

**Narratives on Access to Higher Education:
Educational Leadership Looking Beyond Barriers**

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ABSTRACT

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This research aims to understand the social, economic and political complexities that surround a learner's access to higher education in South Africa. The objective of the study is therefore to particularly examine the enabling and constraining factors in accessing higher education for the participants in the study.

The study looks at the experiences of four young men and women (two men and two women) from South Africa that led to their educational achievements. It weaves their success stories through the complex interwoven social, familial, school and community environments. The narratives have been observed in context to existing key educational leadership theories and mainly by evaluating the strengths of the transformational leadership, pedagogical leadership and leadership for social justice in creating a more equitable educational system.

The research indicates that social inequalities in accessing higher education continue to persist. The data from the narratives reveals that it was the aspiration and motivation to achieve access to higher education that ultimately led the learners through these challenging environments. In thinking of these findings, educational leadership has the potential to respond by looking beyond the barriers to understand more of what enables these participants to access higher education. Progressive policies, intervention through capacity building, and involving stakeholder communities are useful, yet do not completely help address the complexities being faced in accessing higher education. The learners are agents of social change and it is important for educational leadership to perceive these learners in new light to address issues in access to higher education.

Key words: Access to higher education, South Africa, Educational Leadership, enablers and constraining factors

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CALS - Centre for Applied Legal Studies

CHE- Council of Higher Education

DBE - Department of Basic Education

DOE - Department of Education

DHET - Department of Higher Education and Training

EP-NUFFIC - The Dutch organisation for Internalisation in Education

HESA - Higher Education South Africa

1 INTRODUCTION

In South Africa, access to higher education has long been an area of concern. With an historical context of the apartheid era, the black majority were denied learning experiences that were available to the white population. The access to well -resourced higher education institutions were more easily available only to the white students. The year 1994, the beginning of a democratic era signifying an end to the apartheid era, did not see light in resolving this problem. So, one of the major focus areas of higher education in South Africa is one of equity. There is also a great demand for building on a skilled workforce that responds to a growing economy (Boughey, 2003, p. 66). Increasing access to higher education and improving the student success rates continues to be an important research focus within higher education policy in South Africa. The fact that schools are not able to prepare students sufficiently to be ready to enter university and the university unable to generate skilled individuals has been a growing concern and at the heart of academic discourses and higher education literature. (Wilson-Strydom, 2015, p. 3.) While schools and university environments pose challenges to the preparedness levels, so do the home and community environments. This study identifies the role of the both school and non-school environments in building the educational path and defining the success of these individuals from South Africa.

This research aims to primarily understand the social, economic and political complexities that surround a learner's access to higher education in South Africa. To understand the interwoven influences of these factors, the study examines the enabling and constraining influences in accessing higher education for the participants in the study while choosing to focus on the home, school and community environments.

The following research questions guided the study:

- 1) What were the enabling and constraining factors in the family environment that influenced the learner's access to higher education?

- 2) What were the enabling and constraining factors in the school environment that influenced the learner's access to higher education?
- 3) What were the enabling and constraining factors in the community environment that influenced the learner's access to higher education?

This study finds its relevance since research indicates that social inequalities in accessing higher education are persisting despite progressive policies, remedial measures and their efforts to mitigate it. The study views the findings from the data, the arising themes in the narratives and the research literature on access to higher education through the lens of educational leadership.

Below is a chapter wise detail of how the study has been organised.

The *introduction chapter* presents an overview of the challenges in education in South Africa with effects of the apartheid era. It presents the complexities related to accessing higher education and need and purpose of the current study while listing out the guiding research questions. It also states that educational leadership has been chosen as the theoretical framework of the study.

The *chapter two* presents a detailed literature review on access to higher education in a global context. This gives an understanding of the vast spectrum of challenges in accessing higher education among youth in various parts of the world. The summary at the end of the chapter throws light on the major constraints and the commonalities in context to accessing higher education.

Chapter three is detailed literature review of access to higher education in South Africa, moving from a global to a local context. The chapter begins with the history of basic education and higher education in South Africa since the historical context has relevance to the study. The second part of this chapter is divided in to three sections discussing in detail access to higher education and the socio-economic context, schooling and challenges related to accessing higher education and availability of resources at home, school, community and university environments and constraints in accessing higher education. The main reason for examining the constraints are to highlight, how far and few the enabling factors are in support of those who aspire to access higher education in South Africa.

The next section in this chapter is a policy perspective on accessing higher education and in South Africa and the main purpose of this chapter is to emphasize that many progressive policies have been brought in as a response to the constraints faced by the learners in accessing higher education as discussed in the earlier sections. The summary at the end of the chapter draws attention to how the policies fail to address these challenges completely and how many of the policy documents direct at strengthening the system through effective leadership.

Chapter 4 builds on the role of educational leadership and leads to a detailed theoretical review of all the existing educational leadership theories and elaborates on the pros and cons of each of the theories beginning from the early theories to the more recent contemporary theories in educational leadership. The final part of the chapter presents three major leadership theories that can be used to understand further how leadership can respond to the challenges that one faces in accessing higher education in South Africa and enabling a more equitable environment.

Chapter 5 details the structure of the study listing out the main aims and objectives and the research questions being addressed in the study. It also substantiates the need for viewing the entire study through the lens of educational leadership. It details how the data has been organised and analysed in relation to the research questions being addressed in the study besides giving details on the reliability and validity of the study.

Chapter 6 is an empirical analysis of the narrative interviews and the data presented as answers to each of the research questions. The key themes are the family, school, and community environment and each of these themes have been discussed in detail with supporting quotations from the narratives. The theme agency arises as a theme from the data although the research questions set out at the beginning of the study did not set out to explore the same. This chapter elaborates on the aspect of aspirations of the learners.

Chapter 7 summarizes the findings from the data with details on the enabling and constraining factors in the home, school and community environment.

It highlights the role of the aspirations of the learners as the defining factor in them accessing higher education.

Chapter 8 examines the findings from the data, learning from the research literature on access in higher education globally and in South African context through the lens of educational leadership. The final section of this chapter discusses the limitation of this research and opportunities for further research.

2 ACCESS TO HIGHER EDUCATION

The literature review in this chapter examines the social, economic and political complexities that revolves around the research problem and the core of this study from a global context and in local context to South Africa. Access to higher education has been researched from very many dimensions some of them being the enrolment process (McCowan, 2016), transition from high school to university education (Wilson-Strydom, 2012; Evans, 2016), socio economic backgrounds of the learners, (Forsyth & Furlong, 2000; Karen, 2002; James, 2000; James, 2001) financial aid for students (Hansen, 1983; Dynarksi & Scott-Clayton, 2013; Scott-Clayton, 2015), enabling and constraining influences of the contextual environments such as home, schooling and community (Wilson-Strydom, 2015, 2017; Calitz, 2015) educational policies and its impact. (Fataar, 2003; Pinheiro & Antonowicz, 2015; Assaad, 2013; McCaig, 2016.)

2.1 Research Literature on Challenges in Accessing higher education in the global context

Although difficult to quantify, access to education is also largely influenced by the socio-economic context division (Soudien, 2010). In educational research issues related to social class has been extensively researched related to schooling. Children from learning class backgrounds have been less likely to enter post school education, while experiencing fewer resources and poorer living conditions. Thereby class inequalities have led to challenges in access, retention and attaining higher education. (Archer, Hutchings & Ross, 2005, p. 5.)

In a study based in USA, the analysis of detailed data of over three decades highlight that there existed substantial socio-economical inequities in who gained access to most selective colleges and universities. The research shows that these trends have increased in the recent decade despite interventions such as outreach programs and financial aid. The study states that, "American higher education, in other words, is more socioeconomically stratified today than at any

time during the past three decades.” It attributes this to the increasing competitiveness among prospective college students for admission to the country’s most selective colleges and universities (Astin & Oseguera, 2004, p. 338). The admission process to higher education institutions greatly reflect a selective process that creates a larger level of stratification among the society which denies access to these universities for a select stratum of students. (Fleming 1990 as cited in Astin & Oseguera, 2004, p. 323.) The key obstacle to highly ranked institutions among underrepresented groups is the selective admission process. The base criteria for these admission processes is the standardization admission tests and the average score from secondary schooling. Since many of the students from less well-educated families have poor access to quality schooling and resources, they tend to perform less well and are highly disadvantaged in the competitive process to being selected.

A similar study compares the action policies in England, Brazil and Kenya for enabling accessibility and addressing the barriers to entry for disadvantaged groups. The major barriers were identified to be competitive exams for free-of-charges places in universities and tuition fees for private institutions. The progressive policies did not seem to represent an adequate solution to the existing problems. While introducing financial aid through loans, addressed issues related to accessibility, there were other subtle barriers such as stratification that affected low-income students from accessing higher education. (McCowan, 2016.) On the brighter side, the reinvestment in federal universities in Brazil (including establishment of campuses in interior towns, increasing the number of places and introduction of new selection processes, increasing government recognition of the centrality of higher education to development in Kenya, and in England, widening participation policies including the facilitation of entry of mature students via ‘access’ courses made a difference to addressing the barriers related to access to education. (McCowan, 2016, p. 661.)

A study in India by Biswamitra, Jefferey & Nakkeeran (2017, p. 189) examines the significant barriers to attending higher education. The study presents some of the key challenges to the women learners which includes the interplay

of class and financial position, gender, minority status, the geographical location of the colleges and the residential location, women's 'security' in public space, and family and community interventions in decisions about young women's educational opportunities. The findings reveal that based on the ethnicity, the women from lower socio-economic backgrounds were likely to face several obstacles in attaining higher education. Financial barriers reduced the opportunities of entering and continuing higher education. Learners who resided in poorer neighbourhoods, such as slums, had to deal with the restrictive influences of neighbours. Community-level factors, such as identity politics, spatial segregation and family and community dynamics, also played a significant role. Among these, financial hardship was found to be most daunting factor in constraining access to higher education.

Forsyth & Forlong (2000) in their study of students from disadvantaged backgrounds from different districts in UK noted that the potential barriers were finance, distance from the institutions, local labour markets and cultural familiarity with higher education. This indicated that relatively a few number of school leavers from disadvantaged backgrounds would have the academic readiness and achievement levels which would allow them to gain entry to higher education (Forsyth & Furlong, 2000, p. 7). It is unclear if the disadvantaged young people who did gain adequate qualifications were as likely to progress to higher education as their more advantaged peers. This led to a disparity in the opportunities available for these youths.

A Croatian based study, (Doolan, Puzić & Baranović, 2017, p. 11) indicates that students from family backgrounds who had more formal education and more well received occupations, had shown an overrepresentation in higher education as compared to students from less educated family backgrounds and who belonged to the working class. Also, the choice of courses was distinctively different with students in the study of medicine. The medicine sector was largely represented by students from a more privileged social background, as was evident in one university in Croatia in the study.

While underrepresentation is an issue that has been tackled in various ways by the university administration, the educational policies of the region pose their own range of challenges thereby inhibiting from achieving the goals that they set out to address. Assaad (2010, p. 8) in his research argues that the policy of free, or almost free, public higher education in the countries of the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region, failed to achieve its objective of ensuring equal access to post-secondary education for people from all social classes and backgrounds. The policy of free education in the country had resulted in creating an unequal system where scarce public resources were rather subsidizing education for those who could afford to pay, while those from the poor backgrounds were virtually excluded from the system. This ascertains the fact that access to education was not purely enabled by the implementation of the policies. The family background and the financial resources of the learner further dictated the opportunities available to the learner.

A study in China shows that the role of education finance policies in promoting equal access to higher education is too limited to mitigate the negative influence of income disparities in China. To drive economic progress, resource allocation was skewed and this in turn affected the equality in education. The student aids were insufficient and they had very minimal effect on the access to higher education. The lack of effective financial policies in assuring equal access had left market forces to dominate the distribution of higher education opportunities. This along with the displaced enrolment processes increased the urban-rural and regional inequalities, favouring the upper class and middle-class students but denying more rural students. (Yang, 2011, pp. 173-174.)

While many of the studies examine the challenges that students face in accessing higher education, they are few that study what enabled students to access higher education despite the challenges that they face. This study is similar in its scope and purpose looking at both the enabling and constraining factors to accessing higher education while seeking new dimensions to establishing equity in access to higher education.

In the study by Calitz (2015), which is situated in a transformative paradigm termed the capability approach. It is a human development approach that has been taken to view the agency of individuals with fresh eyes. It shares the voice of students on the individual consequences of inequality while focussing on the agency and resources that students bring to higher education. Based on this framework, this research makes the argument that unequal participation is a remediable injustice that can be partially addressed by creating enabling arrangements for capability development.

Wilson-Strydom (2012, 2017) presents the importance of locating the individual stories and histories considering the broader social conditions within the university and outside the university walls. Studying this from the conceptual framework of the capabilities approach, the study seeks to understand what young people entering universities are able to be and do and what limits their being and doing. Instead of defining success through tangible terms such as credits achieved, enrolment demographics which does not focus on student well-being, the capabilities approach argues that educational resilience is an indicator of successfully transitioning in to university. (Wilson-Strydom, 2012, p. xvii.)

The analysis presented in this paper supports this statement, particularly in the context of resilience to challenges to achieve access to higher education. Relevant to this were the positive roles played by teachers, schools and families although these had negative influences too. The difficult community backgrounds that the students came from, worked as a motivational factor to achieve educational well-being for themselves and a better future for their families. The study interrogates how universities can become more responsive institutions with several pointers for universities wishing to think differently about students from marginalized backgrounds. (Wilson-Strydom, 2017, p. 12.) While there are various aspects to understanding the complexities behind access to higher education, there are also several perspectives as to how to view these challenges and the individuals who are faced with them.

2.2 Summary

The literature review indicates that issues related to access to education exists at various levels in the educational system starting from barriers at home and community to the admission processes that decides who can enter the university. The research literature indicates that challenges related to access to education is not merely limited to the developing countries but rather that social inequalities exist even in many of the developed countries. It therefore appears to be a common challenge that many countries face when even with progressive educational policies. The challenges to accessing higher education has been largely associated to the socio-economic context of the learners. Many of the students from the disadvantaged backgrounds with limited access to resources are often those that are challenged in accessing higher education. It is also evident that even though educational policies try to mitigate these inequalities and widen participation, these efforts are still insufficient to close the existing gaps, though they do minimally benefit some of the disadvantaged students. It is seen that learners who resided in poorer neighbourhoods had to also deal with restrictive influences from relatives and neighbours. Community related factors such as spatial segregation and family and community dynamics were deciding factors in them accessing higher education. Although research has largely focussed on the challenges that students face, a few recent studies have chosen to focus on what enabled students from disadvantaged backgrounds to access higher education despite the difficulties that they faced. Even though school, community and home has negative influences, they were also supporting in certain ways. The literature reveals that these negative influences and barriers worked as strong motivational factor for the learners to create a better life for themselves.

The next section of the literature review begins with the history of basic education and higher education in South Africa with a brief historical context since it is relevant to the context of the study. The chapter also highlights challenges in access to higher education in context to the socio-economic conditions, schooling

and resource availability at home, school, community and university environments for students in South Africa.

3 ACCESS TO HIGHER EDUCATION IN SOUTH AFRICA

3.1 Brief History of Basic Education and Higher Education in South Africa

Access to education in South Africa has been a highly-complicated area with multiple layers of complexity that could be associated with the social, political and the educational history from the past and the present. With a history of racial segregation and discrimination under the effects of apartheid and as a country that emerged from a lack of social justice and fairness, the complex history of South Africa has had implications on how the purpose of education and higher education were understood and transformed over the years. Both the schooling and the higher education section were integral parts of the apartheid practice and influenced largely by it. (Du Toit, 2010.) The post-apartheid period began in 1994 and this was a time of transition from apartheid to democratic rule largely impacting the changes in the education system and policies. The South African government has since then given great importance to introducing policies aimed at mitigating the effects of apartheid which had created a dispersed, dysfunctional and an unequal education system. The new governance system encouraged participation among the different stakeholders of the school community including the establishment of a National Qualifications Framework in working towards a more equitable education system. (Cross, Mungadi, & Rouhani, 2002, p. 171.)

While this was the local impetus for change, the international factor that created a need for a more inclusive society was the *"The 1990 World Declaration on Education for All"*. Adopted in Jomtien, it presented an overarching vision for the future, namely universalising access to education for all children, youth and adults, as well as the promotion of equality.

