Perceptions of Academic Resilience by Senior Phase Learners and Teachers from Low Socioeconomic Schools

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ABSTRACT
This article reports on the perceptions of academic resilience of Grade 8 and Grade 9 learners and their teachers in low socioeconomic township schools. Learners from township schools experience many risk factors that can impede their academic success and careers. A lack of resources is one of the risk factors experienced by the learners. During COVID-19, where an online or hybrid learning model was relied on for teaching and learning, most township schools relied on the rotational learning model instead. The study's main aim is to evaluate and understand the learners' perceptions of their academic strengths, future aspirations and motivation, and to compare their perceptions with those that emerged from their teachers' blind evaluations. The participants were teachers (n = 8) and learners (n = 12) from two purposively sampled township secondary schools. Data-generation instruments included semi-structured interviews for learners and a self-constructed Likert-type-scale questionnaire for teachers. Content analysis was used to analyse the data. The findings suggest that risk factors to academic resilience exist within the family and the school environment. Lack of parental support and school security, poor teacher-learner relationship and unemployment were frequently mentioned. However, factors that can enhance academic resilience were also identified within the family, school and community. Risks and protective factors affecting learners' immediate threats and needs were identified. Access to technology and the need for technological advances were not identified as resources or risks. Future research should examine the relationship between resilience, academic resilience, career aspirations and the role of technology in education.

KEYWORDS
Academic resilience; relational; family support; future aspirations; secondary school, low socioeconomic schools.

INTRODUCTION

Learners from disadvantaged socioeconomic backgrounds often find it difficult to succeed academically (Sinay, 2018). They experience continual academic and social challenges in their academic, home and community environments (Kader & Abad, 2017). These challenges may put them at risk of poor academic achievement at school. Academic resilience is a rare attribute that characterises learners who overcome multiple academic adversities. Martin and Marsh (2009, p. 353) define academic resilience as a "student's capacity to overcome acute or chronic adversities that are seen as major assaults on educational processes". These authors confirm that there are risk factors in the education process. However, academic resilience is accounted for when an individual experiences academic success despite multiple risk factors. Similarly, Novotny (2011) and Perez et al. (2009) define academic resilience as academic success and persistence, despite stressful events. Academic resilience is a dynamic process that (by definition) acknowledges the existence of multiple risk factors. Schools play a significant role in the academic achievement of learners. According to Bayat et al. (2014), the quality of education in schools from a low socioeconomic background is poor. In South Africa, these schools are mostly for black and coloured learners. The negative influence of low socioeconomic status on the quality of the education and academic achievement of learners in such contexts is well documented in the literature (Adebola, 2021; Bayat et al., 2014; Crosnoe, 2009; Lim et al., 2014; Thrupp, 1998). A study by Lim et al. (2014, p. 3) concluded that "academic school quality has a considerable differential effect on school completion for those who come from the lowest socioeconomic band" and "the quality and socioeconomic profile of schools matter with respect to academic outcomes" (Lim et al., 2014, p. 8). Thus, even though the quality of education for learners from low socioeconomic contexts matters a lot and should not be ignored, it is difficult to offer high-quality schooling when faced with limited resources and compounding adversities.

To enhance access to education, the government funding model of South African schools is pro-poor, where poor learners receive a larger subsidy than their richer counterparts. Hall and Giese (2008) confirm that, even though the norms and standards for school fee exemptions and no-fee schools are state measures to redistribute resources and improve access to quality education, they achieve little success. These attempts are not sufficient to equalise resources between low socioeconomic schools and middle to higher socioeconomic schools. The most unequally distributed resources are human resources – mostly affecting teaching capacity – because salaries are not allocated on a pro-poor basis (Hall & Giese, 2008).

