

Final Research Report - Psychology Honours

Title: A qualitative study investigating the impact of high schools on identity formation in a South African context.

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Declaration:

*I hereby declare that the Research Report submitted for the **Psychology Honours degree** to The Independent Institute of Education is my own work and has not previously been submitted to another University or Higher Education Institution for degree purposes.*

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ABSTRACT

The study was conducted based on the lack of available literature found that explored identity formation in the school context. Educational institutions are prevalent societal structures and therefore have the potential to be influential based on the number of learners that could be shaped by school practices and interactions. The majority of the available literature found appeared to be quantitative and therefore provided motivation for a qualitative study on identity formation in the South African high school context.

The research problem was that the available literature appeared to be theoretical and did not clearly define the role of institutions in the formation of identity. Three participants were used and semistructured interviews were conducted which allowed participants to answer questions about their experiences with identity formation in high school.

The role of teachers, a multicultural education, adolescence, peer interactions, and friendships proved to be significant in impacting identity formation. The exploration of these factors contributed to the existing body of knowledge and provided insight into identity formation in South African high schools. The findings encourage further research on this topic in the South African context and provide insight for high schools as the importance of supporting learners in their identity formation through adolescence was significant.

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Contextualisation

High school learners face many challenges and life-decisions during adolescence as they develop their identities (Erentiate, Vosylis, Gabrialavičiūtė, & Raižienė, 2018; Wright, 2018). Therefore, it is important to understand how to support adolescents through this time and to identify the high school practices and interactions that contribute to the identity formation process in a South African, multicultural context.

1.2. Rationale

The impetus for the present study arises due to the influential role that educational institutions have in society and the large amounts of people that are impacted by these institutions, which therefore requires knowledge in the high school context (Flum and Kaplan 2006, 2012; Harrell-Levy and Kerpelman 2010; Lannegrand- Willems and Bosma 2006; as cited in Erentaite et al., 2018). It is important to understand identity; and thereafter how to support this identity formation in the school context (Erentaite et al., 2018), especially with the diversity of South African identities. The research is relevant as the study aims to contribute to informing society about the potential impact that high schools have in shaping identities.

1.3. Problem statement

The research problem that guided the study was informed by the fact that there appeared to be a lack of current literature available that focused on identity formation in the context of educational institutions. The available literature was theoretical and did not clearly identify the role of the institutions in identity formation. This gap must be addressed. Moreover, much of the existing knowledge around identity formation appeared to be quantitative, which lacked suitability in considering the uniqueness of every person's experiences with their identity development as well as the subjective nature of identity and identity formation (Erentaite et al., 2018).

1.4. Purpose statement

The research purpose is therefore to explore the impact of secondary educational institutions on identity formation. The study also aims to highlight the multicultural aspect of identity development within educational institutions as this is relevant to a South African context due to the diversity of cultures amongst learners. It is important to understand identity and how to support this identity formation in the school context (Erentaite et al., 2018), especially with the diversity of South African identities. The present study's value thus lies in its knowledge generation and awareness-raising of the impact that educational institutions have in shaping identities.

1.5. Research Questions

- What impact do South African high school institutions have on the formation of a person's identity?
- To what extent does the stage of adolescence have an impact on identity formation in high school?
- To what extent does school engagement and interactions reflect in a learner's identity formation?
- How does a multicultural education impact the development of a learner's identity?

1.6. Research Objectives

- To determine the impact that South African high schools have on learner's identity formation.
- To determine the extent to which school engagement and interactions are reflected in a learner's identity formation.
- To explore the extent to which the stage of adolescence has an impact on identity formation in high school.
- To explore the influence of a multicultural education in the development of a person's identity.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Educational institutions are relevant to many people's lives and are important structures in society (Erentaite et al., 2018). Therefore, it is important to understand identity and how to support identity formation in the school context (Erentaite et al., 2018). It is necessary that more research is generated around identity formation in educational institutions due to the prevalence of schools in most people's lives and the gap in research available on identity in the school context (Abbassi, 2016). Erentaite et al (2018) explain that the relationship between identity and the school context is unclear therefore highlighting the importance of research on this topic. A deeper understanding of identity is needed, especially with the diversity of people and identities in South Africa, and therefore a multicultural education should be explored (Tenaglia, 2018) as a way of supporting identity formation in South African learners.

The literature will be informed by Social Identity Theory and will conceptualise the key terms of identity, identity formation, adolescence, school engagement, culture, and multicultural education. Previous literature will be critically analysed and discussed under the themes of identity formation in adolescence, identity formation in the school context, the role of school engagement and interaction, and finally, a multicultural education. These themes will provide deeper insight into identity formation in the school context as well as highlighting a South African perspective due to the uniqueness of the school experience unique for South African learners (Lundgren & Scheckle, 2018).

2.1. Theoretical Foundation

Tajfel, Turner and Worchel's (1979) Social Identity Theory can be applied to the research to understand how group identity, specifically in the South African context, can impact identity formation. This is suitable for the South African context as many identities and cultural groups exist in high schools which could increase the potential for learners to identify themselves based on these social groups. Islam (2015, p. 1781) explains Social Identity Theory as the way in which "individuals define their own identities with regards to social groups." These identifications strengthen and protect self-identity (Islam, 2015). Group identities are explained by the theory as bias is shown in favour of a person's "in-group" in comparison to the "out-group" (Islam, 2015). "In-groups" and

“out-groups” can be explained as having a sense of belonging to a particular peer group or not having that sense of belonging and being excluded in social settings. For example, there might be a learner who is considered to be different because they come from a culturally rich background and therefore do not fit in with a group that is very westernised. This learner could therefore feel that they do not belong and would be considered a part of the “out-group” as they do not identify with the majority.

Islam (2015) suggests that this results in an individual identifying with the collective identity of the group and can therefore be applied to the school context, specifically in a South African high school for example, where there is diversity amongst learners and this could cause groups to form and influence the shaping of identities. Flum and Kaplan (2012) also explain that an important part of the identity formation process is being a part of something which may be a social group, a community or a culture. McLean and Syed (2015) suggest that the concept of identity involves a process of social categorisation and group affiliation which shows the relevance of Social Identity Theory and the study of identity as the school experience involves interactions with peers and environments that could result in social categorisation (Erentiate et al., 2018).

In the South African context, this theory could be applied as there is diversity amongst learners in terms of cultures, backgrounds, race, and beliefs (Maseko, 2019). This diversity and differences could lead to learners developing their identities based on the ‘in-groups’ and ‘out-groups’ and conforming to the most accepted identity, possibly excluding those who might be different in their values and cultures (Maseko, 2019).

2.2. Review of the literature

A critical review of the literature provides insight into previous research and studies conducted on identity formation and educational institutions. The themes of identity formation in adolescence and identity formation in the school context will provide background and information about the period of adolescence, as well as the school context which is needed to fully understand the research. The role of school engagement and interaction, as a theme, will use previous research to determine the impact of school engagement and interactions with peers and teachers on identity formation. The final theme will explore a multicultural education which adds to the South African context of the research and focuses on the need for this culturally sustainable education (Tenaglia, 2018)

2.2.1. Identity Formation in Adolescence

Buckingham (2008, as cited in Wright, 2018) states that identity formation is a crucial period for adolescents and is deemed as one of the most important tasks as there are lifelong implications attached to identity formation and the development of a person throughout their life. Wright (2018) adds to this perspective, explaining that during adolescence a person asks fundamental questions about the world around them and through this, gains perspective about their future and about themselves in general. A sense of purpose and coherence is gained through the asking of these questions, explains Wright (2018). Verhoeven, Poorthuis, and Volman (2018) agree with the significance of identity formation for adolescents, explaining that this age is a time of making career decisions, personal decisions, and shaping themselves which all contribute to identity. Based on this time of vulnerability and decision-making, the high school context was chosen for the present study as this stage of education consists of adolescents who are in the process of forming their identities.