With various such efforts at establishing a more effective educational system, in the most current Annual Performance Report (2017/2018), the statistics indicate that the enrolment of children aged 7 to 15, which has been well above

95% for at least a decade, has moved closer to 100%, the enrolment ratio for 2014 being 99% and the highest ever recorded. It also indicates that nationally around 57 000 children aged 7 to 14, all of whom should by law be attending school, are out of school at any point in time and that better strategies to handle these challenges are needed.

Statistics indicate that the children who complete Grade 9¹ have increased since 2002 from about 73% to about 87% in 2015. This indicates that there is the 13% of the population who remain excluded and this gap can pose to be a vulnerable section of population that needs attention. (Department of Basic Education, 2016a, pp. 6-7.)

The report also highlights structural challenges such as school fees collection in officially non-fees schooling environments, walking distances to school being a hindrance, access to textbooks and grade repetition figures remaining high, especially amongst boys. This could be seen as a reflection of the inability of many schools to get teaching and learning right and the limitation posed by being from a disadvantaged background. While there have been positive steps taken to resolve these issues, they continue to persist. These glaring concerns continue to create a need for new understanding regarding issues to accessing education. While policy reports and historical background of the country represent only one part of story, the detailed literature review that follows focusses on the social, economic and political complexities underlying the access to higher education for youth in South Africa.

1- The basic education system starts with primary education includes a foundation phase up to grade 3, followed by a intermediate phase from grade 4-6. and secondary school from Grade 7 - 9 followed by grades 10-12 which is also a further training and education phase. This is followed by undergraduate education or university education. (EP-NUFFIC, 2015.)

3.2 Research Literature on Access to Higher Education in South Africa

This chapter looks at access to higher education as influenced by three major domains, the socio-economic context, challenges related to schooling that impacts the access to higher education and the availability of resources both human and material resources at home, school, community and the university environments.

3.2.1 Access to Higher Education and socio-economic context

The levels of poverty indicate clear disparity in basic resources among the population and its share of impact on the educational opportunities. With only half of the children who enter grade one in each year completing 12 years of schooling, and a higher education participation rate of 18%, it is clear that the majority of young South Africans are still excluded from higher education (CHE, 2013, p. 41). This is further complicated by the apartheid history that led to race-based educational and social exclusion in South Africa. Cohort studies indicate that less than 5% of black youth manage to succeed in higher education (CHE, 2013, p. 51).

Many individuals who are a part of the unsuccessful cohort in South African universities, are those who come from poorer backgrounds and are often in debt. The fact remains that poverty directly affects affordability and the benefits of meaningful access to education and this significant inequality in the income is evident in the race and class divides in the society. (Motala, Dieltiens, & Sayed, 2009, p. 253.)

Hurley (2013) examines the factors associated with socio-economic status and the educational outcomes of learners in post-apartheid South Africa. The article studies the extent to which the variables related to social, cultural and economic capital predicts the highest level of education and the successful completion of the matriculation exam of the learners. The study reveals that White participants achieved higher levels of education compared to coloured and black participants, when it came to both the highest level of education achieved and the pass rate for the matriculation exam. Using the individual-level variables of

gender, language and population group, the study found that students who spoke English as a first language performed better than those who spoke Afrikaans or an African language.

Leibowitz & Bozalek (2014, p. 105), cross-examines in the study how access to higher education has been articulated in government policy documents. The study highlights the fact that large emphasis has been given to the one-dimensional view of disadvantage in terms of race. While it is true that race and class are influential factors in gaining access to higher education, on the contrary this one-dimensional view distracts educational analysts and leaders from developing more fine-tuned strategies and techniques. These strategies could be used to deal with the key question: How does one ensure that more, and more socially and educationally disadvantaged youth benefit from access to higher education, both physically and epistemologically? Despite the enabling factors such as state policies and funding mechanisms, there is clearly an interplay between the system and individual and collective behaviour, or sociocultural interaction and this needs attention too.

Heaton, Acheaompong and Dufur (2012, p. 21) discuss in their research a nationally representative household survey from 2002 to 2009 from post-apartheid South Africa. The survey demonstrates that substantial educational inequality still exists. The patterns become more distinct as the children grow older and represent that African and Coloured children either dropped out or repeated grades to the extent that by age 18 they have a two-year education disadvantage compared with White and Asian children. A substantial share of this disadvantage was because of family background. These results implied the need for a more effective education policy that should address both issues of racial inequality and disadvantaged family backgrounds.

3.2.2 Access to Higher Education and Schooling context

The aspect related to schooling in South Africa deals with both a historical context and the vast disparities in the socio-economic conditions in South Africa and this part of the literature review highlights these aspects. The schooling status in

South Africa has been receiving much attention and critique over the years and the challenge that persists is in transforming a system that has been divided and unequally resourced both with infrastructure and human resources. While access to the doors of the school may have been achieved, some of the road blocks include inappropriate curriculum, teachers with insufficient training, dearth of school resources, ineffective leadership within schools and districts (Jansen, 2010; Reddy et al., 2016; Wilson-Strydom, 2015). While more schools continue to receive the basic facilities of water, sanitation and electrification, infrastructure backlogs remain a deep concern in the sector.

In context to the communities that the students belong to, there is an evident bimodality in the schooling system. The schools that were historically disadvantaged continue to remain dysfunctional and unable to produce student learning, while historically advantaged schools are more learner centred and able to build academic skills. (Spaull, 2013, p. 438.) The student population also vastly differs in the two school systems with the historically underprivileged schools still being racially homogenous (i.e. Black, despite the abolition of racial segregation) and coming from poor backgrounds while the historically advantaged schools serve a more diverse population, with almost all of the students coming from middle and upper-class backgrounds, irrespective of race. The fact that the disadvantaged population lives far from the good schools makes it inaccessible besides being a financial struggle since schools charge heavy school fees that this population cannot afford to pay.

Various researches have described the issues related to schooling which is by far one of the most influential factors after the family. Ever since the end of the apartheid period, several reforms and policies have been implemented that have not created far-reaching improvements in their outcomes due to complex and deep issues that exist (Branson, Garlick, Lam & Leibbrandt, 2012). South Africa despite a large state expenditure on education, still performs poorly in international benchmarking tests. (le Roux & Breier as cited in Leibowitz & Bozalek, 2014.) The social, economic and cultural factors have their influences on schooling, creating their rippling effects despite the progressive educational policies.

(Leibowitz & Bozalek, 2014, p. 95.) Another related study (Murrow, 2007 as cited in Leibowitz & Bozalek, 2014) suggests that race, ethnicity, language and class cohere as factors at school level to hinder students from what are known as “educationally disadvantaged” backgrounds from gaining “epistemological access” once they reach university.

Badat (2010) represents that despite almost universal formal participation in schooling, South Africa’s schools evince significant problems related to drop outs, retention, progression and successful completion. As has been noted, “the simple reality is that enrolment is not the same as attendance and attendance does not imply learning” (Sayed, 2007 as cited in Badat, 2010, p. 35). South African school students perform extremely poorly on a range of international assessment tests, in terms of which “65% of school leavers...are functionally illiterate” (Badat, 2010, p. 6). It recommends that ultimately, improved access and outcomes in higher education, especially for black South Africans and in the fields of science, engineering and technology, is strongly dependent on significant improvements in the quality of South African schooling. (Badat, 2010, p. 32.)

Case & Yogo (1999) discuss how the South African apartheid system continues to profoundly influence the life chances of many Black Africans, through its long-lasting effects on the country’s education system. Many of them who are currently employed showed patterns where they had attended schools with inadequately trained teachers, insufficient textbooks, and pupil-teacher ratios above 80 children per class. (Case & Yogo, 1999, p. 23.) The lack of school resources mainly created challenges with educational attainment and probability of employment.

Conley (2005) in his study related to schooling and readiness, identifies the gap between high school and college and the role of schools in preparing a learner for higher education. It is evident that merely taking preparatory courses for college in high school and achieving a high score does not ensure student success in post school education. Teachers at the high school level have little expertise and guidance on the knowledge and skills required for a student to be ready for entry level college courses. Wilson-Strydom’s (2012, pp. 7-8), research

highlights how high schools must aim for students to be college ready and the principles and practice that define that students are not only admitted in to college while also being ready with the needed skills and knowledge. Understanding this gap becomes highly critical for higher education in South Africa.

Wilson-Strydom & Okkolin (2016) in their study highlight the enabling and constraining factors related to schooling that influence the access to higher education among students in South Africa and Tanzania. The study presents examples of how the school creates an ambience for an environment for nurturing a sense of educational and well-being among the participants in the study. Despite the difficult backgrounds that the participants came from, the school served as a place that nurtured them. (Wilson-Strydom & Okkolin, 2016, p. 232.) In the study, the enablers in the domains of school, family and community are identified and their contribution to educational well-being and achievement are demonstrated.

Calitz (2015, p. 130) in the research analysis shows how participants used agency within structural arrangements to negotiate different conditions of schooling. They relied on resources at home and school to develop aspirations for higher education, and the structural constraints played a significant role in shaping their educational advancement.

Although schools posed constraints at various levels, the lack of physical, financial, and human resources persisted as barriers in students accessing higher education. Lack of resources impacts various levels of the education system in South Africa and the next section highlights this aspect.

3.2.3 Access to Higher Education and Availability of Resources in the home, school, community and university environments

The lack of resources and its impact on access to higher education happens at various levels that include the individual, the family besides the institutional and government budget decisions. In the detailed Technical Report of the National Household Survey by CALS, the study on the enabling environments highlights that major challenges with access to education and schooling involves lack of access to resources and infrastructure including basic facilities such as access to

water and clean sanitation. Sharing textbooks, lack of desks in classrooms were other infrastructural challenges. Students also had to deal with teacher absence and most of the content not being taught. Sexual assault and bullying were also issues in schools. Unsafe environments built a culture of fear and largely impacted learner's ability to learn. Potentially harmful social behaviour such as alcohol and drugs were also challenges to creating a healthy learning environment among the youth. The report clearly indicates that there is much to be done for creating safe, engaging and better resourced school environments. (CALS, 2009, pp. 124-138.)

Although educational policies aim towards creating equity and justice, the lack of resources associated with the disparities in the socio-economic status, has a trickling down effect on the universities. (Vally & Motal, 2014 as cited in Calitz, 2015, p. 12.) While this may affect all students, it does particularly impact students who are more vulnerable due to less academic readiness, the compulsion to work while studying, and cultural resources that are under-valued in the institution. These students are more prone to exclusion. On the contrary, students from wealthy families, can afford most of the basic needs related to tuition, textbooks and have the necessary academic and social re-sources that allows them to the complete the university studies successfully.

University budgets are a major concern and often insufficient budgets affects the student body (Choudaha, 2013; HESA, 2014). Universities running on insufficient budgets with a significantly larger student body also face operational constraints that can affect the quality of teaching and learning, the retention of qualified staff, adequate infrastructure, attention to pedagogy, and a basic threshold of resources needed for equal participation (HESA, 2014).

According to the HESA (2014, p. 11), report, higher education expenditure has declined over the last few years and its allocation in the government budget has been reduced. Also, the state subsidy has decreased from 50% to the current 40% of total funding in the past 20 years. This results in universities relying on tuition fees, income from donors and other third-stream income sources. The worsening in the financial position has cascading effects on the students from

disadvantaged backgrounds. (HESA, 2014, p. 11; Bozzoli, 2015 as cited in Calitz, 2015, p. 12.)

Considering that there are such a wider range of complexities in access to higher education, it is important to know how educational policies have been directed and implemented in response to bridging these gaps and enabling a greater ease of access to higher education among the varied segments of the population. The next section on the policy perspective in South Africa details these efforts and the limitations in how they have not completely addressed the gaps that continue to persist constraining access to higher education among the youth of South Africa.

3.3 Access to Higher Education in South AFRICA: A policy perspective

In one of the document by the Council of Higher Education it stated:

Equity should mean more than access in to higher education. It must incorporate equity of opportunity- environments in which learners, through academic support, excellent teaching and mentoring and other initiatives genuinely have every chance of succeeding. Equity to be meaningful is also ensuring that learners have access to quality education and graduate with the relevant knowledge, competencies, skills and attributes that are required for any occupation and profession. (CHE, 2001, p. 10.)

While the issue of access to higher education has been examined through research in various parts of the world, in context to South Africa too, the challenges of access to higher education and socio-economic contexts have been presented as a persisting issue even though statistical numbers indicate an optimistic improvement. Statistics South Africa revealed that an estimated 10,944,089 South Africans live below the food poverty line (i.e. cannot purchase enough food to meet a minimum daily caloric intake) and a total of 27 117 973 people currently live on less than R779 per month (approximately \$68) (Lehohla, 2015).

In attempts to address the gaps in the socio-economic conditions and its percolating effects on the access to education, many policy changes and structural and functional arrangements were made within the education system. It began with the reforms in the South African constitution that education must be

democratised with the values of equality, human rights and freedom embedded in it. The National Educational Policy Act in 1996 inscribed in law the policy, legislative and monitoring responsibilities of Minister of Education and the relation between the national and provincial authorities. One of the major reforms that was brought in was the South African Qualifications Act. This was in response to establishing a scaffolding of a national learning system that integrates education and training (DOE, 2001, p. 8). In it was embedded the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) which established the need to standardize and ascertain the quality of qualifications across the entire system that was disintegrated through racial divisions. In higher education, the distinction between universities and the vocational training centres was glaring. Linked to the NQF was established the Outcome Based Education (OBE), which ensured baseline principles for registering qualifications focussing on producing citizens with the necessary skills who could contribute to a growing economy. This led to an extensive curriculum reform. Though a positive change, the focus shifted to efficiency rather than the achievement of equity in higher education.

With regards to higher education, from 1994 onwards which marks the end of the apartheid era, there has been a wide spectrum of initiatives that aimed to lead to changes in the way educational institutions work. The 36 exclusive higher education institutions were merged through a major restructuring in to 23 institutions which included eleven universities, five universities of technology and six comprehensive universities. The key goal behind the restructuring was to break the scaffolding set by the apartheid landscape to the institutions in higher education and create a new structure that would allow for the goals set in the national policy. (CHE, 2004, p. 54.)

These new policies primarily included setting the purposes and goals of higher education, investing on policy research and implementation that amounted to a major restructuring of landscape of higher educational institutions. (Badat, 2010, pp. 2-3.) According to Cloete (2002, p. 87), who describes the first two years as “a massive, participatory drive towards policy formation”, the

culmination of which was the report of the National Commission on Higher Education released in 1996.

The next phase included the development of the White Paper 3 – A Programme for Higher Education Transformation – which was released in 1997 and followed by the Higher Education Act 101 introduced in the same year. The White Paper 3 specified four purposes for South African higher education. A summary of the purpose includes (from the White Paper 3, pp 7-8) how higher education is the key vehicle for achieving equity in the distribution of opportunity and achievement, addressing the needs of the society and the labour market adding to the prosperity of the modern economy. It also revolves around higher education encouraging the development of a reflective capacity and a willingness to review and renew prevailing ideas, policies and practices based on a commitment to common good and to contribute to creating a knowledge sharing society. (DoE, 1997.)

With the publication of the National Plan on Higher Education in 2001, the higher education system was restructured to categorise them as comprehensive universities and universities of technology, while opening their doors to students from all backgrounds. This did to some extent resolve the issues related to access to education for students coming from all backgrounds, the challenges related to resources, skill levels and outputs of the institutions that were historically white and those that served historically disadvantaged groups. (CHE, 2010, p. 2.)

The policy environment brought in many changes in terms of increasing access signified by the number of enrolments. The university enrolments grew from 369,029 in 1995 which about 460,438 in 2002. (CHE, 2004, p. 70.) In 1980, there were 159,756 students enrolled in South African universities. By 1990 this number had grown to 304,625 and by 2003 it was close to 490,000. This increase appears substantial, but represents a significant slowing in the rate of growth. From 1950 to 1990, the student headcount in South African universities had grown at between 85% and 92% each decade, but between 1990 and 2000, it grew by only 27%, declining between 1995 and 1998, with 1999 marking its lowest point. (CHE, 2010, p. 3.) The White Paper for Post-School Education and Training

states that by 2030 the goal is to have head-count enrolments of 1.6 million in public universities, 2.5 million in TVET colleges, and 1.0 million in the community colleges. In addition, it is estimated that there will be approximately 0.5 million enrolments in private and higher educational institutions. (DHET, 2013, p. 7.)

