Chapter 6

Evolving higher education teacher identities through the Postgraduate Diploma in Higher Education Programme at the National University of Lesotho

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Introduction

The right to education is one of the principles of state policy in Lesotho (Government of Lesotho, 1993). Education is vital to the full development of the human personality, a sense of dignity and strengthening respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. Lesotho has undertaken to make education available

to all and has adopted policies that ensure that higher education is made equally accessible through the progressive introduction of free education, based on capacity, and by every appropriate means (Government of Lesotho, 1993). The Lesotho Council on Higher Education (LCHE) was established to regulate the higher education sub-sector. Amongst the LCHE's goals is improving teaching and learning in higher education. One of the LCHE's strategic objectives provides that all teachers in higher education institutions (HEIs) should have acquired a teaching qualification by 2030. The goal of the LCHE in this respect is to improve the quality of teaching and learning in higher education by developing expertise for teaching at this level. For example, policy objective 3.1.1 of the document seeks to build capacity and expertise amongst academic staff members employed by higher education providers to deliver a high-quality teaching and learning experience for their students (LCHE, 2013:9-10).

In response to this context, the National University of Lesotho (NUL) has created a strategic plan, which provides for the objective of teaching enhancement as well as the enhancement and strengthening of teaching and learning. "Teaching enhancement", as used here, refers to any formal pedagogical staff development or training provided to teachers in different ways and formats, such as continuous professional development (CPD) seminars, and workshops. Against this background the Postgraduate Diploma in Higher Education (PGDip) programme (hereafter, the PGDip) at the NUL was created to provide professional validation for HE practitioners, with a view to enhancing their academic practice in their specialised disciplines. A particular focus on the programme was enabling teachers to develop not just sound pedagogies but also professionalise their identity as teachers. However, there has been no formal evaluation of the PGDip yet, that aims to understand how teacher identities have evolved through the lens of the PGDip programme, in the context of the Lesotho higher education landscape. Thus, we have a gap in our knowledge of what higher education teachers think of the work that they are performing, and how they do take on and develop an identity as teachers. This gap needs to be filled, because teacher identity is a vital part of ongoing learning,

reflexive practice, and taking on new skills and experiences (Colbeck, 2008).

This chapter thus aims to examine evolving teacher identities developed through the PGDip programme within the context of the NUL. To this end, the study addresses four broad questions:

1. What kind of experiences in teaching in higher education (HE) did the participants have before engaging in the PGDip programme?
2. How did the participants' competencies as HE practitioners evolve through their engagement with the programme?
3. What characteristic features of teaching in the 21st century do participants think that they need?
4. How do participants characterise themselves as teachers?

The chapter aims to unravel the nuanced dynamics and multifaceted dimensions that contribute to the evolution of teacher identities, with a particular focus on the PGDip at the National University of Lesotho.

By investigating the teaching experiences of participants in HE before enrolling in the PGDip, the study aims to lay the groundwork for understanding the diverse backgrounds and perspectives that shape their journey. Secondly, the exploration of how participants' competencies as HE practitioners evolve throughout their engagement with the programme is intricately tied to the broader aim of unravelling the nuanced dynamics in teacher identity formation. Moving forward, the study endeavours to probe the characteristic features of the 21st century teacher that participants think that they need (and may currently lack). This not only addresses a specific aspect of the professional development that the PGDip offers participants but also aligns with the broader goal of comprehending the multifaceted dimensions influencing teacher identities. The aim reflected in the fourth research question, is to delve into the characteristic features that participants feel mark them out as teacher practitioners in HE.

This study employed a qualitative research approach. It utilised surveys and interviews to comprehensively explore the evolution of higher education teachers' professional identities

through their engagement in the PGDip. This combination allows for a more robust and nuanced understanding of the complex dynamics involved in this transformative process. This not only enhances the transparency of the research process but also positions the study within the broader scholarly discourse on teacher identity research. Drawing on the findings from this study, the chapter highlights the potential implications for educational practice, policy, and future research. It sets the stage for discussions on how insights gained from the investigation may contribute to the enhancement of teacher training programmes, institutional policies, and the overall quality of higher education in Lesotho and beyond. In essence, the study's aspirations intertwine with its research questions, forming a cohesive narrative that strives to uncover the intricate dynamics shaping teacher identities in the specific context of the PGDip at the National University of Lesotho.