The formation of identity, as explained by Erentaite et al. (2018), allows a person to build their uniqueness and continuity in their lives. Erikson (1968, as cited in Erentaite, 2018), states that this sense of uniqueness and continuity is built through the integration of goals, values, and roles which become meaningful. Suarez-Orozco & Sattin (2007, as cited in Lundgren and Sheckle, 2018) suggest that identity is constantly developing and this involves linking experiences from individual's lives to a total experience. Crocetti (2017) confirms this, suggesting that identity formation in adolescence is a dynamic process. Identity is also described by McLean and Syed (2015) as allowing the individual to feel a sense of internal coherence within different social contexts which is suited to the present study as participants who had positive experiences in their identity formation may have experienced a better sense of internal coherence in the high school context. This theme helped define the role of institutions as the high school experience is unique for every person. Each learner would experience their own challenges and life-changing decisions during this time which could influence their high school experience and ultimately their identity.

2.2.2. Identity Formation in the School Context

The school context is emphasised by Verhoeven et al. (2018) stating that learners

spend a lot of their time in the school environment where they develop and can be supported through this process of identity formation. Tenaglia (2018) expands on the importance of the school context, stating that this is the primary setting where a learner experiences peer pressure and socialisation which contributes to identity formation and development. Flum and Kaplan (2012, p.241) also see the relevance of studying identity in the school context, stating that “experiences during adolescence, particularly in social contexts such as schools, carry pivotal meaning in people’s lives.” This is further explained by highlighting the emergence of cognitive capacity in adolescence as this is linked to the development of an adolescent’s self- reflection ability and therefore develops a sense of identity (Cole & Cole, 1989; Erikson, 1968, as cited in Flum & Kaplan, 2012). Understanding the role of the school context assisted in defining the role of institutions in identity formation as the relevance was shown through the literature.

In opposition to the sources that explain the pertinence of the school context as an influential context for the formation and development of identity, Lannegrand-Willems and Bosma (2006, p.87) consider studying identity in the school context as a “wasteland.” Lannegrand-Willems and Bosma (2006) suggest that the studies done have been inconsistent in their outcomes and are therefore not of great value. However, Erentiate et al. (2018) state that the high school period of a person’s life is full of decisions and challenges, therefore highlighting the relevance of the study as there is still a lack of valuable research available.

2.2.3. The Role of School Engagement and Interaction

Erentiate et al. (2018) explain that engagement in schools helps a learner to develop their identity. Rich and Schacter (2012, as cited in Erentiate et al., 2018) suggest that positive interactions with teachers and perceiving teachers as role models leads to the student having confidence in their identity commitments as well as actively taking part in their identity exploration. Erentiate et al. (2018) go on to explain that positive student-teacher relationships showed links with teachers supporting basic needs and facilitating learner’s identity exploration.

According to Erentiate et al. (2018), engagement in school encourages active identity exploration. The link between engagement in class activities and learning is also ex-

plored by Erentiate et al. (2018) as higher levels of engagement have shown better academic results and positive development in a learner's identity. Verhoeven et al. (2018) support this as it is suggested that teachers and the school context often unintentionally influence identity but should focus on intentionally supporting identity formation by encouraging identity exploration and self-reflection. Verhoeven et al. (2018) also explain that interactions and relationships with peers also impacts a learner's identity. Lundgren and Scheckle (2018) emphasise the importance of having good role models in the school space as a tool in developing identity and teachers are often role models for learners.

Erentiate et al. (2018) suggest that most of the past studies conducted on identity in the school context fail to acknowledge the reciprocal relationship between the two variables. Just as educational institutions have the capability to impact identity formation, identity also has the potential to impact a learner's school experience, according to Erentiate et al. (2018). Many of these studies around school engagement appear to be using a quantitative design which therefore provides justification for qualitative research to be generated to provide a more well-rounded perspective of identity formation in the high school context which could help define the role of institutions.

2.2.4. Multicultural Education

South African learners face unique challenges in the education system in South Africa with a lot of these challenges related to the history of the country as it has been majorly affected by the inequalities of Apartheid (Lundgren & Scheckle, 2018). Vandeyar, (2008, as cited in Lundgren & Scheckle, 2018) supports the relevance of these challenges and the associated impact on identity formation in South Africa, suggesting that culture, power, and history always influence identity. This is relevant to the research as these influences could highlight the school practices that affect identity and assist in defining the role of high schools regarding identity formation. Altugan (2015) emphasises the importance of culture in the formation of identity in school and states that cultural identity cannot be isolated or considered separate in the learner's school experience.

Although the research is not based in the South African context, Martin (2009, as cited in Ortiz et al., 2009) and Tate and Linn (2005, as cited in Ortiz et al., 2019) state that

black people have not always been allowed the same opportunities as other race groups and classrooms have not always acknowledged their abilities or their brilliance. The source is dated, however, it is important to acknowledge that in the classroom, learners from different cultural backgrounds, educational backgrounds, and socio-economic backgrounds all come together to be educated in the same space (Borrero & Yeh, 2011). Maseko (2019) adds that cultural displacement in schools can lead to learners feeling alienated and the issue of institutional misrecognition is probable due to existing inequities in the curricular and the schooling system. Verhoeven et al. (2018) suggest that many South African students come from a supportive community and must then learn to create an individualistic sense of identity in school yet this might not be suited to their lifestyle out of school.

This shows the need for schools to facilitate and support those with collective identities and beliefs as well as for those with more individualistic beliefs (Verhoeven et al., 2018). By adding to the body of knowledge that exists around identity formation in the high school context, this study may contribute to a deeper understanding of identity formation in educational contexts which could help other researchers with their studies that would be more in-depth studies. These future studies could possibly assist schools in supporting the identity formation of their learners.

Tenaglia (2018) explains that often learners are given texts to read yet there is no explanation or understanding for unique cultural beliefs and experiences which fail to appreciate and celebrate learner's cultures. A multicultural education would allow the learner to "see themselves in the story" and their culture could therefore be represented in their school environment (Tenaglia, 2018, p. 47). Tenaglia (2018) states that schools need to promote cultural appreciation as this impacts the development of an adolescent's identity and creates culturally sustaining pedagogy. Although the source is dated, Modiba and Wilhelm (2006) support Tengalia's (2018) notion, stating that pedagogy is a critical practice in terms of culture and that teachers need to facilitate the reading of cultural texts as well as allowing learners to produce their own work that reflects their cultural knowledge.

Borrero and Yeh (2011) provide insight into the importance of embracing ethnic identities in high schools. This importance is stressed due to the belief that ethnic identities and how a school community embraces these identities affects how learners see

themselves as well as how they interact with their peers and teachers (Smith et al., 1999; Yeh & Hwang, 2000, as cited in Borrero & Yeh, 2011).

Tenaglia (2018) suggests that a multicultural education and an appreciation for learner's cultures is a tool for knowledge construction and can shift the mindset of culture being an obstacle, rather viewing it as a mode of learning. The source is dated yet provides valuable information about a multicultural education that can be applied in a South African context as Ozturgut (2011) states that a multicultural education helps learner's to learn about each other and break down stereotypes and prejudice that may have been held which plays a large role in the development of a person's identity. This research highlights the need for teachers and schools to encourage an appreciation for cultures in high schools as this has an impact on the identity formation of learners.

2.3. Conclusion of The Literature

Identity formation in the school context has been explored through this critical review of the literature. The research argued that a quantitative design has been employed for a lot of the previous studies which indicates there is a need for qualitative research to be generated, specifically when studying identity as this implies a subjective experience. An interpretivist paradigm was suitable for the research as it provided a qualitative, subjective perspective and takes people's experiences into account to gain insight into their personal identity formation. Social Identity Theory (Tajfel et al., 1979) informed the research as identifying with the collective appeared to be present in the school setting. For example, learners may try to fit in with peer groups and form their identities based on their interactions and experiences with 'in-groups' and 'out-groups'.

The gathered literature was also often out of date and showed a lack of current research done on identity formation in the school context, especially in the South African context where there was very little research available. Given the diversity in South Africa, it is necessary that more research is generated on identity and a multicultural education, as Abbassi (2016) explains that schools often overlook the support of identity or the planning of a culturally sustainable approach to teaching when planning for new schools to open or for improvements to be made. Although there are difficulties and complexities in transitioning

to providing multicultural education (Maseko, 2019), culture cannot be ignored and must be integrated into learning (Altugan, 2015).

