

**MENTORING IN THE INITIAL TEACHER EDUCATION OPEN DISTANCE E-LEARNING
CONTEXT: AN UBUNTU-ORIENTATED PERSPECTIVE**

by

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I declare that **MENTORING IN THE INITIAL TEACHER EDUCATION OPEN DISTANCE E-LEARNING CONTEXT: AN UBUNTU-ORIENTATED PERSPECTIVE** is my own work and that all the sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

I further declare that I submitted the thesis to originality checking software and that it falls within the accepted requirements for originality.

I have not previously submitted this work, or part of it, for examination at Unisa for another qualification or at any other higher education institution.



SIGNATURE

30/04/2026

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DEDICATION

To Layla, my heart, my light, and my greatest inspiration

To the women who carried me when I needed carrying, and who now walk beside me
with strength and grace

To strength, rebuilding, healing, and becoming.

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ABSTRACT

Title of Thesis:

MENTORING IN THE INITIAL TEACHER EDUCATION OPEN DISTANCE E-LEARNING CONTEXT: AN UBUNTU-ORIENTATED PERSPECTIVE

This study explores mentoring within the Initial Teacher Education (ITE) Teaching Practice (TP) context at a South African Open Distance eLearning (ODeL) institution. This research is underpinned by an Ubuntu-orientated perspective. The study responds to growing concerns of the limited professional and psychosocial support experienced by student teachers (STs) during TP, particularly in decentralised, low-resourced school environments where distance-based support may be limited. Guided by a constructivist paradigm and informed by Kram's Mentoring Functions Framework, Ubuntu philosophy of humanness and interrelationships, and the Afrocentric paradigm, the study employed a single, descriptive qualitative case study design bounded within one South African ODeL institution. Data were generated from semi-structured interviews with STs, qualitative questerviews with mentor teachers (MTs), and document analysis of institutional tutorial letters, thereby enabling a deep thematic exploration of mentoring practices and needs based on participants' lived experiences and supported (or contradicted) by key institutional documents. Braun and Clarke's six-phase model of thematic analysis was used to interpret the data. The findings from the data revealed that STs have fundamental psychosocial and professional support needs that are not consistently met in the current ITE TP mentoring system. Key themes included the need for emotional availability, affirming feedback, constructive lesson observation, and relationships built on ethical care, support, and cultural sensitivity. MTs also highlighted institutional challenges and their own need for clearer guidance and recognition in fulfilling their mentoring roles. The study uncovered a misalignment between institutional intentions and communication, as reflected in TP documentation, and actual mentoring practices that happen during TP. The study concludes with the development of an Ubuntu-orientated Mentoring Framework tailored for ODeL contexts, aiming to bridge the interpersonal, pedagogical, and institutional gaps in current TP mentorship. This framework highlights empathy, support, affirmation, mutual respect, and professional

guidance, offering a culturally responsive model for supporting STs' development and enhancing the quality of teacher preparation in South Africa. This research presents original insights into the field of ITE, by proposing a contextually grounded mentoring model that acknowledges African values and addresses the nuanced realities of ODeL ITE. The findings have implications for institutional policy, mentor training, and the reimagining of equitable and interpersonal mentoring in diverse educational contexts.

KEY TERMS

Mentor teacher, student teacher support, Ubuntu-orientated mentoring, Open Distance eLearning (ODeL), Initial Teacher Education (ITE), Teaching Practice (TP)

Afrikaans:

Titel: MENTORSKAP IN DIE AANVANKLIKE ONDERWYSEROPLEIDING OOPAFSTAND-ELEER (e-LEER)-KONTEKS: 'N UBUNTU-GEORIËNTEERDE PERSPEKTIEF

Hierdie studie ondersoek mentorskap binne die Aanvanklike Onderwyseropleiding (AOO)-onderwyspraktik (OP)-konteks by 'n Suid-Afrikaanse Oopafstand-eLeer (ODeL)-instelling. Hierdie navorsing is gegrond op 'n Ubuntu-georiënteerde perspektief. Die studie reageer op toenemende kommer oor die beperkte professionele en psigososiale ondersteuning wat studentonderwysers (SO's) tydens OP ervaar, veral in gedesentraliseerde skole met beperkte hulpbronne waar afstandsgebaseerde ondersteuning beperk mag wees. Gelei deur 'n konstruktivistiese paradigma en ingelig deur Kram se raamwerk van mentorskapsfunksies, die Ubuntu-filosofie van menslikheid en onderlinge verhoudings, en die Afrosentriese paradigma, het die studie 'n kwalitatiewe gevallestudie-ontwerp gebruik. Data is gegenereer uit semi-gestruktureerde onderhouds met SO's, kwalitatiewe *questerviews* met mentoronderwysers (MO's), en dokumentontleding van institusionele tutoriale briewe, wat dus 'n diep tematiese verkenning van mentorskapspraktyke en -behoeftes moontlik maak, gebaseer op deelnemers se geleefde ervarings en ondersteun (of weerspreek) deur belangrike institusionele dokumente. Braun en Clarke se ses-fase model van tematiese analise is gebruik om die data te interpreteer. Die bevindinge uit

die data het getoon dat SO's fundamentele psigososiale en professionele ondersteuningsbehoefte wat nie konsekwent in die huidige AOO OP-mentorskapstelsel bevredig word nie. Sleuteltemas het ingesluit die behoefte aan emosionele beskikbaarheid, bevestigende terugvoer, konstruktiewe leswaarneming, en verhoudings wat gebou is op etiese sorg, ondersteuning en kulturele sensitiviteit. MO's het ook institusionele uitdagings uitgelig, sowel as hul eie behoefte aan duideliker riglyne en erkenning in die vervulling van hul mentorrolle. Die studie het 'n wanbelyning blootgelê tussen institusionele bedoelings en kommunikasie, soos weerspieël in OP-dokumentasie, en die werklike mentorskapspraktyke wat tydens OP plaasvind. Die studie sluit af met die ontwikkeling van 'n Ubuntu-georiënteerde Mentorskapsraamwerk wat vir ODeL-kontekste aangepas is, met die doel om die interpersoonlike, pedagogiese en institusionele gapings in huidige OP-mentorskap te oorbrug. Hierdie raamwerk beklemtoon empatie, ondersteuning, bevestiging, wedersydse respek en professionele leiding, en bied 'n kultureel-responsiewe model om SO's se ontwikkeling te ondersteun en die gehalte van onderwyservoorbereiding in Suid-Afrika te verbeter. Hierdie navorsing bied oorspronklike insigte in die veld van AOO deur 'n kontekstueel gegronde mentorskapsmodel voor te stel wat Afrika-waardes erken en die genuanseerde werklikhede van ODeL-AOO aanspreek. Die bevindinge het implikasies vir institusionele beleid, mentoropleiding, en die herverbeelding van regverdige en interpersoonlike mentorskap in diverse opvoedkundige kontekste.

SLEUTELWOORDE

Mentoronderwyser, studentonderwyser-ondersteuning, Ubuntu-georiënteerde mentorskap, Oopafstand-eLeer (ODeL), Aanvanklike Onderwyseropleiding (AOO), Onderwyspraktyk (OP)

isiZulu:

Isihloko:

**UKWELULEKWA (MENTORING) EMONGWENI WOKUQEQESHA KOTHISHA
ABAQALAYO (INITIAL TEACHER EDUCATION) NGOHLELO LWE-OPEN DISTANCE
eLEARNING: UMBONO OQONDISWE UBUNTU**

Lolu cwaningo luhlola ukwelulekwa (mentoring) ngaphakathi komongo woKuzeqeshwa Kothisha Abaqalayo (Initial Teacher Education [ITE]) ngesikhathi soKuzijwayeza Ukufundisa (Teaching Practice [TP]) esikhungweni saseNingizimu Afrika se-Open Distance eLearning (ODeL). Lolu cwaningo lusekelwe embonweni oqondiswe Ubuntu. Lolu cwaningo luphendula ukukhathazeka okukhulayo mayelana nokwesekwa okulinganiselwe ngokomsebenzi nangokwengqondo-nangokwenhlalo (psychosocial) okutholwa othisha-abafundi (student teachers [STs]) ngesikhathi se-TP, ikakhulukazi ezindaweni zezikole ezihlakazekile, ezinezinsiza ezimbalwa, lapho ukwesekwa okususelwa ebangeni kungase kube nokulinganiselwa.

Luqondiswe ipharadayimu yokwakha ulwazi (constructivist paradigm) futhi lwaziwe ngohlaka lukaKram lwemisebenzi yokwelulekwa (mentoring functions framework), ifilosofi yoBuntu emayelana nobuntu nobudlelwano phakathi kwabantu, kanye nepharadayimu ye-Afrocentric; lolu cwaningo lusebenzise umklamo wecala locwaningo lwekhwalithethivu (qualitative case study design). Idatha yakhiqizwa ngezingxoxo ezihleleke ngokwengxenywe (semi-structured interviews) nama-STs, ama-*questerviews* ekhwalithethivu nothisha abangabeluleki (mentor teachers [MTs]), kanye nokuhlaziywa kwemibhalo yezincwadi zokufundisa zesikhungo (institutional tutorial letters), okwenze kwaba nokwenzeka ukuhlola ngokujulile ngezindikimba (thematic exploration) imikhuba nezidingo zokwelulekwa, kususelwa kokuhlangenwe nakho kwababhadli ocwaningweni, futhi kusekelwa (noma kuphikiswe) yimibhalo ebalulekile yesikhungo. Imodeli kaBraun noClarke yezigaba eziyisithupha yokuhlaziywa kwezindikimba (six-phase model of thematic analysis) yasetshenziswa ukuhumusha idatha.

Okutholakele kudatha kwaveza ukuthi ama-STs anezidingo eziyisisekelo zokwesekwa ngokwengqondo-nangokwenhlalo kanye nangokomsebenzi ezingahlangatshezwana nazo ngokungaguquguquki ohlelweni lwamanje lwe-ITE TP mentoring. Izindikimba ezisemqoka zazihlanganisa isidingo sokutholakala ngokomzwelo (emotional availability), impendulo eqinisekayo (affirming feedback), ukubhekwa kwesifundo ngendlela eyakhayo (constructive lesson observation), kanye nobudlelwano obakhelwe ekunakekeleni ngokuziphatha okuhle, ekwesekeni, nasekuqapheliseni amasiko (cultural sensitivity). Ama-MTs nawo agcizelele izinselelo zesikhungo kanye nesidingo sawo

semihlahlandlela ecacile kanye nokuqashelwa okwengeziwe ekufezeni izindima zawo zokweluleka.

Ucwaningo luphinde lwembula ukungahambelani phakathi kwezinhloso zesikhungo nokuxhumana kwaso, njengoba kubonakala emibhalweni ye-TP, kanye nemikhuba yangempela yokwelulekwa eyenzeka ngesikhathi se-TP. Lolu cwaningo luphetha ngokwakhiwa koHlaka Lokwelulekwa Oluqondiswe Ubuntu (Ubuntu-orientated Mentoring Framework) oluhlelwe ngokukhethekile izingqikithi ze-ODEL, ngenhloso yokuvula igebe lobudlelwano phakathi kwabantu, elokufundisa (pedagogical), kanye nelesikhungo elikhona ohlelweni lwamanje lokwelulekwa kwe-TP. Lolu hlaka lugqamisa uzwelo (empathy), ukwesekwa, ukuqinisekisa (affirmation), ukuhloniphana (mutual respect), kanye nesiqondiso sobungcweti (professional guidance), lunikeze imodeli ephendula amasiko (culturally responsive) yokweseka ukuthuthuka kwama-STs nokuthuthukisa ikhwalithi yokulungiselelwa kothisha eNingizimu Afrika.

Lolu cwaningo lunikeza ulwazi olusha noluyingqayizivele emkhakheni we-ITE ngokuphakamisa imodeli yokwelulekwa egxile esimweni sendawo (contextually grounded) evuma amagugu ase-Afrika futhi ebhekana namaqiniso acashile nahlobene nezimo ze-ODEL ITE. Okutholakele kunomthelela kunqubomgomo yesikhungo, ekuqeqesheni abeluleki (mentor training), nasekucabangeni kabusha ukwelulekwa okunobulungiswa nokusekelwe ebudlelwaneni phakathi kwabantu ezimweni zemfundo ezihlukahlukene.

AMAGAMA ABALULEKILE

Uthisha ongumeluleki (mentor teacher), ukwesekwa kothisha-abafundi (student teacher support), ukwelulekwa okuqondiswe Ubuntu (Ubuntu-orientated mentoring), Open Distance eLearning (ODEL), Initial Teacher Education (ITE), Teaching Practice (TP)

ABBREVIATIONS

AOO – Aanvanklike Onderwyseropleiding

ATP – Annual Teaching Plan

B.Ed. – Bachelor of Education

BELA – Basic Education Laws Amendment

CAPS – Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement

CHE – Council on Higher Education

COVID-19 – Coronavirus Disease 2019

CPD – Continuous Professional Development

DBE – Department of Basic Education

DHET – Department of Higher Education and Training

DoE – Department of Education

EMS – Economic and Management Sciences

FET – Further Education and Training Phase

GDE – Gauteng Department of Education

HOD – Head of Department

ICT – Information and Communication Technology

ITE – Initial Teacher Education

KMFF – Kram's Mentoring Functions Framework

MO – Mentoronderwyser

MRTEQ – Minimum Requirements for Teacher Education Qualifications

MT – Mentor Teacher

NPFTED – National Policy Framework for Teacher Education and Development

NQF – National Qualifications Framework

ODL – Open Distance Learning

ODeL – Open Distance e-Learning

OP – Onderwyspraktyk

PGCE – Postgraduate Certificate in Education

POPIA – Protection of Personal Information Act

SACE – South African Council for Educators

SAQA – South African Qualifications Authority

SASA – South African Schools Act

SDG – Sustainable Development Goal

SDG4 – Sustainable Development Goal 4

SGB – School Governing Body

SO – Studentonderwyser

SSI – Semi-Structured Interview

ST – Student Teacher

TL – Tutorial Letter

TL101 – Tutorial Letter 101

TL103 – Tutorial Letter 103

TP – Teaching Practice

TP4 – Teaching Practice 4

UNESCO – United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

WIL – Work-Integrated Learning

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CHAPTER 1

ORIENTATION

1.1 INTRODUCTION

“A proactive approach to teacher recruitment, training, and retention is essential to avoid a full-blown education crisis.” Prof. Mbulu Madiba (Ruiters, 2025)

Globally, education systems are facing growing pressure amid concerns about teacher shortages, attrition, and the quality of teacher preparation. In a recent news release (Ruiters, 2025) following the publication of the UNESCO Global Teachers Report, Prof. Mbulu Madiba, Dean of the Faculty of Education at Stellenbosch University, warned of an alarming shortage of qualified and competent teachers by 2030, particularly in Sub-Saharan Africa. This crisis in the education workforce is linked, in part, to weaknesses in teacher preparation and training. It is reflected in declining enrolments in teacher education programmes and increasing attrition driven by stress and heavy workloads (Kervick et al., 2025). Scholars agree that ineffective teacher training is a significant factor in poor educational quality worldwide (Hill-Jackson & Lewis, 2023). In the South African context, Motsoeneng (2022) similarly expresses concern that poor-quality Initial Teacher Education (ITE) programmes are one of the contributing factors to the country’s education crisis.

As education systems continue to reform, research into innovative higher education practices should keep pace with these changes (Van den Berg, 2024). The UNESCO Global Teachers Report emphasises that strengthening teacher education programmes is fundamental to improving teaching quality and education systems more broadly (UNESCO, 2023). Within this context, mentoring in the ITE phase is increasingly recognised as an important means of enhancing teacher efficacy and educational outcomes (Hobson & Maxwell, 2020).

Mentoring has become an important component of teacher development in both the pre-service and in-service phases because of its influence on teacher retention, self-efficacy, and well-being (Esera, 2023; Ingersoll & Strong, 2011). It is also important in helping new teachers navigate the challenges of their early careers and establish a sense of identity

and belonging in the workplace (Kuchynka et al., 2023). However, while mentoring programmes may benefit both mentees and mentor teachers (MTs), there is often a lack of structure to guide mentoring in many teacher education settings, particularly during work-integrated learning (WIL), also referred to in this study as the Teaching Practice (TP) phase (Esera, 2023).

International studies similarly demonstrate the importance of structured mentoring during teacher preparation. In Indonesia, Nopriyeni et al. (2019) used a quasi-experimental design and found that mentoring-based learning improved prospective teachers' pedagogical knowledge. In a Turkish distance teacher education programme, Koç (2012) identified academic, psychological, social and professional-development roles for MTs, demonstrating that mentoring functions must be responsive to the particular conditions of distance education.

TP is an important planned and supervised component of ITE that allows student teachers (STs) to apply theoretical knowledge and pedagogical skills in real classrooms. It serves as a link between university coursework and the realities of teaching in different school contexts (Kiggundu & Nayimuli, 2009). Grossman (2011) states that TP is essential because it provides STs with opportunities to develop professional identity, improve classroom management skills, and receive guidance from more experienced teachers. Scholars therefore argue for more structured mentoring during the ITE phase in order to strengthen teacher preparation. Nopriyeni et al. (2019) found that a well-organised mentoring model used during TP contributes to more effective pre-service teaching and learning practices, while Abdullah et al. (2020) stress that effective mentoring during TP improves pre-service teachers' learning experiences and equips them with practical skills that cannot be learned from textbooks alone.

This study is aligned with the growing body of research that positions effective mentoring as a fundamental component of quality teacher education. The practicum phase can foster important professional skills and provide emotional support that may shape STs' future teaching careers. Grima-Farrell (2015) notes that mentoring promotes a stronger sense of integration into the school community among STs, thereby strengthening their sense of belonging and professional identity. Moosa and Moodley (2024) similarly argue

that intentional mentorship during the pre-service phase can lead to more effective classroom teachers entering the profession because they are better able to navigate the complexities of teaching.

In South Africa, the importance of contextually relevant mentoring is particularly significant. South Africa is a diverse country with a rich cultural heritage, and Ubuntu remains a widely recognised philosophy that emphasises community, mutual respect, shared humanity, and interconnectedness (Mabovula, 2011). Msila (2015) observes that mentoring relationships in the South African context are complex due to diversity in race, gender, and culture, and suggests that these realities should not be ignored when designing support systems. Regarding South African distance education students, Tafirenyika and Van den Berg (2023) argue that policymakers should consider the values of Ubuntu when designing student support systems to make them more contextually relevant. The Ubuntu philosophy, often expressed through the phrase “I am because we are”, foregrounds interdependence, community, and shared values in human relationships (Letseka, 2013; Van der Walt & Oosthuizen, 2021). In a similar vein, Kotze (2025) calls for African solutions to African problems in teacher education and encourages scholars to explore how the Ubuntu approach can strengthen mentoring and improve teachers' early classroom experiences.

Despite these calls, the literature reviewed in Chapters 2 and 3 reveals a gap in scholarly work on a context-specific mentoring framework for STs during TP, grounded in an Africanised, Ubuntu-orientated approach. This gap becomes even more significant in the Open Distance eLearning (ODEL) context, where STs may experience physical distance from the institution, limited face-to-face interaction, and uneven support during TP. It is within this context that the present study is located.

This study explores mentoring in the ITE ODeL context from an Ubuntu-orientated perspective. It focuses on the mentoring needs and experiences of STs and MTs during TP and considers how the Ubuntu philosophy may inform a more contextually relevant mentoring framework. In doing so, the study seeks to contribute to current debates on improving teacher education in South Africa by foregrounding a culturally responsive and human-centred approach to mentoring in the ODeL TP context.

Against this broader concern about teacher preparation, the background to this study now narrows the focus to the South African teacher education context and the specific mentoring challenges experienced during TP in ODeL ITE.

1.2 BACKGROUND TO THE RESEARCH

In South Africa, concern about the quality of teacher education and teacher development has been evident for some time. In 2009, the Departments of Basic Education and Higher Education and Training hosted a Teacher Development Summit that brought together stakeholders across the education sector to identify challenges facing teachers and the education system and to consider ways of addressing them. The goals emerging from the summit were incorporated into the Integrated Strategic Planning Framework for Teacher Education and Development in South Africa, 2011–2025 (Departments of Basic Education and Higher Education and Training, 2011). This framework aims to improve the quality of teacher education, teaching, and learning in South Africa and includes strengthening work-integrated learning (WIL) experiences for student teachers (STs). However, despite its implementation, there remains considerable room for improvement (Kotze, 2024).

This concern has continued in more recent national educational discussions. In 2023, the South African Council for Educators (SACE, 2023) hosted its Inaugural National Teachers' Conference, which again drew attention to the challenges facing the South African education sector. In her keynote address, the then Minister of Basic Education, Minister Motshekga (2023), emphasised the need for practical solutions to support teachers, improve working conditions, strengthen professional development, and address teacher shortages through improved training and retention strategies. These concerns point to the need for stronger collaboration and more effective intervention in the teacher education sector.

Within this broader context, teacher education in South Africa continues to face criticism. Ramrathan (2024) argues that teacher education in the country has not changed substantially over the past five decades and that relevant policies and practices should be updated to meet the needs of South Africa as a developing country. Similarly, Baartman (2020) notes growing concern about the shortage of competent and qualified teachers entering the profession. In the global competitiveness rankings for education

and training, South Africa ranked 50th out of 63 countries (Department of Higher Education and Training [DHET], 2023). This indicates that intervention in the South African education system remains necessary.

One way stakeholders in Initial Teacher Education (ITE) can contribute to improving education is by strengthening WIL experiences for STs, thereby better preparing them for the challenges and opportunities of teaching (Du Plessis et al., 2010; Mbhiza et al., 2024). Kiggundu and Nayimuli (2009) argue for more authentic teaching practice (TP) experiences, while McDonald et al. (2021) report that TP is fundamental to preparing teachers to develop the competencies expected of reflective, ethical professionals. The policy framework guiding teacher education in South Africa, including the Norms and Standards for Educators (Department of Education, 2000) and the Minimum Requirements for Teacher Education Qualifications (DHET, 2015), also underscores the importance of preparing teachers to meet the demands of contemporary classrooms.

However, the practical component of teacher education remains uneven. TP, also referred to in some contexts as WIL, field experience, field training, or clinical experience, is understood in this study as “the range of experiences to which STs are exposed when they work in classrooms and schools” (Kiggundu & Nayimuli, 2009, p. 354). It forms part of ST training under the guidance of a mentor teacher (MT) and is intended to bridge the gap between theory and practice (Du Plessis et al., 2010). However, the quality of this experience is largely shaped by the support STs receive during TP.

Mentoring is therefore a central concern in this study. Hudson and Nguyen (2009) argue that mentoring can address some of the challenges STs face during TP, and Dreyer (2017) notes the strong support in the literature for mentoring during practical learning. In the South African context, however, effective mentoring cannot be taken for granted. Davids and Waghid (2020) argue that South Africa requires more effective TP to respond to the realities of diverse school contexts, including geographical distance, limited teacher expertise, resource shortages, and weak disciplinary structures. These conditions may affect the TP and learning experiences of STs placed in specific schools, making effective mentoring even more important.

The literature also shows that mentoring is not a simple or uniform process. There is no single, universally accepted definition of a mentor or a standardised list of mentor roles. However, certain traits and practices are widely recognised as important in mentoring relationships (Hudson & Nguyen, 2009). For this study, the role of the MT is understood in line with Kiggundu and Nayimuli's (2009) description of a teacher who acts as a guide, supervisor, counsellor, coach, model, supporter, critic, and instructor. Yet one of the problems repeatedly identified in the literature is the lack of clear communication between teacher education institutions, host schools, and MTs. MTs often do not know what is expected of them or how best to support STs in ways that meet their needs (Baartman, 2020; Du Plessis et al., 2010; Hodges & Baum, 2018; Kiggundu & Nayimuli, 2009; Schoeman & Mabunda, 2012).

These concerns are particularly relevant in the Open Distance eLearning (ODEL) context. The site selected for this study is one of the largest ODeL institutions on the African continent and trains thousands of teacher graduates annually (Letseka, 2012). Its Bachelor of Education degree includes a five-week TP component in each year of study (Du Plessis et al., 2010). STs complete TP at host schools and submit a portfolio of professional development evidence, while school principals, senior teachers, and classroom mentors submit assessment reports to university lecturers. During TP, the MT is expected to assist the ST in learning to teach by coaching, guiding, facilitating, motivating, and advising the student in practice (University of South Africa [Unisa], 2021). In principle, this should create a classroom environment in which the ST becomes more confident and more prepared for the realities of teaching.

In practice, however, support in the ODeL TP context is not always consistent. Tuli and File (2009) and Du Plessis et al. (2010) found that although many STs report positive experiences with MTs, they also face a range of difficulties during TP. More recent research by Mbhiza et al. (2024) found notable deficiencies in mentoring in the ODeL context, with many STs reporting feeling unsupported and abandoned by their mentors. The study also highlighted disparities between rural and urban TP experiences. Similarly, Mokoena and Van Tonder (2024) identified problems such as mentors unwilling to devote sufficient time to mentoring, mentors leaving STs alone in classrooms to cover for them,

mentors failing to address unethical behaviour, and MTs not fully aware of their mentoring role. These findings suggest that the mentoring needs of STs are not consistently met in practice.

The studies reviewed above by scholars in the ODeL ITE field have examined mentoring through ST TP experiences, investigations of MT roles and preparedness, and institution-specific analyses of the support provided during school placement. Collectively, these scholars identify recurring concerns relating to unclear mentoring expectations, limited mentor preparation, insufficient lesson observation and feedback, weak communication between universities and schools, and inconsistent professional and psychosocial support (Du Plessis et al., 2010; Schoeman & Mabunda, 2012; Mbhiza et al., 2024). Although this literature establishes that mentoring during TP is uneven, it offers limited guidance on how to structure mentoring, particularly in ODeL contexts. It does not sufficiently explain how professional and psychosocial mentoring functions may be combined to meet the diverse needs of STs during their TP. The gap, therefore, is how to make mentoring more consistent, developmental, and responsive to the realities of ODeL STs and MTs.

The present study emerged from these concerns. It is based on the view that improving TP in the ODeL context requires more than general calls for better support. It requires a clearer understanding of what STs and MTs need from mentoring in this context, how they experience current mentoring practices, and what kind of framework may respond more appropriately to these realities. In a South African context marked by diversity, inequality, and uneven educational conditions, such a framework should also be culturally and contextually relevant.

For this reason, the study is located within broader national, continental, and global concerns about teacher education and development. It aligns with Sustainable Development Goal 4, which emphasises inclusive and equitable quality education and the need to increase the supply of qualified teachers through teacher training. It also aligns with the African Union's Continental Education Strategy for Africa 2016–2025, which highlights teacher development and the promotion of African values in education (African Union, 2016), as well as with South Africa's National Development Plan 2030,

which emphasises the need for quality teacher education and improved teacher development (National Planning Commission, 2012). Against this background, the present study explores mentoring in the ITE ODeL context from an Ubuntu-orientated perspective to contribute to a more contextually relevant and human-centred approach to TP mentoring.

In light of this background, the central problem addressed by this study becomes clearer, namely the need to understand how mentoring in the ODeL TP context can be strengthened through an Ubuntu-orientated perspective.

1.3 PROBLEM FORMULATION

Over the past two decades, there has been a marked increase in local and international research on how teacher education programmes can be improved and how pre-service ST development can be strengthened (Hodges & Baum, 2018). In South Africa, the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET, 2015) identified a clear need to strengthen the TP component of ITE programmes in order to produce sufficient numbers of competent and qualified teachers. This need for improvement in teacher education provided the impetus for the present study.

Pre-service STs cannot be adequately prepared to become effective teachers if they are placed in settings that expose them to ineffective TP experiences and negative understandings of teaching (Hodges & Baum, 2018). Their own experiences as learners, together with broader societal views of teaching, may reinforce poor teaching practices and beliefs. For this reason, increasing attention is being paid to the need for effective, positive TP experiences in schools (Baartman, 2020). Mentoring of STs during pre-service training has long been recognised as an important part of developing competent teachers (Ganser, 1997). Heeralal (2014) also notes that, just as the learners they will one day teach differ from one another, STs themselves have diverse mentoring needs. University coursework alone cannot replace positive, well-supported practical teaching experiences.

Research conducted in the South African ODeL context suggests that this support is often uneven. Schoeman and Mabunda (2012) found that more than half of the STs in their

study felt unsupported by colleagues and MTs at their placement schools. Du Plessis and Marais (2013) similarly identify major challenges in TP at ODeL institutions, including placing students at approved schools, ensuring effective mentoring, conducting supervisor visits, building relationships among stakeholders, and providing authentic assessment and feedback. These challenges weaken the value of TP as a professional learning opportunity.

Further evidence suggests that mentoring during TP is experienced inconsistently. Jita and Munje (2022) found that STs reported mixed experiences of mentoring during TP. While some described positive experiences, others reported that MTs left them feeling isolated and negative about their future profession. In an earlier study conducted at a South African ODeL institution, Du Plessis et al. (2010) found that STs felt they had to 'adapt or die' during TP. They also reported feeling unsupported by the university and indicated a need for clearer role expectations and better prepared mentors. These findings suggest that STs in the ODeL context may not be receiving the kind of mentoring support needed to make TP a meaningful and developmentally effective experience.

Although existing studies show that mentoring support during ODeL TP is inconsistent, the problem extends beyond the challenges of TP conditions. Mentoring is often informally organised and not consistently understood, with unclear MT roles, limited mentor preparation, inconsistent lesson observation and feedback, and weak communication between universities and schools (Schoeman & Mabunda, 2012; Mbhiza et al., 2024). These challenges are institutional and interpersonal, as current practices prioritise TP portfolio and assessment requirements while not consistently promoting care, belonging, reciprocity, mutual respect, and shared responsibility in TP mentoring. Ubuntu, therefore, does not replace the professional and psychosocial functions of mentoring identified by Kram (1988), but provides an African approach that encourages more collaborative, humane, and contextually responsive mentoring (Msila, 2015).

Effective teacher preparation requires STs to be placed with MTs who can model good practice and provide constructive support in authentic classroom contexts (Tuli & File, 2009). Jita and Munje (2022) argue that upskilling MTs in both their professional and mentoring roles would better equip them to mentor future teachers. In the same vein,

Heeralal (2014) argues that STs need opportunities to learn effective teaching practices from capable MTs rather than to reproduce the weak practices encountered during their own schooling or in poorly supported placements. Practice-based teacher education is widely regarded as one of the most effective means of preparing teachers for the realities of the classroom because it links content knowledge to contextual knowledge (Du Plessis, 2010; Heeralal, 2014; Hodges & Baum, 2018). Within this process, mentors play a pivotal role in shaping the field experiences of STs (Schoeman & Mabunda, 2012).

The literature, therefore, provides strong support for more comprehensive mentoring during the ITE phase. Such mentoring may strengthen practical learning experiences for pre-service teachers and contribute to more successful novice teachers in practice (Sutcher et al., 2019). Orland-Barak and Wang (2020) similarly present mentoring as one response to novice teacher attrition and emphasise its importance for teacher growth and support. In South Africa, this issue is particularly urgent given concerns about a future shortage of qualified and experienced teachers (Madiba, 2025). New teachers often enter classrooms feeling unprepared and overwhelmed by realities for which theory alone has not prepared them. International scholarship repeatedly positions mentoring as one means of improving novice teacher retention and creating more supportive professional environments (Edwards & Anderson, 2023; Esera, 2023; Ingersoll & Strong, 2011).

At the same time, scholars increasingly call for context-specific and Afrocentric responses to educational challenges in African contexts, including South Africa (Le Grange, 2018; Ndebele et al., 2024). Despite this, little literature could be found on Ubuntu-orientated mentoring in a South African ITE context, particularly in relation to pre-service teacher development during TP in ODeL. This points to a gap in the existing body of knowledge. It suggests the need for continued research into how mentoring practices in teacher education can be refined to be culturally and contextually responsive.

This study responds to that gap by exploring the mentoring needs and experiences of STs and MTs during TP in an ODeL context and by considering how the Ubuntu philosophy may inform a more relevant mentoring framework. In advocating for a reappraisal of Ubuntu to recover values of humanity, tolerance, and respect, Mabovula (2011) argues that these values may guide members of a community towards more

caring, thoughtful, considerate, and socially responsible ways of being. This study, therefore, proceeds from the view that mentoring in teacher education may be strengthened through an Ubuntu-orientated perspective that is sensitive to the realities of South African classrooms and the relational needs of STs during TP.

Flowing from this problem, the study was guided by a main research question and related sub-questions that focused the inquiry on mentoring in the ODeL TP context.

1.4 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Drawing from the research problem, the following research question was formulated:

How can an Ubuntu-orientated perspective enhance mentoring practices in the ITE Open Distance eLearning context and inform the development of an Ubuntu-orientated mentoring framework?

The following sub-questions were explored to answer the main question:

- Which mentoring needs do STs and MTs identify during ST TP?
- How do STs and MTs experience mentoring practices during ST TP?
- How do STs and MTs perceive Ubuntu-orientated mentoring?
- What institutional support would promote Ubuntu-orientated mentoring in TP, according to the study participants?
- What are the key requirements for an Ubuntu-orientated framework that could improve the TP experiences of ODeL STs and MTs?

To respond to these questions in a focused and coherent way, the study's aim and objectives were formulated as follows.

1.5 AIM AND OBJECTIVES

The main aim of this study was to explore how an Ubuntu-orientated perspective could enhance mentoring practices in ODeL ITE and to use these insights to inform the development of an Ubuntu-orientated mentoring framework.

To achieve this aim, the following objectives were set for the study:

- To explore the needs of STs and MTs with regard to mentoring practices during ST TP.
- To understand the experiences of STs and MTs with regard to mentoring practices during ST TP.
- To establish the perceptions held by STs and MTs regarding Ubuntu-orientated mentoring.
- To examine participant views on what institutional support would promote Ubuntu-orientated mentoring in TP.
- To explore the key requirements for an Ubuntu-orientated framework that could improve the TP experiences of ODeL STs and MTs.

By exploring the mentoring needs and experiences of STs and MTs and by considering how the Ubuntu philosophy may serve as a framework for the ODeL TP context, this study aimed to address mentoring-related contextual gaps. In ODeL environments, where physical distance and limited face-to-face interaction may contribute to feelings of isolation and disconnection, both STs and MTs may struggle to build meaningful, supportive relationships that underpin effective TP mentoring. By grounding mentoring in the philosophy of Ubuntu, with its emphasis on interconnectedness, mutual respect, compassion, and shared humanity, the study sought to inform a more holistic and culturally responsive approach to mentoring.

Such an approach may contribute to a more inclusive and affirming TP environment for ODeL STs, strengthen professional development, and support more equitable educational practice in diverse, under-resourced contexts such as South Africa.

To address these aims and objectives in a conceptually coherent way, the study was framed by a theoretical foundation that guided the interpretation of mentoring in the ODeL TP context.

1.6 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

A theoretical framework is a structured set of concepts and theories that guides a research study. It provides the lens through which the research problem is understood and supports data collection, analysis, and interpretation (Grant & Osanloo, 2014). It also helps to

position the study within the existing body of knowledge and to make sense of complex social phenomena in a contextually coherent manner (Grant & Osanloo, 2014).

This study drew on three theoretical lenses, namely the Ubuntu philosophy, Kram's (1988) Mentoring Functions Framework (KMFF), and the Afrocentric paradigm, in order to provide a culturally relevant and contextually grounded framework for exploring mentoring in ODeL ITE. Ubuntu emphasises interconnectedness, humanness, mutual respect, and collective responsibility in human relationships (Letseka, 2012). KMFF provides a structured framework for understanding the role of mentors in providing both professional and psychosocial support to mentees (Kram, 1988). The Afrocentric paradigm foregrounds African values, perspectives, and lived realities and supports education and mentoring grounded in African contexts and knowledge systems (Asante, 1980).

Taken together, these three lenses provide a foundation for understanding mentoring that addresses both the professional and personal development of STs while remaining culturally sensitive and contextually relevant. The framework, therefore, supported the study's research questions, research design, and data interpretation. It also supported the study's focus on mentoring during TP as a relational and developmental process that may be re-envisioned through an Ubuntu-orientated perspective in the ODeL ITE context.

A detailed discussion of the theoretical frameworks and their relevance to this study is provided in Chapter 2, sections 2.2 and 2.3.

Guided by this theoretical framework, the study adopted a research design that was appropriate for exploring the mentoring needs and experiences of STs and MTs in the ODeL TP context.

1.7 RESEARCH DESIGN

A research design is the overall plan that guides a study and explains how the research will be conducted in order to address the research question effectively (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). It includes selecting an appropriate paradigm, approach, research type, and methods for generating and analysing data. A sound research design ensures that the methods used are aligned with the aims of the study and strengthen the credibility, trustworthiness, and relevance of the findings (Creswell & Poth, 2016; Tisdell & Merriam,

2025). In this study, the research design included the research paradigm, research approach, research type, and a brief indication of the methods used. A detailed discussion of these follows in Chapter 4, section 4.3.

1.7.1 Research Paradigm

A research paradigm is the worldview that guides a researcher's understanding of reality, knowledge, and the process of inquiry (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). It shapes the assumptions made about what counts as knowledge, how knowledge is generated, and how findings are interpreted. Creswell and Poth (2016) similarly explain that a paradigm provides the broad philosophical orientation within which a study is conducted. In social science research, the choice of paradigm is important because it influences how the research problem is framed and how the researcher engages with participants and data.

The most common research paradigms include positivism, post-positivism, interpretivism, critical theory and pragmatic paradigm, which are briefly summarised in Table 1. Each of these paradigms guides how the researcher frames the research question, collects the data, and interprets the findings (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Creswell & Poth, 2016).

Table 1: Summary of research paradigms

Research paradigm	Ontology (assumption about reality)	Epistemology (how knowledge exists)	Research aim	Research methods
Positivism	Reality is objective, and there is a single fixed truth.	Knowledge is measurable and observable.	To test hypotheses and generalise findings	Experiments, surveys, and statistical analysis
Post-positivism	Reality exists, but it can never be fully known or understood.	Knowledge is interpreted based on the researcher's background, values and limitations.	To refine theories and uncover patterns	Mixed methods, quasi-experiments

Constructivist	Reality is socially constructed by the people who live it, based on multiple views.	Knowledge is co-created by the researcher and the participant.	To understand meaning from the participants' perspectives	Interviews, observations, case studies
Critical Theory	Reality is shaped by power and social, political, cultural, and economic factors.	Knowledge is influenced by power relations and ideologies.	To critique and transform social realities that have been influenced by power and inequality.	Participatory action research, critical ethnography
Pragmatic Paradigm	Reality is plural, dynamic, and understood in terms of what works in a given context (no single truth or reality).	Knowledge is valued for how useful it is in practice and what results it produces; something is considered 'true' if it works and helps achieve effective outcomes.	To address real-world problems and generate actionable, context-sensitive understanding/solutions	Mixed methods, design-based research, case study with multiple data sources

Source: Author's own construction

This study was located within a constructivist paradigm. Constructivism was considered appropriate because the study sought to understand how STs and MTs experience and make sense of mentoring during TP in the ODeL context. The study did not seek to test a hypothesis or measure mentoring as a fixed phenomenon. Rather, it sought to interpret the meanings that participants attach to their experiences of mentoring, support, and professional learning. This paradigm was also appropriate because it aligns with the Ubuntu-orientated perspective that underpins the study, as both emphasise relationships, human experience, and socially constructed meaning (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Ramose, 2002).

1.7.2 Research Approach

This study employed a qualitative research approach. Qualitative research is appropriate when a study seeks to understand participants' lived experiences, meanings, and interpretations in context (Creswell & Creswell, 2017; Tisdell & Merriam, 2025). Rather than reducing experience to numerical variables, qualitative research aims to generate rich and contextualised understanding of social phenomena (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011).

A qualitative approach was suitable for this study because the focus was on the mentoring needs and experiences of STs and MTs during TP in the ODeL context. These experiences are shaped by personal, relational, institutional, and contextual factors that require interpretation rather than measurement. The study therefore sought to explore how participants understood mentoring, how they experienced support or lack of support, and how an Ubuntu-orientated perspective might inform a more contextually relevant mentoring framework. In this way, the qualitative approach complemented the constructivist paradigm, as both support an interpretive exploration of meaning in lived experience (Creswell & Poth, 2016; Guba & Lincoln, 1994).

1.7.3 Research Type

The study adopted a qualitative case study design. Case study research is useful when a researcher seeks to investigate a contemporary phenomenon in depth within its real-life context (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Yin, 2012). It is particularly appropriate when the boundaries between the phenomenon and the context are not clearly defined, and a detailed understanding of a specific case is required.

In this study, the case was bounded within one South African ODeL institution and focused on mentoring during TP in ITE. The case study design was therefore appropriate because it allowed for an in-depth exploration of the mentoring needs and experiences of STs and MTs within a specific institutional and educational context. It also allowed the study to examine mentoring as a complex and context-dependent phenomenon shaped by the realities of ODeL, school placement, institutional support, and interpersonal relationships.

The case study design further enabled the use of multiple data sources to deepen understanding of the case. This was important because mentoring in the ODeL TP context

cannot be understood from a single perspective alone. The study, therefore, considered the voices of STs, the views of MTs, and the role of institutional documents in shaping mentoring expectations and practices. In this way, the case study design provided a rich, contextually grounded understanding of the phenomenon under investigation.

However, while the richness of case studies may yield deep insight, it also requires the researcher to remain objective and unbiased (Stake, 1995). Stake (1995) suggests that these challenges can be addressed through triangulation, thick description, and reflexivity to ensure that the findings remain credible and meaningfully situated, as discussed in detail in the methodology chapter.

1.7.4 Research Method

Drawing on the constructivist paradigm, the qualitative approach, and the case study design, this study employed methods suited to generating in-depth, contextually grounded data. The study drew on three sources of data, namely semi-structured interviews with STs, qualitative questerviews with MTs, and document analysis of relevant institutional tutorial letters. These sources enabled exploration of mentoring from multiple perspectives and strengthened the study's trustworthiness through triangulation. Only a brief overview is provided here, as the research methods are discussed in detail in Chapter 4, Section 4.4.

1.7.4.1 Sampling

In research, the population refers to the broader group from which the study sample is drawn (Creswell & Poth, 2016; Tisdell & Merriam, 2025). In this study, the population comprised STs in an ODeL programme who had participated in TP, as well as MTs who had mentored ODeL STs during TP in school settings. Because the study was qualitative and case-based, the intention was not statistical representation but rather the selection of participants who could provide relevant, information-rich insights into mentoring in the ODeL TP context (Tisdell & Merriam, 2025; Yin et al., 2012).

The study used purposive and convenience sampling. STs were selected purposively because they had direct experience of TP in the selected ODeL institution and were therefore able to respond meaningfully to the research questions. MTs were included on

the basis of their availability and willingness to participate after mentoring ODeL STs. This combination of sampling approaches was appropriate to the practical realities of the study and allowed the researcher to access participants with relevant experience of the phenomenon under investigation. The inclusion criteria, recruitment process, and participant profiles are discussed in Chapter 4, section 4.4.1.

1.7.4.2 Data collection

Data collection in qualitative research refers to the process of generating detailed, descriptive information to gain an in-depth understanding of participants' experiences and the context in which the phenomenon occurs (Creswell & Poth, 2016; Tisdell & Merriam, 2025). In this study, data were generated through semi-structured interviews, qualitative questerviews, and document analysis.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with STs because they allowed participants to describe their experiences in detail while also enabling the researcher to probe issues relevant to the research questions. Qualitative questerviews were used with MTs because they offered a practical means of gathering reflective written responses from participants who were geographically dispersed and working in different school contexts. Document analysis was used to examine relevant tutorial letters to consider how mentoring was communicated at the institutional level and whether this aligned with participants' experiences and expectations.

The use of these three methods enabled the study to explore mentoring as experienced by STs and MTs and to examine how mentoring was formally presented in institutional documents. This data collection process is described in detail in Chapter 4, Section 4.4.2, and summarised in Table 2 below.

Table 2: Data collection methods used

	Student Teachers	Mentor Teachers	Institutional Documentation
Data source	Eight STs	13 MTs	TL 101 and 103

Method	Semi-structured interviews	Questerviews	Bowen's (2009) steps of document analysis
Platform	Microsoft Teams	Google Forms	Desktop reading
Duration	45 to 60 minutes each	Completed within a three-week period	Two weeks
Questions	22 open-ended questions	19 open-ended questions	Guided by the findings of ST and MT data themes

Source: Author's own construction

The following discussion introduces the data analysis approach followed in this study.

1.7.4.3 Data analysis

Qualitative data analysis involves organising, interpreting, and making meaning of the accounts provided by participants and other data sources in relation to the research questions (Creswell & Poth, 2016). Data were analysed using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) to identify patterns, meanings, and themes relevant to mentoring in the ODeL TP context.

The institutional documents were also examined through content analysis to support the interpretation of how mentoring was framed at the institutional level. The use of multiple data sources and analytic approaches enabled comparisons of participants' experiences with formal institutional communication and the development of a more nuanced understanding of mentoring in the case. The analytic procedures followed in the study are discussed fully in Chapter 4, Section 4.4.3.

Data analysis was conducted for each of the three sets of data using thematic analysis (Clarke & Braun, 2017) and content analysis (Bowen, 2009). Analysis of the recorded SSIs and questerviews was conducted by manually transcribing each participant's responses and feedback. The transcription process involved thematic analysis, i.e. the researcher identified and coded themes within the data (Clarke & Braun, 2017). The thematic analysis was conducted in several stages: familiarisation with the data,

generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and reporting on the findings. Analysis of the TLs (TL101 and 103) was done using Bowen's (2009) content analysis process, i.e., intentionally selecting appropriate documents; skimming the documents for a quick overview; a thorough reading of each of the TLs; identifying codes and themes in the material to interpret and find meaning. These codes and themes were then cross-checked against the data collected in the first two data collection processes to provide triangulation.

Data were therefore analysed and interpreted in a thematic discussion across all datasets (triangulated by theme), as suggested by Denzin and Lincoln (2011), to strengthen the trustworthiness of the findings.

A detailed step-by-step description of the procedure (including how coding decisions were made and how themes were refined) is provided in Chapter 4, section 4.4.3. Because this study explored participants' lived experiences within a qualitative and case-based design, it was necessary to demonstrate how the trustworthiness of the research process and findings was ensured.