Policy agendas have been on an upward trajectory since 1995 while being influenced by the international developments such as globalisation of higher education and commodification of education. The developments begun as a response to providing social justice rather than a direct impact of providing skilled labour to fulfil the needs of the industry. There exists a complex tension between the aim of a neoliberal development model and that related to social equity. (Bundy, 2006, p. 9; Boughey, 2007.) It is also argued that elements of management and performance must be used as indicators to measure goals to make access to higher education more equitable, improve the quality of higher education and produce citizens with the skills appropriate for the economy. (Lange, 2006, p. 9.) The current paper White paper on Post-School Education and Training again stresses on the elements of social justice and central to these policies is the determination to bring about social justice, to overcome the legacy of the colonial and apartheid past, and to overcome inequity and injustice whatever its origins. (DHET, 2013, p. 75.)

While policy literature begins to focus on elements related to management, leadership that goes beyond mere management finds its significance in many of the reports and as action points in leading the country's educational system through a change process. Therefore, the need to understand how leadership can respond and potential it holds to address the challenges in accessing higher education.

3.4 Need for Effective Leadership

It is evident that despite the national educational policies and their vision being targeted towards a more progressive education system, there is still much work

to be done. Increasingly there has been greater attention being given to training and capacity building for effective leadership. It is a highly discussed topic and finds mention in the policy documents. (CHE, 2010.)

Ngcobo and Tikly (2010), in their article identify the key dimensions of effective leadership for creating the needed changes for the historically disadvantaged. It states that subsequent studies could consider broadening the scope of what is taken to be 'effective leadership' to embrace other potential outcomes from education besides academic achievement and change management (Ngcobo & Tikly, 2010, p. 223).

Department of Higher Education and Training (2013, pp. 18-19), in their report of The White Paper for post school education and training clearly focusses on capacity building and effective leadership for creating efficient post school systems. Without effective, efficient, dedicated and motivated leadership, the colleges will not be able to provide the quality of education and training required by the hundreds of thousands of youth who enter the colleges every year, or ensure that the college system can expand to meet the country's needs. The report suggests that the successful development of a single coordinated educational system takes more than just commitment to transformation. It depends on building and enhancing the capacity in all spheres which includes management, governance and attention to leadership at institutional and national levels.

According to the annual report on basic education in South Africa states that the many mission of the department is to provide leadership that will lead to an improved educational system in South Africa. The report outlines the leadership capacity building program and the process for strengthening educational leadership at school and policy making levels. (Department of Basic Education, 2016b, p. 92.)

While recognising the disproportionate and unequal nature of the system of education, the report mentions the need for analysing and identifying methods and strategies for achieving equity and equality in the provision of quality education. It also evaluates the way the national Department and the provincial education departments (including districts) support, monitor and evaluate schools,

while examining the state of schools in general and the quality of school leadership (Department of Basic Education, 2016b, p. 119). Thus, leadership comes out emphatically as an important intervention in addressing challenges in relation to equity in education.

The policy literature indicates how a greater emphasis on leadership is being developed to address challenges related to higher education. To understand more on how educational leadership can respond to this, the following chapter on educational theories highlights the existing theories and identifies three leadership theories with their strength and limitations in context to the aim of this study.

3.5 Summary

The articles from the research literature indicate that the challenges related to accessing higher education in South Africa continue to exist and persist despite an optimistic improvement shown by statistics. There is a large section of the youth still excluded from higher education. The fact that poverty affects educational opportunities is evident and there exists still a significant difference in the income levels among the class divides. Research studies suggest that race and class divide is a one-dimensional view of this problem and it is important for leaders and educational analysts to find new ways to ensure more socially disadvantaged people have access to higher education.

The student population at schools reveal distinctions within schools' systems. The historically underprivileged schools are racially homogenous while historically advantaged schools have a more diverse population but largely students from middle class and upper-class backgrounds. Race, ethnicity, language and class are factors at school that hinder students from accessing higher education. While the factors related to socio-economic status and ethnicity are key constraints, on the other hand is the lack of resources both material and human resources at schools. Schools pose the problem of untrained teachers, insufficient textbooks and large class populations.

Even if one does complete schooling successfully, there is the aspect of university readiness. Research studies reveal a glaring gap in preparing students with the required knowledge and skills for higher education. There are also studies that introspect on what enabled students from difficult backgrounds to access higher education, where students share that schools were safe and nurturing environments and contributed to their educational well-being in subtle ways. These studies look at how structural constraints though present, contributed to building aspirational individuals who were motivated to achieve higher education.

Besides the schooling related factors are the weighing factors such as university budgets. The lack of sufficient funds does affect students since it creates operational constraints that can affect the quality of teaching and learning, the retention of qualified staff, adequate infrastructure, attention to pedagogy, and a basic threshold of resources needed for equal participation. When universities begin to rely on tuition fees and income from donors, it would certainly leave its impact on students who cannot afford to pay for their college education and educational resources.

While the research literature does highlight the existing challenges to accessing higher education, the literature on educational policies ascertains the efforts made as policy directives in mitigating the effects of the apartheid history and building a more integrated and functional education system. Statistics clearly indicate that despite the progressive policies, the gaps in the society continue to exist with imbalances in the affordability and ability to access higher education. This literature there by emphasises that despite progressive educational policies, remedial measures and placing funding mechanisms as active steps in creating access to higher education for all, there lies much to be done. Policy documents have been emphasising on leadership as a significant component in addressing barriers in education. Hence the need to understand further how educational leadership can respond to the challenges and complexities in accessing higher education that are at the core of this study. To begin with we look at the existing leadership theories and the strengths and limitation of each of them.

4 EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP THEORIES

4.1 Early Theories

4.1.1 Trait Theory

The early leadership theories set a trend in looking for ideal leaders. As early as the 1840's was the great man theory that gave the starting point that human traits make great leaders. This was used at a time when leadership was associated as a male quality in context to military leadership.

Scientists looked for leaders with distinguishable characteristics of what defined a leader such as intelligence, sense of responsibility, creativity and a list of other values that would define who a good leader. Traits that related most to the effectiveness or advancement of the leader was self-confidence, energy, initiative and stress tolerance. (Yukl, 1989, p. 260.) But, studies were unable to establish there was a clear relationship between each characteristic and its impact on leadership and this led to further variations in leadership theories. (Stogdill, 1974 as cited in Yukl, 1989, p. 260.)

4.1.2 Behavioural Theory

The behaviour theory came as a response to the trait theory offering a perspective that one must focus on the behaviour of the leader as opposed to the mental, social or physical characteristics. Behavioural theory assumes leaders can be made, rather than are born which means that, people can learn to become leaders through teaching and observation.

4.1.3 The Situational Theory

Situational theory proposes that leaders choose the best course of action based upon situational conditions or circumstances. This research and theory falls into two major subcategories. One line of thought is researchers study how the situa-

tions influence the behaviour and how the behaviour varies across people of various managerial positions for similar situations. (Yukl, 1989, p. 262.) The other looks at how situations moderate the relationship between leader attributes or behaviour and leader effectiveness

The style of leadership that the leader adopts may vary based on the situation. In the case that he is the most knowledgeable in that situation, he may choose to be authoritarian and decide on the action of the team. (Uzohue et.al., 2016, p. 20.) It is also possible that the leader adopts a democratic approach involving inputs from other members in the team when there are more skilled experts in the team who can contribute effectively to the situation.

The trait, behaviour and early theories are stories of heroics of leadership and this genre is problematic for a few specific reasons. These equate in educational leadership, the leadership itself with an individual leader who would be the head of the educational institution e.g. school principal. This is largely inaccurate since it is never the school principal himself who leads the school to the kind of organisation it must function as an entity. There are an extensive team of people who are involved in establishing this. The second aspect is that it deals more with the 'what' factor. The routines and structures are more in focus than the how of leadership and the purpose behind certain routines and roles. One must understand deeper the role of leadership practice and create knowledge that would be useful in practice. An alternative conceptualization is one where leadership is distributed and understood in terms of shared activities and multiple interactions. (Spillane, 2005, p. 243.) Distributed leadership comes as a response to the extensive literature in the heroics of leadership

4.2 Distributed Leadership

Distributed Leadership has been extensively researched in context to school leadership literature (Spillane, Halverson & Diamond, 2001; Spillane, 2005; Harris, 2004; Elmore, 2000) and it also in relation to higher education (Jone, Lefoe, Har-

vey, & Ryland, 2012). It has been adopted as an approach for encouraging principals to increase organisational capacities and there by enhance student learning and growth (Klar, Huggins, Hammonds, & Buskey, 2016). Distributed leadership has been an area of scholarly focus (Bolden, 2011; Gronn, 2002), yet there are varying notions of the term distributed leadership and what it represents.

Distributed leadership is popular as a post heroic representation of leadership where the focus has shifted from individual traits and behaviour to one of a collective and collaborative process involving various stakeholders in the system and leadership emerging as this process of interactions (Klar et.al., 2016; Bolden, 2011, p. 251). Gronn (2002) in his framework describes distributed leadership as spontaneous collaboration where different groups of individuals with varying skills and knowledge come together for a particular task and execute it. They return to their individual roles on completion of this group task. The framework also describes distributed leadership as an intuitive working relationship, where individuals work closely over a period of time and "leadership is manifest in the shared role space encompassed by their partnership. It is the working partnership as a focal unit which is attributed with leadership by colleagues, and the partners are aware of themselves as co-leaders." (Gronn, 2002, p. 430.) The third perspective includes building an organisational structure where teams are put in place to enable collaboration between individuals in the team.

Harris, Leithwood, Day, Sammons, & Hopkins (2007) add more elements to distributed leadership. This included the planned alignment where the tasks and functions of those providing leadership is carefully thought out by the members of the organisation and prior agreements between the different sources of leadership such as principal, teachers, heads of departments and who is to execute a certain leadership practice or function. Leithwood's research shows that planned and spontaneous patterns of alignment have shown the greatest potential for favourable and short term organisational change (Harris et.al., 2007, pp. 343-344). Spillane (2005, pp. 146-147) elaborates on the concept of distributed leadership as being one of collaborated distribution were two or more individuals work together contributing towards the same leadership routine. It could be collective

distribution where one or more individuals work separately but are interdependent in executing the same task or function. It could also be a coordinated distribution where they work in sequence to complete a leadership task. Distributed leadership is considered to provide solutions to many of the leadership and organisational change challenges but this may not be completely true. It is a diagnostic tool and conceptual framework that can be used to understand educational leadership and its purpose further on how it can and must be practiced.

While research does indicate an important link between distributed leadership and organizational development, clear patterns are not established with empirical evidence. So further research is needed to clearly establish the limitations and possibilities that this mode of leadership provides. (Harris et.al, 2007, p. 345.)

There is an absence of extensive empirical research that shows how distributed leadership can actually impact instructional improvement and make a marked change in student outcomes. But what really is important is how leadership is distributed and not the mere fact that it is distributed in nature. Extensive theory building around this concept is essential to understand and study its impact in educational environments. (Spillane, 2005, p. 149.)

4.3 Instructional Leadership

Instructional leadership has been viewed largely as a term that refers to the more traditional form of leadership in schools with principals assuming the role of a hierarchical position giving directions to teachers and ensuring that the prescribed curriculum is covered. Most of the schools with this form of leadership may have more teacher-led classrooms, with test results given large importance. Although there are some differences in the characteristics that define instructional leadership, the theoretical foundation is similar in many of its forms (Reitzug, West, & Angel, 2008, p. 695). In its transformation, it has moved from presenting the principal as “an inspector of teacher competence” to one where the principal becomes “a facilitator of teacher growth.” (Marks & Printy, 2003, p. 374.) It has become a model representative of one that not only allows for professional growth but one

that represents collaborative inquiry, opportunities for reflective work and growing as a professional learning community. (Marks & Printy, 2003; Reitzug, 1997.)

The instructional leadership model emerged in the early 1980's and in context to research on effective schools. The model focussed on how leadership improved educational outcomes. Hallinger (2003) conceptualized instructional leadership as consisting of three key dimensions: defining the school's mission, managing the instructional program, and promoting a positive school-learning climate.

Dimmock (1995) presented instructional leadership as a top-down process of management and emphasized that the model is laid out with rules and processes that may be limiting in nature. It is like a prescribed-formulae that if a school principal executes certain key tasks, teaching and learning would effectively improve in the process of doing so. He suggested as an alternative the option of mapping backwards starting from the student outcomes as the prime objective to learning styles and processes; teaching strategies; school organization and structure; and leadership, management, resources and culture/climate.

In order to understand the characteristics of the principal's in instructional leadership, Hallinger (2005) suggests three dimensions for the role. This comprises of defining the school's mission, managing the instructional program and creating a positive school climate. (Hallinger, 2005, pp. 224-227.) Hallinger has developed these ideas by reviewing previous researchers describing the relationship between principal leadership and students' achievement.

There are some popular framework models of instructional leadership which identify the key dimensions of this form of leadership. (Bossert et al., 1982; Hallinger & Murphy, 1985; Murphy, 1990; Weber, 1996.) Some of the commonly highlighted dimensions in these frameworks lay great emphasis on the functions and role of the principal and the principal's management behaviour. The second aspect that gains importance is the school climate for promoting an academic learning climate favourable for the students. The later models stress on the mission and goals of the school and managing the curriculum and instruction, observing and improving instruction, and assessing the instructional program.

Key Concerns

Some of the key concerns with instructional leadership may be that firstly the role of the principal in many schools may not be one of an educational expert. There are some who perceive their role as one of administration and management and in the profile of their work be distanced away from the classroom teaching and active learning environment.

Secondly as Hallinger (2003) suggests that in many instances principals have less expertise than the teachers they supervise. The principal's role is the link between the higher district authorities and the parent community. Their authority might be limited considering that they receive instructions from higher authorities and if the goals and vision of these interconnected communities are not in sync, the principal is left to deal with conflicting needs and demands from these stakeholders. (Stewart, 2006, p. 6.)

Furthermore, Hallinger and Murphy (1987, p. 55) state that there are four obstacles that restrict principals from practicing instructional leadership; lack of knowledge of curriculum and instruction, professional norms, expectations of school district and role of diversity. Moreover, they added the fifth obstacle that seems to make the role of the principal more difficult to assess; the lack of clear definition of the principal's instructional leadership role (Hallinger & Murphy, 1987, p. 57).

There are also more recent dimensions that have been added to how instructional leadership can be conceptualized. Although all that has been described before is at the core of the model, it also includes certain transformational practices. Waters and Cameron (2005) have even added the dimension of individualized consideration in terms of the professional development of the individual teacher. Mangin (2007) highlights another change to the existing models, which has been that instructional leaders are more distributed in their leadership process. Besides instructional leaders provide opportunities to teachers for professional development and allow for building a professional learning community. So instructional leadership is undergoing a change in its dynamics, in its influence and

turning towards a model of leadership that involves leading for change or one that is transformational in nature.

According to Hallinger (2003, p. 340), the imagery contrasts with the 'strong leader' imagery encompassed in much of the instructional leadership literature. Indeed, in the classic instructional leadership model, the principal seeks to limit uncertainty. S/he does this through the increased coordination and control of curriculum and instruction, even if it may reduce opportunities for exercising voice among others.

4.4 Move to Transformational Leadership

Instructional leadership as a model has served many schools well during the 1980's and 1990's. Considering the current day complexities and need for initiatives for restructuring and leading schools through the changes they face, instructional leadership no longer seemed to define the entirety of a school's purpose and what school leadership must aim to become. (Leithwood & Poplin, 1992, p. 8.)

The idea of transformational leadership was initially proposed by Burns (1978 as cited in Leithwood & Jantzi, 2005, p. 177) and later by Bass (1990), who described its relevance in non-educational contexts with relevance to positive organisational change. He argues that with training, leaders can learn the techniques and qualities needed to be transformational leaders. The concept of leaders and followers takes a different dimension in this form of leadership in the relationship between the two. "When the relationship focuses on the continuing pursuit of higher purposes, change for the better occurs both in the purposes and resources of those involved and in the relationship, itself. Whereas the transformational leader plays a pivotal role in precipitating change, followers and leaders are bound together in the transformation process". (Marks & Printy, 2003, p. 375.)

