



Exploring Preservice Secondary School Teachers' Narratives of Professional Identity and Growth through Reflective Teaching Practice at St. Paul's University, Kenya

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Abstract

Teaching practice is a vital phase in the professional development of preservice teachers, helping them bridge the gap between theory and classroom application. However, many struggle with this connection due to the compartmentalized nature of teacher education and the absence of standardized frameworks. As a result, preservice teachers often graduate feeling underprepared, highlighting the need for improved teacher education models. Reflective practice has emerged as a valuable tool for enhancing preservice teachers' professional growth by deepening their understanding of teaching roles and improving the integration of theory and practice. This study examines the impact of structured reflective practice on preservice teachers' professional identity and pedagogical competencies during teaching practice, employing a narrative inquiry approach. A qualitative case study design was used, involving all 396 preservice teachers from St. Paul's University who participated in teaching practice in 2024. Data were collected through structured reflective diaries and analyzed thematically to identify patterns in their evolving professional identities and competencies. Findings revealed varied outcomes: while many narratives demonstrated growth and identity development, others reflected limited reflective skills and weak connections to the teaching profession early in their careers. The reflections also highlighted gaps in teaching knowledge and skills, underscoring the critical role of reflective practice, mentorship, and a supportive school environment in professional development. The study recommends integrating structured reflection into teacher training, along with planned mentorship and quality feedback, to better link teacher education theory with real-world classroom practice. This calls for a review of current teaching practice models.

Keywords: *Reflective Practice, Narrative Inquiry, Preservice Teachers, Teaching Practice, Teacher Identity, and Professional Growth*



Introduction

Teaching practice is a fundamental phase in the professional development of Preservice teachers. It allows a Preservice teacher to bridge the gap between theory and practice if the model used is appropriately designed. Elmabruk (2020) notes that teaching practice is when a Preservice teacher is allowed to apply the knowledge and skills they learned during the theoretical part of their training to make them proficient teachers. Unfortunately, as noted by Hoban (1999), Farrell (2002), and PWPER (2023), teacher education in many countries is affected by a myriad of challenges, which include a lack of standardized frameworks that promote equity, access, and quality. These challenges eventually affect the quality of preservice teachers produced by teacher education institutions. GoK (2005), Shiundu & Mohammed (2005), Hoban (2005), Feiman-Nemser (2001), and Carter (2000) opine that this makes preservice teachers feel inadequately prepared after completing their teacher education programmes. To mitigate this challenge, Mwangi (2017) posits a need for improved teacher education models emphasizing the connection between theory and practice to enhance preservice teachers' professional identity and growth. One way to do this is by integrating structured reflective practice into the teaching practice model for Preservice teachers. Researchers in teacher education agree that reflective practice can significantly enhance preservice teachers' learning by deepening their understanding of the teaching role and improving the application of theory to practice within specific classroom contexts (Belvis et al., 2013; Johansson et al., 2007; Kavaliauskienė et al., 2007). Schön (1983) emphasized that expertise develops through reflection, a view supported by Galea (2012), who argues that reflection helps teachers adapt their practice to meet students' needs and respond to educational changes. However, Galea (2012) warns against rigid models of reflective practice that promote fixed standards, potentially stifling innovation. He cautions against turning reflection into a standardized ideal, what Plato called a logos, advocating instead for a reflective process that embraces both possibilities and limitations to foster creativity and transformation in teaching. Although this study used TSC standards as a reference, preservice teachers were encouraged to explore their interpretations of teaching through open-ended reflections in diaries grounded in their real classroom experiences.



Schön (1983) identified two key forms of reflection: *reflection-in-action*, which occurs during teaching, and *reflection-on-action*, which happens after. Both are essential for developing professional knowledge and practice. Through reflective narratives, preservice teachers engage in narrative inquiry, critically examining their personal and professional experiences. Craig (2011) emphasizes that this approach strengthens professional identity and pedagogical skills, viewing teachers not just as curriculum implementers but as curriculum creators who make meaning based on context and prior knowledge. This reflective process is relational, ongoing, and rooted in personal and social interactions.

Professional identity is crucial for developing committed, competent teachers who embody the values of the profession (Mutanga, 2020; Van der Want et al., 2017; Weld, 2015). It is shaped through professional socialization (Cruess et al., 2015) and influenced by mentors, role models, and individual experiences (Wilson et al., 2013), as well as contextual factors like school environment, subject taught, available resources, and teacher communities (Barbour & Lammers, 2015). Mutanga (2020) adds that teachers often adopt multiple identities depending on their roles—such as mentor, counselor, club patron, or department head. While Loughran (2014) cautions that juggling multiple roles can cause professional dissonance, this study focused specifically on the professional identity of a school teacher—one who performs a broad range of duties beyond subject instruction. In the Kenyan context, regardless of the employment sector, a professional teacher is expected to fulfill all responsibilities assigned within the school. Hence, the study explored how preservice teachers construct and experience the identity of a holistic school teacher.

Professional growth involves a teacher's ongoing, intentional learning. This process is most effective within supportive school environments that offer opportunities for practice, reflection, feedback, and mentorship (Geiger, Muir & Lamp, 2015; Fullan, 2020). Fullan (2020) argues that isolated training sessions have limited impact, highlighting the need for sustained, classroom-based learning that helps teachers acquire, interpret, and apply new knowledge (Timperley, 2008). Effective professional learning should be contextual and evidence-based, as this approach is more



likely to enhance teaching practices (Clarke & Hollingsworth, 2002). Reflective practice plays a key role in this process, allowing teachers to learn from experience, integrate new insights, and apply research-based strategies. It also strengthens teacher identity and agency, promoting self-improvement and higher teaching quality (Aswin et al., 2020).