1.8 TRUSTWORTHINESS

Trustworthiness is the cornerstone of quality in qualitative research. To ensure trustworthiness, Guba and Lincoln (1994) recommend adhering to credibility, transferability, confirmability, and dependability. These criteria form the foundation for qualitative research. Shenton (2004) supports this recommendation and suggests that, if they are addressed thoroughly and appropriately, trustworthiness can be ensured in qualitative research.

Therefore, Guba and Lincoln's (1994) criteria were used to address issues of trustworthiness in this study, such as member checking as part of confirmability (Morse et al., 2002). This process allowed participants to confirm the accuracy of the data and the researcher's interpretations, helping ensure that the research findings accurately reflect participants' experiences (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011).

Credibility refers to the authenticity and reasonableness of the data, findings, and interpretations (Shenton, 2004), and therefore to the extent to which the research

accurately reflects the actual views of the participants. Mechanically recording interviews using Microsoft Teams and Google Forms (Bashir et al., 2008) enhanced the credibility of the recordings. The use of multiple research instruments ensured triangulation (Shenton, 2004), thereby enhancing the credibility of this study. Peer review was also conducted, with scholars in the field reviewing the work and providing critical feedback to the researcher (Creswell & Miller, 2000).

Transferability is the extent to which the research findings can be applied to other contexts. This study aimed to enhance transferability by providing thick, detailed, and comprehensive descriptions of the phenomenon and its context (Creswell & Miller, 2000). This allows other researchers to assess the applicability of the findings in different settings (Korstjens & Moser, 2017).

Confirmability ensures that the findings are shaped by the participants' experiences, rather than the researcher's bias. This study aimed to enhance confirmability through member checking, peer reviews, triangulation and a rigorous data analysis process (Shenton, 2004; Korstjens & Moser, 2017).

Dependability refers to the stability and consistency of the data over time. To ensure dependability, a detailed, comprehensive description of each stage of the research process is provided, allowing future researchers to repeat the research process using a similar prototype model (Shenton, 2004, p. 71).

By adhering to these criteria, this study established a robust foundation of trustworthiness, ensuring that the research findings are credible, transferable, confirmable, and dependable.

1.9 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Denzin and Lincoln (2008) stress the importance of ensuring that qualitative research promotes participants' rights, dignity, and well-being. This study involved collecting data from STs and MTs and therefore required adherence to rigorous ethical standards. It considered various ethical issues to ensure it meets ethical standards, and applied the following strategies (adapted from Denzin and Lincoln (2008):

- Informed consent was obtained from participants, who signed a consent form after they were provided with comprehensive information about the study and the risks related to their participation.
- The confidentiality of participants was ensured by using pseudonyms (ST1, 2, 3... and MT1, 2, 3...), and any identifying information was removed to protect the participants' identities.
- Fostering a respectful, empowering environment for participants, to minimise the power imbalance.
- To protect the data, it was stored securely on the researcher's personal computer, which is password-protected, and access to all data was restricted.
- The university through which the research was conducted has stringent ethical protocols that must be adhered to. Ethical approval for the study was obtained following these protocols (ethical approval number 2022/11/09/ 50839500/22/AM).

The summary below includes a visual illustration of the research design adopted for this study.

1.10 SUMMARY OF THE RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODS

Figure 1 provides a visual summary of the key components of the research approach and theoretical framework selected for the study. It reflects the link between the main research question and the researcher's theoretical, methodological, and analytical choices.

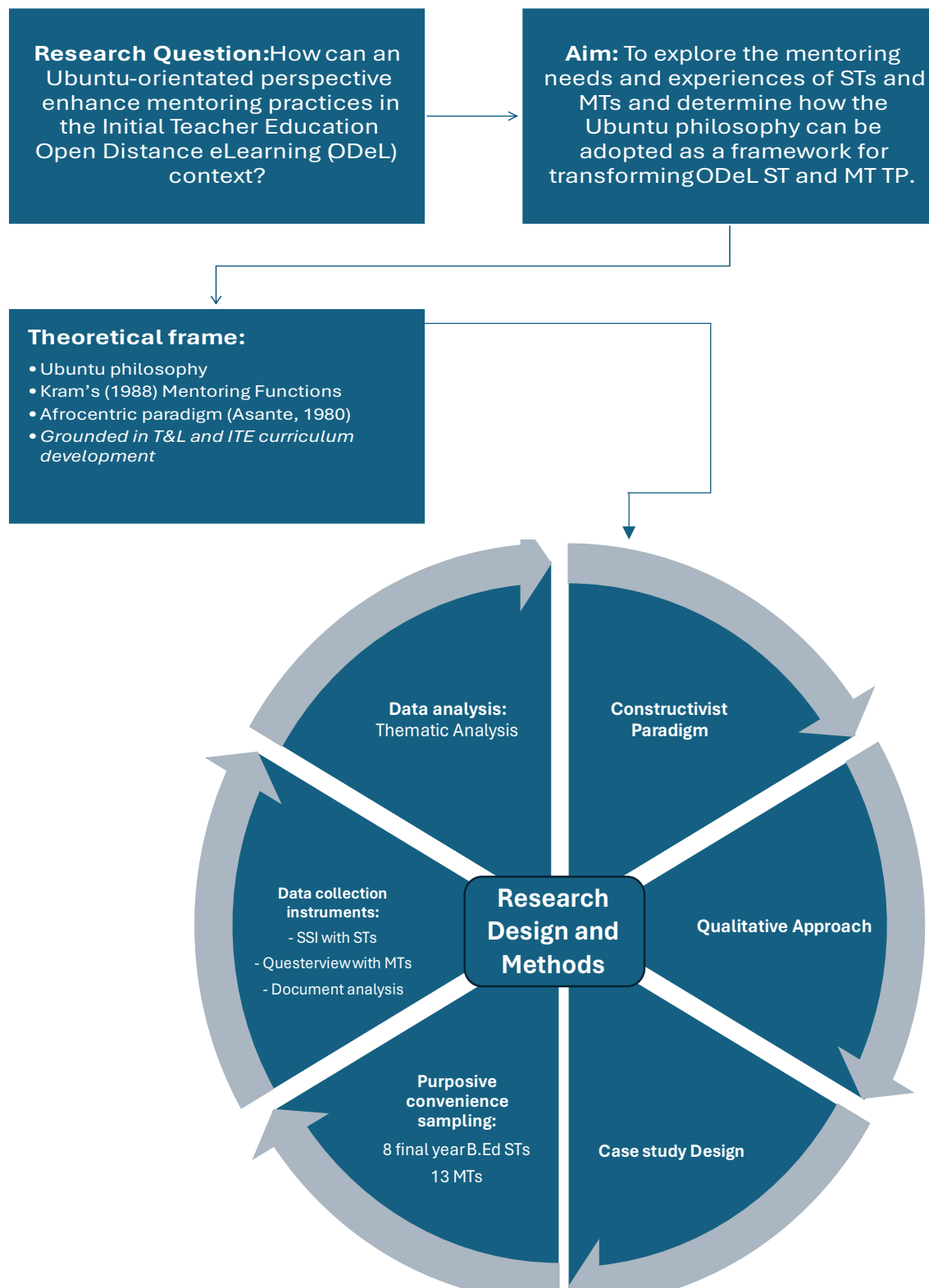


Figure 1: Summary of data collection methods

Source: Author's own design

The research design and methods in this study ensured a logical, culturally grounded, methodologically sound research plan. The study was grounded in a constructivist paradigm (Guba & Lincoln, 1994) that integrated the Ubuntu philosophy, Kram's (1988) mentoring functions, and the Afrocentric paradigm (Asante, 1980) to explore mentoring in an ODeL context. The qualitative (Creswell & Creswell, 2017; Denzin & Lincoln, 2011) case study design (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Stake, 1995; Yin, 2012) allowed an in-depth understanding of the complex and context specific ST and MT experiences, which was supported by purposive sampling (Etikan et al., 2016; Tisdell & Merriam, 2025) and triangulated (Shenton, 2004) data collection (interviews, questerviews and document analysis). Thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) and the strategies used to ensure credibility (Creswell & Miller, 2000) and trustworthiness (Korstjens & Moser, 2017) resulted in a rigorous, rich analysis of the data. Together, these strategies support and reinforce one another, thus enabling deep understanding and the potential transformation of mentoring practices through an Ubuntu-orientated lens.

1.11 DEFINITION OF KEY CONCEPTS

This section defines the key concepts that underpin this study, drawn from education, psychology, and African studies, to create a comprehensive conceptual framework for understanding Ubuntu-orientated mentorship in ODeL ITE.

1.11.1 Initial Teacher Education

ITE refers to the formal academic and practical preparation of STs before they enter the teaching profession. It includes a blend of theoretical instruction and practical application that equips STs with the competencies they need to navigate diverse classroom contexts (Darling-Hammond, 2006).

1.11.2 Mentorship

Mentorship within ITE is a developmental relationship that involves experienced in-service teachers (mentors) supporting and guiding STs (mentees) during their TP (Feiman-Nemser, 2001). Mentorship promotes skill development, professional identity formation, and reflective practice. From a psychological perspective, mentorship is also

recognised as a supportive relationship that encourages personal and professional growth (Kram, 1988).

1.11.3 Ubuntu Philosophy

Ubuntu is an African philosophy that is often translated to mean, "I am because we are". It emphasises interconnectedness, empathy, respect, and collective responsibility (Tutu, 2004). In the educational context, Ubuntu promotes inclusive, compassionate relationships between learners and educators (Msila, 2015).

1.11.4 Afrocentric Paradigm

The Afrocentric paradigm in education challenges Eurocentric traditions by centralising African pedagogies, perspectives, cultural values, and knowledge systems in the curriculum (Asante, 1988). It calls for reclaiming and integrating African epistemologies into ITE to empower STs and affirm their identities.

1.11.5 Open Distance e-Learning

ODeL refers to the use of digital and distance education methods to make learning more accessible, flexible and inclusive. It combines open learning principles and student-centred pedagogies with technology to reach diverse student populations (Zongozzi, 2021). ODeL supports ITE by making teacher preparation programmes more equitable, especially for students in rural or under-resourced areas.

1.11.6 Teaching Practice

TP, also known as practicum, is a structured period during which STs engage in school-based learning experiences. It enables them to apply theoretical knowledge in the classroom setting under the supervision and mentorship of experienced educators (Ngubane-Mokiwa, 2017; DHET, 2011). TP is a key component of ITE, as it offers an authentic opportunity for professional learning and reflection. Tuli and File (2009) clarify that TP is a practical classroom-based teacher education programme that develops the professional knowledge and skills of STs to prepare them for the 21st-century classroom and workspace. They encourage all educational institutions that teach STs to align their content modules with practical modules under the supervision of teachers who can assist in preparing them for the full scope of teaching. Taole (2015) describes TP as the

classroom-based time a student must spend observing and teaching while being observed by an MT from whom the ST can learn. Taole (2015) lists the following types of TP: observation, co-teaching and supervised teaching. The participants for this study were purposefully selected as they were required to have experience of all three types of TP.

1.11.7 Ubuntu-Orientated Mentoring

Ubuntu-orientated mentoring merges traditional mentorship practices with the Ubuntu values of empathy, mutual respect and community. This approach promotes collaborative, inclusive mentoring relationships focused on the collective well-being of mentors, mentees and learners (Waghid, 2019). It serves as the ethical and philosophical foundation for a culturally-grounded model of mentorship in ITE.

1.11.8 Africanising ITE

Africanising ITE involves infusing the teacher education curriculum with African values, pedagogies and knowledge systems. This process seeks to create a more relevant, inclusive and empowering educational experience for African STs (Msila & Gumbo, 2016). It is a deliberate effort to indigenise knowledge and challenge colonial legacies within education in Africa.

1.11.9 Student Teacher

Kotze and Meeran (2024) define STs, or pre-service teachers, as college (or university) students completing coursework in teaching and subject content pedagogy. These students are required to complete a minimum number of supervised practical teaching days/weeks/months in order to gain WIL, as set out in The Integrated Strategic Planning Framework (Departments of Basic Education and Higher Education and Training, 2011).

Since future teachers will be expected to perform in the modern classroom and meet the needs of learners, the teacher education curriculum must adapt to adequately prepare them for this task (van der Berg et al., 2022). The literature review indicates that scholars strongly advocate for more effective mentorship to improve teacher education and prepare teachers for the complex task of teaching.

1.11.10 Mentor Teacher

The practice of mentoring new or novice practitioners is not new, and mentoring is necessary in almost every profession. Mentoring in teacher education is viewed as an important component of professional development and authentic learning for teachers globally, according to Heeralal (2014).

While there is no one specific, widely accepted definition of a mentor, Keengwe (2020) agrees that a mentor should be a caring confidant, friend, role model and expert in their field, and should have the professional and personal skills to effectively assist the mentee to grow as a professional.

1.12 CHAPTER OUTLINE

To support the chapter outline, the report is structured sequentially, which reflects the logic of the research process and the development of the argument. The report first establishes the study's context and research positioning, then outlines the theoretical and philosophical foundations that frame the study. The methodological choices and procedures used to gather and analyse the data are then explained. This structure will enable the reader to see how each element contributed to the overall flow of the study, and how the different components build on one another. Figure 2 is a visual summary of how this study is organised and progresses from conceptual grounding to methodological implementation, and finally to the interpretation and evaluation of the findings. The chapters of this thesis are organised to follow the phases of the research process outlined by Denzin and Lincoln (2011) and Creswell and Creswell (2017). These authors suggest that the researcher investigate and be acutely aware of, and report on the following aspects, which become the building blocks of the research process.

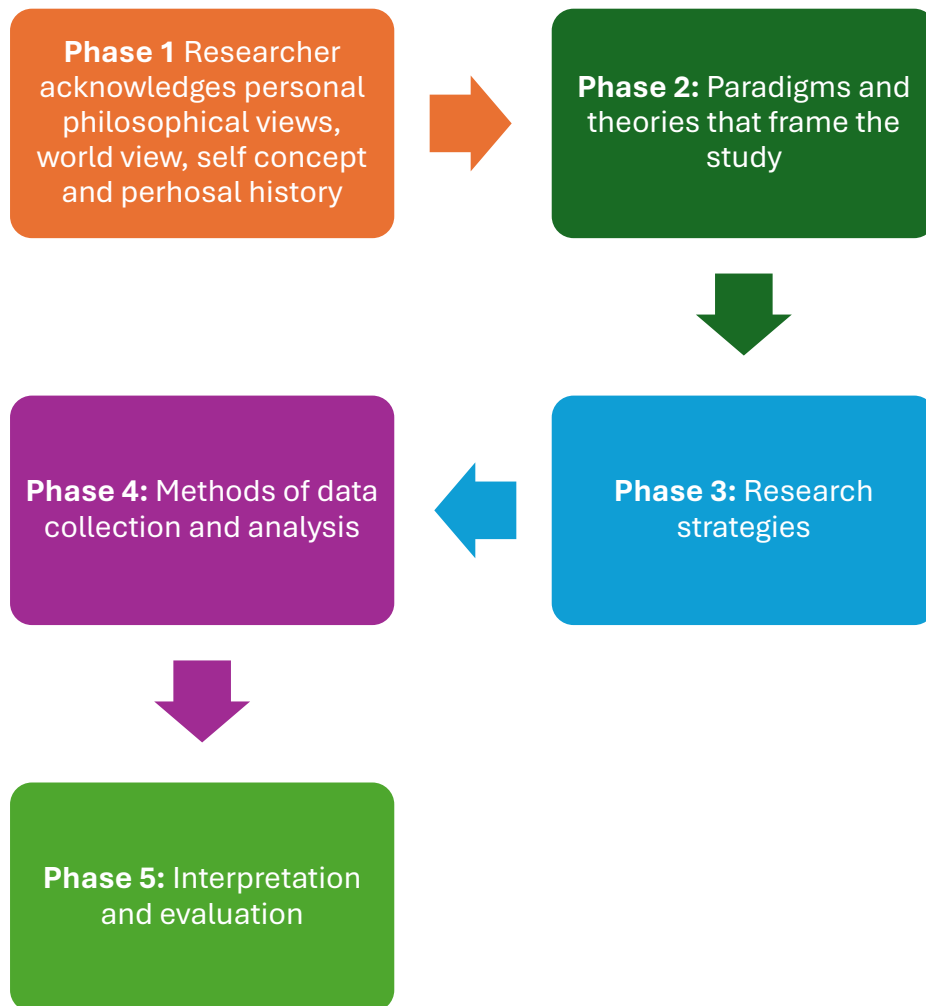


Figure 2: Research process followed

Source: Adapted from Creswell and Creswell (2017)

The next section provides a brief overview of each chapter included in this thesis.

1.12.1 Chapter 1: Orientation

In this chapter, the study's topic, purpose, and value are outlined. The chapter conceptualises the research problem from which the research question, paradigm, design, and methods are discussed. The choice of research design and methods are briefly explained, as well as important key concepts. The chapter also briefly introduces the aim and goals of this research and provides a brief summary of the chapters to follow.

1.12.2 Chapter 2: Theoretical Framework

This chapter provides a review of Kram's (1988) Mentoring Functions Framework, the Ubuntu philosophy, and Asante's (1980) Afrocentric paradigm. It explains how these theories are relevant to this study and how they shaped the researcher's pedagogy throughout the research process. The theories are discussed in detail, and prominent scholars in the field are referenced to support the decision to frame the study using these three theories and to ground the knowledge considered in the current body of literature in answering the research question. The limitations of each theory are explained to indicate the researcher's understanding of the implications of selecting these theories to underpin the research.

1.12.3 Chapter 3: Ubuntu-Orientated Mentoring in Initial Teacher Education

The review of the existing literature indicated the usefulness of this study to the current body of knowledge and prepared the researcher to better understand the research problem by analysing previous research. The aim of this chapter was to validate the study based on previous research and to point out any gaps in the previous research. The literature review examines global and local perspectives on teacher education and its evolution over recent history. It also explores major policy changes in South African education since 1994 and describes the impact of these policies on ITE. The current structure of ITE in South Africa is explored, and the local teacher education programme is compared to that of other countries. Furthermore, the scholarly work on ODL and the jump to ODeL in South Africa is discussed, ITE in an ODeL context is considered, and a discussion about TP as a component of ITE follows. Equally important, the problem of novice teacher attrition in South Africa is explained, along with a potential solution that uses ITE TP. Mentorship is also discussed, and its role in TP is explored. A detailed discussion of the Ubuntu methodology is given. The chapter concludes with a conceptual framework that provides a written and visual representation of the concepts studied.

1.12.4 Chapter 4: Research Design and Methods

Chapter 4 provides a detailed discussion of the research design and research methods employed in this study. The constructivist paradigm that underpinned the research is explained, along with the qualitative study's approach. Additionally, the case study design

is justified, and the rationale for purposive convenience sampling is explained. The research instruments used are also discussed, and the trustworthiness of the research is justified in this chapter. Data analysis and interpretation are described, along with the research's limitations and shortcomings. The ethical issues considered are outlined, and the measures implemented to ensure trustworthiness (credibility, dependability, confirmability and transferability) are explained.

1.12.5 Chapter 5: Findings and Discussion

The findings of the research are reported, based on the analysis of the empirical data collected. Chapter 5 discusses how triangulation and interrelated themes occurred across the different data sets. The results provided the basis for the recommendations, which form a framework for Ubuntu mentoring in ODeL ST TP.

1.12.6 Chapter 6: Summary of the Findings, Conclusions and Recommendations

In the final chapter of this thesis, the research findings are summarised, and the conclusions drawn are discussed. The implications of the empirical research are summarised. Possible shortcomings are explained, and recommendations based on the research findings are provided. Recommendations for future research are also made. This chapter, therefore, answers the research questions and provides a framework to support those answers.

1.13 CONCLUSION

This research aimed to explore mentoring in the ITE ODeL context from an Ubuntu-orientated perspective. Chapter 1 provided an overview of the research process that guided the study, introduced the research question, and outlined the research orientation, background, design, and methods.

Chapter 2 shifts the focus to the theoretical framework that underpinned the study. This framework provided the lens through which the research process was interpreted and situated the study within broader scholarly debates.

CHAPTER 2

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 INTRODUCTION

Chapter 2 explains the theories that shaped the interpretation of the key concepts underpinning this study, including their limitations. This discussion is presented as a precursor to the literature review in Chapter 3. This theoretical framework provided the foundation for the study by supporting its rationale and guiding the formulation of the problem statement and associated research questions. The theories were drawn from established literature to support the building of new knowledge on existing foundations (Xiao & Watson, 2019).

A theoretical framework is an organised and coherent set of ideas that provides an interpretive lens through which a research problem can be understood and investigated (Reeves et al., 2008). In qualitative research, such a lens helps to identify what is most significant in the literature, clarifies what should be examined, and supports coherence between the research questions, data generation, and analysis (Creswell & Creswell, 2017; Reeves & Hean, 2013). In this sense, a theoretical framework serves as a guiding blueprint, orienting the research focus and supporting methodological alignment (Grant & Osanloo, 2014). That said, theory should not be applied too rigidly. Qualitative scholars caution that a framework should guide interpretation without constraining the researcher's responsiveness to participants' lived meanings and contextually grounded insights (Majid & Vanstone, 2018; Reybold, 2009). Accordingly, this study used theory as a disciplined guide for interpreting mentoring experiences in the ITE ODeL TP context, while remaining open to complexity and nuance in participants' accounts.

To achieve the aim of this study, namely, to explore how an Ubuntu-orientated perspective could enhance mentoring practices in ODeL ITE and to use these insights to inform the development of an Ubuntu-orientated mentoring framework, three underpinning lenses were adopted: KMFF, Ubuntu philosophy, and the Afrocentric paradigm (Asante, 1988; Kram, 1988; Letseka, 2013). These lenses were selected because mentoring in the ODeL context is simultaneously developmental, relational, ethical, and culturally situated. It requires structured professional and psychosocial support, humane and dignity-

preserving engagement, and contextually meaningful ways of knowing and being within the realities of South African schools and communities.

Within this integrated framework, Kram's (1988) mentoring functions clarify what mentoring should provide through career and psychosocial support. Ubuntu philosophy clarifies how mentoring should be enacted and experienced through ethical care, interrelatedness, and human dignity. The Afrocentric paradigm clarifies why this framing is appropriate by foregrounding African-centred epistemic and cultural relevance in knowledge construction and practice (Asante, 1988; Kram, 1988; Letseka, 2012). Together, these lenses provided a suitable foundation for analysing ST and MT mentoring experiences in the ODeL TP context and for informing the development of an Ubuntu-orientated mentoring framework, which constitutes the original contribution of the study.

2.2 THEORETICAL LENSES THAT FRAMED THIS STUDY

The sections that follow discuss each underpinning lens in turn and highlight its contribution to this study. The aim is not to treat these as separate or competing theories, but to show how they work together to support a culturally responsive understanding of mentoring in the context of ITE in ODeL and to strengthen the coherence of the study.

2.2.1 Kram's Mentoring Functions Framework

KMFF is among the most influential models in mentoring research (McInnes, 2022). It provides a structured, multidimensional approach to understanding the mentor-mentee relationship across a range of contexts (Nuel et al., 2021). Learning to teach and mentoring those who are learning to teach is a complex and challenging task (Orland-Barak & Wang, 2020). KMFF offers a useful lens for viewing the mentoring of STs as they navigate these complexities.

Kram's (1988) Mentoring Functions Framework emerged from research on developmental relationships in organisational and career contexts. It is a functional developmental framework based on the premise that professional and personal growth may be supported through a sustained relationship with a more experienced person (Ragins & Kram, 2007). Its multidimensional structure comprises career functions, including sponsorship, exposure, coaching, protection and challenging assignments, and

psychosocial functions, including role modelling, acceptance, counselling and friendship (Kram, 1988).

KMFF is useful for the present study because it enabled mentoring to be examined from both professional and relational perspectives. Within TP, career functions relate to modelling practice, developing teaching competence, lesson observation, constructive feedback and professional socialisation, while psychosocial functions relate to encouragement, confidence, belonging and emotional support (Mullen & Klimaitis, 2021). The framework, therefore, enabled the study to examine which mentoring functions were provided, absent or unevenly experienced by STs and MTs. Although KMFF was not developed specifically for education, its functions have subsequently informed mentoring scholarship in contemporary professional and teacher-development contexts (Resch & Schritteser, 2023).

The framework can be applied to understand mentor-mentee relationships from both professional and personal perspectives (Ghosh, 2012). Ragins and Kram (2007) explain that mentoring relationships should facilitate career and professional development, skill acquisition, and visibility, while also fostering personal growth, self-efficacy, and a sense of belonging in the mentee. This is illustrated in Figure 3.

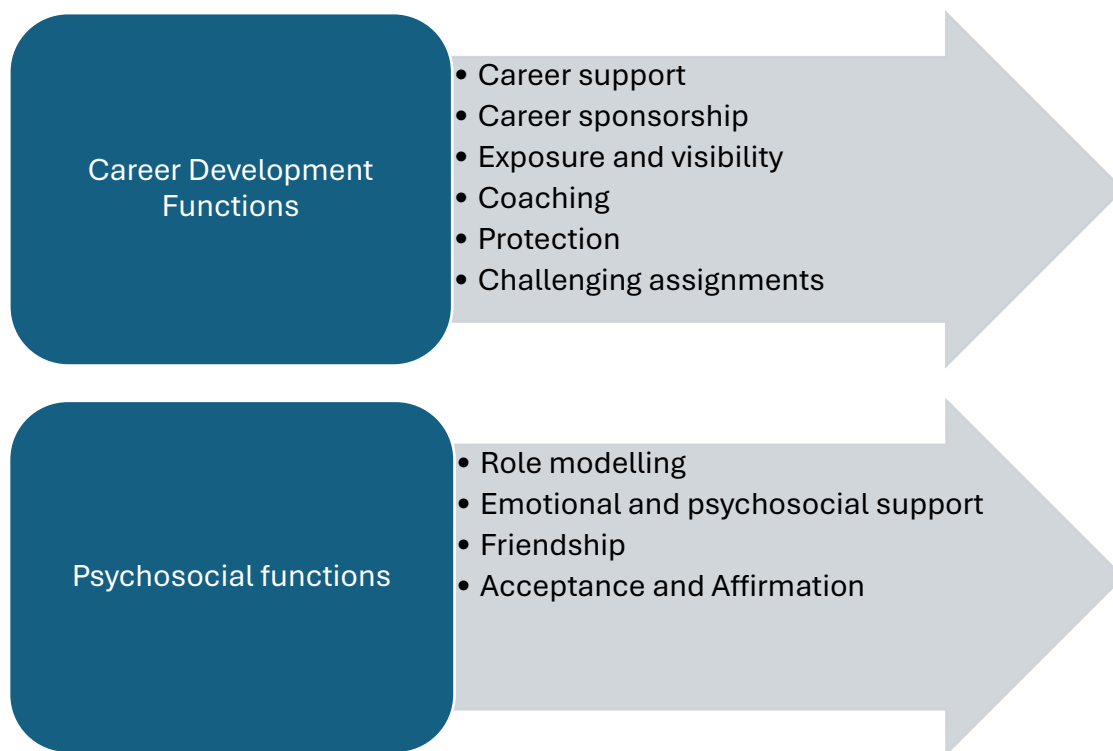


Figure 3: Core functions of KMFF

Source: Author's own design based on Kram's (1988) Mentoring Functions Framework.

Career functions include professional mentoring practices such as sponsorship, coaching, protection, exposure, and challenging task assignments (Ghosh, 2012; Kram, 1988; Ragins & Kram, 2007). Through these functions, mentors guide mentees in career advancement, skills development, and professional growth. Sponsorship involves advocating for mentees, helping them gain recognition, and creating access to opportunities, networks, and resources. Coaching includes constructive criticism, assistance with goal refinement, and support in navigating professional risks (Gergen, 2012). Assigning challenging tasks further encourages development by stretching the mentee's abilities and broadening opportunities for professional learning.

The second function identified by Kram (1988) is psychosocial support, which includes role modelling, acceptance, counselling, and friendship. Mentors act as role models by demonstrating professional and ethical behaviour, attitudes, and values (Gergen, 2012). They also provide emotional support and encouragement to help mentees navigate

personal and professional challenges (Ragins & Kram, 2007). In this way, psychosocial support contributes to a sense of belonging, confidence, and resilience by creating a safe relational space grounded in trust.

2.2.1.1 Relevance to this study

KMFF was selected because it allows exploration of mentoring functions within a contemporary educational setting, such as the ITE programme investigated in this study. Its emphasis on both career and psychosocial support is particularly relevant to STs, whose professional learning during TP requires more than technical guidance alone. Ghosh (2012) argues that clearly defined mentor functions provide direct guidance for mentor-mentee relationships and better prepare mentors for their roles. Similarly, Resch & Schritteser (2023) note the impact mentors have on the professional identities of STs and encourage the use of effective mentoring frameworks adapted to present-day settings.

Kram's framework offers structure for examining how mentors support STs as they move from theoretical knowledge to practical teaching (Mullen & Klimaitis, 2021). This is especially useful in TP, where STs must develop teaching skills, classroom management strategies, and professional confidence while also navigating the emotional demands of the school environment (Botha, 2023). Career functions support the development of practical teaching competence and professional socialisation, while psychosocial functions help reduce feelings of isolation and strengthen confidence and resilience (Gergen, 2012). KMFF is therefore appropriate for examining the challenges faced by STs during TP and in their transition into the profession (Du Plessis, 2020; Mokoena, 2017).

2.2.1.2 Critique of KMFF

While Kram (1988) provides a useful framework for assessing the multifaceted interactions within mentoring relationships, it is criticised for being potentially outdated, as it was originally published in the pre-digital era (Eller et al., 2014). Moreover, some critics argue that Kram's framework may over-simplify the complexity of the mentoring relationship, which often evolves in a non-linear manner (Eller et al., 2014). The

framework also places considerable emphasis on the individual mentor and mentee relationship and may therefore give insufficient attention to the broader cultural, community and institutional factors that impact ST mentoring (Geber & Keane, 2013). In the context of this study, this critique is particularly relevant because mentoring during ODeL TP is influenced by school conditions, university support, and the cultural context in which the relationship occurs. Therefore, while Kram's framework remains valuable for identifying professional and psychosocial mentoring functions, it requires contextual adaptation when applied to South African ODeL TP.

2.2.1.3 Limitations of the theory

Whereas the KMFF is a comprehensive model for exploring the relationship between mentors and mentees from a professional and personal viewpoint, it has limitations when applied to the context of STs at an ODeL institution in South Africa (Mukeredzi, 2017). These limitations are the different cultural context in which the study was done, and that it was done in a contemporary environment (Eller et al., 2014). Kram's (1988) framework was developed in a European context and does not fully cater to the cultural distinctions of an African setting, which is the core focus of the Ubuntu philosophy.

The body of literature on mentoring relationships in general is established and growing; however, there is scant literature on a shift toward Afrocentric Ubuntu-orientated mentoring as a culturally inclusive learning practice and a potential driver of SDG4 Equal Education for All by uplifting STs doing their TP at an ODeL institution. KMFF is a European learning theory that emphasises the importance of career and psychosocial support for mentees (Yip & Kram, 2017); however, for purposes of this study, a postmodern Afrocentric framework was necessary.

Despite its limitations, KMFF is a solid framework for understanding how mentoring can provide holistic support to STs in the complex, contextually and relationally demanding environment of TP. Therefore, to further support the use of this theory in an African ODeL ITE context, two additional philosophies were used, as discussed below.

2.2.2 Ubuntu Philosophy

Ubuntu is grounded in an interpersonal understanding of personhood, commonly expressed as ‘umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu’: a person becomes fully human through relationships with others (Ramose, 2002; Letseka, 2012). Although scholars emphasise different dimensions of Ubuntu, their broad descriptions echo one another. Kamwangamalu (1999) and Letseka (2012) highlight interconnectedness and shared humanity; Nzimakwe (2014) emphasises practical service and participation in the community; Msila (2015) applies Ubuntu to leadership, excellence and communal responsibility, and Geber and Keane (2017) describe these values in supportive mentoring relationships. These perspectives all reflect dignity, reciprocity, compassion, mutual respect and responsibility for the growth of others. Ubuntu is therefore understood in this study as an ethical and relational orientation for mentoring.

For centuries, Ubuntu has guided collaboration, well-being, and relationships among African people (Ramose, 2002). Ngubane and Makua (2021) identify core principles of Ubuntu within education, as reflected in Figure 4. Applied to TP, solidarity implies shared responsibility for ST development; co-existence and reciprocity recognise that MTs and STs may learn from one another; compassion requires emotional availability and supportive guidance and respect and dignity require feedback that corrects without humiliating. Ubuntu does not replace the professional functions identified by Kram (1988), but shapes how these functions are enacted. This is particularly relevant in ODeL TP, where the school-based MT may be the ST’s most immediate source of professional and psychosocial support (Tafirenyika & Van den Berg, 2023).



Figure 4: Principles of Ubuntu

Source: Adapted from Ngubane & Makua (2021, p. 5)

2.2.2.1 Relevance to this study

Ubuntu is highly relevant to this study because its values of mutual respect, kindness, compassion, and shared humanity resonate with the needs of mentoring in the South African ODeL context. These values also align with those promoted in South African educational policy (DBE, 2000). In a society still shaped by social inequality and prejudice, teacher education requires approaches that foreground dignity, accessibility, and inclusivity (Munir, 2020). Ngubane and Makua (2021) further advocate the use of Ubuntu pedagogy to help transform higher education in South Africa.

This relevance is strengthened in ODeL contexts. Tafirenyika and Van den Berg (2023) explored the challenges faced by ODeL students in South Africa and urged ITE

stakeholders to consider Ubuntu values when designing policies and support structures. Although conventional models such as KMFF provide a useful account of professional and psychosocial mentoring functions, their predominantly individual and organisational orientation may pay less attention to communal responsibility, reciprocity, and African contextual realities (Geber & Keane, 2013, 2017; Kram, 1988). Ubuntu may also serve as a pedagogical and theoretical approach for restoring and preserving cultural identities and indigenous knowledge systems while strengthening relationships within society (Ngubane & Makua, 2021).

Recent empirical studies further demonstrate the practical relevance of Ubuntu in educational and mentoring contexts. Kotze (2024) identified care, belonging, interconnectedness and shared responsibility as important mentoring support needs among novice teachers. This finding supports the application of Ubuntu and related Afrocentric principles to mentoring, while the present study extends this work to STs and MTs during ODeL TP.

The study, therefore, sought to connect Ubuntu more directly to the mentoring of STs during TP. This is important because communal responsibility, reciprocity, dignity and respect for locally situated knowledge are often absent from formal mentoring programmes in South Africa (Geber & Keane, 2013). Yet, African education systems continue to be shaped largely by Eurocentric assumptions, despite the richness of indigenous philosophies such as Ubuntu (Ngubane & Makua, 2021; Tafirenyika & Van den Berg, 2023).

Within this study, Ubuntu-orientated mentoring is understood as encouraging mentors and STs to view themselves as part of a whole, and to reframe the TP relationship in terms of solidarity, coexistence, compassion, respect, and dignity (Kotze, 2024). Such an approach has the potential to empower both mentor and mentee through shared goals and values (Letseka, 2012). It also offers a culturally grounded way of addressing the isolation and lack of support often reported by STs in ODeL contexts. Viewing mentoring through the Ubuntu lens, therefore, informed both the purpose of this study and the questions it sought to answer.

2.2.2.2 Critique of Ubuntu

Scholars have critiqued Ubuntu as a theoretical framework. While acknowledging that Ubuntu supports interdependence and social justice, it is essential to understand its application when used as a theoretical framework. Van Breda (2019) argues that the Ubuntu philosophy may be too broad and lacks the concrete specificity needed for application in real life. Moreover, Ngubane and Makua (2021:3) explain that the notion of Ubuntu is difficult to translate and that, when translated into English, it “loses its essence and true meaning”. Similarly, Le Grange (2016) stated that translating Ubuntu into another language is challenging because it is part of the cultural identity interwoven into the lived experiences of African people. These sentiments are echoed by Thembelihle and Bongane (2023), who praise the ethical ideals of the Ubuntu philosophy but warn of misunderstandings when it is applied to real-world practices. Ubuntu can be effective when applied in a context-sensitive manner that acknowledges the complexities and realities of real-world mentoring environments.

2.2.2.3 Limitations of the theory

Although Ubuntu offers a valuable relational and ethical lens, its application to mentoring is not without difficulty. Mentoring relationships are complex, especially across cultures, and mentors and mentees may hold different assumptions about their roles and responsibilities. Such differences may limit the practical enactment of Ubuntu-orientated mentoring (Louw, 2001). In higher education contexts, it is also necessary to balance relational care with professional agency. Brown et al. (2020) remind scholars that mentoring should support both emotional and academic development while also recognising the mentor’s professional role.

Another limitation is that Ubuntu is often used in the social sciences as a broad, sometimes ambiguous concept. Different people and communities may understand Ubuntu differently, which may shape expectations of the mentoring relationship in different ways (Ngubane & Makua, 2021; Thembelihle & Bongane, 2023; Van Breda, 2019). Despite these concerns, this study positions Ubuntu as a relevant and transformative pedagogy for mentoring in ODeL ITE contexts. Its focus on relationships, human dignity, and care closely aligns with the holistic aims of mentoring and offers a culturally relevant

way of re-envisioning mentoring as a communal practice of care and mutual growth (Du Plessis et al., 2010; Letseka, 2012; Tafirenyika & Van den Berg, 2023).

To strengthen this framework further, Ubuntu was considered alongside the Afrocentric paradigm.

2.2.3 Afrocentric Paradigm

An Afrocentric paradigm places African worldviews, cultural narratives, and histories at the centre of knowledge generation and interpretation (Amenyedzi, 2023). Introduced by Asante (1980), Afrocentricity emphasises African cultural values, beliefs, perceptions, and traditions as important for understanding social life. It challenges Eurocentric dominance in African contexts and encourages African research and practice to be grounded in African realities (Asante, 2020). In this sense, the Afrocentric paradigm encourages Africans to interpret the world through an African lens and to write their own narratives (Lee & Green, 2016).

Mazama (2001) cautions, however, that Afrocentricity should not be viewed as the only valid paradigm. Rather, it offers African people a way to reclaim their voice, dignity, and collective well-being without repeating the exclusivity associated with some Western paradigms. In the context of mentoring, an Afrocentric paradigm provides a basis for understanding mentor-mentee relationships in ways that are culturally grounded and responsive to the realities of African students and MTs (Lee & Green, 2016).

Mazama (2001) identifies three aspects of the Afrocentric paradigm: affective, cognitive, and conative. The affective aspect relates to emotional and value-oriented dimensions and emphasises African values, culture, history, and experience. The cognitive aspect concerns knowledge and epistemology and stresses the need to view phenomena through African perspectives to generate African knowledge. The conative aspect focuses on action and behaviour and advocates the practical application of African principles, values, and beliefs in everyday life and social practice. These three aspects resonate with the holistic approach adopted in this study, which seeks to understand mentoring as culturally, intellectually, emotionally, and practically grounded within the day-to-day realities of ODeL STs.

2.2.3.1 Relevance to this study

This theory can be adopted when exploring the lived mentoring experiences of students and MTs in a South African context, to ensure the focus is on creating African knowledge, by African participants, which can be applied in an African setting.

Mazama's (2001) affective aspect of the Afrocentric paradigm can be applied as a lens through which to view the ST mentoring relationship as it emphasises the importance of African cultural and historical experiences. Mentoring should offer emotional support that is sensitive to the cultural backgrounds, experiences and expectations of the STs and MTs. Therefore, the mentoring relationship should validate and respect the cultural identities of the mentor and mentee, creating a space of belonging and resilience for STs during the practical learning phase (Ringstaff, 2023). A mentoring relationship should incorporate African cultural values such as those reflected in the Ubuntu philosophy, described above. This would allow STs to learn in a supportive environment in which they feel valued and understood. An Afrocentric approach to mentoring also encourages mentors and STs to explore and affirm their cultural identity and fosters a sense of pride in African traditions and heritage from a mentoring perspective (Lee & Green, 2016). This could be achieved through reflection, sharing stories, and promoting teaching and learning activities that highlight African traditions and contributions to education as a whole. This would have a knock-on effect, and the STs would carry this Africanity into their future classrooms and encourage their learners to explore African paradigms (Ringstaff, 2023).

Mazama's (2001) cognitive aspect of the Afrocentric paradigm is relevant to ST mentoring during TP, as it emphasises African-based intellectual knowledge and incorporating indigenous knowledge systems into mentoring practices. This could be done by integrating African literature, history and pedagogical approaches into mentoring discussions, reflection, and teaching and learning activities. In addition, MTs could encourage STs to critically analyse and challenge Western norms and practices in education, and to consider alternative, culturally relevant, and more inclusive practices (Amenyedzi, 2023).

Mazama's (2001) conative aspect of the Afrocentric paradigm calls mentor and mentee teachers to action by advocating the practical application of Afrocentric principles in their classroom learning and mentoring experiences, as well as in their everyday lives and social practices. MTs could model and promote African TPs, thereby helping create an inclusive and engaging learning environment that embraces cultural diversity. Mentors could also promote community engagement and encourage STs to actively help uplift their local communities, fostering relationships that enhance their TPs. This includes community service projects, projects that involve local businesses in uplifting the community, and projects that promote African culture. MTs could also empower their mentees to advocate for social justice and educational equality for all (driving SDG4) in their schools and communities. This would require that STs are equipped with the skills and knowledge to address systemic injustice and promote positive change for communal well-being.

2.2.3.2 Critique of the Afrocentric paradigm

The Afrocentric paradigm has also been critiqued. Scholars caution that it cannot be used as a one-size-fits-all approach to Africanness because there is no single definition of what it means to be African, and these meanings vary across communities and cultures (Letseka, 2012). Adeleke (2015) similarly warns against oversimplifying Afrocentricity, given the diversity of African histories, ethnicities, philosophies, and cultural practices. Ubuntu itself provides an example of such diversity, as it is interpreted and practised differently across communities (Letseka, 2012).

Some critics also point out that key Afrocentric scholars, including Asante, were based in the United States rather than on the African continent, which may shape or distort their interpretations of Africanness (Oyebade, 1990). In addition, some scholars argue that uncritical acceptance of all traditional African ideals may unintentionally reinforce patriarchal or hierarchical values (Knowles, 2021). In mentoring contexts, this may risk reproducing power imbalances and excluding those who do not align with dominant cultural expectations.

2.2.3.3 Limitations of this theory

A limitation of the Afrocentric paradigm in this study is that it can be difficult to operationalise in mentoring relationships, as is the case with Ubuntu. Odora-Hoppers (2001) notes that, unlike many Western theories, Afrocentrism does not offer a clear or standardised toolkit for practice. This makes its direct application to MT-ST mentoring more complex.

Another limitation relates to the globalised nature of higher education. Le Grange (2016) argues that higher education institutions often operate within standardised, frequently Eurocentric, systems of curriculum development and quality assurance. This can make it difficult to reimagine educational practice from a purely Afrocentric perspective. Afrocentric learning often values oral knowledge, non-linear ways of knowing, and communal reflection, whereas formal education systems in South Africa continue to prioritise standardisation and individual assessment (Le Grange, 2016).

Etieyibo (2016) also warns that privileging an African perspective rigidly may unintentionally marginalise others within a diverse multicultural society such as South Africa. It is therefore important that mentoring remains inclusive of STs from different cultural, racial, linguistic, and social backgrounds. Despite these limitations, the Afrocentric paradigm remains valuable to this study because of its focus on indigenous knowledge systems, cultural affirmation, and historical pride. Guided by Ubuntu values, it supports a more flexible, context-sensitive approach to mentoring in an African ODeL setting.

This study, therefore, adopts Ubuntu philosophy, supported by the Afrocentric paradigm and KMFF, as an integrated framework for understanding mentoring in the ODeL ST TP context. This combined approach seeks to support the professional development of STs while also affirming cultural identity and promoting inclusive and equitable education.

2.3 TOWARD UBUNTU-ORIENTATED MENTORING

The theories informing this study were selected because they complement one another in explaining mentoring in the ODeL ITE TP context. KMFF provides a clear understanding of mentoring as both a career and a psychosocial support. Ubuntu

philosophy contributes an ethical and relational orientation grounded in mutual respect, care, dignity, and shared humanity (Letseka, 2012). The Afrocentric paradigm adds cultural and epistemic grounding by locating mentoring within African realities, values, and ways of knowing (Asante, 1980). Considered together, these lenses provided a nuanced contextually relevant basis for understanding ST mentoring in South African ODeL teacher education.

On this basis, this study conceptualises Ubuntu-orientated mentoring as a form of mentoring that is professionally purposeful, relationally supportive, and culturally grounded. It moves beyond a narrow view of mentoring as technical supervision or career advancement only. Instead, it frames mentoring as a humane, context-sensitive process that supports STs academically, professionally, emotionally, and ethically during TP. In this sense, mentoring is not merely guidance from a more experienced person, but a reciprocal practice shaped by responsibility, dignity, and shared growth.

This conceptualisation is particularly relevant in the ODeL TP context. STs are expected to develop teaching competence, professional identity, and practical confidence while often working within complex school environments and at a distance from the university (Du Plessis et al., 2010; Langsford & Rusznyak, 2024). For this reason, mentoring in this context should not be reduced to mere observation and feedback. It should also include relational support, encouragement, and culturally responsive engagement that recognises the realities of South African schools and the diversity of those who teach and learn within them. Ubuntu-orientated mentoring, therefore, offers a way of understanding TP mentoring that is better aligned with both the developmental needs of STs and the social and cultural realities of African education.

In this study, Ubuntu-orientated mentoring is therefore understood in terms of five interrelated components, as summarised in the visual below and discussed thereafter.

