an opportunity to reflect on their experiences of university life and the extent to which this had transformed their lives on a personal and academic levels.

Secondly, the study contributed to assisting participants to recognise the fact that they possessed agency that they could use to negotiate university life and accessing opportunities for success. The study contributed to the efforts to trouble an assumption socially and within research that successful black students from low socio-economic backgrounds represent disadvantage and deficiency. Findings of this study revealed that the origins of the perceived deficiencies among these students are embedded in historical disadvantage to which they have been systematically subjected. Furthermore, findings of the study revealed that the intersections of class and race gave birth to a complex mix of disadvantage, which required participants to build networks of support for themselves.

The study contributed to the body of knowledge on successful black students from low socio-economic backgrounds revealing how the students could use their agency and social positioning to achieve academically. This is comparable to what Collins (2005) has pointed out about some social identities. For this study, successful black students were thrown into the deep end, expected to navigate university, just like all the other students. For these students, the university field was often characterised by a dynamic of power that supported the culture and values of a White middle class university context. From a surface perspective, the students were expected to fail within such a context. However, often students found ways of successfully negotiating this maze of complexity to achieve their academic goals.

5.3 Reflections on the conceptual/theoretical framework and the methodological issues

In this section, I reflect on the theoretical framework as well as the methodology that was used in the study. With its concepts of habitus, field, and capital, Bourdieu's Theory of Practice provides insight into understanding and interpretation of individual and collective activities in the social world. Bourdieu (1990) cautioned that the activities of social groups cannot be explained solely in terms of individual behaviours, but rather as activities influenced by cultures, traditions, and objective structures within society (Jenkins, 1992). Thus, for this study, Bourdieu concepts of habitus, field and capital provided insights into the connections of people with their everyday life (Norodien-Fataar, 2018). This theoretical framework enabled me to consider structural and social inequalities faced by the students, especially through the education system.

Findings from this study have demonstrated that certain students have been socialized by higher education provisions (i.e., habitus) and resources (i.e., capital). However, this was not the case for the participants in this study, who had little or no knowledge or resources to supported them to achieve academically. This resulted in range of struggles for the participants, such as lack of a sense of belonging, cultural clashes that resulted in them feeling like a ‘fish out of water’ and universities that were foreign to them (Wong & Chiu, 2019, p. 870). Research reveals that successful black students from low socio-economic backgrounds are often disempowered, marginalised and isolated due to the inequitable distribution of resources (Lehmann, 2014; Rhynas, 2005; Norodien-Fataar, 2016). Therefore, using Bourdieu’s (1990) theory of practice enabled me to understand that despite the challenges that successful black students faced, they tended to use their agency to navigate university life in order to achieve their academic goals.

This study was underpinned by the critical paradigm. The critical paradigm is concerned with concerns of social justice and empowerment as a means of achieving emancipation. The adoption of the critical paradigm enabled me to explore and analyse the experiences of the participants from low socio-economic of inclusion in and exclusion from university life (Scotland, 2012). Using this paradigm, I could understand the ways and strategies that participants used to challenge aspects of the culture of the university. For this, participants could critically reflect on the challenges that they experienced and why they experienced these challenges, often relating it to educational and social inequality in society. These social

and educational issues shaped participants' experiences of university life. The tenets of the critical paradigm on empowerment were evident in the study in that it provided a critical lens for participants to reflect on the ways in which their experiences of institutional factors enabled and constrained their actions, and how they ensured that they were included and achieving academically. This responded to the change agenda of the critical paradigm.

The combination of the qualitative approach and narrative inquiry was appropriate and effective for achieving the purpose of the study. The intention was to understand participants' experiences in a critical manner. This was achieved using qualitative research, which enabled me to generate rich, contextual data. Furthermore, narrative inquiry and semi-structured interviews enabled me to obtain the richness of the voices of participants, as they shared their experiences of how they navigated university life. Member-checking enabled me to verify with the participants that their voices and stories had been captured accurately.

With regards to the selection of the participants for this study, I initially used purposive sampling. However, it became difficult to find participants who met the set criteria, using purposive sampling. I later decided to use snowball sampling, which enabled participants to point me to other potential participants. The study used semi-structured interviews, which provided an instrument for collecting rich data. Harrell and Bradley (2009) contend that semi-structured interviews allow participants to express their views in a face-to-face conversation with a researcher regarding particular phenomenon. Even though focus group discussion did not go as planned, participants could tell their stories and complement what they had shared in the semi-structured interviews (Longhurst, 2003). Focus group discussions were useful for obtaining in-depth answers or viewpoints. In addition, focus group discussions encouraged participants to speak out in the presence of other participants, which provided them with an opportunity to support each other.