The government of South Africa introduced its school fee exemptions policy in the South African Schools Act of 1996, and outlined it in the regulations of 2006. The funding model divided schools into quintiles 1–5 (where 1 is lower and 5 higher). Quintile 1–3 schools receive more funding from the government and are referred to as no fee-paying schools (Dass & Rinquest, 2017) or, in some instances, pay low school fees because they cater for learners from low socioeconomic family backgrounds. This puts more pressure on school resources because parents cannot afford high school fees, which creates more opportunities for high teacher:

learner ratios and the overcrowding of classrooms. Furthermore, Quintile 1–3 schools also cater for learners from informal housing settlements as a result of a lack of adequate housing facilities and high rates of unemployment.

The school fees waiver for Quintile 1–3 schools (and learners within these categories) is seen as financial support to parents and learners from such schools, as well as an incentive to encourage and improve school attendance, and protect parents and learners from the financial burden of school fees. Although low socioeconomic schools are situated in low socioeconomic environments, learners from low socioeconomic contexts in South Africa are free to attend other public schools (even those schools in Quintiles 4–5), with the possibility of a school fee waiver if they qualify in terms of the policy.

Academic success is key to a successful future and the career aspirations of learners. However, exposure to multiple risk factors – including lack of access to educational resources and the possibility of receiving poor-quality education – exposes the learner to potential academic failure. Academic resilience is important to learners from low socioeconomic backgrounds as it can enable them to achieve academic success. Learners are considered to be academically resilient if they can maintain high levels of achievement, despite the stressful challenges they encounter in their developmental context (Martin & Marsh, 2006). Gafoor and Kottalil (2011) distinguish clearly between the concepts of being academically at-risk and academic resilience. Academically at-risk learners are defined as those "facing problems in school-related aspects and manifest poor academic performance", while academic resilience is shown by learners "who successfully respond to the risk conditions and demonstrate academic success" (Gafoor & Kattalil, 2011, p. 107).

Resilience literature shows that a supportive relationship with caring adults is a key resilience protective factor (Masten, 2011; Theron, 2012) and that resilience is an interactive and reciprocal process. Theron and Engelbrecht (2012, p. 265) agree that "responsive adults are synonymous with protective resources that buffer risk and enable prosocial development, provided that youth and adults engage in reciprocal, resilience-promoting transactions". Teachers are caring adults within the school system, who can significantly buffer academic risk factors and thus enhance the academic resilience of their learners. This article, therefore, reports on and highlights perceptions of the academic resilience of Grade 8 and Grade 9 learners and their teachers.

Sadly, with the emergence of the Fourth Industrial Revolution and posthuman era, many schools in disadvantaged communities lack the resources to implement technology in their teaching and learning (Oke & Fernandes, 2020; Skhephe & Mantlana, 2021). The lack of implementation of technology in teaching and learning at the school level might further be affected by poor teacher training and lack of confidence in the use of e-learning, including poor network connectivity (Hameed & Hashim, 2022; Mncube et al., 2019; Moloi & Mhlanga, 2021; Moyo, 2022). Teaching methodologies in disadvantaged schools were not adapted to include technological advances or advance the posthuman era. Similarly, learners in this study have not

identified technology as a resource, or protective or risk factor in their academic performance. The disjuncture between the use and significance of technology in teaching and learning (especially smart mobile phones) and social media platforms requires more research as learners seem to have a dichotomous view of their use during class. A study by Mncube et al. (2019) indicated that teachers rely more on traditional methods of teaching, reading from textbooks and writing on the board, rather than incorporating hybrid or e-learning methodologies, and thus enhancing posthuman teaching and learning methodologies. Similarly, Moyo (2022) indicates that posthuman technological advances can be enjoyed more if access to resources is enabled, especially in disadvantaged schools. Thus, knowledge of risks and protective factors to learners' academic success can help indicate how they can access resources that can advance their educational success.