The context: The PGDip programme at NUL

The PGDip is one of the higher education programmes that NUL offers, for professional development. HE, as a field of study, requires those who offer it to acquire relevant training so that they can understand the relevant discourses around teaching, learning, assessment and evaluation (Robinson & McMillan, 2006). Emerging imperatives impacting this field require epistemological shifts from positivistic and behaviouristic teacher-centred practices, which traditionally dominated teaching, learning and assessment, to constructivist, interpretivist and other student-centred practices, which allow space for engagement, interaction and conversation with and amongst students (Alam, 2016). The NUL PGDip's generic and applied competencies aim to cultivate participants with a set of beliefs, values, and commitments towards being a particular kind of HE practitioner (distinct from another professionals). HE practitioners must be professionally developed to better understand their role in the evolving HE landscape, locally (i.e., Lesotho) and more broadly (i.e., shifts in research, theory and so on across HE globally). Importantly, as indicated in the NUL PGDHE Student Guide, teachers need to understand and value African identity and cultural heritages,

within a global context, and display a commitment to promoting Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS). This means that our participants need to be provided with space to reflect upon critical underlying educational philosophies and on their own practices, within the contexts in which they teach (Sööt & Viskus, 2015). This will help them to become well-grounded and equipped in their roles as assessors, curriculum developers, researchers, and community engaged educators.

Thus, the NUL PGDip is designed to help participants to critically reflect on higher education discourses, philosophical perspectives relating to teaching, learning and assessment, epistemological sources of teaching, as well as policy imperatives in higher education, especially as they pertain to Lesotho's education system. The aim of the programme is that participants emerge from it with several competencies. Firstly, the ability for conceptual thinking, analysis and synthesis with the capacity to systematically analyse bodies of knowledge within a field, discipline or practice for practical application. The programme also empowers participants with skills to translate knowledge into practice, demonstrating an understanding of the complexities of selecting, applying or transferring procedures and techniques to unfamiliar problems in a specialised field, discipline or practice. Secondly, professionalism and ethical values based on critical reflection and the appropriateness of different ethical value systems to specific contexts. Professional identity involves self-knowledge in teaching-related situations, relationships developed within professional practice, feelings of belonging, and learning experiences. Its development is a constant learning process (Baxter, 2012). Once a participant has accepted and internalised expectations for a teaching role as part of their identity, that identity becomes a cognitive framework for interpreting new experiences (Colbeck, 2008:10). Thus, finally, the programme improves the capacity for critical evaluation and self-awareness, applying self-reflective and critical learning strategies to own professional and ongoing learning needs and those of others.

Additionally, critical competencies for a 21st century teacher in higher education must include being able to use appropriate educational technologies to create and deliver learning content

(Real Torres, 2021), and to assist in the assessment of student learning (Mostert & Snowball, 2013). The NUL-PGDip enhances the capacity of teachers to use innovative and appropriate technologies to effectively engage their students. Further, teacher practitioners need to be endowed with skills to interrogate the issues and factors affecting student learning in HE, so that they can better create effective learning environments for their students (Alam, 2016). Thus, PGDip participants are equipped with the knowledge, skills, and attitudes required for a) understanding how students learn; b) managing and monitoring student learning; c) planning/designing, implementing, reflecting on and reviewing the curriculum for a particular programme ; d) preparing appropriate learning materials and media for the students; e) creating and facilitating quality, meaningful and profound learning opportunities for students; f) assessing and monitoring the student's learning progress professionally and ethically, and assuring quality in all these processes (Postgraduate Diploma in Higher Education Student Guide, 2022).

Finally, in line with research that argues for space and time for critical reflection as a vital part of ongoing learning, and professional identity development (Sööt & Viskus, 2015), the PGDip looks at the value of the scholarship of teaching and learning, or SoTL. SoTL provides educators with opportunities to undertake research activities which include collecting, documenting, analysing, organising, critically evaluating and reporting on one's teaching. But importantly, it engages teachers with research on different aspects of teaching, learning and assessment practices, thus enabling them to conduct research on and solve identified problems in a changing higher or further education environment (Felten, 2013).

The PGDip at NUL is thus comprehensive and has been designed to respond to needs and competencies identified in research into effective higher education teaching by researchers working in a range of HE contexts, and to local policy and contextual imperatives and needs within Lesotho. In addition to gaining technical and conceptual teaching knowledge and competence, the programme enables a significant amount of

critical reflection with the aim of helping participants to develop their professional teacher identities.

Before we move on to consider whether and how the PGDip is succeeding, we must discuss how the field, and this chapter, defines professional identity in the higher education context.

Academic and teacher identity development in higher education

Definitions of academic identity in higher education are limited, with a relative paucity of research in this area (Clarke et al., 2014). The existing definitions explore concepts related to professional identity in general rather than academic identity in higher education. For example, Sachs (2001:153) states that professional identity refers to "a set of externally ascribed attributes that are used to differentiate one group from another... It provides a shared set of attributes, values, and so on that enable the differentiation of one group from another". Academic identity can be situated at the crossroads of individual life course experiences and higher education-specific contexts and thus understood as an increasingly plural identity.