Clarke & Hollingsworth (2002) propose an Interconnected Model of Teacher Professional growth with four domains that influence a teacher’s professional growth and change.

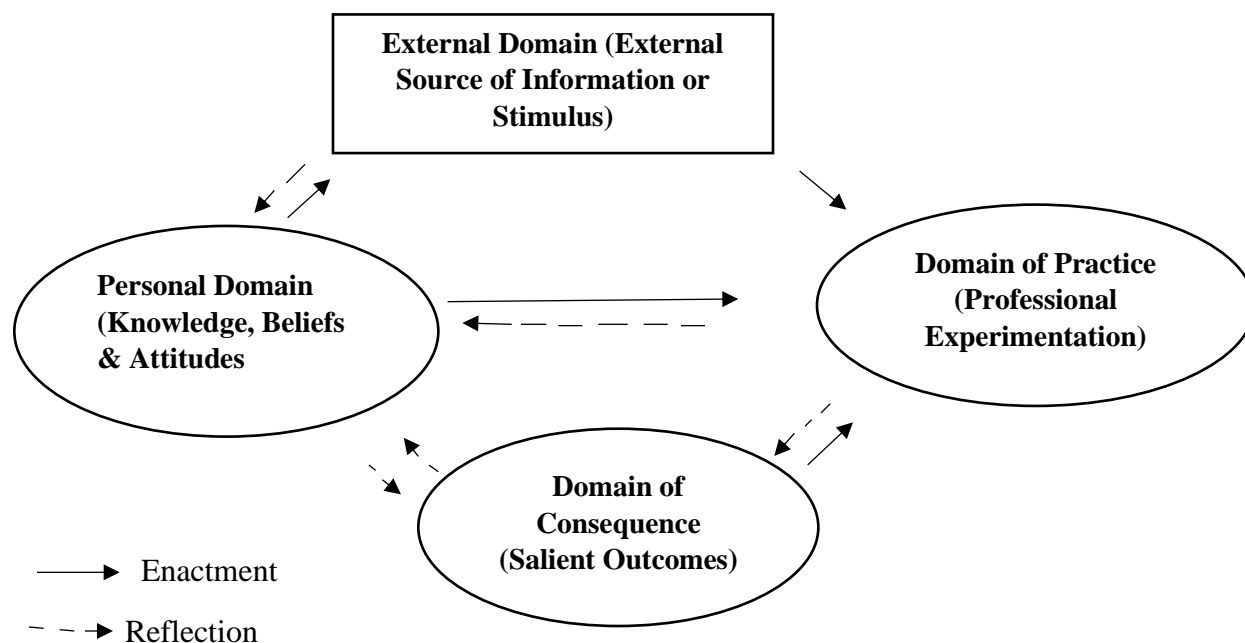


Fig. 1.1: Interconnected Model of Teacher Professional Growth (Clarke & Hollingsworth, 2002)

Figure 1.1 shows the Interconnected model of teacher professional growth by Clarke & Hollingsworth (2002). The model shows the four domains that influence a teacher’s professional growth, namely, the External Domain, which consists of the External Source of Information or Stimulus, the Personal Domain (Knowledge, Beliefs, and Attitudes), the Domain of Consequence (Salient Outcomes), and the Domain of Practice (Professional Experimentation). The four domains are the mediating processes of reflection and enactment through which a teacher’s professional identity and growth occur. A change in any domain results in a change in another. For example, a



change in a teacher's knowledge, beliefs, and attitudes would result in a change in his/her domains of practice and consequence. In other words, if a teacher has new pedagogical knowledge or a positive attitude towards the profession, subject, class, or school, there is a likelihood of positive changes in his/her professional practice and teaching and learning outcomes.

This study adapted the Interconnected model of teacher professional growth by Clarke and Hollingsworth (2002) in the context of the Teacher Service Commission (TSC), Kenya Teaching Standards, as provided for in the TSC Teacher Performance Appraisal and Development (TPAD) tool that indicates performance Standards for evaluating public school teachers in Kenya. The TPAD tool was implemented in 2016 pursuant to Article 52 (1) and Article 52 (2)(c) of the TSC Code of Regulations for Teachers in Kenya (TSC, 2021 & Republic of Kenya, 2015). TSC is mandated by the provisions of Article 237 (2) of the Constitution of Kenya 2010 to register all basic education (Early Childhood, Primary, Secondary, and Diploma Teacher Training Colleges) teachers in Kenya, whether teaching in public or private schools. It also employs the majority of the teachers who teach in basic education schools. Given its legal mandate, TSC determines the teaching standards of all teachers teaching in basic education schools in Kenya. Therefore, the teaching standards indicated in the TPAD tool provide the basic requirements of a professional basic education teacher in Kenya. The TPAD tool provides 5 five standards for measuring the quality of basic education teachers in Kenya. These are: (a) Professional knowledge and Practice, (b). Comprehensive Learning Environment; (c). Teacher Professional Development; (d). Teacher Conduct & Professionalism; (e). Participation in Professional Learning Community. The five standards outline the broad areas that determine the quality of a teacher in basic education in Kenya and, thereby, the Professional Identity of a teacher in Kenya. Preservice teacher education programmes should, therefore, be aligned to the five Teaching Professional Standards. St. Paul's University (SPU) Secondary School teacher education undergraduate programmes are focused on helping Preservice teachers acquire teaching professional knowledge, skills, and values in line with the five Teacher Education Standards. Therefore, the five teaching standards measured teacher professional identity and growth in this study.



