



**Understanding the influences in personal name-giving of firstborn children born within  
the AmaZulu nation in 1990-1994.  
*A case of the uMkhambathini community***

**By**

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of the requirements for the degree of

**Master of Arts in IsiZulu**

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## DECLARATION

I Thandi Sibisi declare that:

- i. The research reported in this dissertation, except where otherwise indicated, is my original research.
- ii. This dissertation has not been submitted for any degree or examination at any other university.
- iii. This dissertation does not contain other persons' data, pictures, graphs or other information, unless specifically acknowledged as being sourced from other persons.
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## **DEDICATION**

This thesis is a reflection of the unwavering support and boundless love I received from my family and friends during this challenging academic pursuit. I would like to dedicate this dissertation to my husband: Mr Alex Vusumuzi Sibisi without you there would be no dissertation. Also, I would like to dedicate this dissertation to my two sons Minenhle and Wandile and to my daughter-in-law Ntokozo, and lastly to my grandchildren. I appreciate your presence in my life. You have been the light that shines in my life every day. I will continue to treasure you and working hard for you. Thank you to my late mother Mrs Edna Ntombilezi Dladla, who nurtured my curiosity and supported my educational endeavours from the very beginning, God bless you all.

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## ABSTRACT

The study is grounded in Social Identity Theory and Social Constructionism, which together provide a framework for understanding how names contribute to identity formation and how meanings attached to names are socially and culturally constructed. Naming practices are examined as both reflective and constitutive of social identities, collective memory, and cultural continuity.

The research highlights how naming is influenced by collective memory, ancestral reverence and significance, and sociopolitical history, particularly the lingering effects of colonialism and apartheid, which have disrupted and reshaped indigenous cultural practices. It further reveals the coexistence and tension between traditional naming systems and Western ideologies, including the incorporation of Christian and modern influences in naming conventions. Findings also indicate that naming reflects familial expectations, gendered roles, and patriarchal authority, while simultaneously serving as a medium for expressing resistance, hope, and social commentary.

Grounded in an interpretivist paradigm, the study adopts a qualitative research design to provide in-depth, context-rich insights. Data were gathered through purposive and snowball sampling, which were appropriate for accessing participants with specific cultural knowledge and lived experiences of naming practices within the community. Semi-structured interviews were conducted to capture participants' lived experiences, and thematic analysis was used to identify key patterns and meanings in the data.

Findings reveal that naming firstborn children is not merely a familial act but a cultural responsibility imbued with symbolic, spiritual, and social meanings. Names function as carriers of identity, markers of historical continuity, and expressions of cultural resilience in a changing sociocultural landscape. The study contributes to a deeper understanding of how personal naming among the AmaZulu reflects broader cultural narratives, identity formation, and the preservation of indigenous knowledge systems.

**Key words:** Naming, Culture, Family, Patriarchy, Gender

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# CHAPTER ONE

## INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

### 1.1 Introduction

The study investigates the case of the uMkhambathini community. To explore the influences on personal name-giving for firstborn children born in 1990-1994 within the AmaZulu nation. De Klerk and Bosch (1996) assert that many African civilisations have used naming as a key strategy for conveying specific cultural themes. Until recently, the principles underlying African traditional cultural perspectives continued to be overshadowed by the influence of Western concepts, as evident in numerous biased articles written in the 1970s. The interaction of colonialism and apartheid, which resulted in societal divisions around African cultural practices, serves as the backdrop to the research problem. Laws from this era affected the African community's language and interaction. Chapter One provides a comprehensive overview of the research project by outlining the background and problem statement, establishing the relevance of the study, and detailing its aims, objectives, and guiding research questions. It also introduces the theoretical foundation drawing on Social Identity Theory and Social Construction Theory, and outlines the methodological framework, including the qualitative research design, interpretivist paradigm, purposive sampling, and thematic analysis. Ethical considerations, as well as issues of validity, reliability, and rigour, are briefly discussed, along with the clarification of key concepts relevant to the study.

### 1.2 Background of the Study

Naming is a universal cultural phenomenon and one of the most significant symbolic practices within human societies. Across cultures, the giving of names carries deep social, cultural, spiritual, and emotional significance. Names are not merely functional markers used for identification; they encapsulate histories, communicate familial values, record societal changes, and project future aspirations. Among African communities, particularly within the AmaZulu nation of South Africa, naming is a culturally embedded process that is reflective and constitutive of identity (Zungu and Zulu, 2018). The name bestowed upon a child can carry generational meanings, allude to ancestral spirits, refer to prevailing social or political conditions, or express the parents' emotional states and expectations at the time of the child's birth (Herbert, 1999).

In the context of the AmaZulu, names are imbued with symbolic power, often connected to key moments in family or community life. They serve as cultural archives, recording individual,

familial, and communal experiences through language. Infant naming, especially the naming of firstborn children, occupies a particularly sacred and influential position within the AmaZulu family structure. The firstborn is often perceived as the bearer of legacy, continuity, and spiritual connection to the ancestors (Makoni, 2013). This is especially important in societies where lineage, ancestry, and heritage are central to social organisation. The current study is in the Mkhambathini community, within the uMgungundlovu District of KwaZulu-Natal. The research seeks to explore the influence and meaning behind the names given to firstborn children born between 1990 and 1994, a time of monumental social and political change in South Africa. The years 1990 to 1994 mark the transitional phase between the end of apartheid and the establishment of a democratic order in 1994. The period was filled with social unrest, political negotiations, and heightened national consciousness, all of which profoundly impacted local communities' cultural practices, including naming traditions (Posel, 2001).

This critical period in South African history provides a unique lens through which to examine naming practices, as the shift from oppression to democracy brought about a redefinition of identity, belonging, and hope. For the AmaZulu people in uMkhambathini, naming a firstborn child during this time may have represented more than a familial event; it may have also symbolized aspirations for freedom, social justice, and cultural renaissance. Names given during this time thus provide a meaningful archive for understanding how families engaged with the socio-political environment, responded to historical moments, and asserted cultural identity amid change. The sociocultural elements influencing these naming practices are manifold. They include religious beliefs, traditional customs, family histories, and collective memory. For instance, within the AmaZulu cultural context, names often honour ancestors, reflect spiritual beliefs, or convey emotional responses to life circumstances (Ndimande-Hlongwa and Mkhize, 2016). The naming of a child may also pay homage to political heroes, express societal frustrations, or assert a redefined sense of African pride. Therefore, the names given to firstborns between 1990 and 1994 likely exhibit a blend of traditional Zulu values and emerging democratic ideals.

This study also explores the linguistic characteristics of the names chosen, particularly those that derive from the isiZulu language, incorporating Christian references, political allegories, or metaphoric allusions to freedom, struggle, and unity. According to Koopman (2002), Zulu names often fall into identifiable categories, such as names expressing emotions (e.g., joy, sorrow), names referencing events surrounding birth, and names reflecting historical or political circumstances. As a result, by identifying common themes, the research seeks to

understand how names may be categorised according to their meanings and contexts in which they were given such as ancestral reverence, national identity, or spiritual hope. Moreover, the importance of firstborn children in traditional AmaZulu families makes them ideal subjects for understanding the cultural significance of naming practices. The firstborn child is often seen as a spiritual continuation of the ancestors, and their names are frequently chosen with great care and deliberate intention. The firstborn's name may serve as a family's formal declaration of identity, historical consciousness, and social positioning. During transitional periods, such as 1990 to 1994, such declarations may be even more pronounced as families seek to inscribe their values and hopes into the names of their children.

The study also acknowledges that naming is not a static tradition, but a dynamic practice shaped by multiple intersecting factors. The names given during the early 1990s may reflect tensions between tradition and modernity, between rural customs and urban influences, or between indigenous beliefs and global ideologies such as Pan-Africanism or the African Renaissance. Scholars such as Mazrui (2003) have argued that African naming practices in post-colonial contexts often reflect attempts to reclaim cultural autonomy and resist Western hegemonic naming systems. In this light, naming may function as a form of cultural resistance or resurgence. Another central focus of this research is the extent to which names reflect the parents' political sentiments or national pride during this transitional period. Names such as Nelson, Freedom, Nkululeko, or Mandisa may suggest a celebration of democratic ideals or an act of honouring struggle heroes. Conversely, names that express disappointment, loss, or frustration may indicate how communities experienced the ongoing uncertainties and violence during the transition (Seekings, 2000). Therefore, names become narrative devices through which families document and interpret the times in which they live.

Furthermore, this study is attentive to whether naming practices in uMkhambathini were influenced by local factors such as church affiliations, traditional leadership structures, or community-based struggles. Understanding how local realities shaped name-giving decisions can shed light on how global and national discourses were interpreted and adapted at the grassroots level. This community-based perspective is crucial for capturing the lived experiences of ordinary people during extraordinary times. This study offers a focused yet rich exploration of naming as both a personal and political act by focusing on a specific time frame and a specific group of firstborn children of the uMkhambathini community born between 1990 and 1994. It bridges the fields of anthropology, linguistics, cultural studies, and political history to explore how naming practices functioned as tools of meaning-making,

memory preservation, and identity construction during one of South Africa's most critical historical junctures. This study aims to illuminate the deep cultural logic underpinning naming practices within the AmaZulu nation, particularly during national reconfiguration. Investigating the names of firstborn children in uMkhambathini will contribute to a broader understanding of how communities use language and tradition to respond to change, preserve cultural integrity, and articulate visions for the future.

## **1.2 Problem Statement**

Within onomastics, personal naming is understood as a culturally embedded practice through which societies encode meaning, identity, and social relations. In this study, culture is defined not as a vague or static concept, but as a *dynamic system of shared meanings, symbols, practices, and historical experiences through which communities construct and communicate identity*. From this perspective, naming among the AmaZulu is a structured cultural practice governed by social norms, ancestral belief systems, and linguistic conventions.

The arrival of European settlers across the African continent brought a range of cultural, political, religious, and linguistic disruptions that profoundly affected indigenous traditions, including naming practices. In countries such as Ghana, Nigeria, and South Africa, the naming systems that once reflected deeply rooted spiritual, familial, and communal values were challenged and, in some cases, partially supplanted by Western naming conventions introduced through colonial education systems, Christian missionary efforts, and administrative requirements (Agyekum, 2006; Obeng, 2001). These external influences gradually infiltrated indigenous naming practices, creating tensions between traditional and Westernised systems of identity formation. Among the isZulu-speaking people of South Africa, naming is an essential cultural practice that historically reflects the name-givers' worldview, philosophy, emotions, and historical consciousness. However, over the past several decades, social, political, and religious changes have partially eroded and transformed traditional naming customs. These changes are particularly observable during significant historical transitions, such as the years leading up to South Africa's first democratic elections in 1994. The period from 1990 to 1994 was characterised by intense political negotiation, cultural reawakening, and shifting identities. This historical context is critical in understanding the underlying motivations and cultural meanings behind the names given to children, particularly firstborns, in the AmaZulu community of uMkhambathini.

While numerous studies have focused on naming conventions in post-colonial Africa, there remains a gap in the literature regarding the insider perspectives of communities during specific transitional moments in history, especially in rural contexts. The naming of firstborn

children holds a special place in AmaZulu society, given the spiritual and ancestral connections associated with birth order. Firstborns are often seen as cultural torchbearers and are expected to carry forward their family's values, identity, and lineage. This significance makes the naming of firstborns during politically charged periods an especially revealing area of study (Ndimande-Hlongwa and Mkhize, 2016).

This study addresses a multidimensional problem: the influence of colonialism and Westernisation on traditional African naming practices, the impact of South Africa's political transition on personal and familial identity, and the growing tension between communal cultural traditions and individual modern preferences. The study offers a localised yet representative case through which broader patterns of cultural change and continuity can be examined by focusing on the AmaZulu community in eMkhambathini. It responds to the need for ethnographically grounded, context-sensitive research that prioritises African perspectives on identity, memory, and belonging.

### **1.3 Motivation of the Study**

The study is motivated by the need to document and preserve indigenous AmaZulu naming practices before they are completely diluted or forgotten. The lived experiences of parents and elders who named their children during 1990–1994 offer invaluable insights into how communities navigated a period of intense uncertainty, change, and hope. Investigating these practices enables a deeper understanding of identity-making, resilience, and cultural memory during South Africa's transition to democracy.

Additionally, the study seeks to explore gendered aspects of naming, recognising that naming customs often differ for boys and girls and reflect patriarchal ideologies. Examining whether and how firstborn sons and daughters were named differently during this period may reveal insights about shifting gender dynamics within the AmaZulu community. The study also responds to a growing academic and societal interest in the preservation of indigenous knowledge systems, recognising community members as active interpreters and theorists of their cultural practices.

Finally, the study is motivated by the need to connect micro-level cultural practices, such as naming, with macro-level historical, political, and social transformations. Therefore, research captures how everyday practices reflect, negotiate, and sometimes resist broader societal changes by documenting the insider perspectives of families and communities.

### **1.4 Relevance of the Study**

The significance of this study lies in its focus on the intricate interplay between cultural

heritage, identity construction, and political transformation through the lens of personal name-giving rituals among firstborn children in the AmaZulu community of eMkhambathini. Naming in African societies is not a random act but a deeply symbolic process that encodes historical memory, cultural values, social aspirations, and ancestral ties. In particular, the naming of firstborn children in AmaZulu society is revered, as these names carry ancestral weight and are often bestowed with spiritual and genealogical significance (Gumede, 2022).

The choice of eMkhambathini as the study site is deliberate. It is largely rural, with residents closely tied to ancestral practices and oral traditions. Unlike more urbanised AmaZulu communities, uMkhambathini retains a stronger orientation towards communal life, ritual practices, and clan-based social structures, making it an ideal location for exploring authentic and nuanced naming customs. The symbolic and socio-political meaning of names, particularly for firstborns, remains more vivid and intact in such communities (Zuma, 2021).

The period from 1990 to 1994 represents a watershed moment in South Africa's history. The collapse of apartheid created an ideological vacuum in which African communities actively sought to reclaim their cultural identities and reassert traditional values that had been suppressed or marginalised under colonial and apartheid rule (Mkhize, 2023). In this context, naming practices became instruments of resistance, reclamation, and affirmation (Mthembu, 2022). Names became a medium through which families expressed cultural pride, historical awareness, and aspirations for a more just society (Zulu, 2024; Ndlovu, 2022).

Furthermore, this study contributes to anthropology and onomastics by integrating historical antecedents, social identity theory, and social constructionism to analyse naming practices as active processes of identity formation rather than mere reflections of tradition. The research prioritises insider perspectives, emphasising community members as co-producers of knowledge in line with decolonial and participatory research methodologies (Chilisa, 2012).

Ultimately, the study provides a comprehensive, context-sensitive understanding of how political, social, and cultural transformations are expressed through firstborn naming practices, thereby contributing to the preservation of indigenous knowledge and advancing scholarly debates on culture, identity, and historical change.

## **1.2 Aims and Objectives**

- To identify sociocultural factors that influenced the naming of firstborn children during the period 1990-1994
- To investigate common characteristics among names given to firstborn children
- To determine the impact of historical events on the selection of names
- To assess how names reflect behaviour or perceptions

### 1.3 Key Questions

- What sociocultural factors influenced the naming of firstborn children during the period 1990-1994?
- Why are there common characteristics among names given to firstborn children?
- What is the impact of historical events on the selection of names?
- How do names reflect behaviour or perceptions?

### 1.4 Overview of Methodology and Theoretical Framework

#### 1.4.1 Theoretical Framework

The study uses the social identity and social constructionist theories.

##### *1.4.1.1 Social Identity Theory and Social Construction Theory*

The social identity theory suggests that social categorisations are perceived as fixed tools that sector, organise, and direct the social environment. As a result, the individual can take many forms of social action (Hogg, 2016). In the early 1970s, British social psychologist Henri Tajfel and his colleagues undertook a series of research known as minimal-group investigations, which led to the development of social identity theory. Initially dubbed the social identity theory of intergroup relations, this framework asserts that social groups allow their members to identify themselves in social terms. These identifications are largely relational and comparative; they define the individual as similar to or different from, and better or worse than, members of other groups (Hogg, 2016). The term *social identity* emerges from these definitions. In the context of this study, the social identity theory will provide guidance for establishing how the AmaZulu people, as a cultural identity group, relate to and perceive the act of name-giving. Their perceptions as AmaZulu people are significant, and uncovering the factors that shape their collective identity, particularly through language and naming, will be a valuable contribution. Names given to firstborn children between 1990 and 1994 may reflect how AmaZulu individuals positioned themselves within broader social, cultural, and political environments during a time of transition in South Africa.

On the other hand, social construction theory is an interdisciplinary discourse that posits that human reality is significantly influenced, understood, and experienced through cultural and social norms. As proposed by Gergen (1992), social constructionist theory draws from sociology and communication theory to examine the development of jointly constructed understandings of the world that form the basis for shared assumptions about reality. The theory is grounded in the notion that meanings are developed in coordination with others rather than individually. Social constructs can vary across societies and are deeply shaped by the

historical and social events surrounding the period in which they exist. This demonstrates how people in society construct ideas or concepts, such as names, that may not exist or carry meaning without the language and culture that validate them. In this study, social constructionism helps illuminate the cultural constructs embedded in naming practices within the AmaZulu nation. Since names are rooted in language and symbolic meaning, they carry socially constructed values and reflections of community identity, spirituality, resistance, or hope. Thus, the theory is relevant in examining how the meanings assigned to names of firstborn children in the eMkhambathini community during 1990–1994 were socially and culturally co-produced in response to the socio-political climate of the time (Gergen, 1992).

#### **1.4.2 Methodology**

The methodical strategy or procedure used to gather, examine, and evaluate data for a research project is known as a research methodology. It describes the procedures, methods, and resources used to ensure that the research is conducted thoroughly and yields reliable findings. The design of a study, the collection of data, and the analysis of the findings, whether using qualitative or quantitative approaches, all depend on the research technique. An explanation of the research design, data collection, and data analysis techniques is included, as these methods influence the research findings and their applicability to wider contexts (Creswell, 2014).

### **1.5 Research Design**

#### **1.5.1 Qualitative Method**

This study adopts a qualitative research approach, well-suited to exploring complex social phenomena and uncovering the meanings individuals attach to their experiences. One key strength of qualitative research is its ability to provide in-depth and richly detailed accounts of how people perceive and respond to specific issues (Smith, 1995). It allows researchers to explore the "human" side of a problem, encompassing behaviours, relationships, attitudes, and opinions that might not be captured through numerical data alone. Furthermore, qualitative methods are particularly effective in uncovering less visible factors such as cultural norms, socio-economic status, gender roles, ethnicity, and religious influences, all of which are relevant to this study. While qualitative findings are not always generalisable, they offer valuable insights transferable to populations with similar characteristics.

In this study, qualitative methods are employed to understand the social meanings and cultural structures that shape people's perceptions and practices regarding the naming of firstborn

children. This approach enables the collection of nuanced narratives that reflect the community's lived experiences and traditions. A sample of 20 participants was purposively selected to ensure a diverse representation of views across age, gender, and socio-cultural backgrounds. This number is considered sufficient for thematic saturation in qualitative research, allowing the researcher to identify recurring patterns and themes without compromising the depth and richness of data.

### **1.5.2 Interpretivist Paradigm**

It is important to note that, given the interpretivist emphasis on examining the factors that influence the names given to firstborn children, the study will be supported by an interpretive paradigm. To interpret each participant's reality, the researcher adopts a more individualised inquiry, with an open mind that considers participants' diverse perspectives, rather than a truth that can be ascertained through measurement. Interpretivism creates a relativist ontology in which a single phenomenon may be interpreted in multiple ways (Rehman and Alharthi, 2016). Constructivist ontology is necessary for interpretivism. According to constructionists, social contact is how people create and impose the social environment rather than receiving it as if handed to them (Goldkuh, 2012). The paradigm rejects detachable entities and fixed facts. It is noted that, in contrast to positivism, these inherent realities originate in human action (Irshaidat, 2022).

Social actors engage people and provide explanations to create social reality. Although the existence of facts is unchangeable, the underlying meaning is nuanced. Since the canons of truth are socially constructed assertions, interpretivists reject realism. Accordingly, human behaviour and interaction through normative and epistemic readings of reality shape the outside environment (Gaus 2017). Social learning is regarded as a way for entrenched norms to spread. A collective societal net makes these rules inherent and inseparable. As a result, the idea of uniformity is rejected, and it is acknowledged that different interpretations of the same reality are acceptable. As a result, using this paradigm to analyse phenomena often means ignoring accepted terminology and everyday vocabulary.

However, understanding human decisions is based on cultures, texts, theories, concepts, and behaviour (Irshaidat, 2022). From an epistemological perspective, knowledge is derived from experiences, is subjective, and is subtle. It is difficult to acquire knowledge because of the different explanations ingrained in a society, not to mention that these interpretations will inevitably change as social reality changes. According to Thanh and Thanh (2015), interpretivists hold that norms and other collective concepts control behaviour. It is impossible

to overstate the impact of social surroundings on identity and conduct. Moreover, their environment shapes people's ontological beliefs (Thanh and Thanh 2015). The researcher must be involved in the subject matter to understand particular phenomena fully. The researcher and certain components of the research process are connected. Since social contact is considered the birthplace of reality, interactions between the researcher and respondents produce empirical data (Thanh and Thanh 2015). Such an observation refutes the positivist condition that isolates the researcher from the research process.

## **1.6 Data Collection and Analysis**

### **1.8 In-Depth Interviews**

Data for the study was gathered through in-depth interviews to support more complex answers. This also made it possible to examine the stories in greater detail in a more intimate setting. An in-depth interview is an open-ended, discovery-oriented method of obtaining comprehensive knowledge about a subject from a stakeholder. One qualitative research method for thoroughly examining a respondent's viewpoint, experiences, emotions, and viewpoints is conducting in-depth interviews. This approach supports a seamless data-collecting phase by establishing a conversational atmosphere and a naturalistic setting. Additionally, it enables the collection of more data. Since the interview conversation develops gradually, this is a flexible technique. More information becomes available the more the individual speaks. The interview schedule was set after 20 participants were chosen.. These people were chosen because they have children born between 1990 and 1994 and are, therefore, aware of the cultural significance of the AmaZulu firstborn name. Referrals were used to identify participants and the interviews employed semi-structured questions. .

### **1.9 Thematic Analysis**

This study employs thematic analysis to organise and interpret the data collected. Thematic analysis, according to Kiger and Varpio (2020), is a qualitative data analysis technique that entails looking for, examining, and reporting recurring patterns within a data collection. Although it is a technique for factual description, it also uses interpretation in the code selection and theme development processes. The capacity to be used with a broad range of study topics, designs, and sample sizes, as well as within a broad range of theoretical and epistemological frameworks, sets thematic analysis apart. The technique assists in organising and simplifying data. This is essential for reading responses and comparing them to create consistency and reliability in the findings.

## **1.10 Sampling**

Sampling is a vital component of any research, as it provides structure and direction while facilitating the study's objectives. This research employs two non-probability sampling techniques: purposive sampling and snowball sampling. Purposive sampling involves selecting participants based on the researcher's judgment of who holds relevant knowledge (Etikan and Alkassim, 2016). Purposive sampling was effective in this study, as it enabled the researcher to deliberately select participants with specific knowledge and experience regarding the naming of firstborn children. This method ensured the inclusion of individuals such as parents, elders, and cultural leaders who could provide rich, relevant insights. Therefore, focusing on those directly involved in naming practices, the study captured meaningful and diverse perspectives. It also enhanced the depth and cultural relevance of the data collected. Snowball sampling, which allows initial participants to refer others, is particularly useful for accessing hidden or hard-to-reach populations (Acharya et al., 2013). This approach ensures a growing pool of suitable respondents with culturally relevant experiences. Snowball sampling enabled the researcher to reach participants who might not have been easily accessible through conventional recruitment methods, especially elders and cultural custodians who play key roles in name-giving decisions but are often overlooked in mainstream databases or public spaces. This method fostered trust and continuity within the participant pool, as referrals were based on existing social relationships. As a result, the study gathered rich, authentic narratives that reflect both individual and collective perspectives on naming firstborn children within the community.

## **1.11 Summary of Ethical Considerations**

### ***1.11.1 Validity, Reliability and Rigour***

Reliability and validity are critical components of this empirical study. In qualitative research, these concepts are often referred to as *dependability* and *credibility*, forming the foundation of research rigour. Scholars argue that establishing rigour in qualitative research is just as important as in quantitative studies, although it is approached differently. Among naturalistic inquirers, however, there has been ongoing debate about how to define and ensure quality in such research. While reliability and validity have been clearly defined and operationalised in quantitative research, they are equally relevant to qualitative inquiries. In the context of this study, where the researcher's subjectivity may influence data interpretation, careful attention to the trustworthiness of the research through consistent methods and credible findings is especially important.

