

CHAPTER ONE

1.1 INTRODUCTION AND PROBLEM STATEMENT

The poor academic achievement of black students can be attributed to problems in the community, home, school, and with the teachers and students themselves (Natriello, McDill and Pallas, 1990:3-5 and 13; Tozer, Violas and Senese, 1993:308). These problems include *inter alia*, a lack of discipline, learning facilities and parental care; low socio-economic status, overcrowding, ill-trained teachers, and a lack of knowledge with regard to learning and motivation (Flaxman, 1985:887-889).

The assumption is made that these problems create, *inter alia*, a very poor culture of learning on the one hand, and a lack of control over and responsibility for learning, on the other hand. Parents for instance, do not support their children (Ross, 1991:69; Garbarino, 1985:52); the community does not hold the school accountable for carrying out its primary function, namely teaching the students (Cemane, 1990:2; Mthembu, 1993a:2); teachers stage chalkdowns etc., when they should be teaching (Luti, 1993a:4); students do not demand that the teachers teach (Luti, 1993b:3); and finally students neither study nor feel responsible for failures in the academic area (Mthembu, 1993b:2).

Students from an environmentally-deprived community are students who are educationally, socially and culturally disadvantaged (Natriello, McDill and Pallas, 1990:5). Environmentally-deprived students have been exposed to insufficient educational environments. Their social and cultural backgrounds limit their acquisition of the knowledge, skills and abilities needed for cumulative academic success (Flaxman, 1985:887). Usually these students are born into families in which their fathers and mothers have a low educational or occupational level (Flaxman, 1985:887). In environmentally-deprived communities, there is a large number of fatherless families where mothers find it difficult to support their children alone, and the children's school attendance is delayed (Le Roux, 1994:43). When entering school, environmentally-deprived children cannot read, or count. For example, they do not know the letters of the alphabet, and cannot name colours (Tozer, Violas and Senese, 1993:307).

Environmentally-deprived students usually repeat one or more grades and drop out of school in larger numbers than advantaged students (Flaxman, 1985:887). Thus, they have fewer opportunities of qualifying for the advanced education required for higher level jobs (Flaxman, 1985:887).

According to Natriello *et al.*, (1990:5), Tozer *et al.*, (1993:306) and Le Roux (1994:39) normal school facilities are not available to such students. Schools attended by environmentally-deprived students have inferior educational resources such as old dilapidated classrooms, laboratories, textbooks and maps, ill-trained teachers and libraries which affect their school performance (Tozer *et al.*, 1993:306). They do not travel, visit art museums and zoos or participate in conversations on a daily basis with their elders at home or in the community (Tozer *et al.*, 1993:306).

Natriello *et al.*, (1990:7) and Le Roux (1994:39) maintain that deprivation affects students' social and cultural groups (i.e, ethnic origin, race, poverty, sex and geographic groups). Environmentally-deprived students are also faced with overcrowded housing, language deprivation, educational neglect and lack of personal warmth and affection (Le Roux, 1994:39).

An environmentally-deprived community is also characterised by ill health and diseases such as gastro-enteritis, trachoma, pneumonia, bilharzia, sleeping sickness, cholera etc. These diseases are more common in a culture of poverty than in developed high socio-economic communities (Le Roux, 1994:40). As students in deprived communities also suffer from improper food, they go to school hungry and are unable to cope with intellectual tasks (Le Roux, 1994:42).

Tozer *et al.*, (1993:307), Le Roux (1994:44) and Flaxman (1985:895) advocate that environmentally-deprived students grow up in an environment that does not teach them to think, to reason and to speak in the manner generally approved by an advantaged society. Thus, they are victims of language deficiencies, because their use of language is of a poor quality which negatively affects their academic achievement (Tozer *et al.*, 1993:307; Le Roux, 1994:44).

According to Le Roux (1994:44), environmentally-deprived students' limited language ability is a reflection of their restrictive environment. Inadequate language usage and communication are detrimental to the child's development and promote a culture of poverty.

Environmentally-deprived students come from a section of society which lacks most of the personal and environmental factors that influence self-regulated learning. These variables embrace one-parent families and poor health (Vandell and Ramanan, 1992:939; Garbarino, 1985:51). Due to circumstances, the parents mostly follow a permissive educational style engendering a lack of control and responsibility in children (Garbarino, 1985:57). Children also drop out of school easily due to circumstances (*inter alia*,

pressure from parents) and a lack of interest in academic learning (Keen, 1992:101; Garner and Raudenbush, 1991:252).

These problems are neither conducive to effective learning in general nor to the development of the abilities students need to self-regulate their own learning. To self-regulate their own learning, students need to develop metacognitive, motivational and behavioural abilities and skills to manage their learning.

