

**Student-teachers' experiences of teaching Life Orientation during work-
integrated learning**

by

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DECLARATION

I, **Florence Mamoroleng Shange**, declare that the dissertation, which I hereby submit for the degree Magister Educationis at the University of Pretoria, is my own work and has not previously been submitted by me for a degree at this or any other tertiary institution

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to my parents, Sipho Sekhasimbe and Modiehi Shange. I am where I am today because of your love, encouragement, support, and prayers.

Kea leboga, Modimo ale hlonolofatse!

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed to explore student teachers' (final-year B.Ed. students) experiences teaching Life Orientation (LO) during their work-integrated learning (WIL). The research was conducted in consideration of the apparent gap between theory and practice, as student teachers sometimes find it difficult to relate course content to daily classroom practice, and limited literature exists in South Africa regarding this phenomenon. The literature explored in this study illustrated what other scholars have said regarding this study's research topic. This included, among others, the work of Marais and Meier (2004), Prinsloo (2007), and Magano and Rambado (2012), which dealt with student teachers during their work-integrated learning, the status of LO, and stakeholders' perspectives of the subject. This study was qualitatively underpinned by a phenomenological research design and interpretive paradigm. Furthermore, Bronfenbrenner's ecological model systems theory was employed to explore how student teachers function within complex systems.

The participants were purposefully selected, and an in-depth description of the phenomenon was achieved through two focus group discussions. The data were analysed through thematic analysis. Four themes emerged from the findings, namely; student teachers' intrinsic and extrinsic motivation for obtaining their teaching degree and how they perceive the teaching profession; status quo of Life Orientation as a subject; the merging of curricula and fieldwork (theory and practical experiences); and student teachers' experiences of work-integrated learning. The participants reported negative and positive experiences in teaching LO during their WIL period.

Keywords: Student-teacher, Work-integrated learning, Experience, Life Orientation

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To whom it may concern:

I hereby confirm that I edited the dissertation entitled: “Student teachers’ experiences of teaching Life Orientation during work-integrated learning”. Any amendments introduced by the author hereafter are not covered by this confirmation. The author ultimately decided whether to accept or decline any recommendations made by the editor, and it remains the author’s responsibility at all times to confirm the accuracy and originality of the completed work. Research participants’ verbatim quotes were not grammatically altered or checked for contextual accuracy. The author is responsible for ensuring the accuracy of the references and its consistency based on the department’s style guidelines.



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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

AIDS	Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome
APS	Admission Point Score
B.Ed.	Bachelor of Education
CAPS	Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement
CBD	Central Business District
DBE	Department of Basic Education
DoE	Department of Education
FET	Further Education and Training
HIV	Human Immunodeficiency Virus
ITC	Information Communication Technology
LO	Life Orientation
MRTEQ	Minimum requirements for Teacher Education Qualifications
PE	Physical Education
PGCE	Postgraduate Certificate in Education
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
VUT	Vaal University of Technology
WIL	Work-integrated learning

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1. CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 OVERVIEW OF CHAPTER

This chapter serves as an orientation to the study. The chapter introduces the background and context related to student teachers' experiences teaching Life Orientation (LO) during work-integrated learning (WIL). I specify my research question and discuss the rationale of the study. The central concepts of the study are also described and clarified. The reader is also provided with the significance of the study and its aims. The quality criteria of the study are highlighted, ethical considerations are explained, and I conclude with the organisation and outlines of the remaining chapters of the dissertation.

1.2 INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

Over the last few years, there has been extensive research and crucial discussions globally among academic organisations concerning teachers' development (Caires, Almeida & Vieira, 2012). Teachers hold noteworthy positions in the educational system and are regarded as crucial players in their communities. Okemakinde, Adewuyi and Alabi (2013:82) highlight that "education unlocks the door to modernisation and sustainable development but that it is the teachers that hold the key to the door". Therefore, all countries require teachers with particular knowledge, skills, values, and the ability to respond to learners' needs so they can become capable, self-assured, and responsible citizens (Mthinyane, 2014). Overall, scholars globally share the same sentiments about teachers' development. They note that WIL is an important part of teachers' education to better prepare teachers in undeveloped and developed settings (Ifeoma, 2016; Danner, 2013; Agustiana & Nurhayati, 2019; Bhargava, 2009).

To positively impact the South African education system, student teachers' primary preparation is essential to produce quality teachers. "The richness and complexity of this phenomenon (work-integrated learning) have been the subject of multiple interests and ways of exploring its different dimensions, actors, and dynamics" (Caires et al., 2012:163). Fafunwa (2001) further emphasises that WIL is essential in training teachers. WIL programmes need to provide student teachers with relevant skills and abilities to help them grow in the teaching profession and become effective teachers. WIL promotes the expansion of information, professional competence, "sense of efficacy, and flexibility in their performance" and relations (Nkambule & Mukeredzi, 2017:1).

Marais and Meier (2004:221) describe that the concept of WIL presents “a range of experiences to which student teachers are exposed when they work in classrooms and schools”. Its purpose is to train student teachers to operate in environments that are diverse and dissimilar. The time student teachers spend in WIL is expected to complete their teaching practicals programme. Both a mentor lecturer and a teacher are assigned to the student teachers during this period. Furthermore, the student teachers are “expected to demonstrate academic and professional abilities and utilisation of a range of teaching strategies relevant to different contexts” (Robinson, 2003:24).

Most South African universities offer a Bachelor of Education (B.Ed.) Degree; it aims to produce quality teachers and prepare student teachers with the required pedagogical knowledge to aid them in teaching efficiently and effectively upon qualifying in their respective phases (Dyosini, 2016). The B.Ed. course includes various methodologies, one of which is LO. The subject (LO) is currently compulsory in South Africa for Grades R-12, and forms part of the reformation of the South African educational system post-1994. LO is not a new concept because it has always been part of the South African curriculum but under different names, such as Guidance, Youth Preparedness, Religious Education, and Physical Education, in both the previously White education and Black education curricula (Nel, 2014). Therefore, the government regarded it as an important aspect of formal education. LO is defined as the study of the self in relation to others and society (DoE, 2012). Ngwena (2003:201) further argues that LO “is intrinsically responsive to urgent concerns such as the health, environmental and safety issues to which learners are exposed, the HIV and AIDS pandemic and youth risk behaviour”. Therefore, the subject should be central in the process of guiding and preparing learners for life as it plays a significant role “in realising the aims of developing the full potential of learners as citizens of a democratic South Africa” (DoE, 2002:1).

Within the context of WIL, it becomes necessary to explore student teachers’ experiences. This study aimed to explore these experiences by positioning this study within the existing theory of Bronfenbrenner’s ecological systems model. This study was prompted by my personal experience of my final-year teaching practice period, lecturing first and third-year B.Ed. students, and assessing final-year LO students during the WIL period. This study is significant as it adds value to research emerging in the South African context about student teachers’ experiences during their WIL period and the status of LO within schools. The study also

allowed the student teachers to reflect on their professional identities and cultivate more self-awareness.

1.3 PROBLEM STATEMENT

Student teachers often find it daunting to transition from higher education programmes to WIL for practical learning in a real classroom environment (Frick, Carl & Beets, 2010). Substantial research has been conducted on student teachers' experiences of WIL (Ngidi & Sibiya, 2003; Nkambule & Mukeredzi, 2017; Hobson, Malderez, Tracey, Giannakaki, Pell & Tomlinson, 2008). According to Marais and Meier (2004:222), "University lecturers value teaching practice as the bridge between theory and practice, but research findings indicate that student teachers sometimes find it difficult to relate course content to daily classroom practice". The transition from the university to the school environment is seldom a smooth one (McLaughlin & Talbert, 2006), making it difficult for student teachers to adjust to their new environments. This seems to suggest a gap between theory and practice, and there is a longstanding argument that the theory taught in student-teacher educational programmes is largely separated from the real practice of teaching in classrooms (Kwenda, 2014).

Student teachers build their own professional identities based on how well they operate and fit in within their placed schools during WIL. Their experience also depends on support from mentor lecturers, teachers, and colleagues (Caires et al., 2012). According to Bolarfinwa (2010), during WIL, student teachers mostly pay attention to their grades during supervised school visits and not the whole experience. Hence, when the supervisor visits, they 'put up a good performance' with high standard teaching aids. Caires et al. (2012:166) believe WIL is the best time to analyse the lived experiences of student teachers because this is when they explore themselves and others. They further mention this period does not only involve the "procedural and pedagogical components of this process but also the individual as a whole".

Upon reviewing the literature, there seems to be limited research on the topic of student teachers' experiences of LO during their WIL placements. The general findings mainly focus on the experiences of Postgraduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) student teachers (Mthinyane, 2014) and not B.Ed. student teachers. Literature related to LO as a subject specifically is also limited. Since the subject was introduced in the 1990s, it has received a lot of criticism from various stakeholders. Two challenges that underpin the subject are that it is

not valued (it is often considered as an extra subject), and it cannot be taught effectively in schools (Allen, 2005; Francis, 2011). However, Parker (2018) posits that even though it may seem the status of LO as a subject is at stake, research maintains the subject is relevant and necessary in the South African educational system. The subject is discussed in greater detail in Chapter 2, Section 3.

Scholars have been exploring research in the field of LO in reference to teachers and learners (Jacobs, 2011; Prinsloo, 2007; Christiaans, 2006; Brown, 2013; Ganesh, 2015; Strydom, 2011; Diale, 2016; Pillay, 2012; Manzini, 2012; Modiba, 2017). Based on the literature, there seems to be a lack of research within the South African context exploring student teachers' experiences teaching LO during their WIL.

In summary, the identified gaps in research are as follows: Firstly, there seems to be a gap between theory and practice that causes disorientation for student teachers to relate course content to daily classroom practice. Furthermore, LO student teachers are of interest to me based on my personal experience and the limited research available on the study of student teachers' experiences of teaching LO during their WIL in the South African context. This study addressed these gaps by exploring the student teachers' subjective experiences of teaching LO during WIL.

1.4 PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore student teachers' experiences of teaching LO during their final year of WIL.

1.5 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1.5.1 Primary research question

A single research question guided this study:

What are student teachers' experiences of teaching LO during their WIL?

1.6 THE RATIONALE OF THE STUDY

This study aimed to fill the identified gap in the literature by bringing together the subjective experiences of the student teachers within the methodology of LO, adding value to the body of knowledge. The rationale for the study was also based on personal reasons. Looking back to 2013 as a matriculant, I can affirm LO is a vital subject as it concentrates on engaging the overall development (physical, spiritual, personal, and emotional) of an individual. Growing up in the dusty streets of Letlhabile, a township in Northwest province, was very challenging for me. My upbringing shaped my life. As learners who suffered from negative self-concepts, unprivileged backgrounds, broken homes, and abuse, LO was introduced to us as a subject that addressed topics such as stress and HIV, among others. Prinsloo (2007:155) advocates children from such backgrounds “are not adequately guided towards positive self-concept formation or the realisation of their potential”. LO ultimately became personal for me the moment I chose it as my elective in my undergraduate year because I was curious about the subject based on my high school experience. Then, as a result of my teaching practice experience, I selected LO as my elective until honours level.

In the final year of my B.Ed. studies, I had the opportunity to teach LO during my teaching practice sessions for the Senior & FET phase in two different schools; one in Mamelodi and the other in Pretoria central (CBD). Both schools had a lot of diversity in terms of race, language, culture, and religion. These experiences had good and bad outcomes, and I learnt valuable lessons. During this time, I was also assigned two mentor teachers who did not specialise in LO; this was a challenge because my learning was very limited. This experience concurs with what other researchers have discussed (see Section 3.6.2). However, it was my prerogative to ensure that I learnt everything independently from my mentor teachers, which compelled me to be more creative and innovative in my application of the subject. The experiences I gained from these varied contexts contributed to my teacher identity and professionalism. In retrospect, I realise that teaching an elective such as LO is not easy, and many topics have to be studied in depth. This led to my interest in this research, because what I personally experienced in the schools where I was placed was different from what I had been taught in class.

From this study, I hoped to gain an in-depth understanding of how student teachers' experiences are influenced by the systems they encounter in their everyday lives through the ecological systems-level theory. I also wanted to explore the relationship between the three main concepts, namely student teachers, LO, and WIL.

1.7 CLARIFICATION OF CONCEPTS

Some concepts are fundamental for this study: 'student teacher', 'WIL', 'experience', and 'LO'. A clear explanation of these concepts follows.

1.7.1 Student teacher

For this study, a definition by Ngidi and Sibiya (2003:18) was adopted for 'student teacher'. A student-teacher is operationally defined as a student who is in the process of pre-service training in teaching (Ngidi & Sibiya, 2003:18). Student teachers are those persons who experience training for teaching; this training phase is an essential part of a professional teaching degree, like a Bachelor's or Master's of Education (Akhter, Kanwal, Fatima & Mahmood, 2016). Several authors have adopted this definition in their studies (Hourcade, Parette & McCormack, 1988; Ngcobo, 1995; Butler, 2001; Jianping, 2002).

1.7.2 Work-integrated learning

Kiggundu and Nayimuli (2009:347) describe WIL "as a period when students are working in the relevant industry to receive specific in-service training to apply theory in practice". According to Caires et al. (2012:166), WIL "is a period of intense search and exploration of self, others and the new scenarios, it is believed that it is most relevant to analyse the lived experiences of those who are learning to teach". Conversely, Emerole (2000:78 in Korros, 2016) posits that this concept "is an experience of guided teaching in which the trainee teacher assumes increased responsibility for directing the learning of a group over a period of time". For the purpose of this study, the definition by Kiggundu and Nayimuli (2009:347) was adopted, which states WIL is a period that prepares student teachers for the practical element of teaching in a real classroom.

1.7.3 Experience

According to Roth and Jornet (2014:2), an “experience is a category of thinking, a minimal unit of analysis that includes people (their intellectual, affective, and practical characteristics), their material and social environment, their transactional relations (mutual effects on each other), and affect”. Hence, experience is not hidden within an individual but rather ranges in space and time amongst individuals as they engage in “temporally unfolding societal relations”. I used this definition of experience as it relates well to this study.

1.7.4 Life Orientation

The DBE (2012:8) describes LO as a subject that focuses on a learner’s self-development within a certain society. “It addresses skills, knowledge, and values about the self, the environment, responsible citizenship, a healthy and productive life, social engagement, recreation and physical activity, careers, and career choices”. For this study, I adopted the definition of LO proposed by the DBE (2012:8). Several authors have similarly adopted this definition in their studies (Nel, 2014; Rooth, 2005; Prinsloo, 2007).

1.8 REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Chapter 2 explores existing literature on this study’s research topic and the theoretical framework that guided this study. The chapter presents both local and international existing literature. This chapter is grounded in the following themes: WIL-teacher training requirements; strengths of WIL; WIL during the pandemic; the background of LO; description of LO, scope of LO; qualities, skills, and roles of a LO teacher; the challenges in LO; student teachers’ experience of WIL; and teacher identity. The chapter begins with a discussion of the concept of WIL in practicing schools and higher education institutions. The literature also explores LO conception in South Africa, and provides insight into LO’s crucial components and challenges. The section further considers how WIL was facilitated during the pandemic, student teachers’ experiences during WIL, and how student teachers negotiate through these experiences to establish their teaching identities. The chapter introduces the theory under which this study positions itself, and explains its background, systems, and how it can be applied in research. Likewise, the chapter also looks at how the theory integrates the study. Finally, the chapter concludes with a summary.

1.9 OVERVIEW OF RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

This section provides a summary of the research and methodology that underpin the study. The detailed methodology is discussed in Chapter 3. I employed a qualitative research approach, which allowed me a direct investigation and enabled me to gain an in-depth understanding of student teachers' experiences. The research approach was linked with the interpretive paradigm so I could interpret how student teachers understand the world around them and create their own experiences (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2002). To further gain the participants' perspectives and generate substantial views regarding the study's phenomenon, phenomenology was employed. By following this approach, I was able to understand the student teachers' worlds, interpret their experiences with WIL, and make generalisations based on the thick description from all individuals' experiences.

The data for this study were constructed through two focus group discussions, and I employed a non-probability sampling method, namely purposive sampling, to select participants. The student teachers were chosen purposively because they had LO as their methodology and practiced in schools that offer the subject. Furthermore, the data collection process included video recordings of the focus group discussions and field note documentation. The ontological and epistemological positions of the study were that only LO student teachers could be explored in their social contexts, and their experiences could be interpreted in these contexts; each participant gained distinctive lived experiences during their WIL. Lastly, I applied thematic data analysis using the six steps proposed by Creswell (2009). Presenting data in the thematic stage enabled me to analyse data based on an understanding of what was happening in the group and why it happened.

1.10 ETHICAL CONSIDERATION

The most basic ethical issues in research are concerned with protecting participants from harm. Mcmillian and Schumaster (2001) emphasise the importance of ethical guidelines in educational research since the research involves human beings. In addressing ethical matters, I successfully defended my research proposal and received permission to conduct the study from the ethics committee of the Faculty of Education, University of Pretoria (EDU044/20).

When interacting with the participants, ethical practices were adhered to. Activities employed in this study were research-generated and therefore required participants' permission. Participants' participation in this study was voluntary, and pseudonyms were used to protect their identities. All the recordings from this study were viewed only by my supervisor and me, and were kept safe and confidential. Lastly, informed consent and confidentiality agreements were obtained from the participants. This is discussed in greater detail in Chapter 3.

1.11 QUALITY MEASURES

According to Maree (2016), trustworthiness is of the utmost importance in qualitative research. He further emphasises that trustworthiness is the acid test of your data's analysis, findings, and conclusions. Lincoln and Guba (1985 in Maree, 2016) proposes four criteria to be considered by qualitative researchers in pursuit of a trustworthy study: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. In order to ensure credibility in this study, the participants were informed throughout the study of any interactions related to the research and member checking was employed. To address transferability, I painted a full picture of the research design and methodology section that explains the relevant sampling, data collection methods, and research methodology. To ensure the dependability of the study's research design, I described the critical processes and procedures associated with the analysis process and documented the necessary steps. To ensure confirmability, I used reflexivity and recorded the data from the focus group discussions, video recordings, and my notes truthfully to avoid bias. Moreover, all participants' information was kept confidential, anonymous, and will be kept in the University of Pretoria storage facility for 15 years.

1.12 OUTLINE OF CHAPTERS

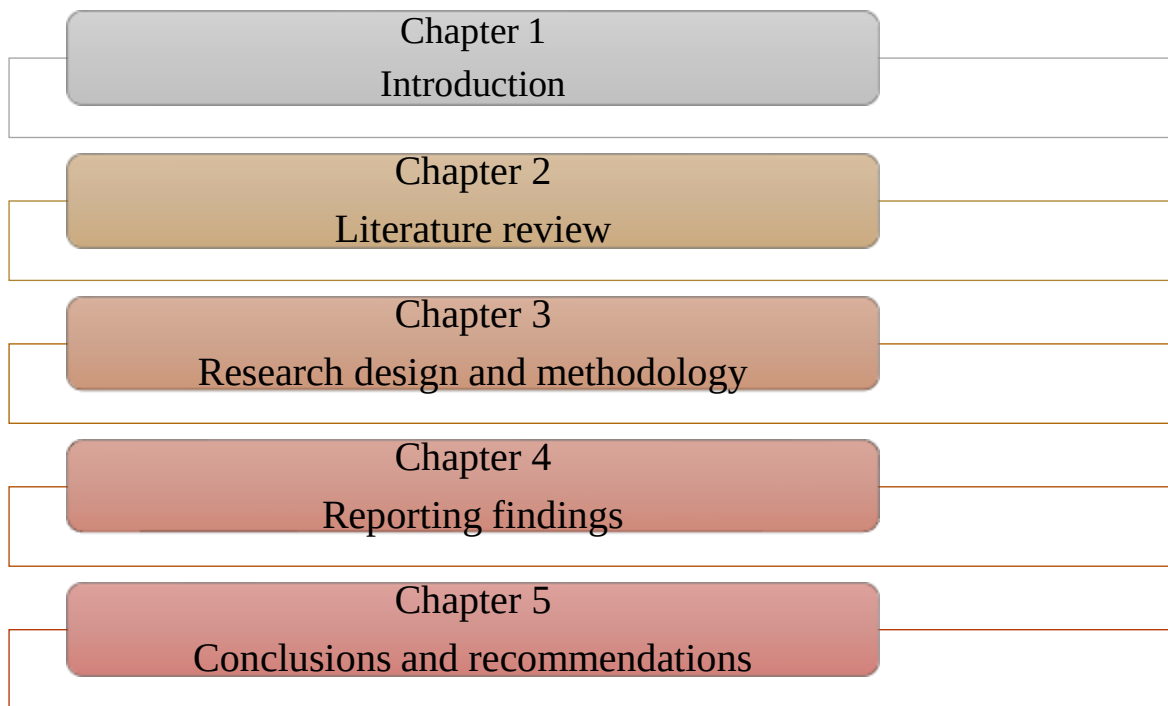


Figure 1.1: Outline of chapters

Chapter 1

Chapter 1 presents the research introduction and background. The relevance of this study is also discussed. The focus and aims of the study are described, and the research question is highlighted. Important concepts are clarified, and the ethical considerations, quality measures, and research assumptions are outlined. Lastly, the chapter concludes with a summary of the research design and methodology.

Chapter 2

Chapter 2 presents relevant and important reviewed literature on the research topic from both national and international research. All the themes relating to the study are discussed in depth. The theoretical framing that underpins the study is highlighted, as well as the criticisms. Furthermore, I discuss how the study and the theory integrate in this chapter.

Chapter 3

Chapter 3 explains the research design and methodology adopted in the study. It also includes justifications for my methodological choices. Furthermore, I discuss the ethical considerations and quality measures I employed to ensure the validity and trustworthiness of the study.

Chapter 4

Chapter 4 focuses on the research findings against the backdrop of literature. The chapter presents the data that were collected by linking it to the identified themes of analysis. A discussion and interpretation of these findings are also provided.

Chapter 5

Chapter 5 provides the conclusion of the study. The findings are linked to the guided main research question and theoretical framework. A discussion of the study's limitations, a summary of the study, final reflection, and future recommendations are also provided.

1.13 SUMMARY OF THE CHAPTER

Chapter 1 presented the reader with a roadmap to the study. The chapter also described my motivations for conducting this study, including scholarly, professional, personal, and conceptual views. The problem statement was presented, and the guiding research question was explained. The purpose of the study was also presented, concepts were explained, and a brief overview of the research methodology was highlighted. In the next chapter, a review of existing literature on the phenomenon is discussed.

2. CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter focuses on the important and relevant existing literature relating to the research topic. According to Webster and Watson (2002:13), this chapter provides “a firm foundation for advancing knowledge” and enables the researcher to contextualise their study. This chapter is grounded in nine themes and explores local and international existing literature. The themes are: WIL-teacher training requirements; strengths and challenges of WIL; WIL during the pandemic; the background of LO; description of LO; scope of LO; qualities, skills, and roles of a LO teacher; the challenges in LO; student teachers’ experience of WIL; and teacher identity.

The first theme looks at the broad concept of WIL in practicing schools and higher education institutions, and I further discuss its advantages and disadvantages. The chapter highlights the background of the study’s specific methodology and its crucial components, along with obstacles. I also present student teachers’ experiences during WIL and discuss how they negotiate through these experiences to establish their identities. The chapter’s conclusion consists of the theoretical work employed in this study, namely Bronfenbrenner’s ecological model systems theory. The theory delineated the individuals’ development and explored how student teachers function within complex systems while teaching LO during WIL.

2.2 WORK-INTEGRATED LEARNING – A TEACHER TRAINING REQUIREMENT

For this study, the two terms ‘teaching practice’ and ‘WIL’ are used, as a lot of existing literature uses the term ‘teaching practice’; however, these terms are interchangeable. Since the founding of teaching institutions in the Middle Ages, teacher training has continued to be incontestable and a vital component in the training of future teachers (Cohen, Nisbett, Bowdle & Schwartz, 1996). Cooper, Orrell and Bowden (2010) and Groenewald (2004) mention that students’ preparation through their involvement in WIL programmes is recognised as a vital element of their learning experience. This learning experience should take place where a more prolonged duration is envisioned and expanded throughout the programme; for instance, during the student’s final year or in a planned mentorship programme.

WIL and practical learning take place in a school environment or community setting. It consists of elements of learning from other people's experiences (for instance, observing a mentor teacher in a classroom) as well as gaining knowledge through practical training (for example, preparing lessons and teaching in an actual classroom) (Minimum Requirements for Teacher Education Qualifications (DHET), 2014). The MRTEQ (DHET, 2014) policy "serves as a basis for the development and updating of the Criteria for the Recognition and Evaluation of Qualifications for Employment in Education policy for teachers in the schooling sector". The policy indicates that student teachers' WIL component should be thoroughly planned, supervised, assessed, and incorporated with the theory part of the programme. Furthermore, section 7 of MRTEQ (DHET, 2014) emphasises that the academic institutions offering the education programme are responsible for building partnerships with schools and offering student teachers opportunities in line with the policy.

Koross (2016:79) describes teaching practice as the "preparation of student teachers for teaching by practical training". Imart (2003:78) explains that "the term teaching practice has three major connotations: the practicing of teaching skills and acquisition of the role of a teacher, the whole range of experiences and practical aspects". Komba and Kira (2013) further highlight that teaching practice is a time when student teachers create their own experiences by implementing various skills and methods in the classroom, engaging in relations with teachers and mentor lecturers while reflecting on their teaching. Emerole (2000) adds that this is the time student teachers have a responsibility to teach a certain group of learners and partake in activities the school provides. Generally, the period of WIL takes place in selected collaborating schools in blocks of about 20 weeks, depending on the academic institution offering the course. Extending the view on the concept of teaching practice, Andabai (2011 cited in Koross, 2016:79) suggests that "it is the practical use of teaching principles, teaching techniques and practical training/practical exercise of different activities of daily school life".

The main focus of the teaching programme is to develop classroom teachers who are professional and qualified, able to illustrate intensive knowledge and skills in their specific phases and subjects (DHET, 2014). MRTEQ (DHET, 2014) adds that teachers need to equip learners with skills to help them function in transforming communities and societies. Universities provide student teachers with the theory of how to teach for about three years (Agustiana & Nurhayati, 2019), but it is only during the WIL period that student teachers acquire experience in the role of a teacher, gain knowledge, and go through the complex tasks

and roles of being a teacher (Saphier, Haley-Speca & Gower, 2008). These roles include classroom management, organising the classroom for effective learning, using relevant tools to evaluate approaches, such as formative and summative assessments to measure pupils' learning. Research further highlights that some of the student teachers' tasks include delivering classroom content that accommodates all learners, irrespective of their individual needs, such as learning styles and intellectual capacity (Saphier et al., 2008).

