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**Exploring the identities of final-year student-teachers: Narratives of
teaching practice**

A dissertation presented by:

Arthi Maharaj

215038326

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University of KwaZulu-Natal, Edgewood Campus

Supervisor: Dr. Vusi Msiza

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DECLARATION

I, **Arthi Maharaj**, hereby declare that:

The research reported in this dissertation is my original research and where the work of others has been used, it has been appropriately cited and referenced. This dissertation has not been submitted for any degree or examination at any other university.



Arthi Maharaj

Researcher

Dr Vusi Msiza

Supervisor

DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this thesis to my parents, Navin and Renita, who have been my continuous source of support and inspiration throughout my academic journey, and to my sisters, Kirti and Sristi, thank you for always being there for me, celebrating my successes and providing comfort during setbacks. Your love and belief in me have been the driving force behind my achievements.

Thank you for your continuous support and guidance.

I love you always.

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ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

Abbreviation/ Acronym	Definition
B. Ed	Bachelor of Education
Covid-19	Coronavirus Disease 2019
HEI	Higher Education Institution
MRTEQ	Minimum Requirements for Teacher Education Qualifications
TEI	Teacher Education Institution
TP	Teaching Practice
UKZN	University of KwaZulu-Natal

ABSTRACT

There exists extensive research on the practices of student-teachers, the language barriers they experience, reflection and stressors related to teaching practice (hereafter referred to as TP). However, the phenomenon of student-teachers' identities in higher education has been studied minimally. The focus of this study is to explore the extent to which TP shapes the professional identity of student-teachers. For example, one's multiple inherent identities, their home context and family dynamics are just a few of the factors that shape the type of person that they become. Similarly, the theoretical knowledge which a student-teacher acquires from a Higher Education Institution (hereafter referred to as HEI), the contexts in which they live and learn, and their personal values and beliefs, will play a role in determining the type of teacher that they become. In this study, narrative inquiry was used as the research methodology, and I used two methods of data generation. The first data generation method was letter writing and the second was individual interviews. The study was conducted at the time when there were still Covid-19 restrictions. Due to the Covid-19 safety protocols, letters and interviews were conducted electronically (letters were emailed and interviews took place via an online platform). The study was conducted at a selected HEI within KwaZulu-Natal; the data sample consisted of six participants, of which all were final year BEd. students who had completed their final TP. The study adopted Sheldon Stryker's identity theory as its theoretical framework. The theory assisted with understanding how identities are constantly constructed, deconstructed and reconstructed each time a new experience is encountered. It also shed light on how the most prominent identity role takes priority over other roles as and when a particular situation arises. The findings showed that context impacted identity construction among the student-teachers to a great extent. For example, the student-teachers who were placed in what they experienced as productive and supportive school contexts felt a greater sense of satisfaction and optimism towards the profession as opposed to student-teachers who experienced lack of support and harassment. Another finding was that student-teachers were acting as agents of change subconsciously, as they were not completely aware of their professional identities whilst being out on TP. However, they were able to take decisive measures in order to overcome their challenges. Some student-teachers (participants in this study) also mentioned that they became more aware of their emotions and practices during TP, and that TP was instrumental in helping them to learn more about themselves professionally. Therefore, the findings of the study

provide insights into how student-teachers construct and negotiate their identities in the HEI context.

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CHAPTER ONE: BACKGROUND AND INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

Identity is an essential concept in education that considers the uniqueness of each individual and enables them to act, based on that distinctiveness. Identity has become a focal point in education in recent years, mainly due to factors such as social and cultural changes, educational equity and inclusion (Ullom & Guler, 2023). This also includes social justice movements, learner-centred approaches and advanced educational research (Bremner et al., 2022; Islam et al., 2021). In the context of education and educational research, the identities of learners, teachers and other educational stakeholders are of utmost importance (Reeves, 2018; Steenekamp et al., 2018). In this study, I am seeking to explore the identities of final year Bachelor of Education students at a selected higher education institution (hereafter referred to as HEI) in KwaZulu-Natal, and I am particularly focusing on their narratives from teaching practice (hereafter referred to as TP). This chapter discusses the problem statement and rationale of the study, which will be followed by the focus and purpose. Subsequently, the chapter delves into the objectives, research questions, and significance of the study. Finally, an overview of the study is presented, followed by the conclusion.

1.2 Background and problem statement

In South Africa, being a teacher in a multicultural and multiracial landscape requires one to become more aware of their identity. There are many factors which contributed to the developing interest in teacher identities. Firstly, the apartheid system which officially ended in 1994 had a major impact on education and teacher identity (Maringe & Mavhunga, 2023). There were disparities in resources and opportunities based on race. Furthermore, educational institutions had also been segregated. This had implications for teachers and their identities – for example, the way in which they perceived other race groups, the opportunities available to them and the conditions under which they were working were factors, which would have shaped the type of teachers they became and their interactions with others. Secondly, with South Africa being diverse and multilingual, teachers needed to be able to deal with the complexities of teaching diverse groups of learners. With each curriculum reform there were newer challenges for teachers. Several years later, a professional body for the teaching profession known as the South African Council for Educators (SACE) began to regulate the teaching profession and

provided more support for teachers through skills development programmes. SACE continues to upskill and empower teachers to ensure that their teaching practices are effective and relevant (Baloyi, 2023). This initiative started to provide teachers with more knowledge on the importance of their teacher identity in the profession and the role it plays when they are actively involved in their work environment, as it clearly stipulates all the guidelines for professional and ethical conduct from teachers (South African Council for Educators (SACE), 2022; Baloyi, 2023).

This study focused on exploring the identities of final-year student-teachers. According to the Minimum Requirements for Teacher Education Qualifications (MRTEQ) policy document, integrated school-based learning, includes supervised and evaluated teaching practice, which is a vital part of the B.Ed program (Department of Higher Education and Training, 2015). In a full-time contact program, students are expected to dedicate a minimum of 20 weeks and a maximum of 32 weeks to formally supervised and evaluated school-based practices throughout the four-year duration of the degree. Each year, a maximum of 12 weeks can be allocated to school-based activities, with at least three weeks being consecutive (Department of Higher Education and Training, 2015). In part-time or distance learning programs, students may spend extended periods physically present in schools, especially if they are working as unqualified or under-qualified teachers. However, they are still required to complete the same amount of supervised and evaluated school-based practice (Department of Higher Education and Training, 2015). At the selected HEI, TP has enrolments for two programmes, first for the PGCE which is approximately 975 students and the B.Ed which has approximately 4 975 students. However, in this study I am focusing on B.Ed final year students. The students, regardless of the programme enrolled for, are assessed twice formatively and once summatively by both, the University staff and by their school-based mentor teachers.

The constant global trends have led to various changes in teacher education, such as teachers switching roles from content disseminators to agents of transformation in the classroom (Marino, 2011; Olsen, 2021). As a result, teacher education has evolved to the extent where teacher professional identity has become a focal point in both the policy and practice of teacher-education (Sachs, 2001). The study by Sachs (2001) found that there are two distinct types of teacher professional identity, namely the managerialist discourse and democratic discourse. Sachs (2001) further explains that the managerialist discourse gives rise to the entrepreneurial identity, which promotes qualities such as accountability, efficiency and effectiveness and, on

the other hand, the latter, known as the democratic discourse, give rise to an activist identity. This activist identity provides educators with the opportunity to actively develop their identities and engage with other communities of practice (other people in the teaching profession) (Sachs, 2001). The growing interest in teacher identities developed when the role of emotions, passion and commitment has been explored in teacher education (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009; Leveto, 2016). Therefore, the research area of teacher identities has been explored to a reasonable extent by studying different aspects which contribute to the broader notions of teacher identity. The study by Mockler (2011) acknowledges that teacher professional identity is continuous and dynamic. Varghese et al. (2005) view identity as having a sameness or singularity, whereas, on the other hand, Akkerman and Meijer (2011), Carrier et al. (2017) and Bronkhorst et al. (2013) focus on the multiplicity of identities. Current literature relating to identity claims that identity is a broad concept, and all facets need to be considered when trying to theorise teacher identity (Gupta, 2021; Rahmani & Khatoony, 2020; Gao & Cui, 2021). Rahmani and Khatoony's (2020) study centred around the impact of socio-cultural activities on identity construction. It explored the classroom context to a large extent in detail, paying attention to how different socio-cultural factors affect the construction of teacher identity.

Teaching practice and teacher professional identity remain a contentious area because educational stakeholders interpret the criteria differently. Teachers have their own epistemologies, which they bring along with them to the profession (Kaarlõp et al., 2022). It appears that such factors result in teachers having different expectations from the students they assess. The stakeholders are usually concerned with the student's ability to satisfy a range of criteria during their TP experience. However, there appears to be little understanding of how each student's background influences their ability and their professional teaching identities during TP. The studies by Lampert (1985), Beltman et al. (2015) and Walkington (2005) raise concern about factors which limit student-teachers from fully constructing and establishing their teacher professional identities in the classroom. These factors include varying classroom dynamics, teachers' reflexive practice and students' internalised beliefs. In the context of this study, the selected teacher education institution (TEI) registers students from diverse backgrounds. Some of the identity markers include race, gender, sexual orientation, religion, social class and ethnicity. However, the TP criteria appears to be a standardised one-size-fits-all description of what a professional teacher is. The one-size-fits-all assessment criteria do not consider different factors that are at play in the construction of teacher identities during TP. Factors such as gender, sexual orientation and religion are also in effect during the overall TP

experience. For instance, male and female student-teachers experiences may differ. Some schools may perceive male student-teachers as being strong and having greater classroom control as opposed to the female student-teachers. Secondly, some schools do not take into account the student-teachers' sexual orientation. For instance, schools with strong cultural ethos may not be comfortable to allow a student-teacher who engage in same-sex relations into their school environment although the school's decision is unconstitutional in South Africa. Lastly, schools with strong religious beliefs may be in conflict with other religious beliefs. For instance, schools with staunch Islamic values and ethos may prioritise their values and ethos at the expense of other religious beliefs of other cultural groupings.

1.3 Rationale

The rationale of a study refers to the researcher's intention regarding their topic and significance of their study (Vithal & Jansen, 2010). My experiences as a Bachelor of Education Honours student stirred a sense of interest within me to further research the way in which TP assessments affect the construction of student-teachers' identities. TP is a critical component of the Bachelor of Education degree in the selected institution, and, to graduate, students must undergo four years of practical experience in the classroom. Exploring the identities of student-teachers is also essential because student-teachers are young individuals who can contribute their fresh perspectives and insights to the study and the broader scholarship. After completing their final TP, student-teachers have thorough contextual understanding of the classroom dynamics. They are also immersed in real-life classrooms, where they gain first-hand experience of all the challenges which teachers face. During TP, student-teachers are consciously in the process of reflecting on their own beliefs, practices and experiences. The intense reflective process develops the professional identity of student-teachers (Pinnegar & Lay, 2023). The student-teachers' practical experience from TP is, therefore, useful to gain insight into their identity construction process. Hence, engaging student-teachers in the process of teacher identity awareness and construction will bring about more relevant and authentic knowledge to the fore, drawing from current contexts in the South African classroom.

This study will contribute to the scholarly literature on the phenomenon of identity construction in relation to TP. From my experiences of having undergone TP, one of the reasons for the gap in this field may be that institutions conduct TP differently and the criteria may vary in each institution. In this study I am not seeking to compare teacher education institutions. I am

exploring in-depth the phenomenon of identity construction in relation to TP in one teacher education institution.

South African classrooms consists of a diverse and multicultural landscape. This implies that student-teachers need to become more aware of their identities as well as the identities of other stakeholders in the school environment – such stakeholders include learners, colleagues, parents, and other members of staff.

1.4 Focus and purpose of the study

This study focuses on the identity construction of final year BEd. student-teachers. The purpose of the study was to understand how student-teachers construct their professional identities. The study can guide mentor teachers, supervisors, and teacher educators in providing effective guidance and support to student-teachers during their TP.

1.5 Objectives of the study

The objectives of this study were:

1. To explore the narratives of final-year student-teachers' understandings of their identities from teaching practice.
2. To explore how the student-teachers negotiated their professional identities during their final teaching practice.

1.6 Research questions

The overarching research question which informed the entire study was:

- a) What are the factors that influence the professional identity construction among student-teachers during their final teaching practice?

The specific research questions of this study were:

1. What are final-year student-teachers' understandings of their identities from teaching practice?
2. How do student-teachers negotiate their professional identities during their final teaching practice?

1.7 Significance of the study

The topic of student-teachers' identities in education has gained momentum in recent years. There has been quite a bit of research focusing on TP, teaching and learning, student success and engagement, access and equity issues and global education (Marino, 2011; Browne, 2012; Kim, 2015; Klassen & Dirksen, 2014). Though there has been some research on student-teachers' identities and the pressures which student-teachers undergo during TP, there are still gaps within the existing literature. This study is of significance because it focuses on student-teachers' first-hand experience of their identity construction.

The study is also significant because it will change the landscape of teaching. This study will be beneficial to student-teachers because, once they acquire a thorough understanding of their identity (both personal and professional), they will benefit by starting to know themselves better (Rinne et al., 2023) – this helps them to become more confident in the work environment and it also provides them with a clear perspective of their teaching goals. When the student-teacher has constructed their own professional identity, they can then connect with their learners and staff within their work environment, which will enable them to build strong relationships with empathy and dedication (Narinasamy & Logeswaran, 2023). Identity awareness will also help student-teachers to embrace and promote diversity.

1.8 Chapter overview

This section presents an overview of the chapters in the study and the study consists of six chapters.

Chapter one:

Chapter one of this thesis serves as the introductory chapter, providing essential background information of the study. Within this chapter, a comprehensive overview of the research context and the underlying rationale is presented. The chapter begins with an exploration of the problem statement, clearly articulating the research questions. Furthermore, the chapter offers a thorough explanation of the rationale behind the study, outlining the significance and relevance of the chosen research topic. This includes a discussion of the gaps in existing literature, highlighting the need for further investigation. The chapter also elucidates the specific focus and scope of the study, delineating the boundaries and parameters within which the research will be conducted. In addition to clarifying the focus, the chapter explicitly states the purpose of the study and its specific goals and objectives.

Chapter two:

Chapter two presents the literature review of the study which locates the relevance of the study both nationally (in South Africa) and internationally. It highlights the extent to which the identity of student-teachers has been researched and compares existing literature to current student-teacher identity challenges to identify the gaps in the literature.

Chapter three:

In this chapter, an in-depth discussion of the theoretical framework employed in the study is presented. The selected theory forming a framework in the study is based on Stryker's identity theory (Stryker & Burke, 2000). By adopting this theory, the study aims to gain insights into the process of identity construction and negotiation among student-teachers as they engage in practical teaching experiences during their TP at schools. Using Stryker's identity theory provides a valuable lens through which to explore how student-teachers navigate and shape their identities within the educational context. The theory offers a comprehensive framework that considers the interplay between personal identities, social roles, and the broader social structures in which individuals operate. The chapter delves into the key concepts and principles of Stryker's identity theory, highlighting its relevance and applicability to the study's research objectives. By utilizing this theoretical framework, the study aims to shed light on the intricate process of identity formation and negotiation that occurs among student-teachers during their TP experiences. Through this exploration, a deeper understanding of the factors that shape student-teachers' identities and their implications for their teaching practice can be gained.

Chapter four:

In chapter four, the research methodology is comprehensively outlined. The chapter delves into the chosen methodology, namely narrative inquiry, as well as the research approach, which is qualitative research. It covers the methods employed to generate data, including the use of letters and semi-structured interviews. Additionally, the chapter addresses key aspects such as trustworthiness, data analysis approaches, and ethical considerations that were taken into account during the study.

Chapter five:

In this chapter, the focus is on the data analysis and findings derived from the study. The primary analytical approach employed in this research is a combination of both narrative and thematic

analysis, which allows for a systematic exploration of the data in order to identify and interpret meaningful themes that emerge from the narratives. Thematic analysis involves a comprehensive examination of the data, so as to identify patterns, recurring ideas, and significant concepts within the participants' accounts. During this process, researcher engages in a rigorous process of coding, categorizing, and organizing the data based on these emergent themes. This process involves reading and re-reading the narratives, extracting relevant excerpts, and assigning descriptive labels or codes to capture the essence of each theme. The analysis is not limited to surface-level descriptions but delves deeper into the underlying meanings and interpretations conveyed by the participants. It seeks to uncover the nuances, complexities, and multiple dimensions of the data, allowing for a comprehensive exploration of the research question or objectives. Throughout the chapter, the themes that were identified are presented and discussed, providing rich and detailed descriptions supported by quotations or excerpts from the narratives.

Chapter six:

In chapter six, the study presents a comprehensive conclusion. This chapter encompasses several key elements, including a summary of the main findings, a discussion of the study's limitations, and the discussion of the implications for various aspects such as policy, practice, and future research. In addition to the main findings, the chapter acknowledges and discusses the limitations of the study. It critically reflects on the methodological constraints, sample size or composition, data collection procedures, or other factors that may have influenced the results. By recognizing the limitations, transparency is demonstrated and acknowledges the boundaries within which the conclusions should be interpreted.

1.9 Conclusion

This chapter discussed the background and introduction of the study. The chapter started with the presentation of the background, problem statement, focus and purpose of the study. Thereafter, I presented the rationale, key research questions, objectives, as well as the significance of the study. The next chapter will present the literature review of the study and provide a critical account of the existing literature on the phenomenon of student-teachers' identities as well as more insight into how this study will relate to or extend on the existing literature.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

A literature review can be described as an evidence-based, in-depth analysis of a particular subject (Winchester & Salji, 2016). The purpose of a literature review is to put a research study into the context of previous research by showing how it connects to the existing studies (Bertram & Christiansen, 2014). In this section, I will explain the concept of identity, the different notions of identity from existing literature and, focus particularly on personal and professional identities. I then discuss some of the major problems identified by scholars and unpack the gaps which I found in the existing literature and lastly, I discuss how my study will contribute to the existing literature in this field.

2.2 Understanding the concept of identity

Existing literature has highlighted that identity is a broad concept which cannot be defined completely (Tatum, 2000; Beijaard et al., 2004; Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009). This section of the literature review focuses on the existing ideologies pertaining to identity. Identity is about how we perceive ourselves in a social context, and it is also the process of considering the perspective of others about us (Danielewicz, 2001). Identity can be explained as the very core of who we are as human beings and the roles we enact at any given time and place (Smolicz, 1981; Brubaker & Cooper, 2000; Gee, 2000; Beijaard et al., 2004). Identity explores a simple question: Who am I? (Gee, 2000; Tatum, 2000). This question is the starting point in understanding oneself and the unique features which make them different in comparison to others (Tatum, 2000). Identity includes the inherent qualities that an individual possesses which make him/her unique (Browne, 2012). The study by Tatum (2000) mentions that identity is a complex concept since it is influenced by one's personal characteristics, social, cultural, and political contexts. This implies that human beings have multiple identities. Gee (2000) mentions that there are four perspectives to understanding identity. These perspectives are: 1) nature-identity – from a particular state; 2) institution identity – taking a particular position; 3) discourse identity – possessing an individual trait and 4) affinity identity – from experiences. This study will focus on institution identity and the different positions that individuals take whilst they are in the process of developing their professional identity and having to conform to certain institutional norms (Gee, 2000). For example, though student-teachers at the selected

institution may possess the creativity to design their own documentation, such as lesson plans and forecasts, they ultimately ought to conform to all the guidelines and norms provided by the institution.

The personal characteristics of identities are informed by how individuals view themselves and how they perceive others (Browne, 2012). Olsen (2008) affirms that personal characteristics considers features such as personhood and persistence. Personhood focuses on what makes one a person rather than a non-person – there must be a degree of awareness about humanity within each individual; it also focuses on how people function and what makes them who they are (Jean, 2002). An example of personhood in the context of this study would be the student-teachers' compassion and humanistic approach which may help them to understand the dynamics of the teaching profession to a deeper extent. A humanistic approach in this context is necessary, because the student-teachers during TP interact with people from different levels, such as learners, staff at the school, and the University. As a result, the best way for student-teachers to understand these types of interactions would be to understand the different dynamics of each person they interact with (Freire, 1985; Khatib et al., 2013; Firdaus & Mariyat, 2017). According to scholars such as Kiggundu and Nayimuli (2009), teacher educators (school mentor teachers) need to embark on a journey to understand future teachers and assist them in the creation of their professional identities. Several teacher educators come from a background of education from kindergarten to high school making them suitable for the task (Williams et al., 2012). Student-teachers are new to the system and in the midst of the chaotic school systems, they are still pursuing their own identity. By acquiring adequate guidance from their mentor teacher, it will assist them greatly in negotiating their own identities and also in gaining more information about the requirements of the teaching profession. Persistence in identities is centred around the determination that drives one to continue to exist despite one's shortcomings (Olsen, 2008). This implies that human beings have a preconceived notion that they shall continue to live their whole lifespan with the same identity – for example, a person who believes that he/she will remain affluent forever.

