



# **Geographies of Access and Participation: Narratives of First Year Students Receiving Financial Aid**

By

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A dissertation submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

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## Declaration

I, Nombuso Patience Gabela, declare that this dissertation entitled:

**Geographies of Access and Participation: Narratives of First Year Students Receiving Financial Aid**, is my own work and that all sources I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references. It has not been submitted before for any degree or examination at any other university.



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## Dedication

This work is dedicated to my husband, Mlungisi Wiseman Gabela, my father-in-law, Mr. Bernard Gabela, mother-in-law, Ms. Nonhlanhla Khumalo, my parents Mr. and Mrs. Khanyile, my siblings (Sthembiso, Sthembile and Nelly) and my niece and nephew (Mandisa and Thabiso). You've all been an inspiration to me and thank you for never "throwing in the towel". This piece of work took all my time but your smiles and support gave me the impression that it was okay to make it a first priority and yourselves, a second. As I was busy with this thesis, God blessed me with a son who is estimated to be born on the 12<sup>th</sup> of January 2017. He is the reason I want to further my knowledge in education and I can't wait to hold him in my arms.

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## Abstract

After the dismantling of the apartheid laws which divided South Africa as a nation, the country became a democratic one entitling all citizens the right to education. The South African government has made it a mission to ensure that education is accessible to all its citizens (Freedom Charter, 1955; Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996; National Commission on Higher Education, 1996; National Student Financial Aid Scheme [NSFAS], 1999; Department of Education, 2001). Post-apartheid education legislation and policies, supported by the values of democracy, equity, quality and the expansion of educational opportunities for all, has resulted in increased numbers of South African youth accessing higher education. While there has been a significant increase in the number of previously disadvantaged students in higher education such as poor, black, and female students, South African universities still have a low retention and poor graduation rates.

This research study set out to investigate the higher education experiences of five first year university students who had gained access through financial aid. The study was conducted in one university in the province of KwaZulu-Natal, a province with a large rural population. It is a qualitative narrative inquiry, which adopted a critical stance using Bourdieu's concepts of capital, field and habitus as well as the concept of geographies of youth. As a narrative inquiry the study, through the use of participatory methods, privileged participants' experiences and acknowledged their agency in the research process. Data was collected by means of in-depth individual interviews, a focus group discussion as well as a mapping exercise with selected participants. The same data was then analyzed by reading it thoroughly in search of the key ideas emerging. Subsequently the data was then coded, that is, a word or a phrase was used, for example, decision to proceed to university in order to organize the collected data.

This study revealed that even though there were other contributing factors, funding was the main factor influencing students' access to and participation in higher education. Finance whether from guardians or sponsors gave the students the opportunity to enter into this institution in order for them to pursue their careers. Lack of finance meant that they could not take control of their lives, in other words, they could not make informed decisions regarding their future. According to the study, gaining access to higher education is not a simple task if you are a student from a

disadvantaged family as the registration fee is merely an entry fee but it does not guarantee participation in the university culture.

Other academic factors that influence access to the curriculum and participation include the challenge of learning in a second language, unfamiliarity with assessment strategies and practices, the lack of technological and academic literacy as well as the lack of resources to support effective teaching and learning. Non-academic influences such as the lack of and poor student housing also impacted on students' participation and achievements in this institution.

In terms of the university's intervention to assist students, this study found that even though students were struggling academically, there were support programs provided for them as a platform to catch up with the rest of the students. However, the university's budget constraints meant that these tutorial classes had to be cancelled which greatly impacted on the overall performance of the participants. Due to the financially, academically and socio-culturally related dynamics experienced by students from disadvantaged backgrounds, it can be concluded that more research should be carried out in South African HEIs to further examine the experiences of such students to explore the gap between higher education policies and practices.

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## CHAPTER 1 : INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

The South African government has made it a mission to ensure that education is accessible to all its citizens (Freedom Charter, 1955; Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996; National Commission on Higher Education, 1996; National Student Financial Aid Scheme [NSFAS], 1999; Department of Education, 2001). Post-apartheid education legislation and policies, supported by the values of democracy, equity, quality and the expansion of educational opportunities for all, has resulted in increased numbers of South African youth accessing higher education.

Currently, there are 25 public and 113 private higher education institutions (HEIs) in South Africa. According to Statistics for Post School Education and Training: 2013 (Department of Higher Education and Training [DHET], 2015), student enrolment in public HEIs increased from 837 776 in 2009 to 983 698 in 2013. The government aims to increase enrolment in public HEIs to 1 620 000 by the year 2030 (DHET, 2015).

A significant increase has been noted in the number of students previously denied access to higher education such as poor, black, and female students. The government established the National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS) in order to offer financial assistance to students from low socioeconomic backgrounds to facilitate their access to higher education. In addition to this, the Funza Lushaka bursary scheme administered by the Department of Basic Education was set up specifically for disadvantaged students who wanted to pursue a career in teaching (Department of Basic Education, n.d.). By 2013, 68% of all full-time contact students in public HEIs were African and 54% were women. 73 % of all students enrolled for study through the distance mode were African and 64% were women (DHET, 2015).

Of the 983 698 students enrolled in public HEIs in 2013 about 181, 000 students graduated which is approximately 25% of the starting number (DHET, 2015). According to Lewin and Mawoyo (2014), South Africa has low retention rates as a huge number of students do not complete their studies entirely while others do not complete timeously. Despite the increase in student enrollment disadvantaged students continue to experience challenges in terms of access and success.

In addition to poor graduation rates, the higher education sector continues to be plagued by challenges which are indicative of our apartheid past. Historically disadvantaged universities, predominantly those located in rural areas and the former Bantustans continue to reflect huge disparities in comparison to historically advantaged universities in terms of finances, infrastructure, teaching resources and staffing (DHET, 2015). Issues of racism, sexual violence and the exclusion of students with disabilities are still prevalent on university campuses (DHET, 2015). Black, women and poor students, as well as students from rural backgrounds, continue to face difficulties assimilating into universities designed for white, male and middle-class students (DHET, 2015).

### **1.1 Focus, Aims and Rationale**

It is against this background that this study aimed to investigate the higher education experiences of students from low socio-economic backgrounds. The purpose of this research was to gain insight into these students' academic lives by investigating their access, participation and achievement in higher. In addition, the study sought to investigate the factors that facilitate or impede their participation and success at one university in the province of KwaZulu-Natal.

The Freedom Charter stressed that no person will be left behind as the doors of education will be opened for all, irrespective of race, socio-economic status or gender which was the vision of the African National Congress (ANC) in 1955. However, the promise of free education did not materialise as Black and poor South African youth continue to be excluded from higher education institutions because it is unaffordable. In the year 2015 student protests over tuition fees, shortages of student accommodation, and the language of instruction spread across South African universities. One of the main issues raised by the students during these protest was discontentment with the increase of fees at South African universities. Hall (2016) emphasised that the anger of today's youth can be attributed to the heritages of racial discrimination and colonialism, the increasing unemployment rate and the increasingly growing income disparity which has resulted in global student protests. The student protests led to the South African government announcing that there would be no fee increment for the year 2016 which was a victory for the students. This was a decision which was reached after a meeting between the president of the country (Mr. Jacob Zuma), Higher Education minister, Blade Nzimande, university vice-chancellors and student

leaders from several campuses across South Africa. According to Calitz and Fourie (2016), higher education annual fees in the past seven years have escalated more than any other economic price item. The authors further explained that the main reason for this was insufficient government funds which are the key contributors to university revenue. So how does this escalation in tuition fees impact the students from low-socio economic backgrounds?

According to Okioga (2013)

A family's socioeconomic status is based on family income, parental education level, parental occupation, and social status in the community such as contacts within the community and group associations. Families with high socioeconomic status often have more success in preparing their young children for school because they typically have access to a wide range of resources to promote and support young children's development (p. 40).

Ebrahim (2009) has argued that parents from disadvantaged families do not have the time to support their children as their main responsibility is to provide food and shelter while also maintaining household chores. The author also reiterated that there is a great deal of pressure for students from disadvantaged backgrounds to leave school in search of job opportunities so that they can contribute to the income of the family which might help explain the 18% graduation rate of all the students enrolled in HEIs in 2013 (DHET, 2015).

I was fortunate to go to university as I came from a working class background and was the third of four children. My mother became pregnant with her first child while in Grade 10 and therefore had to leave school. She could not return to school as she and my father had to get married as the rest of their children could not be born out of wedlock. My father came from a very traditional background and was a very proud man who insisted that his wife remained at home and look after the children, while he worked for the family. As a result, my mom has never worked in her life. My father who only completed Grade 7 of his schooling was a laborer at a steel firm in Durban. He was the sole breadwinner in a family of two adults and four children. When I completed my schooling two of my older siblings were already at tertiary institutions while my youngest sibling was at high school. It was a challenge for my dad to pay for all of us but he was determined that all his children had a tertiary qualification. In my first two years at university, my father struggled

to pay my tuition fees and I had to contend with not knowing the outcome of my hard work as my results were withheld until all fees were paid up. My siblings had the same experience and we were fortunate that we were not excluded for not being able to pay tuition fees. My siblings and I were very motivated to complete our studies because we wanted to make our parents proud. Today, our family boasts four graduates in various fields of study and my father is now a pensioner who enjoys spending time with his wife and family.

This is also a key motivation for this study.

## **1.2 Key Research Questions**

The key questions explored were:

- What are the experiences of students in receipt of financial aid in regard to access and participation in the context of one university in KwaZulu-Natal?
- What are the contextual dynamics that affect such students' access and participation in this university?
- How do these students navigate the dynamics which affect access and participation?

## **1.3 Research Design**

This study is a qualitative narrative enquiry framed by the concept of 'geographies of youth' which refers to an area of study in human geography that centres on 'places' and 'spaces' of young people's lives, in which research is child/youth centred and researchers recognise the agency (power) of children/youth (Barker & Weller, 2003).

The data was collected by means of individual and focus group interviews, along with a mapping exercise which is a participant-centred approach. Participants in this study are five first-year students funded through the NSFAS which provides financial support for students who want to further their studies but cannot afford to.

## **1.4 Structure of the Dissertation**

This dissertation is made up of six chapters as follows:

**Chapter 1** offers a general overview of the investigation which includes the background, focus, rationale, research questions and research design that guided me while undertaking the research.

**Chapter 2** presents a review of local and international literature most salient to this enquiry as well as the theoretical framework within which this study is framed.

**Chapter 3** presents the research design and methodology which informed this study.

**Chapter 4** offers the main findings of the study ordered in relation to the key themes and issues that emerged during analysis.

**Chapter 5** draws conclusions from the research study, considers their implications, notes the limitations of the study, and presents recommendations for prospect research.



## **CHAPTER 2 : LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

### **2.1 Introduction**

This chapter presents a review of the literature and the theoretical framework which informs the study. This study aimed to investigate the higher education experiences of student from low socio-economic backgrounds and the ways in which they navigate the contextual dynamics that they experience in terms of their participation and achievement in a higher education institution.

I begin with a review of relevant South African higher education legislation and policy, focusing particularly on government's response to addressing widening participation and student achievement in terms of promoting equity and redress. I then draw on local literature to determine the main debates about student participation and achievement in South African higher education. In addition, I present a review of international research on the higher educational experiences of students from low socio-economic backgrounds.

I then discuss the conceptual framework that informs this study, namely geographies of youth, in an attempt to illustrate how society's conception of youth hood has an impact on the youth in society. In addition, I present Bourdieu's (1986) theory of capital as the main theoretical framework, particularly his concepts of field, capital and habitus, which I draw on to understand how students from low socioeconomic backgrounds experience higher education.

### **2.2 Higher Education Reforms in South Africa: Access, participation, and achievement.**

For quite some time, scholars have argued for access and participation in higher education as the key solution to equity and equality of educational opportunity for students irrespective of their difference in terms of their social backgrounds (Govinder, Zondo, & Makgoba, 2013; Wangenge-Ouma, 2012; Hlalele & Alexander, 2012; Machingambi, 2011). Ramphele, Crush, and McDonald (1999) make reference to the term "massification" which they explained to be the "transition from an elite to a mass-based education system - entails increased participation and greater expenditure" (p.1). The authors further clarified that even though in higher education institutions, there is an increasing number of students from disadvantaged backgrounds (as per the government's policies of transformation), however, it is still up to the government to provide financial assistance to such students.

In reviewing the policies of equity and redress passed after the apartheid era, I will do so in conjunction with literature on the experiences of students from low-socio economic backgrounds regarding access, participation and achievement as documented in international and national research.

Access, according to Machingambi (2011) involves among other things the elimination of all apparent restrictions, obstacles and inhibitions affecting an individual or collective partaking in educational activities. The question arises: What is the role of the South African government and public educational institutions in ensuring that all youth have access to post-school education and are able to fully participate in educational activities?

Participation in higher education, according to Morley and Lussier (2009) “is not just about individuals, but it is about positional advantage and the relations and spaces between social groups” (p. 82). In this study we will be looking at access to higher education and as well as access to the curriculum within the institutions. The National Department of Education (2001) maintains that inclusion means that no learner or member of staff should be discriminated against due to their culture, gender, disability or any other difference assigned by society. Gibbons and Vignoles (2012) reminds us that students bring with them various factors which may support or hinder progress in higher education, for example, many White students are already at an advantage due to their good secondary training, their parents’ levels of education, parental incomes as well as English as a medium of instruction at universities. Consequently, for students from affluent backgrounds, one’s family background determines which institution they attend and what to study, while closing doors for those from disadvantaged communities (Bourdieu, 1986).

Osman (2009) pointed out that in a study which centres on investigating the experiences of students from low socio-economic backgrounds, ‘experience’ is viewed as something with considerable significance for, and happens to an individual, engaging the subject holistically through accumulative history or momentary experiences.

### **2.2.1 Legislation and Policy on Access**

The Bill of Rights in the South African Constitution (Republic of South Africa Act, 1996), states in Section 29 (1) (a): “Everyone has the right ... to a basic education, including adult basic

education; and to further education, which the state, through reasonable measures, must make progressively available and accessible.” Even though higher education legislation and policy promotes social justice and equal educational opportunities for all regardless of diversity, students from different socio-economic backgrounds still have different experiences in terms of access, participation and achievement in higher education.

In 1996 President Mandela established the National Commission on Higher Education with a view to transforming the higher education sector making it available to all sectors of society, responsive to the needs of post-apartheid South Africa and characterised by co-operation and partnerships between higher education and the wider society (National Commission on Higher Education [NCHE], 1996). The NCHE identified three pillars for transforming the system of higher education i.e. increased participation; greater responsiveness; and increased co-operation and partnership. Increased participation referred to the need for increased expansion of student enrolments to widen participation. In this respect, the NCHE recommended a new funding model that would support increased enrollment and address the financial constraints of widening participation. The NCHE advocated for a mass higher education system. Greater responsiveness was about making the higher education system more responsive to the interests and needs of society through open and active communication between universities and the wider society. This meant changes to programme offerings as well as curriculum and content changes to accommodate student diversity and to respond to the social and economic needs of the country. The third pillar focused on co-operation and partnerships in the governance of higher education. The state sought to take on a steering and coordinating role and not an interventionist role. The state provided a regulatory framework which higher education institutions could use to improve institutional policies and strategic plans.

The establishment of the NCHE was followed by publication of Education White Paper 3: A Programme for the Transformation of Higher Education in 1997 (Department of Education [DoE], 1997) which outlined the guidelines for the formation and functioning of higher education institutions. As defined in the Education White Paper 3 (DoE, 1997), the purpose of higher education is to redress past inequities in the provision of education and to contribute to the people-driven development to ensure a better quality life for all citizens as well as economic growth.