The WIL period offers student teachers a demanding yet worthwhile encounter in engaging with learners in real classrooms, gaining skills and abilities to boost their careers. The period of WIL also helps the student teachers with their career path choice and allows them to determine if the teaching vocation is the right choice for them. The experience also helps student teachers improve their communication skills.

The success of WIL depends on what Aglazor (2017) refers to as the "Teaching Practice Triad", consisting of a student teacher, mentor teacher, and mentor lecturer. The scholar further explains that it is vital for the team to know what is expected from the programme, and the team's focus is to collaborate and mentor the student teacher until they complete their WIL. Furthermore, Bhargava (2009) states the WIL period will only be successful if collaborative schools and universities work together. Similarly, Cooper et al. (2010) mention the dimensions that contribute to WIL success, as highlighted in Figure 2.1. These dimensions are incorporated in student teachers' systems level and are discussed later in the dissertation as I unpack the themes.



Figure 2.1: Dimensions of work-integrated learning

According to Haigh (2001), WIL is the most significant element in the 21st century for preparing teachers in the education programme. Even though WIL is vital in preparing teachers, scholars emphasise that this task is not simple. “It has been recognised as a complex practice which cannot be acquired by imitation” (Reed, 2014:7). For instance, Koross (2016:77) reports that “with the world of teaching being complex, the demands being placed on teachers to meet the needs of diverse students have increased”. Sometimes the process becomes even more difficult because the student teachers must take suggestions from both mentor teachers and lecturers and adopt the strategies of the mentor teacher (Bhargava, 2009). Marais and Meier (2004) further state that underdeveloped countries, including South Africa, still face challenges in student teachers’ training, and WIL can potentially lose its relevance

because of various challenges. These challenges include “geographical distance, low and uneven levels of teacher expertise, a wide-ranging lack of resources as well as a lack of discipline among a wide cross-section of learners and educator” (Marais & Meier, 2004:221).

2.3 THE STRENGTHS OF TEACHING PRACTICE/WORK-INTEGRATED LEARNING

Numerous studies have been conducted to explore different topics on teaching practice. For instance, Bhargava (2009) explored the difficulties B.Ed. student teachers experience during teaching practice. Agustiana and Nurhayati (2019) conducted a study on how Indonesian student teachers deal with anxieties during teaching, and Danner (2013) conducted a study on student teachers’ perspectives about resources for teaching practice. The results of most studies show that WIL has more strengths than weaknesses (Kiggundu & Nayimuli, 2009; Akhter et al., 2016; Nkambule & Mukeredzi, 2017; Matthews, 2010). This section highlights the strengths the scholars have established. One of the strengths is that WIL enables student teachers to gain experience in the real world of teaching (Marais & Meier, 2004; Perry, 2004). During this time, student teachers have opportunities to perform activities related to the culture of teaching before being exposed to the world of work (Kasanda, 1995).

According to Tuli and File (2009), the period of WIL enables student teachers to establish proficiencies that could assist them later in their teaching career. Edem (2003 in Koross, 2016:79) further asserts that “during the work-integrated learning period, student teachers feel engaged, challenged and even empowered”. Moreover, Osuala (2004:110) indicates that teaching practice “exposes student teachers to the realities of influential teaching and helps them to try out methods of teaching and gain practical classroom experience under experts”. Most student teachers reported to Bhargava (2009) that they gained more confidence and were able to easily talk in front of a group of people after the WIL experience. This also ties in with strengths such as classroom management skills and learning how to be responsible. In terms of ‘being responsible’ during the WIL period, student teachers are expected to take responsibility and perform some extramural duties, attend staff and parents’ meetings, invigilation, and supervise pupils during assembly and lunch breaks. The teaching practice thus exposes student teachers to challenges they may encounter in the future (Koross, 2016). Therefore, student teachers should be exposed to different environments that consist of diverse learners and different school systems.

One of the vital strengths of WIL is that it allows student teachers to develop greater knowledge about the standards of the educational field; hence, “it plays a significant role in bridging the gap between theory and practice” (Koross, 2016:79). Ifeoma (2016) notes that this experience helps student teachers in the preparation of lesson plans and efficient planning. Ifeoma (2016) also mentions that WIL helps student teachers realise their strengths and weaknesses and establish skills in using crucial and relevant methods and approaches when teaching. It also exposes student teachers to appropriate teacher-pupil relationships. Furthermore, this period prepares student teachers to transition from one role to another. According to Akbas (2002), WIL provides student teachers with an opportunity to be assessed by mentor lecturers, teachers, their peers, and gain constructive criticism from their feedback. Akbas (2002) further emphasises that WIL promotes student teachers’ personal relations with colleagues, parents, and pupils. Generally, the WIL period allows the student teachers to become involved emotionally. According to Edem (2003), most of the time, WIL is a positive experience and, as a result, student teachers start to relate to the art of teaching. Additionally, WIL helps student teachers to establish their teaching identity and develop optimistic perspectives about the teaching profession.

2.4 THE CHALLENGES OF TEACHING PRACTICE/WORK-INTEGRATED LEARNING

Some scholars highlight certain weaknesses of WIL. Kiggundu and Nayimuli (2009) note the teaching practice frequently turns into a discouraging and terrifying experience for student teachers. Other researchers report WIL presents students with challenges such as anxiety, poor management in the classroom, poor professional relations with their mentor lecturer and teacher, and an inability to deliver content in the classroom (Regan 1989 in Marais & Meier, 2004). Akhter et al. (2007:7) also concur that WIL is not adjusted according to student teachers’ needs and with their benefits in mind. The authors emphasise that it is vital for such a programme to be designed with “student teachers’ needs in mind to make the most of this central quality issue”.

According to Nkambule and Mukeredzi (2017), WIL challenges are more severe in rural areas. The authors claim WIL is more challenging for student teachers placed in rural areas mainly because of the following reasons; poor infrastructure, lack of school materials, and basic

services and facilities. Matthews (2010) further concurs that most student teachers placed in rural areas find WIL more stressful and lonelier than their counterparts in urban areas.

2.5 WORK-INTEGRATED LEARNING DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Many institutions worldwide cancelled their face-to-face lessons due to the outbreak of COVID-19 and lockdown restrictions. This led to institutions adopting an emergency online learning approach (Maphalala, Khumalo & Khumalo, 2021). Like many other countries, South Africa went into lockdown on 27 March 2020 and, as a result, this impacted the 2020 WIL programme. Institutions had to consider online learning and teaching and innovative alternative practices to ensure the successful completion of the WIL programme. The University of Pretoria specifically introduced a lesson study approach where student teachers had to collaboratively plan, teach, and refine a lesson online (see Section 3.6.3).

According to Halverson and Graham (2019) and Watson (2008), ‘online learning’ is a broad term and consists of multiple definitions. Watson (2008) defines online learning as access to learning through the use of technology. Similarly, Morisson (2003) describes online learning as acquiring knowledge and skills through synchronous and asynchronous interactions. Various stakeholders, including students and lecturers in the institutions, were caught off guard by the rapid move to online learning and its challenges. Many lecturers were not fully equipped to teach online and found the experience challenging and stressful (Hew, Jia, Gonda & Bai, 2020). The other main challenges included the integration of information and communication technology (ICT), network coverage inefficiency, and maintaining academic integrity and internet connectivity (Maphalala et al., 2021; Mukhtar, Javed, Arooj & Sethi, 2020). Ogbonnaya, Awoniyi and Matabane (2020) highlight that other online learning challenges were electricity outages, access to technological devices, time management, and family interruptions.

Despite these challenges, Kumar (2018) argues that online learning is beneficial to students because they can learn independently, anytime, from anywhere. A recent study by Ogbonnaya et al. (2020) further supports Kumar’s (2018) statement by revealing 112 student teachers reported they enjoyed the online learning experience since it was flexible. The student teachers further mentioned that online learning improved their digital skills and knowledge. Additionally, Hoq (2020) and Masonta, Ramoroka and Lysko (2015) explained that some of

the online learning benefits are attributed to the fact that students may access materials directly on electronic devices and share different learning resources, such as class notes. In Chapter 4, the student teachers' experiences of teaching online during the pandemic are discussed. The following section unpacks the existing literature regarding student teachers' experiences of WIL.

2.6 STUDENT TEACHERS' EXPERIENCES OF WORK-INTEGRATED LEARNING

Students seek to meet the requirements of WIL as they prepare for the bigger journey of becoming professional teachers. Every student teacher's experience is unique. Therefore, in the following section, international and local research focusing on student teachers' experiences is discussed.

2.6.1 Challenges in the classroom

2.6.1.1 Classroom management

Managing learners in a classroom is one of the major challenges student teachers face during the WIL period, especially in terms of instilling discipline. Classroom management refers to the learning climate that is established and managing learners throughout the lessons. In terms of discipline, student teachers find it difficult to handle misbehaving learners; many of the learners are aware student teachers are only in their schools for a certain time, and they struggle to exercise their authority when it comes to classroom discipline (Bhargava 2009, Abongdia, Adu & Foncha, 2015). Mudzielwana and Maphosa (2014) further explains that student teachers also face a significant challenge in handling learners in front of their observers (mentor lecturers or mentor teachers). Research reveals that during the theory part of the education programme, student teachers are not properly equipped to manage discipline in the classrooms (Danner, 2013). Kiggundu and Nayimuli (2009:352) and Marais and Meier (2004:229) emphasised that most student teachers complete WIL in schools that do not have proper "moral values" and "neglected discipline". Student teachers also highlighted that discipline was "non-existent in most schools". Otanga and Mwangi (2015 in Agustiana & Nurhayati, 2019) explain that the less knowledgeable student teachers are regarding classroom management, the higher the chances of them failing in teaching and controlling learners.

2.6.1.2 Delivery of content in the classroom and lesson planning

The effective delivery of content entails engaging with learners in the classroom, having a positive attitude, and presenting realistic and logical content. According to McBer (2000), lesson planning involves teachers' approach to teaching a comprehensive curriculum and strategising how learners will receive the content. Lesson plans must integrate the aims and outcomes of the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) document. The student teachers are expected to deliver content that is appropriate and links to the learners' prior knowledge. Boikhutso (2010) posits that the nature of lesson plans is to contribute to the process of teaching and learning in the classroom environment. However, the details of the lesson plan on paper often fail to correspond with the realities in the classroom (Bhargava, 2009). The author further elaborates that the formal writing of a lesson plan, followed by giving formal instruction in the classroom, inconveniences a lot of student teachers. According to Reed (2014), the student teacher's weakness in not understanding the content can result in an unsuccessful WIL experience. The author further explains that appropriate teaching strategies, methods, well-formulated questions, and evidence of new knowledge enable learners to understand the content being taught. Therefore, student teachers must develop the ability to plan properly and deliver applicable classroom content (Okonkwo & Chikwelu, 2015).

2.6.1.3 Resources

Efficient teaching and learning in schools during WIL requires resources that are appropriate and relevant. During this period, student teachers are expected to conduct their lessons supported by resources aligned with the lessons' outcomes and aims. These resources include PowerPoint, textbooks, flashcards, pictures, posters, the library, and laboratories. Student teachers utilise these resources in conducting lessons allocated to them so that effective learning can take place (Okonkwo & Chikwelu, 2015). However, several scholars report that student teachers face a severe challenge in terms of teaching and learning resources during their WIL period (Marais & Meier, 2004; Çakmak, 2008, Heeralal & Bayaga, 2011). Most student teachers are placed in schools that are not well resourced, which impacts the effectiveness of student teachers' teaching (Koross, 2016). The significant lack of resources also causes student teachers to be unsatisfied with their WIL experience (Abongdia et al., 2015). Student teachers often find themselves in schools where they cannot "improvise instructional materials" and are unable to access relevant textbooks (Okonkwo & Chikwelu,

2015:12). The lack of resources adds more stress to student teachers' classroom management, especially in crowded classrooms.

2.6.2 Relationship with a mentor teacher and mentor lecturer

Mentor lecturers and teachers are expected to give student teachers support and “feedback to enable them to make corrections and amends” (Okonkwo & Chikwelu, 2015:13). The authors further state that these mentor lecturers and teachers should be competent and dedicated during the WIL period. Abongdia et al. (2015:51) elaborates that supervision enables student teachers to receive guidance from “experienced professionals and practitioners”. This is the time when student teachers get assessed and critiqued based on the criteria and outcomes of WIL. Otanga and Mwangi (2015) argue that being assessed by mentor lecturers and mentor teachers is the most worrying aspect for student teachers, especially when mentor lecturers assess them. The mentor lecturer is expected to visit the student teachers at their practicing school at least once and give written and oral feedback based on their lesson (Abongdia et al., 2015). The mentor teacher must evaluate the student teacher's lesson and their involvement in school activities, their attitudes during the WIL period, and improvement in the school (Kiggundu & Nayimuli, 2009).

Student teachers report that most mentor teachers are not adequately informed about their tasks during the WIL period (Bechuke et al., 2013). The author further adds that his findings revealed mentors are at times ill-equipped with proper training to fulfil their roles during WIL. Research findings in South Africa, Mozambique, and Zambia indicate that student teachers receive “very little support and lack of trust from mentor teachers”; moreover, the mentor teachers also fail to respect the student teachers as their colleagues and regard them as amateurs (Kasanda, 1995, Kiggundu & Nayimuli, 2009 in Koross, 2016:80; Yassin, 2004). Okonkwo and Chikwelu's (2015) findings indicated that student teachers did not have a relationship with their mentor lecturers, and the lecturers did not provide them with sufficient feedback. Mentor lecturers and teachers should treat student teachers with respect, interact with them in a respectable and accommodating manner, and work with them in a mutually beneficial way (Abongdia et al., 2015).

2.6.3 Anxiety

Several studies in countries such as South Africa, Great Britain, Indonesia, Ethiopia, Canada, Mozambique, India, and Kenya have reported that a lot of student teachers experience anxiety during WIL (Ngidi & Sibiyi, 2003; Çakmak, 2008; Agustiana & Nurhayati, 2019; Koross, 2016; Hart, 1987; Morton, Vesco, Williams & Awender, 1997; Dejene, 2017; Bhargava, 2009). Mudzielwana and Maphosa (2014) argue that teaching in the real classroom environment creates feelings of suspense, leading to anxiety. Anxiety can be referred to as a sense of concern, uneasiness, fear, self-doubt, and discontent regarding a particular outcome (Brown, 2000). According to Ngidi and Sibiyi (2003), factors related to student teachers' anxiety during WIL are common in many countries, and include assessments, class control, professional preparation, school staff, and unsuccessful teaching. Conversely, Rieg, Paquette and Chen (2007 in Agustiana & Nurhayati, 2019:9) report other factors contributing to student teachers' anxieties are "learners, parents of learners, and internal problems of the student teachers themselves which include knowledge, pedagogy, workload, and social relations". The most anxiety-provoking aspect student teachers face internationally is evaluation. Moreover, Kiggundu and Nayimuli (2009) posit that anxiety also relate to the activities that take place during the orientation week. This is discussed in greater detail in the next section.

2.6.4 Orientation at the school

Before the student teachers conduct lessons, engage with learners, and partake in school-related activities, they need to be orientated by their mentor teachers about the school's ethos, background, values, and rules. These also include "being introduced to all staff members, school governing bodies, administrative personnel, and the language of learning and teaching" (Abongdia et al., 2015:52). In most cases, orientation occurs in the first week of WIL and aligns with classroom observations; it is one of the most vital roles that need to be played by mentor teachers (Abongdia et al., 2015). Kiggundu and Nayimuli (2009) reported that many of their participants felt a sense of alienation, and a lack of proper orientation can lead to anxiety among students. In Mozambique, students also complained that they never felt they belonged in the schools, and they lacked guidance when entering schools' systems. Moreover, student teachers from a study conducted by Heeralal and Bayaga (2011) complained about mentors not being cooperative and not providing required help and guidance.

2.6.5 Other challenges

Lack of finances is another challenge student teachers face. Koross (2016) determined that some student teachers have inadequate funding for their daily living requirements. In Nigeria, Balogun, Oladele and Jamiu (2018) found that students faced financial challenges in terms of paying for transportation, accommodation near their allocated schools, and extra instructional materials.

It has also been determined that mentor teachers and staff members at schools see student teachers as a relief resource, meaning student teachers end up taking mentor teachers' workload and are allocated some of their duties while they take a back seat (Maphosa, Shumba & Shumba, 2007; Koross 2016). Bhargava (2009:102) indicates that student teachers are overloaded by the requirements of WIL; for instance, they have to make time for "preparing a lesson plan and teaching aids, assessment of work given by them as homework in the class". Moreover, in terms of geographical constraints, Yassin (2004) reported that student teachers in Gaza faced challenges in travelling between their placement schools and their home residence. Lastly, student teachers face challenges with the school's timetables. According to Bhargava (2009:103), "uneven distribution of classes among student teachers causes worry" and, unfortunately, the schools do not change their schedules based on student teachers' needs. This leads to student teachers undertaking extra classes and methodologies for which they are not equipped to meet the WIL requirements in terms of lesson plans.

This section unpacked the student teachers' experiences during WIL. The following section discusses the background of LO, qualities and skills of a LO teacher, and challenges that underpin LO as a subject.

2.7 BACKGROUND OF LIFE ORIENTATION

2.7.1 Introduction

LO is one of the subjects introduced by Curriculum 2005 in Further Education and Training (FET). It is now regarded as a crucial subject in the newly transformed South Africa. Unpacking the term "Life Orientation", Maree and Ebersohn (2002:228) explain that 'life' refers to "the existence of human beings which include the ability to develop and continuous change". The authors further explain that 'orientation' means "the ability to adjust to

circumstances such as political, social, psychological and economic aspects”. Joining the two – “Life and Orientation” – highlights that the subject does not only revolve around the idea of developing learners’ insights into life knowledge but also prepares them to gain skills that will enable them to utilise this knowledge (Maree & Ebersohn, 2002). Hence, the subject aims to develop learners who are significant influencers and contributors to a democratic society.

In South Africa, LO is compulsory for all Grade 10-12 learners (DBE, 2012:8). It is an interdisciplinary subject rooted in a variety of disciplines, namely “Sociology, Psychology, Religious Studies, Political Science, Human Movement Science, Labour Studies, and Industrial Studies” (Nel, 2014:19). The subject consists of the following topics: 1) Development of the self in society; 2) Social and environmental responsibility; 3) Democracy and human rights; 4) Careers and career choices; 5) Study skills; and 6) Physical Education (PE). These topics cover the content in Grades 10-12 and link with Grade R-9 content. The content learnt in the foundation, intermediate, and senior phase provides the groundwork for the content to be learnt in the FET phase. “Both Life Orientation curriculum focuses on alike sections of skills, knowledge, and values within a just and democratic society which upholds and strives for the improvement of quality of life for all in society” (DBE, 2011:8).

2.7.2 Description and purpose of Life Orientation

LO is a subject that focuses on a learner’s self-development within a certain society by applying a holistic approach (DBE, 2003). The DBE (2003:9) explains LO “guides and prepares learners for life, and its responsibilities and possibilities”. The subject enables learners to be informed and exercise their rights and duties as citizens. The document (DBE, 2003:9) further reports that the subject “addresses knowledge, values, attitudes, and skills about the self, the environment, responsible citizenship, a healthy and productive life, social engagement, recreation and physical activity, and career choices”.

According to Rooth (2005:57), LO is the subject that “equips learners to make informed decisions about personal, community, and environmental health promotion while encouraging them to build beneficial social relationships”. The DBE (2011) further asserts that the subject empowers learners to accept life’s challenges and make the right choices so that they live a meaningful life in a constantly changing society. LO promotes learners’ understanding of the importance of community backgrounds, values and morals, humanity (Ubuntu), diversity,

well-being, community, and respect for others. The main purpose of LO is to mould learners who are confident and lead a balanced life, learners who will be able to contribute “to a just and democratic society, a productive economy, and improved quality of life for all” (DBE 2003:9), and challenge discrimination, biases, and the violation of rights.

Regarding the scope of LO, the DBE (2003) highlights the following components. LO teaches learners about study techniques, making informed career choices, and opportunities in higher education institutions. The subject addresses topics such as HIV and AIDS, changes during puberty and adolescence, responsible sexual behaviour, risky adolescent behaviour, and attitudes regarding various issues, including substance abuse, road use, dietary and lifestyle behaviours, and personal safety. The document further highlights that LO fosters self-awareness, social abilities and the achievement of a balanced and healthy lifestyle and “helps learners to make informed decisions about personal, community and environmental health” (DBE, 2003:10). Lastly, the subject enhances the learners’ well-being by encouraging them to be involved in and physical activities.

2.7.3 Qualities, roles, and skills of a Life Orientation teacher

This section explores the role and qualities of LO teachers, and the skills needed in assisting learners and teaching the content in the classroom.

2.7.3.1 The qualities of a Life Orientation teacher

According to Gouws (2004), an LO teacher should possess vital qualities in terms of their conduct, interest, and concern for learners. It is a calling to become a counsellor, requiring love for learners, friendliness, realistic conduct, humility, openness, and a sense of humour. Berns (2007:256) agrees that LO teachers should be “competent, helpful, inspiring and flexible”. Furthermore, they should be well-informed about LO, dedicated, adapt to the constantly changing world, value the real world of learning, be a long-life learner, and motivate students to learn and reinforce their efforts (Van Deventer, 2009).

2.7.3.2 The role of a Life Orientation teacher

The LO teacher's role is to develop learners holistically in all aspects of life, as they are the key contributors to the South African education system. The vital role of LO teachers is to respond to LO-specific outcomes and aims, and "have in-depth insight into this complex world to assist learners" (Lamprecht & Lamprecht, 2002:8). Palmer, Stough, Burdenski and Gonzales (2005 in Pillay, 2012) argue that the most imperative factors to consider about LO teachers' roles are their content knowledge and expertise.

The LO teacher's role has taken a new shape (Tlhabane, 2004) in this 21st century, and teachers face multiple and challenging tasks. They require emotional intelligence in the classroom, experience violence at school, and must offer career guidance. Therefore, the teachers must create physically and psychologically safe environments where learners can express themselves and "explore the world of ideas" (Kottler & Kottler, 2000:6). The LO teacher is also tasked with ensuring that learners feel protected and safe, and that they cannot be harmed as many external factors can disrupt the process of learning and affect learners' lives. These factors include living in poor households, suffering from abuse, dysfunctional families, and being an orphan, amongst others (Magano & Rambado, 2012). To address these challenges, LO teachers need to fulfil their roles by paying attention to these external factors and promoting tolerance and cooperation in their classrooms (Tlhabane, 2004). Coetzee (2003) further emphasises that in addressing learners' need for physical and psychological safety, the LO teachers should establish distinct classroom guidelines, respect learners' privacy, act sensibly and keep the classroom setting tidy and orderly. A conducive classroom environment has a significant influence on the process of learning (Coetzee, 2003).

LO teachers must adapt teaching methods and styles to enable learners to perform to their full potential. This includes guiding the learners through their activities, "working with learners towards building their self-esteem and self-respect" (Tlhabane, 2004:54), and constructing a learning environment that will challenge the learners and enable them to attain "real competence". Prinsloo (2007:168) highlights that the "character of the LO teachers is of the utmost importance and should be displayed with integrity". Several authors claim that an LO teacher is expected to serve as a role model, mentor, leader, parent, social worker, and psychologist, be creative and play a pastoral role (Helleve, Flisher, Onya Mukoma & Klepp,

2011; Magano, 2011; Theron, 2008; Prinsloo, 2007; Harden & Crosby, 2000 in Mthinyane, 2014).

In the next section, I discuss the skills of a LO teacher as suggested by Tlhabane (2004), Lamprecht and Lamprecht (2002:8), Kottler and Kottler (2000:28) and Roets (2002:97).

2.7.4 The skills of a Life Orientation teacher

2.7.4.1 Communication

Communication is a vital tool in the classroom. Al-Mabuk (1995:32 in Tlhabane, 2004) describes communication as a “two-way street”. In the classroom, communication is based on verbally and non-verbally conveying meanings. Coetzee (2003) adds that classroom communication is about the learners’ strengths and skills, which enables them to progress in their tasks. The way teachers communicate with learners daily can positively influence the learners.

The two most important elements that affect the classroom climate are the teacher’s body language and tone of voice. Therefore, it is vital that teachers create a healthy and sensible relationship with learners. Teachers should also be rational about learners’ vulnerabilities and well-being, prompting learners to open up and have a sense of belonging and psychological safety.

2.7.4.2 Respect

Showing and receiving respect in the classroom is significant because it reduces the sense of unsafeness and anxiety for both the teacher and learners. It is critical that the teacher and learners feel valued and accepted in the classroom. Roets (2002) describes respect as open communication between the teacher and learners about genuine opinions that could help them tackle the possibilities of life and make their own decisions. It is important that LO teachers sensibly choose their words and how they deliver feedback to learners. The treatment and respect shown by the teacher ultimately promote learners’ self-esteem, positive self-image, and awareness of their strengths.

2.7.4.3 Listening

Listening is a dynamic method that involves creating meaning, evaluating, and reacting to what we hear. Listening in the classroom refers to learners paying attention to the teacher's content via verbal communication. The dynamics of listening in a classroom highlight that both the teacher and learners should be good listeners, as this builds trust in the teacher-learner relationship. Furthermore, listening skills give teachers a chance to recognise the way learners communicate (Tlhabane, 2004). The LO teachers should also be able to convey clear messages so that learners can understand the information they receive. Tlhabane (2004) posits that it is important for LO teachers to listen to learners' views and make them feel important.

2.7.4.4 The ability to assess and notice distress

In the 21st century classroom, learners deal with many challenges that could lead to physical, emotional, behavioural, and mental damage. These challenges include “academic underachievement, cognitive deficits, learning disabilities, behavioural problems” (Kottler & Kottler, 2000:28). LO teachers must recognise the challenges the learners face and teach with emotional intelligence. Teaching with emotional intelligence helps learners feel valued and accepted. The LO teachers should assist and encourage learners to deal with their challenges effectively as encouragement creates a foundation of trust between teachers and learners (Coetzee, 2003).

2.7.4.5 Confidentiality

Confidentiality is one of the essential elements in the classroom. Teachers should ensure confidentiality in their classrooms by not sharing any information learners disclose to them. All learners have the right to privacy, and permission should be granted before disclosing their information. The LO teachers should only share the learner's information with certain parties with their consent, such as the school management and parents. Additionally, the teachers should build the learner-teacher relationship based on trust so that learners feel free to talk to them, anytime about anything (Gouws, 2004).

2.7.4.6 Helping learners to make right career choices

Career guidance informs learners about their future occupational options and careers (Modiba, 2017). The CAPS document highlights the overview of careers and career choice topics that will enable learners to fully grasp the dynamics of choosing a career. It is the LO teacher's responsibility to inform, guide, and help learners regarding career choices. Lamprecht and Lamprecht (2002) explain that LO teachers are expected to fully equip learners with the right information to make better choices. It is also their duty as teachers to understand careers in this constantly changing world as new popular careers are evolving. These new careers include Forex trading, becoming a social media influencer, YouTuber, DJ, musician/dancer, digital content writer, among others. Tlhabane (2004:59) maintains that the guidance of LO teachers should enable learners to “acquire self-knowledge regarding their personality, interest, and abilities” so that they choose the right careers with confidence.