Contemporary concepts of identity tend to take the view that it is a cumulative project involving a relationship between individuals and the social structures in which they are located (Delanty, 2008). It is thus viewed as something that is situated and contingent, involving interpretation and negotiation on the part of an individual; identities are thus seen as being multiple, overlapping, and provisional. These views corroborate the fact that there should not be any fixed frames of reference regarding teacher identity, as this does not do justice to the diversity and complexity of contemporary identities in higher education (Baxter, 2012). This is because some fundamental tensions and dynamics are involved in the lives of teachers in higher education. For instance, some academic staff can be involved in business-oriented activities such as consultancies and commissioned research. In contrast, others remain more focused on teaching and a "public service" orientation. Also, most professional staff are becoming more specialised in their expertise while at the same

time becoming involved in cross-boundary areas such as teaching and learning support (Whitchurch, 2009).

Therefore, there are dynamics within the university that create common purpose and tensions between diverse groupings of staff who may, in the past, have worked independently of each other. This phenomenon results in convergence and divergence between academic and professional identities and opens up spaces for new types of identity to emerge with associated activities. The latter includes collaborative work concerning appropriate content and delivery design, especially in this new era of various forms of virtual learning (Voogt et al., 2015).

Changes have impacted higher education systems, institutions, and structures worldwide at different rates and levels. While there are substantial cohorts of academic staff who continue to perform either teaching or research roles, there are those who combine administrative and teaching and research roles. According to Whitchurch (2009), the typology of "bounded," "cross-boundary," "unbounded," and "blended" identities have potential relevance for academic as well as for professional staff. "Bounded" academic staff are strongly influenced by the rules, opportunities, and recognition criteria of the institution where they work, whereas "boundaryless" staff take a more freewheeling approach and are less constrained by such factors. However, as some authors have argued, careers and identities are only sometimes synonymous. The relationship between them is often nuanced, complex, and even contested.

There is significant literature on changing academic identities. According to Clarke et al. (2013), research in higher education has concentrated on several areas, which include the values and collective identities of academic staff, their role in higher education governance, their norms and socialisation processes, and the impact of change in higher education on academic roles. While many authors advocate for the types of research methodology that should be used in such investigations, others are interested to know how academics come to possess the constructs and ideas that inform their professional identity. Discipline-based cultures are a key source of the identity and expertise of academic staff (Ballantyne & Grootenboer, 2012).

They include assumptions about what should be known and how tasks should be performed, standards for effective performance, publication patterns, professional interaction, and social and political status. However, changes in higher education have added further complexity to identity formation within higher education. Against this background, our study explored professional identity as a construct, the different ways in which professional identity should be viewed, the relationship between identity and professional socialisation in higher education, and the role played by networks and their impact on identity formation. The study also considered gender; midlife career academics; the emergence of mixed identities; and the development of new professional boundaries within higher education.

Developing a teacher's identity

Many scholars acknowledged that teacher identity is central to the teaching profession. Holland and Lachicotte (2007) argue that teachers who identify with their teaching role are emotionally attached to this role, and it informs their worldview. Akkerman and Meijer (2011) agree that when one becomes emotionally attached to the teacher role, that role becomes part of who that person is; it becomes an organising element in teachers' lives. Though teacher identity development is sometimes presented as unproblematic, most authors identify it as a struggle, as teachers must often give meaning to different, sometimes conflicting, perspectives (Beijaard et al., 2004). It is generally assumed that university teachers develop a teacher identity after a few years of being a teacher. This teacher identity is built on other identities, including those of a professional, an academic, a researcher, or an intellectual.

Over the last decade, the number of studies concerning teacher identity development in the university context has increased substantially. As Beijaard et al. (2004) articulated, developing a teacher identity is an ongoing process of interpretation and re-interpretation of whom one considers oneself to be and whom one would like to become. There are varied theoretical approaches to teacher identity; some stress the social and cultural nature of identity, whereas others focus on its

discursive and narrative nature. Most contemporary approaches, however, agree that identity is constructed in a social context and that rather than being stable and fixed, it is shifting and dynamic (Rodgers & Scott, 2008). Based on this view, our study adopted the social constructivist approach, which emphasises the social contexts of learning, and that knowledge is mutually built and constructed. In other words, human development is socially situated, and knowledge is constructed through interaction with others. This is in line with Wenger's (2011) theory of communities of practice (CoP), which is detailed in section four.