Social contexts can give rise to social identities – the Greek philosopher, Socrates, once mentioned that knowing yourself serves as a foundation for a strong sense of self and ironically, knowing oneself can lead to knowing one's unknown self (Moore, 2014). This statement is profound, as Socrates had identified the importance of self-concept and identity many years prior to these concepts becoming a focal point in education. Identities are constructed in a social

context and the context is structured according to six social factors. These factors, according to Fershtman et al. (1996), include: 1) Social statuses, which refers to the value of a person in a society – for instance, are they wealthy? Educated? Do they belong in the upper, middle, or lower class grouping in society? Prato et al. (2019) state that social statuses can be obtained either through attributes or achievement. Through the attributed status, Prato et al. (2019) imply that individuals gain status from the family lineage or acquaintances, whereas in the achieved status, they earn their status through the work they perform. Having an ascribed status refers to assigning pre-determined societal roles without judging the capabilities of a person, whereas the achieved status depends on the performance of a person. For example, in the era of the monarchy, the family members of kings received stature through the power of the king and not necessarily because of their potential to make decisions. In countries where the traditions of the monarch are still respected, this could be considered as one's birthright, such as the king's son (Fayyaz et al., 2015). The achieved status can be a career status that is achieved through the years of studying and working towards a particular goal. In the context of this study, students will achieve the status of a teacher after undergoing and completing four years of studying teacher education modules. Therefore, this means that ascribed status is a pre-determined status and achieved status is a status which is bestowed upon one after achieving something meritorious. 2) Social roles: this refers to an individual playing a certain character in a particular context and having to perform a specific function in that context (Eder, 2010). Being a parent at home, being a student in college, being a learner in school, being an employee in an organisation, and being a Hindu devotee in a temple are all examples of, but are not limited to, the above-mentioned roles and contexts which shape identities. 3) Social networks: this refers to a social structure made up by a set of social actors whom individuals rely on to connect to a particular society. 4) Social groups and organizations: this refers to the pattern of relationships which exist in society, such as family, businesses, and clubs. The study by Eraut and Hirsh (2010) highlights that people possess capabilities, performance, contexts for work and/or learning, and both informal and formal learning experiences. When various individuals collaborate, it forms a wealth of knowledge which can then be used by each person to explore their ideas to a broader level and to provide newer insights to the discussion. In the context of this study, if student-teachers were to collaborate and share their TP experiences and reflect on the challenges they faced during TP, they can help one another to overcome the issues and also shape their professional teacher identities at the same time. 5) Social institutions: this refers to the structures or methods of social order focused on meeting certain needs, such as government,

family, media, religion, education, and health care. 6) Society: society is made up of all the social factors mentioned previously, and it also encompasses people who live in a definable community and share the same interests.

In relation to social contexts, Mead (1934) particularly highlighted two levels of social structure. The first level consisted of the network of people and their embedded identities – for example, education students have the identity of being a student at university and a student-teacher in the school environment; the second level was the link between larger social structures such as organisations and their interconnectedness to the first level (Mead, 1934) – for example, people from diverse backgrounds may not be able to access the same spaces such as private institutions, due to their own dynamics such as socio-economic challenges. Stets and Burke (2014) mention that social structures can invoke different identity roles in individuals. For instance, a student who works part-time may choose to prioritise their job over their studies. This implies that individuals may choose certain prominent identities over other types, which again reinforces the notion of human beings having multiple identities. According to Stryker and Burke's (2000) initial works, role choices were seen to be a major purpose of identities and the concept of salience was seen to be the commitment to a particular identity role. For instance, as stated earlier in the study, students have many identities other than being students – they may be parents and employees; however, if their child is ill, they may choose to prioritise their parent role over others. The commitment with which they then fulfil the parent identity is referred to as parental role salience.

Culture is characterised according to the background and ethnicity of an individual which is responsible for shaping the attitudes and beliefs of the person. The political aspect may also affect an individual in that capitalist, communist or socialist perspectives will influence the professional identity that one creates. When trying to understand the concept of identity in teacher education, there are two types of identities that need to be understood, namely personal and professional identity (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009; Ivanova & Skara-MincLne, 2016). This study will examine these two types of identities and the extent to which they are interconnected. Some of the questions which one may ask about the interconnectedness of these identities are: 1) how does my identity influence the type of teacher I become? 2) how can I maintain a balance between my personal and professional identities? and 3) to what extent are these two identities interconnected? For example, if the student-teacher is an atheist, should he/she influence the learners and colleagues he/she is working with in the professional

environment to accept his or her beliefs? Would he/she show disregard for other religious practices and cultures? Similarly, if the student-teacher is Muslim and must conform to a certain dress code due to religious practices, how does that impact such a student-teacher who may end up teaching in a school with a Christian ethos and a multicultural landscape of colleagues and learners? In the next section, I discuss literature on personal and professional identities.

2.3 Unpacking different notions of identity from existing literature

The constant global trends have led to various changes in teacher education (Marino, 2011). As a result, teacher education has evolved to the extent where teacher professional identity has become a focal point in both the policy and the practice of teacher-education (Sachs, 2001). Teachers are expected to adapt to the demanding, collaborative and democratic nature of the teaching profession at a rapid pace and, consequently, they often tend to overlook the importance of their role in the profession and the factors which make them unique professionals in their work environment (Hoffman-Kipp, 2008). The study by Sachs (2001) found that there are two distinct types of teacher professional identity, namely the managerialist discourse and democratic discourse. Sachs (2001) further explains that the managerialist discourse gives rise to the entrepreneurial identity, which promotes qualities such as accountability, efficiency and effectiveness, and, on the other hand, the latter known as the democratic discourse gives rise to an activist identity. This activist identity provides educators with the opportunity to actively develop their identities and engage with other communities of practice (other people in the teaching profession). The growing interest in teacher identities developed when the role of emotions, passion and commitment was explored in teacher education (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009; Leveto, 2016; Banerjee et al., 2017). Therefore, the research area of teacher identities has been explored previously by studying different aspects such as focusing on the role of emotions when negotiating one's teacher identity and teachers using their identity awareness in order to be agents of change. The study by Mockler (2011) acknowledges that teacher professional identity is continuous and dynamic. Varghese et al. (2005) view identity as having a sameness or singularity, whereas on the other hand, Akkerman and Meijer (2011); Carrier et al. (2017), and Bronkhorst et al. (2013) focused on the multiplicity of identities, the discontinuity of identity and the social nature of identity. Current literature relating to identity, claims that identity is a broad concept, and all facets need to be considered when trying to theorise teacher identity (Gupta, 2019; Rahmani & Khatoony, 2020; Gao & Cui, 2021). Though Rahmani and Khatoony's (2020) study centred around the impact of socio-cultural activities on

identity construction, it explored the classroom context to a large extent and how different socio-cultural factors affect the teacher's identity construction. The implication of this is that there are many possible perspectives on teacher identity. Thus, given the varied existing research in teacher identities, my study focuses on how student-teachers understand their identities during teaching practice.

2.4 Understanding personal and professional identity

In the context of education, the terms “personal identity” and “professional identity” are used interchangeably. However, the difference between the two terms is seldom defined (Beijaard et al., 2004). The following section defines the two terms – personal identity and professional identity – and aims to provide insight on what the two concepts entail theoretically.

2.4.1 *Personal identity*

Personal identity can be defined as the personal strengths which individuals develop from their prior experiences (Browne, 2012). Educational institutions such as schools and universities also play a major role in the shaping of one's personal identity through the content taught and through the hidden curriculum (García Pérez, 2010). This means that, along with the explicit academic curriculum, which is taught during working hours, there is also an unwritten curriculum which teaches individuals to internalise certain practices that are informed by the school code of conduct and societal norms and values (Wren, 1999; Kamasak et al., 2019). General examples of this includes simple practices which are performed in schools each day such as standing up to greet the teacher. In the context of this study, student-teachers might apply certain hidden aspects when they stand before a class to present a lesson, for example, the varied disciplinary knowledge, the type of academics that taught the student and the context might influence the ways in which one becomes a student-teacher during teaching practice. Another example includes the aspect of professionalism, such as dress code and punctuality. Dress code differs from person to person and is at times affected by the person's internalised cultural or religious beliefs.

2.4.2 *Professional Identity*

Professional identity can be expressed as the beliefs, values, and attitudes which an individual manifests in their professional working environment (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009). Bell and Gilbert (1994) present a framework which posits that teachers assume the role of researcher as

they find value in newer experiences. Teachers ought to also view themselves as learners – this serves as a remedial process which can assist teachers to improve their professional and cognitive development practices (Bell & Gilbert, 1994). These cognitive practices include: 1) evaluating existing practices and beliefs; 2) Locating an input of new information by listening and reading and 3) understanding new knowledge by linking it to existing knowledge (Bell & Gilbert, 1994). These ideas relate to teacher professionalism and can assist teachers towards improving on their professional identities. This section of the study will also discuss teacher professional identity and the factors which enable teachers to construct their identities in the classroom. Danielewicz (2001) asserts that, in order to become a teacher, individuals need to implement an identity to tackle the intricacies of the teaching profession. Scholars such as Arnon and Rachel (2007) and Sfard and Prusak (2005) state that the image of an ideal teacher ought to be conceptualised by individuals themselves. The extent to which teachers develop and critique their own identities determines their success in the profession and the type of teachers they become. This conceptualisation of teacher identities can be drawn from various contexts, experiences and notions. Teacher identity can also be determined socially through collaborative discussions from senior expert teachers, family members and friends, and individually through their own identity roles and experiences (Dollof, 1999; Sfard & Prusak, 2005; Arnon & Rachel, 2007). Some of the other qualities which an ideal teacher should possess include: 1) encouraging learners to think critically; 2) being a wealth of knowledge; 3) punctuality; 4) exceptional administrative and classroom management skills and 5) being well-prepared for all lessons (Virta, 2002). Korthagen (2004) recognises that teachers are agents of change and, whilst being a teacher, teachers need to be willing to embrace the emerging changes. Therefore, it can be deduced that the professional identity of teachers is multi-faceted, and the teacher development process cannot neglect the facets other than the administrative abilities and personality of teachers.

Current literature indicates that, in a changing context and many life circumstances, teachers can have several identities such as social identity, professional identity and co-identity which refers to a teacher's rapport with students, peers, and members of management in shaping and modelling a teacher (Cheung et al., 2014). In the South African context, the study by Khoza (2016) suggests that the construction of teacher professional identity is essential as it enables the student-teacher to understand curriculum visions. Khoza (2016) further states that student-teachers without identity awareness would not be able to fully implement their curriculum visions which is a high risk in teacher education. Teacher education and identity awareness is

necessary to aid teachers in navigating through the Fourth Industrial Revolution (Khoza, 2021). Khoza (2021)'s research also suggests that by fostering awareness and understanding of the Fourth Industrial Revolution impact on teaching practices and identities, teacher education programs can empower teachers to effectively integrate digital technologies into their pedagogical approaches. Through targeted professional development and training initiatives, teachers can acquire the skills and knowledge needed to influence digital tools and platforms for enhanced teaching and learning experiences (Khoza, 2021). Cross and Ndofirepi (2013) highlight that there is a clear distinction between those who teach and choose it willingly as their profession and those who merely regard it as a job. The study by Cross and Ndofirepi (2013) identified that current approaches were falling short and that teacher education programs were not fully addressing the issue of teacher identity construction. Cross and Ndofirepi (2013) also found that teachers had developed different notions toward the profession over a period of time, and factors such as lack of resources, low pay and limited room for professional growth have led to teachers viewing the profession in a negative light. The suggestions provided in Cross and Ndofirepi's (2013) study were: 1) provisioning of incentives for teachers would motivate them to feel more enthusiastic and appreciated as professionals; 2) to incorporate unions into decision-making processes regarding professional development opportunities for teachers and 3) there is a need for a paradigm shift in education to review how teachers knowledge, skills, values and strategies contribute to their development as professionals in the education field.

Côté and Levine (2014) mention that teacher professional identity formation can be approached from three different dimensions: ego, personal and social. The first level is the ego level, which deals with understanding the mental processes which one goes through when they are made aware of their own teacher professional identity. The main idea of this level coincides with Beijaard et al. (2000) and Mitchell's (1997) notion that one's personal identity impacts the way in which one negotiates one's professional teacher identity. Personal identity links to the idea that individuals attach meanings or symbolisms to their experiences which further help them to navigate through their own identity construction (Beijaard et al., 2000; Mitchell, 1997). For example, before stepping into a classroom, teachers already have experiences which shape their personality, and these experiences will determine their attitude towards the profession. In this study, I would like to use the example of two teachers from vastly different contexts: on one hand, teacher (A) may have grown up in a space where most family members are passionate teachers. Such teachers will have a positive outlook towards the profession and are most likely

to teach to the best of their ability due to their intrinsic motivation and support from family members. This will also assist such teachers with professional guidance to approach matters arising in the school environment, either academic or administrative. On the other hand, teacher (B) may come from a background where he/she is the only teacher, and family members may not be able to support him/her due to lack of knowledge of the profession dynamics. As a result, teacher (B) may find him/herself in a frustrating situation. The second level refers to the personal level which is a continuation of one's own intrinsic identity (Côté & Levine, 2014). For example, teachers may become more involved in reflective practices and take note of how they present their lessons, how they can integrate information from their own experiences and relate it to learners. The last level refers to social identity (Côté & Levine, 2014). Social identity refers to how one engages socially and is influenced by social factors. Teacher professional identity can be defined as features that characterise the model teacher and is shaped by the meanings which teachers attach to it (Mitchell, 1997; Beijaard et al., 2000). According to Van Huizen et al. (2005), professional teacher identity is an ongoing process of integrating the personal and professional identities during the process of becoming a teacher. Therefore, personal and professional identities are interconnected. Gee (2014) developed an interesting theory relating to teacher professional development in which he defined *discourse and Discourse* – the same term, written and explained differently to explain teacher identity. According to Gee's (2014) term *discourse*, it represents people such as teachers, learners, and parents, whereas *Discourse* represents the ways in which people interact – for instance, by means of reading, speaking, listening and writing. Gee's (2014) study also mentions that certain expressions can evoke a particular identity role. For example, a teacher can also be a parent or child; however, it is the choice of language which the teacher uses in the professional environment which makes him/her aware of the role-choice at play.

In addition to the above-mentioned points, it is also essential to note teachers previously followed a standard protocol with limited liberty to customise their teaching practices – as a result, content was pre-packaged, and the teachers only had the responsibility of delivering the content to learners without involving their own experiences in the process (Samuel, 2008). At present, teachers are no longer expected to teach with the sole intention of having to disseminate content, rather their professional teacher development is currently being characterised by various identity factors (Samuel, 2008). This indicates that the development of professional identity has become more dynamic over the years.

2.5 Problems identified by scholars in existing literature

When conducting the review of literature, I noted that there were several problems affecting the effective identity construction of both teachers and student-teachers identified by scholars and I discuss them below:

2.5.1 Varying dynamics in the classroom

Every classroom has its own sociological dimensions which student-teachers need to learn and adapt to (Lampert, 1985). Some of these differences include age, gender, culture, class and sexual orientation. Lampert (1985) suggests that student-teachers need to be able to adapt and navigate between these varying conditions.

2.5.2 Student-teacher's and/or teachers internalised beliefs

Student-teachers have their own internalised practices which they have adopted from their personal learning experiences in a teacher education institution (Beltman et al., 2015). This may make them more reluctant to embrace newer teaching methods and advanced subjects – for example, subjects like robotics which are in line with the emerging fourth-industrial revolution. Danielewicz (2001) mentions that individuals must be self-motivated to achieve and develop themselves as teachers and this could possibly be done through engaging in processes of collaboration. This notion is drawn from the idea of creating a strong social identity (Eder, 2010; Stets & Burke, 2014 and Mead, 1934). This implies that the extent to which student-teachers are most likely to perform their best is based on their levels of intrinsic motivation.

2.5.3 Teacher reflection

Teacher reflection refers to the process in which teachers deliberate over their actions and develop methods to overcome their challenges or weaknesses (Howard, 2003). Schön (2017) outlines that teachers are reflective practitioners. Brigden and Purcell (2004) further clarify that the role of a reflective practitioner is to internally examine any issue or factor of concern. These scholars argue that there are eight steps to understanding the functions of a reflective practitioner – the first three of the seven steps focus on reflective practice only and are: 1) awareness – this involves feeling uncomfortable about a certain topic or thought. It may also involve trying to find a solution to a particular dilemma; 2) critical analysis – this involves examining all the pros and cons in order to address the problem or thought in mind; 3) new

perspectives – this step involves acquiring new knowledge from various sources such as additional research or other people. The purpose of this step is to find new methods or notions to resolve the problem. The last five steps focus on the skills required to perform reflective practice and are: 4) self-awareness – this step involves evaluating what gave rise to the problem or becoming aware of how the problem impacted one internally either physically, emotionally or psychologically; 5) description – this involves having the skill to recognise and recollect prominent events. This may entail drawing knowledge from past experiences which lead to similar events or problems; 6) critical analysis - this process entails inspecting prevailing knowledge, challenging theories, imagining and exploring alternatives. Imagining and exploring alternatives also promote the establishment of innovative ideas and originality; 7) synthesis – this entails incorporating new knowledge or experience and making it part of one’s individual knowledge base. However, this step can also endorse the perpetuation of a certain procedure within a particular context at the cost of considering other factors and lastly, 8) evaluation – this is defined as the creation of opinions about the value of something. Both synthesis and evaluation are vital to the advancement of a new perspective. These steps can also be applied to the teaching context as teachers require both the knowledge and skills required to act as reflective practitioners.

Constant reflection is required for student-teachers’ to conscientize themselves about their identities (Walkington, 2005). During the process of teacher education, student-teachers are taught the importance of daily and weekly reflections. Reflection can also be referred to as a valuable life-skill which can help individuals to process their actions and thoughts (Henderson & Gornik, 2007). Karataş and Karaman (2013) posit that the challenges which student-teachers face have recently increased globally due to the constant shifts in the outlook of expertise and teachers’ abilities such as critical thinking and reflection. Teachers are always in the course of developing themselves, hence one’s identity can never be completely mastered (Naidoo, 2013). By exploring and critiquing the dynamics of their work, teachers are always engaged in this developmental process and are constantly creating new identities through dialogue, collaboration, research, and a deep reflection on their practice (Naidoo, 2013). Therefore, student-teachers must engage in effective reflective practices as it will assist them in creating their professional identities.

According to Moonsamy (2011), reflection for teachers can also take place by interacting with past learners whom one has taught over the years. They may remind the teacher of previous learning and teaching strategies which they once employed and were effective in the past. The advantages of conversing with past learners exposes the teacher to the positive or negative experiences the learners had that highlight the teacher's strengths and weaknesses. Moonsamy (2011) also highlights that teachers can remain motivated and more enthusiastic towards their job by evaluating their learners' performance and this can be done by watching young learners work hard and persevere; it also keeps the teacher inspired to keep up to the learners' pace.

2.5.4 Adapting to shifting roles

Student-teachers are often not completely prepared for the transition from student-teacher to teacher. This involves them taking on new responsibilities (Ovens et al., 2016). Taking new responsibilities has been seen to be affecting their role salience as mentioned in Stryker's (2000) theory. Student-teachers must accommodate this new teacher identity and therefore, other identities move further down the hierarchy (Yilmaz & Ilhan, 2017). Each time the student-teacher experiences conflict, a newer part of their identity is being constructed.

2.5.5 Feelings of uncertainty and insecurity

Student-teachers may not be completely prepared for the transition from student-teacher to teacher (Kiggundu & Nayimuli, 2009). This may result in feelings of anxiety, lack of confidence and nervousness (Leveto, 2016). Anxiety is sometimes evident when the student-teacher struggles with the presentation of their lessons in the initial phases of TP. Classroom management and discipline related matters can also be additional stress factors impacting student-teachers and therefore, their identity roles must be amended to adjust to the changes they experience (Oral, 2012). The study by Floden & Clark (1988) highlights some of the uncertainties which teachers experience in the profession – these include: (a) uncertainty in terms of learner performance; (b) uncertainty in terms of actual teaching such as being unsure of whether or not teaching practices are effective and are accommodating all learners; (c) uncertainty about whether learners are achieving the desired outcomes (skills, knowledge and values) from lessons and (d) uncertainty about learning to teach – this point is relevant to student-teachers because they may not be completely sure of what is expected of them from

their assessors such as mentor teachers and university tutors. Along with these essential points about uncertainty in teaching, Floden & Clark (1988) also reiterate Oral's (2012) point about uncertainty regarding classroom management.