2.7.4.7 Counsellor

The 21st-century classroom environment is very different from early years, and unique challenges are faced in the new classroom context. Therefore, LO teachers should possess counselling skills and sufficient knowledge to help learners (Modiba, 2017). The author maintains that these skills should help teachers to show empathy when helping learners. The teachers should always be open-minded, provide guidance, and reflect a willingness to help. They should be active listeners and sensitive. This brings us back to ‘confidentiality’, since the teachers should be trustworthy and reliable with the learners’ information, as most learners will confide in them and seek guidance. It is their responsibility to help learners with suggestions and rational decisions regarding the situations they face. LO teachers should also be able to cooperate with parents and school management if professional counselling is needed.

2.7.4.8 Multicultural issues

Teachers find themselves in diverse classrooms where they meet learners with different backgrounds, races, beliefs, political perspectives, and languages. This provides the teachers with an opportunity to learn about learners’ differences. It is the LO teacher’s responsibility to ensure they are informed about learners’ different backgrounds. This will prevent teachers from being ignorant and biased. Tlhabane (2004) further emphasises that teachers should avoid

making generalisations in their classrooms as they can lead to prejudice and affect the well-being of the learners. LO teachers should be culturally conscious so that every learner in the classroom feels welcome and celebrated without compromising their identities. The LO teacher should be able to recognise learners' uniqueness, encourage different viewpoints, use diverse learning and teaching support materials, and empower learners to learn about others' differences.

The following section highlights the challenges that the subject (LO) faces in the South African educational system.

2.8 THE CHALLENGES IN LIFE ORIENTATION

2.8.1 Marginalisation of the subject

LO is currently one of the subjects being marginalised by not being valued and considered as an 'extra' subject (Hay, 2015). The application and status of the subject have not yet reached maximum potential, and still needs a distinct definition and meaning (Rooth, 2005). Since the subject was introduced in the 1990s, it has received a lot of criticism from different stakeholders, such as teachers, principals, learners, parents, and the community (Jarvis & De Jager, 2021). One major challenge is that LO does not count for Admission Point Scores (APS) in higher education institutions. Other challenges include time and teachers' allocation to the subject. According to Parker (2018), there is a possibility of LO being phased out.

2.8.2 Training

Teaching is a complex profession, and it is expected that teachers are trained according to specific subjects and phases. It is essential that teachers "provide the service that they are competent in" (Tlhabane, 2004:60). Researchers, such as Ganesh (2015) and Diale (2016), report that LO teachers do not receive insightful information about the subject at workshops, and they are not fully equipped (personally and professionally) to take on the responsibilities of a LO teacher. More scholars comment that LO teachers are inexperienced and lack sufficient knowledge to deliver the content (Christaans, 2006; Morrow, 2003 in Mosia, 2011). Mosia (2011) further emphasises that training is limited for teachers in terms of the LO curriculum. In support, Steens (2001) and Prinsloo (2007) explain that teachers need to be equipped with relevant and current content and knowledge that will enable them to engage with learners based

on their developmental levels. This includes presenting various topics of the curriculum and being knowledgeable about the topics for specific grades.

2.8.3 Inadequate training for LO student teachers

As discussed earlier, student teachers should be empowered to engage in a successful WIL experience. Gouws (2004) explains that higher learning institutions that offer education programmes do not expose students to the essential background of LO. The author further emphasises that some higher education institutions offer a separate route between LO theory and those who want to specialise in PE. For instance, the student teachers in Mthinyane's (2014) study reported they had no idea how to teach PE; what they considered realistic in theory was unrealistic in practice. For example, they were teaching over 40 pupils in a single class. The student teachers in that study further emphasised there was a gap between what they were taught in class and the encounters they had in the schools. Mthinyane (2014) suggests that higher education institutions (HEIs) network more with the schools in giving the student teachers and mentor teachers sufficient support (Mthinyane, 2014). Magano (2011) also explains that HEIs must align their training to develop a new kind of teacher who will be able to meet the challenges of the 21st century.

2.8.4 Support from the Department of Education (DoE)

The DoE is responsible for supporting schools in all aspects. This includes involving schools in decision-making, organising workshops, and offering training. Several scholars (Modiba, 2017; Ganesh, 2015; Rooth, 2005; Mosia, 2011) reported that LO had not received enough support from the DoE since its establishment. According to Brown (2013), teachers had complaints about poor communication from the DoE regarding the LO curriculum and its implementation. Teachers further reported that the workshops were not sufficient, too short, and the facilitators did not have enough knowledge themselves about the subject (Prinsloo, 2007). Teachers feel the DoE does not contribute to the reputation of LO, leaving them hopeless (Mosia, 2011).

Pillay (2012) claims the DoE should cater not only to teachers but also to student teachers, especially in terms of basic counselling skills. The author (Pillay, 2012) further emphasises the DoE should consult and collaborate more with HEIs so they can be certain about the student

teachers' readiness and their ability to tackle the subject during their WIL period. Ganesh (2015) suggests that the DoE should arrange appropriate and organised workshops for the subject to be successfully implemented.

2.8.5 Content delivery in the classroom

2.8.5.1 Delivery of content by teachers who are not LO specialists

The biggest misconception about teaching LO is that “any qualified teacher with life experience can teach it” (Gouws, 2004:64). Van Deventer (2004:128) concurs that it appears “LO is taught by a broad spectrum of teachers that are not specialists in this field”. For example, the participants in Diale & Brown's (2014) study stated they do not specialise in or qualify to teach LO. Rooth's (2005) findings support this claim, citing a significant proportion (75%) of teachers were not qualified to teach LO in the intermediate and senior phases. These teachers were allowed to teach LO either because they did not have a full timetable, there was no one to teach the subject, or the management instructed them to do so. Teachers who are not LO specialists tend to neglect the significance of LO, causing them to interpret the curriculum differently. This, in turn, means they teach content that might hinder learners from fulfilling the aims and outcomes of LO (Van Deventer & Van Niekerk, 2009 in Mosia, 2011). This is the reality in many South African schools, and it leaves a lot of learners at risk. Unfortunately, this phenomenon reduces the subject's status (Talbot, 2001; Rooth, 2005; Christiaans, 2006).

2.8.5.2 Teaching diverse topics in the classroom

Addressing sensitive topics in the LO classroom is important, and this requires special attention. These sensitive themes include: “decision-making regarding sexuality, sexual health, behaviour and development, religious diversity, poverty, substance abuse, dealing with the loss of the loved one and appreciation and tolerance of diversity” (Gouws 2004:74). The sensitiveness does not come from the themes, per se, but personal experiences; most learners are likely to revisit their pain during these discussions (Gouws, 2004). As mentioned earlier in the chapter, the LO classroom requires a teacher who is confident, non-judgmental, and competent. Still, it seems many teachers become uncomfortable teaching some of the sensitive topics. For instance, the LO teachers in Ganesh's (2015) study reported they felt awkward and embarrassed teaching certain topics.

Sex education is a sensitive topic that still challenges LO teachers to date (Modiba, 2017; Ganesh, 2015; Brown, 2013). In support, Shefer and Macleod (2015) posit that sex education is falling short of its goals in South Africa. Therefore, Ganesh (2015:77) suggests that schools utilise the community and “local authorities during the teaching of sensitive issues”. Gouws (2004) explains that the role of the LO teacher as a counsellor needs to come in place in case some sensitive topics get discussed and discussions get heated in the classroom. The teacher should be able to navigate emotions and guide the learners accordingly.

2.8.6 The attitude of learners, teachers, and principals towards LO

2.8.6.1 Principals

The subject's (LO) significance in the school environment is determined by the principal's attitude (Gouws, 2004). In this case, if the principal is negative towards LO, this will also influence colleagues' and learners' attitudes. Gouws (2004:72) explains that the negative attitude of principals starts by them making statements such as “Let's first arrange a timetable with the academic subjects in mind” and “Teacher X does not have an LO background but her periods are not full yet, let's give it to her”. Participants in Mosia's (2011:125) study reported that it is evident principals have negative attitudes towards LO because they often allocate the subject “to teachers who are regarded as ineffective in schools” and the heads of departments. Principals' attitudes towards LO are also reflected in terms of resources; for example, one participant in a study by Ngobese (2018) mentioned that the principal would not allow them to use the computers at school for LO, and this resulted in them feeling discouraged. Principals need to view LO from a different perspective to promote curriculum implementation and upliftment of the subject's status in their schools, as they are the most influential people in the life of the school (Diale & Brown, 2014).

2.8.6.2 Teachers

In this section, I refer to ‘teachers’ as the colleagues of LO teachers/specialists. Teachers often perceive LO as an inferior and insignificant subject (Strydom, 2011). Gouws (2004) agrees and emphasises that LO faces the same challenge in universities. The teachers tend to have a negative attitude towards the subject due to the subject not being examinable, their past experiences of the subject, uncertainty of the subject, and the curriculum itself. Some of the experiences occur during staff meetings or when LO periods are borrowed for ‘more important

subjects' like Mathematics or taken up for sports practice and matches. One study (Diale & Brown, 2014) reported that teachers often use the LO period to make up teaching time and cover more content for their subjects. These negative attitudes lead to LO teachers feeling demotivated and helpless (Ngobese, 2018; Diale, 2016; Van Deventer, 2009).

2.8.6.3 Learners

It seems learners do not care about LO and perceive it as a waste of time (Jacobs, 2011). Gouws (2004:72) posits that learners perceive LO as the subject that “presents general knowledge”. A study by Jacobs (2011) revealed that learners felt they were not influenced by LO, and it did not help them with anything in life. The learners further emphasised that new content is not introduced to them; it is the same year in and year out. Learners claimed topics such as HIV and AIDS were ‘overtaught’.

However, Mzindle's (2011) study reported some learners' attitudes towards LO were positive. The author's (Mzindle, 2011) findings were broken into three divisions of scales: The scale of 1-5 revealed that learners did not understand the context of LO; the scale 6-7 revealed that learners felt LO was easy and it is about the basics of life; lastly, the scale 8-10 revealed learners were aware of the depth of the subject content. Overall, the results of this study indicated that learners' attitudes towards LO were somehow influenced by their age, gender and race. Ultimately, according to Gouws (2004), learners' attitudes towards LO are influenced by their teachers and the subject's reputation in their school.

2.9 TEACHER IDENTITY

Teacher identity is based on the individual as well as their context. The context enables teachers to learn professional characteristics in ways that are unique to them as individuals. Beauchamp and Thomas (2009 in Woest, 2016:29) define “teacher identity as a complex and dynamic phenomenon”. The authors further explain that the term ‘teacher identity’ not only describes an individual but raises questions such as *Who am I as a teacher?* and *What does this identity mean in terms of the way I teach?* Ballantyne, Kerchner and Aróstegui (2012:212) view teacher identity as “something that is not fixed, but rather an establishment through experiences and interpretations of those experiences”. In this case, the student teachers are able to attach meaning to their identities as LO teachers through WIL experiences.

This study explored these experiences through the lens of the ecological systems theory. Through these experiences, the student teachers construct their ideas of ‘how to be’, ‘how to act’, and ‘how to understand’ their work and place in society. Chong, Low and Goh (2011) emphasise that the establishment of a professional identity during the WIL period mainly informs the student teachers about their chances in the teaching profession. Danielewicz (2001) and Steffy, Wolfe, Pasch and Enz (2000) concur that student teachers’ identities are constantly challenged during their training.

Teacher identity comprises three dimensions, namely “personal experience, professional context, and environmental and political context” (Mockler, 2011 in Hartell, Steyn & Chetty, 2015:91). Personal experiences involve the student teacher’s experiences with learners, parents, colleagues (peers and school staff), personal beliefs and expectations, and teaching in an actual school classroom during WIL. The professional context dimension focuses on the school’s context, the school’s functionality, resources, teachers’ training, and the development of student teachers as they evolve to become professionals. The environmental and political context highlights the importance of classroom settings, policies, attitudes, and understanding of the teaching profession, lack of support, learning materials, teacher strikes, and continuously changing curricula. All three dimensions contribute towards teachers’ identity.

Olsen (2008:139) notes “that teacher identity is fluid and is the collection of many different contexts and relationships”, and I agree. In this study, during the WIL period, the student teachers negotiated their identities against the expectations that constitute a good teacher and the different contexts and experiences they encountered. Dyosini (2016) argues that student teachers’ identities may not align with what is being perceived as characteristics of a good teacher, which can result in a gap between the two. Consequently, student teachers may find themselves in unexpected realities at schools and unable to cope. Korthagen (2004) suggests that during the preparation of WIL and student teachers’ placement, it is vital that institutions consider the importance of student teachers’ identities, their professional development, and their mission as teachers because these considerations will allow them to improve their identities consciously.

2.10 THEORETICAL FRAMING

A theoretical framework guides a researcher's study. It is a well-developed existing theory that explains clear and cohesive events. Phakisi (2008:17) defines a 'theoretical framework' "as an explanation of a certain set of observed phenomena in terms of a system of constructs and laws that relate these constructs to each other". The author further explains that the theoretical framework guides researchers to carry out appropriate research. Researchers utilise a theoretical framework to analyse a certain phenomenon in their studies (Sefotho, 2015). The theoretical framework researchers use influences their study's rationale, research problem, design and data collection. "It also has to link with the research purpose and research questions" (Bertram & Christiansen, 2010:117). Tuli (2011 in Buys, 2017:45) describes that "social studies seek to understand the meaning of social phenomena", and the purpose of this type of research is to understand a particular person instead of a large number of people. It includes the contexts of individuals and the complexity of the phenomenon. Therefore, the choice of a relevant theoretical framework is crucial for researchers.

For this study, I employed Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems model theory (see Figure2). This theory enabled me to explore how WIL is experienced by LO student teachers within their schools. Bronfenbrenner and Morris (2006) confirm that this theory is useful in relation to student teachers' experiences because it applies to personalised learning and interactions that directly shape their professional development and identities.

2.10.1 The bioecological model theory - Bronfenbrenner

The ecological model was initiated by a psychologist called Urie Bronfenbrenner in the 1990s, and the initial aim of this theory was to understand the development and process of human beings over time (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). Swart and Pettipher (2011 in Buys, 2017:46) argue that "the model explains direct and indirect influences on the individual at the centre of the model". To understand this theory better, one needs to consider the "developing person and their surroundings together" (Sudbery & Whittaker, 2018:2). The theory highlights the interactions that exist between individuals' systems. Swart and Pettipher (2011 in Buys 2017:46) claim the model focuses on "the product of a network of interactions". Therefore, it explores and exposes how "central social contexts in an individual's life interact and influence key outcomes, including social and emotional adjustment and school performance and

engagement” (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006:205). Human behaviour, experiences, actions, and perceptions cannot be attained if the contexts within which they occur are not reviewed (Ganesh, 2015). Diale and Brown (2014:85) further clarify that “the development of a LO student teacher can be better understood if the context in which it takes place is considered”.

Based on this background, I used this theory as a lens through which to look at student teachers’ experiences. The theory comprises five systems, namely the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem, and chronosystem. Sudbery and Whittaker (2018) define a system as a collection of elements with relationships that describe how one element affects the others. The student teacher is at the centre of these systems. Each system has an influence and a structure, and therefore relates to and impacts one another.

2.10.1.1 The microsystem

The microsystem is the power level that consists of immediate context systems and is regarded as the greatest influence on an individual’s life. Berk (2000 in Paquette & Ryan, 2001:2) explains that “the microsystem encompasses the associations and connections a child has with their immediate surroundings”. In this study, the immediate contexts for student teachers are universities, schools, mentor teachers, and mentor lecturers/supervisors. The student teacher is viewed in relation to the school classroom as a whole. At this level, the student teacher interacts directly and has relations with the school staff, supervisors, and pupils. The connections between peers, school management, mentor teachers and lecturer at the microsystem level shape the student teacher’s experiences. This system, possibly, has the most influence on student teachers’ experiences.

2.10.1.2 The mesosystem

In the mesosystem, the student teacher is bound by curriculum implementation, WIL guidelines and support, and direct interaction with their assigned mentor teacher and lecturer for assessments and school visits. According to Taylor and Gebre (2016:210), the mesosystem “is a system of microsystems and illuminates how these contexts typically are integrated and act together to influence an individual’s behavior”. This system closely links to the student teacher and signifies the student teachers’ interrelatedness with specific individuals in the microsystem.

2.10.1.3 The exosystem

Although the student teacher is passive and does not in any way have an immediate influence in the exosystem level, “this system still involves the social system within which the student teachers operate even with no decision powers or active role” (Herselman et al., 2018:3). In this study, student teachers from the University of Pretoria, who have access to printing, a library, and internet connections, may find themselves in a school with limited or no available resources.

2.10.1.4 The macrosystem

According to Bronfenbrenner and Morris (2006:3), “the macrosystem encompasses cultural and societal beliefs and programming that influence an individual’s development”. The University of Pretoria collaborates with culturally diverse schools. UNESCO (2002 in Nel, 2014) describes cultural diversity as the quality of diverse or different cultures. Therefore, in the macrosystem, student teachers find themselves practicing in culturally diverse schools. Cultural diversity influences the student teachers’ interactions with others in the macrosystem. Within these culturally diverse schools, student teachers encounter values, policies, and laws that have already been implemented. This includes the student teachers’ beliefs and expectations of WIL. Therefore, the system might have an indirect impact on student teachers.

2.10.1.5 The chronosystem

The chronosystem describes any events in an individual’s life that happen over some time and which an individual develops over time (Boon et al., 2011). For student teachers, these life events may include divorce, pregnancy, strikes, the loss of a loved one, and illness, which may influence their WIL experiences. It also includes Covid-19 (Coronavirus), a deadly infectious disease that has impacted the global education sector (Naah, 2020).

2.10.2 The influence between the systems

Each system has a direct and indirect influence and a structure; therefore, they relate and impact one another. The student teachers’ development cannot be explored based only on one system, and it was important for this study to explore the student teachers’ experiences in all systems

as they are all interdependent and have relationships. According to Ganesh (2015:28), “all the systems have to pull together and support each other equally to attain success”. The systems “work together to shape and mould the individual” (Buys, 2017:49). Bronfenbrenner and Morris (2006) further explain that all the systems are regarded as important and need efficient cooperation to contribute to the development of an individual.

2.10.3 The ecological model criticism

The main criticism of this theory is that it is overused. Shaffer (2009:89) asserts that the theory “falls far short of being a complete account of human development”; although it is labelled “bioecological”, it says very little about biological contributors. It does not explain how the developing person decides or chooses to respond to influences. Other critics echo Shaffer’s observations. They point out that it is not like the theories of Piaget and Erikson, which address the step-by-step developmental changes of children. As a result, they recommend that the theory be used in conjunction with others, as “a complement to, rather than a replacement for, other developmental theories” (Shaffer, 2009:90; Watt et al., 2012:511). Despite these criticisms, this study found this model relevant in exploring individuals’ experiences and how they are influenced by the systems they encounter, as seen in Figure 2.2. Similarly, several South African studies (Buys, 2017; Naude, 2017; Ganesh, 2015) employed this model successfully; for example, Buys (2017) used this model as a lens to look at the role of learning support while teaching in private schools in Pretoria. Additionally, Naude (2017) used the model to investigate learner leadership development in a South African home-schooling context, and lastly, Ganesh’s (2015) study utilised the model to explore how LO teachers implemented policy within their classrooms.

2.11 THE RESEARCH STUDY AND THEORY INTEGRATION

As demonstrated in Figure 2.2, this theory integrates with my study in that the student teacher comes into the WIL environment with their specific LO methodology and personal and professional expectations. They also find themselves in different environments that impact their time management, identities, and teaching styles during the WIL period. After WIL, student teachers may have different perspectives and attitudes towards LO, which then creates their experiences (see Figure 2.3). As mentioned, these experiences may vary for student teachers, and they can result in diverse outcomes.

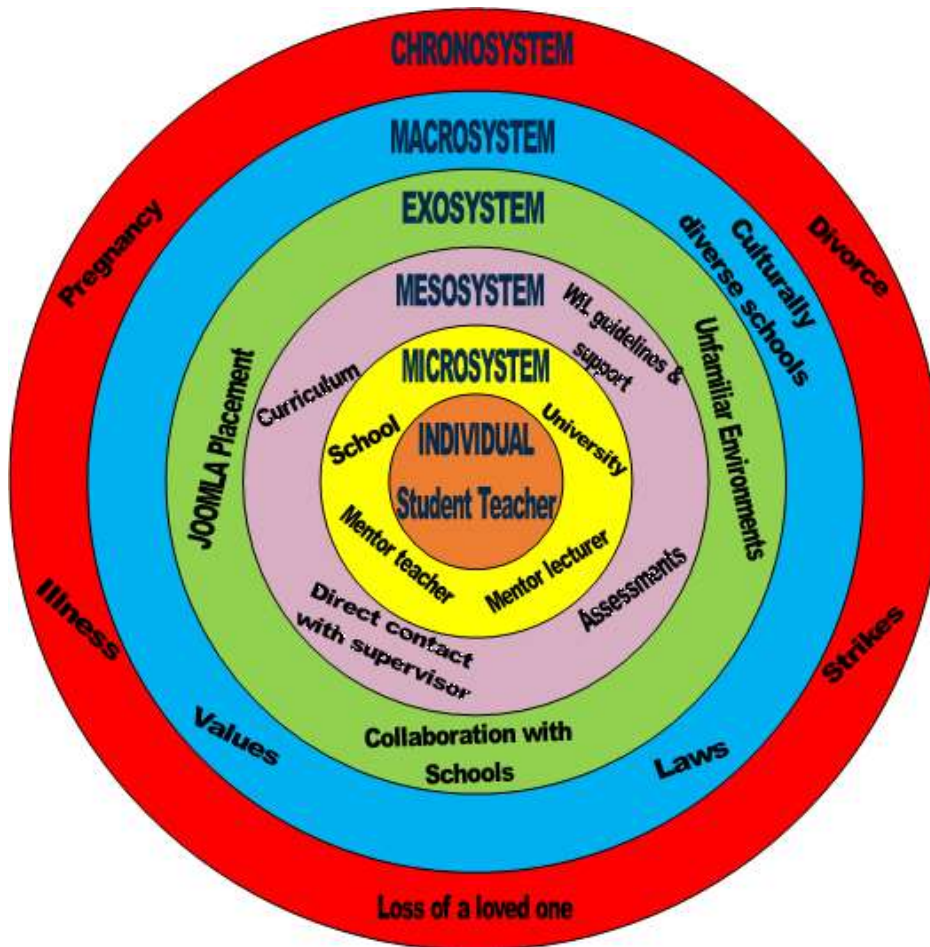


Figure 2.2: Bronfenbrenner's Ecological System Levels

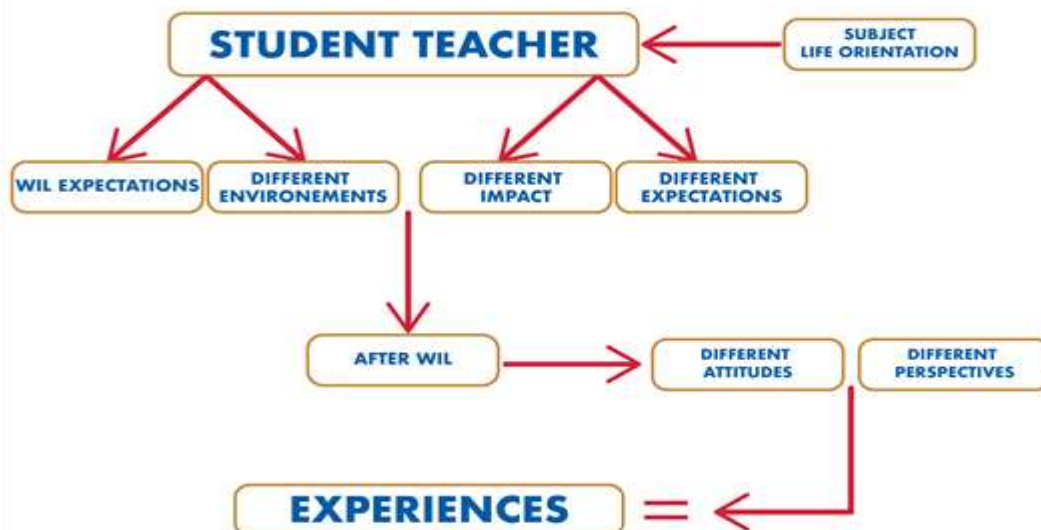


Figure 2.3: Theory and my study Integration

2.12 CONCLUSION

In summary, this chapter explored what WIL is to better understand the strengths and weaknesses embedded in the practice. The chapter further looked at the origin of LO and its purpose. The literature reflected on the subject's reputation in the South African education system as well as how people, such as teachers, principals, and learners, perceive the subject in their schools. Moreover, the qualities, roles, and skills that LO teachers should possess were discussed. The challenges that underpin the subject was highlighted, and it became evident student teachers faced significant challenges during the WIL period. Both internal and external challenges were discussed; these include understanding who they are as teachers and finding their foot in the teaching field. Ultimately, the chapter also highlighted the gap that exists in terms of literature regarding the topic.

Furthermore, I briefly introduced the theory under which this study positions itself and explained its background, systems, and how it was applied in this study. I attempted to respond to the gaps mentioned earlier by conducting qualitative research, as discussed in the next chapter. Chapter 3 highlights the research methodology and research design of the study.

3. CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

3.1 INTRODUCTION

Chapter 2 of this study explored the existing body of knowledge relating to this research phenomenon. The chapter gave a detailed overview of eight themes that underpins the research topic. Hesse-Bieber and Leavy (2011 in Maree 2016:51) define a research methodology as a link that connects “our philosophical standpoint (on ontology and epistemology) and method (perspective and tool) together”. In essence, the research methodology includes measures that help researchers go about their work of clarifying and depicting a particular phenomenon. Furthermore, Maree (2016:72) describes a research design as a flexible plan that interchanges from “the underlying philosophical assumptions” to a broader methodological orientation.

This chapter describes the research design and methodology I used to explore student teachers’ experiences teaching LO during WIL. The chapter highlights the strategy used, selection and inclusion criteria for participants, the construction of the data collection and analysis method, paradigmatic stances, and quality measures. This study is qualitatively underpinned by the phenomenological research design and interpretive paradigm. The primary goal of this chapter is to describe the research plan and strategy I used to answer the following research question:

Primary research question

What are student teachers’ experiences of teaching LO during their WIL?