As indicated in the Report of the Ministerial Committee on the Review of the National Student Financial Aid Scheme (DoE, 2010), in the period 1990 to 1994 the government established the Independent Development Trust (IDT) as a means to provide funding for deprived Black students who wanted to further their studies through the Tertiary Education Fund of South Africa (TEFSA). In the year 1993, IDT was replaced by TEFSA whose main objective was to provide loans to historically disadvantaged students of South Africa. The report of the Framework for a National Student Financial Aid Scheme which delineated the government's framework for an inclusive and on-going financial aid system for students was released in 1998. The following year the National Student Financial Aid Scheme Act 56 of 1999 was passed and provided for the establishment of a National Student Fund. The fund was to ensure the availability of loans and bursaries to qualifying students at public higher education institutions. The Act also made provision for the recovery of these loans from students. In 1999, National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS) was established and TEFSA was incorporated into this new scheme which aimed to "redress past discrimination and ensure representativity and equal access" (DoE, 2010, p. 17).

In keeping with the goal of equity and redress, the National Plan for Higher Education (DoE, 2001) advocated increased participation in public higher education to "promote equity of access and fair chances of success to all who are seeking to realise their potential through higher education, while eradicating all forms of unfair discrimination and advancing redress for past inequalities" (p. 9). South African higher education legislation and policies provide all South African citizens the right to education, irrespective of race, gender, religion, or family background.

After the apartheid era, the country was faced with various social and economic challenges (lack of housing, inadequate education and health care and shortage of job opportunities) therefore the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) was adopted as an attempt to address these challenges. Likewise, in response to the country's economic issues, in 1996, the Department of Finance adopted GEAR (Growth Employment and Redistribution) which was a strategy to strengthen its economy while also providing socio-economic opportunities for the disadvantaged (Knight, 2004). However, Visser (2004) defined this shift from RDP to GEAR as "Growth through redistribution being replaced by redistribution through growth" (p. 9). In other words, the people-driven development of ensuring a better quality life for all was replaced by economic development of the country which was a different proposal compared to that of the Education White Paper 3

(DoE, 1997) as well as the National Plan (DoE, 2001). This shift now meant a decrease in the allocation of budget for the NSFAS which served as financial support for students who wanted to further their studies but could not afford to. As a result, according to the review of NSFAS (DoE, 2010), higher education institutions were pressured into increasing their income from both students' fees as well as private income, thereby excluding those students from disadvantaged backgrounds who could not afford to pay for their studies. Even though post-apartheid policies encourage access and growth in higher education institutions, these policies have also led to restriction of access, as reported by the NSFAS Review (DoE, 2010).

Despite the financial setbacks, there was a significant growth in student enrollment in higher education. Wangenge-Ouma and Cloete (2008) maintain that the funding challenges faced by higher education in South Africa may possibly endanger the process of productively accomplishing the main goals of universities, namely; teaching, research and community (public) service as the government is the key source of funding for these institutions. In regards to access to higher education, the same authors also make reference to the issue of NSFAS's allocation formula that uses students' race as the key determinant of funds to be given to higher education institutions which has also been criticised by other authors such as Le Roux and Breier (2007). The NSFAS Review (DoE, 2010) further explains that one of the problems with the current institutional allocations formula is the fact that it uses race as a determinant of one's level of deficit. This then implies that students of the same race are equally grouped into the categories of either well-off or deprived. The question that often arises in the debates of South African higher education is, if the students' socio-economic background is the issue, then shouldn't social class and not race be the determining factor for allocation of such funds? The reason for the posed question is that one needs to be reminded that the main purpose of higher education institutions is to advance equity in access to such institutions by ensuring that those students, who were marginalised in the past, are now assisted in obtaining a higher education.

Spaull (2013) points out that in South Africa there are actually two different educational systems, with just 25% being functional while the remainder is dysfunctional. Odhav (2009) supports this point by stating that there has been a continuation of socio-economic as well as political and geographical apartheid after 1994, evident in the division of rural and urban privileged and underprivileged campuses. Heleta (2016) observes that currently, the university culture is still a

reflection of the history of unequal power relations which existed many years ago during the apartheid era. The above literature is a clear confirmation that post-apartheid South Africa is still confronted with issues of inequality, despite the existing legislation which aims to promote equity and redress.

Bitzer (2010) points out that the key features in regard to higher education participation are equity as well as access and as a result, these should be the main criteria for admission in such institutions.

### **2.2.2 Institutional Policies: University Entrance Requirements**

According to the Higher Education Act 101 of 1997 (Republic of South Africa [RSA], 1997), and the Promotion of Equality and Prevention of Unfair Discrimination Act 4 of 2000 (RSA, 2000), higher education institutions have to ensure that the demographics of South African society are well represented. However, how can this be achieved when higher education institutions have their own regulatory councils which control student enrolment? According to the Higher Education Act of 1997 (RSA, 1997), these institutions were granted permission to set their own entrance requirements regarding certain programs which they offered. As a result, they serve as gatekeepers, which excludes the previously disadvantaged groups, as most prospective students from such groups cannot meet these requirements. Chetty (2014) makes it clear that indeed there are numbered seats in higher education, but yet these are being occupied by the privileged students. As articulated by Ebrahim (2009), parents from disadvantaged backgrounds are so pre-occupied with paying bills and making ends meet that they do not have the energy, money and the relevant information to encourage their children to pursue careers in higher education institutions.

For these reasons, Machingambi (2011) argues that despite the education policies on equal access, South African higher education institutions continue to privilege students from the well-off families while disadvantaging those from poor families since most learners from poor backgrounds are found in certain types of institutions due to their circumstances. Bitzer (2010) further elaborated on this issue by stating that the majority of Black students tend to enroll in low quality higher education institutions, not because they choose to but because of their backgrounds. The author points out that socio-economic status is now being used as a major criterion for entry into higher education, for instance, students are now competing for entry into high-status universities while these institutions are also competing for the top-achievers (closely linked to social class and

race) (Bitzer, 2010). Such an example can be found in the University of Cape Town's (UCT) admission policy which clearly states that the institution seeks to enroll the best students "who get the top results in school and formal school leaving exams; and those who despite educational and other disadvantages do well in these exams" (University of Cape Town, 2012, p. 1).

In her study conducted in the UK investigating access to and choice of higher education, Brooks (2008) found that higher education institutions are divided according to a status which then means that these are not all accessible to students of different social backgrounds. She further contends that while entry-level qualification may be one of the reasons for the above, there are other factors which play an important role.

In Australia, a study by James, Bexley, Devlin, Garnett, Marginson and Maxwell (2008) on participation and equity found that prospective students' social class played a vital role in whether they will gain access to university. Moreover, according to the same study, those students from low socio-economic backgrounds who do complete Grade 12 have very low chances of gaining entry into prestigious institutions and fields of study due to issues of finance, lower levels of educational attainment and educational ambition.

Goastellec (2008), in a study exploring globalization and the implementation of equity norms in higher education, concluded that higher education systems are there to legitimize social mobility amongst a certain class of students. In other words, institutions implicitly gate keep in order to give access mainly to upper-class students, and that government policies have also tended to favor those who are already privileged. As a result, it has become an accepted assumption that only a certain group of students will gain access to universities.

Wilson-Strydom (2011) argues that access does not only mean a diverse culture of students and an increase in the resources for these students, but it is also means providing appropriate support for such students so that they can make full use of the opportunity. Reisberg and Watson (2011) maintain that equity is not just about more students having access to higher education but is about ensuring that more students (including those from under-represented groups) persevere and graduate at the end of their programs.

As per the mandate of equity policies in the South African context, a number of scholars have argued that access to higher education as such is not sufficient to infer that democracy exists in

our country, hence the shift to investigating participation as well as the achievement of students in higher education (Wangenge-Ouma, 2012; Hlalele & Alexander, 2012; Machingambi, 2011; Odhav, 2009; Letseka & Maile, 2008, 2010; Jones, Coetzee, Bailey & Wickham, 2008); quality of higher education is just as important as access to higher education institutions.

### **2.2.3 Students' Experiences of Participation and Achievement in Universities**

In reference to the goals set by the National Plan for Higher Education and Education White Paper 3 of 1997 (DoE, 1997) which were meant to steer the higher education system towards equity, Wangenge-Ouma (2012), argues that in reality this has not materialised since expansion in higher education institutions has not yet benefited students from poor backgrounds due to the low participation rates of such students. The author found that existing access and participation patterns served to replicate inequality as per the reflection of low participation and high dropout rates of particularly Black South Africans. This claim has also been confirmed by the Department of Education (DoE, 2002 & 2003) which further recognised that this high dropout rate can be attributed to financial and/or academic exclusion.

Hlalele and Alexander (2012) state that the main concern for higher education is not just students' support in access programs, but it is also about increasing involvement in creating opportunities for nourishing and sustaining academic success for prospective students.

Morley and Lussier's (2009) study in Ghana and Tanzania revealed the link between poverty and participation in higher education as reflected in this participant's view: "the children of real peasants, nomads and general farmers, the really low-income small scale producers, small-scale traders, wafugaji (small-scale animal keepers) ... are underrepresented in University" (p. 79). In the same study, the consequences for not paying fees is captured in this quote: "there are people who really have difficulty paying fees and we have the unpleasant duty of driving people out of the examination room. We bring private security men around" (p. 81).

Morley and Lussier's (2009) study discovered despite the various policies, interventions and strategies in place which were meant to widen participation, higher education institutions in Tanzania and Ghana still reflect historical inequalities. This is disturbing as the study concludes that higher education is intended to be a site which provides one with the opportunity of escaping



poverty, therefore, if the same inequalities are experienced in such institutions, then which poverty are students escaping?

In another study exploring students' experiences of poverty in a South African higher education institution, Firfirey and Carolissen (2010) found that students from poor backgrounds utilize several strategies to bypass the emotional distress associated with poverty in order to camouflage their inadequacies. The authors concluded that due to the fact that NSFAS only pays a fraction of the cost of their university fees, students from poor backgrounds are unable to fully benefit and therefore end up eventually dropping out of university to avoid exposing their poverty to other students.

Soria, Weiner and Lu (2014) contend that there are many barriers (for example, lack of finance) for students who were previously disadvantaged which has resulted in some students enrolling for more than the required number of courses per semester in order to graduate earlier. This according to the authors is one of the contributing factors to students not finishing their studies on time.

Research conducted by Ramburuth and Hartel (2010) which focused on how the needs of students from disadvantaged backgrounds are being met, found that one of the implications for higher education is that marginalized students are less likely to feel as competent as students from advantaged backgrounds because of their social circumstances. In support of these findings, Letseka and Maile's (2008) study, which investigated the drop-out rate of university students, found that a large percentage of the students dropping out of tertiary institutions come from low socio-economic backgrounds within Black communities. Since loans are only able to cover a fraction of their university degrees, they are dependent on their parents and guardians for the remainder of their living expenses. As a result, many had to work part-time which became a distraction to their studies while others had to leave these institutions entirely.

In addition to financial support (which provides both stability and admission for students), Ntakana's (2011) study revealed that there was a need for academic, social, emotional, physical and financial support in addressing students' needs, due to poor performance and high drop-out rates in higher education institutions. She explains that both social and emotional support (orientation, mentorship, social networks, health and counselling programs) are of benefit to

students as this helps them to deal with any mental health problems which they may experience during the course of their studies.

In conforming to the education policies of redress and equity for all citizens, the Rural Education Access Programme (REAP) which is a South African based program available in the various provinces to assist students from marginalized rural backgrounds in accessing quality education, embarked on a research project of their own. This project focused on the factors facilitating success for disadvantaged higher education students which include institutional support services such as counselling, health services, student development (life skills workshops such as planning and goal setting), career guidance and career development/employability workshops and services. In their report (Rural Education Access Programme [REAP], 2008) the authors Jones, Coetzee, Bailey and Wickham (2008) confirmed that one of the main factors contributing to the high drop-out rate in higher education is the lack of career guidance in secondary schools since students later realise that the courses they enrolled for do not meet their expectations or interests. Hence, again as mentioned by Ntakana, orientation programs play a vital role in assisting students in this new environment, thereby improving their performances.

Massification as a worldwide phenomenon has also had an impact on the experiences of students from disadvantaged backgrounds because the expansion in numbers is only noticed on the side of the students in higher education while various resources required in such institutions such as infrastructure, finance and lecturers, remained scarce. Mohamedbhai (2014) explains that massification is the term used to describe the growing numbers in the education sector which also impacts funding, quality of teaching and learning, available infrastructure in addition to the quality of student life.

The Rural Education Access Programme (REAP, 2008) report, concluded that even though the policies are calling out for greater access to higher education, providing such access to students does not necessarily ensure success as over the years, there has been an increase in both the dropout and failure rates, particularly amongst Black and disadvantaged students. As a result, some authors have declared that if we ignore what works and does not work for previously marginalized students, we are in danger of failing a considerable fraction of today's higher education students (Latino, 2010).

Thus the aim of this study focused particularly on access, participation and achievement in an attempt to investigate the higher education experiences of students from low socio-economic backgrounds. In a study conducted in the UK by Crozier, Reay, Clayton, Colliander and Grinstead (2008) which investigated the provisions made by universities for their diverse students, it was noted that students' experiences within the same university are different for those coming from the working class as well as those coming from the middle class. The researchers observed that the middle class students were well prepared for the university life by their families while the students from the working class background felt that they were at university through luck and did not deserve to be there.

In addition to the above issues, residential accommodation also played a vital role in facilitating both participation and achievement for the participants in this study.

As much as student housing is a key issue in higher education, there is no national student housing policy regulating the provision of accommodation for students, except the National Plan for Higher Education which stipulates that universities should set the minimum standards for the provision of such accommodation. Dr. Nzimande (2009), the Minister of Higher Education and Training, emphasised the need for "accessible, decent, safe and academically conducive accommodation in ensuring a quality higher education system and the success of our students, especially those from a rural and poor background" (p. xii).

The lack of student housing as well as funding to support students in terms of accommodation has led to unrest at several universities such as the University of KwaZulu-Natal, Durban University of Technology and Tshwane University of Technology (Sapa, 26 January, 2014; Mkhize, 2 September, 2014; Mokoena, 9 September, 2015)

Accordingly, the Report on The Ministerial Committee for the Review of the Provision of Student Housing at South African Universities (DHET, 2011), revealed that there are various admission to residence policies in South Africa, however, the most common is the "first come, first served" policy based on academic performance, distance between student's home and campus, financial status as well as equity considerations. The same report further states that nine out of twenty-two universities admitted to using academic performance as a criterion for rewarding accommodation

to first year students which has been criticised as this is seen as a procedure of awarding success rather than providing security for students to succeed.

## **2.3 Theoretical Framework**

### **2.3.1 Geographies of Youth**

For the purpose of this study, I conceptualize youth as individuals between the ages of 14 to 35, as approved by the National Youth Policy (The Presidency, 2009) and the African Youth Charter (African Union Commission, 2006). Customarily, the youth were regarded as people who have nothing to offer to society and therefore were not given any specific roles to play, and others viewed them as an impulsive and disorderly group of young people (Carrington, 1969). However, researchers within the critical paradigm oppose this traditional conception of youth as they believe that the youth are capable of developing positively as influential individuals who are capable of making their own choices, despite the challenges (such as social class or gender) facing them (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2002). Increasingly, youth hood is being regarded as a period of exploring who one is, and literature has shifted away from viewing young people as problems to be solved to seeing potential in them as individuals who have a great deal to offer to society (Forman, Du, Kiely, Lerner & Carrano, 2009).

Traditionally, youth hood was viewed as a stage between childhood and adulthood which meant that people at this stage were transitioning from one stage to another. This then implied that these young people were going through a phase of development from being naïve to being responsible, hence society viewed them as passive participants in decision making, objects for concern and people who merely brought problems into society.

This traditional perspective of youth hood became the centre of concern for authors emerging from the field of human geography (Helfenbein & Huddleston, 2013; Jeffrey, 2012; Barker & Weller, 2003) who did not just see the youth as a threat to society but viewed them as people with their own particular voices and who are able to change their destiny through agency, implying that the youth also had a great deal to offer their societies. This fairly new field calls for the abandonment of the traditional construction of youth hood as a development phase, merely comprised of incompetence and immaturity. I have adopted this concept of geographies of youth in which young

people are not passive participants in decision making and implementation and in this study demonstrate their agency through investigating their participation in the struggle against social injustice as they raise their voices (Helfenbein & Huddleston, 2013; Jeffrey, 2012).