LITERATURE REVIEW ON A LOW SOCIOECONOMIC BACKGROUND AND SUPPORT

Low socioeconomic status and single motherhood were found to be important potential risks for developing children (Crawford, 2006). Single mothers often have the lowest-paying jobs and live in poor households. Research indicates that most children from poor households develop behavioural problems that affect them academically and increase the likelihood of school dropout at an early age (Crawford, 2006). Although learners from low socioeconomic backgrounds tend to perform inadequately at school, literature shows that not all of them are academically unsuccessful (Willis & Hofmeyr, 2018). Learners from low socioeconomic backgrounds have specific educational needs when compared to learners from higher socioeconomic backgrounds (Sandoval-Hernandez & Cortes, 2012). Willis and Hofmeyr (2018) argue that poverty is a risk factor that jeopardises many learners' academic and future prospects. Youth in high-risk environments are labelled as high risk because of the possibility of developing behavioural problems due to their exposure to multiple risks in their developmental environment (Abukari, 2010).

Socioeconomic status plays a significant role in shaping the academic prospects and future aspirations of adolescents. Robinson and Diale (2017) believe that socioeconomic status influences adolescents' career aspirations. According to Salgotra and Roma (2018), socioeconomic status determines the quality of education a learner will receive and the kind of career for which the family can afford to pay. Having high future aspirations can be complemented by improved achievement at school (Khattab, 2018). Although having a good parent-child relationship can be beneficial for a child's academic performance, the family's socioeconomic status also plays a definite role (Khattab, 2018). Parents will need to provide resources and skills to ensure they meet their child's high future aspirations (Khattab, 2018).

A study by Gore et al. (2015) indicates that learners from high socioeconomic status backgrounds tend to have higher aspirations than learners of lower socioeconomic status. The study found that even if learners from low socioeconomic backgrounds have high aspirations and gain entry to a university, financial burdens often emerge as a risk factor at university (Gore et al., 2015). It is furthermore believed that parents' educational level can serve as an inspiration

for young people (Abiola, 2014). A study by Willis and Hofmeyr (2018) confirms that learners' individual factors, such as their socio-emotional skills and environmental factors (e.g. time-on-task and the availability of texts [school resources]), emerged as strong correlates with academic resilience. Therefore, this research must explore the perceptions of academic resilience of Senior Phase learners from low socioeconomic schools. The Senior Phase is critical because that is when learners choose the careers they wish to pursue, and need to follow the relevant stream in school (Khattab, 2018).

Research by Thompson (2018) indicated that learners from low socioeconomic backgrounds perform poorly compared to those from higher socioeconomic backgrounds. This outcome is due to several factors, such as not having an academic-friendly environment at home or parents not being able to provide the resources for things such as schoolbooks for the child to succeed at school (Thompson, 2018). Another study by Abdu-Raheem (2015) indicates a correlation between parents' educational level and the learner's motivation in high school. Family support is crucial for a child to perform well in school. A family can be supportive by assisting the child to complete their homework, motivating a positive attitude towards the teachers and school, and showing great interest in the child's education (Okten, 2016). Regarding our understanding of what constitutes academic success or performing well in school, York et al. (2015, p. 5) define academic success as "academic achievement, attainment of learning objectives, acquisition of desired skills and competencies, satisfaction, persistence, and post-college performance". Most schools measure academic success in terms of promotion to the next grade.

Support is a complex construct. According to Suldo et al. (2009), social support is a multidimensional construct that involves four types of support: emotional, instrumental, appraisal and informational. Emotional support is defined by trust and love, and includes communications of empathy and care. Instrumental support involves tangible assistance and presence such as one's time, skills, services or even money when the child is in need. Appraisal support refers to "providing evaluative feedback on behaviour, for instance, critical assessment (whether positive or negative) of the child's performance and suggestions for improvement" (Suldo et al., 2009, p. 68–69). Informational support is characterised by providing guidance, advice or information that can help to solve a problem. Within each context of child development (whether family, school, community or social), all forms of support are important. It is therefore not surprising that all four dimensions of support tend to be lumped into one definition of support.