2.5.6 Navigating through different identity roles

As mentioned earlier in the study, student-teachers have several identity roles to fulfil (Stryker, 2000) such as being an individual, a child, a sibling, a grandchild, and student. There are also other social factors which impact the identity of the individual, such as neighbourhood and community. It can sometimes be challenging for student-teachers to focus on solely developing their professional identities, especially when there is conflict between other existing identities and the new professional identity which is in the process of being shaped. For example, in the study by Anspal et al. (2018), student-teachers mentioned that their idea of being an ideal teacher involved being thoroughly prepared for each lesson and to make lessons as interactive and original as possible. However, the planning was time-consuming and started to take over their time, leaving very little to no time being dedicated towards other identity roles, such as interacting with family after work (Anspal, 2018).

2.5.7 The Covid-19 pandemic

The Covid-19 pandemic has impacted teachers' identity construction to a great extent. Both nationally and internationally, the lockdown has prevented student-teachers from stepping into the classroom (Lema et al., 2020). This has had a negative impact on first-time student-teachers who required thorough exposure to the classroom dynamics, appropriate mentorship from experienced teachers, and insight into school practices, administration practices and the overall school ethos. Additionally, the pandemic has also led to the other challenges mentioned earlier, such as the lack of reflection or professional identity development (Kim & Asbury, 2020). It is important to note that the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic has had a devastating impact on all professions. Chen et al. (2020) and Pressley (2021) explored the burnout and frustrations which University teachers (hereafter referred to as lecturers) experienced during this period and how it impacted the lecturers' professional identity. The study by Chen et al. (2020) is unique in the sense that it investigated the rapid shift from traditional teaching and learning methods to online teaching and learning methods. The main findings of the study were that lecturers had experienced mental and physical problems (Chen et al., 2020).

Studies by scholars such as Lema et al. (2020) and Kim and Asbury (2020) examined the impact of Covid-19 on student-teachers teaching practice component. The scholars particularly place emphasis on the challenges which student-teachers have faced, especially with having to teach for the first time and not be in a physical school classroom. The study by Kim and Asbury (2020) focused on teachers' experiences of teaching through the pandemic in the United Kingdom and, six major themes emerged: uncertainty, finding a way, worry for the vulnerable, importance of relationships, teacher identity and reflections. The study found that the teachers were under tremendous pressure upon the implementation of the national lockdown in UK. However, since the start of the pandemic the excessive stress associated with online teaching and learning had led to teacher burnout (as mentioned by Chen et al. (2020) earlier) and lower job satisfaction. This has impacted the overall performance of teachers, leaving them with minimal time and energy to evaluate their professional identities and to change their teaching styles. Kim and Asbury (2020) further mentioned that previous studies have mentioned that teaching is a multi-faceted profession which could be characterised by a variety of factors. The scholars claim that the pandemic can be seen in a positive light in the sense that it has brought about many new opportunities for teachers to consider their professional practices and reflect on their new teaching roles which have been implemented since the start of the pandemic. Consequently, teachers can also examine the shift from their existing professional teacher identities to their newly found multi-talented identities.

2.6 Unpacking the gaps and limitations within existing research

As much as identity in education has been identified as a problem, there are still many gaps and limitations which existing research neglects. Studies claim that, to an extent, teaching practice influences identity development amongst student-teachers (Beijaard et al., 2000; Steenekamp et al., 2018). The existing literature in the field of student-teachers' identities places great emphasis on the importance of being aware of one's identity during the process of becoming a teacher (Flores & Day, 2006; Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009). Scholars such as Lampert (1985), Sfard & Prusak (2005) and Grossman et al. (2009) argue that there are still issues that are not fully addressed in the scholarly area of identities in education. As far as professional identity is concerned, existing studies mention that the concept has been defined differently by various scholars or not defined at all (Beijaard et al., 2004). The study by Holland et al. (2001) explored teachers' identity construction from a sociocultural perspective. The main finding of the study was that teachers need to adopt new professional identities to support any new practices which

they implement. Taylor (2017) claims that teacher professional identity is best constructed when teachers themselves assume the role of researchers and lifelong learners. This enables teachers to reflect, research and become more conscious of the practices that impact their identity construction. Experienced teachers place less emphasis on identity and identity construction (Naidoo, 2013). Although they place less emphasis on identities, there are several sources, such as Vähäsantanen (2022), Castro et al. (2022) and Rodrigues and Mogarro (2019), on constructing and negotiating the professional identities of teachers, that show that constructing professional identities is a dynamic process that balances intrinsic and extrinsic expectations as well as gives meaning to teacher roles. Teachers are expected to reflect on their practices and modify their practices as well as their identities. Naidoo's (2013) study shows that experienced teachers are content with their current teaching practices and are not involved in or concerned about their identity negotiation and construction. Teachers also must fulfil their role as curriculum implementers and interpreters. The study by Naidoo (2013) focused on teacher identity and practice in the context of curriculum reform. The study explored the extent to which various curriculum reforms in South Africa have developed and promoted teacher identity over the years. One of the many issues raised by this study is that the curriculum is determined by curriculum developers who are not actively present on the field (classroom), hence decisions made by these curriculum specialists neglect the role of teachers and limit the expansion of their identities (Naidoo, 2013).

New teachers or student-teachers may also find themselves lost in the teaching profession upon realising that teaching practice does not prepare them adequately for their actual teaching responsibilities (Wang & Zhang, 2021; Köksal, 2019; Alhebaishi, 2019). According to Wang and Zhang (2021), Köksal (2019) and Alhebaishi (2019), some of the main challenges which new teachers face include: (1) limited practical experience; for example, at the selected institute, TP is restricted to a four-week and at the time of the data generation phase, TP was allocated four weeks; (2) teaching has an unpredictable nature and as a result, student-teachers are not always fully prepared for the real classroom challenges which await them (Castañeda-Trujillo & Aguirre-Hernández, 2018); (3) understanding and bridging the gap between theory and practical teaching (Null, 2023) and; (4) lack of mentorship (Mohd Ariff Albakri et al., 2021) – student-teachers with experienced mentor teachers may feel more confident about the profession, however student-teachers without proper mentoring may feel frustrated and distressed during TP.

Scholars such as Ji et al. (2022) and Lutovac (2020) assert that both positive and negative teaching experiences can assist in identity construction. For example, student-teachers are most likely to shape their professional identities by making mistakes and learning from them. The negative experiences can also motivate new teachers to improve on their teaching practices such as learning to teach innovatively, understanding their learners' needs and accommodating learners as per their needs – this is what teacher development entails and once again, it is through this type of reflection that teachers learn where they are going wrong with their practices and how they can improve on their practices.

Teaching practice is thought of as an exciting and inspiring phase for student-teachers in their initial teacher education phase (Mugabo, 2006). In the context of teacher-education, there is mutual agreement that the mentor teachers are the key contributors to a student-teacher's development during TP. According to Beck and Kosnik (2000), student-teachers and mentor-teachers work together on developing the inexperienced student-teachers' expertise in the field. Mugabo's (2006) study explored Science student-teachers experiences of TP at a selected South African higher education institution (HEI). The study revealed that student-teachers felt that the TP period is limited, the overall organisation of TP needs to be improved and schools need to give greater recognition to student-teachers and handle them in a more appropriate manner. With TP being restricted to a period of between two to six weeks for some institutions, there are many facets of the teaching profession which student-teachers are not exposed to.

2.7 How will this study contribute to the existing literature in the field?

To understand the specific contribution of this study, it is first necessary to explore the literature on how student-teachers construct their identities during TP. The TP criteria are unique to each TEI; what can be observed anecdotally from across institutions is the use of a one-size-fits-all method of assessment. For instance, the study by Çakiroglu et al. (2005) compares the teacher education processes between Turkey and United States of America. The main findings of their study were that Turkey's teacher education programme is more centralised, in that it was structured and aligned to the Ministry of Education's goals. The goals are: 1) to establish schools and raise highly qualified students; 2) to provide successful students with the opportunity to continue their education by granting scholarships throughout the country and 3) to create scientific platforms to increase educational standards. On the other hand, the USA teacher-education curriculum is determined by each state and different in each. The nature of Çakiroglu et al. (2005) study focused on student's views of their efficacy in science education.

Similarly to those of Turkey, the teacher education qualifications of South Africa are aligned to the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) goals (Le Grange, 2014). The Minimum Requirements for Teacher Education Qualifications (MRTEQ) policy states that the Bachelor of Education degree (B. Ed) aims to provide graduates with a wide range of skills required in education, encompassing vital subject content knowledge, educational theory, and methodology. This equips them to exhibit expertise and accountability as student teachers, both academically and professionally qualified (Department of Higher Education and Training, 2015). The DHET main goals are: 1) to create a fully inclusive post-schooling system; 2) to fulfil the economic and social goals and 3) to participate in an inclusive economy and society. The study by Kiggundu and Nayimuli (2009) asserts that during the period of TP at least two formal lessons must be critiqued by mentor teachers and that assessments from the TEI lecturers are compulsory. Çakiroglu et al. (2005) also posit that along with coursework relating to both general and subject matter areas, students must undergo the compulsory practical teaching experience. In contrast to the teacher-education programmes in Turkey and South Africa, the USA programme does not follow a standard national requirement rather, each state determines its own guidelines and the courses offered encompass one general module, one specialisation module (such as Science, Math, or Languages), electives and professional education (Çakiroglu, et al., 2005). Though the modules in the North American countries resonate with the South African teacher-education curriculum, there are several differences between the curriculum goals in each country. However, the similarities in two countries are that they focus on the teaching practices which student-teachers must undergo in order to develop their identities in the profession (Çakiroglu et al., 2005; Kiggundu & Nayimuli, 2009). Similarly, the Canadian, Turkish and South African curricula consist of similar teacher education modules and are structured with both theoretical and practical aspects. The study by Klassen and Durksen (2014) makes the point that TP in Canada is conducted in a compressed timeframe in which student-teachers must meet the expectations of their mentor-teachers, university assessors and school staff. Kabilan (2013) explored the TP experiences of six student-teachers from Malaysia who were sent to the Maldives to conduct their TP and gain professional development. The study found that the TP experience exposed students to new world views of education and culture; that the students adapted to new cultures, gained confidence in communication, and developed effective planning skills and better interpersonal skills (Kabilan, 2013). Therefore, it can be deduced that skills such as thorough lesson planning, reflection, administration, and communication are major factors that can have a positive impact

on the student-teacher. The Canadian and Maldivian TP contexts thus resonate with the teacher-education practices at the selected South African TEI in which I conducted my study from. Another study in Hong Kong by Trent (2010), examined the conflict and contestation amidst identity development during TP. The main findings which emerged from Trent's (2010) study were that student-teachers were expected to: 1) follow the syllabus thoroughly; 2) to complete syllabus content timeously and 3) feedback on lesson delivery was more exam focused, which prevented student-teachers from conducting lessons freely and thus develop their expertise. Another finding was that lessons were monotonous in that no new teaching strategies could be implemented, and the main objective was for content to be delivered as prescribed in curriculum documents (Trent, 2010). This differs from the practices at the selected TEI in this study, where student-teachers are encouraged to adopt creative and innovative teaching styles.

In contrast to Trent's (2010) study, Dollof's (1999) study explored the identities of teachers during music teacher-education. The nature of this study was distinctive because it is rare for creative disciplines such as Arts (particularly for music teachers) to consider a topic such as teacher identity construction. The study also mentioned that the images we come across in life are most likely to stay with us throughout our lives and it also impacts our identity. For example, having the image of an educator being strict or scary can remain with a child forever. Likewise, how we view ourselves as teachers can shape our professional identity as teachers. Dollof (1999) described three methods which teachers could use to analyse the positions which they hold internally: story writing, visual metaphors and drawing. Each of the three methods is very creative and effective in grasping teacher identity. Firstly, the story writing method focuses on writing stories based on pre-conceived images. For example, writing a story on the factors which influences one to become a teacher. Therefore, teachers can be asked to write about any topic, and they ought to write a story from their own experiences which relates to the topic. The second method entails visual metaphors – Dollof (1999) mentions that metaphors help students express their beliefs and mental images. The third method involves drawing - this can be ensured by asking someone to draw a picture which best explains how they view a particular topic. This method was used in Dollof's (1999) study to determine how teachers already viewed themselves and what they perceived to be the ideal teacher. This method seemed to be the most effective and innovative. Research has shown that visuals can help you to store information for a longer period of time (Vanichvasin, 2020).

The above discussion has focused on existing literature based on student-teachers' identities and the ways in which TP is carried out in countries such as Canada, Malaysia and the United Kingdom. The review, drawing from studies in other contexts, has unpacked the concept of identity and shown how multicultural and borderless education systems promote and develop learning and understanding amidst teachers. Some of the new factors which have also emerged explored the role of information technology, international research and collaboration and how it could enhance education and empower teachers (Kabilan, 2013). These factors may impact the process of becoming a teacher.

This study will contribute to a contextual and scholarly gap—noting that only few studies exist in South Africa exploring similar phenomena, such as the studies by Kiggundu and Nayimuli, (2009) and Grossman et. al (2009). Whilst the studies by Kiggundu and Nayimuli (2009) and Grossman et. al (2009) focus on factors which shape and affect student-teachers at South African HEIs, not much has been mentioned about the identity construction of student-teachers in South Africa.

2.8 Conclusion

This chapter presented a review of the existing literature relating to the construction of student-teachers' identities, explained the concept of identity, differentiated between personal and professional identities, and also highlighted some of the major problems which have been identified in existing literature. The review suggests that more research can be done regarding understanding how student-teachers construct and negotiate their professional identities. The next chapter will present the theoretical framework of the study.

CHAPTER THREE: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK OF THE STUDY

3.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to discuss the theoretical framework that informs the study. A theoretical framework can be defined as a structure which shows how a researcher defines his/her study philosophically, epistemologically, methodologically, and analytically (Grant & Osanloo, 2016). Rocco and Plakhotnik (2009), posit that a theoretical framework is used when investigating a specific phenomenon. It provides a lens to understand the phenomenon within the study. I have therefore adopted a specific theoretical framework for this study, that of identity theory.

3.2 Discussion of the theoretical framework

Since the study focuses on the multiple identities which influence the shaping of student-teachers' professional identities, identity theory served as an appropriate theoretical framework. Identity theory is an overarching framework which considers the different types of identities. Identity theory focuses on the formation of an individual's identity (Stets & Burke, 2000) and was constructed by Stryker (1968). The theory explains the mutual connection between the self and society (Burke & Stets, 2022).

Identity theory has been developed from works related to structural symbolic interaction (SSI) (Stryker, 2008). The following five statements on SSI, presented below, are valuable for understanding the concept of identity. The first statement makes clear the symbolic interactionist perspective and begins with exploring the impact of social structures on the self: (1) Behaviour is understood based on classifications in the world (Stryker, 2020) – this means certain behaviours are classified according to certain interaction standards. The shared behavioural expectations that emerge from social interaction give meaning to the categories of terms that are attached to physical and social aspects of the environment (Stets et al., 2020). This implies that individuals are mainly able to make sense of the world through their interactions. (2) In symbolic interactions, symbols establish roles, identities and relationships among those who are involved in the interaction (Stryker, 2020; Stets et al., 2020). For instance, in the work environment, employees speak the same work language, the method of conducting tasks are similar and certain terminology is used to represent the type of work that is done in

that environment, so the processes and procedures are standardised for everyone within that workspace. With roles being clearly specified through standard symbols, understanding the position becomes easier for employees. (3) Persons take action according to certain behavioural patterns. This could be in the context of the social structure. They attach names to the roles which they enact and, upon naming one another, they invoke expectations regarding each other's behavioural roles (Stryker, 2020; Stets et al., 2020). (4) Persons acting in the context of organized behavioural roles apply symbolic meanings to themselves as well. These reflexively applied positional designations, which become part of the "self," create internalized expectations regarding their own behaviour (Stryker, 2020; Stets et al., 2020). (5) When interacting in collaborative circumstances, persons define the situation by applying symbolic meanings to it, to the other participants in the interaction, to themselves, and to particular features within the situation, and use the resulting definition to organize their own behaviour accordingly (Stryker, 2020; Stets et al., 2020). For instance, when students are assigned group tasks, they will firstly try to understand the strengths and weaknesses of all group members involved in the task prior to assigning duties and based on these symbolic interactions which they share with other students. They try to alter their own thought processes in order to accommodate the others involved in the interaction. As mentioned in the previous example, everyone alters their thinking to speak the same language in the context of their collaborative environment.

SSI refers to how individuals attach meanings to their interactions with others (Conner & Baxter, 2021). This implies that various interactions which individuals encounter play a role in their identity construction. Individuals can make sense of these newer identity roles due to the meanings which they attach to that particular interaction. For instance, in the context of my study, student-teachers learn from the symbolic meanings which they attach to their interactions with other students-teachers and/or lecturers. Consequently, such an interaction enables them to learn more about their field of study or what is expected from them in the selected discipline. Markovsky and Frederick (2020) are theorists who recently interrogated Stryker's (1968) theory in their work and added a definition which introduced the word "role" in identity as they felt it was omitted from Stryker's (1986) original theory. However, Stets et al. (2020) argue that Stryker (1968) had in fact included the role of social actors but had used other terminology in his theory. Initially, Stryker (1968) defined a social position as a socially distinguishable type of social actors which interact with one another. On the other hand, Markovsky and Frederick (2020) define the role associated with a social position as a set of the rights, responsibilities and

duties which are connected to a social position. For instance, in the context of this study, being a student-teacher at a school means that students will have to fulfil the duties of being a student-teacher. Stets et al. (2020) argue that there are two sociological notions associated with exploring identity roles: (1) structural role theory, and (2) one based on SSI, which means interaction premised on shared meanings and their maintenance. The first type involves fixed or structured behaviours of individuals in relation to the position or occupation which they hold (Stryker, 2008); for example, students in a university have a constant role of remaining students and they have to carry out all the tasks relevant to their student identity. To understand the structural role theory and behavioural roles of human beings, understanding role theory is essential. Role theory concerns one of the most important characteristics of social behaviour and the differences in human behaviour are mainly due to the vast range of factors which impact each individual socially (Biddle, 1986).

Role theory has been gradually developed. There are five main perspectives to role theory. (1) Functional role theory – this perspective mentions that every role has its own function and symbolism for each individual. (2) Structural role theory – in this perspective, attention is focused on social structures, regarded as steady organisations of sets of persons referred to as social positions who share the same, patterned behaviours that are directed towards other sets of persons in the structure. Biddle (1986) suggests that more emphasis should have been placed on acceptable norms and values for such a structure. This theory is encompassed within identity theory due to the various social structures impacting the hierarchy and salience of identity. (3) Organisational role theory – this type of theory focuses on social systems that are pre-determined, concerned with tasks, and are hierarchical in nature. This type of role is presumed to be connected to recognised social positions and to be created by standardised expectations, but norms may vary among individuals and may reflect both the official demands of the organizations and the pressures of informal groups (Biddle, 1986). (4) Cognitive role theory – this type of role theory focuses on associations between role expectations and behaviour. Attention has been given to social conditions that give rise to certain expectations, to methods which measure expectations and to the influence of expectations on social conduct. This theory is also concerned with the ways in which a person perceives the expectations of others and with the effects of those perceptions on behaviour (Biddle, 1986). (5) Symbolic interactionist role theory – this theory was developed by Mead (1934), in which importance was given to the roles of individual actors, the changes in the roles of the actors and an evaluation of cognitive

processes through which social actors could make meaning of their own interactions and those of others (Mead, 1934).

Some of the role theories mentioned above are also closely associated with or interwoven into the second type of interaction, namely structural symbolic interaction. The second type involves attaching a symbolic meaning to an interaction (Stryker, 2008; for example, being a student in university, an employee at work, and a parent at home, amongst others. Symbolic interactions and the meanings which people attach to symbols were of interest to Mead (1934) and Blumer (1986). Symbolic interaction theory is an important method of analysing gender roles in social structures, with an emphasis on meaning and symbols. It highlights how meaning is generated and changed through the interaction of people and the interpretation of different objects in their natural environment. These two types of interactions form the basis of exploring identity and identity construction, because most of the identities which are bestowed upon individuals are sociological – this means their social hierarchies, social networks, social organisations, and interactions. Each interaction provides individuals with an identity of a different sort. For example, a teacher in the classroom, a student on campus, a sibling and child at home, a gym member, a sports coach in the field. Thus, it can be deduced that the context in which interactions occur also aid in the overall identity construction of a person.