5.4 Summary of findings

This section provides a summary of the key findings that emerged from the study. To respond to the first key research question about the experiences of successful black poor students, findings were similar to other research studies, such as that by Lehmann (2014), Reay (2018), Wong and Chiu (2019) and Crozier, Reay and Clayton (2019), which reported that successful students from low socio-economic backgrounds often found ways to

negotiate the university context, namely, adopting a middle-class habitus in order to integrate into the university. This study revealed that successful black students' performance was influenced by their experience of basic education, as a result of teachers' lack of dedication and skills, and inadequate access to resources, such as textbooks, library, computer and science laboratories.

According to Du Plessis and Mestry (2019), rural schools often encounter problems that are unique to their setting, such as lack of resources, insufficient funding from government, lack of parental interest in children's education, underqualified teachers, lack of teacher discipline, commitment, and preparation. What was significant in this study, which other research studies have not found, was the resiliency and agency that students displayed. Within a context that was steeped in inequality, participants reported how they drew strength from relationships with peers and teachers from other schools. According to Van Zyl (2016), successful black students who did not receive a quality education in their previous schools often end up in poverty or experience challenges in their transition to higher education. Participants in this study reported deficiencies in the education that they had received in the basic education system.

The absence of teachers can affect learners where they fall behind with their work. Participants in this study received support from their peers, lecturers and mentors. The participants in my study reported having been taught by their peers from other classes some aspects of the curriculum, given the fact that teachers were not always available or willing to teach. This suggests commitment and motivation to succeed from students, despite the challenges that they were facing. Whilst this helped them to obtain the necessary knowledge and to be admitted to university, they lost out on some skills that they were supposed to have been taught. This affected them emotionally, which led to them experiencing feelings of self-doubt, insecurity, uneasiness, alienation and low self-esteem as they did not have the skills that were required for them to achieve academically at university.

This study revealed that funding manifested as a serious barrier to education for the participants. Lack of financial support meant that they could not take control of their lives and affected them emotionally. When the participants were still waiting for the release of funds from NSFAS, they had to find alternative ways of meeting their basic needs. Participants, for example, split food expenses to ensure that they had enough money to meet

other expenses. Participants referred to gaining new knowledge when they joined the university, developing a new disposition and aspiration to build a better future for themselves.

These findings are similar to those of Lehman (2014) and Reay (2018), both of whom conducted studies on successful working-class students who went through habitual transformation. Habitus transformation for some of the participants was important at the university but caused problems in their relationships with their families and friends. When this happened, it caused a disconnect between the participants and their friends and families. However, other participants were able to maintain healthy relationships with their families, who supported them financially and emotionally. Support from their families helped them to negotiate university life. There is a distinction between international and local studies that focus on successful working-class students' university experiences and the manner in which their social class positioning played out. Local studies go beyond social class position, but there is evidence that these experiences disproportionately affect black, working-class students. For instance, some people in South Africa are still living in the same racially segregated zones that they were assigned to under apartheid, even though the country is now democratic (Vincent & Hlatshwayo, 2018). With South Africa celebrating the 27th year of the country's democracy, participants in this study still struggled to form interracial relationships with students of a different race. Participants in the study often felt inferior based on the fact that their White and Indian counterparts from the middle and upper social classes had material possessions, such as expensive clothing brands and drove fancy cars. Therefore, social class in South Africa must be understood as a lived experience in order to see the differences in social class experiences.

The finding of this study in this regard relives the fact that many students only interact with peers of their own ethnicity and, to a lesser extent, class (Vincent & Hlatshwayo, 2018). For instance, attending a historically white university, such as the UKZN created an alienating environment for some of the participants. For these participants, making friends was difficult. Participants attributed this to not understanding how to make friends with people from different racial groups, given the fact that it was their first-time for the participants to learn together with individuals from other racial groups.

What the study also revealed were experiences of racial incidents on campus. Researchers, such as Kessi and Cornell (2015) and Boonzaier and Mkhize (2018), found that black students who were admitted in elite universities were often marked by "*feeling black*". That is, these students were often seen through a stigmatising gaze of their blackness, which resulted in them questioning their abilities. Like participants in this study, successful black students who enter a historically white university often feel that they are seen for their racial identity. Participants in this study developed a sense of otherness when relating to other race groups who they believed were privileged.