According to Zimmerman (1989:329; 1986:308), students are self-regulated if they are metacognitively, motivationally and behaviourally active participants in their own learning (see paragraph 2.2). Self-regulated students initiate and direct their efforts in order to acquire knowledge and skills (Zimmerman, 1988:3; 1990:5).

The social cognitive view of self-regulated learning assumes the reciprocal causation among three influential processes (Zimmerman, 1989:329), namely, personal, environmental and behavioural determinants, that stand in a triadic relation to one another (Zimmerman and Martinez-Pons, 1992:187; 1986:614).

Bandura (1983:754) reports that self-regulated learners are enactive, rather than reactive. Such learners apply themselves in a way that makes learning easier because they have the tools of agency, academic learning skills and self-control. They (self-regulated learners) can thus create a facility for learning and the desire to learn (Corno, 1987:249).

Self-regulated learners plan, organize, self-instruct, and self-evaluate during the learning process. They perceive themselves as self-efficacious, autonomous, and intrinsically motivated. They select, structure and understand their environment and improve it through the use of various strategies (Zimmerman and Martinez-Pons, 1990:51; 1988:284).

Corno (1987:250) indicates that self-regulated learners learn from the teacher's instructions and make an effort to follow them up. They take notes to validate what the teacher has said, and may even audio-tape the lesson in order to analyse it later (Zimmerman, 1986:310). Self-regulated learners can force the teacher to clarify confusing points or give more examples and can apply ideas in different ways. They direct the educational experience to ensure that learning occurs (Zimmerman, 1986:311).

According to Zimmerman (1990:4), self-regulated learners approach educational tasks with confidence, diligence and resourcefulness. They know when they understand a fact, and when they have mastered a skill or not. Unlike their passive classmates, self-regulated students seek out information when needed and take the necessary steps to

master it. They find ways to succeed when they encounter obstacles such as poor study conditions (Zimmerman and Schunk, 1989:89).

There is a direct relationship between personal, environmental, and behavioural influences. Self-regulated learning occurs when a student uses personal influences to strategically regulate behaviour and the immediate learning environment (Zimmerman, 1989:330). It can be postulated that a student from a deprived community, who lacks a supportive learning environment and a culture of learning may, in comparison to a student from a supportive learning environment, be characterized by a lack of culture of learning and be less self-regulated than the student from the more supportive environment.

This study therefore seeks answers to the following questions:

- * How do personal variables such as inter alia age, attitude, motivation, anxiety and goal setting determine the self-regulated learning abilities of students from an environmentally-deprived community?
- * How do environmental variables such as the socio-economic status, the physical conditions in the home and teacher support, determine the self-regulated learning abilities of students from an environmentally-deprived community?
- * How do behavioural variables such as learning strategies (i.e., concentration, time management, information processing, selecting main ideas etc.) determine the self-regulated learning abilities of students from an environmentally-deprived community?
- * How do the above-mentioned variables including self-regulated learning, influence academic achievement?

1.2 AIM OF THE STUDY

The aim of this study is to determine how personal, environmental and behavioural variables influence

1.2.1 the self-regulated learning abilities, and

1.2.2 the academic achievement of students from an environmentally-deprived community.

1.3 RESEARCH HYPOTHESES

To achieve the aims set in paragraph 1.2, the following three hypotheses have been set:

Hypothesis 1

There is a relationship between personal, environmental and behavioural variables and self-regulated learning.

Hypothesis 2

There is a relationship between personal, environmental and behavioural variables and academic achievement in English.

Hypothesis 3

There is a relationship between personal, environmental and behavioural variables and academic achievement in maths.

1.4 METHOD OF RESEARCH

The method of research consisting of a literature study and empirical research, is presented in seven chapters. The first four chapters report on the literature research (i.e., chapters 2-5) while the fifth and the sixth (i.e., chapter 6 and 7) report on the empirical research done. In chapter 8 conclusions are drawn, the research is summarized, the limitations of the research identified and some recommendations are made. Some implications for future research are also discussed.

In chapter 2 the influence of self-regulated learning on academic achievement of students from an environmentally-deprived community is analysed, while the aim of chapter 3 is to analyse the relationship between behavioural variables and academic achievement.

In chapter 4, the relationship between personal variables and academic achievement is discussed with special reference to the relationship between self-efficacy, goal setting, and attribution and academic achievement. The influence of environmental variables, such as family status variables, family process variables and school variables on the academic achievement of students from an environmentally-deprived community is analysed in chapter 5.

The method of research is discussed in chapter 6, whereafter the results of the statistical analyses of the data with reference to the relationship between personal, environmental, behavioural variables and self-regulated learning and academic achievement are discussed in chapter 7. In chapter 8 conclusions are drawn, the review of the literature is summarised and the limitations and recommendations of the study are discussed.