The concept of geographies of youth refers to an area of study in human geography that centres on the places and spaces of young people's lives, and include the key concepts 'place' and 'space' (Barker & Weller, 2003). These authors defined places as a neutral, physical surface where social action occurs, for example, the lecture theatre, while space is power-laden as it is socially created in various and complex ways. They also emphasised that as researchers, one ought to be conscious of the spaces in which one undertakes research as sometimes the type of research methods used may only be suitable for researchers but not to the participants. As a result, in this particular study, the participatory research method was employed, which allowed the participants to narrate their stories while I tried to interpret these since the research was conducted with them and not for them. Barker and Weller (2003) point out that children/youth centred methods provide only a glance into the intricacy and variation of children/youth's lives and experiences thus one cannot simply affirm that all young people are the same and therefore will have the same experiences. This is the reason why the aim of this research was not to generalize the findings but to understand these intricacies that the authors had spoken of.

According to Barker and Weller (2003), the concept of children's geographies centres around children's voices and what they have to say, which distinguishes this type of research from the traditional positivistic methodologies, in which children are seen as objects to conduct research on, rather than subjects to conduct research with. Hence, to address this issue of power relations, social geography promotes the use of participation which privileges youth voices and standpoints.

Those in the field of human geography have been mapping the experiences and practices of young people practically by "focusing attention on the simultaneous process by which young people are embedded and embodied within spaces and in the ways in which they embark in place-making both as strategies of resilience and resistance" (Helfenbein & Huddleston, 2013, p. 7). This then suggests that scholars have now realised that children/young people have a mind of their own, and through agency they are able to mobilize themselves in an attempt to fight social injustices (Helfenbein & Huddleston, 2013; Jeffrey, 2012). This is my ontological and epistemological stance on the youth as I embark on this study.

### **2.3.2 Bourdieu's Theory of Capital**

Pierre Bourdieu (1930-2002) was a sociologist, anthropologist and a philosopher born in France to working class parents. His theory of capital explains the dynamics of power in society and the subtle manner of transferring and maintaining such power from generation to generation. This study draws on the work of Bourdieu (1986) and his theory of capital as its main theoretical base.

According to Bourdieu (1986), the education systems in modern society operate in such a way as to ensure class inequality so that the rich become richer while the poor remain poor. As a result, all citizens in society become aware of their positions and remain in their places. His main interest was to analyze the structures in society which determined how resources were distributed, by drawing on the concepts of field, capital, and habitus which will be explained in detail. Accordingly, Bourdieu (1986) identified three major concepts in his theory, i.e. field, capital and habitus which he used to demonstrate how inequality is reproduced in society. The author further established four essential types of capital, i.e. economic, cultural, social and symbolic which will be used to examine the factors which shape student access, participation and performance in higher education which is the focus of this study.

#### **2.3.2.1 How relevant are Bourdieu's Concepts to the Education System?**

Bourdieu (1986) argued that the only way students would succeed in the modern education systems is if they possess what he called cultural capital as well as the habitus of the higher class. For him, cultural capital refers to the ability to fit into the culture of the higher class, especially by grasping and understanding the language as well as the expected norms and values of that specific educational institution. In this particular study, Bourdieu would be referring to the dominant language, i.e. English and the expected behavior. Whereas habitus looks at what the individual learns (norms and practices) during their primary and secondary socialization which allows them to respond differently to situations. As a result, if one's habitus matches that of the institution, for example, then this would assist the student to successfully acquire the values of that specific educational institution, and therefore be perceived as performing well. Furthermore, the author explained that children coming from the lower class do not have the abilities to fit into the dominant culture which then makes it difficult for them to succeed in the education system. As a result, success and failure in such a system becomes attributed to one's gifts or lack of these. This

infers that it is the students who are responsible for their own success or failure and not the system which already puts those coming from the lower class at a disadvantage. Hence, the author argued that educational qualifications are in themselves the reason for the inequality which exists in our society as students from both higher and lower classes are seen deserving of their positions due to their credentials or lack thereof.

Bourdieu (1986) distinguished between economic, social and symbolic capitals. Economic capital is the resource that a person requires in order to maintain eminence in a hierarchy of a society, which could be anything, ranging from shares, property, to finance while social capital refers to the influences or networks that one has with people similar to themselves, required specifically to utilize one's cultural capital. Social capital gives one access to material and non-material resources, information and knowledge. By virtue of belonging to a particular group an individual gains access to all the resources of that group. Symbolic capital denotes honor and recognition and is an essential source of power as it is the result of the exchange of the other forms of capital. Burke (2012) further elaborated that symbolic capital is the use of symbols to express other forms of capital, e.g. driving an expensive car tells us much about the person's other capitals.

In order to grasp Bourdieu's theory, one needs to first understand his concepts of 'field' and 'habitus'. Burke (2012) explained that what Bourdieu defined as field was actually a social context in society with particular requirements and rules (for example, in order for an individual to enter into this institution which is the focus of this study, they have to have obtained a Matriculation exemption). However, it does not end there, because together with this qualification, individuals must also be in possession of habitus which is basically the minimum amount of knowledge of that particular field for them to be accepted as a player (for example, they have to pass specific subjects). Hence, entering any field in society requires those certain resources which Bourdieu termed capital. Consequently, as an individual enters a social field, they are evaluated and ascribed to a particular position in the field, which is known to many as a social class. One's position determines one's language and one's lifestyle (where to hang out, type of food to eat, the type of sports to engage in, etc.). Walther (2014) reminds us that players in Bourdieu's fields are referred to as agents.

Bourdieu strongly believed that without economic and cultural capital it is extremely difficult for agents to have access to or even take control of their daily lives. He further argued that the rules

of the social field are strongly influenced by those with a great deal of economic and cultural capitals (which is the dominant group from high socio-economic backgrounds) while the rest (people from low-socio economic families) are excluded ensuring that they remain within the low paying jobs since they are without educational qualifications. Hence, for Bourdieu, the more economic capital parents have, the more likely that their children will possess more cultural capital (through education) which then allows them access to and success in higher education thereby granting them positions of highly paid professions. In addition to the aforementioned capital, the agent's social networks can also provide opportunities for acquiring more economic capital which can be re-invested in cultural capital and vice versa.

Bourdieu's theory proposed that it is the capital structure which gives one access to enter a social field and which determines the agent's position in the social field. Further, social positions are determined by the capacity and organization of one's capital portfolio in comparison to others in the same field. Class distinction is determined by the amount of economic and cultural capital which then becomes the criterion for distinguishing the dominant class (managers and professors) with a great deal of capital from the dominated class (unskilled workers and farmers) with little or no capital.

Thus, in the context of this study, Bourdieu's theory would posit that individuals from low socio-economic backgrounds are at a disadvantage because their parents are not well-off. This means that they are less likely to receive better opportunities resulting in them receiving lower paid jobs while also being confined to the lower social status. This is a cycle which such individuals can only break through education, but they are at a disadvantage to start with even when they enter a higher education institution so it is difficult to get the education required. This is how inequality in society is reproduced. Locating the study within the critical paradigm, as well as adopting Bourdieu's theory, contributes to this investigation of the experiences of first-year students receiving financial aid as well as the contextual dynamics that affect their access and participation in this particular university.

## **2.4 Concluding remarks**

It is evident that Bourdieu's capital theory is relevant to this study as it is imperative that both students, as well as the policy developers and governors in higher education institutions,



understand the impact of social injustice in our society. This will, in turn, provoke every individual's internalized ideology in an attempt to expose the inequalities.

This chapter has discussed the literature on prevailing class structure in a South African education system, in spite of the government's attempt to ensure equality by rectifying past injustices through new policies. I now present the third chapter which looks at the research methodology as well as the design of this study influencing my epistemological stance on young people.

## **CHAPTER 3 : RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY**

### **3.1 Introduction**

The central focus of this chapter is the research paradigm, the research design and methodology underpinning this study. I begin with a discussion of critical theory as this is the research paradigm within which this particular research is located. Critical theory will provide a perspective on how inequalities in the educational systems are maintained. I then discuss the conceptual framework that informs this study, namely geographies of youth, which explains society's conception of youth hood and youth's conception of themselves. The chapter also explains the qualitative approach adopted and the research methodology that informs this investigation. Finally, an outline of the research process in terms of the research instruments used, data collection and data analysis measures, as well as the ethical issues relating to the research conducted, is provided.

### **3.2 Key Research Questions**

The following are the key research questions:

- What are the experiences of students in receipt of financial aid in regard to access and participation in the context of one university in KwaZulu-Natal?
- What are the contextual dynamics that affect such students' access and participation in this university?
- How do these students navigate the dynamics which affect access and participation?

### **3.3 Research Methodology**

#### **3.3.1 Research Design: Qualitative research**

This research study is a qualitative narrative inquiry. A qualitative approach was employed in this study for the purpose of collecting rich, descriptive data to ensure an enhanced understanding of the educational experiences of first-year university students in receipt of financial aid. For Denzin and Lincoln (2003), qualitative research means that things are studied in their natural locale while the researcher seeks to make sense of these occurrences regarding the meaning people make of their experiences. Guest, Namey and Mitchell (2011) recommend the qualitative rather than the

quantitative approach to research as qualitative research is viewed as a naturalistic way of investigating the lived experiences through direct interaction with the research participants. Within this approach, there is no interest in a broad conclusion as researchers are not interested in searching for a causal effect but rather they want to understand a particular phenomenon which, in this case, is the experience of the participants in this research study.

### **3.3.2 Research Methodology: Narrative Inquiry**

#### **3.3.2.1 Narrative Inquiry**

The methodology adopted for this study was a narrative inquiry. Connelly and Clandinin (2000) define narrative inquiry as “stories lived and told” (p. xxvi). They further state that this methodology seeks to explore more about the social, cultural as well as organizational or institutional narratives representing a person’s experiences on how these are shaped, expressed and endorsed. For Langellier and Peterson (2004), a narrative inquiry seems best suited when the researcher aims to study intensely particular accounts of participants’ existence and experiences, which is the aim of this research. Once those specific personal experiences have been studied, the next step, according to Bell (2002) would be to link these seemingly separate events of a person’s life and interpret these in order to make meaning and find their connections.

Bruner (1986) articulated that narrative knowledge is useful in simplifying the complication and ambiguity of human existences. Human beings are complicated species, for example, one person could have multiple identities as in the case of a female who is a CEO of a company, a sister, a mother, and a wife at home. Now, through stories, one is able to find these complex patterns of how identity is constructed and reconstructed.

Thus, narrative inquiry differs from other styles of inquiry by involving “a collaboration between the researcher and the participant, over time, in a place or series of places, and in social interactions with milieus” (Connelly & Clandinin, 2000, p. 20). As the purpose of this study was to gain a deeper, richer consideration of the experiences of access, participation and achievement of students from disadvantaged backgrounds, using narrative enquiry provided the opportunity for them to tell their stories while my duty (as a researcher) was to listen and interpret these stories as told by the participants. This then meant that these stories may not represent the “lives lived” by the

participants but these are actually a representation of what was told to the researcher as the participants choose what to share and what not to share. Secondly, this also implies that there is not just one truth out there to be discovered, but that there are various perspectives from multiple voices which are all important in the meaning-making process.

By drawing focus on the what (what do they tell me) and the how (how do they tell their stories) in terms of my research questions, my intent was to unveil the meanings within the narratives (Chase, 2005) since the aim of the study was to examine the students' experiences of access and participation, i.e. the quality of their participation as well as the role of tuition fees and financial support mechanisms. Chase (2005) further elaborated that by listening to the stories, one is able to make sense of what actually happened and how the participants created meanings while representing what happened to them in the past.

Etherington (2006) states that the focus of attention is not in the lives lived by the people but how they are represented according to the participants as they tell their stories. Thus, the researcher listens to how participants interpreted events in their lives which provides clarity on the values and beliefs guiding such interpretations, what the participants hope for, their goals as well as their future plans.

Drawing from authors such as Clandinin and Huber (2010) who say "narrative inquiry is a process of entering into lives in the midst of each participant's and each inquirer's life" (p. 10), it becomes obvious that narrative enquiry allows for both parties to continue living their lives while still telling their own stories which then means that the storytelling process does not interfere with their daily routine. Given that traditional scientific methodology tends not to acknowledge the needs and circumstances of individuals from deprived and vulnerable backgrounds, narrative inquiry provides an opportunity to capture the authenticity and diverse nature and complexity of such lived stories.

This approach to research seemed most appropriate for this study because it privileges the voices and stories of the participants, and complements the researcher's objective of expressing the voices of the participants (university students from low socio-economic backgrounds) as well as their stories. Thus, participants were given an opportunity to voice their points of view, therefore, they are not only to be seen as objects to be studied but form part of the research team, allowing even

the disadvantaged to be liberated from their struggles. The aim of the socially critical research is to give hope to the participants and the question “What needs to be done to make the situation better?” should form part of the research process. In the sections below, the design of the study and the researcher’s design choices will be discussed.

### **3.3.3 Participatory Research Methods**

Researchers within human sciences have recognised that the key aim of research is not just to investigate one’s participants but also to empower those who have been marginalized. This informs my choice to adopt a participant-centred approach to data generation, which is in line with perspectives from the ‘new sociology of childhood’, geographies of youth’ and ‘socially critical research’.

According to Kemmis and McTaggart (2004), participatory research means being knowledgeable of the actual, physical as well as specific practices of certain people in certain places. This means that as a researcher, one is constantly adapting one’s approach in order to learn from the participants and making use of their own concepts.

Power relations play a vital role in any type of research, therefore in order to overcome such relations between the researcher and the participants, participatory inquiry draws from Freire’s approach which aims to emancipate those who are marginalized. As a result, in this type of research, knowledge comes from the participants, giving them the opportunity of being agents who are able to identify their own problems and find solutions for their own problems rather than being viewed as mere objects to be studied (Cornwall & Jewkes, 1995). Cornwall and Jewkes (1995) explain that the key element in participatory research is the knowledge and perception of community members which needs to be incorporated into the planning and research process itself. The key strength of this approach to research is that it provides an opportunity to engage participants as hands-on contributors which give the participants a sense of control.

One of the unique aspects of participatory research is the use of visualization (such as art and storytelling) which provides an opportunity for participants to investigate, evaluate and represent their own perceptions (Cornwall & Jewkes, 1995). Visualizations add a vital element in this sort of research as they reveal much that has previously been covered up by oral communication alone,

for example, through the process of visualization, issues and connections that participants may not have realised may be revealed.

For the above-mentioned reasons, as a researcher, I have made an important call in my choice in participatory methods as I intend to become both a learner and a facilitator in the research process which directly affirms that my participants' knowledge is extremely valuable.

### **3.3.4 The Research Site**

After the dismantling of the apartheid policies in South Africa, studies have mainly focused on racial dynamics of South African students while neglecting to delve into the social aspects of students from different backgrounds. As much as the new policies are applicable to the entire country, the context of this study was limited to a particular university in the city of Durban, located in the province of KwaZulu-Natal. The study participants' context was influenced by their experiences of gaining access into and participating in this particular institution of higher education, which is one of the universities which were previously regarded as predominantly for students from advantaged backgrounds. However, in a transformed and a democratic era, both staff and students in this particular university now come from all walks of life. Neuman (1997) emphasised the importance of the social context in order to understand the social world.

The choice of this particular research site was based primarily on the fact that I have had the opportunity of being a student from a disadvantaged background at this university which was a motivation for me to return and further explore the narratives of first-year students receiving financial aid.

### **3.3.5 Research Participants**

Participants in this study are all first-year students funded through the NFSAS which serves as financial support for students who want to further their studies but cannot afford to. Students who qualify receive a fully subsidised education. According to the Report of the Ministerial Committee on the Review of the NSFAS (DoE, 2010), applications are open to:

- Those with household income lower than the lowest threshold, according to current SARS tax tables;

- Those who went to a Quintile 1 school and including those who were exempted from paying school fee in particular public schools; and
- Those from the most deprived municipalities.