Transformation leadership conceptualizes leadership as an organisational phenomenon rather than being accountable to one individual, thereby accounting for multiple sources of leadership. (Hallinger, 2003, p.338.) The studies in

transformational leadership in school contexts (Leithwood & Jantzi, 1990) focus on various aspects of this leadership in developing a professional learning community in schools and in being directed towards creating more enabling learning environments that are aimed towards school restructuring. One of the characteristics of this form of leadership is that the leaders work with the school community to understand their individual goals and create a sync with the larger goals of the organisation. This approach enables an increased commitment from the staff since they see a sync between their own goals and the organisational goals.

In leading a change process, this is conceived as second order change since the principal creates a school climate and culture where the others in the team feel committed and motivated without implying a top down instructional approach as a leader. (Hallinger, 2003, p. 338.) Leithwood & Poplin's (1992) extensive research in this form of leadership in educational contexts suggested that transformational school leaders stand for three fundamental goals. Firstly, that they help staff members develop and maintain a collaborative, professional school culture. Secondly this form of leadership focusses on teacher development and thirdly it emphasizes on solving problems together effectively.

Leithwood and Jantzi (1990) demonstrated how transformational leadership has a distinct influence on teacher collaboration and another study established a relationship between the aspects of transformational leadership and teachers' own experiences of change in attitude towards school improvement and while bringing in relevant changes in the instructional style. Through a synthesis of various studies, Leithwood highlights that the effects it has on the people is the main strength of the transformational leadership model. The findings showed that transformational leadership had strong direct effects on the school conditions which in turn impacted the classroom conditions. Together transformational leadership and school conditions explain variations in classroom conditions even though the direct effects of this form of leadership may be negative or non-significant. (Hallinger, 2003, p. 339.)

On the positive note, several studies show that transformational leadership has had an impact on teachers' perceptions of school conditions, their commitment to change and the organisational learning that takes place. In weighing the outcomes of this form of leadership it is shown to have an influence on teacher's perceptions of progress with implementing reforms as an initiative. It also has an influence of teachers' perceptions of increase in student outcomes. Two evident characteristics of this form of leadership is that it is distributed in nature and focusses on capacity development across various levels of the school community. (Hallinger, 2003, p. 339.)

Jackson's (2000, p. 70) conclusions about how shared transformational leadership evolves in the school community also highlights other characteristics that are an integral part of this form of leadership. He suggests that this form of leadership is not sustainable over long periods of time. He notes that when leadership becomes dispersed, it leads to an increase in uncertainty since there are more voices who are an active part of leading the change towards school improvement. This includes the principal, the teachers, parents, staff and students in the school community. He suggests that transformational leadership demands a higher level of tolerance to ambiguity and ability to stay through the process of change. (Jackson, 2000 as cited in Hallinger, 2003, p. 340.) While it may lead to favourable organisational changes and build organisational capacity, in comparison with instructional leadership it still does not accomplish improved instructional competence at an individual level. (Marks & Printy, 2003, p. 377.)

Transformational Leadership is leadership for change, and leading people through the change process. While it may have been highly researched for studying school reforms and redefining school culture towards a positive change, it would be also interesting to see how university education can contribute towards developing this form of leadership. While universities have the purpose of preparing students with academic and work skills, a key need for the future may be that we need more transformational leaders and the university may be the right crucible to prepare students and developing them in to leaders for change. Riggs & O'Malley (2017) present how universities can aim to prepare such leaders and

what kind of university education and curriculums could create transformational leaders for social change.

4.5 Pedagogical Leadership

The learning centred leadership theories have been presented as a collective model of leadership involving various key elements and stakeholders in the education system and aims to represent a sustained improvement if practiced. Yet, in its practice, it is still limited in its nature to lead change and therefore pedagogical leadership seems closer to the needs of today and the contemporary nature of education. (Male & Palaiologou, 2012, p. 111.) Pedagogical leadership is a term that has been examined from many different perspectives and extensive research related to this terminology exists. According to Moss (2006, p.32), 'pedagogy is a relational and holistic approach to working with people' and within pedagogy, 'learning, care and upbringing' are interwoven and connected.

The research literature has viewed pedagogy through five different lenses. Firstly, epistemological where pedagogy is viewed as transmission of knowledge, secondly socio-ideological, as a tool for the enculturation of students. Thirdly as a social lens where pedagogy is a social practice and a relationship that leads to construction of knowledge. (MacNeill, Cavanagh, & Silcox, 2005.) The others deal with the pedagogical act on how knowledge is transmitted and lastly research represents pedagogy as separate from didactics with pedagogy related to the actual learning process and didactics to subjects being taught.

Pedagogical leadership has been proposed as a broader concept in terms of its reach on the school community and the impact it can create. Successful pedagogy maintains that teachers must understand how students learn and have the much-needed autonomy to design educational activities and assessments that meet the students' needs. (MacNeill, Cavanagh, & Silcox, 2005.) It is essential that a pedagogical leader demonstrates a deep understanding of how knowledge is constructed moving from the mere aim that learning outcomes are achieved. It

also involves building on teaching competencies with the aim to improve school-wide learning.

When one speaks of pedagogical leadership it is imperative that we discuss the concept of distributed leadership since both are intertwined. The connection between pedagogical leadership and distributed leadership in research highlights the collaborative and cooperative functioning of pedagogical leadership. With context to the shared thinking of teachers' roles and responsibilities and success in pedagogical leadership the study by Lunn and Bishop (as cited in Heikka & Waniganayake, 2011, p. 508) found that shared understandings among teachers about pedagogical ideas contributed significantly to realizing the functioning of pedagogical leadership. The principal as the school's pedagogical leader assumes various responsibilities with regards to building on the relationships with all the stakeholders in the school community while each of these stakeholders have a share and function in the distributed leadership model. This is a huge resource bank for the principal and in his role, must ensure that he leads teachers and empowers them with responsibilities that will have an impact on the curricula, learning, budgets, human resources, assessments and evaluation practices. The student involvement is high and they are an integral part of the school development.

The principal's role as a pedagogical leader has two dimensions, one that is direct and other indirect though both these dimensions are interactive in nature. In direct pedagogical leadership, the principal's role is directly involved in the guidance and support for teacher's knowledge and learning and discussions centered on the development of the school. The indirect pedagogical leadership relates to the way the principal guides the school development process and enables the entire school to grow and develop as a professional learning community. (Alava, Haltunnen, & Risku, 2012, p. 38.)

In a school management study, (Alava, et. al., 2012, p. 43) the study discusses how besides empowering the teachers in the school community, it is equally important to involve the out of school stakeholders which includes the parents and local community. These collaborations are what builds the potential

of the school. In broad terms for pedagogical leadership, distributed leadership focuses on leading the entire organisation's knowledge and learning. Each of the stakeholders becomes a learning member thus creating a learning organisation while enabling partnerships through dialogue and mentoring. The principal while enabling these relationships and development to take form, is an active learner in the school community himself.

“Effective education settings are those which have developed productive and synergistic relationships between learners, families, the team and the community, because the context, the locality and the culture in which learners live are vitally important.” (Male & Palaiologou, 2012, p. 112.) While all of this is a critical part of the pedagogical leadership, one another key finding is the fact that leadership is not looked at a prescribed model but one that is understood deeper in context to the situational challenges itself.” Leadership is presented as a praxis that goes beyond the dichotomy of teaching and learning. The organisation is envisioned as a live learning environment and the social axes represented by contextual environments in which the educational organisation is set. It is important to understand the social settings if one is to aim at desired learning outcomes for students.” (Male & Palaiologou, 2015, p. 214.) Therefore, pedagogical leadership is looked at as a collaborative process, which includes growing in knowledge both collectively and individually taking in to account all the structural, communal and institutional challenges.

Pedagogical leadership seems to integrate in it many dimensions of the leadership process with hidden elements of the strengths of distributed leadership, developing professional learning communities, redefining the essence of the term pedagogy while not excluding the importance of teachers' involvement in the instructional process. It focusses on student learning which is determined by the needs and the interests of the students. The principal while leading the school improvement process also leads the professional learning and development of the teachers. It evolves as a collaborative process involving the different stakeholders in the community. It aims to bring out the best in the learners while not ignoring the institutional barriers such as policies, race, gender or class.

While in an instructional leadership model, the focus is on the learning outcomes and achievements both at an individual and collective level, in pedagogical leadership the aim is to contribute to the growth of knowledge both at the individual and as a community. (Male & Palaiologou, 2012, p. 116.)

It presents the social environments as pedagogical or social axes that have an impact on the learning. Pedagogy is an interplay of theory, practice and the social axes which many of the traditional models of educational leadership do not include. Therefore, pedagogy represents the creation of learning environments in which the centrality of interactions and relationships among learners, teachers, family and community environments (i.e. their values, beliefs, culture, religion, customs and economic circumstances) interact with external elements (such as the global economy, climate and social phenomena that additionally influence the life of the community) in order to jointly construct knowledge.

For an educational setting and for an educational leader, to function at the best potential, it is important that the relationships that exists between the learners' families, the team and the communities is one of synergy and aimed at being productive. The context, the locality and the culture of these environments to which the learners are connected to are critically important. They have an impact on the learning and teaching environment and if an educational leader is aiming to enhance the learning process, it would require an approach of building shared knowledge, experience, and practices through collaboration while establishing an atmosphere of openness and trust. As challenging it may sound, this is at the core of educational leadership. In other words, teaching and learning no longer occur in isolation or solely in the education buildings; they have become part of the community ecology, with the learners, families, community and government all being partners. More important is that all these are partners in the teaching and learning cycle and must be moving together building new ways of thinking and where intercommunicative actions are required. It is essential therefore, to further our understanding of what is involved in teaching and learning. (Male, & Palaiologou, 2012, p. 112.)

4.6 Educational Leadership and Social Justice

Considering that educational environments need to respond to the diversity among the learners and to the changing society governed by global issues and local issues intertwined, educational leadership as a field and discipline has been slow to respond. There is a need for leadership to address the realities of increased racial, ethnic, cultural and linguistic diversity and their intersectional implications on social justice at various levels of education. (Theoharis, 2007.)

Educational Leadership for social justice has been in the research literature over a decade and is undergoing transformations in its theory and practice. (Larson & Murtadha, 2002; Brown 2004; Bosu, Dare, Dachi & Fertig, 2011.) Researchers and others suggest that culturally responsive leadership may result in socially just and equitable outcomes for all learners in contexts where there are vast differences among the quality of access to education available (Gooden & Dantley, 2012; Jean-Marie, 2008; Khalifa, 2012; Santamaría, 2014).

Gradually but over time, educational leadership has evolved to provide scope for discussions on discriminations due to racial inequality. This becomes imperative due to the way it manifests itself in academic achievements and opportunities for higher education. What was initially an academic conversation about multicultural education as a supplemental curriculum about diversity; has moved to representation of education for social justice and equity. The need for an equity agenda is essential if one has to allow for access to student learning and equal opportunities for all.

One of the recently proposed models of educational leadership for social justice has been the Applied Critical Leadership. Applied critical leaders are defined by a leadership that promotes social justice, educational equity and is culturally responsive. (Santamaría & Santamaría, 2015, p.22.) It has emerged from several research studies of indigenous and culturally and linguistically diverse leaders. Santamaría (2014) captures and conceptualizes the ways in which educational leaders from systemically underserved backgrounds (e.g., Latino/a, Māori, African American) practice this form of leadership. Since many of these

leaders have experienced, identified or witnessed oppressions, they are a valuable resource of knowledge and experience who could actively contribute to addressing and finding solutions to educational inequities that exist in various parts of the world.

The major strengths of this form of leadership is that the leaders are deeply passionate about the betterment of the students in the community they serve. Besides they are deeply responsive and resonate with the local context and the challenges they present. They see themselves as local, regional, and global citizens. It is sustainable over time and these leaders seek out connections with others with whom they can relate,

Theoharis (2007), in his study of principals who stood for justice and equity observed that under their leadership they led their schools to become better educational environments. These leaders enacted their own resistance by raising student achievement, improving school structures, enhancing their staff capacity and strengthening their school culture and community. They used these as the course of action for maintaining the privilege for certain groups of people and marginalized students based on race, class, disability, language, gender, family structure and neighbourhood. In the process of doing this, the principals had to face resistance through lack of resources, difference in attitudes and opinions among the teachers and administrative staff. The study suggest that leadership preparation programs must enhance the ability of leaders to lead for social justice.

The characteristics of the principals who were able to advance and make social justice possible were that they possessed key knowledge and skills that could be aptly applied in designing leadership preparation programs. These included special education, ELLs, curriculum, differentiation and teaming, using data, presentation skills, race, poverty, working with diverse families, and taking a global perspective. This along with the ability to be resilient to resistance greatly helped them through this process of enabling change. (Theoharis, 2007, p. 250.) The learnings from this study could benefit future leaders who require the skills

to develop their own resistance and resilience as they face barriers to social justice.

Another research study that highlights what leadership training must focus on, implies that leadership preparation program should promote critical reflection, critical discourse and develop pedagogy related to ethics, inclusion, democratic schooling and social justice. The paper suggest that it is only appropriate that the capacity of schools is broadened by developing educators who go beyond the traditional ideas of teaching and administration while they prepare to respond to “issues of social justice (e.g., gender, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, etc.) shape and influence possibilities and desires for a more harmonious society that transcends national and international boundaries.” (Jean-Marie, Normore & Brooks, 2009, p. 20.)

4.7 Findings from the Leadership Theories

Each of the leadership theories present their own strengths and limitations in their applicability. In context to this study to understand how educational leadership can contribute to enhancing the access to higher education, it is important to enlist the pro and cons of each of these particularly in context to research problem at hand. This section of the chapter summarizes the learnings from the educational leadership theories.

The early theories focus largely on the individual traits, characteristics, values the leader possesses. The focus is not on the how leadership is envisioned rather than on the routines, functions of a leader which is still limited in nature. The distributed leadership model began with the concept that leadership must be distributed among various members of the school community. It is an approach that encourages the leader to build on the organisational capacities with the goal of building of student learning and growth. As a collective collaborative process, leadership emerges as a process of these interactions. The limitations of this model of leadership is that it still focusses on the fact that leadership is dis-

tributed but not how it must be distributed. Also, empirical facts still do not reflect that it actually has an impact on student learning outcomes. The instructional leadership model often viewed as a traditional hierarchical model of leadership presents itself with many strengths and dimensions. Here the role of the educational leader is one who facilitates the professional growth of the teachers while being actively involved in the instructional program. The limitations include that the authority of the principal or the school leader may be limited since he/she is the link between the parent community and the district authorities. Most relevantly the principal may not always be an educational expert and may not have the necessary skills to supervise and guide teachers. Research does indicate the nature of instructional leadership to hold elements of distributed leadership but rather focused on the professional growth of the teachers and the school community as a learning organisation.

Educational leadership as a discipline is constantly evolving and how the leader and the definition of leadership evolves in each of these though distinct, is still largely interconnected. I choose to focus on three major leadership theories that add their strengths to finding solutions to creating a more equitable educational system while tackling the challenges that access to higher education poses.

Transformational Leadership came as a response to the complex needs and leading schools through reforms. It presents itself as a collaborative model aimed towards organisational change. It involves the team work of committed individuals with multiple sources of leadership. It clearly resonates a distributed leadership model and supports capacity building across the members of the school community. This leadership model would highly support the fact the school, universities and policy makers should aim to be more equitable and would aim to tackle the challenges the learners face in accessing higher education. The leadership still presents ambiguity at certain levels since leading people through change is a complex process with very many elements. Also, the role of the closely connected communities including the learner is still unclear though they may be unanimously committed to the vision and the reform. The emphasis on curriculum, pedagogy and class environments still lacks clarity while these may

be active tools to support the transformational process being aimed at. The emphasis is largely on organisational change and this takes precedence over the learning and instructional process.

The pedagogical leadership model comes again with new strengths. This is also a more recent leadership theory that represents a broad reach on the school community and leaving a meaningful impact in the process. It focusses on the process of knowledge construction unlike transformational leadership that focusses on organisational change. It talks more about an emerging and evolving meaning of pedagogy and in this process how leadership evolves. Interestingly it involves the active involvement of the other connected stakeholders in the educational system. Each of these stakeholders is a learning member and this leadership involves dialogue and mentoring through these partnerships. A more recent study presents pedagogical leadership as praxis emphasising on understanding the social settings if one is to create desired learning outcomes. It evolves as a collaborative process involving the different stakeholders in the community. It aims to bring out the best in the learners while not ignoring the institutional barriers such as policies, race, gender or class. In context to this study where the role of the contextual environments is bearing on the educational opportunities of the learners, this leadership model presents itself as significantly strong in addressing a greater understanding of the learner, family, community and school environment to evolve as a pedagogical leader. The model is still limited in the when considering that creating equitable and greater accessibility to education is the question at hand. While knowing these environments deeper would help address this problem, the focus is still largely on the learning and understanding how learning happens. It is an evolving form of leadership with no prescribed formulae, yet one that could address the social, economic and political complexities in accessing higher education by understanding the influences of these contextual environments better. While the leadership model aims to redefine the role of the leader and the meaning of pedagogy in context to this, it does not completely prescribe the actions, roles and functions of the leader in each of these contexts which is the very nature of it. This is a leadership form that

would emerge from understanding the constraints and enabling factors that these learners have.