## **1.12 Key Concepts**

### ***1.12.1 Culture***

Cultural concepts can be divided into several groups. Culture is a set of meanings, and culture is a system of actions that oppose one another (Spenser-Oatey and Franklin, 2012). Additionally, some academics, known as realists, ascribe culture to an autonomous existence, while others, known as nominalists, consider it a subjective human invention. Conventional thought, behaviour, and artifact patterns transmitted from generation to generation make up culture (Spenser-Oatey and Franklin, 2012).

### ***1.12.2 Naming***

The cultural, social, and familial customs that influence how people are given names are referred to as personal naming practices (Becker, 2023). The procedure can differ significantly from one culture or community to another and frequently involves different naming practices depending on elements like tradition, religion, or family structure. In many cultures, names have more meanings than just identifying a person; they may represent a person's family history, cultural heritage, or specific values and aspirations (Becker, 2023). A person's official social debut may also be marked by naming ceremonies in several Indigenous, Asian, or African civilisations. A naming ceremony is a formal event where a person or people are given a name. Different cultures and faiths have distinct customs in this regard. A name may be given a few days after birth, months later, or years later (Becker, 2023). The goal in this study was to comprehend how firstborn children born in the AmaZulu nation between 1990 and 1994 are influenced by their name choices; therefore, the concepts serve as the focal point of the study since any cultural, social, or community elements that influence the name will be crucial.

### ***1.12.3 Family***

A family is a group of two or more people who live together and are connected by birth, marriage, or adoption; all are regarded as belonging to the same family. Researchers have always been interested in and intrigued by the family as an integrated and functional unit of society (Hao and Ruggiano, 2020). The role of the family in influencing and impacting an individual's development, conduct, and well-being is just as significant for research as the family itself. Numerous social science fields, including sociology, psychology, economics, anthropology, social psychiatry, and social work, use the family as a fundamental unit of analysis (Hao and Ruggiano, 2020).

### ***1.12.4 Community***

According to Jovchelovitch (2019), community is an enduring product that can take many

shapes and essences. The community may range from communion within a setting characterised by friendship, trust, reciprocity, and loyalty to one in which the community is a commodity. This premise is important because it forces us to reject the idea that community must be defined solely by ideal traits such as consensus on values and self-sufficiency. According to Jovchelovitch (2019), communities are characterised by a small and low-density population, a resource-based economy (in our instance, subsistence farming), and a usually homogeneous occupational structure.

#### *1.12.5 Patriarchy*

A patriarchal social structure is one in which men dominate political leadership, moral authority, social privilege, and property ownership. Certain patriarchal societies are also patrilineal, meaning that the male lineage inherits property and titles (Pringle, 2020). A system of beliefs known as patriarchy serves to legitimise and explain this domination by attributing it to the innate, natural differences between men and women. Sociologists prefer to focus on how gender roles in a society impact power disparities between men and women, viewing patriarchy as a social construct rather than the result of inherent inequalities between the sexes (Pringle, 2020).

#### *1.12.6 Gender*

All people have biological sex traits from birth, whether they are intersex, male, or female. Nonetheless, gender is a social construct typically based on the roles, customs, and behaviours society expects of people based mostly on their sex (Johnson, 2021). A person's self-perceived gender, which may be male, female, or another, is their gender identity. Growing public awareness of gender has allowed many people to live as they see themselves and feel more at ease in their own flesh in recent years. The gender identity of transgender individuals differs from the sex they were assigned at birth.

### **1.13 Structure of Dissertation**

#### **Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study**

This includes the research background, relevance of the study, aims and objectives, and key questions to be asked.

#### **Chapter 2: Literature Review**

The literature review channels all related concepts to expand the study's knowledge.

#### **Chapter 3: Theoretical Framework**

Social constructionism and social identity theory will be helpful frameworks for the study.

#### **Chapter 4: Research Methodology**

The applied method, such as a qualitative strategy, is clearly outlined, as well as the unstructured interview method.

#### **Chapter 5 Data Presentation and Analysis**

Using thematic analysis enables the researcher to organise and channel the available data.

#### **Chapter 6: Summary, Recommendations, and Conclusion**

The summary emphasises the results obtained, the contribution made by the results, recommendations, and suggestions for further research.

##### **1.14 Chapter Summary**

This chapter introduced the study by outlining the research problem, its significance, and the broader context within which the inquiry is situated. It specifically examined the dynamics of naming practices in uMkhambathini, with a focus on how names are influenced by cultural, social, and external factors. The chapter presented the study's aims and objectives, including an exploration of the extent to which Western and Eastern influences shape the naming of individuals, particularly firstborn children. It also aimed to develop an insider's perspective on the socio-cultural meanings attached to name-giving within local households. In doing so, the chapter unpacked the deeper influences that personal names carry in uMkhambathini families, revealing how naming is not merely a symbolic act, but one rooted in tradition, identity, and belief systems. Key thematic concerns such as gender, patriarchy, and community were also introduced, laying the groundwork for further exploration. These foundational insights prepare the reader for the next chapter, which presents a critical review of the relevant literature and theoretical frameworks guiding this study.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **2.1 Introduction**

This chapter provides a comprehensive review of the existing literature pertinent to the study of naming practices, with a particular focus on the AmaZulu nation. Building upon the foundational understanding established in the preceding chapter, which outlined the study's background, aims, and objectives, this review delves into various dimensions of name-giving. The central aim of this research is to explore the factors influencing the naming of firstborn infants born into the AmaZulu nation between 1990 and 1994, specifically within the uMkhambathini community. A thorough literature review is indispensable in academic research, as it offers critical theoretical insights that guide the development of robust research frameworks and facilitates the organization and synthesis of existing knowledge (Rowley and Slack, 2004).

The structure of this chapter is designed to progress from a general theoretical understanding of naming practices to a more specific examination of their manifestation within the African and, ultimately, the AmaZulu contexts. Initially, the discussion will establish the theoretical foundations of naming within the broader context of family and socialization. Subsequently, it will explore onomastics as a field of study, examining global perspectives on naming conventions and clarifying the distinction between international naming structures and their underlying sociocultural significance. The review will then narrow its focus to the sociocultural context of naming in Africa, delving into the philosophical underpinnings and ceremonial aspects of name-giving. This will be followed by an analysis of the intricate relationship between ethnicity, identity, and personal naming, including the impact of Western cultural influences and colonialism on African naming traditions. Finally, the chapter will concentrate on naming practices specifically within South Africa, culminating in a detailed examination of the AmaZulu nation's unique naming conventions and their spiritual and cosmological significance, particularly within the specified research period and community. This structured approach ensures a coherent and in-depth exploration of the literature, providing a solid theoretical and contextual basis for the empirical investigation.

## **2.2 Theoretical Foundations of Naming and the Family**

### **2.2.1 The Family as the Primary Agent of Socialisation**

The family unit serves as the foundational crucible for human development, acting as the primary agent of socialization that profoundly shapes an individual's early life. Beyond its biological function of reproduction, the family is a complex social institution responsible for transmitting language, instilling values, fostering belief systems, guiding social behaviors, and nurturing emotional capacities (Anastasiu, 2012). This process of socialization is often deeply embedded and operates at a subconscious level, making it challenging for individuals to fully recognize the extent to which their social habits and identities are influenced by familial interactions (Anastasiu, 2012).

The responsibilities of parents extend beyond mere physical sustenance to include providing emotional security, cultivating self-esteem, and fostering psychological resilience in their children, particularly during vulnerable developmental stages. A failure to meet these psychological and emotional needs can lead to behavioral dysfunctions that impair an individual's capacity for healthy social interaction (Eekelaar, 2017). Eekelaar (2017) further supports this perspective, asserting that the family, as a primary group, possesses a unique capacity to fulfill these interdependent biological, psychological, and social needs in ways that formal institutions, such as schools or peer groups, cannot fully replicate.

An often-underestimated aspect of familial responsibility, yet one of profound cultural and symbolic significance, is the act of name-giving. This practice transcends the simple assignment of an identifier; it is a ritualistic act that intrinsically links the individual to the family's lineage, heritage, and belief systems. In numerous cultures worldwide, names are bestowed to honor ancestors, commemorate historical events, reflect religious or spiritual convictions, or articulate parents' hopes and aspirations for their offspring. For instance, within certain African societies, names may encapsulate the circumstances surrounding a child's birth, such as the prevailing weather, the time of day, or the mother's emotional state, while in others, names convey moral teachings, denote clan associations, or embody traditional praise. Consequently, naming serves as an initiation, ushering a child into the cultural and symbolic universe of both the family and broader society. Through this enduring practice, families ensure the transmission of identity, continuity, and a profound sense of belonging across successive generations, with the name itself becoming a conduit through which kinship is legitimized, cultural memory is preserved, and societal expectations are framed.

Furthermore, families are pivotal environments for the cultivation of coherence and solidarity (Eekelaar, 2017). Within the family, an individual's earliest social position is ascribed, and it serves as a critical site for the allocation of roles and responsibilities. Individuals initially define themselves by their familial affiliation, acquiring their primary understanding of hierarchy, authority, reciprocity, and care within this intimate context. Consequently, many facets of an individual's ascribed status, including age, gender, ethnicity, religion, nationality, and social class, are inherited through family ties (Eekelaar, 2017). In the South African context, family dynamics are complex and continuously adapt to evolving social landscapes, influencing how roles are negotiated and parental responsibilities are redefined (Sikhakhane & Roman, 2025). The diversity of family structures and the fluid nature of household arrangements further highlight the cultural expectations within extended family networks (Breshears & Rabe, 2025). The practice of name-giving further reinforces this phenomenon by frequently encoding many of these attributes within the very names individuals bear, thereby fulfilling both a social and cultural function in delineating one's place within the world. However, modern factors such as education, Western religion, and broader social changes are significantly altering traditional naming customs, leading to shifts in who assigns names and the meanings embedded within them (Mukosi et al., 2025; Ramohlale et al., 2026). These changes can impact the preservation of cultural identity and traditional heritage within communities.

### **2.2.2 Evolution of Family Structures**

The conceptualization of the family has undergone significant evolution over time, although traditional paradigms continue to exert considerable influence within sociological and philosophical discourse (Dermott and Fowler, 2020). Historically, the family was often rigidly defined in institutional terms, establishing clear boundaries between insiders and outsiders and presuming a stable membership over extended periods. These conventional definitions were frequently underpinned by functionalist theories, which posited distinct and complementary roles for men and women, intrinsically linked to public and private spheres of life. Consequently, traditional family models placed a strong emphasis on economic cooperation, reproductive functions, and heteronormative structures, with societal institutions often viewed as mechanisms for managing this gendered division of labor and preserving a specific social order (Dermott and Fowler, 2020).

Archard (2012) further elucidates how early definitions of the family typically stressed co-residence, consanguineous ties, heterosexuality, and generational succession. Murdock's

influential approach, for instance, characterized the family as a social group distinguished by shared residence, economic collaboration, and reproduction, typically involving both adult males and females with their biological or adopted progeny. However, such definitions have faced substantial critique for their perceived abstractness, ahistorical nature, and incongruence with the diverse realities of contemporary family structures. Critics argue that these models often reflect a male-centric, white, middle-class, and heteronormative bias, failing to adequately account for the lived experiences of families shaped by migration, socio-economic constraints, single parenthood, or same-sex unions (Archard, 2012).

Modern family theorists increasingly acknowledge the inherent complexity and fluidity of family life, recognizing that familial bonds are forged not solely through biological connections but also through social commitment, affective ties, and symbolic practices, among which name-giving holds a prominent place. Archard (2012) suggests that while a family can be simply defined as a multigenerational unit where adults assume custodial responsibility for children, a more nuanced understanding is required to grasp the moral and philosophical dimensions of familial existence. In African contexts, this nuanced understanding often incorporates concepts of personhood and communalism, where moral status is deeply intertwined with community and relationality (Atuire, 2022). Name-giving, in this context, exemplifies a moral practice that underscores the ethical responsibilities of family members, facilitates the transmission of cultural values, and provides symbolic recognition of individuals as integral members of a social and spiritual order. For instance, among the amaXhosa, naming practices are imbued with spiritual, religious, familial, and ancestral significance, highlighting their profound sociocultural role (Diko, 2024). Similarly, in Botswana, personal names serve as crucial vehicles for preserving Setswana culture and identity (Ramaeba, 2026). Thus, the family endures as a foundational institution, not only for socialization and psychological development but also for the profound transmission of identity and belonging through the act of name-giving. This act represents a deeply symbolic gesture that connects individuals to their lineage, cultural heritage, and prescribed social roles, thereby enabling families to maintain continuity, instill values, and equip individuals to navigate the complexities of the social world.

### **2.2.3 Name-Giving as a Symbolic Familial Act**

As previously established, name-giving is far more than a mere administrative task; it is a deeply symbolic and culturally significant act embedded within the broader process of familial socialization. This ritualistic practice serves as a powerful mechanism through which

individuals are formally integrated into their family's lineage, heritage, and belief systems. Across diverse cultures, the act of bestowing a name is imbued with profound meaning, often reflecting a complex interplay of historical, spiritual, and aspirational elements. Names may be chosen to honor revered ancestors, thereby preserving genealogical connections and ensuring the continuity of familial memory. They can also serve to commemorate significant historical events, linking the individual to a collective past and shared narrative. Furthermore, names frequently embody religious or spiritual beliefs, acting as a testament to the family's faith and its hopes for divine guidance or protection for the child. In many instances, names articulate the hopes, dreams, and aspirations that parents harbor for their offspring, imbuing the child with a sense of purpose or a desired character trait. For example, in various African societies, names are often intrinsically linked to the circumstances surrounding a child's birth, such as prevailing weather conditions or the mother's emotional state, making them living narratives of the child's arrival (Mukosi et al., 2025; Ohaja, 2021). These naming patterns also reveal significant socio-cultural and religious beliefs (Abubakari, 2020). In other cultural contexts, names may carry explicit moral teachings, functioning as ethical guideposts for the individual's life, or denote clan associations, reinforcing tribal or lineage identities. Among the amaXhosa, for instance, naming practices are deeply rooted in spiritual, religious, familial, and ancestral reasons, underscoring their profound sociocultural role (Diko, 2024). Similarly, in Botswana, personal names are vital for preserving Setswana culture and identity (Ramaeba, 2026). Consequently, the act of naming represents a crucial initiation, formally introducing a child into the intricate cultural and symbolic world of both their immediate family and the wider societal fabric. It is through this enduring practice that families effectively transmit identity, ensure cultural continuity, and foster a profound sense of belonging across generations. The name itself thus transforms into a powerful medium through which kinship ties are legitimized, cultural memory is meticulously preserved, and societal expectations are clearly framed, solidifying the individual's place within the collective social and cultural landscape.

## **2.3 Onomastics: The Science of Names**

### **2.3.1 Defining Onomastics**

Onomastics, derived from the Greek word *onoma* meaning "name," is the scientific study of names and naming customs. This interdisciplinary field encompasses the investigation of the origins, meanings, usage, and cultural significance of names across various communities and historical epochs. Onomastics is broadly categorized into several sub-fields, primarily

anthroponymy, which focuses on personal names, and toponymy, which deals with place names. However, it also extends to the study of names for things, ideas, and even brands.

The historical roots of onomastics can be traced back to ancient civilizations. In Mesopotamia and Ancient Egypt, names were not merely labels but were imbued with profound religious and symbolic meanings, reflecting a deep understanding of their power and significance (Suzuki, 2017). The Greeks and Romans further contributed to the nascent field by examining etymology and developing systems for classifying names based on their roles and origins (Mills, 2018). With the advent of Christianity in Europe during the Middle Ages, biblical names and associated naming customs became prevalent, significantly impacting onomastic traditions (Smith, 2016).

In contemporary scholarship, onomastics has evolved into a rich interdisciplinary domain, drawing insights from sociology, history, anthropology, and linguistics. Researchers leverage onomastic analysis to uncover historical shifts, trace patterns of cultural blending, and map migratory movements of populations (Hough, 2020). For instance, the study of human names can provide invaluable insights into broader societal trends and belief systems, while geographical name studies (toponymy) can illuminate linguistic transformations brought about by historical events such as colonialism or warfare (Hough, 2020). In an increasingly globalized world, onomastics remains crucial for comprehending the intricate connections between legacy, identity, and cultural heritage.

### **2.3.2 Global Perspectives on Onomastics**

Onomastics offers a vital lens through which to understand the complex cultural, historical, and linguistic landscapes of Asia. This vast and diverse continent exhibits naming practices that frequently reflect deeply ingrained customs, intricate social structures, and profound familial relationships. For example, in Chinese culture, the use of characters in personal names carries deep connotations, with each character meticulously selected to convey a specific hope, quality, or aspiration for the individual (Qian, 2020). Similarly, in India, names such as Krishna or Saraswati, which denote celestial qualities, are frequently derived from Sanskrit, reflecting the enduring influence of religious scriptures and Hindu mythology (Joshi, 2019). Japanese naming conventions, particularly the use of kanji, possess both symbolic and linguistic significance, often aligning with philosophical concepts or seasonal themes (Suzuki, 2018). In regions like Indonesia and Malaysia, Islamic naming customs highlight the importance of Arabic origins, with names frequently drawn from the Quran to express spiritual aspirations (Rahim, 2021). Furthermore, Korean naming traditions place a

strong emphasis on family ties, with surnames like Kim and Lee tracing their roots back to ancient clans that have existed for centuries (Park, 2020). This rich tapestry of naming practices across Asia underscores how onomastics serves as a powerful analytical tool for examining the intricate relationship between language, religion, and identity, thereby providing critical insights into the region's dynamic social structures.

### **2.3.2.1 Europe and North America**

In the United States, onomastics investigates the origins, significance, and social ramifications of personal names, place names, and even commercial brand names, thereby offering valuable insights into the nation's historical and cultural dynamics (Park, 2020). The lexicon of American names is a vibrant mosaic, influenced by Native American, European, African, Asian, and Latin American cultures, reflecting the country's broad and diverse heritage. Researchers frequently study naming patterns, such as the growing popularity of unique baby names or the resurgence of traditional names, as indicators of broader cultural shifts (Smith, 2020). Moreover, toponyms place names provide invaluable insights into the geography, history, and identity of various regions, often preserving the heritage of early settlers, Indigenous groups, or significant historical events. Beyond purely linguistic considerations, onomastics intersects with identity studies, recognizing that names carry profound cultural and personal meaning that influences perceptions and social interactions (Jones, 2019). Understanding these naming traditions can enhance engagement and authenticity in diverse real-world applications, including branding, marketing, and genealogical research. Consequently, the study of onomastics in the United States provides a crucial prism through which to more fully appreciate the intricacies of American culture.

Similarly, in Europe, ethnicity plays a significant role in naming, as names are deeply rooted in the cultural, historical, and linguistic traditions of various ethnic groups. For instance, in countries like Spain and Italy, surnames often reflect regional heritage, frequently deriving from geographical locations or occupations, thereby reinforcing ethnic identities (Moor, 2019). In the United Kingdom, names can also signal a person's ethnic background, with modern naming practices influenced by Anglo-Saxon, Celtic, and Norman ancestries (Smith, 2021). The increasing multiculturalism across Europe has led to a complex interplay of ethnicity and naming practices, resulting in a blend of names from diverse linguistic and cultural traditions that collectively present a nuanced picture of ethnic identity and belonging (Jones and Roberts, 2020). This dynamic highlights how names function not merely as identifiers but also as potent indicators of social history and ethnic membership within

European societies.

### **2.3.3 International Naming vs. Significance**

It is crucial to distinguish between the structural conventions of international naming practices and the underlying sociocultural significance embedded within those names. While naming conventions refer to the formal rules and patterns governing how names are constructed, ordered, and used across different cultures (e.g., the placement of given names versus family names, the use of patronymics or matronymics, or the adoption of generational names), significance pertains to the deeper meanings, values, beliefs, and historical narratives that names convey within a specific cultural context. The former addresses the 'how' of naming, while the latter addresses the 'why' and 'what' a name truly represents.

A common challenge for individuals interacting across cultures is the uncertainty regarding the structure of names, such as identifying which part of a Chinese name constitutes the given name and which is the family name. This structural misunderstanding has historically led to practical issues, as exemplified by Chinese immigrants to New Zealand whose surnames were inadvertently altered due to misinterpretations of naming conventions (Fearon, 1999). To mitigate such confusion, Chinese individuals often capitalize their family names on business cards, a practical adaptation to Western naming structures. Traditional Chinese naming also illustrates structural conventions, where boys of the same generation might share an initial character in their given names, a practice rooted in pre-determined generational names recorded in family histories or poems (Fearon, 1999). Furthermore, names can reflect the historical decade of birth, such as 'Jianguo' (founding the nation) or 'Guoqing' (national celebration) for those born in the 1950s and 1960s, showcasing a blend of structural convention and historical significance. The fact that women do not change their surnames after marriage and children inherit the father's family name further highlights the distinct structural and cultural rules governing Chinese names (Fearon, 1999).

In contrast to these structural considerations, the significance of a name delves into its symbolic weight. For instance, while a Chinese name like 'Kang' (healthy), 'Yong' (brave), 'Mei' (beautiful), or 'Ling' (wise) might follow specific structural rules, its true significance lies in the parents' aspirations and wishes for their child (Fearon, 1999). Similarly, in many African cultures, the structure of a name might indicate the day of birth or the order of siblings, but its significance often lies in its connection to ancestral spirits, historical events, or the circumstances of birth, imbuing the name with protective qualities or moral lessons. Therefore, while international naming conventions provide a framework for understanding

how names are organized and presented, it is the exploration of their cultural, historical, and personal significance that truly unlocks their profound meaning and role in identity formation. This distinction is paramount for a comprehensive onomastic analysis, moving beyond superficial categorization to a deeper appreciation of names as cultural artifacts.

## **2.4 Sociocultural Context of Naming in Africa**

### **2.4.1 The Philosophy of African Naming**

Naming holds a profoundly significant place in African cultures, transcending its function as a mere identifier to become a culturally loaded act deeply embedded with meaning, history, and values. According to Machaba (2004), naming serves as a pivotal cultural strategy employed by many African societies to transmit collective beliefs, historical memory, and sociopolitical structures to individuals, families, and communities. Through the lens of onomastics, the study of names, it becomes possible to explore deeper aspects of individual behavior, psychological meaning, and social dynamics within these societies. Names, in this context, possess the power to either unite or divide groups, reflecting shared heritage or contested identities.

For instance, among the Akan people of Ghana and Ivory Coast, names are not arbitrarily assigned but are intricately linked to the specific day of the week a child is born and the unique circumstances surrounding their birth. The naming ceremony itself is traditionally deferred until the eighth day, a practice symbolizing the child's firm establishment in the world and believed to prevent premature death by reinforcing ancestral connections. These ceremonies, frequently conducted at dawn to signify purity and new beginnings, involve elaborate rituals where elders symbolically place water and alcohol on the infant's tongue. This act is not merely ceremonial; it is intended to distinguish truth from falsehood, thereby imparting a moral compass for the child's future conduct (Adelaide, 2004). This rich symbolic act vividly illustrates the pervasive influence of culture across all dimensions of life, encompassing values, beliefs, and daily practices.

As Idang (2015) observes, culture encompasses the distinct characteristics of a people, including their language, dress, religion, art, music, morals, and social conventions, all of which collectively shape their identity and differentiate them from other groups. Crucially, culture is not solely a collection of artifacts or observable behaviors; it is also fundamentally constituted by shared values—deeply held convictions about what is right or wrong and what holds ultimate importance in life. These values, which fall under the philosophical domain of

axiology (encompassing both ethics and aesthetics), warrant critical examination within the African context to fully comprehend their enduring influence (Idang, 2015).

#### **2.4.2 Cultural Dynamics and Diversity**

Culture must be understood as an interconnected and dynamic system comprising both material aspects (such as tools and artifacts) and non-material elements (including norms, taboos, and values) (Onebunne and Okechukwu, 2021; Raji, 2021). It is imperative to clearly delineate the parameters of culture to avoid circular reasoning in academic discourse. Jahoda (1984) cautions against the tautological claim that “culture causes behavior” when behavior itself is an intrinsic component of culture. Similarly, Fischer and Schwartz (2011) suggest that values should be treated as distinct from culture when investigating causal relationships, thereby preventing tautological arguments. Researchers must establish clear conceptual boundaries; for example, while climate is not culture, it can undeniably influence behaviors and attitudes that subsequently become integral to cultural expression (van de Vliert, 2009).