Identity theory was primarily developed in response to Mead's (1934) social philosophy (behaviourism) theory. Stryker (1968) aimed to improve on Mead's theory by providing explanations of specified behaviours which could be tested via empirical research. The theory diverted from Mead's (1934) theory by rejecting the notion of adopting a view consistent with modern sociological imagery, in that Stryker and Burke (2000) ensured that the theory took larger social structures into cognisance and not merely those of contemporary sociology. Stryker and Burke (2000) also mention that the social behaviour concept from Mead's (1934) theory has been adapted into their identity theory; however, in identity theory it is referred to as role-choice behaviour, due to the focus of identity theory being on the individual and how an individual navigates different roles. According to Stets et al. (2020), identity theory should be first understood through its singular definition, also known as an identity. Markovsky and Frederick (2020) define an identity as role-specific self-perceptions. This implies that, based on the role which an individual activates, there is a specific type of perspective that they envision themselves in when performing the activated role. For example, being at university

activates the scholar role and students are conscious that they need to study in that environment and being at school may activate the student-teacher role for students when they are out on TP.

The second step to understanding identity theory would be identity salience (Stets et al., 2020). Whilst Markovsky and Frederick (2020) define identity salience as the psychological prominence of an identity, Stets et al. (2020) counter-argue that identity salience is misrepresented by the former scholars. Stets et al. (2020) claim that identity salience is underpinned by two key factors as mentioned by Stryker (2020). These factors are identity salience and identity prominence.

On one hand, identity salience refers to the level of importance which is attached to each type of interaction – identities can also follow their own hierarchy according to the number of times a particular interaction occurs (Stryker, 2020). For instance, a student may have many roles to fulfil, however, being a sibling may be higher on their priority list due to the number of times they are involved in that interaction. Sometimes the sibling role may have greater importance over their scholar identity at that particular moment. On the other hand, identity prominence focuses on the subjective importance of a particular identity to an individual (Stets et al., 2020).

This implies that the individual's perception of identity in relation to a particular context may impact the way in which they arrange their identity hierarchy and its levels of importance. For instance, if a student values their family identity over their studies, then they will always give priority to their family responsibilities over their scholarly responsibilities.

Similarly, Burke and Reitzes (1981) mention that the concept of identity salience is essential because the level of prominence that individuals show for each of their identities determines the amount of effort that they put into enacting a specific identity role. For example, in the context of this study, if students take a keen interest in the education profession, then they are most likely to invest their time and effort in shaping their teacher identities. Furthermore, the extent to which they build their teacher identities will determine their success in the profession. According to Stryker and Serpe (1982), the greater an individual's commitment to an identity, the greater their level of salience will be. If the individual is well aware of their identity salience, their performance and role expectations will be constant. Whereas, if one is uncertain about their roles and the corresponding identity for that role, then they will be in doubt about which identity to consider in their priority list (Stryker & Serpe, 1982).

Individuals also have an identity network which is linked to each identity of theirs. For instance, at work, an employee is constantly networking with many other professionals and higher authorities; at university, students interact with other students, the university staff, administration and management members – thus, it can be deduced that identities cannot be fulfilled in isolation. There are various factors which influence and connect to one's identity construction.

The paper by Stryker and Burke (2000) reflects on the developments in identity theory. It was found that there were two stances on the theory; Stryker's (1968) theory focused on the connection between social structure and identities. Burke's (1991) theory advanced Stryker's (1968) by placing the focus on the self-verification process. Self-verification can be defined as expecting society to view one as they would view themselves. The article argues that the first theory by Stryker (1968) neglected the internal dimension of self-processes (relating to individuals), and Burke's (1991) theory excluded the impact of social structures on the internal self-process. Identity theorists such as Stets (2005), Leveto (2016), Stets and Burke (2014) and Stryker and Burke (2000) mention that emotions play a significant part in identity construction. Self-verification that is accepted by other people generates positive feelings such as happiness which increases interest in shaping identities. In contrast, the rejection of self-verification leads to negative feelings such as disappointment, which can prevent individuals from fully establishing their identity.

There are also scope conditions when attempting to interpret identity theory. Scope conditions provide the circumstances under which a theory holds (Stets et al., 2020). Markovsky and Frederick (2020) and Stets et al. (2020) state four possible conditions under which identity theory can be tested. The first condition is that person X's (referring to an individual in general) identity is non-zero. Stets et al. (2020) mention that identity salience is dependent on probability and could range from 0 to 1. Zero salience is unlikely due to every person having some sense of which identities matter to them in their hierarchy. Therefore, drawing from Stets et al.'s (2020) ideas of zero salience, it can be assumed that zero salience would mean that person X would have never invoked any part of their identity, which is rarely possible when considering the cognitive processes involved in identity construction. Therefore, identity construction and identity theory cannot rely on a zero-salience possibility. The second condition is that person X has multiple roles – as mentioned earlier in the chapter, individuals have to fulfil various types of roles in contexts which are continuously changing. The third condition is that reaching

consensus regarding identities is always subject to change, depending on which identity role takes precedence over the next. For example, between a career and family, person X could select their career and give all their time to building their career. This scope condition also depends on how individuals understand and interpret their identity roles and how they go about negotiating which identities are important to them. Finally, condition four is that person X is a member of a network relevant to one or more of his/her identities – this means that person X may be a part of a work team, they may be involved in more than one project at a time hence, they may belong to various little networks within their work environment. Person X could also possibly be involved in a community engagement project or a member of their child's school parent body. Therefore, person X can belong to more than one network at any given time. The implications of these conditions for this study are that they are all important aspects of navigating the complexities of identities in various social contexts. Understanding the conditions of the identity theory can promote individual well-being, social cohesion and encourage inclusive groups.

3.3 Limitations of identity theory

Identity theory has only been applied to select disciplines such as crime and law, education, race/ethnicity, gender, family, and the environment (Stets & Burke, 2014). Within these disciplines, it has been discovered that identity theory is useful when attempting to understand issues such as the role of women in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) education disciplines and how the female gender is underrepresented. However, some of the limitations of identity theory include the fact that it is not testable – this implies that it has not yet been adapted to newer disciplines and examined further. Several theorists such as Stets and Burke (2014) and Stryker and Burke (2000) propose that the theory still requires development; it needs to be integrated solidly as a framework to social psychological theories (focusing on groups of people rather than an individual), it lacks in-depth critiques, and more studies need to consider resources, stigmatised identities, and identity change. The study concurs with the notions of such theorists, as the flaws of the theory will only surface when a thorough critical account is provided. The criticisms will also make way for new advancements relating to the theory. There is always room for improvement, and hence, the theory needs to be examined by other critics.

Identity theory is an active research programme (Stets et al., 2020). Some of the distinguishing features which make identity theory an active research programme are: (1) it represents a socio-

psychological model of the self in relation to other social factors; (2) people derive their sense of self from how they navigate in the real world with their interactions – as a result, they can continuously adjust the way in which they perceive their own identities. As the interactions change, the perspective of individuals also changes, which also has an impact on the salience of a person (Hogg et al., 1995). For identity theory to be made applicable to any other context relating to identity, the entire theory must be understood. However, some of the recent developments and interpretations of identity theory may hinder the theory from being applied to newer contexts when it is confused with factors from social identity theory (Hogg et al., 1995). Social identity theory differs from identity theory in the way in which it moves the focus from individualism to social and external factors mainly. Therefore, depending on the nature of a study, identity theory needs to be fully understood to be applied in other scenarios. According to Stryker (2008), identity theory can be seen as a complex framework, as the intrinsic self-identity can sometimes conflict with other external identities. It becomes difficult to make a choice between the two. However, in this study I am using Stryker's (1968) identity theory for these reasons. First, I am exploring the range of identities which student-teachers bring to the forefront when in the process of developing their own professional teacher identity, and Stryker's (1968) theory explains the link between self and society comprehensively. Secondly, the student-teachers narratives provide actual real-life applications of Stryker's (1968) theory. Thirdly, identity theory is a large framework which focuses on all issues that are identity-related; therefore, there are continuously new findings which can enhance and expand my understanding (as a researcher) of identity theory. I also choose to accept the arguments made in the recent works of identity theorists such as Stets et al. (2020) and Leveto (2016), as their studies raise more recent concerns regarding issues which have been omitted in the original version of identity theory. Some of these issues include the role of emotions on identity and the extent to which identity theory can be applied to different disciplines. Generally, people are faced with identity-related scenarios daily, however, identity theory accounts for most of the issues and delves beyond the general understanding of identity. In the next section, I elaborate further on how I am seeking to theorise student-teachers identity through identity theory.

3.4 Exploring student-teacher's identities through identity theory

The focus of the study is to explore the student-teachers' identities that are formed during the TP period, specifically concentrating on the assessment criteria of TP. The assessment criteria

at the selected HEI are demanding, and it is important to note that student-teachers already have their own pre-determined identities from home before stepping into the classroom. Consequently, TP tends to generate/enable new student-teacher identities. The criteria encompass dress code, punctuality, adhering to school policies such as the code of conduct and interacting with both staff and learners at the school. Identity theory serves as an apt lens to explore such identity issues since it allows for the various roles of student-teachers and their level of salience to be examined. When student-teachers head out to schools to perform their TP, they are faced with several challenges – many of these challenges are interconnected with their identities. In relation to previous studies, identity theory has been useful in identifying issues in education such as the roles of women in STEM education as noted earlier; the issue of domestic violence in crime and law and other role-related issues. Therefore, adapting identity theory to the assessment experiences of student-teachers (who are in the process of becoming teachers), will allow me (as a researcher) to explore the extent to which TP assessments allow identities to emerge. It will also assist the researcher to identify some of the problems associated with the TP assessment criteria and the extent to which the criteria affect student-teachers' identities.

3.5 Conclusion

This chapter discussed the theoretical framework which the study adopted, which is Stryker's (1968) identity theory. This framework was most suitable since it takes into consideration the various aspects relating to identity as well as focuses on the identity construction of the self in relation to various social factors. The theory focuses on the link between the self and society, specifically the hierarchy of identity salience (placing emphasis on the most important identity) and the role-related behaviours of the identity. The study explores the identities of final-year Bachelor of Education students; hence, through identity theory the phenomena of identities can be understood better. The next chapter will discuss the research methodology of the study.

CHAPTER FOUR: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

4.1 Introduction

The previous chapter has discussed the theoretical framework of the study, and identity theory was the selected framework. This chapter focuses on the research methodology and design of the study. A research methodology is important as it explains the research processes, the research design, the research paradigm, the data collection processes, sampling and trustworthiness measures, and it unpacks the sequence in which the research process occurs (Cohen et al., 2018; Daniel, 2022). This chapter will discuss the research paradigm, the research approach, the research methodology, which also includes the data collection methods and sampling, and the trustworthiness of the study.

4.2 Research paradigm

A research paradigm can be defined as the way in which people understand the reality of the world and study it (Rehman & Alharthi, 2016). Paradigms are ways of looking at the world through a certain type of lens. The paradigm which is adopted in a research study will provide the lens in order for readers to understand the context of the study (Cohen et al., 2018). According to Cohen et. al (2018), there are six paradigms. The first of these is empirical-analytical; this paradigm is mainly concerned with prediction and control and requires a quantitative approach. This paradigm would be most suitable for scientific research or research in the natural sciences. The second is the pragmatic paradigm, which adopts a trial-and-error method, centred around what works versus what does not work. Its methods are constantly reviewed in order to obtain a different outcome at the end of the research process – this is more suitable for scientific research. The third is the interpretive paradigm, which focuses on making meaning; it is human-centred and relies on experiential understanding. The fourth is the critical paradigm, which is concerned with critically viewing existing research, critiquing and proposing newer ideologies. The fifth is the post-structural paradigm, which deals with deconstructing and reconstructing views on a particular research topic of interest. It is applicable to studies in the humanities discipline. The final paradigm is transcendental, viewing a topic through a spiritual, moral and intuitive lens.

The focal point in the context of the interpretive paradigm is to understand the subjective world of human experience. Another feature of the interpretive paradigm is that it does not impose external rules and structures in research because the research represents the observer's perspective and not the person being observed (Cohen et al., 2018). After exploring the different paradigms, the interpretivist paradigm was selected as the most suitable paradigm for this study. Wahyuni (2012) asserts that the interpretivist paradigm uses social experiences of how human beings construct their reality and interpret their knowledge. The purpose of the interpretivist paradigm is not to predict what people do, instead it expresses how they make sense of the world (Bertram & Christiansen, 2014). The interpretivist view constructs meanings from reality through subjective experiences (Bertram & Christiansen, 2014; Adil et. al, 2022). The interpretivist paradigm was suitable for my study because I was interested in the lived individual subjective experiences of final-year student-teachers and their narratives of identity construction from TP. As mentioned in chapter 2, TP plays a significant role in identity construction, mainly because it shapes and prepares future student-teachers for their future roles. It offers several opportunities for new teachers (student-teachers) to become aware of their identity construction by reflecting daily, taking on leadership positions and being exposed to newer social networks such as teacher action teams (Kiggundu & Nayimuli, 2009; Moonsamy, 2011; Naidoo, 2013). Their future roles as educators requires them to constantly construct and deconstruct their professional identities as they grow and develop from each experience which they encounter. The student-teachers as participants were also important to the study because there are also other social factors which contribute to the way in which they made meaning of their identity and how they fulfil the identity roles. For student-teachers, the most common social factors which impact their identity construction would be: (1) close social interactions such as family members and friends; (2) their social organisations such as the university student representative council and other student organisations; (3) social networks such as educator/student-teacher groups and community initiatives. Therefore, student-teachers bring stories which they can relate to the study which differ based on their context and experiences. In the study, I explored student-teachers' identities and how students constructed and interpreted their identities. The paradigm therefore provided fertile ground to explore the study. The nature of the interpretive paradigm is that it is constructed by human experiences and is not objective (Cohen et al., 2018; Muzari et al., 2022). Therefore, it does not follow a standardised method of gaining new knowledge; rather, it takes the view that new knowledge can only be gained from real-life experiences.

Ontology in research is conceptualised as the question of reality, for instance, what reality within the interpretivist paradigm is (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). The ontological position within interpretivism suggest that it is deeply entrenched in social contexts. Ontology refers to the beliefs and assumptions that underpin the research. It shapes how researchers perceive their topic, design their research method and interpret findings (Creswell & Poth, 2016). For instance, every participant shared different events and experiences which are unique to them. Epistemology in research is defined as how people learn about themselves and the world through research (Guba & Lincoln, 1994); thus, the epistemology in the study focused on the various participants and their perspectives, in particular how participants construct their own knowledge. The interpretive paradigm and epistemology are connected. The epistemology is consistent with the interpretive paradigm as the interpretive paradigm unpacks how knowledge is moulded through personal experience and interpretation. This suggests that participants construct knowledge and make meaning of their own perspectives and experiences. Thus, the participants were the main source of knowledge to the study owing to their unique TP experiences and the major factors that they shared in their stories.

4.3 Research approach

The research approach of the study refers to the strategy which researchers adopt to analyse information relating to their research questions (Cohen et al., 2018). A research approach helps the researcher to consider all facets of the research process. For example, how they will collect the data, how they will select their participants and their sample size and how they will analyse, interpret and present their data (Teherani et al., 2015). It provides a structure which unpacks how the research should unfold. This study adopted a qualitative research approach.

4.3.1 Qualitative research approach

The study used a qualitative approach. Qualitative approach involves the collection of textual, visual or verbal data and the qualitative approach is used when depth is required in a study (Bertram & Christiansen, 2014). The study explored an in-depth analysis of participants experiences from TP in relation to identity construction – some examples included how TP was conducted; the major challenges which took place during TP which may have hindered effective professional identity construction; the ethos and general operation of the school and how it shaped one’s identity; school management systems and discipline methods; the effectiveness of mentor teachers and university tutors when shaping one’s professional identity; the personal

factors such as ethics, cultural and moral practices which play out when the student-teacher stands before the class to present a lesson; and, finally, having to adapt to learners and their social dynamics such as religious practices. Therefore, the participants in this study provided a critical account of the extent to which TP has shaped their professional teacher identity and also the main factors which prevented them from fully exploring their identities. Qualitative research allows the researcher to gain rich data from the participants (Cohen et al., 2018). The qualitative approach is a form of social inquiry which centres around people, how they understand and interpret their experiences. It involves an interpretive, naturalistic approach to its subject matter; it attempts to make sense of, or to interpret, phenomena in terms of the meaning people bring to them (Lincoln & Denzin, 2003). Therefore, this approach was suitable for this study, mainly because it focused on interpreting the verbal and textual data of the participants' lived experiences. For instance, during the data generation process, participants narrated stories about the types of schools they visited, the resources and infrastructure in each school, stories about the extent to which they managed to build rapport with learners and staff during TP – such information is not measurable and thus, it required more interpretation from me as a researcher.

4.4 Research methodology

The research methodology of a study refers to the practical method with which the study will be conducted. It deals with all the methods applied in the study in a systematic manner (Kumari et al., 2023). This section entails the procedures that were used during the data generation period such as the type of methodology used, data collection methods, sampling and profiling of participants, the analysis process, and ethical considerations. This study used narrative inquiry as its research methodology.

4.4.1 Narrative inquiry

This study followed the conventional structure of a narrative inquiry research. There are five and many other emerging qualitative methodologies to inquiry which include: (1) Narrative research (2), Phenomenology (3) Grounded theory (4) Ethnography and (5) Case study (Creswell & Poth, 2016). Creswell and Poth (2016) explain the various types of research methodologies as follows: (1) Narrative research: this type of research focuses on the stories narrated by participants. It can be both a method and phenomenon. Method refers to generating data through stories and expressing narratives, whereas phenomenon is about stories of a

particular phenomenon. It is important to note that narrative inquiry differs from phenomenology, since it focuses only on one individual participant's experiences at a time. (2) Phenomenology – this focuses on several participants' lived experiences. Phenomenologists assess the common ground of their participants' responses and derive various phenomena. (3) Grounded theory – this type of inquiry intends to advance from some simple descriptive responses by participants into broader theory. The main idea is that this theory-development is generated from participants who have undergone the same processes and can relate their experiences. (4) Ethnography – the focus of this type of inquiry is on an entire cultural group. The patterns or processes which participants experience may vary, and the ethnographic researcher pays particular attention to the variations. In ethnographic research, the researchers can also immerse themselves into the participants' context to gain more insight as to how participants experience certain situations in a particular context. (5) Case study – focuses on one or more similar cases relating to the issues mentioned in a study (Creswell & Poth, 2016).

While I have discussed common methodologies in qualitative research, I have selected narrative inquiry for this study. Connelly and Clandinin (1990) mention that narrative inquiry is used in educational research since humans are storytelling organisms who individually and socially lead storied lives. This implies that narrative inquiry involves gaining understanding into people's experiences by means of the stories which they share. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) also mention the three-dimensional spaces of narrative inquiry, namely, temporality, sociality, and place. The first dimension emphasises that research is conducted under conditions of time (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Green (2013) validates that the temporal dimension focuses on the past, present and future of people, places, things, and events under study. The second dimension entails sociality. This dimension is centred around both personal and social conditions (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Green, 2013). This aspect is a major focus of this study as the topic deals with identity construction, through the data collection process as a researcher and the participants. The participants reflected on their sociality (both personal and in relation to the social structure) during the letter writing and interview process. I had to also do the same before I started to analyse the data in order to be able to interpret the data. For instance, in the context of this study, when trying to unpack the participants' responses regarding their TP experiences, I also had to reconsider who they are, and the places they come from, and focus on the challenges they highlighted from each of their experiences, so as to interpret the data. This provided me with insights into their lives and the way in which their social hierarchies function.