METHODOLOGY

A qualitative research methodology was adopted using complementary research methods, namely a questionnaire and semi-structured interviews. According to Creswell (2014), qualitative researchers view reality through multiple lenses and gather multiple forms of evidence. The study followed an interpretivist paradigm influenced by phenomenology (Mack,

2010). An interpretive paradigm assumes multiple realities with the perception that a single phenomenon could have multiple interpretations. Phenomenology, on the other hand, aims to describe research phenomena as they manifest to understand them while focusing on the subjective interpretation of human experiences (Chan et al., 2016).

The primary method of data collection was semi-structured interviews because they are known to generate rich, in-depth data from a relatively small sample of participants (Creswell, 2014). Twelve (n = 12) adolescents participated in these semi-structured interviews, while eight teachers (n = 8) completed a self-constructed survey questionnaire. Subject teachers for the Grade 8 and Grade 9 learners from two Quintiles 1–3 schools in the Mamelodi township of Pretoria, South Africa, were requested to complete the questionnaire for the 12 learners selected for the interviews. The questionnaire required these teachers to evaluate the academic and social behaviour of the learners blindly, as well as confidentially.

Due to their being professionals and having knowledge of assessment, the teachers were requested to complete the questionnaire and allocate an average score (as a percentage) based on the overall performance of the learners' school-related behaviour (Mampane, 2010). It was assumed that teachers might lack knowledge of the learners' coping skills and behaviour in the home and community environment, but that they would have the knowledge to assess the overt (and possibly covert) behaviour of the learners – especially concerning their academic performance. Teachers used a Likert-type-scale questionnaire (see Table 1) to evaluate the academic resilience of learners. This learning behaviour scale, which was in English and consisted of 20 items in the form of a five-point Likert-type scale, was developed to address the essential criteria of resilience (Mampane, 2010). In most cases, two questions covered one criterion, some were designed in the negative to measure the consistency and dependability of the teachers' answers to encourage objectivity and discourage adherence to a particular response style (Terre Blanche et al., 2006, p. 294). Table 1 presents an example of one completed questionnaire of the 12 participants.

The research question explored the following: What are the perceptions of academic resilience by Senior Phase learners and teachers from low socioeconomic schools? In the interviews, the learners were asked the question: If you have to give yourself an academic score (as a percentage) based on your overall performance, how would you score yourself? This information was important to measure the learners' perceived academic performance. Learners were interviewed and teachers were asked to respond to the questionnaire.

Ethical considerations

Permission to conduct the research was obtained from the Provincial Department of Basic Education, and ethical clearance was granted by the university before the initiation of the study. Permission, in the form of informed consent and assent from participants, is key in social research, especially to gain clarity and confirm that there was no deception (Braun & Clarke, 2013; Creswell, 2014). Informed consent and assent demonstrate respect for the participants in the research. The following principles and ethical considerations were adhered to in the study:

confidentiality and anonymity, protection from harm, referral to a social worker for emotional support should that be needed, and the right of participants to withdraw at any stage of the research (Creswell, 2014).

THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE

The 2008 academic resilience model of Silas Casillas and its four dimensions of academic resilience were used to gain insight into teachers' and learners' perceptions of academic resilience (Sandoval-Hernandez & Cortes, 2012). Since the original work of Silas Casillas was published in Polish and thus inaccessible to me as a researcher, only secondary works were used to access the theory. The model explores factors that learners from adverse and detrimental developmental contexts employ to experience academic resilience. These factors were incorporated in the data-collection tools used in this study, i.e. the teachers' questionnaire and the research question put to the learners during the interviews.

The academic resilience model also borrows from Bronfenbrenner's systemic theory to group the data into the four dimensions of personal, family, school and community factors. According to Sandoval-Hernandez and Cortes (2012), as well as Shah and Thomas (2016), the personal dimension, which constitutes self-confidence and effort or motivation, is essential for the process of resilience, and is mostly nourished and supported by the family dimension. Similar to the family dimension, within the school dimension of resilience, the learner accesses emotional support from the teacher and peers (Shah & Thomas, 2016). These authors further confirm that educational resilience works because of the manifested determination of the individual, i.e. the personal dimension.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