This study was also guided by the Dual System Theory by Kahneman (2011), which contends that cognition is a product of the interaction between the unconscious and conscious processes. The conscious processes, attitudes, and actions can be transformed within a shorter time through education and persuasion. However, the unconscious processes and attitudes take longer to transform. Unconscious processes are implicit and draw on past experiences, are based on pattern recognition, while conscious processes are deliberate and rational (Hattie and Yates, 2014, & Kahneman, 2011). In this study, secondary school preservice teachers have undertaken three years of coursework, which is expected to provide them with the knowledge, skills, and values required for teachers. During their teaching practice, preservice teachers were required to record their reflections in lessons and relevant school activities. This study was interested in the preservice teachers' attitudes, beliefs, and routines regarding professional identity and development as exhibited in their adaptability and resilience, pedagogical knowledge, professional ethics and conduct, commitment to lifelong learning, research and innovation, teaching approaches, and evidence-based teaching approaches. While the interconnectedness model of teacher professional growth helped the study to focus on the four domains that influence a Preservice teacher's professional growth, the Dual system theory enabled the

Preservice teachers at St. Paul's University undergo a mandatory one-term (approximately three months) teaching practice undertaken after the third year of study for undergraduate degree students. Before being allowed to register for teaching practice, each Preservice teacher is expected to study pre-requisite courses and do Micro-teaching. Micro-teaching is a simulated classroom teaching activity in which the Preservice teacher is expected to plan and teach a micro-lesson of between 5-10 minutes while a small group of their colleagues, usually 5 -10 in each group, take the role of classroom learners at the level the Preservice teacher is practicing to teach. Each Preservice teacher is expected to practice a total of eight teaching skills. The eight Micro-teaching skills are: Motivation, Verbal Exposition, Questioning, Reinforcement, Stimulus Variation, Set Induction, Use of Examples and Illustrations, and Integrated skills. Each Micro-teaching group is supervised by at least one supervisor. After each micro-lesson, the Preservice teacher is given feedback by the supervisor and colleagues on his/her teaching performance based on the rubric



that provides the parameters of effective use of the specific teaching skill the teacher was using. Feedback given has both areas well done and those not well done or that need improvement. The preservice teacher is expected to use the feedback given to improve his/her subsequent micro-teaching lessons. Reflections of the preservice teacher on feedback provided present the first opportunity for formal reflective practice for each preservice teacher. The same is repeated for each preservice teacher in the group until all have practiced the teaching of the eight skills. Preservice teachers are supposed to use the knowledge, skills, and values gained during micro-teaching, including reflective practices, and apply them during teaching practice in schools.

During teaching practice, St. Paul's University preservice teachers are required to reflect on all lessons taught each day, as well as other relevant school activities, and objectively record their reflections in the Schemes of Work and records of work. In addition, they are provided with a teaching practice daily reflections booklet, which they use to record their daily reflections. The daily reflections booklet has questions that guide Preservice teachers in their reflections on their daily teaching and school activities experiences. They are required to objectively record their daily reflections each day for the entire school term based on the reflection questions provided.

This study focused on preservice teachers' daily reflections through a narrative inquiry approach. The study examined the reflective journeys of Preservice teachers to establish how preservice teachers constructed and reconstructed their professional identities and how reflective practice shaped their growth and development as teachers. This study aimed to fill the existing knowledge gap in the existing literature on preservice teachers' reflective practice and professional identity and growth based on the actual narratives in the context of teaching practice. Thus, the objectives of this study were to;

1. establish preservice teachers' constructions and reconstructions of their professional identity during reflective practice.
2. examine preservice teachers' narratives of their professional growth through their reflections during teaching practice

Methodology



A qualitative design and a case study research method in the form of a narrative inquiry method were used. A qualitative and case study method was used since the study aimed at exploring an in-depth understanding of the experiences of respondents and their constructed meaning of a social phenomenon in their school contexts and their common teacher education training in the same institution (Creswell, 2014). The use of qualitative design and case study is useful when a researcher wants to gain a deeper understanding of the phenomenon (Priya, 2020). The narrative inquiry method was used to understand the lived experience of preservice teachers in terms of their teaching practices and school activities in the context of their specific schools. Clandinin and Connelly (1999) point out that narrative inquiry can serve as a powerful tool for preservice teachers to explore and interrogate their "stories to live by" - the personal and professional narratives that inform their teaching practice. The method is useful when a study aims to interrogate the lived stories of the study participants in the context of the variables of the study. Narrative inquiry emphasizes understanding how individuals experience and interpret events in their lives to capture the richness and complexity of those experiences through their stories. Through the lens of narrative inquiry, this study aimed at gaining a deeper understanding of how Preservice teachers constructed and reconstructed their professional identities and how this shaped their daily teaching practice and school activities experiences.

Interpretivism research philosophy underpinned this study since the main aim was to explore the subjective preservice teachers' experiences and perceptions of their daily teaching and school activities, which they were involved in during their teaching practice. The study's target population was 396 2024 St. Paul's University (SPU) preservice teachers on teaching practice. A census approach was employed, and therefore, all 2024 SPU students on teaching practice were included in this study. A structured reflective practice diary was used to collect data on each preservice teacher's daily reflections. Each participant filled in the reflective practice diary daily for a school term, equivalent to about three months, based on their daily teaching experiences and school activities.