As mentioned previously, the target population for this study was a group of five students in receipt of financial aid either from the NFSAS or the Funza Lushaka bursary offered in this university. The Funza Lushaka bursary scheme aims to assist students in completing a full teaching qualification in an attempt to encourage teaching in public schools. In terms of the selection process, priority is given to candidates from previously disadvantaged backgrounds as well as those from the rural areas (Department of Basic Education, n.d.).

In terms of sampling procedure, Cohen, Manion and Morrison, (2007) asserted that in purposive sampling, participants are handpicked for a specific purpose. This group of students was purposively sampled in an attempt to satisfy the specific needs of this study focusing on the geographies of students from low socio-economic background accessing higher education for the very first time. In selecting my participants, I approached the funding office of this campus after being granted permission by the dean of the campus (**Appendix A**) and was given the details of ten students who were in receipt of funding. However, at the time of the data collection phase, students from this university were protesting due to fee increment, accommodation, and other reasons. As a result, they did not respond to my request as most were not at campus. Due to time constraints (the protest took more than two weeks) I ended up selecting students who were part of the protest as they were readily available and were willing to partake in the study. I targeted this group of students and acknowledge that it does not necessarily represent the wider population and there is no attempt to generalize the research findings (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2000).

I was aware that many students within this university fit the above description of participants but only a sample of only five students was drawn as this was a small qualitative study. According to McMillan and Schumacher (2001), sampling is a procedure of choosing small groups or individuals who would possibly be knowledgeable and informative about the phenomena of interest and from whom the researcher would be able to generate contextual data.

### 3.3.6 The Data Generation Process

Qualitative research requires the researcher to capture verbal communication and behaviour as the main purpose is to hear the words of the participants as well as to observe their actions. As pointed out by Harrell and Bradley (2009), the enhancement of a researcher's data collection method improves accuracy, validity, and reliability of the study's findings. For the purpose of gathering in-depth data for this study, semi-structured individual and group interviews along with mapping were utilized as research instruments (explained below). These data collection methods complemented each other. In both the focus group and individual interviews my key question was: "So tell me, what informed your decision to pursue university studies?"

Harrell and Bradley (2009) state that an interview is a one-on-one or a telephonic conversation between an interviewer and an interviewee or a group regarding a particular topic. For this particular study, firstly semi-structured individual interviews were conducted and the focus group interviews followed later on after all five participants were interviewed. The advantage of employing semi-structured interviews lies in the fact that these allow the researcher to inquire and gain clarity on issues regarding the phenomenon being explored (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011). Focus group members are able to motivate and encourage each other's perceptions and ideas, which is useful in collecting a wide range of detail and recollecting forgotten details of experiences (Cohen et al., 2011). Focus groups, according to Harrell and Bradley (2009) are also useful in providing a platform for allowing reflection and comparison and for clarification and negotiating so that both the researcher and participants are on an equal footing. The purpose of the focus group interview was to conduct the mapping exercise (**Appendix**) with the participants in order to gain a better understanding of the spaces and places in which they find themselves. The data from the focus group was linked to the second and third research questions which looked at the contextual dynamics which affected access and participation of students from low socio-economic background in this institution, as well as the manner in which these students navigated such dynamics.

As suggested by Harrell and Bradley (2009), during the interviews I introduced myself and then provided a general idea of the study, further information on how data would be used, and a guarantee of confidentiality. Furthermore, during the focus group interview, ground rules were established as I was working with a group of students who were not familiar with the process.



Finally, participants were given a chance to ask questions and express any uncertainty regarding the study. In research, an important factor is being aware of the shortcomings of a study and for this particular study, I foresaw time as a constraining factor since I had allocated only forty-five minutes (when all students were available, according to their timetables) to the interviews as all students do not have lectures at this particular time. I had asked students to choose their preferred time during the week (according to their timetables) for the individual interviews and they suggested using the forum period (which is a no-lecture period at a particular time and day) for the group interviews.

Harrell and Bradley (2009) state that in semi-structured interviews the most important tool is the interview schedule which is used to elicit the data. One of the advantages of an interview schedule is that the researcher can probe further into the responses provided by the participants which is useful in both untangling complex topics as well as getting a better understanding of the experiences of participants so that they do not stray from the intended questions and to ensure full participation of the participants. In addition, since there was too much data to be collected, the authors warn that all interview sessions should be recorded and transcribed in order to capture both the verbal and non-verbal aspects of the interaction. In this study, consent was gained to record all interview sessions, which were also transcribed.

As the study falls within socially critical research, its main aim was to uncover the power relations in higher education institutions. The reason for my choice of this specific paradigm is to empower my participant in order for them to be aware of the unfavorable systems that they find themselves in and to take control of their lives. Thus, my choice of a narrative inquiry accompanied by both individual and focus group interviews with my participants was influenced by the need to capture their full stories while I (as a researcher) then interpreted. As noted by Freire (1970), human beings are active agents who have the ability to transform their world which is also in line with my chosen conceptual framework, geographies of youth.

Geographies of youth allowed me to view my participants as people who are able to make informed decisions about their lives and future, as social agents of change. Helfenbein and Huddleston (2013) explained that youth geographies “**focus attention on the simultaneous process by which young people are embedded and embodied within spaces and in the ways in which they embark in place-making both as strategies of resilience and resistance**” (p. 7). My ontological

view is that there is a variety of truth out in the world which is shaped by individuals at certain times of their lives, through different experiences and contexts (de Gialdino, 2009). This particular lens provided me with insight into the geographies of access and the quality of my participants' participation in higher education while also exploring the ways in which they navigated the contextual dynamics that affected their achievement, which was the ultimate aim of this study.

### **3.3.6.1 The Mapping Exercise**

As mentioned in the previous chapters, my main aim was to use 'participant centred' data generation processes in line with both the conceptual and theoretical frameworks of my study. Cornwall and Jewkes (1995) explained that unlike conventional research which focuses on explanations, participatory research aims to find knowledge so that action can be taken. I chose mapping as my participatory research data collection tool. As proclaimed by Burns, Paul and Paz (2012), mapping is a method used in qualitative research which allows participants to shape the discussions of a given topic with not much interference from the researcher who acts as the facilitator. Thus, participatory mapping is an exercise of gathering rich data drawing on the knowledge of the people of the community by giving them the opportunity to generate visuals and non-visuals to determine their social problems.

As a researcher, I had the following research questions to address: "What are the contextual dynamics that affect access and participation of students from low socio-economic backgrounds in this particular university?" and "How do these students navigate such dynamics which affect access and participation?"

Warren (2004) pointed out that maps are lived out stories interlinked with the politics and culture of the environment in which they are utilized. Theis and Grady (1991) explained that maps are useful in that these offer the researcher a variety of information, for example, their socio-economic circumstances, attitudes and points of view and the use of space by different social groups. Additionally, the advantage of mapping is that it is fairly cheap and less time consuming since the scale map of this particular university is readily available.

Burns et. al. (2012) elaborated on the use of maps by explaining that it is actually the community members themselves who provide the researcher with the relevant information for their

community. They further reiterated that this approach alerts the people of the broader social, political and economic powers and their effects which was also an aim of this study. In developing the mapping process for this study, I was guided by the aforementioned authors' work. The following is an outline of the steps that were adhered to with the participants during the mapping exercise:

- I described and explained the research project to participants again – its aim, focus and intention
- At the beginning of the session, it was again emphasised to the participants that participation was voluntary and they were free to leave the session, anytime.
- Consent was also negotiated to record the session and all the participants agreed to have the session recorded.
- The room had two round tables and all the participants sat around one table.
- Each participant was provided with an A4 size floor map of the university and red permanent marker pens, pencils and sticky notes.
- As both the researcher and the facilitator of the session, I also explained how the sessions would work.
- As a way of breaking the ice and introducing the topic, I began with a simple exercise whereby participants were asked to answer the following question: “What is the first thing that comes to your mind when you think of the university?”
- Participants were asked to share their answers with others.
- The next step was to start the process of the ‘map’ experiences in a visual form. This involved drawing on the maps provided.
- As a way of managing the process, I used the interview schedule as guidance to avoid participants going off the topic.  
As a final note, participants had to present their maps to the rest of the group.
- At the end, I expressed my gratitude towards my participants by offering them some light refreshments.

These maps also formed the basis for discussion in the focus groups where the semi-structured interviews were conducted.

### **3.4 Data analysis**

The main reason for conducting a research study is to yield findings regarding the phenomena being investigated and the analysis of data collected during the study produces these findings. Once again, Osman (2009) had stressed that a researcher has to analyze the massive data collected during a research project so that there is order, structure and meaning to it. The data (including audio) collected during the interview stages (semi-structured and focus group interviews) and the mapping exercise was transcribed and coded using a thematic approach adapted from Denzin and Lincoln (2008). I began this process by reading the data several times to familiarize myself with the key ideas emerging. I then switched to coding, that is, using a word or a phrase, for example, decision to proceed to university; choice of university; choice of career; expectations of a university; experiences of the curriculum; and barriers to learning in order to organize the data.

To illustrate the above process, one of the questions asked during the focus group interviews was: “What influenced your decision to proceed to university?” One of the most common responses to the question was “*I was persuaded by my teacher at school who said I would be a good teacher*”. Their responses were then boxed into the “decision to proceed to university” category. The main purpose of the mapping exercise was to gain better knowledge of the places and spaces which impeded on the processes of teaching and learning as well as the opportunities that the students were given. For example, all five participants identified the lecture venues as one particular place which did not allow teaching and learning to take place due to overcrowding. One of the students even mentioned that he does not attend classes anymore as he has someone signing the register on his behalf because he still does not learn anything. A more in-depth analysis was then followed by a comparison between the various codes within and across data groups. As a point of departure, all writings and notes were analyzed to generate recurring themes (Newman, Woodcock, & Dunham, 2006), for example, contextual dynamics to learning. The theoretical and conceptual frameworks of the study played a vital role in making sense of the enormous data collected.

### **3.5 Issues of validity and trustworthiness**

In qualitative research, naturalistic researchers have opted to use terminology which distance them from the traditional positivist paradigm which relies on terminologies such as validity and reliability to demonstrate the dependability of the instrument(s) used as well as their findings. For

instance, Lincoln and Guba (1985) begin from the premise that validity is not always physically measurable in a qualitative research, instead, the term ‘trustworthiness’ is said to be the appropriate term to describe the authenticity and genuineness of a qualitative research. Accordingly, four issues of trustworthiness are imperative in any qualitative research, namely, credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. During the individual interviews, I rephrased the interview questions deliberately to verify the consistency of the participants’ responses which Fetterman in Bharuthram (2006) describe as ‘self-contained triangulation’, and is necessary when measuring internal consistency.

Self-contained triangulation refers to a researcher continuously challenging or maintaining their formal position while internal consistency is the measure of the reliability of the responses of the participants. Furthermore, the collected and analyzed data including the outcomes was subjected to further criticism by my supervisor. This was to ensure that the findings of the study were in line with the theoretical and conceptual frameworks, along with my aforementioned ontological and epistemological stance of young people having a voice which in turn gives them agency to fight against social injustice.

In addressing the issues of dependability and confirmability, I relied on the independent examination of the research methods by my supervisor (Patton, 1990), who meticulously inspected my audit trail which comprised of the original transcripts, data analysis documents and the text of the dissertation itself. Calitz (2009) emphasizes the need of pre-testing a research instrument before it is finally used, therefore, a pilot study with students who were not part of the study was conducted to test the relevant tools.

### **3.6 Limitations of the study**

At the onset, I would like to disclose that several years ago, I was a student from a low-socio economic background in receipt of financial aid in this university but in a different campus and therefore I may not have a sense of balance in terms of my own perceptions and those of my participants. However, every effort has been made in engaging with the framework(s) and methodology of the study and as mentioned before, one of the duties of my supervisor was to cross-examine the data, the analysis as well as research findings to eliminate any researcher bias. Despite the aforementioned limitation, I still trust that the study provided an essential basis for

future research regarding the experiences of students from low socio-economic backgrounds accessing institutions of higher education.

### **3.7 Ethical issues/considerations**

Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2007) articulated that informed consent requires that the participant understands and is competent enough to make a choice to partake in a study, voluntarism and access to full information about what it means to be a participant. If a participant is immature, permission ought to be sought from parents or guardian. They further note the concepts of confidentiality, anonymity, caring and fairness as fundamental values of protecting the rights of the research participants. As a result, appropriate steps were taken to negotiate ethical clearance from the University of KwaZulu-Natal research office and agreement from all parties concerned, including obtaining approval from the KZN Department of Education.

Some of the ethical issues considered, in reference to the National Committees for Research Ethics were:

- The participants were made aware in advance of the aim of the research;
- The participants were assured of confidentiality and anonymity;
- Even though the participants are adults, they were still provided with consent forms to sign;
- Participation was voluntary. Every step in the research was taken with the permission of the participants, as they were given the option to withdraw from the study at any time if they wished to; and
- Participatory techniques were used to try and ensure that the power dynamics concerning myself (as a researcher) and the participants are attended to.

All members of the university concerned were treated with respect and protected through the confidentiality clause concerning their true identities and the information which they provided. According to the UKZN policy, all data collected should be submitted to the supervisor and stored safely and then appropriately destroyed after five years. A copy of this study will be made available to the university and the KZN Department of Education.

### **3.8 Concluding thoughts**

In this chapter, the research methodology and the design of the study were discussed. The subsequent chapter explores the findings of the research study.

## CHAPTER 4 : DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

### 4.1 Introduction

In this chapter of the research project which was designed to investigate the geographies of access as well as the quality of students' participation in higher education, I present the research findings and a discussion thereof. According to Statistics South Africa (2012), education is the most important instrument in combating poverty since in South Africa about 66% of adults without formal education are poor, while only 5, 5% of those with a post-matric qualification were considered poor. The same report further states that investing in both education and more job opportunities will ensure the eradication of poverty in this country which goes hand in hand with John Dewey's (1897) famous quotation: "Education is a social process; education is growth; education is not a preparation for life but is life itself". I interpret this to mean that in order to fight the inequalities and alleviate poverty in our communities, one ought to become educated so that we can all pool our resources together to bring about opportunities for a better life.

According to the African Youth Charter Article 13 (1), "every young person shall have the right to education of good quality" and Article 13 (4) (f) of the same document further elaborates that it is the duty of States Parties to "make higher education equally accessible to all including establishing distance learning centres of excellence" (African Union Commission, 2006). Hence, there is a need for the implementation of policies for achieving equity, for the sake of our youth who are the future and also for our economy and the standard of living of our citizens.

**The research questions of the study were as follows:**

- **What are the experiences of students in receipt of financial aid in regard to access and participation in the context of one university in KwaZulu-Natal?**
- **What are the contextual dynamics that affect such students' access and participation in this university?**
- **How do these students navigate the dynamics which affect access and participation?**

As discussed in Chapter 3, this study was framed within Bourdieu's (1986) theory of capital as well as the concept of geographies of youth. Bourdieu's work emphasised class disparities in



educational achievement in relation to how class is reproduced in modern capitalist societies. Geographies of youth study the places and spaces of young people, who are viewed as active participants in the creation of their own lives. Drawing on the concept of social geographies and Bourdieu's conceptions of capital, I analysed the research data and categorized it into emergent themes in order for the above research questions to be addressed.

I begin with a brief introductory narrative on each participant because it is important to understand who the participants are, where they come from and what they bring with them to university.

## **4.2 Profile of Participants**

This section provides an introduction (in their own words) to the five research participants (two females and three males) who, as previously described (see Chapter 3), are the first year Bachelor of Education students in receipt of financial aid. They are all African, first language isiZulu speakers who come from the rural areas in KwaZulu-Natal.