Teachers were requested to use the Likert-type scale to score learners in terms of their perceived academic behaviour at school. The teachers' scores on the questionnaire, compared to the learners' scores on the scales *Always* and *Very often*, were percentage-wise scored higher by teachers (80–70%) for the following questions (variables): 2, 3, 5, 6, 8, 10, 12, 14, 16, 18, 19, and 20 (see Table 1). The rating *Sometimes* was used mostly with questions 4, 13 and 17. The ratings *Rarely* and *Never* were selected for items 1, 7, 9, 11, 13, 15, 16 and 17, often for learners who were scored lower percentages by teachers (60–40%).

Table 1: *Example of scoring the learning behaviour scale: Teachers*

QUESTIONS	Always	Very often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
1. The learner is afraid to attempt new things.	1	2	3	4	5
2. The learner chooses positive role models.	5	4	3	2	1
3. The learner performs beyond what is expected, i.e. extends him or herself.	5	4	3	2	1
4. The learner has no adult support.	1	2	3	2	1
5. The learner is able to utilise support provided to him/her.	5	4	3	2	1
6. The learner does the work required independently.	5	4	3	2	1
7. The learner is unable to work well with other learners.	1	2	3	4	5
8. The learner likes to be in control of things.	5	4	3	2	1
9. The learner is not afraid to attempt new things.	5	4	3	2	1
10 The learner uses different strategies to reach a solution.	5	4	3	2	1
11 The learner is not performing to his/her full potential.	1	2	3	4	5
12 The learner gets support from home.	5	4	3	2	1
13 The learner is afraid to explore new opportunities.	1	2	3	4	5
14 The learner likes to succeed.	5	4	3	2	1
15 The learner lacks future aspirations	1	2	3	4	5
16 The learner lacks motivation.	1	2	3	4	5
17 The learner cannot be trusted by his peers.	1	2	3	4	5
18 The learner has a positive influence on others.	5	4	3	2	1
19 The learner shows potential for a bright future.	5	4	3	2	1
20 The learner has some guts.	5	4	3	2	1

Teachers' questionnaire scores were consistent with the overall percentage they gave learners. They also appeared to use the questionnaire items to motivate the score given (see Table 2 for the academic resilience percentage teachers assigned to the learners). Table 2 shows that teachers' scores for academic resilience are dispersed over a range between 84 and 47%. Learners 4 and 8 – both in Grade 8, aged 13 and 14 years, respectively – were scored at 80% and 84%. These learners also scored themselves higher at 88% and 100%, both indicating that they receive support from family, teachers, friends and other adults in the community. Four of the five learners (learners 3, 7, 9, 10 and 12), who were scored at 70+%, scored themselves 80+% (with Learner 7 scoring 100%). The only exception was Learner 12, who scored himself at 62%. All the learners indicated adult support and family support in their lives, with some also indicating school support. Learner 12, who scored himself at 62% on academic performance, conceded to having academic problems. However, it seems the teacher saw the best in the learner because of the 77% given to him. The teachers' highest ranking was 84% compared to the learners' 100%, while the lowest ranking was 47%, compared to the learners' 62%. Two learners (learners 2 and 6) received a score of 60+% for academic resilience from teachers. However, since Learner 2 saw herself as academically successful and resourceful, with support from family, friends and teachers, she scored herself at 100% for academic resilience. Learner 6 scored himself at 62%, which correlates well with the teacher's score. What was concerning, though, was that Learner 6 perceived he had no support in his environment, and rejection was highlighted as one of his risk factors. Two learners (1 and 11) received academic resilience scores of 58% and 59% from their teachers, whereas Learner 1 scored himself at 88% and Learner 11 scored herself at 68%. Both learners indicated they had talents and family support. Learner 5, who received an academic resilience score of 47% (the lowest score), assigned herself a score of 68%. The learner saw herself as being academically competent with self-confidence and supportive friends.