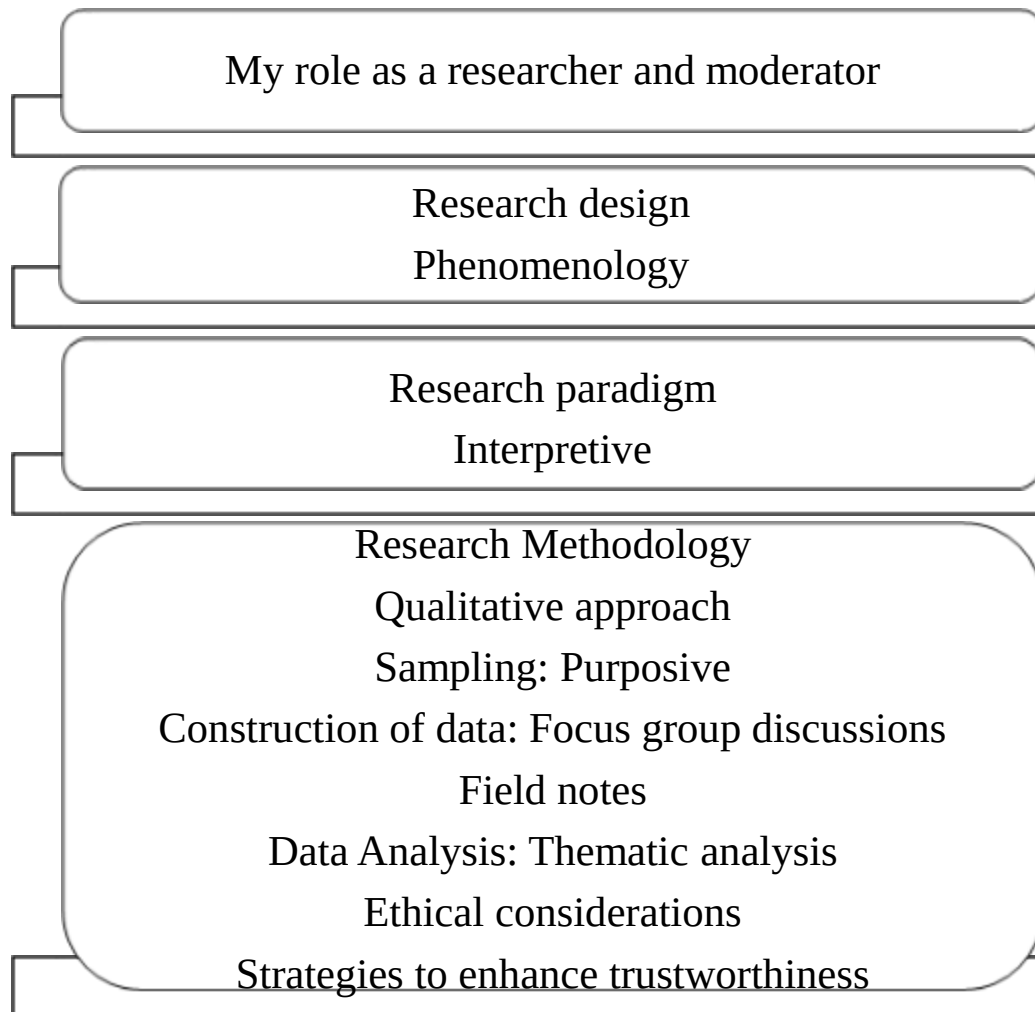


Figure 3.1: Chapter three process map

3.2 PARADIGMATIC STANCES (ONTOLOGY AND EPISTEMOLOGY)

Ontology is a paradigmatic and philosophical stance, perspective, or position that a researcher declares concerning their perception of reality (Sefotho, 2018). Thus, it was important that I took a position in terms of how I perceive reality. Maree (2007:53) denotes ontology as “the nature and form of reality”. Epistemology is also defined by Sefotho (2018) as the science of how knowledge about reality is acquired. Jackson (2013 in Sefotho, 2018) emphasises that researchers’ epistemological stances are central to their choice of methodology.

In terms of the interpretive paradigm’s ontological assumptions, social reality is characterised by diverse individuals looking at events from different perspectives; this results in various interpretations for a specific incident. Ontologically speaking, from the position of a researcher,

I believe reality is socially constructed through acts of interpretation. For this study, it meant LO student teachers could be explored in their social contexts, and their experiences could be interpreted in these contexts based on the meaning they attach to these experiences.

Bertram and Christiansen (2010) outline that interpretivism is favoured by dialogic and in-depth exploration methods. The question is, how can we know about the reality out there? Terre Blanche and Durrheim (1999) claim the characteristics of the methodologies underpinning the interpretive paradigms are interactional, interpretive, and qualitative in nature. In this study, I used focus group discussions to collect data to explore the truth of student teachers' experiences. Research shows that focus group discussions "produce rich data in detail" (Maree, 2016:95). To link the theoretical framework and the paradigmatic stances in this study, the ecological systems theory made sense as it resonated with reality (Bronfenbrenner & Brown, 2006). Bronfenbrenner further explains that experience supports the idea that opportunities in one environment or system can affect the individual, directly or indirectly. Significantly, Bronfenbrenner's theory accounts for the influence of microsystems – or the immediate environments in which a person operates – and the greater world on the developing person. Therefore, it was vital that I developed a reciprocal relationship with the participants (Sefotho, 2018) and acknowledged there is no one objective truth or reality.

3.3 RESEARCH DESIGN APPROACH

3.3.1 Phenomenology

The phenomenology approach is rooted in the philosophical perspectives of consciousness. Phenomenology is credited to Edmund Husserl and was further expanded on in the writings of Heidegger, Sartre and Merleau Ponty (Creswell, 2007). This particular research approach is qualitative and seeks to define an individual's experiences based on a specific phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). Its primary goal is to achieve "the four aspects of a lived experience: lived spaced, lived body, lived time, and lived human relations" (Giorgi, 2012:3). Complex meanings are built through this approach because it allows researchers to obtain an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon being experienced by certain individuals (Moustakas, 1994). Furthermore, Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2013:301) add that phenomenological research focuses on the subjective experiences of the participants, "which are at the heart of research". This research approach was suitable for this study because it allowed me to explore how student teachers experienced teaching LO during WIL. An in-depth description of this phenomenon

was achieved through two focus group discussions. According to Lester (1999:1), the methods that underpin phenomenological research are predominantly “effective at bringing to the fore the experiences and perceptions of individuals from their perspectives”. By following this approach, I was able to enter the student teachers’ worlds, conduct a direct investigation, understand their experiences of teaching LO during their WIL, and make generalisations based on the thick description of all individuals’ experiences. The generalisations were limited to the group (selected participants) that experienced teaching LO during their WIL, and not every student teacher who had an opportunity for practicals, since “conclusions depend on the particular participants chosen for the study” (Starks & Brown, 2000:1374). The goal was to delve into their lived experiences of teaching both online and in a physical classroom, and explore their understanding, feelings, and perspectives in terms of WIL as a whole, their identities, and teaching LO.

Due to Covid-19, the WIL office at the University of Pretoria introduced lesson studies as part of WIL, as discussed in Section 3.6. The phenomenological approach thus suited this study because the main characteristics align with the theoretical framework I employed. The essence of this phenomenon is discussed based on a cluster of meanings in the findings and results of the study. In conclusion, this research design enables readers to understand the research finding as I looked closely at the lived experiences of the student teachers and explained everything without bias (Descombe, 2014). According to Gorgi (2012), the operational term in phenomenological research is ‘describe’. The idea is supported by Qutoshi (2018), who notes that it is vital that a moderator explains and interprets the findings of a phenomenon as they are and describes them at a deeper level of consciousness.

3.4 RESEARCH PARADIGM

Thomas Kuhn (1970) is credited with having propagated the term ‘paradigm’ within research and scientific communities (Cram & Mertens, 2016 in Sefotho, 2018). According to Denzin and Lincoln (2005:17), “a paradigm is a basic set of beliefs that guides an action” embedded within its theoretical orientation. For this study, I employed an interpretive paradigm. The interpretive paradigm sets out to explore how individuals interpret the world around them (Cohen et al., 2002). Bertram and Christiansen (2010) further elaborate that the interpretive paradigm has, in many ways, evolved, and how a person responds in a given situation depends

largely on their past experiences and circumstances. Through this paradigm, multiple meanings of student teachers' overall experiences were constructed (Scotland, 2012).

With the interpretive paradigm, the study adopted a relativist ontology with a subjectivist epistemology (Levers, 2013). Maree (2016) further explains that the interpretive paradigm is strongly influenced by the phenomenology approach because it is rooted in the belief of people's subjective views and observations of the world. Through the interpretive paradigm's lenses, student teachers' subjective experiences of teaching LO during WIL were understood, and my interpretations of their experiences were informed by the theoretical framework (Bertram & Christiansen, 2010). Thaanyane (2010) posits that interpretivism strives to understand people's actions the way they are and tries to give them meaning by interpreting them. Moreover, Neiuwehuis (2007:23) notes, "the human life can be understood only from within, and mind is the origin of meaning".

Like many other paradigms, the interpretive paradigm has both its advantages and disadvantages. One of the disadvantages is that it can be pruned according to the researcher's bias (Mack, 2010); however, this challenge was managed in this study (Smith & Noble, 2014), as discussed in Section 3.7.5 and the data analysis section.

3.5 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.5.1 Qualitative approach

For this study, I employed a qualitative research approach. Williams (2007:67) describes the qualitative research approach as a "holistic approach that involves discovery". Creswell (1994 in Williams 2007:67) further explains that qualitative research is an "unfolding model that occurs in a natural setting that enables the researcher to develop a level of detail from high involvement in the actual experiences". According to Merriam (2009), the four primary characteristics of qualitative research include a focus on meanings and understanding how people perceive the world; thick descriptions of the research findings; the main role that the researcher plays in terms of collecting and analysing data; and lastly, how the process is built on inductive reasoning. Sefotho (2018:26) describes inductive reasoning as a "line of reasoning from the specific to the general". He further notes that this line of reasoning relates closely to how people interact in their day-to-day lives.

Considering the nature and focus of this study and the research question, this approach was suitable because the research purpose was to explore student teachers' experiences. Qualitative researchers seek to understand how individuals position themselves in certain settings and "make sense of their surroundings through symbols, rituals, social structures, and social roles" (Maree, 2016:53). In this case, the study explored how student teachers functioned within complex systems in the school environment and positioned themselves in their professional identities and LO as the subject, and still drew meaning from the whole experience. The focus on understanding relied on verbal narratives and observations rather than numbers (Maree, 2016). This approach enabled me to explore the real-life experiences of the selected student teachers. I had an opportunity to recognise their underlying feelings, emotions, motives, thoughts, and views of their experiences. The approach also allowed me to explore their attitudes associated with LO as a subject and WIL as a whole.

All the knowledge and meanings generated in this study are based on the student teachers' views (Williams, 2007). According to Patton (2002), qualitative research enables researchers to obtain rich information from their participants. The rich information obtained in this study is further discussed in Chapter 4. In the section that follows, the qualitative approach's strengths relevant to this study are discussed.

3.5.2 Strengths of a qualitative approach

The strengths of the qualitative approach, related to my study, included:

- Firstly, the approach offered flexibility in terms of following unexpected ideas during the research (Rahman, 2016). This occurred a lot during the focus group discussions where students were diverting into other topics instead of the main question that was asked. As an interpretive researcher, I was aware that it was my duty to let the student teachers share their experiences and raise matters they deemed necessary without any fear. This resulted in a second advantage, where I was able to delve deeper into the student teachers' responses, ask more questions, and continue the discussion from there.
- Secondly, the approach helped me obtain more details and compare different views and opinions that student teachers shared through the discussions.
- Lastly, I was able to understand the different insights, thoughts, and meanings that student teachers conveyed during the focus group discussions. As part of the focus

group discussion guidelines, I highlighted the importance of respecting one another's responses and opinions.

3.6 SAMPLING

Gay, Mills and Airasian (2009) describe qualitative sampling as the procedure of selecting a small number of participants for a study in such a way that these participants are key informants who contribute to the researcher's understanding of a given phenomenon. Bertram and Christiansen (2010 in Ganesh, 2015:33) further define 'sampling' as "making decisions about people, setting, events or behaviours to observe or study". Sampling consists of two big clusters, namely non-probability and probability sampling methods. During qualitative research, it is always important that participants are selected with sound judgment and specific characteristics. Therefore, I employed a non-probability sampling method, purposive sampling, and used specific criteria to select the participants.

Since the purpose of the study was to explore the student teachers' experiences of teaching LO during their WIL, purposive sampling was deemed necessary because it allowed me to choose participants who could answer the main question. The participants were recruited via email due to the Covid-19 pandemic; I could not recruit the participants during their methodology class because they were not attending classes physically at that time. I maintained a close liaison with the WIL office to get a list of student teachers. The student teachers were individually contacted to participate in the study, and they allowed me to use their contact details for further arrangements. All the participants gave informed consent, and further communication regarding the time and place of the focus group was communicated via the WhatsApp platform.

Through the invitation letter (see Appendix F), I made sure that I communicated a clear message for recruitment and explained the purpose of the study and procedures properly. The information was also clarified via email, WhatsApp messages, and phone calls. I ultimately conducted two focus group discussions, and the composition of these groups is discussed in Table 3.3. The student teachers were chosen purposively for this study because they had LO as their methodology and were completing their WIL online. Participants were placed in schools

that offer the subject, either in Block A or B.¹ In total, the sample consisted of eight student teachers.

The relevant selection criteria for participants are presented in Table 3.1. The advantage of using purposive sampling is that it provides more detailed information than expected and is a flexible procedure that adapts as situations change. Conversely, purposive sampling is often criticised for being highly biased and having challenges in selecting representative samples (Mhrika, 2014). Part of the management of data describes how bias was avoided. I believe the sample of this study was rich and included the relevant target of participants that the study needed.

Table 3.1: Selection criteria for student teachers

Uniqueness	Characteristics
Nature of the case	➤ Student-teacher ➤ Final-year B.Ed. student ➤ FET (General) and Senior Phase ➤ Major in Life Orientation
Gender of participants	➤ Either female or male
Contexts	➤ Registered student at the University of Pretoria ➤ Either placed in a public/private school

3.7 CONSTRUCTION OF DATA AND DOCUMENTATION

In this section, I clarify the processes and procedures I followed for data collection and documentation. I further discuss the limitations and strengths of the strategy to which the study adhered and move to the analysis and interpretations.

Cohen et al. (2007) describe methods as a range of approaches used in the academic field to collect data. These include textual data, observations, interviews, surveys, focus groups, field notes, and questionnaires. Similarly, Gama (2015) explains data collection is an application of a particular research approach to the sample of cases selected for the exploration to create new

¹ Block A means assessed Block of student teachers
Block B means unassessed Block of student teachers

data about the topic available for further processing. I employed focus group discussions as the data collection method for this study.

3.7.1 Focus group discussions

Focus group discussions entail gathering a particular group of individuals with comparable backgrounds and experiences together to discuss a specific topic of interest (Baral, Uprety & Lamichhane, 2016). This forms part of qualitative research, whereby particular groups of individuals are asked questions about their insights, attitudes, views, and beliefs. Moreover, focus group discussions are conducted based on the fact that “a group interaction will be productive in widening the range of responses, activating forgotten details of experience and releasing inhibitions that may otherwise discourage participants from disclosing the information” (Maree, 2016:95). Focus group discussions embody the following key characteristics, as highlighted in Table 3.2 (Krueger 2002; Baral et al., 2016; Mack et al., 2011).

Table 3.2: Main characteristics of focus group discussions

Characteristic	Criteria
Participants	➤ Sensibly recruited ➤ 5 to 10 people per group ➤ Similar types of people
Environment	➤ Relaxed ➤ Circle seating ➤ Audio/video recordings
Moderator	➤ The researcher should be able to understand the language in which discussions are conducted ➤ Use pre-determined questions ➤ Create a permissive environment ➤ Flexible and free of bias
Analysis and reporting	➤ Verifiable measures ➤ Methodical analysis ➤ Appropriate reporting

I chose focus group discussions since they enable the participants to engage with others rather than directing their comments to me. The other reason is that they allow the participants to

speak freely and encourage discussions of open-ended questions, unlike other approaches. Maree (2016:95) elaborates that “new perspectives can be explored easily within the focus group discussions and can add value to a study”. During the focus group discussions, it happened a lot that the student teachers expressed new opinions and thoughts. This is discussed later in the results and findings section of the study. Since my focus was to gain the participants’ perspectives, I conducted two focus groups, and in the table below, I describe the groups.

Table 3.3: Description of focus group discussions

Focus group number	No of the student teachers	Gender	Time	Pseudonyms
1	Five	4 x females 1 x male	2.5 hours (20-minute break)	P1-P5
2	Three	1 x female 2 x males	50 minutes (No break)	P1-P3

Initially, the estimated time of the focus group discussions was approximately 70-90 minutes per group (Appendix B). However, since the discussions were flowing, all the student teachers were comfortable continuing the discussions, as they were fully engaged. No participant left the discussions early. All group discussions were held on the University of Pretoria’s premises (Groenkloof campus), as permission was granted by the Dean and HoD of the department (See Appendix C), and all Covid-19 regulations were adhered to before, during, and after the discussions.

3.7.2 Lesson study approach

Due to unforeseen circumstances, as explained earlier in Section 2.5, the WIL office had to adjust the structure of the WIL period. As a result, it introduced a lesson study approach whereby student teachers had to collaboratively plan, teach, and refine a lesson. The student teachers had to work through three phases; they had to plan a lesson, teach it online, and reflect and refine the lesson. Figure 3.2 summarises how the process was planned. By the end of the lesson studies, the student teachers were placed in schools, which allowed them to practice in an actual school environment. As a researcher, I adapted and used this lesson study/online teaching opportunity to capture the student teachers’ experiences of teaching LO both online and in a real classroom.

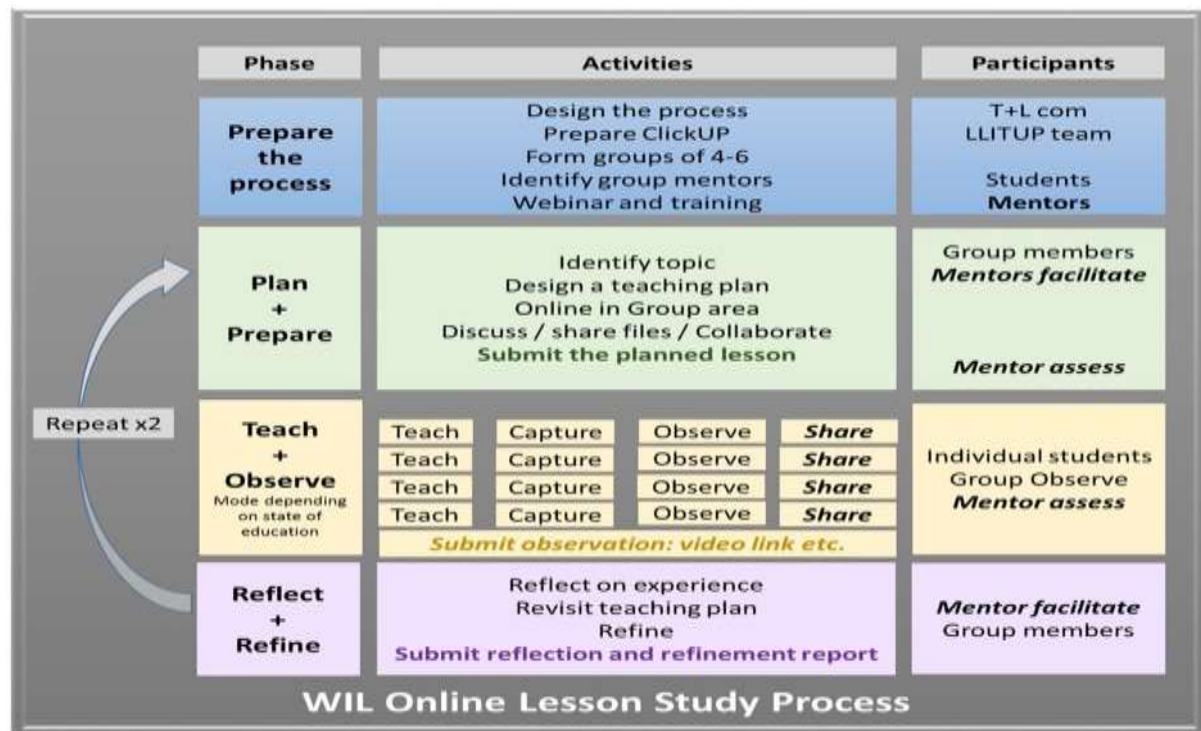


Figure 3.2: Adopted from ClickUp page -WIL PR0 453 (01/08/2020)

3.7.3 My role as a researcher and moderator

My role as a researcher was to create mutual understanding between myself and the participants and to be a sensitive moderator who recorded their responses as effectively as possible. Throughout the study, I made sure that I was cautious to prevent bias, and I did not impose my views, opinions, and beliefs to influence the participants' responses or the nature of the research. From the outset, I was transparent to all the participants about the purpose of the study and guidelines for focus group discussions. I adhered to some of Joubert's (2005 in Maree, 2016:44) researcher functions, which entailed:

- Preparing the focus group discussions
- Facilitating the focus group discussions
- Preparing the focus groups schedules
- Compiling the focus group discussions questions
- Analysing data

The person leading or conducting the focus group (normally the researcher) is called a moderator. As a moderator, my duty was to facilitate and direct the focus group discussions, which were carefully planned and structured. Firstly, I had to arrive before the scheduled time and check the venue and setup. Secondly, an appointment was set with the student teachers at the residence communal hall so they could be briefed about the focus groups. Another session was then scheduled in the Letlotlo Building (Groenkloof Campus), where the focus group discussions were held. Before the student teachers' arrival, I arranged the seating in a circle (maintaining social distancing) and tested the functionality of my recording devices. The student teachers arrived wearing their masks, and I made them feel comfortable by providing them with bottles of water, sanitising their hands, and assigning them stickers that presented their pseudonyms.

Before starting the discussions, I welcomed all the participants and asked that they read and sign the consent form to participate (Appendix A) and consent letters for video recordings (Appendix B). After everyone settled in, the recording devices were switched on, and I started facilitating the discussions using guidelines (see Appendix D). The discussions were shaped by the funnel structure (Maree, 2016). Therefore, I started asking general to more specific questions guided by focus group guidelines and encouraged full participation and interaction between the participants. I believe that starting the discussions with general questions eased the individuals into the situation. For instance, the first question I asked was: *Why do you want to become a teacher?* This question immediately grabbed the student teachers' attention, and they were eager to participate. Moreover, this question explored how individuals see themselves and find their identities within the teaching career.

As a moderator, it was important for me to understand the group dynamics, since student teachers had different characteristics and personalities. It was also important that I acknowledged their responses and welcomed them as they were throughout the discussions. I did not force any participants to speak. Maree (2016) states that understanding group dynamics helps researchers to recognise the conditions that encourage participants within the groups.

3.7.4 Limitations of focus groups

One of the limitations reported in the literature is that focus group samples are typically small. Also, during the sessions, strong participants might try to dominate and control the discussions. Therefore, it is sometimes difficult for moderators to assess the views of “less assertive participants” (Maree, 2016:97). The author further emphasises that some of the participants may find focus group discussions threatening. Baral et al. (2016) also claim during the sessions, some participants may be hesitant to speak about some sensitive thoughts and concerns. Lastly, Leung and Savithiri (2009) note that the success and quality of a focus group discussion depend on how the moderator facilitates the session.

Considering these limitations, as a moderator, it was my duty to encourage full participation, interaction, and maintain focus so that everyone could express their feelings fully and honestly. I was also prepared to attend to the student teachers’ queries and made sure that I explained the focus group guidelines, consent form, invitation letter, and consent letters for video recordings to build rapport. It was also important for me to establish an encouraging, relaxed, and positive atmosphere, which resulted in student teachers feeling free and responsive.

3.7.5 Field notes

Part of data documentation entailed using field notes, which served as supplementary documentation of the discussions. Field notes are used to record what the researcher sees and hears during the data collection process (Mpofu, 2016). During and after the focus group discussions, I compiled the field notes; then, before analysing the data, I transferred all the handwritten notes to an electronic field note document that I created. The field notes allowed me to capture student teachers’ non-verbal cues during the discussions. I paid attention to their facial expressions, body postures, gestures, eye movement, quietness, awkward moments, points of accordance, and differences. These notes were captured carefully and reflectively. The same day as the discussions, I made sure to expand my notes; this helped me remember the other brief notes I took after each focus group discussion. It was important that I captured accurate notes and gave full details of what happened. I therefore captured what I saw, heard, and observed during and after the sessions. This process also helped me recall and link the participants’ responses and points that needed further clarity and discussion.

During the group discussions, I noted down my thoughts to self-reflect and thoroughly check the details of the discussions. All field notes were essential for the study because they addressed possible bias towards findings and certain thoughts I had about the student teachers' responses. This contributed immensely to the trustworthiness and rigour of the study.

3.7.6 Video recordings and transcriptions

Naude (2017:53) describes “transcription as a process of reproducing spoken words” such as those from video recordings during the focus group discussion, into written text. Video recordings were used to capture both focus group discussions. Before I started the recording, the students were asked whether they consented to be recorded, and they signed a consent form indicating their agreement (see Appendix B). In line with the research methodology, it was crucial to capture the discussions via video recordings because this allowed me to document verbal and non-verbal information. After the discussions, I had to transcribe the recordings verbatim. I also had to translate some of the responses that student teachers related in Tswana and Zulu, but as a Tswana and Zulu-speaking individual, it was easy for me to translate these responses during this process. As mentioned under the focus group characteristics, researchers should be able to familiarise themselves and understand the language in which discussions are conducted. Even though the transcription process was very time-consuming, it was crucial that I familiarised myself with the data, maintained accuracy, and reported complete information.

3.8 DATA ANALYSIS: THEMATIC ANALYSIS

This section describes the data analysis process I employed and my interpretations. Cohen et al. (2011) describe qualitative data analysis as attaching logic to data in terms of the participants' definitions of the situation, noting patterns, themes, categories, and regularities. Qualitative data analysis tends to be an ongoing and iterative process, implying that data collection, processing, analysis, and reporting are intertwined and not merely many successive steps (Maree, 2016). Van Manen (2007 in Maree, 2016) further emphasises that data analysis in phenomenology focuses on how individuals experience the world. I used an inductive thematic analysis method and followed Creswell's (2009) six steps for data analysis, as illustrated in Figure 3.3. Thematic analysis is used in qualitative research and focuses on examining themes within data (Daly, Kellehear & Gliksman, 1997). Guest et al. (2012) further explain that thematic analysis focuses on the human experience subjectively.