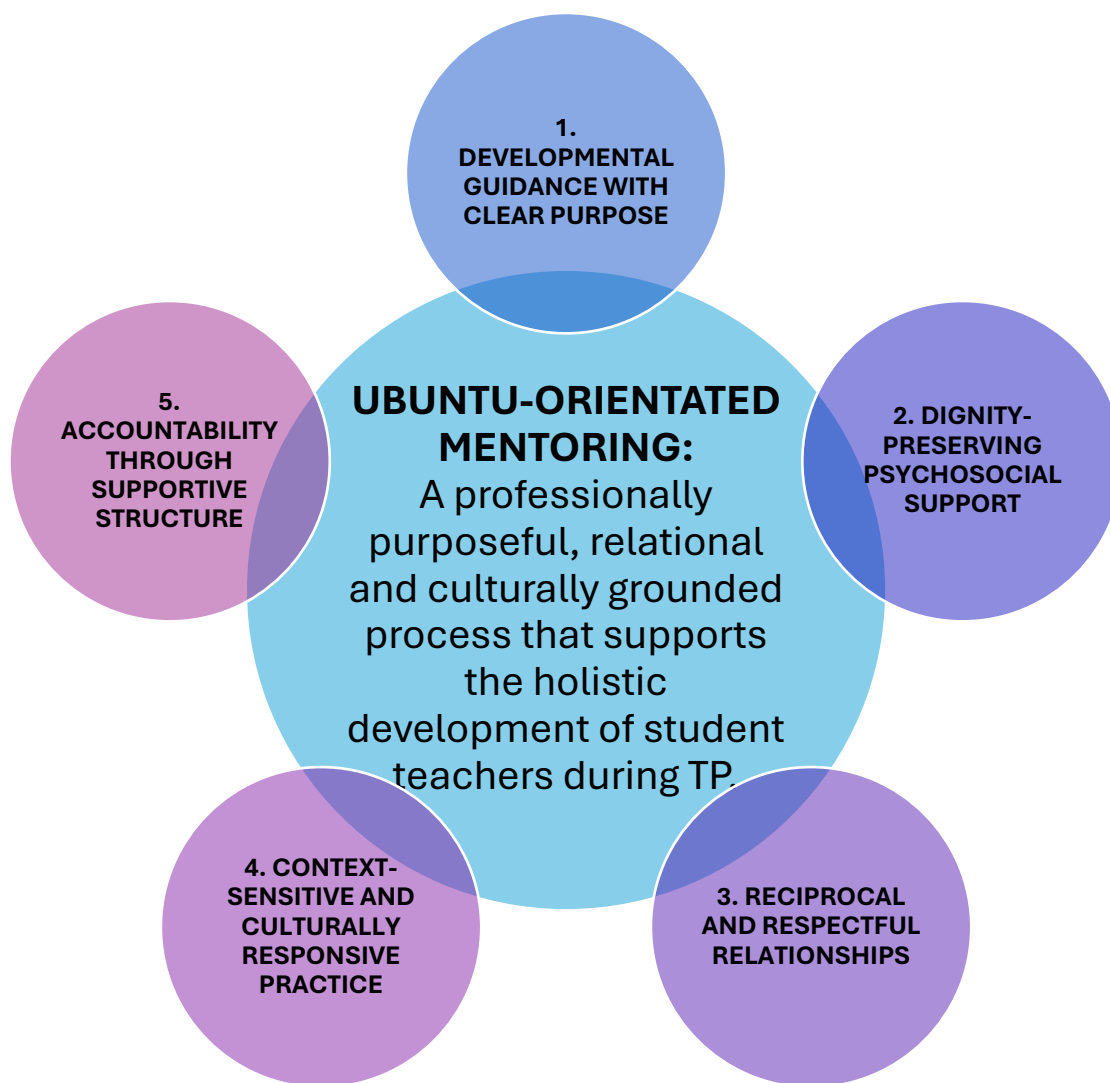


Figure 5: Ubuntu-orientated mentoring components

Source: Author's own design

The five components draw on the three theoretical perspectives in complementary ways. Developmental guidance with a clear purpose is primarily informed by KMFF's career functions, while dignity-preserving psychosocial support integrates KMFF's psychosocial functions with Ubuntu values. Reciprocal and respectful relationships are principally grounded in Ubuntu, whereas context-sensitive and culturally responsive practice reflects the Afrocentric paradigm and Ubuntu. Accountability through supportive structure draws

on KMFF's developmental purpose and Ubuntu's emphasis on shared responsibility. The components are therefore interrelated rather than sequential and function in any order throughout the mentoring relationship.

2.3.1 Developmental Guidance With a Clear Purpose

Mentoring should support ST development through guidance that strengthens professional learning and teaching practice. This includes co-planning where appropriate, modelling good practice, observation where feasible, and constructive feedback that offers practical direction for improvement (Kram, 1988; Ragins & Kram, 2007). In this way, mentoring supports competence, confidence, and professional socialisation.

2.3.2 Dignity-Preserving Psychosocial Support

Mentoring should also include encouragement, affirmation, and emotionally safe guidance. Such support helps to preserve ST dignity, strengthen confidence, and support the development of professional identity, particularly in demanding and potentially isolating TP conditions (Kram, 1988; Letseka, 2013; Ramose, 2002). This element is important because STs often need not only technical advice but also reassurance and humane engagement.

2.3.3 Reciprocal and Respectful Relationships

Ubuntu-orientated mentoring is grounded in mutual respect, empathy, and responsiveness. It assumes that mentoring relationships should not be authoritarian or one-directional, but relational and developmental. This reflects the Ubuntu emphasis on interconnectedness and the moral responsibility to support another person's growth (Letseka, 2012; Msila, 2007).

2.3.4 Context-Sensitive and Culturally Responsive Practice

Mentoring in South African TP contexts cannot be approached as if all placements are the same. Ubuntu-orientated mentoring, therefore, recognises variation across schools, communities, and mentoring relationships. It values mentoring practices that are responsive to local realities and culturally meaningful forms of engagement, rather than

relying on universalised assumptions about what effective mentoring should look like (Asante, 1988; Msila, 2015).

2.3.5 Accountability Through Supportive Structure

Although Ubuntu-orientated mentoring emphasises care and humanity, it does not imply an unstructured or vague process. Mentoring is strengthened when expectations are clear and when there is some consistent structure, such as agreed goals, opportunities for reflection, and feedback processes. In the ODeL context, where the university may be less visible during TP, such a supportive structure may help promote fairness and continuity across placements (Creswell & Poth, 2016; Shenton, 2004; Yin et al., 2012).

Collectively, these components position Ubuntu-orientated mentoring as a conceptual bridge between mentoring functions, Ubuntu ethics, and Afrocentric relevance. Kram's framework clarifies what mentoring should include. Ubuntu clarifies how mentoring should be enacted. The Afrocentric paradigm clarifies why such mentoring should be culturally and contextually grounded in an African setting. Ubuntu-orientated mentoring, therefore, provided the conceptual basis for analysing the experiences of STs and MTs in this study and informed the Ubuntu-orientated mentoring framework proposed later in the thesis.

2.4 CONCLUSION

The theoretical framework and underpinning lenses that guided the study's conceptual and analytical orientation of integrating KMFF, the Ubuntu philosophy, and the Afrocentric paradigm to conceptualise Ubuntu mentoring as a structured yet relationally and culturally grounded approach to support STs and MTs during TP in an ODeL context, were explained in this chapter. This integrated framing was the foundation for interpreting the participants' experiences and informed the Ubuntu-orientated mentoring framework proposed later in the thesis. Building on this conceptual base, Chapter 3 provides a review of literature on mentoring and TP in the ITE and ODeL contexts, with particular attention paid to the South African schooling environment and the practical conditions that shape mentoring relationships and support during TP.

CHAPTER 3

UBUNTU-ORIENTATED MENTORING IN INITIAL TEACHER EDUCATION

3.1 INTRODUCTION

McMillan and Schumacher (2010) explain that the main purpose of a literature review is to relate the current research problem to established knowledge and theory. Previous scholarly perspectives therefore serve as a guide for the selection and justification of the research design, methods, questions, and participants.

Building on the combined theoretical framework of Ubuntu mentoring discussed in Chapter 2, this chapter reviews the literature relevant to the main concepts of this study, namely ITE, ODeL, TP, the mentoring of STs during TP, and the Afrocentric perspective of Ubuntu in relation to mentoring. The chapter thus situates the study within the existing body of scholarship and develops the conceptual framework that underpins the research.

Miles and Huberman (1994) describe a conceptual framework as a visual or written representation of the concepts to be studied and their relationships. Similarly, Jabareen (2009:51) defines a conceptual framework as “a network [or] a plane of interlinked concepts that together provide a comprehensive understanding of a phenomenon or phenomena”. In this study, the selected concepts helped justify the qualitative methodological approach, as it explored the lived experiences of STs and MTs regarding mentoring during TP (Tuli, 2010). These concepts were deliberately selected because they are central to the study and are well established in the scholarly literature.

Qualitative research is grounded in socially constructed human experiences and interpretations (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008). Since concepts may be understood differently across contexts, societies, and individuals, a conceptual framework is necessary to clarify their use in a particular study. Hills and Gibson (1992) therefore argue that a well-constructed conceptual framework is a key feature of qualitative research, as it provides coherence and context for interpreting core concepts.

Because this study engages multidisciplinary concepts from different fields of knowledge, the conceptual framework guided both the research questions and the data generation process (Jabareen, 2009). As Hills and Gibson (1992:10) propose, it served as a

“linguistic-conceptual system” that defined the meanings attached to the concepts used in this research. In this way, the framework not only guided the interpretation of literature and data but also strengthened conceptual clarity throughout the study.

The discussion is organised from broad international scholarship to the Global South and, more specifically, the South African context. The literature is synthesised and critiqued to identify key arguments, opposing viewpoints, and gaps relevant to the study. The second part of the chapter then presents the concepts that frame the study and explains how they are connected in the conceptual framework.

3.2 MULTIDISCIPLINARY CONCEPTUAL FOUNDATIONS OF THE STUDY

The qualitative, multidisciplinary nature of this study draws on concepts from three broader fields, namely education, psychology, and African studies. Figure 6 illustrates the interrelationships among the concepts in these fields.



Figure 6: Conceptual framework for this study

Source: Author's own design

High-quality teacher education is central to the quality of education in any country, and Botha (2023) argues that mentoring is crucial to strengthening teacher preparation. The mentor teacher has a considerable influence on the development of both the ST and the novice teacher. Du Plessis et al. (2010) similarly argue that TP in schools requires improvement, while Du Plessis and Marais (2013) identify mentoring as an important starting point for such improvement. TP plays a key role in preparing STs for the profession, and Ajani and Govender (2024) likewise call for strengthened professional development practices in ITE.

The National Foundation for the Improvement of Education (1999) argued for the creation of mentoring programmes in which experienced teachers are selected to support STs during teacher training. Through regular contact and guidance, STs' TP experiences can be strengthened. In turn, learners and MTs may also benefit when STs feel more supported and better able to cope in the classroom. Mentors are therefore a vital part of TP because they provide authentic, hands-on support in a real WIL context. Kotze (2025) similarly found that the guidance provided by MTs and their willingness to mentor positively influence the learning and development of pre-service teachers.

Mentoring of STs has been widely researched, particularly regarding challenges and strategies for effective mentor–mentee relationships (Hobson, 2002; Perry, Phillips, & Hutchinson, 2006; Izadinia, 2016; Ndebele & Legg-Jack, 2022). Furlong & Maynard (2012) also emphasise the importance of mentoring in teacher education for the development of professional skills and identity. In the South African context, Dlamini et al. (2024) discuss effective mentorship in an ODeL institution and highlight the need for more tailored support in distance education settings. Similarly, Mukeredzi and Mandrona (2013) found that one of the most significant challenges reported by STs during TP was negative mentoring. These scholars, therefore, call for further investigation into the lived experiences of STs in South Africa to illuminate challenges and inform contextually relevant solutions.

Despite these calls, literature that examines mentoring from an Afrocentric, Ubuntu-orientated perspective remains limited. Although some scholarly work recognises the value of Ubuntu in fostering interconnectedness and community, little research has examined its application to mentoring STs. For example, Ngubane and Makua (2021) discuss Ubuntu pedagogy in the transformation of educational practice in South Africa, but their work does not focus specifically on mentoring in ODeL contexts. Similarly, Kotze (2025) explores mentoring novice teachers from an Ubuntu perspective, but not pre-service teachers in ODeL institutions. Literature on the unique mentoring needs of South African STs and MTs from an Ubuntu perspective, therefore, remains limited, and more localised studies are needed in response to calls by Dlamini et al. (2024) and Kotze (2025) for the development of tailor-made mentoring frameworks.

It can thus be concluded that, although there is extensive scholarly work on mentoring STs, there is still limited knowledge on an Africanised, Ubuntu-orientated approach to mentoring pre-service teachers during TP in an ODeL institution. To address this gap, this study selected an appropriate theoretical framework for exploring mentoring in the ITE ODeL context and for developing an Ubuntu Mentoring Framework. This literature review, therefore, aimed to lay the foundation for the inquiry and to identify gaps in the field from both global and local perspectives (Xiao & Watson, 2019).

3.3 GLOBAL PERSPECTIVES ON INITIAL TEACHER EDUCATION AND INTERNATIONAL DESIGN PRINCIPLES

Internationally, ITE is widely conceptualised as a professional preparation pathway that must balance conceptual knowledge, pedagogical skill, and the formation of professional identity through authentic practice. A consistent emphasis in the global scholarship is that learning to teach is not achieved through coursework alone: it requires structured opportunities for situated learning in schools, supported by guided reflection, modelling, observation, and feedback (Darling-Hammond, 2006; Feiman-Nemser, 2001; Korthagen, 2010). TP is therefore positioned as a core component of ITE because it provides the setting in which STs learn to interpret classroom complexity and integrate theory and practice in context. However, the literature also indicates that the quality of TP is strongly influenced by the support structures surrounding STs, particularly the nature, consistency, and developmental quality of mentoring (Hobson et al., 2009; Wang & Odell, 2002). Contemporary debates, therefore, increasingly focus on strengthening practice-based teacher education through clearer role expectations, mentor preparation, coherent supervision and feedback processes, and stronger alignment between university and school expectations (Cochran-Smith & Villegas, 2015; Zeichner, 2010).

While national systems differ in how they structure ITE, comparative literature commonly identifies shared design principles relevant to mentoring during TP. These include: positioning the practicum as a developmental process rather than a once-off placement; preparing and supporting mentors for their role; strengthening coherence between institutional requirements and school-based mentoring practices; and recognising that mentoring is both developmental and relational, because professional learning is shaped

by belonging, confidence, and psychological safety (Flores, 2016; Hobson et al., 2009; Korthagen, 2010). Rather than offering copy-and-paste models, international examples are useful because they illustrate how systems attempt to strengthen mentoring quality and reduce variability across placements.

Finland is frequently referenced in international literature for its strong professional status of teachers and coherent approach to teacher preparation, where research-informed practice and a sustained practicum experience are emphasised (Suwalska, 2020). Comparative discussions often indicate that school-based learning is positioned as a structured developmental space and that the supervision of practice is taken seriously within teacher preparation processes (Niemi, 2015). Therefore, Finland is often used to illustrate the value of a coherent practicum that supports deliberate professional learning rather than relying on informal or ad hoc mentoring arrangements. For purposes of this study, the key implication is not the replication of an international model, but rather the principle that practicum learning is strengthened when mentoring and supervision are embedded as purposeful, consistent developmental processes.

Germany is often discussed in terms of a staged approach to teacher preparation, in which initial preparation is followed by an extended, structured period of school-based induction and supervised practice (Eğimli & Solhi, 2021). Comparative literature frequently notes that this staged structure clarifies professional progression and strengthens the link between professional expectations and the development of practical competence (König et al., 2022). Although systems differ, the German example illustrates how extended school-based learning phases and clearly defined roles can strengthen support and reduce uncertainty for novice teachers. For this study, the key relevance lies in the principle that mentoring and supervision are most effective when role expectations are explicit and when feedback and development are treated as continuous rather than a once-off administrative requirement.

Kenya is a relevant African comparative context often included in ITE discussions because it highlights the realities of teacher development amid uneven resourcing and diverse school environments. Kenya trains its teachers through a mix of in-college pre-service preparation coupled with school-based practicum placements that foreground

mentoring, context-sensitive practice, and ongoing professional socialisation (Okumu et al., 2023). Scholarship in African contexts highlights the importance of context-sensitive support, professional socialisation in real school conditions, and the challenges of ensuring consistent mentoring quality across decentralised placements (Okumu et al., 2023). For this study, the value of including an African example is that it reinforces the need for mentoring approaches that are culturally and contextually responsive rather than assuming that mentoring practices can be transplanted unchanged across contexts.

Taken together, these global and comparative insights support the central argument of this thesis: while systems differ, mentoring during TP remains a decisive factor in shaping ST learning, confidence, and professional identity (Feiman-Nemser, 2001; Hobson et al., 2009). This is especially significant in decentralised and ODeL contexts, where institutional visibility may be reduced and mentoring practices can vary widely across placements.

Therefore, the international literature strengthens the rationale for a mentoring approach that is both structured and relationally supportive, and that can function across diverse school contexts. This directly informs the thesis's focus on Ubuntu-orientated mentoring, which provides a culturally coherent articulation of ethical, dignity-preserving support while maintaining purposeful developmental guidance.

3.4 EVOLUTION OF INITIAL TEACHER EDUCATION IN SOUTH AFRICA

The evolution of ITE in South Africa reflects the country's complex history. The often turbulent, politically driven changes to South Africa's educational history have shaped teacher training as it stands today. The discussion below shows how education in South Africa has developed over time to an educational system that aims for transformation, equity, and equality.

3.4.1 Historical Initial Teacher Education in South Africa

The history of teacher education in South Africa is blemished by the legacy of apartheid, which created a fragmented and racially segregated education system. During the apartheid period, teacher education was characterised by substantial discrepancies in quality and access, with black teachers receiving inferior training and ITE programmes

being grossly underfunded, compared to their white counterparts (Msibi & Mchunu, 2013; Sayed & Kanjee, 2013). Influential scholarly work detailing the struggles in the history of equal and equitable ITE in South Africa is abundant in the literature (Christie & Collins, 1982; Kallaway, 2002; Msila, 2007; Ogunniyi & Mushayikwa, 2015), but was not delved into in this literature review, as it was not the focus of this study. However, a thorough review of policy and its impact on current ITE in South Africa follows.

3.4.2 Post-Apartheid Initial Teacher Education Transformation

With the first democratic election won by the African National Congress political party in 1994, and the end of the apartheid era, one of the biggest imperatives of the new government was to create a national system of education that redressed the inequalities of the past and provided equal resources and opportunities for all (Ogunniyi & Mushayikwa, 2015). The South African government undertook significant reforms to transform its educational system, including Higher Education and ITE. During this time, a significant number of education laws and policies were implemented in South Africa. The most significant of these education laws and policies, according to Motala et al. (2002), is the South African Schools Act (1996), which dismantled the previously segregated education system and created a uniform school system for all schools in South Africa.

Similarly, significant transformations were taking place in higher education in 1997. The DoE established the Higher Education division as a new authoritative branch of the DoE, and Education White Paper 3: A Programme for the Transformation of Higher Education were introduced (DoE, 1997). Education White Paper 3 marked the end of centuries of racism in higher education in South Africa and promoted the inclusion of previously disadvantaged groups to higher education. Later, the Department of Higher Education and Training's (DHET) National Policy Framework for Teacher Education and Development (NPFTED) was introduced in 2007 to regulate teacher education in the country (DHET, 2007).

The NPFTED represented a major step toward ensuring transformation and regulation in ITE in post-apartheid South Africa. With a strong focus on quality, equity, and life-long learning, the framework aimed to redress fragmented and unequal access to quality teacher training in the country, which was a characteristic of the Apartheid system. The

NPFTED introduced measurable and closely monitored standards for teacher education, ensuring that ITE was designed to develop competent teachers to meet the diverse needs of learners in South Africa. This transformative framework continues to have a significant impact on ITE today, aiming to improve the quality of teacher training and CPD. This is particularly relevant to the objectives of this study, which aim to explore Ubuntu-orientated mentoring of STs to train teachers that meet the goals set out in the National Policy Framework for Teacher Education Development.

3.4.3 Contemporary Initial Teacher Education in South Africa

While South Africa shares many of the international trends in contemporary ITE discussed above, certain developments in modern South Africa warrant highlighting. In recent years, South Africa has continued to refine its teacher education policies and practices (Sayed & Kanjee, 2013). The DBE (2011c) built on the NPFTED to establish the Integrated Strategic Planning Framework for Teacher Education and Development (2011-2025), which details a comprehensive approach to improving teacher education and development. This framework focuses on improving the quality of teacher training, addressing subject-knowledge gaps, and promoting professional learning communities (DBE, 2011c).

The evolution of ITE in a contemporary South African context sets the tone for exploring how to ensure teachers are being trained that meet the aims set out in the Integrated Strategic Planning Framework for Teacher Education and Development, which aims to ensure an adequate supply of competent quality teachers in the country; improve ITE, promote CPD training and life-long learning of teachers (DBE, 2011). Stakeholders in ITE are called to action to design curricula that meet the requirements set out in contemporary ITE policies in South Africa, while ensuring that globally competitive teachers enter the profession (Annan, 2020).

While South Africa offers a unique historical, social, and political context for ITE, it is also valuable to examine how international ITE structures vary. The need for quality teacher training to pursue SDG4 is a global phenomenon (Nakidien et al., 2021), and comparative insights could inform efforts to improve local practice by drawing on global best practices.

3.5 EDUCATION IN SOUTH AFRICA SINCE 1994

Teacher education in South Africa is central to the broader national project of strengthening a democratic society grounded in human dignity, equality, and social justice. In the post-1994 era, education reform has been shaped by a commitment to redress apartheid-era inequality, restructure governance, and improve quality across a highly diverse schooling system. Although this study focuses on mentoring during TP in an ODeL ITE context, a brief overview of key post-1994 policy milestones is necessary, because persistent differences in schooling conditions continue to shape how TP is experienced and how mentoring support is enacted across placements. As Taylor (2019) notes, educational policy reform in South Africa has been strongly influenced by political change and symbolism, and early reform phases were often critiqued for ambitious policy intent that exceeded realistic implementation capacity. This matters for the present study because policy intentions do not automatically translate into consistent lived experiences of support in schools; implementation variability intersects with differences in resourcing, workload pressures, and the realities of school functioning in urban and rural contexts.

3.5.1 Key Policy Milestones Post-1994

Since 1994, reforms have aimed to establish a unified education system and regulate quality and qualifications across the sector. Foundational developments included the creation of national structures for qualifications and quality assurance through the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) and the National Qualifications Framework (NQF). Additionally, school governance reforms through legislation such as the South African Schools Act (SASA) and the National Education Policy Act, all of which sought to dismantle segregationist structures and strengthen equitable access and governance (Allais, 2011; DBE, 1995). In higher education, transformation frameworks and legislation such as Education White Paper 3 and the Higher Education Act (1997) strengthened regulation and restructuring of the post-school sector, with implications for institutional accountability and the standardisation of qualification pathways, including teacher education (DoE, 1997; DHET, 1997). Collectively, these reforms positioned education as a key vehicle for national reconstruction, while also revealing persistent implementation challenges within deeply unequal systems (Jansen, 2002; Sayed & Kanjee, 2013).

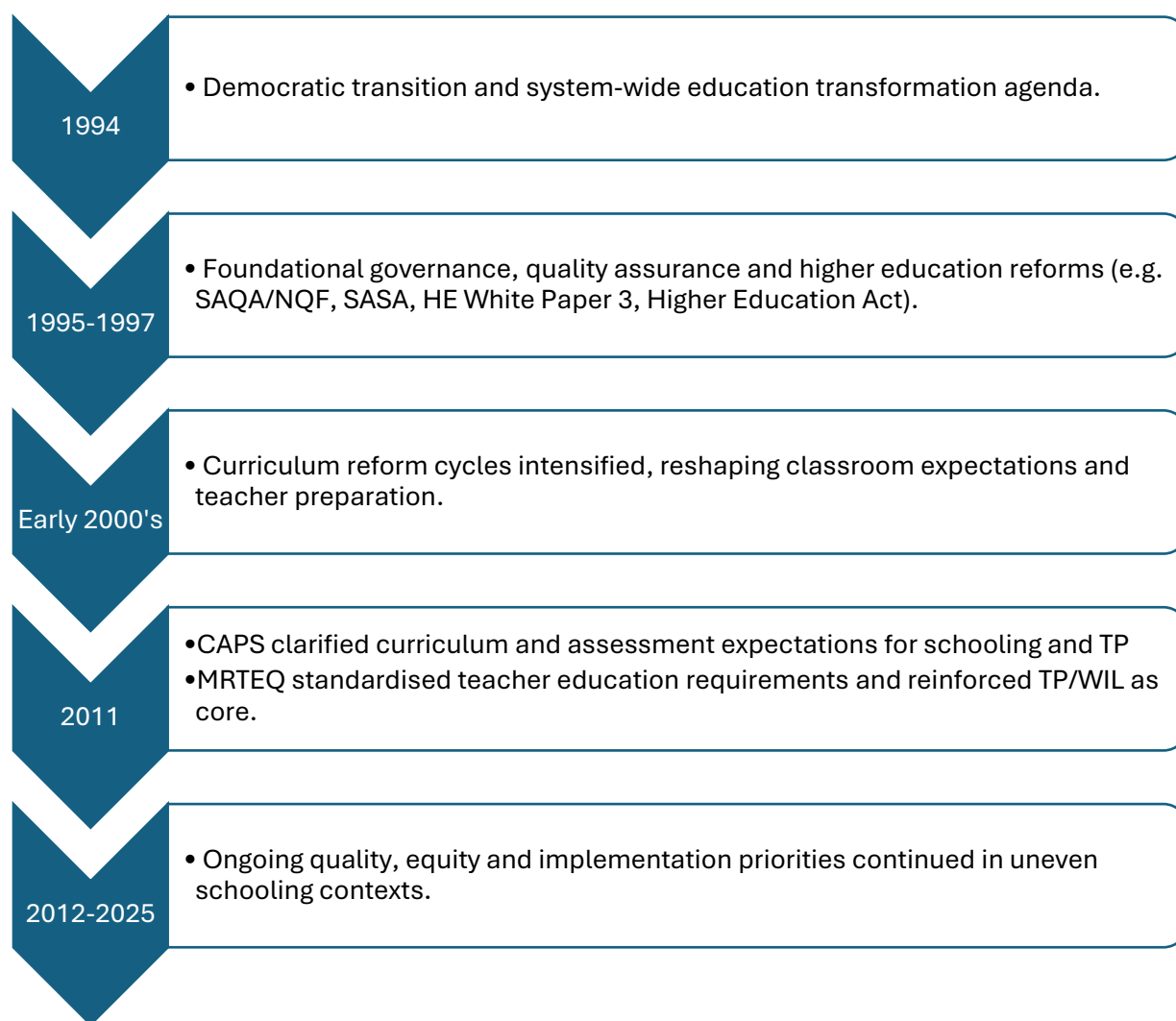


Figure 7: Policy milestone timeline shaping South African education and ITE/TP, 1994–2025

Source: Author's own design

3.5.2 Curriculum and Teacher Preparation Implications

Curriculum reform has had direct implications for teacher education and TP expectations. The adoption of outcomes-based education and subsequent revisions required ongoing adjustments in teacher preparation and professional development, with widespread critique highlighting the difficulty of implementing ambitious pedagogical reforms in contexts characterised by limited resources and uneven teacher support (Chisholm, 2005; Ramrathan, 2024). CAPS later provided a more structured curriculum and clearer

assessment expectations, thereby increasing the specification of what teachers should teach and what STs are expected to demonstrate during TP (DBE, 2011b; Mabunda, 2023). In relation to ITE, policy has progressively clarified the competences expected of new teachers and the centrality of WIL. A particularly significant milestone was the introduction of the Minimum Requirements for Teacher Education Qualifications (MRTEQ) policy, which standardised teacher education qualification requirements and reaffirmed TP/WIL as a core programme component intended to ensure that ITE produces teachers with the knowledge, skills, and professional attributes required by the system (DHET, 2011, 2015).

3.5.3 Relevance for TP Mentoring in Diverse Contexts

Despite stronger policy frameworks and clearer curriculum expectations, the literature continues to emphasise that implementation is uneven and strongly shaped by contextual challenges. Schools differ substantially in capacity, resourcing, infrastructure, language demands, and teacher workload, which shapes both the quality of TP learning opportunities and the feasibility of consistent mentoring support for STs. This variability is particularly significant in decentralised placements and can be amplified in ODeL contexts, where STs may have reduced institutional visibility and rely heavily on school-based mentoring for both professional guidance and psychosocial support. More recent reforms and contemporary pressures further reinforce the relevance of mentoring support and professional development. Amendments such as those associated with The Basic Education Laws Amendment (BELA) Act 32 of 2024 reflect the ongoing attention to governance, equity, language, and access, while the Covid-19 period accelerated technology-mediated learning and highlighted persistent inequality in digital access and the importance of human connection and psychosocial support within mediated learning environments (DBE, 2024; UNESCO, 2021). For this study, the significance of the post-1994 reform landscape lies not in ministerial chronology but in the enduring reality that South African schooling contexts remain uneven, and this unevenness shapes the support conditions available to STs during TP. This contextual foundation strengthens the rationale for examining mentoring experiences and needs in the ODeL TP context and

supports the relevance of an Ubuntu-orientated mentoring approach developed later in this thesis.

3.5.4 The Structure of Initial Teacher Education in South Africa

South Africa's ITE system prepares teachers for different schooling phases (Foundation, Intermediate, Senior, and Further Education and Training (FET) phase) and is offered through accredited universities and ITE providers (DBE, 2021). The main qualification routes are a four-year B.Ed. and a Postgraduate Certificate in Education (PGCE), both of which are completed after a bachelor's degree. Graduates must register with SACE, the statutory professional body that regulates professionalism and ethics in teaching (DBE, 2021). Scholars note that entry requirements into ITE are comparatively low, which may affect the profession's perceived status (Taylor & Robinson, 2016). ITE is centrally regulated through DHET policy, particularly MRTEQ, which reinforces TP/WIL as being integral to teacher preparation and stipulates that STs must complete a minimum of 20 and a maximum of 32 weeks of supervised and assessed school-based practice, although implementation varies across institutions (DHET, 2015; Loukomies et al., 2022). While the system aims to develop well-rounded teachers through the integration of theoretical, pedagogical, and practical learning, challenges such as resource constraints and uneven quality across institutions persist, underscoring the need for ongoing improvement and evidence-informed strengthening of teacher education (Loukomies et al., 2022).

3.6 INITIAL TEACHER EDUCATION IN SOUTH AFRICA COMPARED GLOBALLY

Comparing the quality of ITE across countries is complex because no single indicator fully captures what counts as quality in teacher preparation (Kennedy, 2024). Scholars, therefore, caution against narrow comparisons based on one measure alone. However, STs' subject content knowledge can still serve as one useful indicator of ITE quality, provided that it is interpreted alongside broader structural and contextual factors (Ingvarson & Rowley, 2017; Moats & Foorman, 2003). In this section, ST content knowledge is used cautiously as one comparative point of reference rather than as a complete measure of ITE quality.

South African ITE shares several structural features with international systems, including formal qualification pathways, regulated programmes, and the inclusion of TP as a core component of teacher preparation. However, the literature suggests that South Africa continues to face significant challenges regarding the knowledge base with which some STs enter and leave ITE programmes. Van Broekhuizen (2015) identifies several contributing factors, including comparatively low higher education entry requirements, uneven programme quality across institutions, and unequal access to resources for many students, particularly those from historically disadvantaged backgrounds. Armstrong (2015) similarly argues that teaching in South Africa does not consistently attract the highest-achieving school leavers, partly because of the profession's relatively low status and remuneration. By contrast, countries such as Singapore and China are often cited as examples of systems that combine high selectivity with stronger incentives for academically strong entrants (Ingvarson & Rowley, 2017).

Concerns about ST content knowledge in South Africa are reflected in empirical studies. Alex and Roberts (2019) found that 71% of first-year Mathematics teacher education students in B.Ed. programmes across seven South African universities did not demonstrate at least 60% knowledge of primary school mathematics content. Taylor (2019) likewise points to weak incoming literacy and mathematics competence among many ITE entrants, together with inadequate TP opportunities in some contexts. Comparative work also suggests that ST performance varies across African countries, with Tanzania and Botswana reporting stronger outcomes in content knowledge in some studies (Chunga, 2020; Sapire & Sorto, 2012).

International evidence reinforces the significance of these concerns. Ingvarson and Rowley (2017), in a large comparative study of approximately 22 000 mathematics STs from about 500 ITE institutions in 16 countries, found major differences in mathematics content knowledge across national contexts. They also found that the strongest-performing systems were those with more selective entry requirements into ITE. Although such comparisons must be interpreted carefully, they suggest that the quality of entrants, programme coherence, and the status of the profession all shape ITE outcomes.

These concerns are consistent with research on in-service teachers in South Africa. Alex and Roberts (2019) note weak mathematical knowledge even among teachers in relatively affluent contexts, while Spaul (2013) found that 79% of Grade 6 Mathematics teachers tested below the level expected for the grade they taught. Spaul (2013) further argues that many South African teachers lack sufficient content knowledge to teach the curriculum effectively, raising serious questions about how well ITE prepares future teachers. These concerns are intensified by inequality between urban and rural schooling contexts. As Spaul (2013:28) notes, “South Africa is the only country where urban teachers have statistically significantly higher levels of mathematics content knowledge than rural teachers.” Du Plessis and Mestry (2019) similarly show that rural schools often face compounded disadvantage, including lower teacher qualifications and fewer material resources.

Considered together, these studies indicate that South African ITE operates within a context of persistent inequality and uneven quality. At the same time, the literature does not suggest a simple deficit view. Rather, it shows that efforts to strengthen teacher education must account for broader contextual pressures, including unequal schooling conditions, uneven institutional capacity, and the need to support students entering ITE from diverse educational backgrounds. As Taylor (2019) argues, pre-service teacher education remains one of the most important points at which these inequalities can be addressed.

International scholarship also shows that South Africa is not alone in facing ITE challenges. Avalos (2011) notes that, despite contextual differences across countries, teacher education systems often confront similar questions about programme quality, practical preparation, and the relationship between theory and practice. Ellis et al. (2010) likewise observe common international debates about how best to structure practical learning in ITE. However, scholars caution against uncritical borrowing from other systems, since local social, economic, technological, and policy conditions shape how ITE is experienced and what kinds of reform are feasible (Asfahani et al., 2023).

For this reason, international comparison is useful as it sharpens contextual understanding rather than only encouraging the imitation of models developed elsewhere.

In the South African case, the literature points to clear imbalances in access and quality, especially when compared with better-resourced systems internationally (Ngema & Lekhetho, 2019). These imbalances also strengthen the importance of alternative modes of provision that can widen access while responding to local realities. From a social justice perspective, Van den Berg (2021) argues that ODeL offers one such possibility because it can expand access to higher education for marginalised groups in contexts such as South Africa. This provides an important link to the next section, which examines ODeL as a key mode of ITE delivery in the South African context.

3.7 OPEN DISTANCE AND E-LEARNING

As South Africa continues to address persistent imbalances in teacher education (Mosito & Mdoana-Zide, 2025), ODeL remains a key mode of ITE delivery, expanding access through its flexibility (Ngubane-Mokiwa, 2017). However, DHET cautions that expanded access through distance education only improves student success when institutions invest adequately in appropriate types and levels of student support (DHET, 2014). This section, therefore, clarifies ODeL, traces its shift from ODL to ODeL, and situates its relevance and constraints within the South African ITE context.

3.7.1 Defining Open Distance and e-Learning

Distance education is longstanding and was classically defined as learning that occurs without teachers physically present, supported instead by tutors and institutional structures, with students working largely independently (Sewart et al., 1988). While contemporary distance education increasingly incorporates digital delivery, the core features of separation, institutional mediation, and learner independence remain salient (Maphoto & Suliman, 2024).

ODeL integrates open learning principles with distance education and e-Learning to remove barriers to access, enable flexibility, and foreground student support and student-centred design (Zongozzi, 2021). It is also frequently positioned as a mechanism for advancing social justice through redress, equity, and empowerment of historically disadvantaged groups (Zongozzi, 2021). Globally, distance learning continues to expand rapidly because it enables participation for those excluded from traditional contact

models, particularly as access to ICT grows (Nair, 2020). In this study, these definitional features matter because they shape how ITE students experience learning, support, and professional formation at a distance, particularly during TP.

3.7.2 From Open Distance Learning to Open Distance and e-Learning

In South Africa, ODL and ODeL are distinguished largely by the extent to which digital technologies mediate teaching, learning, and communication. Van den Berg (2018) notes that the largest ODL institution on the African continent formally shifted policy towards ODeL due to increasing reliance on electronic technologies. This broader shift was further accelerated by COVID-19 disruptions, which intensified the use of online and remote modes of higher education (Van den Berg, 2020; Magano, 2022).

ODeL is often associated with increased interaction among students, lecturers, and peers relative to older correspondence models, thereby strengthening learning support (Ngubane-Mokiwa & Letseka, 2015). Nevertheless, the transition to ODeL may produce unintended inequities when institutions implicitly assume that all students can access and use the required technologies (Ngubane-Mokiwa, 2017). This concern is amplified in many sub-Saharan contexts where infrastructure and resources constrain equitable participation (Nyaruwata, 2012). Internationally, ODeL is also entangled with broader trends such as massification, privatisation, and internationalisation (Traxler, 2018), raising questions about quality, profit-driven expansion, and contextual relevance, particularly for Global South institutions (Traxler, 2018; Gani & Van den Berg, 2024). These dynamics are important for this study because they frame the conditions under which ODeL ITE mentoring and TP support are enacted or constrained.

3.7.3 Open Distance and e-Learning in South Africa

Distance education in South Africa expanded in response to national development needs in the early democratic era, including teacher shortages and the demand for wider access to education (Nielsen, 1997; Mokoena & Van Tonder, 2024). ODL has been positioned as an access strategy in contexts where higher education participation has historically been restricted, particularly due to apartheid-era distortions that privileged white male access and constrained black and female educational mobility (Badat, 2004; Letseka, 2015). The

DHET policy has consequently recognised the importance of ODeL institutions in meeting the demand for access to higher education in the post-school sector (DHET, 2014).

Within this context, Afrocentric perspectives emphasise the centrality of African knowledge systems and cultural worldviews in education, challenging Eurocentric dominance and affirming Africans as authors of their own narratives (Asante, 2020). This aligns with Ubuntu's emphasis on humanness, relationality, dignity, and mutual responsibility, which is foundational to this study.

ODeL in South Africa, particularly when offered through large-scale institutions such as Unisa, offers clear strengths: flexible access for geographically and economically constrained students; diverse learning materials that support self-directed learning; scalability to accommodate large enrolments; and an institutional commitment to providing structured student support despite distance (Unisa, 2025). However, South African research consistently identifies major constraints: the digital divide and unequal access to devices, connectivity, and data; uneven digital competence among students and staff; strained support services in high-enrolment modules; and dispositional challenges such as self-discipline and motivation (Akintolu & Letseka, 2023; Kgabo, 2021; Pretorius et al., 2021). Despite these constraints, ODeL remains central to widening participation and advancing SDG4 goals of inclusive and quality education, including in teacher education.

3.7.4 Initial Teacher Education in an ODeL Context in South Africa

ODeL plays a substantial role in teacher training in South Africa (Mashile, 2023). While some ODeL ITE students report that access, affordability, flexibility, and increased independence are significant benefits (Abera, 2021), empirical studies also document recurring challenges that shape TP specifically, i.e.: limited institutional/lecturer support, difficulty accessing devices and connectivity, uncertainty about programme expectations, and persistent problems with school placement and TP administration (Maja & Motseke, 2021; Kotze & Meeran, 2024). Similar concerns about preparedness and the theory–practice gap were noted in earlier South African studies done on ODeL teacher education (Du Plessis et al., 2010; Ogunniyi & Mushayikwa, 2015). Structural constraints such as loadshedding, high data costs, limited devices, and digital exclusion further compound

the TP experience in many communities (Majola & Mudau, 2022). These challenges are also linked to lower completion rates in some ODeL contexts, reinforcing calls to strengthen the quality of ODeL teacher education (Mashile, 2023).

Importantly, Pretorius et al. (2021) argue that authentic, structured real-world engagement is a sustainable response to contextual constraints in the Global South. In an ODeL ITE context, therefore, TP is not merely a programme requirement, but a key site for professional learning where structured mentoring can mediate constraints and support learning-in-practice. As discussed earlier, ODeL offers an opportunity to address access challenges in ITE, but it requires contextually responsive support mechanisms (Kotze & Meeran, 2024). Although teacher education is guided by national policy frameworks and professional regulation, concerns remain about the alignment between institutional provision, socially just practice, and students' lived realities across diverse school contexts (Barnett & Teise, 2024).

Given that ODeL reduces routine, face-to-face contact with lecturers and peers, school-based mentoring becomes more consequential for the professional learning, identity formation, and confidence of STs during TP (Marais, 2010; Ngubane-Mokiwa & Letseka, 2015; Mpungose, 2025). South Africa's schooling context is also profoundly diverse, and ITE must prepare teachers to respond ethically and pedagogically to complexity, difference, and uneven resourcing (Sekome & Mokoele, 2022; Schuelka & Engsig, 2022). TP therefore remains a central mechanism through which STs learn in context, and mentoring within TP becomes a key lever for strengthening ODeL ITE outcomes.

In the next section, TP is dealt with as a core component of ITE. It also examines how mentoring during TP supports STs' learning and professional development.

3.8 TEACHING PRACTICE AS A COMPONENT OF INITIAL TEACHER EDUCATION

TP is a central and compulsory component of ITE because it provides STs with structured opportunities to learn in authentic school settings (Grossman et al., 2009). It is during TP that STs begin to engage directly with the practical demands of teaching and to apply the theoretical and pedagogical knowledge developed through their coursework. TP therefore serves as a key site of professional learning in which STs start to interpret the realities of

classroom life, develop practical teaching competence, and form an emerging professional identity.

Steadman (2018) describes TP as the process through which STs learn to teach by putting theory into practice in real classroom settings. In this process, STs are typically placed in schools for a specified period to observe teaching, participate in classroom activities, and teach under guidance. TP thus provides a structured opportunity for STs to learn through observation, participation, practice, and reflection. In South Africa, TP is not an optional enrichment activity, but a formal requirement of ITE. According to the MRTEQ policy, STs must complete between 20 and 32 weeks of supervised and assessed school-based practice, depending on the programme structure and mode of delivery (DHET, 2015).

The literature consistently positions TP as one of the most important components of teacher preparation because it brings STs into direct contact with the realities of schooling. Scholars argue that practical classroom experience is necessary for helping STs connect pedagogical theory to the demands of actual teaching (Anis & Hasan, 2025; Mapinda & Honori, 2022; Njiku, 2025). Through TP, STs practise classroom teaching techniques and encounter the relational, organisational, and ethical dimensions of the profession. In this way, TP helps STs move beyond abstract knowledge towards the situated judgement required in practice.

TP should not be romanticised as though school placement alone automatically produces meaningful learning. Merely placing an ST in a classroom does not guarantee growth, reflection, or effective preparation. Hodges and Baum (2018) argue that the value of practical placement depends largely on the quality of guidance, modelling, and support available to the ST. Classroom experience may expose STs to real teaching, but without appropriate support, it may also leave them uncertain, overwhelmed, or limited to imitating the practices of a single teacher in a single context. Kengwee (2020) similarly warns that STs may adopt narrow teaching practices if they are exposed to only one way of teaching without critical engagement.

This concern is particularly relevant in the South African context, where TP often occurs in schools marked by significant differences in management, resourcing, staff stability, and mentoring capacity. Some schools provide strong developmental environments for STs, while others struggle with ineffective management, weak timetabling, staff absenteeism, or limited willingness to support student teachers (Du Plessis et al., 2010; Heeralal, 2014; Taole, 2015). Under such conditions, TP may become a stressful and disorienting experience rather than a strongly developmental one. STs may then complete the required practicum hours without receiving the quality of support needed for deeper professional learning.

The literature also shows that many STs experience TP as a difficult transition from theory to practice, such as Kiggundu and Nayimuli (2009) who note that STs often report a disjuncture between what they learn at university and what they encounter in schools. Similar concerns are raised in South African research, where STs describe confusion about expectations, limited coordination between universities and schools, and insufficient support during practicum experiences (Du Plessis et al., 2010; Schoeman & Mabunda, 2012). These challenges are significant because TP is often the first sustained opportunity STs have to test their developing teacher identity in a real educational setting. When the connection between coursework and school-based learning is weak, STs may struggle to make sense of their experiences and to translate theory into practice in meaningful ways.

These concerns become even more pronounced in an ODeL context. As discussed in section 3.7, ODeL expands access to ITE, but distance also reduces routine face-to-face contact with lecturers and peers. In this context, TP becomes especially important because it is one of the main spaces in which professional learning is grounded in actual school practice. Modise and Molotsi (2022) describe TP in an ODeL setting as a hybrid arrangement in which academic learning takes place largely online, while practicum learning occurs face-to-face in schools. This means that TP carries weight in the ODeL environment, since it offers STs direct engagement with classroom realities that cannot be fully simulated online.

However, the South African ODeL literature also indicates that STs often experience TP in conditions marked by uneven support, weak communication, and uncertainty about roles and expectations. Students report feeling isolated and insufficiently supported, especially when contact with the institution is limited and school-based support is inconsistent (Makoe & Nsamba, 2019; Mukeredzi, 2016; Van den Berg, 2021). This suggests that the significance of TP in ODeL lies not only in its practical exposure. Its value also depends on whether STs receive the guidance and support needed to interpret and learn from that exposure.

TP is therefore best understood as time spent in a school that must be a structured professional learning process through which STs begin to integrate knowledge, practice, reflection, and identity formation. In this study, TP is important because it forms the immediate context within which mentoring is enacted and experienced. Since the quality of TP learning is shaped not only by placement itself but also by the support surrounding it, the discussion now turns to mentoring within ITE TP as a key mechanism for strengthening ST learning and development.

3.9 MENTORING WITHIN INITIAL TEACHER EDUCATION TEACHING PRACTICE

This section foregrounds the literature directly related to the study's central phenomenon by examining shortcomings in current TP mentoring, the characteristics of effective mentoring, strategies appropriate to decentralised and ODeL contexts, and the resulting need for a contextually grounded mentoring framework. Its theoretical and philosophical foundations are discussed in Chapter 2, sections 2.2 and 2.3.

Mentoring within ITE TP refers to a structured and relational process through which a more experienced teacher supports an ST's professional learning, socialisation into the teaching role, and personal development within authentic classroom contexts (Hobson et al., 2009; Wang & Odell, 2002). In the TP phase, mentoring is not an optional add-on, but a key mechanism through which STs learn to translate pedagogical knowledge into practice, interpret classroom complexity, and develop professional identity through guided participation, modelling, feedback, and reflection (Feiman-Nemser, 2001; Korthagen, 2010). Effective mentoring, therefore, serves both developmental and supportive purposes, as it strengthens competence and practice, while also reducing isolation,

anxiety, and uncertainty commonly experienced during early professional learning (Hobson et al., 2009).