Table 2: Risk and protective factors per interviewed learner and overall percentage score for academic resilience

Learner	Age	Gender	Grade	Risk factors inferred from interview and questionnaire (teacher evaluation)	Protective factors inferred from interview and questionnaire	Overall percentage by teacher	Overall percentage by learner
1	16	M	9	Divorce, parental rejection (father), poverty, overcrowding (grandmother's place), academic problems (failed Grade 8), corporal punishment (school), separation from siblings (sister).	Talents (soccer and sprinting). Family support.	58%	88%
2	15	F	9	Unemployment, poverty, anxiety in heterosexual interactions, concern over parents, poor study habits and time management. Unsafe environment.	Support (aunt, friend, teachers, and family). Resourcefulness. Academic success.	67%	100%
3	17	M	9	Illegitimacy, poor stepparent relations, migration, academic problems, unemployment (aunt and mother), cultural demands (circumcision versus school demands) and need to belong (establish identity). Risk-taking behaviour (gambling).	Support (father, granny, aunt, teachers and family friend). Leadership role.	75%	100%
4	13	F	8	Death (mother), conflict relations (father), poverty (unemployed granny), corporal punishment (school). Violent neighbourhood.	Support (family, friends, teacher). Sense of humour, sports (community). Awards (sports).	80%	88%
5	14	F	9	Parental death (mother), death (sibling), poverty, unemployment, pregnancy (sibling), rejection (sibling rejection, peer rejection and family rejection).	Academic competence, supportive friends, dreams. Self-confidence.	47%	68%
6	17	M	8	Poverty, single parenting, unemployment, peer rejection (bullies), academic problems, punitive	Talent, dreams, religion, employment.	62%	65%

				measures (school and home: corporal punishment), conduct problems.			
7	13	F	8	Unemployment, poverty, traumatic experience (sister's burn accident; violent death of friend: murder).	Support (teachers, family, peers, friends, church), religion, academic success.	73%	100%
8	14	M	8	Maths problems, peer rejection and pressure (bullies), drugs. Dangerous neighbourhood (bullied), unruly class behaviour (disruption of class). Corporal punishment.	Talents (drama, drawing, soccer, cricket), support (family, friends, teachers).	84%	100%
9	14	M	8	Corporal punishment (school), family discord (parental conflicts and fights).	Emotional support (aunt, friends, girlfriend), talents (gardening), corporal punishment.	73%	89%
10	18	F	9	Academic problems, poverty, unemployment, single parenting, alcohol abuse (mother), lack of stable residence, rejection by family, emotional abuse (mother).	Religious beliefs, support (sister, friends, priest).	75%	89%
11	15	F	8	Death (two aunts), single parent. Unemployment, poverty. Corporal punishment (school).	Talents (braids hair for money), support (family, teachers, friends).	59%	68%
12	17	M	9	Death: parents (both) and siblings (two), poverty, academic problems, corporal punishment (school), truancy, peer rejection.	Family support, talents, academic problems.	77%	62%

With regard to the presence of risk and protective factors in their environment, learners were able to name a few (see Table 3). Although learners focused on family, community and school risks, the following risks were mentioned five times or more during the interview: parental neglect, bad parental influence, lack of family support, lack of security at school and parental unemployment. Most of the risks mentioned above manifested in the family environment, which is the learner's immediate environment. Unemployment and lack of family support were mentioned 80+%. Research has shown that learners with loving, caring and supportive parents tend to achieve higher grades at school (Crawford, 2006). When asked about

the risk factors to their academic resilience and success, learners mentioned only two risks more than ten times: inability to pass Mathematics and poor teacher-learner relationships. These two risks are teacher related. According to Hughes et al. (2008, p. 2), students who experience "teacher-student interactions characterised by high levels of warmth and support or low levels of conflict gain more in achievement".