According to van Lankveld et al. (2016), some factors strengthen, while others constrain the development of teacher identity in the university context. The authors found that the immediate work environment, the broader context of higher education, interaction with students, and staff development activities each have a varying impact on teacher identity. Their findings show that contact with students and staff development programmes usually strengthen teacher identity. In contrast, the broader context of higher education generally has a constraining impact, and the immediate work environment can either strengthen or constrain.

In summary, teacher identity is dynamic and will continue to change throughout one's career. Knowing how much to "give" of yourself in the classroom is part of the challenge of establishing your own identity. Friesen and Besley (2013) explain that teachers who are more likely to have a well-formed sense of personal identity are more likely to be ready to form their professional identity. Teacher identity is individual with no right or wrong way to be, but it is essential for professional development to suit it, and personalised approaches are most effective.

Theoretical or conceptual framework

The study this chapter draws on adopted a sociocultural perspective, drawing on the notion of communities of practice (CoP) advocated by Wenger (2011), where groups of people who share a concern or passion for something interact regularly and learn how to do it better. Different CoPs (e.g., workforce, faith settings, sports teams, etc.) support different aspects of individual

communities of practice. Central to a CoP is the understanding that newcomers learn from more experienced practitioners. The three distinct yet interdependent elements that characterise a CoP are i) a shared domain of interest, ii) relationships that promote collective learning, and iii) interests and interactions generating a shared repertoire of resources and strategies for tackling recurrent problems. Wenger (2011) posits that novices and relative experts within a CoP are shaped by participation and interaction.

The CoP framework provides a lens through which to understand the evolution of HE teacher identity in the PGDip. This is so, because the shared domain of interest, relationships promoting collective learning, and the shared repertoire of resources and strategies, contribute to the shaping of individual identities within a dynamic and interconnected community. The first element of a CoP is the shared domain of interest. In the case of the PGDip, this shared domain is the realm of higher education teaching. HE teachers participating in this community are united by their interest in enhancing their teaching practices, staying current with educational trends and navigating the challenges specific to higher education. The second element involves relationships that promote collective learning. As individuals engage in the CoP, they interact regularly with fellow teachers, sharing experiences, insights, and challenges. Novice teachers, in particular, benefit from the wisdom of experienced practitioners, contributing to the collective knowledge of the community. This interaction fosters a sense of belonging and facilitates the exchange of ideas, ultimately influencing the development of individual teacher identities.

The third element is the development of a shared repertoire of resources and strategies. Through ongoing interactions, CoP members create a repository of knowledge, tools, and approaches that are collectively owned. This shared repertoire becomes a valuable resource for teachers within the PGDHE (Postgraduate Diploma in Higher Education), offering a set of effective strategies, best practices, and solutions to recurring problems in higher education teaching. Wenger (2011) emphasises that individuals and the CoP are shaped by participation. As HE teachers engage in the CoP, their identities evolve through active

involvement in shared practices, discussions, and collaborations. By participating in the CoP, novice teachers not only learn from experienced practitioners but also contribute to the collective identity of the community, thus influencing the ongoing peer learning between experienced and novice teachers participating in the programme.

Methodology

The study explored whether enrolment in the PGDip has brought about any shift in identities for programme participants as higher education teachers, with desired competencies to enable them to carry out institutional mandates while at the same time fulfilling HEI requirements relating to teaching and learning in higher education. The investigation sought to answer the following questions: i) What kind of experiences in teaching in higher education do the participants have before engaging in the PGDHE programme? ii) How did the participants' competencies as higher education practitioners evolve over their engagement with the programme? iii) What characteristic features of teaching in the 21st century do participants think that they need?, and iv) How do participants characterise themselves as teachers?

This section outlines the research design, data collection methods, and analytical tools utilised to explore and interpret the experiences of educators participating in the programme. This research employed a mixed-methods design, incorporating quantitative and qualitative research methods. It utilised an online survey and interviews, to comprehensively explore the evolution of higher education teachers' professional identities through their engagement in the PGDHE programme. The qualitative data obtained from the semi-structured interviews aimed to provide in-depth understanding and complement the quantitative findings. This combination allows for a more robust and nuanced understanding of the complex dynamics involved in this transformative process.

The survey items were divided into three categories, looking at participants' experiences of teaching before enrolling in the programme, their journey into becoming a professional higher education teacher, and their reflections on their learning and

understandings of teaching at the exit level of the programme. Participants were asked to rate their responses on a five-point Likert scale. Out of 22 programme participants, only 13 responses were received on the survey. Thus, we will represent their responses as whole numbers, rather than as percentages.