In the TP context, mentoring is best understood as a partnership involving three key role players: the MT, the ST, and the teacher education institution (university). MTs are central to school-based mentoring because they provide situated guidance, model professional practice, and create the daily conditions under which STs can learn from real teaching routines and dilemmas (Wang & Odell, 2002). Typical mentoring expectations include welcoming and orientating the ST into the school environment, assisting with planning and classroom management, supporting lesson preparation, observing teaching where feasible, and providing constructive feedback that identifies strengths and areas for improvement (Hobson et al., 2009). In addition, mentors support professional socialisation by making tacit knowledge visible, i.e. how teachers engage learners, work with colleagues, and uphold professional and ethical conduct in everyday school life (Feiman-Nemser, 2001).

The university also carries significant responsibility in mentoring during TP, particularly by clarifying role expectations, providing guidance on required outcomes, supplying practical tools (such as observation templates, feedback prompts, and reflective activities), and maintaining communication and support structures across placements (Creswell & Poth, 2016). In decentralised placements, especially in ODeL contexts, university support is often mediated through TLs, online platforms, and limited contact points, which makes clarity and practicality in support documents especially important. When institutional expectations are unclear, mentoring varies widely across schools, and STs may experience inconsistent support and uneven opportunities to learn (Letseka, 2013). STs themselves are not passive recipients of mentoring; they contribute to mentoring effectiveness through professional conduct, preparation, openness to feedback, reflective practice, and active engagement with improvement goals (Ragins & Kram, 2007). In this sense, mentoring during TP is a reciprocal developmental relationship that requires clarity of roles, commitment, and ethical engagement from all parties.

3.9.1 Common Breakdowns in TP Mentoring

Although mentoring is widely recognised as essential for meaningful TP learning, the literature also highlights recurring breakdowns that reduce mentoring effectiveness. First, mentoring often lacks structure: observation may be absent or informal, feedback may be minimal or delayed, and guidance may focus on compliance rather than development (Hobson et al., 2009). Second, role ambiguity is common: MTs may not be adequately prepared for mentoring responsibilities, STs may not know what support they are entitled to request, and universities may not provide sufficient clarity or scaffolding to standardise minimum mentoring practices across placements (Wang & Odell, 2002). Third, contextual constraints such as mentor workload, time pressures, large classes, and resource limitations can reduce mentor availability and lead to superficial engagement, particularly in under-resourced schools (Letseka, 2013). In ODeL contexts, these challenges may be intensified by distance from the institution and limited university visibility, which may leave STs more dependent on local mentoring quality and school willingness to provide support (Mashile, 2023).

Mentoring can also break down relationally. If a mentor adopts an authoritarian, dismissive, or overly critical interaction style, an ST may experience reduced confidence and psychological safety, which limits their openness to learning and reflective growth (Hobson et al., 2009). Conversely, where mentors are supportive but avoid challenging feedback, STs may be affirmed without being developed, resulting in limited pedagogical growth. These tensions point to the need for mentoring that is both relationally supportive and developmentally purposeful, balancing care with constructive guidance (Feiman-Nemser, 2001).

3.9.2 What Effective TP Mentoring Looks Like

The literature suggests that effective mentoring in TP is characterised by intentional structure and responsive relationships. Structurally, effective mentoring typically includes clear expectations, planned support cycles, opportunities for observation (of mentors and/or ST lessons), and feedback processes that identify strengths and provide specific, actionable next steps (Wang & Odell, 2002). Formative feedback is particularly important because it helps STs make meaning of teaching decisions, develop classroom judgement,

and progress from survival teaching toward reflective practice (Korthagen, 2010). Effective mentoring also supports professional identity development through encouragement, affirmation, and the creation of a learning-orientated environment in which mistakes are treated as developmental opportunities rather than failures (Flores, 2016).

Relationally, effective mentoring is underpinned by trust, respect, and professional care. When mentors demonstrate attentiveness, dignity-preserving guidance, and ethical professionalism, STs are more likely to participate actively in the mentoring relationship, request help, and implement feedback, strengthening learning outcomes. This relational dimension is not separate from development; rather, it shapes whether development is possible because STs learn best when they experience belonging, safety, and recognition as emerging professionals (Hobson et al., 2009; Flores, 2016).

3.9.3 Strategies That Strengthen Mentoring in Decentralised and ODeL TP Contexts

In decentralised TP placements, mentoring quality can be improved when institutions provide practical scaffolding that reduces ambiguity and makes mentoring doable within school constraints. The literature highlights strategies such as mentor orientation and role clarification; simple mentoring tools (e.g. mentoring agreements, observation notes, feedback prompts); reflective prompts aligned to TP requirements; light-touch accountability mechanisms that support consistency without becoming punitive (Creswell & Poth, 2016; Shenton, 2004). In ODeL contexts, where the university may be less visible, such scaffolding becomes particularly important because mentoring may otherwise depend solely on individual mentor willingness and capacity.

3.9.4 Why a Mentoring Framework is Needed

Interpreted collectively, the literature indicates that while mentoring during TP is essential for professional learning, it is frequently uneven, under-structured, and highly dependent on contextual and relational factors. This variability is especially pronounced in ODeL contexts, where distance from the institution and decentralised placements can limit standardisation and reduce institutional oversight, leaving ST experiences strongly shaped by local mentoring quality (Mashile, 2023). These realities justify the need for a

mentoring framework that clarifies minimum expectations, supports mentors with feasible tools, and promotes mentoring that is both developmentally purposeful and relationally supportive. In this study, the Ubuntu-orientated perspective provides a culturally grounded way to conceptualise mentoring that affirms human dignity, interdependence, and ethical responsibility while maintaining structured developmental support, an approach that is elaborated in the discussion on Ubuntu mentoring in section 3.11.

While this section has shown that mentoring during TP is central to ST learning, confidence, and professional identity formation, the discussion below briefly considers novice teacher attrition in South Africa to highlight why strengthened support during TP has implications beyond practicum performance and why it may influence early-career resilience and retention.

3.10 NOVICE TEACHER ATTRITION IN SOUTH AFRICA

Education systems in developing contexts such as South Africa face growing pressure to strengthen teacher supply and quality, yet scholars caution that policy and resource investment often prioritise in-service improvement while under-emphasising pre-service preparation, with implications for the preparedness of new teachers entering complex classrooms (Zuilkowski et al., 2023). The international and South African literature consistently reports that many novice teachers experience reality shock when transitioning from theory-based preparation into full classroom responsibility, often feeling overwhelmed by workload, classroom management demands, administrative pressures, and the mismatch between expectations and practice (Rens & Botha, 2018; Kiggundu & Nayimuli, 2009). Where formal induction and supportive onboarding are weak or absent, novice teachers may be expected to perform as fully functioning teachers without sufficient guidance, which can heighten isolation and reduce early-career confidence (Heeralal, 2014). Within this context, mentoring is repeatedly identified as a protective factor that can ease the transition into the profession by providing developmental guidance, professional socialisation, and psychosocial support that strengthen resilience and identity formation (Hobson & Malderez, 2013).

South African scholarship further links teacher attrition concerns to broader system pressures, including uneven school resourcing, teacher shortages, and the need to

produce sufficient competent teachers across phases and subjects (Gumede & Biyase, 2016; Shibiti, 2020; van der Berg et al., 2022). Recent work continues to warn of attrition and staffing pressures driven by retirements and turnover, calling on ITE programmes to better prepare STs for the realities of teaching and to strengthen the support pipeline into the profession (Madiba, 2025; Ndebele et al., 2024). While attrition is multi-causal (e.g. working conditions, leadership, workload, administrative demands, and limited progression), the literature consistently notes that early-career retention is shaped partly by how effectively teachers are prepared for practice and supported during the transition from student to teacher (Rens & Botha, 2018). Importantly, mentoring is often described as inconsistent and under-standardised in resource-constrained settings, reinforcing the need for feasible, context-responsive mentoring approaches rather than relying on informal goodwill (Njenga, 2023).

Although this study does not directly measure attrition, the discussion is relevant because novice teachers often draw heavily on the pedagogical and relational learning gained during TP as a basis for their early classroom practice (Zuilkowski et al., 2023). In the ODeL TP context, where institutional visibility may be reduced and support may be uneven, strengthened mentoring during TP may contribute to improved professional confidence, belonging, and identity, factors associated with early-career resilience. Accordingly, this study investigated mentoring experiences and needs during TP in the ODeL context and used the insight to inform the Ubuntu-orientated mentoring framework proposed in Chapter 6, which was designed to strengthen both developmental guidance and dignity-preserving psychosocial support for STs across diverse placement conditions.

3.11 UBUNTU MENTORING

This study adopted Ubuntu as a key conceptual lens for understanding mentoring within the ITE TP context and for interpreting the relational and ethical dimensions of support in school placements. Building on that conceptual grounding, this section focuses on the applied mentoring literature discussed earlier and shows how Ubuntu provides a culturally coherent articulation of mentoring imperatives evident in practice in South African contexts.

Across the ITE/TP mentoring literature reviewed in section 3.10, a consistent theme is that mentoring is not only an instructional process but also a relational and identity-shaping experience. Scholars emphasise that STs learn best when mentoring relationships are characterised by trust, respect, recognition, and psychological safety, because these conditions enable openness to feedback, willingness to take pedagogical risks, and sustained reflective growth (Flores, 2016; Hobson et al., 2009). In practicum settings, mentors often serve as gatekeepers to professional belonging: they influence whether STs experience inclusion in the school's professional community, whether they feel legitimised as developing teachers, and whether they develop confidence and agency in their emerging professional identity (Feiman-Nemser, 2001; Wang & Odell, 2002). When STs encounter dismissive, authoritarian, or humiliating interaction patterns, the literature notes that confidence and engagement can be undermined, leading to avoidance of feedback, reduced learning, and increased emotional strain (Hobson et al., 2009). Conversely, mentoring that is relationally attuned, where mentors affirm effort, encourage growth, and correct with care, strengthens professional identity formation and resilience during the demanding period of TP (Flores, 2016).

The literature synthesised in this chapter further highlights the importance of mentoring as a form of care enacted through everyday interactions rather than only through formal supervisory tasks. Caring mentoring involves attentiveness to the ST's well-being, genuine interest in development, and responsiveness to the realities of school and classroom pressures (Feiman-Nemser, 2001). Importantly, this does not imply soft mentoring; rather, effective mentors combine warmth with purposeful challenge by offering clear, specific, and dignity-preserving feedback (Wang & Odell, 2002). As argued in section 3.9.2, the tone used when feedback is provided is therefore significant: formative feedback is most developmental when it identifies concrete next steps and maintains respect, safeguarding the ST's sense of professional worth while promoting growth (Hobson et al., 2009). The applied insight aligns closely with Kram's psychosocial mentoring functions and points to why relational support cannot be separated from development during TP.

These applied findings from mentoring scholarship resonate strongly with Ubuntu as an ethical–relational orientation to professional support. Ubuntu provides culturally meaningful language for mentoring practices already recognised as significant in the mentoring literature: relational ethics, compassion, dignity, belonging, reciprocity, and responsibility for another’s growth (Letseka, 2013; Msila, 2015; Ramose, 2002). In the South African TP context, characterised by diverse schooling conditions and uneven support, Ubuntu strengthens mentoring by foregrounding humane relational engagement as integral to professional development rather than an optional interpersonal extra. Ubuntu-orientated mentoring, therefore, frames the mentor’s role as both developmental and morally accountable: to guide ST growth in ways that preserve dignity, promote belonging within the school community, and provide supportive correction that strengthens competence and identity (Letseka, 2012; Msila, 2015).

In ODeL contexts, where institutional visibility may be reduced and placements are decentralised, relationally grounded mentoring becomes even more consequential because STs may rely heavily on the MT for both instructional guidance and psychosocial anchoring (Mashile, 2023). Ubuntu provides a coherent articulation of why such mentoring matters and how it should be enacted, not only through technical supervision, but also through ethically grounded, respectful, compassionate support that recognises the ST as a developing professional within a shared human community. This section thus positions Ubuntu mentoring as an applied response to mentoring challenges documented in the ITE/TP literature reviewed in section 3.10, while the study’s original Ubuntu-orientated mentoring framework was based on the empirical findings.

3.12 QUALITIES OF AN UBUNTU MENTOR

Ubuntu mentoring foregrounds humanness, interrelatedness, and ethical responsibility within mentoring relationships. The applied mentoring literature discussed in section 3.9.2 highlights that relational tone, trust, and dignity-preserving feedback strongly shape ST learning and professional identity during TP. In this chapter, the qualities described below are a brief synthesis of the literature and a conceptual preview; they are not offered as a full framework at this time. The detailed Ubuntu-orientated mentoring framework and the development of its operational components are explained in Chapter 6.

In summary, in the TP context, an Ubuntu-orientated mentor is characterised by the following qualities:

- Humane, dignity-preserving engagement: Treats the ST with respect, corrects without humiliation, and safeguards the ST's professional worth, while guiding development (Letseka, 2013; Ramose, 2002).
- Relational care and empathy: Demonstrates genuine concern for the ST's wellbeing and learning and creates psychological safety that supports confidence and openness to feedback (Msila, 2015).
- Developmental purposefulness: Provides structured guidance through practical support (e.g. planning, modelling, observation where feasible) and feedback that includes clear next steps (Kram, 1988).
- Reciprocity and collaborative stance: Engages the ST as a developing colleague, encouraging dialogue, shared problem-solving, and reflective learning rather than one-way supervision (Ragins & Kram, 2007).
- Context sensitivity: Adapts mentoring to the realities of the school context and acknowledges the diversity of South African schooling environments, which shape what support is feasible and needed.
- Ethical responsibility and professionalism: Models professional conduct, accountability, and supportive correction, reinforcing teaching as a moral and relational practice (Letseka, 2013).

These qualities provide a concise, literature-based indicator of what Ubuntu-orientated mentoring should embody in TP settings and lay the groundwork for the framework design presented in Chapter 6.

Having outlined the key qualities associated with an Ubuntu-orientated mentor, the following discussion draws these ideas together by showing how the main concepts in this chapter are interrelated and jointly justify the study's focus.

3.13 INTERRELATED NATURE OF CONCEPTS

The preceding discussion demonstrates that the central concepts of this study are closely interconnected and should be understood as a coherent chain rather than as separate topics. In this thesis, ITE provides the broader professional preparation context within which TP functions as the primary site for learning to teach in authentic school settings. Within TP, mentoring is the key relational and developmental mechanism through which STs receive guidance, feedback, modelling, and psychosocial support, enabling competence development and professional identity formation. However, in an ODeL environment, distance and decentralised placements can reduce institutional visibility and increase variability across mentoring experiences, making ST support more dependent on school-based mentoring practices. These realities underscore the need for mentoring that is both structured and relationally supportive, aligning with the integrated lens reported on in Chapter 2, which combines mentoring functions, Ubuntu ethics, and Afrocentric relevance. Accordingly, the interrelatedness of these concepts provides the rationale for this study's focus on Ubuntu-orientated mentoring in TP and prepares the ground for the empirical analysis in Chapters 5 and the framework development in Chapter 6.

3.14 ALIGNMENT WITH GLOBAL, CONTINENTAL, AND NATIONAL STRATEGIES

Figure 8 illustrates how the focus of this study aligns with broader national, continental, and global education priorities. Although this study is located within the specific context of mentoring STs during TP in an ODeL ITE setting, its concerns are not isolated from wider education goals. The emphasis on strengthening mentoring, improving teacher preparation, and promoting contextually relevant support speaks directly to policy and strategic priorities that seek to improve teacher quality, educational equity, and student success.

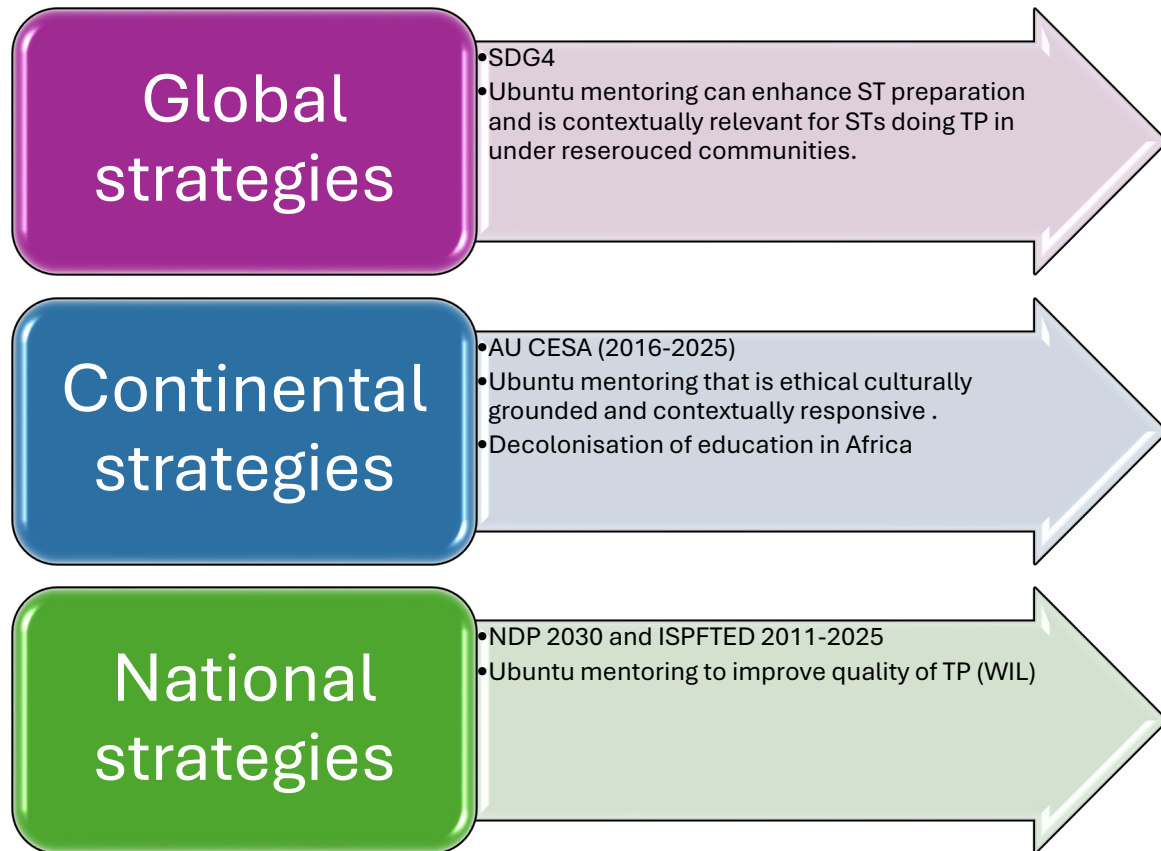


Figure 8: Alignment to global, continental and national strategies

Source: Author's own design

At a national level, the study aligns with South African priorities to improve the quality of teacher education and strengthen the preparation of competent, ethical, and professionally responsive teachers. The focus on Ubuntu-orientated mentoring is relevant in this regard because it foregrounds relational support, professional guidance, and context-sensitive development during TP. These concerns are consistent with national efforts to improve teacher preparation and to strengthen the quality of education more broadly, as reflected in policy priorities such as the National Development Plan and teacher education policy frameworks discussed earlier in this chapter.

At a continental level, the study resonates with the African Union's Continental Education Strategy for Africa, which emphasises quality education, teacher development, and education systems that are responsive to African realities and aspirations. An Ubuntu-

orientated approach to mentoring supports these priorities by drawing on African values of relationality, dignity, community, and shared responsibility. In this way, the study contributes to ongoing efforts to strengthen education in ways that are culturally and contextually grounded.

At a global level, the study is aligned with Sustainable Development Goal 4, which calls for inclusive and equitable quality education and the promotion of lifelong learning opportunities for all. Since teacher quality remains central to achieving this goal, efforts to strengthen ST support during TP are directly relevant. By focusing on mentoring within ITE, the study addresses one practical way to strengthen teacher preparation and support better educational outcomes.

In combination, these alignments show that the study is relevant beyond its immediate institutional setting. Its contribution lies in showing how Ubuntu-orientated mentoring may strengthen TP support in an ODeL context while also responding to broader educational imperatives related to teacher quality, equity, and socially responsive education. The study therefore speaks not only to a local gap in mentoring practice, but also to wider strategic concerns about how teachers are prepared for diverse and demanding educational contexts.

3.15 CONCLUSION

This chapter reviewed the literature relevant to the study's conceptual foundations and situated the research within the broader scholarly field. Building on the theoretical framing presented in Chapter 2, this chapter examined key concepts that shape the study, namely ITE, ODeL, TP, mentoring, and Ubuntu within an Afrocentric perspective. In doing so, the chapter developed a conceptual framework to guide the interpretation of mentoring in the ODeL TP context.

The literature reviewed in this chapter showed that TP is a central component of ITE and that mentoring plays an important role in shaping ST learning, confidence, and professional identity during this period. The discussion also showed that, in an ODeL context, where institutional distance may reduce routine support and increase variability across placements, school-based mentoring becomes especially significant. That said,

the literature highlighted a gap in relation to culturally grounded approaches to mentoring STs in South African ODeL contexts. This gap provided a clear rationale for examining mentoring through an Ubuntu-orientated lens.

The chapter further demonstrated that the concepts explored in this study are closely interrelated. ITE provides the broader professional preparation context; TP serves as the practical site of professional learning; mentoring functions as a key developmental and relational mechanism within TP; and Ubuntu offers an ethical and culturally relevant lens through which mentoring may be understood in a South African context. Therefore, these concepts justified the study's focus on Ubuntu-orientated mentoring and supported the need for a contextually relevant mentoring framework.

Having established the conceptual basis of the study and identified the key scholarly gap, the next chapter explains the research design and methodology used to investigate the mentoring experiences and needs of STs and MTs in the ODeL TP context.

CHAPTER 4

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODS

4.1 INTRODUCTION

The preceding chapters discussed the literature, concepts, and main theories relevant to this study, focusing on the impact of mentoring on STs and MTs, as well as the potential of Ubuntu as a sound mentoring approach to improve TP in ITE. This chapter describes the research design and methods chosen for the study. It explains the research paradigm, data collection methods and instruments, and the manner in which the data were analysed. It also outlines the ethical issues related to the data collection process and explains how trustworthiness was addressed to establish confidence in the findings and justify the study's contribution to the field of teacher education.

The research design and methods for this study were guided by the research problem identified in the field of ITE. In line with Creswell and Creswell's (2017) explanation of research design, the research process for this thesis began with the identification and conceptualisation of a problem, followed by the formulation of research questions, data collection, analysis, and interpretation, and the reporting of findings.

This chapter also acknowledges the researcher's beliefs, worldview, and paradigm, as these informed how the study was approached (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). Qu and Dumay (2011) caution that it is inaccurate to assume that qualitative researchers could remain fully objective throughout every phase of the research process. Stake (1995) similarly notes that the researcher is an active participant in the research process and co-constructs knowledge with participants. Mays and Pope (1995) further observe that critics of qualitative research often associate it with personal impression, which necessitates that qualitative researchers remain systematic and reflexive throughout the research process.

The researcher's personal constructivist ontology closely aligned with the paradigm adopted for this study, providing the lens through which the literature and the data were viewed, informed by the epistemology and methodology used in this thesis. Although the

researcher's ontology was therefore briefly acknowledged, a deliberate effort was made to guard against researcher bias throughout the study.

This chapter provides a detailed discussion of the philosophical paradigm that shaped the development of the research questions, the selection of the research design and methods, and the approaches to data collection and analysis. The research design and methods were underpinned by KMFF, Ubuntu philosophy, and the Afrocentric paradigm, as discussed in Chapter 2. These provided the lens through which the phenomenon of ST and MT TP mentoring experiences was investigated from an Ubuntu-orientated perspective.

This chapter, therefore, describes the research design and methods chosen to answer the main research question and address the problem statement formulated in section 1.3:

How can an Ubuntu-orientated perspective enhance mentoring practices in the ITE Open Distance eLearning context and inform the development of an Ubuntu-orientated mentoring framework?

The following sub-questions were explored to answer the main question:

- Which mentoring needs do STs and MTs identify during ST TP?
- How do STs and MTs experience mentoring practices during ST TP?
- How do STs and MTs perceive Ubuntu-orientated mentoring?
- What institutional support would promote Ubuntu-orientated mentoring in TP, according to the study participants?
- What are the key requirements for an Ubuntu-orientated framework that could improve the TP experiences of ODeL STs and MTs?

The next section presents the rationale for the empirical enquiry.

4.2 RATIONALE FOR EMPIRICAL ENQUIRY

Empirical research, as described by Creswell and Creswell (2017), is based on observation and measurement of a phenomenon. The empirical researcher collects and analyses data derived from participants' real-world experiences rather than relying solely

on theory or belief. In qualitative research, this approach allows for rich description and a more trustworthy contextual understanding of the phenomenon (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Empirical enquiry was therefore adopted in this study to explore the lived experiences, perceptions, and practices of STs and MTs within an ODeL context. In this qualitative study, empirical enquiry was particularly appropriate because it allowed for a deeper understanding of how Ubuntu-orientated mentoring unfolded in practice within specific social, cultural, and institutional contexts. This aligned with the Afrocentric epistemology of the study, which is grounded in relationships and the co-creation of knowledge, and which therefore seeks meaning through participants' experiences rather than through the imposition of external theories (Guba & Lincoln, 1994).

The quality of ITE is central to preparing competent and reflective teachers and, by extension, to improving education systems globally (Darling-Hammond, 2017). In developing countries such as South Africa, where inequalities in access to quality ITE programmes persist (McDonald et al., 2021), ODeL widens access to teacher education, especially for students in under-resourced and rural contexts. However, structural and social inequalities continue to present challenges for the practical and professional learning required in ITE, especially in relation to mentoring during TP (Ngubane-Mokiwa, 2017).

Research on mentoring has largely been based on contact-based ITE and has shown that mentoring relationships are central to the development of pedagogical skills, professional identity, and emotional resilience among STs (Hudson, 2013). These relationships support STs as they navigate the complexity of learning to teach in real classrooms and help to bridge theory and practice. In ODeL contexts, however, some scholars note a lack of consistent, supportive mentoring structures, leaving STs feeling isolated, disconnected, and insufficiently prepared for their future careers (Khoza, 2015). As discussed in the previous chapters, although a substantial body of literature exists on mentoring in teacher education, a gap remains regarding Ubuntu-orientated mentoring in the pre-service phase of ODeL STs.

This study was therefore motivated by the need to respond to South African ODeL ITE realities through an Afrocentric lens. It investigated the potential of Ubuntu-orientated

mentoring as a culturally grounded and relationship-focused approach to support STs during TP. Ubuntu is rooted in the African philosophy of *umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu*, meaning that a person is a person through other people. This philosophy emphasises interconnectedness, mutual respect, humanity, compassion, and interdependence (Tutu, 2004; Letseka, 2012). Such an approach differs from more individualistic models of mentoring dominant in many Western contexts and offers a more holistic, community-based way of understanding ST mentoring (Msila, 2015).

The significance of this empirical research, therefore, lies in its contribution to both theory and practice. By focusing on ST mentoring within a non-traditional ITE context, the study offered a nuanced understanding of mentoring in ODeL and proposed an Afrocentric framework aligned with the principles of Ubuntu to enrich STs' mentoring experiences. By viewing STs as active participants in the mentoring relationship, the study supported a more meaningful and culturally relevant approach to mentoring future teachers. In this way, it sought to inform practice and policy by contributing a context-specific model for teacher development in South African ODeL ITE.

The research design guiding this study is described in the next section.

4.3 RESEARCH DESIGN

This section outlines the chosen research paradigm, approach, and design, aiming to provide a foundational framework for the study and ground it in relevant philosophical assumptions. It describes the overarching plan (Creswell & Creswell, 2017) that guided the study and the research methods used to answer the research question.

4.3.1 Research Paradigm

Guba and Lincoln (1994) explain that a paradigm is the worldview a person holds. It reflects what a person believes about the world, how it operates, and how knowledge about it can be generated. In research, a paradigm guides the way the researcher views the world and conducts empirical enquiry (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). It therefore shaped the manner in which the research questions were posed, the methods were selected, and the data were interpreted in this study. Major paradigms are commonly identified in social science research, namely positivism, post-positivism, pragmatism, constructivism, and

critical theory (Creswell & Poth, 2016). These paradigms differ in terms of their ontological, epistemological, and methodological assumptions.

Positivism views reality as objective, fixed, and measurable through specific methods of enquiry. Positivist researchers seek to discover general laws by testing hypotheses under controlled conditions. This usually involves quantitative methods such as experiments, statistical surveys, and structured observation (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). The aim is to produce findings that can be generalised through repetition and logical reasoning.

Post-positivism develops from the positivist paradigm. It accepts that reality exists, but holds that human understanding of reality is always partial and affected by background, values, and limitations (Clark, 1998; Guba & Lincoln, 1994). This paradigm is often associated with mixed-methods research, where triangulation and careful testing of patterns may be used to refine theory (Creswell & Poth, 2016).

Pragmatism is another recognised research paradigm and is usually associated with mixed-methods research approaches. It focuses on what works in addressing the research problem and allows researchers to draw on different methods when these are useful for answering the research questions (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). Although pragmatism can support practical and flexible enquiry, it was not the most suitable paradigm for this study because the study did not aim to combine quantitative and qualitative methods. Instead, it sought to understand the meanings, experiences, and mentoring needs of STs and MTs within a qualitative case study design.

Constructivism aims to understand experiences as people live them (Cohen & Crabtree, 2006). Guba and Lincoln (1994) describe the constructivist paradigm as flexible and responsive to the ways in which people experience their world and understand their own realities. McMillan and Schumacher (2010:14) define it as a paradigm in which the researcher uses systematic procedures while acknowledging that there are “multiple socially constructed realities”.

Critical theory focuses on societal structures, power, oppression, and structural inequality (Creswell & Poth, 2016). It holds that reality is shaped by historical, political, social, and economic forces (Tyson, 2023). As a research paradigm, critical theory aims not only to

understand the world but to challenge and transform it, often through approaches such as participatory action research and ethnography (Creswell & Poth, 2016).

Based on these paradigmatic positions, a constructivist paradigm was most appropriate for this study, as the study sought to explore the lived mentoring experiences of STs and MTs within a South African ODeL context. The constructivist paradigm was particularly suitable because it acknowledges that reality is subjective and shaped by social and cultural experience (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Given the focus on Ubuntu-orientated mentoring, which emphasises interconnectedness, empathy, community, and shared humanity (Letseka, 2012; Waghid, 2019), constructivism provided an appropriate foundation because it recognises shared values and the co-construction of meaning. Constructivism is based on the ontological view that meaning and reality are socially constructed rather than fixed and objective (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008). This aligns with Ubuntu philosophy, which accepts that individuals exist and find meaning in relation to others, as expressed in the principle of *umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu* (Letseka, 2013). Both positions, therefore, move away from positivist assumptions of a single objective reality and instead foreground co-constructed meaning. A constructivist paradigm, enriched by Ubuntu epistemology and Afrocentric values, therefore framed this study.

This study used Ubuntu as a guiding lens and adopted the Afrocentric paradigm as an important frame of reference. Mazama (2001) describes Asante's Afrocentric paradigm as one that places African cultural experiences and perspectives at the centre of knowledge production. Afrocentricity emphasises the importance of locating African people and African realities within African-centred frameworks of interpretation (Mazama, 2001). Although Asante is an African American scholar, his work remains relevant to a culturally diverse South African context because it foregrounds African perspectives that have often been marginalised by dominant Western paradigms. The inclusion of an Afrocentric worldview was therefore important in this study, which explored Ubuntu as a component of mentoring in the South African ODeL context (Tafirenyika & Van den Berg, 2023; Kotze, 2025). A focus on mentoring grounded in African values and traditions increased cultural awareness in the South African context and supported appreciation for

Ubuntu as a possible way of strengthening mentoring experiences in ITE (Sefotho & Letseka, 2024).

This paradigmatic position allowed for the interpretation of participants' experiences within their specific educational and cultural contexts (Alharahsheh & Pius, 2020). It also allowed the study to propose an Ubuntu-orientated mentoring framework grounded in participants' experiences and interpreted through an Afrocentric lens. Scholars such as Cohen and Crabtree (2006) support the use of a constructivist approach when a study aims to explore how participants understand and experience their world through socially constructed realities. In this study, mentoring was understood as socially and culturally shaped, and the needs and expectations of mentees were recognised as context dependent. This justified a constructivist and Afrocentric exploration of how participants experienced mentoring through their social, cultural, and professional interactions during TP.

The study further recognised that learning and professional growth did not take place in isolation. Support for structured mentoring of STs is found in socio-cultural pedagogies (Heeralal, 2014) as well as in Afrocentric theories such as Ubuntu (Asante, 1980), both of which emphasise that development occurs through social participation and the guidance of others. For this reason, the study drew on the African philosophy of Ubuntu to guide both the research process and the development of the proposed framework.

Within the constructivist paradigm, the study assumed that reality was multiple and socially constructed through participants' lived experiences in specific contexts (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). From an epistemological perspective, knowledge was understood as co-constructed through engagement between the researcher and participants, which aligns with the Ubuntu-orientated emphasis on interpersonal meaning-making and human interconnectedness (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Letseka, 2013). In line with these assumptions, the study followed a qualitative approach and used methods suited to generating rich, contextual accounts of participants' meanings in order to understand mentoring experiences during TP within the ODeL context (Creswell & Poth, 2016).

4.3.2 Research Approach

This study followed a qualitative research approach, as it sought to understand the meanings and perceived experiences of the participants (Merriam, 2008). Eisner (2017) explains that, in educational research, a qualitative approach explores the real-world settings of schools and classrooms in which teachers and learners' function. Merriam (2008) and Denzin and Lincoln (2008) likewise describe qualitative research as an attempt to understand people's meanings, feelings, and lived experiences in their natural settings. In the same way, Eisner (2017) supports the use of a qualitative approach in educational research because it aims to understand what teachers and learners do and how they experience their environments. Creswell et al. (2007) also recommend a qualitative approach when the purpose of the study is to explore participants' lived realities.

McMillan and Schumacher (2010) argue that educational decisions should be evidence-based and informed by participants' lived realities. In this study, the experiences of STs and MTs during TP offered insight into mentoring as it was experienced in practice. This created an opportunity to examine mentoring in relation to real challenges and support needs within the ODeL context. Bogdan and Biklen (1997) similarly argue that qualitative research is appropriate for studying teachers in practice because it provides rich descriptions of people, their beliefs, conversations, feelings, and experiences that cannot be easily captured statistically.

A qualitative approach was therefore well-suited to exploring the lived experiences, perceptions, and needs of STs and MTs in the complex and context-specific environment of ODeL. This approach is grounded in the view that reality is subjective and socially constructed (Creswell & Poth, 2016), which aligns with the constructivist paradigm that underpinned the study (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Through this approach, the study sought to understand how participants made meaning of their TP mentoring experiences through an Ubuntu-orientated lens.

A qualitative approach also enabled deeper engagement with participants' perceptions and beliefs in their natural settings, thereby yielding a more holistic understanding through rich descriptive data (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008). It further recognises the active role of the

researcher in qualitative inquiry, particularly during interviewing and data analysis (Merriam, 2008; Patton, 1999). Du Plessis and Marais (2013) also support the use of qualitative research to study aspects of TP in an ODeL context, as the phenomenon can be examined in a natural, context-sensitive manner. Schoeman and Mabunda (2012) similarly maintain that educational research requires an understanding of social phenomena as they occur in context.

The limitations of qualitative research were, however, also considered. Choy (2014:101) identifies several weaknesses, including the inability to objectively verify results as in quantitative findings, the need for specific interviewing skills, and the time-consuming nature of data collection. Johnson (1997) further argues that researcher bias may affect the validity of qualitative data if observations and interpretations are selective. For this reason, steps to reduce bias and strengthen trustworthiness were incorporated into the study, as discussed later in section 4.5. Gheondea-Eladi (2014) further notes that critics of qualitative research often question the generalisability of the findings. However, Smith (2018) argues that statistical generalisability is not the appropriate measure for evaluating qualitative research in the social sciences.

Despite these limitations, qualitative research remained the most appropriate approach for this study. Choy (2014) also points to important strengths of qualitative inquiry, including its ability to raise issues through open-ended data generation and to explore values, beliefs, behaviours, and paradigms in depth. A qualitative approach was therefore deliberately chosen because it aligned with the constructivist paradigm, the Ubuntu-orientated framing of the study, and the exploratory nature of the research aims. It offered a flexible, context-sensitive way to engage with the socially constructed realities of STs and MTs in the South African ODeL context. Through this approach, the study sought to contribute to a deeper understanding of mentoring practices and to support the development of a culturally grounded, context-specific Ubuntu-orientated mentoring framework.

The next section explains the research strategy that guided the design, data generation, and data analysis processes in this study.

4.3.3 Research Strategy

A research strategy is the overall plan for conducting a study that guides the researcher in selecting the most appropriate methods to investigate a specific phenomenon in its real-life context (Creswell & Poth, 2016). Given this study's objective of exploring the mentoring needs and experiences of STs and MTs in an ODeL context from an Ubuntu-orientated perspective, a descriptive qualitative case study design was selected as the most appropriate research strategy. A case study allows for in-depth investigation of a complex social phenomenon in its real-life context, particularly where the boundaries between the phenomenon and the context are not clearly defined (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Yin, 2012). This was relevant to ODeL TP mentoring, where experiences varied across placements and participants.

As highlighted in Chapter 1, ODeL STs experienced a range of challenges during TP, including limited support, unclear mentoring expectations, and feelings of isolation (Mbhiza et al., 2024; Schoeman & Mabunda, 2012). The case study strategy, therefore, enabled exploration of these challenges as they occurred naturally in TP settings and to develop a holistic understanding of mentoring within the ODeL context. This strategy also aligned with the Afrocentric and Ubuntu-orientated framing of the study. Afrocentric research calls for methodologies that recognise African worldviews, cultural knowledge, and the co-creation of knowledge (Asante, 1988). Ubuntu similarly emphasises interconnectedness, community, and ethical relationships, which supported the use of a research design that was dialogue-based, interactive, and sensitive to context (Msila, 2015; Ramose, 2002). A descriptive case study strategy, therefore, supported the development of a culturally responsive mentoring framework rooted in African values.

Baxter and Jack (2008) stress the importance of identifying and defining the case clearly in the early stages of the research process. In this thesis, the case was mentoring during TP in the ITE ODeL context, as experienced by STs and MTs. The research question was therefore well suited to a case study approach because a bounded case could be identified. Creswell et al. (2007) also justify the use of case study design when a study seeks to recognise the multiple realities that shape perspectives on a case. This design was appropriate because it allowed the

experiences of STs and MTs to be studied in their natural environments during TP (Merriam, 2008). It was also consistent with the constructivist paradigm underpinning the study, since it sought to understand participants' values, beliefs, and experiences through their own perspectives (Stake, 1995). While participants could hold different views based on their personal experiences, the study also sought to identify common patterns and themes across these socially constructed realities.

A descriptive case study design is appropriate when the purpose is to provide a detailed account of experiences, meanings, and contextual conditions (Creswell et al., 2007). In this study, the intention was to explore the needs, experiences, and perceptions of STs and MTs during TP within a particular institutional and temporal context, and to identify participants' expectations of mentoring during TP. Descriptive case studies also support analytic generalisation and transferability by producing thick, contextualised descriptions that allow readers to judge their relevance to other contexts (Stake, 1995; Yin et al., 2012). For this reason, a descriptive qualitative case study strategy was used to generate rich, context-sensitive insight that could inform mentoring practice and policy discussions beyond the immediate case, while recognising that meaning was co-constructed and context dependent (Stake, 1995).

Baxter and Jack (2008) describe case study research as useful for developing theory, evaluating programmes in context, and developing interventions to improve practice. Yin et al. (2012) likewise explain that case study research can be used to document and analyse participants' lived experiences. Scholtz and Tietje (2002) further discuss the value of case study design for examining authentic, complex, and current problems for which it is difficult to apply a single analytic method or numerical values. This made a descriptive case study approach valuable in this study because mentoring during TP was experienced differently across participants and placements, with differing needs, demands, and beliefs about mentoring and Ubuntu, while still revealing shared patterns of challenge and support.

This strategy was strengthened by the use of multiple data sources, namely SSIs with STs, qualitative questerviews with MTs, and document analysis of the university's TLs on TP. The use of multiple data sources enabled triangulation, which strengthened the

credibility and trustworthiness of the findings (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Shenton, 2004). It also supported Stake's (1995) recommendation that case studies should draw on more than one source in order to produce a richer understanding of the phenomenon under investigation. Baxter and Jack (2008) further note that case study design allows a researcher to deconstruct and reconstruct phenomena. In this study, which was relevant to the analysis of mentoring and to the rethinking of mentoring through an Afrocentric Ubuntu paradigm. Yin et al. (2012) also advise the use of a case study when the researcher does not seek to influence participants' behaviour, but rather to understand experiences within their real-life contexts. Since this study sought to identify the mentoring needs and experiences of STs and MTs in authentic TP contexts, a case study design was most suitable.

Yin et al. (2012) distinguish between exploratory, explanatory, and descriptive case studies. He also differentiates between single-case and multiple-case designs, while Stake (1995) distinguishes between intrinsic and instrumental purposes for studying a case. Figure 9 summarises these types and design options relevant to case study research.

Exploratory case study	Explanatory case study	Descriptive case study
• Investigates unfamiliar topics with no clear outcomes, often as a precursor for further studies to be done. • Not limited to quantitative or qualitative data.	• Explains a phenomena but the results are not flexible and are not open to interpretation.	• Explain a phenomena within real-life contexts and lived experiences of participants.

Intrinsic case study	Instrumental case study	Single-case case study	Multiple-case case study
• The reseracher has a personal interest in the case that is unique in nature. • The phenomena does not occur at a variety of sites but instead is focussed on a single site.	• The case is not studied, but instead used as an insturment to study another phenomena.	• Focuses on one bounded case within its real-life context.	• Explores differences between cases in order to replicate the findings accorss different cases.

Figure 9: Summary of Stake's (1995) and Yin et al. (2012) types of case studies

Source: Author's own design

This study adopted a single, descriptive qualitative case study design in which the bounded case was mentoring during the TP component of an ITE programme at one South African ODeL institution. A single-case design was appropriate because the study sought an in-depth, contextualised understanding of one institutional setting rather than a comparison across multiple institutions or cases (Tisdell & Merriam, 2025; Stake, 1995; Yin et al., 2012). The study was descriptive because it aimed to describe and interpret mentoring practices, experiences, and needs within their real-life institutional context.

Within this bounded case, the study drew on multiple sources of evidence to develop a holistic account of Ubuntu-orientated mentoring practices and needs, namely SSIs with STs, qualitative questionnaires with MTs, and document analysis of institutional TLs on TP (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Creswell & Poth, 2016; Yin et al., 2012). These three datasets made it possible to compare consistencies and tensions between participants' lived

experiences and the institution's formal expectations, thereby strengthening the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Shenton, 2004; Tracy, 2010). The researcher's interest in this study stemmed from her own experiences and those of STs within the ODeL TP context. A possible need for stronger support, and the view that STs might benefit from more structured mentoring by MTs guided by Ubuntu principles, suggested the value of research that could contribute to more meaningful TP experiences and stronger preparation for a teaching career. In line with a single-case design, the inclusion of multiple STs and MTs was intended to ensure depth and diversity of perspective within the bounded case. This supported robust thematic analysis, thick description, and the transferability of findings through detailed contextual evidence rather than statistical generalisation (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Stake, 1995).

The limitations and challenges associated with case study research were also considered. To strengthen the study's trustworthiness, the common weaknesses of qualitative case studies and the steps taken to address them are summarised in Table 3.

Table 3: Weaknesses of the case study as a research strategy and the mitigating steps taken in this study

Weaknesses of case study design	Suggested mitigating action	Mitigating steps taken in this study
Selecting the wrong case or theory to underpin the case appropriately.	Conduct an in-depth literature review and critically evaluate the theories underpinning the study.	- A detailed literature review and review of the theoretical frameworks were conducted in Chapters 2 and 3. The theories used in the study were selected with attention to their strengths and limitations.
Collecting too much, too little, or irrelevant data.	Ensure data collection remains focused on the research question while remaining open	- The research question was carefully reviewed with peers and the supervisor. Data generation remained focused on the research question throughout the study.

	to participants' experiences.	Openness was maintained to allow issues important to the participants to emerge.
Bounding the case	Set clear boundaries for the case's scope.	- The boundaries of the case were defined clearly in terms of time, site, geographical spread, and participant group.
Lack of rigour	Ensure triangulation, member checking, transparency, and appropriate sampling.	- Triangulation was strengthened through the use of multiple data sources and theoretical lenses. Member checking was undertaken before the findings were finalised, as discussed later in the chapter.
Ethical challenges	Ensure informed consent, confidentiality, and anonymity.	- Ethical measures included informed consent, anonymity through the use of participant codes, and the right to withdraw at any stage without negative consequences.

Source: Author's own construction

Flowing from the discussion above, it was also necessary to explain the specific steps followed in conducting the case study. Crowe et al. (2011) identify stages of activity in case study research, which informed how the study was conducted.

Stage 1: Defining the case

Formulating a research question through critical engagement with the literature and the theoretical framework allowed the case to be bounded clearly in terms of time, participant group, and geographical range. In this study, the case was defined as the mentoring experiences and needs of STs and MTs in the TP component of an ITE programme offered through one South African ODeL institution. The case was bounded by the final-year TP period in 2024, a defined participant group of STs and MTs involved in mentoring relationships during TP, and a geographical spread across urban and rural schools across South Africa. The research questions were informed by literature in the fields of teacher education and social science, and by a theoretical framework that incorporated Ubuntu

philosophy (Letseka, 2012), Kram's Mentoring Functions Framework (Kram, 1988), and the Afrocentric paradigm (Asante, 1988). This definition of the case provided clear boundaries for data generation and guided the main focus of the study (Yin et al., 2012).