Despite the vast regional differences across the African continent, many African cultures share underlying value systems that distinguish them from other global cultures. Sewell (2004) affirms the universality of culture, stating that every human group possesses it—no society exists without some form of social organization, belief system, or tradition. Even when some Western scholars historically denied the existence of African societies’ history or philosophy, they could not refute their inherent cultural complexity. Africans, though remarkably diverse, frequently express shared principles such as communalism, profound respect for elders, and strong spiritual worldviews. For instance, while Nigerian and Ghanaian cultures may exhibit distinct customs, they often align more closely with each other in fundamental values than with Western or Oriental cultures (Weisgrau, Rosman, and Rubel, 2023). This phenomenon illustrates the concept of cultural diversity within universality the idea that while culture is a universal human trait, its expressions are always uniquely localized.

Ultimately, culture is a living, evolving system that individuals carry with them, continually shaping and reshaping it through their actions, beliefs, and interpretations. It encompasses both tangible and intangible heritage, ranging from the physical artifacts people create to the moral values by which they live. In African societies, naming stands out as a quintessential cultural expression that encapsulates the philosophy, history, and values of a people, thereby revealing the profound ways in which culture is transmitted, preserved, and transformed across generations.

### **2.4.3 Naming Ceremonies as Rites of Passage**

The naming ceremony in South Africa is a highly symbolic and culturally significant occasion, exhibiting variations across its numerous ethnic groups. Far exceeding the simple act of bestowing a name upon an infant, this ceremony functions as a crucial rite of passage, formally incorporating the child into the family lineage, the broader community, and the ancestral legacy of indigenous African groups. For example, among the Zulu people, the *imbeleko* ceremony serves to present the child to the ancestors through customs such as the burning of *impepho* (incense) and the sacrifice of a goat. These acts express profound thankfulness and constitute a plea for the ancestors' protection and guidance (Mbiti, 1990).

Similarly, the Xhosa people incorporate blessings and prayers into their naming ceremonies, with the chosen name frequently reflecting the family's current situation, aspirations, or a significant connection to a notable ancestor (Hammond-Tooke, 1997). To foster social solidarity and ensure the transmission of cultural traditions, naming events are typically characterized by communal gatherings that feature traditional music, dances, and feasts. In contemporary South Africa, these traditions have undergone modifications due to the pervasive influence of Christianity and industrialization. Consequently, church rituals and Christian prayers may now coexist with indigenous customs. Despite these evolutionary changes, naming ceremonies continue to represent an essential cultural manifestation of identity, underscoring the profound significance of names in reflecting both individual and collective history (Ngubane, 2020). This enduring custom highlights the intricate interaction between the spiritual, social, and cultural facets of South African life.

## **2.5 Ethnicity, Identity, and Personal Naming**

### **2.5.1 Ethnicity as a Naming Determinant**

South Africa is renowned for possessing one of the world's most diverse and intricate populations, comprising numerous indigenous ethnic groups alongside significant communities of Indian and Coloured (mixed White and Black ancestry) individuals (Posner, 2004). Among the Black population, prominent groups include the Khoi-San, Xhosa, Zulu, Ndebele, Sotho, Shangaan, and Venda, with the largest ethnic groupings being the Zulus (21%), Xhosas (17%), and Sotho (15%) (Posner, 2004). This study specifically focuses on the AmaZulu people, aiming to delve beyond a general understanding to explore the specific factors that determine the naming of individuals, particularly firstborn children, within this distinct ethnic context.

The concept of ethnic solidarity is intrinsically linked to the practice of personal name-giving. Cultural traditions significantly influence a child's name choice, often guided by collective principles that reflect shared perspectives, experiences, and perceptions of a particular group. Therefore, a prerequisite for discussing the relationship between personal name-giving and ethnic groupings is a clear conceptualization of ethnicity itself. According to Ratcliffe (2010), an "ethnic group" can be defined as any group that either perceives itself, or is perceived by others, as a unique community distinguished by specific traits that serve to set it apart from the broader local community. Eriksen (2012) further elaborates that ethnicity refers to shared characteristics that contribute to defining an individual's or group's identity, encompassing elements such as culture, language, religion, and customs. This includes the belief among members of a social group that they are culturally unique and distinct from outsiders, their willingness to identify with and emphasize symbolic markers of that difference (e.g., food habits, religious practices, clothing styles, and language), and their inclination to structure relationships with outsiders in a manner that preserves and reproduces a form of "group boundary" (Eriksen, 2012). This perspective highlights that ethnicity is not always solely inherited; it also illustrates how an individual who has resided in a foreign environment for an extended period and chooses to embrace the customs, symbols, and interpersonal interactions of their new community may define themselves by an ethnicity distinct from their birth identity.

Consequently, ethnicity plays a crucial role in the naming of individuals across various global contexts, as names frequently reflect cultural, historical, and linguistic ties to particular ethnic groups. In Europe, for example, surnames can denote regional heritage in nations like Spain and Italy, where names are often derived from geographical locations or occupations, thereby strengthening ethnic identities (Moor, 2019). In the United Kingdom, names can also serve as indicators of a person's ethnic background, with modern naming practices influenced by Anglo-Saxon, Celtic, and Norman ancestries (Smith, 2021). The increasing multiculturalism across Europe has led to a complex interplay of ethnicity and naming practices, resulting in a blend of names from diverse linguistic and cultural traditions that collectively present a nuanced picture of ethnic identity and belonging (Jones and Roberts, 2020). This dynamic underscores how names function not merely as identifiers but also as potent indicators of social history and ethnic membership within European societies.

Similarly, the relationship between ethnicity and personal name-giving in Asia profoundly reflects deep cultural, historical, and linguistic traditions. Ethnic groups in Asia frequently possess distinctive naming practices imbued with profound significance, where names serve

as powerful indicators of heritage, identity, and family ties. For instance, in many East Asian cultures, including Chinese, Japanese, and Korean, surnames typically precede given names and are closely linked to ancestry. Some names also reflect specific qualities, aspirations, or natural elements (Yip, 2019). In South Asia, the naming customs of Hindu, Muslim, and Sikh groups are influenced by religious scriptures, local languages, and caste systems, which frequently dictate the selection of both first and last names (Khan, 2021). These naming customs not only preserve ethnic identity but also sustain the social standing and cultural continuity of these groups. This highlights the complex relationship between ethnicity and naming customs throughout Asia, where personal names function as a means of honoring cultural and ethnic roots in addition to serving as identifiers.

In many African civilizations, the custom of naming is heavily influenced by ethnicity, often being based on cultural, historical, and familial importance. Names are more than just a means of identification; they reflect a person's ethnic background, clan, or group. For example, the Akan people of Ghana typically give their children names that correspond to the day of the week they are born, with each day carrying a particular spiritual or cultural meaning, a practice that continues to be a deep spiritual and cultural connection to family and ancestors (Opoku, 2006; ExploreKumasi, 2025; PVAMU LibGuides, 2025). Similarly, among the Zulu people of Southern Africa, names frequently signify ancestry and are held in high regard, with contemporary research highlighting both the shifts and continuities in these personal naming practices that reflect the socio-cultural environment (Dube, 2013; Ngubane, 2026). Names like Zinhle, meaning "good" or "beautiful," carry both cultural and personal connotations. Name-giving customs can also reveal how ethnic identification is intertwined with personal identity by reflecting the community's historical conditions, such as during periods of migration, conflict, or significant social events (Mungazi, 1996). Recent studies further emphasize how African names serve as a vehicle to selfhood and cultural identity, even as modern factors influence traditional customs (Mukosi et al., 2025; Ramohlale et al., 2026). Thus, the name serves as a potent cultural tool that upholds historical continuity and cultural values across generations by confirming a person's position within their ethnic group.

### **2.5.2 Identity Construction through Names**

In the context of this study, a person's name-giving identity was selected from the literature to coordinate the values underlying identification. Name-giving manifests the identity of a specific social group, providing a channel for labels, meaning, and conventions. Fearon (1999) posits that identity, in its contemporary manifestation, carries a dual meaning. It

simultaneously alludes to social classifications and to the origins of a person's dignity or sense of self. These two aspects are not necessarily interconnected. In everyday discourse, identity can describe personal traits or qualities that are difficult to articulate solely in terms of a social category. Conversely, some categories can be referred to as identities even if no individual considers them essential to their own personal identity (Fearon, 1999). However, identity in its current form often reflects and evokes the notion that an individual's self-respect is fundamentally rooted in social categories.

### **2.5.3 Resistance and Reclaiming Identity**

Historically, attempts to deny African people the fundamental human right of self-determination and self-identity have been systematic and brutal for millennia (Benjamin, 2010). The Black Consciousness Movement emerged as a powerful force seeking to reaffirm African identity across the continent and throughout the broader Pan-African world, including regions such as the United States, the Caribbean, Europe, and South America. A brief examination of Africa's historical trajectory reveals a persistent struggle against external forces that sought to impose foreign identities and suppress indigenous cultures. This struggle often manifested in the realm of naming, where colonial powers and missionary efforts actively encouraged or coerced the adoption of Western names, viewing indigenous names as primitive or un-Christian. This renaming process was not merely a superficial change; it was a deliberate strategy to dismantle existing social structures, sever ties to ancestral heritage, and undermine the collective identity of African peoples.

In this context, the act of reclaiming and asserting African names became a potent symbol of resistance and a declaration of cultural pride. Authors such as Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o (1986) and Zakes Mda (1995) have extensively examined how Western culture has influenced African names, highlighting the inherent conflict between colonial influences and indigenous customs. Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, in particular, has been a vocal critic of the adoption of Western names, viewing it as a direct consequence of colonization and a profound loss of African identity. Mda (1995), in his exploration of post-apartheid South Africa's complex relationship with identity, echoes Ngũgĩ's assertion that the adoption of Western names was an integral part of a broader agenda to repress African languages and cultures. For these writers, African names are not merely linguistic markers but represent a powerful political statement of resistance and a vibrant cultural manifestation. The writings of authors like Bessie Head (1990) further demonstrate the deep cultural meaning embedded in African names, serving as a constant reminder of ancestry and origin. These literary voices advocate for a resurgence of

African pride and self-identification in the face of persistent Western influence, actively challenging the erasure of African names through their narratives and critical analyses.

## **2.6 The Impact of Western Culture and Colonialism on African Names**

### **2.6.1 Historical Imposition**

The 19th century witnessed a fervent European scramble for Africa, during which foreign religions, particularly Christianity, and Western-style schools were widely introduced across the continent (Notzon and Nesom, 2005). This period of intense colonial expansion inevitably had a profound impact on indigenous naming systems. As Europeans settled in various African nations, such as Ghana and Nigeria, the adoption of European surnames like Ferguson and Johnson became increasingly common, suggesting that these names were not traditionally part of African societies prior to European contact (Notzon and Nesom, 2005). This imposition of foreign nomenclature was often intertwined with the broader colonial project, which sought to reshape African societies according to European norms and values. The linguistic diversity of Africa, with nations like Ghana boasting 46 languages among its approximately 22 million people, further complicated the naming landscape. Despite this diversity, indigenous naming conventions, such as those among the Akan people, were deeply rooted in cultural practices, with names often reflecting family lineage, days of the week, birth circumstances, flora and fauna, and occupations (Notzon and Nesom, 2005). The arrival of European powers disrupted these established systems, introducing new naming paradigms that often supplanted or coexisted with traditional practices.

Thwala (2017) conducted a study titled “An Onomastic Approach to a Comparative Analysis of Naming Customs in Mpuluzi and Metfule, Two Settlements in Mpumalanga Province,” which aimed to compare and analyze naming practices within Siswati culture. This research explored how various aspects of life, including natural events, political disputes, commemorative events, birth circumstances, religious beliefs, and family dynamics, influenced naming. The study also investigated the effects of marriage, month names, and days of the week on naming conventions. The primary objective was to compare and analyze Siswati naming customs, specifically focusing on how individuals are named in the communities of Mpuluzi and Metfule in Mpumalanga province. Utilizing an onomastic approach, Thwala's study examined historical, social, and cultural settings related to naming, seeking to comprehend the importance of names within the community. The findings

highlighted both distinctions and parallels between the two communities, offering insights into their naming customs and patterns and thereby advancing knowledge of the cultural significance of names in Siswati society. While Thwala's study provides valuable insights into African naming practices, it differs from the current research in its specific group focus and ethnic selection.

Sogoba (2019) emphasizes the profound influence a name can have on an individual's character, their group's social identity, and even their destiny. The meaning ascribed to a name is believed to significantly shape a child's present and future. Often, an individual's name can reveal socio-cultural aspects such as their ethnicity, gender, day or date of birth, family's occupation, social and political class, religious affiliations, parental hopes and dreams, and more (Sogoba, 2019). A name also serves to express the values, ethics, and beliefs of the culture into which one is born. It creates an expectation and an attitude in those who hear it, even before they encounter the name-bearer. This is partly why, according to Sogoba (2019), many West Africans, when introduced to people from different ethnic groups, will not only state their name but also explain its meaning to ensure clear understanding regardless of language barriers.

### **2.6.2 Linguistic and Cultural Erasure**

The adoption of Western names during the colonial era was not merely a matter of convenience but a deliberate strategy that contributed to linguistic and cultural erasure. As discussed in Section 2.5.3, authors like Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o (1986) and Zakes Mda (1995) have critically analyzed this phenomenon, portraying the renaming process as a significant loss of African identity. Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's work, particularly, highlights how the imposition of European languages and names was a tool of cultural subjugation, designed to alienate Africans from their indigenous heritage and foster a sense of inferiority. Mda's (1995) research on post-apartheid South Africa further reinforces this perspective, arguing that the adoption of Western names was part of a broader colonial agenda to suppress African languages and cultures. For these scholars, African names are not just personal identifiers; they are powerful symbols of cultural resilience, historical memory, and political resistance. The writings of Bessie Head (1990) also underscore the deep cultural meaning and ancestral connection embedded in African names, advocating for their preservation as a vital aspect of African self-identification.

### **2.6.3 Modern Trends: Reclaiming African Names vs. The Continued Use of Euro-Western Names**

In the post-colonial and post-apartheid eras, a complex dynamic has emerged regarding naming practices in Africa. While there is a growing movement to reclaim and prioritize African names as markers of cultural identity and resistance to cultural erasure, the influence of Euro-Western names persists for various reasons. Zungu and Zulu (2018) observe that some individuals, particularly among the AmaZulu, may prefer their Euro-Western names over their African names due to perceptions of the latter being too direct or plain, potentially revealing personal or familial details they wish to keep private.

However, Zungu and Zulu (2018) also highlight a contrasting trend: many Africans who possess both African and Euro-Western names are actively reclaiming their African identity by prioritizing their indigenous names as their preferred first and calling names. In some instances, individuals have gone as far as formally removing their Euro-Western names from official documents. This movement signifies a powerful assertion of cultural pride and a conscious effort to reverse the historical legacy of colonial naming practices. Among Africans, naming is rarely a random act; it is a deeply considered process that reflects the current circumstances of the family, carrying rich meaning and revealing intricate familial and societal dynamics (Zungu and Zulu, 2018). Names often mirror the social behavior patterns of both the household and the broader community, and can even be strategically used to ease tensions or prevent conflict within the homestead, particularly those that might anger ancestors.

In African cosmology, a name is far more than a mere label; it plays a crucial role in shaping identity, as it is believed that the name-bearer becomes what they are called. This profound belief often guides name-givers to choose neutral or positive names, which are thought to carry protective and empowering qualities. Traditional beliefs among the AmaZulu, for example, underscore the spiritual function of names, viewing them as a means of introducing the bearer to the 'living dead' and forging a vital connection with ancestral spirits. Conversely, names can also expose the bearer to spiritual danger, as traditional communities often believe that witches and sorcerers can use names to bewitch or harm individuals. Accusations of witchcraft, familial disputes, and inheritance conflicts frequently revolve around names and naming practices. Ultimately, the significance of naming within African societies, especially among the AmaZulu, cannot be overstated, as names encapsulate identity, history, and spirituality, making them powerful tools for both unity and division.

The influence of Western culture has also led to alterations in nomenclature, with names carrying negative connotations becoming less common among some AmaZulu people. While

the majority of Christians view witchcraft as un-Christlike, it is noteworthy that in certain African countries, some Christians are themselves perceived as witches and sorcerers. In severe cases, individuals may change their names if they believe them to be too explicit or to carry undesirable associations within AmaZulu culture. Irvine and Gunner (2018) observe this phenomenon particularly in AmaZulu anthroponymy, where names alluding to the practice of witchcraft are not uncommon. Despite these complexities, the AmaZulu people now have greater freedom in their naming choices compared to the colonial, missionary, and apartheid periods, when the adoption of Euro-Western names was often coerced. Today, individuals can choose names that make them feel more at ease, often opting for Euro-Western names to avoid mockery because of the perceived bluntness of some traditional names (Irvine and Gunner, 2018). This ongoing negotiation between tradition and modernity highlights the evolving landscape of naming practices in Africa.

## **2.7 Naming Practices in South Africa**

### **2.7.1 The South African Onomastic Landscape**

South Africa's unique onomastic landscape is a direct reflection of its rich linguistic diversity and complex socio-political history. With 11 official languages and a multitude of ethnic groups, names in South Africa serve as profound expressions of personal identity, ancestral heritage, and shared cultural values. For instance, isiZulu names such as *Thandeka* (meaning "beloved") and *Sibongile* (meaning "we are thankful") are deeply embedded with expressions of gratitude or aspirations within the family (Ngubane, 2020). Similarly, Afrikaans names like Jan or Annalise often carry Dutch colonial roots, reflecting another layer of the country's historical influences. The study of onomastics in South Africa thus provides a rich prism through which to view the intricate interaction of history, culture, and identity (Raper, 2004).

### **2.7.2 Political Dimensions of Naming**

Onomastics in South Africa is inextricably linked to the country's colonial and apartheid past, during which naming customs were often employed as instruments of identity erasure or imposition. For example, the anglicization of African names was a common practice, serving to diminish indigenous cultural identity and assimilate individuals into a dominant Eurocentric framework. This historical context underscores the political dimensions inherent in naming practices, where names became battlegrounds for cultural dominance and resistance. In the post-apartheid era, there has been a significant resurgence in the prevalence of indigenous names, which are now embraced as powerful symbols of pride and cultural

reclaiming (Raper, 2004). This shift reflects a broader societal movement towards decolonization and the affirmation of African heritage. Furthermore, South African place names vividly demonstrate the political and cultural forces ingrained in onomastics, as evidenced by significant renamings, such as Pretoria to Tshwane (Ndletyana, 2012). These acts of renaming are not merely administrative changes; they are profound statements of historical revision, cultural affirmation, and political transformation, reflecting a conscious effort to reshape the national narrative and reclaim indigenous identities. Thus, the onomastic landscape of South Africa is a dynamic arena where historical legacies, cultural assertions, and political aspirations continuously intersect.

## **2.8 Naming within the AmaZulu Nation (The Specific Focus)**

### **2.8.1 Traditional Zulu Naming Conventions**

Among the AmaZulu nation, naming is a practice imbued with profound cultural, historical, and spiritual significance, extending far beyond simple identification. Traditional Zulu naming conventions are deeply rooted in the belief that a name carries the essence of an individual's identity, destiny, and connection to their lineage and community. Names are often descriptive, reflecting the circumstances surrounding a child's birth, the family's experiences, or the parents' aspirations. For instance, names like *Thandeka* (beloved) and *Sibongile* (we are thankful) are not merely pleasant sounds but encapsulate specific sentiments of gratitude, love, or hope within the family context (Dube, 2013). These names serve as constant reminders of the conditions and emotions prevalent at the time of birth, acting as living narratives that connect the individual to their personal and collective history. Other names might reflect significant events, natural phenomena, or even the emotional state of the parents, thereby weaving a rich tapestry of meaning around each individual. The choice of a name is therefore a deliberate and thoughtful process, often involving elders and other family members, ensuring that the bestowed name aligns with the family's values and the child's anticipated role within the community.

### **2.8.2 The Imbeleko Ceremony**

The *Imbeleko* ceremony is a quintessential example of the spiritual and cultural depth embedded in AmaZulu naming practices. This ceremony is not merely a celebration of a new life but a critical ritual that formally introduces the newborn to the ancestors, thereby forging an unbreakable spiritual bond. During the *Imbeleko*, customs such as the burning of *impepho* (incense) and the sacrifice of a goat are performed. These acts are deeply symbolic, serving as

expressions of profound thankfulness to the ancestors for the new life and as earnest pleas for their continued protection and guidance over the child (Mbiti, 1990). The smoke from the *impepho* is believed to carry messages to the ancestral realm, while the sacrifice signifies a sacred offering and a renewal of the covenant between the living and the dead. This ceremony underscores the AmaZulu belief in the continuous presence and influence of ancestors in daily life, highlighting that an individual's existence is not isolated but is part of a larger, interconnected spiritual lineage. The name bestowed during or after this ceremony is thus imbued with ancestral blessings and carries the weight of familial and spiritual expectations, reinforcing the child's place within the cosmic order of the AmaZulu nation.

### **2.8.3 Sociopolitical Influences (1990-1994): The Specific Context of uMkhambathini**

The period between 1990 and 1994 in South Africa was marked by profound sociopolitical upheaval and transition, culminating in the dismantling of apartheid and the establishment of a democratic government. This era of intense change undoubtedly influenced various aspects of AmaZulu life, including naming practices, particularly within specific communities like uMkhambathini. During this time, the AmaZulu nation, like other ethnic groups, navigated a complex landscape of political negotiations, social unrest, and the emergence of new national identities. The choices made in naming children during this period could reflect a range of responses to these external pressures: some names might have symbolized hope for a new democratic future, others a reaffirmation of traditional AmaZulu identity in the face of change, and still others a subtle commentary on the ongoing political struggles. The specific context of uMkhambathini, as a distinct community within the AmaZulu nation, would have experienced these broader sociopolitical shifts in unique ways, potentially leading to localized naming trends or preferences. Understanding the historical backdrop of this period is crucial for interpreting the factors that influenced naming decisions, as names often serve as historical markers, encapsulating a community's collective experiences and aspirations during significant periods. Therefore, an analysis of naming practices between 1990 and 1994 in uMkhambathini must consider the interplay between traditional AmaZulu customs and the transformative sociopolitical environment of the time.

### **2.8.4 Spiritual and Cosmological Significance**

In African cosmology, particularly within the AmaZulu belief system, a name is far more than a mere label; it is a potent entity that shapes an individual's identity and destiny. The profound belief that the name-bearer becomes what they are called underscores the importance of careful name selection. This conviction often guides name-givers to choose

names that are neutral or positive in connotation, as these are believed to imbue the individual with protective qualities and empower them throughout their life. Traditional beliefs among the AmaZulu further emphasize the spiritual function of names, viewing them as a vital means of introducing the bearer to the ‘living dead’ the ancestors thereby forging a continuous and essential connection with the ancestral spirits (Zungu and Zulu, 2018). This connection is not merely symbolic; it is believed to provide guidance, protection, and a sense of belonging within the spiritual realm.

Conversely, the spiritual potency of names also implies a potential for vulnerability. In traditional communities, there is a pervasive belief that malevolent forces, such as witches and sorcerers, can exploit an individual’s name to cast spells, inflict harm, or manipulate their destiny. This belief highlights the dual nature of names as powerful tools for both good and ill. Accusations of witchcraft, familial disputes, and inheritance conflicts frequently revolve around names and naming practices, underscoring their central role in social and spiritual dynamics within AmaZulu society. Ultimately, the significance of naming within African societies, and particularly among the AmaZulu, cannot be overstated. Names encapsulate identity, history, and spirituality, serving as powerful conduits for both unity and division within the community. They are living entities that carry the weight of tradition, the aspirations of the present, and the spiritual connections to the past, profoundly shaping the individual’s journey through life.

## **2.9 Chapter Summary**

This chapter has presented a comprehensive literature review, meticulously structured to progress from general theoretical concepts to specific contextual applications, culminating in a focused examination of naming practices within the AmaZulu nation. The review commenced by establishing the foundational role of the family as the primary agent of socialization, emphasizing its critical function in shaping individual identity, values, and cultural continuity. It then explored the evolving definitions of family structures, contrasting traditional and modern perspectives and highlighting the enduring significance of name-giving as a symbolic familial act that binds individuals to their lineage and heritage.