Semi-structured interviews with three purposefully selected respondents were also carried out to gain an in-depth understanding of views expressed in the survey. The selection was based on accessibility, taking into consideration the issues of time and expenses that would be spent in conducting the interviews. The focus of the interviews was on three questions: a) What impressions did they have regarding the relevance and responsiveness of the programme regarding their expectations from it? b) Are there any changes in the manner in which they have been conducting their teaching practice, resulting from engagement in the PGDip? and c) What factors contributed to the experienced changes?

Findings

The findings of this study are based on the data that was provided by the research participants regarding the evolution of their professional identities as higher education teachers through their enrolment in the PGDip programme. The participants provided information about their professional careers as higher education practitioners (teachers) from three different perspectives over time, before enrolling in the PGDip, as a professional higher education teacher in the making, and at the exit level, as discussed below.

Before enrolling in the programme

The focus here was on finding out the participants' views on their level of expertise in teaching in higher education, their subject matter knowledge, the extent to which they regarded themselves as teachers and what motivated them to enrol in the PGDip at NUL. As suggested by Beijaard et al. (2004), university teachers develop a teacher identity after a few years of being a teacher, and that teacher identity is built on other identities, including those of a professional, an academic, a researcher, or an intellectual.

It was important therefore to determine the relative level of participants' identity development at the point of entry into the programme. Research also indicates that the rate of development of professional identity is dependent on, amongst other factors, the reasons for the participants for enrolling in a professional development programme such as the PGDip (Baxter, 2012).

Regarding their expertise in teaching in higher education, eight of the 13 participants felt their level of expertise ranged from good to excellent, with only two considering themselves as excellent in teaching at this level. Meanwhile four participants regarded their level of expertise as fair, and only one participant thought that they were poor. Of the 13 responses, ten of the participants indicated that they were competent with their subject matter knowledge, two were not sure, and one felt that they were less competent with the content of the course(s) they taught. These results are consistent with the fact that academics are employed based on competence in their subject matter knowledge, and most do not have any teaching qualification, hence they are not necessarily competent in the delivery of content. In some cases, academics are assigned courses which they do not feel confident to teach because of staff shortages that may have arisen, sometimes from someone having left the institution. However, it was surprising that two of the participants believed that they were excellent in their teaching at this level, even before they could start on the programme, so why they enrolled in the programme remains a question. As to whether they had ever considered themselves as teachers, ten responded in the affirmative, and the remaining three participants said that they "hardly" or "never" regarded themselves as teachers. It may not be incorrect to believe that the participant who felt that they were poor in teaching at this level, is the same participant who "never" regarded themself as a teacher.

On the issue of what motivated them to enrol for the programme, most participants indicated that they felt the need to improve their teaching skills, particularly in the 21st century with its knowledge boom, and associated advancements in technology, and in particular, technology required for the enhancement of teaching and learning. There is also the fact that the LCHE is

beginning to require all academics in the higher education field to have obtained a PGDHE by the year 2030. One of the participants pointed out:

> ...the institution where I teach does not offer capacitation in teaching methodology and obvious lack pushed me to enrol in this course.

Another participant wanted to:

> ...improve on my teaching and training.

The following comment expresses a similar reason:

> ...to get the required skills in teaching in order to be proficient in my job.

This final comment highlights the importance of developing expertise as a teacher of a discipline:

> The motive behind this programme is to make sure that I qualify to be a teacher in higher education. To fulfil the need of being an informed teacher in higher education in the 21st century. Being just a practitioner in my field was not sufficient in my practices of teaching and learning. Therefore, I found a need to engage into this field to better and sufficiently fulfil its needs.

One of the interviewees reported that even though he was a teacher by profession, he felt that during his earlier professional training he had only been prepared to teach learners at high school level, as opposed to the young and mature adult students who he is interacting with at higher education level. The challenges that he is confronted with at this level, he asserted, forced him to seize the opportunity that came through the offering of the PGDip, to master knowledge and skills required for effective teaching, especially in this digital age.

Research indicates that teacher identity is directly associated with an academic's work commitment, job satisfaction

and motivation to become better in how they perform (Beijaard et al., 2004). Indeed, the advent of the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) brought new challenges and shook the education sector with everyone involved having to move from their comfort zones. Administrators, teachers and students all had to adopt new ways of functioning to survive or succeed in their respective territories. As indicated earlier, teachers who are more likely to have a well-formed sense of personal identity are more likely to be ready to form their professional identities (Friesen & Besley, 2013), hence their enrolment in the PGDip.

A professional HE teacher in the making

The focus of investigations in the next part of the study was to determine the extent to which participants understood what was expected of a teacher in higher education, and how they felt that they had acquired knowledge, skills and attitudes required of effective teaching in higher education. The aim was to determine the impact of the PGDip in the construction of professional teacher identities.