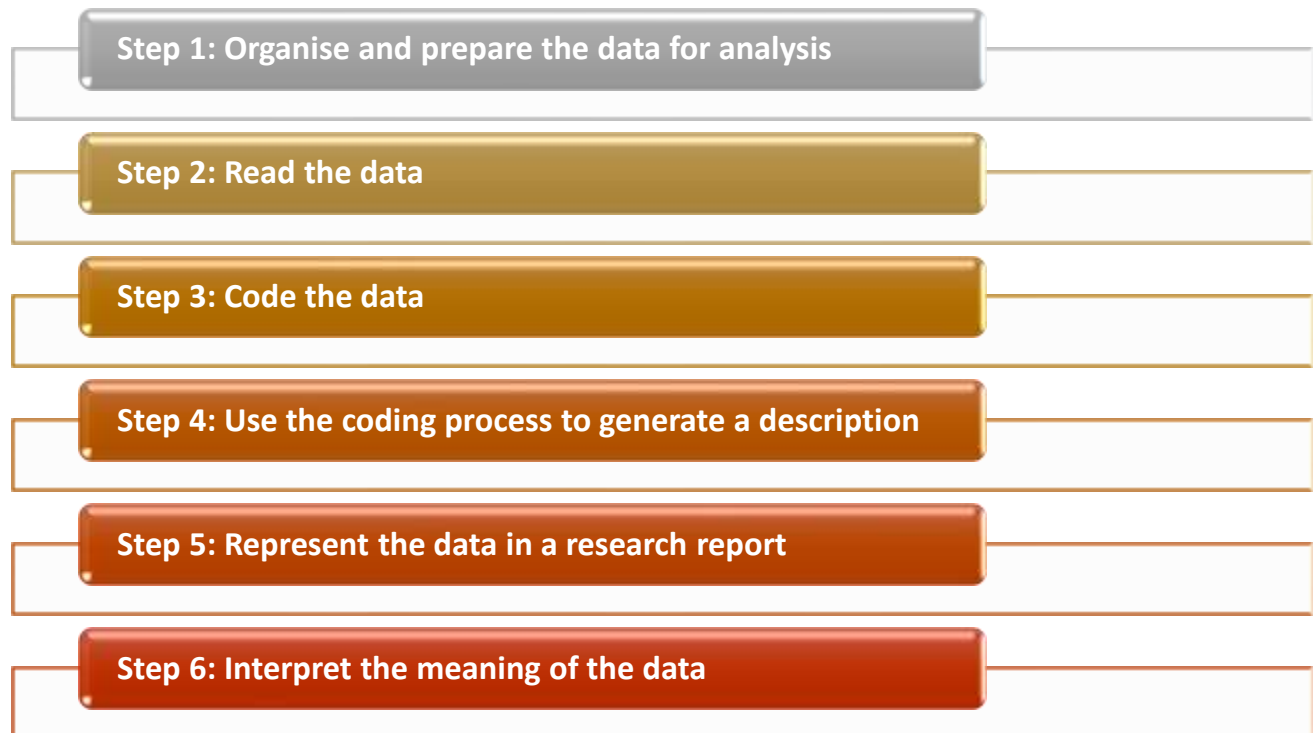


Figure 3.3: Steps for data analysis (Creswell, 2009)

In this section, I describe how I applied Creswell's six steps of data analysis. For the first step, I had to transcribe the raw data from the focus group recordings verbatim. I listened carefully to the participants' responses to each question and replayed some recordings where necessary. The second step was to read the data so that I could obtain a general sense of the collected data – I had to read and re-read the transcripts from step 1 along with my field notes. This step helped me become familiar with the study's data, and I also wrote down the impressions I had during the transcription. The third step involved developing patterns from the study's raw data, called coding. Ganesh (2015) posits that coding allows researchers to separate the data into different themes, with each theme assigned to a specific focus. In this step, I recognised important patterns by using open codes and highlighted key quotes and phrases that seemed similar. This led to step 4 of the process, where I discovered the themes emerging from the study by categorising and combining related codes into themes. I reviewed the themes and made sure they were accurate and aligned with the representations of the data. This led to the

final list of themes for the study. Finally, I had to name and integrate the themes and present the data in the form of a report. These final steps are elaborated on in the next chapter.

I used inductive thematic analysis to identify what is similar and different regarding the student teachers' experiences of teaching LO during their WIL. Presenting data in the thematic stage enabled me to analyse data based on my understanding of what happened in the group and why it happened. Guest, MacQueen and Namey (2012) further add that a researcher's judgment is the main tool in determining which themes are vital. I transcribed all the words recorded from the focus group discussions, including important elements, such as nonverbal cues. No one had any access to the raw data, and all the files were secured, kept safe, and remained confidential. In conclusion, Poland (2002) states that for transcription to be accurate, it should be done by the moderator because they have the process of the focus group in their mind as an event.

3.9 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

This section explains the ethical issues relevant to this study. Ethical matters deal mainly with the "interaction between researchers and the people they study" (Mack et al., 2011:8). Marshall and Rossman (2011:47) define 'ethical procedures' as a process that requires researchers to do "whatever they reasonably can to ensure that participants are not harmed". Before the data collection process began, I applied for ethical clearance from the Research Ethics Committee of the Education Faculty at the University of Pretoria as a legal requirement for all postgraduate students (EDU044/20). Also, permission was granted by the Head of Department of Humanities Education and the Dean of the Faculty of Education to conduct the research using the final-year B.Ed. students (student teachers) as a research sample. I was also permitted to use the University of Pretoria seminar room (Letlotlo building) and residence communal hall for meetings and focus group discussions (see Appendix C). This study conformed to all the ethical principles set by the university's ethics committee.

3.9.1 Informed consent and voluntary participation

Before starting the data collection, student teachers were invited to participate in the study through the invitation letter (see Appendix F). The invitation letter was emailed to the student teachers, as liaised with the WIL office. The letter gave a clear explanation of what I would expect of them, and they were informed that they could make an informed decision whether to

participate (Bertram & Christiansen, 2010). The nature, principles, and methodology of the study were explained thoroughly.

Before the focus group discussions, the participants agreed to participate, and they indicated this by signing a consent form (See Appendix A). Kumar (2005 in Thaanyane, 2010:78) points out that “it is unethical to collect information without the knowledge of the participants and their expressed willingness and informed consent”. Permission to record the discussions via video recordings was also granted by the participants before the sessions commenced, and participants were asked to sign a consent letter to this effect (see Appendix B). The participants were assured that these video recordings were for the sole purpose of the study and nothing else. They were also informed of voluntary participation, and I explained that they were free to withdraw from the study at any stage without any negative repercussions and penalties. Mack et al. (2011) further note that participating in focus group discussions is always voluntary, and no participants should be forced to participate. For this study, no participant was forced, influenced, or intimidated to participate. Moreover, I offered no incentives to the participants before, during, or after they participated in the study.

3.9.2 Confidentiality, anonymity, and protection of participants

Bertram and Christiansen (2010) state that all research studies must follow certain ethical principles, namely autonomy, non-maleficence, and beneficence. Throughout the research process, participants were treated with respect and fairness, and most importantly, they were assured of their confidentiality; all information obtained from participants was kept anonymous. It was my duty as a researcher and moderator to maintain confidentiality throughout the discussions. Therefore, at the start and the end of both focus group discussions, I emphasised the importance of participants respecting each other’s privacy and anonymity during and after the sessions.

To ensure anonymity, pseudonyms were used. Participants were assured that their names would not be used for the study, and data would not be linked to their responses or identities. In terms of the video recordings, student teachers were also assured that the videos would be edited to hide or blur their faces to ensure confidentiality. To ensure that the participants were protected from any harm or risk, they were reminded of the counselling services available on the campus should they require support. All information gathered from participants was kept secure and

confidential. Participants were also informed about the possibility of the study being available on the University of Pretoria website library should they want to review it. The raw data, transcripts, and documents were kept in a safe place as required by the faculty. Additionally, to protect participants from the spread of Covid-19, student teachers arrived wearing their masks. Everyone kept wearing their masks throughout the focus group discussion, hand sanitiser was used, and social distancing was adhered to.

3.10 QUALITY MEASURES

3.10.1 Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness is considered a significant element in qualitative research. Zhou (2006) explains that trustworthiness embodies the measures built into the research procedure by the researcher to measure the quality of the study and verify the reliability of the findings. As discussed in Section 1.9 of this study, Guba's trustworthiness model enhanced the trustworthiness of this study. In the following section, I discuss the four criteria of trustworthiness, namely credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

3.10.1.1 Credibility

Shenton (2004) notes that credibility is one of the vital factors in achieving trustworthiness. To ensure credibility, I interpreted and presented the research findings and responses of the participants accurately. Buys (2017) emphasises that credibility is achieved when the researcher ensures accounts are recorded as the participants intended. I employed member checking to ensure that the data were accurately captured; I thus verified the findings with the participants to confirm whether my interpretations represented their responses. Member checking allowed me to avoid bias in the stage of analysis.

In addition, I maintained credibility by answering any questions participants had before and after the data collection, and kept the focus of the study in mind. Throughout all stages of this study, I frequently engaged with my supervisor, who reviewed my progress and safeguarded against bias. Through regular discussions, my supervisor commented on the tasks we were working on, which allowed me to learn and have a different view of the tasks. Lastly, credibility was established by employing research methods that aligned with the study.

3.10.1.2 Transferability

According to Shenton (2004:69), transferability “is concerned with the extent to which the findings of one study can be applied to other situations”. To ensure this study’s transferability, no generalisations were made. Findings were based only on the participants of this study, who were selected using purposive sampling. As an interpretive researcher, it was important that I seek to gain the student teachers’ perspectives to enhance trustworthiness. Furthermore, I provided a full description of the study’s methodology and context, explaining every step of the process, including why I chose the specific sampling technique and methodology.

3.10.1.3 Dependability

Dependability refers to the consistency or reliability of research (Strydom, 2011). Rule and Vaughn (2011 in Ganesh, 2015:38) argue that dependability “focuses on methodological rigour and coherence towards generating findings”. To address the dependability of this study, a detailed report of the research design, sampling, methods of data collection and analysis was provided. Maree (2016) further notes that it is important to document research processes because it allows future researchers to repeat the same processes and enables readers to follow the decisions that were taken. For this study, I used an audit trail to enhance dependability. The audit trail refers to how data were collected, recorded, and analysed so information can be traced back to its source. I provided clear documentation of all research choices and activities, and documented the focus group discussions via video recordings, then transcribed them verbatim. Moreover, I maintained the schedule of focus group discussions, field notes, and memos, and ensured all the study documentation was stored safely.

3.10.1.4 Confirmability

Confirmability refers to the steps taken by a researcher to ensure that the study findings represent the “results of the experiences and ideas of the informants, rather than the characteristics and preferences of the researcher” (Shenton, 2004:72). To adhere to the principle of confirmability, bias was reduced by grounding my interpretations of the data on student teachers’ explanations.

Furthermore, I used reflexivity as a strategy to acknowledge my personal experience and views. From the outset of the study, in the background section, I shared my own experiences of teaching LO during WIL and acknowledged that these experiences might influence the data analysis process. However, I did not share my views and experiences with the participants. The field notes also helped to keep my biases in check. It was vital for me to be neutral and focus only on the viewpoints of the participants. Korstjens and Moser (2018:122) assert that confirmability “concerns the aspect of neutrality”. Moreover, capturing the sessions via video recordings, maintaining confidentiality and anonymity, and conducting member checking helped ensure confirmability.

3.11 CONCLUSION

This chapter discussed the key insights of the research design and methodology of the study. This study is underpinned by a qualitative research approach using an interpretive paradigmatic view. Furthermore, the justification for my selection of research design, construction of data, documentation strategies, sampling, and data analysis were highlighted. The chapter further explained the purpose of the paradigmatic stances and linked them with the theoretical framework. The chapter concluded with a discussion of ethical considerations and quality measures adhered to in this study. The measures and procedures I followed in this study ensured the trustworthiness and rigour of the research findings. The next chapter describes the collected data and presents the findings.

4. CHAPTER 4: REPORTING FINDINGS

4.1 INTRODUCTION

In Chapter 3, I presented the research methodology and justified the selection of the research design, construction of data, documentation strategies, sampling, and data analysis method used in the study. In this chapter, I present the research findings based on the data collected from the participants during two focus group discussions. As discussed in Chapter 3, thematic data analysis was used to analyse data and identify themes and sub-themes which emerged. In response to the study's research question, "*what are student teachers' experiences of teaching Life Orientation during their work-integrated learning?*" four themes with related sub-themes emerged. Figure 4.1 summarises the identified themes of the study.

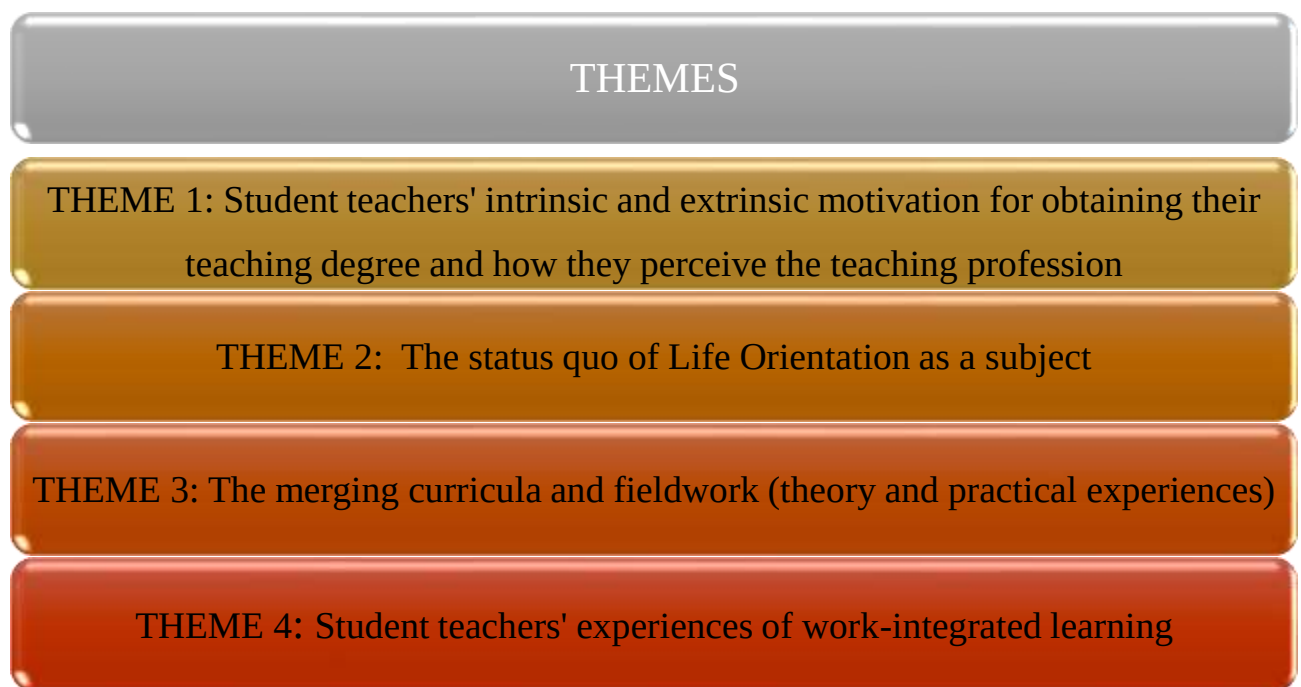


Figure 4.1: Visual presentation of the themes

The themes relate to the subjective lived experiences of the student teachers who participated in the study during their WIL. In addition, the findings reflect the student teachers' experiences of teaching LO, both online and in a real classroom environment. As mentioned in Chapter 3, I took the University of Pretoria's restructured WIL guidelines due to Covid-19 into consideration. It was important to capture the student teachers' experiences in both settings to make sense of the whole WIL experience.

As highlighted in Chapter 3, two focus group discussions were used to generate data. To ensure the participants remained anonymous and that all the information was confidential, pseudonyms were used. The student teachers were referred to as P1, P2, P3, P4, P5 for focus group discussion one, and P1, P2, P3 for the second focus group discussion. The focus groups were referred to as FGD1 and FGD2. Furthermore, to support the research findings, the student teachers' verbatim statements were quoted where necessary. In the following sections, I unpack the themes and their related sub-themes individually and use the existing literature to attach meaning to the themes.

4.2 THEME 1: STUDENT TEACHERS' INTRINSIC AND EXTRINSIC MOTIVATION FOR OBTAINING THEIR TEACHING DEGREE AND HOW THEY PERCEIVE THE TEACHING PROFESSION

This section unpacks theme one. This theme is related to the following emerged subthemes:

- Subtheme 1: Student teachers described their decisions for choosing teaching as a profession
- Subtheme 2: Student teachers described their views about teaching as a profession in the 21st century

4.2.1 Subtheme 1: Student teachers described their decisions for choosing teaching as a profession

During the focus group discussions, the student teachers were asked (see Appendix E): “*why did you choose to teach?*” I wanted to explore their reasons for choosing teaching as a career, and it was evident in both sessions that each individual had different motives for their choices and how they understood the concept of teaching. Most participants highlighted similar responses with regards to their decision. They mentioned that they chose teaching as a profession because they wanted to make a difference, change and contribute towards the educational system and inspire children and the community at large. For instance, P3 (FGD 1) stated:

“Okay, I chose to teach because I wanted to change the system because where I come from public schools are treated inferior because we lack resources and most of the

schools are dysfunctional. So, I'd like to change the system and inspire the kids that's why I choose to teach."

P1 (FGD 1) shared the same sentiments and commented:

"Eh, why I wanted to become a teacher is very simple, is just simply to inspire the kids, the learners..."

Similarly, P5 (FGD 1), P2 (FGD 1), P1 (FGD 2) mentioned:

"For me, I think I wanted to add value to our education system. During my High School, years there were a lot of things that I was not happy with. And I wanted to be part of the process of changing how we view education and how teachers teach and to cater to different multiple intelligences of the learners. So that's my foundation for why I chose to become a teacher" (P5; FGD 1)

P2 (FGD 1):

"I choose teaching because I saw a need for teachers in our township."

P1 (FGD 2):

"I just want to make a difference in the community, shaping the young minds so that they can be good citizens of the country, yeah that's what made me choose to teach."

However, P2 (FGD 2) had a different view:

"For me is sort of like a generational blessing my father is a teacher, my uncles have been teaching so it's been a family thing for like, two decades now"

Participants seemed to relate their personal life stories and experiences to the decision to become a teacher. They wanted to make a difference because they were exposed to a flawed system. Participants specifically mentioned that they wanted to bring about change in learners' lives and the system. They also expressed the desire to inspire learners and cater to their

individual needs. Many participants came from the township context, which profoundly shaped their experiences and motivation for becoming teachers. The following sections describe the student teachers' views of teaching as a profession in the 21st century.

4.2.2 Subtheme 2: Student teachers described their views about teaching as a profession in the 21st century

The student teachers responded to a broader question about teaching as a profession in the 21st century. It was important to pose this question to understand their perceptions about teaching as a profession in the fourth industrial revolution. The student teachers gave different responses on how they view teaching as a profession in this day and age. As the world evolves, teaching remains a complex phenomenon, and views, characteristics, and perceptions that are embedded in it continue to extend and change (Hanisch & Eirdosh, 2020). The student teachers shared the same concerns and opinions about teaching as a profession in South Africa, and agreed the profession is underrated; more so in South Africa than in the rest of the world.

P4 (FGD 1) said:

“Teaching is a very underrated and underestimated career.”

P4 (FGD 1) also commented:

“The teachers are underrated as she said, and also, I’m also thinking about the attention that they give the teachers, I think the curriculum and the life as a teacher, don’t match.”

P1 (FGD 1) agreed and said:

“Just to further add on, I think it is truly looked down upon you know especially in South Africa we are in the 21st century, but then I feel South Africa especially is far behind.”

P5 (FGD 1) further expressed:

“When you look at other countries, our system of education differs from theirs, in a sense that in South Africa a teacher you have a lot of responsibilities and you play a lot of roles. Whereas in other countries, you are only there imparting knowledge.”

In addition, P5 (FGD 1) shared:

(Chuckles) “well just do add on what my to my colleagues have said, I think loco parentis is what is dominant in South African schools also, I can add my what my colleague said that some schools have more resources, and some schools don’t have resources, so there is no balance when we look at the 21st century because it requires technology to be precise.”

Participants felt teaching as a profession is underrated and looked down on by society. They also seemed to feel the education system in South Africa is behind compared to other countries, and teachers in the South African context have much more responsibilities. Participants also highlighted the divide between resourced and impoverished schools.

In summary, Theme 1 reflected participants’ motives for choosing teaching as a career and their perceptions of teaching as a profession. All participants described their motivations, and it is evident from their quotes that intrinsic factors played a significant role when they chose teaching as a career. Participants indicated that they wanted to impact and change children’s lives and be in service to their communities. Furthermore, the participants mentioned some external negative factors that underpin teaching as a profession and explained how the public perceives the profession. The following section reports on the findings discussed in this theme.

4.2.3 Interpretation of Theme 1: Student teachers’ intrinsic and extrinsic motivation for obtaining their teaching degree and how they perceive the teaching profession

Research findings highlight that intrinsic and extrinsic factors influence student teachers’ motives for choosing teaching as a career (Yüce, Şahin, Koçer & Kana, 2013). Tomšik (2016) and Amengual-Pizarro and García-Laborda (2017) define the two motives as follows: extrinsic factors are influences relating to external rewards, such as teaching benefits (for example,

medical aid, housebound) and holidays. Intrinsic factors are influences relating to internal rewards, such as personal interest and making a social contribution. My findings suggest that the student teachers' primary reasons for choosing teaching as a profession were mostly influenced by intrinsic factors. The participants shared the same sentiments about contributing to society and being social change agents in the teaching fields. This is in line with some of the local and global literature findings, including countries like Botswana, Australia, and Turkey (Richardson & Watt, 2007; O'zbek, 2007), where reports highlighted many student teachers are influenced by intrinsic factors to move into the teaching field.

According to Watt et al. (2012:792), "the desire to work with children" and "helping young people to learn" are two of the common influences that relate to intrinsic motivation. This is congruent with the findings of this study, as five of the participants mentioned that their goal is to address and cater to children's holistic development and impact their lives. In a study by Hobson et al. (2008), most student teachers were influenced by the two factors Watt et al. (2012) discussed. Tomšik (2016) also reported similar findings that student teachers who wanted to pursue teaching as a profession were highly interested in working with children and youth.

Teaching, as a profession, has been investigated from several angles. Despite continuous debatable research about the professionalism of teaching, it is one of the notable services in every society and "is referred to as the mother of all professions" (Nenty, Phuti & Moyo, 2015:2804). The participants in this study mentioned some negative views from the public regarding teaching as a career and its occupational status. Such perceptions arise from underlying educational issues such as inequitable treatment of teachers and socio-economic factors like resources. Researchers reported that the public attitude and decline of respect for teachers are caused by how the service sphere undermines and undervalues the teaching profession (Hammet, 2008; Scott, Stone & Dinham, 2001; Sokolova, 2011). In a study conducted by Peter and Peter (2011), the student teachers similarly revealed that one of their perspectives about teaching as a profession is its low status. They shared their views on low pay with no incentives, and a lack of trust in male trainee teachers. In addition, student teachers in Oguz, Unal, Murat, Duran, Lutfi and Ergun's (2013) study agreed with what *P4 (FGD 1)* alluded to in terms of insufficient relations between the curriculum, content, and the role of a teacher.

4.3 THEME 2: THE STATUS QUO OF LIFE ORIENTATION AS A SUBJECT

This section reports on the findings related to Theme 2. The theme contains the following subthemes:

- Subtheme 1: The low status of Life Orientation
- Subtheme 2: Subject and curriculum knowledge of Life Orientation
- Subtheme 3: The importance of Life Orientation as a subject
- Subtheme 4: Caring relation between a Life Orientation teacher and learners

The participants in both discussion groups agreed that the LO subject in schools had not reached its full potential, and they believed some intervention was required. The participants explained the challenges that underpin the subject and the perceptions of other stakeholders within the school system regarding the subject. Furthermore, they shared some concerns around curriculum implementation and teaching content in the classroom. They also felt it is important that LO teachers in schools fulfil their roles and that the government provides training workshops to assist the LO teachers in their roles.

4.3.1 Subtheme 1: The low status of Life Orientation in South Africa

The participants shared several views about the status of LO as a subject. They still felt, even to date, the subject needs to be redefined and aligned with the current realities. *P3 (FGD 1)* shared her previous high school experiences with LO and stakeholders' attitudes towards the subject. The other participants shared the same sentiments.

P3 (FGD 1)

“Where I come from, LO is the most underrated subject in the sense that the principal can elect a mathematics teacher and say ‘go and teach LO’”

P2 (FGD 2) echoed *P3 (FGD 1)* by sharing the following views about the status of LO and unqualified teachers who get allocated to teach the subject:

“It has lost meaning in our schools because other teachers are just teaching Life Orientation without majoring in it. For instance, when there is no professional teacher, who is majoring in Life Orientation in schools, they just take any teacher and the teachers within the school environment they don’t take the subject seriously”

Conversely, P3 (FGD 2) mentioned LO is not well-received by the stakeholders and the public because it is known as one of the minority ‘easy subject’ in South Africa, that does not need to be taught in-depth:

“As my colleague has said it’s not taken seriously...it’s not taught in-depth”

P1 (FGD 2) and P3 (FGD 1) shared the same sentiments:

“To add to what she has been saying, LO it’s not taken seriously. And I think the problem that we’re facing as a country as a whole is seeing a lot of young people, are on drugs and doing all sort of things which are not good it’s because the life orientation itself they have been undermining it for so long”

P3 (FGD 1):

“People have left this room or this mindset of saying LO is an easy subject. They wanted to even phase out LO in the FET phase- I stand to be corrected though”

Another negative factor that adds to LO’s low status is what P2 (FGD 1) mentioned: LO is not examined externally and does not count during APS for admissions to higher learning institutions. She stated:

“Like you don’t write a formal final exam. LO is underestimated because of that part regarding the exams. Again, it’s underestimated, because it’s LO so it’s life in general, and also, what’s hurting me also is that LO doesn’t count for APS. LO doesn’t have that strong foundation.”

The following participant also highlighted that PE is still not taken seriously, and it is difficult to apply the things you are being taught in theory:

P5 (FGD 1):

“Physical Education hasn’t changed...the thing is that they like to focus on theory, and I feel like the subject should allow you to apply what you learnt.”

The status of LO was discussed in this subtheme. The participants said LO is one of the subjects that is not taken seriously, and negative attitudes of the subject come from a variety of stakeholders, including principals and learners. Moreover, the participants mentioned that the challenges that underpin the subject include the subject’s lack of a clear purpose and mission, APS score admission, external examinations, phasing out the subject, and non-specialists LO teachers. To further explore the status of LO, the discussion surrounding its subject and curriculum knowledge is highlighted in the section below.