The discussion subsequently delved into onomastics, the scientific study of names, defining its core concepts such as anthroponymy and toponymy and tracing its historical development. A global perspective on onomastics was provided, illustrating the diverse naming traditions across Asia, Europe, and North America, and demonstrating how names reflect unique cultural, historical, and linguistic contexts. Crucially, the chapter clarified the distinction

between international naming conventions (structure) and their underlying sociocultural significance (meaning), emphasizing that a comprehensive understanding requires appreciating both the formal rules and the profound symbolic weight names carry

Transitioning to the African context, the review explored the philosophical underpinnings of African naming, where names serve as powerful carriers of history, values, and collective memory. It examined the dynamic nature of African cultures, encompassing both material and non-material aspects, and underscored the importance of naming ceremonies as vital rites of passage that integrate individuals into their communities and ancestral legacies.

The intricate relationship between ethnicity, identity, and personal naming was then analyzed, defining ethnicity as a determinant of naming choices and exploring how names contribute to identity construction, encompassing both social classification and personal dignity. The chapter also addressed the historical impact of Western culture and colonialism on African names, discussing the imposition of foreign nomenclature, the resulting linguistic and cultural erasure, and the contemporary movements to reclaim African names as acts of resistance and cultural affirmation.

Finally, the review narrowed its focus to naming practices within South Africa, highlighting the country's diverse onomastic landscape and the political dimensions of naming, particularly in the context of apartheid and post-apartheid identity politics. The chapter culminated in a specific examination of naming within the AmaZulu nation, detailing traditional Zulu naming conventions, the spiritual significance of ceremonies like *Imbeleko*, the sociopolitical influences on naming during the transformative period of 1990-1994 in uMkhambathini, and the profound spiritual and cosmological significance of names in AmaZulu belief systems. This comprehensive review provides a robust theoretical and contextual foundation for the subsequent chapters, particularly the theoretical framework that will guide the empirical investigation of naming factors among firstborn AmaZulu infants.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

This chapter establishes the theoretical foundation for understanding the cultural and social significance of naming practices among firstborn children in the uMkhambathini community of the AmaZulu nation, particularly during the transformative period from 1990 to 1994. It draws upon two complementary theoretical perspectives: Social Identity Theory (SIT) and Social Constructionism. These frameworks collectively offer a robust lens through which to analyse how personal names shape identity, reflect broader cultural meanings, and are constructed through social interaction and collective understanding. The dual-theoretical approach enriches the analysis by foregrounding identity issues while also acknowledging the layered and multifaceted aspects of cultural expression, linking naming practices to the cultural constructs that shape and distinguish identities within the AmaZulu community.

#### **3.1 Social Identity Theory**

Social Identity Theory (SIT), primarily developed by Henri Tajfel and John Turner in the late 1960s and early 1970s, provides a foundational framework for understanding how individuals derive a sense of self and belonging from their group memberships (Tajfel and Turner, 1979; Turner et al., 1987). Tajfel's initial contributions emerged as a critique of existing models that explained intergroup dynamics solely through individual traits or competition over material resources. SIT proposed a more nuanced understanding, suggesting that individuals perceive themselves along a continuum, from a purely personal identity that highlights their uniqueness to a fully social identity that emphasizes shared characteristics with other group members (Smith, 2012). This foundational insight forms the core of SIT, focusing on how people align themselves with certain social groups (in-groups) while distinguishing themselves from others (out-groups), and the implications of this categorization, including phenomena such as ethnocentrism (Turner et al., 1987).

##### **3.1.1 Core Principles of Social Identity Theory**

SIT is built upon several interconnected core principles that explain the psychological processes involved in group membership and intergroup relations. Firstly, Social Categorization refers to the cognitive process by which individuals classify themselves and others into various social categories, such as nationality, ethnicity, gender, religion, or profession. This process simplifies the complex social world, making it more manageable and helping individuals define their place within it, serving as a fundamental mechanism for understanding and identifying both oneself and others (Tajfel and Turner, 1979; Simply

Psychology, n.d.). Secondly, Social Identification occurs once an individual categorizes themselves into a particular group, leading them to adopt the identity of that group. This involves a psychological attachment to the group, resulting in a sense of belonging and emotional significance derived from group membership. Social identification means aligning one's perspective, values, and behavior with fellow group members, essentially seeing the world through the lens of the group (Tajfel and Turner, 1979; Hogg and Abrams, 1988). This contrasts with role identity, which involves conforming to the expectations of a specific role rather than a shared group identity (Smith, 2012). Thirdly, Social Comparison involves individuals constantly compare their in-group with relevant out-groups. This comparison is not arbitrary but is often driven by the desire to achieve or maintain a positive image for their own group, with the outcomes significantly influencing an individual's self-esteem and overall social identity (Tajfel and Turner, 1979; ibpsychmatters, n.d.). Finally, Positive Distinctiveness is the overarching motivation within SIT, where individuals seek to achieve or maintain a positive social identity by differentiating their in-group favorably from out-groups. This can manifest as in-group favoritism, where members of a group tend to favor their own group over others, and in more extreme cases, ethnocentrism, where one's own ethnic group is believed to be superior (Tajfel and Turner, 1979; Simply Psychology, n.d.). Strategies for achieving positive distinctiveness can include social creativity (redefining comparison elements) or direct competition (EBSCO, n.d.).

Group-based identities are characterized by a strong sense of uniformity across cognition, behavior, and attitudes (Hogg and Abrams, 1988; Oakes, Haslam and Turner, 1994). Cognitively, strong in-group identification can lead to social stereotyping and a tendency for individuals to view themselves as typical representatives of their group (Haslam et al., 1996; Hogg and Hardie, 1992). Attitudinally, group members often develop positive feelings and strong attachment to their group, even in the absence of close personal relationships (Hogg and Hardie, 1992; Ellemers, Spears and Doosje, 1997). Behaviorally, identification with a group can lead to coordinated action and loyalty, even in low-status groups (Ethier and Deaux, 1994; Turner et al., 1992).

### **3.1.2 Application of Social Identity Theory to Data**

In the context of name-giving among firstborn children in the AmaZulu nation, particularly within the uMkhambathini community between 1990 and 1994, SIT offers critical insights into how cultural, social, and political dynamics shaped personal naming practices as markers of identity, heritage, and collective memory. This period was a transformative era in South Africa's history, marked by the dismantling of apartheid and the reconfiguration of national

identity. In this context, names were not merely labels but carried profound symbolic meanings tied to ethnic pride, political awareness, and the collective experiences of AmaZulu communities navigating a new socio-political landscape.

The AmaZulu community, as a distinct in-group, actively utilized name-giving practices to construct and reinforce their cultural identity. Names chosen for firstborn children, who traditionally represented the continuity of lineage and tradition, often embodied aspirations for freedom, peace, and family restoration. These values were deeply rooted in AmaZulu group consciousness and collective resilience during a period of significant societal change. For example, names such as *Thembelihle* (beautiful hope), *Sibusiso* (blessing), or *Nkosinathi* (the Lord is with us) were likely chosen to reinforce spiritual and communal beliefs during a time characterized by both uncertainty and optimism. These naming patterns served as a form of in-group language, communicating shared values, histories, and experiences that were often fully understood only by members of the AmaZulu group. From an SIT perspective, this signifies the deliberate formation and reinforcement of in-group boundaries that differentiated the AmaZulu from other ethnic groups and broader societal influences, particularly during the emergence of a new national identity in post-apartheid South Africa. The distinctiveness of these names contributed to the AmaZulu's positive social identity. Furthermore, SIT helps explain the intergenerational transmission of identity through name-giving. Naming a firstborn child after a grandparent, a revered clan hero, or a significant cultural event strengthened familial and communal ties, solidifying the child's membership within the AmaZulu social group.

The social categorization process was evident in how these names marked the child not only as an individual but as a symbol of the family's and community's identity. In uMkhambathini, this process was further informed by local customs, isiZulu idioms, and traditional roles that placed significant importance on the firstborn as a bearer of legacy, thereby reinforcing communal belonging, roles, and expectations. SIT also highlights how external political or social pressures can lead to shifts in identity emphasis. During 1990-1994 in uMkhambathini, there was a rising awareness of both AmaZulu nationalism and broader South African transformation. Parents who strongly identified with movements like the Inkatha Freedom Party or traditional AmaZulu structures may have chosen names that aligned with those political ideologies, thereby reinforcing their group identity in opposition to perceived external threats or assimilation. Conversely, those embracing national unity and reconciliation might have leaned towards names representing peace or unity. These identity negotiations, as explained by SIT, illustrate how social identity is fluid, contextual, and

actively constructed in response to the socio-political environment.

SIT thus significantly contributes to understanding the socio-cultural and political influences behind the naming practices of firstborn children among the AmaZulu of uMkhambathini. It illuminates how naming is an act of identity construction rooted in collective belonging, cultural preservation, and social positioning, allowing researchers to trace how names serve as markers of historical consciousness, intergroup relations, and community pride during a critical period in South Africa's transition.

### **3.2 Social Constructionism**

Social Constructionism is a theoretical perspective that posits that knowledge, meaning, and reality itself are not objective or inherent but are actively created and maintained through human interaction, language, and cultural context (Schwandt, 2003; Krippendorff, 2009). It challenges the notion of a singular, objective truth, arguing instead that our understanding of the world, including concepts like identity, gender, and social norms, is a product of ongoing social processes and historical specificities (Burr, 2015). This perspective emphasizes that what we consider "reality" is largely a shared interpretation, collectively agreed upon and sustained through social practices.

#### **3.2.1 Core Theorists and Principles**

In their seminal work, *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge* (1966), Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann laid the groundwork for understanding how individuals and groups participate in the creation of their perceived social reality (Berger and Luckmann, 1966). They argue that society is a human product, and reality is socially produced and maintained through continuous social interaction. Their theoretical framework is built upon three fundamental processes. Firstly, Externalization refers to the ongoing process by which humans project their own being into the world, both in mental and physical activity. This involves the creation of cultural artifacts, institutions, and social roles. For example, when people interact, they create patterns of behavior and shared meanings (Berger and Luckmann, 1966). Secondly, Objectivation occurs when the products of externalization, once created, attain a reality of their own, confronting their producers as an external and objective fact. These social products appear as if they exist independently of human creation. Language, for instance, once developed, becomes an objective reality that shapes our thought and communication, rather than merely being a tool (Berger and Luckmann, 1966). Finally, Internalization is the process by which the objective social world is re-appropriated by individuals through socialization. Individuals learn and adopt the socially constructed reality as their own, making it subjectively meaningful. Through

internalization, individuals come to understand and accept the norms, values, and beliefs of their society as natural and given (Berger and Luckmann, 1966).

Through these dialectical processes, subjective meanings become institutionalized through language, norms, and habitualized actions, forming what Berger and Luckmann term "social reality." This reality, though humanly constructed, comes to be experienced as objective and compelling (Berger and Luckmann, 1966).

Vivien Burr, a prominent contemporary figure in social constructionism, further elaborates on the dynamic and process-oriented nature of social construction. In her influential work, *Social Constructionism*, Burr highlights several key tenets that distinguish this perspective (Burr, 2015). One key tenet is Anti-essentialism, which fundamentally rejects the idea that there are inherent, fixed natures to phenomena, whether they be human characteristics (e.g., personality, gender) or social categories. Instead, it argues that all such categories and their associated meanings are products of social and historical processes, constantly subject to change and redefinition (Burr, 2015). Another principle is Language as a Precondition for Thought, where Burr emphasizes that language is not merely a neutral medium for describing an pre-existing reality, but rather it actively constitutes reality. Our ways of understanding, perceiving, and interacting with the world are profoundly shaped by the linguistic categories and discourses available to us, as language provides the framework through which we make sense of our experiences (Burr, 2015). Furthermore, Historical and Cultural Specificity dictates that socially constructed understandings are not universal or timeless; they are specific to particular historical periods and cultural contexts. What is considered "true," "normal," or "real" varies significantly across different societies and historical epochs, underscoring the contingent nature of knowledge and meaning (Burr, 2015). Lastly, Knowledge and Social Action asserts that knowledge is never neutral, but is intrinsically tied to social action, power relations, and moral implications. Different constructions of reality have different consequences for individuals and groups, influencing what is considered acceptable, desirable, or even possible within a given social order (Burr, 2015).

Burr's perspective aligns with the broader understanding that knowledge is a human product, shaped by experience, culture, and context, and is created through processes of social negotiation rather than being discovered as an objective truth (Schwandt, 2003). This allows for the recognition of multiple truths or realities, each informed by differing cultural and historical perspectives (Schwandt, 2003).

### 3.2.2 Application of Social Constructionism to Data

In the context of the AmaZulu nation, particularly within the uMkhambathini community between 1990 and 1994, Social Constructionism offers a powerful lens to understand how name-giving for firstborn children was deeply embedded in collective memory, social meaning-making, and cultural negotiation. This historical period, coinciding with South Africa's transition from apartheid to democracy, brought about significant shifts in social consciousness and identity, making the act of naming a profoundly social and cultural endeavor.

The act of naming a firstborn child was far from a neutral or isolated decision; it was a product of communal dialogue, reflecting shared hopes, values, fears, and socio-political transformations within the AmaZulu community. Names like *Siphesihle* (a beautiful gift) or *Khanyisile* (she who brings light) were not simply chosen but emerged from collective understandings, embodying the community's emotions and expectations. These names became tools through which families constructed their realities and made sense of their experiences during a period of national uncertainty and renewal, demonstrating how subjective meanings become institutionalized through shared practices (Berger and Luckmann, 1966). The decision-making process for naming a firstborn child rarely rested with a single individual. Instead, it involved extended family members, drawing upon traditional naming customs, clan identities, and ancestral considerations. These practices were not static inheritances but were actively constructed and reconstructed over time through continuous dialogue and reflection within the community.

This was particularly evident during the transitional historical moments of the early 1990s, where traditional practices might have been reinterpreted or reinforced in light of new social realities (Burr, 2015). Furthermore, Social Constructionism highlights the crucial role of language in constructing social reality. In uMkhambathini, isiZulu naming conventions carried rich symbolic and narrative meanings, serving as linguistic tools for expressing collective experiences and historical consciousness. Names became a powerful way of documenting family histories, remembering those lost in political conflict, or celebrating the community's resilience. For example, names that emerged in the post-apartheid era, such as *Hlengiwe* (rescued or saved) or *Musa* (mercy), acted as narrative anchors that linked the personal identity of the child to the broader social and historical fabric of the community, demonstrating how language actively constitutes our understanding of the world (Burr, 2015). Social Constructionism thus offers a nuanced framework for understanding the naming of firstborn children within the AmaZulu nation, revealing that name-giving is not merely a

personal or familial decision, but a socially negotiated process embedded in cultural meaning, collective memory, and historical transformation. Through shared narratives, linguistic expressions, and community interactions, names become powerful tools for constructing and communicating social reality.

### **3.3 Integration of Social Identity Theory and Social Constructionism**

The integration of Social Identity Theory (SIT) and Social Constructionism provides a comprehensive and multi-layered framework for analyzing the naming practices of firstborn children in the uMkhambathini community. While SIT focuses on the psychological processes of group identification, social categorization, and the pursuit of positive distinctiveness, Social Constructionism emphasizes the social processes through which these identities, meanings, and even the categories themselves are created, maintained, and transformed. These theories are not contradictory but rather complementary, offering a more holistic understanding of the phenomenon under study.

Firstly, regarding Identity as Socially Constructed and Identified, SIT posits that individuals derive a significant part of their identity from their group memberships. Social Constructionism extends this by arguing that the very categories of these groups (e.g., "AmaZulu," "South African") and the meanings, values, and characteristics attributed to them are not natural or inherent but are socially constructed through ongoing human interaction and cultural processes. Therefore, the names chosen for firstborn children are not merely reflections of pre-existing AmaZulu identities but are active constructions and affirmations of those identities within a specific historical and cultural context. The act of naming becomes a performative act of both social identification and social construction. Secondly, concerning Language, In-group Boundaries, and Meaning-Making, SIT highlights how naming patterns function as an in-group language, reinforcing boundaries and fostering a sense of shared identity. Social Constructionism deepens this understanding by demonstrating how language (specifically isiZulu naming conventions) actively constitutes the social reality of the in-group. It serves as a powerful medium for expressing collective experiences, historical consciousness, and cultural values. The symbolic weight of names, as understood through Social Constructionism, directly contributes to the positive distinctiveness and shared identity emphasized by SIT. Thirdly, regarding the Dynamic Nature of Identity and Social Change, both theories acknowledge the fluid, contextual, and dynamic nature of identity. SIT explains how external political or social pressures (such as the end of apartheid) influence shifts in identity emphasis and group strategies for maintaining positive distinctiveness. Social Constructionism provides the mechanism for *how* these shifts occur: through continuous

social interaction, dialogue, negotiation, and the re-interpretation of cultural narratives. The evolving naming practices observed during the 1990-1994 period are thus understood as both a response to changing intergroup dynamics (SIT) and an active process of re-constructing collective meaning and identity (Social Constructionism).

By integrating these two perspectives, the study can analyze how the AmaZulu community in uMkhambathini utilized name-giving as a practice that simultaneously reinforced their social identity, differentiated them from out-groups, and actively constructed their collective reality and cultural meanings during a pivotal historical moment. This dual theoretical lens allows for a nuanced interpretation of how names both reflect and shape the lived realities of the AmaZulu people.

### **3.4 Chapter Conclusion**

This chapter has laid a robust and comprehensive theoretical foundation for understanding the cultural and social significance of naming practices for firstborn children in the uMkhambathini community of the AmaZulu people, focusing specifically on the transitional period between 1990 and 1994. By integrating Social Identity Theory (SIT) and Social Constructionism, the study is equipped to explore the symbolic, political, psychological, and interpersonal dimensions of name-giving during a profoundly transformative period in South Africa's history.

Social Identity Theory provides a crucial lens to examine how naming practices served as powerful tools of group identity formation, cultural preservation, and the pursuit of positive distinctiveness. Through SIT, we understand how names operated as markers of in-group membership, reinforcing ethnic pride, fostering collective aspirations, and navigating intergroup relations during the post-apartheid era. This theory helps situate naming within broader social and political dynamics, highlighting how identity is constructed through alignment with group values, resistance to out-group influences, and the intergenerational transmission of cultural meaning.

**Social Constructionism**, drawing significantly on the foundational works of Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann, and the contemporary insights of Vivien Burr, adds a critical layer of depth by focusing on the social processes through which knowledge, meaning, and cultural norms are co-constructed. It emphasizes that naming is not merely a personal or familial act but one deeply rooted in shared cultural understandings, historical narratives, and everyday interactions. This perspective underscores how cultural encounters, community discourse, and collective memory shape the symbolic weight of names, revealing the dynamic interplay between individual agency and societal structure, and how reality itself is a product of human

creation.

Together, these theories enrich our understanding of the complex, contextual, and socially embedded nature of naming practices. They frame name-giving as both a product and a process of identity formation an act that encodes cultural values, political orientations, and social affiliations. The application of these theoretical insights will guide the subsequent analysis of empirical data, allowing for a nuanced interpretation of how names both reflect and actively shape the lived realities of the AmaZulu people in uMkhambathini, particularly during a period of profound societal change.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND DESIGN

#### 4.1 Introduction

The methodical approach to data collection and analysis is known as methodology, and it is crucial to addressing the objectives of this study. Examining the cultural and societal elements that affect the naming of firstborn children in the AmaZulu community born between 1990 and 1994 is the primary goal of this study. The methodology chapter describes the approaches and strategies employed to gather and examine the data, demonstrating how these approaches align with the study's goals and advance a thorough comprehension of the phenomena. The methodology chapter serves as a roadmap for the investigation. It guards against potential biases in the data collection procedure and guarantees that the research is methodical and exact. The methodological selection impacts the validity and trustworthiness of the research findings. The methodological chapter's presentation of the research techniques also permits transparency and reproducibility, both of which are critical for preserving the integrity of the study. This is particularly important for cross-cultural studies, as the research process needs to consider cultural sensitivity and context.

Chapter Four outlines the research methodology employed in this study, beginning with a description of the research site uMkhambathini, located in the uMgungundlovu District with strategic links to both Pietermaritzburg and Durban. The chapter adopts a qualitative research design guided by an interpretivist paradigm, and details the research approach, sampling strategies, namely purposive and snowball sampling, as well as data collection methods through in-depth interviews. It further explains the process of thematic analysis used for interpreting the data and discusses key ethical considerations, including voluntary participation and the implementation of a pilot study to ensure the credibility and trustworthiness of the research.

#### 4.2 Research Methodology

Several research methodologies are employed depending on the issue and the researcher's approach (Neumann, 2011). Research methodology is a data-gathering method (Babbie and Mouton, 2006). Research is the systematic study that results in the observational discovery and prediction of social phenomena. The methods employed to find solutions to societal issues are included in the research. According to Babbie and Mouton (2006), a research technique comprises the methodical application of theoretical analysis to the subject of study. In contrast,

a research methodology is employed to achieve the objectives of the research process. It is a grouping of several approaches and ideas arranged into a field of knowledge. Throughout the investigation, the research methodology chooses the methods for gathering and analysing data.

#### **4.3 Research Site**

South Africa's KwaZulu-Natal is home to the uMkhambathini. Situated in the UMgungundlovu District, it has connections to Pietermaritzburg and Durban. The region is traversed east-west by the N3, which the Spatial Growth and Development Strategy designate as a provincial corridor. Convenience in terms of research time and travel distance is the rationale for the area's selection. I found it easier to comprehend the neighbourhood I was studying because I could drive in and out of the research setting. The emphasis on diversity-related issues does not reach the grassroots level, where these issues are genuinely raised in discussions and storytelling. Therefore, studying individualised aspects of naming culture may be valuable for emphasising the norms and values that influence people's lives. This study aims to advance knowledge of the intricate histories and views underlying the naming of the African AmaZulu people. Figure 1 provides a map of the Mkhambathini area.



Figure 1: Mkhambathini Area Source: ARCHMAP: iMkhambathinu Municipality

#### **4.4 Research Design**

In this study, the qualitative methodology was chosen because it enabled an anti-positivist, interpretive, and holistic approach to the AmaZulu naming system. Unlike a positivist approach that seeks objective truths, this study recognizes that naming is a deeply personal and culturally embedded act, specifically influenced by the 'isiZulu' value system and the socio-political climate of the early 1990s in South Africa. The interpretive lens allows the researcher to move beyond the surface-level names to understand the underlying motivations and ancestral communications that define a child's destiny. This is crucial because AmaZulu names are not merely identifiers but are often prophetic or reflective of the family's social standing and spiritual alignment during the time of birth. The decision to focus on the 1990-1994 period is justified by the significant transition South Africa was undergoing. This era marked a shift from the constraints of apartheid toward democratic freedom, and the naming of firstborns during this time often reflected these broader societal changes, embodying hopes, struggles, and the reclamation of cultural identity.

The research is carried out qualitatively. Levitt (2017) asserts that qualitative research is inductive. Research that produces descriptive data, typically in the form of participants' written or spoken words about their experiences or perceptions, is called qualitative. This involves compiling the opinions, stories, and observations of parents of firstborn children regarding naming their offspring. Usually, no counts or numbers are assigned to these observations. Finding unexpected or distinctive discoveries and the potential to modify study goals in response to them are key components of qualitative research. Qualitative approaches offer flexibility that extends beyond language to incorporate environmental data collection. Because the process enabled the application of several methods for gathering and evaluating research data, the study's conclusions were strengthened.

According to Cypres (2015), today's qualitative research studies require greater attention to the interpretive nature of inquiry and to situating the study within the political, social, and cultural contexts of participants, researchers, and readers. He outlined several features of qualitative research (2015). These include (a) natural setting: information is gathered in-person at the location where participants encounter the phenomenon being studied; the investigation should be carried out in a manner that does not interfere with the phenomenon's natural context.

(b) researcher as key instrument: instead of depending on tools created by others, the researchers gather the data themselves (c) many data sources: rather than depending just on one source, researchers collect data in a variety of ways, such as through observations,

interviews, and document examination; (d) inductive data analysis: material is arranged into abstract units ("bottom-up," or from specific to general), and themes and the database are consulted until a complete set of themes is identified, leading to general conclusions or theories;

(e) meanings of participants: the researchers remain focused on understanding the participants' interpretations of the phenomenon rather than their own interpretations of it; (f) emergent design: After the researchers reach the field and start gathering data, the initial strategy for the study cannot be strictly described; instead, it is emergent, and all stages of the process may change or shift (Chesebro and Borisoff, 2007); (g) theoretical lens: the application of a "lens" to examine the subject matter, such as the idea of cultural, gender, racial, or class distinctions, as well as the social, political, or historical background of the issue being studied; (h) interpretative inquiry: a type of investigation where researchers interpret what they observe, hear, and comprehend in a way that is inextricably linked to their own context, history, background, and existing knowledge; (i) holistic account: summarizing several viewpoints, recognizing the various elements at play in a situation and illustrating the resulting bigger picture (Chesebro and Borisoff, 2007).