Credibility of the data was ensured through peer discussions, where researchers and colleagues talked about the methodology, analysis, and interpretation. Careful planning, participant



orientation, and expert review of the reflective diary questions, along with ongoing feedback during teaching practice, further improved credibility by addressing emerging issues. Researchers enhanced confirmability and credibility through reflexivity. They continuously examined their own beliefs, biases, and training to maintain objectivity and meet scientific standards. Hadi and Closs (2016) point out that reflexivity, peer discussions, and member checks can strengthen credibility. In this study, reflexivity and peer discussions were crucial, as the assessment relied on preservice teachers' reflective teaching diaries. A census approach and systematic coding ensured authenticity and transferability by capturing the voices of all participants, while verbatim excerpts added contextual depth. Finally, using a structured reflective diary created an audit trail, which increased both dependability and credibility. Lincoln and Guba (1985) posit that qualitative research should maintain an audit trail that documents all decisions, methods, and changes, while ensuring fairness and an accurate representation of participants' experiences to strengthen credibility, trustworthiness, dependability, and confirmability.

Informed consent of each study participant was assured before the beginning of the study. Since reflective diaries are part of the academic teaching practice requirements, participants were informed of the use of the data for data analysis. The anonymity of data obtained from participants was assured by keeping participants' details secret during the analysis of data by use of coded identifiers. Study participants were assured of the confidentiality of the information they provided within the provisions of the SPU Teaching Practice policy. Data collected was used for both academic and study requirements in strict adherence to the SPU Academic policies. The do-no-harm principle was observed through informed consent, respect for all participants, and provision of all necessary information.

Data obtained from the structured reflective practice diaries was coded and analyzed using a thematic network analysis process to get a clear understanding of the main narratives that characterized preservice teachers' reflections. Kujuir (2023) asserts that narrative analysis is a powerful method of extracting meanings from participants' experiences. It involved careful reading, re-reading, and transcribing data to identify, describe, and interpret themes emerging from



the data sets. Data was systematically analyzed at three levels: Basic Themes which is the lowest order theme derived from the respondents' textual data, Organizing Theme that denotes several basic themes on the same subject and global theme which is the main theme that covers the main idea in the data and is comprised of several organizing themes (Attride-Stirling, 2001 & Pokorny et al., 2018). A thematic network is created that originates from the basic theme, through organizing theme to a global theme as illustrated in Figure 1.2: Thematic Network Structure Below.

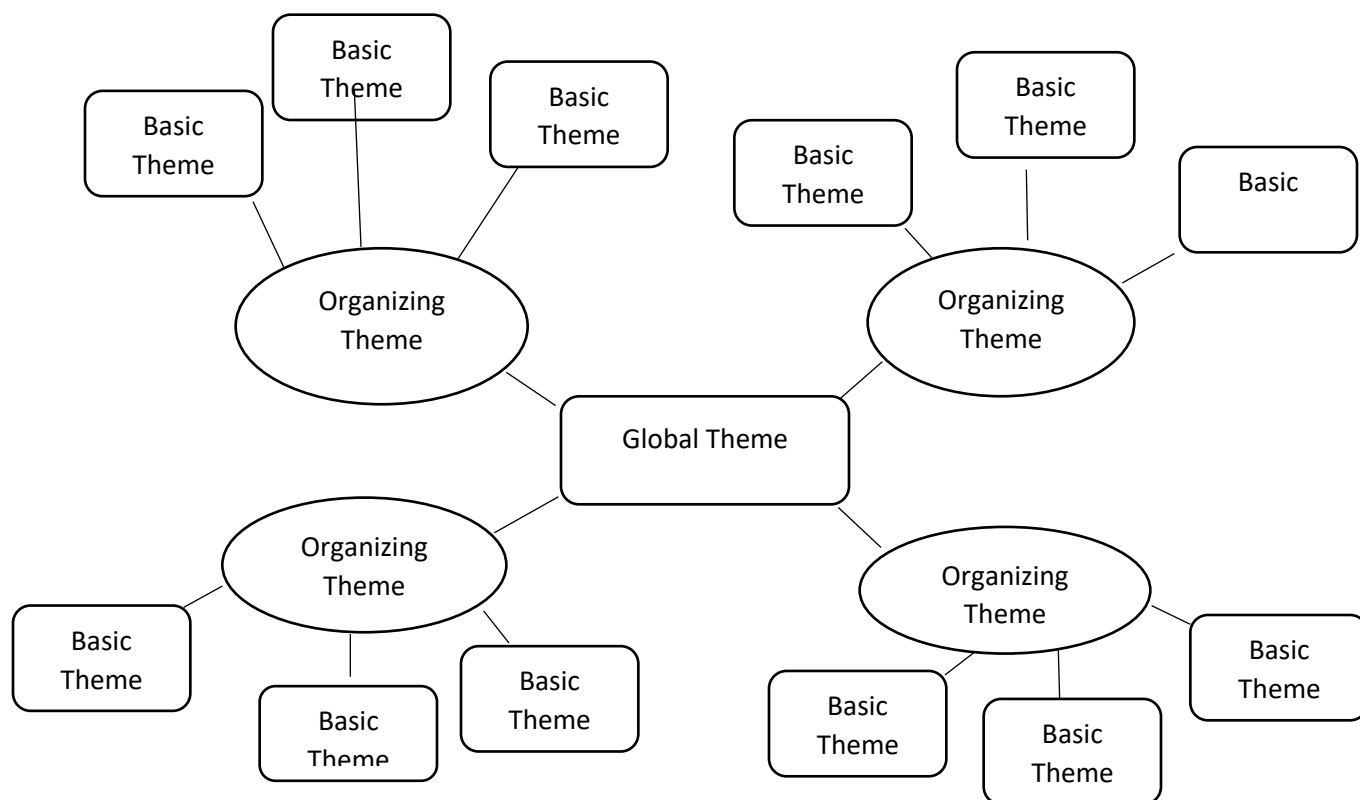


Figure 1.2: Thematic Network Structure

In this study, the 5 five TSC standards that measure the quality of a basic education teacher in Kenya were the organizing themes, while the narrative of preservice teachers was grouped into basic themes that eventually formed organizing themes based on each of the five 5 TSC Teaching Professional Standards. The global theme was the teaching of professional knowledge and Application, both at the start (Initial) and end of teaching practice. TSC registers all basic education