The participants in this study felt inadequate since their privileged White and Indian classmates drove cars and dressed nicely on campus. While participants voiced this, their socioeconomic status served as a constant reminder that they were not on an equal playing field with their counterparts from wealthier backgrounds, which made them feel different in a negative way. Academically, participants also felt excluded, especially by their fellow Indian students, who were unwilling to include them in their study groups. Faced with this kind of exclusion, participants often gravitated to their own black group. That is, participants reported feeling a sense of shared community even with black students, who were from middle class backgrounds, who they believed shared the same beliefs and struggles with them, simply because they were black.

Students' narratives highlighted challenges regarding language and access to education. Participants raised challenges with the university's choice of English as a medium of teaching and learning and felt that they were being intentionally excluded. This is in keeping with the argument of Kanno and Cromley (2013) who have pointed out that students from disadvantaged families are already entering higher education with various limitations, such as funding and the absence of support from their illiterate parents, and that this was often compounded by inadequate competence in English. Participants reported that they were taught in their home language in schools. Often, teachers did not teach subjects in in English, although it was a language of teaching and learning. This had serious implications for their transition to higher education, which required English competence for academic purposes. Often, participants resorted to rote-learning to try and escape the challenge of English. In some instance, participants shied away from using English for fear of ridicule.

However, participants showed their agency and resilient, often findings strategies to negotiate the university context, utilising support services to improve their academic performance. Thus, whilst students complained about the language of teaching and learning at the university, they also appreciated the support they were receiving from the university, especially from lecturers, mentors, and academic peers.

5.5 Implications of the study

The following implications emerge from the findings of this study:

- Schools must develop measures to ensure that students develop a sense of resiliency and agency. It is important for schools to provide facilities and support for disadvantaged students, who do not have support systems at home (Mahoney, Lord & Carryl, 2005; MacBeath et al., 2005).

- To help students who have not been adequately prepared to transition to higher education because of poor schooling, the university must develop bridging programmes. Other support programmes that could be offered may include student counselling, writing laboratories, supplementary instruction programmes for targeted classes and students, academic support centres and mentoring.

- Findings for this study revealed that successful black students from low socio-economic backgrounds often experienced financial problems, which impacted negatively on their wellbeing. Government and university must expand financial assistance programmes and customise these in a manner that ensures that black students are supported adequately. For instance, systems must be put in place to assist students who are still waiting for funding.

- Findings revealed that participants were experiencing challenges with the use of English as a language of learning and teaching. This largely emanated from the fact that they had not been taught properly at high school. To mitigate this challenge, the university must develop academic literacy improvement programmes to support students who may not have been equipped with the necessary linguistic skills in English.

5.6 Limitations of the study

The findings of the study did not represent the issue outside the university, which shaped how participants negotiated their space in the university's social life, such as club, church/religion, residences, and sport. While these aspects were important, it robbed the study and caused certain restrictions of not giving a full view of a holistic university life in this study. One major limitation resided in the small sample size (six participants); the findings of this study may not represent all successful black students from low socio-economic backgrounds. However, it was not the intention of this study to generalise findings: the intention was to understand in-depth the experiences of this sample of students. In addition, the findings of the study do not provide a complete story. However, it is important to point out that this was not the intention of the study, as the narrative inquiry does not by its very nature offer complete answers to the issues involved but seeks to investigate certain issues of interest (Langellier & Peterson, 2004).

Focus group discussions and semi-structured interviews were used to generate the data for the study. While these methods enabled me to interact with the participants and engage in deep discussion, as well as providing rich descriptive data, the challenge was managing to cover all of the questions asked and probing sufficiently for deeper responses during interviews. I was so overwhelmed that I missed many critical questions, requiring me to return for follow-up interviews with the participants. Conducting follow-up interviews with participants increased the time required for data collection, which had repercussions for the timeline of the study.