4.3.2 Subtheme 2: Subject and curriculum knowledge of Life Orientation

In terms of the LO curriculum and content, the participants reported some uncertainty, inconsistency, and lack of exposure regarding the subject, resulting in dissatisfaction and incompetency. The focus group discussions revealed LO teachers are not equipped and comfortable in teaching sensitive topics. Both focus group discussions shared the same views regarding the curriculum and content. The following extracts illustrate that the curriculum does not align or relate to the South African context, and it is not current:

P4 (FGD 1) stated:

“The curriculum and subject content need to evolve and be refined and be more relatable... So that LO it's just not that subject where you just, write an exam without studying for it. I just feel like it just needs to be more relatable, and very generic to what kids are going through now because, to be honest, the LO that you learn in class, and real-life are not the same. Just to add something ...we also don't address emotional things in the South African context”

P2 (FGD 1) echoed the same views and said the curriculum should be flexible, employ a practical approach, and introduce programmes such as career choice assessments for public schools:

“With regards to curriculum, it's more limited. I feel like LO should be more practical, they should add something like knowing your career...for public schools, where you assess yourself in terms of a particular career that you want to grow yourself into.”

Moreover, P5 (FGD 1) mentioned that delivering LO content is challenging because the assigned LO teachers regard some topics taboo, especially since most of them are steeped in African culture.

“Just to add to what you're saying this is maybe because those teachers are also those African parents. So, they are culturally and religiously, and lastly, the content we're teaching in LO does not apply to South African people.”

Other participants commented specifically about the LO content and how it is taught in the classroom; the responses referred to the sex education topic. The participants agreed that topics like sex education seem to excite learners, and teaching such topics in the classroom is important because learners need to be informed. However, they also agreed that LO teachers are not brave enough to teach sensitive topics because they are uncomfortable and not well-informed. The participants shared:

P2 (FGD 2):

“When coming to topics like sexuality is where we getting more learner participation than others, like sustainable development and responsibilities, when you get that chance to teach learners such topics, learners participate and they like those kinds of topics, whereby teachers, get afraid to teach them...”

P4 (FGD 1) noted that the LO content does not cater to the South African context, and things such as pregnancy myths should be clarified in LO classrooms. This becomes difficult as LO teachers are uncomfortable teaching sensitive topics, resulting in misleading content:

“Just to add something, LO in general needs to accommodate a South African home. You know, like, the typical South African home where someone is raised by the

grandmother who is feeding six kids and clarify things such as how you fall pregnant via sexual intercourse, protecting yourself by using a condom and giving consent.”

P2 (FGD 1) agreed and mentioned that LO teachers are typically selective of the topics that make them comfortable. They avoid discussing topics like sex education in the LO classroom:

“And also, Life Orientation teachers are just tiptoeing around they are just the way (P4 FGD 1) explained.”

P3 (FGD 1) further noted that it is not only a problem of teaching such topics openly, but it is also a problem when teachers are unable to use appropriate anatomical terms, like ‘scrotum’:

“Like yoh I would have a Life Orientation teacher, teaching me about the whole concept of re-production, and she couldn't even say scrotum. She was not even comfortable in saying such”

Participants expressed that the content of LO is underdeveloped. They mentioned that certain aspects of the curriculum need to evolve to suit the times we live in. They also explained that the curriculum content seems out of touch with the reality of life, and LO needs to be more relatable and practical. Many participants spoke of the fact that teachers’ cultural background seems to affect how they teach the content, and topics like sex education are entirely avoided. The following section discusses the importance of LO as a subject.

4.3.3 Subtheme 3: The importance of Life Orientation as a subject

During the focus group discussions, participants emphasised the importance of LO and how the subject should be promoted going forward. From my observations and the participants’ responses, it seems participants recognised the importance and value of the subject. Some of their verbatim responses follow.

P1 (FGD 2) expressed the following in terms of the importance of LO and emphasised that, as LO teachers, they need to be competent and make some changes:

“I think as Life Orientation teachers it is our responsibility to bring back the dignity of the subject, I think this will boost its status and change people’s perspectives and people who were undermining the subject will start understanding the purpose of the subject because I think that the purpose of the subject is the one that has been marginalized a lot in schools, that is why it’s not been taken seriously like other subjects. I think it’s time now that all stakeholders take the subject seriously because we have seen how badly the status of the subject is. This will also help the youth in a lot of ways.”

P2 (FGD 2) also mentioned that LO is one of the subjects needed in our country as it deals with a variety of topics that can address challenges in the classroom:

“In South Africa, we do need Life Orientation...”

P3 (FGD 1) shared it is also important to incorporate stakeholders such as learners in the curriculum implementation.

“I think LO is a very important subject because it has different spheres of life and I feel like we have a long journey to go ...It’s not only about the teacher only, learners also have to adopt because LO is very important guys”

In the same light, P3 (FGD 2) and P5 (FGD 1) mentioned that LO is important because it is one of the subjects that help learners become better individuals in society and make better decisions for their future. They said:

“Life Orientation teaches us life skills. As much as we do maths, physics, we do not apply those things in real life.” P3 (FGD 2)

“LO relates to your personal development and you as a person and it focuses on one’s individual’s well-being and if your well-being is not in check all the other areas of your life automatically fail.” P5 (FGD 1)

Furthermore, two participants indicated that for them to be equipped in implementing the LO curriculum, some measures or initiatives should be in place, such as campaigns and more teacher training workshops for LO teachers.

P1 (FGD 1) suggested that LO outreach programmes, and discussing different topics every term, can be some of the initiatives to empower learners:

“If we just have some certain campaign-wise, maybe they talk about in a certain week, you talk about mental health. Maybe on another term, there’s a certain thing they talk about”

Moreover, P1 (FGD 2) indicated that effective workshops should be implemented to help teachers impart requisite knowledge to the learners. He expressed:

“Another thing which I think is important is to maybe change the way Life Orientation teachers are being trained I think they should be another more effective way. I think they should be more workshops.”

This theme highlighted the benefits of LO as a subject. The participants mentioned that it would be advantageous to continue teaching LO as it guides learners, promotes their self-development, and offers life skills. They further expressed that challenges such as unqualified LO teachers and insufficient training should be addressed. Furthermore, they stated that effective measures such as workshops and training should be established to ensure teachers are adequately prepared in teaching LO, and learners must have opportunities to discuss matters relating to LO openly via outreach programmes. The participants seemed to believe that addressing these challenges will result in a return of the subject’s dignity; it will be taken seriously. The following subtheme focuses on the caring relationship between the LO teacher and learners.

4.3.4 Subtheme 4: A caring relationship between a Life Orientation teacher and learners

In terms of the qualities of an LO teacher, most participants emphasised that the following traits are vital: openness, friendliness, compassion, and understanding. These characteristics can shape the relationship between the LO teacher and learners. The participants indicated it is also important for LO teachers to engage and communicate with the learners and build relationships with them outside the classroom because learners go through a lot and need someone they can talk to.

P2 (FGD 1) commented that it is important for the LO teachers to be open and have some psychology background so they can help learners holistically:

“I feel like you should be that teacher who is open, be engaging as much as you can and have a background in psychology.”

P2 (FGD 2) shared the same sentiments and said it is important that teachers possess qualities like openness and compassion because this will prompt learners to approach them about anything:

“As Life Orientation teachers we are the ones who should give learners room to approach us because when you look in most cases at the school, they call a Life Orientation teacher if a learner is crying at the school to assist this learner.”

P3 (FGD 2) further gave an example of her own experience during WIL and emphasised how important it is, as a LO teacher, to be open-minded about life:

“Like going back to the being open part. I remember I received bad news the previous night and I was crying the whole night. So, I was open with my learners. I told them that you know what today I’m not the ghel(girl) like, I received so and so news. I’m just not feeling okay, they understood because, at the end of the day, I’m also human again I’m not saying like share everything but like if you share a bit about your own life experiences it also helps that the learners open up.”

Furthermore, P1 (FGD 2) mentioned that it is also important to be enthusiastic about life and build a relationship with learners outside the classroom; this will allow you to know more about them and gain trust from them:

“What I can add is that being a teacher doesn’t end in the classroom, I think that it’s not about just teaching LO then it ends, it’s about having a relationship with your learners even outside of the classroom so that you can get to know the learners better in the classroom and understand more their needs so that you can offer them your support that will allow them to fully participate and perform great”

In summary, this theme emphasised the importance of a caring relationship between the LO teacher and learners. The participants explained it is vital for LO teachers to create a safe space for learners, where learners can feel free to approach them with any matters or concerns. According to the participants, it is important for LO teachers to possess qualities like openness, as most schools rely on LO teachers to address learners' concerns. They noted that it is important for LO teachers to establish a trusting relationship with learners, both inside and outside the classroom, offer support to learners, and have some psychology background. The following section attaches meaning to the findings discussed under this theme.

4.3.5 Interpretation of Theme 2: Status quo of life orientation as a subject

The participants mentioned that the perceptions of stakeholders, like principals, learners, HoDs, and other teachers are negative towards the subject and is not taken seriously. The findings of this study also suggest the status of LO is underpinned by the following challenges: the non-examinable status of the subject; using LO periods for more prioritised subjects; non-specialist LO teachers; and content delivery in the classroom, especially sensitive topics like sex education. Scholars (Adewumi, 2012; Rooth, 2005; Modiba, 2017; Van Deventer, 2009; Visser, 2005) reported similar findings that, in general, the status of LO is compromised, and the components of the subjects are fragmented. They further stated that, to some extent, moving over the LO prescribed allocated time and assigning any teacher to teach the subject is arbitrary.

The participants reported some concerns in terms of delivering the content in the classroom. This is one of the shortcomings that the LO teachers face when trying to implement the curriculum. Discussions with the participants also revealed that LO teachers lack knowledge of the content, and they have inadequate experience when discussing certain topics. The findings illustrated that the teachers feel the values they hold are contrary to the content they are expected to teach, because their values mostly stem from their religion and culture, and they believed content such as sex education could promote promiscuity. This is in line with the findings of Visser (2005), Manzini (2012), Ganesh (2015), and Adewumi (2012), who reported that LO teachers were faced with challenges in addressing sensitive topics and were shy to talk about sex education; this placed them in uncomfortable situations. They further emphasised that teachers found it difficult to balance their values and beliefs and the content they needed to teach in the classroom.

All the participants in this study clearly explained the effectiveness and benefits of the subject. They shared that having LO as a subject is vital because it will eliminate many socio-economic issues in the communities and empower learners with 21st-century skills. Manzini (2012) supported these findings and shared that student teachers felt it would be beneficial to continue with the subject as a form of guidance and outreach programme for learners, especially teenagers who are still struggling with life. Additionally, Ganesh (2015) reported that teachers acknowledged the importance of the subject. The author (Ganesh, 2015) said it is important for LO teachers to upgrade their knowledge regarding the subject's content for the subject to be taught more effectively.

In terms of the caring relationship between a LO teacher and learners, the participants noted it is vital for LO teachers to be adequately prepared to apply the following caring relation elements: listening, thinking, creating a climate for caring, and extending the moral climate (Noddings, 2012). The participants explained LO teachers must be honest and authentic with the learners as this can promote a safe space and element of trust. They further agreed that the LO teacher should develop a certain degree of emotional competency and have a background in psychology to function effectively in the classroom and be able to deal with learners from all walks of life. These findings resonate with Strydom's (2011) results, where participants shared the same sentiments about the caring relationships between LO teachers and learners. Strydom's participants mentioned that LO teachers need to be open and approachable to promote an environment where learners feel it is safe to share their problems. In addition, Manzini (2012) claim LO content would be provided at a higher level if teachers majored in psychology or had a background in psychology.

4.4 THEME 3: The merging of curricula and fieldwork (theory and practical experiences)

This section reports on Theme 3. The theme contained the following subthemes:

- Subtheme 1: Student teachers' positive experiences relating to the consistency between theory and practice
- Subtheme 2: Student teachers' negative experiences relating to the discrepancy between theory and practice

During the focus groups, participants were asked if the theory they were taught in the classroom prepared them to teach effectively, both online and in a physical classroom. Participants highlighted both negative and positive experiences regarding the merging of curricula and fieldwork. The following statements indicate that some participants benefited from the theory taught in the lecture sessions, whereas others felt the theory limited their teaching. Some participants expressed a gap between theory and practice, while others felt theory and practice were aligned or rather consistent.

4.4.1 Subtheme 1: Student teachers' positive experiences relating to the consistency between theory and practice

The following participants indicated there was some consistency between theory and practice P2 (FGD 2), P1 (FGD 2), P5 (FGD 1), P3 (FGD 1), P3 (FGD 2), P1 (FGD 1). Conversely, P4 (FGD 1) and P2 (FGD 1) disagreed.

P2 (FGD 2) felt there was some consistency between theory and practice, and said he prepared thoroughly before lessons using the theoretical aspects taught during the lecturer sessions. These were his views:

“The theory prepared me to teach Life Orientation effectively. We are taught how to interpret things, how to teach the content so the theory parts they taught us gave us the courage to teach effectively, so I didn't get that challenge of teaching some content.”

P1 (FGD 2) agreed:

“Yes, more of the same. I didn't find it challenging to teach theory, our lecturers prepared us very well so I could interpret the topics and explain sufficiently to the learners, so it was just smooth”

P5 (FGD 1) also affirmed that the theory was helpful for online teaching. She stated:

“For me, it was very helpful. Because as (participant 4) said, they teach you about this ideal classroom. So pretty much the online was like the ideal classroom, so it has

prepared me because I was glad to incorporate that in this lesson study... it has worked a lot, so it has prepared me for this online thing.”

P3 (FGD 2) remarked that the lecturers in the B.Ed. programme prepared them for the period of WIL. When the WIL format was altered due to Covid-19, they had to adapt and use what they were taught in other teaching settings.

“I think also, we wouldn’t be studying or attending lecturers if like the lecturers were not equipping us but I think also to a certain extent, like some things I we don’t plan for them they just happen and you need to have adapting skills, so to some certain extent it did help.”

Moreover, P3 (FGD 1) echoed these sentiments and also acknowledged the aspects she learnt from one of the educational core modules, called OPV (Education 312). It enabled her to navigate between different teaching settings:

“The theory prepared me, it did play a role because I remember from OPV they taught us about different sources that you can use as the teacher to teach online and in the classroom.”

P1 (FGD 1) added that the theory and practice outcome was positive as it enabled him to effectively teach in two different settings; in this case, teaching LO online and in a physical classroom:

“One of the positives about the content we learnt is that we were able to adjust and prepare for the unknown.”

This subtheme discussed participants’ views in terms of the consistency between theory and practice. It is evident from the above quotes that the participants had positive experiences relating to the consistency between theory and practice. They mentioned they could link the theory and practice, and theory prepared them thoroughly for the practical component. Moreover, they explained that the lectures they attended enabled them to teach effectively and interpret topics that relate to the content thoroughly. Likewise, they also alluded that the theory equipped them for online teaching. However, these sentiments were not shared by all the

participants, and the following subtheme focuses on student teachers' negative experiences due to the discrepancy between theory and practice.

4.4.2 Subtheme 2: Student teachers' negative experiences relating to the discrepancy between theory and practice

In contrast with the above quotes, participants *P4 (FGD 1)* and *P2 (FGD 1)* expressed that the theory part of the degree did not adequately prepare them for the practical part, resulting in a gap between the two.

P4(FGD 1) remarked there is an enormous difference between the theory taught in lecturer sessions and the reality of instruction. She expressed:

“No, and I say this because the things that I learnt were helpful, and the scenarios they use are for an ideal classroom. And to be honest, theoretically, it makes sense...and it's great. But once you go into the real classroom, we are not fully prepared.”

P2 (FGD 1) shared the same views and stated that she could not reconcile the aspects she learnt in the LO methodology class into practice. Therefore, she had to learn things on her own:

“The theory I learnt from was not helpful when I was doing practicals, because I feel like I learnt things on my own.”

In summary, this subtheme reported the student teachers' negative experiences relating to the discrepancy between theory and practice. The participants said they could not link the two, and the practical aspect of their WIL was difficult. They also mentioned they were not fully equipped, and that the theory taught by the lecturers is not ideal for the real classroom. Furthermore, one participant stated that the gap between theory and practice forced her to learn on her own. The following section situates the findings in the literature.

4.4.3 Interpretation of Theme 3: The merging of curricula and fieldwork (theory and practical experiences)

Based on the participants' responses, this theme has factors differentiating the student teachers' experiences. The findings of this study reflected on student nurses' positive and negative experiences in terms of the consistency between theory and practice. Some participants confirmed the balance between the theoretical and practical elements, but others reported an imbalance between the theoretical and practical elements. During the focus groups, the student teachers alluded to both positive and negative experiences. Those who reported negative experiences emphasised there was a gap between what they were taught in class and the encounters they had in the schools. However, the student teachers who reported positive experiences mentioned they were able to translate theory into practice and apply the theory learnt during their LO methodology classes during their WIL period.

Likewise, some studies (Mthinyane, 2014; Bhargava, 2009; Abongdia et al., 2015; Boikhutso, 2010; Boz & Boz, 2006; Mudzielwana & Maphosa, 2014; Marais & Meier, 2004; Hobson et al., 2008) reported negative experiences in the disjuncture between theory and practice. The student teachers in these studies expressed that they could not link what they learnt in the methodology classes to school practice. These findings further highlighted that the theory of education and reality of instruction differs significantly, and it seems the two are estranged partners. This links to participants' views in this study.

In contrast with the above findings, some researchers (Marais & Meier, 2004; Koross, 2016; Kiggundu & Nayimuli, 2009) reported a positive correlation between theory and practice. The student teachers in these studies expressed that their work-integrated period was remarkable because they could link the theory and practice; they felt the theory adequately prepared them for the practical element. Most participants found teaching practice very interesting because they could apply what they had studied and enjoyed teaching because they were conversant with the subject content. This view was reflected by some participants in this study, who reported during focus groups that they could relate to the theoretical element and reconcile the teaching methods explained in their LO methodology classes. This, in turn, also prepared them for the lesson study phase and helped them adapt to new WIL challenges. These experiences are unpacked in the following theme.

4.5 THEME 4: STUDENT TEACHERS' EXPERIENCES OF WORK-INTEGRATED LEARNING

This section reports on the results of Theme 4. The theme included the following subthemes, categories, and subcategories:

- Subtheme 1: Student teachers' experiences of teaching Life Orientation online during WIL
 - Category 1: Positive experiences of teaching online
 - a) Adapting to the new strategies of teaching and learning
 - b) Technology integration and instruction tools
 - c) Virtual assessment by the mentor lecturer
 - Category 2: Challenges of teaching online
 - a) Collaboration with peers
 - b) Challenges that student teachers faced regarding technological resources
 - c) Insufficient support and guidelines from the mentor lecturer
- Subtheme 2: Student teachers' experiences of teaching Life Orientation in the classroom
 - Category 1: Sense of accomplishment
 - Category 2: Relationship with the mentor teacher
 - Category 3: Disrespectful attitude from the learners and colleagues
 - Category 4: Lack of teaching and learning resources at schools

The focus of Subtheme 1 is the student teachers' experiences of teaching LO online. As mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, WIL consisted of online teaching and physical classroom experience to assist students in completing their WIL component during the pandemic. Therefore, this subtheme reports on the results of student teachers' online teaching experiences. The first category is their positive experiences, which consist of three subcategories, namely a) Adapting to the new strategies of teaching and learning; b) Technology integration and instruction tools; and c) Virtual assessment by the mentor lecturer. The second category reports the challenges of teaching online, which consist of three subcategories, namely a) Collaboration with peers; b) Challenges that student teachers faced

regarding technological resources; and c) Insufficient support and guidelines from the mentor lecturers.

Subtheme 2 focused on student teachers' experiences of teaching LO in the classroom. It consisted of four categories, namely a) Sense of accomplishment; b) Relationship with the mentor teacher; c) Disrespectful attitude from the learners and colleagues; and d) Lack of teaching and learning resources at schools. This subtheme is discussed in sections to follow.

4.5.1 Subtheme 1: Student teachers' experiences of teaching life orientation online during WIL

4.5.1.1 Category 1: Positive experiences of teaching online

Due to Covid-19, face-to-face sessions were interrupted, and this resulted in institutions considering online learning and teaching. The University of Pretoria's online teaching was based on a structure called the Lesson Study approach, adapted from the Japanese education system (Lenski & Caskey, 2009). As mentioned in Chapter 3, the student teachers had to work through three phases, namely: 1) Planning; 2) Teaching/presenting; and 3) Refining/reflecting. Therefore, they had to plan a lesson, teach it online, and reflect on and refine the lesson. This subtheme presents the positive experiences that the student teachers encountered during this phase of the WIL period.

a) Adapting to the new strategies of teaching and learning

One of the positive experiences participants shared during the focus groups of teaching online was that the experience enhanced their skills. Moreover, even if the lesson study approach was new to them, they managed to adjust under the circumstances of the "new normal". In addition, they emphasised the importance of adapting as a teacher in this 21st century. It is also important to mention that the theory the participants were taught in the classroom never prepared them for such an experience; however, the following statements indicate what the participants gained from the experience and felt fulfilled.

P4 (FGD 1) mentioned that the lesson study pushed her to adapt and learn new skills to teach online because, as student teachers, they were left with no choice but to consider such

adjustment due to Covid-19. She further emphasised that adopting new teaching strategies links with a passion for teaching and, as a teacher, you should remain teachable. She said:

“For me, I got to like, learnt the tips and tricks as a teacher, you don't have a choice but to adapt to be very honest, because especially if you're passionate, you want to kids to excel, you want your kids to pass. I feel like it goes back to being very passionate like you as an individual, going an extra mile, adapting.”

Similar views were echoed by P1 (FGD 1), P3 (FGD 2), and P1 (FGD 2). They stated that teachers are expected to adapt to such frameworks because the world is changing, and information communication technology (ITC) integration in teaching and learning is slowly being introduced in developing countries like South Africa. They further said that the lesson study contributed to their ability to adapt to other teaching strategies

“I think adaptation for teachers just to add very briefly is very crucial. It's the changing world after all.” P1 (FGD 1)

“What I believe every teacher should do is to be adaptive. Whatever thing has to come your way, you have to be adaptive to it. For instance, when they say we moving from the classroom to online” P2 (FGD 2)

“You need to have adaptive skills because it's not going to be always where you have to refer to the textbooks. And follow through what the textbooks say sometimes you will have to act now” P3 (FGD 2)

In addition, P5 (FGD 1) and P1 (FGD 2) mentioned that they developed digital competency during the lesson study and were exposed to the complexities and opportunities of teaching and learning online. This is what they said:

P5 (FGD 1) shared:

“The overall Lesson Study was good, I learnt a lot. I even got to know that there are teaching posts where you are required to teach online. So as a teacher, you have to

adapt, you must adapt very quickly and learn and not limit yourself to what you are doing. Now I can apply for a job and just teach online. So, it has benefited us a lot”

P1 (FGD 2) concurred and stated:

“I really appreciate everything. If it was not the case of lesson studies, we wouldn’t know how to prepare online lessons. We wouldn’t even know to teach online, so yes, we have adapted very well.”

This theme reflected student teachers’ experiences in terms of adapting to new online teaching and learning strategies. Similarly, the participants highlighted that the teaching profession requires effective adaptation in terms of adjusting to new strategies. The participants explained having to navigate through constant changes in terms of resources since times are changing and teaching is evolving. They further mentioned that the lesson study offered them new skills, insights, and opportunities relating to teaching in a complex setting. The following subcategory reports further positive experiences that the participants encountered.

b) Technology integration and instruction tools

The second positive experience that the participants shared was that the lesson studies prepared them for the fourth industrial revolution and they were now equipped and comfortable using technology. The participants agreed that this experience prepared them for the future, and the skills they gained during this experience might work for them in the future as teaching continues to change. They further commented that they are now aware of instructional tools that one can utilise to teach online and incorporate technology in their teaching. Some of the participants went further to explain the advantages of using technology. Their verbatim responses follow.

P3 (FGD 1) expressed she benefited significantly from using different technology and instructional tools during the lesson study. One of the advantages of these tools is that they can be used in future classrooms in absentia of the teacher.

“For me I think it will help us as teachers to teach even if you're absent, you can send a video, and then ask them to continue with their lesson. So, I think it became an advantage for me.”

P1 (FGD 1) corroborated P3's (FGD 1) views:

“Overall, the lesson study is good because it teaches you the extent of technology; how far can technology take you and how impactful technology and what to consider. Now in the case of the future, it's preparing us for the future. In a way, that it gives you an early thought that teaching might occur online and providing you with a vision for the future because this is how the world would look like.”

In addition, P5 (FGD 1) asserted that she is now equipped in the logistics of teaching online, such as recording a video, and she found apps such as YouTube valuable:

“One of the successes is that I was confident in the video, and I knew what I was doing. So, it helped me to be more structured because I'm not really a structured person. I now know how to use Zoom, what Zoom is what YouTube is, Google meet, how to do a PowerPoint...and how to record lessons.”

P1 (FGD 2) expressed:

“It was also a good experience because I learnt how to make a video and to teach online.”

Additionally, P2 (FGD 1) echoed the views and said:

“Online teaching made me to be more creative, and maybe go out of my way. I think the online practicals taught me how to use different apps, now I am really equipped with online learning.”

The benefits of technology integration and online instructional tools were discussed in this theme. The participants clearly acknowledged that using technology and online instructional tools enhanced their teaching presentation skills. The participants indicated that, overall, it was a good experience. They also highlighted the following advantages of their experience: exposure to different online applications, for example, using Zoom application; the logistics of teaching online, such as creating a video; and employing online teaching tools in future

classrooms. The following subcategory reflects the third positive experience the participants encountered.

c) Virtual assessment by the mentor lecturer

The third positive experience that the participants discussed was the assessment from their mentor lecturer. Assessment plays an enormous role during WIL, and a lot of things in the final year depend on the grades of WIL. During the focus group discussions, the participants mentioned that one of the advantages of the lesson study was the assessment criteria, as it kept them from experiencing challenges like anxiety, stress, and face-to-face criticism. They felt the structure of the lesson study assessment worked in their favour and boosted their grades. The lesson study gave them an opportunity to record their teaching videos more than twice. This was a big advantage because they could fix the things they were not confident about and send the improved product video. The following participants shared the same sentiments about lesson study assessments by the mentor lecturer.

P3 (FGD 1) expressed that the virtual assessment meant she had multiple attempts to fix her recorded lessons and work at her own pace:

“Well with online learning it was easier if I can say so because if you did a mistake and you can start over and record it again.”