Leedy (1997:195) defines a research design as a study technique that offers the overall framework for gathering data. This project involves basic applied research. It seeks to provide new insights into the naming of firstborn children born between 1990 and 1994. Burton (2008: 114). This was achieved through human engagement to gain first-hand knowledge on naming firstborn children. The researcher is considered the primary tool in qualitative research for gathering data. This gives the research process greater flexibility and enables the researcher to ask open-ended how and why questions to elicit additional information (Terre Blanche, Durheim, and Painter, 2006).

The qualitative approach aims to collect extensive data on naming practices for firstborn children. One of the strengths of a qualitative research approach is the insider perspective it provides through parents. In uMkhambathni, eMaqongqo, I saw and spoke with parents whose children were born between 1990 and 1994, which allowed me to use the naturalistic style I valued as a researcher. With its naturalistic foundations and capacity for ongoing elaboration, this qualitative approach maintains a social scientific approach to research (Engel and Schutt, 2013) typically examining the participants' social lives and interpreting their meanings (Engel and Schutt, 2013). However, using the qualitative approach, each participant can contribute their values and expressions (Fouché and Delpont 2002). This was made possible by the number of interviews I conducted; each person's unique perspective added

something new to the study. Nevertheless, as the research progressed, similarities surfaced. The implementation of a qualitative approach enabled observation. It allowed for an evaluation of the parents' awareness of the factors influencing the naming of firstborn children.

The qualitative methodology was chosen for this study because it enabled an anti-positivist, interpretive, and holistic approach. Understanding respondents' social reality and the significance they ascribe to it is the main goal of this qualitative study (Babbie, 1992). One of qualitative research's strengths is its ability to offer detailed written accounts of how people perceive a particular study question. It offers comprehensive details on human cultural characteristics, including behaviours, beliefs, emotions, and the interactions between people and their surroundings. According to its definition, qualitative research is the study of the nature of phenomena, encompassing their quality, various manifestations, context, or perspectives, but excluding their range, frequency, and position within an objectively established causal chain. This formal description can be supplemented with a more helpful rule: qualitative research usually uses verbal rather than numerical data.

To better comprehend ideas, opinions, or experiences, qualitative research gathers and examines non-numerical data (text, audio, or video). It can be applied to uncover intricate details about a topic or to produce fresh research ideas. The antithesis of qualitative research is quantitative research, which collects and examines numerical data for statistical analysis. Qualitative research is widely used in the humanities and social sciences, including history, anthropology, sociology, education, and the health sciences. Qualitative research is a type of social activity that focuses on how people perceive their social reality by interpreting and making sense of their experiences. To gather, examine, and interpret data, content analysis of visual and textual resources, as well as oral history, uses interviews, diaries, notebooks, classroom observations, immersions, and open-ended surveys (Zohrabi, 2013). It is exploratory and aims to clarify "how" and "why" a particular social phenomenon, or program, functions in a given way within a given setting. It attempts to assist us in comprehending the social environment in which we live and the reasons behind the current state of affairs (Polkinghorne, 2005). Its territory in the social sphere has grown steadily. It seeks to offer a thorough comprehension of human emotions, behaviour, attitudes, and experiences (Tong et al., 2012). According to Punch (2013), interpretivist, and critical paradigms are the primary paradigms used in qualitative research. It investigates people's actions, viewpoints, emotions, experiences, and the central themes of their lives. Its foundation describes human lived experience and the interpretive approach to social reality (Atkinson et al., 2001).

Social and cultural anthropology, philosophy, psychology, history, and sociology are the foundations of qualitative research (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005). Qualitative research aims to produce new ideas and theories while methodically describing and interpreting problems or events from the perspective of the person or population being examined. The questions were posed to guide the methodological selection (Viswambharan and Priya, 2016). The qualitative method helped with descriptive analysis and ensured successful interpersonal interaction. This pertains to the narratives and social constructs that shape and organize people's perceptions of firstborn personal name-giving. It also shares the influences behind personal name-giving.

#### **4.5 Research Approach**

A qualitative phenomenological research method identifies and characterises a phenomenon's fundamental characteristics. The method suspends the researchers' prior notions about the phenomenon to examine people's ordinary experiences. In other words, phenomenology research examines lived events to learn more about how individuals interpret them. Phenomenological researchers assume humans interpret their experiences using a universal framework or essence. They interpret the participants' emotions, perceptions, and beliefs to elucidate the essence of the event being studied. Any preconceived notions the researcher may have about the experience or phenomena must be bracketed when using a phenomenological research design (McQueen, 2021). In other words, researchers employ phenomenological study designs to comprehend its universal character by investigating the perspectives of individuals who have encountered a phenomenon. This method is often used to investigate lived experience, learn more about human thought processes, and broaden a researcher's understanding of a topic.

A researcher might, for instance, examine issues such as workplace antisocial behaviour, women's experiences with a particular illness, and more (McQueen, 2021). Qualitative research is a research methodology that focuses on comprehending and investigating people's lived experiences of a specific topic. Phenomenology, with philosophical roots, aims to understand the nature of human experience and how people interpret their surroundings. Phenomenology in qualitative research explores the subjective and individual interpretations people ascribe to their experiences, beyond simply characterizing observable behaviours (Lionerd, 2017). To view the phenomenon differently, phenomenological researchers try to bracket or temporarily set aside their preconceptions and ideas. This method, called epoche, enables researchers to investigate the phenomenon as people perceive it without imposing interpretations from other sources. The objectives are to find the fundamental patterns of the

lived events and understand the underlying meanings that people attach to them. In phenomenology, gathering data usually entails conducting in-depth, open-ended interviews with people with firsthand knowledge of the topic under study. These interviews provide rich, qualitative data, inviting participants to consider their feelings, experiences, and perceptions (Jones, 2011).

Finding and grouping themes or patterns in the data is a systematic approach central to the analysis phase of phenomenological research. To uncover the essential elements of a phenomenon, researchers identify commonalities in participants' descriptions (Jones, 2011). The outcome is a phenomenological account that captures the shared meanings and patterns of lived experiences, offering a deeper understanding of the phenomenon from the perspective of those who have encountered it. Phenomenology is widely employed across disciplines such as psychology, sociology, education, and healthcare to explore the subjective dimensions of human experiences (Jones, 2011). By focusing on the essence of lived experiences, phenomenology provides valuable insights that can inform theory development, counselling practices, and the interpretation of complex human phenomena. In qualitative research, phenomenology is distinguished by several key features, which are fundamental to understanding its nature and objectives.

#### **4.6 Population and Participant Demographics**

The study focused on the uMkhambathini Local Municipality, specifically within the eMaqongqo area, known for its strong adherence to traditional AmaZulu customs. The population consisted of 20 participants, ensuring a depth of data sufficient for thematic saturation. The sample included 14 parents, 4 elders, and 2 traditional leaders. The parents provided the direct 'lived experience' of naming their firstborns, while the elders and traditional leaders offered crucial 'cultural justification' and historical continuity, explaining the broader societal and ancestral significance of naming practices. The participants were aged between 45 and 70 years, ensuring they were active decision-makers during the 1990-1994 period. The gender distribution consisted of 12 females and 8 males, reflecting the dual roles in AmaZulu naming where mothers often suggest names based on emotional context and fathers or paternal elders finalise them based on lineage.

All participants were long-term residents, ensuring they were deeply embedded in the local socio-cultural fabric. Specifically, the inclusion of elders was vital as they serve as the custodians of 'isiZulu' oral history and traditional protocols. Their role in the naming process often involves consulting the ancestors or ensuring that the name aligns with the family's 'isibongo' (clan name). The traditional leaders provided a broader community perspective,

validating the naming customs against the backdrop of local governance and traditional authority. The 14 parents, who were the primary caregivers, offered the emotional and situational context of the birth, bridging the gap between ancient tradition and the immediate realities of the early 1990s. This triangulation of perspectives, parents, elders, and leaders, guaranteed that the study captured a holistic view of the naming phenomenon in uMkhambathini.

#### **4.7 Research Paradigms**

The interpretivism paradigm was applied in the study. A research paradigm is a collection of ideas and guidelines that scientists in a certain field use to determine what should be investigated (Brayman, 2011:630). According to McGregor and Murname (2010) and Robinson (2009), a paradigm is a collection of presumptions, ideas, beliefs, and behaviours that make up a perspective on the world. Croosan (2003) and Zammito (2004) propose two major categories: positivism and post-positivism. Other researchers, such as Guba and Lincoln (2005:54), have recognized paradigms like pragmatism, interpretivism, and positivism. Emerging perspectives on strategic planning have been interpreted using the paradigm. This led to differing opinions and helped explain the occurrence. Given its emphasis on comprehending the impact of naming on firstborn children between 1990 and 1994 in the AmaZulu culture of the uMkhambathini community, the study is grounded in an interpretive paradigm. It was the researcher's responsibility to interpret each participant's experience to understand how they felt about cultural influences on firstborn child name choices.

The interpretive paradigm was used in this investigation, focusing on an individualized approach, with the researcher appreciating that everyone has a unique viewpoint. To complete the task of identifying firstborn children born between 1990 and 1994, I had to locate, document, and analyze the experiences of these 20 parent participants. Interpretivism is grounded in a relativist ontology, which rejects the idea of a singular, measurable truth. Instead, it recognises that reality is socially constructed and open to multiple interpretations (Hammersley, 2013). This approach was particularly suitable for this study, as it allowed me to engage deeply with participants and prioritise their subjective experiences. The unique stories shared by participants provided valuable insight into how both Western and Eastern cultural influences shape the naming of firstborn AmaZulu children. Rather than attempting to generalise findings across an entire population, interpretivist researchers seek to understand the complexity of social phenomena within their specific contexts (Creswell, 2007).

This practical application of interpretivism enabled a more nuanced, contextually grounded understanding of naming practices, with participants' perspectives central to meaning-making. I have tried to understand the current range of naming practices in the sample population and their impacts on communities and families. It is important to demonstrate the further benefits of the interpretive paradigm. The first advantage, on the one hand, is in its ability to identify points of view; interpretive researchers can comprehend and describe things and social occurrences in a social context. In addition, researchers adopting an interpretivist stance often employ critical qualitative methods, such as ethnography, case studies, or life history approaches, to explore phenomena in authentic, real-world contexts. These methods are particularly valuable for gaining an insider's perspective and uncovering deeper layers of meaning related to the subject under investigation. Interactive techniques, such as in-depth interviews, are especially effective in this regard, as they enable researchers to access and document elements of human experience that are not immediately visible or quantifiable. Through these rich, dialogic encounters, researchers are able to explore participants' beliefs, values, perceptions, biases, emotions, and lived experiences in nuanced ways (Wellington & Szczerbinski, 2007). Such interpretive methodologies thus align with the goal of capturing the complexity and context-specific nature of human understanding.

This paradigm has certain drawbacks despite the aforementioned advantages. One of its acknowledged drawbacks is that interpretivism seeks to increase knowledge and comprehension of a phenomenon within its complicated context rather than extrapolating these findings to other individuals and situations. This type of action often fails to confirm the validity and scientific use of the research findings. This paradigm's ontological perspective, which leans toward subjectivity rather than objectivity, is another significant critique (Mack, 2010). Therefore, based on my belief system, my interpretation might influence my research results through various ways of thinking, leading to many biases. The final drawback of interpretivism is its failure to confront the influence of politics and ideology on knowledge and on social reality itself.

Methods for understanding human and social sciences cannot be compared to those used in physical sciences because humans interpret their environment and act accordingly (Hammersley, 2013:26). This is because the interpretivist paradigm is based on the idea that people's perceptions, ideas, thinking, and the meanings that are significant to them can be understood through researching their cultures (Boas, 1995). To better understand the event and uncover the intricate problems and phenomena in the particular context the situation is embedded in, interpretivists also embrace a relativist ontology, which holds that an event may

have multiple interpretations rather than being a fact that can be ascertained using a specific method (Creswell, 2007). This allows researchers to see what has happened and how it has happened. From ontological and epistemological perspectives, the meaning of reality is socially constructed through the experiences of social narrators, who may diminish the resonance of socially situated events (Whitley 1988). Regarding this idea, an interpretivist researcher should know that the data results may be interpreted in multiple ways. Therefore, the researchers must discover methods for recognising and understanding the diverse ways people experience problems and circumstances across different cultural contexts (Hammersley, 2013).

Interpretivist scholars believe that their society has common belief systems; they can use their varied perspectives on phenomena to describe people, events, or things and fully understand them in their socio-cultural contexts. This is one advantage of this paradigm. Furthermore, because they offer the detailed life experiences of the narrators, the social actors that make up their culture studies within the interpretivist paradigm can employ a variety of approaches, including ethnography, case studies, and story studies (Tuli, 2010). Additionally, by employing the crucial technique of interactive interviews, which enables researchers to examine and trigger issues we cannot see, researchers can delve into an interviewee's thoughts, values, prejudices, perceptions, opinions, emotions, and attitudes. According to Wellington and Szczerbinski (2007), researchers can delve into interviewees' thoughts, values, prejudices, views, emotions, and other perspectives. Therefore, the significant data collected will give scholars better insights for future action. Notwithstanding the aforementioned noteworthy benefits, there are drawbacks to an interpretive worldview. Numerous theorists and academics have criticised the interpretivist paradigm for its reliance on subjective notions, beliefs, and participant perspectives. Interpretivism offers valuable insights into understanding social reality through participants' subjective perspectives. However, some criticisms have been raised regarding its limitations. For example, Yanow (2006) notes that interpretivists often possess a strong sense of self, which can sometimes lead them to overlook how powerful individuals' perceptions influence their interpretations of subjective experiences. Additionally, Gadamer (1970) critiques interpretivism for the tendency of researchers to interpret and analyse social reality through the lens of their own prior prejudices and preconceptions. Despite these criticisms, interpretivism remains a powerful approach for exploring complex social phenomena because it foregrounds the meanings individuals ascribe to their experiences, offering rich, context-sensitive understanding.

Interpretivist research is frequently criticised for lacking specific hypotheses before fieldwork, using small sample sizes in some studies, and facing challenges with impartiality and generalizability (Yanow, 2014). These criticisms, however, stem from philosophical disagreements. To overcome these issues, interpretivists have developed reliable research procedures over time (Yanow and Schwartz-Shea, 2014). Interpretivists aim to better understand events within their complex contexts rather than extrapolate results from individuals and their social settings. Interpretivism is intrinsically subjective rather than objective; this method questions the validity and dependability of conclusions (Mack, 2010; Lawrence, 2015). As a result, the researcher's subjective interpretations could impact on the findings. Additionally, researchers must recognize that interpretive research does not necessarily predict future actions that emerge during data collection or align with their intended study topics (Willis, 2013).

#### **4.7 Data Collection and Analysis**

##### **4.7.1 In-Depth Interviews**

The use of semi-structured interviews in this study was specifically justified by the need to capture the 'story' behind each child's name. In the AmaZulu context, names are often 'izibongo' (praises) or reflections of family circumstances. The flexibility of this method allowed the researcher to probe into why a specific name like 'Nkululeko' was chosen, whether as a tribute to an ancestor or a reflection of the 1994 political transition. Conducting interviews in isiZulu ensured that cultural nuances and linguistic metaphors were preserved, providing a depth of meaning that a structured questionnaire would have missed. This linguistic choice was essential, as many AmaZulu names contain deep metaphorical meanings that do not translate directly into English, and speaking in the participants' mother tongue fostered a sense of comfort and authenticity during the narrative process.

Data for the study were gathered through in-depth interviews. One crucial qualitative research technique is the interview, in which the researcher obtains information from the subjects. Interviews are important for revealing the perspectives, experiences, values, and other characteristics of the studied population. They are typically used in conjunction with other research methodologies such as surveys, focus groups, and others (Eppich, Gormley, and Teunissen, 2019). Goals are always the focus of interviews. Interviews can occur in various settings, including homes, markets, colleges, and schools, to obtain the information needed from a respondent. In addition, the number of ways to conduct an interview has increased with technological development. Nowadays, unlike in the past, a meeting can take place without being physically present via phone, Skype, email, or other internet and phone

platforms. Interviews come in several forms. There are two types of interviews: formal and informal. The study questions determine the interviewing technique (Brounéus, 2011). One qualitative research technique miming the surprisingly familiar logic of human contact is in-depth interviews, in which participants converse, engage, and ask and receive questions. An interview is a specific interaction in which a researcher asks a participant questions about their life experiences, opinions, dreams, concerns, and hopes, and the interviewee responds.

Interviews are frequently employed alone or in conjunction with other quantitative techniques like surveys or experiments or qualitative techniques like focus groups or ethnography. Despite being a commonly employed technique, interviews should not be considered a simple default by qualitative researchers. Additionally, interviews are not appropriate for addressing every qualitative research topic; their unique advantages should determine whether or not they are used in a given study. Interviews offer a forum for lengthy discussions that give the researcher insights into people's beliefs and ways of thinking, but ethnography may be more appropriate for seeing what people do. Quantitative surveys also provide these kinds of insights. However, they prioritize breadth over depth and frequently ignore individuals who are more difficult to contact, as they use pre-formulated questions and scales.

In-depth interviews can take various forms depending on the research objectives and participant characteristics. They may be highly structured, following a predetermined interview guide similar to a survey; semi-structured, guided by a flexible topic list; or completely unstructured, allowing for free-flowing, narrative responses. Researchers often combine these approaches within a single study to suit different contexts or participant needs. Importantly, the interview format can shift during the interaction for example, a structured interview may become semi-structured or unstructured if the interviewer diverges from the prepared questions to explore emerging themes. Throughout, careful attention to the interviewer-participant dynamic is essential to ensure meaningful and ethical data collection.

The study made use of in-depth interviews conducted in English I received longer and more detailed responses due to this method, which brought me closer to achieving the objectives. There were 20 interviews, lasting 20 to 40 minutes each. The advantage of interviews is the opportunity to push respondents for answers to important questions. The interviews in this study took place in a natural setting. Other observations focused on the difficulties participants face daily. The data-gathering tools were prepared prior to my interviews. One qualitative research technique is interviewing, which allows the researcher to obtain information from participants. In this study, the interviewing technique has proven crucial in revealing viewpoints, experiences, values, and other facets of naming firstborn children.

Interviews are always goal-oriented, such as my task of investigating the naming of firstborn children born between 1990-1994; the questions asked benefit and kept the data accumulation going until all participants were interviewed.

The challenges I encountered during the interview process affected my initial sampling plan. Initially, I was unable to secure participation from all 20 identified parents in uMkhambathini. As the researcher, I managed the scheduling and timing of the interviews through the data collection phase. Since the interviewer directs the flow of the interview by posing specific questions, they maintain control over the interview setting (Welman and Kruger, 2002). Throughout the interviews, I carefully explained the study and its objectives to minimize unnecessary expectations. This approach to data collection encouraged participants to freely express their ideas and concerns, facilitating richer insights. The interviews enabled the compilation of potential responses and solutions, which in turn informed the design of a more structured interview framework. By carefully examining respondents' detailed explanations, new dimensions of the research problem were identified (Bless, 2013). Various interview types exist such as in-depth, semi-structured, unstructured, and structured interviews (Marlow and Patton, 1990). For this study, unstructured interviews were particularly relevant, as they were intended to explore officers' perceptions and understanding of the program, including whether it adequately addresses their needs and challenges. The semi-structured interview prioritises the participant's first-hand experience over interpretation or conjecture. The more the participant speaks, the more data becomes available. The interview schedule was prepared after a selection of participants. These individuals were selected because they have children born between 1990 and 1994, thereby enabling an understanding of the cultural meaning behind the AmaZulu name-giving for the firstborn. The interviews were conducted through referrals from other participants in the study. The interview questions were semi-structured.

#### **4.8 Thematic Analysis**

In this study, data analysis was conducted using thematic analysis. Thematic analysis, according to Kiger and Varpio (2020), is a qualitative data analysis technique that entails looking for, examining, and reporting recurring patterns within a data collection. Although it is a technique for factual description, it also uses interpretation in the choice of codes and the formulation of themes. The capacity to be used across a broad spectrum of theoretical and epistemological frameworks and applied to various research objectives, designs, and sample sizes sets thematic analysis apart. The approach aided in organising and simplifying the data. This is essential for reading responses and comparing them to ensure consistency and

reliability in the findings.

Thematic analysis involves looking for themes that encapsulate the stories in the data sets. It entails carefully reviewing and rereading the recorded material to uncover themes (King, 2004). Braun and Clarke (2006) state that thematic analysis is a theoretically flexible method for thoroughly finding, characterising, and interpreting patterns (themes) within a data collection. It works effectively with any qualitative study that aims to investigate intricate research problems. Chamberlain (2015) states that it is sufficiently adaptable and "can be incorporated into any epistemological approach." However, despite being commonly utilised in qualitative research, thematic analysis may have a drawback because its approach is not always transparent.

Braun and Clarke (2006) highlight the advantages of thematic analysis in qualitative research, arguing that its accessibility, transparency, and flexibility increase the validity of the analysis. Both deductive (top-down) and inductive (bottom-up) approaches can be used to conduct thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The data is coded inductively without attempting to fit the themes into an existing coding frame or the researcher's beliefs about the research (Brown & Clark, 2006). Thus, themes arise from the data itself without considering the themes found in other studies. Rather than the researcher's theoretical interest in the subject, themes are closely related to the data. According to Braun and Clarke (2006), the deductive approach, on the other hand, is specifically researcher-driven and enables researchers to analyse data in light of their theoretical interests in the topics under investigation. When employing this method, the researcher often starts the analysis by identifying topics through a literature review.

Both deductive and inductive methods can be used to maximise the overall depth of the investigation. One possible starting point for analysing data is a deductive approach, which enables analysis of themes derived from the study's literature review or research objectives. However, all of the intriguing or pertinent details (themes) in the data can also be considered. Even the unexpected motifs might be considered to better comprehend the situation in question. As a result, when data is analysed, many inductive codes may emerge. According to Cavendish (2011), thematic analysis is a constant-comparative technique that entails methodically reading and rereading transcripts. The most crucial component of thematic analysis is that the procedure be methodical, ensuring a high-quality final product. A study can use the six-phase process suggested by Braun and Clarke (2006), each of which is covered below, to maintain the required rigour in the analytical process. However, such analytical processes are iterative and reflective, involving a continuous back-and-forth

between phases rather than a linear sequence of actions. Finding codes and themes in data collection is a prerequisite for the fundamental thematic analysis procedure. To identify and condense key ideas in a data set, you can use a code or a label applied to a piece of data. Any pattern you find in the data is called a theme.

#### **4.9 Pre-coding: Data Familiarisation**

You must comprehend data before you can work with it effectively. See what broad themes emerge by getting a sense of the data. Transcribing audio recordings allows you to identify patterns and meanings in the dataset. Make notes about possible codes to build while you read the transcript.

- ***Open Code Work: Initial Code Creation***

To symbolise the patterns and meanings in the data, create an initial set of codes. To remember the codes, create a codebook. Review the data again to find noteworthy passages and apply the relevant codes. You should use the same coding to describe passages with the same meaning.

- ***Code Clustering and Collation***

It is time to compile all the passages related to a specific code. Cluster initial code and collate codes with supporting data. Cut out codes and combine them if you are doing this by hand. Thematic analysis tools will automatically compile them.

- ***Thematic Grouping***

After the codes are complete, you can categorise them into possible themes. Data trends and patterns are reflected in themes. Some codes can be combined to produce sub-themes.

- ***Thematic Revisions***

After deciding on the basic themes, you can return and make any necessary adjustments. Every subject should be unique and supported by sufficient evidence. Similar topics can be combined, and those with insufficient evidence can be eliminated. Start formulating themes into a narrative.

- ***Write the Report***

Writing the report is the last stage in narrating a set of data. To demonstrate the analysis's correctness, you should carefully consider the themes.