Finally, the fact that data was collected in English might have influenced how the participants understood questions and their capacity to express themselves during focus group discussions. Despite the fact that questions and conversations were constructed in such a way that they could be easily understood and interpreted, language competence issues among participants may have influenced the results obtained in both phases of the study. Furthermore, focus group discussions were conducted via Zoom video conferencing, and there was background noise that made it difficult to make out what the participants were saying in certain sections, which may have rendered transcriptions not to be entirely accurate, although they were few and insignificant. This risk was, however, mitigated

through member-checking, in which the participants were given an opportunity to review the transcriptions and provide feedback, which was later incorporated. In this regard, participants did not make major modifications to the transcripts of interviews and focus group discussions that they were asked to verify.

5.7 Recommendations for future research

The following recommendations for further research are made based on the findings of the study:

- While this study focused on a single institution, comparative analyses of all institutions could provide more insights into the institutional culture and internationality experiences of successful black students from low socioeconomic backgrounds from several universities across South Africa's regions should be considered in future studies. Future research, particularly in the context of South Africa, should offer more insight on the complexities of academic success.

- While the focus of this study was on the person, future research could benefit from including institutional elements, for example, resources and support services available to students.

- Including lecturers' perspectives on their students' academic aspects and experiences, as well as the elements that influence their academic performance, may provide another dimension to our understanding of students' academic success.

- Finally, the conclusions of this study on university-parent collaborations provide little to no proof. This is an area that should be researched more.

5.8 Concluding thoughts

This study centred on the experiences of successful university students who were black and from low socioeconomic origins during their time at university. This study highlighted the challenges faced by successful black students from poor backgrounds. The findings of the study revealed that, in addition to academic issues, students from working-class backgrounds frequently faced financial, language, racial, and class barriers, all of which had a substantial

impact on their academic success. This shows that academic performance was not the only element influencing university success; a variety of systemic factors also had a role. The findings of this study point to the fact that the students who participated in this study used their agency to overcome obstacles and attain academic success.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Informed consent letter

The School of Education
College of Humanities
University of KwaZulu-Natal
Private Bag X01
SCOTTSVILLE
3201

Dear Participant

My name is Nomthandazo Khuzwayo. I am studying towards the Masters in Social Justice Education in the School of Education, University of KwaZulu-Natal, Pietermaritzburg Campus. The title of my research study is: *An exploration of how black, successful university students from low socio-economic backgrounds experience and negotiate the university space.*

My study seeks to understand the experiences of successful university students, who are black and from low socio-economic backgrounds of university life. The study also seeks to understand the impact of low socio-economic background on the experiences of success of students within the university. The assumption is that this study will afford black students from working class contexts with the opportunity to present their experiences of success through telling their stories about their experiences of university life. Through the study, I would like to explore the ways in which the students navigate their challenges to achieve academically, despite the possible misalignment of their working-class backgrounds and the resources required for academic success with a university context. To this end, I would like to invite you to participate in the research study.

Before you consent to participating in the study, I would like to assure you of the following:

- The confidentiality of your responses will be strictly protected. This will be achieved through the use of pseudonyms and storing the data in a secure place encrypted and under lock and key.
- Any information you provide will not be used against you, and will be used for purposes of this research study only.
- You are at liberty to choose to participate or not participate and to stop participating in the research in case you are no longer comfortable to, without any penalty.
- Your participation in the study is only for purposes of assisting me to fulfil the academic requirements of my studies. To this end, there are no financial benefits for participating in the study.

If you are willing to be interviewed, please also indicate (by ticking the appropriate box) whether or not you are willing to consent for the interview to be audio-recorded.

Should you have any comments, queries or complaints, kindly be advised that I can be contacted at: Email: nomthi.k1995@gmail.com ; Cell: 0724810370. My supervisor is Dr. Melanie Martin, located in the School of Education, University of KwaZulu-Natal,

Pietermaritzburg Campus. Her contact details are: Email: Martinm@ukzn.ac.za ; Cell: 0836514564.

If you are willing to take part in this research, please indicate by filing and signing the attached declaration form. Thank you for your contribution to this research.

Yours Faithfully

Miss Nomthandazo Khuzwayo

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 study.

I understand that I am at liberty to withdraw from the research at any time, should I so desire. I hereby provide consent to audio-record my interview and focus group discussion

	Willing	**Not willing**
Audio-recording of interviews		

..... **.....**

Appendix B: Permission to conduct research

UNIVERSITY OF KWAZULU-NATAL
INYUVESI YAKWAZULU-NATALI

2 August 2019

Miss Nomthandazo Immaculate Khuzwayo (SN 214550710)
School of Education
College of Humanities
UKZN
Pietermaritzburg Campus
Email: 214550710@stu.ukzn.ac.za

Dear Miss Khuzwayo

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:

"An exploration of how black, successful university students from low socio-economic backgrounds experience and negotiate the university space."