Educational Leadership for social justice came up purely as a response to challenges in the educational system related to social inequalities. Since the current study's aim is to understand the social, economic and political complexities that arise, the foundational reason is largely the existing disparities in socio-economic conditions. The question at hand is how to avoid this from affecting access to higher education allowing for equal educational opportunities for all. This leadership responds to the realities caused due to racial and ethnic diversities and their implications on social justice. This is again yet another evolving form of leadership and is highly context based. Depending on the needs of the student in the local community that the leadership prevails over, the responses must be defined. Research suggests though that it is important that leadership programs enhance the ability for leaders to lead for social justice. The active leadership model theorizes that one can learn valuable lessons from indigenous leaders who have witnessed and experienced oppression and are committed to making a difference to the students in their local community. These leaders consider themselves global citizens and believe in collaborating to find solutions to educational inequalities. In this form of leadership, the focus is on the social reform. How leadership functions, the role and functions of a leader, the involvement of the closely connected environments such as the learner, family and community is still largely vague and unclear. While most leaders who stand for social justice are resilient and committed to change, their role as a pedagogical leader aiming to create and enhance student learning is still unclear.

It is interesting to note that although the study with its aim did not set out to study the factor of agency, it is largely the internal drive and aspirations of the learner and their self-motivated nature that ultimately led them to access higher education despite all the challenges that they faced. This is one of the reasons that the study looks at the enabling factors and constraining factors to accessing higher education among the learners. These inherent qualities of the learner are an important resource for educational leadership and in building individuals and

leaders by themselves who could contribute largely to creating more equitable societies and it is not a factor that educational leadership can ignore. There is therefore a need for educational leadership to perceive this strength and enhance their capabilities institutional practices, curriculum, pedagogy and administration. (Wilson-Strydom, 2017, p. 12.) Given the challenges in the educational system in schooling and university education in South Africa, there is a choice on how this could be addressed, providing academic support does help but the extent to which students are marginalized does not change distinctly, the other option is build meaningful connections amongst students, fostering and encouraging students' aspirations and actively harnessing the power of students' sense of being agents who can "act and bring about change" in their lives (Sen as cited in Wilson-Strydom, 2017, p. 12). In the final chapter on conclusions, we discuss further the learnings from the study and the need for educational leadership to respond to the findings from the study.

5 RESEARCH DESIGN

5.1 Aims, Objectives and the Theoretical framework of the study

As indicated by the detailed literature review and the previous chapters, the study is about accessing higher education. To be more specific, the main aim of this study is to better understand the social, economic and political complexities related to access to education and higher education in particular. The objectives of the study have been to examine what were the key enabling and constraining factors from the home, school and community environments in accessing higher education for the participants in this study.

Based on the detailed research literature on access to higher education, the study identifies the various constraining and enabling factors in the global context and in context to South Africa. The historical background supported by the review of the policy of the South African education system expands on the constraining and enabling factors in accessing higher education in South Africa. The theme of leadership emerges significantly as a prerequisite for addressing educational challenges. Besides the literature perspective is my standing as a researcher. As a student of educational leadership and having been through the entire program with intense exposure to the meaning, purpose and scope of the educational theories, it is of keen interest for me to study this issue through the lens of educational leadership. The entire findings, therefore, have been examined through the theoretical framework of educational leadership theories.

The research questions guiding the aim of this study were centred around examining the enabling and constraining factors in the home, school and community environment and their influences on accessing higher education for each of the research participants since the socio-economic status of the learners had one of the greatest bearing on their educational opportunities.

The narrative interviews have been analysed using qualitative content analysis and the empirical section has been presented with relevant quotations from the

narratives to support the observations and findings from the data. An arising theme that had an emphatic presence in the data was one of agency which was not a part of the initial research questions. Since it is an important theme and one relevant to the core of the study, it forms an integral part of the data analysis and the findings from the study. The findings from the data has been presented in chapter 6. These findings and their analysis largely complement the academic literature on access to higher education in general, access to higher education in South Africa a policy perspective on access to higher education in South Africa and the educational leadership theories. A synergy of the learnings from all of them is presented in the discussion chapter in the light of educational leadership. I further elaborate below the selection of the research participants, the collection of data and the criteria for coding in the content analysis.

5.2 The research participants

The South African (SA) data is drawn from a three-year study (2014-2016) with final year university students (pre-service and in-service) in the field of teacher education. The study focused on understanding opportunities and constraints to reach university education; and the social, economic political complexities underlying the access to higher education.

As per the official racial population groups in the country, Black African (N=6; 3 females and males), White (N=5; 4 females, 1 male) and Coloured (N=3; 2 females, 1 male) students were represented. At the time of the interviews, most of the participants were in their early twenties (the four youngest were 22 years; the oldest participant was 43); three of them were married, three were dating, and eight were single; four of them had children.

Collecting the Data

The research participants were informed about and recruited to join the study through an open invitation. Research participants were informed according to ethical principles about the purpose and focus of the study, and notified about anonymization and archiving of research data. The informed consent gained

from the research participants included principles regarding how the data is shared, and a statement of anonymity towards the participant as an individual and confidentiality regarding the received information.

5.3 Qualitative Content Analysis

Qualitative content analysis has been used in this thesis for analysing the data because it permits taking into account the context in which the material was generated and at the same time it considers the theoretical background of the research (Mayring 2000). Coding the material by using a structured category system makes it possible to reconstruct the steps of analysis. This strengthens the reliability of the analysis and the comparability of the results (Mayring 2000). In order to be able to conduct a qualitative content analysis, the materials being used as data need to be defined as the preliminary step. This includes sharing who are the sample participants, how was the sample chosen, the basic ethical considerations for conducting an interview and how the text to be analysed was generated. The coding and analysis of this data was carried out using a qualitative analysis software Atlas.ti.

Coding and Analysing the Data

As a detailed view of how the coding of the data was carried out, initially a set of tentative categories was defined and explained in the coding agenda. Each of these codes were given a definition on what they stood for. Subsequently the researcher read through the transcript and started to highlight statements and attach a quote to it. Almost all the quotes were significantly important barring a few general statements. The code categories took new form during this process and led to creating many sub codes with a positive or negative code attached to it, since it either stood for enabling or constraining factors to accessing higher education which is at the core of this study. The categories were developed in an inductive way, guided through the conducted data. However, some categories were found in a deductive way through including theoretical aspects in the development of the categories- Agency or individual attributes was one such

theme. The study did not set out to examine the theme of agency but it appears very strongly through the data examination and was therefore an included theme. The output reports which are a consolidation of the quotes belonging to each code were generated. These reports were very useful in identifying the quotes that would be supporting each of the research questions as presented in the empirical results chapter 7.

A summary of the codes used and the key characteristics noted in the participant's narration of experiences have been represented as shown in FIGURE 1:

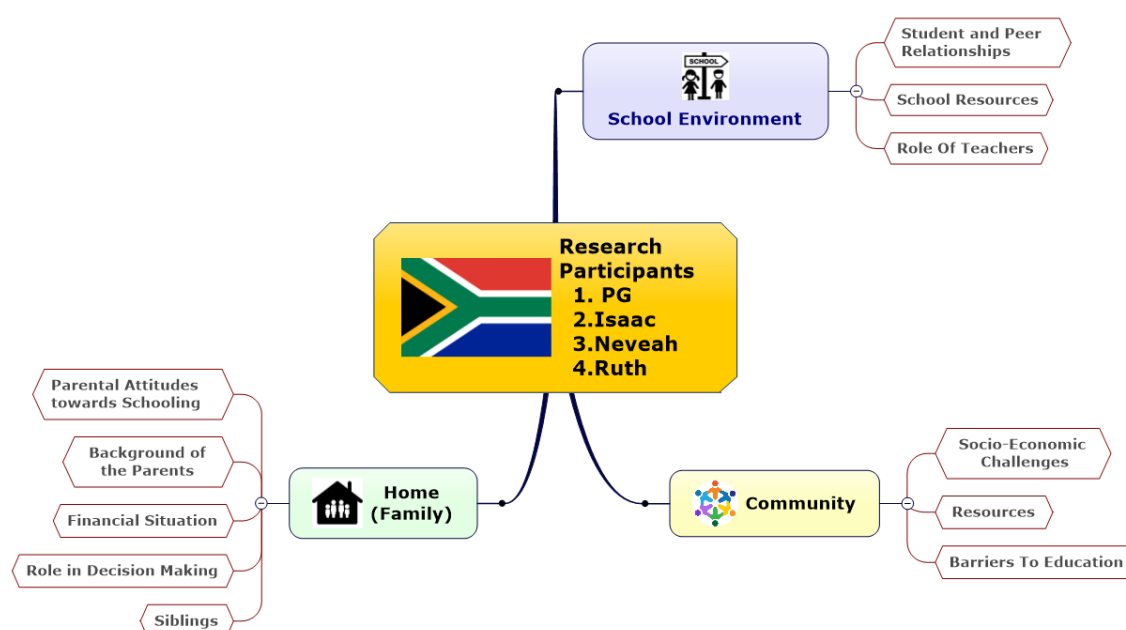


FIGURE 1: Main codes for data analysis and factors for each code.

The thesis includes the voices of the participants as direct quotations in the study which adds to the reliability of the inferences and observations made based on these quotes. To further add to the reliability factors, the analysis has been reviewed and checked by my supervisor who has been actively involved in collecting the data to check for any inconsistencies.

5.4 Reliability and Validity

The two concepts reliability and validity are very important to take into consideration when carrying out a qualitative research since they help to determine the objectivity of the research. Reliability and validity could be seen as two different measurement instruments that illustrate the level of trustworthiness and credibility of a research. Reliability refers to the question of whether a repetition by different researchers or by the same researcher at another time and place would come to the same result (Silverman 2006). Silverman (2006) proposes possible measures to conduct a reliable qualitative research study, which has been followed in this thesis. He suggests that researchers should display their research process as well as the choice of theory in a transparent way so that the steps made can be followed, understood and reproduced by others. Furthermore, he argues that readers of a research report should be able to access the concrete observations made, not only summaries or generalizations. This has been adhered to by transcribing the interviews verbatim. Also, in the thesis direct quotes have been used from the transcript in the analysing part to support the observations and the inferences made.

To get a more detailed insight of how the transcribed interviews were transferred into analysable contents for this thesis, the proceeded steps will be described in the following paragraphs. As a first step, tentative categories including main codes and sub-codes were designed. Each of these codes were given a definition to clearly state what they stood for. In case the contents did not fit in existing categories, new ones were developed. These codes were reviewed by the supervisor for the study. Most statements have been quoted directly and a summary after each section states the observations and inferences made from the statements. After coding all interviews, the collected statements were analysed and interpreted (see chapter 6). This detailed description increases the ability for other researcher to replicate this study under same conditions with comparable results.

Validity refers to how well a scientific test or piece of research measures what it sets out to, or how well it reflects the reality it claims to represent. The

validity of this study could be supported by the fact that a very detailed literature review has been made of two major aspects for this study, access to higher education and theories in educational leadership. This has been complemented with an equally detailed data analysis with all the reliability elements taken in to consideration. Both have been elaborated on with their pros and cons clearly listed. The summaries at the end of each section clearly indicate the basis on which the inferences have been made from the literature review and the data analysis. The study set out to understand better the social, economic, political complexities in relation to access to higher education for youth in South Africa and this has been clearly achieved with the above said.

.

6 RESULTS

This results section presents the data analysed with answers to each of the research questions that this study set out to explain. After each section is a short summary that sums up the findings in the each of the contextual environments. Each section contains detailed quotations that add value to the realities in these environments while clearly depicting the support systems and challenges that exist to pursuing an educational path.

6.1 Research Question 1: What were the enabling and constraining factors in the family environment that influenced the learner's access to higher education?

6.1.1 Familial Environment

In this section, the prime focus is on the participant's attitude towards education, the background of the parents and their financial situation. It also includes the role of siblings and the decision-making influences of the family on the participants' education.

6.1.2 Parental attitudes towards schooling

While parental support has a direct influence on the schooling and learning for a child, it is equally important to understand their attitudes towards supporting and furthering the educational opportunities for the child. The narratives of the participants reveal very supporting and encouraging parents for whom education was a priority except in the case of PG who grew mostly in the absence of parental support.

"My mother, my pillar of strength; my mother always supported me when I was in primary school supported me. Remember I said now she forced us into certain directions, but... and she didn't actually listen to what we wanted. But when you would ask her for advice like motivation, yes, she would motivate you, she motivated and supported us. Yes, she always did what's best for us, always put our needs first, not our decisions, but our needs."

"Once again, at home whilst we were growing up my mother's kids... my mother always emphasized now this is the four of us, my one sister and my one older brother and my one younger brother, my mother would always emphasize education to us; yes, talked about education. I never... she never... I never actually talked about like what I wanted to do with them. Education, yes, since we were grade one we always talked about education." (Isaac, 24.)

Indicating that education was of prime importance to Isaac's mother.

While for Neveah the support from her father stemmed from the fact that he had missed out on opportunities as a child and was achieving his dreams much later in life. He did not want history repeating itself when it came to Neveah and was particular that she had the opportunities that both the parents were not privileged with.

"I think my mother had a very big influence on that, as well as my father, because my father was studying law and he only needed to do two modules then he would have had his degree, but he didn't do it, and then he was always telling me don't make the same mistakes that I made. And my mum always said she didn't have... her parents didn't have the funds to give her the opportunity to study further." (Isaac, p. 24.)

Besides the fact that they had their priorities towards providing education, they also had the attitude of motivating the child and supporting in an instance when she was not able to achieve the goals set.

"when I don't get to those goals my mum would always just say, have you done your best. And then I said, yes, in my circumstances. Then she would say, no, then it's good enough for her. So they were, my dad as well, very motivating, yes. (Neveah, 24.)

Similarly, for Ruth, her story is one of a supportive father who prioritised education.

Yes, my father he always made sure, that is like his number one priority. Because he didn't really get a chance to further his education, because then he studied when he was very old. He's very passionate about schooling and everything. (Ruth, 22.)

6.1.3 Background of the Parents

Isaac's mother was educated herself and trained nurses at a nursing college, while his father was a retired pensioner who studied until Grade 9. In his narrative, it is evident that his mother's educational background was linked to her pushing her children to be educated.

Yes, he's a pensioner, he's

retired. Previously he was a driver, then after being a driver he owned a few transport businesses. After that he was a driver again, and then the past years he has been owning a few transport businesses, but now he's retired; so, yes, he's just settled.

She's a lecturer at college, it's a nursing college, and it's Free State Government

Nursing College, but it's linked up with the university. She basically trains nurses.

"But my mother, because she's educated she felt like she knew best, so we never discussed what you wanted to do, she only pushed you in the direction that she felt you should go." (Isaac, 24.)

In Ruth's story, although her father was not highly educated, the lack of being able to access formal education becomes a motivating factor for the parent to ensure his child attends school. The parents compromise on their own wants and needs in order to be able to educate their child.

He started working as a plumber at first, because my grandparents weren't educated they weren't educated at all. He got himself to school with the money that he got and then he also tried educating some of his siblings and then us.

I think they really wanted to see all their kids get educated. That was their plan. They really wanted that to happen. Because they always put us first in everything.

He does a lot of sacrifices for us in order...and he's done a lot of sacrifices in the past for us to get to university.

So they're really pushing us and they really want to make it happen for us. Because they say it's a chance they say they never got and they want us to get a better chance, a better shot at life. (Ruth, 22.)

For Neveah, her mother had been through a formal education while the parents both continued to farm and the fact that they had to start over rebuild their lives did not stop them from prioritising her education.

My parents started farming. My mum was then teaching in Bethlehem, and we were there until I was about the age of nine.