## **4.9 Sampling**

According to Babbie (1992), a sample is a specific subset of a population used to conclude the characteristics of the entire population. In this case, the sample consists of 20 parents of firstborn children born between 1990 and 1994. Finding research participants was part of the sampling (Marlow, 2001). The topic may influence the sample style choice since it determines the participants' types, numbers, ages, social statuses, locations, accessibility, and capacity to respond to the research questions. Social scientists have permitted the combination of non-probability and probability sampling techniques. McMillan and Schumacher (1993) state that the researcher may also be responsible for deciding on the sample size because the more participants, the more data there will be with varying responses to the study questions. According to Babbie (1992), a sample is a specific subset of a population studied to conclude the characteristics of the entire population. Two sampling strategies were used in the study. These are methods of purposive sampling and snowball sampling.

### **4.9.1 Purposive Sampling**

Purposive sampling was specifically chosen to ensure that every participant met the strict inclusion criteria of being a resident of uMkhambathini and having named a firstborn between 1990 and 1994. This was crucial for capturing the unique shift from traditionalism to modern aspirations during South Africa's transition. Snowball sampling was employed as a trust-building mechanism; initial participants referred the researcher to others, which was vital for gaining entry into families to discuss private or sacred naming rites, such as 'ukuthelwa ngamanzi'. This method was particularly effective in uMkhambathini, where community networks are tightly knit, and personal referrals carry more weight than external solicitations. By starting with respected community elders, the researcher established credibility, enabling a more open dialogue about family traditions and the spiritual significance of the names chosen for their firstborn children.

Participants were selected through purposive sampling. According to Burton (2008: 114), a sample is a subset of people chosen from the target or parent population to accurately represent the features of the group in all important ways. Purposive sampling, also called judgment, selective, or subjective sampling, is a sampling approach in which the researcher uses discretion to select study participants from the population (Campbell et al., 2020). A nonprobability sampling technique, "purposive sampling", occurs when "the researcher's judgment chooses elements selected for the sample."

Researchers frequently think that using good judgment may save time and money by

obtaining a representative sample (Campbell et al., 2020). I found possible participants (library managers) who could be willing to respond to my study questions thanks to the sampling process. Their assistance strongly indicated that the study's goals and objectives would be achieved. The dynamics of naming firstborn children are understood by the 20 parents selected. Their opinions played a significant role in this study's success. Purposive sampling was used to select participants who were most relevant to the study's goals of investigating the impact of personal name-giving on firstborn children born in the AmaZulu nation between 1990 and 1994, with an emphasis on the Mkhambathini community. Elders, parents, and traditional leaders in the community who had firsthand knowledge of AmaZulu naming customs throughout the designated time frame were the target audience for this sampling technique. The study sought to collect rich, context-specific data that accurately reflected attitudes towards and influences on naming customs in this community by selecting participants with firsthand knowledge of naming practices and their sociocultural importance.

#### **4.9.2 Snowball Sampling**

A popular sampling technique in qualitative research, snowball sampling is utilised in the social sciences, such as anthropology, political science, sociology, and human geography, as well as in the medical field. However, the term "snowball sampling" is employed inconsistently across disciplines, as is common with terms embraced by various domains. One interviewee provides the researcher with the name of at least one additional possible interviewee as part of a sampling technique. In turn, that interviewee gives the name of at least one further possible interviewee, and so on. The sample grows like a snowball if each interviewee gives more than one recommendation.

At first glance, this concept seems self-evident, so most peer-reviewed studies that use snowball sampling hardly describe it. In response to this defense, researchers who oppose snowball sampling contend that the technique cannot guarantee sample diversity, a prerequisite for reliable research results. Since referrals may not materialise during an interview if a potential interviewee is only moderately or not eager to be questioned, some researchers have claimed that snowball samples underrepresent and may even omit people who are least willing to cooperate. Similarly, prospective interviewees with smaller networks can be underrepresented because they are less likely to be suggested for an interview.

Individuals with smaller networks might also belong to a particular network whose diverse viewpoints might be interesting, but they are not included in the final sample. The study employed snowball sampling to find members of the Mkhambathini community who may shed light on the naming customs of firstborn children born in the AmaZulu country between

1990 and 1994. The researcher first enlisted key informants familiar with cultural customs and naming traditions. These individuals included parents, elders, and local historians. The sample grew naturally due to these informants' subsequent referrals to others with pertinent viewpoints or experiences. This approach ensured a large and varied collection of qualitative data by successfully reaching people ingrained in social networks where these cultural practices are prevalent.

#### **4.10 Data Analysis**

Grounded theory, content analysis, and narrative analysis are some of the techniques used to analyse qualitative data, according to Kawulich (2004:97). Thematic analysis differs from narrative analysis, which looks for recurrent themes in people's tales, in that it identifies categories or concepts that appear in the text and employs those notions to construct significant formal theories. This alternative kind of analysis is covered in greater depth by Nowell et al. (2017:2). On the other hand, even if content analysis is qualitative, it involves the development of codes, their application to texts, the formation of a matrix of units, and, finally, the statistical analysis of the matrix. Nowell et al. (2017: 2) classify thematic analysis as a qualitative research approach that may identify, analyse, organise, characterise, and report themes in a data collection. It can also be applied to a range of research issues. Thematic analysis provides a flexible approach that may be applied to a range of studies and modified to produce a detailed, complex, and nuanced description of the data (Nowell et al., 2017:2).

Other important advantages of thematic analysis include the ease with which the researcher can understand and learn the methodology, and the additional insight it offers in analysing different viewpoints from different researchers. Because thematic analysis is flexible, themes derived from the research data may be inconsistent and lack coherence. To combat this, Nowell et al. (2017: 2) proposed creating an epistemological viewpoint that can logically support the study's empirical claims. A qualitative study seeks to provide meaning to the study environment, whereas a quantitative investigation seeks truth. The data were evaluated using thematic analysis, which involved classifying the data and identifying themes, emergent patterns, and linked relationships (Nowell et al., 2017).

#### **4.11 Ethical Considerations**

The University of KwaZulu-Natal's research ethics guidelines regulated the process. The study required authorisation from several jurisdictions in the municipality where it would take place. Letters from institutional gatekeepers providing authorisation to conduct research were distributed to the appropriate individuals. As a result of the letter's purpose statement,

participants were fully aware of the study's nature and what it entailed. Research ethics addresses the ethical obligation of researchers to protect participants' human rights, as well as the legal and moral grounds for doing so. The following are the ethical issues uncovered throughout this research.

- ***Voluntary Participation***

Voluntary participation occurs when the study ensures that no one is forced to participate and everyone is willing to do so (Walker, 2007). No pressure was placed on the study participants. They were assured that they might discontinue participation at any time and that their refusal to participate or expulsion from the research would not compromise their involvement. The participation of parents of firstborn children was voluntary and free from force or pressure. The freedom to leave the study at any moment, without consequence, was explained to the participants.

- ***Informed Consent***

Informed consent is the process by which the subject reads about the research and receives important information from the researcher (Walker, 2007). The purpose and contents of each were communicated to the participants. Participants were informed of the study's aim and purpose, and interviews were conducted solely with their consent. Thus, before this study was conducted, the subjects provided informed consent. Parents were fully informed about the goals, procedures, and possible results of the study prior to their participation. They completed informed consent forms attesting to their comprehension and willingness to participate.

- ***Confidentiality***

Keeping research data private or discreet from the general public is an ethical protection for the study's subjects. The data obtained is only be accessible to the researcher (Walker, 2007). Data was stored in a closed, secure area for privacy reasons. Participants must be treated with secrecy; the researcher is responsible for preserving anonymity throughout the study. Therefore, no names or physical addresses were required for the data. To protect their identities, participant replies and personal data were anonymised. Data was safely stored, and publications did not reveal personally identifiable information.

- ***Beneficence***

The definition of beneficence is "doing good" and favourably helping someone. Both people and society should gain from research if it helps participants and improves their well-being. Participants are entitled to avoid injury (Walker, 2007). To ensure the safety and security of

the participants, the researcher had an ethical duty to balance potential benefits against hazards and to reduce those risks as much as possible. Beneficence, in this study, emphasizes the ethical responsibility to ensure the well-being of participants and the community. By exploring the cultural meanings and influences behind naming practices, the research aims to preserve and honour indigenous knowledge systems, fostering cultural pride and intergenerational understanding.

- ***Reliability and Validity***

A measure's validity and reliability are established through consistent patterns across multiple studies rather than a single research effort, and evaluating these aspects is an ongoing process (Creswell and Poth, 2018). In this study, quality was assessed based on both validity and reliability. Validity refers to the accuracy and truthfulness of the data obtained from interviews, while reliability concerns the consistency and dependability of the data sources used (Cohen, Manion, and Morrison, 2018). Reliability and validity are ensured in the study through consistent data collection methods and triangulation. Reliability is achieved by applying the same set of open-ended interview questions to all participants, enabling consistent responses that can be compared and analyzed. Validity is strengthened by cross-verifying information with historical records, community narratives, and cultural texts to ensure that the findings accurately reflect the authentic naming traditions and cultural influences within the AmaZulu community during the specified period.

- ***Trustworthiness***

The trustworthiness of a study is defined as the level of confidence in the data, interpretation, and methods used to guarantee its quality (Walker, 2007). The study gained credibility and a solid basis for its conclusions through the researcher's interaction with parents and the combination of information from other sources (such as interviews, archival documents, and community perspectives). Trustworthiness in this study is established through the application of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Credibility is ensured by engaging participants with lived experience and cultural knowledge, including parents and elders. Transferability is supported by providing rich, detailed descriptions of the cultural context, which allow others to determine its relevance to similar settings. Dependability is maintained through clear documentation of the research process, while confirmability is upheld by keeping reflexive notes and ensuring that findings are grounded in participants' narratives rather than in the researcher's bias.

- ***Dependability***

The consistency of the data over time and across study settings is referred to as "dependability" in this context. It concerns reliability in quantitative research and is based on the idea that the nature of the study determines the stability of the conditions (Walker, 2007). The consistency of the study also determines it. To ensure reliability, the research questions were straightforward and logically related to the goals and design of the study. The researcher did not ask multi-part questions. Because of the thorough documentation of the research methodology, other researchers could repeat the study with consistent outcomes under comparable circumstances.

- ***Transferability***

"Transferability" refers to how well the results of this study can be applied across different contexts. Additionally, the researcher must ensure that the study results can be applied across contexts to maintain transferability (Walker, 2007). "Transferability" refers to how well qualitative research findings can be applied across different situations or contexts. From a qualitative standpoint, the person generalising is primarily responsible for transferability. A clear description of the research context and the underlying assumptions might help the qualitative researcher improve transferability. The uMkhambathini community and its cultural practices were described in detail so that other researchers could evaluate the applicability of the findings to comparable cultural or temporary contexts.

- ***Confirmability***

Confirmability alludes to the impartiality of the research study conclusions. This implies that the results are based on the participants' responses rather than the researcher's possible bias or personal goals (Walker, 2007). Confirmability makes it easier to achieve reliable results that accurately reflect participants' responses. The researcher could retain objectivity while avoiding personal biases by obtaining direct quotes from participants and keeping an audit trail of all decisions made during the study.

- ***Credibility***

According to Walker (2007), the credibility criteria entail proving that qualitative research findings are realistic or credible from the viewpoint of the research participants. According to this viewpoint, the goal of qualitative research is to describe or comprehend the phenomenon of interest from participants' perspectives, and only participants can reasonably assess the reliability of the findings. Iterative data collection and extended participant interaction made sure the results accurately reflected parents' opinions on name-giving customs.

- ***Generalisability***

Most, if not all, qualitative research studies are designed to examine a particular problem or occurrence in a specific region, demographic or ethnic group, or setting. As a result, it is typically believed that qualitative research findings are not generalisable (Walker, 2007). Although the study focused on parents in the Mkhambathini community, its findings have broader applicability to comparable cultural contexts throughout the AmaZulu nation, helping clarify naming customs and the sociocultural factors that shape them.

#### **4.12 Pilot Study**

Before the actual study began, a pilot study was conducted to test every step of the technique to be utilised, ensuring the study achieved its intended goals. Finding any areas that required improvement was the goal. The pilot study included two participants from a total sample of twenty. After identifying errors and omissions in the pilot study and making the necessary adjustments, the researcher called on the remaining 18 participants to complete the full study (Malmvist et al., 2019). A few parents participated in the pilot to assess the viability of the questions. This testing round had a unique criterion not present in the final sample.

The goal was to complete a pilot study before beginning the next phase to assess the research concept's viability. The approaches I had intended to utilise for my research study were tested in this initial, small-scale "rehearsal." This included using an interview schedule to gather data. I utilised the findings to guide the actual investigation. According to the research, language and family unity impact the naming process. This is due to the significance of naming the child in one's native tongue and the lack of Western influence on infant naming in rural areas. Additionally, patriarchal components were discovered. The weakness I identified led me to shorten the interview duration, as employed parents were in a hurry. I had to change my final approach to accommodate the rest of my sample.

#### **4.13 Chapter Conclusion**

The study's methodology was discussed in this chapter. This pertains to uMkhambathini eNkanyezini's qualitative research design. The research design involved collecting descriptive data, typically in the form of participants' own written or spoken words about their experiences or perceptions. The interpretivist paradigm, which aimed to interpret new perspectives about naming practices, was also used in the study. This led to uncovering differing opinions and helped explain the occurrence. The chapter also

discussed the techniques used for data collection and analysis. In-depth interviews were used, a crucial qualitative research technique in which the researcher gathers data directly from participants. This was followed by thematic analysis. In addition to providing facts, the

thematic data analysis approach includes interpretation in the code selection and theme development procedures. This chapter also addressed the purposive and snowballing sampling approaches. Here, purposive sampling was described as a method by which the researcher uses their discretion to select study participants from the population. Thereafter, an interviewee provides the researcher with the name of at least one additional possible interviewee, a technique known as "snowball sampling," which was also employed in the study. All ethical considerations were covered in this chapter. Data analysis and presentation are covered in the following chapter.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

#### 5.1 Introduction

Understanding the influences in personal name-giving of firstborn children born between 1990-1994 among the AmaZulu was made possible thanks largely to the data gathered in the Mkhambathini community. Several qualitative methods were used to investigate AmaZulu name-giving, enabling thematic analysis. The 20 research participants collectively contributed to the conclusions. The varied responses provided a clear focus, aiding critical engagement and analysis. Social constructionism and social identity theory are two theoretical frameworks used in investigating firstborn name-giving in uMkhambathini, in the Pietermaritzburg region of the KwaZulu-Natal Province, South Africa.

The development of data presentation required the inclusion of goals and objectives. A key component of the qualitative approach employed in this research is the way themes shape the breadth of comprehension through imaginative, critical examination. This chapter presents and analyses the demographic characteristics of the study participants, followed by an in-depth discussion of the emergent themes and sub-themes derived from the qualitative data. The demographic data provide essential context, helping situate the participants within their specific social, cultural, and linguistic environments. This information enriches the thematic interpretation and strengthens the validity of the findings.

The analysis is guided by the principles of thematic content analysis, identifying recurring patterns and meanings in participants' narratives. From this process, a number of core themes and sub-themes emerged, reflecting the complex interplay between naming practices and broader socio-cultural dynamics. The themes include contextual factors, emotion in name-giving, and predisposing factors that influence the selection and interpretation of names. Additionally, themes such as assimilation, particularly its link to language and naming, patriarchal constructs, and societal expectations, highlight the influence of structural and normative forces.

The data also reveal a need for a mind-set shift in how names are understood and valued, with many participants expressing a desire to link with others through shared cultural or spiritual meanings. The emergence of new perspectives and a localised worldview further illustrate how contemporary naming practices are adapting to changing social realities while retaining deep

cultural resonance. Together, these themes offer a nuanced understanding of how personal names serve as more than mere identifiers. They are embedded within emotional experiences, social norms, and cultural narratives.

## 5.2 Participant Demographic Data

Participant no.	Age	Parents' Gender	No of Children	Name of firstborn
1.	40	Male	2	<b>Vusumuzi:</b> Rekindle the family, builder of the home. <i>Boy</i>
2.	45	Female	4	<b>Gugulethu:</b> Our treasure, precious. Also Gugu. <i>Girl</i>
3.	55	Female	3	<b>Khanyisile:</b> Bringer of light, brought light. <i>Girl</i>
4.	56	Male	6	<b>Mandla:</b> Strength/power. <i>Boy</i>
5.	58	Female	7	<b>Khethiwe:</b> Chosen, the one who is chosen. <i>Girl</i>
6.	61	Female	6	<b>Hlengiwe:</b> Redeemed. <i>Girl</i>
7.	62	Female	4	<b>Thandiwe:</b> Beloved. <i>Girl</i>
8.	58	Female	6	<b>Thabisile:</b> Has brought joy. <i>Girl</i>
9.	44	Male	2	<b>Themba:</b> Trust, hope, faith. <i>Boy</i>
10.	39	Female	1	<b>Bhekisisa:</b> Be very careful, cautious. <i>Boy</i>
11.	59	Male	5	<b>Bheka:</b> Behold. <i>Boy</i>
12.	66	Female	8	<b>Sizani:</b> You all help. <i>Girl</i>
13.	50	Male	2	<b>Bhekani:</b> You all look. <i>Boy</i>
14.	42	Female	5	<b>Anele:</b> The lastborn. <i>girl</i>
15.	48	Female	8	<b>Dudzile:</b> Consoled. <i>Girl</i>
16.	52	Male	1	<b>Kwanele:</b> It is enough. <i>Boy</i>
17.	56	Male	2	<b>BongiNkosi:</b> Be grateful to God. <i>Boy</i>
18.	62	Male	4	<b>Bhekokwakhe:</b> The one who minds his own. <i>Boy</i>
19.	58	Female	2	<b>Kholwa:</b> Believe. <i>Boy</i>
20.	54	Female	5	<b>Jabulisile:</b> She has brought joy. <i>Girl</i>

**Table 5.2: Participant demographics Demographic Data**

The table below represents all 20 participants from Mkhambathini rural area. These are male and female participants.

### 5.2.1 Discussion

A total of 20 females and males were required for this research study. The sharing of experiences occurred through an interview format, yielding rich, valuable data, as shown in Table 5.2. There were 12 females, ranging in age from 39 to 63 years, and 8 males, aged between 44 and 62 years old. The predominance of females could indicate that rural males are less likely to engage in studies. This might be caused by many factors, including levels of education and traditional mindsets, which may result in resistance to understanding certain aspects, especially in education. The table above illustrates

distinct patterns in the naming practices of female and male parents, reflecting differing cultural and social influences.

Among female parents, the choice of names strongly embodies religious beliefs and personal values. The names such as Gugulethu, Khanyisile, Khethiwe, Hlengiwe, Thandiwe, Thabisile, Bhekisisa, Sizani, Anele, Duduzile, Kholwa, and Jabulisile carry meanings deeply connected to spiritual faith, hope, gratitude, and emotional expression. For example, many of these names originate in concepts of blessing, thankfulness, or happiness, often rooted in Christian religious values or other spiritual traditions embraced by these mothers. This pattern suggests that female parents tend to emphasize the aspirational, protective, and nurturing dimensions of their identity through the names they give their children, which are imbued with meanings that reflect hope for their child's well-being and a connection to divine providence or moral virtues.

In contrast, male parent participants show a tendency to select names that reflect a patriarchal and clan-oriented worldview. Their chosen names, such as Vusumuzi, Mandla, Themba, Bheka, Bhekani, Kwanele, Bonginkosi, and Bhekokwakhe, are often linked to male strength, leadership, authority, and continuity of family lineage. These names carry meanings related to power (Mandla means "strength" or "power"), trust (Themba means "hope" or "trust"), and responsibility toward family or community. This pattern indicates that male parents prioritize names that symbolize their roles as protectors, leaders, and bearers of the family or clan legacy, reinforcing traditional social structures where the male identity is closely tied to authority, social status, and clan belonging. Together, these differing approaches highlight how gender roles and cultural expectations shape naming conventions within the community. While female parents imbue names with spiritual and emotional significance reflecting values and aspirations, male parents emphasize names that uphold patriarchal ideals and reinforce familial and clan identities. This dynamic reflects broader societal norms where gender influences not only social roles but also the symbolic meanings parents attach to their children's names. **Table 5.2** also illustrates that all these parent participants have an average of 4 children per person (the numbers ranged from single children to eight children per family). Each child's name is unique. The naming of the firstborn child holds special significance and the name conferred has the highest status possible.

The analysis of the table, guided by the objectives and grounded in the framework of social constructionism, highlights how sociocultural, historical, and emotional factors shaped the

naming practices of firstborns in Mkhambathini during the period 1990–1994. Social constructionism, which emphasises the role of shared societal meanings in shaping individual and collective practices, allows us to view naming as a profoundly symbolic act reflective of cultural norms, values, and historical circumstances. The names in the table reveal patterns tied to communal aspirations, historical events, and emotional responses to personal and societal circumstances. Names such as *Vusumuzi* ("rekindle the family") and *Mandla* ("strength/power") carry profound significance, symbolising resilience, family restoration, and the importance of rebuilding, possibly in the aftermath of personal or communal challenges during the late apartheid period or early transitions in South Africa. These names reflect parental hopes for their children to embody strength and contribute to the continuation or renewal of the family unit.

Similarly, names like *Gugulethu* ("our treasure") and *Khanyisile* ("bringer of light") embody themes of joy, love, and hope, emphasising the perceived value of children as blessings and sources of happiness. These names suggest that the birth of a child, especially a firstborn, was seen as a cherished event that brought light and treasure into a family, reflecting deeply rooted cultural ideals surrounding the role and value of children. The prevalence of names with positive emotional and spiritual meanings, such as *Thandiwe* ("beloved") and *Hlengiwe* ("redeemed"), further underscores the cultural emphasis on relationships, gratitude, and the sacredness of life. The impact of historical events during this period is also evident. For instance, names like *Kwanele* ("it is enough") and *Bhekokwakhe* ("the one who minds his own") may reflect parental reactions to societal or personal struggles, such as political unrest, economic hardships, or a desire for stability and self-reliance amidst uncertain times. These names can be interpreted as expressions of resilience and determination to move beyond hardship. Moreover, names such as Themba ("trust, hope, faith") and Kholwa ("believer, faith") reflect deep cultural values and aspirations that parents hold for their children.

### 5.3 Themes and Sub-Themes

- **Objective one:** *To identify sociocultural factors that influenced the naming of first-born children during the period 1990-1994*

#### 5.3.1 Contextual Factors

The evolving sociocultural dynamics among the AmaZulu significantly shape parental naming practices. Naming a child is deeply intertwined with individual and family values, cultural beliefs, and the broader community context. In AmaZulu culture, the act of naming establishes

a meaningful relationship between the child and their family, reflecting both historical traditions and contemporary influences (Kpanake, 2018). These sociocultural factors carry rich narratives about social expectations and cultural norms, often anticipating the impact that a new family member will have on the household's way of life. When it comes to naming the firstborn child, these variables can exert both positive and negative influences. Such influences affect parental behaviour, attitudes, and the emotional or financial support available from extended family members (Kpanake, 2018). Core beliefs and expectations constitute critical sociocultural elements, as they guide learned practices and ways of life within the community. Gender is also a pivotal factor in naming, given that many African cultures including AmaZulu are traditionally patriarchal, often privileging males and assigning distinct roles and responsibilities that may marginalize women. Furthermore, development whether social, economic, or cultural remains a central force that shapes and intersects with these contextual factors, influencing naming practices alongside other related subcontexts.

### **5.3.2 Emotional connection in Name-Giving**

Naming a firstborn has numerous social, cultural, and environmental implications. These aspects form part of an emotional path that connects to one's belief and love. The significance of naming your baby cannot be overstated. Participants indicated that the name you choose for your child will be a major part of their identity for the rest of their life (Spivak, 2023). It can influence their self-image, self-esteem, and even their success in life. Names can have cultural, historical, and personal significance. For example, participants reported that many parents name their children after family members or loved ones, while others prefer names with a specific meaning or origin. It is important to take the time to consider what your child's name will mean to them and how it will impact their life.