teachers in Kenya based on their qualifications from approved and accredited teacher education institutions and programmes as per the provisions of Article 237 of the Constitution of Kenya 2010. Approved teacher programmes must meet the requirements of TSC registration. It thus follows that TSC only registers teachers who have met the five teacher standards. The said TSC Standards are: (a) Professional knowledge and Practice, (b). Comprehensive Learning Environment; (c). Teacher Professional Development; (d). Teacher Conduct & Professionalism; (e). Participation in Professional Learning Community.

Results and Discussion

Preservice teachers were required to record daily school activities they were involved in during the entire teaching practice period. These served two-fold purposes, namely: determining the teaching professional activities preservice teachers were engaged in, and secondly, they served as the foundation of their daily reflections. Some of the school activities preservice teachers were involved in include: Classroom teaching, staff meeting attendance, attending religious meetings, community service activities, management of co-curricular activities, weekly teacher-on-duty activities, and school assembly sessions. A thematic analysis approach was used to analyze data. This helped to capture the basic and organizing themes from preservice teachers' narratives as per each global theme based on the five TSC Teaching Professional Standards and the global theme of a quality secondary school teacher.

Initial Preservice Teachers' Reflections

Initial Preservice teachers' narratives on their teaching experiences in the context of their professional knowledge, skills, and school environments during the first three weeks (Weeks 2,3 & 4) of teaching practice were as indicated in Figure 1.3.

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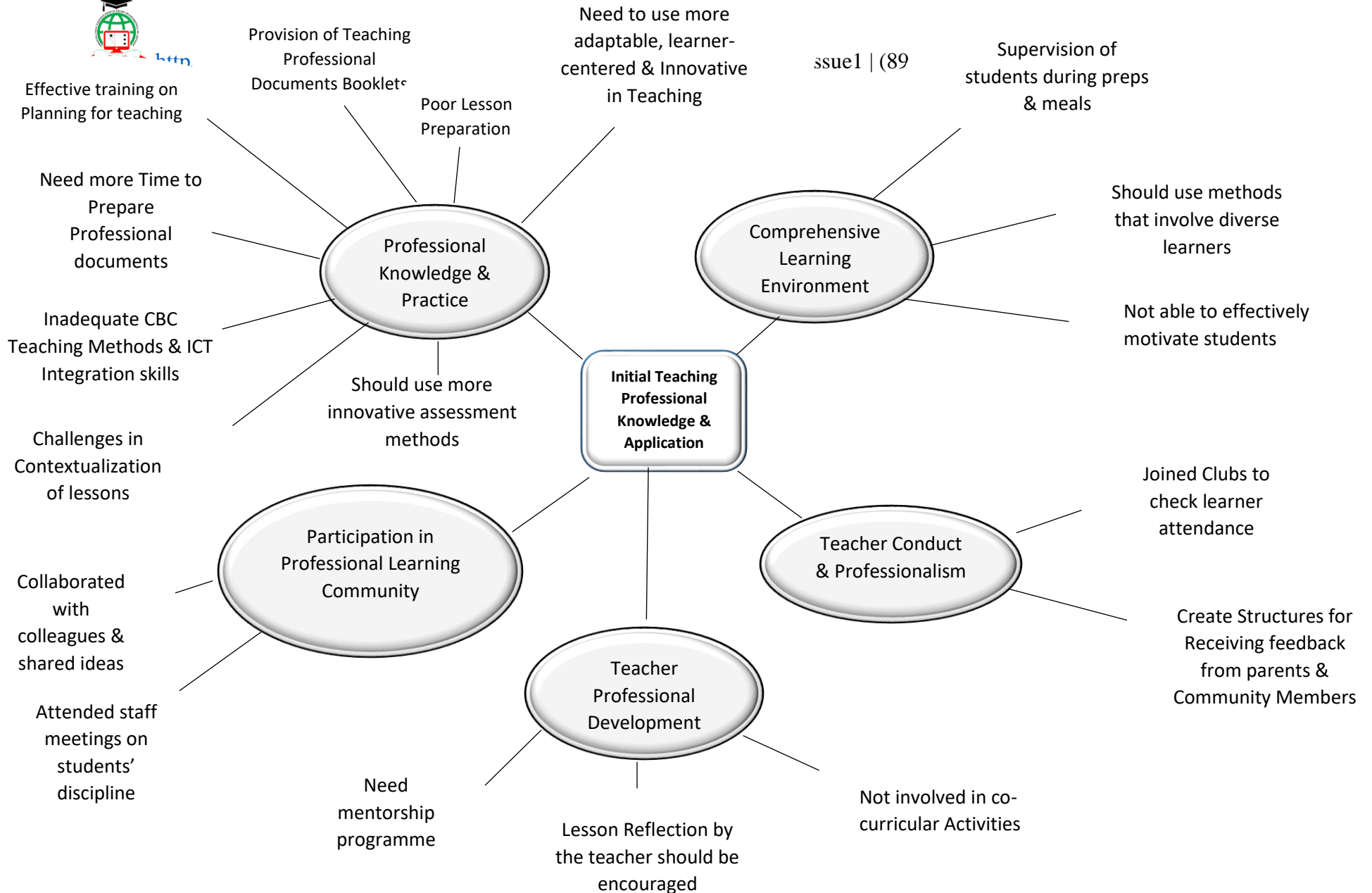