P4 (FGD 1) further corroborated her views by stating he was relieved the mentor lecturer was not physically present as this reduced his anxiety:

“With the online learning, I like the fact that my mentor lecturer was not there like it was just me and my laptop and me presenting the lesson if I didn’t like it, I would start over again until I get it right”

Likewise, *P5 (FGD 1)* and *P1 (FGD 1)* shared the same sentiments and stated that they found assessments by mentor lecturers flexible, and this played a vital role in their final year WIL grades:

“It's better because if you make a mistake, you can just correct yourself, you just record your lesson again and post it and the mentor lectures will assess on their own.” P5 (FGD 1)

P1 (FGD 1) shared:

“Online assessment is more advantageous and simpler in terms of when you want to get good marks, and it is easier, you know.”

This theme focused on the mentor lecturer's virtual assessment during the lesson study phase. The participants mentioned that the virtual assessment was modifiable, allowing them to pace their own learning process. Moreover, during this phase, they were allowed to modify their recorded lesson presentation assessments and rectify certain mistakes until they were satisfied, and this resulted in them having good grades. Additionally, it was advantageous to them because the mentor lecturer was not assessing them physically but rather online, and this reduced their anxiety. In the following section, the student teachers' negative experiences of teaching online are discussed.

4.5.1.2 Category 2: Challenges of teaching online

This section focuses on the participants' challenges in teaching online, in terms a) Collaboration with peers; b) Challenges with technological resources; and c) Insufficient support and guidelines from the mentor lecturers. The following statements verify what the participants relayed during the focus group discussions.

a) Collaboration with peers²

During two phases (phase 1 and 3) of the lesson study, the student teachers had to collaborate with peers. In phase 1, they had to collaboratively create a lesson plan, and in phase 3, they had to reflect collaboratively on the lesson plan and refine it depending on the challenges and limitations they encountered in phase 2. For this category, the participants expressed feelings of frustration. They mentioned that collaborating with peers was not an easy task because,

² Peers are the other student teachers who had to work with each other and collaborate for the online period of WIL

firstly, they did not choose who to work with, and secondly, the strategy of collaborating with others did not work for everyone. In the following statements, the participants highlight their feelings about collaborating and how the planning, refining, and reflecting proceeded.

P3 (FGD 2) mentioned her frustrations and said it was difficult for her in the group because the group members did not understand her circumstances. She felt the structure favoured those who were privileged in terms of their geographical location and finances:

“For instance, my group members didn’t understand when you tell them that (eh guys)- I don’t have electricity then they will be like buy a generator...they didn’t understand and so that was a frustrating factor on its own.”

P2 (FGD 2) and P4 (FGD 1) were in agreement that the structure favoured those who were in good geographical locations. They explained:

“Yeah, I would agree with her (P2 FGD2) ...phase one was very traumatizing. It really favored those who are in the suburbs who are in town, but for us who are coming from townships, it didn’t really favour us...”

P4 (FGD 1):

“The privilege was very apparent. When we were doing the meetings, the planning, you could see that the contexts are different.”

P1 (FGD 2) mentioned that he missed the meetings because of network problems, and this was a big issue for his team members as they did not sympathise with him. This resulted in him appearing as a less serious member of the group.

“So, when we have to have meetings, online meetings, I will miss meetings because of the network, then the group will not understand that. So, they just see you as someone who’s not serious. They couldn’t understand your problem.”

P5 (FGD 1), P1 (FGD 1) and P3 (FGD 1) further commented it was difficult for their groups to come to an agreement. Everyone had their preferences and wanted to prepare the lesson in a specific way:

“When you're working as a group... it can work, either for your good or bad, for instance, it's not just one person, it's four people. Now everyone has an opinion and saying I agree with this...I don't agree with this... Why do you use Google classroom? Why don't we use Zoom? Why don't we use Google meet? Now you must vote and majority rules but sometimes the majority thing doesn't work out. Another disadvantage of the group is that some people cannot focus on the goal that all of us want to pass together”

P1 (FGD 1):

“I could say in phase one. It's just a matter of disagreement, in a lot of things. It was hard to plan for even the next stage... So, it was a big issue.”

P3 (FGD 1):

“The challenging part was now executing what you have planned as a group because now you have come to disagree with some ideas with your other group members. And now, you want to put your efforts and somebody saying no.”

This theme presented the challenges and disagreements that the student teachers faced during phase 1 of the lesson study. The participants expressed their frustrations in collaborating with peers. They mentioned that it was difficult to overcome some challenges, such as the privilege of good geographical locations, and it was seldom easy to make decisions as a group. Some participants felt the lesson study did not consider their living conditions and their peers could not understand their circumstances. The following subcategory reports the second negative experience the participants encountered.

b) Challenges with technological resources

In terms of resources, the participants expressed that they faced significant challenges. This made it difficult for them to learn effectively, attend meetings, and record their teaching videos. From the participants' responses, it is evident they struggled primarily with laptops, connectivity and networks, data, and electricity. These challenges frustrated the participants because, most of the time, they could not perform at their best, and some did not have any form of support. The following statements highlight their responses.

P5 (FGD 1) reported that power outages were one of the major challenges she faced during this time of WIL. She further mentioned that her digital device was giving her problems, so it was difficult when her lessons got interrupted as a result:

“One of my challenges was definitely connectivity issues. Like your laptop will just freeze and you're in the middle of the lesson. One of those unknowns was also load shedding ...I forgot to mention load shedding because this online thing requires electricity and in South Africa, we have an electricity issue.”

The cost of data was also identified as a challenge in technological resources. *P4 (FGD 1)* expressed her frustrations and said:

“Like I mentioned previously, the whole privilege thing, you know, like, when you're telling your group members that there's load shedding or I don't have data at this time. So, I'll be uploading at this time, or whatever the case may be, they didn't understand.”

In some rural areas, there was no electricity or network at all. *P3 (FGD 2)* alluded that her area's connection was a serious challenge, and electricity was only available at night for certain hours.

“For me, where I come from is basically the farms so the network was never there and electricity was never there like it was a mess but we had electricity from midnight till like 6 am. So those would be like my working hours.”

Her views were echoed by P2 (FGD 2), who shared the same frustrations and added that due to load shedding, most of the time he submitted his work late as there was network congestion on the day of submission. He frequently only had electricity for an hour each day. He said:

“For instance, you’ll find that we have to submit the videos on Friday. And during that week we experience load shedding... she was lucky P3 (FGD 2) she had at least five hours of electricity we had only one hour per day so imagine that one hour. Like it was frustrating because everyone will be online at the same time and there will be the network congesting, the convoy moment and the internet goes down. So, it was bad.”

Furthermore, P1 (FGD 2) highlighted that even though the university gave them data, the rural area where he lived had no service, and the network was not stable. As a result, he frequently failed to record his assignments.

“Yeah, teaching online was a big challenge. Just like what they have said the internet in the rural areas was giving us the problem, even though they provided us with the data, but still, the areas that we were at were not effective for the network and having to make a video eish Technology is something.”

The challenges the students faced in terms of technological resources were described in this section. Participants reported poor internet connectivity, network failure, the cost of data, power outages, and a lack of access to technological devices. Some participants alluded that the network was still a barrier even if they received free data because they lived in rural areas. They further mentioned it was difficult to submit activities in time due to the above-mentioned challenges. The following subcategory reports the third negative experience participants encountered.

c) Insufficient support and guidelines from the mentor lecturers

The mentor lecturer’s role during online study is to facilitate, guide, provide support to their allocated groups, and assess the student teachers’ lesson plans, lesson presentations, and written reflections. Some participants felt they did not receive enough guidance and support, and found themselves initiating things on their own and seeking assistance from other groups. They further commented that it was not easy to find mentor lecturers, which was frustrating because they

could not get the right guidelines for certain tasks. Another problem was that some of their mentor lecturers did not provide constructive feedback; this was confusing as they were not sure of the work they were producing. The following verbatim responses indicate how the participants felt about their particular mentor lecturers in terms of support and guidelines.

P4 (FGD 1) shared her frustration in terms of support and guidance from her mentor lecturer. She shared her mentor lecturer was not willing to assist, and she found herself asking the other groups to clarify certain things:

“The support from my mentor lecturer could have been better to be completely honest. Because I found myself asking other groups. Like, eish I was frustrated because this is a new thing for all of us. And obviously, there will be a lot of questions. So, I think in terms of support, he could have honestly done better in supporting us.”

Similar views were also shared by P3 (FGD 1), who stated:

“The mentor lecturer was not there for us. So, we had to carry on with the lesson study on our own... We did things by asking other people.”

P1 (FGD 1) added that they did not receive any communication or feedback from the mentor lecturer until the end of the lesson study’s third phase:

“Well, in the case of the mentor lecturer there was no support at all. If you ask a question, he didn't respond, so we decided to do our own thing, then from there, he didn't care about what we're doing there, till today, he never responded.”

P1 (FGD 2) agreed the mentoring was not effective and coherent. Her mentor lecturer specifically struggled with the lesson study guidelines, navigating technological devices, and online platforms.

“For phase two, I felt like I was alone, I didn't know what to do, there's was confusion from the go. I feel like mentor lecturers are slacking you know, I don't think that they are equipped and well informed when coming to online learning, they don't know

anything. If you ask something, they will be like I don't know, if we have the meeting, they will be like, oh where do I press this? ... they also don't know how to support you.”

P2 (FGD 2) agreed:

“On my side eh I feel like I got enough support even though it was not from my mentor lecturer”

Lastly, P5 (FGD 1) related her experience and mentioned that guidelines from the mentor lecturers were delineated, and feedback and communication were not prompt.

“There was little support because she came after two weeks so we had to create our own group. So, when she came, we were already far we did whatever that we could and she didn't give us guidelines, so there was little participation from her side”

This theme illustrated that participants experienced some of the mentor lecturers failed to provide sufficient guidance and support during the lesson study. The participants explained some mentor lecturers did not have any knowledge of computer operation and online platforms. They highlighted a lack of collaboration, communication, and proper guidelines. Lastly, participants mentioned that they felt they were alone in the whole process, and insufficient guidelines resulted in them relying on other groups.

4.5.2 Subtheme 2: Student teachers' experiences of teaching Life Orientation in the classroom

This subtheme relates to Theme 4, and the following categories emerged:

Categories:

- a) Sense of accomplishment
- b) Relationship with the mentor teacher
- c) Disrespectful attitude from the learners and colleagues
- d) Lack of teaching and learning resources at schools

The core of this subtheme is the student teachers' experiences of teaching LO in a physical classroom. For this part of the WIL period, student teachers were placed in various schools in the country, including schools in partnership with the University of Pretoria. This theme consists of four categories, namely a) Sense of accomplishment; b) Relationship with the mentor teacher; c) Disrespectful attitude from the learners and colleagues; and d) Lack of teaching and learning resources at schools. The results are discussed next.

4.5.2.1 Category 1: Sense of accomplishment

The participants shared being physically at the school made them content as they had been waiting for this opportunity for their final year of studies. Although the student teachers were not physically placed in schools for the intended 20 weeks (due to Covid-19), the participants still reported feelings of accomplishment and fulfilment. They mentioned they were satisfied getting experience in both contexts even though they did not expect things to turn out the way they did. However, they felt they completed the task of WIL successfully and gained a lot of experience. The participants highlighted that they gained experience teaching LO, being placed in a different school environment, and learning from learners. They commented that the skills and knowledge they gained from this experience helped them grow as individuals and, overall, it was a good experience.

P1 (FGD 2), P3 (FGD 2) and P2 (FGD 2) reported that their experience was a success, and they learnt a lot from teaching LO and learning from learners. The participants also highlighted the fact that the learners had prior knowledge of certain topics, so it was fulfilling for them as student teachers to gain some knowledge from the learners.

P1 (FGD 2):

“About teaching the subject Life Orientation. It was a good experience. I have learnt a lot from teaching life orientation. Because of the learners, I got different perspectives and views about the themes and the topics, that are in life orientation. So, I also learnt a lot from them. So that’s was a good experience.”

P3 (FGD 2):

“With regards to teaching life orientation, it was a great experience. I think like our generation, we are well informed, and like you get to see the different opinions that different learners have.”

P2 (FGD 2):

“Like for instance, there was this topic about contraceptives, the learners taught me much about contraceptives, even the other contraceptives I didn’t know about. So, teaching Life Orientation doesn’t mean that you have to just teach, you have to be willing to learn as well and leave room for learning.”

P1 (FGD 1) and P5 (FGD 1) shared the same sentiments that they enjoyed the experience a lot, and the highlight was that they were placed in different school environments. They further reported they were now familiar with both private and public-school contexts.

P1 (FGD 1) expressed the following regarding the private-school encounter:

“I had a good experience in a school I was teaching because that is a multi-racial school and it was for the first time to, go to such a school because I’ve been practicing in the rural schools. So, I had a good experience teaching other races I enjoyed a lot.”

Similar views were shared by P5 (FGD 1), who was placed in a public school:

“I’m more familiar with the rural township school now I know the ins and outs I know like how to deal with bad behavior, how to deal with and different personalities, different attitudes, how to deal with everything.”

Furthermore, P3 (FGD 1) commented that she had a good experience and gained some skills. Her placement contributed to her growth and taught her some of the responsibilities of a teacher:

“I learnt during the process how to manage my class and to teach as well, so I had a very good experience, it went well and my expectations were met. I also grew as a teacher, because now I know how to manage my class.”

In this category, the participants related a sense of fulfilment in teaching LO and working in different school sectors, namely public and private schools. They said they learnt a lot from the experience, and teaching the subject contributed to their growth as teachers. They enjoyed interacting closely with the learners and learning more about different topics, such as contraceptives. Participants added that they are now equipped in terms of teaching certain content and managing a classroom. The following section discusses the student teachers' experiences with their allocated mentor teachers in the schools.

4.5.2.2 Category 2: Relationship with the mentor teacher

During the focus group discussions, the participants had different opinions and views of the supervision they received in their schools from their mentor teachers. Half of the participants – *P3 (FGD 1), P2 (FGD 1), P1 (FGD 2), P3 (FGD 2)* – commented that they received support and were properly supervised and guided. The rest participants – *P4 (FGD 1), P5 (FGD 1), P1 (FGD 1), P2 (FGD 2)* – disagreed and mentioned they experienced a lack of support and guidance. The following statements indicate both experiences that the participants encountered with their mentor teachers. It is evident that some of the mentor teachers understood their roles and supported the student teachers, while others did not fulfil their roles.

P4 (FGD 1) reported that she experienced a lack of support and guidance. Throughout her placement at the school, she had to do things on her own because her mentor teacher was not interested:

“I was expecting that my mentor teacher would just be as excited as I would be and that was not the case, she wasn't as interested. And this is because the mentor teacher has been doing this for years, they are old now and they don't have the passion and the fire that you can come with. That was my experience.”

P5 (FGD 1) shared a similar response and mentioned her mentor teacher was not accommodating and made her uncomfortable. She felt mentorship plays a vital role in this experience, therefore mentor teachers must fulfil their role and support the student teachers.

“The mentor teacher was negative and she was a bully. I never experienced such. It was a horrible experience for me. Having a mentor teacher is vital to your experience as a student-teacher... So, we must have mentor teachers who are willing to mentor there must not be forced”

P1 (FGD 1) said his mentor teacher assigned the work and classes to him and left him unsupervised until the day he finished his practicals. The mentor also asked him to teach another elective for two grades and act as a substitute teacher because no one was available to teach those classes. This resulted in an unpleasant experience as he felt he had an overload of work without support or guidance:

“Well, my mentor teacher just gave me information. He was like, ‘there’s the class go teach until you leave, I’m not going to come just call me when there’s a problem’. And in this school, they didn’t have a grade 8&9 teacher at that time. So, they were like, ‘since you know mathematics, just cover for the absent teacher we will just assist you there and there’.”

Similarly, P2 (FGD 2) commented on the importance of having a mentor teacher who is aware of their roles and duties:

“I expected mentor teachers to mentor us but instead, they just give you a class. They expect us to teach everything without them telling us what to do, you know, and their mentoring is important because we are still doing teaching practice, we are not yet qualified. We need someone who can just say, you’re doing it right, you’re not doing this right.”

Conversely, P3 (FGD 1) expressed that her journey with her mentor teacher was smooth because she was allocated to a supportive mentor teacher. This worked in her favour, as the mentor teacher was familiar with most of the guidelines and understood her role.

“I was lucky enough to get a mentor teacher from the University of Pretoria so she knows how this thing goes so I had a very good experience with her”

P2 (FGD 1) shared the same sentiments and expressed that besides the mentor teacher giving her full support, she involved her in school activities, such as staffroom meetings.

“My mentor teacher was willing to teach me and go through this experience with me. So, she would allow me to be even part of the meetings and everything in school that has to do with the teacher.”

P1(FGD 2) further agreed there was enough support, and the support was not only from his mentor teacher but also from other colleagues. He further emphasised that his mentor teacher supported him in every way, and if he was uncertain about anything, the mentor teacher would help and give him the right guidance:

“I also got support from the school as a whole and my mentor teacher as well, she was always there to support me to ask if I have a question. I got enough support.”

P3 (FGD 2) further corroborated P2 (FGD 1) and P1's (FGD 2) views, and highlighted that her working relationship with her mentor teacher was amazing. Her mentor teacher would consistently give her feedback, and from that feedback, she learnt a lot and the dynamics in her teaching changed.

“My mentor teacher was like the best in everything. I like constructive criticism because I feel that's an opportunity to better yourself so she would always pull me aside and tell me that you know next time instead of doing this, do this, and this... so, I appreciated that there was mutual respect.”

This theme reflected the student teachers' experiences with their mentor teachers. Some participants received full support, while others reported they did not receive any support from their mentor teachers. The participants who had positive experiences explained the mentor teachers were supportive, approachable, and respectable. One of the participants further mentioned that her mentor teacher was dedicated enough that she involved her in the daily school activities, such as staffroom meetings. Other participants commented that their mentor

teachers were not accommodating and incompetent. They explained their mentor teachers saw them as a relief resource, meaning they ended up taking the mentor teacher's workload and some of their duties. Lastly, the participants highlighted the importance and value of having a competent mentor teacher during WIL. The following category focuses on the student teachers' interactions with learners and staff at the schools in which they were placed.

4.5.2.3 Category 3: Disrespectful attitude from the learners and colleagues

Besides working with the mentor teachers, the student teachers worked and interacted with other parties such as learners and staff members of the schools. Building relationships with other parties in the school plays a vital part in the experiences of student teachers. This challenge was the biggest concern for participants, who felt they were not welcomed and did not have a sense of belonging. In addition, they felt dealing with learners in a classroom was hard, as the learners misbehaved and, in some instances, other staff members condoned this behaviour. It resulted in them not being able to manage the classroom. The participants mentioned it was challenging for them to fulfil their duties in the school because of how they were perceived and undermined. They mentioned ill-treatment and a lack of respect from the learners and their colleagues.

P5 (FGD 1), P2 (FGD 1), and P1 (FGD 1) mentioned challenges in terms of learners who were disrespectful. This resulted in unpleasant relationships and the learners not respecting the student teacher's boundaries.

P5 (FGD 1) mentioned:

"As a student teacher, they know that you don't have the authority like a teacher. Some learners view you as their peer during the practicals so they don't have respect for you."

P2 (FGD 1) alluded to the following by giving details of an incident that happened during his WIL:

"The challenge that I faced was being disrespected as a student teacher for instance during the examinations there was this young guy who was disrupting every learner in

class. So, I had to expel that learner and disqualify him for not writing the examination. So basically, I did this because they tend to think that we as student teachers don't have the power to manage the class like the other qualified teachers. So that was only the challenge I had."

P1 (FGD 1) shared that classroom management was a challenge for him:

"The difficult part was classroom management. It was problematic you know, there are some disruptive learners in township schools so it was a little bit hard."

P3 (FGD 1) mentioned some teachers intimidated her and made her feel unwelcome in the school. However, she chose to be positive and followed the WIL guidelines and instructions, implementing new teaching strategies so that she could enjoy her stay in the school:

"Some teachers will intimidate you, knowing that you are a student-teacher. But with the information that I got from the university; I knew that I was going to do something different from the original teachers."

P2 (FGD 2) agreed that some mentor teachers were indeed intimidating them because he found himself being disrespected by a teacher in front of learners:

"The challenge that I got was from one of the teachers actually, the learners were making noise during an exam so I had to hold the papers and tell them that I won't start distributing these papers until they keep quiet so then the teacher came and said: 'no give them the papers it's fine even if they make noise'. So that was the challenge that I got cause after this incident the teacher started having problems with me."

P1 (FGD 2) also added that the teachers in schools tend not to give them respect, space, and the freedom to exercise their WIL duties because they undermine them and think they are too young or unprofessional.

"Another thing is that teachers have a tendency of undermining us because of our age and that we can't tell them anything because they have been in their schools for a long time. They don't give us a space to practice our profession and things like this

disadvantage us, so this thing of them undermining us and not welcoming us properly it acts as a barrier towards our development.”

P3 (FGD 2) further reported that the staff members were not pleased receiving them at the schools, because the schools were already behind in their work and their timetables were adjusted, so it was evident teachers took their frustrations out on them. She further explained her teaching capabilities were criticised, and during the orientation week she was clueless.

“In the beginning, when we were placed in the schools, the teachers in the school were under pressure to complete what they had to complete during this year, everyone was just overwhelmed. And now they had university students coming to teach and that time they can’t teach the way they want to because they are not capable.”

The participants indicated it was difficult to form relationships with the learners and other staff members because they were not friendly and welcoming, which negatively impacted their experience because the treatment was poor. This treatment also caused challenges in terms of classroom management. Moreover, the participants mentioned most of the staff members undermined them because of their age and denied them the space to fully enjoy the experience. The participants said a lot of staff members doubt their teaching abilities and intimidate them. The following category focuses on the lack of teaching and learning at schools.

4.5.2.4 Category 4: Lack of teaching and learning resources at schools

One of the challenges experienced during the WIL period was a lack of resources. The schools did not have enough resources, and this hindered participants’ teaching as they needed the resources for learning to progress. Some participants questioned the support of the Department of Education, as schools needed resources during the pandemic.

P1 (FGD 2) said the school in which he was placed did not have enough resources, especially textbooks, and this resulted in him thinking outside the box so that learning could take place.

“I was expecting to find enough resources. So, I was disappointed because there were not enough resources like books to teach. So, it was a bit challenging.”

P2 (FGD 2) commented that his school had a shortage of textbooks as well:

“They had no enough textbooks for more information about the topics that I had to teach”

P5 (FGD 1) indicated that the shortage of resources in the school in which she was placed included machines, such as printers and materials for the school’s administration. She explained she felt clueless because such challenges hindered most of her lesson plans, learning and teaching support materials. She could not prepare effectively for teaching and learning to take place.

“You would want to print out the learner’s support materials and the activities, there’s no paper and the printer is not working.”

P2 (FGD 1) further commented it was challenging to adapt, especially because she was placed at a disadvantaged school with no resources. She emphasised that resources such as tablets were essential because the learners were not attending every day and teachers needed to communicate more.

“Adding on about resources I was so shocked that South Africa is facing a pandemic, but then the tablets were not issued out. So, it was so difficult because we needed those tablets to make sure that teaching and learning continue.”

The participants mentioned that the schools in which they were placed lacked resources, including textbooks and equipment, such as printing ink and papers. Participants were disappointed that the schools had no resources, and it was difficult to execute the process of teaching and learning under such circumstances. One participant further mentioned that she was placed in an under-resourced school, and it was disappointing that the DoE could not provide resources like tablets during the pandemic for teaching and learning to continue. The following section presents my interpretations of Theme 4.

4.5.3 Interpretation of Theme 4: Student teachers' experiences of WIL

As mentioned, student teachers engaged in two approaches to get the full WIL experience. The findings of this study reported on student teachers' positive and negative experiences of teaching LO online. The participants generally felt the advantages of the whole experience were that it enhanced their skills, and they grew through their experience. However, some student teachers reported negative aspects of the experience. The participants faced several challenges; a general remark in this regard was the lack of technological resources and working with certain stakeholders such as mentor lecturers and peers.

Researchers (Ogbonnaya et al., 2020; Kim, 2020; Nel & Marais, 2020; Varela & Desiderio, 2020; Lei & Medwell, 2021; Zilka, 2021) reported similar findings of student teachers' limitations and the benefits of teaching online during their WIL placement within the Covid-19 context. The results of this study showed a positive response from the student teachers in terms of adapting and transitioning to the new online platform. The participants explained that teaching LO online had improved their digital communication skills and appreciation for using technology. Ogbonnaya et al. (2020), Lei and Medwell (2021), and Thomas et al.'s (2021) studies reported the same findings. They claim student teachers mentioned teaching online has enhanced their teaching presentation skills, and they were exposed to various applications and instructional tools. In terms of online mentor lecturer assessments, the participants had peace and less stress. They explained that the virtual assessment was flexible, allowing them to pace their learning process and amend their lesson presentations until they were satisfied. This finding aligns with Thomas et al. (2021) and Hill's (2021) claims that student teachers are doing well in virtual assessments.

Despite the positive online teaching experiences, participants also encountered several challenges. While many studies highlight positive, active engagement and collaboration among student teachers (Hill, 2021; Ogbonnaya et al., 2020; Nel & Marais, 2020), this study reported a lack of collaboration among student teachers as part of their negative experiences of teaching online. This finding is corroborated by Crosta (2016) and Gilbert (2015), who claim online collaboration among student teachers removes some barriers that limit participation to some extent. Poor internet connectivity, network failure, the cost of data, power outages, and lack of access to technological devices were major challenges reported in this study that the participants encountered during their online WIL. The participants mentioned the internet connectivity was

not stable, and the data the university provided did not have full coverage in some of their areas and was not sufficient.

Several studies conducted in South Africa and Ghana revealed that their participants faced challenges in terms of internet connectivity as some parts of these countries still face a digital divide (Ogbonnaya et al., 2020; Naah, 2020; Atta-Obenga & Dadzie, 2020; Dube, 2021). The participants in Ogbonnaya et al. (2020) and Dube's (2020) studies further explained that, although they received some free data, it was not enough for most of them, and some could not afford to buy additional data for their online teaching. Furthermore, this study revealed that the participants had technical difficulties with their laptops and struggled to connect to online platforms to create videos. In addition, all the participants in this study generally mentioned power outages were their main challenge throughout their experience, which resulted in them submitting lessons late and being behind in some of their work. The power supply in South Africa is erratic, and most areas experience load shedding. These findings are congruent with those reported by Dube (2021), who found many participants in his study came from rural areas with no electricity, and this resulted in them being inconsistent with their online teaching and submitting activities late.