It is noted that you will be constituting your sample by conducting interviews and/or focus group discussions with black students on the Pietermaritzburg campus.

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

- Ethical clearance number;
- 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 '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 Protection of Public Information 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.

Yours sincerely

[redacted]

ERIC NJABULO ZUMA
DIRECTOR: GOVERNANCE & ADMINISTRATION
OFFICE OF THE REGISTRAR
UNIVERSITY OF KWAZULU-NATAL
UNIVERSITY ROAD
WESTVILLE, 3629

REGISTRAR

cc. Supervisor
Office of the Registrar

Appendix C: Semi-structure interviews

A. Biographical information

Please note that this is for record purposes only. Thus, it will not be shared in any communication outside of this project.

Name:	
Degree /Qualification:	
Year of study:	
Previous schooling: (Which school did you attended)	
Year in which you matriculated:	

Age (Tick one)	**18-20**	**21-25**	**26-30**	**Over 30**

Gender **(**Tick one)	**Female**	**Male**

First Language	
Other Languages	

Race (Tick one) (Please note that while we acknowledge that South Africa has officially moved beyond race classification, this still provides analytical insights in a historical context.)	**African**	**Coloured**	**White**	**Indian**	**Other**

B. Interview questions

1. Please tell me about yourself, your family etc.
2. Are you first in your immediate family to attend university?
3. Did your schooling experiences prepare you in any way for university life? (why\not)
4. Was this university your first choice? (why/why not)
5. What influenced your decision to apply to this particular university?
6. What is your motivation to study your course?

Research Question 1: What are the university experiences of high performing black university students from low socio-economic backgrounds?

1. What have been some of your experiences at this university so far? (last year)
2. You are regarded as a high performing student, what /who has helped you to become this high performing student?
3. What makes you different to other students?
4. Who has helped you to become successful?

5. Have you faced particular difficulties in any of your modules? If no, why or yes why? and how have you come those difficulties?
6. What kind of university programs does the university provide for students who are experiencing challenges regarding the curriculum? (e.g., academic mentors, curriculum support).
7. Have you ever doubted your personal ability to cope with the challenges why?

Research Question 2: How are the university experiences of high performing black students influenced by their social position in relation to class and race?

1. How has been poor motivated you to be successful?
2. Who is the mentor or role model that you have that makes you want to succeed at university?
3. What are some of challenges you have encounter and how did you overcome them in relation of being poor or black?
4. Do friends /peers from other racial groups help you? And how do they help you? And if they do, they you help why? and how does it make you feel?
5. Having to learn all the module in English during lectures does it have an impact in your academic performance or social activities?
6. In your view, how has the institution transformed itself with regards to its racial, gender and social class composition? And is this positive or negative?
7. Do you feel that you are appreciated within the university environment by students who come from different racial group or lecturers?

Appendix D: Focus group discussions

Please note that this is for record purposes only. Your name or any other identifying symbol will not be revealed in any way in any communications emanating from this project.

Research Question 3: How do high performing black students navigate their class positioning and experiences of success within the university?

1. What is your biggest achievement so far at university?
2. What is feeding your strength to thrive last year?
3. Do you find that your experiences at university have changed you? How?
4. Do university lecturers help you to get better markers? and how do they help you? And what do you do if they don't help you?
5. What different assessment strategies do they use to help black poor students to be successful? And do they have different expectation of you because you are successful?
6. What are some of the methods you used to overcome the challenges you experience?
7. When you go home how do you relate to your parents, friends, members of the community? And how do they feel about your success?