Learners accredited their academic success to various factors, including individual factors. The latter illustrate their own initiative in taking control of their lives, taking responsibility for their academic success and being proactive in accessing the resources available. The following factors were mentioned more than five times as being significant to the academic success of learners: being disciplined, seeking further academic information, seeking academic support from friends, seeking teacher support, seeking academic support from home, having self-confidence, working hard and working as a team. The above indicates what is within the learners' control. However, learners viewed factors significant to their academic success, but outside their control – and within the teacher's control – as good teacher-learner relations and teachers' ability to teach well. Furthermore, the attributes mentioned have a positive impact on academic achievement and can assist learners in having self-esteem, staying motivated and becoming resilient (Crawford, 2006). An individual's attributes can successfully buffer them against academic failure.

Table 3: Clustered risk and protective factors per research question

Research question	Categories and frequency
What are the risk factors in your environment?	• Accident in the family (2) • ***Bad learner-to-learner relationship (6)*** • ***Bad parental influence (6)*** • Carelessness (1) • Death of a parent (4) • Divorce (3) • Fear of the unknown (2) • Fighting between parents (3) • Keeping wrong friends • ***Lack of family support (14)*** • ***Lack of security at school (16)*** • Loss of hope (2) • Bullying (3) • ***Parental unemployment (11)*** • Parental neglect (5) • Peer pressure (3) • Poor accommodation (3) • Poverty (3) • Security challenges (2)

Research question	Categories and frequency
What are the risks to your academic success?	• Taking drugs (4)
	• Boredom (2)
	• Class indiscipline (1)
	• Failing exams (3)
	• Failure to give maximum attention to academic work (4)
	• Inability of teachers to teach well (1)
	• ***Inability to pass maths (11)***
	• Inability to pass maths and science subjects (2)
	• Lack of diligence (1)
	• Not asking for assistance in school (2)
	• Not attending classes (5)
	• Peer pressure (2)
	Poor teacher-learner relationship (18)
	• Struggling academically (1)
What helps you to succeed academically?	• Asking questions (1)
	• Being ambitious (1)
	• ***Being disciplined (7)***
	• Creating self-interest in school subjects (2)
	• Having self-determination (4)
	• Discipline from teachers (4)
	• Encouragement from teachers (3)
	• Attending extra classes after school (3)
	• ***Good teacher-learner relationship (25)***
	• ***Teachers' ability to teach well (7)***
	• ***Seeking academic support from home (17)***
	• Seeking assistance at school and at home (1)
	• Seeking assistance from teacher (1)
	• ***Seeking further academic information (6)***
	• ***Seeking academic support from friends (8)***
	• ***Seeking teachers' support (6)***
	• ***Having self-confidence (15)***
	• ***Working hard (28)***
	• ***Working as a team (6)***
	• Planning not to fail (1)
Silences	• Access and use of technology or technology is not viewed as a resource (protective factor) or a risk factor

DISCUSSIONS

The theoretical framework adopted in this study, Silas Casillas's Model of Academic Resilience, as discussed by Sandoval-Hernandez and Cortes (2012), is defined by the four dimensions of academic resilience: personal, family, school and community (environment). The learners in this study identified their risk and protective factors in these four dimensions. In most instances, the risks were externalised, while the protective factors were internalised. Learners could directly link the risks to an external system that disempowered them, while the protective factors indicated their abilities and resilience. The most frequently mentioned risk (mentioned 16 times) (see Table 3) involved a *lack of security at school*, showing that lack of safety is a huge concern to learners. According to Kutsyuruba et al. (2015, p. 103), "school climate, safety and well-being of students are important antecedents of academic achievement". Learners in this sample had concerns about their safety in school, which could also indicate a lack of safety in their community, as schools are a microcosm of their communities.