Stage 2: Selecting the case and participants

In a single-case study, the focus falls on clearly bounding the case and purposefully selecting participants who have direct experience of the phenomenon within that bounded system (Tisdell & Merriam, 2025). Practical matters such as access, risk, and ethics must also be addressed (Crowe et al., 2011). This study involved eight STs and 13 MTs who were selected purposively, with convenience also influencing access because of the distributed nature of ODeL placements (Etikan et al., 2016; Tisdell & Merriam, 2025). STs were selected because they were final-year B.Ed students who had completed TP, while MTs were selected because they had mentored ODeL students during the final year of study. Ethical issues were addressed through institutional ethical approval (Ref. 2022/11/09/50839500/22/AM), informed consent, and protection of participant anonymity. The use of technology further enabled access to participants across South Africa and supported engagement with diverse settings while maintaining ethical participation (Letseka, 2012).

Stage 3: Data generation and collection

Because this single case study drew on multiple qualitative data sources, careful planning was required to ensure an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon while maintaining alignment with the research objectives (Crowe et al., 2011). Data generation needed to remain flexible enough to accommodate participants' varied contexts and experiences, while still focusing on the research question. The study therefore used three data generation methods: SSIs with STs, questerviews with MTs, and document analysis of institutional TLs on TP (Bowen, 2009; Creswell & Poth, 2016). The use of multiple sources supported triangulation (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011) and strengthened the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings (Shenton, 2004). The interview schedule and questerview questions were standardised to promote consistency, while still allowing flexibility where

participants' responses required elaboration. During analysis, patterns, consistencies, and tensions were examined across the three data sources.

Stage 4: Analysing, interpreting, and reporting findings

Analysis, interpretation, and reporting had to be planned carefully to ensure an authentic representation of participants' meanings and contexts. In case study research using multiple data sources, each source is examined individually, after which areas of convergence and divergence are identified in order to strengthen interpretation and develop a fuller account of the case (Tisdell & Merriam, 2025; Yin et al., 2012). Coding and theme development make it possible to identify key issues relevant to the research questions and theoretical framing. In this study, the ST and MT datasets were analysed using thematic analysis (Clarke & Braun, 2017), supported by document analysis of the institutional TLs (Bowen, 2009). Each data source was analysed to identify codes and themes, after which a cross-source analysis examined patterns, contrasts, and recurring ideas across the datasets. Ubuntu philosophy was used as an interpretive lens in making sense of the interpersonal, cultural, and emotional aspects of mentoring. Thick description in the findings and discussion chapters supported credibility and allowed readers to judge the transferability of the findings to other contexts (Creswell & Miller, 2000). The findings are presented in the next chapter through themes supported by direct participant quotations.

Throughout these stages, the study remained grounded in the relevant body of academic knowledge presented in Chapters 2 and 3. The data sources had already been defined in Chapter 1, and care was taken throughout the study to ensure that the scope of the case remained clear despite the flexible nature of qualitative data generation (Mwita, 2022). Reflection during each stage of the research process helped to maintain alignment with the main research question.

The next section provides a detailed discussion of the research methods used to generate, collect, and analyse data in alignment with the aims of the study and its theoretical framing.

4.4 RESEARCH METHODS

A research method encompasses the tools, techniques and procedures used by researchers to collect, analyse, and interpret data to answer the research question (Creswell & Poth, 2016). In qualitative research, research methods are flexible and interactive, allowing an in-depth exploration of participants' personal lived experiences (Tisdell & Merriam, 2025). Qualitative research methods prioritise meaning-making, rich descriptions of the phenomena being studied, and the co-creation of knowledge between the researcher and the participants (Patton, 1999). The following section offers a detailed description of the specific research methods used in this study, each intentionally selected to align with the constructivist paradigm and qualitative case study design adopted.

4.4.1 Selection of Participants

Selection of participants, also known as sampling, in qualitative research involves intentionally selecting people, settings, or documents most likely to provide rich, relevant, and diverse insight into the phenomenon being studied (Patton, 1999). In contrast to the probabilistic sampling used in quantitative studies, qualitative sampling prioritises depth over breadth, quality of in-depth data over quantity of statistical data and seeks out participants who can provide meaningful insight into the research problem (Tisdell & Merriam, 2025).

In line with the research paradigm and case study design, two non-probability sampling methods were employed: purposive and convenience sampling (Bernard, 2017). These sampling approaches were chosen to allow the researcher to access rich, context-specific data from individuals who were directly involved in mentoring relationships in an ODeL ITE TP context. The final participant sample comprised 21 participants: eight STs selected through homogeneous purposive sampling and 13 MTs selected through convenience sampling.

4.4.1.1 Purposive sampling of STs

Bernard (2017) advocates purposive sampling in qualitative studies and defines it as the selection of participants based on specific characteristics relevant to the study. Patton (1999) similarly proposes purposive sampling when the aim is to study in-depth

information-rich cases rather than to generalise findings statistically. In this study, homogeneous purposive sampling was used to select the ST participants (Etikan et al., 2016), as they were all final-year B.Ed students enrolled at the same ODeL institution and had completed TP in South African schools.

The research question and objectives focused on the lived experiences and perceived mentoring needs of fourth-year B.Ed STs during TP. Purposive sampling was therefore appropriate because it enabled the selection of participants with the characteristics required to answer the research question. These included final-year B.Ed students who were studying at an ODeL institution and completing TP at schools in South Africa. These participants were regarded as particularly well placed to meaningfully reflect on their mentoring experiences because they had recently completed their TP requirements.

The rationale for selecting fourth-year students was that they had already completed three TP periods during their degree and could therefore draw on a range of mentoring experiences. The students were selected from a list provided by the university after the relevant policy requirements were considered and permission to conduct the research was granted. Once ethical clearance had been obtained, the university also granted permission to contact the participants. Permission to collect data from students and institutional documents is included as Annexure 3. An open call was then sent by email to all STs registered for a specific final-year module (TP4) in the B.Ed programme at the ODeL institution. The email explained the study's purpose and invited volunteers to participate. The written invitation and informed consent documentation are included as Annexure 4.

More than 3 938 students were registered for the module. Fourteen students volunteered and were selected based on their willingness and availability to participate in the SSIs. Of these 14, eight STs completed the interviews in full. The remaining six were unable to complete the process, mainly due to connectivity issues or last-minute availability constraints. Despite this, the selection process ensured that the eight participating STs could provide direct and nuanced reflections on their mentoring experiences during TP (Creswell & Poth, 2016). Once the ST participants had volunteered and met the inclusion

criteria, all willing participants who remained available were included in the sample for data generation.

4.4.1.2 Convenience sampling of MTs

MT participants were selected through convenience sampling, which involves recruiting participants who are readily accessible and willing to participate (Etikan et al., 2016). Given the geographically dispersed nature of the ODeL context and the time constraints faced by in-service teachers, convenience sampling was deemed appropriate to engage MTs who had recently mentored ODeL STs during TP.

In this study, 13 MTs were included as participants through convenience sampling. These MTs were drawn from a group of in-service teachers who had recently mentored STs from the South African ODeL institution during TP. An email invitation (see Annexure 4) was sent to 234 MTs whose contact details were obtained from the institution's TP database. These MTs had been formally listed as mentors in the university system during the relevant academic year. The invitation asked them to reflect on their recent mentoring experiences by completing a qualitative questionnaire in the form of a questerview. Of those who responded, 13 completed the full questionnaire within the allocated time frame and formed the final MT sample.

This sampling method was appropriate given the practical difficulties of arranging interviews with teachers across different provinces. The questerview format, which used an open-ended Google Form, accommodated participants' time constraints while still generating qualitative data relevant to the study. Although convenience sampling did not offer the same level of deliberate selection as purposive sampling, it provided access to mentors who were actively involved in the field and able to contribute contextually relevant data. In this context, its use was therefore both practical and appropriate to the realities of the ODeL environment.

The use of purposive sampling for STs and convenience sampling for MTs was intended to ensure that the study included perspectives from both sides of the mentoring relationship (Yin et al., 2012). By drawing on the views of STs as mentees and MTs as

mentors, the study developed a fuller understanding of mentoring in the ODeL TP context, in line with the theoretical and empirical literature discussed in Chapters 2 and 3.

4.4.1.3 Data saturation

In qualitative research, data saturation refers to the point at which no new information, themes, or insights emerge from additional data generation, indicating that sufficient data has been collected to address the research questions (Guest et al., 2006; Fusch & Ness, 2015). Reaching saturation is important in supporting the credibility and adequacy of qualitative findings (Creswell & Poth, 2016).

In this study, data saturation was reached after the completion of SSIs with eight STs and the collection of questerview responses from 13 MTs. In the ST dataset, saturation became evident as the final interviews repeated themes that had already emerged, including emotional needs, institutional support, and perceptions of Ubuntu-orientated mentoring. This suggested that the participant group had generated sufficient insight into mentoring experiences within the bounded case.

A similar pattern was evident in the MT dataset. The written responses from the 13 MTs reflected recurring views on mentoring roles, communication challenges, institutional gaps, and ways of improving mentoring in ODeL contexts. After the tenth questerview, responses largely reinforced themes that had already appeared, and the final three responses did not introduce substantially new insights. This indicated that saturation had also been reached in the MT group.

The inclusion of two complementary participant groups strengthened the depth of the study and supported triangulation of the findings (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). It also allowed saturation to be considered both within and across participant groups (Fusch & Ness, 2015). These outcomes are supported by Fusch and Ness (2015), who argue that in studies with clearly defined aims and relatively homogenous participant groups, saturation may be achieved with smaller samples when responses begin to repeat and reinforce one another.

The following section explains the data collection instruments and procedures used in this study.

4.4.2 Data Collection

Data collection in qualitative research involves gathering rich, descriptive, and context-specific information from participants in order to explore how they make meaning of their lived experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2016; Tisdell & Merriam, 2025). In this study, a multiple-method data collection strategy was used in keeping with the qualitative case study design and the constructivist and Ubuntu-orientated framing of the study. The data collection instruments and procedures were selected to capture the mentoring experiences and needs of both STs and MTs within an ODeL ITE TP context.

4.4.2.1 Data collection

Data collection instruments refer to the specific tools used to gather information from participants or sources. In qualitative studies, these instruments are selected to generate rich, descriptive, and contextually grounded data (Creswell & Poth, 2016). Three qualitative data collection instruments were used in this study, namely SSIs with STs, questerviews with MTs, and document analysis of university TLs related to the TP module completed by the STs. This combination allowed for triangulation across data sources, which strengthened the depth and trustworthiness of the findings (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011).

4.4.2.1.1 Semi-structured interviews with STs

SSIs were used to collect in-depth narrative data from the eight STs who participated in this study. Cohen and Crabtree (2006) describe SSIs as more formal interviews that make use of an interview guide, while still allowing participants to move beyond direct questions and provide detailed accounts of their personal experiences. The interview guide developed for this study drew on themes identified in the literature, the theoretical framework, and the document review. It included questions on the mentoring relationship, challenges experienced during TP, perceptions of Ubuntu mentoring, and institutional support.

Adams (2015) supports the use of SSIs in qualitative studies because the interview guide helps produce reliable, comparable data while still allowing for a more personal, conversational exchange. Open-ended questions allowed participants to elaborate on

their thoughts, feelings, and perceptions of mentoring. This was appropriate for the study, as it enabled deeper probing into STs' lived experiences during TP.

Recent scholarship has increasingly supported the use of online platforms for qualitative interviewing. Namey et al. (2020) identify several advantages of online interviews, including wider reach, greater inclusiveness, and the removal of geographical barriers. De Klerk and Palmer (2021) also note that online interviews are more cost- and time-effective than face-to-face interviewing in many contexts. Ethical challenges associated with in-person interviews may also be reduced through technological features that support privacy, confidentiality, and secure recording (Neris et al., 2023).

In this study, Microsoft Teams was used to conduct the ST interviews. This proved advantageous because it enabled remote participation, reduced travel costs and logistical constraints, and allowed for more flexible scheduling (De Klerk & Palmer, 2021; Namey et al., 2020). Given the remote locations of some schools where participants completed TP, this platform enabled inclusion of participants from a wider geographic range than would otherwise have been practical. The interviews also allowed for follow-up questions, which helped generate rich qualitative data.

However, there were challenges associated with using Microsoft Teams. These included occasional connectivity issues and unstable signals, which sometimes required rescheduling interviews (Nkwanyana & Fagbadebo, 2025). A written and illustrated guide explaining how to download and use Microsoft Teams was sent to participants before the interviews. Even so, some participants appeared to be using the platform for the first time, which reflected differing levels of digital literacy (De Villiers et al., 2022). Where necessary, brief guidance was provided at the start of the session to address this.

Kakilla (2021) outlines both strengths and weaknesses of SSIs. These were considered when selecting SSIs as a research instrument to ensure the data collection method was appropriate for answering the research question. Figure 10 summarises these strengths and weaknesses.



Figure 10: Strengths and weaknesses of SSIs

Source: Author's own design

SSIs were used as the main instrument for collecting data from STs. In conducting these interviews, Rabionet's (2022) stages for designing and conducting SSIs informed the process, as discussed below.

Stage 1: Selecting the interview method

A review of the literature on qualitative interviewing was undertaken, and SSIs were selected as the most appropriate method for collecting data from STs (Adams, 2015; Tisdell & Merriam, 2025). As indicated in Chapter 1, SSIs offered a balance between structure and openness. This aligned with the study's aim to gain insight into mentoring from STs while allowing them to describe their ODeL TP experiences in their own words. Given the focus on lived mentoring experiences and perceived needs, SSIs were appropriate because they offered depth and flexibility.

Stage 2: Considering ethical procedures

Ethical considerations formed an important part of the interview process. SSIs provided sufficient structure to guide the discussion while still allowing participants to share meaningful experiences openly (Rabionet, 2022). As discussed in Chapter 1, ethical clearance was obtained from the university's ethics committee before data collection began. Informed consent was obtained from each participant, and confidentiality, voluntary participation, and the right to withdraw were clearly explained. Permission to record the interviews and transcribe the data were also obtained before each session.

Stage 3: Designing the interview guide

The interview guide was carefully prepared to ensure that the questions supported the research purpose and remained aligned with the study's conceptual and theoretical framing (Rabionet, 2022). The interviews began with an introduction of the researcher and the purpose of the interview. Participants were then reminded of confidentiality, informed consent, and their right to withdraw.

The ST interview schedule consisted of a brief biographical prompt and 22 open-ended interview questions and are shown in Annexure 5. These questions included planned probing to elicit participants' elaboration on their mentoring experiences while keeping the discussion focused on the study's aims (Adams, 2015). The guide was also reviewed by an established researcher before the interviews were conducted, as part of a peer-review process (Creswell & Miller, 2000). Care was taken to ensure that the questions were clear,

respectful, and culturally sensitive, in keeping with Ubuntu values of dignity and respect (Letseka, 2012).

Stage 4: Conducting and recording the interviews

The interviews were scheduled with participants by email and were conducted after the STs had completed their five-week TP period. This timing allowed participants to reflect more fully on their mentoring experiences and institutional support. Microsoft Teams was used as the interview platform because it enabled convenient and cost-effective virtual engagement with participants (Selvam et al., 2022). With participants' permission, the recording function was used to capture the interviews. This was useful for later transcription and analysis.

Stage 5: Interview transcription and analysis

Although the software included an automatic voice-to-text transcription feature, it did not always accurately capture accents and dialects. For this reason, each interview was transcribed manually by the researcher after the session. This also allowed for the incorporation of notes on tone, pauses, and body language recorded during the interview (Tisdell & Merriam, 2025). Inductive thematic analysis was then used to explore both the explicit content and the underlying meanings in the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Boyatzis, 1998). This process is discussed in more detail in section 4.4.3.

Stage 6: Reporting the findings

The findings from the SSIs were reported thematically and remained grounded in participants' voices. After themes and insights were compared across the data sources, patterns emerged in the expectations and experiences of STs and MTs. These insights informed the broader Ubuntu-orientated mentoring framework proposed later in the thesis.

Permission to conduct research with student participants was obtained from the university through the relevant institutional process. After permission had been granted, student email addresses were accessed through institutional gatekeeping procedures in accordance with POPIA. During the initial contact, students were introduced to the

concept of Ubuntu and its relevance to mentoring. No data was collected through this information process. Thereafter, STs participated in SSIs on Microsoft Teams after the completion of their TP period.

To strengthen the credibility of the data through triangulation (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Golafshani, 2003), data was also collected from a second participant group, namely MTs, through qualitative questerviews.

4.4.2.1.2 Questerviews with MTs

In this study, questerviews were selected as an innovative and contextually appropriate data collection tool for exploring the experiences, perceptions, and needs of MTs in relation to mentoring ODeL STs during TP. Questerviews combine features of questionnaires and interviews by using open-ended questions in a qualitative format (Adamson et al., 2004). This approach allows the researcher to retain the clarity and consistency of a questionnaire while also generating more detailed personal accounts.

Questerviews were particularly useful for MTs, who may be reluctant to participate in research that places heavy demands on their time (Adamson et al., 2004). The format allowed participants to complete the questions at their own pace, which increased convenience. It also encouraged candid responses because of the relative anonymity of written responses (Tuttas, 2014). Since all participants responded to the same set of core questions, coherence across the dataset was improved, while the open-ended format still retained qualitative depth (Coombs, 2017). In the context of this study, Google Forms provided an efficient and flexible way of gathering responses from geographically dispersed MTs.

Despite these strengths, questerviews also present limitations. Tracy (2024) warns that structured written responses may sometimes lack depth, especially where participants provide brief answers. There is also the possibility of inconsistency when participants engage unevenly with open-ended items. Similar challenges emerged in this study, as some responses were not as detailed as they might have been in an interview setting where follow-up probing would have been possible (Gill et al., 2008). These limitations were acknowledged when the method was selected.

The questerview instrument used in this study consisted of 19 open-ended questions delivered through Google Forms. The questions were designed to mirror the structure and reflective intent of an SSI as far as possible (Adams, 2015). This allowed MTs to respond in their own time and in their own words, which aligned with the constructivist and Ubuntu-orientated framing of the study by respecting participants' voices and experiences (Letseka, 2012).

A total of 234 MTs were invited to participate. These teachers were identified through the university's TP records as mentors who had supervised final-year STs during recent TP placements. A formal invitation was sent by email and included an information letter and consent form. Participation was voluntary, and no identifying information was requested in the completed form. Thirteen MTs completed the questerview in full, and these responses formed the MT dataset for the study.

The questerview instrument is included as Annexure 6. It was aligned with the research questions and theoretical framework, and focused on themes such as the mentoring support provided, challenges experienced, views of institutional collaboration, and perceptions of Ubuntu-orientated mentoring. The open-ended nature of the questions allowed MTs to provide reflective and descriptive responses, in line with good practice in qualitative questionnaire design (Adamson et al., 2004).

This questerview process aligned with the constructivist paradigm because it allowed MTs to construct meaning from their mentoring experiences in their own words. It also supported triangulation by making it possible to compare MT and ST perspectives, thereby strengthening the credibility of the findings (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011).

4.4.2.1.3 Document analysis of the tutorial letter

Document analysis is the systematic process of reviewing and evaluating printed or electronic documents in order to identify meaningful data that can support or triangulate qualitative findings (Bowen, 2009). In qualitative case study research, document analysis is useful for providing background information, clarifying institutional expectations, and validating participant reports (Yin et al., 2012). Tisdell & Merriam (2025) also note that documents provide a distinct source of data that can reflect institutional perspectives.

As introduced in Chapter 1 (section 1.7.4.3), document analysis in this study was used to triangulate the participant data by examining formal institutional communication related to mentoring during TP. The university's written communication was analysed to assess how expectations and guidelines regarding mentoring were presented and whether they aligned with the mentoring experiences reported by participants. This made it possible to consider both the institutional perspective and the lived experiences of STs and MTs through a constructivist and Ubuntu-orientated lens (Letseka, 2013).

The final phase of data collection, therefore, involved a review of the two key institutional documents provided to students for the final-year B.Ed TP module, namely Tutorial Letters 101 and 103 (Bowen, 2009). These documents were not treated as the primary source of data. Instead, they were analysed after the participant data had been generated in order to contextualise those experiences and identify areas of alignment or misalignment between the university's formal guidance and the realities reported by STs and MTs. In this way, the document analysis strengthened the triangulation process by either supporting or contrasting the data obtained through the SSIs and questerviews (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011).

Bowen's (2009) six-step process guided the document analysis.

Step 1: Skimming

The two TLs were first skimmed in order to obtain a general overview of their content and structure. During this stage, sections on mentoring, MT expectations, ST responsibilities during TP, and communication between the school and the university were identified. Initial coding began at this stage as themes from the ST and MT datasets started to guide attention.

Step 2: Thorough reading

Each TL was carefully read several times to gain a fuller understanding of the content. Attention was paid to recurring phrases, the terminology used, and the presence or absence of information relevant to TP mentoring. For example, TL103 referred to MT

duties, and these statements were later considered alongside participants' reports of the support they had actually received.

Step 3: Interpretation

The content of the TLs was then interpreted in order to identify meaning and emerging themes (Bowen, 2009). Particular attention was given to whether the documents reflected values associated with Ubuntu, such as mutual respect, care, empathy, and community (Letseka, 2013). At this stage, the aim was to determine whether the institutional guidance addressed the needs and expectations that had emerged from the participant data.

Step 4: Coding

The relevant content of the TLs was coded manually. Codes such as institutional communication, expectations of MTs, and support mechanisms were grouped into broader categories that aligned with the themes emerging from the ST and MT datasets.

Step 5: Categorising and comparing

The coded categories were then compared with the themes that had emerged from the first two datasets. This made it possible to identify alignment or misalignment between participants' reports and institutional expectations. For example, while Tutorial Letter 103 referred to the MT as an academic supervisor, several MTs expressed uncertainty about their precise role, and many STs reported inconsistent support. This suggested a disconnect between policy and practice in the ODeL TP context.

Step 6: Triangulation and integration

The final step involved integrating the findings from the document analysis with the interview and questerview data. This strengthened the credibility of the findings by ensuring that they were not based solely on participant accounts, but were also considered alongside formal institutional guidance (Bowen, 2009; Denzin & Lincoln, 2011).

Overall reflections on the data collection process

The use of Microsoft Teams for ST interviews and Google Forms for MT questerviews was generally effective, although some challenges were encountered. In the ST interviews, technical issues, connectivity problems, and varying levels of digital literacy affected the process. In the MT questerviews, the main challenge related to uneven depth in written responses. Despite these limitations, the selected methods were effective in generating the qualitative data needed for the study. The data collection phase highlighted both the value and the limitations of digital tools in qualitative research. Their flexibility and convenience supported data generation across a geographically dispersed context, although their use also required attention to technical, logistical, and engagement-related challenges.

The next section explains the data analysis process used in this study.

4.4.3 Data Analysis

Qualitative data analysis is a systematic process of exploring, interpreting, and making meaning of non-numerical data such as interviews, documents, and written responses (Creswell & Poth, 2016). In qualitative research, the aim is to develop an in-depth understanding of the data by identifying patterns, themes, and relationships in participants' lived experiences (Tisdell & Merriam, 2025). Braun and Clarke (2006) explain that qualitative analysis requires close familiarity with the data, careful coding, and the development and interpretation of themes guided by the research questions and theoretical framework. This aligns with a constructivist research paradigm, which holds that meaning is co-created between the researcher and participants in context (Creswell & Poth, 2016).

In this study, thematic analysis was used to interpret the data in a manner consistent with the study's constructivist and Ubuntu-orientated framing. The process enabled examination of participants' experiences, perceptions, and needs regarding mentoring during TP, while remaining attentive to both explicit and underlying meanings in the data.

Braun and Clarke (2006) caution that researchers should not be naïve about their influence on the process of selecting and analysing data. For this reason, the analysis remained focused on the research question and was interpreted in relation to the

theoretical framework discussed in Chapter 2. Although researcher bias cannot be eliminated fully in qualitative research, deliberate steps were taken to reduce its influence. Member checking, as discussed in section 4.5.4, was used to strengthen the credibility of the analysis. An example of member checking done in this study is included as Annexure 8.

The ST interviews were recorded on the researcher's laptop using Microsoft Teams, with each participant's permission. Handwritten field notes were also taken during the interviews and expanded shortly afterwards. Merriam (2008) notes that, in qualitative research, analysis begins alongside data generation. In this study, interviews were transcribed shortly after each interview, and field notes were incorporated into the transcripts where relevant. The questerview responses were exported from Google Forms for analysis, and the TLs were analysed as documentary data.

The interview and questerview datasets were analysed through thematic analysis. Boyatzis (1998, p. vi) describes thematic analysis as a "process of encoding qualitative information" through careful examination of data to identify themes and patterns. Themes may be visible at a manifest level in the data's direct content, or at a latent level in the underlying ideas and meanings that shape responses (Boyatzis, 1998). In this study, the analysis did not focus only on participants' direct statements, but also on the underlying meanings, connections, and tensions that could help answer the research question and relate the findings to the literature and theoretical framework.

Although themes may emerge inductively from the data or deductively from prior theory and literature (Boyatzis, 1998), this study followed an inductive thematic analysis process. Coding was therefore driven primarily by the data rather than by a set of pre-established categories. Thematic analysis was appropriate because it allowed close engagement with participants' experiences while remaining flexible enough to identify patterns across datasets (Braun & Clarke, 2006). It was also suited to a study grounded in constructivist and Afrocentric thinking, since it supported the interpretation of participants' meanings within their social and cultural contexts.

This study drew on Braun and Clarke's (2006) contextualist approach to thematic analysis to examine the realities and experiences of STs and MTs and to make sense of those experiences within the ODeL context. The thematic analysis process involved familiarisation with the data, generation of initial codes, identification of themes, review of themes, definition and naming of themes, and reporting the findings. An example of a transcribed SSI with initial theme identification is included as Annexure 7.

4.4.3.1 Analysis of the ST interviews

The first step involved becoming familiar with the interview data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This required repeated listening to the interview recordings and close reading of the verbatim transcripts, along with the accompanying field notes, to immerse the analysis in the data. Initial notes were made on emerging ideas, noticeable expressions, and emotional cues that shed light on participants' mentoring experiences.

The second step involved generating initial codes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). An inductive coding process was followed so that the analysis remained close to the data, and themes could emerge from participants' responses. The transcripts were organised in a Microsoft Word table, and meaningful data segments were coded line by line using short descriptors that captured their essence. Examples of initial codes included feelings of isolation, negative mentoring experiences, confusion about mentor expectations, university support, lack of feedback, and placement issues.

The third step involved searching for themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Once coding was complete, related codes were grouped into potential themes by identifying patterns across the interview data. Similar codes were clustered and visually organised to explore conceptual relationships. For example, codes related to mentor kindness, emotional support, and being treated as a colleague were brought together under a developing theme related to Ubuntu-orientated mentoring.

The fourth step involved reviewing the themes against both the coded extracts and the data set as a whole (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Some themes were refined, combined, or separated in order to strengthen coherence and ensure alignment with the research questions. For example, an initial theme relating to disconnection from the university was

reconsidered and later differentiated more clearly in relation to institutional support needs. This stage helped ensure that each theme was meaningful, analytically useful, and grounded in participants' accounts.

The fifth step involved defining and naming the themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Each theme was defined clearly in relation to its central organising idea and its relevance to the study. Theme names were selected to reflect participants' experiences while remaining aligned with the study's theoretical framing. Each theme was then supported by a detailed description and illustrated with participant quotations in the findings chapter, thereby preserving the authenticity of ST voices while allowing for critical interpretation (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

The final step involved writing the report (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The themes were organised into a coherent account that connected participants' mentoring experiences to the study's aims, research questions, and theoretical framework. The findings were interpreted through the lens of Ubuntu philosophy, Kram's Mentoring Functions Framework, and the Afrocentric paradigm.

Throughout this process, the analysis remained closely connected to the data. The transcripts were revisited repeatedly in order to test emerging interpretations and ensure that the conclusions remained grounded in participants' accounts (Merriam, 2008). All data, transcripts, and findings were kept confidential and used only for this study.

4.4.3.2 Analysis of the MT questerviews

The written responses from the MT questerviews were also analysed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis approach. These responses were submitted through Google Forms and exported into spreadsheet and text formats for analysis. As with the ST interview data, thematic analysis was appropriate because it supported an inductive, flexible approach to interpretation and enabled examination of participants' experiences in relation to the research question and the study's conceptual framing.

The first step involved familiarisation with the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). All questerview responses were read and re-read carefully in order to develop close familiarity with the

content. Initial notes were made on recurring ideas, wording, and expressions that seemed significant to the mentoring experiences described by MTs.

The second step involved generating initial codes from the written responses (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Each response was examined closely, and descriptive and interpretive codes were identified manually. Coding was first organised in Microsoft Excel and later transferred into a Microsoft Word table for comparison across responses. The coding process remained data-driven, allowing patterns to emerge from the responses rather than being imposed in advance. Examples of initial codes included learning practical skills that cannot be taught in textbooks, Ubuntu in practice, supportive relationships, time constraints, and challenges in mentoring support.

The third step involved searching for themes in the coded data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Related codes were grouped into broader categories by identifying conceptual patterns across responses. For example, codes such as open communication, mutual respect, and shared responsibility were grouped under a developing theme related to Ubuntu-aligned mentoring practices. Themes were identified not only on the basis of repetition but also on their significance in answering the research questions.

The fourth step involved reviewing the developing themes in relation to the full dataset (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Themes were refined, elaborated, or discarded where necessary, depending on the extent to which they were supported by the responses and contributed to the overall analysis. Attention was given to ensuring that the themes reflected the breadth of MT experiences across different contexts.

The fifth step involved defining and naming the themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Each theme was defined in terms of its core meaning and its relevance to the study. The relationship between the themes and Ubuntu principles, such as interdependence, dignity, and collective responsibility, was also considered where appropriate. In the findings chapter, each theme was illustrated with representative quotations in order to retain the depth and specificity of participants' voices (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

The final step involved writing up the findings in an organised and interpretive manner (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The themes identified in the MT data were presented and

interpreted in relation to Ubuntu philosophy, Kram's mentoring theory, the Afrocentric paradigm, and the ODeL context. In this way, the analysis sought to remain grounded in participants' meanings rather than imposing abstract interpretation onto their responses.

Thematic analysis, therefore, provided a coherent and flexible method for analysing the ST interviews, MT questerviews, and documentary data. It enabled the identification of patterns within and across the datasets while remaining responsive to participants' lived experiences and the contextual realities of mentoring during TP. The following section discusses how trustworthiness was addressed in the study.

4.5 TRUSTWORTHINESS

In qualitative research, trustworthiness is important for demonstrating that the findings are credible, authentic, and grounded in the lived realities of participants (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Whereas quantitative research establishes validity and reliability through statistical procedures, qualitative research relies on criteria such as credibility, dependability, transferability, and confirmability (Creswell & Poth, 2016). Within the constructivist paradigm that underpinned this study, particular importance was attached to representing participants' realities and voices authentically. The analysis and interpretation of the data were also informed by Ubuntu values of integrity, respect, and the co-creation of knowledge (Letseka, 2012). As noted earlier in the thesis, care was therefore taken to ensure that participants' perspectives were represented in a manner that was both respectful and trustworthy.

Guba and Lincoln (1994) propose four criteria for establishing trustworthiness in qualitative research, namely credibility, dependability, transferability, and confirmability. These criteria guided the strategies used in this study.

4.5.1 Credibility

Credibility in qualitative research refers to the extent to which the findings present a truthful and plausible account of participants' views and experiences (Korstjens & Moser, 2017). McMillan and Schumacher (2010) similarly describe credibility as the degree to which the data and interpretations can reasonably be regarded as accurate and trustworthy.

Several strategies were used to strengthen credibility in this study. First, prolonged engagement with the data was achieved through repeated reading and re-reading of the transcripts, close involvement in transcription, and detailed coding of the data. This supported deeper familiarity with the participants' responses and strengthened the interpretive process (Creswell & Poth, 2016). Second, triangulation was achieved through three data sources, namely SSIs with STs, questerviews with MTs, and document analysis of university TLs. This made it possible to compare and cross-check emerging themes across sources, thereby strengthening the authenticity of the findings (Bowen, 2009). Third, the interview guide was reviewed by an experienced researcher before data collection commenced, which contributed to the credibility of the data collection process (Creswell & Miller, 2000). In addition, member checking was used during the research process to confirm that participants' views had been understood accurately.

Together, these strategies strengthened the credibility of the study by supporting careful interpretation of participants' lived experiences in ways that remained aligned with the Ubuntu-orientated emphasis on dignity, relationality, and respect.

4.5.2 Dependability

Dependability in qualitative research refers to the consistency of the research process and the extent to which the study can be followed and understood by others under similar conditions (Shenton, 2004). In qualitative inquiry, this requires clear and detailed documentation of the research design, data generation process, and analytical procedures.

In this study, dependability was addressed by maintaining detailed records of the research process at each stage, including the interview schedule, coding procedures, analytical decisions, and the ethical steps followed. A structured thematic analysis process based on Braun and Clarke (2006) was used and reported in sufficient detail, which strengthened consistency across the analysis of both the ST and MT datasets. Dependability was further supported through ongoing consultation with the academic supervisor across the study's different stages (Amankwaa, 2016). In addition, research decisions were framed consistently within the theoretical and conceptual foundations of

the study, including Kram's Mentoring Functions Framework, Ubuntu philosophy, and the Afrocentric paradigm.

4.5.3 Transferability

Transferability in qualitative research refers to the extent to which the findings may be applicable or meaningful in other contexts, depending on the degree of similarity between those contexts and the one studied (Korstjens & Moser, 2017). In qualitative inquiry, transferability is supported through thick description rather than statistical generalisation (Creswell & Miller, 2000).

In this study, transferability was strengthened by providing a detailed account of the research context, the participant groups, and the institutional setting in which the study was conducted, namely the ODeL ITE context in South Africa. The findings were also supported by verbatim participant quotations, which gave readers insight into how mentoring was experienced and understood by STs and MTs. These contextual and descriptive details enabled readers to judge the relevance of the findings to other teacher education settings. Since the study was framed through Ubuntu philosophy, the findings may be particularly relevant to educational contexts that value relationality, care, communal support, and cultural responsiveness (Letseka, 2013).

4.5.4 Confirmability

Confirmability refers to the extent to which the findings are grounded in the data rather than unduly shaped by researcher bias, preference, or assumptions (Korstjens & Moser, 2017; Shenton, 2004). In this study, confirmability was strengthened through member checking, triangulation, and reflexive awareness during the research process.

The transcribed data from the SSIs and the questerviews were returned to participants for checking and confirmation that they reflected their views accurately. This helped to ensure that the analysis remained grounded in the participants' original input. Triangulation through interviews, questerviews, and document analysis further strengthened confirmability by ensuring that themes were supported across multiple data sources (Bowen, 2009).

Attention was also given to reflexivity. Johnson (1997) argues that reflexivity is important in reducing researcher bias because it requires the researcher to reflect critically on possible predispositions and assumptions that may influence the study. Throughout the research process, care was therefore taken to reflect on the influence of the researcher's own views and to keep the analysis aligned with the research question, the data, and the study's theoretical framing.

This chapter explained how the study was conducted so that others could clearly follow the research process. In addition, all transcribed data and recordings were managed confidentially and stored securely on the researcher's personal computer, with a password-protected backup on OneDrive. The data will be stored securely for at least five years after completion of the study. Participants were also given the researcher's contact details and may request information about the findings during that period. They will further have access to the study through the open-access electronic version of the dissertation and through any publications or presentations arising from the research.

The following section discusses the ethical considerations that guided the study.

4.6 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Ethical considerations were addressed carefully throughout this study, and full ethical clearance was obtained before data collection commenced. In addition, sound research ethics were maintained by ensuring that participants were informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any stage without negative consequences (Cohen & Crabtree, 2006). Confidentiality and anonymity were also protected through the use of participant codes such as ST1, ST2, and MT1, MT2 (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010).

Sanjari et al. (2014) identify several ethical challenges that may arise in qualitative research, particularly when interviews are used. These include the right of participants to withdraw, the possibility that participants may not fully understand the aims of the study, and the need to protect confidentiality and anonymity. No risks were foreseen that were likely to cause harm to participants during this study. Furthermore, Sanjari et al. (2014) emphasise the importance of ethical clearance, confidentiality, anonymity, transparency,

respect, and care in qualitative research. These principles informed the ethical conduct of this study.

Permission to conduct the study with university students was formally obtained through the Research Permission Subcommittee of the university by means of the prescribed application process. Ethical clearance was granted under reference number 2022/11/09/50839500/22/AM and is included as Annexure 1. Prior to data collection, participants received an information letter explaining the purpose of the study, the procedures to be followed, and what participation would involve. Written informed consent was then obtained through signed consent forms returned to the researcher.

The information letter and consent documentation were explained clearly at the point of recruitment into the study. Participants were given the opportunity to ask questions, and any concerns raised were addressed by the researcher in consultation with the supervisor where necessary. Participants were informed that their participation was voluntary and that they could withdraw from the study at any stage without penalty.

Confidentiality was maintained throughout the study. No identifying participant information was disclosed to any third party, and anonymity was protected through the use of pseudonyms or participant codes in all reporting. All interactions and data-generating activities were conducted with due ethical sensitivity, ensuring that participants were treated with care, dignity, and respect. These principles were consistent with the Ubuntu-orientated framing of the study, which values humane and respectful relationships in the research process.

The next section concludes the chapter.

4.7 CONCLUSION

This chapter outlined and justified the methodological framework that guided the study. The chapter began by presenting the constructivist paradigm that informed the study, as this aligned with the aim of understanding and co-constructing meaning from the subjective experiences of those involved in mentoring relationships. The inclusion of Ubuntu philosophy within an Afrocentric paradigm further situated the study within a framework that values mutual respect, interconnectedness, and human dignity.

The chapter also explained the qualitative research approach and the descriptive case study strategy adopted for the study. It described how participants were selected, how data was collected through SSIs with STs, questerviews with MTs, and document analysis of institutional TLs, and how the data was analysed through thematic analysis. In addition, the chapter outlined the steps taken to ensure trustworthiness and the ethical principles that guided the study throughout the research process.

Taken together, these methodological choices were intended to ensure that the study was appropriate to the research problem, theoretically aligned, and grounded in the lived experiences of the participants. The next chapter presents the study's findings in relation to the themes that emerged from the data and provides an interpretation of how STs and MTs experienced and understood mentoring during TP.

CHAPTER 5

DATA PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

5.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents the findings, analysis and interpretation of the data generated in this qualitative study on the mentoring experiences and perceptions of STs and MTs during the TP component of a teacher education programme offered in an ODeL context. The data were drawn from three sources: semi-structured interviews with eight STs, questerview responses from 13 MTs, and selected institutional documents.

The chapter is organised according to the themes that emerged from the thematic analysis of the data. These themes are presented across the three data sets to show areas of convergence and divergence in the participants' experiences and views. Verbatim extracts from STs and MTs are included to foreground participant voices, while the document analysis provides institutional context for the findings.

The chapter begins with a profile of the participants, followed by a brief overview of the data analysis process and a summary of the major themes. Thereafter, the findings are presented and interpreted according to the emergent themes.

5.2 PROFILE OF PARTICIPANTS

This section presents the profiles of the participants in the study. The profile of the STs is presented first, followed by that of the MTs

5.2.1 Student Teachers

Eight STs enrolled in an ODeL B.Ed. programme participated in the virtual SSIs. The participants differed in age, gender, employment status, and school context, which provided a useful picture of the varied realities that shaped their TP and mentoring experiences. Table 4 presents the profile of the ST participants.

Table 4: Profile of ST participants

Pseudonym	Gender	Age	Employment status during TP	School resource category
ST1	Female	23	Full-time student	Under resourced
ST2	Male	24	Various part-time contracts as a substitute teacher. Full-time student	Well resourced
ST3	Male	25	Full-time teacher and full-time student	Under resourced
ST4	Female	25	Full-time student	Under resourced
ST8	Female	31	Full-time student	Well resourced
ST9	Male	27	Full-time teacher and full-time student	Under resourced
ST12	Female	34	Part-time contract as a substitute teacher. Full-time student	Under resourced
ST14	Female	29	Part-time contract as a substitute teacher. Full-time student	Under resourced

Source: Author's own construction

All the STs were completing their final-year TP4 module and had completed their five-week TP for that year. Their responses therefore reflected their most recent TP experience while also drawing on their broader TP experience from earlier years of study. Of the eight participants, three were male and five were female. Their ages ranged from 23 to 34, with 6 participants under 30. Three were full-time students, while five were employed either as full-time teachers or as substitute teachers on part-time contracts. Six

participants reported completing TP in under-resourced schools, while two described their schools as well-resourced.

These biographical details reflect the varied realities of students studying in an ODeL context. Although most of the participants were already teaching and, in some cases, managing their own classrooms, they remained teacher education students who required mentorship during TP. Their responses, therefore, offered insight into mentoring needs from the perspective of ST mentees within diverse school and employment contexts.

The pseudonyms used in this dissertation were allocated when interview arrangements were made. They do not appear in numerical order because some participants who initially agreed later withdrew, but the original pseudonyms were retained.

The ST profile shows that participants were navigating TP across diverse, often under-resourced school environments while balancing academic responsibilities with employment. This profile is important because it provides context for understanding the mentoring experiences and challenges discussed later in the chapter.

5.2.2 Mentor Teachers

Thirteen MTs participated in the questerviews. They were practising teachers from public schools in different parts of South Africa and represented a range of teaching experience, school contexts, and levels of mentoring preparation. Table 5 presents the profile of the MT participants..

Table 5: Profile of MT participants

Pseudo-nym	Gender	Years of Teaching experience	Mentoring experience	Mentor training received?	School resource category
MT1	Male	15	Yes	No formal training	Under resourced
MT2	Female	12	Yes	Self-guided	Under resourced
MT3	Male	10	Yes	No	Well resourced

MT4	Female	8	Yes	University guidance only	Under resourced
MT5	Male	6	Yes	None	Under resourced
MT6	Male	20	Yes	School-based	Well resourced
MT7	Female	5	Yes	None	Under resourced
MT8	Female	14	Yes	Experienced-based	Well resourced
MT9	Female	18	Yes	School workshops	Under resourced
MT10	Male	22	Yes	District workshops	Under resourced
MT11	Male	19	Yes	School and district	Well resourced
MT12	Female	11	Yes	None	Under resourced
MT13	Female	9	Yes	None	Under resourced

Source: Author's own construction

All 13 MTs were practising teachers. They taught across the Intermediate Phase and Senior Phase, and several taught more than one subject, including Mathematics, English, Life Skills, and EMS. Six participants were male and seven were female. Their teaching experience ranged from five to 22 years.

Although all the MTs reported mentoring experience, their preparation for the role differed considerably. Some had received school-based, district, or limited university guidance, while others reported no formal mentoring training at all. Nine of the 13 participants indicated that they had received little or no training, instruction, or guidance on how to mentor STs. Nine also described their schools as under-resourced.

These biographical details provide important context for understanding the conditions under which mentoring took place. The MT profile reflects diversity in professional

experience, mentoring preparation, and school context, all of which shaped how mentoring was understood and practised during TP. Despite these differences, many MTs described mentoring as a positive experience and indicated a willingness to support the development of future teachers.

The participant profiles presented in this section provide a contextual foundation for the findings that follow. The next section briefly outlines the analysis of the data before the themes are presented.

5.3 QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS OF DATA

The data were thematically analysed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step approach. This process involved familiarisation with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the report.

The findings are presented thematically across the three data sets. The themes were organised in relation to the research sub-questions and provide the structure for the presentation and interpretation of the findings in this chapter. To provide an overview of the analysis, Table 6 summarises the major themes and categories that emerged from the data.

Table 6: Triangulated themes and categories that emerged from the data sets

	Research Sub-Question	Themes	Categories
1	Which mentoring needs do STs and MTs identify during ST TP?	Interpersonal/psycho social and Professional Support Needs	• Emotional availability and encouragement • Constructive feedback and guidance
2	How do STs and MTs experience mentoring practices during ST TP?	Contextual Constraints and Growth Opportunities	• Under-resourced schools and overcrowded classes • Time constraints and workload • Isolation and limited peer support • Opportunities for reflection, skill development, and learning-by-doing

3	How do STs and MTs perceive Ubuntu-orientated mentoring?	Ubuntu Values in Mentoring Relationships	• Shared humanity, respect and communal learning • Empathy, patience and care in mentoring relationships • Mentoring as a reciprocal, two-way learning process
4	What institutional support would promote Ubuntu-orientated mentoring in TP, according to the study participants?	Institutional and structural influences	• Weak communication between the university and the schools • Lack of mentor training, preparation, and role recognition. • Opportunities for structured mentor support and collaboration
5	What are the key requirements for an Ubuntu-orientated framework that could improve the TP experiences of ODeL STs and MTs?	Responsive, contextualised mentorship models, institutional recognition and resource support	• Ubuntu-orientated, culturally responsive mentoring • contextual equitable mentoring considerations • Structured mentor training and institutional support

Source: Author's own construction

Table 6 provides an overview of the themes and categories that emerged from the data and that structure the presentation and interpretation of the findings in the sections that follow.

5.4 EMERGENT THEMES

This section presents the findings in relation to the research sub-questions. The findings are organised according to the themes that emerged across the three data sets. Where relevant, verbatim extracts from STs and MTs are included to illustrate the findings, while the document analysis provides institutional context. Throughout this chapter, contextual and institutional findings are interpreted only insofar as they shaped the nature, availability, quality or enactment of mentoring during ODeL TP.

Each theme is presented with its related categories, followed by an interpretation of the data.

5.4.1 Theme 1: Interpersonal and Professional Support Needs

This theme highlights the interpersonal and professional support that STs expected and experienced during TP. Across the ST and MT data, participants emphasised the importance of emotionally supportive mentoring relationships, together with guidance that could strengthen STs' professional confidence and classroom practice. The data show that STs wanted mentors who were approachable, caring, and encouraging, but who could also provide constructive feedback, professional modelling, and practical guidance. Two categories emerged within this theme: emotional availability and encouragement, and professional support through observation and constructive feedback.