All participants reported that the programme was relevant to their lives as higher education teachers. Furthermore, all participants pointed out that the following teacher responsibilities were important aspects of the teacher's effective functioning in higher education:

1. Planning/designing, implementing, reflecting on and reviewing the curriculum for a particular programme and/or module.
2. Managing and monitoring student learning.
3. Preparing appropriate learning materials and media for the students.
4. Creating and facilitating quality, meaningful and deep learning opportunities for students.
5. Assessing and monitoring students' learning progress in a professional and ethical way and assuring quality all these processes.
6. Engaging in the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning to improve on own practice as a reflective practitioner and contribute to the field; and

7. Undertaking community outreach projects to enhance teaching, learning and research. (Note: one participant indicated uncertainty regarding the importance of engagement in community outreach projects).

According to the LCHE (2013) standards, teachers in higher education should indeed effectively carry out these functions, to enhance their efficiency in the sector. It is therefore encouraging that the programme participants regarded these responsibilities as important.

On reflecting on the content of the courses that are taught, all participants in the survey regarded curriculum design, teaching and learning, and e-learning as courses that were important in shaping them into the teachers that they wanted to become. Courses like Context in Higher Education, Scholarship of Teaching and Learning, and Quality Assurance were given an importance rating of 92.3% while Assessment was rated 84.3% in terms of importance. It is surprising that programme participants attached less importance to the course on assessment in constructing their identity as professional teachers, yet the role of assessment in enhancing teaching and learning cannot be overlooked. Contrary to the results from the survey, all participants who were interviewed regarded all courses as highly important in making them the competent and confident teachers they are becoming.

Another interesting aspect was participants' opinions regarding the contribution made by activities that they carried out during their study in shaping their professional identities. Here, all participants suggested that the learning activities that involved making presentations, writing individual assignments, reading responses and group assignments, contributed to shaping their identities as professional teachers in higher education, while their engagement in less formal reflective journalling and participation in discussion forums were favoured at 92.3% and tests at 84.6%.

The results reflected above are consistent with research which indicates that teacher identity is constructed in social contexts of learning and that knowledge is mutually built and constructed (van Lankveld et al., 2017; Rodgers & Scott, 2008). As also suggested by Wenger (2011), the in-service teachers

in this programme played a significant role in transforming the students to become better in what they do, as members of a community of practice. The composition of the group was diverse in terms of experience in teaching at higher education, with some being relatively new in the sector and others having significant experience. There were some members who had high school teaching qualifications, and those who were experts in their disciplines but had no teaching qualification. There were opportunities for information and knowledge sharing, where novices were learning from those with experience. All participants indicated that the support that they received from the programme facilitators and programme coordinator played a significant role in the development of their identities as higher education teachers. As a result, they actively participated and enjoyed their studies through the PGDip.

At the exit level of the programme

The focus of the investigation in this part of the study was on determining the extent to which participants felt that they had attained the programme outcomes. The targeted competencies and associated rates of attainment by participants are presented in Table 6.1, which indicates the various competencies associated with the programme learning outcomes, the number of participants who achieved each competency or attribute.

These results indicate that participants felt that they had attained the competencies expected for effective functioning as a teacher in higher education. Participants had earlier suggested that the competencies were key attributes for development of teachers in higher education. Since the PGDip consists of courses addressing the competencies depicted in the table, the results indicate that the programme participants were satisfied and hence confident in their abilities to perform the functions associated with these competencies. The level of their attainment of these competencies is in line with earlier studies that assert that teacher identity is directly associated with their work commitment, job satisfaction and motivation to become even better in what they do. The responses from section one of the survey also affirmed that the participants were committed to their

role as teachers, and were motivated to improve their knowledge, skills and competencies required for effective teaching in higher education. Professional teachers value their work and always seek to do their best for the benefit of their students. As pointed out earlier, Akkerman and Meijer (2011) note that when one becomes emotionally attached to the teacher role, that role becomes part of who that person is; it becomes an organising element in teachers' lives.

Table 6.1: Targeted competencies and rates of attainment by participants

Competency/attributes	**Number of participants who achieved**
Design and planning of learning activities;	13
Teaching and supporting student learning;	13
Assessment and giving feedback to students on their learning;	12
Developing effective learning environments, student support and guidance;	13
Using available technologies to enhance student learning;	13
Integration of scholarship, research and professional activities with teaching and in support of student learning	12

In their survey responses, participants asserted that the programme had attained its main objective, because they now feel competent and confident as higher education teachers. In seeking deeper understanding on this issue concerning the changes that participants experienced in carrying out their teaching roles and responsibilities, they pointed out through interviews, that as a result of their enrolment in the PGDip, they confidently make more informed contributions in forums on curriculum design and development and in the moderation of examinations in their departments. They also mentioned that they now feel empowered to create more engaging tasks during class sessions, thus

improving student interaction. This is expressed in the following comments from one of the participants:

> It is only now that I am proud to say I am a higher education practitioner. In fact, my students can testify that my interactions with them have changed for the good. I am so happy to have done this programme.