Student achievement is an important outcome in the education system. Learners therefore indicated *poor teacher-learner relationship* (18 times), *bad learner-to-learner relationship* (six times) and *inability to pass Mathematics* (11 times) as deterrents to their academic success. The three risk factors were directly linked to the school and classroom climate, the quality of teaching and learning, the well-being of learners, and the relationship with teachers and their peers. The instructional programme of mathematical teaching and learning was of great concern to learners and thus detrimental to their academic resilience. This risk was beyond their control and could only be resolved by quality teaching, which is seen as missing. Kutsyuruba et al. (2015) believe that maintaining a strong academic focus, good staff performance and morale, and establishing a positive school climate can enhance and improve student achievement. Support from the classroom teacher is an important indicator of student success (Suldo et al., 2009). Furthermore, positive teacher-student relationships showing respect, support and being valued by the teachers are key to student success (Suldo et al., 2009). Thus, Jowkar et al. (2011) define academic resilience as the ability to bounce back from low academic performance and alienation. It gives positive prospects to learners experiencing risk in their learning and school environment.

Within the family context, learners focused more on their parents. The identified risks were *bad parental influence* (six times), *lack of family support* (14 times) and *parental unemployment* (11 times). All these risks were related to parenting and low socioeconomic family background (unemployment). Parents were viewed as the responsible individuals who can harm the learner's academic success, as learners require strong support from their parents. Based on the above findings, it can be concluded that family support gives learners a sense of control over their success or failure in school. A study by Rojas (2015), which explored how family and environmental factors can foster academic resilience, found that, although having a supportive family can foster academic resilience, other family risk factors can negatively impact children's academic resilience. The risk factors mentioned above are examples of how family

risk can impede the academic success of learners. The link between low socioeconomic family background and poor academic success is also shown by Yeung and Li (2019), who indicated that children from low socioeconomic status or dysfunctional families tend to have lower academic performance and may drop out of school early. Parental support influences how children perform and participate in the classroom (Okten, 2016). Ruholt et al. (2015) define parental support as being emotionally there for your child and enabling your child to be dependent on you as a parent whenever the child needs to do so. A study by Shahzad et al. (2015) revealed that children who are guided and supported by parents do better in school than those who are supported less by their parents.

Learners are considered academically resilient if they can maintain their high level of achievement, regardless of any stressful challenges they come across that may negatively impact their performance in school (Martin & Marsh, 2006). Regarding what they require to succeed academically, the learners in the current study looked to themselves for answers. The focus was more personal (internal) than external, with a sense of ownership and internal locus of control. With the risk factors mentioned above, the locus of control was external. The question motivated them to find positives in their family, school and environment. In the absence of support, they took the initiative to seek support; thus, they took charge and engaged with their environment to find solutions to their problems. Their responses were as follows: *being disciplined* (seven times), *working as a team* (six times), *working hard* (28 times)*, having self-confidence* (15 times)*, seeking teacher support* (six times)*, seeking academic support from friends* (eight times), *seeking further academic information* (eight times), *seeking academic support from home* (17 times), *teacher's ability to teach well* (seven times), *and good teacher-learner relationship* (25 times)*.* Anghel (2015) defines academic resilience as an indicator of how well learners adjust in school and is a significant predictor of class participation and motivation to study. These protective factors indicate the positive adjustment of learners. It is important to understand that a learner's academic resilience can be influenced by different factors, such as having supportive parents at home and being present in class and participating (Sinay, 2018).

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The learners in this study perceived academic resilience to be key to their academic success, and identified risks that were detrimental to their academic resilience within their family, school and environmental contexts. In line with the definition of academic resilience of Sinay (2018) as the ability to overcome learning difficulties and bounce back, the learners identified individual strengths that can assist them in achieving academic success. The study's findings showed that it is difficult for learners from disadvantaged family backgrounds to succeed academically. This may be because learners encounter academic and social challenges daily, whether in their academic space, home or community (Kader & Abad, 2017). Although the challenges put them at risk of low achievement at school, academically resilient students were able to adjust regardless of the hardships they might come across (Kader & Abad, 2017). None of the learners in this study

indicated technology as a risk or protective factor. This might be because their schools are not using technology resources for teaching and learning.

It is recommended that this study be used as a pilot for a bigger study to involve more learners (quantitatively) and teachers to explore the concepts of academic resilience, academic success and low socioeconomic status. More research is needed in this field, especially in contexts where the quality of teaching and learning is poor.

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