5.4.1.1 Category 1.1: Emotional availability and encouragement

STs consistently indicated that they wanted mentoring relationships in which they felt emotionally supported, acknowledged, and safe to learn. They valued openness, kindness, and encouragement, and they wanted mentors who could guide them without making them feel judged. As the following extracts show:

"It must be an easy open relationship." (ST2)

"Kindness and support and to be caring for me." (ST3)

"I want someone who is kind and helpful and take you under their wing." (ST8)

These responses show that STs valued mentoring relationships characterised by openness, kindness, guidance, and a sense of safety. Emotional support was not presented as separate from professional learning. Rather, it formed part of the support that enabled STs to participate more confidently in TP and develop as future teachers. This finding aligns with KMFF, particularly the psychosocial function of mentoring, which includes acceptance, encouragement, affirmation, and role modelling. It also reflects Letseka's (2012) and Msila's (2015) emphasis on care, empathy, and human dignity within an Ubuntu perspective.

STs also indicated that they wanted feedback that was constructive and growth-orientated. They did not reject criticism, but they wanted it to be offered in a supportive way that would help them improve rather than discourage them. This is evident in the following extracts:

“I expect my mentor teachers to guide me, to protect me and then to be able to criticise me, but good critique.” (ST1)

“You know that there is someone who has your back. Someone who also corrects you. Who will lead you or direct you on the right path, even if you mess up.” (ST9)

These responses indicate that STs wanted mentors who could combine correction with reassurance. Their emphasis on being guided, protected, and corrected reflects the close relationship between emotional and professional support in mentoring. This supports Geber and Keane’s (2017) critique of mentoring approaches that focus too narrowly on technical supervision and fail to respond to the emotional and relational needs of mentees in context.

Where this support was absent, STs described frustration, exclusion, and demotivation. One participant explained:

“My mentor teacher has never mentored anyone before. So, she doesn’t know what to do and didn’t do much to mentor me. Truly speaking, I hate going to that class. Sometimes I don’t even go; I would rather sit in the office.” (ST1)

Another participant stated:

“But she didn’t want to share most of the information. She had a negative attitude. They [MTs] see you as a threat, maybe they think we can steal positions from them, so maybe that is the reason they don’t want to share what they have with us.” (ST3)

These extracts show that the absence of emotional support could significantly weaken the mentoring relationship. Instead of feeling guided and encouraged, these STs experienced the school and mentoring environment as unwelcoming and discouraging. This finding is consistent with Mukeredzi and Mandrona’s (2013) view that negative mentoring experiences can undermine ST development and weaken the professional

value of TP. It also stands in contrast to Ubuntu's principles of mutual respect, care, and interdependence, which emphasise that growth occurs through supportive human relationships (Letseka, 2012; Msila, 2015).

For some STs, emotional availability was particularly important because of the isolation associated with ODeL study. The mentor relationship appeared to fill part of the support gap created by distance learning, where students often lacked regular face-to-face engagement with lecturers and peers. This is reflected in the following extracts:

“Having a mentor, you can work with every day makes TP easier for you as a ST, especially as a distance student.” (ST4)

“In distance learning, we are alone. So, we don't have that aspect of [contact] ... like those other students that are in class almost each and every time, each and every semester, they are in class corresponding with other students and their lecturers and stuff. Like as in physically.” (ST12)

These responses suggest that emotional support carried added significance in the ODeL context. Mentors were often among the few people physically present in the ST's daily teaching environment, which made their encouragement and availability especially meaningful. This supports Du Plessis et al.'s (2010) and Hodges and Baum's (2018) argument that STs in distance contexts rely heavily on local support structures during TP and may experience heightened vulnerability when those structures are weak.

The MT data support this pattern. MTs also referred to the importance of personal connection, everyday engagement, and encouragement in the mentoring relationship. For example:

“I have made valuable friendships and connections with students and can also learn from having a fresh set of eyes and ears in my classroom.” (MT1)

“I believe in checking in with the student teacher every day, not just signing forms.” (MT7)

One MT also reflected on how the relationship could be affirming for the mentor:

“My ST was humble and hard working, and made me also feel valued in their learning time that they were learning a lot from me too. So I was more eager to help them.” (MT1)

These responses show that emotional support was important to STs. MTs also experienced mentoring as relational and, at times, mutually affirming. This supports Ragins and Kram’s (2007) argument that mentoring relationships can benefit both mentor and mentee where mutual respect and genuine engagement are present. It also reflects the Ubuntu idea that relational growth is shared rather than one-sided.

The document analysis showed that the tutorial letters did not explicitly frame mentoring in terms of emotional support or the interpersonal complexity of the mentoring relationship. However, they did emphasise regular meetings, ongoing engagement, and feedback. For example, TL103 required mentors to dedicate time each week to discussing the ST’s progress and providing feedback after lessons. Although this language is procedural rather than relational, it still suggests an expectation of active and sustained mentor involvement. In this respect, the documents partly align with the findings, but they do not make the emotional and psychosocial dimensions of mentoring explicit.

This category, therefore, shows that emotional availability and encouragement were central to how STs understood effective mentoring. STs wanted mentors who were approachable, kind, and willing to guide them in ways that built confidence and created a sense of support. MT responses confirmed the value of regular engagement and encouragement, while the document analysis showed only indirect institutional recognition of these needs. The findings support Kram’s (1988) psychosocial mentoring functions and align strongly with Ubuntu values of care, empathy, and shared humanity as discussed by Letseka (2012), Msila (2015), and Geber and Keane (2017). In this study, these forms of support were particularly significant because STs were completing TP within an ODeL context in which many already experienced distance and isolation.

5.4.1.2 Category 1.2 Professional support through observations and constructive feedback

In addition to emotional support, the data show that STs placed a strong value on professional support during TP. They wanted mentors who could guide them in practice, observe their teaching, help them improve, and support them in developing confidence as future teachers. Across the ST and MT responses, professional support was closely linked to confidence, classroom competence, and gradual growth in teaching practice.

Several STs linked mentoring directly to increased confidence in the classroom:

“Mentors give us courage to stand free in the class and do things in the right way.”
(ST3)

“We also have issues of confidence. Like I initially had that problem with myself by having low self-confidence to teach in my practicals, but now I feel more sure in myself.” (ST9)

These responses suggest that professional support was experienced as enabling rather than merely evaluative. STs associated guidance from mentors with feeling more capable and more secure in the classroom. This supports Kram’s (1988) career or professional mentoring function, which includes coaching, guidance, and exposure to practice. It also aligns with Hudson’s (2004, 2013) argument that mentoring should actively assist STs to develop classroom competence and confidence through intentional support.

MTs also described visible growth in ST confidence over the course of TP:

“Watching the student grow from week one to week five. The student really found his feet and gained a massive amount of confidence.” (MT1)

“We celebrated achievements, especially the fear of being in a classroom full of learners. We reflected on the practice itself and building confidence and resilience.” (MT8)

“Yes. They were very confident after the teaching practice. It makes them to know what is expected of them when they become teachers.” (MT9)

“She was capable of teaching with the same skills as an experienced teacher. She grew daily and applied what I taught her.” (MT11)

These responses reinforce the ST accounts by showing that mentors also recognised confidence-building as an important outcome of professional support. Confidence emerged here as something developed through guided participation, reflection, and repeated teaching opportunities. This aligns with Ngubane and Makua’s (2021) view that mentoring in the South African context should include practical guidance that strengthens competence and confidence in real classroom settings.

STs also wanted professional support through constructive feedback. One participant explained:

“I expect my mentor teachers to guide me, to protect me and then to be able to criticise me, but good critique.” (ST1)

An MT described a similar mentoring approach:

“I also provided ongoing feedback and encouragement to my mentees and celebrated their achievements and progress.” (MT2)

These responses show that feedback was valued when it was developmental and encouraging. STs did not reject critique but wanted it to help them improve rather than simply judge performance. This supports Ghosh’s (2012) argument that effective mentoring should combine professional guidance with supportive interpersonal engagement, particularly where mentees are navigating unfamiliar or demanding environments.

The data further show that some STs wanted opportunities to observe their mentors before being expected to teach independently. Observation was described as an important part of learning how to teach in practice:

“They cannot just throw us into the deep end like that. They could please give us 10 lessons to observe.” (ST12)

“I wish she would engage with me and come to class with me.” (ST4)

“And I think that your mentor teacher has to be present when you are giving your lesson so she can guide you.” (ST8)

These extracts indicate that STs wanted mentors to be physically present to model good practice and guide them during lesson delivery. Professional support, in this sense, involved more than signing documents or giving general advice. It required observation, modelling, and guided participation. This supports Feiman-Nemser’s (2001) view that observation and modelling are important in helping STs move from uncertainty to more confident classroom practice. It also aligns with Harrison et al.’s (2005) argument for scaffolded TP in which STs begin with observation and gradually move towards independent teaching.

Most MTs agreed that observation was important. One MT stated:

“Teaching is complex, and students need support in the classroom. They can learn from observing a mentor teacher teaching.” (MT1)

This response reflects the view that professional learning during TP should include exposure to experienced teaching in context. However, the data also reveal tension in expectations. One MT suggested that STs should move into teaching more quickly:

“It is a problem that they tend to sit a lot and only observe till they are given something to do.” (MT5)

When probed further, the same participant stated:

“They [STs] don’t know what to do. They appear to be at the school just to observe and complete their teaching practice assignments.” (MT5)

These responses point to a mismatch in expectations about the early stages of TP. While STs often wanted a gradual introduction through observation and guidance, some MTs expected a quicker transition into active teaching. This suggests that mentor role expectations were not always clearly understood, which may explain some of the uneven mentoring experiences reported elsewhere in the chapter.

STs also described a need for pedagogical guidance in areas such as classroom management, planning, and time management. For example:

“Mentors must provide guidelines on what to do and what to expect and how to handle situations ... i.e. class management.” (ST2)

“I need help with planning and management of the classroom and time management as well.” (ST2)

An MT echoed this practical orientation:

“Dealing with students and how to teach is only effective when you do it hands-on.” (MT11)

These responses show that STs wanted mentoring that addressed the actual work of teaching. They were seeking practical assistance with classroom management, lesson planning, and coping with the pace and demands of school life. This aligns with Ngubane and Makua’s (2021) argument that pedagogical mentoring should include hands-on support through modelling, discussion, and situated guidance.

At the same time, the data reveal problematic experiences where STs were required to perform tasks unrelated to their professional learning. One participant explained:

“On Monday, most of the time, I don’t do anything. When I get here, I have to clean and sweep the office floor, then mop... I do everything they require me to do, because at the end of the day, my portfolio depends on them.” (ST1)

Another stated:

“And I will not lie, because when I was there, they sent me here and there and everywhere. It is not like you can decline. You will never decline.” (ST8)

These extracts show that, in some cases, the mentoring relationship was shaped by unequal power rather than professional guidance. Instead of being supported as developing teachers, these STs felt compelled to comply with demands unrelated to TP because of the power mentors appeared to hold over their assessment processes. This stands in contrast to Ubuntu principles of dignity, care, and moral responsibility, as discussed by Letseka (2012), and also reflects the concern raised by Knowles (2021) regarding hierarchical and exploitative mentoring dynamics.

The document analysis supports the expectation that mentors should observe lessons, support lesson preparation, and provide feedback. TL103 stated that mentor teachers should observe STs' lessons and provide constructive feedback using the assessment rubrics. The tutorial letters also indicated that STs should be gradually introduced into teaching through observation, guided participation, and reflection. This broadly aligns with what many STs asked for. However, the participant data show that these institutional expectations were not consistently enacted in practice. While the documents outlined professional mentoring responsibilities, STs' lived experiences suggest that implementation varied considerably across schools and mentors.

This category, therefore, shows that STs needed practical, present, and developmental professional support. They wanted opportunities to observe good practice, receive constructive feedback, and be guided in real classroom situations. Where this support was available, STs developed confidence and competence. Where it was absent, or where mentors used their position inappropriately, TP became frustrating and, at times,

exploitative. The findings support Kram's (1988) professional mentoring function, as well as Hudson's (2004, 2013) and Ngubane and Makua's (2021) emphasis on modelling, feedback, and situated pedagogical support. In this study, these forms of professional guidance were especially important because STs were learning to teach within uneven school contexts and an ODeL system that relied heavily on school-based mentor support.

5.4.2 Theme 2: Contextual Constraints and Growth Opportunities

This theme examines how school and institutional contexts shaped mentoring during TP in an ODeL setting. Across the ST and MT data, participants described mentoring occurring in conditions that often limited the support available to STs. These included under-resourced schools, overcrowded classrooms, time constraints, workload pressures, isolation, and uneven support. The data also show that these conditions sometimes created opportunities for learning, adaptation, and professional growth.

The findings in this theme suggest that mentoring during TP was strongly shaped by the realities of the school environment. In some cases, these realities constrained both interpersonal and professional support. In others, they required STs and MTs to adapt mentoring practices to difficult contexts. Four categories emerged within this theme: under-resourced schools and overcrowded classes; time constraints and workload; isolation and limited peer support; and opportunities for reflection, skill development, and learning-by-doing.

Against this backdrop, section 5.4.2.1 explores how under-resourced schools and overcrowded classes shape the ST's TP experience.

5.4.2.1 Category 2.1: Under-resourced schools and overcrowded classes

The realities of under-resourced schools and overcrowded classrooms emerged clearly in the data. Both ST and MT participants described these conditions as shaping teaching, learning, and mentoring during TP. The findings show that resource shortages and large classes limited opportunities for observation, feedback, and sustained mentor support. Participants also suggested that these conditions required STs to develop resilience, adaptability, and practical classroom management skills in context.

Several STs described classrooms that were difficult to manage and not conducive to effective teaching and learning. One participant explained:

“I [have] never been able to teach a class in a peaceful environment. I was alone in the class the whole time and the class is too full.” (ST1)

This extract shows that overcrowding, together with the absence of mentor support in the classroom, shaped the ST’s experience of TP as stressful and unsupported. The participant’s response suggests that the classroom was not experienced as a safe or enabling learning space. Another ST linked overcrowded classes directly to low confidence and uncertainty about classroom management:

“We might not know how to implement class management in classes with so many learners, and I was like having low self-confidence.” (ST9)

This response suggests that the challenge was not only the size of the class itself, but also the pressure it placed on ST’s confidence and competence. In such contexts, mentoring becomes especially important because STs require practical guidance in managing the realities of teaching. These findings align with Du Plessis et al.’s (2010) observation that STs in ODeL settings often feel underprepared where contextual constraints limit meaningful supervision and support. They also support Kram’s (1988) view that mentoring should provide both professional guidance and psychosocial reassurance, both of which become more difficult when classroom conditions are overwhelming.

The data also show that contextual inequality extended beyond the classroom. One participant referred to financial barriers that limited access to better-resourced schools:

“The schools around my neighbourhood are not really the best schools. If you want the best schools, you have to go to town. The problem is money for transport to go to schools in town.” (ST1)

This extract is important because it shows that TP conditions were shaped by both socio-economic realities and school-level factors. Some STs could not easily access schools that might have offered more stable or supportive environments. In this sense, the quality

of TP was affected by structural inequality rather than by mentoring alone. This finding supports Sayed's (2015, 2021) argument that unequal educational conditions remain deeply embedded in South African schooling and continue to shape learning opportunities unevenly.

Additionally, One ST described how teachers and mentors attempted to respond creatively in under-resourced contexts:

"The kids will come to her [the MT] for help on their research, for like technology, and she will hand them her phone, and they will do research because they don't have a phone. But when they go home, they will go home with information from the internet using my mentor teacher's phone." (ST4)

This response shows that resource shortages did not only produce limitations. They also required adaptation, improvisation, and personal sacrifice. In this case, the ST witnessed a mentor responding practically to contextual disadvantage. This reflects Ubuntu values of care, sharing, and communal responsibility, as discussed by Letseka (2012) and Ngubane and Makua (2021), because support was offered through practical relational action rather than through formal provision alone.

The MT data support the ST accounts and show that overcrowding, administrative pressure, and limited resources formed part of the everyday context of mentoring. MT1 explained:

"What you cannot learn in a textbook is how to take a register, how to set up a classroom, how to reach a room full of learners, and how to deal with the daily administration." (MT1)

This extract highlights how school realities shaped what STs had to learn during TP. The focus here is on the practical work of teaching in crowded, demanding environments. It also suggests that mentoring in such settings is often centred on immediate classroom survival rather than on deeper professional dialogue. This supports Hudson's (2013) argument that teacher mentoring must be responsive to the everyday practical demands of school life to be meaningful.

Similarly, MT4 stated:

“You need to mentor them for proper guidance. We can help them by brainstorming and by answering the day-to-day questions, but the challenges they face are mostly with big classes and keeping learners busy.” (MT4)

This response shows that even where mentors wanted to help, much of their guidance was shaped by the urgent demands of large classes. The mentoring relationship, therefore, became closely tied to coping strategies, daily problem-solving, and classroom management. MT12 further emphasised how overcrowded conditions intensified behavioural and management challenges:

“Absenteeism, late-coming and troublesome learners are the things they are going to experience daily; and that is made worse when there are so many learners in one class.” (MT12)

This extract reinforces the ST accounts of feeling overwhelmed in difficult classroom environments. It also shows that classroom management problems were exacerbated in overcrowded settings, making supportive mentoring even more necessary.

One MT also drew attention to material shortages in the school:

“A student must learn to adapt because the schools don’t always have resources. Sometimes they don’t have the textbooks, or they don’t have the technology, so we make a plan and work with what we have.” (MT4)

This response again points to adaptation as a necessary part of teaching and mentoring in under-resourced contexts. It also suggests that mentors often expect STs to learn how to work within limitations rather than outside them. This is consistent with Dlamini et al.’s (2024) argument that mentoring in South African contexts must respond to the socio-economic and infrastructural realities of schools rather than assume ideal conditions.

Across the ST and MT data, overcrowding and resource shortages constrained mentoring in several ways. These conditions limited the time and space available for observation, constructive feedback, and sustained professional support. In many cases, mentoring was shaped by the pressure to cope with daily classroom realities rather than by a more

developmental process of guided growth. The data also show that these contexts fostered resilience, improvisation, and practical learning. This complexity is important because it shows that contextual difficulty did not cancel professional learning, but it did shape the form that learning took.

The document analysis supports the view that context was recognised institutionally. The tutorial letters required STs to describe the school context, including class size, facilities, available learning and teaching support materials, and the school's general environment. In this respect, the documents acknowledged that context mattered in TP. However, the participant data show a gap between this recognition and the support available in practice. Although the tutorial letters required mentors to support lesson preparation, observation, and feedback, several STs described being left alone in overcrowded classes or receiving very limited guidance. The documents, therefore, recognised contextual factors but did not adequately address how those conditions could limit the enactment of mentoring expectations.

These findings support existing scholarship that links weak mentoring experiences to difficult school conditions. Mukeredzi and Mandrona (2013) argue that mentoring is often compromised where support is inconsistent, and school environments are under pressure. Du Plessis and Marais (2013) similarly emphasise that improving TP support is central to strengthening ITE, but such support cannot be separated from the realities of the school context. In this study, the findings also suggest that Ubuntu-orientated mentoring must account for these unequal conditions if it is to be meaningful. Care, guidance, and shared responsibility cannot remain abstract values when STs are teaching in overcrowded and under-resourced classrooms.

This category therefore shows that under-resourced schools and overcrowded classes significantly shaped TP. These conditions often restricted the quality and consistency of mentoring, especially where STs required reassurance, observation, feedback, and practical guidance. Also, they exposed STs to the realities of South African schooling and, in some cases, created opportunities for flexibility, resilience, and situated learning. The findings suggest that mentoring in ODeL TP cannot be understood apart from the unequal

contexts in which it takes place, and that any Ubuntu-orientated mentoring framework must respond directly to those realities

5.4.2.2 Category 2.2: Time constraints and workload

A second significant challenge that emerged from the data was the effect of time constraints and workload on both STs and MTs during TP. The combined demands of school responsibilities, TP requirements, and university tasks often left both groups feeling overwhelmed, which limited opportunities for meaningful mentoring, reflection, and professional growth. The findings show that time pressure shaped both the ST experience of TP and the quality of mentoring MTs could provide.

From the ST perspective, workload was frequently described as one of the main difficulties experienced during TP. One participant explained:

“The thing I first struggled with was the work overload because of my work here at the university and there [at the school] now too.” (ST2)

This response shows that workload was experienced across both settings. The ST had to manage the demands of university study alongside the practical demands of school-based TP, which created a sense of overload rather than a manageable learning experience. The finding supports Hodges and Baum’s (2018) argument that STs in ODeL contexts often struggle to balance academic requirements, TP expectations, and personal responsibilities with limited direct institutional support.

Another participant described how the burden increased when the mentor shifted some of his own responsibilities onto the ST:

“A professional teacher doesn’t have time, and he’s lazy. He’s lazy. He took advantage of the fact that I’m new here, so I have to do this and that, which is his work.” (ST14)

This extract suggests that time pressure in schools could distort the mentoring relationship. Instead of support being developmental and collaborative, the ST experienced it as an unequal transfer of work. In this case, the mentor’s lack of time appeared to result in the ST taking on additional responsibilities that did not contribute

positively to professional learning. This reflects the concern raised in mentoring literature that where mentors are overburdened or unclear about their role, the developmental aspects of mentoring are weakened (Hudson, 2004; Hobson & Malderez, 2013).

The same participant group repeatedly referred to workload as the dominant pressure shaping TP. As ST2 stated:

“The work overload is only the problem.” (ST2)

This short statement is important because it suggests that, for some STs, mentoring itself was not necessarily the main difficulty. Rather, the volume and pace of work overshadowed the potential benefits of TP. The data also indicates that portfolio tasks, lesson planning, assessment responsibilities, and administrative requirements added to the burden. Several STs found the portfolio too extensive or questioned whether all the required tasks were relevant to their learning. This suggests a gap between institutional expectations and the practical realities of TP. It also supports Kiggundu and Nayimuli's (2009) view that school-based professional learning can be compromised when administrative and assessment pressures dominate the experience.

The MT data reinforce this picture. MTs also described time pressure and workload as major constraints on mentoring. One participant stated:

“Time frames were tight and we had to complete our tasks as prescribed and then also help the STs.” (MT13)

This response shows that mentoring took place within already demanding school schedules. Teaching, assessment, curriculum coverage, and administrative duties competed with the time needed for observation, discussion, and support. Mentoring, therefore, had to fit into an already crowded workday. This aligns with Hudson's (2013) argument that effective mentoring requires time for observation, feedback, and professional dialogue, and that these functions are weakened where mentors are overloaded.

Similarly, MT3 explained:

“It takes time, and I already don’t have time now, even family responsibilities getting in the way.” (MT3)

This extract highlights that the time demands associated with mentoring extended beyond the classroom. The MT’s response points to the overlap between school responsibilities and personal responsibilities, which made sustained mentoring engagement difficult. In such contexts, mentoring risked becoming an additional burden rather than a supported professional responsibility. This finding resonates with Hobson and Malderez’s (2013) caution that mentoring can become strained where the practical demands on mentors are not adequately recognised.

The ST and MT data together show that time constraints and workload affected both the availability and the quality of mentoring. Where participants were working under pressure, mentoring could become rushed, reduced to essentials, or displaced by more urgent teaching and administrative tasks. These conditions limited opportunities for observation, constructive feedback, reflective discussion, and relational support. In Kram’s (1988) terms, both career-related and psychosocial mentoring functions were affected, as neither professional coaching nor emotional encouragement can be sustained easily under constant time pressure.

The document analysis supports this pattern. The tutorial letters set out detailed expectations relating to lesson planning, teaching, reflection, observation, and portfolio completion. However, the participant data suggest that these requirements did not always align with the time available to STs and MTs in busy school contexts. While the documents outlined what should be done, they offered limited practical guidance on how to integrate these mentoring activities into daily school realities, where classes were large, resources were limited, and both MTs and STs were already carrying substantial workloads.

This points to a clear tension between institutional expectations and lived experiences. Activities such as pre-lesson discussion, post-lesson feedback, and reflective engagement are important to TP, yet the data show that these were often reduced or neglected because participants were trying to cope with immediate teaching and administrative demands. This supports Mokoena’s (2017) observation that the quality of

TP support depends not only on what institutions require, but also on whether the conditions exist for those requirements to be enacted meaningfully.

These findings are also significant from an Ubuntu perspective. Ubuntu, as discussed by Letseka (2012), Geber and Keane (2013, 2017), and Msila (2015), is rooted in care, relational presence, patience, and mutual responsibility. Yet the patterns in this category show that such values are difficult to enact consistently when mentoring is expected to fit into the margins of already overloaded school routines. In this sense, the study suggests that Ubuntu-orientated mentoring requires not only the right values, but also structural conditions that make those values possible in practice.

This category, therefore, shows that time constraints and workload were central features of TP in this ODeL context. These pressures affected STs' capacity to engage fully in learning opportunities and MTs' capacity to provide sustained mentoring support. The findings support scholarship that identifies workload and time pressure as barriers to effective mentoring (Hudson, 2004, 2013; Hobson & Malderez, 2013; Hodges & Baum, 2018). They also show that, in this study, mentoring cannot be understood solely as a relational process. It was shaped by structural conditions that determined whether mentors and STs had the time and space to engage meaningfully with one another.

5.4.2.3 Category 2.3: Isolation and limited peer support

The data in this category show that the challenges of TP were not only material, but also emotional and relational. In addition to navigating under-resourced schools, overcrowded classrooms, and heavy workloads, many STs described feeling isolated during TP and uncertain about where to turn for support. In an ODeL context, this experience was intensified by limited face-to-face contact with lecturers and peers, together with uneven support at the school level. The findings suggest that peer support and institutional presence were not consistently available, leaving many STs dependent on the quality of support from an individual mentor.

Several STs described isolation as part of their broader experience of studying through distance education. One participant explained:

“In distance learning, we are alone. So, we don't have that aspect of support ... and every time, each and every semester, they are in class corresponding with other students and their lecturers and stuff, like as in physically.” (ST12)

This response shows that the sense of being alone was already present in the wider ODeL experience and continued into TP. During school placement, this distance was not automatically reduced. Instead, the ST's learning and support often depended on the school's local context and on whether a caring mentor was available. This finding aligns with Hodges and Baum's (2018) view that ODeL STs frequently experience disconnection during TP when direct institutional contact is limited. It also supports Du Plessis and Marais's (2013) argument that mentoring in distance teacher education plays an important role in reducing the sense of isolation that STs may experience.

Some STs tried to manage this isolation through informal peer networks. ST12 referred to a Telegram group where STs shared their TP experiences:

“There's a Telegram group that I'm also part of, where I could hear other student teachers, some of them saying their mentor teacher doesn't want them to teach or to hold individual classes. And I think they are so lucky, because some of us were thrown into the deep end of teaching in our first teaching practices.” (ST12)

This extract suggests that peer support existed, but in an informal and self-organised way. The Telegram group created a space where STs could compare experiences and hear how others were coping. It also exposed the unevenness of mentoring across schools. Rather than fully reassuring the participant, the comparison highlighted differences between STs who were supported and those who were left to cope on their own. This supports Van den Berg's (2021) observation that, in ODeL settings, students often build informal support networks to compensate for gaps in formal institutional support.

A similar point appears in ST4's reflection on the experiences of peers at other schools:

“I didn't experience any negative thing. She [my mentor] was very responsible, she gave me work before time, and she helped me with content knowledge before I actually went to class and helped me with everything. Other students had different

mentor teachers who were not as supportive. I would see them panicking because their mentor teachers were not as supportive, and they would not tell them what to do in front of the kids, and how to discipline the unruly kids in the class. They were just left alone and were devastated to not have a caring mentor teacher.” (ST4)

This response is important because it shows the uneven nature of mentoring support. While ST4 experienced strong support, other STs were described as panicking and being left alone. The extract also suggests that isolation was linked not only to physical distance but also to the absence of practical and emotional guidance in the classroom. This aligns with Mokoena’s (2017) argument that where mentor support is weak or inconsistent, STs may feel overwhelmed and unsupported in their school placements.

STs further indicated that a stronger university presence could reduce this sense of isolation. One participant called for more regular contact and more visible support from the university during TP:

“...for the university to check in, say, every week or twice with the student teachers and then to find out how they are doing. I think it is very important for the university to just do random visits. I know the lecturer always communicates with us via emails and stuff, but I don’t think that is enough. I think that ‘drop-ins’ from someone from the university just to check in, even if they’re not there to supervise, to observe just one lesson that the student teacher is doing, I think that could also help.” (ST12)

This extract shows that students distinguished between formal communication and supportive presence. Emails were experienced as insufficient. What the participant wanted was visible, relational contact that showed interest in how the ST was coping, rather than contact linked only to assessment. ST8 echoed this view:

“It doesn’t always have to be visits from supervisors only to assess us, maybe supervisors can just go and check in if there is a student who is experiencing some challenges.” (ST8)

These responses suggest that institutional support during TP should extend beyond formal supervision. The participants' comments point to a need for a more responsive and supportive university role during school placement. This supports Dlamini et al.'s (2024) view that mentoring in ODeL contexts should involve coordinated institutional support rather than relying solely on individual school-based mentors.

The MT data reinforce the importance of active guidance in reducing isolation. MT12 stated:

“Exposure to daily teaching and learning alone is not enough, so ... [a mentor] who guides them gives them confidence and arouses the love of being a teacher.”
(MT12)

This response suggests that simply being placed in a school does not guarantee growth or a sense of belonging. Without active guidance, an ST may remain isolated within the teaching environment rather than being drawn into it as a supported learner. Similarly, MT1 stated:

“STs need to be guided by a person who knows the school, learners, systems, and expectations of teaching ... They can learn from observing a mentor teacher teaching.” (MT1)

This extract emphasises the mentor's role as a knowledgeable guide, helping the ST make sense of the school environment. It supports the view that mentor presence can reduce uncertainty and strengthen the ST's sense of belonging and development during TP. This is consistent with Hudson's (2004, 2013) argument that effective mentoring requires more than access to the classroom. It requires guided participation and sustained support.

Another MT imagined a more communal form of support:

“...a ‘family’ with a group perhaps where we can all learn together!” (MT2)

This response is significant because it moves beyond individual mentor support and gestures towards a more collective model of mentoring. It reflects Ubuntu values of communal learning, connectedness, and shared growth, as discussed by Letseka (2012)

and Msila (2015). It also suggests that mentoring in ODeL TP could be strengthened through group-based or community-oriented support structures rather than depending only on one-to-one relationships.

The document analysis showed that the tutorial letters clearly outlined formal responsibilities relating to lesson planning, observation, and assessment. However, they gave limited attention to emotional support, peer networks, or the risk of isolation in an ODeL context. Communication was framed mainly in formal and administrative terms, and the documents did not provide clear structures for peer support, regular well-being check-ins, or collaborative mentoring communities. This is important because the participant data suggest that isolation was not incidental. It was shaped, at least in part, by the way TP was organised and supported.

These findings support the literature that identifies isolation and inadequate support as recurring challenges for STs in distance and ODeL settings. Schoeman and Mabunda (2012) note that STs often struggle to feel part of the school community during TP, while Du Plessis and Marais (2013) argue that effective mentoring is central to reducing disconnection and improving professional learning. The present findings also align with Ndebele and Legg-Jack's (2022) call for more structured support systems for both STs and MTs. In this study, however, the data go further, showing that where formal support was weak, STs created their own informal peer spaces, though these did not fully compensate for the absence of coordinated institutional and mentor support.

This category, therefore, shows that isolation and limited peer support were significant features of TP in this ODeL context. Many STs felt alone in their learning, and the quality of support often depended on the individual mentor and the school placement. Informal peer networks provided some connection, but they remained uneven and self-organised. The findings suggest that mentoring in ODeL TP requires stronger institutional and relational support structures if STs are to experience TP as a connected and developmental process rather than as an isolating one

5.4.2.4 Category 2.4: Opportunities for reflection, skill development, and learning-by-doing

Despite the contextual challenges discussed in Categories 2.1 to 2.3, the data also show that TP created important opportunities for reflection, skill development, and learning-by-doing. STs described how repeated teaching opportunities, reflection on practice, and mentor support helped them grow in confidence and develop practical teaching skills. However, these opportunities were unevenly experienced. Some STs described rich opportunities for reflection and growth, while others reported very limited reflective support from their mentors.

The ST data show that reflection played an important role in professional learning during TP. Several participants referred to reflection as something that helped them make sense of their teaching experiences and improve their practice across TP modules. One participant explained:

“For TPS3703, I was writing a reflective journal and then from there, I also applied the reflective journal on TPS3704.” (ST3)

This extract suggests that reflection was not experienced as a once-off activity, but as a process that continued across different TP modules. It also indicates that the participant used reflection to carry learning from one practical experience into another. This aligns with Darling-Hammond and Lieberman’s (2013) view that teacher learning is strengthened when practical experience is accompanied by structured reflection across time rather than isolated moments of practice.

Reflection was also linked to specific teaching skills. ST12 described how reflection helped to identify a problem in lesson design and prompted closer attention to learner understanding:

“I had to reflect individually before I went to my mentor. I remember there was a lesson that we were doing in class in English, and then there was class work or homework that I gave them, and then the question wasn’t as clear to the learners as they would have expected it to be.” (ST12)

This response shows that reflection helped the participant recognise a weakness in the lesson and reconsider how the task had been presented to learners. It also suggests that reflective practice could begin with self-reflection before discussion with a mentor. In this way, TP provided the ST with an opportunity to learn through experience, identify a problem, and adjust practice accordingly. This supports Feiman-Nemser (2001) and Loukomies et al.'s (2022) argument that professional growth in teacher education is strengthened when practical teaching is accompanied by critical reflection.

The data also show that opportunities for reflection were not equally available to all STs. Some participants described sustained reflection, while others reported little or no reflective dialogue with a mentor. ST1, for example, reported that the MT did not observe the lessons or engage in reflection afterwards. This meant that the participant had limited support in completing the reflective dimensions of the portfolio and in making sense of the teaching experience. The findings, therefore, suggest that the value of reflection during TP depended heavily on the quality of mentor engagement and the extent to which reflective opportunities were actually created in practice.

The ST responses indicate that reflection supported skill development when it was purposeful and connected to practice. However, reflective opportunities were uneven, and some STs had to rely mainly on their own individual reflection rather than on mentor-guided discussion. This unevenness is important because it affected whether TP became a meaningful learning experience or remained largely task-driven.

The MT data confirm that many mentors viewed reflection as an important part of their role in supporting ST development. Several MTs described post-lesson reflection as part of everyday mentoring practice. One participant stated:

"We reflected at the end of each day briefly about the lessons taught. He told me what he enjoyed and thought worked well, and also what he thought were challenges, and I did the same, and then we discussed ways to improve challenges and the lessons for the next day with the timetable." (MT1)

This extract shows that reflection formed part of an ongoing cycle of teaching, feedback, and planning. Reflection was therefore used not only to evaluate completed lessons, but

also to improve the next day's teaching. This supports Hudson's (2013) argument that mentoring should include regular opportunities for feedback and discussion that are directly linked to classroom practice.

Similarly, MT12 stated:

"We had daily discussions on where and how we can improve." (MT12)

This response highlights reflection as a regular and developmental process. It suggests that learning during TP was strengthened when mentors and STs consistently engaged in discussion about improvement, rather than limiting mentoring to assessment or procedural feedback.

Another MT described a sequence of observation, teaching, and reflection:

"After she observed how I do things, she was given a chance to do what she observed and learnt. We then sat and looked back at how she experienced everything. A few questions were posed to her to check if the teaching practice was beneficial." (MT13)

This extract illustrates a clear practice-based learning process in which the ST first observed, then taught, and then reflected with the mentor. Reflection here was integrated with observation and practical experience, which aligns with Feiman-Nemser's (2001) view that effective teacher learning involves a gradual progression from modelling to guided practice and reflective discussion.

The MT data also suggest that reflection was not beneficial only for STs. Some mentors indicated that mentoring prompted them to think more carefully about their own teaching and to strengthen their own professional practice. In this sense, reflective mentoring could also contribute to mentor growth, though the extent varied across contexts. This supports the broader mentoring literature, which recognises that mentoring can be professionally beneficial for both mentors and mentees (Ragins & Kram, 2007).

The document analysis showed that the tutorial letters placed formal emphasis on reflection and practical learning. STs were required to document school and classroom conditions and to reflect on the functionality and shortcomings of the school environment

in their portfolios. The documents also required mentors to support lesson preparation, allow observation, and provide feedback on assessed lessons. This suggests that the institutional design of TP recognised reflection, observation, and practical teaching as important elements of learning.

However, the participant data indicate that these expectations were not consistently realised in practice. While some STs experienced regular reflection and guided support, others reported little observation and almost no reflective engagement with mentors. This points to a gap between what the tutorial letters expected and what STs actually experienced during TP. The documents valued reflection in principle, but the enactment of reflective mentoring remained uneven across placement sites.

These findings align with scholarship that identifies reflection and practice-based learning as central to meaningful ITE. Darling-Hammond and Lieberman (2013), Feiman-Nemser (2001), and Loukomies et al. (2022) all emphasise that professional learning is deepened when STs engage in cycles of observing, doing, and reflecting in real school contexts. The present findings support this view, but they also show that such opportunities cannot be taken for granted. Their availability depended on mentor involvement, school conditions, and the quality of support during TP.

The category is also significant in relation to KMFF. Reflection, feedback, and guided practice reflect career-related mentoring functions such as coaching and professional support, while regular discussions and encouragement also speak to psychosocial support. From an Ubuntu perspective, reflective dialogue can further be understood as part of a relational process in which mentor and mentee work together to improve practice through care, respect, and shared responsibility (Letseka, 2012; Msila, 2015). In this study, reflection was strongest where mentoring relationships were active, engaged, and supportive rather than distant or procedural.

This category, therefore, shows that TP can offer valuable opportunities for reflection, skill development, and learning by doing. Where STs were able to observe, teach, reflect, and receive feedback, they developed confidence and practical competence. Where these opportunities were limited, TP risked becoming more about task completion than

professional learning. The findings support scholarship that views reflection and situated practice as central to teacher development, while also showing that these processes must be deliberately supported if they are to benefit STs consistently in an ODeL context

5.4.3 Theme 3: Ubuntu Values in Mentoring Relationships

This theme focuses on how participants described mentoring as a relational and value-driven practice. Across the data, STs and MTs referred to mentoring in ways that reflected shared humanity, respect, care, and collective responsibility. Their responses show that mentoring was often experienced as more than formal supervision. It was also understood as a relationship that could create belonging, recognition, and mutual growth within the school community.

The data also show that these values were not experienced consistently across all mentoring relationships. While some participants described mentoring in ways that strongly reflected Ubuntu values, others indicated that these values were unevenly present in practice.

The first category in this theme focuses on shared humanity, respect, and communal learning in the mentoring relationship.

5.4.3.1 Category 3.1: Shared humanity, respect and communal learning

This category shows that some participants experienced mentoring as a relationship grounded in dignity, respect, inclusion, and learning together. For several STs, Ubuntu values became visible when mentors treated them as part of the school community rather than as temporary outsiders. MTs also described mentoring as a reciprocal relationship in which both mentor and ST could learn and benefit. The findings therefore suggest that, in some TP contexts, mentoring was experienced as a communal and relational process rather than only a supervisory one.

One of the clearest examples of belonging appears in ST9's account:

“Getting comments from your mentors, particularly, helped me and shaped me as a person. I could feel that people, you know, have got my back. And they really made me feel I was one of them. I was never a student teacher; I was a teacher.

Due to the fact that they made me feel a sense of belonging. For me, I never felt like I was a ST, because during the meetings they would ask me, and going with them to workshops. So that really shaped me as a person.” (ST9)

This extract shows that the ST experienced mentoring as a form of inclusion in the school's professional life. The participant's repeated emphasis on being one of them and being treated as a teacher suggests that belonging was closely tied to recognition by the mentor and broader school community. In this case, mentoring extended beyond classroom guidance and contributed to the ST's developing professional identity. This finding aligns with Kram's (1988) psychosocial mentoring functions, particularly acceptance, affirmation, and role modelling. It also reflects Letseka's (2012) emphasis on human dignity and belonging within an Ubuntu framework.

Another ST linked a positive mentoring relationship to kindness and respect:

“I think my kindness made everything possible for me and my mentor to get along. I respected her with everything, and I was always showing her respect ... I respected her as my own mother.” (ST3)

This response suggests that the mentoring relationship was shaped by mutual regard and interpersonal respect. The reference to respecting the mentor as her own mother points to a relational form of respect that extends beyond formal professional obligation. It reflects a deeply personal and culturally situated understanding of the relationship. This supports Ubuntu-based scholarship, which emphasises that mentoring in African contexts is often shaped by values of respect, relational closeness, and shared humanity (Geber & Keane, 2017; Msila, 2015).

ST8 also described mentoring in ways that highlighted openness, welcome, and continued belonging beyond the formal TP period:

“For me, I don't know if it was that big, huge cultural difference because my mentor teacher and I, we have good communication ... I know I am always welcome to come back even when I'm not doing any teaching practices. And when I go there, they welcome me.” (ST8)

This extract shows that the participant associated good mentoring with open communication and ongoing acceptance. The sense of still being welcome even after TP suggests that the relationship was not experienced as temporary or purely procedural. Instead, it reflected a form of enduring inclusion in the school community. This aligns with Muwanga-Zake's (2009) and Letseka's (2012) understanding of Ubuntu as a philosophy that values relationship, participation, and recognition within community life.

These ST responses suggest that shared humanity and communal learning were experienced through recognition, inclusion, respectful relationships, and being treated as part of the school rather than as an outsider. Such experiences appear to have strengthened STs' sense of belonging and professional worth during TP. This is significant in the ODeL context, where students may already feel distanced from institutional communities and therefore rely more heavily on school-based relationships for support and affirmation.

The MT data support this pattern. MTs also described mentoring as relational, reciprocal, and personally meaningful. One MT stated:

"I have made valuable friendships and connections with students ... and I also learn different teaching styles. I enjoy being able to help prepare a future teacher."
(MT1)

This response suggests that mentoring was not viewed as a one-directional transfer of knowledge. The reference to friendships, connections, and learning different teaching styles indicates that the mentor also experienced the relationship as mutually beneficial. Similarly, MT6 stated:

"I benefit a lot, because they also share information with us. We learn from each other." (MT6)

This short extract is important because it presents mentoring as a form of shared learning rather than simple supervision. It suggests that communal learning in the mentoring relationship included recognition that STs could also contribute knowledge and insight. These findings support Ragins and Kram's (2007) view that mentoring can involve

reciprocal benefit, but they also extend that view by reflecting the Ubuntu emphasis on interdependence and mutual growth rather than individual advancement alone.

The document analysis showed that the tutorial letters referred to professional values such as respect, dignity, fairness, and cooperation within the school. These values were broadly aligned with the kinds of mentoring relationships described by participants. However, the documents framed them as general professional expectations rather than explicitly as Ubuntu-orientated mentoring practices. They also offered limited direct guidance on how mentors should foster relationships characterised by shared humanity, mutual learning, and communal support.

This is an important point because the participant data suggest that these values were central to meaningful mentoring, yet they remained only partially visible in the institutional guidance. In this respect, the findings support Geber and Keane's (2017) argument that Ubuntu-informed mentoring practices are often enacted informally, even where they are not clearly articulated in formal teacher education structures or policies.

The category, therefore, shows that some participants experienced mentoring as a deeply relational process rooted in respect, inclusion, and learning together. For these participants, mentoring created a sense of belonging and affirmed their place within the school community. The findings align with Kram's (1988) psychosocial mentoring functions and with Ubuntu scholarship that emphasises shared humanity, mutual respect, and communal responsibility (Letseka, 2012; Msila, 2015; Geber & Keane, 2017). In this study, these values were more clearly evident in participants' experiences than in the formal wording of the tutorial letters, suggesting the need for a mentoring framework that makes them more explicit in institutional practice.

5.4.3.2 Category 3.2: Empathy, patience, and care in mentoring relationships

This category focuses on how participants experienced emotionally responsive mentoring during TP. The data show that STs valued mentors who were patient, caring, and willing to guide them without humiliation or indifference. MTs similarly described Ubuntu mentoring as caring for others, being patient with mistakes, and supporting STs in ways that recognised the pressures of learning to teach. The findings, therefore, suggest that

empathy, patience, and care were central to how effective mentoring was understood in this study.

Several STs described their mentoring needs in strongly emotional and relational terms. ST3 explained:

“I want a mentor to show me kindness and support, and to be caring for me to have courage in the class. I will learn, be independent, and manage the class. I also want them to share with me what she or he knows, and I can learn.” (ST3)

This response shows that the participant linked kindness and care directly to confidence and classroom growth. Support was not presented as separate from professional learning. Instead, emotional responsiveness was understood as part of what enabled the ST to become more independent and capable. This finding aligns with Kram’s (1988) psychosocial mentoring functions, which include encouragement, acceptance, and affirmation, and it also reflects Letseka’s (2012) view that Ubuntu is rooted in care, humanness, and concern for the other.

ST4 described her mentor as consistently present and supportive during lesson preparation and teaching:

“My mentor teacher was very passionate and very responsible. Every time I plan a lesson, she would say, ‘This is how I think the lesson went. This is where you lacked and this is what you can fix’ ... Every step she was there, in every lesson she was there. She would engage with me and come with me to class.” (ST4)

This extract shows that care was expressed through presence, attentiveness, and constructive support. The mentor did not simply assess the ST’s performance; they remained involved throughout the planning, teaching, and improvement process. In this case, professional feedback and emotional support worked together. This supports Hudson’s (2013) argument that effective mentoring involves sustained guidance and engagement rather than occasional feedback alone.

By contrast, other STs described the discouragement they experienced when care and purposeful support were absent. ST1 stated:

“I expect my mentor teachers to guide me, to protect me and then to be able to criticise me, but good critique. What I need is for her to guide me. And then, they [MTs] should get training. Training is very needed. I didn’t get to observe a mentor teaching. They [MTs and schools] don’t care, they just give you to whoever they want to give you to.” (ST1)

This response brings together several concerns: lack of guidance, lack of observation opportunities, and the sense that mentor allocation occurred without care or thoughtfulness. The participant’s statement that they do not care suggests that the absence of empathy was experienced not only as poor mentoring practice, but also as disregard for the ST’s learning and well-being. This supports Mukeredzi and Mandrona’s (2013) observation that weak or unsupportive mentoring can leave STs feeling discouraged and professionally vulnerable.

The ST data suggest that empathy, patience, and care were experienced through everyday mentoring actions, such as listening, guiding calmly, being physically present, and correcting in ways that supported rather than humiliated. Where these qualities were present, STs felt more secure and more able to learn. Where they were absent, the relationship became emotionally difficult and less developmental. This is particularly significant in the ODeL context, where school-based mentoring may be one of the few forms of direct interpersonal support available to STs during TP.