Identity formation has been defined and supported by theories in many sources yet there was a lack of depth in most of these sources as little has been done to study which elements of identity have been affected by schools or which school practices that could impact identity. This research, therefore, aims to contribute to this existing body of knowledge around identity formation in the South African school context and provide a qualitative perspective in doing this.

2.4. Conceptualisation

Identity

Flum and Kaplan (2012) state that identity is a deeply ambiguous concept and that definitions differ amongst researchers. Freud (1923, as cited in Abbassi, 2016, p.2) defines identity as, “a subjective sense of an invigorating sameness and continuity.” Identity is further described by Moshman (2011, as cited in Tenaglia, 2018, p.117) as “a matter of determining who one is and whom one decides to be.” For the purpose of this research, the definitions given by Freud (1923, as cited in Abbassi, 2016) and by Moshman (2011, as cited in Tenaglia, 2018) accurately define identity and can be used in the school environment to describe an adolescent who is trying to navigate finding themselves and who they are. Adolescence is a challenging time in a person’s life (Erentiate et al., 2018), highlighting the relevance of the study as the identity of high school learners must be supported throughout this stage of life.

Identity Formation

Identity formation is described by Erikson (1968, as cited in Abbassi, 2016, p.2) as a “normative crisis” for adolescents as development can be seen in “the prerequisites in physiological growth, mental maturation, and social responsibility to experience and pass through the crisis of identity.” For the purpose of this study, Erikson’s (1968, as cited in Abbassi, 2016) definition can be applied as well as furthering this as identity formation can be seen as a process of an adolescent figuring out who they want to be and developing this identity. For example, a learner’s peer group might influence their identity formation as they might be very open-minded and accepting of others, therefore leading the

learner to experience this as well and to identify with the collective (Islam, 2015), forming a part of their identity. Flum and Kaplan (2012) also explain that an important part of the identity formation process is being a part of something which may be a social group, a community, or a culture. This is relevant to the present study as social interactions with peers, teachers, and people of different cultures in high school are explored through this study in relation to identity formation.

Adolescence

Adolescence is described by Crocetti (2017) as a transitional period of a person's life. Jaworska and MacQueen (2015, p.291) goes on to describe adolescence as "the period marking the transition from childhood to adulthood." These definitions are suitable for this research as high school learners are the focus of the literature however, for ethical reasons, the participants in interviews were adults reflecting back on their adolescence. Due to the pressures of decision-making and challenges faced by adolescents (Wright, 2018), it was necessary that high school was chosen as the context of the study as adolescents attend these institutions.

School engagement

School engagement is defined as the extent to which a learner is involved in their learning behaviourally, cognitively, and emotionally (Caraway, Tucker, Reinke, & Hall, 2003, as cited in Holt, Bry & Johnson, 2008). In this research, school engagement was explored by linking it with identity and determining if a learner's level of school engagement had an effect on the formation of their identity.

Culture

Culture, according to the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (2013, as cited in Bennett, 2015, p. 546), can be defined as, "the whole pattern or configuration of values and meanings in a society." The Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (2013, as cited in Bennett, 2015, p. 546) "views these expressive forms as an integral part of social life." Gill (2013) further explains culture as a group of people that share similar beliefs, knowledge, and attitudes. Culture is an important part of the South African context due to the diversity in learner's backgrounds, therefore requiring a sound

understanding and appreciation for these differences (Tenaglia, 2018). The present study, therefore, attempted to understand participant's experiences of cultural acceptance and appreciation in high school to determine the extent to which this impacted their identity formation.

Multicultural education

Banks and Banks (2001, as cited in Ozturgut, 2011, p. 2) explain that a multicultural education is, "an idea, an educational reform movement, and a process whose major goal is to change the structure of educational institutions so that male and female students, exceptional students, and students who are members of diverse racial, ethnic, language, and cultural groups will have an equal chance to achieve academically in school." This definition can be applied to a South African context as there is diversity amongst learner's and therefore there is a need for education to be culturally responsive and make the necessary changes in curriculum in order to do so (Ozturgut, 2011). As culture is a prevalent factor in South Africa, it was necessary for a multicultural education to be explored as this could have an effect on the way in which identities are formed in high schools.

3. RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

3.1. Research Paradigm

Interpretivism is the research paradigm that was employed for the study as the research integrated human interests experiences, unique opinions, and feelings (Maree et al., 2019). This interpretivist approach was necessary when exploring identity as a concept as this is personal to each individual which added depth to the research and a better insight based on these unique experiences. Flum and Kaplan (2012) explain that identity has many different definitions and this shows the uniqueness of the concept as researchers have different views on how identity can be described and expressed. An interpretivist paradigm also assisted in gaining understanding about the context of the topic, being high schools. This was done by placing value on the experiences of learners in the high school context which added depth to the study and went beyond theoretical perspectives, incorporating subjective human experience in the specific context of South

African high schools.

As previously mentioned, previous studies conducted around identity in schools appeared to be using quantitative methods and therefore could be lacking a subjective element of their research which made an interpretivist paradigm suitable for this research where the human experience is valued. An interpretivist paradigm allowed the personal school experience, and the factors that contribute to identity formation, to be inductively explored.

The ontology focused on identity formation as a personal experience and these experiences would shape one's reality through their experiences in high school. The epistemology can be explained by the process of knowledge being gained through personal experiences and with identity formation as subjectivity is considered to be knowledge. The axiology focused on the idiosyncratic values of the participants as this in-depth exploration of personal experiences was valued in the study. Through this, participant's personal values were explored and this contributed to understanding their identity formation in high school.

3.2. Research Design

The research was approached inductively as this is suited to an interpretivist paradigm. Inductive reasoning allowed the researcher to explore identity formation in the South African high school context and then make assumptions based on these understandings as specific observations can be made and later a general conclusion can be drawn from this (Maree et al., 2019). Inductive reasoning allowed the researcher to generate assumptions about identity formation in the high school context which could be used in future research and is likely to be supported by logical research. The pre-existing assumptions that may exist in deductive reasoning can be seen as a limitation in this study and therefore inductive reasoning is suitable. The study is exploratory and aims to explore identity formation in the high school context, providing insight into the research problem at hand. The study is exploratory as a better understanding of the research problem was required as there appeared to be few studies conducted on identity formation in the high school context, therefore requiring further exploration.

Identity is subjective and fluid, therefore making qualitative methods suitable for this research. There appeared to be a lack of qualitative research available and therefore using qualitative methods allowed a more well-rounded argument and exploration of identity in the school context based on the subjective nature of identity. Identity is unique to every individual (Erentaite et al., 2018) and therefore cannot be quantified but should rather be explored subjectively which will add depth to the research.

The study can be considered as phenomenological research, more specifically hermeneutic phenomenological research, as identity formation is a common lived experience amongst people (Creswell, 2002). Phenomenological research aims to understand the shared experiences of a group of people based on a particular phenomenon (Creswell, 2002). In this study, the shared experience was the formation of identity in high school.

A cross-sectional design was employed as this enabled the researcher to collect data from the participants involved at one point in time (Maree et al., 2019). The participants being interviewed were only interviewed once and the data was collected based on that single interview about their personal experiences in high school with their identity.

3.3. Population and Units of Analysis

The population were adults between the ages of eighteen (18) and twenty-five (25) years old, were English-speaking, and had attended high school in South Africa. The units of analysis were therefore the population's experience of identity formation in the high school context with specific focus on how high school influenced that process.

3.4. Sampling

Non-probability sampling was the chosen sampling method as this was best suited to the qualitative nature of the study as participants were not randomly selected (Maree et al., 2019). Shenton (2004) explains that with the selection of participants not being done at random, this assists in putting less time into building a trusting relationship between the researcher and the sample as the researcher is already acquainted with the sample outside of the study and knows the participants personally to some degree. This made non-probability sampling suitable for the qualitative nature of the study as the researcher

aimed to collect data based on personal and subjective experiences of participant's high school experiences with their identity formation. Having this pre-existing relationship between the researcher and participants made it more likely that the sample would feel comfortable sharing these experiences with the researcher.