Then my parents lost everything in a hailstorm, all the farming peas. He was farming peas, and we lost everything. And my mum taught at Steynsrus High School. She's still a teacher today, and my father's... he still has his business there. (Neveah, 24.)

6.1.4 Financial Situation

The financial constraints for each of the participants are a part of a varying spectrum from mild to very difficult circumstances. While financial constraints may seem to a barrier in being able to access schooling, or aspiring to be educated, the

constraint itself takes the role of being a motivating factor and enabling in working towards overcoming financial difficulties as is evident in the story of PG.

Isaac clearly shares how his mother ensured that although they were not financially very strong, she provided the best possible education that she could as a parent.

“The standard of living has been average, but when it came to education my mother did the best. Yes, I really have to applaud her there, she always made sure we had the best when it came to education, even though she didn’t want to listen to what we wanted to do, but she did what she thought best. We had much more than most of our peers had in terms of in our community and stuff, yes” (Isaac, 24.)

It wasn’t easy even though there wasn’t a day where maybe we would go to bed maybe without a meal but yes. Like even though we did have a meal but it wasn’t a proper one. (PG, 25.)

PG circumstances were in deep contrast to the stories of the families of our previous participant. His mother was the sole bread winner of the family and provided for his family by going for a job and he lived with his uncles, cousins and aunt. It was the eldest uncle who supported the family and his education as well, but they had bare minimum resources.

It wasn’t really enjoyable taking account that when I came to university it’s like I didn’t have a strong financial background and all that. (PG, 25.)

Coming from a challenging family background, it would seem that it was not a prime factor in his motivation to study but it was, as is evident in this statement,

“Okay like I said, it’s like the family circumstances or background. It’s also what pushed me to work hard and make sure I progress.” (PG, 25.)

Although not similar circumstances, Neveah’s story is also one of battling financial difficulties but she had a stroke of luck with her grandfather’s savings that gave some temporary relief.

“so luckily for me when I was born my grandfather started a trust for me that paid out when I was 18 to help with my further education, and that helped me into getting started with my drama, but for it was quite a worry for me as well as my parents what would happen after through first year of study. (Neveah, 24.)

Ruth’s life was not easy either when it came to family finances but her father managed his assets in order to be able to provide for his child’s education and

particularly in the case of Ruth, he managed to send her to a private school which was relatively expensive.

"..... but then financial wise and everything it's always my father. He's always the one stepping in and saying if it's for school I do not mind, I can spend. It doesn't matter how much I spend.

For example, okay he owns a lot of cattle so that is how he actually paid for most of my siblings' education. Because I got lucky, I got a Funs Lushaka bursary. So he didn't have to worry about that.

So he always makes sure that he sells some of the stuff and then he gets money for registration every year. Then he goes again for auctions and what, they sell again in June and then he pays the rest of the money that's left

Because there was never a time where he would be like, I'm really out now. The only option is that you guys can stay home a bit so that we can raise more funds, by the time they all went to university they never had any trouble with money.

.....finances was one reason, because then I knew I did not have to rely that much on my parents for helping me, because they were still building themselves and are still doing so today.

So he did it with me, because it couldn't be everyone because private schools are pretty much expensive. So yes. I think he just did it for me. (Ruth, 22.)

6.1.5 Role in Decision Making

Isaac's mother did not invest time in discussing what the children were interested in and at many times the decisions she made were conflicting with their interests. In the example that Isaac gives about his sister who was coaxed in to doing accounting,

"We haven't discussed it as such, but hearing about it vaguely I could sense that she wasn't because she really wanted to do psychology, she was pushed into doing something that she hated, numbers, she didn't like numbers that much."

Also in Isaac's case, his mother changed his school without his consent as is evident in the following statement.

"But she never actually trusted me with my decisions, so she took me away from that school and put me in another school thinking that it was best for me. So she always did stuff thinking it was best for us, she never actually discussed how we felt or what we wanted to do." (Isaac, 24)

In this case Isaac's freedom and decision-making abilities were limited by his mother's intervention in his education. Even at a stage when Isaac decided to stay away from school and his academics took a dip, he says

"She always put those first, high school as well; even when I disappointed her through and through, she was there for me. My mother really helped me and I would honestly say none of the teachers; no teacher actually asked you, but they would ask you, but they wouldn't ask you with care, like what's wrong, do you want to talk? None of the teachers, no." (Isaac, 24.)

When asked if he had anyone as a mentor in his family or in his school to help him make decisions regarding his opportunities for constructing an educational pathway, it seems like he had no one to really talk this out with and it is his self-driven want for change that had enabled his educational well-being. He says,

"I think it is myself basically. Also taking into account the family background, you know, I will tell myself...No this is the situation I'm in at the moment and I don't like it. And it's up to me to change my life and yes. No one else." (PG, 25.)

This self-driven aspiration to create a better life for himself is key to the educational path he created for himself.

While Neveah was debating between studying drama and finding a school that could skill her in this, her mother's subtle but caring suggestion made her change the field of study that she intended to.

"And then my mum said why don't you think about teaching? You've always been good at explaining things and doing things and achieving things, that I would be a great teacher." (Neveah, 24.)

Neveah suggests through this narration that her mother's suggestions and observations for her, explicitly guided her decision in studying education. Further her mother's constant persistence of pursuing higher education through words of encouragement, without a sense of authority as a parent, worked largely towards her decisions to study further.

"And then my mum said if I have the opportunity to keep on studying and to furthering myself and my knowledge I must never stop." "so yes, I think it... my parents a lot." (Neveah, 24.)

She replied when the question was raised about the issue of educational opportunities, alternatives, her choices and decision-making.

In Ruth's story, it is the father who had a predominant impact on her decision to advance his studies. But her choice of what to study and persist as a career was not without her share of debating and constant strife with her father,

“When it comes to careers, yes. We had to debate it a lot. Because my father, sort of had everything planned out. I want my first born to be this, my second born to be this. So he already had it all out” “Then when I came to university, like I want to study education. But then he said no, we already have a lot of teachers in our family. We are fine with that. How about going for occupational therapy or something like that.” (Ruth, 22.)

Except in the case of PG, all the other participant stories reveal strife and debate over choices and opportunities, as much as the parents did encourage and support the educational opportunities of their children, there are instances of the freedom to make choices being curtailed by the parent.

6.1.6 Siblings

Except for PG, all the other participants share fairly successful educational stories of their siblings and particularly in the case of Ruth, her siblings were a motivating factor for her. In Isaac’s story, he shares evidences of varying levels of educational achievements among his siblings, while one of them quit education after reaching the 12th grade, another due to the influences of the community they lived in, engaged in anti-social activities while among his two other brothers, one completed a nursing degree and the other trained as a medical technician. His sister did well in school and moved on to university education.

My other brother, his highest education is... my second oldest, his highest education is grade 12, senior certificate. He didn’t have any educational training, but he had correctional services training, so he was basically a prison warden; but he quit, now he’s unemployed.

My other brother, the third oldest brother is... he, I don’t know, I think he left in grade nine, something like that, grade nine or eight; but... because of now the community whilst he was in grade nine or eight, he got mixed up with the wrong people, gangs, and then killed somebody, actually murdered somebody, and went off to prison and he was released. And he never actually finished his education, he’s currently just doing some odd jobs, you know, driving for somebody, or cleaning, or doing some odd jobs

And then the fourth oldest brother is now currently... his highest level of education, I’m not sure how I can put this but he has senior certificate, and then he also did training, but it’s like training at [unclear]. I know his training as a medical technician, that’s all I know; I don’t talk about him.

He’s currently... he has senior certificate, and he’s currently busy with his diploma in nursing.

No, because my sister wanted to go to a school in the city, an all girls’ school in the city, she didn’t go there. My mother took her to... that’s the same, the school in our community, but the coloured school. My sister did very well there, she passed... she got good symbols which led her to [unclear] university. (Isaac, 24.)

Nevaeh too had well educated siblings who aspirations changed as they discovered new interests.

My oldest brother, he was in business school. Right after school, when he finished high school he started at business school in a private college, and for the main reason because my parents told him he must do something after school; he cannot just do nothing. He was very good in Tae Kwon Do, a Korean self-defence sport, and he wanted to further his career in that, but in South Africa there wasn't much of an opportunity for that, so he finished. He's got a certificate in business administration.

And after that he decided he's also going to follow in my youngest brother's footsteps and go to England, and he was a bus driver there so save money. And when he came back he knew what he wanted to do. He wanted to work in a financial institution, and then he started doing Forex trading and that opened up doors for him and it opened his eyes into what he really wanted to achieve. And he recently completed his degree through UNISA. Yes, so it was... it was a long way for both of them to find what they were looking for. (Nevaeh.24.)

Ruth shares stories of her sisters who were highly educated and how their presence and perseverance were motivating factors in her being able to pursue her own educational achievements.

Mamahlake. It's our first born sister. She's a teacher at Matatiele, at Saint Monica's actually. It's the school I used to go to. She got employed there this year, because she only got her diploma this year as well

Tekhatso, yes she is my sister also. She's currently doing her Master's in Agricultural

Economist for the University of Pretoria. But there she did her Honours here and her degree here in Bachelor of Agriculture and Economics. Lindhle yes. She's a medical practitioner. She's now doing her service, back in the Eastern Cape at home. At a hospital and then, she went to school at the University of the Witwatersrand in Johannesburg. Yes that's where she got her degree.

We have difficult names. That's Sotho for you. She's back home at Matatiele. She's working as an intern at the municipality under the code of the municipal management, because that is what she studied. She also studied here. She was graduating this autumn.

I keep wishing myself by looking at my siblings, referring to them. They just make me want to study more. The fact that they came to university and then they graduated and they are now working and independent. (Ruth, 22.)

6.1.7 Summary

The parental influences are relatively significant in the lives of the participants in their ability to access and to achieve in their capacity in the educational environments. The attitudes of the parents were extremely supportive and encouraging. Though the freedom of choices was not high among the participants with the role of parental authority and decision making, yet except for PG who grew up with

the support of his extended family, for all the rest education and schooling was high on priority. With varying levels of financial constraints, the stories reveal how for each of them the parents made the necessary effort to be able to provide education for their children. In the stories of the siblings it is evident that the participant and his or her siblings were given the same level of importance when it came to education. While most of them had at least one parent who had been through formal education, the attitudes of both parents were relatively synonymous when it came to insisting on quality education for their children. The fact that some of them had the privilege of being educated while some others had lacked it, both worked as encouraging factors in making education happen for their own children.

6.2 Research Question 2: What were the enabling and constraining factors in the school environment that influenced the learner's access to higher education?

6.2.1 School Environment

This section looks at what characterised the school environment of the participant's and if it did really play a role in enabling the construction of their educational path-ways and aspirations. If so was it the challenges and barriers or the encouraging atmosphere that built their education or was it a combination of both?

On observation, the narratives indicate that, the demands of belonging to different socio-economic groups, peers, school resources, teachers and racial disparities are a spectrum of factors that the participants were challenged with in their own school environments. They also shared about encouraging and supportive teachers who had a positive impact on their schooling experiences.

6.2.2 Student Community and Peer Relationships

As in Isaac's story there are clear indications of the presence of various economic layers in the student community with certain characteristics defined by the race

factor. He states that there were different level of educational aspirations among the white kids and the coloured kids and he himself did not set high goals for himself, acquainting himself with mostly the coloured kids had the pressure of being popular to feel included among his peers. So, a large amount of energy was diverted towards these challenges rather than in education.

“And then when I got to Centraal the kids they were motivated because the kids knew what they wanted. This is now what you would call in South Africa the White areas, kids knew what they wanted, they knew from the time, we want to be doctors; so, once again, you find little groups of different residents, you find little groups of [unclear] kids, little groups of Coloured kids. I affiliated myself with the Coloured kids who didn't want much in life, just settled for average; so then you didn't have motivation to learn.”

“We talk about the [unclear] in Centraal, 80% of the school's kids would be White Afrikaans kids, and then 10 would be Black, 10 would be Coloured, no Indian or other. Within the Blacks I was popular, within the Coloureds I was the guy, and with the rest of the school, 80% of the Whites I was... it depends on which grade, because the lower grades I was popular, and like my grade, my peers, I was, yes... I was only one of the guys.”

“If I actually think back to about it, there was classes, you get the upper class, you get the middle class and you get the lower class. With the lower class guys I was fine with them, we really... we got along perfectly, the middle class kids, some of them... got along with some of them, but higher class kids affiliated me with them, funnily enough, which I always find weird but”, (Isaac,24.)

In Isaacs's story, it is evident that the students observed one another to notice how wealthy each one was and defined their friendships based on the same. Particularly for Isaac, he had friends from all groups and was popular among all and this has played a subtle role in enabling his education since he enjoyed an inclusive atmosphere.

The tension of belonging to peers was interspersed with the compulsion to perform and not fail in studies as well since there was the fear of getting labelled by his peers that seems to impact his life even currently.

“fear, because once you fail a year, once you repeat a year people laugh, people do laugh, kids were mean, I was also mean. Kids laughed at me because remember I was the one guy who was the main guy, who was the funny guy, and I'm the one... I was like the only guy who repeated the year. My one friend who got worse grades than me actually they condoned him, and then he went to grade 12. I got left behind and like the principal told my mother, why? So, for me, working hard was that fear of being labelled as a failure. Up to... still up to this day I have a fear of being labelled... I have a fear of failing, that's why” (Isaac, 24.)

Isaac's own challenges as a student and those that others went through seems to lay the foundation for his decision to study teaching and become a

teacher. He expresses how he never wants any other child to make the same mistakes that he did as a child in pursuing an active educational path.

While for Isaac the different socio-economic layers among the children attending, school did not affect his own education to a large extent, Neveah expressed how she felt outcasted in her school purely because of belonging to a different socio-economic background. She also adds that it did not have a major impact on her own schooling but felt that this distinction largely impacted the learners that she taught in her current job.

"I wasn't bullied but I felt a bit outcasted [sic]. I think one of the main reasons, if I think back now, was that a lot of that school's community was very wealthy and they looked down on people that didn't have much or didn't... wasn't able to get what they wanted when they asked for it."

"It can go both ways, positive and negative, but for me the influence of socioeconomics on my schooling career, there was not influence on that at all. Today I think there's... there's a very big influence. Yes, and learners these days, they tell you, listen here, my parents have money, this and this and this." (Neveah, 24.)

What was evidently a pressing factor for Isaac was not for the other participants. The others went to a school that had only Afrikans or in the case of Ruth who felt no sense of exclusion in her schooling life except that she was bullied when she was in primary school. She decided not to talk about in the fear that it may get worse but eventually her parents got to hear about and it did end.

"I didn't even really want to talk about it at home because then I thought that they would confront them and then yes it would get worse. But then it never got too physical"

"I want to be that child who is also able to just stand in front of people, address them, and talk about important stuff and all those things. So the pressure was coming from the people around me, more especially at our hostel." (Ruth, 22.)

Ruth struggled with finding her own footing among her peers and wanted to emerge as a self-confident individual instance of which one finds even in her university life but which she overcomes eventually. Ruth also mentioned how her close friends did not make it to university and while one went in to modeling, the other one got pregnant and stayed at home.

Okay. It's like I didn't have social life. I didn't have...I never...I didn't have friends so because I was...I want to focus on my studies because I want to go somewhere also so socially or the social life wasn't so good. (PG, 25.)

Ruth and PG both did not have active social lives and the role of peers in their education seems very limited. Lack of social life layered with the desire to be a committed learner led to academic engagement taking priority during their schooling life.

The role of peers in supporting the educational environments is fairly limited with probably Neveah being the only participant who shares having a peer who brought in positivity to her school life with a creative element and Isaac's active social life and popularity among peers led him to perform. The rest of the participants share stories of being excluded, bullied, pressured by a sense of comparison or not having any social life at all. But many of these negative aspects worked towards building an aspiration in them in education and for others in the role of being a teacher. It is a paradox that these barriers in disguise were enablers in creating more aspiring individuals.

6.2.3 School Resources - Most of our schools had what all the basic things we needed

The school resources are a mixed bag of the positive and negative. Isaac recollects the classrooms fairly well equipped with all basic facilities but access to clean sanitized bathrooms being a challenge. Three of the participants studied in schools that were relatively well equipped with all basic resources and sporting facilities except for PG who studied in a school with severe lack of basic resources like libraries and laboratories. Instead, the teachers had to work hard to replace the lack of resources and so did the students. Overall majority of the participants enjoyed the availability of all basic facilities and for some the modern facilities of access to learning computers as a subject.