The third dimension entails place. This implies the physical and topological place where the inquiry will take place (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Green, 2013). Riessman (1993) mentions that narrative inquiry is a beneficial qualitative methodology as it enables the researcher to have a clearer perspective of the participant's context as well as factors such as their morals, values and beliefs. This provided me with a holistic overview of the participants' lives and experiences. Connelly and Clandinin (2000) mention that narrative inquiry is commonly used in educational research. Narrative inquiry involves gaining understanding into people's experiences by means of the stories which they share. The reason this study adopted narrative inquiry is that it enabled the participants to narrate their lived experiences relating to identity construction during TP. In Clandinin and Connelly's (2000) book, *Narrative inquiry: Experience and story in qualitative research*, they mention that the purpose of narrative inquiry is to draw knowledge from people's lived experiences. The conditions under which such data is generated may not always be ideal and it differs from context to context. Scholars such as Geertz (1996), Bateson (1994) and Czarniawska (1997) further claim that inquiry ought to be conducted in the temporal and circumstantial settings within the field of research, in order to gain real insight into participants' lived experiences.

4.5 Methods of data collection

The study has relied on two methods of data collection – letters from participants and individual narrative interviews. Narrative inquiry lends itself to various methods of data generation. Amongst others there are observations, conversations, visual or textual analysis or interviews (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Firstly, observation entails generating data using one's senses (Smit & Onwuegbuzie, 2018). This can be done through viewing or listening for specific details over a long period of time, in a particular context. Secondly, visual and textual data generation methods involve studying visuals such as photographs, paintings, sketches, and cartoons, and textual information such as books, documents and journals (Glaw et al., 2017). Lastly, interviewing is the process in which data can be derived through conversations (Kvale, 1996). These conversations can be conducted physically (face-to-face), telephonically or online (Cohen et al., 2018). The participants preferred to send through the letters electronically via email and chose to be interviewed online via Zoom as it was more convenient for them. Some participants were out of the province during the data collection period, hence online platforms were most suitable to reach all participants.

4.5.1 Letter writing

Letter writing is referred to as a process of engaging in written discourse between the researcher and participants (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Letters are a type of field text in research, which are written with the intention of receiving a response from participants (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Letter writing is a useful reflective tool for both the participant and researcher alike (Pithouse-Morgan et al., 2012). According to Davies (1996), letter writing compels individuals to become aware of their own thoughts and feelings, in their own time and space. Letter writing is also a useful method of presenting and reacting to tentative narrative interpretations (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Before all individual interviews were conducted, participants were asked to write letters. I provided the participants with a prompt, requesting them to reflect on how teaching practice has assisted them in discovering their own professional identities. This allowed me to gain more background into their experiences and know more about their feelings regarding their TP experience. The reason I chose letter writing was because they are confidential and are a safe space in which the participants can openly express their themselves regarding the topic. I requested a minimum of one letter per participant.

4.5.2 Individual narrative interviews

The interview schedule can consist of structured, semi-structured or unstructured questions (Easwaramoorthy & Zarinpoush, 2006). Structured interviews require the interviewer to ask a set of pre-determined questions to the participant; semi-structured interviews require the interviewer to ask pre-determined questions and further probe the participants based on their responses; and unstructured interviewing involves the interviewer asking broad questions which will enable them to engage in a free-flowing discussion with the participant (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006; Easwaramoorthy & Zarinpoush, 2006; Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2018). In this study, I used narrative interviews that are semi-structured in nature to generate the data. Narrative interviews provided participants with the opportunity to narrate their own lived experiences (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). This method of data generation was useful since it provided me with insights as to issues which may were relevant to the study. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) mention that the way in which the researcher acts, questions, respond and the conditions under which the interview is conducted determines the way in which the participant respond in the interview - these responses then provide a framework which shapes the participants' perspective of their lived experiences. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) also posit that research interviews tend to have challenges due to various reasons. For instance, the

participants may lack trust in the researcher and may not feel safe to disclose any of their personal experiences with them. During the course of the data generation process, I was able to build a good working relationship with the participants through the following measures: 1) the participants were reminded that their participation in the study was voluntary; 2) they were also informed that they could withdraw from the study and the interviews at any point in time if they were uncomfortable, and 3) they were assured that their responses were treated with strict confidentiality. The study by Guillemin et al. (2018) mentions that a good working relationship between the researcher and the participants is of utmost importance to a successful study. To establish a good working relationship in the study, I provided clear and factual information about the study and the research process to participants; I presented all the necessary documents (such as the consent form and ethical clearance letter) required prior to the commencement of the data generation process and as per the protocols at the selected HEI; I availed myself from time to time to address their questions about the study; I was approachable and provided them with sufficient time to complete their letters and scheduled interviews as per the times and days which suited their schedules. I also provided feedback from the interviews to the participants and verified the data which I obtained from their interviews.

The purpose of narrative interviews as a data generation method is to enable the researcher to understand the participants' lived experiences and interpret the data. This allows the researcher to derive various themes which will explain the findings of the study. The narrative interviews were conducted orally using a virtual platform with the participants. Oral interviews are usually more effective because they let the researcher hear the participants' actual voice which ought to be reliable (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). I used semi-structured interviews to generate the data since this type of interviewing allowed for a combination of both structured questioning and improvised questioning (unstructured) techniques for probing. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) refer to semi-structured interviews as narrative conversations. Semi-structured interviews are useful when there is a need to collect in-depth information in a systematic manner from several participants or interviewees (Easwaramoorthy & Zarinpoush, 2006). In semi-structured interviews, the interviewer uses a set of predetermined questions, and the participants respond in their own words. I created a list of pre-determined questions that I used for data generation.

4.6 Sampling

Sampling refers to the process in which the data sample is selected. In qualitative research, data samples are often smaller and focus more on the stories, experiences and observations of participants whereas, in quantitative research, the data samples are larger and are measured numerically (Turner, 2020). There are two major categories of sampling: random sampling and non-random sampling. Random sampling refers to selecting participants randomly without a specific criterion in mind. In such sampling methods, all participants have an equal chance of being selected. In non-random sampling, participants are selected using a particular criterion or intentionally. In this study, purposive sampling, which is a non-random sampling method, was used because the study required final-year BEd. student-teachers to share their experiences of how TP shaped their professional identities. Purposive sampling entails selecting participants thoughtfully by relating their experiences and knowledge to the study (Cohen et al., 2018).

4.6.1 Purposive sampling

Mujere (2016) describes sampling as the act, process, or technique of selecting a suitable sample, or a representative part of a population for the purpose of determining parameters or characteristics of the whole population. Purposive sampling is the process by which the researcher decides what needs to be known and sets out to find people who can and are willing to provide the information by virtue of their knowledge or experience (Etikan, Musa & Alkassim, 2016). In qualitative research, purposive sampling can be used, since the researcher is allowed to select participants who are related to the phenomena of the study or match a specified criterion (Creswell et al., 2007). Purposive sampling is categorised under non-probability sampling because the participants are selected intentionally to serve a specific purpose in the study. For instance, this study focused on student-teacher's experiences and hence students who have undergone TP were the most suitable for the study. According to Lincoln and Guba (1986), once the data that has been generated is saturated or cannot introduce any new information, then the sample size is sufficient. In this study, purposive sampling was used. Six final year students were purposefully selected to participate; the criteria for selecting them were as follows: they should all be final year students, having completed their last TP programme. Though the sample ought to consist of males and females, the number of female participants outnumbered the male participants. I had five female participants and one male participant. Some of the participants have visited schools with varying ethos, such as Islamic

schools or Christian schools in comparison to government schools. In Table 3.1 below I provide the profiles of the participants.

No	Name(s) [pseudonyms]	Age	Race
1	Ms. Melanie	23	Indian
2	Ms. Sophia	23	African
3	Ms. Gabriella	22	Indian
4	Mr. Lihle	22	African
5	Ms. Natalie	27	African
6	Ms. Ndalo	22	African

Table 4.1 Profile of participants

4.6.2 Profiling of participants:

a) Ms. Melanie

The first participant was named Melanie for reasons of anonymity. She is 23 years old and lives in Newlands West, Durban.

b) Ms. Sophia

The second participant was named Sophia for reasons of anonymity. She is 23 years old and lives in Verulam, Durban.

c) Ms. Gabriella

The third participant was named Gabriella for reasons of anonymity. She is 22 years old and lives in Pietermaritzburg.

d) Mr. Lihle

The fourth participant was named Lihle for reasons of anonymity. He is 22 years old and lives in Bulwer, Durban.

e) Ms. Natalie

The fifth participant was named Natalie for reasons of anonymity. She is 27 years old and lives in Greytown.

f) Ms. Ndalo

The sixth participant was named Ndalo for reasons of anonymity. She is 22 years old and lives in KwaMashu, Durban.

4.7 Location of the study

The study will be conducted at a selected teacher education institution in the city of Durban, Pinetown suburb in South Africa. Pinetown is a small district located in the KwaZulu-Natal province. It is part of the eThekweni Metropolitan Municipality. The eThekweni population consists of approximately 4 239 901 people of which 72.2% of people constitute the working age population (between the ages of 15-64 years) (Statistics South Africa, 2022) which is the category in which students are placed. The eThekweni district is made up of a multicultural landscape consisting of approximately 71.6% African people; 6% White people; 19.7% Indian people and 2.5% Coloured people (Statistics South Africa, 2022). There are approximately 7000 students attending at this specific institution, who are pursuing their undergraduate pre-service Bachelor of Education (hereafter referred to as BEd.) teacher training qualification.

4.8 Ethical considerations

Ethics is an important aspect in all spheres of research because it is a symbol of respect towards the participants' privacy and confidentiality. Ellis (2007) places emphasis particularly on ethics in an ethnographic study, in which the researcher shares a close connection with their participants, because of the immersion of the researcher in the field of study. Munhall (1988) states that qualitative researchers ought to refer to the research experience in an authentic manner which is sometimes in contrast with the researcher's expected goal of the study.

Ethics refers to "behaviour that is considered right or wrong" (Bertram & Christiansen, 2014, p. 65). The three main principles of ethics include: "(a) Autonomy (respecting all people who are participating in the research (b) non-maleficence (ensuring that your research does no harm)

and (c) Beneficence (the research should be of benefit to the researcher, other researchers' and society at large)" (Bertram & Christiansen, 2014, p. 66-67). Cohen et al. (2018) state that some of the ethical aspects which need to be considered when planning research include consensus between all parties involved in the research project, ethical frameworks, guidelines, and codes of practice for research, problems and dilemmas confronting the researcher, accounting for matters of privacy, anonymity, confidentiality, and personal codes of practice.

Therefore, the following ethical measures were implemented in my study. First, the study was approved by the University gatekeeper, and the ethics office issued an ethical clearance, the documents were then provided to the potential participants prior to the interview. Secondly, the study was conducted with the permission of the participants, who were made aware that they could withdraw from the interview at any point they wished to. The participants were also asked to consent to being audio-recorded and all of them granted permission. In keeping with voluntary participation, two of the six participants were not able to send their letters after several attempts, as noted earlier. I consulted with my supervisor and upon his counsel I proceeded with four letters.

During research, the nature of the study requires privacy (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2018). Confidentiality and anonymity were ensured by replacing the participants' real names with pseudonyms. The principles of autonomy, non-maleficence and beneficence were also maintained by ensuring that participants were treated with respect and their participation in the study was voluntary. The participants were informed that interviews would be recorded, and they could either permit or deny me an opportunity to audio-record. In addition to these ethical principles, online or internet research ethics were also considered. Internet research refers to the process of collecting data by using the internet as a research tool (Buchanan & Zimmer, 2012). Some of the other internet ethics which needed to be ensured is that transcriptions or recorded meetings cannot be shared with other participants or broadcasted on any form of media, and neither can the participants' personal dynamics be revealed. This was ensured by sending the interview invitation only to the relevant participant, locking the online meeting room, renaming the participants using a pseudonym (as mentioned earlier) and by keeping recordings safely in an online cloud system. This will ensure the safety of the recordings as the information on the cloud is password protected and will be deleted after five years as per the guidelines of the University ethics.

4.9 Data analysis method

Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the methods in which data was generated had to be amended. The data generation process therefore had to be aligned to the new national protocols which emphasised social distancing. In such a situation, face-to-face interviews were not suitable and hence, online meetings had to be conducted. Considering this scenario, the participants opted to submit their letters via email. This was done prior to the interview sessions. The interviews were done by means of scheduling meetings on Zoom, recording them and thereafter transcribing them. The recordings of the meetings were saved to a cloud folder and password protected to prevent vulnerability on the online platform. Each interview was approximately one hour, and six participants were interviewed. One of the challenges encountered during the data generation process was that, of the six participants, two participants did not submit their letters after multiple attempts to communicate with them. I did not pressure the participants with the submission of the letters; I understood this as their unwillingness to write the letters.

4.9.1 *Thematic analysis*

Data analysis refers to the method in which the interviews and documents have been analysed to acquire, organise and analyse the main findings of the study. There are five main types of qualitative data analysis, which include content analysis, thematic analysis, narrative analysis, grounded theory analysis and discourse analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Content analysis is a method designed to identify and interpret meaning in recorded forms of communication by separating small pieces of the data that represent prominent ideas and then applying or creating a basis to organize the pieces in a way that can be used to describe or explain a phenomenon (Kleinheksel et al., 2020; Graue, 2015). In this study, the data was analysed thematically. Thematic analysis entails six major steps to analyse data: 1) familiarising oneself with the data and identifying items of potential interest; 2) generating initial codes that identify important features of the data relevant to answering the research question(s); applying codes to the dataset reliably; 3) searching for themes; inspecting the codes and collated data to identify broader patterns of meaning; 4) reviewing themes; 5) defining and naming themes; developing a detailed analysis of each theme; and 6) producing a report (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Braun and Clarke (2006) also state in their theory that thematic analysis should be recursive and not linear – this means that the researcher needs to be flexible in their thinking and the way in which they analyse the data. This also implies that not all steps in the thematic analysis process must be followed coherently. Depending on the data generated, the research will have to navigate back

and forth between the steps to analyse the data as per the content it contains (Braun & Clarke, 2006). During the data analysis process, I followed the steps mentioned above by Braun and Clarke (2006). I read all the letters and interviews. After reading, I grouped together similar points of interest from the letters and interviews. I then generated codes for the grouped concepts attributing to their similar characteristics. I then categorised similar codes under broad themes and named the themes. Lastly, I discussed and elaborated on each theme with key points from the letters and interviews. I also ensured flexibility during the thematic analysis process by moving back and forth between the thematic analysis steps.

4.9.1.1 Familiarisation of data

The study used interviews and letters as its data generation methods. The letters were typed and emailed to me by the participants and the interviews were conducted and recorded online via Zoom. Transcription is considered an effective method for becoming familiar with data since it entails continuous listening to audio recordings and the process of writing down the information (Riessman, 1993). Keeping this point in mind, I had to listen to the recording of each interview and type out the transcriptions which involved having to listen to each participants response clearly. At times, the recording had to be rewound and replayed to ensure that every detail was transcribed. During this time, I was also making notes based on the key points from each interview transcript and letter. This was the process which I applied to comprehend the participants responses from each method.

4.9.1.2 Generation of initial codes

A code can be described as a tag that is assigned to a key idea in qualitative research. Codes are used to categorise and organise ideas into different themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Upon reading and re-reading the transcripts and letters, I had started to identify codes from the letters and transcripts. Thereafter, I grouped the similar codes together and tried to develop themes. The next section discusses the process in which the different themes emerged.

4.9.1.3 Searching for themes

As suggested by Braun and Clarke (2006), after evaluating the codes similarities and differences, they should then be arranged into themes. I therefore, grouped all similar codes and different codes together and was able to generate a list of possible themes which were evident.

4.9.1.4 Reviewing themes

The themes of a study must resonate with the research questions and represent major findings of the study (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). I, thereafter, reviewed the tentative themes which I had listed and re-arranged them ranging from the most likely themes to the least likely themes. In some cases, I merged the common themes together to create one theme and in other segments, I had to split some of the themes.

4.9.1.5 Defining and naming themes

After reviewing all the themes, and the newly merged and split themes, I had to find suitable titles for each theme. The title had to be effective in encompassing a range of sub-themes within it. The titles also had to capture the essence of the finding (Braun & Clarke, 2006). I therefore tried to keep each theme title as concise and coherent as possible.

4.9.1.6 Producing a report

After following the previous five steps from Braun and Clarke's (2006) theory. The final stage of the thematic analysis involved writing a report. I prepared a detailed analysis report which was coherent, rational and an expressive analysis and interpretation of the data. In the report, the findings from the study were linked back to knowledge from existing literature, the theoretical framework of the study, the rationale, purpose, objectives, and research questions of the study. It is also essential to ensure that study is transparent and unbiased, therefore, under the next section, I will be discussing my stance under the researcher's reflexivity section.

4.10 Trustworthiness

In quantitative research, the focus is on validity and reliability; however, with qualitative research the focus is on trustworthiness (Shenton, 2004; Heale & Twycross, 2015). Trustworthiness is underpinned by dependability, transferability, confirmability, and credibility (Shenton, 2004).

In qualitative research, the concept of reliability used in quantitative studies is replaced with dependability (Shenton, 2004). Dependability can be defined as the extent to which research could be applied in similar conditions (Stenfors et al., 2020). To ensure dependability, I shared the transcripts with my supervisor for comment on my research methods, data and the process.

I also provided readers with a detailed description of the methodological processes which were followed throughout the research.

Confirmability refers to the clear link between the data and the findings. As mentioned earlier in the chapter, I ensured confirmability in the study by providing a clear method of analysis with details for each step of the analysis process.

Credibility is one of the major elements of trustworthiness. It is important to note that qualitative data methods are subjective, because it is common for such studies to account for participants' emotions, actions, interactions, cultures, and symbols (Morgan & Drury, 2003). Credibility examines the research methods used, and the extent to which participants are honest during the research process. This study ensured credibility through member-checking. Birt, Scott, Cavers, Campbell and Walter (2016) define member-checking as the process in which the participants' responses are shared with them, in order for them to confirm that the data was captured correctly. In addition to the attempts to ensure rigour I attended to the challenges that emerged during data generation. For example, two participants did not submit their letters. By trying to maintain an open channel of communication with the participants and by sending them frequent reminders, I ensured that the study maintained its rigour. Transparency was sustained through clear reporting, clearly noting that despite repeated reminders, two participants did not submit their letters. This was acceptable as participation in the study was voluntarily. This presents the data in an unbiased and ethical manner. It provided a thorough account of participation and highlighted the limitations in the data generation process. There were also other ethical considerations such as respecting the autonomy of the participants, for instance, I did not pressure them to send their letters. After a two-week waiting period, I understood that the absence of their letters suggested that the participants were reluctant to submit their letters.

According to Guillemin and Gillam (2004) reflexivity in research is regarded as an ethically essential part of research. Reflexivity in research refers to the conscious unpacking of the researcher's personal beliefs and values (Shacklock & Smyth, 1998). In the next section, I have completed a researcher reflexivity segment in which I unpack my positionality in the research.

4.11 Researcher reflexivity

In conducting this study, I, as the researcher, recognise the importance of reflexivity in research and I acknowledge my own biases and positionality. I acknowledge that my own beliefs, values, circumstances, and contexts may shape my interpretations and influence the research process.

Belonging to the same HEI as the participants, being a few years older than them and being conscious of the teacher-education practices at this selected HEI, I am aware that I share certain educational experiences and generational influences with them. To address this, I engaged in reflexive practices throughout the research journey and critically examined my own notions on identity and the research topic.

As part of the reflexive practice, I kept a journal in which I constantly evaluated my position on identity and student-teachers identity construction. I also noted key points from the interviews and other matters of interest relating to the study. To gain a better understanding of the data, I read and re-read the transcripts and letters. I also played the interview recordings multiple times to immerse myself in the data. In the next section, I will unpack my personal experiences with identity construction as a former Bachelor of Education student, I will then discuss the challenges of finding relevant literature and selecting a suitable research methodology and approach. Thereafter, I will reflect on the actual data generation process and the psychological process of analysing and interpreting the data.