More specifically, purposive sampling was used as the sampling method. Purposive sampling was selected due to time constraints and ease of accessibility as the researcher can select participants based on knowing that these individuals met the population parameters. Denver and Frankel (2000, p. 264) explain that purposive sampling allows for the researcher to select "information rich" cases which enhances the understanding of particular concepts or individuals. In this case, purposive sampling enhanced the understanding of individuals' high school experiences in South Africa in terms of their identity formation as the researcher already knew that these participants would fit the population parameters and that their personalities would be engaging and suitable for the interview process. This was achieved by the researcher choosing participants whom they predicted would be willing and cooperative in the interview process as this made it more likely that open-conversation would be stimulated in the interviews about their own experiences with their identity formation during high school.

Three participants were included in the sample and these participants were contacted via email. This recruitment via email was initially chosen to maintain a sense of professionalism between the researcher and the sample. However, after the initial email was sent and the sample were asked to participate, conversations continued over WhatsApp as this was a more accessible form of communication and allowed participants to ask questions freely to the researcher at any point in time. The initial email that was sent to participants included details about what the interviews would entail and what participants could expect in terms of their privacy, confidentiality and the sample were asked to sign consent forms as seen in appendix A and appendix B.

The sample consisted of three participants who agreed to participate. Having three participants in the sample is suitable for the qualitative nature of the study as individual interviews with each participant allowed each participant to provide subjectively-rich answers rather than completing a brief written survey or questionnaire, for example.

The sample included participants who had attended high school in South Africa, were English speaking, between the ages of 18 and 25 years old, and had agreed to participate in the research. Due to the interviews being based on reflecting back on the participant's high school experiences, the narrow age range made it more likely that the sample would remember their experiences clearly as opposed to someone older who may have struggled to retrieve memories from when they were younger. This enhanced the validity of the study as if the age range was wider, the participants may have struggled to provide in-depth explanations of their high school experiences due to being out of high school for many years.

3.5. Data Collection Methods

Interviews in qualitative research, according to Maree et al. (2019), allow the researcher to see the world from the perspective of the interviewee and to try to understand their social reality. For the purpose of this research, social reality was understanding and learning about participant's personal high school experiences in their years of adolescence as they reflected on this in terms of their identity. More specifically, semistructured interviews were selected as the data collection method for the research. Harrell and Bradley (2009) explain that semistructured interviews are useful as the researcher is able to guide the interviews and can ensure that all of the necessary topics and material are covered by using a list of questions (Appendix C) and probing during the interview to expand on these questions. Gill et al. (2008) support this, stating that the use of semistructured interviews allows the researcher to structure their interviews in a way that helps define the areas that need to be explored. This was done by making sure that the research objectives which explored identity formation regarding to a multicultural education, school engagement and interactions, as well as adolescence were covered in the questions and discussions. Therefore, the use of semistructured interviews allowed for standardisation of questions and adequate planning to ensure research questions and objectives were answered.

Harrell and Bradley (2009) stated that there is structure and standardisation in semistructured interviews as following an interview schedule (Appendix C) ensured that the same questions were asked to all participants whilst also having an element of flexibility as the researcher was able to probe and ask further questions that were not specified on the interview schedule (Appendix C). This flexibility was necessary as when identity formation in high school was explored, it was important that participants were able to express them-

selves beyond the topics specified in the interview schedule (Appendix C) and this enabled the researcher to expand on topics that came up in the interviews and to ask further questions if they needed clarity or more information. Gill et al. (2008) stated that semistructured interviews allowed for further discovery and elaboration of important information which may have been valuable for the participant but had not been thought about by the researcher. As previously explained, flexibility was important in semistructured interviews and in qualitative research which was facilitated by the use of an interview schedule (Appendix C) as a guideline but allowing conversation and probing in addition to the set list of questions.

Open-ended questions were used in the interviews and were listed in the interview schedule (Appendix C). Gill et al. (2008) explain the value of open-ended questions and these questions are suitable for the qualitative nature of the research as they require more than a yes or no answer, providing useful in-depth responses to questions. Thus, the use of open-ended questions was applied to the present study in terms of participant's formation of their identity in high school. The importance of neutral and sensitively worded questions was also highlighted by Gill et al. (2008) as this was important when dealing with qualitative data around identity formation and this involved participants sharing their personal experiences.

3.5.1. Application of Data Collection Methods

The data collection method was semistructured interviews and due to social distancing and circumstances of COVID-19, were held over Skype. The virtual interviews were suitable as the open-ended nature of the interviews allowed for the personal experiences of identity formation in high school to be explored, which allowed the research questions to be answered. Being able to see the participant's faces in the interviews was important as gestures and facial expressions maintained this open communication. This also helped the participants feel more at ease as they could see the interviewer as well as were able to read facial expressions to further understand questions and to act as cues.

Semistructured interviews were best suited to the research paradigm of interpretivism as the researcher placed value on subjectivity. Participants were able to answer ques-

tions about their own experiences in high school which was constituted as subjective knowledge and added a valuable human element to the research. Based on previous literature which is largely quantitative, semistructured interviews allowed for a qualitative perspective to emerge as placing value on subjectivity focused on the sample's personal experiences with their identity in high school which is in line with the research problem and purpose.

Semistructured interviews allowed subjectivity to emerge and questions were standardised however, the researcher also probed and asked additional questions to gain further insight into certain topics (Maree et al., 2019). A semistructured approach to interviews therefore allowed some form of standardisation with the set questions but there was flexibility. This was necessary due to the qualitative nature of the study which aimed to produce information-rich data through open discussions of participants' high school experiences with identity formation.

The semistructured interviews were approximately thirty minutes each and there was one interview per participant as Maree et al. (2019) explained that semistructured interviews do not usually span over a long period of time. From the start of each interview, the researcher attempted to create a comfortable environment for each participant by ensuring that they were in a quiet location with no risk of intrusions during the interviews. Even though the researcher knew the participants personally (due to the purposive nature of the sample), it was important to build and maintain rapport and trust with each participant so that they felt comfortable expressing themselves in the interview. This was challenging due to the virtual nature of the interviews but the researcher made an effort to help each interviewee feel at ease and to reiterate that they did not have to answer any questions that they did not feel comfortable answering if they showed any signs of discomfort.

The interviews were recorded with a voice recording application on a cellphone so that these recordings could be saved as files and transferred to the password-protected computer used to store the data. The questions were aimed toward understanding experiences in high school such as adolescence, school engagement, interaction with peers, relationships with teachers, and cultural influences which were the focus of the research and were in line with the research objectives. If participants being interviewed diverted from the questions asked, the researcher guided them back to the interview

questions so that the necessary topics were covered by following the interview schedule (Appendix C).

3.6. Data Analysis Method

This data was analysed and processed through the use of thematic analysis, specifically latent thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Thematic analysis is the process of identifying, analysing, and grouping patterns and themes from the data set (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Thematic analysis was suited to the research as the researcher was able to group ideas into themes and analyse the qualitative data surrounding participant's high school experiences with their identity formation which answered the research question which asked what the impact of high schools on identity formation was.

According to Maree et al. (2019), qualitative data analysis could be done through a phenomenological approach where the researcher views social phenomena from the perspective of another person and aims to understand how they make sense of these phenomena. This was applicable to the nature of the study as the researcher aimed to answer the research questions and gain knowledge about how each participant's identity was shaped by their high school experience. This approach was inductive as this was suited to the interpretivist research paradigm. Inductive reasoning allowed the researcher to explore identity formation in high school in the South African context and to then make assumptions based on these findings and understandings. This allowed the researcher to generate assumptions that could be used in future research and are more likely to be supported and informed by logical research rather than pre-existing assumptions that may have existed in deductive reasoning.