6.2.4 Teacher Community at School - Did the teachers make a difference to their schooling experience?

Isaac shares in his responses that he loved going to school because his teachers loved him for his popularity among his peers. His academic achievement was high during this phase.

“And then the socialisation part with others, with the teachers, excellent, the teachers loved me, I was sort of like the teacher’s pet, you know, because I was always, what do you call it, class leader and then I became a prefect.” (Isaac, 24.)

For Isaac, his Afrikaans teacher was his favourite, who was strict and particular about discipline besides being a very humorous person. Also, an elderly teacher who taught civil engineering who appeared superficially strict but was a very humorous and gentle person. The teacher he liked best was his rugby teacher.

He notes that the female teachers in high school were particularly gentle and kind while the male teachers tended to be stricter and militant. As Isaac puts it,

“Even in Centraal we felt care, like the one Afrikaans teacher of ours she made us feel like sometimes, I don’t know how to explain, she made us feel like we were actually like one of her own kids, the whole class, she didn’t have favourites, she treated everyone the same.”

No, she picked anyone, she really like she cared for us all; so... and male teachers were always militant, that’s the first word that comes to mind. Stand up straight, boy; even though, you know, you like them but all... most of them, all of them were militant. There was a difference, the guys were militant and the female teachers showed care. (Isaac, 24)

PG had the challenge of studying in a school that quite severely lacked in resources and has the sensitivity to note how it was the teachers’ hard work that compensated for the lack of resources. He mentions that as a reason for why he liked his teachers and his English and Geography teacher in particular. It was their constant encouragement and belief that he would do well that led to his academic achievement and for him staying a committed learner all through school.

Then they could tell me...No you can do it. If you want it for instance, get a certificate of merit it’s possible you must just get this mark. So yes they encouraged me a lot by telling me I have potential to do well even after school.

They were good in teaching. And some of them they were strict. But even though they were strict, I had a good relationship with them. Because I think I was a committed student or committed learner.

But so many teachers were committed and they had faith in me I believe that's why I am who I am today. (PG,25.)

In Neveah's narration, while in primary school, she felt that despite having mixed grades in the same class and their numbers not being too large, she felt she got the attention that she always needed. From her string of responses, it is evident that what appeals more is the warmth and personality of the person and with specific teachers their personality and their teaching abilities. Also, the liking for a subject and performance in it is closely strung how much the participant liked the teacher. She started off with mentioning that her hospitality teacher was the sweetest with her being there when she needed besides being a good listener who responded warmly and sensitively to whatever she shared. She also was fond of her science teacher and math teacher while remarking that hospitality was one of her favourite subjects.

When she sees you struggling she would come and say, all right, I think you must do that rather than this. And she was always there when you needed her. She always listened to when you wanted to speak or had something to say. She would always listen and then respond nicely to that. She wasn't one of the teachers that said, okay, I'm busy now. Come back later. (Neveah, 24.)

She particularly liked her math teacher since she built a community classroom with interactive learning which introduced her to team work and effective individual work. She mentions her biology teacher for being a humorous man and making the subject fun and full of surprises.

Ruth mentions some very interesting characteristics of the teachers she liked,

"There's things that they teach you in how you should present yourself, how you should treat other people, how you should care for nature and how you should always see the world as one system that works together. So that just enlightened me." (Ruth, 22.)

Ruth's love for natural sciences and biology seems to stem from her liking of her teacher who taught the subject.

Primary. I did. It was my Natural Sciences and Technology teacher, I think that's where I actually got to love Life Science, which led to Biology.

But then in high school Natural Science alone just goes to Biology. So I don't know. Maybe she understood me more, I think I was her favourite in a way. She was more lenient with punishment when it came to me. (Ruth, 22.)

6.2.5 Summary

Except for PG all of them had school environments that did not lack severely in resources but PG was sensitive to notice how the hard work and the commitment from teachers compensated for the lack of resources. In case of PG and Neveah, they both did not have an active social life and the role of peers was minimal or almost missing in the case of PG. As in Isaac's story there are clear indications of the presence of various economic layers in the student community and characteristics defined by the race factor. He states that there were different levels of educational aspirations among the white kids and the coloured kids and he himself did not set high goals for himself, acquainting himself with mostly the coloured kids who had the pressure of being popular to feel included among his peers. So, a large amount of energy was diverted towards these challenges rather than in education.

Neveah felt excluded among her peers because of her socio-economic background though she adds that it did not largely impact her studies. The role of peers in supporting the construction of the participants' educational achievements is fairly limited with probably Neveah being the only participant who shares having a peer who brought in positivity to her school life with a creative element and Isaac's active social life and popularity among peers led him to perform. The rest of the participants share stories of being excluded, bullied, pressured by a sense of comparison or not having any social life at all.

When one looks at the participants experiences with their teachers, it needs to be stressed that as with 'relating with others', a great deal of their stories regarding learning environments and learning experiences were positive with a special sense of healthy affection for them, and highlighted good and committed teachers for both females and males. PG emphasises that his teachers' commitment to their work and their constant encouragement added to the belief that he

would do well academically. He liked his English and Geography teacher in particular. Neveah liked her hospitality teacher and her math teacher for building an inclusive and interactive learning atmosphere while also introducing her to team work. Ruth found her natural sciences and Biology teacher very understanding and her love for the subject developed due to this. She particularly highlights how her teacher helped her learn to care for nature and to see the interconnectedness in nature. Isaac mentions his Afrikaans teacher for creating an inclusive classroom where everyone had a sense of belonging and how she treated everyone with a sense of fairness.

6.3 Research Question 3: What were the enabling and constraining factors in the community environment that influenced the learner's access to higher education?

6.3.1 Communities of the learners

This section looks at what characterised the environment of the participant's and the communities in which they grew up. Were these communities that supported one towards their education or one that posed barriers? The participants share experiences of their own growing up and what they witness in the schools in this context.

In Isaac's story, there are clear evidences of the existence of various socio-economic layers and the attitudinal differences among people belonging to these segments. Sometimes the sheer lack of awareness that education can mould them in to productive citizens seems lacking due to communal pressures. Equality and opportunities in terms of access to quality education is clearly debatable and Isaac seems privileged in growing up in a family that supported him through these challenging environments.

People would define it as upper class section because other sections of Heidedal its impoverished sections, like there's a lot of poverty, joblessness. People don't have money, crime rates are high, so it's a rough... I would say it's a rough community to live in. But, fortunately, my parents made it comfortable for me to grow up.

Then again, exposure to friends, also exposure to the challenges inside the community like drug issues, crime rates and stuff like that; so, yes, it's a hard community to grow up in.

I am because in my community learners have that thing about having a lot of guys at school, being a drug dealer in school, being this in school, being that at school, all the wrong stuff. So they don't know about what good they can do; the public don't even know what good they can do, if they become a doctor it's only, yes, I want to be a doctor because I want to have money and stuff. They don't know about being a doctor is I can contribute more into society. I feel like when I am a teacher, yes, I can make... I can do good for society, for the country, develop learners to be good citizens of the country. (Isaac, 24.)

In Isaac's schooling, he evidently witnessed the stark effects of belonging to various socio-economic groups with children who would faint of hunger or wear coloured shirts to school since they could not afford uniforms although they got shouted at for doing so and even when they could not manage to pay their school fees.

"School shoes, you could see that... you could see who comes from which side, you could see who comes from like the squatter camps because they did attend school there, you could see who comes from the upper class Heidedal, and you could see who comes from like the lower class Heidedal, the impoverished side of Heidedal, you could see kids coming from those sections. At Heidedal the same applies as Olympia, you could see it, the colours were black, or black and white and yellow, and you would find the kid with a red top. A lot of teachers would shout at him, but they don't know... most of them knew like, even if we shout at the kid his parents can't afford uniform." (Isaac, 24).

While Ruth shares how she grew up in a remote rural place and how she finds that inequality among people is visible in their day to day experiences.

Where I grew up, it's a rural place. That's where I still go, like that's home. During the holidays, I go there. At Mount Fletcher. It's a place called Makatseng. It's not really advanced. It's actually not advanced at all.

There's still a huge gap between underprivileged people living in the rural areas and town people and most of his friends are like farmers, so they have their kids in private schools and stuff.

If I find myself in a situation, I would really try my best to make sure that everything is done correct. Because inequality, you really do find it in some schools it just exists and it's still there. (Ruth, 22.)

In contrast Nevaeh grew up in a community that was a fairly wealthy community but not one that was not affected by the differences.

We are situated in an old but still wealthy neighbourhood so the people who live there, they're quite wealthy, but it's quite near to the outskirts of Bloem, and the busses travel there, and then the two areas meet each other. And the wealthy learners are always looking down upon the poorer learners and telling them, no, you can't do that because you parents don't have money and you don't even have parents. And I've heard a lot of things being said.

And the wealthier learners, they think they can use their financial situation to order the school around and other learners as well. And learners are afraid of those people because what can they do to them? And it also involves a lot of drug and alcohol abuse, the money, money issues. So the wealthier learners would give the poorer learners an opportunity to make some money in selling drugs and alcohol illegally. And that's... that's a very big problem at our school.

Definitely, learners coming from a wealthy background have all the things that they need to be able to further themselves and to be able to study and make everything of what they have. Learners from low socioeconomic class, sometimes their parents work two or three jobs. They're never at home so the learners are always alone when they get to home. There's nobody to motivate them to work harder. The parents come to us crying. They don't know.

Low socioeconomic... learners coming from low socioeconomic backgrounds. I don't think learners are being disadvantaged because of their cultures or their religions or their sexual orientation. I think it is all about the economical stand of a family whether they are going to be disadvantaged or not, because a lot of poor families live in rural areas and a lot of the best teachers don't want to teach in rural areas, so the rural areas get the teachers that are not able to get jobs in urban areas or in financially stable communities, so they move there. So it's... yes, it's a spiralling effect. (Nevaeh, 24.)

It can go both ways, positive and negative, but for me the influence of socioeconomics on my schooling career, there was not influence on that at all. Today I think there's... there's a very big influence. Yes, and learners these days, they tell you, listen here, my parents have money, this and this and this

6.3.2 Summary

The stories reveal glaring inequalities and challenges that would have an impact on the education of the participants. Isaac shares the challenges of growing up in an environment that was plagued with the criminal issues and affected the educational choices of the youth in his community, for Nevaeh herself the fact that the learners and people in the community had vast differences in the socio-economic levels did not directly affect her schooling but clearly states evidences of how this fact affects the schooling of current day learners. Ruth too clearly states how she would like to set things right and contribute towards creating a more balanced environment that offers equal opportunities and an environment conducive to supporting access to quality education. She shares her personal experience of witnessing a vast gap between the learners in the rural areas and the towns and the kind of schools each of them went to. Neveah shares instances of learners coming from families where parents did more than two to three jobs to make ends meet and they had no means of supporting the learning needs of their children. Isaac shares instances of witnessing children who lacked the basic needs of nutritious food, clothing for school and were humiliated when they could not

pay their school fees. The factors presented in this summary will be a critical pointer for an education leader in designing school policies and practices and setting the goals for interaction with all the stakeholders, that will aim to diminish the inequality in the school and community environment at various levels of the educational system and create a more effective learning focussed environment in the process.

6.4 Agency and learners as change agents- An arising theme

6.4.1 Perseverance, Aspirations and Me

We have looked so far at the school, family, community environments and various factors related to each of them that were key factors in defining the access to education for the research participants and to the quality of education that they received. Also, key to what they have achieved is yet another aspect of the learner, the men's' and women's self-image and their idea of themselves as individual subjects. Each of their narratives echo a sense of purpose and a strong aspiration to achieve that has helped them overcome certain barriers and challenges in the socio-structural system and convert these very challenges in to enabling factors.

At various instances, the participants share in their narratives, them exercising their agency as an aspiration to what they want to be able to achieve. Also, the stories indicate their ability to transform this aspiration in to them flourishing as an individual, despite the challenges they face. Agency in this context stands for

“what a person is free to do and achieve in pursuit of whatever goals or values he or she regards as important.” (Sen, 1985, p. 206)

“someone who acts and brings about change, and whose achievements can be judged in terms of her own values and objectives, whether or not we assess them in terms of some external criteria as well” (Sen, 1999, p.19).

Thus, agency comes up as a major theme in the narratives although the initial research questions did not set out to explore the theme of agency. It arises

emphatically as a finding from the data which is relevant to the study. The rest of the section discusses stories from the narratives that resonate the aspirations of the research participants.

While in primary school, Isaac was motivated to study and get a diploma influenced by his mother being a role model, the lure of winning a medal, his name being called in the assembly were important to him but as he moved to high school his priorities changed and did not really work towards his studies.

“After that I enjoyed going to school as well, but for the wrong reasons. I saw school as a social institution instead of an educational institution, so I went... I enjoyed going to school but for the wrong reasons.”

“I repeated grade 11 at Centraal, because I was never at school; I didn’t have the motivation to learn. Like in Heidedal, if you affiliate yourself with the wrong types of people, those people don’t care what education, those people don’t care. Whether you go to the best school or the worst school it’s all the same to them, they don’t care, they kept me from school. I can’t say it was... I cannot blame them, I have to put most of the blame on myself because I made the decision to stay away from school.” (Isaac, 24.)

The fear of failure and being labelled by his peers changed his motivation to learn and study better in the 12th grade. Isaac goes through a roller coaster ride in his decision to be involved with his studies, sometimes it is a yes and sometimes a complete no.

In Isaac’s story, primarily it was the mother who was the driving force behind the children’s educational journeys but for Isaac despite his mother’s efforts, he lacked motivation and performed poorly in school and incidentally this failure to perform well became his motivation to be a teacher as he says in his narration.

“I want... I really want to be a teacher, that’s my motivation, I want to be a teacher to help kids not make the same mistakes that I did when I was in school. So it’s also basically like loving your school, by basically helping kids to not make the same mistake that I did, that has been my motivation.” (Isaac, 24)

Eventually having finished school Isaac decided to take a gap year and at the end of it was the decision to become a teacher.

“when I finished school I took a gap year and tried to figure out what I wanted. Then I told her I wanted to do teaching and I did it.” (Isaac, 24)

Having made the choice of a career in teaching Isaac says,

"No, I don't have any regrets of what I've done in school; I don't have any regrets of being here. I'm trying to think, the reason why I'm trying to think is there anything actually, like out of the top five decisions that I've made in my life, being a teacher comes... is definitely in that top... even is in the top three in my life. I'm going to live my dreams; dreams are stuff that you don't even... you can't wake up and this is my dream, dreams are something that builds up. So this dream built up in me, so I'm going to live it now; so, yes." (Isaac, 24.)

In his voice echoes a sense of purpose and clarity in the decision of pursuing a career in teaching. His decision seems to be broadening from the *I*, to what he wants to offer his learners and in the broader context of what he wants to offer the society,

"Where you come from doesn't actually define where you're going; it's your vision, and when... once you have that vision and once you go for your dreams you should know that your dream doesn't mean you're doing it for you. You are doing it for you, but you have to participate in society, you have to try and make society better." (Isaac, 24.)

He sees himself in his role as a teacher as a conduit to creating to a better society. In the previous sections we discussed how Neveah's parent's background and their access to education being limited were motivating factors for Neveah to pursue her education. But Neveah herself comes across a student with a strong conviction on why and how she wanted to build herself.

"I always thought I wanted to go to school because, for me, since I was small it was furthering me, who I am and what I can be. My mum always said I always wanted to try things on my own. I never wanted help from anybody. So I think that for me, there was no other choice for me for myself." (Neveah, 24.)

While she was keen on going to a university while still in high school, the family situation and availability of funds to study often worried her. Her aspirations worked as a scaffolding and guiding force in her decisions related to her education choices and career.

Her mother's words of encouragement often fuelled her own conviction of what she wanted to be.

"I don't think I give myself a choice of stopping because I always want to know what can I achieve, what... where can I go, where is my limit, and this far I haven't reached it". (Neveah, 24)

Her constant need to challenge herself and achieve more in whatever she was doing led her to the choice of doing more in education and move beyond the role of a teacher.

"And during my first drama year I think I saw that what you see from the outside of the university is not at all what it is. And then my teaching, I wanted... from the start I knew I did not just want to be a teacher in a school. I always knew that I wanted to go further and deeper into education itself, not just the practical side of it. So that for me was an expectation, and I'm doing my honours now. I'm getting my degree at the end of the year so for me I passed my expectations for teaching in itself. But I still have expectations for myself to move on further along, maybe into the Department of Education higher up, or at the university within the education department, to teach new teachers." (Neveah, 24.)