Figure 1.3: *Initial Preservice Teachers' Reflections*



The findings in Fig. 1.3 show that most initial preservice teachers' reflections were on Professional Knowledge and Practice, and the least were on Teacher Conduct and Professionalism. It is also evident that preservice teacher identified key gaps in their professional teaching, namely, inadequate knowledge and skills in Competency-Based Education, digital technology integration, and inclusivity in the teaching and learning process, need to use more adaptable, learner-centered & innovative Teaching methods, inadequate skills in planning for teaching, and contextualization of lessons. Other notable issues raised by preservice teachers include: the need for a mentorship programme for those on teaching practice, the use of effective reflective practice, and innovative assessment methods. Several students noted that they needed to use more adaptable, learner-centered, and innovative teaching methods. This may be an indication that they felt inadequately prepared to teach in the context of the schools and classroom environments, especially after the introduction of the competency-based curriculum. Preservice teacher A said

“I needed to utilize a variety of instructional strategies and tools to cater to different learning styles and keep students engaged”.

Preservice teacher B had this to say;

“I realized I needed to foster a positive and inclusive classroom atmosphere where all learners will feel(sic) valued and supported in their learning journey”.

Preservice teacher C

“I should reflect on my teaching methods regularly and seek feedback from learners to identify areas for improvement. I should also provide timely and constructive feedback to learners to help them improve their understanding and performance.”

From the above statements, it is clear that Preservice teachers noted their deficiencies as professional teachers about the context of the requirements of the teaching profession and the needs of the learners they were teaching. This means that from the beginning of teaching practice, they could explore and interrogate their personal and professional identity, given the requirements of the teaching profession. As noted by Graig (2021), preservice teachers' interrogation of their professional work experiences enhances their professional identity and pedagogical practices, leading to the development of a quality and committed teacher who exhibits profession-positive self-image as postulated by Mutanga (2020); Van der Want et al. (2017) & Weld (2015). However,



it is critical to note that the initial preservice teachers' narratives pointed out their perceived inadequate teaching knowledge and skills. This could be a pointer to either inadequate connection between theory and practice in their training, a disconnect between the university teacher education training and the school realities in secondary schools, or perhaps the initial classroom teaching anxiety. When asked how their perceived inadequate teaching knowledge and skills can be mitigated, Preservice teacher A proffered the following;

“The University should link us with school mentors during teaching practice. It should also help us to(sic) adequately prepare for teaching practice, especially in preparing teacher professional documents... and create opportunities for student teachers in different regions and schools can share their classroom teaching experiences to learn from each other.”

Preservice Teacher D had this to say;

“I should enhance my professional development, be involved in regular training, and attend workshops to update me(sic) on the latest teaching techniques in order to apply the knowledge and skills gained in my school.”

Preservice Teacher E noted that'

“Reflecting on what worked well and identifying areas for improvement in the context of my classroom and class is essential for ongoing professional development.”

These narratives show that preservice teachers identified with the teaching profession and hence the suggested solutions to the personal challenges they faced in their classroom teaching. This would most likely lead to their teaching professional growth. Clarke & Hollingsworth (2002) submit that a teacher's knowledge, beliefs, and attitudes influence his or her professional identity and growth. The narratives also show reflections based on each preservice teacher's classroom context and environment, which would probably lead to more successful and effective reflections that positively influence preservice teachers' professional development and growth as posited by Geiger, Muir, and Lamp (2015) & Fullan (2020). Timperley (2008) argues that context-based reflections provide opportunities for continuous learning where a teacher learns new information,



its implications, and practical application it in a specific classroom and or school or what Clarke & Hollingsworth (2002) refer to as the Interconnectedness model of teacher professional growth.

Even though at the beginning of teaching practice, many preservice teachers reflected on areas that needed improvement in their teaching practice, a significant number of them focused their reflections on learners and school daily activities. This means their interest was largely not in their performance as teachers. Their narratives were as follows;

“This week was dedicated to administrating and supervising examinations. It involved careful coordination and attention to details to ensure a smooth and fair testing process.”

Preservice Teacher F.

“The week has been good. All learners attended(sic) as planned and objective(sic) well met as planned.”

Preservice Teacher G

“This week has been highly productive and insightful. I observed significant progress in the learners (sic) grasp of concepts.”

Preservice Teacher H

“The week ended well and all activities was(sic) achieved.”

Preservice Teacher I

The comments above suggest a lack of critical reflective knowledge and skills or understanding of what was expected in the reflective practice among some preservice teachers. This robbed preservice teachers a fundamental opportunity to explore and critique their professional practice against the teaching professional standards, school or classroom context, and the teaching and knowledge acquired during their university training. The said comments may also indicate a lack of professional identity in terms of the teaching professional standards, leading to little or no professional growth. This would affect the quality of teaching and learning in such preservice teachers' classrooms. If not addressed may result in long-term teaching professional challenges, poor output leading to poor students' learning since reflective practice is critical in improving



teaching effectiveness and students' learning outcomes (Jay and Johnson, 2002, and Larrivee, 2008). Similarly, Farrell (2015) and Richards and Lockhart (1994) emphasize reflective practice's critical role in a professional teacher's development, identity, and growth. Thus, there is need for reflective practice knowledge and skills by all teachers. These skills can be cultivated and nurtured right from the initial training of a preservice teacher. Teaching practice offers a crucial opportunity for preservice teachers to practice and develop their reflective practice knowledge and skills since it helps them connect theory to practice (Aldabbus, 2020).