Braun and Clarke's (2006) step-by-step guide of thematic analysis was followed by the researcher. Braun and Clarke (2006) explained that this was suitable for qualitative data which was relevant to the research as, through thematic analysis, the researcher aimed to add a qualitative perspective to the existing literature around identity formation and high schools due to the majority of literature on the topic being quantitative. The first phase in the guide to thematic analysis involved the researcher familiarising themselves with the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This was achieved through the process of immersion as Braun and Clarke (2006) explain that this includes reading through the entire data set more than once and familiarising oneself with the contents of the data set. Prior to coding themes, the

researcher was familiar with the contents of the data and had ideas about possible themes or commonalities that could emerge from this data as Braun and Clarke (2006) deemed this a necessary step before coding began. A part of this familiarisation was achieved by transcribing the interviews as this process helped the researcher become familiar with the contents of each interview (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The second phase in Braun and Clarke's (2006) guide to thematic analysis specified that the researcher should generate initial codes that followed the previous phase as this initial list of possible themes formed codes from the data. Braun and Clarke (2006) state that coding is important in thematic analysis because meaningful groups can be formed from the data and line-by-line coding was a useful way of sorting through the data one line at a time.

Phase three involved searching for final themes in the data that arose from the list of possible themes and focusing on the analysis of themes at a broader level (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This step allowed the researcher to combine codes to form overarching themes which were used to organise the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This step was followed by phase four which involved reviewing themes which Braun and Clarke (2006) explain as the refinement of the themes that the researcher formed in previous steps. At this phase, codes can be reviewed and checked to see if a coherent pattern can be formed (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This assisted in making sure that the codes and themes were in line with the research objectives such as the theme of a multicultural education being in line with the research objective that explored the influence of a multicultural education in the development of a person's identity in high school. Therefore all of the data that surrounded this theme was used to form coherent patterns with the relevant codes, and drawing up a thematic map was useful in achieving this (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Phase five included the defining and naming of themes which involved a final refinement of themes, using the thematic map as a guide (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Defining and refining themes also assisted in the fulfilment of the research purpose and objectives as themes were necessary in making sure that the researcher gathered all of the relevant information in order to answer their research questions. This assisted in defining the role of high schools in a person's identity formation as codes and themes could be used to answer the research questions pertaining to the research problem and generated further insight on the topic of identity formation in high schools. The final phase of producing the report involved analysis of the themes and writing up the final report was completed as the last step.

3.6.1. Application of Data Analysis Method

The data was analysed by following the guidelines specified by Braun and Clarke (2006) in order to thematically analyse the data. The researcher familiarised themselves with the data through typing out the interview transcripts themselves as this helped the researcher become familiar with the contents of each interview, immersing themselves in the data. Immersion was also achieved by reading each transcript multiple times and becoming familiar with each participant's transcript contents. Interviews were transcribed verbatim by listening to the audio recordings of each interview. The interviewer's questions were typed out in full, along with the responses of the interviewees, and the researcher also noted any behaviour that may have added depth to the data such as participants which appeared emotional in their responses to certain questions. These transcriptions were saved and stored in a password-protected computer that was only accessible to the researcher.

Being familiar with the data also assisted the researcher in identifying potential codes and themes that could arise from the data set which was achieved by printing out the interview transcripts and colour-coding the commonalities and relevant points to form codes. These codes were then labelled by the researcher and a mind map was composed in a notebook to organise these codes and potential themes. This phase allowed meaningful groups to be formed from the data which generated information on the research problem, purpose, and the objectives. This step also allowed the researcher to constantly refer to these codes and the research aims to assess the relevance of themes and codes. As the research problem dealt with previous literature not clearly defining the role of high schools in identity formation, it was important for the researcher to take this into consideration with every theme that was formed in order to make sure that each theme was a beneficial contribution to the research and in adding to the body of knowledge around the research problem. Highlighting and identification of codes and themes were done through the process of line-by-line coding which allowed the researcher to analyse the data one line at a time and to extract important data in the form of codes by doing this.

The rough mind map that the researcher drew up in a notebook was refined and was altered to form a digital thematic map where the researcher finalised themes and organ-

ised them into main themes and sub-themes based on the codes that were highlighted from the transcripts. The main themes were based on the important data that arose from the interviews and the researcher also made sure that these themes were in line with the research purpose as they had to assist in the exploration of the impact of high school practices in influencing a learner's identity formation.

The final phase involved the researcher reviewing the themes that they had highlighted and placed in the thematic map and refining these themes to ensure that they were all relevant and beneficial to the research objectives and purpose. This allowed the researcher to identify which themes could be removed or merged with other themes to organise the data into clear themes and sub-themes. This process allowed for refinement as the researcher had to fine-tune each theme, often having to evaluate the value of each sub-theme in relevance to the main theme and to the overall research purpose.

The process of using thematic analysis and line-by-line coding allowed the researcher to form an organised thematic map and an outline of all the relevant themes and sub-themes based on codes found in the transcriptions. The researcher gained familiarity with the data, insight into each participant's high school experiences with reference to their identity formation, as well as provided an organised set of themes.

3.7. Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness was enhanced in the study and the concept of credibility was addressed through the researcher having positive relationships with the participants (Shenton, 2004). Purposive sampling was selected as the sampling method and this was beneficial as not only was the researcher able to choose participants based on existing knowledge that they meet the requirements and population parameters, but also having existing good relations with them. This increased the likelihood of participants opening up to the researcher in the interviews and sharing valuable information as they felt that they were able to trust the researcher (Shenton, 2004). Well-established research methods were used as Shenton (2004) explains that this reinforces that the correct methods have been selected for the study. Interviews can be considered a widely used method of data collection and are suitable for the qualitative nature of the study based on being reliable and frequently conducted.

Credibility was enhanced by using the following tactics which ensured that participants were as honest as possible (Shenton, 2004). Based on the researcher having a pre-existing relationship with participants, this allowed researchers to select participants who were genuinely willing to participate, and rapport was also built at the start of the interviews to encourage open communication. When the interviews were being conducted, iterative questioning was implemented to detect if participants were contradicting themselves or possibly lying (Shenton, 2004). The researcher having regular debriefings with a supervisor also improved credibility as this includes another person's expertise and opinion on the study.

Shenton (2004) explains that transferability can be addressed by providing an adequate amount of background and contextualisation for the reader to get an adequate understanding of the research and the context of the research. The importance of thick description is explained by Ponterotto (2006) and was used to describe and interpret social action and behaviour that was observed in the context of the interviews as participants reflected back on their high school experiences. The researcher observed participants' body language and non-verbal behaviours in the interviews to add depth to the research and to detect emotional responses.

Due to the research being framed by a South African perspective, there are unique concepts and factors in the research that may not be understood by international readers. This was addressed by operationalising unique definitions and providing sufficient explanations to ensure that the research could be understood by local and international readers.

It was also important that dependability was addressed and this was done to ensure that future researchers are able to make use of this research in their studies.

Dependability was achieved by acknowledging the limitations of the study, clearly outlining the data collection method and how the research design has been implemented (Shenton, 2004). Shenton (2004) also explains that a critical reflection should be done which entails analysing the research that they have done thus far and evaluating their research decisions so that the researcher can evaluate their execution of the project. This reflection was completed in the researcher's personal capacity to better their own work and to learn from the mistakes and challenges that were experienced in this research. For example, the re-

searcher reflected on the interview process and when reading the transcripts, noted that participants could have been probed further at times to gain a better understanding of their answers. Therefore in future studies, the researcher will be mindful of this and can implement this into their interviews.

Although qualitative research and interpretivist approach cannot be unbiased due to the subjective nature of the research, confirmability was enhanced as the researcher admitted to personal beliefs and assumptions in order to mitigate this potential bias as this will allow future researchers to confirm the findings of the present study as these findings derive from data. For example, if the researcher had a negative high school experience, they could have an existing underlying bias about high schools. This therefore would have been acknowledged so that the research was not influenced by this bias nor was the reader being guided to think a certain way. The limitations of the study were also acknowledged along with these assumptions. An audit trail, according to Shenton (2014), helps the researcher keep track of their processes in the compilation of their research and a step-by-step record of the work that has gone into the research. In this case, a research journal was kept by the researcher to monitor progress and keep a record of all of the research divisions being made.