The MT data support this pattern. MTs also described Ubuntu mentoring as characterised by care, patience, and understanding. MT6 explained:

“Ubuntu is all about caring for others, and with regards to mentoring, then it would mean the mentor teacher needs to create a way for the success of the teaching practice in general.” (MT6)

This response presents care as central to the mentor’s role rather than incidental. The mentor’s responsibility is framed as helping create the conditions for TP’s success, suggesting a broader, more relational understanding of mentoring than one limited to supervision. This aligns with Msila’s (2015) argument that Ubuntu in educational relationships involves practical care, ethical responsibility, and support for others’ growth.

Similarly, MT13 stated:

“Being patient, accepting their mistakes, understanding that being a new teacher is hard, but we must support them.” (MT13)

This extract shows that the participant understood mentoring as requiring patience, acceptance, and recognition of the difficulty of learning to teach. The emphasis on supporting STs through mistakes rather than judging them harshly reflects a mentoring approach grounded in empathy and development. This supports Geber and Keane’s (2017) argument that mentoring in African contexts should be responsive to the human and emotional realities of the mentee rather than focused only on performance or compliance.

The MT responses indicate that some mentors understood Ubuntu mentoring as emotionally responsive and human-centred. In their accounts, mentoring involved more than technical guidance. It required patience, encouragement, and recognition of the ST as a developing person as well as a student teacher. This also supports Ragins and Kram’s (2007) broader view that mentoring relationships are strengthened where trust, emotional support, and interpersonal respect are present.

The document analysis showed that the tutorial letters included expectations relating to professional conduct, learner safety, and respectful relationships. In that sense, they implied a duty of care. However, they did not explicitly frame empathy, patience, or emotional support as core requirements of mentoring practice, nor did they provide clear guidance on how to enact these qualities in everyday mentor-ST interactions. As in the previous category, the institutional expectations were therefore only partly aligned with the participant data.

These findings are important in relation to Ubuntu and Afrocentric perspectives. Letseka (2012), Msila (2015), and Geber and Keane (2017) emphasise that care, compassion, and humane engagement are central to African-centred understandings of educational relationships. The ST and MT responses in this study support that position by showing that emotionally responsive mentoring was not peripheral to TP. It was central to how participants understood what good mentoring should look like. The findings also support

Kram's (1988) psychosocial mentoring functions, showing that encouragement, protection, and patient guidance were essential to the STs experience of growth and confidence.

This category, therefore, shows that empathy, patience, and care were central to participants' understanding of effective mentoring during TP. STs valued mentors who were present, calm, constructive, and willing to guide them through difficulty. MTs similarly described good mentoring as caring, patient, and supportive. The tutorial letters reflected these values only indirectly. The findings, therefore, suggest that an Ubuntu-orientated mentoring framework should make these relational qualities more explicit if mentoring is to be consistently experienced as humane, developmental, and contextually responsive.

5.4.3.3 Category 3.3: Mentoring as a reciprocal, two-way learning process

Category 3.3 shows that some participants experienced mentoring as more than support flowing from MT to ST. In several responses, mentoring was described as a reciprocal relationship in which both parties contributed to the process and learned from one another. Reciprocity appeared in ST accounts of what they believed they offered to MTs, in MT reflections on how they benefited from mentoring, and in ST views that their present experience as mentees would shape how they mentor others in future.

Some STs suggested that mentoring was valuable to both MTs and STs. One participant explained:

“Yes, I think they learn so much from us. We are also fresh. For learners, so we have more ideas and more energy to do our work.” (ST1)

This response suggests that the participant did not view mentoring as a one-way process. The ST saw herself as bringing fresh ideas and energy into the school, which could also benefit the mentor. Another ST similarly recognised the mentor's experience, while also identifying her own contribution, especially in relation to technology:

“That person has been on that hill, so he knows how to deal with certain situations. And they can also learn from me. I am more adaptive and dynamic in a

technological environment. I can teach him a lot of things when it comes to ITC and everything.” (ST2)

This extract shows that the ST valued the mentor’s experience but did not position herself only as a passive recipient of support. Instead, she saw the relationship as one in which different forms of knowledge could be exchanged. In this case, the mentor brought experience of school practice, while the ST brought technological confidence and new ways of working.

ST8 described Ubuntu mentoring in explicitly relational and reciprocal terms:

“Ubuntu is an idea; it’s like a philosophy. Just having that humanness. The idea of sharing a relationship, for the benefit of teaching. Because teaching should transcend all prejudices. Working together. For a common goal, that is teaching. Helping each other, because, if you want to grow, you grow together.” (ST8)

This response places reciprocity at the centre of the mentoring relationship. The participant links Ubuntu to humanness, shared purpose, and collective growth, and in doing so frames mentoring as collaborative rather than hierarchical. ST8 extended this idea by connecting her current experience as a mentee to a future mentoring role:

“I think there is no end to learning and improving yourself, and that’s a good thing for us. And paving the path for future students. And one day, I will become a mentor, and I will know what experience is... I know what I felt and what I needed from my mentor teacher.” (ST8)

This extract suggests that reciprocity extends beyond the immediate mentor-mentee relationship. The participant viewed mentoring as part of an ongoing cycle in which being supported now may shape how support is offered to others in future.

The MT data support this understanding of mentoring as a two-way learning process. MT1 stated:

“I have made valuable friendships and connections with students. I enjoy being able to help prepare a future teacher.” (MT1)

This response shows that mentoring was meaningful to the mentor on a personal and professional level. Likewise, MT6 stated:

“I benefit a lot because they also share information with us. We learn from each other.” (MT6)

This brief response clearly captures the reciprocal nature of the relationship. It shows that, for some MTs, mentoring was also a source of learning and renewal rather than only a professional obligation.

Taken together, the ST and MT data show that some participants experienced mentoring as a shared process of learning and development. STs were not positioned only as receivers of guidance, but also as contributors through energy, ideas, and technological knowledge. MTs, in turn, described gaining insight, connection, and professional value from the relationship.

These findings align with the Ubuntu and Afrocentric framing of this study, which positions human relationships as interdependent and mutually formative rather than strictly hierarchical (Asante, 1980; Letseka, 2012; Muwanga-Zake, 2009; Sefotho & Letseka, 2024). ST8’s emphasis on working together and growing together reflects Ubuntu’s stress on shared humanity, collective responsibility, and growth through relationships. The findings also support Geber and Keane’s (2017) view that mentoring in African contexts should be understood as relational, communal, and culturally grounded.

The data also extend KMFF. Kram’s framework recognises that mentors may derive satisfaction from the relationship, but it largely presents mentoring as a support relationship between the mentor and the mentee. In this study, the participants’ accounts suggest a stronger sense of mutuality than that model usually foregrounds. In that respect, the findings support the argument that mentoring in this South African ODeL context can be understood not only as career and psychosocial support, but also as a reciprocal process of shared learning (Ragins & Kram, 2007).

A further consideration is that the document analysis frames mentoring more one-directionally. The tutorial letters largely present the MT as the more experienced teacher,

guiding, supporting, observing, and assessing the ST. While this is appropriate in relation to formal TP responsibilities, it leaves little room for mentoring to be understood institutionally as mutual learning or shared professional growth.

The data in this category show that several participants understood mentoring as a reciprocal, two-way learning process. This was evident in how STs described their own contributions to the relationship and in how MTs acknowledged that they also learned from STs. The findings therefore suggest that, in practice, Ubuntu-orientated mentoring can be experienced as collaborative and mutually beneficial, even where institutional guidance presents mentoring in more one-directional terms.

Categories for Theme 4 are therefore: weak communication between the university and the schools; lack of mentor training and preparation; limited recognition of mentor roles, and finally, opportunities for structured mentor support and collaboration.

5.4.4 Theme 4: Institutional and Structural Influences

Theme 4 shifts the focus from the interpersonal and school-level dimensions of mentoring to the institutional and structural conditions that shape how mentoring is organised, supported, and sustained during TP. The data show that mentoring did not occur in isolation. It was influenced by the quality of communication between the university and schools, the preparation and support provided to MTs, and the broader systems within which TP was managed.

Across the ST and MT data, participants identified several institutional challenges that affected the quality and consistency of mentoring during TP. These included weak communication between the university and schools, limited mentor training and preparation, and a lack of formal recognition of the mentor role. Participants also pointed to ways in which stronger institutional support and collaboration could improve mentoring practices. The categories discussed under this theme, therefore, show that mentoring in an ODeL context is shaped not only by individual relationships, but also by the effectiveness of the systems that support those relationships

5.4.4.1 Category 4.1: Weak communication between the university and the schools

The data in this category show that weak communication between the university and schools affected the mentoring and support that STs received during TP. Across the ST and MT responses, participants noted that limited, indirect, or inconsistent communication reduced clarity, weakened accountability, and made it difficult to resolve challenges when they arose. In several cases, communication was experienced as too distant or too administrative to support an effective university-school partnership.

STs indicated that the university did not always communicate directly enough with MTs or schools. One participant stated:

“I feel like they should have direct communication with the mentor teacher.” (ST8)

The same participant also questioned the effectiveness of the formal documentation used to communicate expectations:

“That letter [in the portfolio] isn’t really something that helped; they [MTs] don’t take it seriously.” (ST8)

These responses suggest that written instructions alone were not always sufficient to establish the seriousness of mentoring expectations. From the ST perspective, communication needed to be more direct and more visible to strengthen mentor accountability and support.

ST8 further suggested that the university should establish stronger links with selected schools:

“They [the university] should communicate with a few schools.” (ST8)

This response points to a desire for a more structured partnership between the university and placement schools. It suggests that STs felt more vulnerable when relationships between the university and schools were weak or loosely coordinated.

Other ST responses indicate that communication challenges were also experienced within the university’s own support structures during TP. Participants reported delays,

difficulty accessing supervisors, and a lack of timely responses when support was needed. ST3 explained:

“Communication must be better. If we receive better communication from the university, especially from our module lecturers, we will be better.” (ST3)

The same participant further stated:

“With our supervisors, I can tell you now, I never had any supervision since I started my teaching practice, even now, I am still waiting.” (ST3)

And:

“I got a contact detail for my supervisor, and when I tried to call, they are invalid, they are not going through...” (ST3)

These extracts show that communication problems affected STs’ confidence in the support structures surrounding TP. When contact details were not working, supervision did not occur, or responses were delayed, STs were left to manage difficulties with limited institutional support. In an ODeL context, where students already rely heavily on mediated contact, this weakened the sense of university presence during TP.

The MT data support these concerns. MTs also described weak communication between the university and schools as a barrier to effective mentoring. MT1 stated:

“More communication between lecturers and the schools is urgent. Also, training from the university on how to be a good Ubuntu mentor is needed.” (MT1)

Moreover, MT9 explained:

“There must be a good working relationship with the relevant schools. They [lecturers] don’t come to visit the STs for teaching practice sessions.” (MT9)

These responses show that MTs also experienced the partnership between the university and schools as underdeveloped. They wanted communication that was more consistent, relational, and visible, rather than communication that depended mainly on documents or indirect channels. The reference to visits is particularly important because it suggests that communication was not understood only as the exchange of information but as ongoing

engagement that could build trust, clarify expectations, and support joint responsibility for TP.

The document analysis indicates that the tutorial letters functioned as formal communication tools through which the university conveyed expectations about TP, mentoring, and assessment. The documents outlined responsibilities and procedures and, in that sense, provided a structured means of communication. However, when this is read alongside the participant data, a gap becomes evident between written communication and the lived experience of ongoing support and coordination. The documents communicated what should happen, but the ST and MT accounts suggest that they did not ensure sustained, two-way engagement between the university and schools.

These findings align with scholarship that positions TP as a collaborative practice that depends on effective coordination among multiple stakeholders. Du Plessis et al. (2010) and Feiman-Nemser (2001) argue that school-based professional learning is strengthened when there is clear communication and collaboration between institutions and placement sites. The findings also support Schoeman and Mabunda's (2012) view that weak stakeholder communication can reduce the quality of support available to STs during TP. In the present study, weak communication not only created administrative inconvenience. It affected how mentoring expectations were understood, how problems were escalated, and how supported STs felt in their placements.

The findings are also significant in relation to ODeL-specific literature. Scholars such as Makoe and Nsamba (2019) and Ngubane-Mokiwa and Letseka (2015) note that, in distance contexts, students rely heavily on structured communication and accessible support systems. Where such systems are weak or inconsistent, the effects of distance are intensified. This is reflected in the data, where STs reported delayed supervision, inaccessible supervisors, and insufficient contact with lecturers during TP.

From an Ubuntu perspective, weak communication is also more than a procedural problem. Letseka (2012), Ramose (2002), and Msila (2015) emphasise that educational relationships should be grounded in mutual responsibility, connection, and

responsiveness. In this study, the communication problems described by participants weakened that relational ethic. They limited the extent to which the university, MTs, and schools functioned as a connected support structure around the ST.

The data show that weak communication between the university and schools constrained the quality and consistency of mentoring during TP. STs and MTs both identified the need for more direct, responsive, and sustained communication, including clearer contact channels and greater university presence at schools. While the tutorial letters provided formal guidance, the findings suggest that documentation alone did not create an effective mentoring partnership. The study therefore supports the view that communication is a central institutional condition for effective mentoring, particularly in an ODeL context where distance must be actively mitigated through purposeful and responsive engagement.

Building on the communication challenges discussed above, the next category focuses on limited mentor training and preparation, which further constrains the quality and consistency of support provided to STs during TP.

5.4.4.2 Category 4.2: Lack of mentor training, preparation, and role recognition

This category presents findings on the institutional conditions that shaped MTs' capacity and willingness to mentor effectively. The data point to two closely related concerns: limited mentor training and preparation, and insufficient recognition of the mentoring role within the TP system. Although mentoring was positioned as important to ST development, the findings suggest that MTs were not consistently prepared through structured training, clear guidance, or orientation to the role's requirements. As a result, mentoring practices varied across schools and, at times, were reduced to administrative support rather than developmental engagement.

The ST data indicate that uneven mentoring practices were closely linked to MTs' limited preparation for the role. Participants suggested that when mentors did not know what was expected of them, mentoring became inconsistent and, in some cases, superficial. This is evident in ST8's response:

“I definitely say the most important thing is that if you [the university] had mentor training that would be good, because she doesn’t know what is expected of her.”
(ST8)

This extract shows that the participant did not attribute weak mentoring only to personal unwillingness. Instead, she linked it to a lack of institutional preparation and role clarity. The comment suggests that mentor training could strengthen both confidence and consistency in mentoring practice.

Another ST drew attention to how weak institutional involvement appeared to shape how ODeL STs were prioritised in schools:

“Sometimes teachers only attend to our students later on. The other students [from contact universities] were helped first because our supervisors are not coming but theirs are always there on time.” (ST3)

This response suggests that mentor engagement was influenced by the university's visibility and presence during TP. In this case, the ST experienced unequal treatment that seemed linked to weak university follow-through. The extract also implies that mentor accountability may be affected by whether support structures around TP are active and visible.

ST4 further highlighted the effect of inconsistent mentoring support when referring to the experiences of peers:

“The others [peers] were just left alone and were devastated to not have a caring mentor teacher.” (ST4)

This extract again points to uneven mentoring experiences across placement sites. Although some STs described supportive mentors, others experienced neglect and limited guidance. The data therefore suggest that the absence of structured preparation and clear expectations contributed to variability in mentoring quality.

The MT data support these concerns. Several MTs indicated that they entered the mentoring role with little or no formal preparation and relied mainly on their own teaching experience. MT4 explained:

“The university gave instructions and guidance on how the mentorship should be conducted, but not personally trained.” (MT4)

Additionally, MT7 stated:

“I wasn't trained. I guess my experience as a teacher automatically qualified me to mentor. No one from our school gets prepared or trained to mentor.” (MT7)

These responses show that being an experienced teacher was often treated as sufficient preparation for mentoring, even though mentoring required additional knowledge, guidance, and relational skills. The participants' comments suggest that general teaching experience did not automatically translate into confidence or readiness for the mentoring role.

The data also show that limited recognition of the mentor role affected MTs' perceptions of their involvement in TP. Some participants noted a lack of professional benefits, support, or incentives associated with mentoring. MT5 stated:

“Honestly, it has not benefited me much apart from the fact that sharing the little I know makes me happy to know that I can help.” (MT5)

This response suggests that the mentor role was carried more as a personal commitment than as an institutionally valued contribution. MT8 also referred to the need for stronger development and recognition:

“The university can train and develop me on the principles and how to apply them during the mentoring stage. And maybe like give us a bonus or something for the hard work.” (MT8)

This extract indicates that mentors wanted more than a list of duties. They wanted preparation, development, and recognition of the work involved. Although the reference to a bonus may not be central to the framework itself, it points to a wider issue of role value and institutional acknowledgement.

The document analysis suggests that the tutorial letters did communicate expectations for MTs, particularly regarding lesson observation, formal meetings, and feedback.

However, when this is read alongside the ST and MT responses, a clear gap emerges between what the institution expected and the support available to enable those expectations to be enacted consistently. The documents placed responsibility on MTs, but offered limited guidance on the relational and developmental complexity of mentoring in practice. This helps explain why some participants experienced mentoring as reduced to signing forms or offering occasional assistance rather than sustained guidance.

These findings support scholarship that argues mentor quality is strengthened when mentors receive structured preparation and role clarification. Mokoena (2017) and Ndebele and Legg-Jack (2022) emphasise that MTs require targeted preparation to mentor effectively and consistently. The findings also align with Hudson's (2013) view that mentoring should not be assumed to occur simply because an experienced teacher is present. In this study, the data suggest that where mentor expectations were loosely communicated or unsupported, developmental mentoring was less likely to occur consistently.

The findings are also significant in relation to Ubuntu and Afrocentric perspectives. Ubuntu emphasises relational responsibility, care, and communal accountability (Letseka, 2012; Msila, 2015). Yet the study shows that such values cannot depend only on individual goodwill. Where mentors are not prepared, supported, or recognised, Ubuntu-orientated mentoring is more difficult to enact consistently in practice. In that sense, the findings reinforce the argument that humane and relational mentoring also requires institutional scaffolding.

The category, therefore, shows that the lack of mentor training, preparation, and role recognition weakened mentoring quality in some TP contexts. STs reported inconsistent support from mentors, who did not know what was expected of them, while MTs described entering the role with little formal preparation and limited recognition. Although the tutorial letters outlined responsibilities, the findings suggest that clearer guidance, structured preparation, and stronger institutional acknowledgement are required if mentoring is to function as developmental support rather than variable administrative assistance.

5.4.4.3 Category 4.3: Opportunities for structured mentor support and collaboration

This category presents the ways in which STs and MTs identified practical opportunities to strengthen mentoring through more structured support and more deliberate collaboration between the university, schools, and mentors during TP. Across the data, participants proposed clearer systems, stronger communication platforms, increased university presence, and organised training or workshops as ways to improve mentoring capacity and consistency.

In the SSIs, STs often framed improvement as creating formal spaces where challenges could be raised, discussed, and addressed. Rather than leaving support to individual initiative, they emphasised the need for structured mechanisms for reporting concerns and obtaining guidance. ST3 suggested:

“As a university, I think you need to have a review page whereby a student did a TP at a certain school, and she or he was not treated nicely, she can write feedback.” (ST3)

This response indicates that STs wanted a system to record and review their experiences at placement schools. The suggestion points to the need for both accountability and support. It also reflects a concern that, without a formal mechanism, problematic mentoring practices may remain hidden or unresolved.

STs also noted the value of structured communication platforms that would allow them to engage more directly with supervisors or lecturers as challenges unfolded. ST3 further explained:

“There must be a platform where we can engage ourselves with our supervisors or the lecturers for the modules.” (ST3)

This response suggests that participants wanted communication to be more accessible and more responsive during TP. The point is not only that contact should exist, but that there should be an identifiable and dependable channel through which support can be sought when difficulties arise.

Another issue raised by STs was the need for supervision to take place within a predictable and useful timeframe. ST1 stated:

“If my placement is done, then within two weeks, the supervisor must come to supervise me while I am doing TP.” (ST1)

Although the wording is slightly imprecise, the meaning is clear. The participant wanted supervision to occur while TP was still active and while support could still make a difference. This suggests that delayed supervision weakens its developmental value and turns it into a procedural requirement rather than meaningful support.

STs also linked structured support to lecturers' openness and responsiveness. ST2 explained:

“I would really appreciate it if lectures were more open-minded. And they would try by all means to communicate with student teachers, so that they can help them whenever they encounter problems.” (ST2)

This extract points to the relational dimension of institutional support. Formal systems matter, but so does the communication culture within those systems. Participants wanted support structures that were approachable and responsive, not merely available in theory.

The MT data similarly indicate that opportunities to strengthen TP mentoring lie in formalising support and collaboration more clearly. MTs described mentoring as more effective when they had access to university engagement, organised training, and practical support. MT10 stated:

“Support us by providing workshops, training, and webinars in addressing different TP mentoring issues.” (MT10)

This response suggests that MTs wanted structured opportunities to develop their mentoring knowledge and skills. Workshops and webinars were viewed as practical ways to support mentors across different contexts, especially where direct university presence may be limited.

MT1 also highlighted the need for greater university visibility and engagement with schools:

“More visits from the university to meet and discuss our challenges, and they can see how things are happening at the schools during TP, and if it is good or not, and help us resolve the challenges we face.” (MT1)

The same participant added:

“Perhaps a review of the portfolio? More visits and communication from the university so that we can sit face to face and discuss with lecturers and students all together.” (MT1)

These extracts show that MTs viewed collaboration as active and dialogic. They wanted the university to engage directly with schools, not only to monitor practice, but also to understand local challenges and support problem-solving. This would strengthen alignment between institutional expectations and school realities.

MT3 pointed to the need for practical resourcing and mentor development:

“Providing us with data and even venues for meet-ups, and resources we need to upskill us as mentors.” (MT3)

This response shows that collaboration was understood in material terms as well. Support was not limited to communication alone but also included resources that enabled participation, discussion, and development.

MT9 emphasised that structured collaboration should also include follow-up and stakeholder accountability:

“There must be a good working relationship with the relevant stakeholders, and the university must check and make a follow-up since sometimes the university Assessors don't come to visit the STs for teaching practice sessions.” (MT9)

This extract highlights that collaboration was tied to monitoring and continuity. Participants wanted stronger stakeholder relationships, but also assurance that agreed processes, such as supervision and support visits, would actually be carried out.

The document analysis indicates that the tutorial letters and related institutional guidance already positioned TP as a collaborative arrangement involving the principal, MT, university staff, and the TP office. The documents outlined roles and channels of responsibility and, in that sense, implied shared accountability. However, when these expectations are read alongside the participant data, it becomes clear that this collaboration was not always experienced consistently in practice. The gap lay less in the formal allocation of roles than in how reliably those roles were enacted across different placement sites.

These findings support scholarship that presents TP as a collaborative process requiring coordinated support from multiple stakeholders. Feiman-Nemser (2001) and Du Plessis et al. (2010) argue that school-based professional learning is strengthened when mentoring is supported through partnerships rather than isolated individual effort. The findings also align with Ndebele and Legg-Jack's (2022) emphasis on structured support for both STs and MTs, particularly where professional learning depends on sustained interaction and shared responsibility.

The data are also significant in relation to Ubuntu and Afrocentric perspectives. Ubuntu frames development as relational and communal and therefore supports the idea that mentoring should be scaffolded through structures that promote cooperation, accountability, and collective growth (Letseka, 2012; Msila, 2015). In this study, participants' calls for review systems, communication platforms, workshops, visits, and shared discussions suggest that effective mentoring in ODeL TP depends on more than goodwill. It requires institutional arrangements that enable people to work together in more connected and supportive ways.

The findings in this category, therefore, show that STs and MTs identified clear, practical opportunities to strengthen mentoring through structured mentor support and collaboration. These included formal feedback mechanisms, accessible communication platforms, predictable supervision, workshops, stronger university presence, and practical support for mentors. While the tutorial letters framed TP as collaborative in principle, the participant data suggest that these collaborative structures need to be more

visible, more consistent, and more actively implemented if mentoring is to be strengthened in practice.

Having presented the institutional and structural influences shaping mentoring during TP, the next theme explores STs' and MTs' articulated requirements for an Ubuntu-orientated framework to improve TP experiences in the ODeL context.

5.4.5 Theme 5: Key Requirements for an Ubuntu-Orientated Mentoring Framework in ODeL TP

Theme 5 focuses on what STs and MTs identified as necessary to strengthen mentoring during TP in an ODeL context. Drawing on participants' responses about how Ubuntu could be applied in mentoring, how current challenges could be reduced, and how universities and schools could better support mentoring practices, this theme highlights the key requirements that could underpin an Ubuntu-orientated mentoring framework.

Across the data, participants pointed to the need for mentoring that is human-centred, contextually responsive, and institutionally supported. Their responses suggest that an Ubuntu-orientated framework should not be limited to interpersonal goodwill, but should also provide practical guidance for how mentoring can be enacted across diverse school and ODeL realities. Three categories are discussed under this theme: Ubuntu-orientated, culturally responsive mentoring; contextual and equitable mentoring considerations; and structured mentor training and institutional support.

5.4.5.1 Category 5.1: Ubuntu-orientated, culturally responsive mentoring

This category presents participants' views that an Ubuntu-orientated mentoring framework should be grounded in culturally responsive and human-centred practices. Across the data, Ubuntu-orientated mentoring was described less as a fixed set of rules and more as a way of relating to others through respect, humanness, care, guidance, and mutual support. Participants linked this form of mentoring to belonging, dignity, inclusivity, and supportive relationships within the school community.

The ST responses framed Ubuntu-orientated mentoring as a relational approach based on respect, fairness, and support. ST4 explained:

“We should treat everyone with respect and equally. How you want to be treated, you should treat people like that... We should try to help each other where we lack... We should have a support system for teachers and students where we share information and share ideas.” (ST4)

This response shows that the participant understood Ubuntu mentoring in relational and practical terms. Respect, equality, and mutual help were not presented abstractly. They were linked to how people should work together in the school and support one another in areas of need. The emphasis on sharing information and ideas also points to a collaborative rather than individualistic mentoring relationship.

ST12 similarly described Ubuntu mentoring as kindness, guidance, and supportive presence, especially when entering a school context that can feel uncertain or intimidating:

“It is scary not knowing what to face. Ubuntu says, ‘I am a person because of other people’... You always have to be kind... But when we get there [schools for TP], and we get a person that is kind... [a person that] holds our hand and helps us and even gives us more information to better teach.” (ST12)

This response is significant because it shows how Ubuntu was connected to TP's lived emotional reality. The participant associated Ubuntu mentoring with a mentor who reduces fear, offers practical help, and provides guidance in a humane way. The idea of holding a hand reflects supportive presence and careful guidance rather than judgment or distance.

Another ST drew attention to the importance of recognising cultural differences within mentoring relationships:

“We are people with differences and different cultures. We must understand one another. If you are asking for help from me, I have to help you.” (ST14)

This extract suggests that culturally responsive mentoring requires more than politeness. It requires recognition of difference, understanding, and a willingness to help across those

differences. In this way, Ubuntu is linked to inclusion and relational responsibility within diverse school settings.

Ubuntu-orientated mentoring was also described through the language of family care. ST1 stated:

“My mentor always had Ubuntu. She was like a mother to me.” (ST1)

This response points to warmth, safety, and relational closeness in the mentoring relationship. While the image is personal, it reflects the participant’s experience of mentoring as protective and caring rather than detached or procedural.

The MT data support these understandings. MTs also framed Ubuntu-orientated mentoring in terms of togetherness, support, empathy, and inclusivity. MT3 stated:

“We are there to build each other up. Working together to build each other for the better of our learners.” (MT3)

This shows that the mentor understood mentoring as collective upliftment directed towards a shared educational purpose. The phrase “build each other up” suggests that mentoring involves mutual support, while the reference to learners situates the relationship within a broader communal goal.

MT8 linked Ubuntu mentoring to empathy, diversity, and inclusivity:

“We have Ubuntu by promoting empathy and respect and by celebrating diversity and inclusivity.” (MT8)

This extract shows that, from the MT perspective, Ubuntu mentoring involved deliberate relational values. Respect and empathy were linked to recognising difference rather than sameness, thereby strengthening the culturally responsive dimension of the framework.

MT6 also emphasised the importance of closeness and open communication:

“Bonding with our student teachers is crucial. It makes them open, and they can share whatever they need.” (MT6)

This response suggests that culturally responsive mentoring also depends on creating a relationship in which the ST feels safe enough to speak openly. In this way, Ubuntu mentoring was associated with trust, openness, and relational accessibility.

The document analysis indicates that the tutorial letters offered limited explicit guidance on Ubuntu-orientated, culturally responsive mentoring as a deliberate human-centred practice. The documents placed stronger emphasis on lesson preparation, classroom management, and procedural support than on the relational and psychosocial dimensions of mentoring. While some expectations in the tutorial letters, such as professional conduct, respectful relationships, and cooperation, are broadly compatible with Ubuntu values, they were not clearly framed as part of a distinct Ubuntu-orientated mentoring approach.

These findings align closely with the Ubuntu and Afrocentric positioning of this study. Participants' emphasis on respect, kindness, understanding, and mutual support reflects Letseka's (2012) view of Ubuntu as grounded in humanness, dignity, and interdependence. The findings also support Msila's (2015) and Geber and Keane's (2017) arguments that mentoring in African contexts should be relational, culturally grounded, and responsive to participants' social and emotional realities. The ST and MT responses further resonate with Afrocentric perspectives that place human relationships, belonging, and shared growth at the centre of development (Asante, 1980; Mazama, 2001).

The data also align with the mentoring literature, which highlights the importance of psychosocial support and relational trust. Kram (1988) and Ragins and Kram (2007) argue that effective mentoring includes encouragement, affirmation, and identity support in addition to career-related guidance. In this study, however, the participants' responses show that such support was closely tied to Ubuntu values of care, reciprocity, and communal responsibility. The findings therefore suggest that an Ubuntu-orientated mentoring framework in ODeL TP should deliberately foreground these values rather than assume they will arise informally.

The category shows that participants viewed Ubuntu-orientated, culturally responsive mentoring as a central requirement for improving TP in an ODeL context. STs and MTs

described this form of mentoring as respectful, caring, inclusive, and grounded in mutual support. Yet, the document analysis suggests that these human-centred expectations remain only partly visible in formal institutional guidance. This supports the need for a mentoring framework that makes these values more explicit and more actionable in practice.

5.4.5.2 Category 5.2: Contextual and equitable mentoring considerations

This category explores participants' views that an Ubuntu-orientated mentoring framework should respond realistically to the unequal and diverse conditions in which ODeL TP takes place. Across the data, STs and MTs emphasised that mentoring cannot be effective if it ignores class size, learner discipline, resource shortages, safety concerns, transport barriers, workload, and the wider practical realities of schools. Their responses suggest that fair mentoring requires flexibility and contextual responsiveness rather than a one-size-fits-all approach.

The ST data show that difficult school conditions could undermine both teaching and mentoring during TP. One participant described a placement environment in which effective teaching and learning were difficult to achieve:

“During this TP, I have never been able to teach a class in a peaceful environment and learn from my teaching practice.” (ST1)

The same participant linked this directly to overcrowding and limited support:

“I was alone in the class the whole time, and the class is too full. Sometimes I will go with an assistant educator.” (ST1)

These extracts show that, in some contexts, mentoring was needed not only for professional development but also to help STs cope with unsafe or overwhelming classroom realities. In such environments, equitable mentoring would require more than standard expectations. It would require support that responds to the actual conditions under which the ST is teaching.

STs also referred to socio-economic factors that shaped access to better-resourced placement schools. ST1 explained:

“The schools around my neighbourhood are not really the best schools. If you want the best schools, you have to go to town. The problem is money for transport to go to schools in town.” (ST1)

This response is important because it shows that placement quality was linked to affordability and mobility. Some STs could not easily access schools that might have offered stronger support or better teaching conditions. In this sense, fairness in mentoring cannot be separated from the structural inequalities that shape where STs can complete TP.

Participants also suggested that mentoring expectations and support should be realistic in relation to the demands of ODeL TP. ST8 stated:

“The focus shouldn’t only be on a lesson where they [MTs] are only there to observe you for one lesson. They must help you to learn how to really teach. There are books that you can read [on teaching methodology], but you don’t have the time to do that, and it is not always relevant to our school.” (ST8)

This extract shows that the participant wanted mentoring that was grounded in the realities of practice rather than limited to isolated observation or abstract theory. The comment also suggests that STs needed guidance tailored to the context in which they were teaching.

The same participant argued for more interactive institutional support that could respond to contextual variation:

“I also think, since it is ODL, maybe have more live classes, or TEAMS classes weekly, even. This could be beneficial, and maybe like lesson differentiation and how to teach in each different setting.” (ST8)

This response highlights the need for mentoring and support structures that acknowledge the diversity of school contexts. It also suggests that more regular interactive support from the university could help STs navigate different teaching settings more effectively.

The MT data support these concerns. MT9 referred to the strain of balancing teaching duties with mentoring responsibilities:

“Managing multiple responsibilities, doing my own job, and finding time for mentorship, coupled with time constraints, is difficult.” (MT9)

This extract shows that equitable mentoring also depends on recognising the conditions under which MTs are expected to mentor. Where mentors are overburdened, even committed support becomes harder to sustain.

The same participant also drew attention to the effect of limited teaching resources:

“Another challenge is that the school has a serious problem of LTSMs, and this made it very difficult for my ST to deliver the lesson.” (MT9)

This response again shows that contextual constraints shaped what STs could do during TP and what mentors could reasonably support. In such environments, mentoring had to include helping STs adapt to shortages rather than assuming ideal teaching conditions.

MT13 similarly pointed to the need for practical recognition of school conditions:

“At least a reasonable number of learners in class... Also, we need someone assisting us with our work because mentoring requires one's extra time.” (MT13)

This response suggests that equitable mentoring depends not only on interpersonal goodwill but also on structural conditions such as class size and workload support. Without these, mentoring responsibilities place an uneven burden on mentors and may not be enacted consistently.

The document analysis shows that the tutorial letters did recognise context to some extent. STs were required to document class size, school facilities, and the availability of teaching and learning resources in their portfolios. This indicates that the institution acknowledged that context mattered. However, the documents did not differentiate mentoring expectations based on the realities of different school settings, nor did they offer clear guidance on how STs and MTs should respond to challenging contextual conditions. The result is that schools with very different circumstances were still expected to work within largely the same framework.

These findings align with the literature on persistent inequality in South African education and its impact on school-based professional learning. Sayed (2015, 2021) and DHET (2011) note that educational opportunity is unevenly distributed across contexts, while Hobson and Malderez (2013) and Hudson (2013) argue that mentoring is affected by workload, time, and school conditions. The findings in this study support those concerns by showing that mentoring quality was closely tied to the practical realities of placement sites.

The category is also significant in relation to Ubuntu and Afrocentric perspectives. Ubuntu emphasises communal responsibility and the dignity of all participants, while Afrocentricity foregrounds context and lived experience as central to understanding educational processes (Asante, 1980; Letseka, 2012; Mazama, 2001). In this study, participants' accounts suggest that an Ubuntu-orientated mentoring framework cannot rely only on values of care and support in the abstract. It must also respond to the unequal material conditions that shape STs' and MTs' experiences of TP.

The findings therefore show that Ubuntu-orientated mentoring must be contextually and structurally responsive if it is to be fair and effective. Participants did not call for a rigid uniform model. They pointed instead to the need for mentoring that recognises diverse school conditions, the constraints of ODeL study, and the uneven opportunities available to STs and MTs. This strengthens the argument that a humanising mentoring framework must also be equitable.

5.4.5.3 Category 5.3: Structured mentor training and institutional support

This category captures participants' calls for formal mentor preparation and clearer institutional systems to support Ubuntu-orientated mentoring during TP in ODeL contexts. Across the data, STs and MTs identified mentor training, clearer guidance tools, regular communication, monitoring, and accountability as necessary if mentoring is to move beyond procedural compliance and function as meaningful developmental support.

The ST data show that participants expected mentors to be prepared for the mentoring role in practical and visible ways. They wanted mentors who could guide them, allow them to observe teaching, be present during their lessons, provide feedback, and create

opportunities for reflection. Where this did not happen, STs linked the problem to the absence of mentor preparation. ST1 explained:

“So, what I need, I need her to guide me. And then, they [MTs] should get training. Training is very needed. I didn’t get to observe a mentor teaching.” (ST1)

This extract shows that the participant directly linked weak support to a lack of mentor training. It also makes clear that training was not understood in abstract terms. It related to specific mentoring practices such as guidance, observation, and developmental support during TP.

STs also indicated that mentoring should involve planned, regular interaction rather than occasional exchanges. ST8 stated:

“Your mentor teacher has to be present when you are giving your lesson so she can guide you. I think, even like once a week, having sessions where you will sit for half an hour or 20 minutes just to talk about how you are doing.” (ST8)

This response points to the value of routine and structure in the mentoring relationship. The participant did not want support to depend on chance or on the mentor’s availability in the moment. Instead, she wanted regular opportunities for guidance and reflection.

Another concern raised by STs was the absence of practical tools that clearly outlined what mentors were expected to do. ST12 explained:

“Other universities have a logbook. This tells the mentor what he needs to do with the students. We don’t have a logbook we only have a portfolio with only one or two mentor pages and it just needs to be signed. It doesn’t have the full actual information on what the mentor teacher can do to like help the student through the TP.” (ST12)

This extract suggests that mentor support was weakened by the lack of a detailed and usable guide. The participant contrasted the portfolio’s limited mentor pages with a more structured tool that could clarify expectations and make mentoring more consistent. This supports the view that institutional support should include practical instruments, not only general statements of responsibility.

The MT data reinforce this pattern. Several mentors explained that they had received instructions, but not formal preparation. MT4 stated:

“The university gave instructions and guidance on how the mentorship should be conducted, but I was not personally trained.” (MT4)

This response highlights the gap between information and preparation. While the mentor had received some form of guidance, this was not experienced as training that developed mentoring capacity in a structured way.

MT1 similarly called for stronger communication and explicit preparation for Ubuntu mentoring:

“More communication between lecturers and the schools is urgently needed... Also, DEFINITELY training from the university on how to be a good Ubuntu mentor.” (MT1)

This extract suggests that institutional support should include both relational and practical dimensions. Communication with schools mattered, but so did focused development on how to enact Ubuntu principles in mentoring practice.

MT10 also emphasised the need for induction and clearer role expectations:

“Give induction or training to mentors through mentorship programmes so that we are clear as to what is expected from us, and in so doing, we will bridge the gap between the mentee and mentors. We will be able to deliver as expected.” (MT10)

This response shows that, from the mentor's perspective, training would strengthen clarity, consistency, and confidence in the role. It also suggests that weak mentoring was not necessarily the result of unwillingness, but often of uncertainty about what effective mentoring required.

MTs further linked institutional support to university presence and monitoring during TP. MT9 stated:

“Visit the school more often to track and discuss the progress of the ST with the mentor teachers, and step in if there is a problem.” (MT9)

This extract highlights that mentors wanted support systems that were visible and active. Monitoring was not framed only as control, but also as a way to provide assistance, resolve problems, and strengthen accountability.

The document analysis indicates that the tutorial letters did state several mentoring expectations, including lesson support, observation, and feedback. TL103, for example, required mentors to support lesson preparation, observe lessons, and provide feedback on assessed teaching. However, when these expectations are read alongside the participant responses, a gap becomes clear between institutional expectations and the support available to help mentors enact them. The documents outlined duties but did not provide the structured training, detailed guidance tools, or follow-up that participants considered necessary.

These findings align with scholarship that identifies mentor preparation as a prerequisite for effective TP mentoring. Mokoena (2017), Ndebele and Legg-Jack (2022), and Hudson (2013) argue that mentoring quality improves when mentors are inducted, trained, and given clear guidance on their roles. The findings in this study support that position. They suggest that without formal preparation and accessible support tools, mentoring is more likely to become inconsistent and dependent on individual initiative.

The category is also significant in the study's theoretical framing. KMFF assumes that mentors provide both career-related and psychosocial support through purposeful interaction. Yet the data show that these functions cannot be enacted consistently when mentors are expected to perform the role without preparation. From an Ubuntu perspective, this is equally important. Letseka (2012) and Msila (2015) emphasise care, relational responsibility, and communal support, but this study's findings suggest that these values require institutional scaffolding to shape practice in a sustained way.

The findings therefore show that structured mentor training and institutional support were viewed as essential requirements for an Ubuntu-orientated mentoring framework in ODeL TP. STs called for mentors who were prepared, present, and guided by clearer tools, while MTs called for training, induction, stronger communication, and more active university involvement. Although the tutorial letters communicated mentor responsibilities, the data

suggest that expectations alone were insufficient. More structured preparation and support are needed if mentoring is to be consistent, developmental, and contextually responsive.

5.5 CONCLUSION

This chapter presented and interpreted the findings from the ST and MT data, read alongside the document analysis of the tutorial letters, to show how mentoring during TP was experienced and understood in an ODeL context. The findings indicate that mentoring was valued beyond a procedural or administrative requirement. Participants described it as a developmental relationship requiring emotional availability, encouragement, constructive guidance, and professional support.

The chapter also showed that Ubuntu was understood as a practical mentoring ethic grounded in shared humanity, respect, empathy, care, and reciprocal learning. These values were associated with mentoring relationships that supported STs' sense of belonging, confidence, and professional growth. However, the findings revealed that such mentoring was not experienced consistently across all contexts.

A further contribution of the chapter was to show how mentoring during TP was shaped by contextual and institutional realities. Under-resourced schools, overcrowded classrooms, time pressures, uneven support, weak university-school communication, limited mentor preparation, and poor role recognition all influenced the quality of mentoring available to STs. Participants, therefore, identified clear requirements for improvement. They called for mentoring that is culturally responsive, contextually equitable, and supported through structured mentor training, clearer guidance, and more consistent institutional support.

The findings in this chapter provide the empirical basis for Chapter 6. The next chapter draws on these findings to propose an Ubuntu-orientated mentoring framework and related recommendations to strengthen mentoring practice in ODeL teacher education.

CHAPTER 6

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND THE PRESENTATION OF AN UBUNTU-ORIENTATED MENTORING FRAMEWORK FOR ODeL TEACHING PRACTICE

6.1 INTRODUCTION

This study examined the mentoring needs and experiences of STs and MTs during TP in an ITE programme offered through Open Distance eLearning (ODeL) in South Africa. The study was underpinned by an Ubuntu-orientated perspective, informed by Kram's Mentoring Functions Framework, and located within a constructivist paradigm. A qualitative case study design was used to generate in-depth, context-specific insight into how mentoring is understood and experienced in the ODeL TP context. Data were generated through SSIs with STs, questerview responses from MTs, and document analysis of the university's TP TLs. The data were analysed by means of thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

This chapter brings the study to a close. It presents a concise summary of the study, draws conclusions from the findings in relation to the research questions, and presents the Ubuntu-orientated mentoring framework developed from the study. The chapter also discusses the study's limitations, offers recommendations for key stakeholders, and identifies avenues for further research.

6.2 CONCISE SUMMARY OF THE STUDY

The mentoring needs and experiences of STs and MTs were investigated during TP in an ODeL-delivered ITE programme in South Africa. The study was motivated by the recognition that, although TP is widely regarded as a central component of teacher preparation, mentoring within ODeL contexts is often shaped by distance, uneven school conditions, and inconsistent support structures. These realities can weaken the quality of professional learning available to STs during placement. The study, therefore, sought to explore how mentoring is experienced in this context and how an Ubuntu-orientated perspective could strengthen mentoring practice in ways that are both relationally ethical and practically relevant.

This research was informed by an integrated theoretical lens consisting of Ubuntu philosophy, an Afrocentric paradigm, and Kram's Mentoring Functions Framework. This combination provided a contextually relevant basis for understanding mentoring as both an interpersonal and developmental relationship. Ubuntu foregrounded values such as dignity, empathy, mutual respect, and shared responsibility. The Afrocentric paradigm strengthened the study's contextual and relational orientation, while Kram's framework provided a useful framework for understanding the interpersonal and career-related functions of mentoring during TP.

A constructivist paradigm and a qualitative case study design were adopted to explore participants' lived experiences and meanings within a specific ODeL ITE context. Data were generated through SSIs with STs, questerview responses from MTs, and document analysis of the university's TP TLs. This combination of data sources enabled consideration of mentoring from the perspectives of both key participant groups, while also comparing these experiences with the formal expectations communicated through institutional documentation. The data were analysed using thematic analysis, which enabled the identification of recurring patterns and meanings across the dataset.

The findings showed that participants understood mentoring during TP as requiring both professional guidance and interpersonal support. STs needed observation, constructive feedback, modelling, guidance with lesson planning and classroom practice, and support that affirmed their confidence and dignity. MTs similarly recognised the importance of guidance, support, and inclusion, although their capacity to mentor effectively was often shaped by time constraints, workload, and school conditions. The findings further showed that mentoring experiences were uneven. While some STs described supportive and developmental mentoring relationships, others reported limited observation, insufficient feedback, and inconsistent support. These variations suggest that mentoring during TP often relies too heavily on individual mentors' dispositions and contextual circumstances rather than on clearly supported and consistently enacted expectations.

The findings also revealed that participants associated Ubuntu mentoring with humanness, respect, empathy, patience, inclusion, and supportive correction. Ubuntu was therefore not perceived as separate from professional mentoring, but as the manner

in which mentoring should be enacted. Although the findings indicated that these values were not consistently translated into practice. This highlighted a gap between the ethical ideals associated with mentoring and the realities of mentoring as experienced during TP in the ODeL context.

A further finding was that institutional support plays a critical role in whether mentoring is experienced as meaningful and consistent. Participants identified the need for clearer mentoring expectations, practical guidance for MTs, improved communication, and mechanisms that can support accountability without turning mentoring into a purely administrative exercise. In this regard, the study showed that strengthening mentoring in ODeL TP requires more than goodwill from individual mentors. It requires a clearer institutional framework that can support relationally ethical and developmentally effective mentoring practices across diverse placement contexts.

The study concludes that mentoring in an ODeL ITE context should be understood as a structured, relational, and context-sensitive process that integrates interpersonal support with professional development. On this basis, the study proposes an Ubuntu-orientated mentoring framework as its original contribution. The framework responds to the identified need for an ethically grounded, practically clear, and better-aligned mentoring framework for STs and MTs in South African ODeL TP contexts.