Final Preservice Teachers' Reflections

Preservice reflections during the last three weeks (Weeks 9,10 & 11) of their teaching practice period were as indicated in Fig. 1.4.

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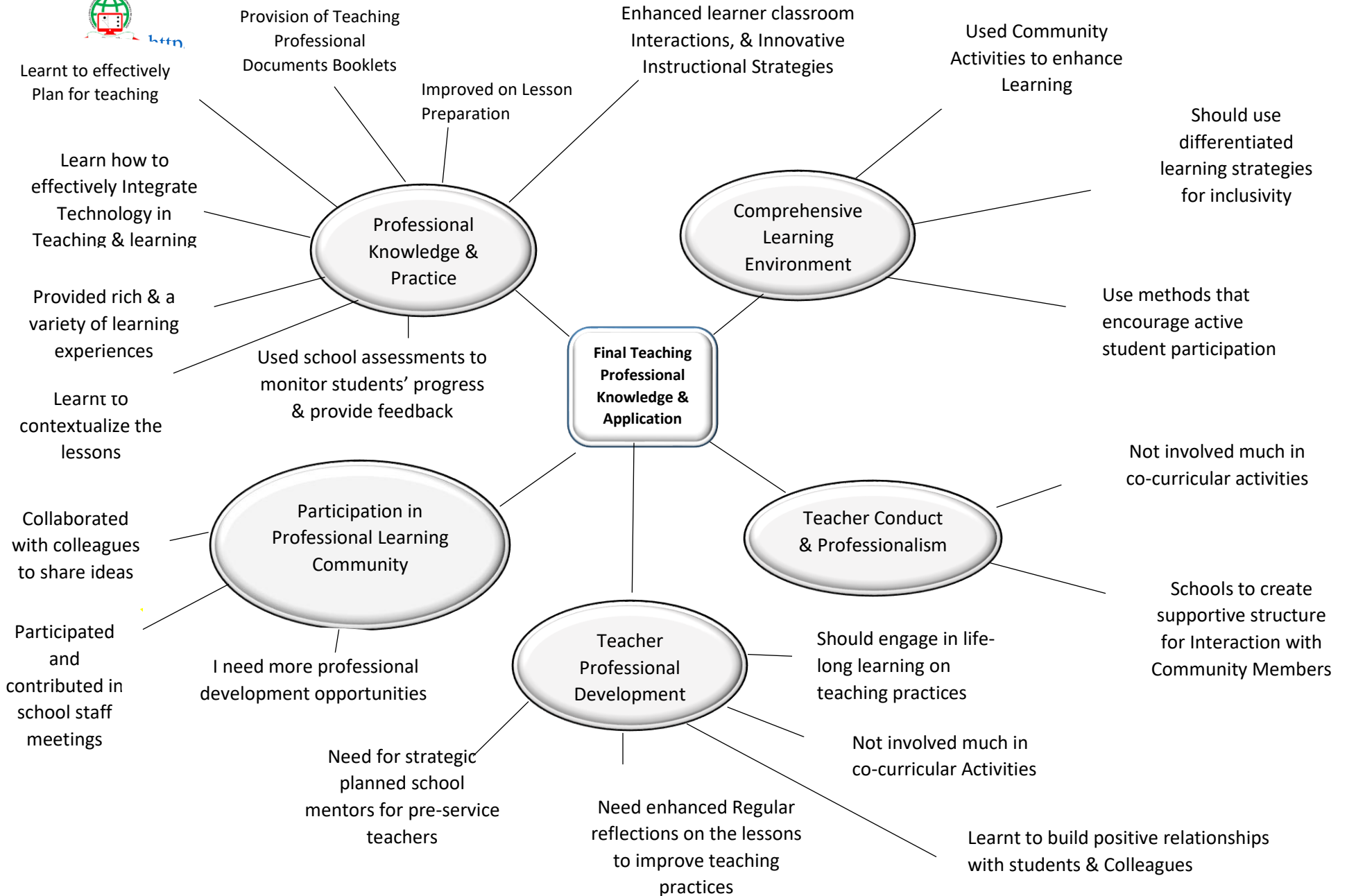




Figure 1.4: Final Preservice Teachers' Reflections



The narratives presented in Fig. 1.4 on Final Preservice Teachers' Reflections done at the end of their teaching practice suggest that preservice teachers identified areas they improved in and the ones that had gaps in the teaching professional development. Most of their reflections focused on Professional Knowledge and Practice, as was the case during their initial reflections at the start of their teaching practice. Teacher Conduct and Professionalism had the fewest reflections. Respondents indicated they have learnt how to plan for the lessons effectively, integrate technology in their teaching of the lessons, enhance classroom interactions & use innovative teaching strategies, provide a variety of learning experience to their learners, use community activities to enhance learning, contextualize lessons, assessed students and provided feedback, collaborated with colleagues and shared ideas on their teaching practices, participated and contributed in staff meetings, and built positive relationships with colleagues and students. Preservice teacher' observation of their teaching practice denoted perceived improvement in their teaching performance. Their narratives agree with Belvis et al. (2013), Kavaliauskienė et al. (2007), and Parsons and Stephenson (2005) observations that reflective practice in teacher education focuses on improving teacher performance. Preservice teachers also submitted that they needed more professional development opportunities, strategic and planned school mentorship, enhanced regular reflections on their lessons, and to engage in lifelong learning to improve their teaching practices. They also indicated that they needed to use differentiated instructional strategies for inclusivity, use methods that encourage more active student participation, school environments that provided supportive structures for interaction with community members in the teaching and learning process, and be more involved in co-curricular activities. These narratives reflect Preservice teachers' critical thinking about their teaching practice experiences and practice, especially in their weak professional practice areas. It may also be a pointer to the gaps in their professional teaching training. As argued by Galea (2012), reflective practice in the teaching profession democratizes the teaching and learning process that moves teachers away from the brick and mortar teaching practices to their professional paths based on their context and teaching philosophies, which often leads to educational transformations.