As mentioned in Section 1.2, mentor lecturers are assigned to student teachers for supervision, guidance, and support during the WIL period. While teaching online in the Covid-19 context, the institutions could still allocate mentor lecturers to the student teachers and expected these parties to collaborate purposefully. However, the findings of this study suggest that mentor lecturers encountered difficulties as they were not skilled in terms of using technological devices and online platforms. Moreover, the participants expressed that the mentor lectures' guidelines were not delineated; this included instructions to assist them in lesson delivery, lesson study expectations, and they failed to give constructive and prompt feedback. These findings resonate with those of Bechuke, Thomas and James (2013), who reported that the majority of mentors are not adequately informed about their tasks during the WIL period. Echoing these findings, research in Africa determined that student teachers receive little support and feedback from their mentor lecturers (Kasanda, 1995; Kiggundu & Nayimuli, 2009 in Koross, 2016:80; Yassin, 2004; Okonkwo & Chikwelu, 2015). Furthermore, the student teachers in these studies indicated that they did not have a relationship with their mentor lecturers, and engaging with their mentor lecturers was often difficult.

In terms of the second part of the WIL period, this study's findings reflect that student teachers encountered various experiences in their placement schools. Firstly, the participants reported feelings of satisfaction and enjoyment. From their responses, it is clear that the participants were responsive to their pedagogy and half of the participants received full support and guidance from their mentor teachers. These participants enjoyed teaching LO content, especially being exposed to and learning about different topics and interacting closely with the learners about sensitive topics. Moreover, the study revealed that the participants benefited from both private and public-school contexts, gained confidence, and learnt how to manage the classroom.

These findings resonate with other researchers who reported that their participants expressed teaching in a classroom helped broaden their subject knowledge and enabled them to gain an insightful experience of teaching as a profession (Hobson et al., 2008; Koross, 2016; Marais & Meier, 2004; Kiggundu & Nayimuli, 2009; Mthinyane, 2014; Mudzielwana & Maphosa, 2014). The participants in these studies further mentioned that the overall impression of their mentor teachers was positive, and their mentor teachers were always supportive and willing to help.

The other half of the participants in this study expressed they did not receive enough support from their mentor teachers, and their mentor teachers were not aware of their duties. They considered student teachers as a relief resource, meaning they ended up taking the mentor teachers' workload and duties. These findings resonate with the findings by Marais and Meier (2004), Komba and Kira (2013), Abongdia et al. (2015) and Heeralal and Bayaga (2011), who reported some mentor teachers were unprofessional. Likewise, these findings are also supported by Li et al. (2019), who mentioned that experts find it difficult to foster a sense of belonging, support and interact with novices in their organisations.

As emphasised in Section 2.6.1.3, resources are vital in promoting effective teaching and learning in schools. The participants in this study reported that the schools in which they were placed lacked resources to facilitate the teaching and learning process, and this hindered the effectiveness of their teaching. For instance, the schools were not well resourced and lacked textbooks, printers, printing paper, and technological devices (tablets). One participant indicated that not having access to a printer and printing paper to make copies of learners' support materials and activities was frustrating. Several studies reported similar findings of student teachers facing challenges in terms of teaching and learning resources (Marais & Meier,

2004; Çakmak, 2008; Heeralal & Bayaga, 2011). Similar findings were reported by Koross (2016) and Abongdia et al. (2015).

The other challenge participants faced in this study was the disrespectful attitude of the learners and staff members. The participants alluded that staff members who were not their mentors did not make them feel welcome and did not respect them. Concerning the teacher's unprofessional behaviour, *P2 (FGD 2)* mentioned that one of the teachers at his school addressed him inappropriately in front of learners. In such schools, student teachers find it difficult to practice, and this could also play a significant part in their classroom management. Similarly, *P2 (FGD 1)* mentioned he could not exert any authority over learners because learners do not take student teachers seriously. The participants generally mentioned that controlling a class was one of the major challenges they faced as they found themselves in schools that are dysfunctional and have disruptive learners. These findings are congruent with the findings reported by Kiggundu and Nayimuli (2009) and Marais and Meier (2004), who shared their participants had similar challenges with staff members and classroom management. The study participants further noted that some staff members were unprofessional and learners at these schools needed discipline.

4.6 CONCLUSION

This chapter presented the findings of this study based on themes, subthemes, categories, and subcategories. The findings were interpreted and integrated with existing literature that was congruent and contrary to the research findings. In the next chapter, I revisit the research question and relate the findings with the theory. Finally, I represent recommendations and a conclusion.

5. CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 INTRODUCTION

In Chapter 4, I presented the findings of the study. These were interpreted and integrated with the existing literature. This chapter serves as a conclusion of the study. I start by revisiting the research question stated in Chapter 1, and present the findings in the context of the theoretical framework. Finally, I reflect on the study and make recommendations for future research.

5.2 SUMMARY OF THE STUDY

Chapter 1 provided an overview of the study. The chapter presented the background and context, including both my personal and professional reasons for conducting this research. Furthermore, the chapter defined the key concepts and provided a brief overview of the research design and methodology. Chapter 2 explored existing literature on the research phenomenon. In addition, the theoretical framework that guided this study was also described. In Chapter 3, I explained the research design and methodology used in this study, and focused on aspects such as the sampling strategy, data collection tools, data analysis, ethical considerations, and quality measures. Chapter 4 presented the findings and a discussion of the findings. Four main themes emerged from the focus groups, namely student teachers' intrinsic and extrinsic motivation for obtaining their teaching degree and how they perceive the teaching profession; status quo of LO as a subject; the merging of curricula and fieldwork (theory and practical experiences); and student teachers' experiences of WIL. In this chapter, I summarise the study, answer the research question, discuss the limitations and recommendations for future research, and include my reflections.

5.3 SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AS THEY RELATE TO THE THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In this section, I describe the link between the study's theoretical framework and the findings discussed in Chapter 4. I used the bioecological model theory by Bronfenbrenner for this study. As illustrated in Figure 2.2, the theory comprises five systems: microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem, and chronosystem. These systems showed how the student teachers' experiences were influenced during WIL. Linking these systems with the findings, the study revealed that the student teachers at the microsystem level had differentiating experiences with

the various school stakeholders. The findings concerning their relationship with and support from mentor teachers indicated that some mentor teachers fulfilled their roles and guided the student teachers, while others failed in this task. The other immediate context at this level was the university; the findings revealed interesting views about this aspect. Most participants confirmed they could apply the theory taught at the university during WIL, but some felt there was a discrepancy between the theory taught in class and the practical side of WIL.

The findings also explored the direct relations that the student teachers had with the staff members and learners. In discussing these direct relations, participants reported unpleasant experiences with some staff members and learners. This resulted in them not feeling welcomed and not managing the classrooms properly. In terms of the mesosystem level, the student teachers were more at ease during the WIL period in terms of their teaching assessments from mentor lecturers, which had a beneficial impact on their grades. In addition, the mesosystem level showed that the student teachers enjoyed teaching LO content and being exposed to and learning about different topics. Regarding the mentor lecturers' support and WIL guidelines, this level further revealed participants did not receive enough support from their mentor lecturers, and mentor lecturers could not relate to the guidelines received from the WIL office. At the exosystem level, student teachers found themselves in schools that had limited resources. Participants reported that the schools where they were placed lacked resources such as textbooks, printing and photocopying machines. The student teachers said such challenges hindered their lessons. It had an indirect impact on the student teacher because, firstly, they did not choose the schools in which they were placed; they were allocated to schools by the University of Pretoria. Secondly, the student teachers found themselves in unfamiliar environments and did not have a sense of belonging. As a result, the challenges caused them stress, uncertainties concerning their skills and capabilities, difficulties managing learners and developing working relationships with their colleagues. Thus, the student teachers had experienced what was available in these diverse school systems.

On the macrosystem level, the findings reported that the student teachers were placed in both private and public schools; this included schools in partnership with the University of Pretoria. The participants alluded that they benefited from these two culturally diverse contexts and gained skills, such as confidence and classroom management, and this contributed immensely to their professional development. Lastly, the chronosystem reflected the Covid-19 pandemic

as one of the factors that influenced student teachers' WIL experiences. Ultimately, another WIL dimension, namely lesson study, was added to minimise the loss of the WIL period.

5.4 RESEARCH QUESTION REVISITED, AND FINDINGS DISCUSSED

The research question that guided this study was: *What are student teachers' experiences of teaching Life Orientation during their work-integrated learning?* As mentioned in the previous chapter, this study's findings reflected the student teachers' experiences of teaching LO both online and in a real classroom environment. A range of experiences was mentioned in both settings. These experiences varied for student teachers and resulted in positive or negative outcomes. The key findings influenced and affected the student teachers during the WIL period in some way, as explained in detail in the next section.

Generally, the participants indicated that they benefited from the WIL experience. It was evident from the findings that the most outstanding positive experiences student teachers encountered during their WIL were the sense of accomplishment they felt when teaching LO; the support received from their mentor teachers; virtual assessment by their mentor lecturers; the consistency between theory and practice; adapting to the new strategies of teaching and learning through the use of technology. Conversely, the participants cited several challenges they encountered during the WIL period, including collaboration with peers; insufficient support and guidelines from the mentor lecturer; lack of teaching and learning resources at schools; challenges regarding technological resources; and disrespectful attitudes from the learners and colleagues.

Based on the themes, the following key conclusions are drawn. The findings confirmed that the student teachers' experiences during WIL were influenced by the theoretical aspects of their LO methodology class. The foundation provided by this class allowed them to function and effectively deliver learning content in both settings. However, some participants mentioned that the theoretical aspect from this class did not link with the practical side and the reality in both settings. Still, the findings reflected that the student teachers enjoyed teaching LO content, and this resulted in feelings of enjoyment and fulfilment. They were enabled to engage fully with the learners, establish teacher-learner relationships, and adopt new teaching and learning strategies. The findings also indicated that student teachers learnt how to use some

technological resources and applications during WIL. Ultimately, teaching LO expanded their professional growth.

In terms of supervision during the WIL period, the findings showed some support structures and cordial relationships between the student teachers and other mentors. For instance, some participants mentioned their mentor teachers were encouraging, willing to assist, and provide enough guidance. Yet, others mentioned they were dissatisfied with their relationships with their mentors, and there was a lack of supervision. Instead, they did not show any interest and were overloading student teachers with their work, leaving their classes with them. This included mentor lecturers who were not present during the lesson study. These mentor lecturers were not engaging with the student teachers constructively and did not understand their roles in this regard. Another factor regarding the mentor lecturers was the provision of constructive feedback; the findings indicated that the student teachers received little to no feedback, which prevented them from reflecting on their own teaching.

Access to resources remains a challenge during the WIL period. Student teachers were placed in schools with insufficient resources, and they experienced challenges with technological resources, such as connectivity and load shedding. This made the process of teaching and learning difficult. Working with other stakeholders, such as peers, learners, and staff members, was another challenge for the student teachers. The findings showed that the student teachers struggled to collaborate with peers in terms of online planning. Some also found it difficult to engage with learners and other staff members at the schools, as they were not welcoming. In addition, they felt that engaging with learners in the classroom was not easy as the learners misbehaved and, in some instances, other staff members condoned the behaviour. Such challenges were linked to negative factors in classroom management and reflected a lack of control.

Student teachers reported positive experiences in terms of supervisors' assessments. They mentioned that the criteria and performance of their lesson presentations were encouraging. In addition to all these experiences, the participants explained why they chose teaching as a profession, and it was evident most were influenced by intrinsic factors in making their decision. The participants expressed the negative perspectives that underpin teaching as a profession and how the public perceives teaching. Moreover, the participants shared that LO is not taken seriously by stakeholders such as principals, learners, HoDs, and other teachers. The

non-examinable status of the subject, using LO periods for more prioritised subjects, non-specialists teaching LO, and ineffective delivery of the content in the classroom contribute immensely to the low status of the subject.

The findings also indicated that LO teachers lack knowledge in terms of teaching the content, and they have inadequate experience in discussing certain topics, like sex education. It was determined one of the reasons teachers fail to deliver such content is because they find it difficult to balance between their values and beliefs and the content they need to teach in the classroom. Lastly, the participants expressed the need to have LO as a subject in South Africa and a caring relationship with the learners. They felt it would be beneficial to continue with LO as it guides learners and promotes their self-development. Ultimately, having a caring relationship with learners in class will create a more trusting learning environment.

5.5 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

Limitations are factors that can affect the trustworthiness of a study. This study was qualitative, meaning a limited number of participants were used. The focus group discussions were conducted at the University of Pretoria and focused on the Life Orientation subject, so generalisations cannot be made for every student teacher in the faculty, as the study dealt with a specific methodology. Furthermore, another limitation was that some participants felt overwhelmed by the focus groups sessions. For example, one of the participants was quiet for most of FGD 1, and felt overwhelmed because he was the only male participant in the session. In addressing this limitation, I asked probing questions and tried to ensure everyone had a voice and felt welcome. Another limitation was the Covid-19 pandemic, which meant I had to re-adjust the study according to the new structure of WIL, namely lesson study, and adhere to Covid safety regulations.

5.6 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

In this section, I offer recommendations for future research based on the study's findings. The following are suggested:

- A similar research study could be conducted in different institutions.
- Research could be conducted to explore the partnership and working relationship between universities and schools.
- Training and workshops for mentor teachers, principals, and HoDs should be investigated for them to fully support the student teachers and provide proper induction during the WIL period.
- The Department of Basic Education should explore the LO content and curriculum and the possibilities of the curriculum being relevant and linked to the South African context.
- Research could be conducted to explore the challenges LO teachers face in teaching sensitive topics such as sex education in the classroom.
- A comparative study of stakeholders, such as principals' and learners' perspectives towards LO between public and private school sectors, could be conducted.
- A comparative study exploring the differences between how LO non-specialists and LO specialists deliver the content in the classroom is recommended.
- Universities should introduce online teaching modes as one of the paradigmatic approaches in their permanent WIL structures. Moreover, regular training should be provided to lecturers and students to ensure they are well-equipped to use technology and technological resources to teach.
- Government should provide students and teachers in all provinces with technological resources, such as laptops and tablets.
- More orientation should be provided by the universities for mentor lecturers in terms of guidelines, understanding their roles, and professional supervision, e.g., constructive feedback for lesson presentations. In addition, student teachers should also be provided with an orientation week before starting their WIL to touch base on elements such as classroom management.

5.7 FINAL REFLECTION

In this section, I reflect on how this study contributed to my personal and professional practice. This master's study came with a lot of sacrifices. As an individual, this study has challenged me immensely and contributed to my growth. My purpose and goal were always to push my academic limits. During my honour's year, I discovered I was very patient about certain topics in education and wanted to know more. I ultimately wanted to grow holistically in the

educational field. However, things took a turn in the first year of my study; as John F Kennedy would say, “When the going gets tough, the tough get going”. This quote explains how events took place in my master’s journey.

Writing this final piece brings a lot of tears because I didn’t think I would reach this point, concluding a whole dissertation. I think what kept me going was the scripture that I live by (Jeremiah 29:11); I knew that God’s plans will always be to prosper and not bring harm to my life. Again, I think one of the biggest things I had to learn during my research was accepting that nothing is perfect, and as an individual, I am still learning.

This brings me to one of the elements that I struggled with throughout the process, namely receiving feedback from my supervisor. At first, I thought I knew it all and that everything I submitted was perfect. It turned out my supervisor’s perspective and approach were different. I would get frustrated and not know what to do, but I think after our second supervision meeting, I realised my supervisor wanted me to get exposed and explore the dynamics of research and submit work that is of quality. Furthermore, this journey afforded me opportunities that broadened my research scope in terms of qualitative research, and I believe this will help me in my future endeavours. I really thank my supervisor for allowing me to grow and giving me a platform to be an independent individual.

Finally, critically reflecting on the chosen methodology, I had to wait until November 2020 to get my data because my participants were final-year student teachers, and due to Covid-19, the structure of WIL was adjusted. This was one of the biggest challenges I faced as my study was delayed; however, I chose to look at things with a positive outlook and trust the process. Moreover, my initial plan was to use some visual methodology, but with the challenges the country and institutions were already facing, I had to stick to one method and accept that research changes all the time, and some plans will always fall away in the process. However, on the positive side, the focus group discussions produced valuable insights from the student teachers, and this assisted in answering the single research question that guided the study. Lastly, as a researcher, I gained a deeper understanding of the student teachers’ experiences and learnt a lot from the sessions.

5.8 CONCLUSION

This chapter provided the summary of the study and discussed the findings relating to the theoretical framework, answering the main research question. Furthermore, the limitations of the study, recommendations for future research, and my final reflection were highlighted.

The purpose of this study was to explore student teachers' experiences of teaching LO during their WIL. The final-year students who volunteered for this study shared their detailed experiences of teaching online and in a physical classroom. The findings of their subjective experiences addressed the research gaps identified in Chapter 1 and revealed the negative and positive encounters gained from their WIL. Moreover, findings revealed that even when student teachers are faced with challenges, they still regard WIL as important for their profession because it exposes them to the practical component of teaching. Furthermore, the results of this study will promote alternative strategies and extensive research regarding LO as a subject, student teachers, and the elements of WIL.

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Faculty of Education

APPENDIX A: CONSENT FORM TO THE STUDENT TEACHERS

I, _____ your full name, agree/disagree (delete what is not applicable) to take part in the research study titled: **Student-teachers experiences of teaching Life orientation during work-integrated learning**. I understand that I will engage in the focus group for 70 minutes. I understand that I am expected to participate in face-to-face discussions. I understand that this group discussion will not contribute to any of my module marks. I understand that the research study will not interfere with my class time and that these sessions will take place after class on the premises of the University of Pretoria (Groenkloof Campus). I understand that the researcher will inform me about the details of the sessions that I am going to partake in. I understand that my identity will be protected at all times, and that the researcher will disguise my identity when writing up, and that any of the information will not be traced back to me. I understand that all the recordings will be viewed by the researcher and her supervisor and that they will be kept safe and confidential. I fully understand that my participation is completely voluntary and I can withdraw from participating in this study at any time and all discussions will be about research questions and nothing else.

I understand that the researcher subscribes to the ethical principles of:

1. Autonomy and voluntary participation

At all times throughout this study, it is your decision whether or not to participate.

2. Safety

Throughout this study, no participants will be placed at risk or any harm of any kind

3. Trust

All the participant's information will be used only for this study and it will be not manipulated or changed in any way

4. Full disclosure

All the participants will always be fully informed about the research process and purposes, you are more welcome to contact me, should you need to require more information than what is contained in the letter.

5. Confidentiality

This study will not expose the participant's personal information and all the participants have the right to privacy, therefore, all the participants will remain anonymous and no one will only what your answers are.

Signature _____

Date

Researcher: Florence Shange

Email address:

Cell Number:

Signature of student:

Supervisor: Dr. S de Jager

Email of supervisor:

Number of supervisor:

Signature of supervisor: _____



Faculty of Education

APPENDIX B: CONSENT LETTER TO BE VIDEO RECORDED DURING FOCUS GROUPS DISCUSSIONS

I, (full names) _____ have accepted the invitation to be a participant in the research study titled: **Student-teachers experiences of teaching Life orientation during work-integrated learning**, conducted by Florence Shange as part of her masters study at the University of Pretoria, Faculty of Education. I hereby give the researcher consent to video record me, as a participant during the focus group discussions, which I have voluntarily agreed to be a part of. I understand that my identity will be protected at all times, and that the researcher will disguise my identity when writing up, and that any of the information will not be traced back to me. I understand that all the recordings will be viewed by the researcher and her supervisor and that they will be kept safe and confidential. I fully understand that my participation is completely voluntary and I can withdraw from participating in this study at any time.

I fully understand that the recorded video discussions will be transcribed and analysed for research. I understand that these video discussions recordings, as well as its accompanying verbatim transcripts, will be kept in the safe storage of the faculty for about fifteen years. I understand that after the time of safekeeping has passed these recordings will be destroyed.

Signed (full names of participant)

_____ on (date) __/__/2020 at
_____(place).

Signature: _____

Contact number: _____

Name of the researcher: Florence Shange

Email address:

Cell Number:

Signature of student:

Supervisor: Dr. S de Jager

Email of supervisor:

Number of supervisor:

Signature of supervisor:



Faculty of Education

APPENDIX C: CONSENT LETTER TO THE DEAN AND HoD OF THE FACULTY OF EDUCATION

Date:

To: Office of the Head of Department (Humanities)

RE: Ethical clearance for master's study at University of Pretoria

Dear Prof Wassermann

I am hereby requesting approval from your office to conduct my master's research. My name is Florence Shange, student number: 14156513 and I am currently a master's student in the Humanities Education Department, Faculty of Education. I have successfully presented my proposal and I am now in the process of applying for ethical clearance. My topic is *Student-teachers' experiences of teaching Life Orientation during work-integrated learning*. The purpose of this phenomenological study is to explore the experiences of student teachers in their final year, registered for LO as a module elective towards teaching Life Orientation after their work-integrated learning. This is in consideration of the fact that there seems to be a gap between theory and practice as student teachers sometimes find it difficult to relate course content to daily classroom practice

The key scope of this study is to explore definitions of the terms: work-integrated learning, student teachers, experiences, and Life Orientation. This study will also explore how these terms relate to each other through student teacher's experiences in their daily classroom practice experience and other interactions that influences their systems.

Focus and purpose of the study (Aims):

To understand the subjective experiences of student teachers when they return from work-integrated learning after teaching Life Orientation

To contribute to the field of knowledge, by producing data about students' perspectives and attitudes towards Life Orientation

To understand how three main concepts which are Life Orientation, student-teacher, and work-integrated learning relate to each other

By adding value to the research emerging in the South African context about student teachers' experiences

This study is guided by a single research question:

What are the student teachers' experiences of teaching Life Orientation during their final year work-integrated learning?

The research methodology of this study is qualitative, the data method that I will be using will be focus groups. Data construction for this study consists of two focus groups.

- These two focus groups will be held at the University of Pretoria premises. My focus is to gain the participant's perspectives and generate as many views and perceptions from the participants during these focus groups. The focus groups discussions will take place when the student teachers return to the University of Pretoria during the reflection week

Who will be involved in this study?

I, the researcher will be involved as well as the final-year B.Ed. students, who are registered for Life Orientation methodology

When will the data collection take place?

Discussions will take place when the student teachers return to the University of Pretoria during the reflection week, September 2020, and students will be communicated to again after their methodology class, permission will be granted by their respective lecturer. Constructing data will take up to 2 weeks, the timeline is as follows:

Focus groups: 14-25 September 2020

I request permission from the Humanities Education Department office to involve final-year B.Ed. students from UP to participate in my study.

I include my master's proposal in this correspondence.

Kind regard

Florence Shange



Faculty of Education

APPENDIX D: RESEARCHER'S FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION GUIDE

Research study:

Student-teachers experiences of teaching Life orientation during work-integrated learning

Time:

Date:

Place:

Group:

Guidelines to follow before the focus group discussions take place

1. Welcome

Introduce the moderator and explain the role of the moderator.

2. Overview of the topic

Purpose of the study and focus group discussions

3. Ground rules

Good.../day/afternoon/evening and welcome to our session. My name is Florence Shange and I am from the faculty of Education at UP. I am your moderator for today. My role as a moderator is to guide this discussion. The topic of the research study is student-teachers experiences of teaching Life orientation during work-integrated learning.

You have been invited here today because we want to hear more about your experiences of teaching Life Orientation as a student-teacher after your work-integrated learning. I will ask

some questions, which will take about 70 minutes. I want everyone to feel free to say exactly what they think. There are no wrong answers but rather different perspectives. You don't need to agree with others, but you must please listen respectfully as others share their views. Please feel free to share your point of view even if it differs from what others have said. All the information you provide will not be misused and this information will only be accessible to me (the researcher) and my supervisor.

Everything you say here will be confidential and anonymous, so no one will know what you said. Your names will not be used in the transcripts, I will use pseudonyms. To capture what has been said in this session, we will video record this session, this will help me to analyse and precisely understand your views. Talking about confidentially, has everyone signed the consent forms? Does anyone have questions about consent forms?

Before we start with the session, I would like to share with you some ground rules:

- a) Please switch off your cellphones
- b) Only one person speaks at the time, we want to give everyone a chance to talk, and I will assist with the process
- c) Respect the opinions of others
- d) Respect the privacy of others in the group by not discussing what happens in the session.

Thank you for joining me today, are there any questions so far? Well, let's begin.....

APPENDIX E: FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS

Questions

These questions will guide my discussion with the student teachers; however, follow-up/sub-questions will be posed depending on the responses.

1. Why did choose teaching as a career?
2. Could you please tell me how your interest in choosing Life Orientation as one of your electives came about?
3. Do you think the theory taught in the classroom before your work-integrated learning prepared you enough to fully teach and manage the classroom?

Do you think the theory taught in the classroom before your work-integrated learning prepared you enough to teach effectively online?

4. What is your opinion about Life Orientation in South Africa?
5. Could you please tell me about your expectations of teaching Life Orientation before work-integrated learning?
6. Could you please tell me about your experiences of teaching Life Orientation during your work-integrated learning?

Could you please tell me about your experiences of teaching Life Orientation during online sessions?

7. What challenges did you face as a Life Orientation student teacher?

What challenges did you face as a student teacher during the three phases of Lesson study one?

8. Did you receive enough support in terms of your mentor teacher and lecturer?



Faculty of Education

APPENDIX F: INVITATION LETTER

Dear Student Teacher

My name is Florence Shange and I am currently studying towards a Masters in Education through the University of Pretoria. The focus of my research is **Student-teacher's experiences of teaching Life orientation during work-integrated learning** which explores the experiences of student teachers (final year students) towards teaching Life Orientation after their work-integrated learning. A vital part of this degree requires me to conduct research and write a report based on my findings.

The nature and methodology of my study require that I engage with student teachers through a focus group discussion. All the discussions will take place at the University of Pretoria (Groenkloof campus) facilities and they will be recorded (videorecording). Participation in this study will not affect any of your duties and your module marks as this study is not about your schoolwork or marks. The sole purpose of this study is mainly about your work-integrated learning experiences. These discussions will take approximately 70 minutes and you will be sharing your perspectives with other student teachers in a group setting. This may lead to being threatened by other members or feel intimidated to voice out your opinions, but as a researcher, I will make sure that these discussions are carefully planned/conducted to create a non-intimidating environment so that everyone can fully participate and give their honest opinions. Once completed, the recorded video discussions will be transcribed and analysed for the dissertation. It would be an honour to hear your experiences as a student-teacher. I believe you have esteemed perspectives that need to be shared. Your contribution to this study will be adding value to the research emerging in the South African context about student teachers' experiences.

If you wish to participate in the discussions mentioned above of the study, you will be video recorded while engaging. Should you not want to participate in this study you will not be

penalised. You are also allowed to withdraw from the study at any stage if you no longer wish to participate. Please note that you will be treated with respect and fairly, and your identity will be protected and will be known only by myself as a researcher and my supervisor. The information provided by you will be used for the sole purpose of this study.

Name of the student: Florence Shange

Email address:

Cell Number:

Signature of student:

Supervisor: Dr. S de Jager

Email of supervisor:

Number of supervisor:

Signature of supervisor:

Faculty of Education
Fakulteit Opvoedkunde
Lefapha la Thuto