Similarly, another participant commented:

> At the moment, I am one of those who bring in suggestions in my department on how we can review and adapt our curriculum to meet the needs of the 21st century students,

and yet another pointed out:

> I now give my students tasks that are more engaging and that inspire them to think critically and be innovative.

Participants also mentioned that they emulate the conduct exhibited by the course facilitators in the programme, which affirms the assertion that professional identity is a product of all interactions within the immediate work environment, including emulating behaviours exhibited by the more experienced in the field (van Lankveld et al., 2017). Participants emphasised that the friendly, yet scholarly approach taken with their students, has drawn more participation from students in class activities, with students now being open and willing to share their opinions and ideas on the issues being dealt with in class, as seen in the following comment from one participant:

> Most (if not all) of my lecturers left a positive impact on my professional life, and after seeing how they make their classes lively and student-centred, I have made it a goal to be like them.

Another participant supported had the following to say:

> My students are already seeing the positive change in my interaction with them, and frankly I am really enjoying the new me. I now put my students at the centre of all the activities we do.

On comparing the responses at the exit level with those on the question on participants' levels of expertise before enrolling into the PGDip, participants indicated that there had been a greater shift in their development of competencies and confidence in teaching in higher education. Teacher identity development is indeed a process that works in stages and is influenced by various factors, where others inhibit, others promote its development.

On further interrogation on what factors supported development of their professional teacher identity, one participant had this to say:

> The competencies of the facilitators, the modules in the programmes. Time allocated for each module was thoroughly adhered to

and this was supported by another participant who commented:

> The programme in general was so practical and articulated the attributes of a competent HE teacher in this current era.

Research indicates that factors such as the existing curriculum, expectations from educational authorities and institutional culture influence construction of teacher identities (Akkerman & Meijer, (2011). Some participants asserted that the learning activities such as reflective journalling, and development of portfolios helped a lot as they were able to identify their strengths and limitations in time for proper action. They also suggested that the group interactions of the participants in programme, and diversity of background of the participants in the programme contributed significantly to their professional identity development. The opinions expressed here affirm earlier research findings that led to the assertion that professional identity can be

viewed as a product of socio-cultural interactions and reflective practice on the part of the practitioner (van Lankveld et al., 2017; Rodgers & Scott, 2008). Indeed, running the course as a Community of Practice (Wenger, 2011), benefited them a lot.

The participants in the study were working throughout the programme and this gave them an opportunity to try out some of the skills that they were learning as the PGDip course was happening. As one participant noted regarding their developing practice, their *"ability to engage with the students by adopting appropriate techniques and methods suitable for the modules I facilitate"* contributed to their identity development.

Previous research in this area indicates that teacher professional identity is shaped and negotiated through daily activities conducted in the context of an academic's work environment (Beijaard et al., 2004). One of the participants, however, indicated the following:

> From my early professional training as a teacher, I thought that teaching at this level was going to be easy as I would just apply the knowledge, skills and strategies I had acquired over time, however I found that working amongst colleagues who had no knowledge of teaching pedagogies changed my song, I fell into their ways of doing things, I got swallowed up into believing that I was now a lecturer and have to lecture to my students.

Teachers' historical background and experiences, including their pre-teaching identity, their beliefs and values may also constrain or support development of teacher professional identity. In another excerpt, the above participant realised that the newly adopted practice did not bear the kind of results that he was expecting from his students, and as he puts it, he had to "resort" to his "old ways of teaching". In response to this reflection he noted:

> [I] realised that I needed advice on how to teach better at this level. When the opportunity of enrolling in a

> programme such as this one came, I decided not to wait any longer, but to register immediately.

Regarding what participants regarded themselves as needing to be competent and confident HE teachers of the 21st century, the interviewees pointed out a need to consider inclusion of teaching practice engagement in the form of some attachment to higher education institutions, to provide those programme participants who were not directly involved in teaching to have an opportunity to assess their progress regarding the targeted skills development. They also noted a need for help with managing adult learners. Participants felt that they needed empowerment on how to handle adult or mature learners' needs. These concerns are genuine but may be solved through avenues other than expanding the content of the current programme.

These suggestions highlight the reflective engagement of practitioners as professionals who align themselves with lifelong learning as a way of quenching their thirst for more knowledge and development of further competencies, which in turn leads to further constructions of professional identities.