Participants 2,4, 6, 8 and 12 provide the following insights:

*“Well, traditionally the firstborn child usually brings a lot of joy, they present a symbol which may differ for different people” (Participant 2).*

*“All I can say is, there are many meanings behind having a firstborn child, especially in traditional marriages usually “izindlalifa” many families name them with a purpose and responsibility, and expectations” (Participant 4).*

*“To tell the truth, I have observed many people sharing varying perceptions on firstborn children but what I have seen from me and my family is expectations and setting of example,*

*although this pressure first born is what our culture presented way before, it has become a generational aspect” (Participant 6).*

*“Ok, sister being a firstborn child in AmaZulu culture comes with many factors, but mostly for male children it becomes a lot of pressure to carry the family name. This sometimes dismisses the girl child as in some cases she may be ignored although she is the firstborn child“ (Participant 12).*

According to the responses, it is evident that being a firstborn child among the AmaZulu holds deep cultural significance. The firstborn is often regarded as a symbol of joy, lineage, and familial continuity, serving not only as a biological milestone but also as a cultural anchor. This aligns with anthropological theories, particularly Victor Turner’s (1967) notion of symbols as vehicles of shared cultural meaning. The symbolic importance of the firstborn child may reflect broader ideals of continuity, hope, and legacy values often embodied in the figure of the male heir. However, this culturally prescribed reverence for the firstborn, frequently a male, invites critical reflection on the gendered structures within African societies. The emphasis on male heirs ("izindlalifa") as future inheritors of material, cultural, and spiritual responsibilities may suggest a patriarchal inclination that marginalises the roles and recognition of women. This raises pertinent questions about the position of women in traditional societies and opens a space for feminist inquiry into the intersection of gender, culture, and symbolism.

Historically, even prior to the Industrial Revolution, women’s roles in society have been closely tied to cultural expectations and social reproduction. In African traditional societies, the birth of a first child is viewed as an affirmation of fertility, a testament to marital success, and a spiritual link to ancestors. The naming of the firstborn, particularly within AmaZulu culture, is a deliberate act. Names function as "cultural texts," encoding family aspirations, social norms, and collective memories. Scholars such as Ngubane (1977) and Koopman (2002) emphasise that African names are never arbitrary; they carry profound meanings that reflect historical events, moral values, or desired traits. In this context, the naming of a firstborn is not just a familial celebration but a sociocultural performance laden with symbolism and expectation.

Participants’ reflections on generational expectations underscore the intergenerational transmission of cultural values. The firstborn is expected to set an example and act as a role model, reinforcing notions of leadership and responsibility. According to Bourdieu’s theory of habitus (reference), this can be understood as the internalisation of cultural norms and practices within families, ensuring their continuity across generations. Sociological theories such as

Talcott Parsons' functionalism (reference) further explains how the family unit assigns roles to its members to ensure cohesion and stability. The firstborn often serves as a cultural ambassador, embodying the family's values and traditions, a role that is particularly significant in societies where lineage and legacy are central. The response highlights the gendered expectations surrounding firstborns, particularly in patriarchal cultures like the AmaZulu. Male children often bear the family name and are viewed as the torchbearers of the lineage, which can marginalise female firstborns. This reflects gender inequality and the societal privileging of male heirs.

*Objective two: To assess how names reflect behaviour or perceptions*

### **5.3.3 Predisposing Factors**

This theme examines the factors influencing naming practices across different generations, revealing how names embody cultural, religious, and familial values. The objective of this theme is to understand how these naming practices reflect societal perceptions and behaviours across genders and generations. For the older generation, naming practices draw heavily from religious beliefs and cultural traditions, often honouring family lineages, such as naming firstborn boys after paternal ancestors and girls after paternal grandmothers. The middle-aged generation continues to prioritise religion while emphasising the meanings behind names for both genders. In contrast, the younger generation places less emphasis on cultural influences, although religion and name meanings remain important considerations for both males and females. This generational shift highlights evolving perceptions of identity and the diminishing influence of cultural traditions in shaping naming practices.

Participants 4,6, 9, and 11 expressed this theme as follows:

*“Well, I am a very cultural person. We are faced with naming our kids aligned with culture and expectations that you as a parent have, I think you understand”* (Participant 4).

*“I think inasmuch as we face discrimination in all its forms, in our culture, naming became a symbol of hope, I mean, naming your child in your language with a message”* (Participant 6).

*“Sister, it is important to note that our cultural perspectives shape our naming capabilities as our kids grow, we begin to see the impact of that name”* (Participant 9).

*“All I can say is I have much personal connection in naming my children, especially my first born. This stems from the moments, challenges and expectations I had as a cultural person”* (Participant 11).

In line with the tenets of social identity theory (SIT), the answers of Participants 4, 6, 9, and 11 demonstrate the close relationship between naming customs and cultural identification. According to SIT, people feel a sense of identity and belonging from their connection to particular groups, including linguistic or cultural communities. As an example of how cultural norms impact individual decisions and strengthen group identity, Participant 4 highlights how naming should align with cultural standards. As an example of how group values are ingrained in individual practices, Participant 6 emphasises the symbolic function of naming, especially to express hope and communicate cultural messages through language. Participant 9's emphasis on the long-term effects of culturally laden names on children demonstrates how identity and values are passed down through generations, highlighting the importance of naming in maintaining group cohesiveness. Finally, Participant 11 illustrates the intersection of group membership and personal identity by connecting naming to intensely personal and cultural experiences. Taken as a whole, these viewpoints show that naming is a process that affirms and perpetuates cultural values, beliefs, and social identities rather than merely an individual act.

The participants' varied experiences, both positive and negative, have been reflected. This draws attention to the receiving state, which affects its residents' chances of survival and earning a living. The participants' varied experiences, both positive and negative, highlight the importance of the receiving state's social, cultural, and economic dynamics in shaping their ability to survive and thrive. In South Africa, interactions with local communities have not always been favourable, yet many individuals still derive important socio-economic benefits from these engagements. To broaden the perspective on how migrants adapt to new environments, it is useful to consider global patterns of assimilation. For instance, in the United States, a country with a long history of immigration, current data reflects similar challenges and opportunities faced by newcomers. According to Segal and Mayadas (2005), immigrants in the U.S. number approximately 41 million, comprising 13.1 percent of the total population. Moreover, their U.S.-born children represent a significant demographic group, accounting for 37.1 million people, or 12% of the population. This comparative lens provides a useful backdrop for understanding the dynamics of assimilation, integration, and identity negotiation

that are also at play within the South African context. Migrants frequently face difficulties assimilating into host communities, resulting in issues such as communal integration, harmonious living, commerce, cultural practices, religious beliefs, language barriers, agricultural practices, economic activities, social integration, pastoralism, and other issues (Ku and Jewers, 2013).

#### **5.3.4 Assimilation Linked to Language and Naming**

The study of onomatology (the origin of names) has sparked interesting research by scholars worldwide. There is substantial literature on personal naming practices, particularly on the social significance of African names. In isiZulu, names carry a variety of semantic and socio-cultural information, as in other African languages and in various other languages of the world. Many AmaZulu given names are generally, but not exclusively, gender specific. However, the names' interesting, salient linguistic features justify a critical analysis from a gender perspective. In many cultures, considering the prevailing circumstances when naming a child is a common practice. Still, there also seems to be a convention of giving boys' names with a human reference, while girls' names generally have an inanimate reference.

Participants 6, 8, 10, 11, and 13 discuss language and naming:

*“Naming for many of us has to do with our gendered language; we name children in isiZulu as a proud African, and we as amaZulu use gender and event to name our kids like many nations but I believe that depends”* (Participant 6).

*“Em hhm, ok well as part our culture I think we have a lot of pride with our language which makes us name our kids according to culture which is our roots and those all involve language, I am Nkosinathi...my name is usually given to boys not girls ..”* (Participant 8).

*“Oh Well, I think we connect with our language when we are naming; so this makes us also use these names to respect our ancestors for example I named my son after my father as he was an important patriarchal figure”* (Participant 10).

*“Ok, so, for me, for us as Amazulu, we stick to our language when naming a child, and what I think is a name has to have a meaning but we do place meaning on gender as we name our kids. I believe this impacts the child”* (Participant 11)

*“I personally love my culture, and as a rural person, naming a child in my language gives it more identifiable meaning. I am not judging parents who name kids in other languages or who give boys girls names visa vesa”* (Participant 13).

The reflections of Participants 6, 8, 10, 11, and 13 provide a rich tapestry of how language and naming are intricately woven into the cultural and social fabric of AmaZulu identity. Collectively, these narratives reveal that naming practices are not neutral or random, but are deeply symbolic acts rooted in cultural tradition, gender roles, and linguistic pride. Across all five responses, there is a strong consensus that naming in isiZulu is a meaningful cultural process. It serves both as a form of self-identification and as a mechanism for transmitting social values and ancestral heritage. The participants express a shared sense of pride in isiZulu as their mother tongue, with naming emerging as one of the most powerful expressions of this linguistic and cultural identity. One of the most notable themes that surfaces collectively is the gendered nature of naming. Participants indicate that names are often assigned based on gender roles, with certain names being clearly reserved for boys or girls. For example, Participant 8’s reflection that *“my name is usually given to boys not girls”* highlights the socialization process that begins with the very act of naming. This suggests that gender norms are encoded and perpetuated through language, reinforcing symbolic interactionist notions of how social roles and meanings are constructed and maintained through interaction.

Another dominant theme is the role of naming in affirming ancestry and intergenerational ties. Participant 10’s decision to name their child after a patriarchal figure is echoed by others who see naming as a way to show respect for elders, ancestors, and family history. This form of symbolic continuity not only anchors individuals within a broader familial lineage but also reinforces cultural expectations and values, particularly regarding patriarchy and identity. In line with symbolic interactionism, the participants collectively illustrate how names function as symbols through which meaning is negotiated and communicated. Names, in this context, are more than identifiers; they are socially constructed signs imbued with collective memory, status, emotional significance, and expectations. They are used to navigate identity, both individually and communally, and to position oneself within the social world.

Additionally, the participants demonstrate that naming can also serve as a form of resistance or affirmation of cultural sovereignty. In a globalizing world where Western names and languages often dominate public spaces, choosing isiZulu names becomes an intentional act of cultural preservation. This is evident in the strong pride articulated in using isiZulu for naming, as expressed by Participants 6 and 11. Naming thus acts as a symbolic reclaiming of identity

in the face of external influences and linguistic erosion. Participant 13's reflection adds complexity by acknowledging the fluidity of naming practices in contemporary contexts. While affirming the cultural significance of isiZulu names, the participant is open to parents choosing non-traditional or gender-fluid names. This suggests an evolving cultural landscape in which traditional values are being negotiated alongside new forms of identity expression. Taken together, these reflections reinforce the view that naming in AmaZulu culture is a dynamic social practice anchored in tradition, shaped by gender and ancestry, yet flexible enough to accommodate personal and social change. The collective voices of the participants illustrate that naming is not merely a linguistic function but a culturally loaded process that reflects, transmits, and sometimes contests social meanings and values.

**Objective three:** *To investigate common characteristics among names given to firstborns*

### **5.3.5 Personal and Self**

Personal names serve multiple purposes, offering significance to both the individual who bears the name and those who bestow it. Names are conferred, at least in part, in honour of someone who has gone before. Cultural traditions dictate the extent of commemorative name-giving. Names inform about genealogy, geography, and the circumstances of birth (Mazaleni, 2022). The etymological and linguistic associations of names are grasped intuitively without conscious knowledge of semantic roots. These unconscious associations frequently emerge in nicknames and dreams (Mazaleni, 2022). Passage from one life stage to another may be accompanied by a change of name, as may religious conversion or new ideological affiliation. Because so many inferences can be drawn from the choice of a given name, it is no wonder that, in some cultures, the personal name is kept secret, a protection against betrayal (Robert, 2012).

### **5.3.6 Patriarchal Constructs**

One of the themes represents patriarchal constructs attached to the naming of first-born children. Historically speaking, western society and governments have been patriarchal, but with developing changes in family structures, challenging gender roles, and women taking a stand in political/governmental matters, the traditional organisation of a patriarchal society no longer fits the views and attitudes of today (Khelghat-Doost and Sibly, 2020). Patriarchal societies tend to be built around the perceived biological differences between men and women, but most sociologists argue that the patriarchy is an entirely social construct (Khelghat-Doost

and Sibly, 2020). Traditionally, men are supposed to be independent, strong, logical, secure, and unemotional, whereas women are supposed to be dependent, emotional, and weak (Rahman, 2021). However, these roles were made for stability, consumption, and production, not for fulfilling relationships of happiness, respect, and intimacy (Rahman, 2021). Nowadays, 'patriarchy' is a word used to refer to the social power held by men and the subsequent oppression of women through that power. In this sense, patriarchy refers to a social, not biological, dominance.

Participants 2, 4, 6, 8 and 10

*"Mmmh, in the amaZulu culture, we have always named our sons as breadwinners or masculine, for example, Mondli or Mandla, It is important to name him with a strong sounding name,"* (Participant 2).

*"Personally, I named my firstborn with high expectations that he will be the man of the family, this makes us base names on our most desired expectations,"* (Participant 4).

*"Eiy jah for us we have to name our first boys and girls with potentials and for boys izindlalifa, it becomes a different story to name a firstborn son, you see in rural areas having a son, gives hope for surname continuation, therefore, it becomes a passionate process for wishes through the name,"* (Participant 6).

*".....for our culture we name boys with a lot of future vision; it is very hard to accept as a woman that families tend to put much joy, in naming firstborn; it has always been like that here in the rural areas,"* (Participant 8).

*"I think, naming of first-born children, especially boys, has depended on many factors, hopes of the family, joy and perhaps events that may transpire,"* (Participant 10).

The responses above show that there are many factors involved in naming. This is in the uMkhambathini area of KwaZulu-Natal. The response reflects the family's solidarity. The dynamics of naming have reflected family expectations, hopes, and perhaps vision. The AmaZulu name their children with purpose and vision, shaped by socio-economic and socio-cultural influences. The participants' responses reflect symbolic interactionist theory, which emphasizes the creation of meaning through social interaction and shared symbols (ref). In the AmaZulu culture, names are social constructs with symbolic meaning, especially

when it comes to gender roles and expectations within the family. The cultural practice of naming sons with strong, masculine meanings, like *Mondli* or *Mandla*, to represent strength and breadwinning is highlighted by Participant 2. This supports the notion that cultural values and societal expectations are infused into names. The fourth participant relates the naming process to the goals of the parents, presenting the name as a reflection of the family's expectations for the child's future as "the man of the family." It is clear from the participant's description of naming as a "passionate process for wishes" that names can be used to express family aspirations. An ingrained societal narrative that favours male heirs is indicated by Participant 8's emphasis on the gendered joy and future vision connected to naming boys. Lastly, Participant 10 notes that a variety of circumstances, including important events and family goals, have an impact on the naming process. This supports the symbolic interactionist theory, which holds that names are dynamic constructs created by social interactions and cultural settings. Together, these answers show how AmaZulu naming customs are firmly anchored in cultural traditions and shared meanings.

### **5.3.7 Societal Expectations**

This theme highlights the gendered expectations embedded in the naming of first-born children, reflecting broader societal norms regarding gender roles. These expectations often extend beyond naming practices and influence life choices, including career paths. Research shows that societal perceptions and workplace norms significantly shape the career decisions of both men and women (Tabassum & Nayak, 2021). Gender stereotypes especially when intersecting with other forms of discrimination such as race, disability, class, or migrant status—can disproportionately affect marginalized groups of women (Connor, Weeks, Glaser, Chen, & Keltner, 2023). Gender stereotyping involves attributing certain traits, roles, or behaviours to individuals solely based on their sex, without acknowledging personal experiences, achievements, or social contexts. Such reductive perceptions limit opportunities and reinforce structural inequalities by ignoring the complexity of individual identity and capability.

#### **Participants 8, 14, 18 and 20:**

*“.....I as a parent I had expectations when I named my first child, I actually, needed more for her, seeing a brighter future although I decided to stick to my language,”* (Participant 8).

*“..... Historically, firstborn boys have been a symbol of expectation as we believe they can contribute while the girl goes to marry. ”* (Participant 14).

*“We name our children with high expectations for them to look after the home whether it a first-born boy or girl” (Participant 18).*

*“well my sister, I think expectations when it comes to naming a child, especially the first born must be high,..names must reflect positives, and I think that impacts the child’s behaviour,” (Participant 20).*

The response above shows that, among the study participants, AmaZulu people’s history still shapes certain naming decisions. The intricate interaction between cultural norms, individual experiences, and expectations in naming firstborn children is highlighted by the responses of Participants 8, 10, 14, 18, and 20. The aspirational element of naming is exemplified by Participant 8, who highlights a desire for a better future while preserving a linguistic link to ethnic identity. The difficult socio-political environment in KwaZulu-Natal affected the naming process, according to Participant 10, who offers a different viewpoint, indicating that external factors can significantly influence naming choices. Invoking a historical and gendered perspective, Participant 14 highlights the conventional view that firstborn sons play a symbolic role in contributing to the family lineage, whereas girls are expected to marry out. Highlighting equal expectations for boys and girls in upholding family responsibilities, Participant 18 opposes this viewpoint and reflects a trend toward gender-neutral norms. Finally, Participant 20 emphasises the psychological effects of naming, contending that sound and aspirational names can influence a child's conduct and perspective. These answers collectively show how complex naming procedures involve the intersection of personal goals, socioeconomic circumstances, and cultural customs.

**Objective four:** *To trace the differences and commonalities in perceptions of first-born name-giving.*

### **5.3.8 Traditional Mind-Set**

This theme highlights the confident, deeply rooted mindset that parents have when naming their firstborn children within their cultural context. Every individual carries a worldview whether consciously recognized or not that shapes their understanding of life and guides their actions. This worldview manifests in various aspects such as religious beliefs, moral values, and social practices (Johnsen and Fitzpatrick, 2022). For many parents, naming a firstborn child is not merely a casual choice but a deliberate expression of a traditional worldview. It reflects their perception of the child’s place within the family, community, and

wider society, embodying cultural heritage, ancestral expectations, and hopes for the child's future.

A person's worldview influences how they interpret the world around them and establish personal and communal standards. Defining and embracing this worldview offers profound meaning and a deeper understanding of life's purpose, often anchored in tradition and cultural continuity. At the same time, it is important to recognize that others may hold different worldviews, shaped by alternative cultural, religious, or personal experiences. Respectful dialogue and openness to diverse perspectives enrich understanding and coexistence. While gentle persuasion and the free exchange of ideas promote mutual respect and growth, dismissiveness or hostility toward differing beliefs rarely fosters meaningful connection or change. In this way, the traditional mindset surrounding firstborn naming represents a confident assertion of cultural identity, balanced by an awareness of pluralism and the need for respectful engagement with diverse worldviews.

Participants 11, 14, 16, 17 and 19:

*"Well, we as amaZulu have always cared about tradition and beliefs when we name our children"* (Participant 11).

*"I think we have a common purpose when we name our children, but our traditional beliefs are central; we always use it all the time"* (Participant 14).

*"Our traditions make us unique people; we stick to cultural norms and beliefs, and those beliefs shape how we decide to name our first-born children"* (Participant 16).

*"It is very important to push our roots and values if we name our children, I believe ancestors guide our lives and naming your child with someone who passed away also brings light, I believe"* (Participant 17).

*"ah, well, traditions shape us as amaZulu, this also applies in naming decisions especially for our firstborn children, as much as it is different today from back then but I think even today tradition is still key to naming our children"* (Participant 17)

The response above shows that African naming traditions can vary by place and culture. Still, many parents throughout the continent believe a baby's name should reflect their hopes for the child and current events. Parents believe that a child's name can influence the child's life as well as the life of the entire family, at birth and later to celebrate an important event. The responses from participants 11, 14, 16, 17, and 19 emphasise the role of tradition and cultural

beliefs in naming firstborn children among the AmaZulu community. Common to all the responses is the assertion that naming practices are deeply rooted in the cultural norms and ancestral beliefs that define AmaZulu identity. Participant 11 refers to the importance of "tradition and beliefs," indicating a commitment to preserving cultural heritage. At the same time, Participant 14 emphasises the continuity of tradition through a shared "common purpose" centred on traditional beliefs. Participant 16 adds that these traditions make AmaZulu people "unique" and that naming practices are influenced by the values inherited from ancestors, underscoring the connection between identity and tradition. Participant 17 adds an additional dimension by asserting that naming a child after an ancestor provides spiritual guidance, thereby reinforcing the sacredness of names as a conduit between the living and the deceased. Finally, Participant 19 acknowledges that, while there may be changes over time, tradition still plays a central role in naming, reflecting the balancing act between maintaining cultural continuity and adapting to modern influences.

This theme, in the context of these responses, suggests that naming firstborn children is not just a personal or familial decision but also reflects and reinforces a collective cultural identity. Social constructionism, which emphasises the role of social interactions and cultural practices in forming knowledge and identity, is evident in these responses. The community's shared cultural history, values, and beliefs shape the participants' understanding of naming practices. Naming is not a neutral act but socially constructed through the lenses of tradition and ancestral guidance, illustrating the cultural framework within which the individual exists.

Furthermore, SIT, which posits that individuals derive a sense of identity from their membership in social groups, is reflected in these responses. Naming a firstborn child is a way for AmaZulu people to affirm their membership in their community and pass down cultural values to the next generation. Following traditional naming practices, individuals strengthen their social identity as part of a collective heritage deeply tied to their ancestry. Shared cultural norms in naming practices reinforce group cohesion and individual belonging, ensuring the continuity of cultural identity across generations. Thus, social construction theory and social identity theory are instrumental in understanding how the perceptions of naming are shaped by broader societal influences, linking personal and collective identity through naming.

### **5.3.9 Link to Others**

In many African traditions, the naming ceremony of a baby is a necessary rite of passage in the baby's life. It is believed that children are blessings from God and can attract more blessings

(Pallathadkam et al., 2023). Thus, naming ceremonies are considered very important because it is believed that the baby's name will influence their upbringing, personality, and who they will become (in terms of dignity/social status). Therefore, parents often name their children based on what they hope their children will become. Another belief that influences the naming of children is that they are a continuation of their parents or a reincarnation of an ancestor. As a result, many African names have beautiful stories.

Participants 12, 15, 18 and 19:

*"Our names are a unique identifier of the community we come from; I think communities share names"* (Participant 12).

*"oh hhai, well, our names are connected to our community history, well even for us today, we still do that today,"* (Participant 15).

*"Community roots shape our first-born naming decisions, even for each homestead, we acknowledge our firstborn, we feel over joy, it excites"* (Participant 18).

*"Religion and community shape naming decisions; the name uMandlenkosi is an example of religion in the name"* (Participant 19).

The response above shows that naming is a very important tool used across various African cultures to convey messages to individuals, family members, or communities. The naming of various objects is linked with the socio-political factors of countries where anthroponyms and toponyms are found. For this reason, onomastics can never be isolated from the study of the dynamics of various societies, the behaviour, and the psychology of different individuals. While names can unite communities, they can also divide communities. It is through names that one can learn about the various cultures that have been present in a particular place and gain an understanding and appreciation of its history.

The responses from Participants 12, 15, 18, and 19 offer valuable insights into the cultural and community-based significance of firstborn name-giving. There is a strong emphasis on the idea that names are not just individual identifiers but also symbolic of the community and its history. Participant 12 notes that names act as "unique identifiers" tied to the community, suggesting

that names hold collective meaning, which can be shared across individuals within a particular group. This concept is echoed by Participant 15, who asserts that names are deeply connected to the community's historical narratives, with naming continuing as a practice today. The continuity of this tradition is important, as it implies that naming is not just a personal choice but a communal ritual that preserves the legacy of the community's culture. Participant 18 further expands on this by highlighting the emotional importance of firstborn naming, emphasising that naming the firstborn acknowledges the family's roots and a joyous celebration involving the immediate family and the wider homestead. This suggests that firstborn names significantly reinforce the family's identity and connection to the larger community. Finally, Participant 19 brings a religious perspective into the conversation, noting that naming decisions, especially for a name like "uMandlenkosi," are influenced by religious beliefs and community values. This illustrates the multifaceted nature of firstborn name-giving, where the religious and spiritual dimensions intersect with cultural and historical traditions. Together, these responses highlight commonalities and differences in perceptions of firstborn name-giving, with a shared acknowledgement of the community's influence and recognition of individual aspects, such as religion, that shape these decisions. The unifying theme across all responses is that names are a powerful link to heritage, whether through history, joy, or faith.

*Objective five: To determine the impact of historical events on the selection of names*

### **5.3.10 Emerging New Perspective**

As communities and cultures have changed over time, so too has naming. At first, names were frequently assigned based on an individual's physical attributes. Names began representing social standing, occupation, or familial ancestry as cultures became more complicated. Names also started to have spiritual or religious connotations as religious influence grew. People now choose names for sentimental or personal reasons, and naming has become more varied and individualised. Throughout history, naming customs have been greatly influenced by religion. Names were chosen to honour deities or represent religious beliefs in various cultures. There are several reasons why people give children unusual names. Some may want their child to stand out and have a name that is different from others. Others may choose unique names to reflect their cultural heritage or to honour a specific individual or event. Additionally, unique names can be seen as a way for parents to express their creativity or individuality.