### **Participant A: “the Go-Getter”**

*I am a twenty-year old male and I am the first in my household to register in a higher education institution. I grew up in Nongoma which is a region found in the rural area of Zululand within the province of KwaZulu-Natal. I am a “go-getter” and hard work does not scare me at all because I know it pays off at the end. I live with my dad and my four siblings, some older than me but yet they did not leave home to further their studies as they had to work at home (herding cattle and looking after younger siblings). My dream was to become a lawyer but I was told that I would never make it in the field because of my financial circumstances. My dad does not have a secondary education but yet he is a very wise man who worked as an unskilled laborer for many years. Even though there is nobody who is working at home, we are fortunate because my dad has many cows and he also collects his old age grant from the state which helps us daily. As the first member of the family to go to university, my dad had to sell a few cows for my registration fee, so I still owe him those cows when I get my first paycheck.*

### **Participant B: “the Perfectionist”**

*I am a twenty-year old female who is the eldest child in the family. I am from Bulwer which is a small town in the middle region of KZN. I live with my mother who is a professional nurse in Cape*

*Town and three siblings whom I have to care for when mom is working. My mother is a perfectionist because she loves order and I think it rubbed on me. I have always wanted to follow in her footsteps and become a nurse, but I did not get my wish because of my matric results so now I am studying towards a degree in education. I was lucky to get a bursary that pays for everything, including the registration fee so my mother did not have to worry.*

**Participant C: “the Life-long learner”**

*I am a twenty-three-year old male who was brought up by his grandmother. I have never met my father and my mother passed away when I was very young. I have one younger brother and we all live in a town called Nkandla in the uThungulu district of KZN. All three of us are dependent on granny’s Old Age Grant for survival and I was the first person in my family to go to university. I have always wanted to be a teacher because I believe that teachers make a difference in everybody’s life. I love teaching and even though I had a hard time getting the registration fee, I would love to continue educating myself even after I obtain my degree. I will always be grateful to my granny who had to save her money for a few months for my registration.*

**Participant D: “the Joker”**

*In my family, I am the first person to go to a higher education institution. I am a twenty-year old female living with my grandmother and four siblings. I am from eMsinga which is a town in the Umzinyathi district. This is a disadvantaged town found in the valleys of the Tugela and Buffalo rivers. I really like this area even though it is not fully developed which is the reason I had to leave to further my education. This is my community and I would never want to abandon it because people always smile when they see me for the reason that I make them laugh. My dream was to become an accountant as I was told that you earn a lot of money but my teachers told me that the quickest way to make money was to become a teacher. I do hope I will get my degree on time so that I could assist my granny financially after she helped me with my university registration fee. If it wasn’t for her pension money, I would still be at eMsinga, minding everybody else’s business.*

**Participant E: “the Shining star”**

*I am an eighteen-year old male from Mtwalume living with his dad and other siblings. Growing up, I have always wanted to be an accountant because I was told that the money is good but many teachers in my high school advised me to study teaching because of my background. I live with my mother who is unemployed therefore my teachers told me that being a teacher is quicker and much*

*easier than being an accountant since money was an issue. My teachers were the ones who actually paid for my registration fee as they thought that I stood out in my class which made me even more determined to be the best I can. My teachers always said that I should make teaching my first choice if I want to go ahead in life and find a job. But when I asked them if they liked teaching, most did but some did not because the salary for them does not equal the duties. I have chosen to teach as a career so I have to shine here in this university.*

#### **4.2.1 My Participants' Biographies**

##### **Context: Where do they come from?**

My participants come from the deep-rural, disadvantaged towns of KwaZulu-Natal where crime, poverty and unemployment are rife. These portions of the province have been neglected by the municipality as most of them still do not have the facilities to support basic human needs such as clean running water, electricity and decent shelter. One particular story that stood out was that which was shared by one of the participants who described her neighborhood as a “survival of the fittest” camp. She said in her community, only those who have money survive because their children are able to preserve their family name and also become educated. She explained that one way of doing so is to marry into a family which is more fortunate so that they can pay your parents more cows or money as part of the bride price. For others, this means that they have to resort to crime so that everybody survives. Another participant shared his story of how the government has neglected their community because, after 22 years of democracy, they still are without proper shelter and have no clean water as they still fetch their water from the river. Another participant further elaborated on this story as he explained that he was very happy that he was born a male because in their communities, the males have the privilege of bathing in clean water while the females’ bath area is just down that same river so they have to use dirty water from the males to clean themselves and do the washing because that is how things are. The houses, according to the participants are made out of mud with thatched roofs and cow dung is commonly used to polish the floors. One participant explained that in an individual household, all the girls have to take turns in fetching water and cooking, therefore, the first person has to wake up as early as 4am so that the older female can start cooking at 4:30am. Waking up late means that the water in the river could have evaporated or be polluted.

**Caregivers: Who is looking after them?**

Three of the participants live with their grandparents and one lives with his father who are all in receipt of Old Age grants. One of the participant lives with her younger siblings as her mother is a professional nurse in Cape Town, therefore she is the person who is looking after all the other siblings. Those who are living with a guardian have either lost their biological parents at a very early stage of their lives or their parent (paternal side) has been absent from their lives up to now. These caregivers have to use up all their pension money to support families of more than six individuals.

**Caregivers: Level of education and employment**

The level of education of the four caregivers is extremely low, as they all have up to a primary education, and therefore, some of them are illiterate. Two of the participants shared a similar story of how their guardians have to wake up at dawn in order to grow and sell fruit and vegetables for a living while another parent sells cattle to feed his family. However, it seems every household has its own cattle, therefore, it becomes very difficult to sell to the neighbors. As a result, cattle are merely used to pay lobola (bride's price) for those who have the privilege of being chosen as a bride. None of these parents/guardians have permanent employment. One of the participants recalls his father having to sell two of his cattle at a cheaper price for his tuition fee to university. Lack of employment in these areas means that children have to work extremely hard at school to gain entry into tertiary institutions so that they obtain better jobs in order to support their families. The participants further explained the challenges of having only two schools (a primary and a high school) in their communities which included overcrowded classrooms. From what I have gathered from the participants, every community was built around a river which was the source of a basic need (water). However, they also explained that as children, they had to cross these rivers every day to get to schools and in rainy seasons, the rivers become flooded which meant that they had to remain at home and miss school. One participant shared that he had asked his father why the rate of illiteracy was so high in the community and his father explained that due to floods and other challenges, remaining at home eventually became a habit for many of the learners and since there

was no communication between teachers and parents, the learners dropped out of school and their parents were happy because of the extra hands to help feed the rest.

### **4.3 Student Aspirations, Choices and Access to Higher Education**

After graduating from Grade 12, every learner is then faced with an important decision whether to further their studies or find a job (for those who couldn't afford to go to school). Hence, when I questioned my participants about their aspirations in life, this is what they had to say:

*“I am the first one to go to university in my family so I will use this opportunity to better myself, family and community because I want to change my background. For me, I have always wanted to go to varsity because varsity will help me to take care of my granny who paid for my registration fee.” (Joker)*

**Shining star** explained:

*“There are many of us living with our grandparents in this community. There are no parents and some of the children have also become parents because there is nothing else to do. I want to make a difference and help those who need help so I want to leave this place, get educated and then come back.”*

According to Bourdieu's theory, since these participants are without economic capital, it is a challenge for them to access higher education institutions. According to Bourdieu (1986), it is actually educational qualifications that separate the rich from the poor in society since bursaries and scholarships to and within higher education are awarded on merit. This then implies that students from a high class deserve to gain access to universities since they have better grades than those from a lower class which is a strategy of legitimizing inequality in the education system. This has led to disadvantaged students working extremely hard academically to ensure that they leave their communities for better opportunities in the urban areas. These sentiments were also observed during the focus group discussions where participants reported that “life back at the villages is too slow and filled with poverty”. As **Life-Long Learner** said:

*“I had to go to university because I have never known my father and my mother died many years ago. I am now living with my granny who I have to take care of” and a university degree will help me to do just that.”*

The participant shared a story about how his granny had to wake up at 3:00am to go to do gardening so that there would be food for everyone. She had to be back in the kitchen by 4:00am to ensure that by 5:30am when grandpa woke up, the food was ready for him, even though he was unemployed. He and his siblings had to leave at 6:00am to arrive at school by 7:30am because there is only one primary and secondary school in the area which are both far away and one had to cross a river to get to the schools. He also said that his first meal was before 6:00am and his second would be at 4:00pm when he arrived home from school because there was no soup kitchen at school. These stories shared by the participants are evidence of being goal driven despite the hardship they faced while trying to educate themselves in order to escape poverty because for them, education means better job opportunities and equality for their families and communities.

Having aspirations meant that the students also had to have a plan of how to make their goals a reality, hence they all decided to register at this institution which offers a Bachelor of Arts in Education. However, when questioned about their first choice of study, the participants shared the following:

*“There was no one in school to tell us about the different careers out there. I wanted to do B Com Accounting but my teacher told me that it takes time and it requires a lot of money which is something I do not have, rather I become a teacher because there is always funding, our country is short of good teachers and there are bursaries available.”* **(Shining Star)**

*“My dream was to go overseas to study law but since there was no money at home, here I am and nobody even helped me to apply to universities outside my country because they all said I was wasting my time and my father’s pension money. I was told that teaching is quicker and I would get a job easily after obtaining my degree, unlike some other jobs.”* **(Go-Getter)**

*“My mum is a nurse so I also wanted to be one. But I did not meet the requirements so now I want to be a teacher. But nobody cared enough at school to tell us what we could study.”* **(Perfectionist)**

*“I have always wanted to be an Accountant because that is where the money is. But I do not have the time to study for so many years while my family is suffering so my teachers said I should do teaching.” (Joker)*

*“I want to make a difference in people’s lives so teaching is always what I wanted to do. I know the money is not good but I can get a job very easy and support my granny. My teachers believe I can do it too.” (Life-Long Learner)*

From these narratives, one can infer that both secondary and tertiary institutions did not play their roles in disseminating knowledge proficiently. Only one out of the five participants admitted choosing teaching as a first option as he had said that he loved the profession while the other four had hoped to be in the fields of either law or commerce but due to advice from teachers and parents, together with their circumstances, they ended up pursuing a second or third career choice (teaching). It can also be said that the attitudes and perceptions of the teachers had a great impact on the choices made by the participants but had they had the correct information, they might have chosen different career paths. However, Bourdieu (1986) would argue that it was the lack of social capital which landed the other four participants in a teaching career which obviously was their second or third choice. The author further explained that this type of capital is also how the dominant class (those from high socioeconomic backgrounds) are able to preserve and reproduce unity within the group for it to retain its status.

In their study, Udoh and Sanni (2012) discovered that parents’ attitudes towards occupations (whether silent or open), their level of formal education and their occupations all have a significant influence on the career choices of secondary school students. The above narratives support the findings of Ebrahim’s (2009) study that parents of disadvantaged children have no time for education because their main energy is focused on what will the family eat and there is no time for all the other issues of life (like giving career guidance). The above is an example of Bourdieu’s cultural capital since the theorist maintains that possessing such capital automatically means that one has access to that particular world. In other words, if one is not familiar with the culture of the higher class, then it becomes difficult for those from a lower class to discern the upper classes’ dos and don’ts or even how they use their specific language. Therefore, how can the parents of participants in this study make choices in matters which are alien to them? All they are interested

in is that their children are furthering their studies which for them means better job opportunities and less poverty.

Once individuals have made their choice in terms of what they want to study in a higher education institution, the next step is to gain access into their desired university. Brooks (2008) noted that learners from working class backgrounds did not even imagine university as an option for them due to their disadvantaged backgrounds which seemed to be a parental issue since parents themselves did not seem to progress in life. When participants in this study were asked how their dream of being part of this institution materialised, these were their responses:

*“My high school English teacher actually said I must apply and he would pay for my registration in this university because he said it produces the best teachers in the province and I could make it as a teacher.” (Go-Getter)*

*“I had no money to go to university so my teachers helped me to apply here because they knew that our family needs the money so they convinced me to go to university, instead of staying at home and milking the cows.” (Joker)*

The above stories highlight that even though participants had thought of furthering their studies, a university was not an option based on their circumstances. Significant people (precisely teachers) made the choice for them to go to university, and specifically this university. Hence two of the participants had their registration fees paid for them by their teachers as they had explained that there was no money saved up for them at home. For the rest of the participants, their caregivers had to make a few life changing decisions to ensure that they became educated. This was also evident in the following narratives:

*“I live with my granny because I have never known my father. In order for me to be accepted in this institution, my granny had to borrow money from a bank because nobody has so much money lying around in February.” (Life-Long Learner)*

*“I was fortunate to have a teacher like Mr. Nzama who gave me registration fee as he had faith in me and my future. He never says anything, all he wanted was that I study teaching so I don’t even know if I owe him.” (Joker)*



*“The registration fee was a problem for me because my dad is a pensioner living in a rural area, therefore he ended up selling a few cows for me to get the required amount for enrolling in this university. Before leaving for varsity this year, he told me that when I get to university, I should not play because I still owe him a few cows.” (Go-Getter)*

*“My grandmother is the only source of income at home, I have never met my dad, but I know he is still alive. I have to go and study so that I can repay ugogo (granny in isiZulu) for the loan that she had taken for me in the beginning of this year for my registration fee.”*

**(Life-Long Learner)**

However, **Perfectionist’s** experience was a bit different as both she and her parent (a nurse) were unconstrained by the financial burden of her studies as she had been awarded a full bursary which covered her studies for the entire year while others had received partial financial assistance. This was a clear illustration of how cultural capital was certainly converted to economic capital. This is what she had to say:

*“I guess I was one of the lucky few, my bursary covered everything, including the registration fee and accommodation, otherwise I would have just said “thank you” and returned home because I have no one and my mother could not afford to pay so much money, even though she is a nurse as she has other children to care for”.*

De Villiers (2012) argued that in the post-apartheid era, access to higher education is no longer determined by factors pertaining to race but to affordability which has become the new financial hurdle for students from disadvantaged backgrounds. Similarly, Wangenge-Ouma (2012) pointed out that the key determinant of whether a student proceeds to higher education or not relies on funding, which was one of the main obstacles that participants in this study also faced.

The stories told by the participants revealed that finance is one of the key criteria for entrance to higher education institutions. It was also noted in this study that even illiterate guardians understood that they had to do whatever it took to ensure that their children had the registration fee needed to gain access to university. Hence one participant’s granny went to such an extreme that she approached a bank for a loan, and another participant’s parent had to sell his livestock to ensure that his son could go to university. In the Zulu culture, a man’s livestock determines his

wealth therefore this father was willing to lose his status in the community due to the fact that according to the participant, his father did not have much money.

Bourdieu and Passeron (1977) posited that the rest of the other types of capital are dependent on economic capital and the authors also explained that social class (which is determined mainly by economic capital) is the reason for the privilege of certain students while others remain disadvantaged. It can be concluded from the above narratives that for the study participants, the main barrier to accessing higher education was the lack of economic capital. Higher education requires a great deal of such capital which is something that their parents or guardians did not possess.

However, one particular participant, **Perfectionist**, did not have economic capital but her parent had cultural capital due to her level of education as well as her profession (professional nurse) and had symbolic capital (her status), which allowed her to have access to material and non-material resources, namely, a scholarship which paid for the entire year's study including her registration. Walther, (2014) explain that membership to social networks gives one access to material and non-material resources, information and knowledge. In the case of **Perfectionist**, this granted her total access to this institution.

Finance may be a major factor but there are others which impede access to higher education for students. For example, Mueller (2008) contends that in addition to financial constraints, lack of relevant information regarding higher education institutions, together with the students' family backgrounds, play an equally important role. This is demonstrated in the following stories:

*"I don't understand why they tell us now that they will pay for the rest of our tuition fee and all we have to do is cover our registration fee because when they came to my high school last year, I was told that their bursary covers everything. And when I came to register this year, I was told that I had to pay the registration fee which nobody had warned me about or that nobody had budgeted for." (Joker)*

*"Even if you wanted to go to university, you still have to think of the rest of the family. What will they have because nobody is educated or employed back at home? Sometimes I even thought of what my mother said that I should rather look for work than study but my teacher was happy to help" (Shining Star)*

Participants reported that at times their families' circumstances determined their choices in life as the unity of the family is much more valuable. However, four of the participants blamed the universities for some of the issues they had encountered in this institution as they felt that the administrators and information brochures were not upfront with them regarding the terms and conditions of their bursaries or loans. One participant even accused institutions of deliberately misrepresenting themselves to attract more students. He said: "they just want our money, they don't care about us" (**Joker**)

Brooks (2008) states that whether or not learners proceed to university, and the type of university they choose to attend is predominantly determined by their knowledge, or lack of knowledge, of the dominant culture of the community, their family's social networks as well as the financial resources available to them. Bourdieu (1986) states that students from disadvantaged backgrounds who are not familiar with the dominant language (for example, English in this case), not accustomed to the rules of their institution and who did not even think that they would be accepted into the institution in the first place (cultural capital), are already at a disadvantage on entrance when compared to their peers from affluent backgrounds.

