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A capability-informed policy analysis of higher education access for rural youth in Botswana

by

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Supervisor: Dr. T.M.L. Calitz

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Declaration of originality

I declare that the thesis, which I hereby submit for the degree Philosophiae Doctor in Education Management Law and Policy at the University of Pretoria, is my own work and has not previously been submitted by me for a degree at this or any other tertiary institution.

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Esther Mashabile

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Ethics statement

The author, whose name appears on the title page of this thesis, has obtained, for the research described in this work, the applicable research ethics approval. The author declares that he/she has observed the ethical standards required in terms of the University of Pretoria's Code of Ethics for researchers and the Policy guidelines for responsible research.

Esther Mashabile

Dedication

I dedicate this research to my late father, Gilbert Mlambo Tenene, who believed in the transformative value of education for individuals.

Acknowledgements

Abstract

Although access to higher education is growing rapidly across the globe, limited access for rural youth still remains, especially in sub-Saharan Africa (SSA). In the context of Botswana significant strides have been made in increasing enrolment numbers in higher education, however statistics do not show how many of these learners were from rural areas and how many failed to transition to higher education despite qualifying. Access for the marginalised and vulnerable groups including rural youth remains a challenge, yet little is known about the problem. Arguably, many students in rural communities in Botswana continue to experience a series of constraints, including inadequate schooling facilities, limited access to information about career pathways, as well financial and social difficulties. These constraints have a significant impact on youth in rural settings, as these do not necessarily reflect their true potential. In Botswana, research on rural youth's access including their success in higher education is limited. To contribute to this knowledge gap, this study aimed to explore constraints and enablers of access to higher education for rural youth through the capability approach (CA). The capability approach is useful mainly for the emphasis it places on empowering individuals through real opportunities and valuable achievements they have reason to value. In higher education context, this means providing rural youth with the resources and opportunities needed to access and succeed in higher education. Additionally, the study adopts a mixed method approach, specifically a QUAL+quant design with data collected through semi-structured in-depth interviews and survey questionnaires. A total of 108 participants comprising of rural youth who did not succeed in going to university and those who were enrolled at university took part in the study. The chosen design is most appropriate to illuminate experiences of rural youth and the problem of unequal access, therefore it helps in answering the following research questions: 1) What are the structural arrangements that constrain rural youth from accessing higher education in Botswana? 2) What are the structural arrangements that enable rural youth to access higher education in Botswana? 3) How do rural youth use their agency to navigate structural constraints to access higher education? 4) To what extent are rural youth able to convert different resources into human capabilities critical for academic success at university? and 5) What aspirations do rural youth hope to achieve upon attainment of their university education?

Keywords: rural youth**,** capability approach, higher education, constraints, access, agency

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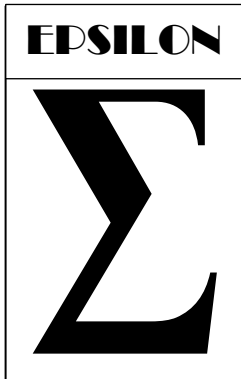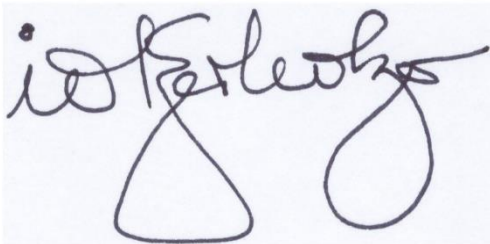
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Yours faithfully

Isobet Oberholzer

31 August 2023

Abbreviations

BEC	Botswana Examination Council
BGCSE	Botswana General Certificate in Secondary Education
BQA	Botswana Qualifications Authority
CA	Capability approach
CHE	Council on Higher Education
DTEF	Department of Tertiary Education Financing
ETSSP	(Botswana) Education Training Sector Strategic Plan
HRDC	Human Resource Development Council
JCE	Junior Certificate Examinations
MDGs	Millennium development goals
NCQF	National Credit and Qualifications Framework
NVQF	National Vocational Qualifications Framework
PSLE	Primary School Leaving Examinations
RADP	Remote Area Development Programme
RADs	Remote area dwellers
RNPE	Revised National Policy on Education
SDGs	Sustainable development goals
SES	Socio-economic status
SSA	Sub-Saharan Africa
STEM	Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics
TEC	Tertiary Education Council
TEP	Tertiary Education Policy
TVET	Technical Vocational Education and Training
UNESCO	United Nations Economic Scientific and Cultural Organization
VDC	Village development committee

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CHAPTER 1: BACKGROUND AND INTRODUCTION

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Globally access to higher education has increased, but not all individuals have equal access to opportunities in higher education (Kilpatrick et al., 2019; Naylor & Misfud, 2020, Ilie, Rose & Vignoles, 2021). Limited access for rural youth still remains, especially in sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) and Botswana is no exception to this phenomenon. This reality has negative impact on higher education, which has been recognised as vital in advancing the youth's social development and economic empowerment in building the human capital that allows young people to avoid poverty and to lead better and fulfilling lives (Diraditsile, 2017; Moremi, 2018; Ayentimi, Abadi, Adjei & Burgess, 2019). In terms of policy priorities and imperatives for improving living standards (Ayentimi et al., 2019), the importance attached to higher education access can never be overemphasised. Yet despite these narratives, there is limited commitment from governments in sub-Saharan Africa to advance inclusion and equity in higher education for marginalised youth in rural communities (Ayentimi, et al., 2019).

As a case in point, while in South Africa statistics show that post-apartheid era enrolment in higher education institutions has increased, disparities in access still exists. In 2018 1 085 5671 students were in enrolled in higher education, which represents a significant increase from 473 3000 in 1994 (Council on Higher Education (CHE), 2013; CHE 2020). In terms of racial equity, in 1993 black African students accounted for 40% of the total enrolment and by 2018 this representation had increased to 81% (CHE, 2020). Prior to 1994 white students had participation rate of about 70 % (Statistics South Africa, 2004). Although there have been some positive developments in the past decades, low participation rates for students from disadvantaged backgrounds have remained relatively skewed, and those from poor backgrounds are unlikely to successfully complete their university degrees (Statistics South Africa, 2019; Pillay, 2019; Mseleku, 2022).

Using South Africa as an example of access to higher education is crucial to understanding that although policies and programmes can address and overcome the long standing disparities in education access these gaps cannot completely be reduced

and this knowledge can be extended to other countries within the Southern African region dealing with similar inequalities.South Africa stands out in terms of access to higher education in sub-Saharan Africa due to its relatively robust economy and well developed higher education system compared to other countries in the region. While South Africa is well known for its world-class universities, access remains unequal, with disparities along racial and socio-economic lines, a legacy of its history of apartheid. The country's efforts to address these inequalities and make higher education more accessible have made it an interesting case to compare to Botswana, although racial disparities are not relevant in the Botswana context. Similarly, to South Africa, Botswana is one the most unequal societies in the world (UNDP, 2021). While Botswana has made significant progress in terms of its economy and provided access to education and other opportunities for all, however economic benefits and opportunities remain skewed. There is unequal distribution of resources (income inequalities) along ethnic lines, arguably due to colonisation legacy. Research reveal variations in unemployment rates, public sector employment and education achievement levels (UNDP, 2021) amongst regions. Another reason that makes South Africa a comparable case to Botswana is that South Africa has effective policies and programmes in place to address access in higher education, yet there are some segments that remains. Essentially South Africa is still dealing with disparities while having functional policies whereas in Botswana's case the policies in place are not yet effective.

Going back to the discussion on South Africa, the enrolment of black African students has increased overall, however there are still marginalised communities, such as rural and working-class communities, who experience challenges to access higher education. Rural students face many systemic challenges such as poor schooling conditions, lower rates of academic performance, lack of access to post-secondary information, limited career options, as well as financial constraints (Denhere, 2013; Njoko, 2018; Barnejee, 2018; Joshi & Bakshi, 2019). Sometimes students from rural areas might not receive the necessary support from teachers or family members to aim for higher education. While inspiration can be a motivating factor, turning succeeding in this endeavour can still present difficulties. Yet access to higher education is one of the fundamental ways through which rural youth's capabilities and well-being can be improved so that the cycle

of vulnerability and perpetual poverty is reduced (Walker & Mkwananzi, 2015; Walker et al., 2022). In South Africa access to higher education remains challenging for marginalised rural youth, about whom little is known in terms of access statistics and lived experiences of academic inequalities (Walker & Mkwananzi, 2015). The purpose of this study, therefore, is to explore access to higher education among rural youth in Botswana (a country in sub-Saharan Africa) drawing on the capability approach.

The capability approach (CA) was proposed by Amartya Sen in the 1980s as an economic theory, which is basically concerned with the quality of life that individuals are actually able to achieve, in terms of what they are able to do, or be (Sen, 1993; Sen,1999; Calitz, Walker & Wilson-Strydom, 2016). By examining access to higher education through the capability approach as a theoretical lens, the study aims to examine the structural arrangements that enable rural youth to access higher education as well as the arrangements that constrain rural youth from equal access to higher education.

At an individual level education has a far greater effect than merely expanding people's economic opportunities (Sharma & Dev, 2017; Marumo & Pansiri, 2016) and lifting them out of poverty. Education also provides students with problem solving skills they need to navigate through career and life challenges. At a broader level education is a public good which is vital for a healthy democracy (Nussbaum, 2006). It responds to the basic need of individuals to receive education, which once acquired plays an important role in the expansion of other human capabilities. From Sen's perspective, education is understood as a capability multiplier, with a critical role in fostering other capability sets such as health, gender equality and so on (Dejaeghere & Walker, 2021). Moreover, Walker (2018), highlights that being educated potentially generates power to enhance various valuable capabilities, thus unequal educational opportunities would create disparities in forming capabilities and as such becomes a concern for the public good.

In this study I argue for a capability approach, as it focuses on human capabilities, in terms of what people are effectively able to do and be either as individuals or collectively (Wilson-Strydom, 2015; Pillay, 2019). One way of developing rural youth's capabilities is through creating opportunities for them to access higher education, in order to mobilise them towards socio-economic, political and environmental freedoms. For instance, being

educated through gaining a university degree, allows individuals to make choices about aspects of their lives that matter, providing them with opportunities to find gainful employment as well as having the freedom to engage productively in the cultural, social and political affairs of their communities. Hence the capability to access higher education is central in my study. Providing opportunities for rural youth to access higher education, is therefore essential in expanding their capabilities to be able to pursue their life aspirations. Research that focuses on gaps in post-secondary education has largely overlooked the disparities in enrolment due to rural status and location (Koricich, Chen, Hughes, 2018). As a result, little is known about access to higher education for rural youth in the context of Botswana, including their experience with individual and social arrangements that constrain and enable access. In this study, I attempt to extend the literature by addressing this gap.

1.1.1 Defining access and capabilities

In my study, access is understood to mean more than the mere ability or freedom to enter higher education or university. From the perspective of the capability approach (CA), access means widening participation and availing equal opportunities to previously marginalised groups (Walker, 2005; Wilson-Strydom, 2015; Walker et al., 2022). Capabilities are defined as real possibilities and opportunities of leading a life which a person has reason to value (Sen, 1999; Boni & Walker, 2013; Walker & Mkwananzi, 2015). Capabilities can also be understood as freedoms each person has to choose a combination of ways of beings and doings for their own good life (Robeyns, 2006; Walker & Unterhalter, 2018; Dejaeghere & Walker, 2021). In this study, the components of access include opportunities that are available to rural youth to negotiate entry into higher education or universities, their experiences, and their engagement while at university up until they complete their studies (Goldman, 2019; Timmis et al., 2019; Pillay, 2019).

Further, access to higher education is positioned to reflect opportunities that enable youth to enter institutions of higher learning. In essence, access reflects how programmes and policies are framed by different systems, structures and institutions to create an enabling environment for youth from rural and disadvantaged communities to participate and succeed in their undergraduate programmes in universities. Access deals with availability

of opportunities while participation focuses on the active involvement and success of rural youth within those opportunities once they have gained access. Understanding the challenges unique to rural youth in accessing higher education is therefore important (Njoko, 2018). Closely linked to the dimension of access is Morrow's (2009) notion of epistemological access which refers to the ways of doing and thinking at the university in particular fields such that students are able to function more confidently and independently (Garraway, 2017). Thus, it is necessary to create enabling conditions for students to acquire the necessary cultural capital required for learning and knowledge construction at university.

It is through exploring issues of access to higher education that I attempt to highlight how rural youth draw on their agency to negotiate access to higher education to enhance their capability freedoms (Katusiime, 2014). Education can be meaningful if all youth are given equal opportunities to make choices to pursue their life aspirations. Extensive literature on access to higher education indicates that generally an 'education gap' exists between the rural youth and mainstream youth. More broadly, the rural context presents enormous challenges; it significantly has a negative impact on rural youth's educational freedoms, particularly for those aspiring to progress to university (Walker & Mathebula, 2019).

1.1.2 Capabilities, sustainable development goals and access to higher education

Creating opportunities that expand rural youth's capabilities is also important for the realisation of the sustainable development goals (SDGs). The SDGs are aimed at achieving sustained economic growth and promotion of more inclusive societies through fighting inequalities and recognising the importance of cooperation and partnerships in pursuit of sustainable environments alongside human development (Garcia et al., 2017). Essentially, the SDGs represent potential new ways to achieve a more sustainable future for all global citizens (UNESCO, 2017; Kwadwo & Konadu, 2019). The SDGs aim to assist governments globally in their plans for progress by encouraging countries to work towards eradicating poverty, reducing inequality and protecting the planet while at the same time ensuring no one is excluded or left behind. They expand on the mandate of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) by bringing tertiary education (higher education) into the global development agenda (Owens, 2017). Previously, higher education had not been

directly addressed in the MDGs agenda. Currently, higher education plays a key role as a means to achieving Goal 4 of the SDGs, which focuses specifically on inclusive, equitable quality education and lifelong learning opportunities for all (United Nations, 2015; Owens, 2017; Ferguson & Roofe, 2020). From the capability approach dimension quality education which is driven by SDG Goal 4 is important as both a goal and an end in itself as well as critical to realising other sustainable development goals. Effectively, it drives development from an understanding that all global citizens have a role to play and contribute towards sustainable development if they have the required knowledge, skills, values and attitudes that empower them to actively take part in the sustainable development agenda (UNESCO, 2017). Hence institutions of higher education have an important role to fulfil in the realisation of SDG 4 (Ferguson & Roofe, 2020). In the context of this study the empowerment of marginalised groups through higher education is seen as essential to their involvement in the socio-economic development of their communities and to the future sustainability of their development programmes across the southern African region (Bolaane & Saugestad, 2011).

This chapter introduces the thesis. Before outlining the research problem, I present an overview of the Botswana landscape on education policy and higher education. This is followed by the problem statement, aim of the research as well as rationale. Lastly, I provide a summary of each of the chapters that outline the whole thesis. The ensuing discussion introduces Botswana and its education system.

1.1.3 Introducing Botswana and its school system

Botswana is a sovereign state in Southern Africa. It gained independence from British rule in 1966. It is landlocked and shares borders with Zambia to the north, Zimbabwe to the east, Namibia to the west, and South Africa to the south. It has an area of about 584,000 square kilometres, which is about the same size as France (Jotia, 2006). The country has a population of about 2, 346 179 with males and females accounting for 50.5 % and 49.5% respectively (Statistics Botswana, 2022). For five decades the country has remained relatively politically and socially stable. Although it started off as a poor country, between 1966 and 1999 it experienced the highest average economic growth in the world, averaging about 9% per year, following the discovery of diamonds in Orapa in the Boteti

region and Jwaneng in the Southern region (Marumo & Pansiri, 2016). Development has since been founded on profitable diamond mining, coupled with prudent fiscal policies, international financial and technical assistance as well as an international favourable foreign policy (Pansiri, 2016). These positive strides have seen Botswana transformed from being a poor country to a middle-income country.

Like other Africa countries, Botswana is a multicultural and multilingual society (Batibo & Smieja, 2000) with several ethnic groups spread within fifteen (15) regions. Six (6) of these regions are urban while nine (9) are rural, with most of the population concentrated around the eastern part of the country and towards the capital city, Gaborone. Mainly due to fundamental economic growth, the urban population has grown from 50% in 2001 to 64% by 2011 (Statistics Botswana, 2014). Thus, more people have migrated to urban areas in pursuit of better opportunities and better livelihoods. The discussion that follows provides a background on Botswana's three phased schooling system.

1.1.4 Botswana's schooling system

The education system in Botswana is guided by the Revised National Policy on Education of 1994 (Republic of Botswana, 1994). The system comprises of 10 years of compulsory schooling. The first seven (7) years are spent in primary education with three (3) years at lower secondary level (grade 8 to 10). The language of instruction for the first four years is Setswana (Malejane & Diraditsile, 2019). English takes precedence thereafter. Despite Vision 2016 calling for linguistic inclusivity, in the curriculum, the education system in Botswana does not recognise linguistic and cultural diversity (Kamwendo & Seretse, 2015; Pansiri, 2020). By enforcing a policy of linguistic assimilation, the education system only recognises Setswana while disregarding other indigenous languages from the curriculum (Nhlekisana, 2009; Jotia & Pansiri, 2013; Boikhutso & Jotia, 2013). The one language one nation ideology which was adopted at independence as a nation building strategy was also borne out of fear of linguistic diversity (Kamwendo & Seretse, 2015). The implication is that students whose mother tongue is not Setswana are disadvantaged in learning right from an early stage of schooling.

From primary level, students automatically progress to junior secondary school irrespective of their pass grade upon sitting for Primary School Leaving Examinations (PSLE). Junior secondary school level comprises of 3 years; Form 1, 2 and 3 (grades 8, 9 and 10). At grade 10, students take a compulsory examination, Junior Certificate Examinations (JCE), to determine progression to Form 4 (grade 11). It is at this point that some students struggle to progress to senior secondary education, as a result they may choose to enrol in vocational training as they would be too young to be formally employed and lack the necessary employable abilities. Those who progress to Form 4, sit for the Botswana General Certificate in Secondary Education (BGCSE) to determine eligibility for higher education. However, there is enough evidence suggesting that over the years, the Botswana Examination Council (BEC) has consistently presented lower achievement rates both for JCE and BGCSE amongst schools that serve under-privileged and marginalised communities (Makwinja, 2017). For instance, in 2014 5 796 BGCSE candidates obtained Grade C or better (this constitutes 25.75 % of the candidature) suggesting that the remaining 74.25% of the candidates obtained a Grade D or below (Malejane & Diraditsile, 2019).

Given these poor overall results, one conclusion could be made that the performance in rural schools is much worse, in comparison to those schools in urban and peri-urban areas. For example, Shakawe Senior Secondary School in the Ngami West region came out in last position, with a 7% pass rate in 2013 (Malejane & Diraditsile, 2019). In 2020 the same school obtained a pass rate of 15. 94%, a significant improvement over the past seven years (Botswana Examinations Council, 2020). Mahupu Unified Secondary School in Kweneng region achieved a pass rate of 26. 54%, while Tsabong Secondary School in Kgalagadi region registered a pass rate of 14.47% and Ghanzi Senior Secondary recorded a pass rate of 26.32% (Botswana Examination Council, 2020).

These figures represent the number of students from government secondary schools awarded C or better in BGCSE. The under-performance in BGCSE has implication for higher education access for rural communities who are pinning their hopes on their children. Most often, academic performance in these areas is lower than elsewhere in the

The figure below indicates performance of students in PSLE (2019) for Kweneng, North West (Ngami West), Kgalagadi, Ghanzi and other educational regions. The graph indicates that South East region, has the highest proportion of Grade A, at 27.77%, while Ghanzi region (one of the regions forming part of the study), has the least proportion of Grade A (10.32%) and the largest proportion of Grade D at 32.06%, followed by Kgalagadi region with the least proportion of Grade A at 12.51 %.

2019 PSLE RESULTS SUMMARY

3.0   PERFORMANCE BY REGIONS

Figure 3.1: Proportion of candidates awarded Grade A to D by Educational Regions

	Central	Southern	Kweneng	South East	North West	Kgatleng	Kgalagadi	Ghanzi	Chobe	North East
A	22.93	17.87	17.69	27.77	13.64	17.87	12.51	10.32	21.08	27.09
B	18.91	17.16	16.10	21.84	14.28	17.15	15.36	13.03	20.34	21.09
C	34.56	36.47	36.01	35.04	37.23	37.08	36.26	31.46	36.01	35.45
D	17.47	22.09	22.02	12.47	25.56	20.65	26.52	32.06	16.60	12.73
A-D	93.87	93.59	91.82	97.12	90.71	92.75	90.65	86.87	94.03	96.36

South East has the highest proportion of Grade A (27.77%) while Ghanzi has the least proportion of Grade A (10.32%), and Ghanzi has the largest proportion of Grade D (32.06%).

Figure 1.1: 2019 PSLE results. (Source: Botswana Examinations Council 2020 Summary Provisional Results)

1.1.5 Access to higher education in Botswana

In order to have a clear understanding of the higher education landscape in Botswana, it is important to look at the environment within which higher education has evolved since independence. In 1966 it is believed that there were a few schools and a few educated people in Botswana as a result of the neglect by the British colonial government (Siphambe, 2010). The bachelor's degree holders were very few (Suping, 2022:01). According to Siphambe (2010), only 40 (forty) Batswana were university graduates, and a 100 with a senior secondary certificate in a total of more or less half a million people.

All the university graduates were trained outside the country in the Republic of South Africa (Harvey & Lewis,1990). Higher education then was viewed as a reserve for the privileged few (Suping, 2022). This meant there was a serious shortage of skilled labour in the country and the skill shortage prompted government to invest massively in higher education as a matter of priority. It is this shortage of human capital that informed and drove government training policy since independence and has helped shape the nature of education and training in the country (Botlhale, 2015). The main provider of higher education has been the University of Botswana, having been established in 1982 from being a campus of the University of Botswana, Lesotho and Swaziland (UBLS). This collaboration has since been broken and Botswana, Lesotho and Swaziland have established their own independent universities.

Around 1990s Botswana took a deliberate move to introduce major reforms in the country's tertiary education; as higher education is an important strategy in driving the knowledge economy (Statistics Botswana, 2015). The country's education system was reviewed for the second time in 1993 through a presidential task force, having been reviewed for the first time in 1977. The outcome of the review was a report released in 1994 and adopted as the Revised National Policy on Education (RNPE) of 1994 (Republic of Botswana, 1994). The RNPE acknowledged that access to education was still a challenge at the time and aimed at transforming Botswana' education system (Suping, 2022). The RNPE therefore proposed enhancing educational access, ensuring equity in education, enhancing educational quality and efficient management of the education system (Suping, 2022). Thus, the RNPE laid the foundations for current reforms in basic education, tertiary education and several other areas of education and the training sector (Statistics Botswana, 2015; Malejane & Diraditsile, 2019).

In an effort to effectively manage tertiary or higher education the Tertiary Education Council (TEC) was established in 1999 and its operations began in 2003 while its policy was enacted in 2008 (Moremi, 2018). It sought to increase access, equity and improve quality and relevance of programmes offered in tertiary education so as to meet the needs of the trainees as well as those of the society (United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization, 2017). TEC was named Botswana Training Authority and later

rebranded to become Botswana Qualifications Authority (BQA). The BQA, which was established under the Vocational Training Act No 22 of 1998, implemented the National Vocational Qualifications Framework (NVQF) (Gumbo, Serefete & Oats, 2023). In 2013, BQA established the National Credit and Qualifications Framework (NCQF) as its core function (Gumbo et al., 2023). Effectively higher education in Botswana became a tool for growth and diversification for a knowledge-based economy (Molutsi, 2009). A knowledge economy is an advanced economy based on skills and information rather than goods and products.

At present the higher education system comprises of both public and private universities, as well as technical colleges (TVETs) and other institutions of higher learning. In the 2017/2018 academic year, there were 85 tertiary education institutions accredited by Botswana Qualifications Authority (BQA); 39 institutions of higher learning, 8 technical colleges and 38 vocational training colleges (Statistics Botswana, 2018). The four (4) public universities; University of Botswana, Botswana International University of Science and Technology (BIUST), Botswana Open University and Botswana University of Agricultural and Natural Sciences (BUAN), are all located in urban areas (specifically in the main capital city, Gaborone) which makes access to higher education problematic for rural communities. In addition to public universities there are three (3) private higher education institutions (registered under category of universities) and other institutions of higher learning that also enrol students under government sponsorship through the Department of Tertiary Education Financing (Statistics Botswana, 2018), however these are also concentrated in urban areas. The distribution of educational resources, especially universities is highly skewed towards peri-urban areas rather than across all regions regardless of their geographical location.

The majority of students who access higher education for the first time are those who have completed Form 5 (or attained Botswana General Certificate of Secondary Education - BGCSE) and have obtained 36 points or better. BGCSE is graded by subjects' specialists at Botswana Examinations Council (BEC) and principal examiners from schools and colleges across the country and validated by a Grade Advisory Committee including a representative from Cambridge International Examinations. Performance by

candidates at subject level is graded on an eight-point scale ranging from A to G. Students who fail to reach the minimum standard for grade G are awarded grade U. The total number of students who sit for Grade 12 or BGCSE in a particular year is used as a proxy to estimate the number of prospective students who are expected to progress into higher education the following year (Human Resource Development Council (HRDC), 2017). Arguably, statistics suggest that most of the students who are successful in transitioning to university are likely to be from urban areas as the majority of learners from rural areas do not perform well. In terms of enrolment, statistics indicate Botswana's higher education system was able to increase student numbers from 20 011 in 2003 to 56 447 in 2015, a 182% increase indicative of the country's move from a resource-based economy to a knowledge-based economy and the ability to produce a competitive human resource by 2026 (Statistics Botswana, 2017).

Between 2009 and 2015/16 the number of higher education students under government sponsorship in local institutions grew from 23,500 to 41,671 with an approved budget of up to P2202.8 million (Statistics Botswana, 2017). Statistics also indicate that the number of students sitting for BGCSE in 2009 increased from 31 468 to 35 462 in 2016 (Statistics Botswana, 2017). In 2016/2017, 43.44% of students who successfully completed BGCSE progressed to higher education and were enrolled for diploma programmes and above, with 22.25 % enrolled for certificate and lower programmes (Statistics Botswana, 2017). The number of graduates increased from 7,306 in 2009 to 15 594 in 2014, decreasing significantly to 13 933 in 2016 (Statistics Botswana, 2017). Thus, while the numbers are generally encouraging, they do not necessarily provide a clear picture of the direction of access especially by marginalised youth in rural and remote areas in Botswana. In addition, not much is known regarding the rate of higher education returns to both private and public institutions.

In order to respond to the need to increase access and equity in education for disadvantaged groups, the department of Technical Vocational Education and Training (TVET) has an equal opportunities policy that reserves a 15% quota for admission of students from disadvantaged backgrounds. For example, the number of students with special needs such as those with disabilities increased from 12 places in 2012 to 64

places in 2014 (Republic of Botswana, 2015), yet this figure is still low. Again, what remains as a policy challenge is access to higher education for the disadvantaged groups such as youth from rural areas, in terms of enrolment rates and equal representation. Tertiary education enrolment at public universities decreased from 39.5% to 23.9 % between 2010/11 and 2016/2017 while enrolment at private universities increased from 10.2% to 20.7% for the same period (HRDC, 2017). This is due to government reducing the budget allocated to funding higher education as a result of a budget deficit, arguably this also had an impact on access to higher education for rural youth. Again, there is a misalignment between policy and practice.

In this regard rural youth are at a disadvantage of being overlooked in terms of enrolment into higher education institutions. As mentioned in the introduction, rural students are faced with many challenges such as poor schooling conditions, poor academic performance, lack of access to post-secondary education information, limited career options (Denhere, 2013; Njoko, 2018; Barnejee, 2018; Joshi & Bakshi, 2019), as well as financial constraints. Although significant strides have been made in improving access and equity in other levels of education, access to post-secondary education remains a challenge especially for young people from disadvantaged backgrounds (Republic of Botswana, 2015), a situation that necessitates more research. While open access to basic schooling in remote areas has increased (Pansiri, 2017), the extent to which learning takes place in classrooms settings can be contested. After 50 years of independence, it was on record that Botswana had provided 90% of universal basic education access and free primary education (Marumo & Pansiri, 2016).

In 2015 there were 319,133 learners enrolled in public primary schools with a transition rate from primary to lower secondary education of 96.0% (Statistics Botswana, 2015). However, research shows that the standard and quality of education is deteriorating as evidenced by high rates of failure at primary and secondary schools (Mokibelo, 2016; Botswana Education Training Sector Strategic Plan, 2015). So, while access to basic education is high, the quality of schooling remains problematic, complicating pathways to higher education access. Automatic promotion allows for learners to progress from primary school level to lower secondary school level even when they did not do well in

the Primary School Leaving Examinations (PSLE). For instance, the proportion of candidates at grade D decreased by 2.08% from 25.35% in 2014 to 23. 27% in 2015, while at grade E there was an increase to 6.8% from 5. 22% in 2014 (Statistics Botswana, 2017). Adding the figures together, the implication is that 30% of the 2015 candidates progressed to lower secondary school with lower grades. This makes access a challenge in Botswana's tertiary education sub-sector later on (Statistics Botswana, 2012; Statistics Botswana, 2013). This suggests that those who are automatically promoted to Form 1 (Grade 8) may not do well in their JCE (and fail to transit to BGCSE. As a consequence, chances of progressing to higher education become limited.

Transition rates from senior secondary schools to public and private tertiary institutions in 2015/2016 stood at 24.61% and 18.83 % respectively (Statistics Botswana, 2017), with a dominance of female student enrolment across all fields of education except for agriculture, science engineering, manufacturing, construction and science fields. Participation of females in STEM[1] programmes remains a challenge not only for Botswana but for both developed and developing countries as well (Hango, Zarifa, Milian, & Seward, 2019). Meanwhile, these statistics are not aggregated during rural geography, but rather based on enrolment figures from tertiary education reports. Furthermore, from these statistics, very little is known about enrolment rates of rural school leavers as well as the challenges they face while attempting to get into university.

Again, the absence of performance indicators regarding equity in higher education in Botswana, is another factor that could be contributing to the challenges of access. For example, Good (2011) argues that analysing inequalities is somehow hindered by the lack of data, as census does not include collection of data on ethnicity, despite numerous calls from various stakeholders for its introduction. Also, while the term equity has been frequently used alongside inclusion in policy and planning documents, there has been very little discussions surrounding its meaning (Unterhalter, 2009) thus making its understanding highly contested or negligible.

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[1] STEM is an abbreviation for Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics.
It is a general term that refers to curriculum that increases students' exposure and efficiency in these disciplines.

1.1.5.1 Policy framework

In terms of policy context, three primary policies guide higher education in Botswana. The Revised National Policy on Education (1994) which aims to provide equal opportunities for all citizens to access quality education, including higher education, regardless of socio-economic background or location. It emphasizes the importance of education in national development and outlines strategies to improve access, equity, and quality across all levels of education, including higher education (RNPE,1994). While these strategies are clearly outlined and there is a common understanding among policymakers, in practice these are not being implemented.

Secondly, the Tertiary Education Policy (TEP) (2008) focuses specifically on higher education and aims to expand access, enhance quality, and promote relevance and efficiency in tertiary education institutions. It emphasises the need for collaboration between government, universities, and other stakeholders to ensure that higher education meets the needs of individuals, society, and the economy. However, some of the challenges for this policy which are of relevance to this study include; access, equity and participation. The policy acknowledges these as major challenges that require attention (Tertiary Education Policy, 2008). The challenge is not just about the current system's limited capacity to accommodate only a small fraction of the conventional 18-24 age group (Tertiary Education Policy, 2008). The policy articulates that there are issues that relate to workforce development, the geographical location of institutions mainly skewed to the east and south of the country and rigid qualification structures with very poor articulation between various levels of the programmes.

Despite the Tertiary Education Policy (2008) targets to increase the tertiary education participation rate from 11.4% in 2007/2008 to a minimum of 17% by 2016 and subsequently to 25% by 2026 (HRDC, 2021), enrolment for rural youth remains limited. Again, the policy framework is silent on higher education access for rural youth. According to the HRDC, target projections indicate a shortfall of 7.2% regarding the target of 25% by 2026. This implies the growing number of NEETS (youth outside labour force and not in education) in Botswana (HRDC, 2021). Furthermore, the decreasing participation rates result in a rise in the number of young individuals

lacking the necessary qualifications for the job market, leading to increased youth unemployment. Overall low enrolment will consequently harm Botswana's efforts and progress towards a knowledge based economy as espoused in the Vision 2036.

The TEP also notes another challenge that needs to be dealt with is the lack of policies and clear consideration of access for people from disadvantaged backgrounds such as those with disability and other forms of impairment. While these challenges have been identified and recommendations made, the needs of all people living with disability are not being met, which contradicts the conventional Botswana Inclusive Education Policy as well as Goal 4 of Sustainable Development Goal which ensures inclusive education for all. Botswana is reported to not have managed to do enough to cater for children living with disabilities (Jonas, 2014). Moreover, not enough has been done to consider the needs of rural youth in disadvantaged communities.

The third framework that deals with higher education is the Human Resource Development Strategy (2009) which recognises the importance of human capital development in driving economic growth and development. It emphasizes the need to align higher education programmes with national development priorities and to promote skills development, innovation, and entrepreneurship among graduates. This strategy also emphasizes the importance of international collaboration and partnerships to enhance the quality and relevance of higher education in Botswana. However, despite these well-articulated goals and aims not enough is done to advance human capital capacity for disadvantaged youth, especially rural youth. Furthermore, Vision 2036 (which succeeded Vision 2016), also has education as one of it pillars (Suping, 2022). Vision 2036 prides itself with its vision ''towards prosperity for all'' promising a future for an educated and informed nation, advocating lifelong learning for all, a vision that remains a mystery to the present (Makwinja, 2020). Botswana embraced both the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and the subsequent Agenda 2030 of SDGs as well as the African Union's Agenda 2063. All these policies and frameworks address education development including tertiary education or higher education. The educational development initiatives mentioned earlier are primarily influenced by successive National Development Plans (NDPs)

which function as Botswana's blueprints for socio-economic advancement. Currently Botswana's economic development is guided by National Development Plan 11 (Republic of Botswana, 2019).

Regardless of the Revised National Policy on Education of 1994, the Inclusive Education Policy (Republic of Botswana, 2011) and ETSSP (Republic of Botswana, 2015), as well as the Tertiary Education Policy (2008), the lack of performance indicators to monitor or evaluate equity for diverse, ethnic minorities and marginalised groups poses a challenge for access to higher education. The Education and Training Sector Strategic Plan (ETSSP) was introduced to implement some of the recommendations of the of the RNPE of 1994. The aim of ETSSP is a public education system that is outcome-based, with multiple pathways for learners (Republic of Botswana, 2015). Through the ETSSP, Botswana seeks to elevate the quality of education, and shift the economy from relying on resources to being knowledge-driven, harnessing the potential of the fourth industrial revolution (Suping, 2022). However, there is a lack of political will for the implementation of the ETSSP. Equity involves initiatives promoting equal access to opportunities. Riddell (2009) considers equity as equal opportunities, suggesting that barriers inhibiting the social progress of a particular group should be removed, such that everyone begins life on a level playing field. However, in higher education, equity encompasses both commutative equity; that is treating people fairly and distributive equity which involves treating people differently according to their needs (Pitman et al*.,* 2020).

I consider the lack of equity performance indicators for higher education in Botswana as a critical indicator of the lack of attention to equity and access for young people outside the mainstream training systems. For example, young people from lower socio-economic backgrounds, students living with disabilities, and young people from remote or rural areas (on whom my study is focused) have unique needs (Pitman et al., 2020), therefore they deserve increased participation in terms of numbers which is equally important as raising their proportional representation in higher education. Conversely access alone does not translate into success (Pillay, 2019). Creating opportunities for these individuals to access a university education and succeed in higher education is equally important. Their plight is poignantly patent in low graduation rates (Pillay, 2019:150).

In trying to address the educational and training needs of the disadvantaged, the Botswana Education and Training Sector Strategic Plan (ETSSP, 2015-2020) reports that the definition of who the disadvantaged groups are, has not been clearly stated in policy frameworks. It is further emphasised that marginalised groups, such as those in remote areas, those with disability and associated challenges, deserve particular attention as they are not captured in the mainstream education policy (ETSSP,2015-2020). The silence of the policy framework on minority access potentially has widened the gap between marginalised and non-marginalised in higher education. Currently there is no updated version of this framework. The under-representation of marginalised youth in higher education ultimately limits their capabilities and access to career opportunities (Walker & Mkwananzi, 2015). This perpetuates the cycle of poverty for disadvantaged members of a society. In essence, the higher education landscape in Botswana is not empowering to the majority of disadvantaged groups including rural youth, who is the focus of my study.

Due to the disadvantage that rural youth suffer in terms of unequal provision of educational resources in basic education schooling (both primary schooling and lower secondary schooling), they risk failing to progress to higher education. Young people from poor communities usually attend poorly-resourced schools that may not have prepared them well enough to transition to university study (Mathebula, 2019). Thus, enrolment for marginalised groups including youth from rural areas tends to be lower in higher education, as access to post-secondary education is very much dependent on success at senior secondary levels (James 2012; Walker & Mkwananzi, 2015). While this is the case, there is very little information on constraints and challenges rural youth experience in their endeavours to access higher education. Thus, the purpose of my study is to address this knowledge gap and to contribute to research in this area within the context of sub-Saharan Africa and Botswana in particular.

1.1.6 Financing higher education in Botswana

At Botswana's independence in 1966, the state of human resources capital was undeveloped and an investment in education became one way by which economic development could be spurred (Damane & Molutsi, 2013). A student loan scheme was

recommended in 1966, however it was never implemented (Mokgwathi, 1992). As a result, education received a substantive share of the national budget to fund both basic education and post-secondary education. Between the 1979/1980 and 1989/1990 financial years the government was allocating between 17% and 19% of the total annual budget to the education (Siphambe, 2010; Siphambe, 2013). This trend continued for almost two decades until in 2008 when the world suffered an economic meltdown. The global economic crisis resulted in a budget deficit of P13.40 billion (approximately 1.18 billion USD) during the 2009/2010 financial period (Botlhale, 2018). This initiated debates on alternative ways of funding education. Despite experiencing the fiscal stress, post-2008, government remained committed to supporting education On behalf of the government, the Department of Tertiary Education Financing (DTEF) administers financial assistance to tertiary education, pre-service, post-senior secondary education and training in the form of grant/loan schemes to produce the technical and professional manpower needed by the economy (Botlhale, 2015; Botlhale, 2018). This support is extended to Form 5 completers, proceeding students qualifying with 36 points or better. Orphaned vulnerable children, rural area communities and special education learners are currently covered under the government affirmative policy through the social and community development offices in their area of stay (Botlhale 2015). While rural students are catered for in policy provision, many rural students face constraints resulting in limited access in higher education.

While government has been the sole financer of higher education in public institutions of higher education a decision was later taken to sponsor students to attend local private institutions (Makwinja, 2020). This meant more students enrolled in private universities and private institutions. This move came as a result of the development of the Tertiary Education Policy (TEP) of 2008 and the National Human Resource Development Strategy (NHRDS) of 2009. The two policy documents emphasised the need to increase access, improve quality and address equity and relevance in tertiary education (NHRDS, 2016). This increased government spending on higher education was accompanied by an increase in enrolment of first year students in the years that followed. In 2016, it was anticipated that qualifying Form 5 completers would increase from 10,501 to 21,212 in 2020 (Dingalo, 2016). This implied more financial resources would be needed. Thus, the

Tertiary Education Policy regards higher education as a mechanism through which Botswana can move from a resource-based economy to a knowledge-based economy (NHRDS, 2016). While higher education budget figures and statistics are helpful in painting the broader picture of higher education access numbers, these cannot tell us much about actual lives of who is left out and why, and what individual advantage is possible for each person (Walker & Mkwananzi, 2015:41).

Yet with mass increase of access to higher education and increased expenditure on higher education by government, some marginalised communities might be overlooked in terms of access in the midst of competing demand for government funds. Schendel and McCowan (2016) argue that inequitable expansion of higher education provision tends to lead to negative social outcomes such as socio-economic inequality, which ultimately may affect the development and economic growth of a country. When higher education is not made accessible to all individuals, it can create a disparity that further divides social groups. The impact of such social inequalities is likely to result in under-funding for disadvantaged and marginalised communities which further perpetuates economic and social vulnerability. Given these conditions individuals from poor backgrounds are likely not to enter higher education or likely not to complete their university degrees (Mseleku, 2022).

Extreme inequalities limit opportunities for most young people to approach anywhere near higher education, while the minority who make it, are most likely not to graduate with a degree (Walker, 2015). At university students may experience unequal participation and are vulnerable to drop out, face resource scarcity and lack sustained access to pedagogical or institutional arrangements that enable them to convert available resources into equal participation (Calitz, 2016). Breir (2010) and Van Zyl (2016) also make a link between deprivation, extreme poverty and vulnerability to exclusion in higher education faced by poor students in the South African context. This indicates students' success is also constrained by a lack of basic necessities that are enabled by finances which might cause them to drop out at any point during their studies (Van Zyl, 2016). The next section brings the aspect of rurality into context.

1.1.7 Botswana and rurality in context

My study is focused on four of the nine rural regions in Botswana. These are non-Tswana, minority-dominated areas considered to be the most remote and disadvantaged, namely Kweneng West, Ngamiland (North West), Ghanzi, and Kgalagadi North. Key indicators for their marginality are based upon low population density, unemployment, low economic status, unequal distribution of infrastructural amenities, lack of good schools and public libraries as well as telecommunication network systems (Riddell, 2009). These areas are also physically removed from other populated areas and major urban centres (Molosiwa & Boikhutso, 2016:50). In Botswana, the Inclusive Education Policy established in 2011 considers individuals as marginalised and vulnerable if they fail to benefit from mainstream educational provision (Republic of Botswana, 2011). This disadvantage may be attributed to a number of reasons, including but not limited to poverty, living in isolated rural areas, homelessness, language deficiency and an inflexible school system (Republic of Botswana, 2011).

In terms of unemployment, Kgalagadi North has a youth population constituting 32.9% and an unemployment rate of 9.7% among females and 9.5% among males (Statistics Botswana 2011a), while in Ngami West, the youth make up 28.5 % of the entire Ngamiland regional population (Statistics Botswana, 2011b). On average 18.1% of the people are not in gainful employment. For instance, Xaxa (a village in Ngamiland West), has the highest unemployment rate at 58.7%, followed by Xhauga at 53.7% (Statistics Botswana, 2011b). In Kweneng West, youth constitutes 28.1% of the population (Statistics Botswana, 2011c). Statistics also indicate the region does not seem to be severely affected by unemployment with an average rate of 11.8% (Statistics Botswana, 2011c). In the Ghanzi region, the youth population is over 30.0%, with most youth concentrated in the Central Kalahari Game Reserve (CKGR) with a proportion at 53.7% (Statistics Botswana, 2011d). Although this study is focussed on youth in rural and remote areas it also included the experience of rural minority groups commonly referred to as remote area dwellers (RADS). RADS are those groups of whom the majority are the San ethnic group (also known as Khoesan or Basarwa) who live in remote areas (Tshireletso, 1997; Pansiri 2008).

The San communities who are a marginal ethnic group are found across all the four regions of the study context as they are spread across the country. The San have faced various forms of marginality including academic, economic, social, cultural and political marginalisation. A number of factors could be associated with this marginalisation including but not limited to colonialism, modernisation and land dispossession. As historic hunter and gatherers with a nomadic lifestyle (Mokibelo, 2014), they have been subjected to subordination, discrimination, forced displacement and cultural genocide, all of which had a role in their marginalisation. Also, the historic low-respect for San people has created a stigma regarding their ethnic identity and this has caused a reduction in their self-esteem and further poverty in their lives (Mokibelo, 2014). Botswana laws and social policies are also factors in the marginalisation of the Khoesan populations (Good,2011; Chebanne & Dlali, 2019). For instance, legislature does not recognise the San as an independent socio-cultural group (Chebanne, 2015), deserving of land rights that could be assigned as their tribal territory. Hence San populations have been driven further into the margins of society and impoverishment.

The San communities form part of a government programme commonly known as the Rural Area Development Programme (RADP). The RADP programme was introduced in 1974 to provide social infrastructure in the form of schools to address problems of lack of access to education in remote areas (Pansiri, 2011). There are sixty-five (65) RADS settlements with primary schools in Botswana (Pansiri, 2008). In order to provide for schooling of children whose parents live in hard-to-reach areas such as farms and cattle-posts, hostels were established. The programme also supports children from these communities with free school uniforms, sports fees and food. Under RADP, San children are transported to remote areas schools in open trucks (lorries), where they stay in hostels for a school term and transported back to visit their families in the settlements (Ketsitlile, 2011).

While assistance is provided at all levels of education, the drop-out rate is high (Republic of Botswana, 2003). Learners from remote and rural areas have the highest numbers in school withdrawals and repetition rates (Pansiri, 2011). For instance, the primary school drop-out rate in the Ghanzi region was 5% in 2011 and in 2012 increased to 6.5%

(Statistics Botswana, 2013). In North West (Ngamiland region) 461 pupils dropped out of school in 2012 (Statistics Botswana, 2013). In 2013, 323 pupils had dropped out in the same region. A slight decrease of 1.0% was recorded between 2014 (314) and 2015 (296), although the numbers were still considerably high (Statistics Botswana, 2015). 501 students dropped out of school in the Kweneng region in 2011 and the number decreased to 475 in 2012 (Statistics Botswana, 2015). Again in 2017, Kweneng recorded the highest number of drop-outs with a total of 561 students, the majority of them female (Statistics Botswana, 2017).

At secondary school level, a total of 1 182 males and 1 657 females dropped out of school in the same period (Statistics Botswana, 2015). Statistics also indicate that in the 2017 academic year 2 751 students dropped out of secondary schooling in Botswana (Statistics Botswana, 2017). Ngamiland recorded 367 drop-out cases, while Ghanzi recorded 171 and Kgalagadi 97 (Statistics Botswana, 2017). Furthermore, studies that investigated reasons why remote area dwellers or San children dropped out of school both at primary and junior secondary level, found that struggling with English language, corporal punishment, inhabitable hostel conditions including abuse at hostels, conflict of cultures, homesickness, and abusive masters are associated with San children dropping out of school (Mokibelo, 2014; Batane 2018; Sebobi & Kelepile, 2022). Other factors associated with withdrawals and drop-outs include pregnancy, truancy, bullying, substance abuse and poor health. Although these statistics have implication for higher education access for rural youth who ultimately end up missing out on opportunities to transition to university, nevertheless, there are examples of success stories of people from these marginalised communities, who were able to complete higher education and went on to have fulfilling lives. The section that follows discusses the education gap in rural area areas.

1.1.8 The education gap in rural areas

In the sub-Saharan African context, learners in rural areas often attend poorly resourced schools that may not adequately prepare them for entry into higher education (Mathebula, 2019). Although students in urban areas may face similar challenges of lack of preparation to successfully navigate access to higher education, the issue of rurality

significantly reduces opportunities for rural students to acquire education that which once acquired, can increase their chances to transition into higher education. Many factors have been highlighted as contributing to low educational participation of children in remote areas and poor performance among rural communities, especially for ethnic minority communities. In the case of Botswana, one issue that stands out is the language problem, including the absence of mother tongue teaching and learning materials (Sekere 2011; Ketsitlile; 2011). Children who belong to minority sections of the population including the San (Basarwa), Bayei, and other minority groups, whose first language is neither the main stream local language (Setswana), nor official language (English) both of which are used as medium of instruction at school (Batane, 2018:01), struggle to learn in the formal languages of instruction (Setswana and English). The lack of learning resources in remote areas compounds this problem, resulting in poor performance. Several authors have observed that English acts as a constraint to learning not only for San children but for minority learners in general (Chebanne, 2002; Batibo, 2005; Mafela, 2010: Batane, 2018; Chebanne, 2022).

At lower levels Setswana is used as a language of instruction while English is taught as an independent subject (Mokibelo, 2014). However, from standard 2 upwards, teaching and learning takes place in English while Setswana is taught as an independent subject along other subjects in the curriculum. This scenario does not work well for ethnic minority learners who start off school only speaking their native languages. The learners grapple with Setswana at lower levels and when they are still struggling with language structure, English is introduced (Mokibelo, 2014). In one of the studies learners, indicated that they sat in class passively without understanding concepts in English, nor expressed themselves in English which has been observed to be so completely different from San languages (Mokibelo, 2018). These language difficulties have led to some learners feeling demotivated and disengaged from learning which impacts negatively on their educational aspirations.

Languages of communication in San households include but are not limited to Sesarwa, Seyeyi, Sekgalagadi, and Sembukushu which are not recognised officially and not spoken in schools. The Sesarwa language also has variations. For example, in New Xade they

speak G|ui, G||ana, Kua and Tsila (Sekere, 2011), while other dialects of –Kx'a, Tuu, and Khoe-Kwadi have been reported (Chebanne & Dlali, 2019). Extensive research in Botswana has shown that, although other ethnic groups have benefited from state-funded education systems since independence in 1966, minority ethnic groups have been excluded. For example, San children have been left behind (Pansiri, 2008; Sekere,2011; Mokibelo, 2014; Makwinja, 2017; Sebobi & Kelepile, 2022). Many reasons have been put forward to explain the lack of access to quality education for these communities; poverty, isolated geographical locations, inadequate fluency in the language of instruction, and an inflexible school system have also contributed to this problem (Republic of Botswana, 2011). Contrary to the general belief that San (who constitutes 2.8 % of the population) children are disinterested in school and prefer to stay on the farms with their parents, San parents and children do care about education (Mokibelo, 2015); it is the odds that are against them that make it difficult for them to realise their education aspirations.

Other researchers indicate that as a way of retaining their cultural identity and as a requirement for their children's academic success, parents tend to favour an education system that reflects their way of life and indigenous knowledge systems (Le Roux, 1999). Nonetheless, Botswana's school curriculum disregards the ethnic minority's indigenous knowledge systems in favour of the mainstream Tswana ethnic groups. Reference material in textbooks depicts concepts that are completely foreign to the learners or reflect mainstream Tswana cultural values all of which have no relevance to ethnic minorities lives. Sebobi and Kelepile (2022:03) observe that "current materials in schools such as the graphics used in referred textbooks, mirror urban lifestyles and a student belonging to the Khoe and San ethnic groups, for instance, may not be able to relate to the concept being taught in class through the use of such illustrations". As a result, the school curriculum has been deemed insensitive to the cultures of minority groups, which makes the learning environment not conducive for remote area children to succeed academically (Nyati-Ramahobo, 2003; Sekere, 2011).

In fact, minority populations have expressed distrust towards government and other mainstream institutions when it comes to the upbringing of their children (Le Roux, 1999; Sekere, 2011). They believe these institutions aim to erode their cultural values, and

impose unfamiliar customs on them, hence the resistance to such impositions. In addition, the school's focus on STEM subjects and neglecting creative capabilities might lead to difficulties for students who lack natural talents in these areas. Despite this being a policy priority, and many declarations that guarantees every child the right to education, some learners have been left behind as a result of not being guaranteed a supportive and nurturing learning environment, which becomes challenging for them to stay interested in learning and achieve their academic goals. Given these constraining conditions, it is clear that rural and remote area learners do not have equitable access to quality education at lower levels of schooling. This affects their educational goals and potentially limit their progression into higher education. As a result, such learners remain missing in most aspects of Botswana society; academically, socially, culturally, economically and politically (Mokibelo, 2014). Neither can they self- actualise nor participate in the socio-economic and political life of their communities. Therefore, this study focuses on investigating access to higher education for rural youth as a disadvantaged group. The disadvantage of marginality is exacerbated by the context of rurality in which young people find themselves (Walker & Mathebula, 2019), which further reduces their capabilities in transitioning from basic education to higher education.

Despite efforts by government, non-governmental organisations, civil society and other key actors in education, access to and participation in higher education for rural youth remains low. For instance, through the Rural Area Development Programme government provides educational support to communities in remote areas especially the San communities, some of whom have been relocated from their ancestral land in the Central Kalahari Game Reserve (Sekere, 2011). The relocation which has led to the displacement of between 28,000 and 30,000 San (Saugestad, 2001) has had an adverse impact on their livelihoods. Due to the loss of land and access to critical natural resources their traditional modes of survival have been gradually undermined over a period of time. As a result, they became more vulnerable to exploitation; sometimes hired as cheap labourers on big farms and ranches working under deplorable conditions. They also became vulnerable to disease scourges and alcoholism as they have been taken out of their familiar natural environments (Chebanne & Glon, 2017).

Although government compensated for the difficulties of their eviction, it is evident most of the San communities' livelihoods have not been improved as some of the programmes meant to empower them have not been successful. Only a handful have taken advantage of the agricultural activities like livestock farming, manufacturing of handicrafts and food gathering (Chebanne & Glon, 2017). Furthermore, they still live off food rations from government. Besides policies on food rations, there has been no robust policy decisions to improve their educational, cultural and linguistic situation (Chebanne & Glon, 2017). While government has declared that education is free for San children, from basic education to higher education, and feeding schemes increased in schools to encourage them to attend school, some children still remain at home, and this affects access to higher education. Meanwhile, many factors have been attributed to children remaining home, including child labour (child exploitation). Some children are hired to work at cattle posts (as cattle herders) while others work on farms and ranches alongside their parents. In other cases, children work for their parents' employers and miss out on opportunities to attend school. Others have never been sent to school due to tensions (incompatibility) between the children's culture at home and the lifestyle they are required to adopt at school (Mokibelo, 2014). Cultural norms that require girls to have marriage partners at a certain age have also kept girls away from school. In their culture, a woman is considered an outcast if she reaches a certain age without a partner (Mokibelo, 2014).

For the children who do not attain basic education, there have been claims that education for RADS communities pushes children from the education system. For example, children reside in low-quality hostels with poor living conditions, such as being forced to sleep on the ground (Ketsitlile, 2011). Parents also complain of being separated from their children when they go to live in hostels as this leads to cultural loss and splitting of family connections (Ketsitlile, 2011:93). Reports of abuse of San children have also been noted. For instance, children have been subjected to excessive beatings from teachers (Tafa, 2002; Pansiri, 2011; Mokibelo, 2014), physical and sexual abuse that were perpetuated by other students in the hostels (Mokibelo, 2014). These factors cannot be treated in isolation as they intersect with each other in so many ways (Marumo & Pansiri, 2016) and result in parents' reluctance to send their children to school. In essence, these factors

play a role in the low enrolment rates in education for the San, which essentially are the lowest.

At the same time these conditions also reveal the lack of care and attention to creating a conducive learning environment that also promotes the well-being of vulnerable groups such as ethnic minority children. More broadly, these have a negative implication on academic performance and overall educational outputs for these communities. In this regard, there is an urgent need to improve the freedoms, choice, and agency of vulnerable groups for their social, cultural, and economic well-being and survival (Republic of Botswana, 2010). Making sure that rural communities are included in educational opportunities and are well prepared for the future is significant in the course of social policy, poverty eradication and growth (Diraditsile, 2017). In this regard, higher education is widely recognised as the key to unlocking human potential in order for individuals to develop their capabilities and to flourish. As caretaker of its citizens the state has a responsibility to meet the needs of its young people who represent the future of societies. The argument is that individuals who fail to benefit from state-funded education prove to be costly to government in the long run; thereby compelling government to absorb them in social welfare protection programmes (Diraditsile, 2017). Hence, in this study, I seek to understand and evaluate how rural youth gain entry to higher education, in terms of how existing structures enable or constrain the enrolment of rural youth in post-secondary education.

1.2 INTRODUCING THE PROBLEM STATEMENT

Equitable access to higher education remains a major global concern. Empirical studies from different parts of the world have demonstrated that although massification has increased access to higher education, limited access among rural youth persists (Kilpatrick et al., 2019; Naylor & Misfud, 2020), especially in sub-Saharan Africa. Rural students experience constraints and continue to be under-represented in higher education. While this is the case their experiences are not well documented within research. In the context of Botswana, statistics show that overall, the number of enrolled students in higher education institutions have increased. Student enrolment has increased from 20,011 in 2003 to 53,930 in 2019 with a gross enrolment rate (GTR) of

18-24 olds from 11.2% in 2004 to 18.5% in 2019 (Human Resources Development Council, 2019; Statistics Botswana, 2018). Thus, while generally the numbers are encouraging, the statistics do not show how many of these learners were from rural areas and how many failed to transition to higher education despite qualifying and why. From these numbers, it is therefore possible to argue that rural youth as a vulnerable group risk being overlooked both in terms of statistical representation, and real experiences of access (Walker & Mkwananzi, 2015). What is known from the literature is that rural youth are under-represented in higher education and the problem of access is an under-researched topic in Botswana, yet not much is known with regards to the constraints and supports to access. Again, existing research on post-secondary education gaps has mostly disregarded the differences in enrolments rates based on rurality.