Preservice teachers' narratives indicated above are indicative of preservice teachers who identified with the teaching profession since they reflected on all five teaching standards. Preservice teachers' final reflections at the end of their teaching practice period, compared to their initial reflections, show professional growth. The initial Preservice teachers' reflections pointed out specific gaps in their teaching professional knowledge and skills, while some focused on the school's daily activities, but their final reflections showed improvements in areas where they had gaps. For example, during the initial reflections at the beginning of the teaching practice, Preservice teachers indicated they did poor lesson preparation and needed to use more adaptable, learner-centered & innovative teaching. While in the final reflections, they indicated they had improved in lesson preparation and had enhanced learner classroom interactions and used innovative instructional strategies, respectively. It is critical to note that none of the Preservice teachers' final reflections focused on the daily school activities, unlike the case in some of their initial reflections. Preservice teachers' final individual narratives, as indicated below, demonstrate their teaching professional identity and support the conclusion that reflective teaching practice allowed them to critique their teaching practice, leading to professional growth.

“The school year term two and the opportunity to reflect on my practice has been a journey of growth and learning, and self-discovery as a teacher. I’m proud of what I have accomplished and the person I have become...”

Preservice Teacher J

“I was able to focus on active learning by shifting from traditional lecture-based instruction to active learning approaches where students are actively engaged such as group discussions, hands-on experiments, and peer teaching.”

Preservice Teacher K

“I learnt to prepare the lesson plans and teaching aids well before the lesson in order to cater for all the learners, including learners who are differently talented.”

Preservice Teacher K



The individual narratives also present preservice teachers' construction of their professional identity in the context of their schools and classes they taught. However, some professional teaching practice skills and opportunities, such as the use of differentiated learning and inclusivity, as well as a lack of involvement in co-curricular activities, were noted as deficient areas in both the initial and final reflections. Preservice Teacher M pointed out that;

“The school(University) should encourage the learners to participate in more co-curricular activities top boost their outside classroom activities. “

It is fundamental to note that preservice teachers indicated their need for more professional development opportunities, enhanced regular reflections, and strategically planned school mentors to improve their professional practice. Preservice teacher N said;

“SPU should assign mentors to learners during their attachment to make them navigate their roles and maximize their learning experiences.”

Preservice teacher O noted the following;

“I should regularly reflect on teaching practices to identify areas for improvement and engage in ongoing professional development to stay updated on best practices.”

Preservice teacher P said that;

“We should also build strong relationships with students, parents, and colleagues, work collaboratively with colleagues to share best practices, and support each other.”

These narratives provide a glimpse of their constructive creation of areas and ideas that pre-service teachers thought could improve their professional practice and growth in the context of teaching practice schools. The schools where preservice teachers were based provided an environment for learning and making any changes required based on their reflections and feedback given by school mentors and supervisors. The final Preservice teachers' reflections, as compared to the initial ones,



show a variety of narratives on teaching practice, which is a testament to their teaching professional growth. Research shows that professional learning and development is most likely to be successful if it occurs in the school environment where a teacher has the opportunity for reflection and feedback from mentors and supervisors (Geiger et al., 2015; Fullan, 2020, & Borko et al., 1997). One-off teacher professional experiences are ineffective in changing a teacher's practice (Fullan, 2020). Both initial and final reflections demonstrate preservice teachers' construction and reconstruction of their professional identity and the mediating process of reflection. Their narratives on the need for more professional development opportunities, structured reflective practices, planned and strategic school mentors, and collaboration with all stakeholders are indicators of preservice teachers' understanding of their teaching professional identity and the gaps in their professional teaching knowledge and skills in the context of their classrooms and schools. Preservice teachers' identification of the areas they felt needed improvement based on their school environment is what Clarke & Hollingsworth (2002) refer to as the external source of information or stimulus, which provides the basis for the need to learn more. It has a substantial impact on teachers' professional identity and growth. The School environment and feedback from mentors and supervisors in this study, as can be deduced from preservice teachers' narratives, allowed them to reflect on their teaching practice knowledge and skills about their teaching experiences. Therefore, there is a need for quality school environments, planned for quality mentors and reflective practice for Preservice teachers during teaching practice.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The study found that while many preservice teachers initially identified with teaching, they lacked reflective skills. All their final reflections demonstrated professional identity and growth, and also revealed teacher education gaps, such as a lack of planned mentors and structured reflective practice. The findings underscore the importance of structured reflective practice, planned mentorship programmes, and a good school environment for quality preservice teachers' professional identity and growth. Therefore, it is critical for teacher education training programmes to integrate. structured reflective practice in their training programmes to effectively bridge the gap between teacher education theory and classroom practice. It is also important to incorporate



planned school mentorship programmes and quality feedback from supervisors and mentors. There is also a need to review of the teacher education programmes to address the weak areas identified by preservice teachers such as integration of technology in the teaching and learning process, effective use of a variety of learner-centered methods, contextualization of content, inclusivity of learners in the classroom, the practical roles of a school teacher which should include; participation and guiding learners in co-curricular activities, effective engagement of school stakeholders such as parents and the community.



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