## **Participants 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5**

*"During the colonial period, many people in uMkhambathini were forced to adopt English or Christian names because traditional AmaZulu names were deemed unacceptable by the missionaries. However, in recent years, we've seen a shift. Parents are now intentionally choosing names that reflect our cultural pride and identity, like Khulekani (be patient) or Siphumelele (we have succeeded), to honour our resilience and reclaim our heritage."* (Participant 1)

*"The history of forced removals and land dispossession in uMkhambathini left deep scars. Families often commemorate these events through names. For example, names like Ndodakusuka (a man who had to leave) or Khumbulani (remember) serve as reminders of the struggles endured by past generations. But now, there's a growing perspective of hope, with parents choosing names like Nkululeko (freedom) or Sinethemba (we have hope) to mark the progress made since those times."* (Participant 2)

*"The advent of democracy in South Africa brought a renewed sense of pride in Zulu heritage. In uMkhambathini, this is reflected in names that celebrate our history and resilience. Names like Mpumelelo (success) or Zandile (they are enough) highlight the shift from names reflecting hardship to those symbolising prosperity and contentment, showing the emergence of a positive, forward-looking perspective."* (Participant 3)

*"I named my daughter Asiphe (we are given) to reflect gratitude for the opportunities we now have, compared to the past hardships my grandparents endured. In uMkhambathini, more young parents are moving away from colonial names and choosing meaningful AmaZulu names that reflect our aspirations and how far we've come as a community. It's like rewriting history through our children."* (Participant 4)

*"The past political struggles and cultural suppression in uMkhambathini have inspired people to embrace their roots more strongly. Names today often carry spiritual meanings. For instance, names like Thandolwethu (our love) or Jabulile (happy) are chosen to convey unity and healing. This new perspective represents a break from colonial influence, affirming that our names are part of our spiritual connection to the ancestors and our identity."* (Participant 5)

The responses reflect a clear shift in naming practices within Mkhambathini, demonstrating the profound influence of historical events on cultural identity and personal expression. During the colonial and apartheid eras, external forces often imposed or influenced names, leading to a loss of cultural identity. However, the transition to democracy and a more inclusive society has sparked a resurgence of pride in AmaZulu heritage, as evidenced by the preference for names that celebrate resilience, hope, and cultural continuity. These responses reveal an "emergence of new perspectives," where naming has evolved from a reflection of past hardships to a tool for honouring ancestry, reclaiming heritage, and expressing aspirations for a better future. This shift highlights the community's growing agency in rewriting its narrative and embracing a forward-looking identity while remaining deeply rooted in its cultural traditions.

Social constructionist theory provides a valuable framework for understanding how historical events influence the selection of names. This theory asserts that meanings, identities, and knowledge are socially constructed through cultural interactions, historical contexts, and power dynamics rather than being inherent or fixed. As social constructs, names reflect societal values and historical realities, making them significant markers of identity and cultural heritage. Throughout history, major events such as colonisation, wars, independence movements, and globalisation have shaped naming practices by reinforcing or challenging dominant ideologies. For instance, during colonial rule, African names were often replaced with European ones as a means of cultural domination, erasing indigenous identities and imposing hegemonic narratives. However, during post-independence periods, indigenous names resurfaced as a form of resistance and cultural reclamation. Deconstruction, a key element of social constructionism, is necessary to unmask worldviews that organise knowledge around associational categories and constructs such as class, culture, race, ethnicity, and religion.

Historically, political and cultural institutions have served as conduits for transmitting and enforcing hegemonic knowledge about African history, influencing the selection of names through imposed norms and expectations. Religious expansion, mainly through Christianity and Islam, also shaped naming traditions, often leading to hybrid or syncretic practices. In the modern era, globalisation continues to affect naming patterns, blending traditional and foreign influences. Therefore, by critically examining these historical processes through a social constructionist lens, we can reveal the power structures embedded in naming practices and challenge conventional thinking about African history and identity.

### 5.3.11 Localised Worldview

It is impossible to register the absolute truth about any identity category, as knowledge about a particular identity indicates a relationship with power or lack thereof, especially when the category is primarily the result of status subordination. Moreover, representational knowledge can only produce a truth within a specific discursive system and positionality (Simandan, 2019). Deconstructing knowledge representing African families and communities while promoting a responsive equality paradigm should be one of the goals at the nexus of African naming scholarship (Simandan, 2019). Deconstruction is necessary to unmask worldviews that are organised around associational or identitarian categories such as class, culture, race, ethnicity and religion, together with the cultural and political institutions that sustain the conventional ways of thinking and serve as conduits for transmitting and enforcing hegemonic knowledge about African history.

Participants 15, 17, 19, and 20

*“I do not think there is any difference in how naming is conducted. Although there have been many changes in South Africa over the years, the change is minor”* (Participant 15)

*“Ehm well, personally comparing them and today, a lot has changed Our parents were named according to certain social events, but today it trends that pushes names, maybe the technology has an impact,”* (Participant 17)

*“For my side, names change, but one thing remains is the purpose within the AmaZulu nation; we want purposeful names, and we also push children towards those goals following their names; the name is powerful”* (Participant 19)

The response above shows that to many Africans, Euro-Western names are just labels which differentiate person 1 from person 2, whereas African names are meaningful and purposeful. The changes have not impacted the purposefulness of the names, but there might be an impact resulting from technology and choice. The analysis of the responses through the theme of Localised Worldview reveals how participants view the evolution of naming practices within their cultural and societal context, reflecting continuity and change. Participant 15 presents a perspective rooted in cultural stability, suggesting that while societal changes have occurred in South Africa, these have had minimal impact on the core tradition of naming. This response indicates a worldview grounded in the belief that naming practices are resilient to external influences and continue to reflect enduring cultural values. In contrast, Participant 17 acknowledges how modern trends and technology have influenced contemporary naming

practices, comparing them to the past when names were more closely linked to social events. This view recognises the dynamic relationship between tradition and globalised modernity, in which naming has shifted in response to external factors such as technology and trends. Meanwhile, Participant 19 highlights the symbolic and purposeful nature of naming within the AmaZulu community, emphasising that names are not merely identifiers but carry deep cultural significance, guiding children's aspirations. This reflects a localised worldview where naming is a powerful cultural tool deeply intertwined with identity, purpose, and community values. Together, the responses present a nuanced picture of how naming practices within the AmaZulu nation balance tradition with modern influences, demonstrating the adaptability of localised worldviews while preserving essential cultural principles.

## 5.5 Study findings

- **Finding 1: Naming as a reflection of sociocultural identity**

The study found that the naming of firstborn children among the AmaZulu in uMkhambathini is deeply embedded in sociocultural values and belief systems. Names are not arbitrary but reflect cultural norms, religious beliefs, and family expectations. Through a social constructionist lens, naming emerges as a socially constructed practice that encodes shared meanings about identity, belonging, and community values.

- **Finding 2: Gendered patterns in naming practices**

There is a clear gendered distinction in naming practices. Female participants tend to select names that emphasise spirituality, emotional expression, and nurturing values, while male participants favour names associated with strength, authority, and lineage continuity. This reflects entrenched patriarchal norms where male identity is closely tied to leadership and inheritance, reinforcing gender roles within the community.

- **Finding 3: Firstborn children as symbolic carriers of family expectations**

The findings reveal that firstborn children hold significant symbolic importance, often viewed as representatives of family continuity, hope, and responsibility. Names given to firstborns are intentionally chosen to reflect expectations such as leadership, resilience, and moral conduct. This reinforces the idea that firstborns function as cultural bearers within the family structure.

- **Finding 4: Influence of historical context on naming practices**

Historical events, particularly the late apartheid period and transition to democracy, have significantly influenced naming practices. Names reflect themes of struggle, resilience, hope, and renewal. This indicates that naming serves as a historical record,

capturing collective experiences and socio-political realities within the community.

- **Finding 5: Language and naming as tools of cultural preservation**

The use of isiZulu in naming practices highlights the importance of language in maintaining cultural identity. Participants expressed strong pride in indigenous naming, viewing it as a way to preserve heritage and resist cultural erosion. Naming in isiZulu serves both as a linguistic and a symbolic affirmation of AmaZulu identity.

- **Finding 6: Evolving naming practices within a changing social context**

While traditional beliefs remain influential, the study found evidence of gradual change in naming practices. Factors such as modernisation, globalisation, and individual preferences are introducing new perspectives. However, despite these changes, the core principle of meaningful and purposeful naming remains central, demonstrating a balance between tradition and contemporary influences.

## **5.6 Chapter Conclusion**

The exploration of firstborn name-giving among the AmaZulu community in Mkhambathini, KwaZulu-Natal, between 1990 and 1994 has revealed the deep-seated cultural, historical, and social factors that shape naming practices. This research, rooted in qualitative methods and underpinned by the theoretical frameworks of symbolic interactionism and social identity, has provided a comprehensive understanding of the intricate ways in which names reflect identity, commemorate lineage, and encapsulate societal influences. The findings drawn from the twenty participants have offered critical insights that not only highlight the communal significance of names but also illustrate their role as a bridge between past traditions and contemporary social contexts. The study has successfully addressed the key research questions, identifying sociocultural factors that influenced name-giving, examining how names reflect perceptions and behaviour, investigating common characteristics among names given to firstborn children, and assessing the impact of historical events on name selection. It is evident that names are more than mere labels; they serve as cultural artifacts that encode collective memory, familial values, and personal aspirations. Through thematic analysis, it became clear that naming firstborn children is a significant act that reflects both individual identity and broader societal trends.

The interplay between personal identity and social structure emerged as a fundamental theme throughout this research. The names given to firstborns in the study period were influenced by historical circumstances, political changes, and familial expectations. Many names carried meanings that acknowledged past hardships, honoured deceased relatives, or expressed parental hopes for their children's futures. These findings reinforce the notion that names

function as linguistic markers of heritage and social belonging, intertwining individual self-preconception with communal narratives. Furthermore, the impact of linguistic and etymological associations on naming practices was evident. The subconscious influence of semantic roots, as noted by Mazaleni (2022), underscores how deeply ingrained cultural and linguistic heritage is in the act of name selection. These unconscious influences manifest in everyday interactions, shaping personal identities and reinforcing cultural continuity. Additionally, names often undergo transformations, evolving into nicknames or symbolic references in dreams, further illustrating their dynamic and living nature within the AmaZulu cultural framework.

A significant revelation from this study is the role of historical events in shaping name-giving practices. The early 1990s marked a period of transition and socio-political change in South Africa, which inevitably influenced naming trends within the AmaZulu community. Names conferred during this time often reflected the collective consciousness of the people, capturing moments of struggle, resilience, and hope. The study demonstrates that firstborn naming is not merely a familial decision but also an act embedded in the era's socio-political milieu. The findings of this research contribute to broader discussions on identity formation and cultural preservation. As globalization and modernization continue to influence cultural practices, traditional naming customs may evolve. However, the enduring importance of names as repositories of meaning and identity suggests that, even as external influences grow, the core principles of name-giving within the AmaZulu community will likely persist. This study underscores the need for ongoing research into naming practices, particularly in relation to contemporary socio-political changes and their impact on cultural identity. The practice of naming firstborns in uMkhambathini between 1990 and 1994 exemplifies the intricate connection among language, culture, and identity. The themes explored in this research illustrate that naming is not a passive act but a powerful form of social expression, reflecting history, personal and communal identity, and parents' aspirations for their children. As cultural landscapes shift, understanding the significance of naming remains crucial to preserving linguistic heritage and cultural identity for future generations of the AmaZulu people. The next chapter is focused on recommendations, findings, and conclusions.

## **CHAPTER SIX**

### **SUMMARY, RECOMMENDATION, AND CONCLUSION**

#### **6.1 Introduction**

The purpose of this chapter is to compile the noteworthy elements crucial to the study and present the summary, results, suggestions, and conclusions. This compilation provides a deeper understanding of the factors influencing the naming of firstborn children in the AmaZulu community in uMkhambathini between 1990 and 1994. The recommendations in this chapter offer meaningful insights and practical approaches for further exploring and improving the viability of name-giving practices. These recommendations not only provide a foundation for further research but also suggest potential methods for assessing how sociocultural, historical, and linguistic factors continue to shape naming traditions. Understanding these elements is essential in preserving and appreciating the cultural significance of name-giving in the AmaZulu community.

The integration of perspectives from all 20 participating parents in uMkhambathini has been instrumental in drawing comprehensive conclusions. Their shared experiences and viewpoints provide a microcosm of the broader AmaZulu population in South Africa, shedding light on the diverse and multifaceted influences shaping name-giving decisions. These voices deepen the study, revealing how historical events, societal expectations, and personal beliefs intersect in the naming process. Moreover, this chapter underscores the importance of contextualizing the research findings within broader social and theoretical frameworks. Symbolic interactionism and social identity theory provide valuable lenses for examining the meanings and implications of firstborn name-giving. This research contributes to a richer understanding of linguistic and anthropological practices within the AmaZulu community.

This chapter offers a comprehensive reflection on the study's key themes. The results and conclusions presented here not only validate the research objectives but also open avenues for future inquiries into the evolving nature of name-giving traditions in South Africa. By preserving and documenting these cultural practices, this research serves as a valuable contribution to the discourse on identity, heritage, and linguistic evolution. The study's recommendations are also valuable since they offer specific concepts that advance the field.

Information from all 20 parents at uMkhambathini has been integrated, reflecting a microcosm of the AmaZulu population in South Africa and revealing the influences behind naming suggestions.

## **6.2 Summary of Chapters**

**Chapter One** introduced the study by outlining the problem statement and its relevance. The problem statement emphasised the impact of European settlement on African countries such as South Africa, Ghana, and Nigeria. Before European influence, Africans had naming systems that reflected their diverse languages and cultures. The chapter explained the study's significance in understanding sociocultural factors influencing parental naming choices, focusing on African myths about the AmaZulu and the naming of firstborn children. Additionally, it briefly covered the study's methodology and theoretical framework, highlighting the qualitative research design. The theoretical framework drew on social identity theory and social constructionism to explore the dynamics of naming in uMkhambathini. The chapter detailed the study's aims and objectives, including gaining an insider perspective on firstborn naming practices and examining the influence of Western and Eastern cultures on naming traditions. It also aimed to explore how names impact families in uMkhambathini. Key concepts such as gender, patriarchy, community, and culture were defined, with culture described as both a system of behaviours and a set of meanings. The community was presented as potentially existing on a spectrum, somewhere between a real place of trust and reciprocity and merely a commodified concept.

**Chapter Two** provided a literature review, exploring the cultural context and its influence on naming practices. It explained how culture might be studied through its expressions, such as values, beliefs, and behaviours, which can be influenced by environmental factors. The chapter discussed how European settlement impacted African naming systems, using examples such as surnames Ferguson and Johnson in Ghana and Nigeria, which were adopted after European arrival. Another theme focused on ethnicity and personal naming, highlighting the importance of identity in naming practices. Identity was explained as encompassing both social categories and sources of individual dignity. The chapter also referenced case studies from China and South Africa to provide comparative insights.

**Chapter Three** focused on the theoretical framework, featuring social identity theory and social constructionism. Social identity theory was defined as alignment with a specific group, adopting its perspectives and characteristics. This theory explored how the AmaZulu, as an identity group, perceive and practise the naming of firstborn children. Social construction

emphasises the role of culture and societal context in constructing knowledge and understanding social phenomena. The chapter also discussed how naming, as a language-rooted practice, reflects social constructs that either transform or maintain cultural traditions.

**Chapter Four** outlined the study's methodology, which employed a qualitative research design conducted in Mkhambathini eNkanyezini. This design generated descriptive data through participants' spoken or written accounts of their experiences and perceptions. The interpretivist paradigm guided the study, helping to interpret participants' emerging perceptions. Data collection methods included in-depth interviews, a qualitative method that directly engaged participants, and thematic analysis, which identified patterns and themes in the data. Sampling techniques included purposive sampling, in which participants were selected based on the researcher's judgment, and snowball sampling, in which interviewees recommended additional participants. The chapter also addressed ethical considerations.

**Chapter Five** presented and analysed the data collected from 20 parents of firstborn children born between 1990 and 1994 in eMkhambathini. The findings highlighted the demographic context and the cultural and social forces influencing naming practices. Narratives collected during the study revealed the dynamics of naming firstborn children. The chapter used thematic analysis to identify trends and develop themes that explained naming choices. The results provided insights into the reasons and cultural meanings behind naming practices, showcasing the interplay between tradition and socio-cultural influences.

### **6.3 Findings**

- **Naming in AmaZulu is Associated with Family Support**

The family's ideals and support networks are fundamental to naming among the AmaZulu. Names are often chosen to reflect the family's shared experiences, goals, or hardships. For example, a child might be named to remember a helpful family member, to show appreciation for overcoming adversity, or to represent continuity and togetherness within the family. This highlights how AmaZulu society is communal, with a person's identity strongly tied to their cultural and familial background.

- **Gender Stereotypes in AmaZulu Name-Giving**

The study emphasises the presence of gender stereotypes in AmaZulu naming customs. Boys' and girls' names frequently reflect conventional gender norms and expectations. For instance, girls may be given names linked to compliance, beauty, or nurturing, while boys may be given

names representing power, leadership, or protection. This reflects the continuation of gendered roles in AmaZulu culture and broader societal norms.

- **Patriarchal Elements in the Naming of Firstborn Children**

In KwaZulu-Natal, naming firstborn infants is heavily influenced by patriarchy. The results show a male-dominated lineage structure, with the father's side of the family frequently having more say on the firstborn's name. The significance of the paternal line in AmaZulu culture is emphasised by the names given to firstborn sons, which may have ancestral significance or indicate the continuation of family tradition.

- **Meanings and Purpose in Naming Firstborn Children Born Between 1990-1994**

Firstborn children's names frequently had deep significance and functions during the period from 1990 to 1994. These names were not randomly picked; instead, they were selected to reflect the family's historical, social, or emotional backdrop at the time. They functioned as a storytelling medium, ingraining ideals, hardships, or aspirations into the child's identity. Names, for example, might allude to the political atmosphere in South Africa in the early 1990s, a period marked by profound social transformation.

- **Need to Enhance Africanism in Contemporary Naming Practices**

The study finds that modern naming practices need to support African identity and values, despite the evidence of rich cultural traditions in naming practices. In several instances, the influence of modernisation and Westernisation has diminished the African character of names. To preserve the distinctive character of the AmaZulu people for future generations, enhancing Africanism entails giving preference to names that represent indigenous languages, histories, and cultural pride.

- **Cultural and Linguistic Influences on Naming**

In the naming process, language and cultural background are crucial. Various dialects, regional idioms, and even nearby civilisations influence the names given to firstborn infants. For instance, a name may have distinct meanings in one isiZulu-speaking region compared to another. Furthermore, migration, exposure to other ethnic groups, and religious rituals can lead to the merging of naming customs, resulting in a diverse range of cultural influences in AmaZulu names.

## **6.2 Conclusion**

These findings shed light on the intricate and dynamic processes behind naming practices among the AmaZulu, highlighting both traditional elements and the evolving challenges in maintaining cultural identity.

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## APPENDIX A: Gatekeeper clearance letter



**Mkhambathini  
Municipality**  
for the Community

**Physical address**  
18 Old Main road, CAMPERDOWN, 3720  
**Postal address**  
Private bag X04, CAMPERDOWN, 3720  
**Telephone:** 031 785 9300  
**Fax:** 031 785 2121

**Enquiries:** Director Community Services  
**Imibuzo:**  
**Navrae:**

**My reference:** Gate Keepers Letter  
**Inkomba yami:**  
**My verwysing:**

**Contact No:** 031 785 9309

**11 October 2022**

**Attention:**  
Mrs T N Sibisi  
University of KwaZulu-Natal  
Cell phone: [REDACTED]  
Email: [sibisi@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:sibisi@ukzn.ac.za)

### **RE: GATEKEEPER'S PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH IN UMKHAMBATHINI AREA**

The request dated 11 October 2022 is reference.


Kindly be advised that permission is hereby granted for Mrs TN Sibisi to conduct here research on a study titled *Understanding the influence in person name giving of first-born children born in 1990-1994, within the AmaZulu nation. A case of Mkhambathini community* to be conducted within the area of Mkhambathini Municipality.

We further request that you share the results of the study with the municipality in the interest of learning and knowledge management.

Should you need further assistance, kindly liaise with the Community Services Director, Ms NS Mkhize on 031-785 9309.

Yours faithfully

[REDACTED]  
NS MKHIZE  
DIRECTOR COMMUNITY SERVICES

 @Mkhambathinimunicipality

## APPENDIX B: Ethical Clearance Letter



24 March 2024

Thandi Nomzamo Sibisi (204520095)  
School of Arts  
Pietermaritzburg Campus

Dear TN Sibisi,

Protocol reference number: HSSREC/00006257/2023

Project title: Understanding the influence in person name giving of first-born children born in 1990, within the AmaZulu nation.

Degree: Masters

### Approval Notification – Expedited Application

This letter serves to notify you that your application received on 27 September 2023 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.

Incidents of adverse events and serious adverse events (AEs and SAEs) should be reported in writing to HSSREC, the study sponsors, and any regulatory authority (where appropriate), within 7 working days of the occurrence for local sites and 14 days for all other South African sites.

This approval is valid until 24 March 2025.

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.

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

Yours sincerely,

Professor Dipane Hlalele (Chair)  
/dd

### Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee

Postal Address: Private Bag K54001, Durban, 4000, South Africa

Telephone: +27 (0)31 260 8330/4552/1587 Email: [hssrec@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:hssrec@ukzn.ac.za) Website: <http://research.ukzn.ac.za/Research-Ethics>

Parenting Campus: Edgewood Reedwood College Medical School Pietermaritzburg Westville

INSPIRING GREATNESS

## APPENDIX C: Turnitin Slip

<b>3%</b>	<b>3%</b>	<b>1%</b>	<b>0%</b>
SIMILARITY INDEX	INTERNET SOURCES	PUBLICATIONS	STUDENT PAPERS
PRIMARY SOURCES			
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<b>2</b>	<a href="http://www.coursehero.com">www.coursehero.com</a> Internet Source		<1%
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<b>5</b>	<a href="http://dc.etsu.edu">dc.etsu.edu</a> Internet Source		<1%
<b>6</b>	<a href="http://www.culturesofwestafrica.com">www.culturesofwestafrica.com</a> Internet Source		<1%
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**TABLE 5.2**

Participant no.	Age	Parents' Gender	No of Children	Name of firstborn
1.	40	Male	2	<b>Vusumuzi:</b> Rekindle the family, builder of the home. <i>Boy</i>
2.	45	Female	4	<b>Gugulethu:</b> Our treasure, precious. Also Gugu. <i>Girl</i>
3.	55	Female	3	<b>Khanyisile:</b> Bringer of light, brought light. <i>Girl</i>
4.	56	Male	6	<b>Mandla:</b> Strength/power. <i>Boy</i>
5.	58	Female	7	<b>Khethiwe:</b> Chosen, the one who is chosen. <i>Girl</i>
6.	61	Female	6	<b>Hlengiwe:</b> Redeemed. <i>Girl</i>
7.	62	Female	4	<b>Thandiwe:</b> Beloved. <i>Girl</i>
8.	58	Female	6	<b>Thabisile:</b> Has brought joy. <i>Girl</i>
9.	44	Male	2	<b>Themba:</b> Trust, hope, faith. <i>Boy</i>
10.	39	Female	1	<b>Bhekisisa:</b> Be very careful, cautious. <i>Boy</i>
11.	59	Male	5	<b>Bheka:</b> Behold. <i>Boy</i>
12.	66	Female	8	<b>Sizani:</b> You all help. <i>Girl</i>
13.	50	Male	2	<b>Bhekani:</b> You all look. <i>Boy</i>
14.	42	Female	5	<b>Anele:</b> The last born. <i>girl</i>
15.	48	Female	8	<b>Dudzile:</b> Consoled. <i>Girl</i>
16.	52	Male	1	<b>Kwanele:</b> It is enough. <i>Boy</i>
17.	56	Male	2	<b>BongiNkosi:</b> Be grateful to God. <i>Boy</i>
18.	62	Male	4	<b>Bhekokwakhe:</b> The one who minds his own. <i>Boy</i>
19.	58	Female	2	<b>Kholwa:</b> Believe. <i>Boy</i>
20.	54	Female	5	<b>Jabulisile:</b> She has brought joy. <i>Girl</i>

Figure 1: Mkhambathini Area Source: ARCHMAP: iMkhambathinu Municipality

Figure 1