While Botswana has performed relatively well in most areas of the Education for All goals, many rural youth face problems of poor schooling conditions, lack of information about career options, poor social support, low socio-economic status and resource scarcity. These have implications on achievement, career choices and well-being. Challenges faced by rural youth are not limited to rurality; their counterparts from non-rural setting might experience similar constraints. While this remains contestable, however, Balfour, Mitchell and Moletsane (2008) hold the view that it would be unwarranted to assume that the extent of challenges in rural and urban areas are comparatively equal. Therefore, it is important to consider unique circumstances of students particularly from disadvantaged and marginalised communities. While individuals' choices might be influenced by their environmental setting, their identities cannot be defined on the basis of the area or spaces in which they live (Omidire, 2020). This suggests individuals have the capability to make their own choices and social arrangements should not stand in their way to pursue goals that shape their future. The purpose of this study, therefore, is to establish the enablers and constraints regarding access to higher education for rural youth, framed theoretically by the capability approach. The next section introduces the research aim.

1.3 RESEARCH AIM

The aim of the study is to assess how access to higher education for rural youth interacts with existing policy measures in order to better understand the structural arrangements that enable and constrain rural youth's access to higher education.

1.4 RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND SUB-QUESTIONS

The research questions provided below are based on the capability approach framework. The research questions also guided the semi-structured interview and survey protocol questions.

1.4.1 Main research question

How do rural youth in Botswana experience arrangements that enable their access to higher education**?**

1.4.2 Sub-questions

1.What are the structural arrangements that constrain rural youth from accessing higher education in Botswana?

2. What are the structural arrangements that enable rural youth to access higher education in Botswana?

3. How do rural youth use their agency to navigate structural constraints to access higher education?

4. To what extent are rural youth able convert different resources into human capabilities critical for academic success at university?

5. What aspirations do rural youth hope to achieve upon attainment of their university education?

1.5 THE SIGNIFICANCE OF AND RATIONALE FOR THE STUDY

The benefits of higher education have long been acknowledged both at macro and micro levels. At macro level higher education contributes to economic development (Schendel

& McCowan, 2016). At micro level, it accrues economic benefits for individuals such as better paying jobs, saving and investment abilities, and an improved quality of life. Apart from accrued economic benefits, a university education helps develop character qualities that enable individuals to be resilient and successfully navigate life both privately and professionally. Overall, it is the acquired education that enhances and empowers individuals functioning across all aspects of life such as work, family and community. People flourish when they are genuinely free to choose how they want to function in all these areas of life (Dejaeghere & Walker, 2021). For rural youth, acquiring a university education might provide social mobility. While empirical evidence reveals that on average, the rate of returns of higher education for Africa is low, South Africa has the highest average rate of private returns from higher education of 39.5% compared to Ghana 28%, Brazil 17%, Turkey 14%, Argentina 12%, and the USA 14% (Walker, Calitz & Höppener (n.d.); Teferra, 2013).

While higher education could be considered important for social mobility in South Africa, access to and success in higher education is greatly influenced by class or socio-economic context divisions (Archer, Hutchings & Ross, 2002; Furlong & Cartmel, 2009). These factors constrain rural students' choices and aspirations, leading them to miss out on the benefits of accessing higher education. In addition, neglecting the educational needs of rural youth in this area, society misses out on the contributions they could make. Overall, investing in their education is an investment in the future prosperity and well-being of the country as a whole. Against this context the capability approach proposes creating opportunities that enable capability formation and agency freedom to enable rural youth to have choices and freedoms to pursue their life aspirations (Walker & Mkwananzi, 2015).

Furthermore, through seeking to understand the enablers and constraints regarding access to higher education for rural youth, it is hoped that understanding their experiences may help policy makers consider the challenges rural youth face; in so doing find ways and means to better support and prepare rural students to transition smoothly to higher education. It is also necessary to understand how rural youth use agency to navigate access to higher education as well as the extent to which they are able to

translate human capabilities into academic success while there. Research into rural youth as agentic beings could increase the understanding of how the capitals they bring in navigating access to higher education could contribute to the reproduction of inequalities or could transform inequalities if converted into other forms of educational and economic achievement (Dejaeghere, Wiger, & Willemsen, 2016). Therefore, this study is important in guiding and informing policy measures and programmes that are aimed at widening access to higher education for rural students.

Furthermore, studies that explore access to higher education for marginalised groups such as rural youth are few, and none have been conducted in the context of rural Botswana through the capability approach. Without research exploring access constraints for rural youth, there is a risk that their voices and experiences will continue to be overlooked, perpetuating their marginalization within higher education and other spheres of society. Therefore, this study is a platform where rural youth clearly express their lived experiences which could be of assistance to other rural youth in similar contexts as well as alert government to what rural youth perceive to be arrangements that contribute to inequitable access to higher education. It is against this background that the study is relevant. In addition, the findings of the study may contribute to new knowledge especially in the area of higher education, which is an area that has not been thoroughly researched in Botswana.

1.5.1 The higher education landscape for the rural youth in Botswana

Despite Botswana government's formulated policies that enable all students to be provided with opportunities to be independent learners and reach their full potential (Makwinja, 2020), access to higher education is still largely determined by academic performance. While this approach rewards individuals who excel academically, it also raises questions about equity and accessibility, as it disadvantages rural youth and other students from disadvantaged backgrounds including those who face barriers to academic achievement. Rural youth face barriers to education across all levels of education (Irvin et al., 2012; Monyai, 2018). For instance, at policy level, the curriculum is portrayed as focusing on the students' needs and interests, while in practice, it demands that students memorize factual content, with teachers being seen more as providers of knowledge

rather than facilitators. Freire (1970) termed such an approach to teaching and learning as the banking system. This model does not create many opportunities for most students to acquire the necessary knowledge and skills to proceed with their education further. Due to poor quality schooling at the primary and secondary levels, many rural youth fail to reach full potential which significantly impedes their freedom to take advantage of various opportunities they encounter later (Monyai, 2018).

Rural schools in Botswana face challenges in delivering quality education, due to limited facilities and teaching materials. Owing to these conditions, schools in remote and rural areas perform much worse in comparison to schools in urban and peri-urban areas (Pansiri, 2011; Mokibelo, 2014; Mokibelo, 2016). As a result, rural youth may enter higher education institutions with uneven academic preparation (Wilson-Strydom, 2011) which can impact their success and retention rates. Suping (2022) notes that overall, the student completion rate in Botswana is high at more than 90%, but the failure rates are also high at a 10-year average of 70%, thus robbing the high school leavers of the opportunity to pursue higher education and training.

Other investigations have been conducted in an effort to understand the reasons for the poor performance, however there is no indication as to whether the suggested recommendations for improvement have effectively been put into practice (Marumo & Pansiri, 2016; Makwinja, 2017; Makwinja & Nthoi, 2022). In addition, some rural youth experience lack of access to education and inequalities due to skewed location of educational institutions (Mbulawa & Mehta, 2016). Owing to these inequalities and the socio-economic realities of their communities, rural youth's opportunities may be limited, significantly constraining their aspirational pathways. Failure to address access constraints denies rural youth the opportunity to fully develop their talents and capabilities, resulting in a loss of human potential that could otherwise contribute to individual well-being and societal progress. Mbulawa (2016:145) notes "development becomes a reality as the country's education expands and the quality of its education improves". However, given the limited available opportunities this may not be realised due to loss of potential human capital for the rural youth.

Inadequate attention to access for the rural youth potentially reinforces existing inequalities and widens the gap between privileged and marginalized groups. This exacerbates social divisions and undermines efforts to build a more equitable and inclusive society which most policies in Botswana (Vision 2016, Vision 2036, the RNPE 1994) seek to promote. From a social justice perspective all citizens have the right to fully participate in the socio-political and economic landscape of their country including rural youth. Thus, research exploring access to higher education for marginalized groups such as youth in rural Botswana through the capability approach is essential for promoting equity, social justice, and inclusive development. A capabilities-friendly approach to policy and practice seeks to highlight what shapes unequal educational life chances including how advantage for some can perpetuate inequality as the natural order of thing (Walker, 2015). Walker urges society to focus on understanding the various elements that contribute to disparities in educational outcomes and how societal structures can maintain these inequalities over time.

While globally most studies have focused on understanding enablers and disablers of access for the rural youth in higher education, not many have conceptualized access from the capability approach perspective. It is also relevant to reiterate that not many studies conducted on access to education have focused on higher education. As such not much has been written specifically in the context of rural Botswana. Internationally, Walker (2006), introduced the capability approach as a framework for evaluating both the social and pedagogical arrangements higher education. This includes examining how various arrangements influence the fairness of learning opportunities for students. Drawing conclusions from a 5-year study conducted in Tanzania and Uganda, Dejaeghere (2019) proposes using capabilities and capability-enhancing pedagogies in formal and non-formal education to promote inclusivity and equality for excluded youth. The study highlights two key capabilities; recognition and imagining alternative futures, which could be nurtured through educational practices. Dejaeghere (2019) emphasises the importance of educational approaches that address unjust social structures and relations, going beyond individual capabilities and critical pedagogy by aiming for tangible social change.

In Zimbabwe Mukwambo (2019) used the capability approach to examine intersecting individual contexts and educational processes which influence perceptions, decision-making and outcomes. The study, which was conducted in rural settings, questioned the relevance of education in rural settings and highlights the need for a minimum threshold of resources before education could be valued intrinsically and instrumentally, and the implications for human development (Mukwambo, 2019). The two studies have relevance to the current study; the first study underscores the significance of educational methods that tackle unfair social system surpassing individual skills and critical pedagogy by striving for real societal transformation. The second study underscores the importance of education that responds to contextual needs in rural settings and how it can offset reproduction of deprivation and poverty. Both these context addresses questioning of structures that limit individual opportunities to make choices in relation to leading the lives they have reason to value.

In the Botswana context, Mosalagae and Bekker (2021) explore experiences of students with mild intellectual disabilities of inclusion or exclusion in TVET institutions using key concepts of the capability approach. The study concludes that negative experiences as a result of exclusionary practices hinder students' achievement limiting their capabilities. Additionally, Ketlhoilwe and Jeremiah (2015) explored concepts such as human capabilities, human agency, and community of practice to understand Kgetsi Ya Tsie[2] capabilities and freedom to achieve poverty reduction through natural resources management projects and entrepreneurial activities. While these studies were approached from the capability approach lens, the debates have not focused on rural youth. As such this critical demographic has not been explored particularly in Botswana. This suggests rural youth are an under-represented group within the domain of higher education and their experiences are often missing from research. Again Koricich et al., (2018) notes that research that focuses on gaps in post-secondary education has largely overlooked the disparities in enrolment by rurality. In this study I attempt to address this

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[2] Kgetsi Ya Tsie is a community based trust formed by group of women in twenty-six (26) villages in the Tswapong area in the Eastern Botswana, to sustainably manage natural resources within their area.

gap by adding to a body of growing literature on the area of higher education access especially from the dimension of capabilities and higher education.

1.6 TERMINOLOGY

Capabilities - captures the positive freedoms and opportunities which people have in order to make choices about what they value doing and being.

Functionings - captures achievement of valued ends.

Capability approach - is a normative theory based on the assumptions that in assessing individual's well-being, the focus should be on their capabilities instead of resources (such as money, wealth or other material goods). Essentially the capability approach considers freedom and choice as important for individuals to pursue the life that they value.

Equity - refers to equal opportunities, suggesting that barriers inhibiting the social progress of a particular group should be removed, so that everyone begins life on a level playing field.

Conversion factors - these are conditions and structures under which students convert their bundles of resources into capabilities and functionings. Conversion factors could be personal, social or environmental. Conversion factors can either work together to support individuals' aspirations or they can work against such aspirations (Walker et al., 2022). In assessing the functionings of rural or marginalised communities it is important to consider the conditions that individuals live amidst. Nambiar (2013) urges that the challenge of improving capabilities cannot be fully appreciated without being familiar with the constraints that the disadvantaged have to negotiate.

Agency - captures an individual's ability to make decisions and act upon those choices to pursue goals they have reason to value.

Higher education - is used to refer to university education or tertiary education.

Rurality - denotes geography, remoteness, characterised by low economic activities, lack of access to important infrastructural facilities, and low population density among others.

Marginality - denotes being treated as unimportant and kept on the margins of development or society.

Youth - are persons aged between 18 and 24.

1.7 ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK OF THE STUDY

The study employs the capability approach, a moral theory which was pioneered by Amartya Sen (1993,1999, 2009) to explore higher education access for rural youth. I found the approach most suited to explore access for the rural youth as it is underpinned by a commitment to the advancement of equality and social justice among people and societies (Dejaeghere & Walker, 2021). In lending itself to development of societies and individuals it promotes the principles of freedoms, equality, fairness and dignity (McLean 2018). As such the approach focuses on human capabilities, in terms of what people are actually able to be and do in their lives, in an informed and reasoned way (Wilson-Strydom, 2015). Therefore, in this study the emphasis is whether or not rural youth have substantive opportunities, and freedoms to achieve access to a university education. The process of evaluation also involves exploring rural youth's agency to do or become that which they reasonably choose to value in pursuit of achieving access to higher education. Providing opportunities for rural youth to access higher education, is therefore essential in expanding their capabilities to be able to pursue their life aspirations. In the context of this study, well-being freedom is achieved when rural youth have access to higher education, so that they can pursue their life aspirations and be able to lead the lives they choose to value.

To achieve well-being, the capability approach urges we should look beyond goods or commodities as the means to achieve well-being. To this end through the capability approach, I assess conversion factors that influence the range of capabilities (opportunity set) available to any given person. Conversion factors are the personal, social and environmental factors that influence capabilities, in achieving the life one values. These play a crucial role in bringing together individual agency and the social context in which agency is exercised in realisation of capabilities and functionings. For instance, I look at the home community and school as social factors that affect individuals differently; either

as positive influences (enablers) or negative influences (constraints) in the sense that they can enable expansion or curtail freedoms to gain access to reveal rural students' lived experiences while navigating access to higher education particularly within the Botswana context. Finally, contextual factors such as rural areas play a role in access. Similarly, personal factors such as socio-economic status affect educational achievements in low-income households.

1.8 METHODOLOGY

The study falls within the pragmatism paradigm, as it is a mixed method study. It involves youth from marginal rural communities in some regions in Botswana. A true mixed methods study must genuinely integrate data at one or more stages of the research process (Creswell et al., 2003), therefore in this study, quantitative and qualitative datasets were integrated during the presentation of the findings as well as during the analysis and conclusion phases. Therefore, this added richer details to enhance the credibility of the conclusions and strengthened the study. However, relative priority was given to the qualitative aspect of the study. Hence, the study adopted a QUAL+quant design, and as such qualitative data collection was primary and the emphasis is on meanings and interpretations (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011). The design is most appropriate to illuminate experiences of rural youth and the problem of unequal access, therefore it helps in answering the research questions fully. Also, the concept of rural location is very significant to the study, in terms of enablers such as community support and resources and challenges such as resources as well as physical access; all of which could be understood better or holistically through the design.

1.9 PERSONAL POSITIONING

This section provides an account of a reflection on the experiences that shaped the personal beliefs and convictions that inspired me to embark on this journey. From both a personal and professional perspective, I am deeply committed to the cause of rural students who fall within the cracks of the education system and fail to achieve their higher education aspirations. When such students do gain access to university, and when they enter university, they often have the odds working against them and they fail to succeed

in their educational endeavours. Thus my commitment to a more just education system provided the inspiration for this research project as I believe it is possible to achieve equitable access in higher education given the small population and the middle income economy of a democratic state such as Botswana. The study contributes towards giving voice to the experiences of the voiceless minority as I seek to interrogate some of the societal systems that perpetually keep other groups of people at the margins of human development. The capability approach adopted as a theoretical framework for this study offers a basis for understanding student agency and importantly emphasising the constraints imposed by educational structures and the wider social environment.

Retrospectively I reflect on the experiences that shaped the choices that led to this journey. Reflecting on my experiences growing up in a marginalised rural community; my early schooling was characterised by attending classes under the trees, an experience I dreaded during the winter season. At home we did not have running water or electricity. It took quite some years for my community to be provided with clean drinking water and electricity. Although a certain level of sufficiency has been achieved in terms of infrastructural development even after more than 50 years of the country's independence, more often than not, rural communities experience water shortages, continuous power cuts, while other remote and rural communities do not have access to these resources. All these experiences arguably affect academic outcomes of schools in these communities. Despite navigating these social challenges I completed my education and trained as a teacher. In hindsight, I acknowledge that negotiating the transition process to higher education was not easy.

Both my experiences as a rural dweller and professional made me aware of the systemic inequalities that exist in terms of educational opportunities among rural settings and non-rural setting. Compared to their urban counterparts, leaners in rural areas have limited opportunities to achieve academically. Again the education system which adopts 'a one size fits all' approach to the teaching and learning process was not serving students very well. As a result, most of them fail their form 5 (grade 12) and subsequently they fail to realise their higher education aspirations. Given the ability of education to transform societies, and liberate families from poverty, I saw this as an area of injustice in education.

In a broader context, the failure to realise higher education aspirations has an impact on individuals' life chances (Walker, 2015). This made me eager to know how rural students experience access to higher education. Hence the motivation to conduct a study to get insights on the experience of rural youth with arrangements enabling and constraining access. I believe that understanding and presenting the range of often contested perspectives (voices) of rural youth is an important contribution that this study makes (Wilson-Strydom, 2011).

1. 10 THESIS OUTLINE

Chapter 1 introduces the thesis. It provides the background to the study. I also define my understanding of access in this thesis, followed by an introduction to the aim and problem statement framing the study as well as the significance and rationale. Finally, I provide an outline of the whole thesis in which I provide a summary of each chapter. The remainder of the thesis is organised into eight chapters.

Chapter 2 presents a review of related literature used to frame the research problem. In this review I focus on factors shaping access to higher education and access to higher education for vulnerable and disadvantaged groups. I also discuss structural arrangements that constrain rural youth from accessing higher education. Interventions that are aimed at increasing access to higher education are discussed. The chapter ends with literature on the capability approach.

The capability approach as the theoretical framework through which data was collected and analysed is discussed in Chapter 3. I provide justification why I found the capability approach as a suitable theoretical framework to explore access to higher education for the rural youth. Key tenents of the capability approach that shape access, namely capabilities, functionings, agency and conversion factors are discussed as well as the strengths and weaknesses of the capability approach.

Chapter 4 details the methodology and research design of the study. Pragmatism was adopted for my mixed method study as the principles and beliefs that underpin the approach are more aligned with the design I have chosen. The pragmatist approach views reality as both objective and subjective or socially constructed. Both quantitative (data

from survey questionnaires) and qualitative responses (data from interviews) are combined to understand access from different angles. Understanding the problem holistically might assist to design appropriate policy measures to address the problem of inequitable access.

Chapter 5 is the first chapter in which I present empirical findings of structural constraints to access for rural youth as well as enablers of access. A summary of demographic information of the research participants is also included in this chapter. The chapter responds to the first and second research questions of the study.

Chapter 6 is the second empirical chapter in which I present findings on how rural youth use their agency to navigate or negotiate structural constraints regarding access to higher education. The chapter responds to the third research question.

Chapter 7 is a discussion of findings to research question 4 and 5. It outlines the extent to which rural youth are able to convert different resources into human capabilities critical to achieve academic success at university (or achieve well-being). In response to research question 5, the chapter also outlines aspirations rural youth hope to achieve upon attainment of their university study.

Chapter 8 provides a discussion of the results linking theoretical concepts and literature in chapters 5, 6 and 7 to propose a capability informed approach to access and success at university for the rural youth and as well as other under-represented groups in the society.

Chapter 9 provides a review of how the research questions were addressed. A reflection on each of the five research questions is highlighted. The chapter concludes the research project with research contributions and recommendations for interventions for policy and practice.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 INTRODUCTION

In this section, I review global literature related to access to higher education for rural youth. I explore the concept of access to higher education in relation to how it is negotiated within structural enablers and constraints (Danic, 2015), drawing from various contexts in the global north and global south. Guided by research questions I have organised the section as follows: access to higher education for vulnerable and disadvantaged youth, contextualising access to higher education, and arrangements that constrain access to higher education for rural youth. I also detail how disadvantaged youth use agency to navigate various spaces of structural constraint in order to gain access to and succeed in higher education. Lastly, capabilities and higher education as well as interventions supporting access to higher education are discussed.

2.2 ACCESS TO HIGHER EDUCATION FOR VULNERABLE AND DISADVANTAGED GROUPS

Rural students are regarded as vulnerable or disadvantaged because education in some contexts can restrict capability development. The one-size-fits-all type of education that is provided by the state may fail to recognise the unique needs of students living in rural areas, coming from low-income backgrounds with limited resources to support schooling. Increasing access to higher education for minority ethnic, low income and other under-represented groups has been recognised as an important policy issue in many countries, with interventions in place to increase participation for such groups (Younger et al., 2019; Cin & Doğan, 2020). However, it has been found that with these expansions, participation in higher education is not equally distributed (Moses, 2012; Fleming & Grace, 2014). This inequitable distribution of access to higher education is problematic in both developed and developing countries. In the US context, a study examining barriers and supports for rural students regarding access to a flagship university revealed that students faced challenges, with lack of academic preparation and lack of maths and science credits making transitioning to college difficult (Goldman, 2019). For these students, their parents' financial situation was also a barrier in accessing post-secondary education,

while others reported making choices to balance work and school in order to make college financially possible (Irvin et al., 2012; Goldman, 2019). Being first-generation also resulted in a lack of information as family members were not familiar with college processes (Goldman, 2019). Geographical isolation compounded with social and cultural norms, socio-economic status (SES), lower parental expectations and less intensive high school preparations have also been associated with disparities in enrolment among rural youth (Byun, Irvin & Meece, 2012; Byun, Irvin & Meece, 2015). These systemic arrangements further constrained rural youth's educational aspirations for higher education.

A study by Friesen and Purc-Stephenson (2016) explored perceived personal, social and cultural factors that might constrain access to higher education for rural youth in Alberta, Canada and developed a conceptual model illustrating how the interacting nature of these factors influence individuals' choice to pursue a university programme. The study involved 17 individuals aged 18 to 23 and had not attended university (Friesen & Purc-Stephenson, 2016). The findings reveal that the majority of rural youth identified pragmatic factors such as distance and costs related to university study away from home (Friesen & Purc-Stephenson, 2016) as factors decreasing their freedom to access higher education. Thus, decisions to leave communities were complex for rural students (Goldman, 2019). These arrangements impact pathways rural students take to negotiate access through a complex cluster of personal, social and relational factors.

In the context of the UK, access to higher education is not evenly distributed (Elliot, 2018). Students from low-income backgrounds fail to access higher education due to the costs associated with university education. Secondly, research reveals that students from lower class backgrounds have been positioned as lacking relevant and valued cultural capitals (Gibson, Grace, O'Sullivan & Pritchard, 2019). This impacts on their emotional security; students feel disempowered, lack confidence and feel unprepared for university learning (Gibson et al., 2019). In a way, these feelings significantly reduce their capabilities and freedoms to participate equally in higher education. Other studies have also attributed unequal access to the lack of financial resources and social capital (Frempong, Ma & Mensah, 2012; Reay, Crozier & Clayton, 2010). Traditionally, higher education in the UK

has been dominated by privileged and powerful social groups (Burnell, 2015). However, with the establishment of widening participation initiatives, the situation has gradually changed to enable participation for marginalised social classes and ethnic groups. While overall participation rates have increased, and other forms of inequalities have been reduced, it has been argued that social inequalities still remain (Reay, David & Ball, 2007). Essentially, the expansion in access to higher education that has taken place has contributed to a reduction in social mobility, further deepening inequalities between social classes (Reay, 2016). Assumptions can therefore be made that social class still plays a part in determining access and success in higher education in the UK. Among working class and non-traditional students for whom higher education is not a taken for granted stage in a trajectory to adulthood, successful attainment and progression during study depends on mobilisation of capitals that enable fitting in or standing out (Reay, Crozier & Clayton, 2010). Given the importance of education as a primary capability upon which other capabilities can be developed, disadvantaged students (rural students included) may have limited opportunities to achieve economic well-being within their environment.

In the context of most developing countries, existing literature on access and inequalities in higher education especially in Africa, relies mostly on household survey results about completed education levels (Carr-Hill, 2020) which is not adequate for evaluating access to university education for rural students for this study. However, in sub-Saharan Africa, access to higher education benefits a privileged few (McCowan, 2014). Wide inequalities in accessing higher education have been registered for some of the world's poorest countries including sub-Saharan Africa (Ilie & Rose, 2016). For example, a study that analysed demographic data and health survey from 35 low- and middle-income countries in sub-Saharan Africa and Asia found that there were wide inequalities, with only a few from the poorest countries gaining access to higher education (Ilie & Rose, 2016). In some of these countries, very few, if any young people from poor households reach higher education (Ilie & Rose, 2016:436). Again, these findings indicate that gender disparities contributed to increased wealth inequalities, such that the young women from low-income backgrounds have the lowest chances of accessing higher education. Further it is noted that in countries where access to higher education has expanded, the gaps in access between the rich and poor and between young women and men, were found to be

particularly wide-implying that expansion has primarily benefited the elite (Ilie & Rose, 2016). Therefore, an interplay between these inequalities implies that an increase in access to higher education may consequentially benefit privileged groups in society while disadvantaged groups are left in a precarious position if measures are not put in place to address these inequalities.

Low participation levels for the poorest students in primary education and secondary education means that achieving access to higher education is likely to be extremely difficult. For these countries to achieve the desired threshold in higher education, policy attention needs to take a balanced stance to equitable expansion of the education system across all levels of education. This holds true for access in developing countries, where some students would either fail or make it through to higher education depending on their performance in their previous secondary school, socio-economic status, educational attainment of parents and where they are geographically located, provided they have the necessary capital basis to convert resources into capabilities and functionings (McCowan, 2013; Schendel & McCowan, 2015; Nelson, 2016; Asamoah, 2017).

Studies in South Africa show that when completion rates are disaggregated by race and class, both black and coloured[3] students also remain vulnerable to uneven patterns of success upon gaining entry to university (Calitz, Walker & Wilson-Strydom, 2016: Pillay, 2019). Given the above situation, these students are likely to face barriers to academic engagement in higher education. Again, these students have a significantly higher chance of leaving university before completing their qualifications, while the quality of their educational experience may also be compromised (Calitz, Walker, & Wilson-Strydom, 2016). Walker (2019) picks up this debate by emphasising the need to understand the conditions which unequally positioned students have to construct mobility pathways by first gaining access to higher education. For these students without access, social mobility

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[3] The terminology refers to an identity of a racial group in South Africa who were signified and positioned as a group that was both neither and between White and Black (Pirtle, 2021).
The term 'Coloured' was used by the apartheid government as an official category to describe people of mixed race. Assigning citizens as 'Coloured' was a political categorisation, not a biological determination. The designation Coloured was also challenged by groups within the anti-apartheid struggle for its divisive intent of separating Coloureds from other Black people namely Africans and Indians (Walters & Jansen, 2022:05)

cannot follow, nor can the wider public good of higher education materialise (Walker, 2019).

Another vulnerable group of youth that faces exclusion in higher education are students with disability. Higher education provides a means to meaningful employment opportunities to all people including those with disabilities. It is, however, students with disabilities who often experience limited access to higher education opportunities and subsequent career opportunities (Mosalagae & Bekker, 2021). The few students who access higher education face challenges (Mutanga, 2017). This limited access is mostly attributed to avoidable constraints they face as they navigate through different educational structures at lower levels (Mutanga, 2018). According to Sachs and Schreuer (2011) opportunities for inclusion of students in the United States, Great Britain and Israel are estimated at 8%-14%. In Africa only 1% of students with disabilities are enrolled in higher education (Ngwena et al., 2014). These low enrolment rates suggest challenges of inequitable access in higher education for students with disabilities both globally and in Africa. In Southern Africa, there are difficulties not just with enrolment but also with epistemological exclusion due to inaccessible curricula and unequal resource distribution in higher education institutions (Mosalagae & Bekker, 2021).

In Botswana students with disabilities make up 1.9% of the higher education enrolment according to the Botswana Human Resources Council Statistics (Mosalagae & Bekker, 2021:2). This statistic illustrates the low enrolment number of students with disabilities in higher education (Eide & Mmatli, 2015), and does not address the potential concern of epistemological access within the higher education institutions once access is gained.

Similarly, first generation students face exclusion in higher education. They may struggle to navigate the bureaucratic and social systems of higher education institutions, from understanding academic policies to seeking out support services like tutoring or counseling. Without a family member familiar with college processes, these students may feel overwhelmed and isolated. However, social support contributes to their persistence and success in higher education (Motsabi, Diale & Van Zyl, 2020).

Owing to the mentioned factors, there is a need to recognise the unique circumstances of each group in policy measures for equal participation in higher education. There is a clear indication that in order to close these gaps in higher education achievement, there is a need to expand access at lower levels of the education cycle. Widening access particularly at primary and secondary education levels for all social groups, while at the same time extending equitable opportunities in higher levels of education, is likely to benefit marginal youth.

My study aims to investigate access to higher education for rural youth by taking into account the structural arrangements that constrain or enable access for rural populations. Research that focuses on gaps in post-secondary education has largely overlooked the disparities in enrolment by rurality (Koricich et al., 2018; Douglas & Allen, 2023). As a result, little is known about access to higher education for rural youth in the context of Botswana, including their experience with arrangements that constrain and enable access. In this study I attempt to extend the literature by addressing this gap.

2.3 CONTEXTUALISING ACCESS TO HIGHER EDUCATION

Many studies have dealt with the concept of access (including equity) to higher education from various contexts (McCowan, 2016; Durowaiye & Khan, 2017; Asamoah, 2017). In my study access to higher education is positioned to reflect opportunities that enable youth to enter institutions of higher learning. Access reflects how programmes and policies are framed by different systems, structures and institutions to create an enabling environment for youth from different communities to participate in undergraduate programmes at universities. It is through exploring issues of access to higher education that I attempt to highlight how rural youth use their agency to negotiate access to higher education, in order to have the capability to pursue options that make meaning in their lives (Katusiime, 2014).

Education can be meaningful if all youth are given an equal opportunity to make choices to pursue higher education. Existing literature on access to higher education indicates that generally an 'education gap' exists between the rural youth and mainstream youth. More broadly, the rural context presents enormous challenges as it has a negative impact

on the rural youth, particularly those aspiring to progress to university (Mathebula, 2019). This will be discussed in more detail below. These challenges may in part be due to poor achievement in secondary schools. This accounts for variations in attendance, low attainment levels linked to perceptions of barriers to higher education transition, and the subsequent lack of engagement in learning (Younger et al., 2019), reflecting a complex causal phenomenon. Below I discuss the multi-dimensional aspect of access in relation to rural youth; levels at which access is regulated and negotiated by rural youth (Stauber & Parreira do Amaral, 2015). For example, at entry point access is negotiated at information levels so as to transition from school to university. Access is also navigated or negotiated during study at university. The aspects discussed in detail below relate to rural youth.

2.3.1 Access regulated through information

International research indicates that access to university is strongly shaped by having the right kind of information from the right people, good schooling and supportive teachers who form and encourage higher education aspirations, and by families who know about higher education (Walker, 2018). However, there is not enough research on the mediating effects of rurality on higher education (Trahar, Timmis, Lucas & Naidoo, 2020). At the entry point to higher education, rural youth negotiate information deficits. They are likely to have limited access to relevant and adequate information concerning career options and which universities to apply to (McMillan & Barrie, 2012; Barnejee, 2018; Joshi & Bakshi, 2019). The rural school setting may fail to prepare students adequately (Wilson-Strydom, 2015), to know which university programmes to apply for, including how to go about the application process. Information about the actual application process and higher education funding opportunities may be limited as well (Martinez-Vargas, Walker & Mkwananzi, 2019; Walker & Mathebula, 2019). Equally, families may also not be in a position to help their children to access relevant information because they may not be familiar with expectations and requirements of post-secondary education procedures. Effectively the low socio-economic status of the rural youth and poorly resourced public schools compounds the process of access to higher education (Walker & Mathebula, 2019). This position leaves rural youth with limited opportunities.

Evidence also exists that while contact with information about higher education is essential, its lack does not limit access by itself (Walker et al., 2022). There are examples of individuals who despite having no access to information networks and supportive school systems, were able to create a pathway to higher education where none exists for themselves and their family (Walker, 2018). However, under such circumstances, access was achieved under constrained conditions of possibility (Walker et al, 2022).

A study conducted by Denhere (2013) affirms the position that many disadvantaged students have no access to information technology such as computers and internet connectivity which could fulfil an important function of exposing them to the outside world, including different career choices. Walker et al., (2022) found that many qualifying rural and township youth are unable to access university due to a wide education information gap. They posit that information influences access, from decision-making about subject choices at secondary school, the university application process or admission requirements. However, a pertinent question is whether or not institutions of higher education and other structures have a mandate for reaching out to rural communities to empower youth with tools to help them access opportunities that can help them to lead lives they have reason to value. Based on the consideration for the capabilities approach, increasing access to information as a resource enhances rural youth's capabilities to access higher education (Robeyns, 2018). In light of these, I make a case that information is an important capability that has the potential to empower rural youth to access post-secondary education.

2.3.2 Access regulated through financial resources

Access to information about higher education alone may not be enough for rural youth without the financial aspect. Monetary resources are required to pay for application fees, transport to university, tuition, accommodation as well as acquisition of important items like a laptop and other study materials (Walker & Mathebula, 2019). In other instances, finances are required to pay for the actual entry tests or examination (Walker & Mathebula, 2019). Financial resources are an important asset in the general upkeep of an individual to fit within their new academic environment. Without this important asset, students from low-income background may fail to meet the financial demands of access

to higher education. Thus, affordability lies at the heart of rural disadvantage in higher education access (Chankseliani, Gorgodze, Janashia & Kurakbayev, 2020). Lower income for rural people means they cannot afford the cost of higher education, putting them at a financial disadvantage as opposed to their non-rural counterparts (Kilpatrick et al., 2019). A material basis creates an effective opportunity to participate in higher education while money barriers generate exclusions (Walker et al., 2022).

2.3.3 Access regulated through academic standards

Academic achievement determines access to higher education. Lower levels of prior academic attainment may work against the rural poor and the disadvantaged as they tend to have poor attainment levels at key stages prior to progressing to higher education (Barnejee, 2018; Chowdry et al., 2013, Walker et al., 2022). Given that universities have set criteria for admission, low achievement may be problematic for rural youth who do not meet the minimum requirements, subsequently resulting in exclusion. The academic aspect of access also relates to engagement or participation within the university environment. Rural youth may struggle to meet the demands of the new academic environment, especially the aspect of having to study in English. Moreover, there is the challenge of being able to think at theoretical levels and relating knowledge with different aspects (Cross & Atinde, 2015).

The ability to engage critically with academic literature as well as writing academically is easily manoeuvred by students who are fluent in the English language (Cross & Atinde, 2015). Being confronted with the challenges to communicate in English with their lecturers and peers from non-rural settings, as well as dealing with using technology such as computers may cause intimidation and anxiety for rural students resulting in disengagement as well as alienation (Cross & Atinde, 2015).

2.3.4 Arrangements constraining access to higher education for rural youth

Research has shown that widening access to higher education can deliver benefits to individuals, societies and economies (Barnejee, 2018; Kilpatrick et al., 2019), however the existence of different arrangements has made higher education inaccessible to other social groups. The discussion that follows, highlights some of the arrangements that

constrain access to higher education for rural youth, as well as critically reflecting on how these arrangements interact with youth agency. Attention is given to the structural arrangements that shape educational trajectories for marginalised youth (Danic, 2015).

2.3.5 Structural arrangements

Social structures of race and social class still determine access to education (Walker, 2019), to an extent that parents of low socio-economic status are likely to send their children to poorly resourced schools within their locality. Similarly, parents with no history of higher education, are less likely to encourage their children to pursue higher education, thus rural youth's choices about career options are limited to what they are familiar with. Theron (2017) carried out a study of black South African males whose career aspirations were informed by their parents' career ambitions. In disadvantaged situations parents' aspirations tend to have a huge influence in shaping what career paths their children aspire to as compared to situations where children come from more privileged backgrounds (Theron, 2017). Ultimately this arrangement has implications for rural youth and their access to a higher education experience. Aspirations and agency may also affect rural youth's propensity to achieve higher education success (Hart, 2012; Hart, 2016; Adamson, 2022). However, taking into context the issue of resource constraints, aspirations may be brittle with low agency as the outcome (Walker & Mkwananzi, 2015).

2.3.5.1 Low academic expectations of students by teachers and schools

Youth from low socio-economic background may lack the necessary encouragement to aspire for higher education from those around them (for example, teachers and family as well as community), arguably because these people may not believe students possess the pre-requisite social and cultural capitals to make it in higher education. A study by Koricich, et al., (2018) indicated that, relative to their non-rural counterparts, rural students have decreased odds of attending highly selective institutions including those that conduct research and confer degrees. This may be due to the social class landscape that prevents particular groups of people from accessing higher education particularly more elite universities (Reay, 2016; Reay, 2018). I draw conclusions from a study conducted among first year students who had been accepted into a Foundation Year at Oxford. The

study aimed to explore how the cultural and academic experiences of students impacted on their decision to access a prestigious university (O'Sullivan, Robson & Winters, 2019). Key findings detailed students' experiences in relation to the events prior to the actual process of applying to the university, up to the point of the application process (O'Sullivan et al., 2019). These focused on how they chose the university, as well as the factors that supported or inhibited their choices. It emerged that students believed the school system and wider educational structures in which they were engaged were constraining their decisions concerning their higher education study (O'Sullivan et al., 2019). The authors posit that the school inhibited students' aspirations and potential to excel, as well as failed to provide the necessary support in relation to application procedures to a prestigious university.

The narratives were also reported to be indicative of instances where students were not challenged enough and discouraged from aiming too high in terms of university options (O'Sullivan et al., 2019). Their confidence to compete in an unequal system was also affected by the school environment. However, in spite of these structural constraints, students displayed a strong sense of agency in order to overcome the systemic and structural barriers to higher education (O'Sullivan et al., 2019). Reay (2018) highlights that the failure of the education system to provide the necessary support to these students, illuminates the failure of the educational system in the UK to provide a level playing field to support working class young people who are considered successful in their studies. She further argues that the small minority that is able to successfully navigate access into prestigious universities still faces discrimination, set-backs, low expectations and some level of social exclusion (Reay, 2018).

In light of the above observation, Danic (2015) concludes that arrangements are systematically created in order to constrain access to equal participation in higher education for particular groups. These arrangements aim to keep socially disadvantaged members of society at the margins of equal participation. Creating awareness regarding these educational trajectories brings to light the idea that access to higher education should not be left to an individual's sole responsibility. This, therefore, means creating

enabling environments that support aspirations for higher education amongst rural youth to enhance and potentially increase their opportunities to flourish.

2.3.5.2 Lack of cultural capital to fit in

When students lack access to forms of cultural capital that are valued by the dominant middle classes, their educational opportunities and achievements are greatly reduced (O' Sullivan et al., 2019). Cultural capital entails familiarity with the dominant culture within a society, especially the ability to use and understand what is termed 'educated language' (Gibson et al., 2019). The possession of cultural capital has proved to vary with social class, yet the education systems operate with the notion of possession of cultural capital, disregarding the difference in social class (Gibson et al., 2019). Basically, it means that differently positioned individuals operate from a different set of cultural capitals. Lack of cultural capitals poses a challenge for lower class students (rural youth included) to succeed in their education journey. The notion of lack of recognised and valued cultural capitals works against their aspirations for higher education, as it works on the assumption that the students are not good enough or capable of achieving access to university, especially a prestigious one (O' Sullivan et al., 2019; Cross & Atinde, 2015).

2.3.5.3 Lack of knowledge about career opportunities

Limited knowledge about career choice pathways constrain rural youth from attaining access to higher education. A few studies have investigated rural youth career aspirations (Joshi & Bakshi, 2019) and how the rural context shapes career choices (Carrico, Matusovich & Paretti, 2019). In an investigation on rural youth career aspirations of rural high school seniors in Northernwest Iowa, the youth identified financial challenges, lack of knowledge about career opportunities and low academic grades as the most important barriers to meeting their desired educational and occupational goals (Joshi & Bakshi, 2019). In a similar analysis on youth aspirations of 120 rural youth in South India, findings indicated that rural youth aspired to study up to Grade 10 (26.7%), Grade 12, (20.8%), bachelor's degree (25%), and master's degree (15.8%), with their occupational aspirations skewed towards farming (60.8%), office work (17.5%) factory work (9.2%), and business (6.7%) (Joshi & Bakshi, 2019). In rural South Africa, similar patterns were

observed; youth perceived a lack of guidance as a constraining factor in inhibiting aspirations to successfully access higher education (Maila & Ross, 2018). One is inclined to attribute such aspirations to the rural context, where there is an absence of exposure to other career opportunities such as those in STEM programmes. In this case, rural youth' career aspirations are influenced by what they are limited to within their environment. Again, rural schools are distant from urban or metropolitan areas, meaning that rural schools are less likely to be visited by urban university recruiters and rural students are also not able to visit them during open days even if they could afford to attend (Walker & Mathebula, 2019). These factors are likely to affect rural youth' aspirations to access higher education.

2.4 NAVIGATING CONSTRAINTS TO GAIN ACCESS TO HIGHER EDUCATION

Equal access to higher education does not always guarantee equal opportunities. I discuss how rural youth and other disadvantaged groups use agency to navigate access to higher education within the disadvantage of structural and institutional constraints.

2.4.1 Self-determination

At a social level, rural youth develop their own network skills of resilience and determination (capitals) to emancipate themselves from poverty (Cross & Atinde 2015). These capitals are 'compensatory capitals' (Cross & Atinde, 2015), meaning that the compensatory capitals make up for the deficit of the necessary capitals rural youth are expected to have, to transition smoothly to higher education life. Students from disadvantaged backgrounds bring along 'rich' assets with which they are able to navigate access to higher education successfully in a constrained environment. For instance, these assets are in the form of self-reliance, adaptability, self-motivation, hard-work and ability to work independently as well as the will to succeed against all odds (Maila & Ross, 2018). Altogether, these assets reflect determination which equips students with the capacity to respond positively and productively to constraints within the higher education space, thus access and aspirations for success become a possibility (Cross & Atinde, 2015). By mobilising their capabilities, rural youth are able to succeed in the pursuit of higher education by transcending expectations, hence emancipate themselves and their families

from poverty (Walker & Mathebula, 2019). There are always examples of individuals who successfully complete their higher education despite coming from lower social strata (Walker, 2019), indicating that determination is an issue of individual agency.

2.4.2 Resilience

Resilience is described as the creation of ideas which aid adaptation in a healthy manner and helps individuals to function positively against forms of adversities (Southwick, Bonanno, Masten, Panter-Brick & Yehuda, 2014). Another perspective of resilience is explained as the existence of certain factors which ensure security and enable individuals to endure, withstand and overcome challenges (Uleanya & Yu, 2019). Making judgement from the above explanations, resilience cannot exist or be conceptualised in contexts that are risk free (Theron, 2012; Masten, 2001). Much research around the concept of resilience has been carried out in psychological contexts, where significant adversity has taken various forms and shapes (Meyer & Mueser, 2011; Resnick, Guille, McCauley & Kilpatrick, 2011; Buckner & Waters, 2011; Johnson & Galea, 2011). Thus, understanding resilience as an important process that encourages people towards healthy functioning, despite circumstances that predict unhealthy functioning could be used to enable others in similar dire situations to adapt (Theron, 2012). In the context of higher education resilience can be understood as being successful in academic endeavours against all odds (Wilson-Strydom, 2011; Mutanga, 2017). In this sense resilience, entails being able to navigate academic pursuits, persevere academically, to be responsive to educational opportunities and to be adaptive to limitations (Mutanga, 2019).

By demonstrating resilience in their academic pursuits, rural youth can overcome barriers such as resource limitations, inadequate educational infrastructure, and challenging socio-economic contexts. In situations of setbacks, they are able to navigate the setbacks, stay motivated, and maintain a focus on their educational goals despite the constraining conditions. Through resilience rural youth can potentially challenge status quo to advocate for changes in policies and practices that perpetuate inequalities in higher education. They can engage in activism to raise awareness about the challenges they face, mobilise support for equitable educational opportunities, and hold institutions as well as government accountable for addressing systemic barriers.

Although it is important that individuals exercise personal agency or agency freedoms, resilience is influenced by clusters of individual, relational and broader social factors (Ungar, 2012). Therefore, in seeking to understand rural youth resilience, we must understand the various adversity spaces in which their resilience is exercised. Based on this understanding, I consider rural youth to have the capabilities to apply themselves to develop dispositions by which they are able to navigate access to higher education successfully in spite of the circumstances they face. Therefore, gaining access without continuous support may not necessarily allow for the success of such students (Ng et al., 2015; Pillay, 2019). This perspective illustrates that resilience is not an individual project but rather achieved through the interaction of individual agency and their capacity to draw on resources at their disposal. Of relevance to my study is how the different resources at rural youth' disposal help them to successfully adapt to disruptions that constrain access to higher education.

In light of the above, rural youth's navigational capability and their resilience once at university should not absolve universities from providing the educational and social support to foster the capabilities students have reason to value (Walker & Mathebula, 2019). This would enable them to succeed in their courses of study. Universities ought to work towards reducing rather than increasing educational gaps between rural youth and non-rural youth.

2.5 INTERVENTIONS SUPPORTING EQUITABLE ACCESS TO HIGHER EDUCATION

As part of the agenda for increasing access and participation for disadvantaged groups some developed countries have embarked on strategies that create multi-pathways into university and tertiary education (Barnejee, 2018; Kilpatrick et al., 2019). For instance, the Widening Participation (WP) to higher education strategy is prioritised both by government and the higher education sector as a means to raise educational aspirations and attainment of under-represented groups in the UK (Banerjee, 2018). Barnejee (2018) maintains that the targeted support provided to these groups ensure access to higher education, including full participation by way of completing course programmes and employment. The outreach programmes involve schools and universities collaborating to offer early interventions of improving academic performance of poor students and

providing mentorship as a means to increasing their chances of applying and succeeding in higher education. In Australia, a project evaluating three university outreach programmes that were designed to align with rural contexts identified aspects that were effective in addressing factors of rurality, giving direction that higher education was attainable for rural students (Kilpatrick et al., 2019).

In designing outreach programmes these universities consider the social and cultural aspects related to rurality settings. In addition, affirmative action programmes have also been implemented in the US to address low rates of black students in universities, in the absence of which numbers would have dropped (Mendes, Souza, & Waltenberg, 2016). Mendes et al., (2016) confirm that affirmative action policies have also yielded results in South Africa, resulting in the numbers of black students increasing, for example, at the University of Cape Town from 13 % to 49% between 1982 and 2004. However, the findings do not offer insight with regards to numbers (percentage) of those who were disadvantaged or from rural areas. Being black does not always imply disadvantage. Augmenting the above interventions with facilitation of financial, social and physical resources can further enhance full participation of rural youth in higher education.

2.6 CAPABILITIES AND HIGHER EDUCATION

Several studies have argued for the capability approach as the most robust approach to evaluate experiences and well-being of disadvantaged youth in accessing higher education (Wilson-Strydom, 2011; Walker, 2015; Walker & Mkwananzi, 2015; Walker & Mathebula, 2019; Calitz, 2019; Walker, 2019). Again, capability scholars recognise the critical role education plays for the achievement of a life an individual has reason to value (Ribeiro, 2015). The capability approach enables us to think of education as a core capability, one that is important and impacts on the expansion of human freedoms (Walker, 2016; Dejaeghere, 2020; Mackenzie, 2020). As a fertile functioning (Wolff & de-Shalit, 2007), education serves both intrinsic and instrumental purposes. In the context of this study, acquiring a university education expands rural youth's freedoms beyond their environment. If rural youth are educated they are likely to have access to employment opportunities anywhere in the country (Walker & Mkwananzi, 2015) including other places beyond their countries.

Unterhalter (2009) urges that while the main aim of education is to develop human flourishing, it should not aim for the development of skills (human capital) only but also develop practical reason. People must have the freedom to decide - in an informed way - what to value and how to pursue it in terms of choosing capabilities rather than having someone else decide (Dejaeghere & Walker, 2021). In essence, gaining a university degree allow people to fully function in all areas of their lives. Not only does being educated allow individuals to make choices about aspects of their lives that matter, it provides them with more and better opportunities to find gainful employment, and it also expands their freedoms to engage productively in the cultural, social and political affairs of their communities. Hence the capability to participate in higher education is central in my study. It is through having access to higher education, that rural youth's other capabilities can be developed or further enhanced.

The capability approach has also been used in research and policy analysis across all levels of education (Dejaeghere & Walker, 2021). The approach has also been operationalised to understand and evaluate how capabilities fostered through education can redress inequalities or promote justice and well-being (Dejaeghere & Walker, 2021). For instance, the capability approach has widely been operationalised in studies across countries in East and South Asia, Europe, North and South America as well as Southern and Eastern Africa in areas of early childhood studies, basic and secondary education, non-formal, vocational and higher education as well as teacher professional development (Dejaeghere & Walker, 2021). While research on the capability approach has expanded significantly, there is less attention on rural students in sub-Saharan Africa.

Walker and Mathebula (2019) details the experience of rural youth migrating to urban universities in South Africa. Using the concepts of capabilities, functionings and monetary resources and capitals they bring attention to common factors which shape rural youth's agency in accessing an urban university (Walker & Mathebula, 2019). The students' narratives indicate the importance of agency in navigating unfamiliar spaces of intimidating institutions. The combination of rural living and low-income influences students' university experiences, though it may not completely define them.

Wilson-Strydom (2015) makes reference to a host of environmental factors that may influence the ability to effectively participate in the learning process at a university; arrangements that effectively enable or constrain participation in higher education can be found within and outside both the personal and institutional spaces. Calitz (2019) addresses the inequalities in higher education and structural barriers to participation through detailing the experience of eight (8) students from vulnerable background at a South Africa university. Their lives prior to university show how access to and use of resources at home and school both enabled and constrained their agency and freedom (McLean, 2019). While it is evident that the students bring resources to university and have clearly achieved the capability for entry to university, the combination of socio-economic inequalities with constraining school environments put limits on their freedom to pursue alternatives (Calitz, 2019).

At university students experienced structural constraints that affect their capability to participate. The constraints are framed as: individualising failure rather than recognising what arrangements the university ought to make, failure to support students' critical engagement with learning, lack of consultation with students, little contact with lecturers resulting in alienation from lecturers and other pedagogical arrangements, misrecognition of students' academic abilities and resources leading to a deficit view (Calitz, 2019). Thus, Calitz (2019) concludes that it is important to consider how socio-economic vulnerability builds up without interventions as well as having a sophisticated understanding of how socio-economic disadvantage accumulates if it is not disrupted and why culture and pedagogy and curricula are needed. My study considers questions that relate to capabilities that can be used to disrupt inequalities for achievement of greater social inclusion in and through access to higher education for rural youth. I ask questions about arrangements that enable or constrain rural students from engaging fully in the learning process in higher education.

2.7 SUMMARY: IDENTIFYING THE GAP IN THE LITERATURE

From the literature presented in this section, a case can be made that access to higher education for rural youth is influenced and shaped by many arrangements, some of which are socio-economic, structural or institutional. Literature indicates that individuals from their position of disadvantage bring assets and dispositions that they utilise in order to navigate access to higher education within multidimensional constraints. Additionally, access to higher education remains elusive for most first-generation students faced with a host of constraints including resource deprivation; they have a significantly higher chance of not entering university or completing their degrees (Pillay, 2019). Interventions and measures addressing unequal access for the disadvantaged ought to recognise that without other forms of support, full participation cannot be fully achieved, hence policy measures of widening participation ought to address diverse groups differently. Individual capabilities and resources at one's disposal should also be taken into consideration; people do not rise from nothing to achieve their goals and aspirations.

Furthermore, there is little information available on the experiences of rural youth in relation to the arrangements that constrain access to higher education as well as how they negotiate access to higher education in Botswana. According to literature, inequalities in access to higher education persistently remain for disfranchised groups despite the expansion of higher education (Makwinja, 2017; Makwinja, 2020; UNDP, 2021). Studying access to higher education for rural youth in the context of Botswana is therefore significant. Firstly, low higher education enrollment has a detrimental impact on human capital development (Adedeji & Campbell, 2013), hence higher education is significant in fostering the knowledge and skills necessary for a knowledge economy. Higher education not only prepares individuals for high-skilled jobs but also encourages innovation. Given Botswana's youthful population, enhancing access in higher education is crucial to fulfill the goals outlined in Vision 2036, which aims for a knowledge-based economy (Republic of Botswana, 2016). Moreover, there is the likelihood of Botswana losing global competitiveness due to low transition rates to higher education arising from prevalent failure rates at the senior secondary school level (Suping, 2022:10). Suping also notes that poverty and inequality are likely to continue increasing as students who

fail to progress from junior secondary to senior secondary schools and from the latter to higher education institutions find themselves without any employment or useful skills to help themselves. It is apparent that most studies that examine access to higher education for different groups have focussed on understanding barriers to access to higher education from the dimension of low socio-economic background (Ilie & Rose, 2016; Ilie, Rose & Vignoles, 2021) and as such have not involved rural youth especially in the context of developing countries such as Botswana, yet little is known about the constraints to access for the rural youth including the enablers of access. This study therefore seeks to contribute to existing knowledge in this area.

The study also seeks to contribute to existing knowledge from the capability approach dimension. The capability approach goes beyond looking at education from a single lens, though it accepts the human capital function of education, it considers education as having a multidimensional role. The capability approach thus understands education as having intersected intrinsic, instrumental and democratic functions (Dejaeghere & Walker, 2021). It also shifts focus from commodities and resources to a broader understanding that encompasses diverse capabilities people have to choose the life they want to lead. As a matter of social justice the capability approach asks if people have the same opportunities to be the kind of person they want to be and to do what they want (Dejaeghere & Walker, 2021). In essence the approach questions whether all individuals have the same opportunities to become the kind of person they desire to be and to engage in activities that they find meaningful and fulfilling. It recognises that individuals have diverse capabilities, the substantive (real) freedoms or abilities to achieve various functionings and that these capabilities serve as the informational basis for evaluating and comparing individuals' well-being and opportunities (Robeyns, 2011).

The capability approach thus provides tools and frameworks within which education might be conceptualised and evaluated with regards to social justice. Given the context of Botswana were economic opportunities are skewed and wide disparities persist in higher education (UNDP, 2021), the capability approach could provide a more nuanced understanding of how factors that contributes to limited access for rural youth work to reproduce inequalities, thus call for formulation of just and inclusive policies for rural

youth. It is crucial to enhance the skills and opportunities of young people in rural areas so they can select from various a combination of pathways towards a fulfilling and successful life (Robeyns, 2011; Dejaeghere & Walker, 2021). Reflectively, rural youth should not be viewed as completely helpless but rather be viewed as beings of moral worth possessing agency (Sen, 1992). Therefore, it becomes imperative to address constraints that block rural youth from exercising their agency to realise their aspirations. Rural youth also need to be regarded similarly to other citizens of Botswana, who are entitled to actively engage in what they have the capability and freedom to be and do (Sen,1992).

The next chapter discusses the capability approach and how it is relevant to my study.

CHAPTER 3: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

3.1 INTRODUCTION

Given the context of constraints in access to higher education for rural youth as described in Chapter 2, in this chapter I consider the capability approach as a relevant theory to be used for this study, although the issue of access to higher education for rural and marginalised youth can be theorised and interpreted from various standpoints. I find the capability approach more suitable as it is founded on the principles of social justice (freedoms, equality, fairness, and dignity) and human development which focus on both agency and structure in redressing unequal arrangements (Walker, 2015). My study seeks to evaluate access to higher education, looking at structural arrangements that constrain or enhance capability formation for rural youth. As such, the approach is appropriate for evaluating structural arrangements as well as policies and legal frameworks, by taking into account individual differences in terms of their ability to convert available resources at their disposal into valuable capabilities and functionings. According to research access to higher education for disadvantaged and marginalised groups is influenced and shaped by many arrangements, some of which are socio-economic, structural or institutional (Sen,1999; Calitz, 2019; Walker, 2019).

Rural youth experience constraints in accessing higher education, yet research that focuses on access to post-secondary education has paid less attention on enrolment by rurality. As a result, less is known about access to higher education for rural youth. This chapter presents the theoretical framework of the study, outlining key tenents of the approach that are relevant in evaluating arrangements that constrain rural youth from gaining access to higher education in the context of Botswana.The next section provides a detailed discussion of the capability approach.

The capability approach was pioneered during the 1980s and 1990s by Nobel Prize winning economist Amartya Sen (Sen,1999, Wilson-Strydom, 2015). Through the capability approach, Sen sought to provide an alternative to the dominant utilitarian and neoliberal approaches to development and well-being (Wilson-Strydom, 2015). The basic idea was to shift thinking about development from material wealth to non-material goods

or commodities. According to Sen, well-being was to be measured in non-monetary terms. Originating in welfare economics, the capability approach is underpinned by a commitment to human development and social justice and as such focuses on reducing poverty (Sen,1999; McLean, 2018). The capability approach has also been expanded upon by feminist Martha Nussbaum, who incorporated philosophical perspectives into the approach (McLean, 2018). Nussbaum's notion of human entitlements became central in later versions of her writings on the capability approach (Clark, 2013). The current study references the capability approach in relation to both Sen and Nussbaum's ideas and other scholars who have found the approach to be relevant in education.