In order to get the most out of the participants in the interviews, Creswell (2017, as cited in Turner, 2010) advises that the researcher be prepared with follow up questions to clarify certain topics discussed in the interviews as it is common for interviewees to go off track in the interviews. These follow up questions and prompts were used in this study as all three interviews needed sufficient information on the specified topics in order for information to be useful and valuable in the research. The interviews were also planned and organised to cover all of the necessary topics and the process was thoroughly explained to the interviewees so they knew what was expected from these interviews which may have helped to put them at ease.

4. FINDINGS

4.1. Presentation of Findings

The population were adults between the ages of eighteen (18) and twenty-five (25) years old, were English-speaking, and had attended high school in South Africa. The unit of analysis was therefore the population's experience of identity formation in the high school context with specific focus on how high school influenced that process. Participant A was a 23 year old who self-categorised as being male, and graduated high school in 2016. Participant B was 22 years old who self-categorised as being female, and graduated high school in 2016. Participant C was 18 years old, also self-categorised as being female, and graduated high school in 2019.

4.1.1. The Role of Teachers in Identity Formation

This theme explored the role that teachers played in shaping the identity of learners and is relevant to the research problem as it aimed to contribute to clearly defining the role of high schools in shaping learner's identities and this theme focuses on the contribution of teachers in this process. All three participants reported that their relationships with their teachers, both positive and negative, played an influential role in shaping their identities. Participant A stated that identity can be shaped by teachers as many of their classmates had teachers who, *"made them feel stupid and made them feel less of themselves."*

4.1.1.1. Positive Teacher Experiences

All three participants described their experiences with teachers as mainly being positive. Participant C stated that these relationships were positive when *"they treat you like people instead of a student."* Participant A explained that their teachers' support *"helped me become more confident."*

4.1.1.2. Negative Teacher Experiences

Two participants explained that they had negative experiences with teachers and that this had impacted their self-esteem and their identity. Participant C explained that when a teacher was not supportive, this *"lowers your confidence and this obviously has an impact throughout...longer than just high school."*

4.1.2. The Role of Peer Relations and Friendships in Identity Formation

The theme of the role of peer relations and friendships in a high school context arose from the data and this contributed to defining the role of institutions in identity formation. All three participants agreed that they mostly had positive relationships with peers and friends throughout high school and that the majority of these relationships positively impacted their identities and their high school experiences, however, there were negative experiences as well. Participant A explained that they were bullied in the early high school years but that their peer relations improved over time. Participant C stated that their identity was impacted by peer relations as they were *“learning from different people that had completely different upbringings to me.”*

4.1.3. Being an Adolescent in High School

A learner's experience of adolescence in high school was considered in this theme as this stage of life could result in unique challenges and experiences being faced by learners which could impact their identity. All three participants explained that being an adolescent in high school was challenging and participant B described their struggles with identity during adolescence as they felt, *“frustrated a lot of the time.”* Two participants also believed that their high school did not provide accessible counsellors to support them through their adolescence and that having the support of a counsellor would have helped them through this time.

4.1.4. A Multicultural Education

This theme explored the possible effects of a multicultural education on identity formation, exposure to a range of cultures in high schools, and how this had the potential to shape a learner's identity. This was in line with the research purpose and the research problem as a multicultural approach to education was explored to determine to what extent this, as a practice, contributed to defining the role of institutions in the development of identity. The sub-themes highlighted this, determining how participants felt that their high schools were accommodative of cultural expression and if their syllabus was culturally inclusive.

4.1.4.1. Accommodation for Cultural Expression

All three participants believed that for the majority of the time, their high school allowed learners to express themselves culturally. However, although participants felt that this was the case for the majority of the time, participant C highlighted that in terms of support, people of colour often did not get the guidance that they needed as they refrained from going to school counsellors, explaining that *“counsellors at school are white old ladies and why would they feel safe going to them?”*

4.1.4.2. Culturally Inclusive Syllabus

Participant B explained that their *“prescribed textbooks were pretty heavily culturally based.”* All three participants mentioned that the syllabus did include cultural texts but participants A and C felt that the syllabus could have included more cultural content.

4.2. Interpretation of Findings

The present study highlighted that the role of teachers in shaping a learner's identity in high school was influential for participants which could be linked to the theme of participant's experiences of adolescence in high school as participant's identities during adolescence were described as *“closed-off”* (participant C), and being *“an outcast”* (participant A). The vulnerabilities involved in being an adolescent could have increased the need for supportive teachers as learners navigated their way through high school and their adolescence. Participants felt that when they were able to build personal relationships with their teachers, this enhanced their high school experience and their confidence which can be linked to the formation of identity. However, two out of the three participants stated that they did not always feel supported in school as they believed that high schools should have more accessible counsellors for learners to help adolescents through this difficult time in their lives.

The present study highlighted that relationships with peers were influential in the formation of identity in high school and this contributed to the research problem as peer relations can be identified as an important factor in defining the role of institutions in identity formation. Based on participant's lived experiences, it was evident that having positive relationships with peers helped participants feel secure and therefore had a positive effect on the shap-

ing of their identities. Interactions with classmates also helped participants learn about a variety of people which developed their identities by learning about others as they gained knowledge, made connections, and became more open-minded. Learning from others was also emphasised in analysing a multicultural education as two participants felt that they learned about cultures in high school which broadened their minds and their understanding of other's beliefs. High schools appeared to be accommodative of cultural expression however, one participant felt that their high school could have made a better attempt to allow learners to express themselves culturally. The implementation of culturally inclusive texts in the South African syllabus also appeared to be an effective method of educating learners and this developed learner's identities in being able to appreciate other's beliefs.

4.3. Discussion of Findings

The present study confirmed Tajfel et al.'s (1979) Social Identity Theory (SIT) in the context of South African high schools as social interaction with teachers, peers, and different cultural groups played an influential role in shaping the identities of the participants. This was supported by participants B and C who stated that their high schools did not fully allow learners to develop as individuals which impacted their identity formation as they would have felt pressure to conform to the collective (Islam, 2015). Participant B stated, *"the values that they stood for are the values that everyone had to stand for and they pushed that on you."* This theory was supported further as Participant A explained that being bullied in high school left them feeling outcasted and this, according to SIT (Tajfel et al., 1979), would have socially categorised the learner as part of an 'out-group' (Islam, 2015). Findings also showed that high school friendships offered a sense of security and therefore these learners were part of the 'in-group' which correlated with SIT (Tajfel et al., 1979).

The present study refuted the literature presented in Erentiate et al. (2018) regarding the impact of school engagement in the development of identity as participants felt that active participation in high school was not a contributing factor to their identity formation which was an unexpected result. Erentiate et al. (2018) described identity formation in adolescence as a challenging process and stressed the importance of supporting adolescents in their identity formation which was similarly discussed by Verhoeven et al. (2018) who also emphasised the need for supporting learners in their identity development. This was confirmed by the present study as participants felt vulnerable and uncertain in their adolescence and required the support of peers and teachers through this time which facilitated

the development of their identities. Participants felt that if they had better access to counsellors, this would have also helped them feel supported through this time.

McLean and Syed (2015) suggest that positive and stable identity development during adolescence provides a sense of internal coherence in different social contexts which was supported by the findings as participants felt more comfortable in the high school environment when they had support and when they had developed confidence in themselves. The support for facilitation of identity formation appeared to be lacking in some instances in the South African high school context as two participants felt that their high school could have improved in supporting learners' identity formation by promoting the importance of mental health.

Tenaglia's (2018) view of the importance of a multicultural education and culturally sustaining pedagogy, as well as Borerro and Yeh's (2011) research which emphasised the importance of embracing learner's ethnic identities, was supported by the present study as participants confirmed that being surrounded by people of different cultures, having texts that were culturally inclusive and extracurricular activities that allowed people to express themselves culturally, helped them learn about others and to broaden their world-views.

5. CONCLUSION

5.1. Research Question, Problem and Objectives Addressed

5.1.1. Research Question and Problem

The research question was, *"what impact do South African high schools have on the formation of a person's identity?"* and the research problem was informed by the lack of current literature available that focused on identity formation in the context of high schools and educational institutions in general. The available literature appeared to be theoretical and did not clearly define the role of high schools in the formation of learner's identities. The research problem and the research question were addressed through the exploration of the impact that school engagement and interactions (such as interactions with peers and teachers), a multicultural education, and being an adolescent had on identity formation. It was found that most of these factors, school engagement being the exception, contributed to the identity formation in the South

African high school context with teachers and a multicultural education having the most substantial impact. This finding may be due to the changes and vulnerabilities felt by learners in their adolescence which therefore resulted in them needing support from their teachers and peers.