Her choice of wanting to study leadership and management is clearly based on her inference on where the gaps in the education system are and bringing in a quality in the education being offered.

"For me, I chose management and leadership because I feel there is a lack of management within the educational system, and a lot of leaders are only in the position because they were put in there or they got the opportunity to go into a leadership position without any leadership roles teaching them how to be a leader, so I think there's a... leaders... the leaders in education are not leaders per se, if you understand what I mean by they don't consist... they don't have leadership qualities but they are in leadership positions, and I think that really influences the quality of education and the quality of the educational system that we have in South Africa." (Neveah, 24.)

Her unique interest in animals and how working with animals could help learners and adults in their self-development helped her decide on a specialisation in education.

"Yes, and another reason why I... why I chose management is furthering my studies doing my masters I want to do management of animals in education, helping learners and adults as well in developing themselves through contact with animals, especially horses. That's why I did management, the management part of that." (Neveah, 24.)

She expresses resilience in her ability to make decisions even when those decisions failed to open up opportunities.

"I think the choices that I would have made was to... okay, before I avoided all the non-prestigious schools because I felt I'm good enough to be a teacher at a prestigious school. I'm not going to work at a school that is not known. And I think if I made my choices a bit differently I wouldn't have had the stress and the worry of sitting without a job. So I think sometimes you should break yourself down to be able to build yourself up again." (Neveah, 24.)

It is interesting to see how despite her challenging background she constantly acknowledges the role of her mother and father and how it influenced her voice and ideas. Neveah also comes across as a strong woman who wants to build herself. Facing a range of challenges has led to many opportunities that have opened for her, further enhancing her educational well-being.

"But for me the experience, my mother told me before you finish your degree try to get some teaching experience so that you know what you're letting yourself into. And I'm

very glad I did that because I learned a lot of things that I used when I first walked into my class as being said this is my class now; I am a teacher now. I had... I was one step in front of the teachers who had no teaching experience at all so it was... it was about equipping myself to deal with what was going to be handed to me when I first walked in." (Neveah, 24.)

The following quote voices her keenness to build her personal and professional skills while still studying at the university.

"It has been... it has been... I wouldn't say it was easy because I've never been doing just one thing. When I started doing my teaching degree I started tutoring as well in the humanities faculty, so I had... I worked part time for the university and I did my degree, and then I... after tutoring... or I resigned at tutoring, then I started to... substituting at schools. And at schools I did substituting, and then I also did my studies, so for me to fit that in was quite difficult." (Neveah, 24.)

"When it comes to careers, yes. We had to debate it a lot. Because my father, sort of had everything planned out. I want my first born to be this, my second born to be this. So he already had it all out" (Ruth, 22)

Ruth had the challenge of being directed in to studying and building a career as an occupational therapist whereas her interests were tangential and she wanted to be in teaching.

"Then when I came to university, like I want to study education. But then he said no, we already have a lot of teachers in our family. We are fine with that. How about going for occupational therapy or something like that." (Ruth, 22.)

Her father's efforts were constantly aimed at preparing her for a career on occupational therapy following suit of her sister who was a doctor. He had it all planned out for each of his children.

"That I didn't like doing OT and I wasn't happy because I was talking to my siblings about it. I'm like I do not want to do this. Then they also tried convincing him, if you really want her to succeed you will let her do what she wants to do." (Ruth, 22.)

Ruth debated frequently with her father and opposed her lack of freedom in her educational choices. With the help of her sibling she managed to convince her father. Although she did not qualify for entering a degree in occupational therapy, she was asked to give her matric exam again in order to get better marks to qualify for the degree in occupational therapy, when finally her father gave in to her choice.

"Because she's not happy with what she's doing. She might even drop out of university. Then in the end he let me do education and then he likes it now. He's very proud. He can't wait to see me actually go to the workplace." (Ruth, 22.)

As a child, while she was at the hostel, she expressed pressure from her peers and felt she lacked in self-confidence. This fear of being with peers seems to further continue in university life as well. Ruth always wanted to feel included in a group of university students and feel herself in their presence.

"So I really didn't like that because I wanted to be there with everyone, but I just felt that whole lot of things that are still lacking in me in order to be part of a group. It wasn't easy at first but then towards the end of the year, I guess I was adapting a bit. But now I'm fine with everything, it doesn't scare me anymore. Yes." (Ruth, 22.)

The adaptation process took time and slowly she overcame the fear of being among them. Overcoming this fear becomes a strength for her and a reason to perform and do much more academically.

That's what pushes me the most. Everything else is just there to support. Like when we are together with my other friends at the university at the education faculty. Like we all want to pass, we all have these dreams. (Ruth, 22.)

It is the aspiration to see one's dream become a reality that enables one to stay motivated. The collective aspect of everyone having a dream they wish to achieve also serves as an impetus.

I think education has played a vital and important role in my life because in high school I knew that I want to change my life. And the only thing that, which would enable me to change my life is education. (PG, 25.)

In the previous sections, we looked at the different challenges that PG had with his familial and school environment, but there is a certain part of him that is led by his own aspirations, achievements and this defines his education path.

Okay like I said, it's like the family circumstances or background. It's also what pushed me to work hard and make sure I progress. (PG, 25.)

His decisions to stay a committed student and perform consistently well in academics in school arise from his struggles. The grades were a motivating factor to study more and stay happy.

I think it is myself basically. Also taking into account the family background, you know, I will tell myself...No this is the situation I'm in at the moment and I don't like it. And it's up to mean to change my life and yes. No one else.

But here at the university, things are okay but you know. I'm not receiving an income from home. So I'm the one who has to make sure that I do have everything that I need yes. (PG, 25.)

6.4.2 Summary

While the role of the family, school, peers, teachers, financial resources are complexly intertwined factors in influencing the decision making for all the participants, it is interesting to note how their aspirations took positive spurts during various phases of their life. Isaac started off as a highly-motivated child with his mother as a role model, to being slowly engulfed by the influence of his peers and late on the fear of failure and being labelled by his peers motivated his academic performance. His deep observations and experiences of the differences and challenges that children from different socio-economic backgrounds faced including his own, drew him towards wanting to create a change in the lives for future students and an aspiration for a career in teaching. For both PG and Neveah, the difficult family situations they came from did largely influence their own convictions and aspirations. While for PG it was also the encouragement and firm belief that his teachers had in him besides a very challenging family background with struggling resources that created a strong inclination in him to change his life and excel academically. Neveah's parent's background and their access to education being limited were motivating factors for her to pursue education. But she herself comes across a student with a strong conviction on why and how she wanted to be and build herself to be. Her constant need to challenge herself and achieve more are characteristics that one finds in PG too. Ruth had the twin role of being dominated and yet supported by her father for her education. She comes across as self-motivated individual with a sense of clarity in her choices despite having to debate and face conflict on her ascertaining her choice of building an education and career in teaching. All of them come across as learners who are perseverant, aspiring and self-motivated with a sense of purpose. These personal attributes seem to underline all the other enabling factors and

challenges they faced and is a critical factor to consider in terms of the individuals' contribution to the quality of education being achieved since they are eager and motivated to learn and contribute to the society in a productive manner.

7 SUMMARY OF THE FINDINGS

The findings from the narratives reveal key indicators on what are the supporting factors and challenging factors in each of these environments. It is evident from the stories that the parental influences were relatively significant, providing a scaffolding of support and encouragement.

Except for PG who had minimal support from his immediate family, all others had the strong influence of either their mother or their father and in the case of Neveah, both had a significant influence on her educational well-being. PG was largely self-driven and his family situation was a motivation to change his life and build on his aspirations and educational well-being. For Isaac, his mother played a dominating role related to his school choices but was deeply concerned about his educational well-being. Growing up in a challenging community, his family ensured that education was not compromised on. For Neveah the fact that her parents were rebuilding their lives after having lost their major resources but always supported her dreams for higher education was a strong motivation. Her mother's keen observation and encouragement led her to pursuing a profession in teaching. For Ruth, her father did dominate her academic decisions but he was equally committed to her educational well-being. Her father's influence and the academic performance of her siblings both played a strong role in her decisions and aspirations.

PG experienced an encouraging growth in his school even though it lacked severely in resources. He was sensitive to note how his teachers' hard work and commitment compensated for this limitation. Except for PG the others grew up in schools that were relatively well resourced with a commonality among all of them being having found teachers they liked and those who were caring and encouraging. Each of them cited specific characteristics in their teachers of being a good listener, creating an inclusive atmosphere or as someone who treated everyone justly. It is these humane qualities that was an appealing factor for most of them as is evident in the narratives. The role of teachers seems to largely influence each of their academic aspirations. In case of PG and Neveah, they both did

not have an active social life and the role of peers was minimal or almost missing in the case of PG while for Isaac it was a key factor in deciding his academic goals and his own performance.

While the role of the family, school, peers, teachers, financial resources are complexly intertwined factors in influencing the decision making for all the participants, it is interesting to note how their agency took positive spurts during various phases of their life. Isaac started off as a highly motivated child with his mother as a role model, to being slowly engulfed by the influence of his peers and late on the fear of failure and being labelled by his peers motivated his academic performance. His deep observations and experiences of the differences and challenges that children from different socio-economic back-grounds faced including his own, drew him towards wanting to create a change in the lives for future students and an aspiration for a career in teaching. For both PG and Neveah, the difficult family situations they came from did largely influence their own convictions and aspirations. While for PG it was also the encouragement and firm belief that his teachers had in him besides a very challenging family background with struggling resources that created a strong inclination in him to change his life and excel academically. Neveah's parent's background and their access to education being limited were motivating factors for her to pursue education. But she herself comes across a student with a strong conviction on why and how she wanted to be and build herself to be. Her constant need to challenge herself and achieve more are characteristics that one finds in PG too. Ruth had the twin role of being dominated and yet supported by her father for her education. She comes across as self-motivated individual with a sense of clarity in her choices despite having to debate and face conflict on her ascertaining her choice of building an education and career in teaching.

The ground realities from the participants narratives add voices to further define the learner and the potential for educational leadership for addressing the barriers in education. The aspirations and agency is a critical element in creating a more equitable effective learning environment.

8 DISCUSSION

8.1 Examining the Results

The aim of the study was to better understand the social, economic, political complexities that learners face in accessing higher education in South Africa. This aim was met by examining the narratives of the students to study the constraining and enabling factors in their home, school, and community environment. Although the study did not set out with a research question on the agency of the individuals, it is evident from the data analysis that it was ultimately the deep embedded aspiration to achieve access to higher education that enabled them to make it a reality.

Bringing together the learning from the educational leadership theories, the literature review from access to higher education and the stories that the data reveals, this chapter deals with the synergetic learning that arises from them. The literature review on access to education presents that challenges related to access in higher education continue to exist. There is still a large section of the youth who do not gain this opportunity. It is also evident that even though educational policies try to mitigate these inequalities and widen participation, these efforts are still insufficient to close the existing gaps, though they do minimally benefit some of the disadvantaged students though. The factors that contribute to these widening gaps include the persisting effects of the apartheid history in creating a disparity in the socio-economic conditions. This in turn leaves its impact on the educational opportunities they have.

Literature highlights that the closest environments to the learner have a great bearing on accessing higher education, firstly the family, school and then the community. Therefore the study focusses on examining these three environments and their enabling and restrictive influences on education for the research participants. It is seen that learners who resided in poorer neighbourhoods had to also deal with restrictive influences from relatives and neighbours. Community related factors such as spatial segregation and family and

community dynamics were deciding factors in them accessing higher education. The general review of literature from various parts of the world clearly indicate that these issues are not exclusive to South Africa and these inequalities to access to higher education tend to exist in many other parts too. There are also research studies that demonstrate that even though school, community and home has negative influences, they were also supporting in certain ways. The literature reveals that these negative influences and barriers worked as strong motivational factor for the learners to create a better life for themselves. The aspect of agency that the students bring to the university is a resource by itself and how universities begin to perceive this is important.

This entire phenomenon of students accessing higher education despite complexities being posed by home, school and community has been examined in this study from the lens of educational leadership. Although the study gives a preview to many of the early theories. I choose to focus on three main theories that throw light in context to the study. These theories being the transformational leadership theory, the pedagogical leadership theory and theory of educational leadership for social justice. Firstly all these three theories look at change, a positive improvement in the educational system and a collaborative model of functioning. Secondly they involve the co-operation and commitment from all the involved stakeholders in this vision for improvement. While educational leadership as a leadership form aims to create more enabling and meaningful learning environments for the learners, it cannot afford to ignore the context of the learners in this process. Transformational Leadership focusses on organisational change and in growing as a professional learning community. Pedagogical Leadership aims at knowledge construction and gives importance to how learning happens and not the mere fact that teaching and learning happen. More recent theories present pedagogical leadership as praxis emphasising on understanding the social settings of the learner if one is to create the desired learning outcomes. Leadership for social justice is emphatic about addressing the social inequalities in the system and stresses that such leaders must be resilient to the resistances they may face. Recent theories suggest on

relying on the values and knowledge of indigenous leaders who have faced or witnessed oppression and can contribute their knowledge to actively seeking solutions to bridging these gaps. While all of these leadership theories have their pros and cons, one can rely on the strengths of these in understanding the context to accessing higher education through knowing the deeper aspects of the learners' settings.

It is interesting to note that although the study with its aim did not set out to study the factor of agency, it is largely the internal drive and aspirations of the learner and their self-motivated nature to access higher education that comes up as a key learning. The study of the supporting factors and constraints in the home, school and community environment further highlight the aspirational aspect of the learners. These inherent qualities of the learner is an important resource for educational leadership and in building individuals and leaders by themselves who could contribute largely to creating more equitable societies and it is not a factor that educational leadership can ignore.

"There is an increasing need for leadership to respond to the deep and contextual rich understanding of the students that study in a university. This understanding should further define the institutional practices, pedagogy and administration. To what extent do our universities build up students' sense of being agents in their lives." (Wilson-Strydom, 2017, p. 12.) This is a critical question that is being posed to educational leadership.

Largely educational leadership theories with all their strengths have an one dimensional view when it comes to challenges among the disadvantaged with context to access to higher education, The socio-economic realities, historical and political reasons have a great bearing on the approach and action. Relooking at this whole picture of access to higher education, with a deeper understanding of the learner's environments and with the knowledge of the enabling factors that led them to access their educational well-being can be an empowering process for educational leadership. Thus educational leadership is beginning to look beyond barriers and understanding its role as something far greater than just bridging the gap between the privileged and the disadvantaged through remedial

measures and policy interventions. Educational leadership can contribute to building universities as a crucible for fostering student aspirations, actively harnessing the power of students' sense of being agents who can "act and bring about change" in their lives (Sen, 1999 as cited in Wilson-Strydom, 2017, p. 5).

9 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

- The main limitation of this study is that I have examined data that has been pre-collected, which has been analysed and understood using the framework of educational theories. Since I have not personally met the research participants and interviewed them, there could be certain experiences and learning as a researcher that may be lacking in the context of understanding what challenges they have been through in greater depth. So, it is the narrative data that has guided me through the research and I had to make it experiential with the concerns and challenges it throws to educational leadership. I have mitigated the scope of error by doing a detailed content analysis, having it reviewed and using direct quotations to support the observations based on the data.
- It is developing model that is further enriched by the contribution of research through the many voices from the learner, school and related systems. This study brings to attention, agency of the learners contributing greatly to their educational success despite various obstacles and how this is an important revelation for educational leadership to consider and evolving further as a transformational and pedagogical leader. It is a relatively unique study in its scope and there is not an elaborate database of research studies that analyses issues in access to higher education from the perspective of educational leadership.

10 CHALLENGES FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

The research presents various factors that supported the participants in enabling them to access education beyond secondary school until tertiary education. One of the major factors that did arise from the findings was the role of their personal attributes including their ability to make decisions that enhanced their capabilities. The individual's agency is one that has an emphatic presence in both the in-school and out-of-school environments.

While learner agency in most education leadership related studies relates to how the learner aids his own learning process and in taking initiatives towards the same in the classroom environment, here the students come across as change agents, leading themselves through challenges to create the change they aspire. Educational leadership frameworks examining the aspect of agency, capabilities and functioning of the individuals in the system which are the key components of the capabilities approach (a human development approach) may be a possibility for future research.

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