4.11.1 My personal experiences of identity construction

Conducting research changes the researcher in many ways. Therefore, reflexivity in research is necessary as it provides transparency and more information about the research's perspective on their study. It also makes the researcher more conscious about their involvement and therefore shapes the way in which they interpret and present the findings from their study (Palaganas et al., 2017). I will therefore begin by unpacking my personal experiences and perspectives on identity construction. Prior to entering higher education, I was unaware about the vast range of factors which impact the professional identity development of student-teachers. Upon enrolling for the Bachelor of Education programme and engaging with extensive literature, lecturers, and peer cohort sessions, I realised that identity awareness was important in education. It was during the undergraduate phase that I had gained a lot of conceptual knowledge about identity. Though I went out to schools to complete my TP, the link between professional identity construction and TP was barely heard of. Upon enrolling for the Bachelor of Education Honours degree, I knew that I wanted to research more on the professional identity of teachers for my independent research project. After consulting with my supervisor, I put together a list of possible topics relating to identity, and it was then when I was advised that TP and identity construction are linked. I had therefore decided that my Master of Education degree will centre around the link between TP and how it develops the identities of student-teachers. Thereafter, I read a lot of

literature based on the identities of student-teachers but not many were focused on the TP component. Now that I am immersed into this topic, I reflected on some of the factors from my TP experiences which would have shaped my professional identity. At the high school where I conducted my final TP for my BEd. degree, I met a senior mentor teacher who taught me so much about the ideal professional identity role which I envisioned for myself. The mentor teacher had years of experience in my subject specialisation, however, he did not let me feel inferior due to that reason. Rather, he encouraged me to present my lessons according to my own style and using creative strategies which were seldom spoken about or implemented at school. He also guided me with other methods of teaching the subject (from his experience). For example, when dealing with practical subjects, it is important to be more instructional. This can be done by demonstrating how certain calculations are done and explain to learners in the first few introductory lessons before expecting them to try more difficult calculations. On the other hand, in theoretical subjects there is more room for experimentation such as allowing learners to do presentations and/or role-plays. This was an instance which allowed me to experiment and start to evaluate my own teaching practices more critically.

4.11.2 Challenges in finding relevant literature for this study

One of the major challenges encountered in the initial stages of this study was being able to locate relevant literature based on how professional identities are constructed during TP. I searched for both national and international literature sources and was particularly focused on finding more information relating to the South African context – for instance, the conditions under which TP is conducted in South Africa and the South African HEIs policies and criteria for TP. However, not much has been done in this regard. Most of the South African literature focused on factors which stressed student-teachers during TP; some were more subject specific, such as exploring student-teachers experiences with English as a second language; another focused on the importance of TP and the fact that it can be seen as a make-or-break phase for student-teachers. Though there were a few resources on the identities of student-teachers and its importance, they did not raise some of the scenarios mentioned in this study.

4.11.3 Analysing the data

I am aware that my enthusiasm and passion for the topic has motivated me to immerse myself into the study. Keeping this in mind, I had to constantly remind myself to focus on the participants' perspectives and not my own during the analysis process. I had a copy of my

research questions and research topic in front of me when I was analysing the data, so that I did not lose sight of the key focus in the study – the voices and opinions of the participants. This prevented me from deviating from the topic. When I felt that my personal views were starting to conflict with the participants, I would re-read the transcripts and jot down the main points that they were trying to make. At times, I had to walk away from the study space just to clear my thoughts and redirect my ideas to those of the participants, it was almost like trying to picture the scenario from their lens to fit in and understand what they experienced and how it impacted them, not just professionally but emotionally too. For example, one participant spoke about being harassed. When I reflected and thought about what the participant said, I also could sense how upsetting it was for her given the amount of work put in for preparation. These kinds of emotions also impacted the way I initially would have analysed the incident, so I had journalled my response to the situation and then kept it aside and focused on what was necessary – which involved the challenges she faced and how they shaped her as a teacher.

4.12 Conclusion

In this chapter I outlined the research design of the study. I then discussed the research paradigm, the qualitative research approach, the methodology, types of data generation methods, the sampling procedures and the sample size. The study made use of purposive sampling due to the number of participants selected. I also took into account the ethical considerations, the data analysis procedures and the trustworthiness of the study. Lastly, I presented a reflexivity section wherein I reflected on my personal experiences of identity construction, the challenges in finding relevant literature sources for this study and an overview of the analysis process. The next chapter will discuss data analysis and the experiences shared by the participants.

CHAPTER FIVE: DATA ANALYSIS

5.1 Introduction

The previous chapter presented a discussion on the research design and methodology of the study. Some of the sections discussed in the previous chapter included the research paradigm, approach, the sample, the participants profiles, ethical considerations, and trustworthiness of the study. This chapter discusses the data that emerged. Data analysis is described as a process in which the data generated is understood and interpreted (Cohen et al., 2018; Harding, 2018). In qualitative research, data can be generated through interviews, observations, case studies and questionnaires (Albertson, 2021). Qualitative data is often subjective, rich, and consists of extensive information normally portrayed in the form of words (Wong, 2008). Data generation encompasses actions such as searching for, focusing on, noting, selecting, extracting, and capturing data (Göran, 2019). The study adopted two data generation methods, namely letter writing and narrative interviews. Therefore, this chapter presents and discusses the data generated through the two methods and the data is presented thematically.

This chapter mentions four themes which emerged after the data analysis process. These themes are: 1) becoming a teacher; 2) experiencing the last teaching practice; 3) student-teachers identity and 4) influences on identity construction.

5.2 Becoming a teacher

Becoming a teacher is a transformative and rewarding journey that involves acquiring the necessary knowledge, skills, and experiences to guide and inspire learners (Lucero & Roncancio-Castellanos, 2019; Kenny & Morrissey, 2020). It is a profession that holds immense significance in shaping the future generations and contributing to the growth of society (Toraman & Korkmaz, 2022). At the selected HEI, teacher education involves a structured programme for student-teachers which consists of practical and theoretical components (as mentioned earlier in the study). There are requirements that student-teachers must prepare themselves for prior to becoming a teacher. A major factor is the academic preparation – in the context of this study, student-teachers must embark on the journey to pursue a Bachelor of Education degree, which is a four-year commitment and, in each year, along with other modules such as Professional Studies and Education Studies, TP plays a major role. TP can be quite demanding in the sense that student-teachers have to adhere to the following: 1) student-teachers have to quickly transition from student-teacher to a professional teacher in a

classroom; 2) student-teachers have to design lesson plans and devote time to preparing innovative and interactive lessons; 3) they have to learn to manage their time efficiently and multi-task where necessary (Macan et al., 1990; Melnick & Meister, 2008); 4) constant reflection is required in order to better identify problems and adjust practices to achieve better teaching and learning outcomes (Mwila et al., 2022) and lastly, student-teachers also end up investing themselves emotionally (Chen, 2018; Jones & Kessler, 2020) in the profession as they are dealing with children and other people who require their time, patience and support constantly. Under this section, I will be delving into participant narratives of TP and how their inherent identities influenced their professional identities.

Firstly, I will focus on the participants' reasons for choosing teaching. Lihle expressed his motivation for becoming a teacher, citing his enjoyment of teaching his younger sisters and classmates as a significant factor. Natalie's decision (in the excerpt below) to pursue a career in teaching stemmed from her personal experience with challenges relating to language. Her motivation derived from a desire to prevent other learners from encountering similar challenges.

“I remember I used to teach my younger sisters the clock and like tell them this is the time and it went on with me until this stage... when I was in high school, the teachers used to tell me that: “Hey wena [you], you are a teacher now, teach these learners!” , I started in grade 8 to 10 to teach I actually used to tell my classmates to come and I would be in front of them doing everything that a teacher should do in class and they were impressed like: “Lihle, wow! You are a real teacher!” , and there I knew that I’m a teacher, I’m born for this...” (Lihle)

“English was my additional language, so I did not get all the necessary basics. I did not get the chance to speak English and the teachers were forced to code switch since we did not understand. I struggled to communicate and lacked knowledge about how to access higher education. With all the above challenges, I then chose teaching to help the upcoming learners not to experience what I went through...” (Natalie, Letter)

Sophia's decision to pursue teaching was inspired by the transformative impact of her own teachers. Their ability to ignite a passion for learning within her motivated her to follow in their footsteps and make a positive difference in the lives of future students. Sophia recognized the significant role teachers play in shaping learners' academic and personal development. Her

experience exemplifies the profound influence that dedicated and inspiring teachers can have on shaping individuals' career choices and their commitment to the field of education.

“So, it’s such a cliché answer because I feel like all of us are influenced by a teacher whom we were once taught by. So, my teachers had a very big influence in choosing teaching as a career. They had a positive influence. They really did impact my life positively, so I just wanted to share that experience and my personality to other kids. Hence, I also decided to just take on the Foundation and Intermediate Phase, because I believe that is where you mould a child to become what they want to be. So, I wanted to be a part of their journey and influence them positively...” (Sophia)

The data above, as stated earlier, indicates various reasons that influenced the participants to choose teaching as a career. I elaborate on one point mentioned by Sophia. She stated that her previous teachers had a positive influence in her becoming a teacher. This is consistent with the study by Cross and Ndofirepi (2013), which highlighted some of the main reasons as to why individuals choose teaching as their preferred career option. Cross and Ndofirepi (2013) state the following reasons for people choosing to become teachers in their study, reasons that resonated with the findings in my study: (1) family influence (as mentioned by Lihle), and (2) school context – being influenced by inspirational teachers (as mentioned by Sophia). The participants also mentioned two other points which were: (1) giving back to the community and (2) inaccessibility of career choices – no other career choice.

5.3 Experiencing the last teaching practice

The purpose of teaching practice is to offer an opportunity for student-teachers to gain knowledge that involves their professional and academic capabilities and to ensure that what they can teach is both relevant and thorough (Reid, 2017). Considering that the participants in the study were final-year student-teachers on their TP, the data revealed that most of the participants mentioned their experiences of this particular teaching practice. Their experiences varied from positive and negative experiences from teachers and the learners. Below I present excerpts of participants who had negative experiences with teachers and learners.

“So, it was very difficult in the sense that, at the University I previously studied at, we choose one specific school to do a practical at... however, in my experience there was a male teacher who was kind of giving me a very difficult time and it led to him borderline harassing me... it was super uncomfortable for me to keep staying at the school and

completing my practicals, which is why I further completed my practical at another school and I just thereafter completed the two weeks which were remaining. So, it was quite difficult for me as well and it was something that made me think differently about my profession and the kind of things that I was exposed to at the school. So, it wasn't a very pleasant experience.” (Gabriella)

“Oh God! (laughs)... I was challenged by the grade 9 learners... well, firstly, it was my first time being in that kind of environment or the mixed race [multi-racial] environment... and it was the most hectic thing! And, they see me as this young man, it was like them knowing I'm a student-teacher was very challenging. They tell these learners that you are a student-teacher. When we were growing up, and I remember when I was in primary school, or those lower grades in high school, we were not told that this teacher is a student-teacher, we were just told that this a teacher in front of you, respect this teacher, do this etc... and, now it is funny that these are student-teachers, they are not teachers – they are here to practise and learners will do what they have to do to exercise their power.” (Lihle)

“...err, like grade four to six are a very complex or rather challenging age group to teach because that is when learners think they have discovered themselves. They think they know everything. So, you are dealing with kids who are like almost teenagers or they wanna show off themselves and think they know everything. And as a student-teacher... they know that you are a student-teacher, so they know that you are not their teacher, you're still gonna leave, so they are a very challenging age group to handle because you might find one that will allow you to be a great student-teacher – allow you to teach and them to learn, but sometimes you will even find the ones that will want to challenge you out of nowhere because they feel as if they know everything because they are at a certain age. So, it was very challenging but at the same time I love challenges. That's why I specifically wanted to go to that age group because I just wanted to test myself as to how can I handle a child or classroom that is challenging and how do you deliver your curriculum or teaching in that type of environment. So, for me it was a great experience in a nutshell...” (Sophia)

The data reveals that Gabriella had extreme negative experiences at the hands of a male teacher who was harassing her. Although, it is not clear what kind of harassment she experienced, it led to her changing schools during the course of her teaching practice. Her teaching practice was

two weeks long at the school at which she faced this challenge. Changing schools indicates that Gabriella had to navigate two different sites for her teaching practice, which might have contributed differently to her student-teacher identity. Research has shown in South Africa that men are at the centre of violence against women, children and other men (Gqola, 2007; Vetten & Ratele, 2013). Experiencing harassment towards the end of completing her teaching qualification in particular from a senior teacher might have led to several thoughts and trauma for Gabriella.

Lihle's experiences emerged from the learners who did not respect student-teachers; the data shows further that Lihle is associating the disrespect and belittling by the learners to an instruction they received from other teachers. Drawing from the excerpts presented earlier Gabriella's experiences from her last teaching practice were centred around gender and power, while for Lihle they are associated with race and power. Even though Lihle didn't explicitly mention that the experiences are partly because of race, mentioning the "mixed-race" issue suggests that it could've emerged from it. The South African history on race and gender are both at play in how the two participants reflected about their last teaching practice. Sophia's point revealed that, despite the difficulties encountered in the teaching practice, it made her resilient and gave her the ability to overcome obstacles.

According to Kiggundu and Nayimuli (2009) other student-teachers often feel exploited by mentor teachers during their TP period. Examples of this include, making the student teacher feel incompetent by demotivating them (Kim, 2015) and preventing them from presenting a lesson (Sali, 2015). Other scholars such as Thornberg et al. (2023) assert that sources of stress for student-teachers occur during TP, particularly due to issues of poor classroom management. Similarly, Klassen and Durksen (2014) state that TP is a psychologically demanding period for student-teachers; within a limited timeframe student-teachers have to juggle between expectations of the school and university. For instance, most of the students at a Canadian HEI posited that their final year TP was the most critical time for them (Klassen & Durksen, 2014). This would be because the criteria are intensely demanding, and planning consumes most of the TP time for student-teachers.

Apart from the negative experiences the above two participants had, there are also positive experiences that appear to have contributed to the student-teachers' lives and identities. I found

that, for Natalie and Ndalo, their last teaching experience was affirming to themselves and their identities. The stated;

“Yes, the teaching practice has shaped me a lot because I met mentor teachers who encouraged me, I also met learners... okay, I used to think teaching was horrible, teaching was difficult... (Natalie)

“I had a good experience; the learners and staff were very friendly. I didn’t have any problems teaching the learners. I was comfortable in the classroom. They gave me the role of being a teacher and I assumed they saw me as a teacher, not student-teacher... and yeah, I had a great experience during my teaching practice.” (Ndalo)

“I found that there were a lot of differences because of the age groups, so Grade 8s are just starting high school... it’s a new territory for them, they used to do certain things from primary school that are different in high school, so teaching them was a little more challenging than teaching the Grade 10s, simply because they are still getting used to what the structure is like in a high school classroom compared to the primary school classroom... so, it was a bit challenging in terms of discipline and getting them to focus. But, overall it was very exciting to teach them because they are still young so it’s easy to plan fun lessons for them to do and things that they can interact with that are exciting... and with the Grade 10s, it was a bit easier I would say than the Grade 8s because they already know how they supposed to behave in a classroom, what’s expected of them and for them as well, it was easy to plan lessons where they can interact for example, like an interactive chart... where you would put one on the board and ask them to come up to the board and put them in groups, it’s easier to work with them because they understand what’s expected of them. So, for me I really enjoyed teaching the Grade 10s more just because I think I thrive a little bit more in that age group.” (Melanie)

Natalie’s excerpt indicates that she previously constructed teaching negatively as horrible and difficult to be precise. Ndalo’s experiences were positive to the extent that she felt more like a teacher than a student-teacher and these experiences are contrary to Lihle’s, who felt that his student-teacher identity was not affirmed by the teachers and the learners. Melanie’s views concurred with Lihle’s in the sense that she also experienced discipline problems in the high school at which she was placed. However, she found that eventually she started to adapt and excel in that environment.

Rissanen et al. (2023) mention that teaching in a diverse environment is complex and is still treated superficially. This implies that more research is required to gain a better understanding of how diverse classrooms impact teacher identities. Thus, it is evident that student-teachers require support and motivation from their mentors and other school stakeholders in order for their TP to be effective. However, uncomfortable experiences and challenges are also beneficial to student-teachers because it does provoke them to reconsider the kind of teacher which they want to become and that is what also gives rise to their new professional teacher identity. Student-teachers have the power to be agents of change. When studying to become a teacher, HEIs emphasise the role of teachers as being agents of change and conducting action research.

Action research can be defined as a process in which teachers and other educational stakeholders are actively involved in improving existing educational practices (Clark et al., 2020). The study by Price and Valli (2005) evaluated four student-teachers' experiences of action research and identified five central tensions in the process and pedagogy of action research. These tensions were: (1) individual and institutional change; (2) action and understanding; (3) support and challenge; (4) passion and reason and (5) regulation and emancipation. Therefore, action research is not always easy for student-teachers to implement. These five suggested tensions prevent student-teachers from fully establishing their role as agents of change. If we evaluate Lihle and Gabriella's negative experiences from their last TP, it is evident that Lihle could not implement change due to the tension of support – the mentor teacher had already stated that Lihle was a student-teacher, which gave learners the impression that Lihle's role was less important than that of their actual teacher's role. Gabriella's experience with her final TP also highlighted that support was a major tension and led to an awkward working relationship between her and her mentor teacher. Consequently, both Lihle and Gabriella struggled to fully act as agents of change. The participants felt that they did not get much support during TP. On the other hand, Natalie and Ndalo shared their positive experiences from the final TP. Natalie found that her mentor teachers changed her view of the profession and of the learners as they were supportive and encouraged her during TP. Consequently, she may have been given more liberty to get to know her learners, teach using her own style, explore with newer teaching methods or classroom management styles and therefore, she felt as though she was an agent of change in that environment. Ndalo's experience was the extreme opposite of what Lihle had stated, she mentioned that she felt like a teacher and not a student-teacher. Therefore, she felt comfortable to take certain decisions and was able to take charge of her own classes and was also developing her teaching identity at the same

time. Thus, it can be deduced that action research and the level to which student-teachers view themselves as agents of change can also play a role in their professional identity construction. They just require adequate support and guidance from mentor teachers in order to verify the efficacy of their practices.

5.4 Student-teachers' identities

Identity can be defined as who one is and how they view themselves (Fearon, 1999). Identity is a multi-faceted concept (Tatum, 2000; Stets & Serpe, 2019). Every individual has multiple identities and identity roles which they have to fulfil such as being a student at university, a child at home, a sibling or a parent. The study found that student-teachers, too, construct and define their student-teacher identities in multiple ways. In the excerpt below the data shows the participants' notions of identity;

"I understand it as the things which make you who you are, what defines you, how you view things, yourself." (Melanie)

"Uhhh, well I think identity is talking about a person, the morals of the person, talking about myself, how I uphold myself, the behaviour... yeah, I think it's just myself. How is Lihle? Well, giving characteristics to Lihle, like I think it's like myself and everything to do with my identity. If you are talking about me, you'll talk about someone respectful, someone who's self-motivated, someone who appears to be happy and everything... likes to laugh... you see, that kind of thing. Yeah, I think that's my understanding of identity." (Lihle)

The above indicates that Melanie associated identity with self-concept and all factors which impact one on a personal, inherent level. Lihle's response was also aligned to self-concept, but he also added that morals play a role in the type of person one becomes. He highlights that respect, self-motivation and happiness define him as a person. The manner in which Lihle understands identity is consistent with the study by Beauchamp and Thomas (2009), which argues that the concept of identity can also be linked to other factors such as the self, emotions, narratives and discourse of identity, reflection in exploring and shaping teacher identity and understanding the link between identity and agency. However, the participants were generic in their response about identities, i.e., they were not specific to teacher identities. Browne (2021) emphasises the link between the inherent qualities that individuals possess and how these shape these individuals' perspectives of others and interpret the identities of others. Various identities

that comprise the self exist in a hierarchy of salience, where the identities that are ranked highest are most likely to be invoked in situations that involve different aspects of the self (Stryker, 1968). Identity is not something that individual can possess and hold on to forever, instead it is something that is deconstructed and reconstructed with every varying experience that individuals go through (Beijaard et al., 2004). As mentioned earlier in this chapter, identity cannot be constructed by isolating the personal identity factors which form the foundation for professional identity to develop (Korthagen, 2004). Having noted that identities are multiple, the next theme presents and discusses the data on different aspects that contribute to the construction of identities, as in the study by Tatum (2000), which explored the complexities of identities and the number of aspects influencing one's identity.

5.5 Influences on identity construction

From the data generated, there were various social influences which emerged that play a role in identity construction. The main social influences which emerged were family, school and religious practices.

5.5.1 Family

If one were to consider the importance of family to a child, some of the main notions which come to mind are that family forms the child's primary social group (Roostin, 2018). Children gain their physical, social, emotional and intellectual abilities from their family first and thereafter, begin to understand the world around them and other external factors. As time passes, one's family imparts values and traditional practices to its members (Barni et al., 2017). Individuals then have the option to either accept or reject their family practices. The factors which the individual accepts then become a part of the individual inherently and therefore, start to play a role in the individual's personal identity.