Findings suggested that a multicultural education was influential and this may be attributed to the prevalence of cultural diversity in South Africa which could be overlooked in Western society but the present study highlighted the importance of cultural inclusivity in the formation of learner's identities.

5.1.2. Research Objectives

The overarching objective, *"To determine the impact that South African high schools have on learner's identity formation"* was in line with the research question and was addressed through the exploration of the above themes in the South African context to determine if and how these factors affected identity formation. The objective, *"to determine the extent to which school engagement and interactions are reflected in a learner's identity formation"* showed no impact of school engagement on the identity of high school learners but the role of teachers and peer relations as interactions were significant for participants identity formation. The objectives, *"to explore the extent to which the stage of adolescence has an impact on identity formation in high school,"* and *"to explore the influence of a multicultural education in the development of a person's identity,"* also showed significant findings in having an impact on identity formation.

5.2. Ethical considerations

A retrospective approach was used for this study as adults who are reflecting on their adolescent experiences in high school comprised the study and this allowed the researcher to maintain ethical integrity. Participants were emailed a document which outlined the present study and what their participation would entail. This informed consent allowed participants to better understand the study and to be made aware that they could withdraw from the study at any point in time, without consequences (Howitt & Cramer, 2017). Another consent form was also signed by participants which explained that the researcher would use an audio recording device to record interviews for the purpose of transcription. These au-

audio recordings were only accessible to the researcher and were stored in a password-protected folder on a computer.

These forms ensured the participant's confidentiality and the personal details and identities of participants were only known by the researcher. Confidentiality was also ensured through the use of pseudonyms in the transcripts and the written research report so that the interviewees felt comfortable sharing their personal experiences without feeling that their identities would become public knowledge. A password-protected computer was also used when collecting data and writing up interviews so that the information was kept from the public and was only accessible to the researcher.

5.3. Limitations

Given that this is a retrospective study, it is possible that participants may have forgotten experiences or in hindsight, developed insight into why certain experiences and emotions occurred. This is a limitation as this resulted in the researcher being unable to receive participant's raw and unfiltered experiences but rather a retrospective, hindsight memory that was filtered by age. This could skew results if the sample is too broad in ages, given the changes between generations in school systems. By keeping the age range under 25, this helped mitigate this limitation as participants had graduated from high school fairly recently and were within a narrow age-range, lessening the differences between them and making it more likely that they would be able to recall high school memories as opposed to someone who is 40 years old, for example.

The study included three participants in the sample and therefore could not be fully inclusive of all genders, races, ethnicities, and other demographics which is a limitation as the study is not generalisable to the larger population. Despite this, there is opportunity for future researchers to expand on this study and to mitigate this limitation further by providing research that is based on a larger and more inclusive sample.

Identity formation is often an unconscious process and it may have been difficult for participants to pinpoint specific life changes and moments within their identity development journey. Identity can also be a personal topic so people may be reluctant to share detailed experiences which is a limitation as subjective, personal, lived experiences are valued in the study. This was mitigated by the researcher providing details about the con-

fidentiality agreement in the consent forms as well as building trust with the participants which Shenton (2004) explains.

5.4. Heuristic Value

The exploration of the high school practices and interactions presented in the study contributed to the existing body of knowledge as well as specifically provided insight into identity formation in the under-researched context of South African high school. The findings encourage further research on this topic in the South African context and provide insight for high schools as the importance of supporting learners in their identity formation through adolescence was significant. The research could contribute to promoting the support of identity in high schools to help learners in their struggles with identity as the findings highlighted a need for better access to counsellors and for teachers to understand the important role that they have in facilitating identity formation.

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Appendix A:

Explanation of information sheet and consent form for participants

Consent to Participate

To whom it may concern,

My name is Dayna Smith and I am a student at The Independent Institute of Education - Varsity College Durban North. I am currently conducting research under the supervision of Jenna-Lee Skea about how educational institutions (specifically high schools) effect a person's identity formation in the South African context. I hope that this research will enhance our understanding of the roles that schools play in shaping the identities of learners and how the process of identity formation can be supported by schools.

I would like to invite you to participate in my study. In order to explain to you what your participation in my study will involve, I have formulated questions that I will try to fully answer so that you can make an informed decision about whether or not to participate. If you have any additional questions that you feel are not addressed or explained in this information sheet, please do not hesitate to ask me for more information. Once you have read and understood all the information contained in this sheet and are willing to participate, please complete and sign the consent form below.

What will I be doing if I participate in your study?

I would like to invite you to participate in this research because your insight would add valuable subjective knowledge to the study as your personal experiences are valued in this research. You also fit the population parameters of the sample being between the ages of 18 and 35 and you have completed high school. If you decide to participate in this research, I would like to interview you for approximately one hour where you will be asked questions about yourself and your personal experiences in high school and how this developed your identity. These interviews will also be voice recorded and later transcribed to be used in the study however your personal details will not be made public knowledge.

You can decide whether or not to participate in this research. If you decide to participate, you can choose to withdraw at any time or to decide not to answer particular interview questions.

Are there any risks/ or discomforts involved in participating in this study?

Whether or not you decide to participate in this research, there will be no negative impact on you. There are no direct risks or benefits to you if you participate in this study. You might, however, indirectly find that it is helpful to talk about your identity formation journey and your high school experiences that may have shaped you. If you find at any stage that you are not comfortable with the line of questioning, you may withdraw or refrain from participating.

Do I have to participate in the study?

- Your inclusion in this study is completely voluntary;
- If you do not wish to participate in this study, you have every right not to do so;
- Even if you agree to participate in this study, you may withdraw at any time without having to provide an explanation for your decision.

Will my identity be protected?

Consent form for participants

I, _____, agree to participate in the research conducted by Dayna Smith about how educational institutions (specifically high schools) effect a person's identity formation in the South African context.

This research has been explained to me and I understand what participation in this research will involve. I understand that:

- I agree to be interviewed for this research.
- My confidentiality will be ensured. My name and personal details will be kept private.
- My participation in this research is voluntary and I have the right to withdraw from the research at any time. There will be no repercussions should I choose to withdraw from the research.
- I may choose not to answer any of the questions that are asked during the research interview.
- I may be quoted directly when the research is published, but my identity will be protected.

Signature

Date

Appendix B:

Consent to be Recorded

Consent form for participants	
I, _____, agree to allow Dayna Smith to audio record my interviews as part of the research about how educational institutions (specifically high schools) effect a person's identity formation in the South African context. This research has been explained to me and I understand what participation in this research will involve. I understand that:	
• My confidentiality will be ensured. My name and personal details will be kept private.	
• The recordings will be stored in a password-protected file on the researcher's computer.	
• Only the researcher, the researcher's supervisor and possibly a transcriber (who will sign a confidentiality agreement) will have access to these recordings.	
Signature	Date

Appendix C

Interview Schedule

1. Can you describe your high school experience?
2. What year did you finish high school?
3. Could you describe your identity during adolescence?
4. How do you think high school has the potential to shape identity?
5. Describe your relationships with your teachers in high school.
6. Do you think these relationships had an impact on your identity formation? Why / why not?
7. Do you feel that high school acknowledged and accommodated for cultural expression of students and your own cultural expression? If yes, how was this done? If no, why do you think this was the case?
8. Overall, would you consider your high school experience to be a positive or a negative experience? Why?
9. How would you describe your relationships with peers in high school?
10. Do you feel that peer relations impacted on your identity development? Why / why not?
11. Which elements of high school impacted you most and why?
12. Do you feel that you were engaged in high school based on your participation and attendance? How so / why not?
13. Do you feel that your level of engagement in school had an effect on your high school experience and your identity?
14. Being a student in South Africa, it is likely that there are a variety of cultures in schools. Based on the curriculum, do you feel that your high school incorporated texts that educated you about these cultures?
15. How does being an adolescent in high school differ in comparison to other times of your life?
16. Did you experience any challenges in high school? If so, what were these challenges?
17. Did you feel supported by your teachers in high school? Why / why not?
18. Do you feel that this support (or lack thereof) impacted on your identity formation during adolescence? Why / why not?
19. How do you think high schools could improve in supporting the identity formation of learners?