3. 2 THE CAPABILITY APPROACH

The capability approach is a moral framework that proposes that arrangements should primarily be evaluated according to the extent of freedoms people have to achieve functionings and goals they value (Sen,1993; Robeyns, 2006; Hart, 2009; Clark, 2013; Calitz, Walker & Wilson-Strydom, 2016; Calitz, 2019). The capability approach provides an alternative to a materialist approach to human development that only measures progress based on material values and take no notice of other aspects of well-being. Human development, grounded on the capability approach, focuses on the enhancement of people's real freedoms to choose the kind of lives they have reason to value (Kuhumba, 2017). Essentially the capability approach emphasises people's capabilities; what people are effectively able to do and be, within a comparative frame of reference (Sen, 1999; Flores-Crespo, 2007).

In essence what counts as a good life or flourishing is not the material resources, but rather the freedoms an individual possesses in order to consciously choose what he or she wants to do or be in life. In Sen's view, the well-being of an individual can be determined by evaluating the important aspects of the being of the individual which are perceived from the standpoint of the well-being of that person (Sen,1993). These aspects of being are linked to what individuals want to pursue or value doing. Theorising the capability approach in relation to higher education offers a justice-focused perspective that takes into account actual experiences (lived experiences) and societal systems. However, the relevance of the capability approach in education studies is that it enables

a more nuanced evaluation, based on what students and their families have reason to value, and the freedom to achieve these (Mukwambo, 2019).

In the context of my study the concept of human development refers to expanding rural youth's opportunities through higher education; thus, the approach asks whether students have access to a high-quality education system and have genuine opportunities to real access and the necessary support to achieve what they would want to be and do in their lives. Core concepts upon which the approach is based (Wilson-Strydom, 2015) include capabilities, functionings, conversion factors, agency freedom, well-being and adaptive preferences. The understanding of these concepts is crucial to better understand access to higher education and how the capabilities of rural youth can be expanded.

3.3   COMPONENTS OF THE CAPABILITY APPROACH

3.3.1. Capabilities

Capabilities can be defined as real possibilities and opportunities for leading a life which a person has reason to value (Sen, 1999; Boni & Walker, 2013). Capabilities are what people are actually able to do or be (Nussbaum, 2011). Expressed as genuine opportunities or freedoms to realise functionings, capabilities can also be understood as freedoms to choose the kind of life an individual values (Robeyns, 2006; Walker & Unterhalter, 2018; McLean, 2018). The core characteristic of the capability approach is its focus on what people are effectively able to do and to be; that is, their capabilities (Robeyns, 2005:94). Examples of capabilities may include being able to be well-nourished, being able to be healthy, and being able to have good social connections. The capability approach enables us to think of higher education access in terms of expanding people's freedoms to access university and courses or programmes of their choice (Walker, 2019). The capability to achieve functionings therefore reflects the person's real opportunities or freedom of choice between possible lifestyles (Sen, 1993; Saito, 2003). Sen urges that our evaluations of well-being and policies should focus on what people are effectively able to do and to be, on the quality of their life, and on removing obstacles in their lives so that they have more freedom to live the kind of life they are proud to lead (Robeyns, 2005). Robeyns further points out that in terms of the capability approach,

policies are evaluated according to their impact on people's capabilities. For instance, it considers whether people are being healthy, and whether the resources necessary for this capability are present, such as clean water, access to health facilities and basic knowledge on health issues (Robeyns, 2005). In this study the evaluation also pays attention to the material well-being (resources) of rural youth while at university. Students' material well-being must be of central concern in any policy dialogues about equity and higher education (Walker et al., 2022). However, material and non-material resources are not the only primary means to people's opportunities, there are other circumstances that also determine the expansion of people's freedoms, for example, in the context of this study, social structures of the home community and school.

3.3.2 Functionings

Functionings are regarded as the realised states of 'beings' or 'doings' or practices individuals undertake in their everyday lives (Walker & Unterhalter, 2018). Wilson-Strydom (2015:46) defines functionings as "achieved outcomes, the things that a person is able to be or do". Examples of things that constitute beings and doings a person is able to achieve include being nourished, being healthy, having supportive relationships or being well educated (McLean, 2018). According to Sen (1993) these may be valued by all for obvious reasons. In my study, an achieved functioning includes having a university degree. The distinction between achieved functionings and capabilities lies between the realised and the effectively possible (Boni & Walker, 2013:03). Some functionings may be more complex but are still considered important, for example, individuals may value achieving self-respect or being socially connected (Sen, 1993). For rural youth acquiring a university degree provides instrumental benefits such as having access to employment opportunities as well as non-instrumental benefits such as respect, recognition and dignity.

In Western and non-Western societies, employment is considered to be a contributor to the overall functioning and well-being of individuals (Naidoo & Van Schalkwyk, 2021). Work potentially contributes to human flourishing as it increases well-being across all aspect of the individual's life such as the psychological, social and emotional domains (Keyes, 2002). In this study I look at conditions fundamental to achieving the functioning

of accessing higher education. I assess opportunities and freedoms essential in enabling access to higher education focusing on arrangements whose presence would leave rural youth at a considerable disadvantage (Walter & Unterhalter, 2007). The capability to be educated is regarded as basic in the sense that it has potential to expand other capabilities. In this sense, social and educational arrangements ought to expand people's valuable capabilities (Walker, 2015:280). For instance, acquiring a university education, offers each individual access to a range of opportunities and alternatives to pursue a life they can be proud of. In the context of the current study the absence of opportunities or freedoms to access university education, essentially result in the rural youth having limited freedoms to make choices about pursuing their aspirations. For example, failure to access higher education (Walker & Mkwananzi, 2015:47) might result in "failure of educational aspirations, employment aspirations, failure of income aspirations". In education, the pertinent question is whether or not individuals have genuine freedoms to achieve their valued educational functioning. In the rural context, I look at the available opportunities for deprived communities from which rural students can choose the kind of education they consider to be of value.

From a capabilities perspective, individuals flourish when they are free to choose how they want to function (what they want to do and be) in all areas of their lives. In line with Sen's perspective on education, it can be argued that the mere fact that schools have been availed as a resource does not guarantee academic achievement (Hart, 2019) for the students in rural communities. Hart (2019:584) further highlights that ''it depends on how well-suited the resource is to an individual's needs; for instance, if the language of instruction is not the one the learner wishes to be taught in, or fear sexual harassment school, then the system falls short''. As a result, more attention has to be paid to the type of education that is provided to rural communities in terms of how it expands their choices. It is not enough to provide education, without actually evaluating whether that education can be converted into valued achievements (Unterhalter, 2003). Unterhalter (2014) captures this under the notion of educational equality, urging that equality in education needs to ask or consider the three levels of equalities: equality of what? (for example, resources which enable access to higher knowledge); equality of whom? (between

working class and middle class students) and equality of how? (for example, teaching which enables confident student identities).

To understand how higher education access may redress social inequalities and enhance individual well-being for rural youth, I explore their capability sets (bundles) within education that foster academic success (Walker & Unterhalter, 2007; Walker, 2019). I use the capability approach to explore the capabilities that matter most for the rural youth as well as how well those capabilities enhance their options to do and be what they have reason to value, in this case achieving access to higher education. The capability approach considers constraints as making it difficult for other people to take advantage of the opportunities available, hence society ought to work to remove barriers that curtail freedoms and prevent rural youth from gaining full access to higher education. Educational and policy reforms have to remove obstacles that constrain educational achievement so that all youth can fully benefit from education.

3.3.3 Well-being

Well-being is understood as human potentials or capabilities and achieved functionings (Wilson-Strydom & Walker, 2015). The well-being of a person can be viewed as an evaluation of the 'wellness' of the person's state of being (Sen,1993). From the capabilities perspective, the evaluation of an individual's well-being, ought to be on the overall wellness of a person's state of being. This evaluation takes into account all aspects of a person's life. Accordingly, "the exercise, then, is that of assessing the constituent elements of the person's being seen from the perspective of her own personal welfare" (Sen, 1993:36). While Sen acknowledges the role of money as an important resource, he is critical of judgements of well-being that is based on how much resources an individual has. Commodities are merely objects which a person might use to improve their well-being (Saito, 2003). Saito (2003) further points to the dimension of freedom as a constituent of well-being. Having the freedom to choose and act freely allows individuals to thrive and flourish. Therefore, in evaluating well-being it is important to consider both capabilities and functionings. In the context of higher education, universities ought to seek to expand ''students' choices to be and do what they value doing and being as students,'' (Wilson-Strydom, 2015:44). Wilson-Strydom (2015) further notes that universities should

be student-centric by having appropriate opportunities that help shape students' lives and study paths.

3.3.4 Agency

Agency can be defined as individuals' capacity to act purposively to make choices in relation to how they wish to lead their lives and effectively act on those choices (Wilson-Strydom, 2015; McLean, 2018). Sen (1993) advances that a person is basically an agent and doer, in pursuit of various objectives and obligations to bring about change. As a doer, the agents actively partake in initiatives to bring change in their own life to achieve that which they value (Walker, 2005). Agency freedom concentrates on what the person is free to do and achieve in pursuit of whatever goals he or she regards as important (Sen, 1985). The individuals' accomplishments can be evaluated based on their own personal values and goals, regardless of whether we only consider outside standards (Wilson-Strydom, 2015). Agency is related to the ideas of having a voice, self-determination, personal autonomy, empowerment (Wilson-Strydom, 2015), and thus the opposite of an individual's agency would be forced as opposed to being autonomous, oppressed instead of being empowered, or passive instead of being active. Agency freedom, therefore, is concerned with the freedom to pursue that which an individual considers to be important for their life. Essentially agency is the means by which freedoms are operationalised, characterised by one's ability to pursue goals that one values or considers important for the life they wish to lead (Lozano et al., 2012; Wilson-Strydom, 2015; Wilson-Strydom & Okkolin, 2016). For this study, agency entails studying hard to achieve academic outcomes and securing a place to study at a university. At university, agency entails taking advantage of the available opportunities offered by the institution and converting them into valued academic outcomes.

In evaluating rural youth's capabilities, I considered the choices or alternatives they have in accessing higher education and the expression of individual agency in making choices about those available alternatives (Walker, 2005). The freedom to determine one's course of action also varies according to existing conditions that constrain or enable agency. These conditions shape each person's capabilities (Walker, 2019). My analysis of access to higher education for rural youth is also extended to include conversion factors; focusing

on the available resources and opportunities that are able to be converted into access for the rural students. The discussion that follows deals with conversion factors in more detail.

3.3.5 Conversion factors

These are the personal, social, and environmental factors that influence capabilities and achieving the life one values (Crocker & Robeyns, 2010). In the context of education, there are conversion factors that can either enhance or diminish students' chances of learning well and stand in the way of them achieving functionings that are important for their educational and personal well-being (Manase, 2020). Personal conversion factors encompass individual (personal) factors that impact on the development of capabilities and the achievement of valued outcomes (Wilson-Strydom, 2015). These include; individual's physical condition, health status, personality, and so on. Social conversion factors relate to social structures and institutions (such as schools, universities) social norms, family norms, gender roles, power relations and so on (Wilson-Strydom, 2015) while environmental conversion factors are factors related to geographical location, for example climate conditions.

The conversion factors have a crucial role in bringing together individual agency and the social context in which that agency is utilised in the realisation of capabilities and functionings. I examine the conversion factors that influence rural youth's expansion of their freedoms to gain access to higher education. In the context of my study, the understanding of enabling environments that expand rural youth's capabilities to access higher education is evaluated through both individually held and structural conditions (Wilson-Strydom & Okkolin, 2016; Robeyns, 2017). The interactions between the two hold the concept of agency and well-being together in a capability approach (Deneulin, 2014). This would mean that conversion factors do not operate in isolation; individuals' freedom to pursue and achieve their goals is always situated within relationships with others (Dejaeghere, 2020). Effectively, this highlights the idea that inequalities are socially and structurally constructed (Dejaeghere, 2020). Therefore, I aim to understand the support and constraints to rural youth's opportunity sets and achievements of valued educational outcomes and livelihoods (Dejaeghere, Wiger & Willemsen, 2016; Dejaeghere, 2019).

From a capability perspective, access is understood as being more than an individual project, but rather intersectionally influenced by both objective and subjective biographies (Walker, 2019). This view represents the argument that an individual's capability to gain educational achievement is also determined by actions and choices of others; these choices are either enabling or constraining. The empirical findings of this study seek to demonstrate that rural youth are unable to succeed in higher education when they lack the necessary material support despite gaining access. The capability approach point to adequate material resources as the means to achieving equal access in higher education (Walker & Wilson-Strydom, 2016; Calitz 2019). This view does not necessarily imply material resources are the only means to achieving the functioning of access.

While capabilities allow each person to choose and exercise a plurality of ways of beings and doings they have reason to value (Walker & Mkwananzi, 2015; Walker, 2019), the actual exercise of these freedoms to make choices would enable a person's options to function, that is actual achievement like being admitted to a university (Calitz, Walker & Wilson-Strydom, 2016; Walker, 2019). However, it remains an issue of concern whether rural youth can convert a bundle of resources such as education (material and non-material aspects) into opportunities for educational achievement, turning their aspirations into choices and actions (Walker & Mkwananzi, 2015). From Sen's understanding of capabilities, carrying out functionings would involve having resources (both material and non-material) and being able to mobilise those resources in line with individual internal conversion factors and deciding to do so, because they are worth pursuing and also enabled by the environment (Lozano et al., 2012).

Effectively, various conversion factors work together depending on individual agency. In exercising agency to access higher education, individuals make use of capitals enabling access and equal participation in higher education. The pertinent question here relates to how external factors such as existing policy measures, institutions or social structures and social abilities determine or shape rural youth's capabilities. I position conversion factors as playing a key function in my study by bringing together rural youth's agency and the social context in which they exercise their agency. Given that individuals differ in many ways, therefore conversion of goods into capabilities varies from person to person

(Sen,1990; Wilson-Strydom, 2015). However, these differences may not necessarily represent some form of inequality. Therefore, I aimed to explore the degree to which different factors are capability enhancing such that rural youth are able to take advantage of those benefits and turn them into educational achievement. For example, I asked questions relating to the source of support rural students have within their different environments; family, school, community and so on and how they have turned the support into resources and opportunities enabling access to higher education. I also asked questions about the unfreedoms that have constrained access to university education for the youth who have not been successful in accessing higher education. Critically, I explore how structural arrangements enable and constrain the conversion of resources into capabilities for equal access to higher education.

My focus is on how rural youth gain access to higher education as well as how they navigate access once at university, given the different contexts within which they find themselves. The interaction between the capability approach concepts is illustrated in the figure *(Figure 3.1)* on the following page.
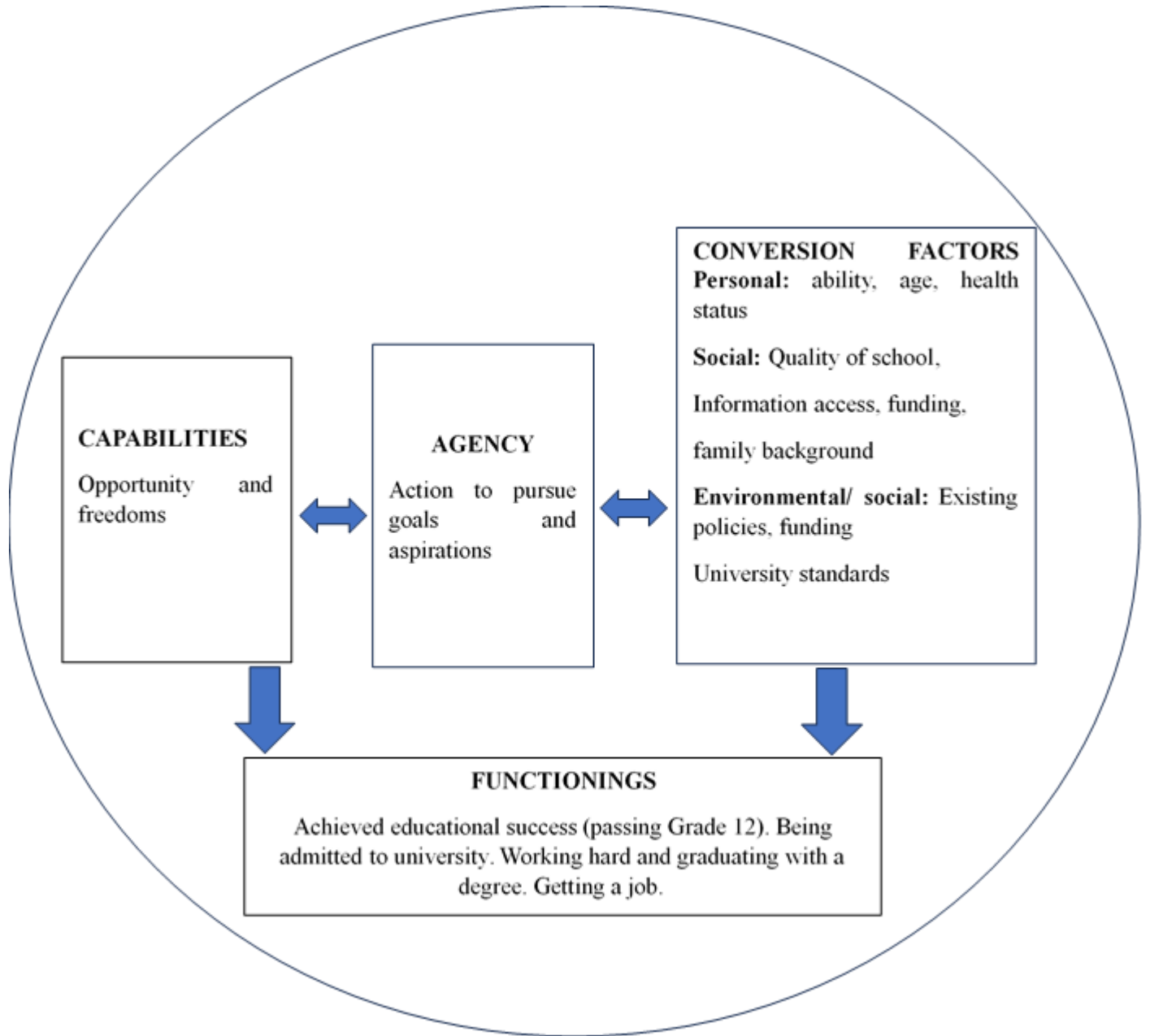
Figure 3.1: Conceptualising the capability framework.

I draw on the above illustrated analytical tools to assess inequalities in access to higher education, to examine both functionings and capabilities of rural youth so that I get a clear picture of how well rural youth are actually doing in terms of capabilities in relation to higher education. Robeyns (2017) urges that the capability approach points to the effects of resources as the means to achieve education, income as well as wealth, and

each person's conversion factors such as structural constraints (social norms, class, race, schooling, university teaching arrangements) shape the conversion of resources into substantive opportunities (freedoms) or capabilities. However, race is not relevant in this study.

In my study, I focused on conversion factors relating to structural constraints such as the schooling environment, asking questions with regard to opportunities in terms of resources rural youth had in school. For instance, resources such as information resources and access to technology are essential for expanding their capability to progress to higher education. I also ask about the conversion factors (social conversion factors) relating to social welfare policies, for example government programmes for higher education that are specifically designed for rural communities. These general factors work out as each person's specific conversion factors shaping the capability set for that individual (Walker & Mathebula, 2019). Conversion factors are neutral in themselves and work out differently for individuals. For example, family can act as both constraint and enabler of rural students' decisions and access to higher education. A family member with a higher education degree and who appreciates the value of education in lifting people out of poverty, may turn things around for a rural student (also depending on the individual agency) by making possible efforts to help the student have the necessary support to gain access to university. While in other cases support may come from a teacher who sees potential in high-achieving students. In all these instances student agency remains an important aspect in capability formation and achievement of aspirations. However, in cases where support is limited, students' opportunities are significantly reduced and access to university may be constrained.

3.3.6 Adaptive preferences

This reflects the observation that in choosing what they will do, how they will spend their time and resources or what kind of life they will lead, people are affected by or take into account for example of what they can afford, the likely response of others to their choices and the values and practices which shape them and the communities in which they live (Bridges, 2006:15).This simply suggests that our preferences and values are in part shaped by the social situations and norms under which they were formed (Terlazzo,

2016). Bridges (2006) shows that adaptation of preferences may be as a result of conscious or unconscious decision-making, in some cases with little awareness of the ways in which these factors circumscribed their choice. Thus, in situations of disadvantage people may not be aware how their circumstances have influenced the choices they make. They may experience their decision as a free choice, but it is one which has been adapted to the limited opportunities set by their circumstances (Bridges, 2006).

Both Sen (1999) and Nussbaum (2000) have responded to the issue of adaptive preferences. Through the capabilities approach they suggest an evaluation of the quality of life based on functionings and capabilities would be able to avoid misinterpretation of objective circumstances (Teschl & Comim, 2007). Therefore, people in limited circumstances must not be viewed as victims of adaptive preferences but instead as individuals bargaining with unfair conditions to achieve the best outcomes that they can (Narayan, 2002). In essence, individuals seek some form of agency to make the best out of challenging conditions although they face unsurmountable difficulties.

3.3.7 Fertile functionings and corrosive disadvantage

Scholars, Wolff and de-Shalit have explored the meaning of disadvantage through the capability approach (Wilson-Strydom, 2015). Wolff and de-Shalit (2007), view disadvantage as a multidimensional phenomenon where people who are most disadvantaged are those who experience disadvantage in various areas of theirs lives. In essence, ''disadvantages and risks compound each other and cluster together'' (Wolff & de-Shalit, 2007:10). This results in "corrosive disadvantage". Corrosive disadvantage is a condition whereby a disadvantage in one aspect of life is likely to spread its effects to other areas of an individual's life. For instance, gambling addiction might lead to bankruptcy. Through empirical findings Wolff and de-Shalit (2007) argue that identifying the disadvantaged is to identify those that are exposed to risks that they would not have taken had they had other options. While risks cannot be completely eliminated, some people face unwarranted risks; although they might have certain capabilities in the present, they are not able to bank on them in the future (Wilson-Strydom, 2015). Enjoying

a certain level of functioning is as important as being able to sustain that functioning over time (Wolff & de-Shalit, 2007).

Furthermore, Wolff and de-Shalit suggest freedom from worry is important for people who are constantly faced with challenges. Moreover, "in many instances disadvantages and risks compound each other and cluster together" (Wolff & de-Shalt, 2007:10). To illustrate this in the context of higher education Wilson-Strydom (2015) gives an example of a student who depends on financial assistance through a bursary. However, this student lives with the uncertainty of whether the bursary will be granted each year and if the granted amount will suffice. Despite possessing the ability to pursue studies, this student confronts the constant possibility of being unable to afford tuition fees. Furthermore, the extent of bursary support may cover tuition but not living expenses, forcing the student to subsist on one inexpensive meal per day. This nutritional deficiency results in health issues and class absences. To make ends meet, the student may take up part-time employment, which could adversely impact their academic performance, potentially hindering their ability to attain the minimum credits necessary to renew the bursary for the subsequent year. These clusters of challenges compound, creating "multiple levels of disadvantage" (Wilson-Strydom, 2015:51) across all aspects of the student life.

The above situation illustrates the concept of disadvantage, formulated by Wolff and de-Shalit (2007) as notions of fertile functionings and corrosive disadvantage. Fertile functionings refers to functionings which are likely to yield further functionings (an achievement in one area likely to have benefits elsewhere) or capabilities while corrosive disadvantage are those disadvantages that are likely to yield further disadvantage (Wolff & de-Shalit, 2007; Hall, 2013). Hence fertile functionings and corrosive disadvantage could be considered as examples of conversion factors (Wilson-Strydom, 2015). Wolff and de-Shalit (2007), argue that people who are often in worse-off positions tend to be in situations where they experience many disadvantages. It is Wolff and de-Shalit's view that understanding the development and perpetuation of these patterns of disadvantage is crucial. They suggest taking preventive measures to dismantle these clusters of disadvantages. In essence, public policy should seek to identify secure functionings and block disadvantages that prevent individuals from making decisions to project their future.

For all students to have a fair chance at success in higher education, institutional and ministerial interventions are required (Calitz, 2019). In Botswana there are a few studies that looked at access in basic education in general and none have theorised access to higher education for rural students using the capability approach, thus this study is relevant in illuminating their experiences with disadvantage.

3.4   AGENCY AND ACCESS TO HIGHER EDUCATION

Agency is the ability to pursue goals that one considers important in their lives (Katusiime, 2014). The implication of this in respect of the current study is that individuals, to a certain level, possess the ability to realise their aspirations and goals, however their agency may be constrained or enhanced by the various arrangements within which differently positioned individuals find themselves. For example, conversion factors such as economic factors, university ethos and culture, technology competences, language and prior learning experiences at schools (Walker & Mathebula, 2019) may to a certain level determine the extent to which individuals use their agency to achieve what they aspire for. Katusiime (2014) explains aspirations as the hope or ambition of achieving something. Aspirations are linked to agency in the sense that it is only when people have identified their aspirations can they start making choices and acting on capabilities they want to enhance to make their lives better. Walker (2005) sees aspirations as part of what individuals need to be motivated to do those things they want to achieve in their lives. In other words, aspirations give individuals direction to use agency to help them realise their potential. The ability of people to express their aspirations and taking time to reflect upon those aspirations can enable them to come up with a number of capabilities from their capability set that they consider to be relevant (Katusiime, 2014).

Students from disadvantaged backgrounds bring along 'rich' assets with which they are able to use to navigate the route to higher education successfully in a constrained environment. In line with this, Timmis et al (2019), highlight the constraints experienced by rural students in applying, entering and participating at university as well as the agency lost, and subsequent new agentic possibilities discovered to negotiate access. For example, rural students coming from a low-income background may exercise agency by first formulating their goals. Due to the situation at home students may decide to work

hard at school in order to go to university so that they help improve the livelihood of their family. Through determination and resilience, the students may pass grade 12 and seek help from teachers with regards to information about post-secondary education. In order to raise funds to pay for application fees students may have to do minimal jobs to meet that need. An achieved functioning for the students is at a point where they get admission into university of their choice. In this challenging context, student have exercised their agency and their aspirations to go to university has helped propel them into action to navigate access. As mentioned in Chapter 2 navigational assets may also be in the form of coping mechanisms such as self-reliance, adaptability, self-motivation, hard work, the ability to work independently and the will to succeed against all odds (Maila & Ross, 2018).

3.5 THE CAPABILITY APPROACH VERSUS HUMAN CAPITAL APPROACH

This section outlines justification why the capability approach has been chosen as a suitable framework in this study. In the context of conceptualising access to higher education several approaches have been used, however it important to discuss some key ideas of the human capital approach in order to highlight why the capability approach was chosen. The human capital approach to education was pioneered in the 1960s by scholars at the University of Chicago (Robeyns, 2006; Marginson, 2019). Human capital approach considers education relevant in so far as education creates skills and helps to acquire knowledge that serves as an investment in the productivity of the human being as an economic production factor, that is the worker (Robeyns, 2006:72). Thus, the human capital approach posits a crucial idea that an individual's skills and knowledge, acquired through education, contribute to their productivity which in turn translates to higher wages. From the perspective of Marginson (2019), education drives marginal productivity of labour and marginal productivity drives earnings. This model suggests that when individuals attend school, they should be able to develop specific qualities that can play a key role in improving economic productivity within their respective communities.

Thus, in the context of this study, skills and knowledge acquired through higher education are an important part of individuals' income-generating abilities. This is particularly significant for individuals facing conditions of extreme. An individual's freedom is limited

when a person lives in poverty, where their living conditions are compromised by lack of basic needs such as accommodation, food, including lack of proper healthcare services (Sen,1987). Therefore, having important skills can make a difference between going hungry and survival, as well as between mere survival and attaining a decent quality of life or flourishing. Sen (1997) also recognises the significance of the human capital approach, which asserts that education contributes to enhancing production through the acquisition of skills, abilities, and knowledge. Based on this understanding a person with a higher education is in a position to produce more goods which in turn enhances their income-earning capacity to sustain a decent standard of living or better quality of life. Through the human capital approach governments design education policies to reflect the economic significance of education to the citizens. Hence the strength of the human capital model of education lies in its focus on technical progress and macro-economic development (Robeyns, 2006) and improving the productive capacity of the people.

While this is the case, human capital approach to education might be problematic in the sense that it conceptualizes education through a single lens; which views education in terms of economic returns. According to Robeyns (2006:73) ''the problem with human capital theory is that it is entirely instrumental; it values education, skills and knowledge only in so far as they contribute (directly or indirectly) to expected economic productivity.'' It is important to note that this view does not undermine the significant role of the human capital approach in education. Both economic growth and individual incomes matter as means to expanding people's freedom in society, as it allows other beings and doing to be pursued (Walker, 2008). Paid work significantly contributes to the quality of life partly because it provides identity to people and opportunities to socialise with others (Stiglitz, Sen & Fitoussi, 2009). However, these should not be seen as ultimate goals in themselves but rather as instruments to enhance human well-being. The over-emphasis on the economic focus on education raises questions when non-instrumental values of education are disregarded in the human capital approach.

This approach to education is less concerned with social returns and intrinsic value that people can acquire from the education process, and so does not include them in their education policies and reforms (Psacharapoulos, 2006). For example, this notion

disregards the intrinsic role of education where individuals acquire knowledge for its own sake. It also disregards the non-instrumental value of education; where education opens one's mind to the fact that there are different ways of living other than an individual's own way of life.

3.5.1 The rationale for pursuing the capability approach

The capability approach is a normative framework based on principles of social justice, therefore it makes sense to apply it explore the Botswana context where opportunities are skewed; for example, socially, economically, politically and so on. It accounts for and values the diversity among individuals and groups. Thus, the capability approach is very sensitive to gender, race and other forms of diversity (Walker, 2015:289). This sensitivity is demonstrated through the intrinsic moral value of every individual, enabling each person to choose a wide range of functionings, and acknowledging the various factors that contribute to inequalities in capabilities as well as through conversion factors which shape inequalities of capabilities (Walker, 2015). In the context of marginalized groups, such as ethnic minorities or economically disadvantaged communities in Botswana, the capability approach allows for a nuanced understanding of the unique challenges and opportunities they face in accessing higher education. It considers a range of factors beyond mere enrolment numbers, taking into account the diverse capabilities and freedoms that individuals within these groups may need to enhance their well-being.

I found the capability approach most suitable because of its focus on individual advantages in terms of opportunity (Sen, 2006). Unlike other utility based approaches such as human capital and human rights-based approaches to education, which measure human development in terms of material values, the capability approach looks beyond assets. It captures non-utility information (Mosalagae & Bekker, 2021). This means that it goes beyond traditional utility-based perspectives in understanding human well-being.

Additionally, the capability approach places a strong emphasis on substantive freedom. This means evaluating not just the formal opportunities available (such as the existence of educational institutions) but also the real freedoms and capabilities individuals have to make choices and lead lives they value (Walker, 2015). In the context of higher education access for rural youth, this approach enables a more comprehensive analysis of the

barriers and opportunities that affect individuals within these groups. It considers factors such as cultural sensitivities, economic constraints, and social inequalities that may impact the substantive freedom to pursue higher education.

Furthermore, the capability approach places a strong emphasis on human agency and empowerment. The approach considers not only the outcomes an individual achieves but also the freedoms and opportunities they have to lead a life they value (Dejaeghere & Walker, 2021). When evaluating constraints to higher education access for rural youth in Botswana, this approach allows for an examination of the agency of these individuals within their specific social and economic contexts. For instance, students who aim to work hard and pass their grade 12 might face barriers specific to their context limiting their agency to achieve their educational goals. The capability approach assists in identifying such limitations and urge society to remove barriers that limit individuals' agency to make choices in life and actively participate in the pursuit of higher education.

The capability lens has the power to illuminate both the conscious and the deliberative aspects of human agency and how structural inequalities present barriers to students' success (Walker et al., 2022:3). The approach is suitable for this study as it offers opportunity to investigate and evaluate the fair distribution of what matters to individuals in the form of capabilities and functionings (Walker et al., 2022). Moreover, the aspect of empowerment involves fostering conditions that enable individuals to lead lives they have reason to value, where they have the freedom to make choices and pursue their own well-being in a manner that reflects their own preferences and aspirations. Both agency and empowerment are non-economic opportunities that can be developed through education (Manase, 2020).

The capability approach is individual-freedom based. For example, in this study, it considers rural youth's individual freedoms and opportunity to achieve capabilities to function (Sen 1995). The approach seeks then to focus on individuals well-being or how well a person is and what the person does to attain wellness (Mosalagae & Bekker, 2021). In this context well-being refers to how an individual's abilities (functionings) are demonstrated based on what is available to them (Sen,1985). Consequently, the capability approach is less focused on an individual's possession of resources or their

mental state. Rather, it prioritizes the individual's freedom to achieve what they have good reason to value (Sen, 1992,1999). In this study individual freedoms and opportunity to access higher education is important in enhancing other life opportunities. The capability to be educated is a basic sense of fundamental freedom and basis for other freedoms in the future (Terzi, 2007; Unterhalter, 2002). This means education serves as a foundation for other freedoms; it is not just a right in itself, but also a multiplier for other freedoms and opportunities later on in life. In this context, the opportunity to access higher education is expected to provide rural youth with the tools, knowledge, and skills they need to lead fulfilling lives, participate fully in society and flourish.

3.5.2 Strengths and weaknesses of the capability approach

The fundamental ideas of the capability approach namely, functionings and capabilities are attributes inherent to individuals (Robeyns, 2003), these qualities make this framework a moral and individualist theory. It underscores the significance of individual choices, and freedoms, at the same time prioritising the well-being of each person over group or communal considerations. Furthermore, the conversion factors, however, takes into consideration the personal, social and environmental implications on an individual's well-being (Tsephe, 2021). Thus social structures or policies are evaluated based on their impact on individual freedoms.

Another important feature of the capability approach is its multidimensional perspective, which recognises that well-being is influenced by a variety of factors beyond economic measures or educational enrolment rates. In the context of this study, the capability approach provides a suitable theoretical framework for evaluating higher education access for rural youth as a marginalised group due to its recognition of human diversity, emphasis on substantive freedoms, and holistic assessment of well-being.

However, while the capability approach is anchored on human capabilities (individual-centred), it can also be criticised for some of its shortcomings. Sen's idea of capability is important for evaluating the opportunity aspect of freedoms; however, it falls short of dealing fully with the dimension of the process involved in achieving those freedoms. For instance, capabilities are regarded as individual advantages, therefore they do not tell us

much about the fairness and systemic process involved in capability formation (Boni & Walker, 2013). This is quite problematic in itself; it may draw attention to the debate of whether means are more important than ends, or vice versa. To this end, Sen explains that more freedom gives us opportunity to achieve the things we value. He justifies that the aspect of freedom is concerned primarily with our ability to achieve, rather than the process through which that achievement comes about (Sen, 1999). Thus, an evaluation of the quality of a human life should look at both the process whereby an individual's outcomes are achieved and the outcomes themselves (Hart & Brando, 2018:204).

The second issue that poses challenging questions especially in the context of education, concerns the extent of freedoms and capabilities children may have, considering that children tend to value things that in some cases could be in contrast with what would enhance their academic capabilities. Although individuals have the ability to choose for themselves what they want to be and do in their lives, children may need guidance to choose positive freedoms as they ''may not make the best decisions when given freedom'' (Hart & Brando, 2018:295). In this sense the school may influence the formation of good values and aspirations to enhance children's capabilities (Unterhalter, Vaughan & Walker, 2007).

This also implies that any obstacles that stand in the way of children to enhance capabilities and achieve aspirations have to be removed (Hart & Brando, 2018). Also, there are other alternative forms of education outside the mainstream or compulsory learning systems that people may choose from. Given the fact that people are always faced with many choices to make with regards to their aspirations, some people may opt to work after grade 12 completion (adapting preferences) disregarding a university education and opting to go into gainful employment in order to support themselves and their families. On the other hand, other individuals may value developing industrial skills.

Criticism has also been laid against Sen's capability approach for not paying sufficient attention to groups (Kuhumba, 2017). Sen's insistence on individual freedom is important only in a communal context; instead of expanding only an individual's capabilities and freedoms we can expand the community's freedoms in such a way that both the individual and the community's well-being are promoted (Kuhumba, 2017).

3.6 SUMMARY

This chapter outlined theoretical tools of the capability approach detailing how they are relevant in aiding the understanding of the problem of access to higher education. The rationale for choosing the capability approach as a robust model for evaluating the problem of access is based on its focus on human development. The capability approach looks at human development in terms of capabilities, functionings, agency (and empowerment) and conversion factors. Core concepts of the approach such as conversion factors are positioned to potentially enhance or constrain the building of rural youth's capabilities that support their achievements. The capability approach emphasises individual advantages in terms of opportunity rather than solely focusing on material values. Unlike other utility-based approaches like human capital and human rights-based approaches to education, which prioritise tangible assets, the capability approach considers non-utility information. This broader perspective allows for a more comprehensive understanding of human well-being beyond conventional measures. By applying the capabilities in the context of rural youth, illuminates the range of options rural youth have to pursue their valued goals. This normative approach to education is very crucial for governments, education policy designers and reformers because it is more focused on the core principles of human freedom and well-being. Through the capability approach they can evaluate and assess individual well-being of students within various contexts in communities or country. They could also look at whether the social arrangements create an atmosphere that is favourable for promoting people's well-being. Overall, the approach to education is unique because of its evaluative processes that focus on different aspects of well-being such as inequality, poverty and the well-being of either the individual or members of a group. The next chapter discusses the research methods, designs and ethical considerations of the study.

CHAPTER 4: METHODOLOGY

4.1   INTRODUCTION

Chapter 3 discussed the capability approach as the analytical framework used to explore access to higher education for rural youth. This chapter gives an overview of the research methodology adopted in my study. I first describe the research context, provide the research paradigm, the research design, sampling procedures, data collection procedures, analysis processes as well as quality measures considered throughout the study. Lastly, I also explain ethical considerations that were followed to carry out the research. In accordance with purpose of the study; to explore constraints and enablers to access in higher education for the rural youth, the design and data collection instruments were selected to answer the following research questions:

Main Research Question:

How do rural youth in Botswana experience arrangements that enable their access to higher education?

Sub-questions:

1.What are the structural arrangements that constrain rural youth from accessing higher education in Botswana?

2.What are the structural arrangements that enable rural youth to access higher education in Botswana?

3. How do rural youth use their agency to navigate structural constraints to access higher education?

4. To what extent are rural youth able convert different resources into human capabilities critical for academic success at university?

5. What aspirations do rural youth hope to achieve upon attainment of their university education?

The discussion that follows describes the research context.

4.2   RESEARCH CONTEXT AND PARTICIPANTS

This research was conducted on rural youth from Kgalagadi North, Ngamiland (Ngami West), Kweneng West, Ghanzi in Botswana. Participants of the study are from these selected regions. These regions were selected as having some of the most rural and remote areas therefore they were congruent with the aim of the study. Studying the context of Botswana is significant mainly because currently Botswana is one of the most unequal countries globally (UNDP, 2021). The most recent UNDP report indicates that Botswana has the highest 9th Gini coefficient (UNDP, 2020). While the country's natural resources, especially minerals such as diamonds, have made significant contributions to its economy (Marumo & Pansiri, 2016), economic benefits and opportunities remain skewed. There is an unequal distribution of resources and opportunities amongst regions. Research reveal variations in unemployment rates, public sector employment and education achievement levels (UNDP, 2021). Given that rural youth unemployment is a global concern (Kemiso & Kolawole, 2017), it is important to expand rural youth capabilities to enable them to choose a combination of ways of beings and doings for their own good life (Robeyns, 2006; Dejaeghere & Walker, 2021).

These regions have higher unemployment rate in most areas. For example, Kgalagadi North, with a youth population constituting 32.9%, has an unemployment rate of 9.7% among females and 9.5% among males (Statistics Botswana, 2011a), while in Ngamiland West, youth make up 28.5% of the entire Ngamiland regional population (Statistics Botswana, 2011b). On average 18.1% of the people are not gainfully employed (Statistics Botswana, 2011b) in the region. For instance, Xaxa (a village in Ngamiland), has the highest unemployment rate at 58.7%, followed by Xhauga at 53.7%(Statistics Botswana,2011b). In the Ghanzi region, the youth population is over 30.0%, with most youth concentrated in the Central Kalahari Game Reserve (CKGR) with a proportion at 53.7% (Statistics Botswana, 2011c).

In addition, other indicators of rurality is based on low population density, low economic status of residents, unequal distribution of infrastructural services, including poorly resourced schools. Concerns have been raised that minority communities who speak Sesarwa (predominantly residing in the Ghanzi and Central districts) and the Seyeyi

(predominantly residing in the Ngamiland) seem to be the most excluded (UNDP, 2021). The UNDP (2021) report further indicates that these communities are among the poorest and most rural in the country, which likely contributes to their high unemployment rates. Again, communities in these areas are disadvantaged to a point that they fail to benefit from mainstream educational provision due to isolated geographical locations, inadequate fluency in the language of instruction (Republic of Botswana, 2011). This suggests possible exclusion based on language, possibly due to the limited availability of education in languages spoken by these communities in Botswana (UNDP, 2021). In line with this, Maruatona (2015) asserts that students in these regions often fail to benefit from mainstream education due to marginality. It might also be argued that existence of schools in these areas does not equate to educational success for the students as English, the language of instruction is not well suited for their needs (Hart, 2019).

As indicated in chapter 1, the four regions used in this study have been reported to have the highest incidences of poverty (Statistics Botswana, 2011), with the lowest academic performance rates in both Junior Certificate Examinations (JCE) and Botswana General Certificate in Secondary Education (BGCSE). Evidence suggests over the years the Botswana Examination Council (BEC) has consistently presented lower achievement rates both for JCE and BGCSE amongst schools that serve under-privileged and marginalised communities (Makwinja, 2017). For instance, in 2014, 5 796 BGCSE candidates obtained Grade C or better (this constitutes 25.75 % of the candidature) suggesting that the remaining 74.25% of the candidates obtained a Grade D or lower (Malejane & Diraditsile, 2019). Shakawe Senior Secondary School in the Ngamiland region presented a 7% pass rate in 2013, while in 2020 the same school obtained a pass rate of 15.94% (Botswana Examination Council, 2020) achieving a significant improvement in seven years. Arguably the rural context is likely to exacerbate the negative impact on higher education access (Walker & Mathebula, 2019). Thus, the selection of the research context of the three regions was underpinned by their high poverty levels and poor students' performance in both JCE and BGCSE.

Research participants fell in two categories; the rural youth who failed to access higher education. This group consists of the rural youth who completed their grade 12 but despite

qualifying were unable to go to university. The second group consists of the rural youth who completed their grade 12 and were able to go to university and were actively enrolled at university at the time of the study. Only participants who resided, attended, and completed primary, junior, and senior secondary level were selected. As provided in the broader context of the study in Chapter 1, primary schooling comprises of seven years, junior schooling comprises of three years whilst senior secondary schooling comprises of two years upon which students transition to higher education based on their academic performance. The purpose of the study is to explore arrangements that enable access to higher education as well as arrangements that constrain access to higher education for the rural youth. Exploring the opinions and perceptions of both these groups concerning constraints and enablers of access was considered ideal in order to get an in-depth understanding of the problem. The issue warrants a thorough investigation as the findings are important in the formulation of policy measures to foster a more inclusive society.

4.3 RESEARCH PARADIGM

A research paradigm is a way of thinking that is shared by a community of researchers, scholars, or scientists. A research paradigm represents world views, values, beliefs, methods, and approaches to research that are shared across a discipline (Chilisa, 2012). It is an agreed way of pursuing knowledge in terms of what problems are to be investigated and how to investigate them (Kuhn, 1962). This way of thinking is based upon ontological, epistemological, and methodological assumptions (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). Denzin and Lincoln (1994) explain that ontology relates to questions about the form and nature to reality, while epistemology pertains to the nature of the relationship between researcher and what can be known about reality and thirdly the methodology relates to how the researcher goes about finding out what is to be known. These assumptions inevitably shape how the researcher goes about formulating the research problem and research questions for the problem of the study. Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2016) observe that the selected paradigm influences the researcher's methodological choice, research design, data collection techniques, and analysis procedures.

Several research paradigms have been used in educational research, ranging from positivism, interpretivism/constructivism, pragmatism, critical realism, and post-modernism. Positivism holds the view that reality is objective and can be tested or measured through scientific methods (Chilisa, 2012). It is the positivists' belief that there is only one reality that is relatively constant and not changed by time or space. Interpretivism on the other hand differs from the positivist view on assumptions about the nature of reality. According to interpretivism, reality is socially constructed (Creswell, 2009; Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). This view holds that there are many realities out there just as there are many individuals creating that reality (Chilisa 2011). Interpretivist research is guided by the researcher's perspective about the world and how it should be understood and studied (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). In essence, what we perceive as reality is influenced more by our individual perspectives and cultural beliefs about our actions rather than solely by the objective physical occurrences of those actions. Critical realism emphasises reflective assessments and critique of society's culture and practices (Guba & Lincoln,1994).

My study adopts the pragmatist approach as its tenents are more aligned to the design I adopted for this study. For pragmatists, reality is regarded as both objective and subjective or socially constructed (Cohen & Manion, 1994; Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004; Mertens, 2007), considering what works to answer research questions as the most suitable approach to an investigation. Within this paradigm, it is convenient to investigate the phenomenon under study (access) from different angles to gain both depth and breadth of reality. This underpins the choice of paradigm of the current research, as a mixed method holistically investigate how structural arrangements enable or constrain access to higher education for rural youth in Botswana. My choice of the pragmatist paradigm is also aligned with pragmatic beliefs, in the sense that my values as a researcher have representation and were incorporated in the search for reality.

In this study, the assumptions are that in Botswana rural youth experience constraints which result in limited access to higher education. Again, the few who access higher education risk not completing their undergraduate degrees due to a myriad of challenges they face once at university. Therefore, there is need to create opportunities for the rural

youth to access higher education in Botswana. Creating enabling conditions for rural youth to expand their capabilities is important for social inclusion, hence understanding the problem holistically assists to come up with appropriate policy measures to address the problem.

4.4 MIXED METHOD RESEARCH DESIGN

Mixed method research or mixed methods is one of the three dominant methodological approaches in modern research or investigations (Creswell, 2011; Assalahi, 2015). The combination of both quantitative and qualitative methods within a single study is not new in social sciences research (Maxwell, 2016). Mixed method research comprises of elements of both quantitative and qualitative approaches. Quantitative approach follows the confirmatory method of inquiry and focuses on hypothesis testing and theory testing (Johnson & Christensen, 2014). On the other hand, qualitative approach mainly follows the exploratory method of inquiry and sometimes used to come up with a new theory (Johnson & Christensen, 2014). Qualitative approach is used to understand peoples' experiences through expressing their perspectives (Johnson & Christensen, 2014). Scholars who advocate for mixed methods research argue that it is important to combine both exploratory and confirmatory methods within one's study (Johnson & Christensen, 2014; Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007).

The current study adopts this approach as it provides a better understanding of the problem of rural youth access to higher education than a single approach would. A study that looks at access to higher education among rural youth can be examined from the three different methodological standpoints. The quantitative design helps to establish the enablers and constraints to access for higher education by rural youth in a highly efficient and structured way by use of a survey but may not provide the depth or richness that is underlying such enablers and constraints. The qualitative design may provide for the richness underlying the constraints and enablers to access for higher education by rural youth but may not enable collection of quantitative data from a large sample in an efficient way, given the magnitude of the study. In this study quantitative data augments the qualitative data in order to lead to a better understanding of the problem of unequal access, as well as enablers and constraints to access for higher education for rural youth

in Botswana. Again, integration of data helps to gain a deeper understanding of rural youth's access to higher education in terms of how they use agency to negotiate access.

As such, the mixed methods design adopted in this research assisted in data collection from rural youth who were unable to access university as well as those who succeeded in entering university. This resonates with Loo and Lowe (2011), Ary, Jacobs and Sorenson (2010) and Teddlie and Tashakkori (2009), who emphasise that mixed methods (both numeric and narratives approaches) are relevant to provide some better outcomes from the research process. Combining methods partly avoids the deficiencies or biases inherent in a single method approach, allowing a more accurate picture of the problem under study (Loo & Lowe, 2011). Effectively, mixed method design facilitates the generation of shared meanings of both quantitative and qualitative data integration (Gabi & Sharpe, 2021), thus permitting the researcher to gain a deeper understanding of rural youth's access to higher education with regards to how they negotiate access and also succeed in higher education.

Given the nature of spread of the target population of rural youth in the study context, the research design adopts a survey strategy, given its efficiency and effectiveness in collecting a large amount of data from a sizable population (Harrison, 2018), to augment data from semi-structured interviews. In this way, an in-depth exploration of arrangements that enable or constrain youth from equal access to higher education and the interventions in place to increase their access was done. Further, the findings of the research are likely to be reflective of participants' point of view (Wisdom & Creswell, 2013), which in a way offers participants voice or agency freedom. To this end the current study adopts the concurrent mixed methods design. However, there are different types of mixed methods designs in research, for example, the convergent parallel, explanatory sequential and exploratory sequential (Ary, Jacobs & Sorensen, 2010). For the concurrent mixed method design adopted for this study, collection of both qualitative and quantitative datasets occurred roughly at the same time (Kroll & Neri, 2009). The design is a concurrent triangulation. For example, questionnaires (quantitative) and semi-structured interviews (qualitative) were used to answer the research questions.

Kroll and Neri (2009) affirm that where quantitative and qualitative data is being collected for confirmation it may be possible to collect data at the same time. The semi-structured interviews are intended to provide more insight into survey findings (into the factors underlying enablers and constraints to access in higher education). Creswell et al., (2003) acknowledge that a true mixed methods study must genuinely integrate data at one or more stages of the research process, therefore in this study, quantitative and qualitative datasets were integrated at all stages of the research process. For example, in Chapters 5, 6 and 7, statistics (numerical data) from surveys and narrative data from interviews are presented. The responses are also included in the analysis and conclusion phases, thus adding richer details to enhance the credibility of the conclusions and strengthening the study.

While this is a concurrent mixed method design, relative priority was given to the qualitative aspect of the study. In essence, the study adopts a QUAL+quant design, whereby qualitative data collection is primary. Emphasis is on meanings and interpretations (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011). This design is most appropriate to illuminate experiences of rural youth and the problem of unequal access, therefore it helps in the interpretation of the problem of unequal access and answering the research questions fully. Also, the concept of rural location is very significant to the study in terms of enablers such as community support, resources, and challenges such as resources as well as physical access; all of which could be understood better or holistically through the design.

The rationale for choosing this design as appropriate for this study is based on the following reasons: Firstly, I found that there was insufficient information available about the problem in the literature. Studies that explore access to higher education for rural youth are few (Hall, 2018), and during my literature search I could not find any studies that have been conducted locally in rural areas (involving both rural youth that were at university and those who were unable to go to university) through the capability approach. Hence exploratory research is appropriate. Secondly, this study is policy-focused therefore it is appropriate to have a detailed coverage of the problem, thus a survey is combined with semi-structured interviews to understand the problem from all dimensions.

It is therefore important to help policymakers understand the challenges faced by rural youth in terms of the extent (quantitative) or nature (qualitative). It is hoped that gaining an insightful understanding of the problem will assist to design appropriate policy measures to address the problem of inequitable access to higher education for rural youth; in that way they can be better supported and prepared to transition to higher education. Therefore, the QUAL+quant design helped me to establish the constraints and enablers to higher education by rural youth in an efficient and structured manner.

4.5   DATA COLLECTION PROCEDURE

Data was collected through quantitative and qualitative methods; through surveys and semi-structured interviews with the intent to gather rich insights to the problem.

4.5.1   Sampling procedures

Sampling is the process of selecting elements of a population for inclusion in a research study (O'Leary, 2010). Purposive and snowball sampling are used in this study. Purposive sampling is a non-probability sampling technique that involves selecting participants based on specific characteristics or traits that are relevant to the research question (Cohen, et al., 2011). This method is often used when the researcher is looking to gain insight into specific groups or populations. Neuman (2007) postulates purposive sampling is used to gain a deeper understanding of what is being studied, but with no intention to generalise the results to a larger population.

In essence in non-probability samples the chances of members of the wider population being selected for sample are unknown (Cohen et al., 2011:153). For the purpose of this study, purposive sampling is appropriate to gain insight into access to higher education among the youth in Botswana; selection of the sample could be based on socio-economic status, location, or other relevant characteristics. Therefore, I used purposive sampling to select the research sites (regions). The four regions were selected purely based on their characteristics which are of interest to the researcher. The following steps were taken to sample the target population:

In accordance with the topic and research questions the target population was clearly defined based on the characteristics of geographical location (rurality), socio-economic

status (such as income level, education level). As provided in the research context in section 4.2 the four regions were selected based on existing data (census data) on high poverty levels, high rates of unemployment and low academic achievement in schools. Thus, some regions are included whereas others are excluded.

The study also adopted the snowball sampling technique to select the target sample of participants. The two groups consist of rural youth (aged 18-24) who were unable to access higher education for various reasons and the second group consists of rural youth who managed to further their education at university. The total number of questionnaires distributed among rural youth who were not able to gain admission to university and those who were able to go to university was 100. To get more insights on enablers and constraint of access, semi-structured interviews were used on eight (8) participants. The interviewees were selected using the snowball sampling technique. The selection of the snowball sampling technique for this research was guided by the number and nature of the spread of the target population which is unknown to the researcher (Bryman, 2015). My samples are not calculated on the basis of statistics. At the time of the study, the total number of rural youth who did not manage to go to university and those who did was not known. Specifically, adopting the snowball sampling technique for selection of both survey and semi-structured interview participants, was guided by the lack of current data on the total number of youth from various regions, specifically youth who failed to progress to university and those who transitioned to university, because higher education statistics are not aggregated based on regions.

Again, the selection of the sampling technique is also informed by the nature of the population under study. Judgement on the sample size was influenced by geographical homogeneity (Robinson, 2014). Fowler (2009) sets out guidelines which were used in this study on the sampling procedure. Fowler (2009) suggests that results of a sample of 150 people will describe a population of 15000 or 25 million with more or less the same degree of accuracy. Snowball, also called the chain referral sampling technique, allows for use of one participant to refer the researcher to others of interest (Geddes, Parker & Scott, 2018), therefore I relied on a few participants to refer me to other rural youth who were able to provide information to the research questions.

Rural youth are the most suited to detail their personal experiences with regards to access to higher education, in terms of how they negotiated access to higher education as well as their experience once there (Walker & Mathebula, 2019). Given the careful selection of the research context, it was my view that the few participants that I would have come into contact with will recommend others to be contacted to take part in the study. Also, there was the likelihood that participants in the selected small communities knew others on a personal level and therefore it was easy for them to locate those who have accessed university and those who have not. Maree (2010) remarks that snowball is a method used to find 'hidden' populations and an event whereby the already contacted participant refers the researcher to their social networks, who could potentially participate in the study. Hence my choice of the snowball technique.

Two urban universities were also sampled to be included in the study; University X (a public university) and University Y (a private university), although only rural students from one university took part in the study. The few students from University Y who responded to the call to take part in the study did not meet the criteria for the study. The two universities were sampled using purposive sampling also known as judgmental sampling which is a form of non-probability sampling (Valerio et al., 2016). The researcher selected these two sites as being representative of higher education institutions (universities) in Botswana. Besides being in the capital city of Botswana, they are considered to be representative of both public and private universities in Botswana and deemed to have students from both rural and urban areas.

Urban universities were selected for this study because there are no universities in the rural areas, most if not all universities are concentrated in urban and peri-urban areas, where most infrastructural developments and services are also found. The concept of migration from rural areas to urban universities (Walker & Mathebula, 2019) is also key in this study, thus the universities are information-rich cases with rural students who are likely to share information and their experiences with regards to transitioning to higher education. Again, my interest was getting a deeper understanding of how youth navigate access given the structural arrangements that may constrain their mobility, hence perspectives from both ends of the extremes were explored (Bryman, Becker, & Sempik,

2007). On one hand, we have rural youth who are attending universities in the capital city, and on another, we have those who remained in the rural areas. It is therefore essential to understand the experiences of both these cohorts, exploring their perceptions concerning the arrangements that enabled and constrained their access respectively.

4. 6   RESEARCH INSTRUMENTS

Commonly used instruments in research include questionnaires, interview schedules, and observation schedules (Wisdom & Creswell, 2013; Assalahi, 2015). For my research I used two instruments to align with mixed methods design which is the method adopted for the current study. The first instrument was a survey/questionnaire tool that I used on both rural youth groups; the youth that were not able to go to university and the rural youth that were enrolled at university. The second instrument was used for semi-structured interviews with rural students (at university) that did not participate in the survey to avoid repetition.