Conclusion

It is evident that development of teacher professional identities is an ongoing process. It involves transformation of character, beliefs and values for influencing practice in the workplace. Several factors may be attributed to the construction of an individual teacher's professional identity. These include factors arising from the individual teacher's personal aspirations and desires to do well in their practice, as well as those that may arise from their immediate work environment including influences from colleagues and support from people regarded as role models. The expectations from educational or institutional authorities, such as the LCHE in this case, may put pressure on academics to realise their limitations in relation to set standards, and compel practitioners to take positive measures to align themselves with the demands of their job. Enrolment and engagement in professional development initiatives such as the PGDip contributed significantly to development of professional

identities of participants. Evidence has shown that the nature of the content, quality of learning and teaching activities, the conduct exhibited by facilitators in the programme have positively influenced the construction of participants' identities as competent and confident teachers in higher education. The fact that the participants were studying while still engaged in their normal routine duties as academics, gave them the opportunity to immediately put into practise whatever excited and engaged them in their training. Through their reflective practice they were able to develop the targeted competencies while still under support and guidance of their facilitators. It therefore takes one's commitment to their job, recognition of one's limitations, willingness to improve and the enabling environment that the needed transformation on the part of a teacher can be realised. A practitioner's intrinsic motivation keeps them focused and maintains their perseverance until they achieve that which they desire, becoming the kind of practitioner that they want to be.

The study has identified a variety of motivations for enrolling in the PGDip, with a predominant focus on improving teaching skills and adapting to the demands of the 21st century higher education landscape. It highlights a critical need for professional development opportunities in teaching methodologies, especially in institutions where such training is lacking. While the study presents valuable insights into the evolution of higher education teachers' identities through the PGDip programme at NUL, it also prompts considerations for programme improvement and expansion. The findings suggest a positive impact but the small sample size and certain identified areas for enhancement should be addressed in future iterations of the programme. Continuous evaluation and responsiveness to the evolving needs of teachers will be crucial for the sustained success of professional development initiatives like the PGDip.

The findings emphasise the perceived relevance of specific courses, such as Curriculum Design, Teaching and Learning, and E-Learning. However, the lower importance attached to the Assessment course raises questions. This may signal a potential gap in understanding the integral role of assessment in effective teaching. The programme should ensure a more balanced

emphasis on all aspects of pedagogy. The high reported rates of competency attainment in various aspects of teaching and learning indicate the programme's effectiveness. This is a positive outcome, aligning with the broader goals of enhancing the capabilities of teachers in higher education. It would be valuable to explore how these competencies translate into actual teaching practices and student outcomes in future evaluations.

The acknowledgment of the significant role played by programme facilitators and coordinators in shaping participants' identities emphasises the importance of supportive learning environments. It suggests that a positive and encouraging educational climate enhances the effectiveness of professional development programmes. Participants' suggestions for improvements, such as including teaching practice engagement and addressing the management of adult or mature learners, indicate a recognition of the need for ongoing professional development. This aligns with the concept of lifelong learning and emphasises the importance of adaptability in the ever-evolving field of higher education. The participants' suggestion that they should be attached to higher education institutions for teaching practice is noteworthy. This aligns with the belief that practical experiences play a crucial role in identity development. Incorporating such experiences into the programme could provide a more holistic learning experience.

In conclusion, this investigation into participants' teaching experiences before joining the PGDip has served as a foundational step in evaluating and developing the programme at NUL, illuminating the diverse backgrounds and perspectives that mould teachers' ongoing educational journey. This groundwork has been essential in comprehending the intricate dynamics influencing teacher identities as they engage in the programme. As our study delved into how participants' competencies as higher education practitioners evolved over the course of the programme, a clear connection has emerged between the research questions and our broader aim of understanding the complexities in teacher identity formation. As we turn our attention to the implications of the study for the PGDip, it is evident that our findings offer valuable insights and raise considerations for programme

improvement and expansion. The identified motivations for enrolling in the PGDip highlight a critical need for ongoing professional development in teaching methodologies, particularly in institutions where such training is lacking.

However, the study also recognises the importance of addressing certain areas for enhancement, such as the small sample size used in the study, and the need for a more balanced emphasis on all aspects of pedagogy within the programme. Continuous evaluation and responsiveness to the evolving needs of higher education teachers emerge as crucial factors for the sustained success of professional development initiatives like the PGDip. The participants' suggestions for improvements, particularly the inclusion of teaching practice engagement, align with the concept of lifelong learning and emphasise the importance of adaptability in the ever-evolving field of higher education. In summary, our study not only adds depth to the understanding of teacher identity evolution but also offers practical insights and recommendations for refining and expanding professional development programmes in higher education.

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