Appendix D
Ethical Clearance Letter



20 July 2020

Student name: Dayna Smith

Student number: 17230520

Campus: Varsity College Durban North

Re: Approval of HPS1 Proposal and Ethics Clearance
HONOURS/PGDIP ETHICAL CLEARANCE LETTER

Your research proposal and the ethical implications of your proposed research topic were reviewed by your supervisor and the campus research panel, a sub-committee of The Independent Institute of Education's Research and Postgraduate Studies Committee.

Your research proposal posed no significant ethical concerns and your supporting documents and instruments are in order to proceed. We hereby provide you with permission to proceed with your research.

In the event of you deciding to change your research methodology in any way, kindly consult your supervisor to ensure all ethical considerations are adhered to and pose no risk to any participant or party involved. A revised ethical clearance letter will be issued.

We wish you all the best with your research!

GENERAL CONDITIONS TO BE FULFILLED IN RELATION TO RE-SEARCH

Permission is granted to proceed with the above study subject to the conditions listed below being met and may be withdrawn should any of these conditions be flouted.

Please note: The panel has not considered the merits, accuracy or ethical soundness of the research. The only merits examined are the use of The IIE as a sample.

Permission is granted subject to the following conditions:

1. The researcher(s) will need to obtain informed consent in writing from all of the participants in his/ her sample if the study is not anonymous.
2. The researcher(s) may only use the data collected for research purposes and in no other way.
3. Photographs of human subjects may only be taken if relevant to the research, informed consent was obtained, and even with informed consent, the photographs may not be published on any online platforms.
4. The researcher is responsible for supplying and utilising his/her own research resources, such as stationery, photocopies, transport, faxes and telephones and should not depend on the goodwill of the institutions and/or the offices visited for supplying such resources.
5. No names or identifying information of participants may be used within the research and the research must be voluntary.
6. Please make it clear that the information will not be used punitively in any way and participants may in no way be counselled/advised based on this.

Supervisor: Jenna Skea

Campus Postgraduate Coordinator (CPC): Dr Razia Khan Honours co-ordinator:
Tracey Haselau

Appendix E: Final Research Report Summary Document Table

Title: A qualitative study investigating the impact of high schools on identity formation in a South African context.

Research Purpose / Objective	Primary Research Question	Research Rationale	Seminal Authors	Literature Review	Paradigm	Approach	Data Collection Methods	Ethics	Key Findings	Recommendations
To expand on the under-researched area of identity formation in South African high schools and to understand which high school practices and interactions contributed to this identity formation process in order to better support learners through their adolescence.	What is the impact of high school practices and interactions on identity formation?	The impetus for the present study arises due to the influential role that educational institutions have in society and the large amounts of people that are impacted by these institutions, which therefore requires knowledge in the high school context (Flum and Kaplan 2006, 2012; Harrell-Levy and Kerpelman 2010; Lannegrand-Willems and Bosma 2006; as cited in Erentaile et al., 2018).	- Kaplan & Flum (2009) - Flum & Kaplan (2012) - Lannegrand-Willems and Bosma (2006) - Borrero & Yeh (2011) - Ozturgut (2011)	Theme 1: Identity Formation in Adolescence	Interpretivism is the research paradigm that was employed for the study as the research integrated human interests, experiences, unique opinions and feelings (Maree et al., 2019). This is an interpretivist approach and was necessary when exploring identity as a concept as this is personal to each individual which added depth to the research and a better insight based on these unique experiences.	Qualitative, inductive approach. Phenomenological research.	Semistructured interviews were conducted as this allowed the researcher to follow an interview schedule (Appendix C), gaining an in-depth understanding of each participant's high school experiences with identity formation.	The researcher maintained ethical integrity by using participants who were adults and reflected back on their adolescent experiences. Informed consent was signed and pseudonyms were used to protect participant's privacy.	The findings that were most significant in impacting identity formation were; teachers, peer relations and friendships, a multicultural education, and the stage of adolescence. School engagement did not prove to be significant for participants in sharing their identities.	The exploration of the high school practices and interactions presented in the study contributed to the existing body of knowledge as well as specifically provided insight into identity formation in the context of South African high school. The findings encourage further research on this topic in the South African context and provide insight for high schools as the importance of supporting adolescents through this challenging period.
				Theme 2: Identity Formation in the School Context		Population The population were adults between the ages of eighteen (18) and twenty-five (25) years old, were English speaking and had attended high school in South Africa.	Data Analysis Methods Thematic analysis was suited to the research as the researcher was able to group ideas into themes and analyse the qualitative data surrounding participant's high school experiences with their identity formation which answered the research question which asked what the impact of high schools on identity formation was.	Limitations Due to the retrospective nature of the study, participants may have forgotten certain high school experiences. This was mitigated by having a narrow age range of participants who all finished high school in recent years. The sample was not inclusive of all races, genders, and ethnicities and this encourages future research that is more inclusive. Identity is a personal topic and participants may have been reluctant to share about this. This was mitigated by having participants feel that their privacy was protected by confidentiality.	Key Contributions Contribution to the body of knowledge around identity formation in the South African high school context. Emphasis on the importance of high schools supporting adolescents through this challenging period.	
Research Problem The research problem that guided the study was informed by the fact that there appeared to be a lack of current literature available that focused on identity formation in the context of educational institutions. The available literature was theoretical and did not clearly identify the role of the institutions in identity formation.	Secondary Research Questions To what extent does the stage of adolescence have an impact on identity formation in high school? To what extent does school engagement and interactions reflect in a learner's identity formation? How does a multicultural education impact the development of a learner's identity?	Key Concepts • Identity formation • Adolescence • School engagement • Culture • Multicultural education	Key Theories Social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) as this can be used to explain in-groups, out-groups and social categorisation in school peer groups. This can be applied to the high school context where interactions with peer groups, for example, may influence ones identity formation. This is especially relevant to the South African context where a range of identities exist.	Theme 3: The Role of School Engagement and Interactions	Sampling Non-probability, purposive sampling was conducted as the researcher was already acquainted with the participants and the researcher hoped to use this preexisting relationship to allow participants to feel comfortable sharing their experiences in the interviews.	Population The population were adults between the ages of eighteen (18) and twenty-five (25) years old, were English speaking and had attended high school in South Africa.	Data Analysis Methods Thematic analysis was suited to the research as the researcher was able to group ideas into themes and analyse the qualitative data surrounding participant's high school experiences with their identity formation which answered the research question which asked what the impact of high schools on identity formation was.	Limitations Due to the retrospective nature of the study, participants may have forgotten certain high school experiences. This was mitigated by having a narrow age range of participants who all finished high school in recent years. The sample was not inclusive of all races, genders, and ethnicities and this encourages future research that is more inclusive. Identity is a personal topic and participants may have been reluctant to share about this. This was mitigated by having participants feel that their privacy was protected by confidentiality.	Key Contributions Contribution to the body of knowledge around identity formation in the South African high school context. Emphasis on the importance of high schools supporting adolescents through this challenging period.	
				Theme 4: A Multicultural Education						

Final Research Report - Psychology Honours

Title: **1** A qualitative study investigating the impact of high schools on identity formation in a South African

context.

Student Name: Dayna Smith

Student Number: 17230520

Module Code: RESE8419 (Research)

Supervisor: **1** Jenna-Lee Skea

Word Count: 11 722 words

Declaration:

I hereby declare that the Research Report submitted for the Psychology Honours degree to The Independent Institute of Education is my own work and has not previously been submitted to another University or Higher Education Institution for degree purposes.

Sign:

Date: **2** 25 October 2020

ABSTRACT



RESE8419_2020_HPS1_VCDN1 - RESE8419_VCDN1

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