4.6.1   Survey questionnaire

A survey questionnaire is a collection of questions used in research to gather statistical information from a group of people. It is used to collect data on a variety of topics such as opinions, beliefs, attitudes, behaviors, and experiences. I used a Likert scale questionnaire with a few open-ended items to gain more insights into the variables investigated. The questionnaire items were simplified and adjusted accordingly for the two groups of participants; those who did not succeed in accessing university and those who succeeded in gaining access to university. The survey questionnaire instrument was piloted on 15 participants drawn from a population similar to the target population to ensure data quality. This was followed by testing the instrument scale items for validity using the KMO & Bartlett's test, and reliability using Cronbach Alpha coefficients to ensure that it is fit for purpose. In total 100 questionnaires were hand delivered, using a drop and pick method to optimise the participants' response rate. For the rural youth who were unable to get admissions into university 70 questionnaires were distributed and 30 were distributed to the rural students at university.

While I exercised patience with the participants, I did not receive a 100% response rate from the survey. The response rate was 89% as detailed in Chapter 5. I conducted this research during the COVID-19 pandemic when movement in some areas was restricted; the universities were conducting some classes virtually; therefore, I relied on students' availability and convenience (those who were attending classes physically at the time).

The survey tool included eight open-ended and 62 closed-ended questions. The questionnaire was divided into three sections with subsections as indicated below:

Section A:

i.   Demographics (9 closed-ended questions)

Section B: Conversion factors

i.   Home, family, community experience and university access (6 closed-ended and 1 open-ended questions)

ii.   School life and university access (8 closed-ended and 1 open-ended questions)

iii.   Resources and university access (6 closed-ended questions)

iv.   Rural life and university access (2 closed-ended questions)

v.   Experience of university access (5 closed-ended questions)

Section C:

i.   Individual conversion factors and agency (12 closed-ended and 2 open-ended questions)

ii.   Social conversion factors and capabilities (14 closed-ended and 1 open-ended questions)

iii.   Structural conversion factors and well-being (6 closed-ended and 3 open-ended questions)

4.6.2 Semi-structured interview

The current study used semi-structured in-depth interviews. In a semi-structured interview, interviewers begin with a small set of open-ended questions and spend a considerable amount of time probing participants' responses, encouraging them to provide detail and clarification (Harris & Brown, 2010) to their answers. Additionally, similar questions are posed to all participants; however, the interview takes on a more

informal tone resembling a conversation, granting the interviewer more freedom and flexibility in the way questions are asked (Ary, Jacobs & Sorensen, 2010). I conducted semi-structured interviews with eight rural students at University X, who were not part of the cohort that responded to survey questionnaires. Initially 10 students had agreed to be interviewed, however two of the participants withdrew from the study. Due to nonparticipation of University Y students in the study the number of interviewees became limited.

Due to the prevalence of COVID-19 it was crucial to explore other ways to collect data, such as virtual or online interviews, and online surveys. The university advised data collection activities were to adhere to the institution's COVID-19 safety protocols. Thus, I settled for telephone interviews instead of conducting the focus group discussion I had proposed to employ. All participants had mobile phones and I was able to reach them at the agreed time for the interviews. Identifying a platform that most participants were likely to feel comfortable with without having to go through the hassles of either buying data or downloading complicated applications was important in order to meet the objectives of the study. The advantage was that participants did not have to leave their personal spaces for the interviews. Transportation costs were also eliminated, since participants were not forced to adjust their routines for a physical meeting or interview. The interview was conducted in their own safe space, at their homes after school at the time of their convenience.

All procedures of the interview were explained to the participants and permission to record the sessions was sought through a letter of consent, which participants read and signed before the interview appointment was set. While I used the interview protocol as a guide, I was also able to rephrase the questions and adjust them to suit the needs of the participants. For example, some participants preferred a combination of English and the local language (Setswana) while others preferred conversations in the local language or strictly English but sought clarity in the local language. This also assisted me to probe and seek participants' clarification to get a clear understanding of their perceptions, thus gathering rich insights on the constraints and enablers on accessing higher education amongst rural youth in Botswana.

Neuman (2000) cautions that interviews could potentially yield unreliable and prejudiced outcomes, given that researchers have the ability to influence participants into giving answers aligned with the researchers' desires. However, to mitigate this I ensured I stuck to the questions on the interview protocol and more clarity was only sought on the issues arising from participants' narratives. The interview sessions lasted on average between 45 minutes and 90 minutes. However, one of the sessions lasted almost 120 minutes. While there was a guide used for the semi-structured interview sessions, I was flexible enough to afford participants a platform to narrate their stories freely without interrupting them. I realised some participants responded to questions in a brief and precise manner, while others provided longer narratives which I attributed to extroverted personalities. These long stories also enriched my data. The interview sessions were recorded via a voice recorder, transcribed verbatim and eight transcripts (documents) were generated.

The guide had four sections as described below:

Section A: Demographics of the participants (8 questions)

Section B: Home, family, community experience (6 questions)

Section C: Schooling experience (8 questions)

Section D: Resources and university access (5 questions)

Section E: University Experience/Transition experience (6 questions) and institutional conversion factors (4 questions)

4.7 DATA ANALYSIS

Analysis is the process of giving data order; organizing, structuring, and making sense of data, which takes time and does not always follow a linear process (De Vos et al., 2004). The process seeks to understand how participants make sense of the problem being investigated (Maree, 2010). Given the mixed methods design adopted, both quantitative and qualitative data analysis were employed. Following the completion of data collection from the field, I started the process of survey analysis by cleaning the data which involves reviewing each questionnaire to ensure responses have been indicated against all applicable questions. I also reviewed the completed questionnaires for the purpose of

identifying errors regarding the filling-in of answers in the questionnaire. Since questionnaires were completed manually, the exercise also involved ensuring there were no marks or side notes next to the questions which could create unclear interpretations during data entry.

The second step involved developing an analysis plan which includes an outline indicating which questions the data analysis exercise associated. This was followed by entering data on the Excel sheets. During data entry into Excel, responses were standardised such that similar answers were merged given the similarity of meanings. This was done to achieve similar categories for easy management as well as data analysis. Python (which is a computer assisted data analysis software package) was commanded to tabulate the data according to the data analysis plan. Statistical tests: chi-square tests were used to compare if there were significant differences between certain factors and going to university. All data were reported as means ± SD. Significance was accepted at $p < 0.05$. The chi-square analysis had limitations on identifying effects of each variable to access to university, therefore, an additional analysis was employed on the data collected using questionnaires. Firstly, the data was captured into Excel according to scale (1-5) of responses. This data was then analyzed using IBM SPSS version 28. Multiple regression analysis was employed at significant level 5%, and this analysis output had descriptive statistical outputs. Chi-square tests were specifically useful since my study involved categorical data. The tests entails testing relationships between categorical variables; establishing if various constraints factors had a significant influence on access for the two groups of rural youth. The use of both chi-square tests and multiple regression analysis can contribute to enhancing confirmability in a study by promoting systematic data collection, transparent analysis procedures. The statistics generated were used to support qualitative findings to fully answer the research questions

Thematic analysis was employed to define and summarise qualitative answers from open ended questions in the questionnaire. Python also generated word clouds from qualitative responses from questionnaires to highlight challenges experienced while applying, schooling challenges experienced, the impact of rurality on schooling and ways access was negotiated.

As for data from interviews (qualitative data analysis), thematic analysis was adopted as a data analysis strategy. Braun and Clarke (2006) describe thematic analysis as a qualitative method used to discover patterns or meanings within data by identifying and categorising recurring themes. The process extends beyond counting words or phrases as it involves analysing data to unearth underlying concepts (Guest, MacQueen, & Namey, 2014). Upon reading the transcripts produced from the semi-structured interviews and familiarising myself with the data, I created a project on Atlas Ti software and uploaded the transcripts. I used the software to identify codes and subsequent themes (groups) emerging from data. While I made use of Atlas Ti.22 for analysing data from transcripts, I followed Braun and Clarke's (2006) five phased model of data analysis. I started by generating initial codes by coding only important aspects of data so that only relevant information remains to be used.

The second step involved grouping the codes into potential themes with the aim of presenting data in good order. I reviewed the themes to ascertain coded extracts are placed appropriately where they belong. Finally, I refined the themes and commanded the generation of the report. In accordance with the capability approach I made use of theoretical tools such as conversion factors of the home, family and community to evaluate rural youth's capabilities to access higher education.

Special attention was paid to the conditions that enable and constrain the capabilities of rural youth in accessing higher education. Rural youth's capabilities were assessed by interrogating variations and the conditions of capability (opportunities) formation of choices which lead to achievement of access in higher education (Walker, 2019), as well as conversion factors that enable them to exercise agency freedom to access university education (see Chapters 5, 6 and 7).

4.8 TRIANGULATION

Triangulation was applied across the study, stretching from data collection methods to data analytical techniques, in order to uphold the overall robustness of the study (Patton, 2001; Golafshani, 2003; Chilisa, 2012). Methodological triangulation which was employed is based on the nature of the research design and data collection sources. Semi-structured interviews and surveys were employed to ensure consistency since similar

questions featured in both instruments. Data collected from interviews was compared with data from surveys as a means of increasing the credibility of my research findings (Chilisa & Preece, 2005; Chilisa, 2012. For triangulation purposes I combined different research methods (methodological triangulation) for instance quantitative surveys and qualitative interview to gather data from multiple angles; that is to understand the enablers and constraints to access from various perspectives. Additionally, data was gathered from various sources; the rural youth who were not able to access university and another group of rural youth who were enrolled at university. For analysis, quantitative data was analysed using chi-square tests and multiple regression analysis (refer to data analysis), followed by thematic analysis of the open-ended questions and interviews. Conducting triangulation ensured consistency within the results which improved reliability and validity of data. Incorporating these forms of triangulation enhanced the rigor and validity of this study.

4.9   RESEARCHER POSITIONALITY

Researcher positionality reflects the position a researcher decides to adopt within a given research study (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013; Holmes, 2020). The position from which research is approached influences the manner in which the research is carried out, its findings, and ultimately its results (Rowe, 2014). Rowe (2014) further alludes that researcher positionality is determined by three key areas. Firstly, the subject under investigation which typically refers to the topic or area the researcher is studying. The researcher's personal experiences, beliefs, and biases might influence how they approach and interpret the problem under study. Secondly, research participants, the people who are being studied as part of the research study. The researcher's positionality can influence how the researcher interacts with participants; that is their ability to understand their perspectives, and the way they interpret their responses. Thirdly, the research context and process which involve the broader context in which the research is conducted which includes the methods chosen, the cultural and social context, and any personal factors that might influence the research process and outcomes.

Dubois (2015) argues that reality can never be described in an unbiased manner. It is difficult to remain unbiased due to personal values or beliefs. The potential closeness of

the researcher to the problem under study calls for researchers to reflect on their connections to the research and the effect those connections have on the study (Martin, Desing & Borrego, 2022). Hence the incorporation of reflexivity in the research process. Reflexivity involves self-scrutiny on the part of the researcher about their role as researcher throughout the research process (Lincoln & Guba, 2000; Bourke, 2014). Interrogating positionality in the research process helps researchers to be intentional about how they recognise power relationships with research participants, rather than delegating these important matters to an afterthought (Martin et al., 2022). This involves reflecting on their own position in society, recognising any biases or privileges they may hold, and being aware of how these factors may have influenced the research process (Secules et al., 2021) including ways in which they could have made different decisions to achieve different results (Martin, 2020). Engaging in this reflection potentially enhances the transparency and integrity of the research work, ensuring a deeper understanding of the study's implications and potential impact on different social groups.

In this study my role as researcher was dual; both insider and outsider. This implies as an insider, I may have had some level of familiarity or connection with the community or subject under investigation. As an outsider, I also maintained some level of objectivity, which allowed for a more impartial and unbiased examination of the phenomenon under study. Thus, the dual role of both insider and an outsider provides a balanced perspective, blending insider knowledge with outsider objectivity, thereby enhancing the richness and credibility of the research process and findings. However, in order to minimise bias and avoid imposing my own experiences and personal beliefs on the participants, I ensured the discussions were only centered around issues related to questions I asked from the semi-structured interview guide.

Additionally, reflecting on my positionality addresses any questions that might arise as a result of my positionality in the research. Thus, my reflections on personal positioning in Chapter 1 (Section 1.9) details the experiences that shaped the personal beliefs and convictions that influenced me to embark on this journey. My experiences as a rural dweller and teacher reveal my personal connection to the research as a result of my identity. This highlights that as a result of my researcher positionality, I may have been

emotionally invested in the participants and their communities, although I do not exactly come from those communities. Recognising similarities between my home area and the areas in which the study was conducted allowed me to relate well to the study participants. Again, my sense of identity enabled me to acknowledge the difficulties and limitations experienced by people residing in these geographically isolated areas. Being aware of how easily and frequently these areas are overlooked I intentionally sought to present the voices of participants in the form of quotations and extracts from the interviews. The aim was to avoid any misrepresentation of participants' lived experiences. Also, as a form of empowerment, I sought to give voice to the voiceless minority.

4.10 CREDIBILITY AND TRUSTWORTHINESS

To ensure reliability in qualitative research, examination of trustworthiness is crucial, and it is used by researchers to address the issues of validity and reliability (Creswell & Miller, 2010). Credibility in qualitative research means the confidence of data (Hammersely, 1992). It is the degree to which the findings accurately reflect the experiences of the participants. Trustworthiness captures the extent to which the findings can be considered accurate and reliable. To enhance the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings in my study, I employed the following strategies:

•   I used a voice recorder to record the semi-structured interviews to capture data from the participants. These interviews were transcribed manually word for word which provided the exact narratives captured from participants, thus enriching the credibility of the study in terms of validity and reliability and avoiding misrepresentation. McMillan and Schumacher (2001) affirm that tape-recorders, photographs, and videotapes may enhance validity by providing an accurate and relatively complete record of data.

•   I then endorsed themes from transcripts with the exact words of the participants (Tsephe, 2021:74). Thus findings were supported with participants' actual narratives.

•   I shared the transcripts with the participants to check if I accurately captured their experiences.

•   I also reflected on my bias and assumptions throughout the entire research process. Throughout my preparations to conduct this research study, from the formulation

of the initial research questions to the construction of the survey questionnaire and interview protocol, I consistently kept in mind my positionality as a member of a rural community investigating issues of social inequality. The act of continuously engaging in self-scrutiny in relation to my positionality involved asking myself the following questions: What role did my positionality as a member of a rural community studying factors underlying constraints and enablers of access in higher education play? How did I use my positionality in different spaces? Did my positionality have an impact on interactions I had with the participants?

• Both chi square-tests and multiple regression analysis were used to enhance confirmability of the study findings.

4.10.1 Transferability

Transferability in qualitative research is the level to which research conclusions of a given study can be applied to similar sample of participants, research context and settings (Ritcher & Mlambo, 2005). Transferability was enriched through providing a full disclosure of the process followed to collect data for this study. The explanation included how I selected the regions and participants of the study context. According to Shenton (2004), to allow transferability, researchers provide sufficient detail of the context of the fieldwork to allow a reader to decide whether the prevailing environment is similar to another situation with which he or she is familiar and whether the findings can justifiably be applied to the other context.

Since this study was conducted in specific rural settings in Botswana, the results may be transferable to rural areas with similar descriptions and similar participants. For instance, the results may be transferable to remote and rural areas experiencing similar challenges in accessing higher education such as lack of access to infrastructural developments, such as communication networks, good roads, including lack of access to good schools.

Secondly the results of this study may be transferable to context with similar cultural and ethnic identities. This study was conducted within ethnic communities whose mother tongue falls outside the mainstream languages spoken in Botswana. The results may have transferability to other rural settings with similar ethnic or cultural identities in

Botswana. These results may be relevant to other ethnic minorities who face similar exclusions, based on language as mother tongue education is still limited in Botswana.

The third context that the findings may be relevant to is the socio-economic context. Rural areas experiencing similar socio-economic conditions, such as poverty rates, high unemployment levels, and low education achievement may find my study findings applicable. These contexts can help researchers figure out if the results could apply to other rural areas. This helps make the research more useful in terms of addressing bigger issues about how rural youth can get into university.

4.10.2 Dependability

This is the stability of data over time and over changing conditions (Ritcher & Mlambo, 2005:64; Polit & Beck, 2014). It has to do with the consistency and reliability of data over time and across different conditions or circumstances. It is the ability, to the extent that all conditions are equal, to obtain the same results if the study were to be repeated (Morse, 2015). In other words, this means if another researcher were to repeat the same study, they would yield similar results. Thus, dependability calls for the research process to be logical and transparent such that the process and procedures can be auditable and traced, ensuring consistency throughout the methods employed and the conclusions drawn (Hanson et al., 2019). This strategy is attainable through credibility, triangulation, splitting data and duplicating the analysis and use of audit trail (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). To enhance dependability, I kept a research audit trail detailing the entire process of the research. From the onset of the research, I documented details about the theoretical framework to be used in the study. I outlined the objectives of the study, established research questions, and the methodology to be used. The methodology included decisions concerning collection of data, methods, sampling strategies and how data were to be analysed. Throughout the data collection process, I documented details of dates, locations and participants involved in each data collection exercise.

4.10.3 Confirmability

This is the extent to which the findings of a study are shaped by the respondents and not the researcher bias, motivation, or interest (Lincoln & Guba,1985). Confirmability pertains

to the degree of assurance that research findings are grounded in the expressions and narratives of participants rather than influenced by potential researcher bias. Confirmability attempts to show that the findings and the interpretations of the findings do not derive from the imagination of the researchers but are clearly linked to the data (Enworo, 2023:374). The strategy shows the connection between data and the findings of a study. Lincoln and Guba (1985) outline four techniques for establishing confirmability of a study, namely confirmability audit, audit trail, triangulation, and reflexivity. I went to great lengths to establish rapport with the potential participants by frequenting the research sites. The first visit was to establish contact and subsequent visits were to establish a working relationship with the participants to be free to open up about their experiences with the problem of unequal access when they responded to questionnaires. Data was collected between December 2021 and May 2022. Lastly, during data presentation and analysis participants' expressions and narratives were captured as reflective of their views and experiences.

4.11 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Ethical consideration is an important aspect that is considered when conducting research. It guides how researchers conduct their research and ensures that the rights and well-being of all participants are considered and respected throughout the research process. This includes ensuring that participants are informed about the research and the potential risks involved, protecting their privacy and confidentiality, and obtaining informed consent.

4.11.1 Gaining access to participants

The negotiation of access to the research sites and participants was done through the relevant gatekeepers. The main recruitment strategy was letter writing. For the survey category in the rural areas, I approached the rural administration authorities of each of the four regions of the research context, with the help of an introductory letter from the University of Pretoria and a research permit issued on behalf of the Botswana government by the Ministry of Tertiary Education, Research Science and Technology. The permit stated the purpose for which the research is being conducted. Upon explaining the purpose of my visit, rural administrators introduced me to the social workers in each community. The social workers helped to identify a few of the participants since they knew

a few of the individuals in their areas. In one of the communities, I was directed to a representative of the village development committee (VDC) who introduced me to a few youth in their community. Upon building rapport and seeking permission to tell them more about my study, consent letters containing a detailed description of the study were handed out to help them gain more insights into the study and its procedures.

Participants who consented to take part in the study referred me to the other rural youth in their areas who also did not succeed in going to university. For the category of those who managed to access university education, the introductory letter and government research permit were personally delivered to the two selected universities, and permission to access the required participants was sought. At University Y through the student affairs office, students were sent automated emails and WhatsApp group messages. I also approached students on campus to tell them about my study, however a few of those who contacted me did not meet all criteria for the study. Although they hailed from the rural areas, they had not done most of their schooling in those areas. At the University X, I was requested to follow the normal procedure for seeking ethical clearance when conducting research. Upon being satisfied that my research protocol met the university's conditions to conduct research, I was issued with a permission letter and directed to approach various faculties. A few students I had contact with referred me to others of similar background.

4.11.2 Informed consent

Prior to requesting participants to take part in the study, full information about the study was disclosed. I explained the purpose of the study to the research participants, its importance, and procedures (Blumberg, Cooper & Schindler, 2008; Christensen, Johnson, Burke & Turner, 2015) in the form of consent letters. The letters pertained to the purpose, the nature of procedures of the study, the expected duration of the survey questionnaires and interviews, as well as how collected data was to be used and stored. To encourage participants to make an informed choice about taking part in the study, I gave them consent letters to read and think carefully whether they would like to be part of the study, and then sign them at their discretion. I informed participants that their

participation was on voluntary basis (and that there would be no financial incentives), therefore they reserve the right to withdraw from the study at any time.

I also informed participants that the research findings were to be used for report writing of the final thesis. In addition, they were intended for publications in journals and conferences. Furthermore, permission was sought to use data, confidentially and anonymously, for further research purposes, as data sets are intellectual properties of the University of Pretoria and, where relevant, project funders which may include secondary data analysis and using the data for teaching purposes. The confidentiality and privacy applicable to this study were going to be binding on future research studies. The datasets were to be stored in accordance with the University of Pretoria's data protection protocols; therefore, I shared this information with participants. Permission was also sought from participants through a consent form to record proceedings of the semi-structured interview with a voice recorder to enable the researcher to capture their responses well.

4.11.3 Confidentiality and anonymity

The principles of confidentiality and anonymity were observed by assuring participants that information they shared in the study was only used for the purposes stated in the consent form, hence the information shall be held in confidence. The essence of anonymity is that information provided by participants should in no way reveal their identity (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011). Research sites and participants' anonymity were preserved throughout the research study by making use of pseudonyms instead of their real names. Participants were not required to provide any personal identifiers. Confidentiality of the completed survey questionnaires was observed: firstly, by ensuring that such questionnaires are identified by pseudonyms or codes and they were not to be held longer than necessary. Secondly, by ensuring that data provided was to be aggregated for purposes of report writing.

All interviewees were assured of the confidentiality of the interview. I assured my participants that whatever information they share in the interviews would be held in strict confidence. It was clarified to the participants, however, the degree to which confidentiality can be protected, as this study was carried out solely for academic purposes (Tsephe, 2021). The information was kept under lock and key to avoid

unauthorized access. I took care to store information securely, on a password-protected laptop which is not shared. In addition, data recorded from interviews was transcribed without divulging individual identities of participants, and as mentioned, such data was stored in accordance with the University of Pretoria's data protection policy. The hard copies of the questionnaires were stored in a locked drawer to ensure confidentiality. Finally, I provided my contact details as well as my superviser's in case the research participants needed to contact me.

4.11.4 Protection from harm

Harm in research ethics implies negative consequences that the research subject or participant may experience as a result of participating in a given research (Saunders et al., 2016). In this study the principle of no harm was upheld by seeing to it that all participants provide informed consent, which also accorded them the liberty to withdraw from the research at any time if they so wished. Also, by upholding earlier ethical assurances promised on use of data provided, confidentiality and anonymity, the principle of no harm was observed. Safeguarding against harm in research also includes protection of other fundamental human liberties for the participants. Protection of human dignity is important hence social researchers must consider the effects of the research on participants, and act in such a way as to preserve the dignity of all human beings (Cohen et al., 2011).

The use of a phone to conduct the interview in private settings allowed for the interviews to be conducted at the participants' convenience, in an environment that promoted honesty as there was no audience that could have had an influence on their responses. No information that could identify the participants such as names or ID numbers was captured. The researcher went to great lengths to explain that the study results would be anonymized, that the participants' perceptions would be used for improvements as opposed to being punitive if differing views were offered. In order to minimise discomfort, with regards to language, I translated the consent letters and research instruments into the local language. Using a language that participants were comfortable with maintained neutrality and ensured all research participants were treated with respect. Finally, the

study was conducted under strict COVID-19 protocols since data was collected during the COVID-19 pandemic.

4.11.5 Treating participants fairly

In research treating participants fairly is important as an ethical obligation as well as for the overall integrity of the study. I maintained the principle of fairness by treating all participants equally with respect, dignity, and sensitivity throughout the entire research process. I made participants fully aware of the research procedures, their aims, the potential benefits and risks, so that they can make informed decisions based on a clear understanding of what they are a part of. I respected the research participants' right to autonomy and took care not to impose my ideas and opinions on the participants. Equally important is representing the participants' views in the exact same way they presented them.

4.12 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

Although the study was a mixed methods design, the findings cannot be generalised due to the fact that it only involved 4 regions in the Botswana. Again only 108 participants took part in the study instead of the initial 150 which was targeted; therefore, the targeted population could not be met. Again, the study was focused on a specific population. Data was collected from a sample of rural youth from specific rural and remote regions, which may not be representative of all the rural youth in Botswana. Due to the fact that only one public university is included in the study limited the sample size for the interviews. One of the private universities did not participate in the study. Furthermore, I collected data during the COVID-19 pandemic, which affected in-person data collection in some restricted areas; universities were still conducting classes remotely which affected how students interacted with others. Instead of having focus group discussions, phone interviews with 8 individual students were conducted, which potentially limited interrogating meanings behind certain covert expressions that could not be observed over the phone. As a result, rich data may have been lost. While these limitations affected the generalisability of the study, the findings were consistent with literature on enablers and constraints regarding access for disadvantaged groups including rural youth.

4.12 SUMMARY

The chapter outlined the methodology and approaches that were deemed suitable for the study. The study adopted the pragmatist paradigm which aligns with mixed methods research. A QUAL+quant design was chosen as the design most appropriate to illuminate experiences of rural youth and the problem of unequal access, therefore it helps in the interpretation of the problem of unequal access and answering the research questions fully. To this end, surveys and semi-structured interviews served as data collecting instruments, with priority given to the qualitative method. Data analysis was done using Python, IBM SPSS28 and Atlas Ti.22 Software. In relation to ethical issues, the study conformed to all ethical considerations in respect of conducting research. Permission to carry out the research was duly sought from gatekeepers and participants. The nature of the research and the relevant procedures were fully disclosed to participants; its purpose, data collection procedures, potential benefits as well as potential risks if there were any involved. In this regard, the study upheld ethical considerations that ensure all participants are treated with respect and consideration. The next chapter presents the empirical data.

CHAPTER 5: EMPIRICAL FINDINGS

5.1   INTRODUCTION

In Chapter 1 I set out the broad aim of the study as well as the research questions of the study. In the first section of this chapter participants' demographic information for both the quantitative and qualitative strands of the study is provided. Statistical findings and qualitative responses are also presented. The sample consisted of two groups; participants from rural youth that were not able to achieve access to university, while the second group consisted of participants from rural youth that were able to achieve access to university and were actively enrolled at university. As such, this chapter is focused on research questions 1: What are the structural arrangements that constrain rural youth from accessing higher education in Botswana? and research question 2: What are the structural arrangements that enable rural youth to access higher education in Botswana? The empirical findings are centered around key tenents of the capability approach: capabilities, functionings, conversion factors and agency. The chapter is focused on the analysis of students' experiences framing the family, home community and school as social structures that has an influence in enabling and constraining access to higher education.

5.2   DATA QUALITY

Quantitative data was collected from 100 participants while qualitative data was collected from 8 participants. Survey questionnaires were distributed among 100 participants and 89 questionnaires were returned. I conducted data screening which involved reviewing questionnaires to ensure answers have been indicated against all applicable questions. The exercise also involved ensuring there were no marks or side notes next to the questions which could create ambiguity during data entry. From this exercise, 16 questionnaires were discarded and 73 were usable for analysis. The questionnaires that were not usable for analysis contained questions that were incorrectly completed, and some closed-ended questions were allocated more than one alternative or were also not completed. During data entry into Excel, I standardised answers, so that similar responses were merged given the similarity of meanings. This was done to achieve

patterns and categories for easy management and analysis. Data was transferred into Python to tabulate the information in accordance with the data plan analysis. A further analysis was done using IBM SPSS28. Qualitative data was collected from semi-structured in-depth interviews with 8 rural students who were enrolled at a public university. Recorded interviews were manually transcribed. Atlas Ti.22 Software data analysis package was used for coding and identification of themes that emerged from the data.

5.3 PARTICIPANTS DEMOGRAPHICS

The following table contains a summary of relevant information of the participants from rural areas that were able to achieve access to university and were actively enrolled at university. These participants were recruited for the semi-structure interview. Pseudonyms were allocated to the participants to ensure confidentiality that they will remain anonymous.

Participants (Pseudonyms)	Gender	Age	Year of study	Programme	Region/Community	First in family to attend university
April	Female	21	2	B.Ed. Counselling	Kweneng West	No
Patience	Female	22	3	B.Ed. Counselling	Ngamiland	Yes
Katlo	Female	20	2	B.Ed. Lifelong Learning & Community Development	Ghanzi	Yes
Kagiso	Male	19	1	Bachelor of Information Systems	Kweneng West	Yes
Sesha	Male	21	3	B Sc. Pharmaceuticals	Kweneng West	Yes

Pono	Female	25	3	B.A. Early Childhood Studies	Ghanzi	Yes
Kamogelo	Female	21	3	B.A. Media Studies	Kgalagadi North	Yes
Donald	Male	19	1	B.Sc. Marketing	Kweneng West	Yes

Table 5.1: **Summary of the demographic information of interview participants from rural youth that were able to achieve access to university and were actively enrolled at university**.

All the other participants' demographic information is presented in detail below. These are the participants who took part in the survey.

5.3.1 Age

The survey sample consisted of:

- 4.5% of participants aged between 18 and 19 years from rural youth that are not attending university and 18% of participants aged between 18 and 19 years from rural students attending university;

- The 20-21 years age group consisted of 43.2% of rural youth not attending university; and 37% of participants from rural students at university;

- The 22-23 years age group consisted of 20.5% of participants from rural youth not attending university; and 30% of rural students at university.

- The 24+ years age group consisted of 31.8% of participants from rural youth not attending university; and 15% of rural students attending university.

Figure 5.1 summarises participants' age groups.
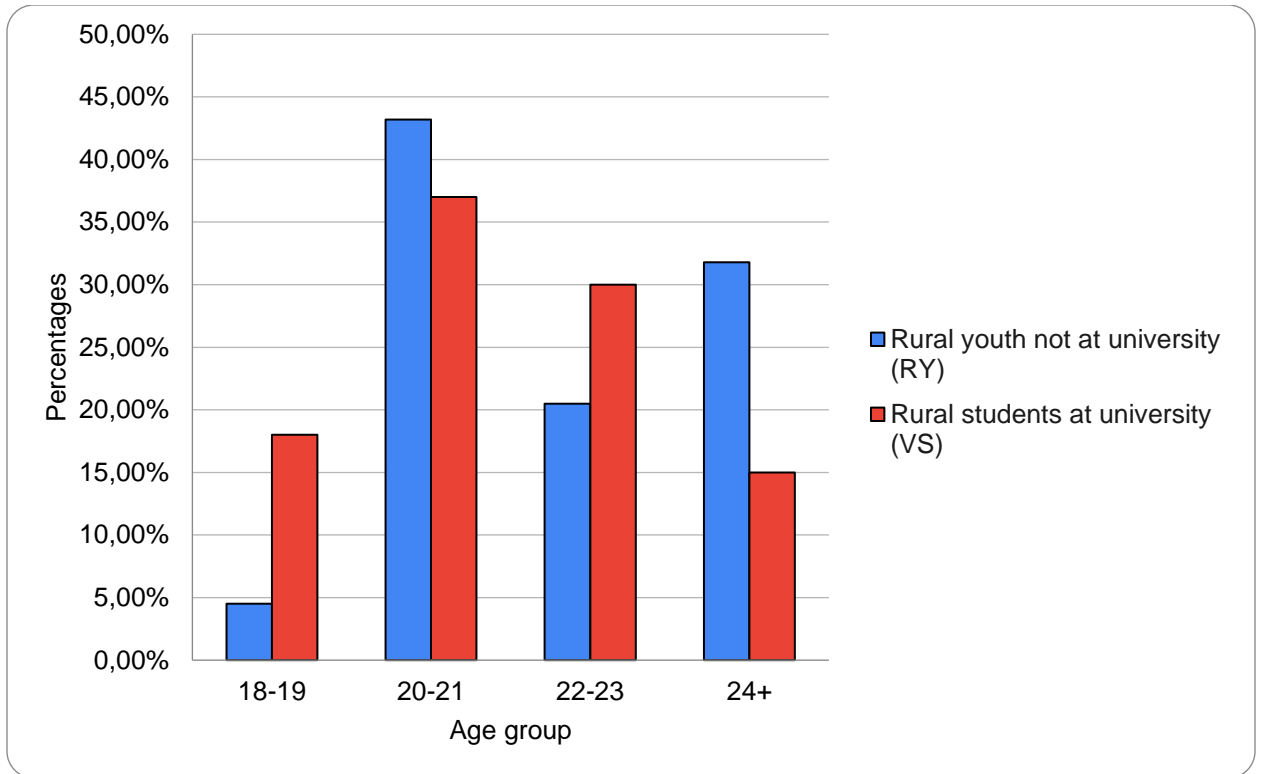
Figure 5.1: **Participants sample by age**

5.3.2 Gender

The survey sample consisted of 57% of female participants from rural youth not attending university and 63% female participants from rural students at university. Also included were 43% male participants from rural youth not attending university while male participants from rural students at university accounted for 37% of the sample.

Figure 5.2 summarises the participants' gender distribution.
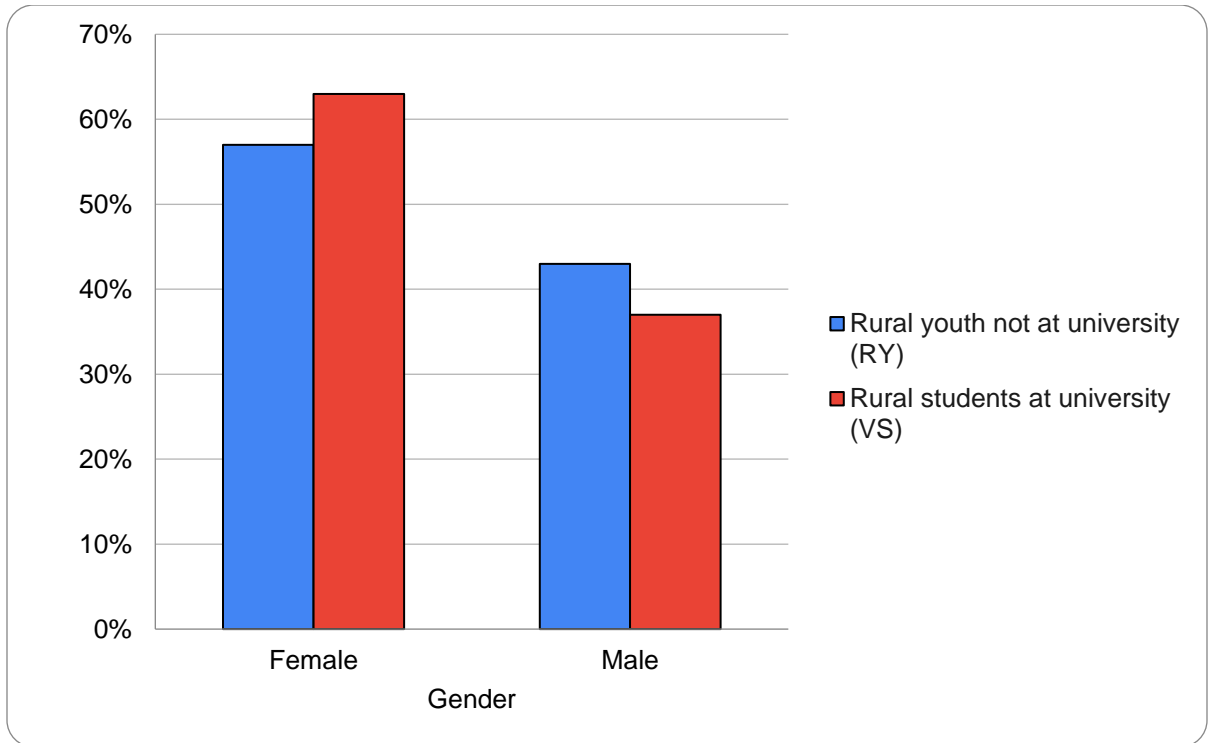
Figure 5.2: **Participants sample by gender**

5.3.3   Family income status

Most participants identified as coming from low-income family background. About 66% participants not at university identified as low-income, while 34% of the same cohort come from a middle-income family background. Of the sample of rural students at university 52% come from a middle-income family background, while 48% of the same cohort come from a low-income family background.

Figure 5.3 summarises participants' information about family income status.
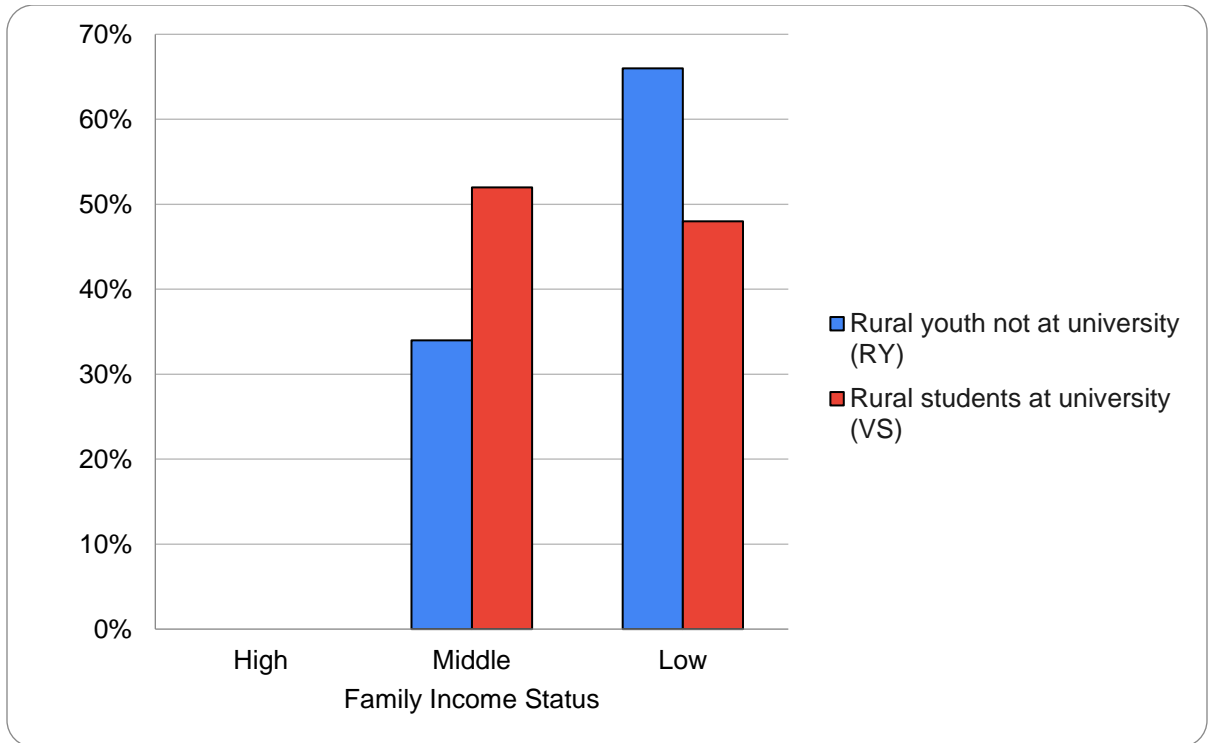
Figure 5.3: **Participants sample by family income status**

5.3.4 Parental education level

The majority of the sample of the rural youth not attending university (75%) indicated their parents' level of education was below Form 5 (Grade12), while only 25% of the same cohort indicated their parents' education level was beyond Form 5. For the rural students at university cohort, 44% indicated their parents were educated beyond Form 5 (Grade 12) and 56% indicated their parents level of education was below Form 5 (Grade 12). The figure below summarises participants' parental education level.
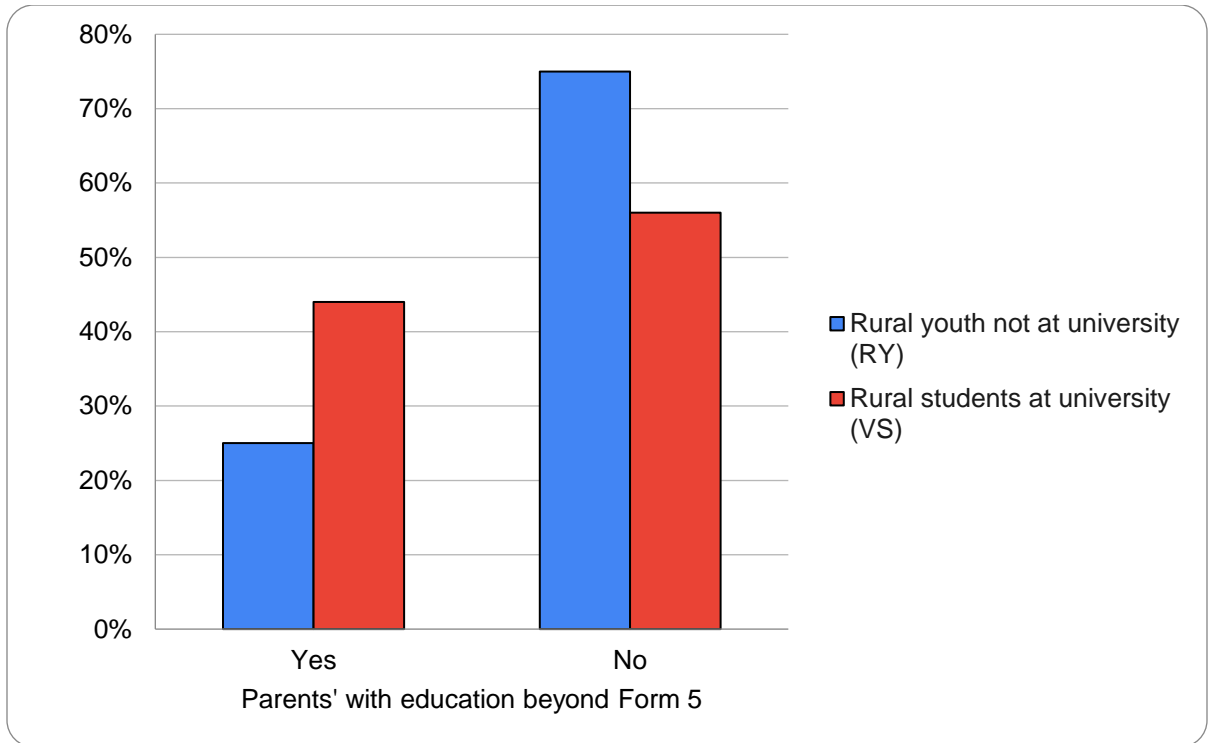
Figure 5.4: **Participants sample by parents' education level**

5.3.5 Regions

In respect of place of origin, Figure 5.5 shows a distribution of participants across regions. The research was focused on rural youth from remote areas within the following regions: Kweneng West=1, Ghanzi=2, Kgalagadi North=4, Ngamiland=4, Other=5.

S1_5_Region

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	1	27	37,0	37,0	37,0
	2	14	19,2	19,2	56,2
	3	21	28,8	28,8	84,9
	4	8	11,0	11,0	95,9
	5	3	4,1	4,1	100,0
	Total	73	100,0	100,0	

Figure 5.5: **Participants sample by regions**

5.3.6 Home language

Of the participants from the cohort that was not attending university, about 70% spoke Shekgalagari and 27.3% spoke Setswana as their home language, while Otjiherero was spoken by 2.3% of the same group. These participants are mainly from Kweneng West,

Ghanzi, and Kgalagadi North regions. Regarding the university cohort, 48% spoke Setswana and 30% used Shekgalagari as their home language. Ikalanga was spoken by 14%, while 4% spoke both Setswana and Ikalanga. Sesubiya was spoken by 4% of the same group. The figure below summarises participants' home languages.
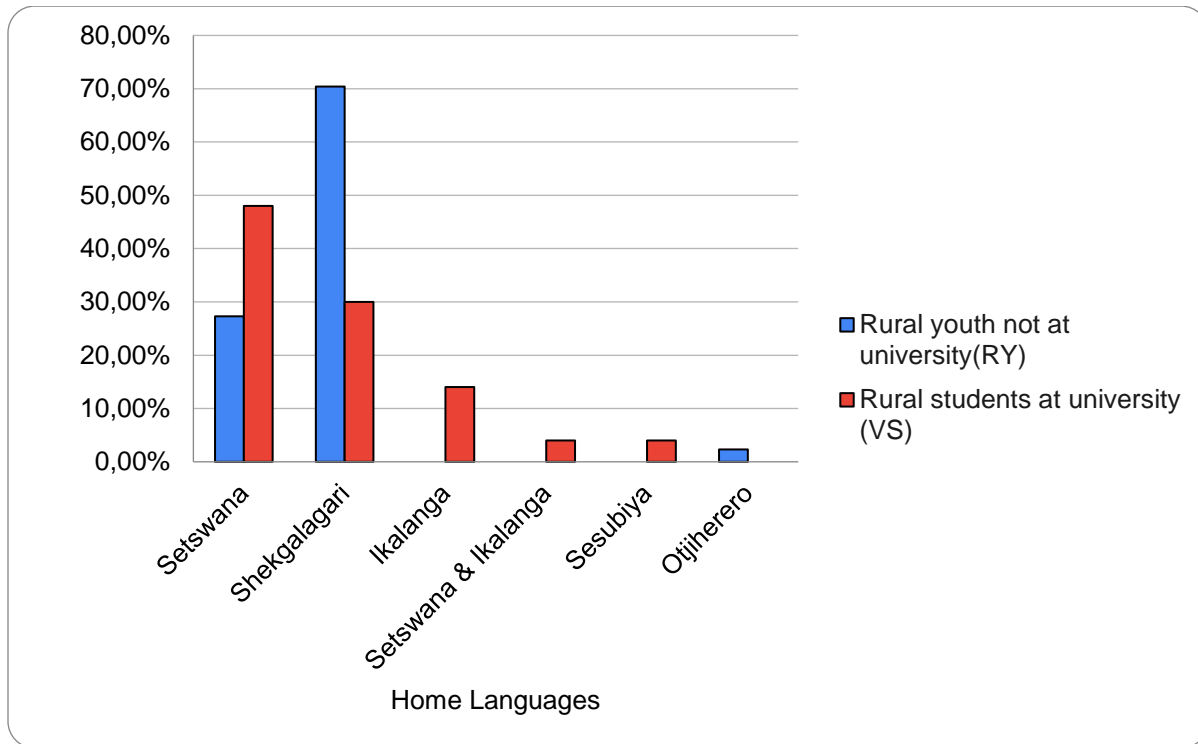
Figure 5.6 **Participants' sample by home language**

5.3.7 Language of instruction at school

Of the rural youth not attending university, about 90% spoke Setswana at school while only 4.5% used both Setswana and English, and 2.3% used English, and another 2.3% used Shekgalagari at school. For the sample at university, 37% used English, while another 37% used Setswana. English and Setswana were spoken by 22%, while 4% spoke English, Setswana as well as French. The figure below summarises participants' sample by school languages.
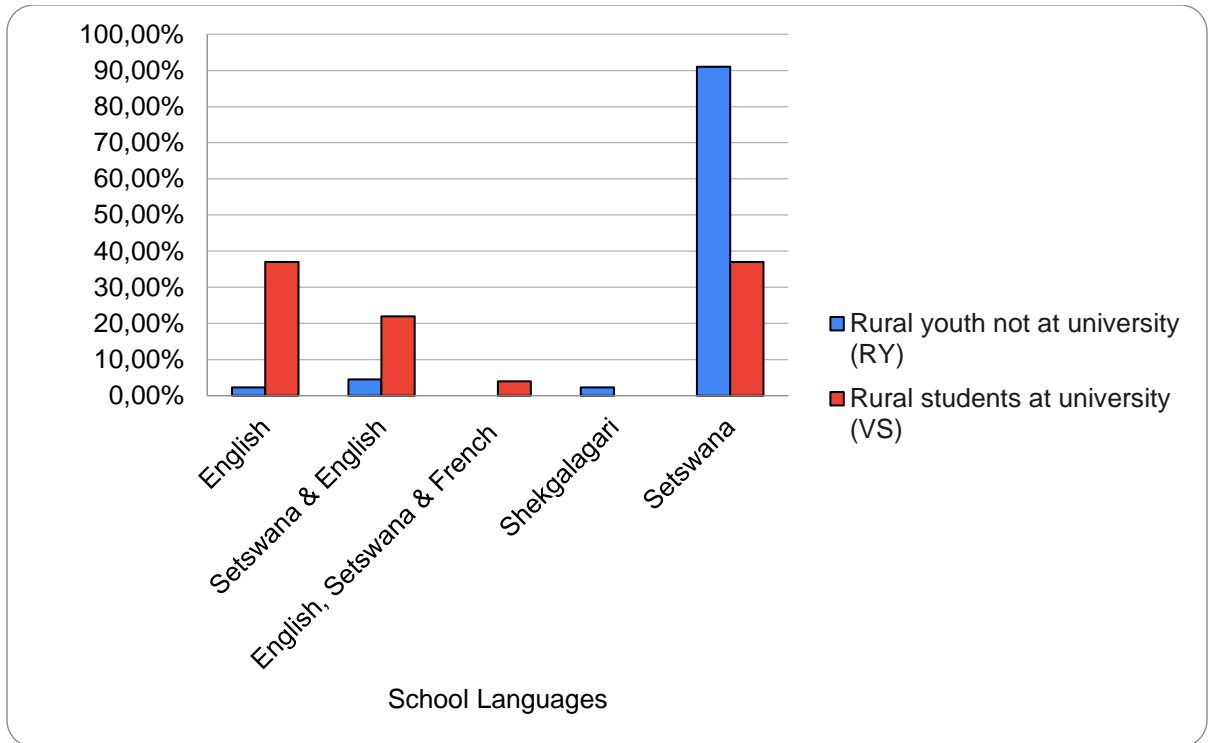
Figure 5.7: **Participants sample by school language**

5.4 FAMILY, HOME AND COMMUNITY

This section introduces the variables that constrain and enable access for the rural youth. Through the capability approach the variables are framed as conversion factors. These conversion factors are in themselves neutral. However, it is the outcomes of these structures that could either be positive or negative. For example, family and home community are conversion factors which can combine virtuously to support a student's aspirations or they can work against such aspirations (Walker, McLean, Mathebula & Mukwambo, 2022).

Statistical data revealed that the factor of family background specifically had an influence on access. Generally, the multiple regression analysis results showed that the participant's family background, community, challenges, application fees, financial support, information on which university to study at, where to study, and university funding highly influenced enrolment at university (p= <0.001), at significance level 5% (Table 5.2).

Variable	Mean	Std. dev	N

University enrolment	1.60	0.49	73
Income status	1.41	0.50	73
Parents education level	1.67	0.47	73
HE Experience	2.01	0.54	73
Decision making	1.79	0.72	73
Application process	1.96	0.81	73
Stat barrier	1.70	0.81	73
Community support	3.19	1.35	73
Friend support	2.41	1.40	73
Financial challenges	1.10	0.41	73
Application fees	2.07	0.65	73
Financial support	2.84	1.31	73
Information on university study	1.88	0.58	73
Where to study	2.70	1.51	73
Course to study	2.71	1.51	73
University funding	1.96	0.59	73

Table 5.2. **Descriptive statistics results on the influence of participant's family background, and community on university access**

The statistics analysis results show that 66% of the participants from rural youth who were not able to attend university come from a low-income family background, while 34% come from a middle- income family background. Results also show that 52% of the participants from the rural youth that were able to go to university come from a middle income family background while 48% come from a low income family background. A chi-square test was conducted to establish whether a relationship existed between family income status and being able to go to university. The chi-square showed statistically significant difference ($p = 0.003$) between family income status and being able to go university. Participants that came from middle to high income groups were able to attend university compared to those that came from low-income families. This suggests families with better income could afford to provide better opportunities that could be converted to academic achievement.

Conversely, students from lower income background may have limited opportunities and freedoms to convert into access.

5.4.1 Family income status as a barrier to access

For most rural youth that were not able to go to university, family income status was perceived as a major barrier to access university. Results show that 68.2% indicated that family income status was a major barrier in attempting to access university. In addition, family income status was a minor barrier to go to university for 20.4% of the participants, while 11.4% indicated that family income status was not a barrier in their attempt to go to university. For this cohort, the inability to go to university might be attributed to other factors besides those related to socio-economic status.

For participants at university, family income status was not a barrier to access university for 37% of the participants, while 33% indicated that family income status was a minor barrier for them in their attempt to access university. Furthermore, 30% of the sample indicated that family income status was a major barrier in their attempt to access university. A chi-square test was conducted to establish whether family income status was a barrier to go to university. The chi-square test showed there was a relationship between family income acting as a barrier and going to university *(p=0.004).* For the rural youth that were not able to go to university, family income was a barrier to attend university. This data is corroborated by data from semi-structured interviews.

Although participants were able to gain access to university through other means such as government sponsorship, for a few participants family income status was a barrier in terms of accessing the course or programme of their choice. For example, one of the participants, Pono, felt if she had financial support from her family, she would pursue a course of her dreams. Although her family background was a limitation for her to pursue a degree of her choice, she did not give up but opted to do another course which was her second option. She was able to access funding from government to study the course. In this case she applied practical reasoning and also adapted her preferences. She said:

> *Yeah, eish! It's a lack of financial support from poor families. I wanted to*
> *be a nurse, but I failed because the government wouldn't sponsor me for*

that course as I had failed sciences. If I had money, I would have managed to sponsor myself to do nursing, but just because there was no money from my family, I couldn't manage, which is a barrier, yeah. Those institutions are found in cities; they are not there in our villages. So, we had to come from the villages to the cities to access them.

Pono further expressed that she did not believe that family background should be a limitation to one's ability to go after their goals. The quotation below shows that she believed individuals had the power to pursue and achieve their aspirations, thus shape their own destinies:

*I think it's a **NO** for me. Though, the way we live in the rural areas is challenging, it's a no for me. It's a no for me because, when you have a vision or a goal that you want to achieve, you just focus. So, like I said before, my family was giving me support. So, this support was the strength that I used to persist in achieving what I wanted. I relied on them. So, this really showed me that my family wasn't a limitation, even though we were lacking money, or the family was poor, the village was poor, the surroundings did not really suit us. But somehow my family wasn't a limit for me.*

Sesha also expressed the same sentiments that despite having gained entry into university, his family background was a limitation when it came to pursuing a career of his choice. He indicated that he had aspired to work in the medical field, but due to the financial hardships he went through from the start of his university studies he did not make it through to the selection to specialise as a doctor. Sesha stated that:

In fact, my family background has limited me to choose my career and to pursue tertiary education. Maybe it was because of being kind of a poor family and also being from a remote area. And also, because where we come from is of a low profile; so, we want to develop where we come from, at home, and even if we fail, at least our children would have a better background than us

Sen (2006) argues that disparities in access to education based on family background are a form of inequality that limits individual's capabilities to achieve their full potential. potential. He highlights the importance of addressing these inequalities through policies and interventions that promote equal opportunities for all individuals regardless of their socioeconomic status or family background.

5.4.2 Funding/money

The inability to have access to funding for a university education is depicted as a strong negative material conversion factor. Funding in this context is money required for tuition fees, textbooks and a living allowance. Despite getting good grades some students could not make it into the government cut off point for sponsorship. According to statistical data 77% of the participants from rural youth who did not go to university had no financial support, while 16% had financial support from government. Only 5% of the participants had financial support from the family. Furthermore, about 2% had financial support from other sources.

Results also show that 44% of the participants from rural youth who were able to attend university had financial support from government, while 33% had financial support from the family and 15% of the participants had no financial support at all. Only 8% indicated they had support from both the family and the government. Based on multiple regression analysis, results show that financial support highly influenced access to university by participants (p= <0.001), at significance level 5%. These results show that financial support was determinant on accessing university. The lack of financial support directly impacted on rural youth's capabilities to pursue educational opportunities and achieve their educational goals to attend university.

5.4.3 Not having money for application fees

Funding or money is also required during the process of applying to university. Money is required to access the internet for online applications. Financial resources are also required to pay for the actual application to universities. The lack of money is framed as a negative conversion factor constraining access to higher education. Data from the survey indicates that 50% of the participants from the rural youth who were not able to go

to university had no money at all for the application fees to attend university, while 43.2% did not have enough money for application fees. Only about 6.8% had sufficient funds for application fees. Multiple regression analysis results showed that (un)availability of application fees by the participants significantly influenced access to university (p=0.014), at significance level of 5%. We can conclude that the lack of money for application fees determined access to university of the participants. Lack of money represents a major barrier to rural youth's chances of equality with other more privileged youth in opportunities and outcomes. Income inequality can restrict agency for the individual and household to expand human capabilities (Van der Hoeven, 2021). This highlights how disparities in resource distribution or income inequality can limit individuals' and their family's ability to fully develop and exercise their capabilities and freedoms to live the lives they value.