#### **4.4 Participation and Achievement: Factors that Facilitate or Impede Students' Success in a Higher Education Institution**

##### **4.4.1 Academic Factors**

##### **4.4.1.1 The Language Issue**

As explained in Chapter 2, 'student participation' refers to access to the curriculum as well as participation in all aspects of university life. During the focus group discussion, when the participants were questioned about the challenges they experienced throughout teaching and learning, this is what they had to share regarding language which was one of the barriers they experienced where academic literacy is concerned:

*"First of all, I am black and English is not my first language so of course, I will find it difficult to speak it. Sometimes I first have to think in isiZulu before I answer the question in English."* (**Life-Long Learner**)

*“It is not easy to translate a difficult English word in your mind and it’s even more difficult for us, Black students because all the other students think in English so there is no need to translate but we think in isiZulu so imagine the time wasted. That is why most of the times, we do not speak in class.”* **(Perfectionist)**

*“What about these words they use such as a semester, lectures and plagiarism? The lecturer just went on without explaining to us so I had to ask someone to explain after class what it all means. I was so confused and I could not even spell some of these words.”* **(Joker)**

Rodriguez (2009) argues that in order for students to feel a sense of belonging and for the purpose of communication, it is important for them to know the dominant language of the country which is English, in this case. This was also evident in this study as four out of the five participants said they chose not to respond to any of the class discussions as they felt that English (as a language of instruction) prevented them from fully expressing their points of view. The four participants perceived language as a barrier since they believed that the language was deliberately imposed on them to prohibit their participation in lectures, as per **Go-getter’s** narrative:

*“I don’t understand, if the lecturers know that we don’t understand English well, then why do they still use it throughout the lecture, why not switch to some isiZulu to include us?”*

As previously mentioned (refer to Chapter 2), academic literacy encompasses both read and written texts, therefore participants also expressed their experiences regarding written text as follows:

*“Here in varsity, it is difficult. Back in high school, my teacher explained the ‘bombastic’ words so there was no need for me to even have a dictionary, which is different here.”* **(Shining Star)**

*“In my school, all the subjects were taught in isiZulu except for English. The teachers only translated the difficult words so English is still difficult for me to understand, especially this university writing.”* **(Go-Getter)**

*“Even essay writing is so different. I really don’t understand academic writing because in high school you were taught that an essay has an intro, a body and a conclusion. But here*

*they teach you how to write their way which does not make sense to me.” (Life-Long Learner)*

*“ALE was difficult for me because in ALE, the terms and the structure was different from what we were taught in high school. All they told us in school is that an essay has 3 parts, an introduction, a body and a conclusion. Nothing else!” (Joker)*

During the focus group interviews one could feel the frustration that participants conveyed as they criticised the university policies for selecting English as the main medium of instruction which automatically disadvantaged them as students from an isiZulu background while advantaging their peers from other racial backgrounds (including black students from the ex-Model C schools) as they were able to participate and articulate themselves well in lectures. These narratives support Rodriguez’s (2009) argument that English language learners commonly associate grammatical precision to effective communication which they then perceive as a door opener for better employment, educational success, as well as recognition by other native English speakers. This is also an example of cultural capital which students from the dominant class already possess, placing them at an advantage over the rest of the students. Bourdieu and Thompson (1991) states that academic writing is no ordinary writing as it is something that is not part of one’s daily language. The narratives shared by the participants illustrated Bourdieu’s point of view as four of them mentioned that academic writing is challenging, therefore, the chances of them passing in this institution are very slim.

In view of the shared stories, it is obvious that language is crucial to social integration and communication in a new environment but in the case of these participants, communication between the students and the lecturers did not seem effective. A contributing factor to any individual feeling a sense of inclusion is when they are able to grasp the language spoken which was not the experience where these participants were concerned. The narratives of the study revealed that they felt excluded and isolated in the lecture theatres where they should have been included to ensure that effective teaching and learning took place.

### **University Interventions Regarding the Language Issue**

As an intervention to manage the language issue mentioned above, the university offers an English Language Course (ELC) and Academic Literacy for Undergraduate Students (ALE) in small

tutorial groups of less than 40 students in a single class. The English Language Course is aimed at providing students with the basics of English as a medium of instruction. The module teaches students to construct simple sentences and is offered to students who did not meet the university requirements in English as a subject at their previous schools. Academic Literacy, on the other hand, is intended to teach students the various ways in which texts are patterned and organized to achieve their diverse and particular communicative purposes (University of KwaZulu-Natal [UKZN], 2013).

However, due to financial constraints and to ensure cost effectiveness, the university has chosen to cancel these tutorials. As a result, students had to find other alternatives to learning therefore two of my participants ended up purchasing dictionaries to help them with meanings of what is being said, while others chose to befriend other students from their social backgrounds who performed well in the module (for example, **Shining Star** who scored 79% in ALE). This became a strategy of coping with the dominant culture of the university while also giving them an opportunity to form friendships with other students from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Nonetheless, as mentioned above, not all the students found English challenging as per the narrative of **Shining Star**:

*“English is not a problem for me because I also came from a disadvantaged school but I like English. My English teacher from school favored English over isiZulu. She told us that English is a language of power. So if you know it, you will be fine and that is why we worked hard to learn it”.*

The above excerpt illustrates an example of adequate preparation for higher education on the part of the teacher and the student. The role and attitude of the above-mentioned teacher is worth noting as he/she added an extra effort in preparing his/her learners for higher education which in turn allowed the student to fit into the culture of the institution due to the acquired cultural capital. This then raises the question of the quality of education that the others received even though they all came from disadvantaged rural schools. It’s interesting to note too that the narratives shared by the participants contradict the Language Policy (2006) of this university which clearly promotes the development of an awareness of multilingualism by recognizing all the official languages of

KwaZulu-Natal, namely isiZulu, English and Afrikaans as well as for isiZulu to be equivalent (officially) to English in terms of its academic status.

#### **4.4.1.2 Academic Assessment**

The next issue of discussion is assessment which is a task that no student can escape. Assessment is imperative as it provides an insight for lecturers regarding the parts of the content with which students are struggling in order for them to be able to assist the students accordingly. Assessment is carried out during and at the end of the module in the form of either an assignment, test or an exam to see if the student should move on to the next level or not. According to the participants in this study, there was a great deal of confusion regarding the assessment tasks. They felt that there was a lack of explanation of the assessment criteria on the part of the lecturers which then affected their overall achievement. They compared and contrasted between the criteria they were used to in high school with what they were encountering in this tertiary institution, as can be seen in these narratives:

*“In Geography, the lecturer taught us as if we were 3rd or 4<sup>th</sup>-year students because she just gave us the topic of the assignment without even explaining what to do. When she returned after marking our scripts, she told us that we had all failed because we had plagiarized.” (Go-Getter)*

*“The way we are assessed here is different from high school and I don’t like it. Here we are told to forget about everything from high school because this is varsity. If that is the case, then even teachers in high schools don’t know how to write because what they taught us is not correct.” (Perfectionist)*

*“We lose a lot of marks and yet there is only one comment. I don’t even know where I went wrong, all I know is that I almost failed. What is this plagiarism, anyway?” (Joker)*

*“At least in Professional Studies 110 they break the tasks down into little parts so it becomes easier to score marks. The other modules are confusing and sometimes the lecturers do not even know how to explain properly so they tell you to read your course outline again.” (Shining Star)*

During the focus group interviews, the students expressed frustration at the mention of the word “assessment” because, according to them, this affects their future and yet there is nothing they could do about how the process is being executed. From these narratives, it is also important to point out that the participants were still confused about one particular concept, namely, “plagiarism” which according to all five of them was a foreign term. Such academic discourse is something that is still unfamiliar to the participants coming from disadvantaged schools. This lack of cultural capital tends to affect the way they experience the curriculum. From Bourdieu’s point of view, cultural capital is something that is instilled in higher class families which facilitate their children gaining higher education qualifications more easily than children from lower class. This, according to Bourdieu (1986), is how class positions are maintained within societies. You are where you are in society because you deserve to be there due to your ability to fit or not to fit into the dominant culture.

### **University Interventions Regarding Assessment**

In order to assist with the overall throughput of students, the university introduced a Mentorship Program with mentors (fellow students) assisting rest of the students with their academic requirements. According to the participants, this program has been of great value and they had nothing but praises for the program since they were being assisted by other students whom they could easily open up to because they had gone through the same process.

## **4.4.2 Lack of Resources**

### **4.4.2.1 Overcrowded Lecture Venues**

In higher education, the new policies of redress have ensured that more students now have access to education. However, in order to ensure equity of access and the possibility of success to all who are registered in higher education, institutions offering such education have to be transformed according to the Green Paper on Higher Education Transformation (DoE, 1996). One way of attaining this vision, according to this document, is to increase student participation which then means allowing as many students to register as possible. In this regard, the university in this study is facing a challenge in that the student enrollment rate has increased by 15% in the last 6 years but there is another challenge of shortage of infrastructure, resulting in overcrowded classes (Figure 1). According to the following narratives shared by the participants, it seems that large



class sizes have impeded the key goal of accessing quality education as the lecture to students' ratio changes drastically.

*"Nothing really takes place in these large lecture venues because there is no personal attention and sometimes there are no registers to sign therefore my friends and I don't attend because we sit for over an hour but yet end up not understanding."* **(Perfectionist)**

*"I do attend but I sit right at the back because I do not want the lecturer to say that he does not know me. I just go there to show my face."* **(Joker)**

*"Some of us choose classes to attend or we leave 10 minutes early so that we get the good seats in the next class. First come, first serve! We always pray that the important stuff is said before we leave."* **(Shining Star)**

**Life-Long Learner** shared a story on how he had to arrive at and leave classes early so that he would get a decent seat for himself in all his lectures. He mentioned that there were about 180 students or more in most of his classes and from his estimations, the venue could only accommodate about 100 students. As a result, many of the students had to either sit on the floor along the aisle and in front of the class or they could stand outside the venue while the lecture was taking place inside. What he said annoyed him the most was the fact that those who were standing outside the venue went on with their businesses (chatting via cellphones and with friends) and the moment they were asked to keep the noise down, that was when the chaos would start as they saw a platform of airing their grievances as individuals who had paid for lectures but were excluded from the learning process. According to this particular participant, the airing of grievances ended up taking most of the time allocated for teaching and learning as lecturers did not come up with solutions but just continued with what they were being paid to do.



**Figure 1: Overcrowded lecture venues**

The findings of this study reveal that not much teaching and learning takes place in these overcrowded classrooms therefore students either attend lectures or leave during lectures. Hornsby and Osman's (2014) study accentuated that overcrowded classrooms affect quality in terms of both teaching and learning due to lack of participation and encouragement which also impacts the country's socio-economic growth. To recapitulate this point, Mohamedbhai (2014) emphasised that the quality of education relies on both the academic staff as well as the available teaching facilities. In this university, due to a shortage of lecturers, smaller lecture theatres are jam-packed with large numbers of students which then impact on the teaching and learning process. This was also evident in the above narratives whereby students ended up absconding lectures since according to the participants, not much teaching or learning took place. Hence, one should critically review Mohamedbhai's (2014) argument that students are worst hit by massification as they are forced to cope with unfavorable conditions such as overcrowded classrooms, unavailability or insufficiency of academic facilities including accommodation, reading materials, research equipment, computers etc. Access to HEIs has indeed been improved so as to accommodate all students irrespective of race, socio-economic background and other differences but the question is: at whose expense?

### **Students' Agency Regarding Overcrowded Venues**

The issue of overcrowded venues remains unresolved due to restructuring and national budget cuts for higher education. This then means that many students absent themselves from classes which again impacts on teaching and learning. As a result, some students decided to form smaller study groups in which other students willingly assisted those in need during their spare time. Although this was a positive act in that it was evidence of agency on the part of the students (after budget constraints that the university was faced with), management has failed to recognise the motive behind the tutorial groups, i.e. lectures being overcrowded and lecturers not having sufficient time to consult with those students who are lagging behind.

#### **4.4.2.2 Technological Literacy**

Even though language has played a crucial role in higher education institutions, technological literacy has played an even bigger role in terms of communication and assessment. The university is considerably into e-learning and a great deal of communication takes place via emails. Technology has become so advanced that e-library is now available for students to have access to academic and non-academic materials on campus and off campus. However, all the participants in this study come from low socio-economic backgrounds which have not equipped them with such skills which becomes another factor which has impeded their access to curriculum as indicated in the following narratives:

*"I have never had a computer in my life. In school we did not use computers because we did not have them. I was told by a friend that a computer is like a cellphone, but I was only given a cellphone last year after I passed Grade 12 so I still am not good at it."* (**Shining Star**)

*"I am not a friend of a computer because I am scared I might break it. Nobody had a computer at home so when I was told that I will have my own computer at varsity, I was happy and scared at the same time."* (**Life-Long Learner**)

*"When I got to a computer at varsity, I just looked at it and smiled because somebody said computers are like people. I did not even know how to switch it on so I spoke to it and said, Open Sesame but it just looked at me."* (**Joker**)

These stories highlight a lack of awareness and skills in one of the crucial technological gadgets pertaining to students' learning, i.e. a computer. According to all five participants there were no computers available in their previous schools. In other words, none of the participants were equipped with the relevant skills in the functioning of a computer which is one of the prerequisites in this university. This in turn impacts on their participation, in terms of both access to the curriculum i.e. everything to do with teaching and learning, as well as participation in the wider university life. From Bourdieu's point of view, the mere fact that individuals are from disadvantaged families means that they lack economic capital (money to purchase university requirements) as well as cultural capital (the education of the dominant university culture). In other words, it will be a challenge for the participants in this study to internalize the university culture which may in turn affect their performance.

Due to lack of technological skills, participants in this study missed out on important information regarding lectures, bursaries and upcoming events which according to the participants was one of the main reasons for their poor performances. For example, **Life-Long Learner** shared his story of how he was not even aware of the Fresher's Party and therefore missed a chance of getting to know others. He also spoke about how he thought that the only form of communication was through classroom interaction so he did not even know a student email account was created by the university on his behalf. While telling this story he referred to his small diary which he used to write all the class announcements, not realizing that more information than this was being sent to his email account. He concluded by stating that he still does not understand how some of his peers handed in typed assignments whereas this was not specified during lectures. According to him this was one of the signs that he was not updated in terms of what was happening in the university life.

### **The University's Intervention Strategy to Improve Students' Success Regarding Technological Literacy**

In response to challenges like the one mentioned above (computer illiteracy), the university introduced a computer literacy course for first-year students to provide them with relevant computer skills. There is also an online learning website with all the modules offered which provides a platform for both students and lecturers to communicate and ask questions regarding their modules. The lecturers also use this space to upload class notes so the question is: what about

those students who are still unable to operate a computer, does this mean they lose out on such activities?

Nonetheless, when I asked the participants about this particular website, they were not even aware that it existed or even knew how to access it, as **Shining Star** asked:

*“What website? Maybe it is not for us first years because our lecturers tell us everything in class. I have never used it”*

**Life-Long Learner**” added:

*“I have heard my other third year friends talk about this website but I did not ask too many questions because I know my lecturers have never talked about it so it does not concern us. Maybe next year, we will hear about it.”*

The above comments reveal ignorance on the part of the participants as all five of them were surprised to hear of the university’s website. Bourdieu (1989) argues that the position of the agents (students) is determined by their amount of economic and cultural capital which in turn determines their language, lifestyles and particular likes and dislikes. Hence, one finds that students from more affluent backgrounds have been exposed to technology at a very early age (from home and at school) because their parents could afford to, while their counterparts were only introduced to technology in higher education. This being the case, it is obvious as to who would perform better in educational tasks requiring the use of technology.