In light of the discussion of family influences on identity construction, Natalie and Lihle noted;

“... my roommates and a supportive mother... in university, I met five roommates, so they are encouraging... they are so supportive, and they made me think... they helped me in shaping my personal or professional identity. I learnt a lot of things from them, and it has changed me.” (Natalie)

“Well, firstly, I think family... before I knew or even interacted with everyone, I knew my family. So, it’s where grooming and actual growth came from. Yeah, I think that it’s the first thing that is an umbrella... family first and then peers...” (Lihle)

Natalie mentioned that her greatest support amidst all her challenges was her mother who constantly remained her silent pillar of strength. Lihle mentioned that he knew his family before anyone else. He emphasised that the grooming skills which he gained from his family set the primary foundation that enabled him to make meaning of the other things around him. From Lihle’s point in the excerpt, it is evident that family is a critical component to consider when trying to understand one’s own identity. Thomas et al. (2017) have indicated that family relationships and personal well-being are interconnected. This means that if one shares a healthy and interactive relationship with their family members, they are more likely to feel content with themselves and they may also notice decreased stress levels. Consistent with Thomas et al. (2017), I also found that the participants were noting the contribution and the importance of family on their identities. The second influence on identity construction is the school, which I discuss in the sub-theme that follows;

5.5.2 School

Education at some point entails a transformation in an individual’s conduct of life. It means the advancement of an individual’s ability to choose the best choice available in any situation that they may face. It also refers to the development of the individual to prepare them to adopt the best approach to any problem at any given time. Learning can therefore be defined as the ability to adapt to ever-changing environments and situations by applying the intellectual knowledge which one has gained over the years (Chazan, 2021). When analysing the data, I found that the participants referred to the influence of education (basic and higher education) to their identities. The participants stated:

“...And also, we are looking at school, a school can also shape a learner or a person’s identity because that’s where we spend most of our time. We spend most of our time at school so... whatever it is that we interact and learn from our teachers, our peers, our school principal and HoD’s – that hierarchy also shapes learners or a person’s identity because how you behave in school and what you see is what shapes us, as well as the school’s mottos, beliefs, mission and values. They also have an impact on what a person aspires to be.” (Sophia)

“A lot has changed because as a student-teacher, I only had two classes, the grade 8s and 10s which are just two units – one grade 8 class and one grade 10 class. But now, as a teacher at this school, I’m teaching Social Sciences and Life Orientation, so I have a full set of subjects... that’s like nine units... and, it’s a lot different from being a student-teacher because you now have a bigger workload, you have to figure your lessons for every class, there’s around 46 children in each class... it’s difficult to incorporate group work and so on like what we’re expected to do on campus. It’s very difficult to do it when you have such a large number of learners in each class. It’s also hard to give learners individual attention and to meet those standards. It is also difficult to plan an innovative introduction for each lesson...” (Melanie)

The studies by Huang and Waxman (2009) and Masoom (2021) found that a professional and pleasant working environment had increased the student-teachers’ level of satisfaction in the field. Sophia asserted that the school environment did impact her identity construction, particularly because she was in a constant process of collaborating with other staff members from school, such as the other teachers, colleagues, heads of department and the principal. She felt that the school’s organisational structure taught her more about how to interact professionally with other experienced professionals (teachers and members of the school community). She also mentioned that as a student-teacher in the school’s working environment, one needs to be aware of the school’s ethos, mission, vision, values and student-teachers need to uphold the value system of the school regardless of their own ideas.

Melanie compared her school environment from her final TP to her current teaching experience. She mentioned that the workload as a student-teacher was much lighter as, when she was a student-teacher, resources were easily made available. For instance, she was allowed to conduct her Natural Sciences lessons in the school’s science laboratory, which also had a projector and screen, so she felt that she had the autonomy to design her lessons creatively and capture the learners’ attention easily. However, at present she is a full-time teacher who finds that her current classroom is not conducive to teaching and learning of her large class sizes and innovative teaching strategies such as group work and other collaborative measures are not practical within the space.

5.5.3 “Lay down, lay low”: Negotiating the influence of the school on identities.

Identity negotiation is a complex process as it is influenced by various individuals and how they choose to interact with others (McCall et al., 2021). During TP, the negotiation of teacher identity is heavily impacted by mentor teachers, university tutors, learners, other members of staff within the school environment, as well as by the other external factors such as being influenced by societal norms and values (Mpofu, 2019). Mentor teachers particularly can either inspire student-teachers or demotivate them. Whilst some participants felt that their mentor teachers did their best to help them, some others felt that they had to just follow the mentor teachers’ instructions for the duration of their TP.

The concept of “lay down, lay low” emerged from Lihle’s interview where he stated that he always attempted to adhere the school rules and also expected learners to follow the relevant behavioural codes. However, the mentor teacher treated him like a “student-teacher” and taught learners to do the same. Therefore, the learners did not respect his position of authority. Lihle was told to “lay down and lay low” for the TP period.

“I am a person of rules and standards, and then you go into a school and realise that it is not of the same rules and standards. And, as an actual student-teacher, you find that it is a different environment. There are different rules that are there but no one is reminding the learners that they need to exercise these rules. You have an idea that this is a school and you know that this is a school. But, the power to actually press... because you’re only going to be here for one month. You have no power to say anything. The other teachers say lay down, lay low because you are only here for one month... do what you are here for and get out sort of outlook. So, that changes your perspective about the school. It reaches a point where you want to say I want to be in a position of authority at school. If you are a clever person it will motivate you to say I want to be in this position of authority. So, therefore the school rules would affect my identity.”

(Lihle)

The comment on Lihle to “lay down and lay low” impacted his identity construction because the actual practices from the school started to interfere with his own morals, beliefs and values, which then had a negative impact on his overall TP performance. Consequently, he felt unable to fully establish himself as a new teacher and was also restricted. He could not implement anything new in his lessons because the mentor teacher wanted the lessons to be conducted in

the same manner as their lessons. The mentor teacher wanted Lihle to stay out of trouble throughout his TP. Mpofu's (2019) study resonates with Lihle's TP experience, as it highlights some of the critical incidents which occur during TP. One of the themes which emerged from this study was critical incidents in developing professional identity. The participants in the study mentioned four critical incidents which they recalled from their TP, which enabled them to become more conscious of their identity construction. These incidents were: (1) discipline; (2) dress code; and (3) large class sizes. Similarly, in the context of this study, due to Lihle not receiving adequate support from his mentor, he also struggled with discipline because the learners already had their own preconceived opinions about him because he was not their "real teacher". He also struggled with large class sizes as he was in a non-private school teaching learners from diverse backgrounds. However, he did adhere to the professional dress codes in order to create a professional image for himself.

In the two excerpts below by Melanie. I found that she was not provided with adequate support by her mentor teacher. She was also surprised that her mentor teacher requested Melanie's lesson plans and teaching resources. She mentioned:

"It did... it pushed me to do things better or more than what I was doing – like I said, I didn't have much feedback but I tried to read between the lines and make sure there was no room for error. But, I realised when I went for TP after that it wasn't necessarily my work that was the problem, it was just the way she looked at it or maybe it was something personal to her, I wasn't really sure but for all my teaching practices, I just did the best that I could to ensure everything was always on par and I did receive quite a lot of mentoring and samples of how your lesson plan should be, so I don't think I lack in that aspect [...] at the end of TP, she asked me to give her all of my lesson plans, all of my digital lesson plans... so, it was a bit confusing to me because why would you like my lesson plans if you didn't like my work or my work wasn't up to standard? So, that was the only negative experience I had but that was my second year of TP" (Melanie)

The previous discussion makes it clear that when mentor teachers provide insufficient support, it can have negative consequences for the professional development and identity formation of student-teachers (Izadinia, 2015). Chu's (2019) study found that mentor teachers were unaware of how to mentor and support student-teachers. Some perceived student-teachers to be assistant teachers who aided the mentor teachers during the lessons. The reason behind this thinking was

because that was the role of the mentor teachers whilst they were student-teachers back in their time (Chu, 2019). Chu (2019) therefore suggests that more training and development sessions need to be provided to mentor teachers for them to understand the role of the student-teachers better, to assess them and help them grow as professionals.

Natalie compared her TP experience at two different schools and described school X as a “warzone”, particularly due to the lack of discipline and respect. She described school Y as a collaborative space where she was allowed autonomy to teach different grades and select teaching methods which were suitable for her. In her letter, she stated:

“Well, I did my teaching practice in two different schools, School X where I was teaching Grades eight and eleven, English and Technology. The experience was not great since there were wars in school, and we were forced to teach while the police officers made sure that we were safe. Teachers’ and learners’ safety was threatened in that School. The wars were between learners from the school and learners from other schools. Besides the fights, the staff of the school was unfriendly, lacked support and learners were not respectful. With all the experience above, I learnt to be independent, stand for myself while being kind, and focus on my teaching practice. The above was very encouraging because it made me realize different challenges in a working place and learn how to be calm... The second teaching practice was at School Y. This is the school where I matriculated. They allowed me to practice on three grades, eight, nine and ten. I was teaching English FAL, Technology and Natural Sciences. The experience was different from the previous one. The staff was collaborative, and some of the learners did not see the necessity of education. The above-mentioned teaching practice had a huge impact on my identity as a teacher: I discovered that the environments are not the same; therefore, a teacher must be flexible. I realized that some of the learners have experiences that I have. So, this encouraged me on keeping my promise to help other learners where I can. Teaching practice is the most significant part of the Bachelor of Education degree and it can have a huge impact on student teachers’ lives.

(Natalie, Letter)

Natalie’s experience at school X reinforces the notion of “lay down, lay low” as there were no measures put in place to address the issues. Teachers were not open to suggestions. However, Natalie found that the scenario at school taught her to deal with similar challenges in a calmer

manner. Akhmedova (2022) highlighted that discipline in lessons is a common challenge in schools and states that by creating a positive learning environment, such challenges can be overcome. Teachers can overcome such challenges by understanding the learners' personalities and finding ways to effectively communicate with learners when they are disruptive (Akhmedova, 2022).

The school premises are not without the influence of religion and culture. The South African Schools Act 84 of 1996 and the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (1996) promote and protect the right to freedom of religion and religious beliefs for teachers and learners. It further mentions that religious observances may be conducted at the school under rules issued by the governing body and attendance by learners and other school members is voluntary (Government of South Africa, 1996; South African Government, 1996). In South Africa we have schools that are predominant in particular religions e.g., schools that follow a strict Christian or Islam ethos. On analysing the data, I found that one of the participants; Gabriella was in schools that provided her with two different experiences in terms of religion, she stated;

“So, I was at an all-Christian school and I’m a Christian as well so, it was kind of something that tied in with what I believed in and they would pray, they would have services – it was really religious. But I was also at an Islamic school where I also followed and respected their beliefs... I had to wear the Islamic attire especially being a female, and it was also a very fun experience for me as well... I learnt a lot and it was something that I was opened to knowing more about and just understanding and learning... so, it was a good experience as well.” (Gabriella)

If the physical school environment makes adequate provisioning for student-teachers to be included in that space, then their sense of agency will motivate them to become more involved in the life of the school and engage more meaningfully in the school's practices (Bascia, 2014). Religion helps individuals to build a moral foundation (Mol, 2022). Gabriella attended two different schools for her final TP. The first followed a Christian ethos and the other followed an Islamic ethos. During the interview session, Gabriella mentioned that because she is also a Christian, the practices at the Christian school were relatable to her and she was able to fit in easily. At the Islamic school, the practices were fairly new to her, however, she tried her best to learn more about the school's ethos and religious practices. She even wore the female Islamic garments. She found that it was a good experience because members of the school were pleased

to see her display respect for their religion and appreciated the fact that she was open-minded to embrace their practices.

5.6 The importance of teaching practice on identity construction

Teaching practice is the basic foundation which all student-teachers need in order to obtain a qualification in teacher-education. It is a phase in which the student-teacher is exposed to the profession, they are provided with the opportunity to learn, to interact within the school community as a member of staff and as a student-teacher to learners (Kiggundu & Nayimuli, 2009). This practical component also requires the student-teacher to immerse themselves into the profession and be actively involved in all school activities (Ndebele & Legg-Jack, 2022). The data in the excerpts below indicates that the participants found teaching practice to have contributed to their teacher identity construction. The participants noted.

“My teaching practical’s have really shaped my professional identity because that is when I received a chance to develop myself on what type of a teacher that I aspire to be and contributed to shaping my professional identity. I discovered that it is much easier when one is still learning how to teach compared to implementing what you were taught with learners who are relying on you to be educated. The school policies and assessment also come into play because the way I had to carry myself in the classroom had to be of the school’s standard and maintain the university’s standard as well. My personality has really helped me in to being the type of teacher I wanted to be because I was able to incorporate my energetic and fun self into my teaching and my learner’s enjoyed that because it made learning fun and enjoyable.” (Sophia, Letter)

“Tutors played the part in for me to discover my identity construction. While assessing, they made sure that they stress the issue of formal or professional dress code, which made me realize that I am built with the norms and standards that are required in the teaching field. It was discovered to me again that teaching does not only require teaching skills, but appearance is as important. Teachers did also play part in my discovering my identity construction. The school has rules and standards which everyone must pay full attention to and follow, but some teachers did not conduct themselves as the rules were indicating the way they should conduct themselves. This developed me to self-motivate myself so to become a better teacher who is guided by the rules so that learners may also find a role model in me. The environment in which I

was doing my teaching practice also acted to for me to discover my teacher identity. As a person, I was not used to a school of different races until I did my teaching practice last year which was quite challenging but also a good experience to develop me in terms of my mindset.” (Lihle, Letter)

While the above excerpt for Lihle emerged from letter writing, in his interview, he further reiterated, as in the excerpt below, that TP does build student-teachers and improves their understanding of the profession;

“Yes, I can say at least 90% of teaching practice builds us and lets us know where we are what we are in terms of our understanding of the profession. If I reflect on my final teaching practice, I realise that it has actually shaped me now. I was actually one who was saying: “No, no, no... I will never go to a school or teach in a school that is mixed raced”. I was having that perspective that going to a school and speaking English the whole day... “No, I can’t!... speak in English... never! I want to go to a school where I can speak in isiZulu...” like I was taught.” (Lihle)

Teacher education equips student-teachers with the skills and knowledge which they require for their own professional growth and development (Mannathoko, 2013). From the excerpts above, Sophia mentioned that TP has helped her to develop her identity through policies and practices, and Lihle in his letter and interview emphasised that the school’s norms and standards were relatable to him because he had also grown up following similar practices. He mentioned that TP exposed him to a diverse class for the first time which was challenging, but during his TP stay at the school he tried to navigate his way through the challenges he encountered. During the period of teaching practice there are various ways in which student teachers construct their teacher identities which can be both positive and negative. As I have presented earlier in the study it could be the student teacher and mentor relationship or the relationship/interaction with the learners. I found that words of affirmation from the learners to the student teachers during teaching practicum contribute to how they see themselves as teachers.

Melanie in the excerpt below was affirmed by a learner regarding the way she delivers the lesson and interacts with the learners. She stated:

“So, for me ... I think this is also something that is common among the younger teachers, because we are more aware of social concepts, and we are more aware of children and

their social needs. For me, I was having a lesson with a student and after the lesson, she came up to me and she said: “You know Ma’am, it’s very easy to speak to you because you listen to us and you understand that sometimes we need to give you our opinion.” And, I realised that from my own experiences as a learner, and the context in which I grew up as a learner, or the interactions I had with my teachers, they often know who can give an answer or explain it, sometimes teachers don’t give children that opportunity to just speak about what they’ve learnt or speak about what’s concerning or if a child had to make a joke in the classroom, usually the teacher would call them out for being rude or disrespectful and ask them to leave the class. When that happens in my class, I relate it or try to bring it back to the lesson. That was something that my learner told me, it’s not something that I do intentionally but learners are able to speak and engage through that method. The learner also mentioned that usually if a teacher says yes, it’s yes... so, there’s no two ways about it. My method as a teacher, I’ve become more understanding to them, more receptive to how they behave... and you know just making them feel comfortable in the classroom because when they’re comfortable they learn more, and you don’t have such a hassle with them where you have to shout at them that you have to listen, and you have to behave this way. Sometimes, it’s just about embracing them and understanding where they are coming from as learners.”

(Melanie)

Melanie elaborated further:

“Upon questioning them, like I said you just need to understand them and where they’re coming from... they mentioned that this particular teacher doesn’t speak to them the way they should be spoken to and she says certain things that she shouldn’t say to them. I had to listen to them, advocate for them, bring the matter to the principal’s attention, speak on behalf of them and it’s just like reiterated to me how much things have changed... how much different I am from the teachers I’ve been with or the teachers I’ve experienced. You know, you have to just put the learner first, they all are the same.

(Melanie)

Positive teacher-learner relationships and meaningful connections within the educational setting have been highlighted as influential factors that contribute to a positive mindset and enhance the professional experience of educators (Cui, 2022). In light of this statement,

Melanie expressed that her learners related to her easily and built a good working relationship with her because of the way in which she interacted with them. They felt that she was more understanding and does not shout at them. Melanie felt that she won the learners' confidence by speaking to them when they defaulted and taught them something meaningful whilst correcting them. According to Melanie, this helped her explain to her learners why they should listen to her or follow her instructions. This quality of Melanie will impact her identity as she will strive to be the understanding teacher when placed in the classroom context.

5.6.1 The role of teaching practice modules and literature on identities

In the previous theme I presented data on how the teaching practice experience has contributed to the student teachers' identity construction. In this theme I shift the attention to the teaching practice module in its entirety and the role of literature. The data below shows that the teaching practice module had a role on student teachers' dress code and their own code of conduct, particularly for Lihle. TP had encouraged Lihle to consider his conduct and appearance to adhere to the expected norms and standards as stated in the school's code of conduct. It also appears as though he felt more prepared for his professional role. He also observed that in practice, not many teachers follow the code of conduct. I also found that the assessment criteria of teaching practice shape different ways in which student teachers think about themselves. They noted;

“Uh, it does develop my identity... in terms of how a teacher needs to uphold themselves. But now, the challenging thing is the assessors or the ones who critting us, they just come there one day in maybe two weeks. They never see us. I think what can actually make me uphold that is the actual school because we reach that point where we can actually see other teachers and then say to ourselves: “Okay, so we can wear jeans!” ... some of the teachers wear shorts and sandals and then I was like: “Come on people, in a school you are wearing shorts and sandals... what in the world is happening here?”. Luckily, I'm a person who likes formal clothes and I grew up seeing teachers who wore formal clothes, so I knew this is the type of person I wanna be and I wanna uphold myself like this. We have now reached a point in schools where dress code doesn't matter and I'm wearing what I like. If people want me to wear a suit, go and buy it and give it to me. So, we've reached that point where the dress code is never a language for teachers, it's a language for learners only. So, yeah the documents from

TP can shape the teacher in a particular way in knowing that I need to dress like this to school.” (Lihle)

Professionalism is evaluated based on adherence to the highest standards and the pursuit of excellence (Phelps, 2006). Lihle found that TP modules, literature and standards impact identity construction because it moulds them into a certain professional entity. For instance, prior to TP, student-teachers are not aware of the importance of the professional dress code or what they are actually allowed to wear when out on TP. Therefore, TP modules emphasise professionalism which then also provides ideas on how teachers should dress and conduct themselves when dealing with impressionable learners. Dress code particularly is key as it determines the attitude that influence how learners will treat the student-teacher. Lihle mentioned that he already had an idea of how to dress as a teacher prior to entering teacher-education because his teacher was always well-dressed with formal pants, and he was inspired by him. He also mentioned that the dress code of his teacher gave off a very professional and respectable image of the teacher.

“It does to an extent, like with the formative assessment form, the way it’s structured, it requires the student-teacher to follow that structure because they score you on that guideline. So, if certain things are missing from your lesson plan, they will mark you down based on that assessment guideline – like you must include prior knowledge in your introduction, you must ensure that your body is well-constructed, concepts are discussed, and learners are engaging meaningfully in the lesson. But yes, it definitely does impact your lesson and TP performance. Like, okay I can use these concepts for the lesson for prior knowledge and during the middle of the lesson, there’s some things that I need to be clearly emphasised. Because you’ve been to teaching practice learning about these forms, when you’re actually teaching, it’s there at the back of your head. So, it does help with structuring the lesson.” (Melanie)

Melanie, in the excerpt below, shares how she is able to learn from the experiences of authors and/or participants in particular published studies. Melanie noted;

“Well, I think stuff that you come across when you are at school or university ... like certain articles, sometimes certain things stand out to you... concepts that other writers or authors have gone through and explained in academic articles can also impact your identity because at university there are many academic journals and articles that can be beneficial to you as a teacher.” (Melanie)

Melanie reflected on the TP assessment criteria and mentioned that it is very structured, simple to follow and outlines exactly what the student-teacher is required to do. Along with TP, there are other teaching modules which student-teachers study (Steyn & Mentz, 2008; Kiggundu & Nayimuli, 2009). Melanie stated that all additional reading resources proved to be effective during her final TP, as she was able to learn from what she read and did in fact apply it to her practice in the classroom. This also links to Kiggundu and Nayimuli's (2009) study, which mentions that TP allows student-teachers to apply the knowledge which they gain from their educational modules on campus.