Model	Unstd. B Coe.		Std Coe. B	t	Sig
1 (Constant)	**0.995**	**0.395**		**2.518**	**0.014**
Income status	0.021	0.115	0.021	0.185	0.854
Parents education level	0.070	0.117	0.068	0.601	0.550
HE experiences	-0.25	0.102	-0.027	-0.245	0.808
Decision making	-0.31	0.094	-0.045	-0.329	0.743
Application process	0.197	0.091	0.322	2.159	0.035
Stat barrier	-0.193	0.069	-0.318	-2.799	0.007
Community support	0.037	0.044	0.100	0.824	0.413
Friends support	0.011	0.040	0.030	0.266	0.791
Challenges	0.334	0.124	0.280	2.689	0.009
1 (Constant)	**0.473**	**0.209**		**2.268**	**0.027**
Challenges	0.214	0.092	0.179	2.322	0.023
Application fees	0.161	0.064	0.213	2.519	0.014
Fin support	0.239	0.032	0.638	7.388	<0.001
Which university to study at	-0.007	0.078	-0.008	-0.089	0.929
Where to study	0.072	0.032	0.220	2.280	0.026
Course to study	-0.063	0.032	-0.194	-1.949	0.056
University funding	-0.064	0.071	-0.077	-0.912	0.365

Table 5.3. **Multiple regression analysis results on influence of participant family background, community, challenges, application fees, financial support, information on university to study at, where to study, and university funding on access to university**

5.4.4 Family experience with higher education/ family history with higher education

Family experience with higher education encompasses collective history, attitudes and behaviours regarding post-secondary education and it can vary significantly from one family to another. Family experience with higher education was a factor that was tested to determine its influence on access. Results show that 64% of the participants from the rural youth who were not able to go to university reported that their family had limited experience or knowledge about post-secondary school choices. This was followed by 20% who reported that the family had no experience or knowledge about post-secondary school choices, while 16% reported that the family had experience or knowledge about post-secondary school choices. Results also show that 82% of the participants from rural youth at university indicated that their family had limited experience or knowledge about post-secondary school choices. About 11% reported that their family had experience or knowledge about post-secondary school choices, while only 7% reported that the family had no experience or knowledge about post-secondary school choices. A chi-square test was conducted to establish whether a relationship existed between the family's experience with higher education and going to university. The chi-square test showed no significant statistical differences *(p=0.238)* between family experience with higher education and going to university.

Additionally, the multiple regression analysis results showed that the education level of the parents had insignificant influence on participant accessing university (p=0.550), at significance level 5%. The results suggest that other factors determined participants' access to university. With the exception of a few, interview participants, despite their families not having experience with higher education, were able to make it to university. For instance, one of the participants who is a first generation student succeeded in going to university despite lack of higher education in his family. A first generation student is student whose parents have not completed a university education. Kagiso explained:

Actually, where I come from in our family none of them are that advanced on tertiary level as all my older siblings went as far as Form 5. So, even if they assisted me with my schoolwork they did not actually understand much. I am the only child at home who managed [to go to university-my own addition]. Actually, there isn't much because they are not really aware of tertiary life, but they do try by advising me about attending university. But financially, they are not stable enough to assist me.

While some participants were able to gain access to university despite not having family history with higher education, family members with some knowledge about university are better equipped to offer insights on the application process and provide advice on selecting suitable courses as well as apply for scholarship opportunities. Valuable information may also include sharing their own experiences to help navigate the challenges of university life.

5.4.5 Family's role in the application process to attend university

Family often provides access to educational resources, financial support and information regarding the university application process. This assistance can be instrumental in overcoming barriers such as financial constraints or lack of information, thereby increasing students' capability to access higher education. Findings indicate that for participants who were not able to go to university, family played a minimal to no role in the application process to attend university. About 41% of the participants indicated that their family played a minor role in the application process, while the same number of participants (41%) reported that their family played no role in helping them to apply for university. Only 18.2 % reported that their family played a significant role in the application process to attend university. As for the sample of rural youth at university, 59% of the participants indicated that family had a significant role in the application process to attend university. About 30% of the participants indicated that family had a minor role in the application process, while 11% reported their family had no role in helping them to apply for university. A chi-square test was conducted to establish whether a relationship existed between the two groups in terms of the family's role in the application process and going

to university. The chi-square test showed significant statistical differences *(p=0.003)* between the family's role in the application process to attend university and going to university. Multiple regression analysis results also showed that the role of the family in the application process significantly influenced access to university (p=0.035), at significance level of 5%.

For these cohorts, the family's role in the application process to attend university was a factor in determining access to university. Participants whose family played a significant role in the application process were able to go to university, contrary to participants whose family played a minimal role or no role at all in the application process. The quotations below show how family played a significant role in the application process to university. From the sample of rural youth who were able to gain entry to university, family played a role in the decision making process about which course to apply for, as well as availing the resources for them to be able to apply. For example, Kamogelo indicated that she also sought out information herself, applying practical reason in the choice of course to study at university which demonstrated exercising agency. She explained:

> *My uncle is the one who has a lot of knowledge about university education as he is the one who ended up having gone through university. My parents are the ones who have not reached university level, so my uncle is the one who mostly helped me in deciding which course to choose. But in other courses (because it has been a very long time since he has passed through university), but I am the one who researched other courses for myself. Well, I chose this course myself after considering whether it's a sought-after course or not. I was also helped by my uncle, he gave suggestions on my choices of courses, but generally it's a course I was well-informed about through the presentations that were always held at school for us. But my uncle played a big role in my choice and where I was to study.*

Kamogelo also added that her family provided the financial resources that were required for applications fees as well as for her to travel to attend career fairs as they were held in areas further away from her village:

Yes, initially my family supported me with the application fee because there is money that we always pay for applications and during our time it was P300 ($22.47) but I heard that they reduced the fee. They are the ones who looked for the money and for me to be able to attend the career fair, to apply and to know about other schools and the courses they offer.

Another participant, April, also pointed out that her family, especially her brother, played a significant role in the choice of course, as well as in the application process. Unfortunately for her brother, he had to drop out of school to look for work in order to save money to pay for tuition fees to re-take some of the courses that he had failed at his university. She indicated:

My brother helped me with the application process, we chose the courses together. He helped me navigate the city during the application process since everything was new to me. My brother and my uncle, who is a teacher, informed me that the university has opened for applications.

Katlo expressed that her family was resourceful during the application process. Her mother also provided moral support as she travelled with her mother to a service centre in one of the villages to process her application:

I went with my mother to deposit the application fee. She then assisted me with the process for course selection although she did not have that much experience. The little experience she had shed some light on what I was supposed to do.

Kagiso also mentioned that although his family did not understand the university application process, they encouraged him to attend career fairs held in some schools around the area. The moral support provided by family influenced student's agency to pursue choices and opportunities for the life that individuals desire. Kagiso added that:

So, I got exposed to programmes offered at university. They also

helped me with transport fares and applications fees for me to come

and apply at the university.

During the interview Sesha had expressed that he was raised by his grandmother, however both his parents provided financial support to enable him to apply to university. This assistance was very instrumental in enhancing his capabilities to pursue his goal of attending university: Sesha expressed that:

> *My mother and father contributed towards the application fee if I can*
> *recall properly. Yeah, they contributed towards the application fee, they*
> *gave me transport money to do these activities; registration, accepting*
> *admission and all that stuff. To study pharmacy I decided for myself, but*
> *my mother always advised me to go for anything in science or health*
> *science. But choosing pharmacy was my idea.*

While other participants were supported by their family to make a decision concerning course choice, for Kagiso things were different. He had no one to help him make a choice regarding which course to pursue at university. According to him there was no one to help him make that decision. He attributed the lack of relevant support to his parents' lack of understanding of higher education. However, he had realised he was good with computer studies, therefore he chose a computer related course. Thus, he applied practical reason. Kagiso stated that:

> *Well, I took the decision on the course I am pursuing because I realised*
> *I performed better in Computer Studies. So, I believed that since this*
> *one is computer related, I would manage it. But there was no one who*
> *told me about it at university and all that, so I did not know at all. I just*
> *chose it because I realised I had potential with computers. Sometimes*
> *you grow up with parents who never attended school, so it's a bit*
> *challenging. Yeah, I had limited information. So, when we got in tertiary,*
> *we were never taught anything about the programmes, they just gave*
> *us manuals to choose courses from. So, I was actually not well-informed*
> *on the requirements for choosing a course, just that I already knew the*

course I wanted to pursue was a computer related course. So, as I went

through the manual, I knew what to look for.

The above narratives demonstrate the instrumental role played by family in creating enabling conditions that help students apply to university. This is essential within the capability approach framework as it directly influences students' capabilities by providing the necessary resources, support as well as other opportunities to expand their freedoms to lead the lives they have reason to value. A single family member attending university represents one of the rare opportunities to uplift the entire extended family's situation. Thus, families make sacrifices and have high expectations of the university student in the family (Walker et al., 2022).

5.4.6 Home community support for higher education aspirations

Home community is captured as a social conversion factor enabling or constraining access. Community support provides individuals with access to resources, and opportunities that can significantly enhance their capabilities. Here rural youth's perspectives are captured to reflect how they consider their communities' support regarding how they enabled or hindered access.

In terms of support towards their goals and plans to attend university, only 13% of the participants from the rural youth that were not able to attend university indicated the community was very supportive of their goals and plans to attend university, while 48% reported that the community was not supportive of their plans to attend university. In addition, 39% maintained a neutral response. For the sample of rural youth at university, 33% indicated the community was very supportive of their goals and plans to attend university, while 22% reported that the community was not supportive of their plans to attend university while 44% maintained a neutral response. A chi-square test was conducted to establish whether a relationship existed between community support and being able to go to university. The chi-square test showed statistically significant differences (*p = 0.037)* between community support and being able to go to university. Participants whose plans and goals were supported by the community were able to attend

university as compared to those who did not have community support for their goals and plans to attend university.

Qualitative data indicate community support played a significant role in enabling access to a university education. Support was in the form of encouragement, information regarding applications and financial resources. Only a few individuals indicated that their communities played a significant role in helping them access university. The following quotations reflect the experience of the participants concerning support from their community:

> *As for community I would say yes, because for community we consider the elderly in the community and the ministers. We had Albert John[4]; he was the Assistant Minister of Basic Education. He was trying by all means that children from Kavango[5] who are less privileged or vulnerable, since he knew the situation, he tried by all means to help us especially financially. We were given money to apply for schools. He gave me money to apply to university.* (Patience)

Sesha also attested to the support received from community members in his village. This support could also be attributed to the understanding of the importance of higher education.

> *When I applied for my university, we went to the primary school*
> *and my friends and I asked for school computers from the school*
> *head. He was hesitating as he did not know us and we told him we*
> *previously schooled there and he checked if we indeed did go*
> *there, that's when he allowed us to use the computers and apply.*

Pono stated that she received community support in the form of moral support (motivation). Community members encouraged her to upgrade her grades after not doing

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[4] pseudonym

well in her grade 12 examination (mentioned in another narrative in the thesis). She narrated that:

> *For the rest of the community the people that most encourage us, is the elder people towards upgrading or towards the application for the courses that you want or to go to tertiary. The community is supportive though not all of them are, but some are supportive. They normally encourage us, motivate us because when you go home for holidays and vacations and whenever they see us, they would encourage us to say, just push, you did well so just continue and keep on doing it. So, those words of encouragement are a motivation to us.*

However, not all participants received the same level of support from the community, for others the experience was different. The lack of support could also be attributed to communities' limited knowledge concerning the value of higher education. The following examples make reference to the lack of support the participants experienced from their communities:

> *They had no role. Every family mind its own business. When it comes to issues of higher education, they are not involved.* (April)

> *Nope. (Gives a little laugh). I can't say I have met anyone in my community who was supportive of my goals to attend university.* (Katlo)

Underscoring the lack of community support, some participants attributed it to limited knowledge about higher education and the lack of value for education in general. Donald indicated that the community did not play any other role besides offering moral support. The following examples reflect the participants' sentiments:

> *Well, the community actually did not contribute much, they just gave words of encouragement.* (Donald)

> *Well, one of the challenges in my community is a lack of value for school and they seem not to understand the importance of school; so, they are not really supportive to encourage one to complete schooling. So, the*

environment itself was not supportive to encourage one to get to school. There isn't any help offered because they also know little about university. (Kagiso)

Participants also acknowledged the challenges their communities experience, while at the same time they were appreciative of the difference one individual might make in their lives. Sesha said:

> *I can say the community was not supportive. Maybe it's because they hardly know if there is a young boy out there willing to go to university. They hardly know. So, it's a challenge because you cannot get the community's support for your schooling, because even if you are in school, they wouldn't even know. Yes, these are some of the challenges we faced but we managed and at times in our village you will find that there is that one teacher who realised your potential and would advise you to come to them if you need any help. So, for some of these challenges we received help from our teachers who'd always been there.* (Sesha)

The above quotations show that some participants received various forms of support from the community. For example, support in the form of financial resources enables individuals to expand their freedoms to be able to access university. Other participants did not receive the same support. The intersection of socio-economic challenges and unfavourable perceptions towards higher education made pursuing higher education difficult. This reduces the chances of individuals getting a good quality education even more if they also come from low- income background and families live in rural areas (Taylor & Yu, 2008; Walker et al., 2022). The capability approach advocates for assessment of individual well-being of people that takes into consideration whether social arrangements create an atmosphere that is favourable for promoting people's well-being.

5.5. INFORMATION

Many qualifying rural youth are not able to reach university because of a significant disparity in information and guidance. Information plays a crucial role in determining

access. It begins with decisions made during the transition from junior secondary school to senior secondary school, including choices about Form 4 (grade 11) subjects and understanding university application or admission criteria. It also involves knowing about available university funding options.

5.5.1 Information about university study

The results indicate that 77% of the participants from the rural youth who were able to attend university had limited information about university study while 19% had adequate information about university study. Only 4% indicated they had no information at all about university studies. A chi-test was conducted to establish whether a relationship existed between information about university study and going to university. The chi-square test showed no relationship *(Chi-square test p=0.176)* between information about university study and being able to go to university. Additionally, multiple regression analysis results showed insignificant influence of participants having information about university to study at (p=0.939), at significant level 5%.

While the results show having general information about university study was insignificant in determining access to higher education, the following variables significantly influenced access to university:

5.5.1.1 Information about where to study

To freely select a course of choice to study, students need to have the necessary information with regards to choices of higher education institutions available. From the rural youth who were not able to go to university, 36% of the participants indicated they did not know which university to study at, while 46% knew which university to study at. Additionally, 18% remained neutral. From the rural youth who were attending university, 52% of the participants indicated they knew which university to study at, while 26% did not know which university to study at. Additionally, 22% remained neutral. A chi-square test was conducted to establish whether a relationship existed between having information about where to study and going to university. The chi-square test showed there is a relationship between knowing where to study and going to university. There were statistically significant differences *(p=0.001)* between having information about

where to study and being able to go to university. Further, the multiple regression analysis shows that having information about where to study had a significant influence on participants going to university (p=0.026) at significance level of 5%.

Qualitative data also indicates that despite having gained entry to university, participants navigated the constraint of limited information about where to study. The intersection of distance between rural areas and universities made access difficult. Most institutions of higher education were only found in the southern part of the country, which constrained access for students whose homes are far away from this area. Patience mentioned how challenging it was for her in terms of not having the appropriate information concerning higher education institutions:

> The thing is when we finished Form 5, we were told that when the results are out, there are schools that we need to apply to. However, they were not specific about these tertiary schools. Honestly the information was very limited. Living in a rural area is not good, especially in a rural area where there is absolutely nothing to bring you information or help you in any way possible. My experience is what I have already mentioned that information is limited, and I didn't know many institutions. I didn't know that we have different institutions, that when you have passed you have a choice between different schools and a lot of careers. It's not only IHS, Tlokweng College and Serowe College. So, the best way was to get on a bus, either the one that goes to Gaborone, or you could attend a career fair in Maun and then you apply there while they are helping you by giving you forms to fill in while they are around. Because when we were in Shakwe[6] alone, it was very difficult to apply, we didn't know what was happening. We knew nothing, to be honest.

The lack of adequate information also implied being limited in terms of career options. The sole source of assistance available was the information provided by the library. The

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[6] Pseudonym

materials accessible at the library proved valuable in providing foundational details about universities and their respective courses. Katlo expressed that:

> *The documents that were available at the library were useful in terms of offering background information for the universities and courses. The library was available. This is the place where we knew we could access information especially things that were not easily accessible from the community.*

5.5.1.2 Information about which courses to study

Regarding information about which courses to study at university, 57% of the participants from the rural youth that were not able to go to university knew which courses to study at university, while 29% of the sample did not know which courses to pursue at university. About 14% remained neutral. Results also show 41% of the participants from the sample of rural youth at university knew which course to study at university, while 33% did not know which course to pursue at university. About 26% of the participants remained neutral. A chi-square test was conducted to establish whether a relationship existed between having information about courses to study and going to university. The chi-square test showed significant statistical differences *(p= 0.0003)* between having information about which courses to study and going to university. Multiple regression analysis results show that having access to information about which course to pursue at university highly influenced access to university by participants (p= <0.056), at significance level 5%. Having information about which courses to study was a factor in determining access to university for these cohorts. Participants that had information about which courses to study were able to attend university in contrast to those that did not have the information about which courses to study.

The quotations below indicate that although participants were able to go to university, they had to navigate limited knowledge on what course to pursue. It is evident from their narratives that most of them relied mostly on practical reason, hence their own agency was significant. Kagiso mentioned that during the application process they were presented with a variety of courses (university prospectus) with little or no guidance with regards to navigating the application process:

So, when we got in tertiary, we were never taught anything about programmes, they just gave us manuals to choose courses from. So, I was actually not well-informed on the requirements of choosing a course, but I already knew I wanted to pursue a computer related course. So, as I went through the manual, I knew what to look for. Well, I took the decision on the course I am pursuing because I realised I performed better in Computer Studies. So, I believed that since this one is computer related then I would manage it. But there was no one who told me about it at university and all that, so I did not know at all. I just chose it because I realised, I had potential with computers.

Both Sesha and Kamogelo attested to being familiar with a few options in terms of choosing a career. It was during the career fairs that Sesha learnt valuable information regarding career options. Career fairs can play a very crucial role in facilitating access to university by providing information and awareness, inspiring motivation as well as aspiration.

Like I heard that information only after going to career fairs. I had no idea about specific jobs or careers, like I only knew there was a doctor. I couldn't differentiate between a psychiatrist and a physician but after those career fairs I learned a lot about university courses. (Sesha)

The only shortage we had was about information about different universities here in Gaborone. We were aware of the most common ones like the University of Botswana, but there were others we weren't aware of. (Kamogelo)

In recognition of the obstacles they faced while accessing higher education, Donald suggested government prioritise educating children extensively about various university programmes and their requirements to help them expand their freedoms in terms of their future career choices. He asserted:

I would encourage the ministry to teach children a lot about the life of university, even the programmes and qualifications so that they know

what their careers require. There is a need for career fairs at schools

in rural areas.

The lack of sufficient information about course choices suggests participants were deprived of the opportunity to make informed decisions that align with their capabilities and aspirations. This potentially hinders their ability to fully utilise their talents and potential, ultimately limiting their freedom to choose and achieve their desired educational and career paths.

5.5.1.3 Information about university study funding

Access to information about higher education study including having information about university funding opportunities is very important for access and success at post-secondary education. Having information about university study funding is crucial for enabling access to education, reducing financial barriers, providing opportunities for excellence, and supporting students in their academic pursuits**.**

Results also show 61% of the participants of rural youth who were not able to attend university had limited information concerning university study funding, while 23% had adequate information about university study funding and 16% had no information at all about university study funding. From the rural youth who were able to attend university,70% of the participants reported having limited information about university study funding while 15% had adequate information about university study funding and the remaining 15% had no information at all regarding university study funding. A chi-square test was conducted to establish whether a relationship existed between information about university study funding and being able to go to university. The chi-square test showed statistically significant differences *(p= 0.039)* between having information about university funding and going to university. Having information about university study funding was a factor in determining access to university for the two groups.

From the interviews participants also mentioned experiencing limited access to information about university funding. For example, Patience described her experience regarding having no knowledge about the application process for higher education funding as well as not being able to differentiate between terms the two forms of funding:

Since most of us didn't even know what applying is, we didn't know what applying for tertiary is. We heard that applications are open, but we didn't know how to apply. When I arrived here, I didn't know what sponsorship was. I couldn't differentiate sponsorship and scholarship. So, I didn't know what they really meant when they said I need sponsorship, I didn't know what sponsorship was. (Patience)

Katlo, however, was aware that she would receive funding for her university education although she was not fully informed about how to go about the process for applying for the funding:

I was aware that I would be sponsored by the government, but I was not aware of the procedures. It was only when I was assisted by my friends studying at the university.

Unlike Katlo, Kamogelo received more details about government sponsorship during the application process for the funding. She stated:

I had little information about the government sponsorship, but I received most of it through the Department of Tertiary Education Finance when I applied, like its terms and conditions.

Overall higher education institutions play a critical role in ensuring that rural students have access to information about government funding for university education and are equipped to take advantage of these opportunities to pursue their academic goals. Through engaging in outreach more rural students can benefit. April took advantage of this opportunity and converted it into access to university. She said:

The information was shared by university representatives during their orientation when they came to address us about their institution.

5.6 CHALLENGES APPLYING TO UNIVERSITY OF CHOICE

Results show that rural youth that were not able to go to university experienced challenges when applying to a university of their choice. About 52% of the participants reported they experienced major challenges while applying to the university of their

choice, while 23% reported they experienced minor challenges while applying to a university of their choice. About 25% maintained neutral responses. Results also show that for the rural youth that were able to attend university, 33% of the sample indicated they experienced major challenges while applying to the university of their choice. About 26% of the participants indicated they experienced minor challenges, while 30% reported they experienced no challenges at all while applying to the university of their choice. Furthermore, 11% gave a neutral response.

A chi-square test was conducted to establish whether there was a relationship between challenges applying to a university of choice and going to university. The chi-square test showed statistically significant differences *(p= 0.001)* between challenges applying to the university of choice and going to university. Participants that experienced minor challenges to no challenges at all were able to attend university compared to those that experienced major challenges. Figure 5.8 and Figure 5.9 summarise the challenges experienced by participants when applying to university. The words in bold or that appear larger than others indicate the particular challenge was more significant in influencing access. For example, financial challenges, lack of support, lack of information resources including lack of internet access to apply on digital platforms (online applications) were experienced by participants while attempting to apply to go to university.

Figure 5.8: A word cloud of challenges experienced while applying by participants that were able to go to university

Figure 5.9: **A word cloud of challenges experienced while applying by participants that were not able to go to university.**

Financial challenges were consistently referenced in the interviews with the participants. For instance, April mentioned that she was faced with extreme difficulties whereby her documents were withheld because her mother owed school fees at the secondary school she used to attend. This situation would have meant without the finances that were required to release her transcripts she risked not going to university. April's situation represents the lived realities of many disadvantaged students who risk missing access as a result of not having money to pay for school fees.

> *I experienced challenges when I completed Form 5, when I was supposed to collect my clearance form to proceed with applications for university. My mother was owing school fees at my former secondary school. The issue took a whole week to be resolved. My mother kept on communicating with the HODs and in the end my mother had to sign an agreement that she would clear the balance by December that year. That was when my clearance letter was released, and I was able to get my documents to apply to university.* (April)

April also mentioned that even after having had her documents released, she still faced financial constraints during the application process. She narrated that she did not have enough money for application fees to afford her the options to apply to several universities. Even before applying to university, lack of funds was always a limiting factor

for her as she was also unable to afford private tutoring in preparation for her final examinations.

> *I remember I ran out of money, and I had to phone my mother asking for more money. She took out a small loan and sent me the money the following day. I was not able to apply to other courses and universities because I was financially challenged, money got short.* (April)

Patience also experienced financial constraints while applying to attend university. She narrated that she did not have enough money to travel to and from where she was lodging during the application process. In some instances, she had to lodge in her cousin's campus room at one of the colleges in the city. She explained:

> *The money issue was challenging, really challenging. Sometimes when I didn't have money for transport to travel back to Kumakwe[7], I would ask for accommodation from my cousin. So, you can see that we were struggling financially.*

Apart from experiencing financial constraints another participant, Kamogelo also mentioned that she did not know anyone in the city who could provide accommodation for her while she was processing her applications. She also did not know her way around the city since she was new. This situation is a lived reality for most rural students such as Kamogelo, as most universities are concentrated in the capital city. Most higher education institutions are skewed in terms of location (Makwinja, 2017) and most rural students have to travel long distances (which has financial implications among other things) in order to have access to universities.

> *Well, I applied to only two universities; but I wanted to go to a specific university and that's why I did not apply to more. Also, I was considering the fact that applying to more universities meant more money for application fees. It was a bit challenging coming to varsity because I did not know anyone. In addition, my family had to find accommodation for me while I was still doing the running around with issues of applications*

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[7] Pseudonym

as well as the sponsorship letter. So, they were forced to find me accommodation at extended family members, yes. So, it was really hard for me to navigate the city the first time I arrived. I was expected to go to the sports arena to collect my sponsorship letter, and at that time I didn't know where I was going. I also did not have an idea how the route transportation system functioned especially regarding the combis operating along university routes. So, it was challenging for me indeed. (Kamogelo)

Patience was also faced with financial constraints while dealing with the necessary procedures to secure a place at university:

My challenge was also financial. I needed transport fares from my village to the city for a career fair as well as application fees. At that time application fees were P350($26.00) but recently it has been reduced to P250 ($19) which meant during our time the application fees were a bit high. When I came for my applications I had no accommodation in the city, so I commuted from my relatives in Molopo[8] every day. I travelled to the city and travelled back to Molopo in the evening.

Across the board participants experienced financial constraints, related to money for travelling to various locations for applications. They also required monetary support for application fees and in most cases, some only applied to one or two universities due to financial limitations. Financial constraints create unequal opportunities for accessing higher education. Individuals from low-income backgrounds may experience greater challenges in covering costs related to applying and travelling to universities. This structural arrangement perpetuates systematic inequalities and limits social mobility, as those with financial resources have more opportunities and freedom in accessing higher education.

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[8] Pseudonym

5.7   SCHOOLING

Schooling is central to access because one cannot be eligible for university admission without having satisfactorily finished their Form 5 (grade 12). For students to obtain good grades to proceed to university, schools provide quality education that equips students with the knowledge skills, capabilities necessary for access and success in higher education. These include competent teachers as well as adequate resources to support learning. This section examines the extent to which schooling conditions enhanced or constrained the attainment of academic success. As highlighted in Chapter 1, the low academic achievement in rural schools has been attributed to various forms of marginality such as academic, cultural and political marginalisation among others. In this study the following conditions in the school significantly influenced access to university. Combined together career guidance, teacher support, internet access and extra lessons were significant in determining access (the multiple regression analysis $p < 0.001$).

Variable	Mean	Stdev	N
University enrolment	1.60	0.49	73
Internet access	4.34	0.84	73
Extra lessons	3.37	1.50	73
Teacher support	1.97	1.00	73
Teaching aids	2.44	1.40	73
Career guidance	2.64	1.32	73

Model B summary						
R	R^2	Adjusted R^2	df1	df2	Sig.F Change	Durbin-Watson
0.69[a]	0.48	0.44	5	67	<0.001	0.91

a: Predictors: (Constant), Career guidance, Teacher support, Internet access, Extra lessons, Teaching aids
b: Dependent variable: University enrolment

Table 5.4. **Descriptive statistics of career guidance, teacher support, internet access, extra lessons, teaching aids.**

Model	Unstd. B Coe.		Std Coe. B	T	Sig
1 (Constant)	**1.15**	**0.26**		**4.38**	**<0.001**

Career guidance	-0.010	0.035	-0.026	-0.280	0.780
Teacher support	-0.056	0.045	-0.113	-1.236	0.221
Internet access	-0.020	0.054	-0.031	0.338	0.736
Extra lessons	0.022	0.032	0.067	0.685	0.496
Teaching and learning aids	0.241	0.033	0.088	7.213	<0.001

Table 5.5: **Multiple regression analysis results on influence of career guidance, teacher support, internet access, extra lessons, teaching and learning aids on being enrolled at university.**

5.7.1 Internet access

Participants who were not able to go to university were asked to rate how often they had access to the internet while at school. About 55% indicated they never had access to the internet while at school, 38% had access to the internet occasionally. In addition, 7% remained neutral. As for the rural youth that were able to go to university, 48% of the participants indicated they never had access to the internet, while 41% indicated they had access to the internet occasionally. Furthermore, only 4% had access to the internet regularly and 7% remained neutral. A chi-test was conducted to establish whether a relationship existed between the two groups in terms of having internet access and going to university. The chi-square test showed no significant statistical differences *(p=0.53)* between having internet access and being able to go to university.

Although the tests showed no statistically significant influence of internet on access, data from the interview confirmed that for some of the participants, internet was not easily accessible during schooling, while a few participants had access to the internet. For example, Pono and Kagiso had access to the internet at their school. Kagiso had access to the internet as he was taking Computer Studies.

> *At senior level it was much better. I could access the internet because I was enrolled for Computer Studies. So, I could access computers only during the Computer Studies lessons.* (Kagiso)

> *We had the internet at the junior school and the senior school because that's where we were sure of the internet whether in the library or the computer labs.* (Pono)

Patience on the other hand never had access to interact with computers or the internet while at schooling.

> *When I went to senior school, I never attended a computer science lesson. At senior school computer science is an optional course. In junior school we didn't know the importance of computers, so when we got to senior school, we would not choose computer science.* (Patience)

Access to the internet plays a crucial role in expanding individuals' opportunities and capabilities. It enables them to acquire various forms of information such as educational resources and also engage in various forms of economic and social participation. Katlo attests to the value of internet although she had never had access to the internet while she was schooling. She affirmed:

> *From the experience I had, I have come to the realisation that computers are very important, as well as the internet. It gives one exposure to things that are happening around the world, as well as to general information that is important and beneficial to an individual. So, I wish at least I could have had the exposure to computers and the internet in order to learn a lot from the internet. Even as early as primary level we should have been exposed to computer literacy and technology just to enlighten us.*

5.7.2 Teaching and learning aids

Participants were also asked to rate the availability of teaching and learning aids including books and textbooks in their previous schools. Results show that 43% of the participants from the cohort that did not make it to university rated the availability of teaching and learning aids as fair, while 36% of the participants indicated that teaching and learning aids were inadequate. About 21% rated the availability of teaching and learning aids as adequate. For the cohort at university, 41% of the participants considered teaching and learning aids adequate while 33% of the participants indicated teaching and learning aids were not adequate. About 26% of the participants indicated the availability of teaching and learning aids was fair.

From qualitative data it was also clear, resources were not that adequate. For example, Katlo highlighted that they did not carry out some experiments in her science classes as resources were not available:

> *I think they were not quite enough, for example, we did not do other experiments due to the fact there were no resources. Some chemicals were not available so certain experiments were not done. Because the chemicals were not available, some apparatuses were not available as well.*

The statement above illuminates the systemic inequalities prevalent across the education system. Further the lack of sufficient textbooks for students arguably restricted their capability to access essential learning materials, hindering their ability to fully engage with the educational curriculum. This deprivation limits their potential to develop the skills and knowledge necessary for independent learning, and other skills necessary for personal development.

> *Even at school we had shortages of textbooks. If there were enough textbooks for each individual student to own one, then it could have been much easier for us to learn.* (Kagiso)

> *In the rural areas we had books, yes, but there were not enough. We had broken chairs in the labs and the learning materials were not really interesting.* (Pono)

5.7.3 Extra lessons or tutorials

Participants were asked to indicate how often they engaged in extra lessons or tutorials as a way of preparing for the final examinations. Only 18 % of the participants from the cohort that was not able to go to university indicated they regularly engaged in extra lessons or tutorials, and 32% indicated they engaged in extra lessons or tutorials occasionally. About 34% had never engaged in extra lessons or tutorials in preparation for the examinations. A further 16% of the participants maintained a neutral response. For the sample at university results show that 41% of the participants occasionally

engaged in extra lessons or tutorials, while 33% of the participants indicated they regularly engaged in extra lessons or tutorials. Results also show that 15% of the participants never engaged in any extra lessons or tutorials in preparation for the examinations, while 11% of the participants maintained a neutral response. A chi-square test was conducted to establish the relationship between engaging in extra lessons or tutorials and going to university. The chi-square test showed no significant statistical differences *(p=0.323)* between engaging in extra lessons or tutorials and going to university. The percentage of those who did not benefit from extra lessons is too low, that shows extra lessons had no influence on accessing higher education.

Generally, in terms of school resourcefulness and teacher support in preparing students for their final examination, participants believed the schools did their best to prepare them. Kagiso explained that they relied mostly on study materials provided by the teachers; there were no additional textbooks to refer for further reading as well as lack of internet facilities in his village. Again, there was no external assistance apart from study time which was created to offer extra help:

> *Extra studying was created like morning study and afternoon extended study for us to study. There was no one else from outside to help with exam preparations or building exam confidence. I feel the school I attended has highly prepared me, the teachers had provided sufficient study materials. The only shortages that I may have encountered were additional books from the library and access to the internet, but the teachers did assist and explained a lot which fostered my interest to progress to university. There weren't much more than the study materials provided by the teachers, because in our village there is no public library and no access to internet so I couldn't have any additional materials except for the ones provided by the teachers. Even at junior school, there weren't any in the library and books and textbooks were limited. There was no public library to use for studying. So, I relied on materials provided by teachers.* (Kagiso)

Yes, my senior school really helped me to make it to university. They prepared us as we had holiday teachings and teachers also helped us to form groups for revision. (Donald)

Yes, during our time the school admin and staff ensured that we had [study] groups and as form 5 candidates, we had time to revise - something similar to tutorials and even on weekends we would come and attend classes to prepare for the exam. (Kamogelo)

Although the schools and teachers aimed to do their best to assist the students with the necessary skills to make it to university, instances were noted that the support was not enough as emphasised by the quotations below, students had certain expectations from teachers especially in relation to the social life at university. Patience narrated:

I cannot say I picked up some skills, because when we are about to write our exams, teachers tend to be fast moving through the syllabus and everything. Then they will say that they want to teach us to be students through learner-centered learning. So, I would say at school we were not fully equipped with the necessary information. In fact, it was very limited. It was so limited. They didn't really give us the information that we really needed. They didn't inform us that university is a place of temptations, more so that if you see yourself getting tempted immediately when you are doing your first year, it is your downfall. (Patience).

Asked if they were offered tutorials to prepare for their final examinations, participants indicated they had never had that kind of support. It is also striking how this was an unfamiliar concept for some of them. Students' narratives illustrated the importance of personal dispositions and values in overcoming challenges of lack of information, poor schooling and geography (Walker et al., 2022). While agency played a role in the students' trajectories, opportunities were unequal and students deliberated on what was possible in the light of their objective circumstances, and worked towards some notion however imprecise, of the course of action to take to advance their access project (Archer,

2003). The following quotations captures the students' experiences in relation to other forms of support:

> *Tutors are not common in Kavango, they are not popular that side. I just wrote my Form 5 through reading. We did group work; we would discuss the answers without the help of tutors and all that.* (Patience)

> *There was no tutoring okay, but I never heard something like tuition or so…* (Sesha)

> *No, I was studying on my own, but sometimes I had group discussions with my colleagues. Yes, morning discussions and evening discussions during the evening study.* (Katlo)

> *I had no tutoring. I revised with my classmates but sometimes alone.* (Donald)

5.7.4 Teachers' support

Participants were asked to rate their teachers' support for their future plans to attend university. For the cohort that was not able to go to university, 61% of the participants rated teachers as having been supportive of their plans and goals to attend university. About 7% of the participants indicated teachers were not supportive of their plans and goals to attend university. In addition, 32% remained neutral. For the cohort at university 70% of the participants reported teachers as having been supportive of their future plans and goals to attend university. About 8% of the participants indicated teachers were not supportive of their plans and goals to attend university, and 22% remained neutral. A chi-square test was conducted to establish the relationship between teacher support for plans and goals to attend university and going to university. The chi-square test showed no significant statistical differences (*p=0.614)* between teacher support and going to university.

The following narratives indicate some of the participants' experience with teachers' support:

Teachers offered that if we did not understand or had questions, we could see them. We were given revision papers and all that, teachers would help with material. A teacher would assist, for example, if it's Maths, they would help. From my own observation, the English teachers really tried. In school there was a space where the English teachers had pasted things like 'This is how you use this word', adjectives and conjunctions. I think English teachers really tried, while others were just vocalising it but without action. They waited for students to consult them, and if you didn't make an effort to see them or check with them it was your loss. (Patience)

Patience also mentioned that teachers also motivated them by telling them about university life which they (the students) were looking forward to, although they did not tell them about the other negative aspect of life at university as she mentioned earlier:

They were saying that university life is nice, and you will get to be independent, no one will be following you, which we were looking forward to. The thing is at senior school we were whipped if we didn't do our schoolwork. (Patience)

Katlo also shared similar sentiments about teachers being supportive of their plans for the future. The teachers even went an extra mile in assisting the students who were struggling in their studies by offering extra help.

The teachers were supportive, they motivated us to work hard so that we can have a better future. The teachers were supportive, because they really helped a lot in terms of where you did not understand. They made sure they helped you with everything they could to provide understanding. For those who were lagging behind they did remedial classes and offered extra lessons. (Katlo)

However, April had a different experience with one of her teachers. The teacher was not encouraging and lacked empathy for the students who were struggling and needed assistance:

I was doing Double Sciences. I and other students from the Double Sciences class used to go to the teacher who was teaching us to seek assistance and she would scold us. She would discourage us by telling us to focus on the doubles and forget about Pure Maths. We ended up abandoning the ideas though initially we intended to revise hoping to make it in the subject. The response from her was that we should not waste our time. She eventually chose one male student to assist her.
(April)

Sesha also had a negative experience with regards to teacher support, although the school facilities at senior high school were better than they were at his junior high school where he indicated that teacher support was lacking:

Yes, the senior one was a little bit better than the junior school because there, there were school computers, and the accommodation facility was better. There were showers. The teachers were not that supportive, though. We spoke English most of the time in senior school. (Sesha)

The capability approach emphasises the importance of functionings, which are the various ways of living that individuals may value (DeJaeghere & Walker, 2021). Lack support from teachers can limit students' ability to engage in valuable functionings related to education, such as acquiring knowledge, developing skills, and achieving their academic goals. Without this guidance, students may struggle to reach their full potential and may be unable to fully participate in the educational process. Moreover, their sense of agency may be diminished resulting in limited opportunities and freedom to make meaningful choices about their education.

5.7.5. Career guidance

Participants were asked to identify initiatives or strategies their senior secondary schools used to provide them with career guidance. For the rural youth that did not go to university, 30% of the participants indicated their schools used career fairs to provide them with career guidance, 27% indicated that their secondary schools invited university representatives to speak to them about career options. About 25% indicated that their

schools provided guidance through motivational speakers, while 7% indicated that their schools invited both university representatives and motivational speakers to provide career guidance. About 5% of the participants indicated their schools held career fairs, as well as invited university representatives and motivational speakers to offer career guidance. Only 2% received guidance during career fairs as well as from university representatives, while the rest received career guidance by travelling to nearby colleges (2%) and others (2%).

For the rural youth attending university, 41% of the participants indicated their schools used motivational speakers to provide them with career guidance. About 22% indicated their secondary schools used career fairs to provide them with career guidance, and18% received career guidance from university representatives who were invited to schools. Additionally, 11% indicated that their schools used career fairs, university representatives and motivational speakers for career guidance. Results also show that 4% were provided with career guidance by university representatives and motivational speakers and a further 4% indicated their schools used career fairs and university representatives. A chi-square test was conducted to establish the relationship between career guidance and being able to go to university. The chi-square test showed no significant statistical differences (*p=0.637)* between career guidance and going to university. Multiple regression analysis results also showed career guidance had no significant influence on going to university (p=0.0780).

While both statistical tests do not show any significance of career guidance on access, the university cohort highlighted its resourcefulness. Kamogelo took advantage of the opportunity and converted these resources into access. She expressed that:

> *The universities came to our school countless times. I remember one institution came while I was doing Form 4 and others came while we were doing Form 5. They were trying to teach us about the courses that are being offered at their schools. But not all of them came to school; some I saw at career fairs.* (Kamogelo)

Kagiso shared that some institutions came for career guidance at his school which he found personally helpful:

> *Well, we never had such trips, but different tertiary schools were invited*
> *to our school to make presentations on their programmes. However, it*
> *was only some of them.*

Career guidance offers students valuable information about different educational and career pathways including the requirements and opportunities associated with different programmes of study. Thus efforts to provide comprehensive and accessible career guidance are essential for promoting equal opportunities and enabling all individuals to pursue their educational and career aspirations to the fullest extent of their capabilities.

5.7.6 Challenges experienced while schooling in a rural area

The figures below (Figure 5.10 and Figure 5.11) summarise challenges experienced while schooling in a rural area. There are common challenges shared by both groups namely financial challenges, inadequate learning resources, long distances, unsafe school environment (including bullying), and lack of access to internet among others. Results show that more than 50% of the participants experienced financial challenges and inadequate resources while schooling in a rural area. A chi-square test was conducted to establish if a relationship existed between schooling challenges and going to university. The chi-square test showed statistically significant differences *(p=0.098)* between schooling challenges and going to university. Participants who experienced less challenges while schooling in rural areas were able to go to university as against those who experienced more of these challenges while schooling. Multiple regression analysis results showed that challenges experienced while schooling significantly influenced access (p=0.009). From the capability approach perspective, encountering challenges while schooling can have significant implications for access to university education as it can limit the development of capabilities, reduce agency and freedom. Overall these can negatively affect motivation and aspirations.

Figure 5.10: A word cloud of schooling challenges experienced by participants that were not able to go to university.

Figure 5.11: A word cloud of schooling challenges experienced by participants that were attending university.

5.7.7 Impact of schooling in a rural area on access

Schooling in a rural area has impacted on plans and goals to attend university for the participants that were not able to attend university and participants that are at university. Lack of basic needs, long distance between school and home, limited resources, lack of inspiration from others, negative community attitudes towards higher education, and lack of parental support have been highlighted as having affected participants' plans and goals to attend university. A chi-square test was conducted to establish if schooling in a rural area has an effect on access to university. The chi-square test showed statistically significant differences *(p= 0.029)* between schooling in a rural area and going to university. Multiple regression analysis results showed the impact of schooling in a rural

area significantly influenced access (p= 0.023). For the rural youth who were not able to go to university, schooling in a rural area had significantly limited their opportunities to go to university. Similar themes associated with the negative impact of schooling in a rural area were highlighted as follows from data from interviews:

5.7.7.1 Walking distance from home to school

From the interview data of rural students' schooling experiences, several challenges were noted including walking long distances from home to school which resulted in exhaustion. Schooling very far away from home compromised their safety while walking in the dark, either too early in the morning or too late at night.

> *So, it was very far to where the school was. It was like even the thieves could just hide there and go into the hostels. They raped the students. We arrived late at school because of the long distance, and when we walk for a long time, we get tired. So, we don't focus on the lessons, and we fail. It's just a connection of problems; that's how challenging it was. Yeah, that's it.* (Patience)

The above quotation also highlights the lack of safety for students residing in hostels. The environment was also not safe as cases of sexual violence were reported. The lack of a safe environment diminished their opportunities to focus on their studies and achieve academic success. To curb the challenge of long distance to school Patience added that more schools could be built:

> *Schools should be increased. There can be as many as possible in rural areas to reduce travelling long distances. So, if the number of schools could be increased in those small villages it could make a difference.* (Patience)

> *During our times there were no taxis, yet schools were far and commenced a bit early at 06:30. So, we were forced to leave while it was still dark in the morning. Currently we have taxis so those who afford it opt for taxis in the mornings, especially in winter.* (Kamogelo)

During my secondary schooling I stayed with my mother in Borakanelo[9]. There is no senior secondary school in Borakanelo. I used to walk to the bus rank at 05:00 to ride public combis to Legaga[10] bus rank. From there I would then walk again from the bus rank to Legaga Senior School. Sometimes I would arrive late at school. During winter it would be too dark to walk, and I waited a bit longer, until a bit of sun came up, to leave the house. It was safer to walk then, but I wound up arriving late at school. (April)

5.7.7.2 Lack of parental support

Narratives also revealed some participants lacked important support from parents. At the same time, it is also evident that these participants understood their family circumstances.

Well since my primary days in Khudumabedi[11] my parents were not staying with us. They stayed at the lands, and we stayed in the village. The school was a bit far from home, so it was challenging at primary school. The teachers did help, but some of the things we didn't understand, but I did manage to progress to junior school at Sejwe[12]. (Kagiso)

5.7.7.3 Scarce resources

Participants' rural life experiences were characterised by hardships. Besides the lack of basic needs at home, it is also evident that there were limited infrastructural amenities in the community and fewer resources at school. The following observations were made by participants:

There was no library, there were no computers except one or two in the staffroom for teachers. (April)

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[9] Pseudonym
[10] Pseudonym
[11] Pseudonym of a village where Kagiso hails from, he also attended his primary schooling in the same village.
[12] Pseudonym of a village where Kagiso attended a junior secondary school.

Living in a rural area is not easy. Sometimes we walk a long distance to collect water, sometimes we had to walk long distances to collect firewood. Basically, we had no time to study, because after school we had to do household chores, collect firewood, fetch water and sometimes our parents would send us to the cattle post to release the livestock from the kraals. There are no libraries, there are no tared roads, nothing which is more developed. I wish that I could have grown up in a homestead with electricity and computers, to be raised by parents that know the importance of education and know how to use computers. Those are the things that I wish I had grown up with. (Sesha)

It is apparent that these participants wished to have had a different experience of living in the rural areas. They expressed the desire to have better facilities in terms of having internet facilities, libraries, even roads and health care facilities among others. Having better teachers in terms of expertise skills was considered as support.

My experience is that in the rural areas there is a lack of resources, poor facilities, even teachers. Yeah, it is tough living in the rural areas. It's tight and a bit challenging because in the rural areas things are always slow because of a lack of resources and a lack of facilities. We are not a little bit civilized; we are far away from developed standards to improve our lives. It's a bit challenging to live in rural areas, yeah. I wish we had more facilities that are improved like the internet, a library, even tarred roads, shops, clinics, hospitals, schools and even more advanced teachers. (Pono)

5.7.7.4 Low value of education

It is also evident from participants' narratives that they had to navigate an environment where the value of education is not greatly emphasised as parents themselves have not been to school. The lack of a supportive environment could also potentially impact on other rural youth's educational goals and aspirations.

Just here and there you would get advice on school, but generally they are not interested in school. (Katlo)

So, living in a rural area where the parents or most of the people just take us to school whereas they themselves have never been to school. It makes them not value education too much. Sometimes you may realise that when a child goes to school, let's say they are at primary school, a parent may just stay at home with the child. A child may consistently miss school, even if the parent is called to talk about issues that may be causing the child to miss school, the parent will just respond simply saying the child doesn't want to go to school. (Patience)

Most of the people in the rural areas don't value education. They don't value education! So, sometimes you could find that those students or those children are just relaxed to learn, and they fail. This is a problem you come to see that there is a mentality again of them going into drugs more especially in our secondary education. (Pono)

Social ills in the community such as drug use can also limit rural youth's opportunities to pursue a life they have reason to value. Pono added:

Most of the people in the rural areas don't value education. They don't value education! So, sometimes you could find that those students or those children are just relaxed to learn, and they fail. This is a problem you come to see that there is a mentality again of them going into drugs more especially in our secondary education. (Pono)

Efforts to promote access to higher education must address underlying cultural attitudes and beliefs to create a more supportive and conducive environment for learning. In a community where education is not highly valued, students may not receive the necessary support and encouragement they need to pursue higher education. Families, peers, and community members may not prioritise academic achievement or see the value in investing time and resources on education. Rural students may also be pressured by their peers to prioritise other goals besides pursuing their academic ambitions.

5.7.7.5 Lack of inspiration

From participants' narratives, growing up in the rural areas there were no role models in their community to look up for inspiration with regards to higher education. The lack of various forms of capitals limited exposure to awareness about higher education. These factors intersected to limit rural youth's freedom to aspire for a better future. Another challenge is the lack of higher education institutions in rural areas as their location is skewed towards one side of the country.

> *I didn't have anybody to look up to when I was growing up, who could teach me that there is higher education. And the other thing is that all tertiary institutions are located on this side. When tertiary institutions are this side only, even if children from Segau[13] grow up hearing that there is a school called Limko, without them actually seeing Limko, it doesn't motivate them at all. So, these schools should also go to Kavango for children to know about them. I am very sure that now if you can go to Kavango and ask a student if they know about BAC or Limko they will tell you that they don't know anything about those institutions.* (Patience)

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[13] Pseudonym for a village where Patience hails from

Figure 5.12: **A word cloud highlighting the impact of schooling in a rural area on the participants that were not able to attend university.**

Figure 5.13: **A word cloud highlighting impact of schooling in a rural area on participants that were able to attend university.**

The word cloud below *(*Figure 5.14) summarises social challenges that were experienced by participants in their rural communities.

Figure 5.14: **A word cloud of social challenges faced by the rural communities**.

5.9 SUMMARY

In response to research question 1 and 2, the chapter outlined structural arrangements that constrain and enable access to higher education. From the data, factors that had significant influence on access were; family background, family role in the application process to university, funding, schooling, information about where to study, which university courses to study and university study funding. Challenges experienced while schooling and applying to university also had a significant influence on access. Factors such as family with higher education experience, community support

Most participants came from low-income households and fewer resources at home complicated academic aspirations. In addition, educational inequalities were revealed as students faced hardships; walked long distances to access school, which compromised their safety as well as their ability to focus on their studies. Schooling as a social arrangement was captured as an enabler to access while other schooling arrangements also were not supportive enough. Funding or money as a conversion factor intersects with information challenges to determine rural students' choices to access university. Combined with deprivation of basic needs, a lack of income generates social exclusions which compromise human dignity (Walker et al., 2022). Challenges experienced within the communities, such as a lack of security due to crime and violence would likely

compromise individuals' ability to convert available resources into valued functioning. Lastly findings also illustrated family, extended family and community networks influenced agency to access higher education. The next chapter maps participants' experiences in navigating structural constraints.

CHAPTER 6: AGENCY AND NAVIGATING CONSTRAINTS

6.1   INTRODUCTION

The aim of this chapter is to map rural youth's experiences in terms of how they used agency within structural constraints to negotiate different conditions in home, schooling and community to develop capabilities to access higher education. This is in response to the research question 3: *How do rural youth use their agency to navigate structural constraints to access higher education?* Agency as an important concept within the capability approach pertains to the willingness of individuals to act to bring about change in their lives in relation to achieving their desired goals (Crocker & Robeyns, 2010; Robeyns, 2017). Assessing how individuals use their agency reveals the opportunities and choices available to them (wellbeing-freedom) along with the independence to make their own decisions (agency-freedom). Thus, understanding agency requires taking into account the broader economic, social, political, and environmental context in which an individual is situated, as these factors can either enable or limit one's ability to act.

6.2   AGENCY AND NAVIGATING CONSTRAINTS

In spite of facing constraints, it is evident participants made use of the available resources and opportunities at their disposal. From the findings (from open-ended items in the questionnaire) most participants maintained a positive mind-set and coped well in order to navigate the challenges. For instance, to address the issue of long distance from home to school, participants reported riding on donkey carts and donkey backs. Participants reported waking up very early and walked the long distance between home and school. In areas where public libraries were not available, participants indicated they travelled to other villages where the public facilities could be found as well as sharing emotional struggles with friends and praying.

The figure below highlights ways in which participants navigated constraints while schooling in order to be able to achieve their educational goals of attending university.

Figure 6.1: **A word cloud of negotiating access**

From the interviews an account of agency came through participants' experiences in relation to how they navigated challenges to achieve academic success. This agency is the effort that participants exercised within a constrained environment of resource scarcity and limited opportunities and freedoms to turn capabilities into achievable educational outcomes. The narratives that follow regarding self-discipline, self-determination, perseverance, persistence and resilience were provided by participants who were able to get into university.

6.2.1 Self-discipline

Self-discipline can be viewed as a capability that enables individuals to effectively pursue their goals and aspirations. It involves the capacity to regulate one's behaviour, make deliberate choices, and persist in efforts to achieve desired outcomes despite potential obstacles or distractions. In most instances participants referred to working hard and exercising willpower to overcome the constraints within their environment. Kagiso pointed to being self-disciplined in a challenging and not so inspiring environment; in his community, people are not educated and not informed. His rural community had little development. The few individuals who were able to advance in education level had moved to cities. Kagiso said:

Sometimes, you would grow up with parents who never attended school, so it's a bit challenging. It is only that we were motivated as teachers advised us, but generally it is challenging to learn as there are no resources like the internet which limit your knowledge. As a matter of fact, it was my individual discipline to work hard. The environment was not conducive and students who took school seriously felt they were struggling. But you could find space to study if you wanted so, I was able to prepare for my exams.

Despite limited resources both at home and school, and decreased agency Kagiso exercised self-discipline to prepare for his final examinations in a constrained institutional environment where there was minimal peer support. Other students also considered themselves to be struggling. Even upon passing his examinations he had to negotiate around the unavailability of resources to apply owing to a lack of facilities such as internet connectivity. He added:

Children in the rural areas don't have internet access so when it comes to them finishing school and qualifying to apply for tertiary. When applications are done online, they are not familiar and only when there is internet access, they are able to apply. Also, they should be helped with their studies and be reminded when universities representatives are sent to rural areas to teach children about tertiary life and programmes being offered, so that they may be able to understand the importance of going to university. (Kagiso)

Donald also had to navigate conditions that were difficult to enable learning. He utilised a personal schedule to manage his time and cultivated academic abilities to achieve his educational goals to attend university. He also reported revising with his classmates; a combination of these resources and agency enhanced his capabilities to negotiate access. He stated:

When I was doing Form 5, I had past papers and I had my personal study timetable after study periods or during my free time over weekends. (Donald)

While self-discipline was made reference to by a few individuals it is evident on the whole students' ability to take initiative and act in accordance with their own values and goals, contributed to making informed decisions which contributed to their overall well-being.

6.2.2 Self-determination, perseverance, persistence and resilience

Other students' narratives of their experiences were centered around being self-driven or self-motivated to work towards achieving their goals to pass their final examinations which will pave a way for university study. Goalsetting also increased their chances to achieving those goals. Patience's secondary school was a long distance from her home, which decreased her agency in her academic performance due to walking long distances. However, in spite of adverse conditions Patience placed the responsibility on herself to make it against all odds, even when her life was placed in danger. She narrated:

> *I was determined about what I want in life. So that's basically it; to be self- determined, to be very resilient. I used to attend evening study. Sometimes when the petrol is finished, I have to see what to do. I would walk through that forest, but I was lucky because there were other kids who also wanted to see something good coming out of their academic work. They also used to leave school late and I remember one time we had to walk at night around 8pm, but we walked without any problems until we reached our homes.*

Patience presented agency in the form of resilience in order to overcome her circumstances to achieve what she was aiming for academically. The quotation below illustrates that she displayed a degree of resilience in order to achieve her aspirations of studying at university by waking up in the early hours of the morning to join the queues for sponsorship*:*

It's our choice to choose whether we stay down there or whether we want to be somewhere in life. When you are at Kumakwe you can't apply for sponsorship. I just woke up at 4am to go and join the queue. So, that's basically it; to be determined, to be very resilient.

In spite of all the financial struggles she faced she remained optimistic that one day her struggles would be over. Patience added:

Light will come at some point. All you have to do is persevere knowing that light will eventually come.

Katlo also displayed actions that were consistent with determination and perseverance. After applying to university, she learned that she was not admitted to the university she had applied for. She had to travel all the way from her home village to the city to enquire as to why she was not admitted. She learnt that the course of her choice was oversubscribed. She was offered an opportunity to re-apply for an alternative course since she was so determined to study at university. Katlo's situation represents one of the many disadvantages that befall students who fail to get admission. Due to one reason or another they are unable to follow up on their admissions, and accept their fate of failing to get in, thus missing out on aggregate access numbers. She stated:

I was very determined, because I found out later that I was not admitted. I had to go to the admissions office for follow up as to what really happened with regards to my admission. I found out that I had been rejected, so I had to apply again and attach the sponsorship letter from the DTEF for sponsorship. Even then, I waited longer for the letter for sponsorship, as the processing also took longer. Our letters had been sent to Legaga[14] Senior and we collected them after everyone else had collected theirs. It is not clear to me what happened to them. However, we were determined to get that sponsorship. (Katlo)

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[14] Pseudonym for a senior school

Kamogelo had to negotiate conditions that made it difficult for her to access resources that would enable her to gain access to university. Her agency came through self- efficacy and self-determination which propelled her desire to go after her goal of attending university. The lack of facilities to apply for university in the community resulted in long travels to the city, to access resources that will enable her access to attend university. These conditions were difficult for others in her position that did not have similar resources and the level of personal power Kamogelo had. She said:

> *I feel my self-esteem really helped. Like I said I was able to ask for assistance by asking around for my way to the university. Also, being determined and persevered throughout even though there were long queues, being patient really helped.* (Kamogelo)

Pono narrated her experience with failing her final examinations in Form 5 (Grade 12), due to personal circumstances. Being the only girl at home she cared for her family including her ailing grandmother who later passed; she was burdened with the responsibilities while grieving. As challenging as it was, she forged ahead despite the journey being difficult. She remained resolute in her aspirations to pass and eventually go to university. At a structural level Pono's narrative presented evidence of negotiating conditions that made it difficult for her to access resources that enabled learning or to convert available resources into valued academic capabilities (Calitz, 2016). She however framed her agency as self-determination, perseverance and persistence. The following quotation also symbolises grit and resilience:

> *It was a very great challenge and I ended up failing because of those reasons. But it wasn't just that, even at home for my senior level preparations for my exam as I was the only girl, I had to prepare everything for the family. It was hard, it was very hard, so it was just challenging for me. I wanted to go to university. Five times I failed but I still tried until I got what I wanted. So, that really shows how badly I wanted to go to university. I really wanted to achieve what I wanted so I persevered. I failed but never thought this was the end of the future,*

the end of the road. I was just persistent though it was difficult, but I just
kept on pushing until I qualified for tertiary education. (Pono)

While these students displayed strength in their personal qualities the conditions were always not working in their favour, which decreased their agency. For example, Sesha stated:

The boarding school was one of the harshest schools I have ever
attended. There were times when there was no food, there were times
when teachers didn't attend lessons, there were times when there were
outbreaks of diseases.