#### **4.4.2.3 Overcrowded LANs (Local Area Networks)**

This particular university has six LANs for undergraduate students which should be sufficient for the students as not all students are using these LANs at the same time. However, according to my participants, one of the biggest LANs is also used as a lecture venue for Mathematics which makes it difficult for the students to access it during those specified times.

All five of the students raised the point of extremely long queues in the LANs, especially during the weeks of submission of assignments. **Go-Getter** had a particular story to share with the group whereby he was occupying one of the computers in the LAN and a group of 3<sup>rd</sup>-year students walked past the long queue, came up to him and asked him to allow them to make corrections on

their assignments which were due on that particular day. He further stated that somehow they knew that he was a first-year student which made it easier for them to approach him. He also explained that he felt very intimidated therefore decided to hand over the computer to them. The participant then said that he decided to leave this particular LAN because he knew that he would not get the computer back. This story shared was evidence of a student being bullied because he was perceived as being inferior and less of a threat because he was a junior student.

#### **The University's Intervention Strategy to Improve Success Regarding Overcrowded LANs**

In the current year, the university has introduced a new policy termed "Paperless 2016", in other words, there will be no course books or materials printed on behalf of the new students. All the relevant work is uploaded to the learning site for all the students. Since there are insufficient computers for every student in the LANs, first-year students were requested to purchase computers for themselves, according to the new university's mandatory laptop policy (<http://www.ukzn.ac.za/>). This raises the question of affordability as if these students were battling with the registration fees, then how would they have the funds for such gadgets?

#### **4.4.2.4 Racial Discrimination in Classes**

Participants shared their stories of racial discrimination in classes:

*"There is so much discrimination on this campus, when you go for Biology and Geography, you are told by lecturers that these two modules are not for Black students so these students will never make it. As for Biology, the lecturer will tell you if they don't like your face, smile and the way you look, then you will not pass the module." (Perfectionist)*

*"Geography is worse because the lecturer would count the number of students who were not black (there were very few) and then say that out of all of us, only a few will pass the module, the rest of us can forget it. So I chose to de-register the module and registered for History." (Life-Long Learner)*

*"Learning in English is also not right because I do not know how to express myself well and by the time I try to think of the answer in English, the lecturer has moved on because they feel we are wasting time. So we choose not to speak in class and just write down what we know and what others say because our language is not acceptable in class." (Joker)*

The above narratives were shared by the participants when asked to comment on the modules which they are registered for in this university. All the participants had a similar story to tell of how on the first day of the lectures they were told by specific lecturers that because of the colour of their skin they would not perform well in both Geography and Biology. One of the participants even recalls silently muttering “Hawu, Sir!” (A word associated with confusion in isiZulu) after the lecturer had made his thoughts known to the rest of the class. From these findings, one can deduce that discrimination still exists in the platform of teaching and learning despite the existing policies of equity (in terms of the Republic of South African Constitution (RSA, 1996) and the UKZN Transformation Charter (2012). The Australian Human Rights Commission (n.d.) defines racial discrimination as an incident in which a person is not treated positively while another person in a similar situation is due to their race, colour, national or ethnic origin.

In this particular scenario, Bourdieu’s (1986) concept of habitus is useful as an explanation for the beliefs held by the different lecturers. Bourdieu explains that as children, we internalize and model the perceptions, feelings and behaviours of our parents which are at a later stage re-enforced at the school level. As a result, our parents’ beliefs become our own. But then again, these teachings as manifested by the lecturers in the above scenarios have to be interrupted as they negatively impact the experiences and the future progress of the participants and other students of colour as they make them feel devalued while other students are being affirmed.

However, all the participants demonstrated agency as two of them made the choice to de-register from these specific modules and chose other modules while the rest continued attending despite the lecturers’ clear warnings that their chances of passing were very slim due to the colour of their skin.

### **Addressing Discrimination in Higher Education**

The South African Constitution (RSA, 1996) clearly states that no person should be discriminated against in terms of their gender, class, background, language and so forth. Cummins (in Jago, 2001) also reminds us of the culturally diverse nature of our modern societies. Therefore, as we find ourselves in a diverse society, it is imperative that institutions of education affirm equally the backgrounds and cultures of all their students. In regards to the dominant culture of the university, an orientation program has been established as an attempt to familiarize new students with the foreign environment they have entered which forms part of the continued process of socialization

as they mingle and get to know each other throughout the course of their education. There is also a Peer Education program in which students assist each other in coping with health-related issues such as HIV/AIDS. The university offers a small stipend to those students who volunteer their services at the HIV/AIDS clinic and provide them with the relevant training and skills to assist their peers to better handle their personal, emotional and social challenges.

### **4.4.3 Non-Academic Factors**

#### **4.4.3.1 Student Funding**

Funding has played a vital role in ensuring that students (especially those from disadvantaged families) remain and participate in higher education institutions. De Villiers (2012) observes that the availability of financial assistance is an important motivation of instilling desire for students to continue with their studies, even though they are not performing well, whereas non-supported students have a tendency to leave school due to financial constraints. However, due to more students enrolling in such institutions, the government seems to be running short of funds. As a result, students from disadvantaged families suffer the most. For example, according to the participants, even though this particular university has funding programs (NSFAS and Funza Lushaka bursaries), at times their allowances are not paid timeously (as per the contract they had previously signed with their sponsors) and this late payment of funds has the following repercussions:

*“To be quite honest, some of us even thought of dropping out and looking for a job to support our families because there is no way I could go back to that poverty and ask for varsity money” (Life-Long Learner)*

*“Mam, you will not believe that at the beginning of the year, I had to walk from Claremont (a township in Durban) to varsity because I had nobody to support me with money. I would leave home at 6’oclock to get to varsity at 7:30. I had to do this for the whole first semester while I was on a waiting list for funding.” (Shining Star)*

*“Without funding, life at varsity and back home is very difficult because we still have to support the family also. I have to make sure that one month is for me and my varsity stuff*



*and then the next month is to send back home to my sisters and brothers. Granny cannot look after all of us alone.” (Joker)*

### **Addressing students’ poverty issues**

Firfirey and Carolissen’s (2010) study reported that due to the inability of students to sustain themselves on a monthly basis, they reported having feelings of hopelessness and internalized oppression while others expressed resilience. The same study also revealed that students adopt various strategies in an attempt to camouflage their poverty and this was also evident in this study as per the following narratives:

*“You know as students, sometimes not having money feels so bad that you end up going to your boyfriend’s residence and you live with him and perform “wifely” duties even though he never even paid one cow for lobola (when the future husband pays for his future wife in terms of money or cows) because there is no reason to stay and stare at an empty apartment, fridge and cupboards for weeks” (Perfectionist)*

*“Some of the students end up selling their bodies for money to ‘sugar mamas and daddies’ outside university while for others, parents have to borrow money from their stokvels just to send to their children in hope that they will complete their degrees and pay them back some day.” (Go-Getter)*

*“What about the boys? Because they have to feed their girlfriends living with them at that time, so they have to steal from other students to get that money. I have heard of students breaking into other students’ residences while they were attending lectures.” (Joker)*

In spite of the above strategies adopted by the students to overcome their financial challenges, one is provoked to ask the question: How does being someone’s “wife” while also being a student and stealing from others impact on the students’ own education? These narratives indicate that poverty changes one’s state of mind and as a result, shifts their focus on why they became students in these institutions in the first place. Tinto (1993) states that success in higher education institutions commands both academic and social adjustment if students wish to complete their studies. Tinto further states that the only way to succeed is if one becomes one with the culture of the institution, otherwise they will end up dropping out. These stories reveal that being educated in a university is expensive and without finance it becomes extremely difficult for students to further their studies.

#### 4.4.3.2 Student Housing

There are basic necessities which should be taken care of in order for students to focus entirely on their studies and accommodation is one of those. The quality of the accommodation and its surroundings should also be considered, for example, living in a rowdy and dilapidated residence with little or no security means that you are constantly on edge, worried about your belongings, rather than your studies, as shared by participants in the following stories:

*“How can you study when the boys keep knocking at your door in the middle of the night drunk? I am coming from a boarding school and no boys were ever allowed to visit us there. Here there are boys living in the girls’ res.” (Perfectionist)*

*“In the res, there are rules but nobody follows them so when I want to study I leave my room and look for a quiet space to study. I like the soccer ground because there are lights at night and I am all by myself.” (Go-Getter)*

From these narratives, it can be concluded that in order for the participants to focus on their studies, their residence also has to feel like home (secure). The less safe it is, the more they want to get away from it to study elsewhere as they are unable to concentrate. The question which arises is: how safe is any other area in the university during the night when compared to their rooms?

Lack of funding and inadequate housing in this university and throughout the country has led to several student protests which have disrupted teaching and learning entirely.

#### 4.4.4 Student Protests

Due to several challenges related to access and participation in universities such as insufficient funds, the ill-timed release of funds to students, an increment in registration fees and lack of accommodation to name just a few, students have resorted to protest action as an attempt to have their voices heard. Despite the difficulties and struggles they have experienced in their pursuit of quality education, students from a low socio-economic background have a resilient mindset which is the driver steering them towards success. It is this agency and resiliency which has allowed them to navigate through their everyday life experiences both at home and at the university.

#### 4.4.4.1 So what led to the Protests?

When asked for the reasons for the protests that took place just before registration for both first and second semesters in this university and other universities during the year this research study was being conducted, participants cited the increment in fees as well as the issue of outstanding fees as the main reasons for protest action. For several years there has been a decrease in the national budget allocated to higher education. As a result, such institutions felt pressured to increase their fees to ensure that they do not fall behind (DoE, 2010). However, what this then meant was that even though all students were allowed to enter into higher education institutions, they were required to have two types of capitals which were cultural (matric qualification) and economic capital (tuition fees). Students from low socio-economic backgrounds were affected the most as per these narratives:

*“We are coming from very poor homes and when they told us that the registration fee for next year would increase and that we have only until the end of February to pay, our heads just exploded. My sister will be coming into this university next year, so how will my mother manage so much of money for the two of us”?* **(Perfectionist)**

*“The FUNDZA bursary allowance is not constant. Who calculates who gets over a thousand rand and who gets only two hundred rands? We all get different amounts each month and we don’t know how.”* **(Joker)**

*“There are so many of us with outstanding fees and now the university tells us that we can’t register next year if we have not settled these fees. Where will we get the money?”* **(Go-Getter)**

*“And the Teaching Practice module increased by one thousand, five hundred rands this year without any notification. What confuses us as students is that we only receive an envelope filled with paperwork which could be emailed to us so that we can print for ourselves.”* **(Life-Long Learner).**

*“We were really scared coming to university because we were told that if you do not pay for that specific semester then they will not allow you back the following semester. I was shocked to hear that some students missed the first semester due to expulsion and only*

*returned in the second semester which was another reason for the protests.”*  
**(Perfectionist)**

Due to the above-mentioned grievances students from this particular university and several other universities decided to disrupt teaching and learning in their respective universities. They were prepared to have the gates locked until management was ready to discuss their issues. Helfenbein and Huddleston (2013) remind us of youth’s agency as youngsters who are able to mobilize themselves in an attempt to fight against what they perceive as social injustices. In the above narratives, it is evident that the students in this university had valid grievances. As agents of change, they mobilized themselves to ensure that their voices were heard which demonstrated resistance to the proposed policies of the university.



**Figure 2: Students protest**

I was a daily observer of the demonstrations and was rather alarmed to note that only black students were protesting which evoked the question of whether the injustice experienced by students was racial or does this mean that the other race groups didn’t have any grievances? During the focus group interviews I shared my observation and these were the responses:

*“Mam, it’s amazing how you see black, white and other colours when we are queuing to apply for financial aid but yet when things are not going right, you only see black, what happens to all the other colours?” (Perfectionist)*

*“I have Indian friends who are receiving funding like me but they said that they will just stay at home since they do not want to get hurt in the process of protesting but at the end when the registration fee decreases, it applies to all of us.” (Life-Long Learner)*

*“That is why they were told not to come to campus during strikes because they will be beaten up for not participating while expecting us to lead the protests and get hurt. All they do is watch and say that the outcome will apply to all of us even those who did not strike. They are very selfish because they think they are better than us.” (Shining Star)*

Findings of this study illustrate that young people from disadvantaged backgrounds have many stories to tell about their experiences of university life. These narratives provided insight into their experiences of access, participation and achievement in one institution. It was quite evident that there were numerous barriers which impeded their journeys in becoming teachers and a few factors which influenced their achievements. Nonetheless, it was quite pleasing to note that the participants were highly motivated to succeed in spite of the lack of economic, cultural and social capital as they all had progressed to the next level of their studies.

## **CHAPTER 5 : IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **5.1 Introduction**

This chapter presents the main findings and implications of the study. The chapter begins with the key findings regarding the experiences of students from low socio-economic backgrounds in a HEI. These findings will also be mirrored against other research on this particular topic. While the second part of the chapter will focus on the limitations of the study the chapter will conclude with the implications as well as the recommendations for future research.

### **5.2 Key Findings**

Statistics for Post School Education and Training: 2013 (DHET, 2015) states that student enrolment in public HEIs has increased from 837 776 in 2009 to 983 698 in 2013.

To start with our first research question regarding students' experiences of access and participation, this study revealed that even though there were other contributing factors, funding was the main factor. Finance whether from guardians or sponsors gave the students the opportunity to enter into this institution in order for them to make their dreams a reality. Lack of finance meant that they could not take control of their lives, in other words, they could not make informed decisions regarding their future. According to the study, gaining access to higher education is not a walk in the park if you are a student from a disadvantaged family as the registration fee is merely an entry fee but it does not guarantee participation in the university culture. The findings of this study were similar to those of Krause, Vick, Boon, Bland, and Clark's (2009) study which indicated that students from low socio-economic backgrounds found it strenuous to focus on their studies while also losing sleep over their money issues.

With regard to the second research question about exploring the contextual dynamics affecting access and participation in this university, findings of the study indicated that there are both academic and non-academic factors. For instance, the students' narratives revealed the general dynamics of language and overcrowded lecture theatres. Students from disadvantaged families were extremely unhappy with the university's choice of English as a medium of instruction and felt that they were deliberately excluded from participating in class discussions. This concurs with Kanno and Cromley's (2013) argument that students from disadvantaged families already enter

higher education with several limitations such as lack of proficiency in the English language, financial resources and lack of assistance from uneducated parents. However, the students were equally appalled at the overcrowded lecture venues they had to occupy which all impacted on teaching and learning. Marais (2016) argues that overcrowded classrooms in South Africa come with several challenges, for instance, discipline, learner performance and time management which all contribute negatively on both the teachers and learners.

Finally, findings in this study implicated the university as the main perpetrator of low retention rates as a vast number of students do not complete their studies entirely while others do not complete on time. According to the stories shared by the students, group tutorials and finance played the key roles in their studies and without these two fundamentals, students found great challenges in completing their degrees. It was evident that some students had to camouflage their poverty by adopting several strategies such as selling themselves and resorting to theft in an attempt to gain economic capital to partake in the university culture. This concurs with other literature in the field on this topic (Firfirey & Carolissen, 2010; Morley & Lussier, 2009). What was most evident in this study was the resilience of the students which gave them the courage to face their adversities despite the lack of economic, cultural and social capital.

### **5.3 Limitations**

Before concluding the discussion, I want to note some of the limitations of this study. One major limitation is that out of the entire demographic of students falling into the category of previously disadvantaged students (poor, black, female), I ended up with only five students who were willing to participate. Therefore, due to the small sample size (five students), it is possible that this may not be a true representation of all the registered students that make up the population of the study as those with valuable data might have been left out.

Secondly, due to the nature of the qualitative methodology and the sample size, the findings of the study cannot be generalized. A qualitative narrative approach has no intention of providing definitive solutions to challenges experienced by first-year students in receipt of financial aid nor does it intend to generalize its findings. A narrative inquiry by nature cannot provide comprehensive answers to the issue at hand, instead, it aims to study intensely, particular accounts of participants' existence and experiences (Langellier and Peterson, 2004).