Appendix E: Certificate from Language Editor

Ntwintwi

Proofreading and Editing Solutions

Date: 05 July 2021

CERTIFICATE OF LANGUAGE EDITING

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

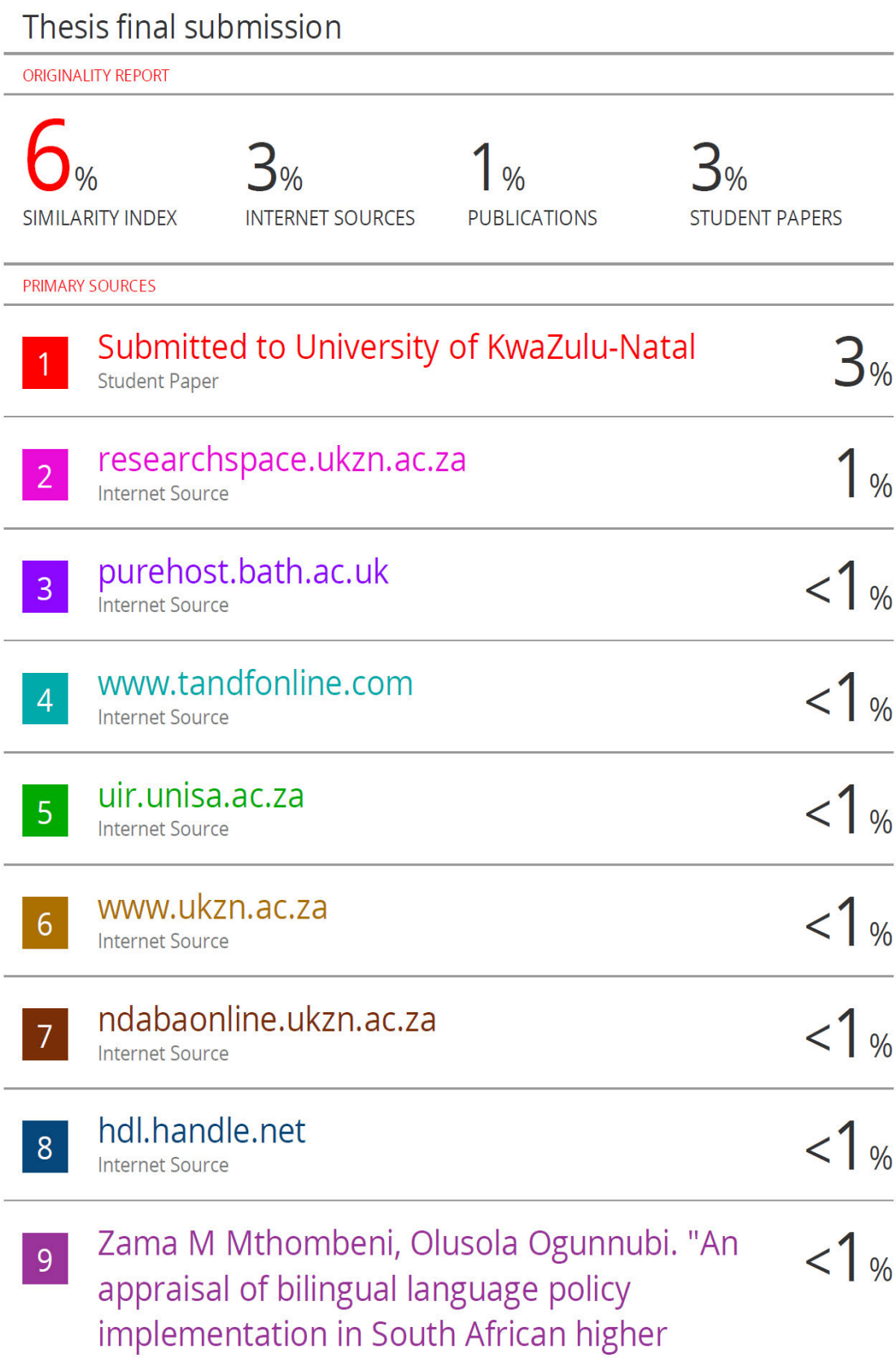
This is to certify that the thesis bearing the provisional title ***An exploration of how black, successful university students from low socio-economic backgrounds experience and negotiate the university space***, to be submitted by **Nomthandazo Khuzwayo** has been edited for language correctness and spelling, consistency (i.e. repetition, long sentences and logical flow), and completeness of the list of references and cited authors, by Ntwintwi Proofreading and Editing Solutions. Neither the research content and substance nor the author's intentions were altered in any way during the editing process.

Ntwintwi guarantees the quality of English language in this thesis, provided our editor's changes are accepted and further changes made to the thesis are checked by our editor.

Yours sincerely,

Jabulani Ngcobo
Ntwintwi Proofreading and Editing Solutions

Appendix F: Originality report



Thesis final submission

ORIGINALITY REPORT

6%	3%	1%	3%
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PRIMARY SOURCES

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3	purehost.bath.ac.uk Internet Source	<1%
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