Sesha described harsh conditions, including lack of food and outbreaks of diseases, which can also have significant implications for the students' physical and emotional well-being. Instances where teachers did not attend lessons indicate a disruption in the provision of quality education. The student's experience of attending a school with such conditions arguably results in feelings of vulnerability, anxiety, and stress, impacting their overall well-being and agency.

6.3 SUMMARY

The chapter presented strategies used by rural students to navigate a constrained environment to achieve their valued outcomes. While students used agency to navigate access, for students from deprived communities, access is not a guaranteed functioning; it is negotiated amidst a myriad of constraints. It is also clear that agency was unequally distributed. While some participants were able to use agency in pursuit of their goals, it is evident also that some of their peers were not able to convert resources into securing a place at university. Participants' agency is reflected as self-determination resilience, and perseverance. Persistence and resilience enabled these students to persist in their pursuit of education despite these challenges. At the same time these constraints shaped the students' hope for a better future. Adversity empowered them to rise above obstacles (Naidoo & van Schalkwyk, 2021). The next chapter presents rural youth's experiences at university and the extent to which they are able to convert available resources into human capabilities critical for academic success at university.

7.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter is divided into two sections. The first section presents students' narratives and reflections on their university experiences which are divided into experiences that enabled or constrained the conversion of resources into capabilities and valuable functionings at university while the second section focuses on aspirations rural youth hope to achieve upon attainment of their university education. As mentioned in detail in Chapter 3 conversion factors are another key concept of the capability approach. These are conditions or factors that impact on a person's ability to convert resources into opportunities or capabilities (Wilson-Strydom, 2011; Robeyns, 2017). Conversion factors determine how much functioning a person obtains from availed resources or services (Robeyns, 2017).

They are elements that influence how effectively a person can turn a resource into a functioning capability. Examining conversion factors of access at university for rural youth is significant from the perspective of the capability approach because it sheds light on the diverse abilities of individuals to convert available resources into meaningful opportunities. A deeper insight into these factors helps us to understand the challenges rural students experience while at university as well as the conditions that have positive outcomes for these students. The conditions that have negative outcomes highlight the areas were efforts are required to promote students' capabilities and well-being.

Walker and Mkwananzi (2015) argue that in order to know what people are able to do and be, we need to analyse the full picture of their resources, and the various conversion factors, or else analyse the functionings and capabilities directly (Walker & Mkwananzi, 2015). The advantage of having a clear picture of the resources needed, and the particular conversion factors needed, is that it also gives those aiming to expand capability sets information on where interventions can be made (Robeyns 2017:47).

The following sections seek to respond to research question 4: *To what extent are rural youth able to convert different resources into human capabilities critical for academic success at university.* The findings present students' experiences of the conditions at

university that developed opportunities and freedoms for students to convert available resources into capabilities critical to achieve academic success at university. The analysis also presents the conditions at university that constrained the conversion of available resources into capabilities critical for academic success at university. Table 7.1 presents the emergent themes and sub-themes that came through participants' experience of the university environment.

Themes	Negative outcome of the conversion	Positive outcome of the conversion
University environment Positive experience Negative experience	Difficulty in navigating university study - Anxiety, lack of self-confidence, dealing with peer pressure - Cultural diversity	- Enthused, inspired, excited, enjoyed the experience - Developed self-confidence or (self-efficacy) - Adapting to new environment
Accommodation arrangements Living off campus student residence (Students' overall sense of belonging and general sense of university and whether they live on or off campus)	- Not having enough money for accommodation, transport and food - Missing classes	- Provided with daily internet data for research and online classes - Engaged in own learning
University academic arrangements Student engagement in learning How students study, how they experience teaching and learning at university (social conversion factor)	- Fear to speak in class due to prejudicial stereotypes - Difficulties in communication (or language competence) - Lacking computer competence - Lecturers unapproachable - Isolated	- Ability to engage with lecturers - Learned new skills - Developed self-confidence - Ability to communicate - Learned new languages - Peer engagement

	- University not supportive towards students' difficulties - Not much support from family	- University providing clinical counselling - Moral support from family and significant others
Trade-offs (sacrifices)	- Surviving on one meal a day - Self exclusion from leisure activities - Sacrificing sleep - Self- isolation	- Self motivation - Saving money - Having a small business

Table 7.1: **Summary of emergent themes in participants' experience of university.**

With regard to transition to university the environment and university arrangements work against rural students especially if they are low-income students. Below are the findings presented in Table 7.1 in more detail. The students' experiences are discussed under the following themes; university environment which relates to how students (personal conversion factor) made sense of the atmosphere upon arrival at a new institution. The theme: accommodation arrangements (environmental) relates to students' experience of living arrangements, while university teaching arrangements relates to how students experience their studying. In this context, their engagement with their lecturers as well as their peers. These conditions have both negative outcomes (opportunity obstacles of well-being at university) as well as positive outcomes. It is also noteworthy to highlight that some of these factors do overlap, for instance they could also be personal while grouped under social or environmental.

7.1.1   Students' experience of the university environment: Personal

General conditions at university both had negative and positive outcomes for participants. Participants experienced transition from a rural environment to university differently, however participants' stories exposed indications of multiple intersecting inequalities. In relation to being in a new environment they talked of experiencing anxiety, lack of self-confidence and dealing with peer pressure, all of which got better with time as they adjusted to the new environment. In contrast others found it easy to navigate the situation;

they developed self-confidence (self-efficacy) as the experience of being in a new place was both exciting and inspiring.

For instance, Donald expressed that he felt anxious and lacked self-confidence all of which got better upon finding new ways to adapt. Although being in a new environment was a challenge to him, he rediscovered agency to navigate the challenges:

> *Firstly, moving here for university, I was anxious and had no confidence, because I knew I was to meet people I did not know, and I was moving to an unfamiliar place. I started making friends with people who knew the school to help me. I also started asking around if I did not understand. With time I managed to get used to it all and was able to adapt and cope in my new environment.*

The students' own agency efforts reduced the negative impact of being in a new environment. Universities in Botswana have progressively become diverse, modern and multicultural (Pheko, Monteiro, Tlhabano & Mphele, 2014). This diversity necessitates that new students, particularly those from rural backgrounds, adjust to university culture and urban living in order to cultivate cultural competence in their social interactions. Meanwhile the necessary support is not provided to help the student adjust to the new spaces. In a new environment and culture, students require not only resources but also knowledge and information (Walker et al., 2022) to make the transition process easier for them. Patience experience more of a 'culture shock' in terms of appearance when she arrived at university. The feeling of a lack of a sense of belonging may potentially result in loss of agency for the rural students. Patience experienced a sense of isolation due to cultural differences:

> *Things like culture, appearance and all that. Yes, and things like appearance. Everyday students at university change hairstyles and their clothing. You are in an environment where you don't fit in at all without a matching big brand labelled bag, an Apple computer as well as an Apple phone. Just because your friend has an iPhone you end up doing what they are doing in order to fit in.*

It is evident that Patience's sense of belonging was also affected by her family's income disparity as well as ethnic inequalities and lack of capability of English language proficiency. Due to the cultural influence of her home language, she lacked the confidence to speak English in what is termed a normal way of speaking. Research on transitioning to university and research on student success underscore the significant role of language competence (Cross & Atinde 2015). Patience described the difficulty in coming to understand the type of language used at university:

> *When you try to speak English it's like you are not speaking it in the right way. Even trying to speak Setswana is a challenge. The Setswana we speak is not the standard version that is allowed. So, it also posed a challenge because that is where issues of racism, stigmatization and discrimination come in.*

Unequal access to educational opportunities that exist between regions was also revealed. Most remote and rural regions lack proper programmes addressing early childhood education which develops children's capabilities for various functionings later in life. She explained that, compared to where she comes from, in the southern part of the country children have better opportunities to develop both language competence and cognitive abilities through early childhood education.

> *The thing is here in the South most kids go to kindergarten and pre-schools so when they get to do Standard 1, they can do most things like counting, letters, writing their names, punctuation and they speak English fluently.* (Patience)

In contrast Pono did not experience any insecurity related to being in a new environment. She simply merged with ease. The ability to adjust easily to the new environment indicate the Pono's strong navigational functioning. Walker et al., (2022: 91) affirm that "students do not arrive at university as black slate without some capabilities in place or development".

> *Yeah, it's a great thing to move from a rural area to an improved lifestyle, it's a great achievement and it's a great school. So, seeing*

myself in the city I know that I am getting there, I am improving. To me it's such a great thing and it motivates me to be moving and not constant. You are not going back; you are going to where you want to be because rural areas can keep you back. But in the city lifestyle teaches one to be independent, self-independent. So, this is a great thing for me. (Pono)

Sesha also felt excited about being at university, despite struggling with finding a place to stay: He stated:

It is an exciting experience with challenges though, like getting here and struggling with accommodation. But coming to a higher education institution was exciting. I was very thrilled to make it to a higher education institution despite the difficulties that I faced.

When Katlo started her course, she did not enjoy it as it was not her dream course. Initially she had wanted to study criminal justice or criminal law. As stated in Chapter 6 she had to choose a different course in order for her to get in, as she had been refused entry for the initial course, she had applied for owing to oversubscription. However, over time she developed interest in the Lifelong Learning and Community Development programme which she was advised to opt for.

I started enjoying the course last semester. To be honest it is this semester that I realise that maybe I can find some opportunities after my degree. But it wasn't the course I wanted but really, I am learning to accept that I have to love it. (Katlo)

Socially, Katlo also managed to develop navigational capabilities; she found it easy to interact with others, which enhanced her sense of belonging at university:

These days I find it very easy to interact with others on the sports field, I am able to socialise with other people. I meet new people from whom I learn a lot of stuff different from what I always knew. Even clubs are

also helpful in terms of socialising and learning new skills such as leadership skills, business management skills.

Despite the transition experience being negative for some participants, the experience turned into a positive outcome in that they developed the capabilities to navigate being new and adjusted or adapted to the new environment. Furthermore, inequalities besides income inequalities were revealed. However, it is also important for universities to have strategies in place to enhance students sense of belonging, especially upon arrival at university.

7.1.2 University academic arrangements: Social

This relates to how students study in terms of their experience of teaching and learning (academic engagement). From the capability approach lens, academic engagement means more than merely taking part in teaching and learning activities. It extends to the individual's ability to effectively make use of available educational opportunities at their disposal to enhance their overall capabilities and well-being. This notion emphasis not only access to education but also the freedom and capacity to fully engage with the learning process to develop critical capacities. Walker (2015:291) suggests the ''functionings of critical capacities would include access to and acquisition of higher knowledge, engaging critically with that knowledge, relating knowledge to action''. Such knowledge enables individuals to pursue their aspirations and choose to lead lives they have reason to value.

In examining the level of academic engagement or inclusion at university, participants were asked to indicate how often they engaged in their own learning, pursuing ideas and finding information by themselves. Most participants (93%) indicated that they engaged in learning on their own more often, while 7% indicated that they engaged in learning on their own occasionally. In terms of participation in class, results show that 59% of the participants occasionally engaged in class activities, while 34% indicated they engaged in class activities more often. Only 7% indicated they never engaged in class activities. These results suggest most students are agentic in pursuing their academic goals. The

following factors influenced the extent to which students were able to convert different resources into positive outcome for their success at university:

7.1.2.1 Language competence and confidence

Language competence shapes the conversion of resources into substantive freedoms (Walker & Mathebula, 2019:4) for rural students at university. Language competence empowers individuals to articulate their needs and aspirations as well as engage meaningfully within their environment. English is both an official language and a medium of instruction in Botswana schools. However, it is also one of the factors that impedes rural students from benefiting fully from teaching and learning instruction. In spite of this, rural students should not be viewed through their perceived short comings or limitations (Ebersöhn & Ferreira, 2012), but rather be viewed in the light of their context (Balfour, et al., 2008). Results show that most participants were able to communicate in the language of instruction at university. About 67% indicated that they found communication in the language of instruction to be easy, while 7% found communication in the language of instruction difficult. About 26% maintained a neutral answer. From the qualitative analysis it is evident that participants were able to navigate the complexities of communication in English at university, with the exception of a few. In contrast to the experience Patience shared regarding her early encounters with speaking English, she discovered her agency and developed the capability of language competence:

> *For someone like me who only had English at school not at home second language communication is neither easy nor difficult. Because nowadays when I have to speak English, I am able to do so. But not fluently, however I can speak it, I try.*

During the interview, Patience mentioned that she took English Literature as an optional subject at school in order to improve her language skills. Apart from having acquired language capabilities during her core subjects, taking literature might also have increased her opportunities to learn the language and use it frequently in her writing. Kamogelo who was also studying French as one of her major subjects, found it easy to navigate the language of instruction at university, while for Katlo it was a bit challenging. However, she

acknowledged that being at university has helped her familiarise herself with speaking English. She said:

> *Sometimes it is difficult, because it is a language I did not grow up speaking all the time. You would use English during presentations in class or in the assembly area but sometimes at assembly it was difficult. I had to adjust to the language of the instruction.*

Although Pono did adjust to her new environment, she however found communication in English a bit complex due to mother tongue language influence:

> *I think it's a little bit challenging because normally we are used to our native language.*

Donald also found it easy to express himself in English, as compared to his initial experience of coming to university of being anxious and lack of self-belief. It is evident that adjusting to the new environment included developing capability of language competence and confidence.

> *Right now, it is easy to communicate in English because that is the main language used at university.* (Donald)

Kagiso's level of English proficiency was low, due to a lack of exposure to English at his secondary school. At school they mostly communicated in Setswana as well as Sekgalagadi (one of the native languages). The lack of an enabling environment meant these participants failed to cultivate critical language capabilities needed for university learning. The inability to cultivate language skills rendered Kagiso unable to fully engage critically on an academic level with others. Even in situations where he had valid contributions to make he found it difficult to do so.

> *It is difficult because where I previously schooled, we never used English outside class to communicate with each other, we only used it during our examinations and reading. So, speaking it was difficult for us to the extent that even at university when discussing assignments with others and they use English, it was not easy to communicate using*

English. Even though I know what to say it is quite difficult to talk to others and support your point in the discussion. The issue being that it's not easy to speak English and not being exposed to it much at my previous school. (Kagiso)

Despite not possessing the required level of English language proficiency, participants were not passive victims of their circumstances but rather exercised agency and turned the negative outcomes opportunities to learn the language in order to navigate learning at university. For the participants that were already competent in the language, this would be transferred further into achievable academic outcomes.

7.1.2.2 Engagement with lecturers

Engaging with lecturers at university involves actively participating in the academic relationship between students and lecturers. In respect of engagement with lecturers and how well they felt supported by faculty staff, participants had contrasting views. Accounts of a lack of sufficient interactions between the lecturers and students, which created a distance between them, were expressed. The lack of an endearing environment made students feel unrecognized and rendered invisible. The following narrative expresses how Kagiso viewed his engagement with lecturers:

> *Well, the university is not doing much. All we do is come for classes to face a lecturer who is there to deliver content and you are forced to grasp the content and go take tests and examinations. They are not there to interact and form relations or to understand our backgrounds and what our problems might be.* (Kagiso)

Conversely Sesha indicated that he interacted with his lecturers during lecture time, while this interaction is restricted to class time, this suggests he took advantage of such an opportunity and turned it into critical capabilities necessary to achieve academic success:

> *Our interaction with lecturers is mostly during their lessons in class, that's where we usually interact. Outside class I would say it is through media such as WhatsApp to submit and receive the assignments.*

That's how we interact but outside class there isn't much interaction.
Most interactions are during classes. (Sesha)

April had a good relationship with most of her lecturers, whom she expressed went an extra mile to assis the students. However, there were others she was not free to interact with for fear of humiliation. Such behaviours and attitudes towards students could be seen as a limitation on their freedom and agency to engage with the learning process effectively.

> *When you get to university there are lecturers who are trying. They give hand-outs and they are always in the office waiting for you to come and ask for clarifications. However, some lecturers really don't try. Whether a student attends school or not, it really doesn't matter to them. There are those lecturers I am free with, while with others I am not free to approach them. Perhaps it is because they like scolding us in class, so it becomes difficult for me to approach them.* (April)

Donald also has cultivated a good relationship with his lecturers as he was able to secure appointments with them to seek assistance when having challenges or requiring clarity on his assignments. For others, the experience was not easy when they started university, but over time, an association with lecturers was formed. Some participants developed the confidence they needed to create those interactions.

Overall, for most participants engaging academically with the lecturers was not that easy. Over time some of the participants gained confidence to approach their lecturers. For example, both Patience and Katlo attested to having difficulties at the beginning of their university study:

> *I would say it was not really easy to interact with my lecturers, but nowadays it's better. When looking at my first year and second year, it was worse because I didn't have the confidence. I didn't have the confidence to even ask a question, even when I didn't understand. I could not even approach a lecturer after class to talk to her about not understanding something.* (Patience)

But generally, the first year was difficult. I started being comfortable and to engage with others and lecturers in my second year. (Katlo)

It is evident that most students did not know what to expect in terms of lecturer-student relationships at the beginning of their university study. Participants also did not know how to approach their lecturers in order to forge that partnership. At the same time, lecturers did not interact with the students in a way that allowed them to know more about their students beyond being 'student numbers'.

7.1.2.3 Engagement with peers

Peer engagement at the university level refers to the active involvement and interaction among students within the academic community. It encompasses various forms of social, intellectual, and collaborative interactions among peers, both inside and outside the classroom. These interactions can enrich students' experience of university by cultivating critical skills for academic achievement in higher education. This aspect of university life also determines the extent to which students effectively convert the available resources into capabilities critical for academic achievement.

From the quantitative data, participants were asked to indicate how often they engaged with other students on issues of common interest on the university campus. About 59% indicated they engaged with other students more often, while 37% engaged with other students occasionally and 4% indicated they never engaged with other students on issues of common interest on the university campus. These results suggest only a handful of students do not interact with their peers, while the majority interacted with their peers. Additional participant accounts (from interview data) reflect that most of them engaged more with their peers and had a good relationship with them.

At first it was not easy for me, but with time things got better as I engaged with my peers through group tasks. I got used to them and ended up interacting with everyone in class. (April)

Yes, when it comes to my peers I am just fine. I interact with them freely, maybe it is because they are doing counselling and they understand

these things about respect, the background and all that. Maybe that is
why I feel a conducive environment of learning around them, there are
no problems. (Patience)

Patience's views suggest she values mutual respect and tolerance, which she attributes to qualities that are emphasised in her counselling course.

Kagiso's interaction with his peers does not extend beyond lecture rooms. This highlights the need to create more opportunities for students such as Kagiso (perhaps due to their introverted personalities find it difficult to build connections easily) to engage with more students beyond the lecture rooms.

> *Yes, in class I am able to interact with them but once we go outside, we*
> *don't interact a lot. When we talk in group chats, we talk mostly about*
> *school* related *issues. When we are not in class we hardly interact.*

While Sesha was free to interact with his peers on an academic level, socially he was not that open to interpersonal relationships with his peers, especially people from other regions apart from his own.

> *My colleagues and I hold quizzes, we ask questions and compete*
> *amongst ourselves. That is how we frequently interact with one another*
> *through quizzes, just like those competitions. Everybody is representing*
> *themselves with one individual facilitating and asking questions. That's*
> *our interaction and it occurs every fortnight.* (Sesha)

He added:

> *I wouldn't call it a strategy per se but my natural demeanor. I am*
> *naturally anti-social and have an introverted personality making it seem*
> *as if I fear interactions with other people, but I just want to hang around*
> *those I know from home. We just hang together and do not socialise*
> *with others from other areas or districts. We are just anti-social, just a*
> *natural strategy we possess. I am content without relating to people I*

don't know but rather socialise with the people I know from my hometown.

Similar sentiments to Sesha's were shared by Donald.

It is not easy to interact with those that I attend classes with, because I see them for short periods. But I can interact with some of them, especially those that are from my school when we meet somewhere. (Donald)

From the students' narratives it is clear these engagements provide opportunities for mutual support, foster critical thinking skills as students interact with others on various academic and social pursuits. This therefore enables them to convert available resources into capabilities necessary for positive academic outcomes. Students such as Sesha and Donald also require more support to feel a sense of belonging to the university community.

7.1.3 Accommodation arrangements: Social/Environmental

Living off-campus student residence is framed as an outcome of living arrangements which intersects with other factors to influence students experiences in relation to converting resources into human capabilities crucial for academic achievement at university. All participants lived off-campus student residence except one. However, common among the students' lived realities is the financial burdens associated with studying at a university far away from home. Participants indicated they experienced not having enough money for food, transport and accommodation. One of the participants who lived in a campus student residence (Sesha) indicated that the monthly stipend the government offers is considered not enough to meet all his needs.

Students who are funded by government receive a monthly stipend and a book allowance that is disbursed at the beginning of each academic year. The stipend offered to students living on- and off-campus student residences differs slightly, P1300 ($98.97) and P1600 ($118) respectively.

I stay on-campus, which means the allowance given to us is not the same amount as for those who stay off-campus. We spend most of the money on food, stationery and the printing of assignments and by month end it would have been long finished. Well, food sold at school is a bit expensive, so most of our allowance share is meant for food. (Sesha)

For the students living in off-campus student residences the financial burden is multiplied as they require money to pay bills for accommodation, utilities, as well as transport fare four times (on average) a day to attend classes. Most student commuters resided a bit further away (sometimes in nearby villages) from the city centre where accommodation is relatively cheaper than in the city. Students commute in public mini-buses or taxis. None of the institutions of higher learning in Botswana offer transport shuttle services for students. Although there are students who may be in a similar position of commuting from their homes to university, missing lessons due to lack of transport money seems to affect rural students more due to distant connections with family. Across the board the lack of money limited students' agency and freedom to fully take advantage of the opportunities at university.

Nowadays things are very expensive, and prices are very high. So, you will find that within this P1600 ($118) you just can't make or achieve your budget - that's another challenge. Sometimes you find that there is no food in the house because there is no money. The allowance doesn't fit well within our budgets so; those things are challenging, even for transport there would be no money to go to school because the budget was tight. (Patience)

The lack of sufficient funding affected the students to the point where they would not have enough to cover transport fare to class. Most of these participants would most likely experience anxiety and stress related to money compromising their emotional balance. To a large extent participants' freedoms and opportunities to convert available resources into critical capabilities to achieve academic success were limited. Donald and Kagiso were both susceptible to exclusion if at the end of the semester or course they did not achieve the minimum grades required to progress to another level.

Yeah, in university the problem that I face is that of money. The money is not enough to do a lot of things, so I end up not attending some lessons. (Donald)

I am experiencing transport fares crises because I am not accommodated at school. So, since I am from afar, I was forced to rent out in Tlokweng to be closer to school because it is not easy to travel from afar to school. (Kagiso)

Most of the students came from low-income families, and being first in the family to attend university was also a double-edged sword on their part. Because the students are sponsored by government, directly or indirectly they are placed in positions where the family members expect some kind of support from them while they study. They assume the role of provider, which puts a lot of pressure on them and the already meagre resources they need for basic survival. In this regard students' freedom to convert resources into human capabilities necessary to achieve academic success is diminished. However, this appears to affect female participants more than their male counterparts. Patience and April mentioned that their budget included assisting their families financially.

*When you get the allowance of P1300 you make it a point that you give your family at home something. You know they don't have any source of income, and even though they try, they are unable to make ends meet. So, you divide that P1300 among all of you and after that you will only be left with money for food or to subscribe for food from the ladies who have stalls outside the university campus. But they only supply you with food only once a day, in the evening. So, you spend the whole day hungry waiting to eat in the evening. You can spend the whole day sleeping in your room with nothing to eat. (*Patience)

I live off the allowance, it is not easy. I need money for rental, transport and food. On top of that my parent can also send a message requesting money. On worst days, I fail to attend physical classes due to lack of transport money. (April)

The above narratives reflect that having monetary resources is necessary though not sufficient to enable the translation of resources into opportunities for academic achievement. The funding students receive from government to pay for tuition and cover their living expenses contributed to the participants' inclusion and participation (Walker et al., 2022) in higher education, however the students struggled to meet their basic material needs. Other factors related to money influenced the degree to which participants were able to convert available resources into capabilities necessary for learning at university. Although most participants pointed to experiencing challenges with accommodation, a few were fortunate to have been provided with accommodation on the university campus in the first year of their studies. This meant that while accommodated there, living on campus student residence offered opportunities and freedoms to take part in the various aspects of student life on the campus as well as utilising the available resources that a student would not have access to while accommodated outside the university campus residence. In a sense the feeling of insecurity associated with not having a stable place to stay was eliminated, allowing them to turn the valuable resources into capabilities and functionings for success at university; focusing on their studies. Further, being on campus also offered them an opportunity to develop or connect with important support structures. Students residing off campus student residence spent less time in the university space, resulting in fewer opportunities to be fully engaged academically and being part of the university community (Walker et al., 2022).

While students' agency is evident from their narratives, they are constrained by the financial burdens they carry, the demand to succeed while studying as well as high expectations from family. While they bring navigational capitals to negotiate access and success at university, when students constantly worry about money, about what to eat, how to get to class, money for stationery, accommodation bills and so on, it places them at a susceptible position and potential vulnerability. While Sen (1999) acknowledges the importance of material resources such as money, but not an end in itself, he argues that resources and commodities are merely objects that a person may use to improve their well-being. Nor 'are goods and services not the only means to peoples' capabilities' (Robeyns, 2005:99). However, in this study lack of money is understood as a conversion factor that intersects with other factors (mutually reinforcing) and its effects spread to

other areas resulting in corrosive disadvantage. In essence, the lack of money to choose what one values is understood as unfreedom. Where there is inadequate income, there is little to convert into capabilities and functionings (Calitz, 2016; Walker, et al., 2022).

7.1.3.1 Students' experience of social support

Support encompasses any form of assistance, guidance, encouragement, or resources and services provided to individuals to help them achieve their goals or overcome any obstacles in order to fulfill their potential. In the context of this study, support holds significant importance due to the unique challenges rural students face while at university. This support could be in the form of academic support, emotional, moral financial aid and access to resources as well as services. These conditions also affect participants experience of university. They also have an influence on the level to which participants effectively convert the resources at their disposal into important capabilities to achieve academic success at university.

7.1.3.1.1 University support

From the survey participants were asked to indicate how well they felt the university was supportive towards their studies. Results show that 67% of the participants reported that the university was supportive of their studies while 4% felt the university was not supportive of their studies. About 29% opted to remain neutral. The same theme also came through the data from interview participants. The students' narratives of being supported emerged as a valued functioning. The university prioritised students' mental health by providing counselling at the university's psychology clinic for the students that were experiencing emotional distress. Almost all students talked about the university providing counselling or supporting the mental health of students. Such human service is a positive resource that students could take advantage of to benefit their mental health, enabling them to focus on their academic studies, a capability that can transfer to achieving well-being and their aspirations.

Counselling is offered for those with problems, that is the only programme I am aware of. I think university is trying, especially with regards to the mental state of students. There are pressures, family problems and all that, so if you get counselling it is better, you become emotionally stable. (Patience)

There is a psychology clinic at the university, offering counselling to those who are facing mental challenges. (Katlo)

While this is a good institutional initiative, it appears not to be enough. Surprisingly, it is the only support programme most students were aware of. Kamogelo and Donald mentioned that the university prioritised giving students from rural areas accommodation, however it is evident not many rural students benefit from this arrangement and if they do, the benefits are temporary or short lived. Accommodation in campus student residences is only provided for the first year of study. The following expressions captures their voices:

I commend them for giving priority when it comes to school accommodation, especially for those students from rural areas. They consider where we are from and where we are schooled. I think that's the most effective initiative for us students from rural areas. I have really benefited from getting accommodation; I was on their list of those students to be accommodated on campus. I got accommodated easily. (Kamogelo)

A priority is accommodation at university. (Donald)

Kamogelo is one of the few students who were fortunate to secure accommodation within the university in her first year of study. On the other hand, students felt dissatisfied with the university for not taking heed of their needs as rural students, especially when dealing with students' accommodation. Most participants expressed having challenges with accommodation (as will be discussed later in the chapter) only a few noted having been fortunate to have been provided with accommodation in the university campus student residence, especially in the first year of their studies. This means, while accommodated

there, living in the campus student residence offered opportunities and freedoms to take part in the various aspects of student life. Thus, allowing them to utilise the available resources that normally a student would not be able to have access to while accommodated in off-campus student residences. In this sense the feeling of insecurity associated with not having a stable place to stay was eliminated, allowing them to turn the available academic resources into capabilities and functionings for success at university.

Overall, the conditions at university (those that students spoke of) were of an acceptable standard. For example, learning facilities such as learning resources centres, and libraries. Computer labs which are well equipped are available so that students have access to online learning resources and also use them for their assignment in case students did not have personal computers or laptops. For students residing at off-campus student residences, internet access is also provided through Mascom[15] .Kamogelo spoke of educational material they were provided with in her department to support their learning. She stated:

> *There is provision of learning aids to facilitate our learning, for instance daily 1 GB internet access. I pursue media studies and we are provided with educational material to support our learning.* (Kamogelo)

The rest of the students supported the view that the university provides adequate facilities for learning. Not only were these adequate but also of high quality, which effectively contribute to students' achieved functioning at university.

> *There is support, they are availing the internet, we have been issued with Mascom sim cards for the internet. The computers at Block 247 are at our disposal 24/7, when you want to study you go there anytime. The library is also available for studying.* (Katlo)

> *Well, each individual course has its own materials, and the materials are there to support students. They are there to elevate students; they*

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[15] Mascom is a network service provider

are there to motivate students. All materials that are needed are available and are of high quality because it's in the city not in a rural area. So, everything that is needed for us to do well in our studies is available. (Pono)

Yes, the university supports us. There are things that it helps us with when it comes to our studies. The university gave us sim cards that have data so that we are able to access on-line lessons and search in Google. (Donald)

It is evident that most students appreciated the support offered by the university, especially the provision of internet services. The availability of such a service expands students' capabilities that are critical for the achievement of their goals.

7.1.3.1.2 Community support

Social support could be any form of support an individual enjoys through their social ties. For example, this could be support from family members, significant others, friends and members of the community. This could be in the form of resources, financial resources, moral, and emotional support. Most participants indicated that they received a lot of moral support from their family but very little in terms of finance. However, most students depended on government for financial aid.

My family is always motivating me to study hard and not to fail or be distracted. (April)

My boyfriend helped me especially with accommodation because he also comes from our village, so he understood my situation. It's very hard, especially when one comes from as far as our villages. Because he was also a student at university he understood, and he told me that he would try to help me wherever he could. So, he helped me with rental money and furniture. He was so great, because if it wasn't for him, I would have nothing. (Patience)

Patience attributed the support she received from her boyfriend to him being more understanding and empathetic to the plight of rural students, more especially that he was from similar background.

> I *would say I was privileged to find somebody who understands my situation, especially because he comes from Segau.*[16] (Patience)

7.1.3.1.3 Social welfare services support

Quantitative results show that 89% of the participants indicated that they were not benefiting from any social welfare initiatives and programmes meant for supporting rural students while only 11% was benefiting from welfare initiatives and programmes supporting rural students. None of the participants who took part in the interview were recipients of any support from social welfare programmes. There were indications that students who are given more attention are those who have always been under the assistance of social workers through the orphans and vulnerable children programme. The following quotations emphasises the lack of attention to individual students' needs:

> *There are none. Students who have parents and do not have any form of disability are treated just the same. Those who are given attention are those who are orphaned. But otherwise, everyone who has parents is not given any special treatment.* (April)

> *Um, the programme that I think I know is that of orphaned and vulnerable students.* (Donald)

Kagiso pointed out that they sought assistance from social welfare services but were told they did not qualify for such programmes. It is surprising how such programmes measure vulnerability, as it is clear that Kagiso was disadvantaged and also vulnerable and yet did not meet the criteria to receive support from social welfare services.

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[16] Pseudonym

Well, we did approach them, and we were told they only assist their long registered clientele who have always been helped by their office even before university. So, we did not qualify for help. (Kagiso)

I am aware of the orphan and vulnerable children programme to be specific. When it comes to transport and accommodation, the social welfare officer assists them to get to university. (Sesha)

Sesha also made reference to the affirmative action programme. The fact that most people (especially those who could be potential beneficiaries) were not aware of such an important arrangement is really worrying. Of more concern is the idea that beneficiaries to this assistance arguably could also be receiving preferential treatment based on their relationship ties to officers from the social welfare services.

Most people are not aware of it. Once they fail to obtain 36 points they just give up. They are not aware that you can visit the social workers to seek assistance; just a handful are aware of it. I don't know if I can suggest who should share the information, maybe the social workers. People, especially from rural villages far from services like you are saying, need to be aware that it does not actually end there. I also recommend that students should be informed about that, and where they can get the services, because only a few are aware of it and maybe because they are close to the social workers. (Sesha)

7.1.4 Trade-offs

Trade-offs are common to secure what is considered as the best possible combination of functionings although this may result in significant sacrifice (Hart, 2016). The narratives below are evidence of trade-offs rural students make in order to achieve academic inspirations. Patience had to forego some of her basic needs in order to save the little money she had:

It was very challenging. I had to save. Financially my family had nothing, honestly, they had no money. To be able to buy a laptop I saved two

book allowances. Those allowances also helped me to buy a phone so
that I can know what's happening around me. I had to share the P1300
with my family after that you will only be left with money for food or to
subscribe for food from the ladies who have stalls outside the university
campus. But they only supply you with food once a day, in the evening.
So, you spend the whole day hungry, waiting to eat in the evening.
(Patience)

Katlo had a small business to supplement her student allowance. During the school semester she sold snacks at the university campus and during the holidays she sold items to support her family and to take care of her rental bills.

> *Then during the school holidays while I am home, I sometimes sell*
> *bale items so that we can make ends meet, including taking care of*
> *rental bills and so on.* (Katlo)

Other trade-offs mentioned included devoting all leisure time to studying hard. Most participants mentioned studying hard and sometimes sacrificing sleep in order to achieve goals. They also mentioned saving money to make ends meet by limiting visits to see family back home so that they could have transport fare at the end of the semester. Figure 7.1 below highlights some of the sacrifices rural youth made to be able to achieve some functionings at university.
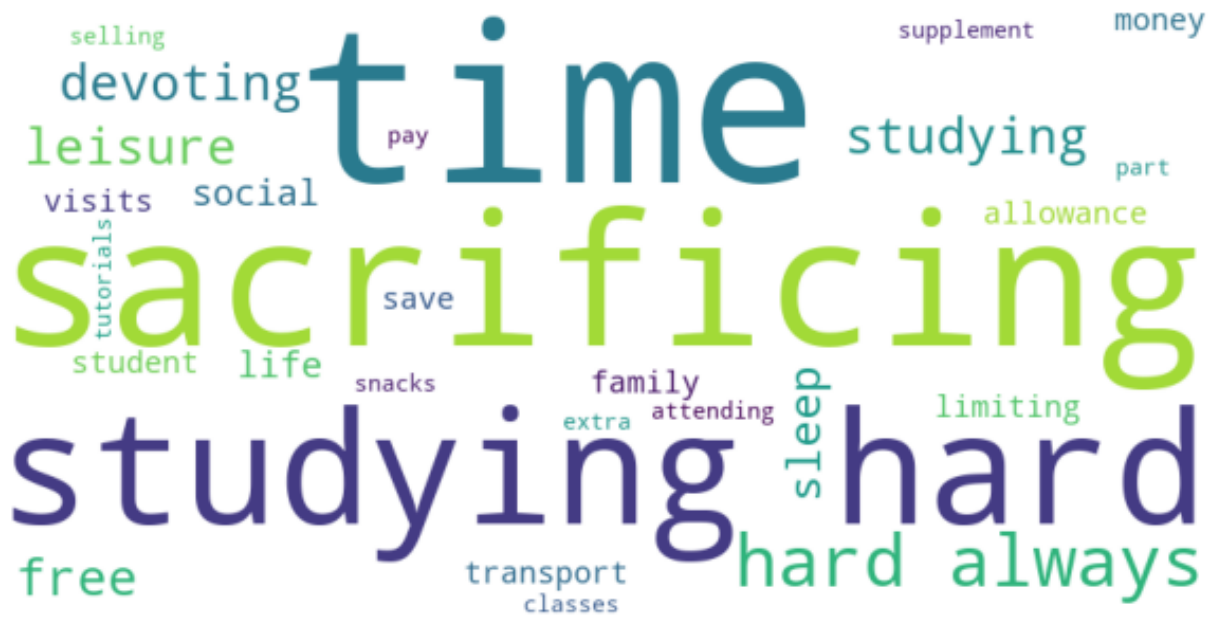
Figure 7.1: **A word cloud highlighting trade-offs participants made to make ends meet.**

7.1.5 Summary

The conditions at university had both positive and negative outcomes. For some the experience resulted in anxiety as a result of being around unfamiliar spaces while for others it was a rewarding experience. For instance, Pono was excited about being in the city (she considered this as part of her growing journey). It is evident students brought navigational capitals from home to the university while others developed this capability over time. However, their ability to convert the different resources into capabilities necessary for academic achievement was dependent on the enabling conditions at university. The academic environment was not very supportive for some participants which narrowed or decreased their capability sets. Overall students constantly worried about bills, food, and transport money, which had the potential to throw them off balance, hence decreased agency. Their capability to turn resources into capabilities and functionings is very much dependent on how well they are cushioned against these burdens such that the load is reduced, and agency is sustained throughout their entire journey at university. Making sacrifices such as saving money in order to secure the next meal means going hungry and it decreases energy levels required to pay attention in

class. The sacrifices they had to make to be a full member of the university community narrowed or decreased their capability sets.

7. 2   UNIVERSITY EDUCATION AND ASPIRATIONS

The analysis evaluated students' experience in relation to the capability to develop aspirations and what aspirations they hope to achieve upon attainment of their university education. Aspirations are the desires and goals that shape individuals' sense of who they are and their relationships to the world around them (Appadurai, 2004). These aspirations include both material (the desire for wealth) and non-material desires such as the desire for respect. Walker (2005) sees aspirations as one of the capabilities that individuals need to be motivated to do those things they want to achieve in their lives. In other words, aspirations give individuals direction to use agency to help them realise their potential. This section specifically responds to research question 5: *What aspirations do rural youth hope to achieve upon attainment of their university education?*

The table below illustrates the themes and sub-themes that came through the data while responding to research question 5.

Figure 7.2: **Themes and sub-themes of participants' aspirations after completion of their university education.**

Themes	Sub-themes
The desire to be independent and provide for family	• Being an entrepreneur • Being a teacher • Working in the medical field • Helping others
Breaking the cycle of poverty	• Improve family status • Desire for success (a better life) • Being first in the family to finish secondary education and go to university
Being an inspiration to others	• Set an example to the young generation

7.2.1 The desire to achieve self-independence

Participants emphasised the reasons they valued achieving being independent and acquiring a university education was going to offer them that. Apart from being independent it was important for them to help others, especially their family. It is not surprising that most participants who aspired to be independent also aspired to help support their family. Most participants come from a low economic social status; therefore, their aspirations were likely to have been shaped by the social environment. Despite not having managed to get to higher education (Motsabi, Diale & Van Zyl, 2020), parents also influenced their children to pursue a university education. For example, Patience expressed herself as follows:

> *It's not like we are deserting our culture or something. You will find out that it is very important when growing up that making your own money is important, you don't ask anybody. It is very painful to ask for money from another person; today you ask for this, tomorrow you ask for that. And when someone refuses to give you money you cannot blame them because it is their money. I want to see myself driving a car, going to Shell to fuel the car, taking money from my purse to pay for it, because I see the importance that if I become an independent woman, I would be able to support my family.*

The participant said that she desired to be an independent woman and considered it to be important to be able to support her family. Besides being independent she also aspired to venture into business.

> *I want to be a businesswoman or to venture into entrepreneurship.*
> (Patience)

> *I think my aspiration is that I want to achieve a lot in life. I want to see myself having a job, having my own family, being well-off, being able to support my family at home, being able to sustain myself, not depending on my parents for assistance or anyone else for that matter.* (Katlo)

Even though the following participant was driven by a passion to pursue teaching as a career, she was also driven by the desire to be independent, as well as the desire to change her family's socio-economic background. This is not surprising as most first generation student desired for a better life in order to uplift their family from poverty.

> *Alright, the course that I am studying now is my dream to be a teacher. I wanted to be a teacher even though it is my second option. My first option was to be a nurse, but I failed sciences five times. I settled on my second option to be a teacher and I am pursuing it now. My goals include seeing myself working, doing what I wanted to do. I see myself achieving my personal goals and doing great in life, as well as being independent like I said earlier. I want to see myself on a different level of life compared to where I am coming from. I want to improve the lifestyle of my family; I want to be better in life.* (Pono)

Despite failing consecutive times she did not give up nor got discouraged in achieving her personal goal of going to university. Hence, she was self-driven and determined to try as many times as it takes to qualify for university.

> *I wanted to come to university. You can see how much I tried - five times failing but still trying until I got what I wanted. So, that really shows how badly I wanted to come to tertiary. I really wanted to achieve what I wanted and I just persevered, failing but never thinking it was the end. I was just persistent though it was difficult, but I just kept on pushing until I qualified for tertiary education.* (Pono)

Sesha, on the other hand, was inspired by medical doctors and people in the medical field; a passion which could be associated with the desire to help and serve others. He hoped to achieve that aspiration which was developed from the beginning as he never wanted his highest level of education to be Grade 12. Growing up in a disadvantaged background and being raised by his grandmother inspired him to pursue higher education which he believed could help change his family status.

I never wanted my highest level of education to be a BGCSE. I grew up inspired by doctors and people in the medical field. So, when I made it to university, I was enthused to see myself working in a hospital setting and putting on a white coat with hospital tags and all, helping patients and helping different clients. That is why I was very determined and persevered in my education. (Sesha)

7.2.2 Breaking the cycle of poverty

Participants revealed the desire to break away from poverty and deprivation. From these participants' voices a university education was an opportunity they thought could change their life narratives, moving them towards the life they desired. This shows that because of their background the participants felt it was upon them to change their family's situation, hence achieving that aspiration was important. The following narratives underscores the value of higher education to transform individuals lives:

> *I wanted to move out of the village and make a better life for myself. Going to university was the only opportunity to leave my village. My brother motivated me, I wanted to enjoy the student allowance. My family background also motivated me, as well as wanting to help provide for my mother*. (April)

> *I realised that I was the first to go to senior school and performed well. I thought I shouldn't give up, because then I would be a failure.* (Pono)

> *I never wanted my highest level of education to be a BGCSE.* (Sesha)

Having a university education, can significantly increase individuals' social mobility by expanding their opportunities and means to move up the socio-economic ladder. By breaking the cycle of poverty within their own families, individuals with a university degree can set a positive example for future generations and inspire others from similar backgrounds to purse higher education as a pathway to a fulfilling life.

7.2.3 Being an inspiration to others

The participants hoped that upon achieving their higher education degrees they could be an inspiration to the young generation, especially family and others from their communities. They wanted to set an example that it is possible to achieve the life that one desires even if one came from disadvantaged backgrounds. Patience and Kamogelo hoped to achieve both self-dependence and being an inspiration to others. By achieving these aspirations, they are also contributing to breaking stereotypes and providing motivation to other young girls to pursue a university education.

> *So having your own thing, having that background on its own sets a line for the coming generation. I heard my sister's child saying that she also wants to go to university just like aunty. So that thing really motivates me, knowing that as I managed to go to university, I am setting an example that the generation after me can follow.* (Patience)

> *Actually, I was driven by wanting to see myself working in future and independent as well as being an inspiration to young ones and being able to help them to excel in their studies.* (Kamogelo)

The figure below highlights some of the factors that motivated participants to pursue university study.
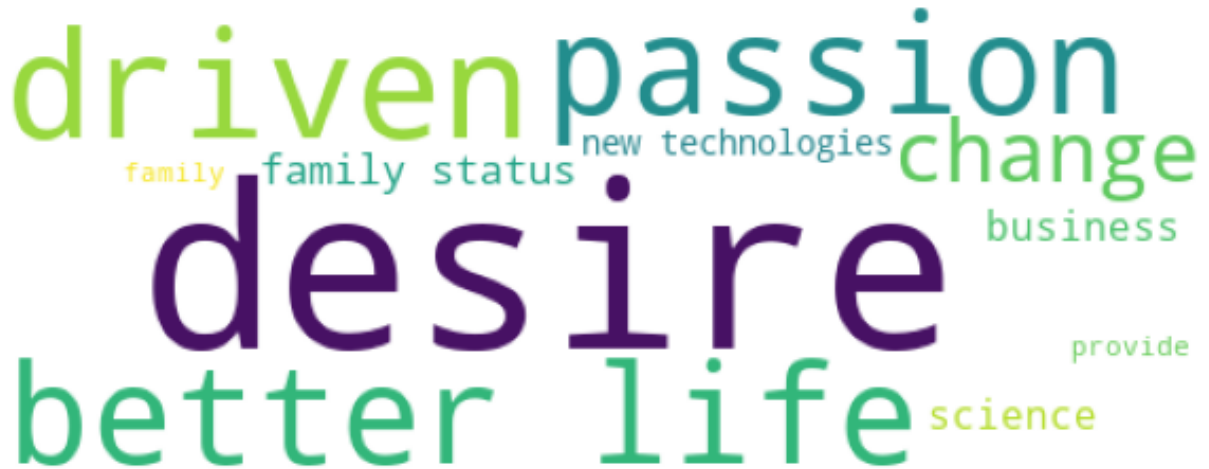
Figure 7.2 **A word cloud highlighting factors that motivated (inspired) participants to pursue university study.**

7.3   SUMMARY

Aspirations are linked to agency in the sense that it is only when people have identified their aspirations can they start making choices and acting on capabilities they want to enhance, to make their lives better. From students' narratives there is clear evidence that all of them exercised agency in order to turn their aspirations into valued functionings of achieving access. All of them indicated that they wanted to become 'something' or do 'something' after university. They emphasised they valued achieving self-independence. Apart from being self-dependent it was also important to them to be able to help others, especially their family. It is not surprising that most participants who hoped to achieve the aspiration of independence also hoped to support their family. Most participants come from a low economic social background; therefore, their aspirations were likely to have been shaped by the social environment.

My findings revealed that all participants exhibited high educational aspirations. This is congruent to Appadurai (2004) argument that aspirations are relatively evenly distributed; having specific aspirations for the future is not only limited to privileged groups. However, the capacity to aspire which is shaped by social, cultural and economic experiences and the availability of navigational information, is not equally distributed (Bok, 2010:164). Even though rural settings have limited resources to invest in learners' education, education is

still considered a priority despite the constraints. Families are also eager to ensure that their children receive an education, even if the rural schools lack adequate resources and support (Omidire, 2020). A study that explored determinants of educational aspirations such as gender, school climate, parental involvement and home and school SES in the context of South Africa, using datasets from a 2015 TIMMS study, found that while overall South Africa's achievement was one of the lowest among participating countries, students' educational aspirations were very high (Fadiji & Reddy, 2020). Arguably the higher the aspirations for higher education, the higher the school achievement needs to achieve it (Turkson, 2021). Hence participants were able to navigate complicated pathways to university.

CHAPTER 8: DISCUSSION

8.1 INTRODUCTION

In the previous three chapters I presented structural factors that enabled or constrained access to higher education for rural youth, and mapped students' experiences in relation to how they exercised agency within structural constraints to negotiate different conditions in the home, community and school to develop capabilities to access higher education. I also presented the students' narratives and reflections on their university experiences as well as the aspirations they hoped to achieve upon attainment of their university education. In this chapter I bring together the findings of the three chapters, interpreting them through the capability approach lens. The capability approach is a normative-framework for evaluating human well-being based on the context of substantive (real) freedoms to achieve capabilities and functionings.

In the context of this study, well-being freedom is achieved when rural youth have access to higher education, so that they can pursue their life aspirations and be able to lead valued lives. For individuals to achieve well-being, the capability approach urges that we should look beyond provision of goods or commodities as the means to achieve well-being. For Sen commodity command is a means to the end of well-being, but can rarely be the end itself (Sen, 1985). The capability to convert a set of means (resources and public goods) into a functioning essentially depends on certain personal, socio-political and environmental conditions (Wilson-Strydom, 2015; Robeyns, 2020)). In capability approach terms these factors are referred to as conversion factors and they either work together to support individuals' aspirations or they can work against such aspirations (Walker et al., 2022).

Thus, the aim is to apply the capability approach in understanding factors that enabled participants to access higher education and the constraints that need to be addressed such that rural youth can achieve equitable access in higher education. It is also necessary to understand the degrees of freedom to aspire enjoyed by individuals, alongside the chances of transforming the aspirations into a capability (Hart, 2016:06).

The discussion that follows thus sketches conversion factors influencing access and the extent to which rural youth can convert available resources to get into university.

8.2 ARRANGEMENTS CONSTRAINING ACCESS

The conversion factors that negatively influenced access are identified under family background, schooling environment and information.

8.2.1 Family background: Social

The family background which encompasses social status, family income and parental educational attainment is presented as an important conversion factor that significantly influenced access. The influence of students' socio-economic status on academic achievement is important in identifying the out-of-school environment that the student comes in contact with and the resources available to support learning (Zuze, 2010). An assessment of students' socio-economic status revealed that accessing education (capability) as well as achieving educational outcomes (functioning) were difficult or impossible for all to accomplish. From the results it is evident that family income status was a barrier to access to university for most students who were unable to go to university

Family background also influenced participants schooling experience and by extension their educational achievement. Most of them would be first generation university students or first in their immediate family to attend university. For students from low income and rural communities, access to resources and its influence on aspirations becomes a complex issue (Walker et al., 2022). Most participants come from low-income households and none of their parents had been to university, while some of the parents had not been through any form of formal schooling (*Figure. 5.4* on p. 119).

The subject of the influence of social background on educational achievement has been widely researched. According to Spiegler (2018), there are many studies from around the world which show the influence of social background on educational success (e.g., Taylor & Yu, 2009; McCoy et al., 2014; Burnell, 2015; Chetty & Panther, 2015; Njoko, 2018). Spiegler (2018) has provided a useful summary of important findings about inequality in education that also apply to access to higher education, of which there are two well-known

findings: 1) social background plays a role in shaping educational access and achievement, but it is not the only determining factor, and 2) there are always instances of individuals from lower social classes who are able to succeed in education despite the odds. The implication is that social background influences educational access and achievement, but it is not the sole determinant, highlights the complexity of the factors at play   The findings of the study also confirm Spiegler's (2018) conclusions.

Data also revealed that students from low-income households lacked supportive social networks, and families had fewer resources to invest in goods and services that directly or indirectly enhanced students' opportunities and freedoms to turn resources into academic outcomes. In such an environment negotiation or balance in the use of family resources and time between family obligations and educational activities is absent. One of the participants (Pono) reported spending time caring for her sick grandmother who later passed on, hence compromising time that could have been used engaging in educational activities like studying and doing homework which could in turn be converted to resources to achieve academic outcomes. Besides caring for her ailing grandmother as the only girl living in an extended family household, she was also in charge of doing household chores. Upon the passing of her grandmother, she experienced a lot of loss and grief as she was very close to her. She recounted carrying the heavy emotional burden while trying to cope with her studies. At the same time, she had no support nor access to resources and services required to deal with her loss and grief. In her case the capability to achieve well-being to function well was compromised.

In addition to these circumstances, she walked long distances to school. Similar findings were reported by Wilson-Strydom (2011) who found that outside school, learners from the poorest socio-economic context spent significantly more time walking to school, caring for family members, doing household chores and less time on educational enrichment activities. Despite her efforts in balancing both household chores at home and studying, Pono ended up not doing well at school. She had to re-write Form 5 (Grade 12) examinations five times, in order to qualify for government sponsorship. Albeit the uneven conditions, her agency was revealed; she maintained determination and displayed resilience and grit.

While this seems to be an isolated case for this study, gender also played a role as a conversion factor where women or girls are assigned roles such as taking care of the family and the household. The implication that females have more responsibilities to shoulder in the home compared to males could have a negative impact on their educational performance and success (Wilson-Strydom, 2011). This uneven distribution of caring responsibilities is entrenched in gender norms and stereotypes existent in society. Although nowadays community attitudes regarding education of girls and women in general have changed, however some cultural norms still assign women to domestic and caregiving roles, while men are expected to be the primary breadwinners and take up leadership roles.

As reflected in Pono's case, perceptions still exist that investing in girls' education is considered less important compared to boy's education as girls were expected to prioritise household duties over formal schooling are. These attitudes arguably limit female students from attain access and success in higher education. From a capability perspective tackling these stereotypes is necessary for women who all too often are not treated as ends in their own right (Nussbaum, 2000).

For some participants schooling (as influenced by social background) was characterised by hardships such as walking long distances to school as families could not afford alternative means to transport their children to school. Quantitative data indicated that participants sought alternative means by riding on donkeys or donkey carts to get to school. Although schooling experience will be revisited later, it is described here as it overlaps with other socio-economic issues to determine genuine opportunities that exist for students to pursue their educational aspirations. For example, Patience comes from a rural community where human and wildlife conflict has negative effects for both people and their resources. She used to walk to school with her peers through elephant-infested forests because her widowed mother could not afford transport costs. April also used to walk very early in the morning around 05:00 to the bus terminus to catch public taxis to another village where she attended her secondary school. From the bus terminus she had to make the long walk to her secondary school. She repeated this routine in the evening going back home. Her mother, who worked as a cook in one of the schools, could

not afford school bus/taxi fare for her. In all the participants' cases, walking long distances resulted in exhaustion and students' focus potentially shifted from learning activities while at school.

For some participants, walking exposed them to insurmountable risks, while their peers in boarding facilities were also exposed to unsafe living conditions. Instances of food shortages and disease outbreaks in boarding schools were cited by other participants. Incidents of lack of safety for learners in Botswana schools and school hostels have been documented (Mogapi, 2009; Moronga, 2009; Tlhaselo, 2011; Pitse, 2012). These scholars note that learners have been subjected to all forms of abuse, including violence and bullying. These are indications of the absence of attention to learners' welfare in school systems in rural and remote areas (Marumo & Pansiri, 2016). Molefe, Pansiri and Weeks (2009), identified cases of abuse, violence and bullying, cautioning government against cases of contagious diseases inflicted on learners in schools. It is the general lack of safety for the rural students that constrains opportunities and real freedoms to convert resources into valued academic capabilities. The structure of socio-economic scarcity and the unsafe school environment narrowed the capability sets available to choose from a range of alternatives. Thus, developing capabilities to access higher education becomes complex for rural students.

The findings of this study are in line with conclusions drawn from a study in South Africa where there is a notable disparity in opportunities in rural areas which encompasses access to higher education (Walker, 2019). Walker urges that despite the potential for high personal benefits, access to higher education remains limited particularly for those from rural provinces, which tend to be poorer overall. Similar conclusions were drawn among learners from low SES in Australia. Gale and Parker (2013) found that learners from low SES tend to be poorly represented in higher education institutions. This is because the life opportunities that determine aspirations available to learners from low SES homes tends to be lower (Fadiji & Reddy, 2020). Fewer life opportunities in turn limits the range of aspirations available to them. For example, they may have limited access to good quality schools, have fewer educational resources at home or face financial challenges in getting into university.

Students' achievement of functioning or lack thereof is a reflection of their agency as well as the options and inequalities that exist within these structural systems. Hence success is not just about the students' agency but also about the opportunities and the uneven conditions that prevail within the education system, therefore change is necessary for just and equitable outcomes. From the capability perspective numerous external conditions undermine young people's internal capabilities to exercise the functionality in accessing higher education (Gasper,1997). In the presence of such conditions ''the aspirations of the youth towards higher education diminish, and access is consequently undermined'' (Mseleku, 2022:264).

Through operationalization of the capability approach in this study, the importance of addressing structural inequalities that limit individuals' opportunities to achieve valuable functioning especially for those from disadvantaged backgrounds is highlighted. By promoting greater equity in education and more freedoms, individuals from all backgrounds can fully realise their potential and achieve their life aspirations and achieve well-being.