5.7 Conclusion

In conclusion, this chapter presented the findings and discussions on the final TP experience of final year student-teachers. There were four themes which emerged from the data analysis. The findings revealed that there are both intrinsic and extrinsic factors that contribute to the identity development of student-teachers. Some factors included understanding one's inherent qualities, belonging to a specific social structure, the school environment and stakeholders within the environment. Some of the other interesting factors which surfaced were the importance of teacher reflection and teacher agency regarding the identity construction of student-teachers. Both processes can also help student-teachers to think critically about their stance on the profession and shape their identity accordingly. The next chapter will focus on the discussion of the key findings, recommendations, and conclusion of the study.

CHAPTER SIX: DISCUSSION, RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION

6.1 Introduction

The previous chapter presented the analysis and discussion of the data. This chapter will present a summary of the key findings in the study through a discussion which will also focus on the implications and reach a conclusion. The purpose of this study was to explore how student-teachers construct their identities, especially in their final-year TP experience. The study was guided by two key research questions: (1) What are final-year student-teachers' understandings of their identities from teaching practice? and (2) How do student-teachers negotiate their professional identities during their final teaching practice? The summary of key findings seeks to demonstrate how the findings of the study are addressing the two key research questions. Thereafter, a discussion on the implications for policy, practice and research will be presented. Lastly, a discussion of the limitations and the conclusion of the study will follow.

6.2 Discussion of key findings

As discussed in the introduction, the study was guided by two research questions, which informed the focus of the study. Below is a discussion of how the findings of the study are addressing my research questions.

Research question 1: What are final-year student-teachers' understandings of their identities from teaching practice?

During the course of my research, I found that the student-teachers displayed various identity traits which were characterised by factors such as their individual experiences and backgrounds. As mentioned by Beltman et al. (2015) and Sutherland et al. (2010), student-teachers need to first unpack or reflect on their personal identity prior to developing their professional identity. Consistent with this research, the participants mentioned that they believed professional identity emerges from an individual's personal identity. In this study, student-teachers assumed the identity role of education students. Teaching is an important field as it forms the basis where all learning occurs. It is therefore necessary for student-teachers to identify the impact which teaching has on them and their professional identity (Azeem, 2011). Most of the participants understood that TP was important for them to acquire certain skills and learn more about the profession from their mentors and the school environment. All participants in the study

expressed that they were enthusiastic about becoming teachers. Some of the participants mentioned that to some extent they were reflective during their TP process. Their reflection helped them to learn more about themselves and their professional identities. This resonates with Riebenbauer et al. (2017) and Shandomo's (2010) ideas of reflection and its importance in the teaching profession. Riebenbauer et al. (2017) and Shandomo (2010) understand professional identities as a factor which is constantly shaped by each situation which an individual experiences. For instance, the study by Reibenbauer et al. (2017) found that students and mentor teachers valued feedback after each lesson more than feedback in regular meetings and that opportunities for reflection (such as exchanging work with peer students and learning diaries) were considered helpful.

Most of the participants stated that they had to be flexible and open-minded during TP as different contexts demanded different aspects of them and their identities. Some participants mentioned that they also had been demonstrating pastoral care for a few learners and others collaborated with teachers on various activities within the school. These are the main factors which the participants linked to their understanding of their identities as final-year student-teachers. After analysing the data, I also found that the participants were influenced by their personal beliefs and values; societal and cultural influences; the physical classroom context and school environment. Stets et al. (2023) have shown that identity is not limited to these factors – instead, more recent sociological research has explored the connection between identity construction and aspects such as mental health, emotions, social movements and family. The study by Derakhshan and Nazari (2022) highlights that student-teachers faced emotional incidents involving colleagues, parents, power relations and contextual cultural norms; this suggests that more research is required with regard to the emotional aspects of teaching. Derakhshan and Nazari (2022) mainly focus on the negative feelings that student-teachers experienced. However, positive emotions in teaching can create a positive environment for both teachers and learners (Derakhshan & Nazari, 2022). Considering the above-mentioned discussion, student-teachers would already have learnt key values and lessons from their other social interactions which could influence how they understand and construct their identities.

Research question 2: How do student-teachers negotiate their professional identities during their final teaching practice?

In the previous section, I discussed my first research question, which focused on how final year-student teachers perceived their professional identities after their final TP experience. I now move on to discuss my second research question (as stated above). It was interesting to note that each participant had a unique perspective to contribute to the study, when asked about how they negotiated their professional identity during TP. One participant stated that his biggest challenge was having to teach in a diverse environment as he previously conducted TP at a school in which learners followed the same cultural practices as he did – he was not fully aware of the learners' cultural differences and beliefs. As a result, he always found it difficult to speak about religion or matters related to culture in the classroom. He mentioned that he navigated through the situation by adapting to the school's values and rules. He also tried to provide more insights into his cultural practices to hear more about other cultural practices through the learners. However, he did state that it was not an easy task, and he tried his best to refrain from debatable topics. International studies such as Singh & Akar (2021) and Moore et al. (2021) have also found that student-teachers already have sufficient skills to deal with classrooms that have diverse landscapes. These skills emerge from their existing ideas about themselves and their own identity.

Another participant reflected on her various interactions within the school environment and mentioned that she came across friendly learners and staff members. She understood the staff members were much more experienced in the field than she was, and she negotiated her professional identity by developing a mindset that is always willing to learn new things about the teaching profession. Salim et al. (2013) and Kustati et al. (2020) have explored the interconnectedness between the attitudes and performance not just of student-teachers but of qualified teachers too. The main findings from these studies suggest that teachers with a positive attitude are able to cope and perform well in the profession and with many years of teaching experience, teachers become more productive in the field.

Another participant stated that, during her final TP, there were other staff members occupying the same space where she needed to conduct her Physical Education lesson for Life Orientation. However, she realised that, as a student-teacher, she needed to adjust and avoid conflicting with other members of staff. She then changed the space where she was going to conduct her lesson.

She negotiated her identity by being flexible and open to change. Research has shown that tensions do exist between student-teachers and other staff members in schools (Patrick, 2013; Callanan, 2019). The study by Hudson and Hudson (2017) found three main causes of tension between student-teachers and mentor teachers namely, personal issues, pedagogical issues and professional issues. Personal issues refer to any matter that impacts the interaction between the mentor teacher and student-teacher on a personal level rather than at a work-related level (Hudson & Hudson, 2017). The pedagogical issues refer to the mentor teacher and student-teacher having tensions over the way in which the lesson is being taught (such as resources and strategies) and the professional issues refer to the mentor teacher and student-teacher not reaching a consensus in decision-making at a professional level, such as not agreeing upon the way in which the student-teacher chooses to teach their subject or not providing sufficient support to the student-teacher. For example, the mentor teacher not alerting the student-teacher about acceptable administrative norms and expectations. Whilst Hudson and Hudson (2017) mainly explore the conflict between student-teacher and mentor teacher, it is essential to note that conflict could occur between anyone in the work environment. The participants in this study understood the importance of sharing a good rapport with staff at the school and resolve conflict.

Some other participants raised the common issue of enforcing discipline in the classroom. The participants negotiated this by being more assertive, authoritative and implementing class rules to command respect. Another participant stated that she navigated through this challenge by trying to understand her learners better through effective communication. The study by Ciuladiene and Kairiene (2017) suggests that teachers need to be able to resolve conflicts between themselves and learners in a suitable manner that does not damage the working relationship. The way in which the participants navigated through the discipline matters which they faced during TP differed, however, each approach was successful in ensuring that there is discipline in the classroom. Therefore, it can be said that the participants did negotiate their professional identities successfully and dealt with the conflict properly.

6.3 Implications

The previous section discussed the main findings of the study in relation to the two key research questions. The next section will discuss the implications of the findings of the study for policy, practice and research.

6.3.1 Implications for policy

Whilst the policies such as MRTEQ, are sufficient and effective in producing competent educators in the context of the South African teacher education, the assessment policies particularly in relation to teaching practice can be amended to focus a bit more on the identity construction of student-teachers. Some possible implications of such amendments would be, first, to change the assessment times and strategies, for instance, by conducting random visits to assess student-teachers informally and observing how they cope in the working environment. Secondly, greater interaction should take place between the HEI and schools in order to ensure that the focus and essence of TP remain effective. Thirdly, more research support and funding should be made available to HEIs in order to upskill student-teachers and provide them with updated information on the best practices for the teaching profession. This could be through workshop programmes, and the HEIs could select student-teachers who have performed exceptionally and should be rewarded. These implications might be difficult to implement, especially since funding is required, however, once implemented, it will be effective in providing practical and extended learning opportunities to student-teachers.

6.3.2 Implications for practice

From the findings of the study, the following key implications for practice emerged. 1) Student-teachers need to understand their reason for becoming a teacher as this plays a pivotal role in them understanding their professional teacher identity. 2) Student-teachers face language barriers which could prevent them from fully establishing their identity due to fear and anxiety of having to interact with learners who may grasp the language better than them. 3) Some mentor teachers do not fully understand their roles and do not treat it with the professionalism which it requires. 4) The first time that student-teachers are exposed to diverse dynamics in the classroom is when they are out on TP. For example, for a new student-teacher who is still in the process of learning about the teaching profession, they are in the still process of adapting to actual teaching environment during TP. It does require time for them to understand their learners. However, as Lihle had stated, when student-teachers are out on TP, the criteria expect them to adjust and work with learners from diverse cultural and racial backgrounds. This can pose a challenge to student-teachers as they are not fully aware of how to deal with such situations immediately along with having to cope with the other pressures of TP. 5) Student-teachers need to be educated on the importance of school rules and professionalism and understand the importance of integrity in the profession.

The recommendations that flow from such implications would be as follows. 1) HEIs should continue to encourage and promote teacher education efficiently so that future teachers are also helped to clarify at an early stage if they are keen/passionate about becoming teachers. 2) They should implement modules that help aid teachers with language barriers and promote public speaking. 3) The HEI could communicate with mentor teachers about protocols and professional ethics with student-teachers to prevent issues such as harassment. Random school visits could be conducted to ensure that policies are being followed and that mentor teachers are fulfilling their roles. 4) HEIs should try to expose student-teachers to various types of classroom dynamics, such as random groupwork sampling at university, to conscientise student-teachers to mixed classroom dynamics. This will also be effective in educating them on how to deal with different cultural and social perspectives. 5) They should constantly communicate the importance of professionalism in the teaching profession to the student-teachers and encourage them to voice their actual experiences of their final TP in a TP meeting with a TP office staff member, either in groups or face-to-face. 6) Finally, through professional studies and/or education studies modules, HEIs could show student-teachers resources such as videos which depict the reality of violence and discipline in schools, align it to existing school policies and encourage discussions based on how to handle such situations in reality – for example, who should such scenarios be reported to and how to complete an incident report if faced with such a situation when out on TP. This will hold the student-teacher in better stead when placed in an uncomfortable situation at school.

6.3.3 Implications for research

Given that this study was conducted at one higher education institution in Durban, KwaZulu-Natal which follows particular criteria for assessing TP, future research could delve into exploring the experiences of student-teachers from other institutions, preferably in other contexts, provinces or countries. For future research, the TP criteria at other institutions could also be interrogated in order to compare the effectiveness of the TP curriculum in constructing professional identities. Additionally, identity theory and its effectiveness in unpacking the concept of professional identity could also be interrogated further or newer models could be merged in order to research deeper into the study of professional identities.

6.4 Limitations of the study

This study focused on the lived experiences of six participants at the selected HEI. Therefore, this study did not explore how other HEIs conduct TP in South Africa, the assessment criteria in other HEIs and the extent to which they promote the professional identity development of their student-teachers. Therefore, the findings are unique to this study and the context in which data was generated. Having discussed the key findings, implications on policy, practice and research, I wish to draw the study to an end and present the conclusion in the next section.

6.5 Conclusion

Initially, this study sought to explore how student teachers' construct and negotiate their professional identities. I particularly focused on the participants' narratives from TP, as TP is the practical module which bridges the gap between the theoretical knowledge acquired from HEIs and the actual teaching environment. Lastly, I have presented and discussed the key findings of the study, which suggest that student-teachers constantly deconstruct and reconstruct their identities based on the situations which they encounter. Consequently, each student-teacher has their own unique way of constructing and negotiating their professional identity. In conclusion, identity construction for all individuals is essential. For student-teachers, identity construction and awareness are particularly important as it will encourage them to reflect on who they are and what they bring into the profession with them. This process is necessary as it will also allow student-teachers to learn to adapt to working with different groups of learners and this will teach student-teachers how to deal with a range of challenges which they could experience upon entering the profession after their HEI studies. By exploring the participants' perspectives and their narratives on identity construction from their final TP, the study has shed light into many of the challenges which student-teachers face. In order to improve on the teacher-education programmes in South Africa, it is necessary to delve into further research into the identity of student-teachers. Identity theory was also useful as the framework which unpacked and aided in the process of understanding the complex identities of student-teachers.

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Appendix 1: Letter of information and consent

School of Education
University of KwaZulu-Natal
Edgewood Campus
P. Bag X03

Dear Student

Re: Request for your participation in a research project

My name is **Arthi Maharaj**, I am a **Master of Education (M. Ed)** student at the **University of KwaZulu-Natal, Edgewood Campus** in Pinetown. You are invited to participate in my study titled: “**Exploring the identities of final-year student-teachers: Narratives of teaching practice**”.

The purpose of this study is to gain insight into students’ experiences regarding the way in which teaching practice shapes the construction of professional identities at an undergraduate level.

I kindly request your permission to participate in this research. This will entail letter writing and there will be an individual one on one interview session. The interviews will be approximately 60 minutes. We will meet in one session that is convenient for you and have a follow up session when there is a need.

Please note that

- The school and students will not receive material gains for participation in this research project.
- You will be expected to respond to each question in a manner that will reflect your own personal opinion.
- Your identities will not be divulged under any circumstance.
- All student responses will be treated with strict confidentiality.
- Pseudonyms will be used (your real name not be used throughout the research process).
- Participation is voluntary, and therefore, you will be free to withdraw at any time without negative or undesirable consequences.
- You will not, under any circumstances, be forced to disclose what you do not want to tell us.
- Audio-recording of interviews will only be done if you give us permission.
- Data will be stored at the University for a maximum period of five years, thereafter it will be destroyed.

Thank you for your contribution to this study.

Yours sincerely

Student:

Ms. A. Maharaj

Tel: 084 7*****

Email: 2*****@stu.ukzn.ac.za

Supervisor:

Dr. V. J. Msiza

Tel: 031 2** ****

Email: m*****@ukzn.ac.za

HUMANITIES & SOCIAL SCIENCES RESEARCH ETHICS ADMINISTRATION

Research Office, Westville Campus

Govan Mbeki Building

Private Bag 540001

KwaZulu-Natal, SOUTH AFRICA

Tel: 27 31 2604557 - Fax: 27 31 2604609

Email: HSSREC@ukzn.ac.za

Declaration

I..... (Full name of participant) hereby confirm that I understand the contents of this document and the nature of the research project and I consent to participating in the research project. I understand that I am at liberty to withdraw from the project at any time, should I so desire.

I hereby **consent/ do not consent** to an audio recording of the interview. (Please mark your selection with a X)

Signature of the Applicant

Date

Appendix 2: Data collection instruments

DATA COLLECTION INSTRUMENTS

Letter writing prompt

How has teaching practice assisted you in discovering your own professional identity?

Interview Schedule

Name: _____ Age: _____

Date: _____ Gender: _____

Subject specialisation and Phase: _____

**N.B: These are prompts, I will engage more with the participants through probing.*

Session 1

For the first session I will meet the participants to explanation the informed consent form, the purpose of the study, knowing the participants and establishing rapport. I will also collect basic biographical information about them. I have prepared the following prompts;

- Tell me about yourself (name, surname, age, where you were born)?
- Why did you choose teaching as a career?
- Where were you doing your teaching practice and what grade?

Session 2

In this session we will catch up from our previous session for each participant and I have also prepared prompts for our interview.

- So how was it like teaching grade X in school Y?
- What is your understanding of the concept identity?
- What do you think impacts an individual's identity construction?
- Do you think TP has any influence over an individual's identity construction?
- Can you think of any other aspects which may affect identity construction?
- Can you narrate a short story of how you became aware of your identity construction?

Appendix 3: Gatekeeper's approval



7 December 2021

Miss Arthi Maharaj (SN 215038326)
School of Education
College of Humanities
Edgewood Campus UKZN
Email: arthi@webmail.co.za MsizaV@ukzn.ac.za

Dear Arthi

RE: PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH

Gatekeeper's permission is hereby granted for you to conduct research at the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN), towards your postgraduate degree, provided Ethical clearance has been obtained. We note the title of your research project is:

"Exploring the identities of final-year student-teachers: Narratives of teaching practice."

It is noted that you will be constituting your sample by conducting interviews with undergraduate students (Taking in account the regulations imposed during lockdown ie restrictions on gatherings, travel, social distancing etc. Zoom, Skype or telephone interviews recommended) on the Edgewood campus.

Please ensure that the following appears on your notice/questionnaire:

- Ethical clearance number;
- Research title and details of the research, the researcher and the supervisor;
- Consent form is attached to the notice/questionnaire and to be signed by user before he/she fills in questionnaire;
- gatekeepers approval by the Registrar.

You are not authorized to contact staff and students using the 'Microsoft Outlook' address book. Identity numbers and email addresses of individuals are not a matter of public record and are protected according to Section 14 of the South African Constitution, as well as the Protection of Public Information Act. For the release of such information over to yourself for research purposes, the University of KwaZulu-Natal will need express consent from the relevant data subjects. Data collected must be treated with due confidentiality and anonymity.

Yours sincerely

Dr KE CLELAND
REGISTRAR

Office of the Registrar

Postal Address: Private Bag 854003, Durban, 4003, South Africa
Telephone: +27 (0)31 260 7971 Email: registrargukzn.ac.za Website: www.ukzn.ac.za

Founding Campuses: Edgewood Howard College Medical School Pietermaritzburg Westville

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Appendix 4: Ethical approval



16 February 2022

Arthi Maharaj (215038326)
School Of Education
Edgewood Campus

Dear A Maharaj,

Protocol reference number: HSSREC/00003820/2022
Project title: Exploring the identities of final-year student-teachers: Narratives of teaching practice
Degree: MEd

Approval Notification – Expedited Application

This letter serves to notify you that your application received on 02 February 2022 in connection with the above, was reviewed by the Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee (HSSREC) and the protocol has been granted **FULL APPROVAL**.

Any alteration/s to the approved research protocol i.e. Questionnaire/Interview Schedule, Informed Consent Form, Title of the Project, Location of the Study, Research Approach and Methods must be reviewed and approved through the amendment/modification prior to its implementation. In case you have further queries, please quote the above reference number. PLEASE NOTE: Research data should be securely stored in the discipline/department for a period of 5 years.

This approval is valid until 16 February 2023.

To ensure uninterrupted approval of this study beyond the approval expiry date, a progress report must be submitted to the Research Office on the appropriate form 2 - 3 months before the expiry date. A close-out report to be submitted when study is finished.

All research conducted during the COVID-19 period must adhere to the national and UKZN guidelines.

HSSREC is registered with the South African National Research Ethics Council (REC-040414-040).

Yours sincerely,



Professor Dipane Hlalele (Chair)

/dd

Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee

Postal Address: Private Bag X54001, Durban, 4000, South Africa

Telephone: +27 (0)31 260 8350/4557/3587 Email: hssrec@ukzn.ac.za Website: <http://research.ukzn.ac.za/Research-Ethics>

Founding Campuses:  Edgewood  Howard College  Medical School  Pietermaritzburg  Wavellville

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Appendix 5: Turnitin report

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Turnitin Originality Report

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Masters Thesis By Arthi Maharaj

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Appendix 6: Editor's letter

[REDACTED]
Glenwood
Durban
South Africa 4001

[REDACTED]

C: [REDACTED]

H: 031 206 1738

4th February 2024

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

This is to record that I have carried out language editing of the Masters dissertation by Arthi Maharaj, entitled **Exploring the identities of final-year student-teachers: Narratives of teaching practice.**

Yours sincerely

[REDACTED]

Crispin Hemson