## **5.4 Implications and Recommendations**

This inquiry has sought a better understanding of students from disadvantaged families in regards to access and participation in one university in KwaZulu-Natal. Participants' stories revealed a range of experiences as well as challenges, such as their decisions to further their studies, participation and challenges faced in the university life. The study has shown that all five participants experienced to some degree exclusionary pressures in their learning spaces, with lack of finance, language, and overcrowded classrooms being the main factors.

As a place, the study revealed that the university tends to exclude students from disadvantaged backgrounds on the basis of language since all of the participants are first language isiZulu speakers while the medium of instruction in this particular university is English. This practice is in violation of both the education policies and legislation in the Republic of South Africa. Page 1 of this university's Language Policy (UKZN, 2006) clearly states "the need to preserve and promote respect for, and proficiency in, the languages referred to in the Constitution, and other languages, including the heritage languages, that facilitate potentially valuable cultural, scientific and economic ties".

The study has also shown that the students experienced oppression exercised by lectures at the institutional level which impacted on their choices regarding the modules offered by the university. For example, two of the participants chose to de-register a particular module as they were constantly told that they would not pass it because of the colour of their skin. However, this type of discrimination does not conform to the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa which "promotes equity of access and fair chances of success to all who are seeking to realise their potential through higher education, while eradicating all forms of unfair discrimination and advancing redress for past inequalities" (p. 9)

This study further revealed that students from disadvantaged backgrounds have to endure certain life changing contextual dynamics which seemed to be financial, academically and socio-culturally related which also affected their overall achievement in their studies. In this particular university, students with outstanding tuition fees were excluded. The Department of Education (DoE, 2004) reports that the main contributors to the increasing dropout rate in our country are a lack of finance and academic exclusion.



This study suggests that more research should be undertaken in our South African HEIs to examine the experiences of students from low socio-economic backgrounds. This research is necessary in order to examine the gap between higher education policies and practices. Bourdieu (1986) argues that in order for students to gain access, fully participate and perform well in HEIs, they need to possess economic, cultural, social and symbolic capital which the participants in this study did not have.

In terms of careers and choice of institutions, parents and guardians of these students played an important role in steering them towards a career in education, however, there is little or no evidence from these narratives of university-parent partnerships. This should be an area of further research.

From this particular study, it can be concluded that these participants together with many other students (from similar backgrounds) are already at a disadvantage which impedes on their journeys to becoming future teachers. Thus, the study could be of benefit to policy developers, the Department of Higher Education, management in HEIs, lecturers and students. The study shows that students have a great deal to offer regarding their experiences in HEIs and all that was missing was a space in which they could raise their voices.

## **5.5 Conclusion**

This study has shed some light on the challenges experienced by students from low socio-economic backgrounds. Findings in this study revealed that as much as there are academic challenges which the students are faced with, however, financial challenges play a key role in determining their access, participation and performance.

Despite limitations such as lack of generalization of findings, the findings of this study have the potential to make a contribution to the limited literature on higher education policies and practices. This study breaks new ground by gaining insight into access, participation and achievement of students who are in receipt of financial aid and by identifying areas that could be explored in future studies.

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## APPENDIXES

### Appendix B: Requests for Consent

Dear Professor Kamwendo

I hereby request your permission to conduct a research study located in the School of Education at UKZN. This research will be for my M.Ed. study and my research topic is **Geographies of Access and Participation: Narratives of first year students receiving financial aid**. My finalized research proposal, completed under the supervision of Ms. Saajidha Sader, is hereby attached, as are the templates for informed consent.

In the course of this study I will be examining the experiences of students from low socio-economic backgrounds in a higher education institution. My aim is to explore the ways in which these students navigate the contextual dynamics that affect their achievement.

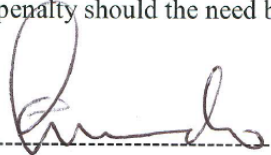
While I will not name the University of KwaZulu-Natal in my study, it could be inferred by prospective readers who are aware of the admission and funding policies at this institution.

In my data generation, I will have audiotaped conversations with students who are in receipt of financial aid at UKZN. Formal consent will be obtained from these students and they will not be identified by name in the study.

#### Declaration

I, PROF G H KAMWENDO.....(full names) hereby declare that I have read and understood the contents of this document and the research project, and I give consent to Nombuso Khanyile in using Undergraduate Students in receipt of financial aid as participants in her study entitled **Geographies of Access and Participation: Narratives of first year students receiving financial aid**.

I also understand that the participants are given liberty to withdraw from the project at any time without any penalty should the need be.

  
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SIGNATURE OF THE HEAD OF SCHOOL

11/09/2014

DATE

## **Request for Consent**



### **EDGEWOOD CAMPUS**

### **School of Education**

### **Private Bag X03**

### **Ashwood**

### **3605**

### **South Africa**

.../.../2014

## **Request for Consent**

Dear Participant/care-taker/gate-keeper

My name is Nombuso Patience Khanyile and I am currently a B. Ed Masters student at UKZN. As a part of the requirements for the completion of my Masters' degree, I am participating in a research project studying the experiences of first year students receiving financial aid, focusing particularly on access, participation and achievement in one KwaZulu-Natal school.

My research requires me to collect data from five students in a campus of higher education in KwaZulu-Natal.

In accordance with the ethical research protocols of the University of KwaZulu-Natal, the research will be conducted in such a way that it causes no harm to people and institutions concerned. This letter is asking for your kind permission to allow yourself/school to be a part of this study.

The Statement of Consent attached provides the detail of how such protection from harm will be achieved.

Investigator's Name: Nombuso Patience Khanyile

Student Number: 204006250

Contact Details: 083 5117 215

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Statement of Informed Consent: Participant/Guardian/Gate-Keeper/Care-taker

I..... (full names of participant) hereby confirm that I understand the contents of this document and the nature of the research project, and I consent to participating in the research project that is being conducted by:

Research Investigators' Name: Nombuso Patience Khanyile

Telephone number: 083 5117 215

Supervised by:

Saajidha Sader

School of Education and Development

Faculty of Education

University of KwaZulu-Natal

Tel: 033 2606 148

I understand

- that I/he/she will be required to answer questions approved by the Supervisor in the form of a questionnaire/ a group/individual interview
- the name of the participant will be kept confidential
- that participation is voluntary
- that the participant/s may withdraw from the process at any time
- that data collected from this process will be destroyed within the next year
- that any form of use or publication of this research is on condition of anonymity of the participating schools and/or individuals
- that participation is entirely voluntary and there is no reward or remuneration attached in any form whatsoever.

***I hereby consent / do not consent to have this interview recorded.***

Name of Signatory.....

Relationship to Participant.....

Date.....

Signature.....

## Appendix C: Research Foci and Research Tools

### Specific focus

The experiences of first year students from low socio-economic backgrounds with the main focus particularly on access, participation and achievement.

### Potential Data Sources, Research Tools & Instruments

The use of individual and group semi-structured interviews, including a mapping exercise (participatory techniques) with a group of five students.

### For EC Purposes: Types of Questions to be asked

#### Biographical Questionnaire

<b>Name, faculty and school, designation</b>  (Please note that this is for record purposes only. Your name or the name of your institution will not be divulged in any way in any communications emanating from this project.)	Name:  Faculty:  School:  Year of Study:  Qualification registered for:
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<b>Age</b>  (Tick one)	<b>18-20</b>	<b>21-25</b>	<b>26-30</b>	<b>Over 30</b>
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<b>Gender</b>  (Tick one)	<b>Female</b>	<b>Male</b>
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<b>1<sup>st</sup> Language</b>	
<b>Other Languages</b>	

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

### **Focus areas**

Decision to pursue university studies

Choice of University

Choice of Qualification

Challenges in gaining access

Experiences of orientation

Experiences of learning and teaching

Barriers to learning

Academic support

Assessment

### **Experience of Access**

What influenced your decision to proceed to university?

Was this university your 1st choice? (Why/Not)

What are you currently studying?

Was this your 1st choice of study? If not, what was your first choice of study and why did you change?

What were your experiences of gaining access?

What expectations do you have for university life?

## **Experiences of Participation (Learning and Teaching)**

Have you faced any particular challenges in any of your modules? If yes, what challenges have you experienced?

How have you dealt with these challenges?

Does the university have any programs for students who experience challenges in accessing the curriculum (Probes: academic literacy, ESL learning, curriculum support, assessment).

Have you accessed any of these programs to address the challenges you have experienced? If so, how effective was it?

Have you received the necessary attention and support from lecturers? If yes, what forms of support have you received?

Have you received the necessary support from administrators that you have dealt with?

Do you feel that you have been valued/affirmed in the university (by students, lecturers, administrators)?

## **Experiences of Achievement**

How were you assessed in your modules? How did you feel about being assessed in the ways you have been assessed?

What challenges did you experience in terms of how you were assessed?

Tell me about your achievements. (What modules have you passed and failed?)

## **Focus Group Interview Schedule**

What informed your decision to pursue university studies?

How did you choose the universities you applied to? Was this university your first choice?

What was your first choice of study? Are you pursuing your first choice of study? If not, why?

Did you experience challenges in gaining access? Explain

Do you feel that you adequately orientated to university study and university life? Explain

How have you experienced learning and teaching?

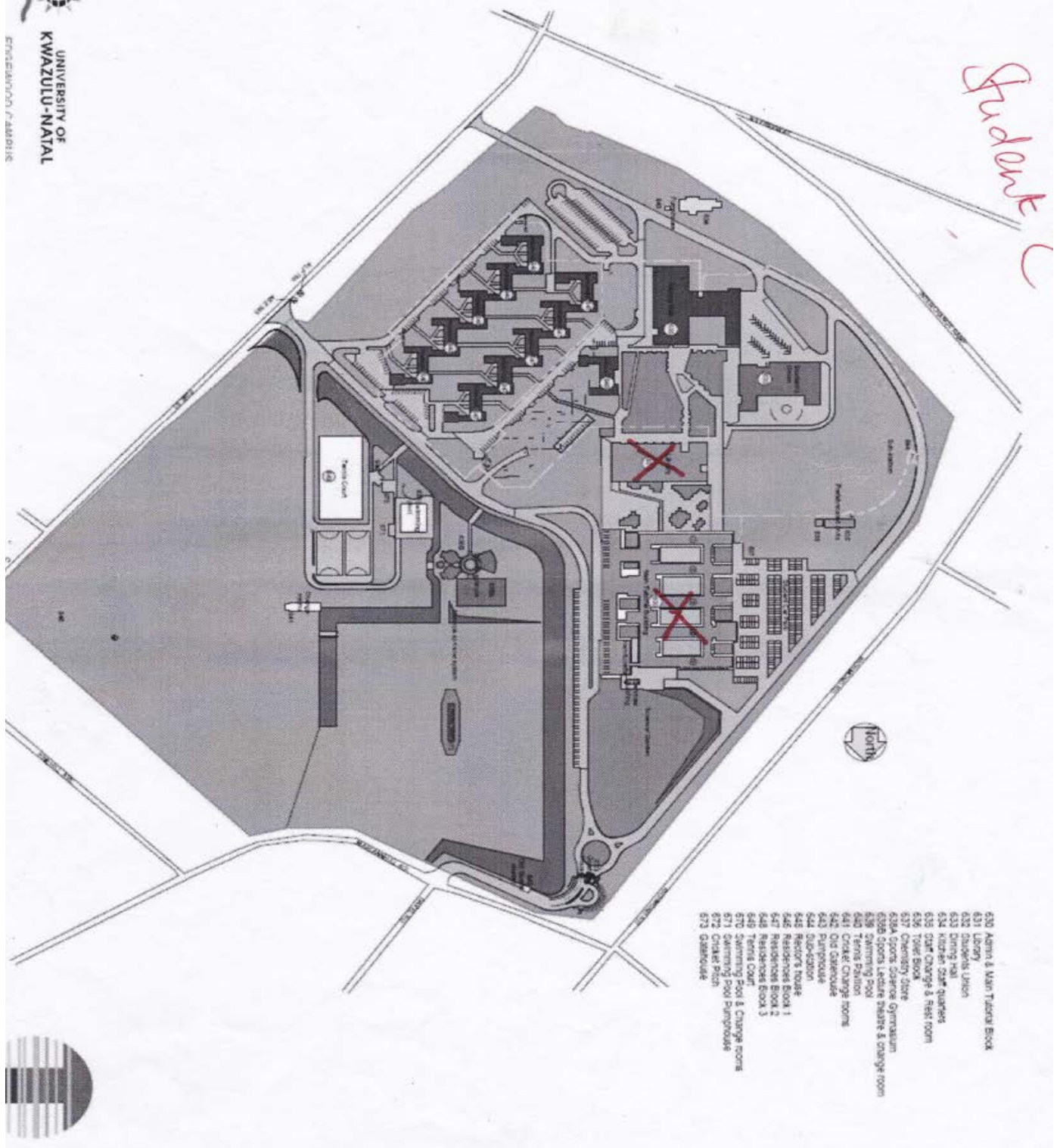
What barriers to learning have you experienced?

Is there academic support available to students who experience barriers to learning?

Have you received academic support to address these barriers you have experienced? Explain

How have you been assessed in your modules? What do you think about how you have been assessed and how do you feel about this?

Are there ways in which you have been supported to achieve success in the university?



Floor Map of the institution

## Appendix D: UKZN School of Education Ethics Committee approval

## Appendix E: Language editor certificate



26 September 2014

**Ms Nombuso Patience Khanyile (204006250)**  
School of Education  
Edgewood Campus

**Protocol reference number: HSS/1028/014M**  
**Project title: Geographies of Access and Participation: Narratives of first year students receiving financial aid**

Dear Ms Khanyile,

### **Full Approval – Expedited Application**

With regards to your response to our letter dated 28 August 2014, the Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee has considered the abovementioned application and the protocol have been granted **FULL APPROVAL**.

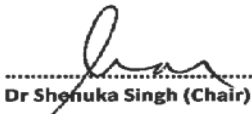
Any alteration/s to the approved research protocol i.e. Questionnaire/Interview Schedule, Informed Consent Form, Title of the Project, Location of the Study, Research Approach and Methods must be reviewed and approved through the amendment/modification prior to its implementation. In case you have further queries, please quote the above reference number.

**PLEASE NOTE: Research data should be securely stored in the discipline/department for a period of 5 years.**

The ethical clearance certificate is only valid for a period of 3 years from the date of issue. Thereafter Recertification must be applied for on an annual basis.

I take this opportunity of wishing you everything of the best with your study.

Yours faithfully

  
.....  
**Dr Shenuka Singh (Chair)**  
/ms

Cc Supervisor: Saajidha Sader  
Cc Academic Leader Research: Professor P Morojele  
Cc School Administrator: Mr Thoba Mthembu

---

**Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee**

**Dr Shenuka Singh (Chair)**

**Westville Campus, Govan Mbeki Building**

**Postal Address: Private Bag X54001, Durban 4000**

**Telephone: +27 (0) 31 260 3587/3350/4557 Facsimile: +27 (0) 31 260 4609 Email: [ximbap@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:ximbap@ukzn.ac.za) / [snymann@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:snymann@ukzn.ac.za) [mohunp@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:mohunp@ukzn.ac.za)**

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### **EDITING CERTIFICATE**

**Re: NOMBUSO PATIENCE GABELA**

**Master's dissertation: Geographies of Access and Participation: Narratives of First Year Students Receiving Financial Aid**

I confirm that I have edited this dissertation and the references for clarity, language and layout. I am a freelance editor specialising in proofreading and editing academic documents. My original tertiary degree which I obtained at UCT was a B.A. with English as a major and I went on to complete an H.D.E. (P.G.) Sec. with English as my teaching subject. I obtained a distinction for my M.Tech. dissertation in the Department of Homeopathy at Technikon Natal in 1999 (now the Durban University of Technology). During my 13 years as a part-time lecturer in the Department of Homoeopathy I supervised numerous Master's degree dissertations.

Dr Richard Steele

18 July 2016

*electronic*

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