8.2.2 Funding arrangements: Social

While some aspects of income were discussed under family background, this section focuses on funding or money as a conversion factor that intersects with other factors to determine students' choices in choosing what they valued. Rural youth may not have access to the same financial resources non-rural youth have. Owing to that disparity the cost of services and goods may be relatively higher. While participants were able to attend university upon securing financial aid from government in the form of sponsorship, most had initially struggled to get the initial application fees. Participants experienced the lack of money as an unfreedom to pursue aspirations (Walker et al., 2022). Findings indicate that the majority of participants from the cohort that were not able to go to university, including the cohort that was able to achieve access to university, experienced financial challenges in securing the initial application fee. Lack of money for most participants had a significant influence on access. Also, most of the participants from the cohort that was not able to make it to university came from low income household suggesting limited financial resources limited participants' freedoms and opportunities to access university.

From the participants' responses most of them either had no money at all or did not have enough to apply or travel to the cities to apply. This demonstrates the role of money as an important asset that might make a difference between getting in and succeeding at university. Again, at university, participants faced the risk of exclusion due to financial constraints.

8.2.3 School environment: Social

Schooling emerged as a social conversion factor with a critical role in determining access to university. Besides expanding capabilities to access university, schooling has the ability to expand opportunities that students have. For students to qualify for university they are expected to reach a certain minimum level of academic achievement typically measured by grades. Students who attend schools that provide high quality education and resources stand a better chance to perform relatively well academically (Zuze, 2010). This creates an access path for students to meet admission requirements, and gain access to university (Spaull, 2013). While these are the ideal schooling arrangements to ensure access, going to university is more than an individual project. Hence personal conversion factors do not work alone to enable the conversion of capabilities into university access. Walker (2019:59) argues university access "it's at the intersection of the person, her schooling, her family, university actions (such as school visits), government policy and social structures."

In the current study, the following variables were used to determine the influence of schooling on university access; teacher support, internet access, extra lessons, teaching and learning resources (labs, libraries, computers, textbooks) on access to university ($p<0.001$). The schooling conditions were not enabling enough. It is clear that although the functioning of access was achieved, participants' opportunities were constrained by attending schools with inadequate learning resources (which complicates pathways to higher education access). The lack of adequate learning resources can have a significant impact on students' aspirations.

While infrastructure (in terms of buildings) was reported to be in fair conditions, resources such as textbooks were not available; where available there were not enough for the

students. For example, throughout his schooling experience Kagiso encountered shortages of textbooks, even the school library was under-resourced. This was exacerbated by the lack of a library in the community. The few instances where computers were available, the majority of students did not have access to the facilities. In some cases, they were only accessible to students who were studying computer science. Patience narrated having her first experience with computers at university. She first interacted with words like PowerPoint at university. Subsequently, the lack of resources may have an impact on learners' aspirations and motivation to engage in their studies, hence limiting the opportunities available to students. For example, in instances where the school does not have adequate technology or science equipment, students may be unable to pursue their interests in these areas and they may instead be forced to focus on other subjects that they may not be passionate about.

The lack of opportunities and real freedoms to explore new fields might result in students settling for less ambitious career paths, thus forcing students to adapt their preferences. Bridges (2006) argues that individuals may develop adaptive preferences in response to limited opportunities and resources. For example, in the context of higher education, students from a low-income family may adjust their aspirations to a career that they believe is attainable based on their socio-economic status, rather than pursuing their true passion.

In this study a few of the participants were pursuing university degrees that they had settled for, simply because they could not afford to apply to other universities for what they truly had reason to value (passionate about) or they did not qualify to pursue a degree of their choice (Walker, et al., 2022). For instance, Katlo had wanted to pursue criminal justice law, but the course was oversubscribed, and she was forced to settle for a course she was not passionate about. Fortunately for her, she grew to love the course as her studies progressed. Other participants also settled for courses that were the affordable choice at the time, as they could not get funding from government to pursue degrees of their own choosing. Although the possibilities of access to university seemed near impossible, students made choices to create pathways that foster the conditions of possibility to exist (Walker & Mkwananzi, 2015)

For some there was limited to no support (in the form of remediation/enrichment) or tutorials offered. While the school supported students' aspirations by embarking on a combination of career guidance initiatives (through career fairs, motivational speakers, university representatives), evidence also suggests there was limited support to help students develop and sustain their aspirations. For instance, students' narratives indicate that teachers tend to move fast (commonly known as chasing the syllabus) before exam time under the pretext of promoting independent learning or learner-centered pedagogies. While this is a good move, it could have been encouraged early during the schooling process to enable students to cultivate independent learning skills and inculcate them throughout. This approach to teaching does not expand students' opportunities to interact with the knowledge in such a way that it can be converted to academic achievement. In this instance access to higher education is complicated not only by resource scarcity at school but by other pedagogical and social arrangements.

Furthermore, Kagiso described his experience as having lacked the support to build what he termed 'exam confidence'. These structural shortcomings constrained students' freedoms to convert the available resources into achieving valued academic outcomes. Overall, when these factors are examined collectively, they demonstrate how structural arrangements impact the ability of individuals to transform resources into functionings (Robeyns, 2011). For students who are already disadvantaged and come to school unprepared with little or no resources (social and material) to take advantage of (Brighouse, 2007), the effects are double. Effectively, the constrained schooling environment intersects with the low socio-economic condition and the resultant factor is corrosive disadvantage. Schooling as a social arrangement affects how people use their personal conversions to live as they wish; upon an evaluation of participants' responses, I came to the conclusion that although some students achieved access, the schooling environment was not enabling enough for the students to pursue that which was of value to them. For education to enhance the capabilities of individuals, to achieve well-being, genuine opportunities for secure functionings must be present (Wolf & de-Shalit, 2007).

8.2.4 Information: Social

Information emerged as another social conversion factor relevant to access to higher education. Findings indicate that rural students had limited access to information about higher education options. Quantitative data indicated that there were statistically significant differences between information about where to study, which courses to study as well as information about university study funding and going to university; indicating that access to information determined access to higher education. From their narratives, participants had limited information about higher education institutions including courses or programmes to pursue at university as well as information about funding options available (Means, Clayton, Conzelmann, Baynes, & Umbach, 2016). For example, while they were familiar with a few public institutions, they did not have sufficient information regarding career options except for the mainstream ones like being a doctor, lawyer, or teacher. This suggests the lack of sufficient information about higher education significantly limited rural youth's freedoms and opportunities to access university.

While navigating limited information when applying to universities of their choice, some reported having been limited by not performing well in some certain subject areas. On pursuing this further, it was revealed that in respect of subject choice in Form 4 (Grade 11) especially with regards to STEM subjects, schools determine placement for the students depending on performance in Form 3 (Grade 10). In a sense personal conversion factor (such as one's academic ability) intersected with information and limited financial resources to narrow opportunities and real freedoms to choose where to study and what to study (what they value).

While the schools made efforts in the area of career guidance for post-secondary education, these seemed not to be enough. To this end, participants were of the views that the Ministry of Education and Skills Development should design programmes that help students in rural areas develop higher education inspirations at grass roots level. For education to be meaningful all students (irrespective of geography) should have equal opportunities and real freedoms to make choices to pursue their life aspirations based on what they have reason to value. It is clear that in terms of information, participants had fewer bundles of resources to choose from. Related to these limited freedoms is the issue

of difficulties and poor resources associated with schooling in rural areas (Timmis et al., 2019). It is well documented that the rural context has a significantly negative impact on rural youth educational freedoms, particularly for those aspiring to progress to university (Mathebula, 2019).

From the participants' voices, while growing up in rural communities there was no exposure to sources of inspiration such as role models. The few community members who had advanced in their education level had moved to cities, suggesting that there was limited knowledge or awareness regarding higher education. Effectively the lack of access to different kinds of social, cultural and economic resources affected students' capacities to articulate and pursue their aspirations (Smith, 2011). This means that disadvantaged students; who do not have access to diverse social networks, cultural experiences and economic opportunities may have difficulty expressing their goals and ambitions (where aspirations have already been developed) and might face constraints when trying to achieve them. Thus, lack of access to the necessary bundle of goods can limit the capability to develop the necessary skills and knowledge to pursue their aspirations. This suggests what rural students are able to be and do including the possible range of choices individuals can choose from in order to be or do what they value (Sen, 1990,1992,1999) are significantly narrowed. While coming from rural areas does not always imply being poor, there is less equitable access to human opportunities in rural areas than in urban areas with poverty levels usually higher in rural areas due to minimal productive economic activities.

My findings are consistent with other studies that found that rural students are likely to have limited access to relevant and sufficient information about career options and which universities to apply to (McMillan & Barrie, 2012; Barnajee, 2018; Joshi & Bakshi, 2019) The rural school setting may fail to adequately equip students with information about which universities and programmes to apply for including how to go about the application process (Njoko, 2018; Martinez-Vargas, Walker & Mkwananzi, 2019; Walker & Mathebula, 2019). Besides little preparations in schools, due to the distance from remote areas, there are fewer university outreach programmes in rural communities, hence

students' knowledge and understanding about university choice and application processes are limited (Timmis et al., 2019).

In these studies, the authors highlight the importance of providing support for students from disadvantaged backgrounds and creating a more inclusive and supportive learning environment. The lack of supportive structures (including lack of information about higher education) may lead to failure of educational aspirations for rural students. It is the failure of educational aspirations which limits capabilities in the future. Walker and Mkwananzi (2015:47) point out that "the failure of educational aspirations deprives young people of the opportunity to develop to their full potential and of a central socio-economic right that provides the foundation for life-long learning and economic opportunities for all citizens".

In addition, choices were constrained by lack of access to the internet within the community to apply for university online. Data revealed that more than half of the participants (55%) of the cohort that did not go to university had not had any interaction with the internet whatsoever. Almost the same percentage of participants (48%) from the cohort that was able to go to university never had access to internet while schooling. These figures reveal the disturbing realities of the urban/rural digital divide that further deepens the precarious position of disadvantaged students. While there are fewer opportunities to access the internet in rural areas, in urban areas many people can easily afford transportation and internet cafes, and some have internet access at home, highlighting the spatial inequalities (Njoko, 2018). In remote areas, access to the internet is more restricted (Chothia, 2017), which further complicates finding out about various higher education institutions. For many disadvantaged students from rural communities, using the internet to learn about university programmes as well as to apply comes at a considerable price. Costs might be related to getting taxis to the cities and purchasing internet time from cafes, which disadvantaged students can ill afford (Njoko, 2018).

In the current study, most participants incurred travelling expenses to apply as all higher education institutions are located far away from their areas. In Botswana most universities are skewed in terms of location. For individuals who were not able to bear travel costs to access the resources to apply, the freedom to access higher education was decreased. In emergencies, as was the case with the COVID-19 pandemic, higher education access

relied on basic technological access (Mpungose & Khoza, 2020), in which case rural students were vulnerable and predisposed to exclusion due to unaffordability of technological access. The intersecting nature of all these factors influenced rural students' choices to pursue university education. Similar findings on access reported pragmatic factors such as distance and cost related to university study away from home (Friesen & Purc-Stephenson, 2016; Kim, 2019) decreased rural youth's freedom to access higher education.

8.3 ARRANGEMENTS ENABLING ACCESS

Not all factors identified were unfreedoms that limited opportunities and freedoms to access university education. From the findings there was evidence that arrangements that enabled the conversion of resources into opportunities and freedoms to achieve academic excellence were also present, thus despite structural shortcomings in the home, school and community, the disadvantage is off-set when students exercise agency to take advantage of the scarce available resources, to expand options of achieving their aspirations.

8.3.1 School environment: Social

Access to higher education is also regulated or determined by academic standards. Narratives also indicate participants believed their schools played an effective role in expanding their capabilities to access university. Participants reported having access to extra assistance to help them with their examinations. Donald, Kamogelo and Pono mentioned that their schools had strategies in place to assist them through holiday teaching, weekend classes as well as small revisions groups. Additionally, extra study materials were provided. Some of the teachers attended study sessions with the students to offer help while they study. Essentially, teachers showed worth in what students were studying which in turn made students value their studying and transformed it into academic achievement.

Moreover, teachers were a source of inspiration; by sharing their own experience at university, they motivated students to prioritise going to university. In dealing with limited resources they (teachers) provided students with study materials in addition to the

morning and evening study periods created for students. The findings of this study highlight the importance of supportive and caring teachers that go beyond their typical scope of duty for students in disadvantaged communities (Naidoo & Van Schalkwyk, 2021; Walker et al., 2022). In addition, they are in line with a study by Bojuwoye et al., (2014), in the Western Cape, South Africa where it is noted that various supports such as provision of books, teacher support and peer support contributed to learners' academic engagement. This is most likely to shape their academic aspirations, indicating that aspirations are determined by personal qualities (personal conversion factors) as well as the intersection of the social structures of the home and the schooling system.

For rural students effective or supportive school contexts (such as supportive teachers) might mitigate disadvantage. This was relevant in the context of my study; students' aspirations were influenced by teachers. Teachers were a source of motivation or inspiration that pushed the participants to aim to go to university. Kagiso emphasised that his teachers advised him to prioritise university as the most advanced educational level. He believed their efforts (agency) pushed him into university. Donald recounted how their teachers used to encourage them to study hard and to do well in order to proceed to university. Effectively, the challenges associated with rurality acted as enabling conversions and encouraged both hard work and hope for the participants.

Overall, based on this cohort's schooling experiences, school played a nurturing role for them with regard to support, supportive networks, and feelings of belonging (Walker & Mkwananzi, 2015). These networks can help to foster a sense of community and belonging, which can enhance students' capabilities to thrive in an academic environment. In feeling valued and connected students are more likely to engage in their academic work, which in turn can enhance their sense of self-worth and confidence. To experience a sense of belonging at school increases aspirations (Fadiji & Reddy, 2020), consequently enhancing students' overall capabilities to function and flourish as individuals and achieve well-being.

In the context of access for rural students, the necessary conditions are required to convert resources into real freedoms and functionings. In achieving their goals and aspirations, rural students must be granted opportunities and real freedoms to acquire

the education they require to improve skills and abilities to select a future that they genuinely appreciate (Walker, 2019).

8.3.2 Language competence: Personal

Another personal characteristic or quality that enhanced opportunities for access for some few participants was language competence (social capital). In contrast to what other participants reported concerning not being encouraged to speak English, and teachers being flexible with students speaking the language they were comfortable with, Sesha noted that in his previous school they were encouraged to speak English all the time, although teacher support was lacking in other critical areas. While teacher support was not enough, he converted the limited resources (personal conversion factors - such as language competence, self-determination combined with external factors such as family support) and exercised agency by pursuing his academic goals. Despite his mother's lack of higher education experience, she had always encouraged him to aim to study at university and choose a science-based course. Crucially, this strengthened his aspirations. He passionately emphasised how acquiring a university education can disrupt the cycle of poverty both for himself, his family and the community at large, "I never wanted my highest level of education to be a BGCSE". BGCSE is the equivalent of a Matric or Grade 12 certificate.

Evidence on the potential of higher education to advance social mobility for disadvantaged individuals abounds. Acquiring a university degree provides individuals with opportunities and real freedoms to have access to a range of alternatives in choosing a life they are proud of. For example, one such opportunity is having access to gainful employment, which according to Naidoo and Schalkwyk (2021:181) "is recognised in both Western and non-Western societies as a significant contributor to the overall functioning and well-being of individuals". Equipped with this knowledge, Sesha drew on his personal resources of strength (grit) to overcome constraints. Thus, while his aspirations were developed from the beginning, they were at the same time shaped by his social context. Individuals develop their aspirations based on the educational resources and community support available to them (Calitz, 2016).

8.3.3 Community: Social

Findings also illustrate the ways in which family, extended family, friends and the community influenced participant's agency. These emerged as social capital enabling participants' success in going to university and having that sense of belonging in their new environment. Social capital refers to networks, relationships and social connections that individuals have access to which can provide them with opportunities and resources (Motsabi, Diale & Van Zyl, 2020). For example, April's brother helped her navigate the application process, although she applied practical reason (based on interest and subjects she studied at secondary school) to decide on what she wanted to study at university. Her brother who had been to university supported her throughout the entire process of applying to university. Although her brother was not successful in completing his course, he had the knowledge and experience of what the process of applying required. In addition to this information, she had acquired some level of understanding about higher education from the career fairs at her last school and this enhanced or expanded her capabilities to make life choices about what she desired to pursue at university. In this regard she took advantage of the 'hot knowledge' (Ball & Vincent, 1998) which her brother acquired through his higher education experience as well as 'cold knowledge' (Ball & Vincent,1998). Although this knowledge was limited (acquired from career fairs) she turned it into capabilities to get into university.

Even though families had limited experience with higher education they supported their children by providing the material and financial resources to facilitate the application process. Kagiso mentioned that his family assisted him with money for application fees even though there were not familiar with higher education. This in itself was a change maker for these students. Friends were also identified as a significant source of support. Friendships are influenced by social opportunities and cultural contexts (Major, 2012). Academic achievement is also positively linked with interacting with like-minded and academically engaged people (Williams et al., 2017). This is an indication that maintaining relations and connections with friends from the same community was valued. Participants mentioned friends who were already studying at university as sources of information and support. They kept looking out for information regarding opening of applications for

universities. Others recounted that friends who were already at the university offered them accommodation and guidance regarding applications, pre-registration processes and other related activities.

Other significant people who made the possibility of access achievable were community members. Sesha mentioned that they sought help from the principal at their former primary school. Upon satisfying himself that they were old students of the school, he gave them access to his office to search for information and applied online. Patience identified a politician who at the time was a member of parliament for her area and held a cabinet position who assisted students (from his constituency) that showed potential in their academic work with money for application fees to universities. Due to these valuable connections participants were able to convert their aspirations into choices and actions. Thus, there is clear evidence that although from a disadvantaged position, participants' freedoms operationalised their ability to pursue goals that they valued and were important for the life they wished to pursue (Lozano et al., 2012; Wilson-Strydom & Walker, 2015; Wilson-Strydom, & Okkolin, 2016).

8.4. AGENCY AND NAVIGATING ACCESS

Agency is fundamental to students aspiring to and forming and developing their capabilities, making choices, and working towards their goals (Robeyns, 2017; Walker, 2018). Drawing conclusions from both quantitative data and qualitative data, participants' agency was revealed through strong navigational functioning as they negotiated constraints to get into university. Maila and Ross (2018) posit that students from disadvantaged background bring along rich assets with which they navigate access to higher education successfully in a constrained environment. Cross and Atinde (2015) refer to such assets as compensatory capitals; meaning that these capitals make up for the deficit in the required skills rural youth are expected to have to transition smoothly to higher education life. In the current study navigational capabilities emerged as navigational capitals in response to constraints. Their navigational capitals were expressed in the form of self-efficacy, self-discipline, hard work, self-determination, perseverance, persistence and resilience.

8.4 1   Self-determination, perseverance and resilience

Findings reveal that all participants were self-driven and self-motivated to work hard to secure a place at university against all odds. Participants' voices reflect that once aspirations were established, they took control of their own academic journey by making deliberate choices to achieve their goals and maintain high aspirations. For example, despite resource scarcity at home and at school participants were determined to achieve their academic goals as a means to pave the way for a university education. In all cases, participants came from communities that were located far away from universities. In fact, rural populations in general are more distant from higher education institutions compared to their urban counterparts, and this added to the challenge of improving access for rural students (Altbach, Reisberg & Rumbley, 2009; Atuahene & Owusu-Ansah, 2013; Njoko, 2018). They had minimal to no access to resources such as transport to get to school, endured walking long distances from home to school and yet their actions remained consistent.

All of them were determined to make it beyond Grade 12. They put extra effort in their schoolwork. For example, Patience and other students from her village used to attend evening studies in spite of the risk and dangers they were exposed to by walking at night through elephant-infested forests. Besides enduring the long distance to school, Pono was responsible for household chores as well as caring for her ailing grandmother. While such social norms and expectations are important familial assets, they might also function as a constraint and result in decreased agency in commitment to her studies. Within such context participants learnt to find their own way, to be resilient and resourceful (Walker & Mathebula, 2019). The point is that students are not passive spectators or "deficit rural students - they have assets that they might mobilise if the conditions of possibility allow" (Walker & Mathebula, 2019:05). Although their academic trajectories were not smooth, it is evident that students took advantage of valuable capitals to make choices that aligned with their valued goals.

Besides negotiating structural constraints within the home, participants had to find their way to negotiate constraints within communities that did not always value education (Wilson-Strydom, & Okkolin, 2016). Narratives also indicate that students in these

communities considered themselves to have been struggling academically, which is most likely to decrease their peers' agency. For instance, Kagiso's peers had lost motivation to try and put effort in their studies. However, within such constraints, participants create pathways to a better future for themselves and their families through access to university (Cross & Atinde, 2015; Maila & Ross, 2018).

8.4.2 Self-efficacy

At structural level, participants negotiated a constrained home environment of limited knowledge about higher education. Most of them would be first generation students, operated within scarce information resources regarding knowledge about higher education from their parents. A first generation student is one who is in the process of getting a university degree though no one in his or her family has ever attained such height (Lucier, 2019). In comparison to their counterparts, first generation students are usually disadvantaged due to lack of exposure to adequate higher education information residing in their parents. Where there is no knowledge or experience of higher education in the family, it is the students who must be agents of school choice, school subject choice and choice of university (Walker, 2019). In addition, rural schools lack substantive information regarding career options, funding, and participants must navigate pathways to access. For instance, Kagiso had no support from his family with regards to which university and course to apply to. Having realised his potential in computer studies he decided to go for a course that had a computer component to it. He emphasised that he was not well-informed about the requirements of choosing a university course. However, he confidently went for something he was familiar with, and also an area in which he believed he would be academically resilient. In that sense he made the decision based on practical reason. This also highlights his belief in his academic capabilities despite his challenges.

The notion of combined capabilities by Nussbaum (2000) alerts us to the importance that individuals need a combination of capabilities to achieve the kind of life that they aspire to. The presence of one capability alone is not sufficient enough to ensure human flourishing. Also, according to Nussbaum's capabilities approach to justice, a liberal society is just if it provides individuals with the necessary means to actualize basic

capabilities required for a dignified human life (Fulfer, 2013). Therefore, individuals need a combination of capabilities that are mutually reinforcing and complementary. For example, having internal capabilities such as having the aspiration to go to university together with the external social uptake conditions effectively enable that person to exercise the capability as an achieved aspiration (Walker, 2019:54).

Kamogelo attributed her ability to navigate access to university to her robust sense of self-efficacy. She framed her agency as both self-determination and self-esteem. Being first in the family to go to university, she had to rely on an uncle who had been through university many years ago. Again, the lack of resources to apply in her village, necessitated long journeys (of around 1 000 kms) to the city. In the city where she knew no one, she summoned her inner strength to ask around for directions to the university and the various places she needed to go to. Her determination and perseverance enabled her to go through all the necessary processes up to a point where she finally got a place at university.

Katlo's exercise of agency also came through when upon learning she was not admitted at the university she had applied to, she travelled to the university to try to understand why she was not admitted. To her knowledge she had met the minimum requirements for the course she had applied for. She learnt the course was oversubscribed, potentially decreasing her agency to pursue that which she valued. She was offered an opportunity to apply for an alternative course, which in actual fact was chosen for her by the university, and this limited her freedoms to pursue her life aspirations. Such a response calls into question, the institutional role of universities towards enhancing agency freedom for rural students. Drawing on her resilience resources she adapted her preferences in order to conform to the needs of the institution and also to benefit from government funding that was available for the course.

The capability approach emphasises empowerment and process freedom where individuals remain in control of their own choices (Vero, Bonvin, Lambert & Moachon, 2012). However, in this context the individual's ability to retain control of their choices was in contradiction with institutional and government requirement, forcing her to be adaptable to the systemic arrangements. The capability approach acknowledges that individuals

cannot always realise their capabilities because of structural inequalities (Nussbaum, 2000) as evidenced in this study. As such the social environment needs to be readjusted in order to make it more inclusive (Egdell & McQuaid, 2016) in order to promote equality and just outcomes for the less privileged.

These findings reveal the centrality of motivation, hard work and high aspirations to students from low- income communities who are driven by lived experiences of hardship (Gore & Botha, 2022). The findings also reveal that students are not passive agents - rather they valued thinking positively about their lives and aligned their actions towards changing their life narratives. The findings also demonstrate students have inner resources, social competences and cultural strategies that allow individuals not only to survive, recover or even thrive after stressful events, but also to draw from the experience to enhance subsequent functioning (Stanton-Salazar & Spina, 2000; Yosso, 2005). While these participants took initiative and sustained resilience, they negotiated risks, persevered academically to respond to educational opportunities and adapted to constraints to make it to university "although conversion of aspirations to functioning were more difficult" (Walker, 2006; Walker & Mkwananzi, 2015:44).

8.5   A CAPABILITY APPROACH TO UNDERSTANDING RURAL STUDENTS' UNIVERSITY EXPERIENCE

Though participants achieved access as a functioning, narratives reveal complex arrangements at university that could potentially diminish their capabilities and decreased their agency to fully participate at university. All students had obtained financial assistance from government to pursue the various degree programmes, but their success cannot be linked to financial assistance alone. Although there are other factors such as institutional and social forces that contribute to student success (Breir, 2010), participants negotiated insurmountable obstacles. These factors are grouped into personal, social, environmental, and material conversion factors.

8.5.1 Personal conversion factors

The study established that students experience of moving to a new environment differed from one individual to another; both positive and negative experiences were highlighted.

These experiences have an impact on the extent to which students are able to function and translate capabilities into academic success in higher education. For example, participants experienced fear, anxiety, and lack of self-confidence due to being in an unfamiliar environment. The experience of culture shock was also highlighted. Coming from rural areas which seemed more conservative, participants were not used to the dress style or dress sense they experienced among their peers in the university campus (Pheko et al., 2014). They felt alienated as they could not afford what other students had, especially matching clothing and gadgets. This restricted their valued functioning of appearing in public without shame and being socially included (Walker & Mathebula, 2019). Patience termed this as "not matching with the environment".

Students also struggled with fitting in as they felt they were discriminated against because of the way they spoke their home language. As a minority ethnic group, the students feared speaking in class owing to stereotypical discriminations. Culturally and socially students felt positioned as inferior to their urban counterparts and initially struggled to fit in which affected their well-being (Timmis et al., 2019). While they were able to rediscover their agency at later stages and adapt to the new environment, altogether these experiences restricted their valued functioning of being equal participants at the university. In a new environment and culture, students require not only resources but also knowledge and information (Walker et al., 2022) to make the transition process easier for them. In the absence of such resources and support students might lack the sense of worth and belonging, hence their agency decreased.

Studies on access and equity have emphasised the importance of targeted support such as mentoring programmes for disadvantaged students during the transition period after enrolment and throughout their university education (Nenji & Ndofirepi, 2020; Wanti et al., 2022;). Wilson-Strydom (2015) expounds that opportunities to develop capabilities for university readiness should be intentionally created at high school and during the first year by assisting first-year students to understand the complexity of university readiness and to see that they are not alone when they are confused, scared or lack the confidence in their ability as a university student. Such responsiveness by institutions of higher learning to the plight of such students is critical if students from disadvantaged

backgrounds are to be allowed not only access but success in higher education (Nenji & Ndofirepi, 2020).

Despite the negative transition experience for some students, the transition experiences had positive outcomes. Participants developed the capabilities to navigate unfamiliar spaces by adjusting and adapting to new spaces. Students reported developing self-confidence, being inspired and learning new skills. Sesha and Pono felt excited and thrilled about moving to a new institution. Despite challenges they struggled with, such as not finding a suitable place to stay, the whole experience was testament to their development, self-independence and progress. They considered this an opportunity that would expand their life choices. While their ability to navigate university challenges did not necessarily increase their freedoms and opportunities to convert resources into capabilities for academic success, students forged new identities, relationships and networks.

8.5.2 Environmental conversion factors

Related to financial constraints is the accommodation arrangement of living in an off-campus student residence, which is framed as a conversion factor that intersects with other conditions to influence students' experiences in relation to converting resources into human capabilities critical to achieve academic success while at university. Data indicates that all participants were affected by financial burdens associated with studying at a university far away from home, providing justification that adequate monetary resources might be one of the many ways that constitute a condition for positive outcomes. They opened up about their experience with not being well-nourished, not well-sheltered and being unhealthy and generally being stressed about money. Students constantly worried about money for food, transport and accommodation which diminished their capability to fully function at university. Most of them survived on meals provided by food vendors around the university campus. Even when the meals were not affordable to the students; in order to save money, they had to make trade-offs and survived on one meal a day. At times they missed classes due to not having enough money for transport, impacting on their commitment to their studies.

These finding are in line with Gore and Botha's (2022) study that used vignettes to explore inequality in South African higher education among honours students in one of the institutions of higher education. Aspects that emerged from reflections on their lived experiences of (dis)advantage were accommodation that was not conducive to study, lack of funding to travel to and from campus, lack of social networks, failure to adjust to a university environment, as well as thoughts about dropping out from university (Gore & Botha, 2022:240). Walker and Mathebula's (2015) study on low-income rural youth migrating to urban universities, outlines that getting to and into university is shaped by resources money can enable including accommodation, food, transport, clothing and toiletries. Lack of these sufficient resources is the greatest inequality students experience, which is not necessarily typically rural, but historical, contextual and intergenerational (Walker & Mathebula, 2015).

Well-being freedom concentrates on a person's capability to have various functioning vectors and to enjoy the corresponding well-being achievement (Sen, 2000). Under conditions of disadvantage, rural students' physical well-being and mental well-being are compromised. While government is funding their tuition, subsistence allowance which is also provided seems to be not enough, as families do not have extra resources to assist students. Even for the students who resided in campus student residences, the stipend was not enough to meet basic survival needs. Conversion factors cluster to suppress students' freedom to function and flourish while at university. This is termed corrosive disadvantage (Wolff & de-Shalit, 2007). Austin (2016) and Uleanya and Rugbeer (2020) observe that constant worry about money can generate harmful adaptation in so far as students' focus their attention on their basic material security and away from higher education achievement, hence narrowing their human potential capability goals and limiting their agency. In other words, this has negative effects on students' beings and doings as pre-occupation about financial concerns shifts attention and energy away from their studies, making it more difficult for them to focus on their academic goals.

For rural students who were first in the family to attend university, being at university was also a double-edged sword on their part. Receiving financial assistance from government, directly or indirectly placed students in a position where the family expects support from

them while they study. The presence of financial assistance may have unintended negative outcomes including increasing students' risk of academic exclusion by virtue of the money being utilised to alleviate family poverty (Mngomezulu, Dhupath & Munro, 2017). In the context of this study students also felt a sense of duty and commitment towards those they left behind. They assumed the role of provider, which puts a lot of pressure on them and the already meagre resources they need for basic survival. Low-income students experience dilemmas associated with financial assistance and the competing demands for such assistance (Mngomezulu et al., 2017). The tension between meeting basic needs and moral obligation to support family complicated the constraint for students. Essentially, the choices students make can compromise their academic success leading to academic exclusion. In addition, in extreme cases the need to support their families might take priority over their personal educational aspirations. This can lead to a lack of motivation and decreased agency in pursuing higher education aspirations, resulting in limited opportunities in the future.

Based on the findings, students' freedom to convert resources into human capabilities critical to achieve academic success was limited. However, this appears to affect female participants more than their male counterparts. None of the male participants mentioned having to support family back home. I consider this as an area of further research in order to understand the role of gender in access to higher education

Although most participants pointed to experiencing challenges with accommodation, only a few noted having been fortunate to have been provided with accommodation on the university campus, especially in the first year of their studies. Effectively, campus life afforded them opportunities and freedoms to take part in the various aspects of student life as well as utilising the available resources that a student would not be able to have access to while living off-campus. Essentially the feeling of insecurity associated with not having a stable place to stay was eliminated, allowing them to turn the valuable resources into capabilities and functionings for success at university. Furthermore, living on campus also offered them an opportunity to develop or connect to important social networks. Off-campus students spent relatively longer times travelling between campus and their place of accommodation, restricting time spent in the university space, therefore resulting in

fewer opportunities to be fully engaged academically and being part of the university community (Walker, et al., 2022).

8.5.3 Social conversion factors

The study established that students were critical of the lack of recognition during the teaching and learning process. Some lecturers attended classes just to deliver content and leave and had no interest in forging relations with students to understand them as human beings. Students felt unseen and unheard. Some lecturers were described as unapproachable as they scolded students, humiliating them. It did not matter to the lecturers whether or not students attended classes. This condition can be deemed unfair in the sense that students did not have the freedom to challenge this and demand better treatment. At the same time, it decreased their agency to engage fully with knowledge during the lecturers' modules. Thus, they miss out on opportunities for gaining critical knowledge. This lack of sufficient affiliation between lecturers and students also created a distance between them (Calitz, 2016); ultimately students feel unrecognized and rendered invisible. For example, one of the participants felt that the university was not doing much as lecturers are simply there to deliver content, students were forced to grasp the content and take tests and examinations. This suggests lecturers were not providing enough resources to support students' critical engagement with learning. Fraser (1996) framed the concept as misrecognition whereby students from disadvantaged backgrounds are overlooked, undervalued or stigmatised by others in the academic community, usually based on unfair or inaccurate deficit views of under-preparedness for university.

According to Calitz (2015) students who negotiate uncritical learning spaces to pass and get it over with also decrease the critical capabilities needed to position students as equal members of an academic community. Contextualising this from the capabilities approach, lecturers should strive to create an environment that fosters students' learning and development by providing opportunities for them to explore their interests, develop critical thinking skills and engage with diverse perspectives. Examinations and tests should not be routinised to the measures of students' abilities or potential. Instead, they should be designed to measure students' progress towards achieving valuable functionings and

capabilities, such as their ability to apply knowledge and skills to real-life situations or to engage in meaningful dialogue and collaboration with others. Students' learning opportunities must lead to their success and educational advancement (Ramburuth & Hartel, 2010).

Based on findings of the current study, it is clear that students valued to be respected and recognised, which was lacking from pedagogical arrangements. To function well at university, students considered having affiliation with their lectures to be helpful in getting a sense of who they (students) are, which might also offer their lecturers a better understanding of what their constraints at university might be. This lack of recognition intersects with other conversion factors to constrain students' effort to convert resources into valued functionings such as succeeding in their course of study.

On the other hand, other students like Donald considered the conditions at university to be conducive or enabling to cultivate good relations with lecturers as he was able to secure appointments with them to seek assistance when having challenges or requiring further support. For others, the experience was not easy in the beginning when they started university, but over time an affiliation with lecturers was formed. Some participants developed the confidence they needed to create those interactions.

Language competence and confidence also affect the ability of students to convert resources into functioning or achievements that students have reason to value. The findings established that participants experienced difficulties to communicate through the language of instruction at university because of a lack of exposure to an English-speaking environment at their secondary schools. Pono found it challenging as she normally used her mother tongue language at school. Kagiso shared a similar experience; throughout his schooling levels they used Setswana as well as Sekgalagadi. Thus, English was a third or even fourth language. Lower teacher expectations and lack of an enabling environment meant these participants failed to cultivate critical language capabilities needed for university learning.

The academic aspect of access also relates to engagement and participation within the university environment. Rural students' ability to meet the demands of the academic

environment may be hampered by lack of English language proficiency. Pheko et al., (2014) observed that students who come from villages found it challenging to speak English, more so when they discover that other students were more fluent and proficient in their use of English. The ability to engage critically with academic literature is easily negotiated by students who are fluent in English (Cross & Atinde, 2015). The inability to cultivate language skills restricted students' freedom to critically engage on an academic level with others. Kagiso indicated that he struggled to put across his opinions and ideas due to lack of language skills. The lack of capability of voice restricted his freedoms to convert available resources into capabilities for academic success.

Patience mentioned that communication in English was neither difficult nor easy for her. Apart from having acquired language capabilities in her core subjects, taking English Literature might also have increased her capabilities to learn the language and to use it in her academic writing. Hence the skills she acquired were transferred to university study and converted to resources for academic success.

8.6   SOCIAL SUPPORT AS A VALUED FUNCTIONING

From students' experiences, emotional balance and being supported emerged as a valued functioning. They indicated the university prioritised students' mental health by providing counselling at the campus psychology clinic for the students that were experiencing emotional distress. Almost all students mentioned the role of the university in supporting students' mental well-being. Such human service is a positive resource that students take advantage of to the benefit of their well-being, enabling them to focus on their academic studies, a capability that can transfer to achieving well-being and the achievement of their aspirations. Student counselling services is considered vital to student retention and success in higher education, especially because of the growing enrolment of students from marginalised groups with rural backgrounds. Many of them had inadequate secondary school preparation and thus encounter diverse learning obstacles (Essack, 2012). While this is a good institutional initiative at the university, it seems to be inadequate. Surprisingly, it is the only programme most students were aware of. Pheko et al., (2014) suggest that the university needs to come up with ways of making support programmes more visible and attractive to students who might need them the

most. On the other hand, students felt dissatisfied with the university's lack of attention to their needs, especially when dealing with the issue of accommodation.

Students also mentioned receiving moral support from family. Some students did not enjoy that support due to the lack of understanding about the complexities of being a university student (Gibbons & Borders, 2011). The students emphasised their family provided moral support, encouraged them not to get distracted while they studied at university. Katlo was the only student who mentioned being supported materially by her family while she studied at university. Her trade-offs included supplementing her student allowance with a small business (selling snacks to other students on the university campus) at the same time her family was also supporting her financially. They bought her a router for the internet and were paying for its monthly subscriptions. During the university holidays she would sell second-hand clothing items at the village to earn money for the next semester. While this helped her to reduce her financial burdens, it could also affect her academic performance due to failure to create a balance between studying and making it in business. Students also mentioned being encouraged and motivated to study hard by community members they encountered at home during the holidays. The community contributes to students' persistence in higher education (Motsabi et al., 2020).

Overall, students described infrastructural conditions at university to be of acceptable standards. For example, facilities such as learning resources centres, libraries, computer labs that were equipped with the internet. Students have access to online learning resources and also use the facilities for their assignments if students do not have personal computers or laptops. Commuting students were provided daily with 1GB data for internet access. Kamogelo spoke of educational extra material resources support they were provided with in her department to support their learning. A combination of forms of support has to be present in order for students to be able to convert available resources into opportunities and opportunities into capabilities for academic success. For instance, emotional, instrumental and information support as well as other forms of resources are critically important for students to successfully navigate the academic journey.

The next section focuses on aspirations (valued functionings) participants have upon completion of their university education.

8.7 UNIVERSITY EDUCATION AND THE CAPABILITY TO ASPIRE

From this study, all participants displayed the capability to aspire, meaning that participants demonstrated that they valued to "become something or do something" (functionings) upon attainment of their university education. The capacity to aspire allows individuals to conceive of alternative realities, and to imagine futures different from the present (Appadurai, 2004). Students desired to be different things, thus the capacity to aspire is shaped by different factors including cultural and social factors such as norms, values, and beliefs that individuals adopt from their contexts. Participants indicated that they valued the following capabilities and functionings.

8.7.1 Value for self-independence

Participants emphasised they valued being self-dependent. "Acting freely and being able to choose may be directly conducive to well-being, not just because more freedom may make better alternatives available" (Sen,1993b:39). Besides being able to sustain themselves they believed it was also important for them to be able to help others, especially their family. They believed a university education would offer them the freedoms and opportunities that come with having a university degree. For example, some of the participants wanted to venture into entrepreneurship, teaching, and working in the medical field. It is not surprising that participants desired self-independence as well as helping others, indicating that helping others is a valued functioning. Most participants come from a low socio-economic background therefore their aspirations are likely to have been shaped by the social environment. The fact that their parents had not been to university served as a motivating factor or catalyst for individuals to imagine a future or life different from those of their parents.

It is also interesting to note that one participant, who besides believing a university education will open up more opportunities to be independent, also believed in studying for the intrinsic value of education, demonstrating both the instrumental and intrinsic value of higher education (Walker, 2018). The participant mentioned that she was also on an academic journey for the sake of gaining knowledge. The capability approach enables us to think of education as a core capability that impacts other capabilities (Walker, 2015;

Dejaeghere, 2020; Mackenzie, 2020). Therefore, acquiring knowledge contributes to the expansion of other capabilities, as it is a fertile capability that fosters the development of other capabilities that are important for individual and social well-being (Robeyns, 2006).

8.7.2 Breaking the poverty cycle

Participants also aspired to help their family break away from the poverty cycle. This demonstrated that higher education was valued for its instrumental value and the social benefits it accrues to individuals. As first in the family to attend university, participants considered acquiring a university education as an opportunity they imagine could change their life narratives, moving them towards the life of flourishing. This demonstrates that because of their background students felt it was upon themselves to change their family situation. These findings resonate with Jehangir's (2010) findings that first generation students are often concerned about improving their family situation. For students from a disadvantaged background, acquiring a university education might provide opportunities to move up the social ladder. Therefore, educational success is instrumentally extremely important for students from low-income households; as it is a key route out of family poverty (Gofen, 2009; Walker & Fongwa, 2017; Motsabi, Diale & Van Zyl, 2020; Walker, 2019; Walker et al., 2022). Success in higher education is key for social mobility and for greater economic and personal well-being (Calitz, 2019). Hence, certain expectations rest on one of the family members at university, usually a first-generation student.

8.7.3 Being an inspiration to others

Participants indicated that they aspire to be an inspiration to the younger generation, especially young members of the family and others from their communities. Based on their experience of growing up in an environment with very little to no sources of inspiration, they wanted to set an example that it is possible to achieve the life that one desires even if an individual came from disadvantaged backgrounds. They hoped others would benefit from their access success stories.

8.8 SUMMARY OF CAPABILITIES GROUNDED IN RURAL STUDENTS' NARRATIVES

Nine capabilities were drawn from participants' narratives by engaging analytically with their responses to questions that were framed within the capability approach. Research question 3; How to do rural youth use their agency to navigate constraints to access in higher education, and research question 4; To what extent are rural youth able to convert different resources into human capabilities critical for success at university, are framed in capability approach terms. Research questions 5: What aspirations do rural youth hope to achieve upon attainment of their university education are framed in capability language, and can be understood as what functionings do rural youth value after completion of their higher education. Thus, the interview questions aimed to elicit answers that were suitable for inferring a range of capabilities. The table outlines the valued capabilities in facilitating access and success and "in one way or another contribute to academic resilience" (Wilson-Strydom, 2011:271). The list was formulated from the data that came through the findings of the study and also guided by work from some of the prominent scholars who have advanced and complimented Sen's work. For example, Nussbaum's (2006) list of central human capabilities based on human rights, Walker (2006)'s list on gender equity in South African schools and Wilson-Strydom's (2011) pragmatic capabilities list for the transition to university. Although the list was not publicly debated upon by the participants, these scholars' guidelines were relevant in enhancing academic resilience to access and success in higher education.

Below is a table that shows capabilities and functionings valued by the participants.

Capabilities	Definitions
Practical reason	Being able to apply practical reason to solve problems to plan one's life projects. Making unbiased judgements. Participants' narratives indicated that they applied practical reasoning in making post-secondary education choices as well as planning their futures.
Critical thinking	Being able to think analytically and critically in pursuit of knowledge. Participants valued being active agents in their own learning instead of being passive recipients of knowledge. They sought out opportunities that allowed them to acquire knowledge on their own. Sesha conducted quiz sessions with his peer. Kagiso was concerned the lecturers were not engaging enough to allow students to engage with the content being taught in class.

Bodily integrity and safety	Having good health, physical well-being, feeling secure in one's environment. Being able to appear in public without shame. Being able to have good health including being adequately nourished. This research established the lack of sufficient financial resources to secure adequate food meant participants were vulnerable to being unhealthy which compromised bodily health. Also, students' capabilities were restricted by not having enough money to commute to classes, and to afford decent attire.
Respect, dignity and recognition	Having respect for oneself as well as having respect for others. Being treated with respect and not being humiliated (or discriminated against) on the basis of ethnicity, language, geography and gender. Based on findings, it is clear that students valued to be respected and recognised, which was lacking from pedagogical arrangements within the university environment. Students experienced micro aggression from the lack of recognition and respect for their mother language.
Affiliation (Social relations and networks)	Being part of social networks in the university and community. Being able to engage and interact with others, feeling a sense of belonging by being a part of social networks at the university and in the community. Students responses indicated that they valued being a part of the university community by interacting with their peers to pursue academic excellence. Students valued engaging with their lecturers and their peers both inside and outside the teaching and learning space. Kagiso was concerned by the lack of interaction between the students and some of the lecturers whose interactions with the students was limited to dishing out content without soliciting for feedback from the students.
Capability for voice	Being able to communicate. Being able to express one's concerns and having one's opinions and views valued. There is evidence that participants felt their concerns and requests to be provided with accommodation in the university campus residences were not acceded to or heard. The university seemed unsupportive and did not afford students opportunities to express themselves regarding the issue. The capability for voice was limited when students were unable to approach lecturers who lacked empathy by humiliating students during class.
Capability to aspire	Having hopes for a good future (Mutanga,2019). Students demonstrated the capability to aspire by having plans of what they would want to achieve in future. The findings established that all participants hoped to achieve various aspirations upon attainment of their university degrees.
Educational resilience	Being able to navigate university study and adapt to educational demands and constraints and take advantage of the available opportunities. Participants demonstrated this capability by drawing on their navigational skills to be able to cope with the academic demands of university study. The trade-offs they made sometimes to the detriment of their well-being helped them to deal with the constraints they experience in their university life.
Language competence and confidence	Being able to understand, read, write and speak confidently in the language of instruction(Wilson-Strydom,2011). Being competent in the language of instruction allowed students to navigate learning in an academic environment. For some students this competence and confidence was lacking from the

	beginning of their university journey. While for others it can be turned into a capability critical for academic success at university.

Table. 8.1: Summary of capabilities emerging form participants' data.

8.9 SUMMARY

The chapter integrated capability approach concepts with findings of the study: what arrangements or factors constrained and enabled access for the rural youth. Narratives reflect agency that all participants want to achieve their valued aspirations. Although the agency is positive, it is not clear if all participants will achieve their desired outcomes considering each individual person's negative conditions at university including financial burdens they carry, the demand to succeed while studying as well as high expectations from family. While Sen (1993) acknowledges the importance of material resources such as money but not an end in itself, he argues that resources and commodities are merely objects that a person may use to improve their well-being. "Goods and services are not the only means to peoples' capabilities" (Robeyns, 2005:99). However, from the findings of the current study it is evident that students require a minimum threshold of resources for equal access and participation at university.

CHAPTER 9: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR POLICY AND PRACTICE

9.1 INTRODUCTION

In Chapter 1, I problematised the issue of access in higher education, that although Botswana has made significant strides in increasing enrolments numbers in higher education, access for the marginalised and vulnerable groups including rural youth remains a challenge. Marginalised groups continue to face challenges in accessing higher education, yet little is known about the problem. To contribute to this knowledge gap, this study aimed to explore constraints and enablers of access to higher education for rural youth through the capability approach. According to this normative approach to human well-being and agency, human flourishing is achieved when individuals have access to a full range of opportunities and real freedoms to pursue that which is of value to them. Higher education access ought then to enable individuals to have a full range of opportunities and achievements while also contributing to the good of others (Walker, 2015). I found this approach to be relevant for this study as it places strong emphasis on substantive freedom. This means the approach not only evaluates the formal opportunities available (such as existence of schools) but also the real freedoms and capabilities individuals possess to make choices and pursue the life they desire. Therefore, the capability approach was suitable for a study in a Botswana context where education and other opportunities are skewed.

9.2 REFLECTION ON ANSWERS TO THE RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This study has explored constraints and enablers for rural youth in accessing higher education in Botswana. Through a comprehensive review of literature and empirical research, this study has identified several factors that hinder rural youth's access to higher education.

9.2.1 Research Question 1: *What are the structural arrangements that constrain rural youth from accessing higher education in Botswana?*

The purpose of the first question was to explore factors within the family, school and home community that constrained rural youth's agency to create pathways and aspirations for higher education. Data confirmed that family background was a barrier to achieving equitable access to higher education. Although all participants had aspirations to go to university, this was countered by low household income which influenced the overall schooling experience and academic outcomes for most participants. Income inequality can restrict agency for individuals and households to expand human capabilities (Van der Hoeven, 2020). Data indicated that the majority of the participants came from families and communities where high levels of poverty were prevalent with minimal economic activities, thus limited resources increased their vulnerability to unequal access. Therefore, when poverty and resources are distributed unevenly, it can have a corrosive effect on students' behaviour and ability to learn, ultimately affecting their aspirations and achievements (Scanlon et al., 2019). Participants' narratives demonstrated that day to day schooling experiences were characterised by struggles. For example, students walked long distances to school which might have had an impact on their ability to convert scarce resources into academic outcomes. The risks associated with such conditions meant students constantly worried about their safety which compromised their bodily integrity (Nussbaum, 2007), and potentially interfered with their focus on their studies.

Additionally, there were limited resources at school to provide good quality education, and limited resources at home to support both in school and out of school enrichment activities. While it is noted that equal income may not necessarily translate into equal functionings, severe income inequality can significantly reduce decent living. Participants experiences also confirmed that the intersectionality of extreme poverty and gender norms that relegate household duties to women constrained individual freedoms to access higher education. These gendered divisions of labour which are reinforced by cultural norms, often pressurize women to prioritize these expectations at the expense of their personal goals. Such practices often sidelined women and predisposed them to the vulnerability of life on the margins of society. Challenging and reshaping such norms

might lead to greater equality and opportunities for all individuals regardless of their gender.

While participants were able to achieve access as a functioning, their trajectories were not smooth. Family background influenced participants' choices of moving on to higher education. Finances were required to take the first step towards achieving access, in the absence of which some participants were not able to apply or travel to apply for university. The intersection of distance from towns and a lack of funding made travel more difficult (Walker et al., 2022). Participants indicated they did not have enough money to cover all expenses related to applying and getting into university. By implication the choices and decision for those who failed to get in were constrained by money, which was a result of low socio-economic status (family background), while some of those who made it through relied on the serendipitous actions of a few members of the community. The lack of adequate information about higher education, and lack of inspiration from the community created additional constraints in accessing post-secondary education

Data shows that most parents' education level was below Grade 12 and participants mentioned that a few individuals who were advanced in their education levels had moved away from their communities to urban places. The lack of these supportive structures might lead to failure of educational aspirations. While these factors might have made access to higher education complex for the participants, and the community's dominant attitudes towards education were not so positive, participants underscored the importance of agency in converting the limited opportunities into valued outcomes. From the perspective of the capability approach, education is one of the key capabilities that can help individuals to overcome poverty and achieve greater human development.

9.2.2 Research Question 2: *What are the structural arrangements that enable rural youth to access higher education in Botswana?*

The purpose of this research question was to explore factors within the structures of home school and community that enabled access. Data indicated that although unfreedoms to access existed, some factors that enhanced participants' agency opportunity freedoms were present. School support emerged as significant in determining access to higher

education. Despite structural constraints prevalent in rural schooling systems, students exercised agency to take advantage of the limited resources and opportunities to expand their options of achieving their educational aspirations. Participants believed their schools made efforts to assist them through various strategies and initiatives. In addition to students' study sessions, holiday and weekend teaching were also conducted. Moreover, teachers provided study materials to make up for the lack of textbooks and reference materials in the libraries. Supportive teachers also attended study sessions to offer assistance. These actions highlight the importance of supportive structures that enhance students' academic engagement. Participants' narratives also revealed that for each individual there was at least one teacher who was an inspiration in one way or another. Teachers were also a source of inspiration for students by sharing their own experiences at university and encouraged them to prioritise going to university.

Personal conversion factors in the form of personal drive and self-motivation played a significant role in influencing access for the rural youth. Data revealed that most of the participants worked very hard to achieve their educational goals. They all put extra effort into their work and remained self-motivated to change their family situations. Despite the different challenges they encountered while schooling in rural areas, they all aspired to further their education, thus individually they took responsibility for their education. For some participants, disadvantage was mitigated by supportive school contexts. Sesha recounted that teachers' support was lacking in some critical areas, however, he mentioned they (the learners) were always encouraged to use English in school; a capability he cultivated and converted into academic achievement.

Supportive structures such as family, extended family members, friends and the community also influenced participants' agency. Despite the limited financial resources, and limited experience with higher education, families secured financial resources for their children to travel to apply for university, while others provided practical help such as navigating the application process. April's brother moved around with her to offer support while she applied at the career fair held in the city. Katlo's mother travelled with her to one of the village centers to apply online. Kamogelo's uncle helped her with background information on university courses, while Kagiso's family gave him transport fare and

money for application fees. Participants also made reference to support they received from their friends who were already studying at university. The friends were a source of information regarding the opening of applications for universities. Additionally, some individuals in the community provided financial assistance for application fees. The support enabled participants to convert their aspirations into valuable choices and actions.

Financial aid in the form of government sponsorships also emerged as a condition that enabled access. Upon securing places at university, participants were able to receive government sponsorship through the Department of Tertiary Education Financing. Participants also mentioned that they had limited information regarding higher education funding, and only learnt more about it when they had been admitted to study at university. The university staff informed them that they were to apply for government funding. The sponsorship included the tuition fee, a book allowance and a monthly stipend.

9.2.3 Research Question 3: *How did rural youth use their agency to navigate structural constraints to access higher education?*

In the context of this study, participants' agency was demonstrated through navigational functioning as they negotiated constraints to achieve their goal of going to university. For example, at structural level participants were self-driven and self-motivated to work hard under unsupportive conditions and resource scarcity. Data related to schooling experience highlighted how participants negotiated challenges to maintain high aspirations for academic success. At the home level, participants negotiated resource scarcity and limited information about higher education. Moreover, there were high levels of illiteracy, and a general lack of understanding about the importance of higher education in the community. In some instances, there was very little inspiration in the sense that other students considered themselves to be struggling and did not make any effort. Under these constrained conditions participants' agency came through self-determination, self-discipline, perseverance, and resilience.

Participants walked long distances to school, put in a lot of effort in their studies and still maintained good grades that later translated to academic success which was one of the

requirements for university access. They all took initiatives to join study groups for revision, attended extra lessons during weekends and school holidays. In addition, they took advantage of the extra support from teachers and demonstrated academic resilience. For example, despite the difficult learning conditions, Donald made use of a personal time planner to help with his studies which cultivated academic abilities to achieve his educational goals that transferred to university. He also reported establishing a revision group with his classmates while April decided to study with a few friends after their Additional Maths teacher told them they should not waste their time with her subject but should rather focus on other areas. These combined capabilities and agency played a role in influencing negotiation of access to higher education.

Another constraint negotiated by the participants was being the first in the family to attend university (first generation student). By implication, participants had very limited freedoms and opportunities in terms of cultural capitals like exposure to information about higher education. Therefore, most of them had to be agentic in making decisions related to subject choices at school, what courses to study at university and to which universities they want to apply, including information about funding. This means that in the midst of the intersection of being a first-generation student and a lack of information facilities, choices were complex, however participants required combined capabilities that are mutually reinforcing and complimentary to achieve their goals of attending university. For example, Kagiso was the first in the family to make it through to Form 5 (Grade 12) and had fewer bundles of resources which potentially decreased his agency. However, he indicated that his choice of course to study at university was based on his academic abilities. He was aware of his potential in computer studies and was confident he could be academically resilient in a course with a computer component at university.

Other participants' agency was demonstrated through the initiatives they took to request help from other people. Sesha and some of his peers approached the school principal at their former primary school to request access to the internet. Had they had not taken that step they might not have been able to apply to university. Kamogelo also travelled a long distance to apply and asked for help from people on the campus to direct her to where she was supposed to go, thus placing her agency in relation to self-determination,

authentic self-direction and personal autonomy to bring about change in her life. Katlo took the decision to demand an explanation for non-admittance from the university. It came to light that the course was over-subscribed, and she was offered an alternative course which was not aligned to what she valued. While she had inspirations to attend university, undertaking a course she was not keen on might lead to decreased motivation to engage academically (Calitz, 2016).

While funding was available for the course, she had to wait for weeks to receive the sponsorship letter. Meanwhile she had to be patient to achieve her goals. Had she not made the decision to make follow up on the application status might have resulted in her failing to secure a place at university. Katlo's situation is a typical example of unfreedoms rural students negotiate to access higher education. This suggests that those who did not have alternative options, and also lacked the agency to demand why they have not been admitted accepted their fate, thus missing out on aggregate access statistics. This also highlights administrative failures of institutional systems by not providing timeous feedback to prospective students whose hopes are pinned on these institutions as their only choice. Nambiar (2013:222) argues that "institutions enable or restrict the operation of political and economic activities and in so doing they have an important influence on the achievement of capabilities". Institutions have a role to play in promoting well-being freedom and agency freedom. By advocating for policies that promote access to basic needs and resources as well as respecting and supporting individuals' choices and decisions might create a just and equitable society where all students have equal opportunities to thrive and reach their full potential. Findings also highlight that participants' high aspirations are driven by their lived experiences of hardship; thus, they are not passive agents, but rather adopt a positive perspective of changing their life narratives.

9.2.4 Research Question 4: *To what extent are rural youth able to convert different resources into human capabilities critical for academic success at university?*

In Chapter 7 participants' narratives of their experience at university revealed that resource scarcity potentially diminished their capabilities to convert different resources into academic outcomes at university. All participants indicated they had difficulties supporting themselves financially. The struggles to satisfy basic material resources such as decent clothing made participants feel alienated from their low-income counterparts from the city. This compromised the achievement of social capability of appearing in public without shame (Sen, 1983, 1999, 2000) demonstrating that the capacity to achieve certain abilities may depend on the availability of resources, goods, or income required to attain those capabilities.

Data revealed that some students did not appreciate nor value language diversity. Participants struggled to fit in culturally in an environment that did not recognise their mother tongue. The micro-aggression from other students also restricted their freedom to participate in class. To deal with this, participants preferred to socialise with peers from similar cultural backgrounds. While participants were able to rediscover their agency and adapted to the university space, the lack of value for language diversity compromised their freedoms to participate at university as equals. At the same time others experienced difficulty in communicating through the language of instruction due to the lack of adequate exposure to English in their previous schooling. The failure to cultivate language capabilities needed for university learning restricted their capability to engage critically with academic literature and convert academic goods into academic success.

Participants experiences also revealed the lack of recognition from lecturers who were not engaging with students. The lecture method of content delivery which limited students to engage critically with the content assumed students were passive recipients of knowledge while on the other hand students had a positive learning disposition. This lack of recognition and limited interactions between students and lecturers decreased students' agency to commit to learning and convert resources into critical academic dispositions for success. Furthermore, learning was reduced to "learning for assessment" which left students with limited opportunities to engage meaningfully with knowledge.

Students also lacked platforms to question the unjust arrangements thus found themselves without voice. More broadly, students failed to experience epistemological access as espoused by Morrow (2009) as being more than just physical access (Garraway, 2017).

Financial constraints compromised participants' freedoms to convert academic resources into capabilities for academic success. Evidence indicates participants struggled to meet basic material resources for survival such as decent accommodation and healthy diets. On worst days they failed to attend classes due to lack of money for transport. One of the participants mentioned that she struggled to meet the financial demands of her teaching practicum as they were not offered any transport allowance for the exercise. While students who resided in student campus residences did not constantly worry about accommodation, they were equally affected by the financial demands of being a university student. Resource scarcity also severely affected first generation students who lacked extra support from important networks.

Besides lacking extra support from family, they also had to spend part of the fewer resources to support those they left behind at home. The cluster of these conversion factors could result in harmful adaptations as long as students constantly worry about money and basic survival needs. Under these conditions, the failure to function well and flourish while at university potentially restricted individuals' capabilities to convert resources into academic success. Calitz (2016:220) suggests "a minimum threshold of resource distribution would be an initial requirement for participatory parity".

Despite the challenging circumstances participants experienced (their social background seemed to be a constraint in many areas of their academic trajectories) the constraint also acted as a motivating factor for participants to persist in overcoming difficulties. Participants had to make trade-offs such as saving money in order to acquire the necessary materials for studying at university such as a laptop. Patience mentioned that she had to save for months to be able to afford a laptop and a phone so that she could keep in touch with her family back home. Having one meal a day saved them money for the next meal. They also dedicated all their free time to studying, and sometimes losing out on sleep.

In relation to support, all participants mentioned the role of university in providing support for students undergoing mental distress at the psychology clinic which contributed to their mental well-being. Participants described satisfactory conditions of facilities such as learning resource centers, the library, and computer laboratories. Commuter students were provided with 1GB of internet data per day to be able to work on their assignments as well as to attend classes remotely. Other departments also provided the necessary support to help students in their programmes. Kamogelo who was studying French for a Bachelor of Arts in Media Studies, painted a positive picture of the supportive environment in her department. The presence of such support and her persistence were enabling conditions for conversion of resources into capabilities crucial to achieve academic success at university.

In chapter 7 Sesha mentioned that he interacted with his peers through weekly class quizzes they conducted amongst themselves, which set a good foundation to develop self-confidence, self-efficacy and academic resilience. The general sense of individual worth potentially facilitates success in learning. While other choices of being at university were affected by multiple factors, we cannot lose sight of conditions of possibility to achieve success (Walker, 2019). Participants mentioned being supported morally by families, although most lacked material support, they were in a position to understand their families' circumstances. Although they could not completely eliminate some of the constraints, they were on the path to utilise their capabilities and turn them into meaningful accomplishments which potentially helped them create a desirable future.

9.2.5 Research Question 5: *What aspirations do rural youth hope to achieve upon completion of their university education?*

It is evident from this study that all participants had the capacity to aspire. Participants' experiences revealed the various "beings" and "doings" that they hoped to achieve (well-being achievement) upon completion of a university degree. Participants indicated that they hoped having a university degree will open up opportunities for them to be self-dependent. For example, they hoped to go into various vocations such as teaching, medicine and entrepreneurship. They hoped that these opportunities would place them in better positions to help others, especially their families. One of the participants

mentioned that while she hoped to be self-dependent upon attainment of her university education, she also believed in education for its intrinsic value. She mentioned that she believed in the value of knowledge. This means that the value of education goes further than economic and instrumental benefits. While having a university education is a means to an end, the acquisition of knowledge and skills is also regarded as an end in itself.

In addition, some believe having a university degree will help them break away from the cycle of poverty, offering them a better life. As the first in their family to reach such educational levels, they believe the degree has the potential to increase their opportunities for social mobility. Literature also points to educational success as being a key route out of poverty for students from low-income backgrounds. Moreover, participants also aspired to be an inspiration to others, especially the younger generation in their communities. Based on the difficulties they experienced growing up in rural communities with limited sources of inspiration, they believe their success stories will serve as examples to others with similar background; that it is possible to achieve one's aspirations despite one's deprived contexts.

9.3 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR POLICY AND PRACTICE

In this exploration of higher education access for rural youth, I have clearly indicated that rural youth experience challenges to access higher education in Botswana, yet not much is known in terms of their experience with access. Little is known about the few who achieve access and success. Based on the findings of this study, I propose a capability research-based framework for guiding practice and formulation of policies aimed at achieving better outcomes for the rural youth. Below I identify gaps that need to be addressed to improve access and capabilities that enable rural youth to access and succeed in higher education. These recommendations are presented under three categories:

9.3.1 Recommendations for The Ministry of Education and Skills Development
9.3.1.1. Redistribute resources to improve learning outcomes

The lack of adequate facilities in rural schools (such as well-equipped laboratories, and well-resourced libraries) that contribute to the delivery of quality education including the

teaching and learning of STEM related subjects diminish rural students' opportunities of access and success. Providing adequate infrastructure and resources in rural schools creating an enabling schooling environment could promote quality education provision. Botswana's policies on education; The Revised National Policy on Education (1993/94), Vision 2016, ETSSP 2010-2020, and Vision 2036 are attempts to improve the learning and teaching environment, however many schools still lack adequate infrastructure and rural students still experience constraints to access good quality education.

9.3.1.2 Tutoring and mentoring programmes

The findings of the study not only revealed income inequalities but also systemic inequalities in education whereby some students did not have access to remedial programmes such as tutoring and mentoring. Often times such programmes are found in urban or semi-urban areas. A striking example; one of the participants mentioned that the concept of tutoring was new to her, as she learnt about it at university. The Ministry of Education and Skills Development could partner with non-governmental and non-profit organisations to establish tutoring and mentoring programmes where students from disadvantaged communities can receive additional academic support from teachers, volunteers, older peers and other experts. These programmes, which could include all levels education (primary to senior secondary schooling), could provide one-on-one or small group tutoring sessions focused on areas where students may need extra assistance.

From the findings career guidance emerged as a significant factor influencing access to higher education. Within the ministry the department or division dedicated to student services and career development like the Department of Special Support System could intensify implementing career guidance programmes aimed at helping secondary students explore various career options, make informed decisions about their future education and career paths, and develop the necessary skills and competencies to pursue their chosen careers successfully. These programmes may include career counseling, job shadowing opportunities, workshops, and the necessary resources to support students in their career exploration and planning process. The programmes could be designed with a broader focus to reach students who are more vulnerable than others

owing to limited opportunities and real freedoms to have access to higher education. Further, strengthening support for students in disadvantaged communities both at school and at home could be important to afford them opportunities to set realistic aspirations and to strive to achieve them. Students' well-being at home and at school could be addressed by targeted interventions.

9.3.1.3 Parental involvement and support

The Department of Social Welfare Services together with traditional or community leaders could engage with parents on the importance of their involvement in their children's education and provide them with strategies to support learning at home. From data, lack of support (including parental support) from the home hindered students from expanding their freedoms to convert different resources into academic achievement. This could include workshops on effective parenting techniques, tips for creating a conducive learning environment at home, and guidance on how to help with schoolwork and other academic activities.

9.3.1.4 Financial assistance for educational resources

Data confirmed that family background significantly influenced opportunities to access higher education. Socio-economic inequality was a barrier to achieving equitable access for rural communities. At ministerial level, business entities could be lobbied to offer financial assistance or subsidies to low-income families (in rural and remote areas) to help cover the costs of educational resources such as textbooks, school supplies, and other educational materials. This can help alleviate financial barriers and ensure that all students (regardless of their geographical location) have access to the resources they need to succeed academically. Evidence from the study suggests the socio-economic context significantly influences the extent to which students are able to convert different resources into academic success. Providing transportation services could also improve accessibility for students whose homesteads are located very far from schools.

9.3.2 Recommendations for higher education institutions (universities)

9.3.2.1 Communication outreach programmes

This study highlighted that rural communities lack access to information facilities due to their geographical isolation, hence it is essential to increase communication outreach efforts to enable rural youth to have access to information regarding higher education institutions, application procedures, as well as funding opportunities. From this study findings, having information about where to study, what course to study including university study funding significantly influenced access to higher education. Universities could extend their outreach programmes to rural and remote areas, by prioritising enhancing university knowledge amongst secondary school students and offer guidance and support that assist them to apply practical reason with regards to post-secondary education decisions. This could also be achieved with collaboration with the Ministry of Education and Skills Development.

9.3.2.2 Institutional support

Through their classroom interactions with students, university staff could identify students who need targeted support such as academic tutoring as well as basic material resource support to attain well-being and flourishing. The absence of a minimum resource threshold affects students' ability to convert resources into academic capabilities. For instance, students living in off-campus residences require extra monetary support to afford decent accommodation, healthy food, and money to commute to campus. The university could ensure there is equitable distribution of resources in such a way that those who are most deserving are provided with accommodation for the entire duration of their undergraduate studies. This could be achieved by adjusting accommodation policies/practices to make them more inclusive, while at the same time maintaining a balance in terms of distribution of the available resources. From the students' narratives it was clear that the lack of accommodation interfered with students' focus on studying. For example, 4 participants mentioned not having enough money to a point where they failed to attend classes. Additionally, participants were also critical of the institutions' unclear procedures for allocating accommodation.

9.3.2.3 Establish programmes that specifically support diverse students

Programmes that encourage active participation of diverse students (rural students included) could create opportunities for students to share their life stories as a way of raising awareness about cultural diversity. In this way students could feel included as valuable members of the institutions. Data suggests lecturers were not engaging with students meaningfully in the teaching and learning process. To create enabling conditions for meaningful engagement lecturers could facilitate open discussions to allow students to form reasoned judgements and to express their views. Assigning case studies, critical reading materials and encouraging students to analyse and evaluate texts could also foster critical thinking. In addition, other platforms for social interactions and networking could contribute to a more inclusive space for all students. Another area requiring a change of attitudes (lectures who scold students, humiliate students or demean them.

9.3.2.4 Tailored academic support

In consultation with students, specific interventions could be designed to address specific students' academic needs. Various faculties within the universities could support students who require extra support in their area of study through provision of developmental modules such as English literacy, computer literacy among others to empower students with capabilities required to take on university study. These modules could be taken on compulsory bases during the first year of study across all programmes to enhance students' communication capabilities in their area of study. Data indicated that some students struggled to fit in due to a lack of language competence and confidence.

9.3.3 Recommendations for government:

9.3.3.1 Formulate policies specifically for rural youth

The Revised National Policy on Education of 1994, the Inclusive Education Policy (Republic of Botswana, 2011) and ETSSP (Republic of Botswana, 2015), as well as the Tertiary Education Policy (2008) lack performance indicators to monitor or evaluate equity for diverse, ethnic minorities and marginalised groups. There is need to design or

formulate policies that focus on access for the rural youth. The target enrolment rate (for 18-24 year olds) of 17% by 2016 and subsequently 25% by 2026 is too low and also suggests rural youth are not included in this numbers. More needs to be done to increase rural youth representation in higher education. Targets for access in higher education need to be set for rural youth enrolment.

9.3.3.2 Strengthen affirmative action policies

Government could focus more on strengthening implementation of the affirmative action policies to promote diversity and provide opportunities for under-represented groups such as the rural populations. These policies which include quotas or preferential treatment in admissions for students from marginalized communities have not yielded the intended outcomes. It is evident from the current study that the many constraints rural youth experience diminish their freedoms and opportunities to access higher education. At the same time, it is important to monitor and evaluate such programmes. The Ministry of Tertiary Education Research, Science and Technology and government could commission research studies by independent researchers to carry out studies on access to higher education, (including demographic information and socio-economic status) to identify the supports and disablers of access. The data on advantages rural youth have could be very useful in informing policy and practice in higher education to effectively address inequalities across regions. Furthermore, the data could be helpful in tracking progress and evaluating success of such policies over time. The results of this study highlighted inequitable access to education due to the skewed location of higher educational institutions.

9.3.3.3 Allocate more funding and resolve funding policies

Government needs to allocate more funding to the Department of Tertiary Education and Financing to increase its capacity not only to assist more students, but to serve first generation students whose success at university is diminished by financial constraints more efficiently. It is evident from the findings that these group of students are more vulnerable to exclusion due to the many obstacles they navigate while at university. Students' material well-being must be of central concern in any policy dialogues about

equity and higher education. Government could work out a formula for determining students who need such targeted intervention. A 'one size fits all' approach to student funding does not serve those who require more funding the most. Moreover, to alleviate the burden on government, of funding higher education, government could lobby for public private partnerships in support of higher education; parastatals, non-governmental organisations and international partners could collaborate with universities to fund both undergraduate and postgraduate studies. Currently government is the primary financer of higher education in Botswana.

It is evident that this model of public financing of higher education is not working well for government. While education receives the largest share of the country's recurrent budget, there is need to establish effective cost recovery measures to retrieve its money from graduates who get employed such that the government continue investing in higher education. In consultation with government higher education institutions must identify alternative means to make money to reduce over reliance on government for financing.

By implementing these strategies, government, universities, policymakers, and community stakeholders can work together to provide targeted interventions and support rural students helping to level the playing field and create opportunities for all students to thrive academically and beyond.

9.5 METHODOLOGICAL REFLECTIONS

In this section I reflect briefly on the methodological strengths and limitations of the research design of the study. I consider the use of the mixed methods design as a reward and challenge, especially considering the nature of the population under study. Although I had set out to involve a specific number of rural youth who had not managed to transition to university, the challenge that remained was finding the exact number of individuals who met the criteria of the study. My study focus was on rural youth who had not succeeded in going to university despite making all efforts to do so. Some of these youth had qualified to go to institutions of higher education, but because they did not meet the minimum requirement for government sponsorship (36) they were unable to continue with their education. Some of the rural youth I was referred to as potential participants had not even

attempted to apply to university, while others had attempted applying to university many years ago and were now outside the age range of 18 to 24. I have to apologise for the standard I set in order to meet the research objectives. However, being confronted with the disappointment those individuals experienced is something I had not anticipated. This left me convinced that a larger study is required in this area to explore perceptions of youth in rural settings (only) in relation to higher education and access. This would have worked to the advantage of this study. This might have provided rich data and more insights in terms of assessing the freedoms rural youth have in relation to their well-being.

Although I adopted the pragmatist paradigm which provides researchers with room to work with what best suits their research to answer research questions, it might have been ideal to also conduct interviews with the rural youth who were not successful in their attempt to go to university to get an in-depth understanding of unequal access through their own voices. This cohort responded to survey questionnaires only. Much remains to be done for rural youth who are silently excluded and remain on the margins of societal development. There is a need to expand their capabilities to enable them to pursue their life aspirations, given the high percentage of the youth population.

Another limitation pertaining to the disadvantages of survey questionnaires is the poor return rate (Patton, 2002). However, for this study 89% were returned and 73% was usable for analysis, which is considered reasonable for this research. To mediate the problem of language barrier, questionnaires were translated into the national language, Setswana. On the other hand, some individuals preferred their mother tongue which is not necessarily Setswana. It is evident some of the participants were constrained in responding clearly and fully to the questionnaire because of the language barrier.

Turning to the cohort at university, while the study allowed participants to narrate their experiences, much information about the actual lives of rural students at university was not revealed. In that regard it might be beneficial to explore the use of participatory action research methodologies including conducting a longitudinal study to track the students' lives from the time they enter university until they complete their university degrees or even beyond university. The long engagement with the participants offers opportunities to build rapport and trust between the participants and the researcher thus allowing for

collection of in depth data and more nuanced insights on rural students' experiences. Participatory action research methodologies offer reciprocity in the sense that the research conducted must also work in the best interest of the participants (mutual benefits). To this, end participants are empowered through being actively involved in the research process. Through building their skills capacity, participants gain voice to advocate for themselves on issues important to them and bring about positive change in their communities. Also, the incorporation of visual methodologies in the form of participants' drawings and photographs might add richness and depth to the study, while adding insights that might not be visible through traditional qualitative data collection techniques (Strydom-Wilson, 2011). While the target sample of the study was not reached the results are consistent with literature on enablers and constraints on access for rural youth and marginalised youth in similar settings.

9.5 RESEARCH CONTRIBUTIONS

The study explored constraints and enablers of access among rural youth in the context of Botswana. Through a freedom and agency-based approach to understanding rural youth's trajectories of access from the perspectives of the rural youth themselves, the study contributes unique findings. The study contributes to findings that in order to shape educational aspirations, and in order for educational aspirations to be turned into capabilities for access, enabling conditions from combined social structures of the home, school and community must be considered. Previous studies on access to education in Botswana, focused on increasing aggregate numbers in basic education (Pansiri, 2011; Makwinja, 2020), which essentially is limited in terms of understanding the real-life experiences of access; not enough is known about substantive freedoms individuals have to achieve access and well-being. The contribution of the capability approach to this study is illuminating the constraints that rural youth must navigate to access higher education as well as factors that potentially contribute to their success. Through sharing their narratives, brings attention to what conditions ought to be improved to achieve just outcomes for the rural youth. This evidence provides justification that a one-size-fits-all approach to access might not yield equitable outcomes for the marginalised. To this end, my study has demonstrated that some students require more resources than others to

acquire the same level of participation parity. The study adds to the growing literature regarding capabilities and higher education especially in the sub-Saharan Africa region.

9.6 CONCLUSION AND THE WAY FORWARD

Evidence indicates that many students from marginalised communities, still face exclusion which further deepens social inequalities within a democratic state such as Botswana. While opportunities exist for others to access university, students from low-income families, risk being excluded owing to the lack of real freedoms to fully convert resources to academic success. Rural youth who fall within the group of first-generation students are "doubly-disadvantaged" in the sense that they are confronted with a cluster of disadvantages including structural constraints that contribute to the lack of real and substantive freedoms to fully function while at university. Therefore, while these findings have provided the basis for answering my research questions, other questions have emerged. For example, from the findings some female students revealed that they shared their living allowance with family they left behind. Exploring the influence of gender on access is also crucially important to understand this phenomenon more clearly. Thus, in my future research I aim to explore the value of the capability approach in understanding access in higher education from that dimension, through participatory action research methodologies as outlined earlier. The perspectives on how best rural youth could be supported should also be explored further (from new data that emerged). As stated earlier in the thesis, according to my understanding no study similar to mine has been conducted in the context of Botswana with a specific focus on the capabilities of rural youth at university and those that did not gain access to university. This signifies more research work needs to be done in the area of the capabilities across the education spectrum.

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ADDENDUMS

Addendum A: Permission to conduct research: University of Botswana

Office of the Deputy Vice Chancellor (Academic Affairs)

Office of Research and Development

Corner of Notwane and Mobuto Road, Gaborone, Botswana

Pvt Bag 00708 Gaborone Botswana

Tel: [267] 355 2900
Fax: [267] 395 7573
E-mail: research@mopipi.ub.bw

UNIVERSITY of BOTSWANA

UBR/RES/IRB/SOC/ 147

Faculty of Education
University of Pretoria

RE: PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH

Project Title: "A Capability-Informed Policy Analysis of Higher Education Access for Rural Youth in Botswana.''

Researcher(s): Esther Mashabile

I am glad to inform you that approval has been granted for the above study to be conducted at the University of Botswana. Since the study is to be conducted within the confines of UB, the study has accordingly been exempted from Government Research Permit requirements. In reaching the above decisions, it was noted the above study involves minimal risk. Before proceeding with the study, you are required to observe and ensure the following conditions and requirements:

1. The study will only be conducted within the confines of UB following the approved proposal version. No investigations will be conducted outside UB as part of the study before permission is sought from the Office of Research and Development as necessary.
2. Approval will be for a period of 12 months with the following dates:
   Approval Date : 1 st March 2022
   Expiration Date : 28th February 2023
   After the expiration date, this project may only continue upon renewal. For purposes of renewal, a progress report should be submitted to ORD one month before the expiration date.
3. **Modifications**: Prior approval is required before implementing any significant changes to the project protocol.
4. If you have been awarded internal (UB) or external funding for the above project:
   a. It is your responsibility to notify and provide the Grants and Contracts office at ORD and the external funding agency (for externally funded projects) with a copy of this

letter as soon as possible. An award letter will not be issued, and your funds will not be released until the Grants and Contracts office has received a copy of this approval letter.

b. You are required to notify the Commercialization office at ORD in advance of publishing or disseminating any results, including Intellectual Property, arising from performing this project according to the requirements established in the award letter or grant contract/agreement associated with this project.

5. At the end of this project, you are required to submit a Final Report on the project on a format provided by the Office of Research and Development.

If you have any questions about the information in this letter, please contact the Office of Research and Development at Tel: +267 3552900, E-mail: ORD@ub.ac.bw Contact information is also available at www.ub.bw.

Sincerely,

For The Secretariat, University of Botswana Institutional Review Board
    Office of Research and Development

BA ISAGO

UNIVERSITY

BA ISAGO University
11 Koi Street Peolwane, , Botswana
Private Bag BR 94 Gaborone
20th September 2021

Dear Ms. Esther Mashabile

REF: REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH

This serves as a response to your letter dated 16th September 2021 as a request for permission to conduct research. BA ISAGO University through the School of Graduate Studies and Research (SGSR) has accepted your request. You will therefore be directed to the Student Welfare and Support Services (SWSS) where you will be assisted.

Should there be any changes in the process of your request, it is advisable to communicate with the SGSR. Our hope is that all the responses collected from BA ISAGO University premises will be kept confidential by adhering to the research ethics. Please, kindly submit a hardcopy of your report to the SGSR as this may benefit the University. Thank you.

Yours sincerely

L. Abidile
Research Assistant

Cc: Manager Innovation and Research—School of Graduate Studies and Research

Faculty of Education

Supervisor: Dr. Talita M. L. Calitz
Department of Education Management and Policy Studies
Groenkloof Campus
University of Pretoria
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Tel: 00 267 71854029/ 00 27 738658656
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17 December 2021
Dear Participant

I invite you to participant in this research project. The title of my study is: *A capability-informed policy analysis of higher education access for rural youth in Botswana.*

What my study will examine.

This study will examine the experiences of those rural youth who managed to access higher education and those who did not. Participants will be requested to complete a survey questionnaire, as well as to participate in a focus group interview detailing experiences of their educational journey.

Why I have invited you to participate in my study.

I would like you to be a participant in this research because it is presumed that you were not able to gain access to university. This means that you are able to contribute valuable information about your experiences with regards to the challenges that you faced in endeavoring to gain access to a higher education facility.

What is the purpose of this study?

The purpose of this study is to address the limited access to higher education available to the rural youth; to establish the enablers and constraints to access to higher education, with a view to advancing policy measures geared towards addressing the problem of limited access to higher education experienced by the rural youth of Botswana.

What are the study procedures?

If you agree to take part in this study, these are the expectations:

a. I will explain the purpose of the study in more detail to you and you will be allowed to ask questions, should you have any.

b. You will be reminded that that there is no right or wrong answer when answering questions. You will be free to express your views as you see fit when answering the questions.

c. You will be asked to complete a survey questionnaire on the constraints hindering one's access to higher education.

d. Completing the questionnaire shall take approximately **30 minutes.**

Are there any risks/discomforts if you participate in this study?

When you complete a questionnaire for this study, you will be expected to share sensitive information about your personal experiences with regard to not being able to gain access to university. All information that you choose to disclose will be shared with the research supervisor and co-supervisor. Although your names will not be disclosed, the rest of the information (your experiences) shared with the researcher will be disclosed in the form of publications such as thesis, journal articles and conference presentations. Also, your demographic information will be kept as anonymous as possible. Furthermore, I will remove any information contributed which could identify you when the research is published.

How will you benefit from participating in this study?

You will receive no incentives for participating in this study. However, your description of your experiences may lead to a better understanding of the structural arrangements that restrict/constrain the rural youth from equitable access to higher education. Your contributions to this study may influence the formulation of policies that will allow admission of disenfranchised citizens, such as yourselves.

Your participation is voluntary.

Your participation is voluntary; you are under no obligation to participate in this study. However, any information you choose to share before you end your participation, will be destroyed or discarded. If you do choose to participate, and an issue arises which makes you uncomfortable, you are free to withdraw your participation at any time, without any further consequences.

Permission to use data in the future.

We would like to request your permission to use your data, confidentially and anonymously, for further research purposes, as the data sets are the intellectual property of the University of Pretoria **and, where relevant, project funders**. Further research may include secondary data analysis and using the data for teaching purposes. The confidentiality and privacy applicable to this study will be binding on future research studies.

Contact information in case of a problem.

If you encounter any problems or are not comfortable with the way the research is being conducted, kindly feel free to contact me to discuss it. You are also at liberty to contact my study supervisor, Dr. Talita Calitz (see contact details above). In the event any personal problems arise as a result of this study, I will contact a trained professional to assist you.

If you are willing to participate in this study, please sign this letter as a "declaration of your informed" consent to participate in this project willingly, and that you understand that you may withdraw from it at any time.

Thank you.

Participant's Signature ……………………..……   Date…………………….

Researcher's Signature……………………………   Date………………....…

Yours sincerely

Ms. Esther Mashabile (PhD. Student)

UNIVERSITEIT VAN PRETORIA
UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA
YUNIBESITHI YA PRETORIA

Faculty of Education

Supervisor: Dr. Talita M. L. Calitz
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Tel: 00 267 71854029/ 0027 738658656
Email: e.mmashabile@gmail.com/u20675072@tuks.co.za
02 February 2022

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c.   You will be asked to complete a survey questionnaire on the constraints hindering one's access to higher education.

d.   Completing the questionnaire shall take approximately **30 minutes.**

e.   You will also be invited to take part in an interview. The interview will be conducted in person. The interview is expected to last from **60** to **90 minutes.** Before the interview, I will seek your consent to record the session.

f.   Member checking sessions will be conducted to confirm if my understanding and interpretations are consistent with your data. This will be done once data has been transcribed and the preliminary report has been written.

Are there any risks/discomforts if you participate in this study?

It is unlikely that you will be harmed. However, when you complete a questionnaire for this study and participate in a focus group interview you will be expected to share sensitive information about your personal experiences with regards to being able to gain access to university. All information that you choose to share with the researcher will be disclosed to the supervisor and co-supervisor. Although your names will not be disclosed, the rest of the information (your experiences) shared with the researcher will be disclosed. Furthermore, I will remove any information which could identify you, when the research is published in the form of publications such as thesis, journal articles and conference presentations. Also, your demographic information will be kept as anonymous as possible.

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If you are willing to participate in this study, please sign this letter as a "declaration of your informed" consent to participate in this project willingly, and that you understand that you may withdraw from it at any time.

Thank you.

Participant's Signature …………………………   Date …………………

Researcher's Signature…………………………   Date …………………

Yours Sincerely

Ms. Esther Mashabile (PhD. Student)

UNIVERSITEIT VAN PRETORIA
UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA
YUNIBESITHI YA PRETORIA

Faculty of Education

A survey questionnaire: A capability-informed policy analysis of higher education access for rural youth in Botswana

Participant Criteria: Participants who were unable to gain access to higher education

The purpose of this questionnaire is to examine rural youths' perceptions with regards to access to higher education in Botswana. The findings of the study may help in advancing a clear understanding of the structural arrangements that constrain rural youths from accessing higher education. All responses are **anonymous** and participation in this study is completely **voluntary**, yet very essential for the completion of this research. Please note, there are **no benefits or disadvantages** from participation, and one is **free to discontinue** at any time. However, participation is very much appreciated and may assist in future policy reform initiatives on expanding access to higher education especially for rural youths in Botswana.

The questions in this questionnaire are about your perceptions on access to higher education for rural youth in Botswana, as well as general questions about your background. Some of the questions are personal and it would be ideal to respond to the questions as honestly as possible. If a question bothers you and you do not want to answer it, you can skip that question and continue with the questionnaire.

Please answer all questions carefully and honestly. Your answers will be kept completely **confidential**, no one from your village or home will ever see your answers. Please work by yourself, and do not discuss the questions with others while responding to the questionnaire.

This questionnaire will be completed in approximately **30 minutes**.

Date: _____

Pseudonym: _____

SECTION A: BACKGROUND INFORMATION
Circle all that is applicable to you.

1. Your age
       A. 18-19
       B. 20-21
       C. 22 -23
       D. 24 +

2. Your gender
       A. Male
       B. Female
       C. Other

3. Your family income status
       A. Low
       B. Middle income
       C. High income

4. Do your parents have history with education beyond Form 5
       A. Yes
       B. No

5. The region within which your village is located
       A. Kweneng West
       B. Ghanzi
       C. Kgalagadi North
       D. Ngamiland
       E Other (Specify) _____

6. Your language at home
       A. Setswana
       B. Otjiherero
       C. Shekgalagari
       D. Afrikaans
       E. Sesarwa Languages (Specify)_____
       F. Other (Specify) _____

7. Your language at school
       A. Setswana
       B. Otjiherero

C. Shekgalagadi

D. Afrikaans

E. Sesarwa Languages (Specify) _____

F. Other (Specify)_____

SECTION B:
Home, family, community experience and university access

The following relates to the role played by the home, family and community environment in your endeavour (attempt) to access university education. (**Circle all that is applicable**)

8. A. My family had experience or knowledge about post- secondary school choices
   B. My family had **limited** experience and knowledge about post-secondary choices
   C. My parents had **no** experience or knowledge about post- secondary school choices

9. A. My family played a **significant** role in the decision-making process
   to access university
   B. My family played a minor role in the decision-making process to access university
   C. My family played **no** role in the decision-making process to access university

10. A. My family played a **significan**t role in the application process for university
    B. My family played a minor role in the application process for university
    C. My family played **no** role in the application process for university

11. A. My family income status was a major barrier in my attempt to go to university
    B. My family income status was a minor barrier in my attempt to go to university
    C. My family income status was **no**t a barrier in my attempt to go to go to university

12. How would you rate your community's support of your goals and plans to attend university?
    A. Very supportive
    B. Somewhat supportive
    C. Neutral
    D. Somewhat not supportive
    E. Not supportive at all

13. How would you rate your friends' support of your goals and plans to attend university?
    A. Very supportive
    B. Somewhat supportive
    C. Neutral
    D. Somewhat not supportive
    E. Not supportive at all

13a. What obstacles (challenges) did your family face as you attempted to go to university?
_____

School life and university access

The following relates to your schooling experience before the application process to university.
(Circle all that is applicable)

14. A. My senior secondary school was located very far from universities (more than 50+kms)
    B. My senior secondary school was located somewhat far from universities
    C. Neutral
    D. My senior secondary school was located somewhat not far from universities
    E. My senior secondary school was located **not far** at all from universities

15. A. I attended a well- resourced secondary school (well equipped with all learning resources/materials)
    B. I attended a somewhat well- resourced secondary school
    C. Neutral
    D. I attended a somewhat poorly resourced secondary school
    E. I attended a very poorly resourced secondary school

16. How often did you have access to the internet while at school?
    A. Quite often
    B. Often
    C. Neutral
    D. Occasionally
    E. Never

17. How often did you engage in extra lessons or tutorials to prepare you for the final examinations?
    A. Quite often
    B. Often
    C. Neutral
    D. Occasionally
    E. Never

18. How supportive were your teachers of your future plans to attend university?
    A. Very supportive
    B. Somewhat supportive
    C. Neutral
    D. Somewhat not supportive
    E. Not supportive at all (discouraging)

19. As a way of providing career guidance, which of the following did your school do?
    (Circle all that is applicable)
    A. Organising career exhibitions

B. Organising trips to nearby universities or colleges
C. Inviting universities or college representatives
D. Hosting motivational speakers
E. Other

20. A. I experienced major challenges when applying for a course of my choice
    B. I somewhat experienced major challenges when applying for a course of my choice
    C. Neutral
    D. I experienced minor challenges when applying for a course of my choice
    E. I **did not** experience challenges at all when applying for a course of my choice

21. A. I experienced major challenges when applying for a university of my choice
    B. I somewhat experienced major challenges when applying to a university of my choice
    C. Neutral
    D. I experienced minor challenges when applying to a university of my
       choice
    E. I **did not** experience challenges at all when applying for a university of my choice

21a. Describe the challenges that you experienced while at secondary school if any.

_____

_____

Resources and university access
The following seeks to examine the resources that were available to you in order to access university. **(Circle all that is applicable)**

22. A. I had money to pay for the application fees to university
    B. I **did not** have enough money to pay for the application fees to university
    C. I had **no** money to pay for application fees to university

23. A. I had financial support from my family to support my studies
    B. I had financial support from government to support my studies
    C. I had financial support from other agencies to support my studies
    D. I did **not** have financial support for my studies

24. A. I had information about university study
    B. I had **limited** information about university study
    C. I had **no** information about university study

25. A. I knew the university I planned on studying at
    B. I somewhat knew the university I planned on studying at
    C. Neutral
    D. I somewhat did not know the university I planned on studying at
    E. I **did not** know the university I planned on studying at

26. A. I knew the course I planned on studying at university
    B. I somewhat knew the course I planned on studying at university
    C. Neutral
    D. I somewhat did not know the course I planned on studying at university
    E. I did **not** know at all the course I planned on studying at university

27. A. I had knowledge about available university funding and scholarships
    B. I had **limited** knowledge about available university funding and scholarships
    C. I had **no** knowledge at all about available university funding and scholarships

27a. Describe resource challenges you experienced while applying to university.

_____

_____

Rural life and university access:
The following relates to your experience living and schooling in a rural area.

28. A. Living in a rural area was a major barrier for me to go to university
    B. Living in a rural area has significantly limited my opportunities to go to university
    C. Living in a rural area has **not** limited my opportunities to go to university

29**.** In what ways has schooling in a rural area affected your goals and plans to attend university?
    A. Lack of parental support
    B. Lack of basic needs
    C. Limited resources at school
    D. Long distance from home to school
    E. Low expectation from teachers
    F. Lack of inspiration from others
    G. Negative community attitudes not valuing education beyond secondary schooling

29a. Describe the difficulties you faced while schooling in a rural area?

_____

_____

29b. Describe how you coped with these challenges.

_____

_____

Social conversion factors and capabilities

The following focuses on conditions at your school that were conducive to turn available resources into educational outcomes. **(Circle all that is applicable)**

30. Libraries

    A. Very well resourced
    B. Somewhat well resourced
    C. Neutral
    D. Somewhat not well resourced
    E. **Not** well resourced at all

31. Laboratories

    A. Very well equipped
    B. Somewhat well equipped
    C. Neutral
    D. Somewhat not well equipped
    E. **Not** equipped at all

32. Computers

    A. Very functional
    B. Somewhat functional
    C. Neutral
    D. Somewhat not functional
    E. **Not** functional at all

33. Building infrastructure

    A. Excellent condition
    B. Very good condition
    C. Fair condition
    D. Poor condition
    E. Very poor condition

34. Furniture Condition

    A. Good
    B. Fair
    C. Bad (broken, not well maintained)

35. Quality education provision

    A. Excellent
    B. Very good
    C. Good
    D. Fair

E. Poor

36. Teaching and learning material including textbooks

   A. Adequate
   B. Somewhat adequate
   C. Fair
   D. Somewhat not adequate
   E. **Not** adequate at all

37. Access to knowledge/information that facilitates higher education access

   A. Easily available
   B. Somewhat easily available
   C. Neutral
   D. Somewhat not available
   E. **Not** available at all

38. Sports fields and extra curricula activities

   A. Very well promoted
   B. Somewhat promoted
   C. Neutral
   D. Somewhat not promoted
   E. Not promoted at all

39. Community attitudes towards higher education

   A. Positive
   B. Somewhat positive
   C. Neutral
   D. Somewhat negative
   E. Negative

40. Community attitudes towards gender equality

   A. Positive
   B. Somewhat positive
   C. Neutral
   D. Somewhat negative
   E. Negative

41. Which of the following infrastructural developments are available in your village?
(Circle all that is applicable)

   A. Tarred roads
   B. Electricity
   C. Running water
   D. Public library

E. Communication networks

42. How would you rate crime and violence prevalence in your community?

   A. Very high
   B. Somewhat high
   C. Average
   D. Somewhat low
   E. Very low

43. How would you rate poverty levels in your community?

   A. Very high
   B. Somewhat high
   C. Average
   D. Somewhat low
   E. Very low

43b. Describe negative social factors (challenges) your community is faced with?

_____

_____

44. What would you say were the two biggest challenges you faced when you wanted to go to university?

_____

45. Since you were not able to go to university what are you doing currently?

_____

46. You are also free to share information about your schooling experience living in a rural area.

_____

Thank you for your time and responses.

*Please return the questionnaire to the researcher once completed.

UNIVERSITEIT VAN PRETORIA
UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA
YUNIBESITHI YA PRETORIA

Faculty of Education

A survey questionnaire: A capability-informed policy analysis of higher education access for rural youth in Botswana
Participant Criteria: Participants who were able to gain access to higher education

The purpose of this questionnaire is to examine rural youths' perceptions with regards to access to higher education in Botswana. The findings of the study may help in advancing a clear understanding of the structural arrangements that constrain rural youths from accessing higher education. All responses are **anonymous** and participation in this study is completely **voluntary**, yet very essential for the completion of this research. Please note, there are **no benefits or disadvantages** from participation, and one is **free to discontinue** at any time. However, participation is very much appreciated and may assist in future policy reform initiatives on expanding access to higher education especially for rural youths in Botswana.

The questions in this questionnaire are about your perceptions on access to higher education for rural youths in Botswana, as well as general questions about your background. Some of the questions are personal and it would be ideal to respond to the questions as honestly as possible. If a question bothers you and you do not want to answer it, you can skip that question and continue with the questionnaire.

Please answer all questions carefully and honestly. Your answers will be kept completely **confidential**, no one from your village or home will ever see your answers. Please work by yourself, and do not discuss the questions with others while responding to the questionnaire.

This questionnaire will be completed in approximately **30 minutes**.

Date: _____

Programme: _____

Level of study: _____

Pseudonym: _____

SECTION A: BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Circle all that is applicable to you.

1. Are you the first person in your immediate family to attend university?
> A. Yes
> B. No

2. Your age group
> A. 18-19
> B. 20-21
> C. 22 -23
> D. 24 +

3. Your gender
> A. Male
> B. Female
> C. Other

4. Are you under government scholarship (student loan/grant)?
> A. Yes
> B. No

5. Your family income status
> A. Low
> B. Middle income
> C. High income

6. Does any of your parents have an education beyond Form 5 (tertiary education)?
> C. Yes
> D. No

7. The region within which your village is located
> A. Kweneng West
> B. Ghanzi
> C. Kgalagadi North
> D. Ngamiland
> E. Other (Specify)_____

8. Your language at home
    A. Setswana
    B. Herero
    C. Shekgalagari
    D. Afrikaans
    E. Sesarwa
    F. Other (Specify) _____

9. Your language at school
    G. English
    H. Setswana
    I. Herero
    J. Shekgalagari
    K. Afrikaans
    L. Sesarwa
    M. Other (Specify)_____

SECTION B:
Home, family, community experience and university access

The following relates to the role played by the home, family and community environment in your endeavour (attempt) to access university education. (**Circle all that is applicable)**

10. A. My family had experience or knowledge about post- secondary school choices
     B. My family had **limited** experience and knowledge about post-secondary choices
     C. My parents had **no** experience or knowledge about post- secondary school choices

11. A. My family played a **significant** role significant role in the decision-making process to access university
     B. My family played a minor role in the decision-making process to access university
     C. My family played **no** role in the decision-making process to access university

12. A. My family played a **significan**t role in the application process for university
     B. My family played a mino**r** role in the application process for university
     C. My family played **no** role in the application process for university

13. A. My family income status was a major barrier in my attempt to go to university
     B. My family income status was a minor barrier in my attempt to go to university
     C. My family income status was **no**t a barrier in my attempt to go to go to university

14. How would you rate your community's support of your goals and plans to attend university?

F. Very supportive
G. Somewhat supportive
H. Neutral
I. Somewhat not supportive
J. Not supportive at all

15. How would you rate your friends' support of your goals and plans to attend university?

F. Very supportive
G. Somewhat supportive
H. Neutral
I. Somewhat not supportive
J. Not supportive at all

15b. What obstacles (challenges) has your family faced as you planned to go to university?
_____

_____

_____

School life and university access

The following relates to your schooling experience before attending university.
(Circle all that is applicable)

16. A. My senior secondary school was located very far from universities (more than 50+kms)
    F. My senior secondary school was located somewhat far from universities
    G. Neutral
    H. My senior secondary school was located somewhat not far from universities
    I. My senior secondary school was located not far at all from universities

17. A. I attended a well- resourced secondary school
    B. I attended a somewhat well- resourced secondary school
    C. Neutral
    D. I attended a somewhat poorly resourced secondary school
    E. I attended a very poorly resourced secondary school

18. How often did you have access to the internet while at school?

    A. Quite often
    B. Often
    C. Neutral
    D. Occasionally
    E. Never

19. How often did you engage in extra lessons or tutorials to prepare you for the final
examinations?

    A. Quite often
    B. Often
    C. Neutral
    D. Occasionally
    E. Never

20. How supportive were your teachers of your plans to attend university?

    A. Very supportive
    B. Somewhat supportive
    C. Neutral
    D. Somewhat not supportive
    E. Not supportive at all (discouraging)

21. As a way of providing career guidance, which of the following did your school do?
(Circle all that is applicable)

    F.   Organising career exhibitions
    G. Organising trips to nearby universities or colleges
    H. Inviting universities or college representatives
    I.   Hosting motivational speakers
    J.   Other

22. A. I experienced major challenges when applying for a course of my choice
    B. I somewhat experienced major challenges when applying for a course of my choice
    C. Neutral
    D. I experienced minor challenges when applying for a course of my choice
    E. I did not experience challenges when applying for a course of my choice

23. A. I experienced major challenges when applying for a university of my choice
    B. I experienced somewhat major challenges when applying to a university of my choice
    C. Neutral
    D. I experienced minor challenges when applying to a university of my choice
    E. I **did not** experience challenges at all when applying for a university of my choice

23b. Describe the challenges that you experienced while at secondary school if any.

_____

_____

Resources and university access

The following seeks to examine the resources that were available to you in order to access university. **(Circle all that is applicable)**

24. A. I had money to pay for the application fees to university
    B. I did not have enough money to pay for the applications to university
    C. I had **no** money to pay for applications to university

25. A. I had financial support from my family to support my studies
    B. I had financial support from government to support my studies
    C. I had financial support from other agencies to support my studies
    D. I did **not** have financial support at all for my studies

26. A. I had information about university study
    B. I had **limited** information about university study
    C. I had **no** information about university study

27. A. I knew the university I planned on studying at
    B. I somewhat knew the university I planned on studying at
    C. Neutral
    D. I somewhat did not know the university I planned on studying at
    E. I did **not** know the university I planned on studying at

28. A. I knew the course I planned on studying at university
    B. I somewhat knew the course I planned on studying at university
    C. Neutral
    D. I somewhat did not know the course I planned on studying at university
    E. I did **not** know the course I planned on studying at university

29. A. I had knowledge about available university funding and scholarships
    B. I had **limited** knowledge about available university funding and scholarships
    C. I had **no** knowledge about available university funding and scholarships

Rural life and university access:

(Circle all that is applicable)

The following relates to your experience living and schooling in a rural area.

30. A. Living in a rural area was a major barrier for me to go to university
    B. Living in a rural area has significantly limited my opportunities to go to university
    C. Living in a rural area has **not** limited my opportunities to go to university

31**.** In what ways has schooling in a rural area affected your goals and plans to attend university?

    H. Lack of parental support

I. Lack of basic needs
J. Limited resources at school
K. Long distance from home to school
L. Low expectation from teachers
M. Lack of inspiration from others
N. Community not valuing education beyond secondary schooling

Experiences of university access

The following relates to your experience while you attend university. **(Circle all that is applicable)**

32. How well do you feel the university is supportive of your studies?

    A. Quite supportive
    B. Somewhat supportive
    C. Neutral
    D. Somewhat not supportive
    E. Not supportive at all

33. How often do you engage in learning on your own, pursuing ideas and finding information by yourself?

    A. Quite often
    B. Often
    C. Occasionally
    D. Never

34. What challenges do you face while at university?
(**Circle all that is applicable)**

    A. Course content (difficult to grasp)
    B. Language incompetence
    C. Lack of computer skills
    D. Lack of accommodation
    E. Lack of money for transport
    F. Lack of money for food
    G. Lack of money for stationery
    H. Neutral

35. How easy is it for you to navigate or negotiate university study coming from a rural environment?

  A. Extremely easy
  B. Somewhat easy
  C. Neutral

D. Somewhat not easy

E. Not easy at all

36. What personal skills do apply to help you adjust to university study?
(Circle all that is applicable to you)

A. Self-determination
B. Resilience (flexibility or the capacity to recover quickly from difficulties or challenges)
C. Commitment
D. Autonomy (self-direction)
E. Self- reliance
F. Perseverance (persistence)
G. Self-efficacy (self- confidence)

SECTION C

Individual conversion factors and agency

The following relates to personal factors that enable or prevent individual freedom to convert agency (the ability to bring about change), available resources and existing opportunities in order to complete university education.

37. How important is attending university as first in the immediate family to go university?

A. Extremely important
B. Somewhat important
C. Neutral
D. Somewhat unimportant
E. Not important at all
F. Not applicable

38. How has being first in the immediate family to attend university influenced your academic performance?

A. I study extremely hard
B. I somewhat study hard
C. Neutral
D. I somewhat do not study hard
E. I do not study at all
F. Not applicable

39. Who is motivating or inspiring you to work hard while you attend university?

A. My family
B. My teachers
C. My friends
D. Extended family members
E. Members of the community

F. Others

40. Which of the following factors have you benefited from or have worked to your advantage?
(Circle all that is applicable)

   A. Extra learning materials from teachers
   B. Extra lessons/tutorials (morning lessons, evening or weekend lessons)
   C. Encouraging teachers
   D. Supportive family
   E. Supportive extended family
   F. Supportive community members

41. How have those who support your university education aspirations (dreams and goals) assisted you?

   A. Provided information
   B. Provide monetary assistance
   C. Provided moral support
   D. Other

How relevant do you consider each of these personal qualities to be for your success in your university study?
(Circle all that is applicable

42. Self-determination

A. Very relevant
B. Somewhat relevant
C. Neutral
D. Somewhat not relevant
E. Not relevant at all

43. Resilience (the capacity to recover quickly from difficulties or challenges)

   A. Very relevant
   B. Not relevant
   C. Neutral
   D. Somewhat not relevant
   E. Not relevant at all

44. Self- efficacy (self-confidence)

   A. Very relevant
   B. Somewhat relevant
   C. Neutral

D. Somewhat not relevant

E. Not relevant at all

45. Perseverance (persistence)

A. Very relevant
B. Somewhat relevant
C. Neutral
D. Somewhat not relevant
E. Not relevant at all

46. Autonomy (Self-direction)

A. Very relevant
B. Not relevant
C. Neutral
D. Somewhat not relevant
E. Not relevant at all

47. Self- reliance

A. Very relevant
B. Somewhat relevant
C. Neutral
D. Somewhat not relevant
E. Not relevant at all

48. Adaptability and flexibility

A. Very relevant
B. Somewhat relevant
C. Neutral
D. Somewhat not relevant
E. Not relevant at all

48b.What aspirations (goals and dreams) have supported your choice to go to university? Why have you chosen the course you are studying?

_____

_____

_____

48c.What trade-offs (compromises and sacrifices) are you forced to make in order to complete your university study?

_____

_____

_____

Social conversion factors and capabilities

The following focuses on conditions at your last secondary school that were conducive to turn available resources into educational outcomes. **(Circle all that is applicable)**

49. Libraries

   F. Very well resourced
   G. Somewhat well resourced
   H. Neutral
   I. Somewhat not resourced
   J. Not resourced at all

50. Laboratories

   F. Very well equipped
   G. Somewhat well equipped
   H. Neutral
   I. Somewhat not equipped
   J. Not equipped at all

51. Computers

   F. Very functional
   G. Somewhat functional
   H. Neutral
   I. Somewhat not functional
   J. Not functional at all

52. Building infrastructure

   F. Excellent condition
   G. Very good condition
   H. Fair condition
   I. Poor condition
   J. Very poor condition

53. Furniture Condition

   D. Good
   E. Fair
   F. Bad (broken, not well maintained)

54. Quality education provision

    F. Excellent
    G. Very good
    H. Good
    I. Fair
    J. Poor

55. Teaching and learning material including textbooks

    F. Adequate
    G. Somewhat adequate
    H. Fair
    I. Somewhat not adequate
    J. Not adequate at all

56. Access to knowledge/information that facilitates higher education access

    F. Easily accessible
    G. Somewhat easily accessible
    H. Neutral
    I. Somewhat not accessible
    J. Not accessible at all

57. Sports fields and extra curricula activities

    F. Very well promoted
    G. Somewhat promoted
    H. Neutral
    I. Somewhat not promoted
    J. Not promoted at all

58. Community attitudes towards higher education

    F. Positive
    G. Somewhat positive
    H. Neutral
    I. Somewhat negative
    J. Negative

59. Community attitudes towards gender equality

    F. Positive
    G. Somewhat positive
    H. Neutral
    I. Somewhat negative
    J. Negative

60. Which of the following infrastructural developments are available in your village?
(Circle all that is applicable)

    D. Tarred roads

E. Electricity
F. Running water
D. Public library
E. Communication networks

61. How would you rate crime and violence prevalence in your community?

   F. Very high
   G. Somewhat high
   H. Average
   I. Somewhat low
   J. Very low

62. How would you rate poverty levels in your community?

   F. Very high
   G. Somewhat high
   H. Average
   I. Somewhat low
   J. Very low

62b. Describe negative social factors (challenges) your community is faced with?

_____

Structural conversion factors and well-being

This section examines university arrangements which enable or constrain students' freedoms to convert available resources into capabilities needed to complete university study (achieve well-being).

63. How easy is it for you to communicate through the language of instruction at university?
   A. Very easy
   B. Somewhat easy
   C. Neutral
   D. Difficult
   E. Very difficult
64. How easy is it for you to adjust to studying at university?
   A. Very easy
   B. Somewhat easy
   C. Neutral
   D. Difficult
   E. Very difficult
65. How often do you engage with your lecturers within the classroom?

   A. Quite often

B. Often
C. Occasionally
D. Never

66. How often do you engage with your lectures or faculty members outside class?
   A. Often
   B. Occasionally
   C. Never

67. How often do you engage with other students on issues of common interest within the university campus?
   A. Quite often
   B. Often
   C. Occasionally
   D. Never

68. Are you benefiting from any welfare initiatives and programmes supporting students from rural areas?
   A. Yes
   B. No

68b. What do you consider to have been the two greatest challenges you faced in your attempt to go to university?

_____
_____

69. What do you consider to have been the two most important factors that enabled you to access university?

_____
_____

70. You are also free to share information about your schooling experience living in a rural area.

_____

Thank you for your time and responses.
*Please return the questionnaire to the researcher once completed.

Addendum F: Semi -structured interview guide

Home, family, community experience and university access

1. Tell me about your self
2. How involved were your family in your schooling? What role did they play?
3. Describe your family experience with post-secondary school education. How has your family background enabled or limited your opportunities and choices to pursue your goals to attend university?
4. What role did your family play in the university application process?
5. What role did your community play in the university application process?
6. Were community members generally supportive of your decision to go to university?

School life and university access

7. Describe your school experience in terms of the following: location, distance from home, resources offered, size, language used, teachers and overall learning experience.
8. What subjects did you take if any selection was offered at Form 4 (Grade 11), and why?
9. Did you take any Pure Sciences, Pure Maths etc.? Describe your experience in these subjects.
10. Describe your experience when you were preparing to write your final examinations in Form 5. Did you have any tutoring or enrolled in a preparatory programme?
11. Did your school organise university visits on open days? Which career options did you learn about? How did you benefit from that information? If you did not attend any open days, why not?
12. In what ways were you supported by your school to gain access to university? Describe how well you feel your senior secondary school prepared you academically for university education.
13. Were your teachers supportive of your plans to attend university? How well did they motivate you to plan for your future?

Resources and university access

14. Describe some of the resources that were available to you, as a student in a rural area?
   a. What resources were at your disposal to help you apply for university?
   b. Did you have any relevant information about university study? Did you have access to the internet?
   c. What scholarships/bursary or financial aid did you receive to study at your current institution? How did you find out about any scholarships or financial aid?

Rural life and university access

15. Describe your experience living in a rural area.
16. Describe the community that you grew up in in terms of infrastructural development.
17. Based on your experience, what information/resources do you wish you had as a student in a rural area?
18. What are some of the challenges faced by your community and how did you negotiate them?

Experience of university access

19. Take me through your decision to pursue a university degree/education. Who decided on the course you planned on studying at university?
20. Describe how you came to learn about university applications process. Tell me more about it.

21. Tell me a story regarding your transition from attending a rural school to university in a big city. How did you navigate university coming from a rural environment? What coping mechanism/strategy did you employ? How determined were you to get a place of study at university?

22. Can you describe any obstacles/challenges that may have prevented you from gaining access to a university of your choice or a programme of your choice?

23. a. Describe any financial challenges you are facing while attending university if any.
    a. How are you supporting yourself financially while you attend university?
    b. What form of support are you receiving from your university with regards to your studies? What form of support are you receiving from your family? What form of support are you receiving from your community?

24. Based on your experience, what information would you share with the Ministry of Education and Skills Development regarding rural students' schooling and access to higher education?

Converting available resources into completing university study

Individual conversion factors and agency (agency- freedom)

25. What aspirations are enabling and supporting your capabilities to complete your studies? In other words; what are your aspirations/motivations/ goals and plans for studying at university?

26. To what extent are you able to engage in the learning/teaching process at university?
    How easy is it for you to engage with your lecturers during class and outside class? Tell me more about it.
    How often do you engage with your peers during learning, both inside and outside class? Tell me more about it.
    How easy is it for you to communicate through the language of instruction (English) at university?

Structural/institutional conversion factors and well-being

27. What programmes or initiatives are being provided to support rural students to complete their university education? To what degree would you say you have benefitted from these resources (assistance/programmes).

28. How well is the university responding to students facing difficult situations?

29. Describe how the university has contributed to your development so far. To what degree has the university developed your capabilities (freedoms and opportunities) to be able to be or do the things that you have reason to value?

30. Is there anything else you would like to add which we have not discussed in this interview?

Thank you for time and participation.

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REPUBLIC OF BOTSWANA

MINISTRY OF TERTIARY EDUCATION, RESEARCH, SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

REF: MOTE 1/18/6 IX (70)

2 nd September 2021

Ms. Esther Mashabile
P O Box 2223ABG
Gaborone

Dear Madam,

Re: Application for Research Permit: A capability-informed analysis of higher education access rural youth in Botswana:

Reference is made to your application on the above captioned matter.

Your application for Research Permit for the proposed research titled: 'A capability-informed analysis of higher education access for rural youth in Botswana' has been granted. The permit is valid for one (1) year. You are kindly advised to peruse section 4.4 to 5.0 of 'Guidelines for Application for Research Permit' in Botswana.

Any changes in the proposed research should be communicated, without fail, to the Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Tertiary Education Research Science and Technology citing above reference. You are advised to submit final research report to the Department of Research, Science and Technology.

By copy of this letter, the Director of Research Science and Technology (DRST) is advised to take note of this development and ensure that deliverables to government are timely met. Furthermore, you are requested to deposit completed research report to DRST.

Yours faithfully

Dr. Kekgonne E. Baipoledi
For/ Permanent Secretary
cc: Director of Research Science and Technology

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