Against this background, the next section synthesises the main findings of the study in relation to the research questions in order to show how the empirical evidence collectively informs the study's conclusions and the proposed Ubuntu-orientated mentoring framework

6.3 CONCLUSIONS OF RESEARCH FINDINGS

This section synthesises the study's main findings in relation to the research questions that guided the enquiry. Rather than repeating the detailed discussion presented in Chapter 5, the section draws together the central patterns that emerged across the data and interprets their significance for mentoring during TP in an ITE ODeL context. In doing so, it shows how the findings illuminate the mentoring needs and experiences of STs and MTs, their understanding of Ubuntu-orientated mentoring, the institutional conditions

required to support such mentoring, and the key requirements for an Ubuntu-orientated mentoring framework.

The synthesis is organised according to the five sub-questions of the study and leads to the main research question:

How can an Ubuntu-orientated perspective enhance mentoring practices in the ITE Open Distance eLearning context and inform the development of an Ubuntu-orientated mentoring framework?

The five research sub-questions are addressed below as a synthesis of the study's main findings rather than as a repetition of the full empirical discussion.

6.3.1 RQ1: Which mentoring needs do STs and MTs identify during ST TP?

The thesis concludes that STs and MTs require mentoring during TP that is both developmentally purposeful and interpersonally supportive. The findings showed that STs needed clear guidance on lesson planning, classroom practice, observation, and constructive feedback, as well as encouragement, respectful communication, and support that affirm their confidence and dignity. MTs similarly required greater clarity about their mentoring role and what effective mentoring entails in practice.

Likewise, mentoring needs in the ODeL TP context cannot be understood in purely technical terms. While professional guidance remained essential, the findings showed that interpersonal support was part of effective mentoring rather than an optional add-on. STs required mentoring relationships in which they felt recognised, included, and supported as developing professionals. In this regard, the study concludes that mentoring needs during TP are best understood as integrating professional and interpersonal dimensions.

The study also concludes that these mentoring needs are more significant in the ODeL context, where institutional distance can intensify uncertainty and the school-based mentoring relationship may be the main source of support during TP. In such circumstances, observation, feedback, induction into school routines, and respectful relational support become central to ST learning and development.

The findings indicate a gap between the mentoring support needed and the support consistently provided in practice. The conclusion is that effective mentoring in ODeL TP requires clearer expectations, stronger support for MTs, and more deliberate institutional structures to ensure that mentoring needs are met more consistently across placement contexts. The mentoring needs of STs and MTs during TP call for an approach that combines practical guidance, relational support, and context-sensitive institutional backing.

6.3.2 RQ2: How do STs and MTs experience mentoring practices during ST TP?

It was concluded that STs' and MTs' experiences of mentoring during TP were uneven and strongly shaped by the quality of support offered within the school context. While some participants found mentoring supportive, encouraging, and professionally valuable, others found it limited, inconsistent, or largely absent. This unevenness showed that mentoring during TP was not experienced uniformly across placement contexts.

A central conclusion is that mentoring experiences were influenced by both relational and contextual conditions. Where mentors were approachable, supportive, and willing to provide guidance, STs were more likely to experience TP as a meaningful period of professional growth. Where mentoring was weak or inconsistent, STs were more likely to feel uncertain, isolated, and left to manage professional demands with limited support. The study, therefore, concludes that the quality of the mentoring relationship plays a decisive role in shaping how TP is experienced in practice.

Additionally, it was determined that school realities affected the enactment of mentoring in significant ways. Time constraints, workload, overcrowded classrooms, and under-resourced teaching environments often limited the consistency and depth of mentoring support. These contextual pressures did not remove the need for mentoring, but they influenced how far mentoring could be sustained in practice. As a result, mentoring was often shaped by what was manageable in a particular school rather than by a shared and consistent standard of support.

In the ODeL context, these experiences were intensified by the distance between the university and the school placement site. The findings indicate that where institutional

presence was less visible, STs depended more heavily on the mentor relationship for guidance, inclusion, and feedback. This meant that variations in mentoring practice directly affected how supported STs felt during TP.

Therefore, the study establishes that mentoring experiences during TP in an ODeL ITE context were inconsistent across participants and settings. This points to the need for a clearer and more structured mentoring approach that remains sensitive to contextual realities while still protecting the developmental and interpersonal purposes of mentoring. This conclusion supports the argument that an Ubuntu-orientated mentoring framework can strengthen TP by providing a more ethically grounded and practically consistent basis for mentoring across diverse school contexts

6.3.3 RQ3: How do STs and MTs perceive Ubuntu-orientated mentoring?

STs and MTs perceived Ubuntu mentoring as a human-centred, relational approach during TP. Their views associated Ubuntu mentoring with respect, empathy, patience, kindness, dignity, and supportive inclusion within the school environment. Ubuntu was therefore understood as shaping the quality of the mentoring relationship and the manner in which professional support should be offered.

A further conclusion is that participants did not view Ubuntu mentoring as separate from professional development. Instead, they understood it as the way in which mentoring should be enacted in practice. In this sense, Ubuntu was reflected in how mentors communicated, corrected mistakes, offered feedback, and included STs as developing professionals within the school community. Therefore, finding that Ubuntu mentoring has practical significance for everyday mentoring interactions during TP.

The findings also showed that participants valued mentoring that protects dignity while still promoting growth. This suggests that Ubuntu mentoring does not imply avoiding correction or lowering expectations. Rather, it requires that guidance, feedback, and support are offered in ways that affirm the ST as a person while strengthening professional learning. The study, therefore, concludes that Ubuntu mentoring integrates interpersonal care with developmental purpose.

Ubuntu was more consistently recognised as an ideal than enacted as a formalised mentoring practice. Although participants valued Ubuntu-related principles, these were not always translated into consistent mentoring actions across TP contexts. This points to a gap between the positive perception of Ubuntu and its uneven implementation in practice.

Ubuntu mentoring was thus perceived as an important and contextually relevant basis for mentoring during TP in a South African ODeL ITE context. However, for Ubuntu to move beyond a valued principle, it needs to be translated into clearer mentoring expectations and observable practices.

6.3.4 RQ4: What Institutional Support Would Promote Ubuntu-Orientated Mentoring in TP, According to the Study Participants?

The research concludes that institutional support is essential for promoting Ubuntu mentoring during TP in an ODeL context. The findings showed that Ubuntu-orientated mentoring cannot depend only on the goodwill or personal commitment of individual MTs. It requires institutional conditions that clarify expectations, support mentoring practice, and strengthen consistency across placement contexts.

Participants viewed clear communication of mentoring expectations as a necessary form of institutional support. In particular, the study found that mentoring is more likely to remain uneven when MTs are not given sufficient guidance on what is expected of them during TP. The university, therefore, has an important role in making mentoring expectations more explicit, especially regarding lesson observation, constructive feedback, and the broader relational responsibilities of mentoring.

Additionally, it was concluded that MT preparation is necessary if Ubuntu mentoring is to be implemented more consistently in practice. Participants' views indicated that MTs require practical guidance on mentoring, supporting STs professionally, and enacting Ubuntu values through everyday mentoring practices. This suggests that institutional support should include mentor preparation that is clear, accessible, and directly linked to the realities of TP in schools.

Moreover, institutional support should include practical tools and processes that make mentoring easier to enact and more visible in practice. Participants pointed to the need for guidance tools, communication processes, and monitoring mechanisms that support mentoring without reducing it to a compliance exercise. The study, therefore, concludes that institutional support should promote both accountability and feasibility, so that mentoring remains meaningful while also becoming more consistent.

The findings further showed that, in an ODeL context, institutional distance can weaken support if communication and follow-up are limited. For this reason, the study concludes that Ubuntu mentoring requires a stronger institutional presence through clearer documentation, improved communication pathways, and realistic mechanisms to verify that key mentoring practices have occurred.

Institutional support is thus a necessary condition for strengthening Ubuntu mentoring during TP. Clear expectations, mentor preparation, practical guidance, and feasible accountability measures are required if Ubuntu values are to be translated into consistent mentoring practice across diverse ODeL placement settings. This conclusion supports the framework proposed in this chapter, which positions institutional support as central to the strengthening of TP mentoring.

6.3.5 RQ5: What Are the Key Requirements for an Ubuntu-Orientated Framework That Could Improve the TP Experiences of ODeL STs and MTs?

An Ubuntu-orientated mentoring framework for TP in an ODeL ITE context must combine ethical grounding with practical clarity. The findings showed that mentoring cannot be strengthened through broad principles alone. It requires a framework that translates Ubuntu values into clear mentoring expectations, defined processes, and realistic practices that can be implemented across diverse school contexts.

A central conclusion is that the framework must integrate interpersonal and professional dimensions of mentoring. The study found that STs required both developmental guidance and relational support, while MTs needed clearer guidance on how to offer these forms of support in practice. The framework should therefore recognise that effective

mentoring during TP depends on the integration of observation, feedback, modelling, and guided reflection with respect, empathy, dignity, and supportive inclusion.

Additionally, the framework must specify minimum mentoring practices to strengthen consistency across placements. The findings indicated that mentoring often varied according to individual mentor capacity, school conditions, and local practice. For this reason, the framework should set out clear expectations regarding induction into the school context, planned observation, constructive feedback, and opportunities for reflection and improvement. These minimum practices can provide a more stable basis for mentoring while still allowing for contextual flexibility.

Furthermore, the framework must remain responsive to the realities of ODeL and diverse school environments. Because STs complete TP across varied, sometimes constrained contexts, the framework should be practical and adaptable rather than overly idealistic or burdensome. This means that it should support meaningful mentoring in ways that are manageable for MTs and relevant to different placement conditions.

The study also determined that the framework must be supported by clear institutional guidance, shared tools, and feasible forms of accountability. Ubuntu-orientated mentoring is more likely to remain uneven if the framework is not accompanied by structures that help stakeholders understand their roles and responsibilities. The framework should therefore include guidance that supports implementation and makes mentoring more visible without reducing it to a procedural exercise.

Key requirements of an Ubuntu-orientated mentoring framework are relationally ethical practice, developmental mentoring processes, clarity of roles and expectations, contextual flexibility, and practical institutional support. These requirements provide the basis for the framework presented in the next section as the study's original contribution to strengthening TP mentoring in an ODeL ITE context

6.4 CONCLUSIONS REGARDING THE MAIN RESEARCH QUESTION

The main research question guiding this study was:

How can an Ubuntu-orientated perspective enhance mentoring practices in the ITE Open Distance eLearning context and inform the development of an Ubuntu-orientated mentoring framework?

The evidence from this study found that an Ubuntu-orientated perspective can enhance mentoring practices in the ITE ODeL context by providing a relational, ethical, and contextually relevant basis for mentoring during TP. The findings showed that effective mentoring in this context should integrate professional guidance, psychosocial support, dignity-preserving feedback, and clearer institutional support. On this basis, the study proposes an Ubuntu-orientated mentoring framework as its original contribution. In this thesis, the Ubuntu-orientated perspective serves as the conceptual lens through which mentoring is understood, while the Ubuntu-orientated mentoring framework serves as the practical response developed from the study findings.

A central conclusion of the study is that mentoring in the ODeL TP context should be understood as both an interpersonal and a professional process. STs required practical guidance through observation, feedback, modelling, and support with teaching responsibilities, but they also required mentoring that affirmed their dignity, confidence, and sense of professional belonging. Mentoring, therefore, becomes more effective when developmental guidance is offered through relationships characterised by respect, empathy, inclusion, and shared responsibility.

Furthermore, it was found that Ubuntu offers a contextually relevant ethical foundation for mentoring in South African ITE. Rather than treating mentoring as a narrow supervisory task, an Ubuntu-orientated framework positions mentoring as a human-centred practice that supports professional learning in ways that recognise the ST as a developing person and professional. In this regard, Ubuntu strengthens mentoring by shaping how guidance is offered, how correction is communicated, and how STs are included in the school's professional life.

Ubuntu values alone are not sufficient unless they are translated into clear mentoring practices and institutional support structures. Although Ubuntu-related values were positively regarded, mentoring remained inconsistent because expectations were often

unclear, mentor preparation was limited, and institutional guidance was weak. For this reason, an Ubuntu-orientated framework can strengthen mentoring practice when it also provides clear role expectations, minimum mentoring practices, practical tools, and feasible accountability measures that support implementation across diverse placement contexts.

Such a framework is particularly important in the ODeL context, where institutional distance may intensify ST vulnerability and increase dependence on school-based mentoring relationships. In these circumstances, a clearer and more structured mentoring framework can help reduce inconsistency, strengthen support, and improve alignment between university expectations and mentoring practice in schools.

An Ubuntu-orientated perspective thus enhances mentoring practices in the ITE ODeL context by humanising the mentoring relationship, integrating interpersonal and professional support, and providing a contextually relevant basis for more structured and consistent mentoring during TP. On this basis, the Ubuntu-orientated mentoring framework presented in the next section is offered as the study's original contribution to strengthening mentoring practice in South African ODeL ITE contexts.

6.5 UBUNTU-ORIENTATED MENTORING FRAMEWORK

This section presents the Ubuntu-orientated mentoring framework proposed as the original contribution of this study to mentoring during TP in an ITE ODeL context. The framework was developed from the integrated theoretical lens that informed the study, namely Ubuntu philosophy, an Afrocentric paradigm, and Kram's Mentoring Functions Framework.

Within this framework, Ubuntu provides the ethical orientation by foregrounding dignity, empathy, mutual respect, inclusion, and shared responsibility (Letseka, 2012; Msila, 2015). The Afrocentric paradigm strengthens contextual relevance by affirming relational ways of knowing and being within African educational contexts (Asante, 2020). Kram's Mentoring Functions Framework provides the developmental structure by clarifying the interpersonal and career-related functions of mentoring (Kram, 1988; Ragins & Kram,

2007). These perspectives support an understanding of mentoring as a relational and developmental practice within the South African ODeL ITE context.

The framework presented in this section sets out the principles, components, and stakeholder responsibilities that underpin Ubuntu-orientated mentoring during TP. It is intended to offer a contextually relevant guide for strengthening mentoring practice in ways that are both ethically grounded and practically workable in diverse placement settings.

Figure 11 provides a visual summary of the integrated framework that underpins the Ubuntu-orientated mentoring framework presented in this study.

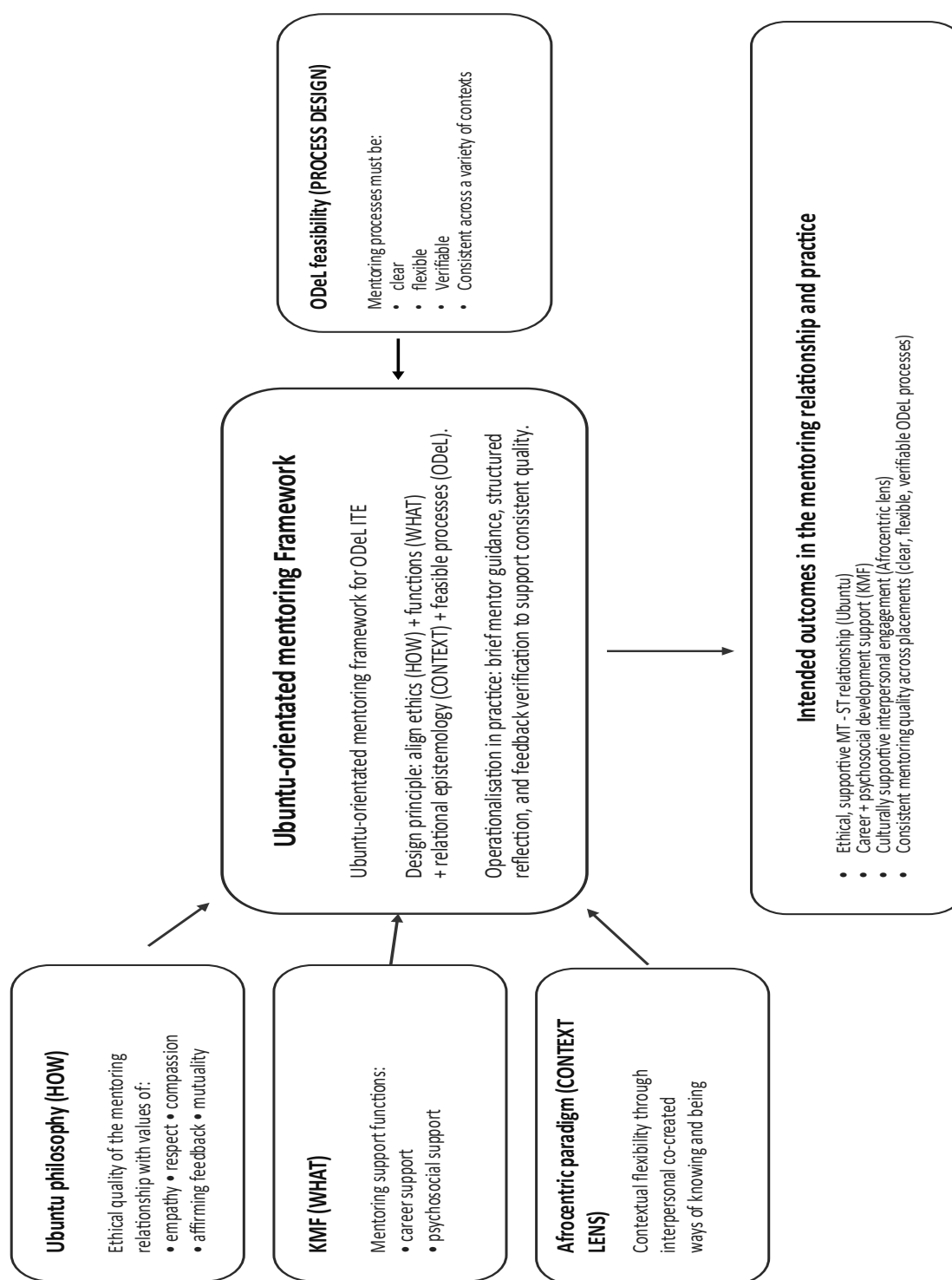


Figure 11: Integrated framework that underpins the Ubuntu-orientated mentoring framework for ODeL ITE

Source: Author's own design

6.5.1 Rationale for the Ubuntu-Orientated Framework

The need for this framework arose from the study's finding that mentoring during TP in the ODeL context was often uneven and insufficiently structured. Although participants valued mentoring that combined professional guidance with respectful interpersonal support, this mentoring was not consistently experienced across placement contexts. This pointed to the need for a framework that could translate the study's conclusions into clearer mentoring expectations and practices.

The framework was therefore developed in response to three issues identified in the study. First, mentoring often depended too heavily on the individual MT's capacity, willingness, and school context. Second, STs required both developmental guidance and relational support during TP, which supports Kram's view that mentoring includes both career-related and psychosocial functions (Kram, 1988; Ragins & Kram, 2007). Third, institutional expectations for mentoring were not always communicated clearly or consistently enacted in practice. In the ODeL context, this is especially important because distance and uneven support can intensify the challenges STs face during placement (Du Plessis et al., 2010; Langsford & Rusznyak, 2024).

Accordingly, the Ubuntu-orientated mentoring framework is presented as a practical response to the study's conclusions. It translates the ethical concerns associated with Ubuntu, such as dignity, empathy, and mutual respect (Letseka, 2012; Msila, 2015), together with the developmental concerns highlighted in the findings, into a clearer structure for mentoring in the ODeL ITE context.

6.5.2 Principles That Guided This Ubuntu-Orientated Mentoring Framework

This framework is guided by five interrelated principles that respond to the study's findings and provide a basis for strengthening mentoring during TP in an ODeL ITE context. These principles are interpersonal accountability, integrated mentoring functions, structured developmental processes, contextual flexibility with minimum standards, and feasible verification. Together, they indicate how Ubuntu and Afrocentric values can be translated into mentoring practices that remain developmentally purposeful and practically workable (Asante, 2020; Kram, 1988; Letseka, 2012; Ragins & Kram, 2007).

The first principle, interpersonal accountability, positions mentoring as an ethical relationship grounded in dignity, empathy, mutual respect, and shared responsibility. Within this framework, mentoring is not limited to technical supervision but includes the quality of the interpersonal relationship through which guidance is offered. Ubuntu, therefore, requires that STs are corrected, supported, and included in ways that protect dignity and encourage growth (Letseka, 2012; Msila, 2015; Ngubane & Makua, 2021).

The second principle, integrated mentoring functions, draws on Kram's framework by recognising that effective mentoring should include both career-related and interpersonal support. In this study, STs required professional guidance through modelling, observation, feedback, and coaching, as well as encouragement, confidence-building, and a sense of belonging. For this reason, the framework treats these mentoring functions as interconnected rather than separate (Kram, 1988; Ragins & Kram, 2007).

The third principle, structured developmental processes, reflects the need for mentoring to occur through a clear and purposeful cycle rather than through irregular or incidental support. The framework, therefore, emphasises mentoring as a developmental process that includes induction, co-planning, observation and feedback, and reflection. This gives mentoring a more coherent structure and supports continuity in ST learning during TP (Harrison et al., 2005).

The fourth principle, contextual flexibility with minimum standards, recognises that mentoring takes place across diverse school contexts, with different constraints and possibilities. While the framework sets out minimum mentoring expectations that should apply across placements, it also allows flexibility in how these are enacted in practice. This principle is important in an ODeL context because mentoring must remain realistic and responsive to uneven school conditions without losing developmental value (Van den Berg, 2020).

The fifth principle, feasible verification, addresses the need for mentoring to be visible and credible without becoming burdensome or punitive. The framework, therefore, includes brief and practical forms of evidence that key mentoring processes have taken place. In the ODeL context, where the university has limited day-to-day access to school-

based mentoring, such verification can support accountability and consistency while keeping the process manageable for mentors and STs (Ingersoll & Strong, 2011).

These principles provide the foundation for the Ubuntu-orientated mentoring framework presented in this study. They show that mentoring in the ODeL ITE context should be ethically grounded, developmentally structured, contextually responsive, and supported by practical mechanisms that strengthen consistency across placements.

6.5.3 Components of an Ubuntu-Orientated Mentoring Framework

The Ubuntu-orientated mentoring framework proposed in this study is organised around four interrelated components, namely inputs, processes, outputs, and outcomes. This structure provides a clear way of translating the framework's principles into mentoring practice during TP in an ODeL ITE context. It specifies the conditions that should be in place before mentoring begins, how mentoring should be enacted, the immediate evidence of mentoring that should be visible, and the framework is intended outcomes.

The input component refers to the foundational conditions required for effective mentoring. These include prepared MTs, prepared STs, shared mentoring tools, and clear communication pathways. The process component refers to the Ubuntu-orientated mentoring cycle through which mentoring is enacted during TP. This cycle includes induction and belonging, co-planning and guided modelling, observation and constructive feedback, and reflection linked to action planning. The output component refers to the immediate and visible products of mentoring, such as mentoring agreements, observation records, feedback records, and reflective action steps. The outcome component refers to the broader improvement the framework seeks to support, including more consistent mentoring, stronger ST competence and confidence, improved mentor engagement, and better alignment between institutional expectations and mentoring practice.

Figure 12 presents a visual summary of these components. The sections that follow explain each component in greater detail in order to show how the framework can support more coherent and contextually relevant mentoring during TP in the ODeL ITE context.

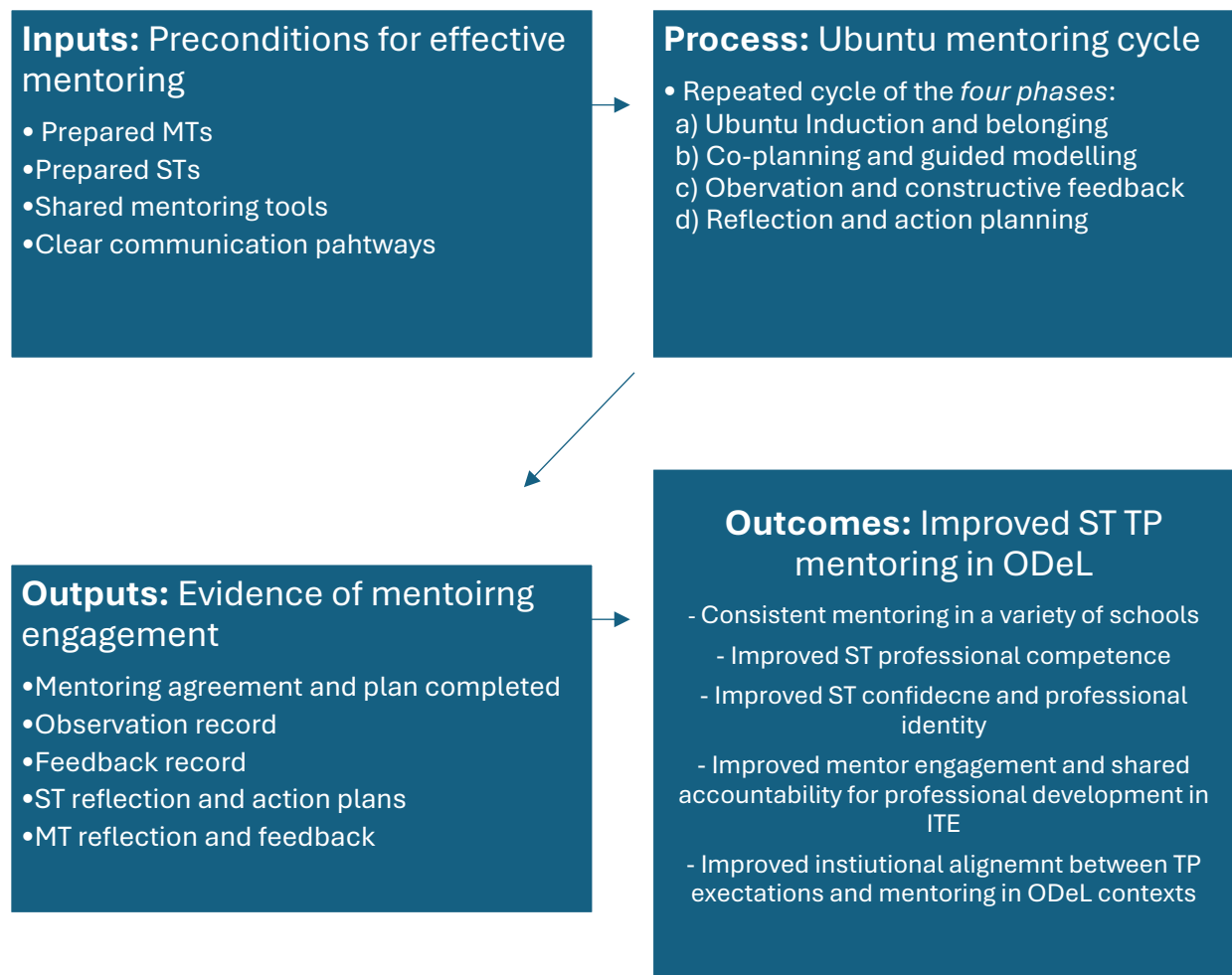


Figure 12: Components of an Ubuntu-orientated mentoring framework

Source: Author's own design

The section below details the components of the Ubuntu-orientated mentoring framework presented in this study.

6.5.3.1 Inputs

The input component refers to the conditions that should be in place to support effective mentoring during TP in an ODeL context. These include prepared MTs, prepared STs, shared mentoring tools, and clear communication pathways between the university, schools, MTs, and STs. The framework proposes that MTs should receive clear guidance

on minimum mentoring expectations, while STs should be prepared to actively participate in mentoring through reflection, feedback, and professional engagement. Shared tools and communication processes are included to reduce uncertainty and promote greater consistency across placement contexts.

6.5.3.2 Process

The process component refers to the Ubuntu-orientated mentoring cycle through which mentoring is enacted during TP. This cycle includes four phases: induction and belonging; co-planning and guided modelling; observation and constructive feedback; and reflection linked to action planning. These phases are intended to support mentoring as a developmental and relational process rather than an irregular or purely administrative activity. Through this cycle, the framework integrates professional guidance with interpersonal support, remaining responsive to the realities of school placement contexts.

The four phases of the Process component:

- Ubuntu induction and belonging: The findings show that STs value openness, kindness, feeling and being supported to learn through mistakes. This phase, therefore, foregrounds psychological safety, belonging, and clarity of expectations through orientation to school routines and culture, and a mentoring agreement that sets roles, communication norms, meeting expectations, and a dignity-preserving feedback approach.
- Co-planning and guided modelling: The STs' views reflect a strong expectation that MTs should guide, direct, and help them understand what good practice looks like in real classrooms. In addition, the contextual constraints described in under-resourced and overcrowded settings indicate that guidance must be responsive to classroom realities. This phase, therefore, focuses on co-planning that is realistic for the class context, purposeful modelling where appropriate, and ST goal-setting linked to the next teaching sequence.
- Observation and constructive feedback: The findings clearly show that STs want mentors who can offer positive critique and who correct in ways that build confidence rather than humiliation or withdrawal. The framework, therefore,

includes planned observation against agreed focus areas and structured feedback that affirms strengths, identifies targeted growth areas, and sets next steps in a supportive, coaching-oriented manner.

- Guided reflection and action planning: Chapter 5 indicates that mentoring should not stop at advice or signatures, but should help STs interpret experience, apply feedback, and improve over time. This phase, therefore, converts teaching episodes into learning through ST reflection linked to feedback and revised goals that inform the next mentoring cycle. Importantly, this reflective process must remain realistic in contexts of time pressure and workload.

6.5.3.3 Outputs (immediate, verifiable products of mentoring)

The output component refers to the immediate, visible evidence that mentoring has occurred. These outputs include a mentoring agreement, observation records, feedback records, and reflective action steps linked to ST development. Within the framework, these outputs are intended to make mentoring more visible and consistent without creating unnecessary administrative burden. In the ODeL context, such evidence is important because it provides a practical way of supporting accountability where the university has limited day-to-day access to school-based mentoring.

6.5.3.4 Outcomes

The outcome component refers to the broader changes the framework is intended to support during TP. These include more consistent mentoring across diverse placement contexts, improved ST professional competence, stronger ST confidence and professional identity, better mentor engagement, and improved alignment between institutional expectations and mentoring practice. Taken together, these outcomes reflect the framework's aim of strengthening mentoring in ways that are ethically grounded, developmentally purposeful, and contextually relevant in the ODeL ITE setting.

6.5.4 Roles and Responsibilities

The effective implementation of the Ubuntu-orientated mentoring framework depends on the shared responsibilities of MTs, STs, and the university. Each stakeholder has a distinct

role in supporting mentoring during TP, but these roles are interdependent and should work together to strengthen consistency, accountability, and professional support in the ODeL context.

MTs play a central role in enacting the framework in daily practice. Their responsibilities include welcoming STs into the school context, supporting their induction into routines and expectations, guiding lesson planning and classroom practice, observing teaching, and providing constructive feedback that preserves dignity and encourages growth. MTs are also expected to keep brief evidence of mentoring activities, such as mentoring agreements, observation notes, and feedback summaries, to support continuity and accountability.

STs are expected to participate actively in the mentoring process as developing professionals. Their role includes co-planning, seeking and using feedback, reflecting on their practice, and acting on agreed-upon areas for improvement. Within the framework, STs are not positioned as passive recipients of mentoring, but as active participants in their own professional learning during TP.

The university has a responsibility to provide the institutional support required for the framework to function effectively. This includes communicating clear mentoring expectations, preparing MTs and STs for their roles, providing practical mentoring tools, and establishing realistic processes to support and monitor mentoring across placement contexts. In the ODeL setting, this role is especially important because institutional distance can weaken mentoring consistency if expectations and support structures are not made sufficiently clear.

These roles and responsibilities support the implementation of the Ubuntu-orientated mentoring framework as a shared and structured process. Through this shared responsibility, the framework seeks to strengthen mentoring during TP in ways that are more relationally grounded, developmentally purposeful, and practically achievable across diverse ODeL placement settings.

6.6 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

This study has several limitations that should be acknowledged. First, the empirical component involved a relatively small number of participants, namely eight STs and 13 MTs. Although this is appropriate for a qualitative case study, the findings cannot be understood as statistically representative of all ODeL ITE contexts. The value of the study lies rather in the depth of insight it provides into mentoring experiences within a specific context.

Second, the study was conducted within one South African ODeL ITE institution. The findings and the proposed framework are therefore context-specific. While the study may offer insights that are relevant to similar contexts, its conclusions should be understood in relation to the particular institutional and educational setting in which the research was conducted.

Third, the study focused on STs and MTs and did not include other stakeholders who may influence mentoring during TP, such as university TP coordinators, lecturers, school management, or subject advisors. Their inclusion may have provided a broader understanding of how mentoring expectations are communicated, supported, and monitored across the university-school interface.

A further limitation concerns the use of online data-generating methods, particularly written questionnaire responses. While these methods were appropriate for the ODeL context and enabled participants to access different settings, the depth and detail of responses may have varied. This may have limited the extent to which some participants elaborated on their experiences.

Despite these limitations, the study makes a meaningful contribution by providing a contextually grounded understanding of mentoring during TP in an ODeL ITE context and by proposing an Ubuntu-orientated mentoring framework informed by participants' experiences and institutional documentation. These limitations, therefore, do not diminish the value of the study but indicate the boundaries within which its findings and contributions should be understood.

6.7 RECOMMENDATIONS

The recommendations below flow from the Ubuntu-orientated mentoring framework, and by implication, the findings proposed in section 6.6. Because the framework was built around minimum standards and aims to provide context-sensitive flexibility, a structured mentoring cycle, and feasible verification, the recommendations are set out at different system levels to support consistent implementation across diverse placements.

6.7.1 Recommendations for the University (Institutional Management Level)

ITE institutions should formally adopt a minimum mentoring standard for TP in the ODeL context, aligned to the framework's principles of interpersonal accountability, integrated mentoring functions, and structured developmental processes. These minimum standards should specify, among others, that mentoring must include the following: a brief induction and welcoming session that introduces the concept of Ubuntu mentoring, and clearly sets out the expectations for STs and MTs; concrete instructions and examples for co-planning and guided modelling support; at least one weekly planned observation with feedback and guidelines on how to best enact the observation and feedback session; and clear guidelines for guided reflection and action planning. This is necessary based on the empirical findings of the study, that mentoring can be uneven and overly dependent on the individual MT's experience and willingness, and the university is the only stakeholder that can set a consistent baseline across all ST TP placements.

In addition, the university should resource the implementation of the framework by ensuring that the TP department (made up of the TP coordinators who manage placements and the TP lecturers) have the capacity to provide simple but concrete mentoring tools and templates (e.g. mentoring agreement forms, observation notes, feedback prompts, reflective questions) and ensure these are built into the official TP documentation package. These tools reduce uncertainty and make it easier for MTs to do the required mentoring work without it becoming burdensome, while also supporting consistency and fairness for STs placed in different school contexts.

6.7.2 Recommendations for the University TP Department (Implementation Level)

The TP department should introduce a short, practical MT and ST orientation (online and on-demand) that clearly explains the university's minimum mentoring expectations and demonstrates *how* to implement the Ubuntu mentoring cycle across the four phases (induction - co-planning - observation/feedback - reflection). The purpose is not to create extra workload, but to clarify what effective mentoring looks like in observable practice and how both career support and interpersonal support (Kram, 1988; Ragins & Kram, 2007) should be provided together.

Linked to this, the TP department should implement a clear, but simple, low-burden verification system that aligns with the principle of practical verification. For example, MTs could submit (or upload via a link) a short checklist or one-page record confirming that a mentoring agreement was discussed, at least one weekly observation occurred, and feedback was provided with next steps. This directly supports the framework's intended outputs.

6.7.3 Recommendations for Schools and MTs

Schools that host STs should support mentoring by ensuring that MTs are allocated time and opportunity to conduct at least one planned observation and feedback discussion weekly, during the TP period. MTs should implement the expected practices outlined in the framework, namely: welcoming STs through an induction and belonging phase; co-planning support aligned with classroom realities; structured observation and constructive feedback that protect dignity; and short reflection and action planning to guide the next teaching cycle. This should be done using the university's templates to keep the process realistic and manageable.

MTs should also keep brief evidence of mentoring (agreement, observation notes, feedback summary, and a short verification that feedback occurred), as recommended in the framework. This is important because it strengthens accountability without turning mentoring into compliance, while making mentoring engagement visible in an ODeL context where the university has limited day-to-day access to schools.

6.7.4 Recommendations for STs

STs should prepare to participate in mentoring as an active professional learning process. In line with the framework, STs should be required to do the following: set goals for each teaching sequence; request feedback and implement agreed actions; and keep a brief reflective record linked to feedback and learning goals. This is necessary because the framework positions mentoring as a shared responsibility. Mentoring improves when STs know what to ask for, how to use feedback, and how to track their own development over time.

6.7.5 Recommendations for the DBE and Provincial Education Departments

The DBE and provincial departments should strengthen the policy-practice link by issuing clear guidance to schools that host STs. It should emphasise that mentoring is part of professional responsibility during TP and should include planned observation and constructive feedback. Where possible, departments should support schools through short briefing notes or cluster-level engagements that promote ethical mentoring conduct and support for STs. This recommendation aligns with the framework's emphasis on equity through minimum standards and the need for consistent mentoring expectations across varied school contexts. Additionally, the department can consider allocating Continuing Professional Development points through the SACE offices to staff attending university MT training to encourage attendance and provide compensation.

The next section outlines suggestions for future research to extend, test, and refine this framework.

6.8 SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

Further research could extend this study by piloting and evaluating the Ubuntu-orientated mentoring framework in practice during TP in ODeL ITE contexts. Such research would enable assessment of how the framework functions across different school settings and identification of which aspects require refinement, adaptation, or further support during implementation.

Future studies could also include a broader range of stakeholders involved in TP mentoring, such as university TP coordinators, lecturers, school management, and

subject advisors. Their perspectives may deepen understanding of how mentoring expectations are communicated, supported, and monitored across the university-school interface.

In addition, comparative studies across multiple ODeL institutions could strengthen understanding of how mentoring practices differ across institutional contexts and further test the transferability of the proposed framework. Research of this nature may also help identify common mentoring challenges and context-specific responses in South African teacher education.

Finally, further research could explore the relationship between Ubuntu-orientated mentoring and specific dimensions of ST development, such as professional identity formation, confidence, reflective practice, and classroom readiness. Such work would contribute to a more detailed understanding of how relationally grounded mentoring supports professional learning during TP.

Concluding this chapter, the final section summarises the study's overall contribution and closes the thesis.

6.9 CONCLUSION

This chapter brought the study to a close by drawing together its main conclusions and presenting the Ubuntu-orientated mentoring framework as the study's original contribution. The study showed that mentoring during TP in an ODeL ITE context was uneven and that STs' experiences of support were often shaped by individual mentor capacity, school conditions, and the clarity of institutional expectations. The findings also confirmed that mentoring during TP should support both professional development and interpersonal growth.

In response, the chapter presented an Ubuntu-orientated mentoring framework that integrates ethical, relational, and developmental dimensions of mentoring within a structured and contextually relevant approach. The framework provides a basis for strengthening mentoring practice by establishing clearer expectations, defined processes, shared responsibilities, and practical support across diverse ODeL placement settings.

This thesis argues that mentoring during TP in South African ODeL ITE contexts can be strengthened by grounding it in Ubuntu values and by supporting it with a clearer, more consistent framework for practice. In this way, the study contributes to current scholarship on mentoring in ITE by offering a contextually relevant framework to strengthen support for STs during TP and enhance mentoring practice in ODeL environments.

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8. ANNEXURES

Annexure 1: Ethical Clearance from the research site



UNISA COLLEGE OF EDUCATION ETHICS REVIEW COMMITTEE

Date: 2022/11/09

Ref: 2022/11/09/ 50839500/22/AM

Name: Mrs CJ Kotze

Student No.: 50839500

Dear Mrs CJ Kotze

Decision: Ethics Approval from
2022/11/09 to 2027/11/09

Researcher(s): Name: Mrs CJ Kotze
E-mail address: 50839500@mylife.unisa.ac.za
Telephone: 0827710606

Supervisor(s): Name: Prof PL Mabunda
E-mail address: mabunpl@unisa.ac.za
Telephone: 0124294478

Title of research:

Mentoring in the Initial Teacher Education Open Distance eLearning Context: An Ubuntu-orientated mentoring perspective.

Qualification: PhD Curriculum Studies

Thank you for the application for research ethics clearance by the UNISA College of Education Ethics Review Committee for the above mentioned research. Ethics approval is granted for the period 2022/11/09 to 2027/11/09.

The medium risk application was reviewed by the Ethics Review Committee on 2022/11/09 in compliance with the UNISA Policy on Research Ethics and the Standard Operating Procedure on Research Ethics Risk Assessment.

The proposed research may now commence with the provisions that:

1. The researcher will ensure that the research project adheres to the relevant guidelines set out in the Unisa Covid-19 position statement on research ethics attached.
2. The researcher(s) will ensure that the research project adheres to the values and principles expressed in the UNISA Policy on Research Ethics.



University of South Africa
Preller Street, Muckleneuk Ridge, City of Tshwane
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3. Any adverse circumstance arising in the undertaking of the research project that is relevant to the ethicality of the study should be communicated in writing to the UNISA College of Education Ethics Review Committee.
4. The researcher(s) will conduct the study according to the methods and procedures set out in the approved application.
5. Any changes that can affect the study-related risks for the research participants, particularly in terms of assurances made with regards to the protection of participants' privacy and the confidentiality of the data, should be reported to the Committee in writing.
6. The researcher will ensure that the research project adheres to any applicable national legislation, professional codes of conduct, institutional guidelines and scientific standards relevant to the specific field of study. Adherence to the following South African legislation is important, if applicable: Protection of Personal Information Act, no 4 of 2013; Children's act no 38 of 2005 and the National Health Act, no 61 of 2003.
7. Only de-identified research data may be used for secondary research purposes in future on condition that the research objectives are similar to those of the original research. Secondary use of identifiable human research data requires additional ethics clearance.
8. No field work activities may continue after the expiry date **2027/11/09**. Submission of a completed research ethics progress report will constitute an application for renewal of Ethics Research Committee approval.

Note:

*The reference number **2022/11/09/ 50839500/22/AM** should be clearly indicated on all forms of communication with the intended research participants, as well as with the Committee.*

Kind regards,



Prof AT Motlhabane
CHAIRPERSON: CEDU RERC
motlhat@unisa.ac.za



Prof Mpine Makoe
ACTING EXECUTIVE DEAN
qakisme@unisa.ac.za



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Annexure 2: GDE Research Approval



GAUTENG PROVINCE

Department: Education
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

8/4/4/1/2

GDE RESEARCH APPROVAL LETTER

Date:	11 September 2023
Validity of Research Approval:	08 February 2023– 30 September 2023 2023/412
Name of Researcher:	Kotze CJ
Address of Researcher:	7 Altair Street, Midstream Ridge Olifantsfontein
Telephone Number:	082 7710606
Email address:	cjmcgeer@hotmail.com
Research Topic:	Mentoring in the Initial Teacher Education Open Distance eLearning Context: An Ubuntu-orientated mentoring perspective.
Name of University:	UNISA
Type of qualification	PhD
Number and type of schools:	10 Secondary Schools
District/s/HO	Gauteng East, Gauteng West, Gauteng North

Re: Approval in Respect of Request to Conduct Research

This letter serves to indicate that approval is hereby granted to the above-mentioned researcher to proceed with research in respect of the study indicated above. The onus rests with the researcher to negotiate appropriate and relevant time schedules with the school/s and/or offices involved to conduct the research. A separate copy of this letter must be presented to both the School (both Principal and SGB) and the District/Head Office Senior Manager confirming that permission has been granted for the research to be conducted.

[Signature] 11/09/2023
The following conditions apply to GDE research. The researcher may proceed with the above study subject to the conditions listed below being met. Approval may be withdrawn should any of the conditions listed below be flouted:

1

Making education a societal priority

Office of the Director: Education Research and Knowledge Management

7th Floor, 17 Simmonds Street, Johannesburg, 2001

Tel: (011) 355 0488

Email: Faith.Tshabalala@gauteng.gov.za

Website: www.education.gpg.gov.za

1. Letter that would indicate that the said researcher/s has/have been granted permission from the Gauteng Department of Education to conduct the research study.
2. The District/Head Office Senior Manager/s must be approached separately, and in writing, for permission to involve District/Head Office Officials in the project.
3. **Because of the relaxation of COVID 19 regulations researchers can collect data online, telephonically, physically access schools or may make arrangements for Zoom with the school Principal. Requests for such arrangements should be submitted to the GDE Education Research and Knowledge Management directorate.**
4. **The Researchers are advised to wear a mask at all times, Social distance at all times, Provide a vaccination certificate or negative COVID-19 test, not older than 72 hours, and Sanitise frequently.**
5. A copy of this letter must be forwarded to the school principal and the chairperson of the School Governing Body (SGB) that would indicate that the researcher/s have been granted permission from the Gauteng Department of Education to conduct the research study.
6. A letter / document that outline the purpose of the research and the anticipated outcomes of such research must be made available to the principals, SGBs and District/Head Office Senior Managers of the schools and districts/offices concerned, respectively.
7. The Researcher will make every effort obtain the goodwill and co-operation of all the GDE officials, principals, and chairpersons of the SGBs, teachers and learners involved. Persons who offer their co-operation will not receive additional remuneration from the Department while those that opt not to participate will not be penalised in any way.
8. Research may only be conducted after school hours so that the normal school programme is not interrupted. The Principal (if at a school) and/or Director (if at a district/head office) must be consulted about an appropriate time when the researcher/s may carry out their research at the sites that they manage.
9. Research may only commence from the second week of February and must be concluded before the beginning of the last quarter of the academic year. If incomplete, an amended Research Approval letter may be requested to conduct research in the following year.
10. Items 6 and 7 will not apply to any research effort being undertaken on behalf of the GDE. Such research will have been commissioned and be paid for by the Gauteng Department of Education.
11. It is the researcher's responsibility to obtain written parental consent of all learners that are expected to participate in the study.
12. 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.
13. The names of the GDE officials, schools, principals, parents, teachers and learners that participate in the study may not appear in the research report without the written consent of each of these individuals and/or organisations.
14. On completion of the study the researcher/s must supply the Director: Knowledge Management & Research with one Hard Cover bound and an electronic copy of the research.
15. The researcher may be expected to provide short presentations on the purpose, findings and recommendations of his/her research to both GDE officials and the schools concerned.
16. Should the researcher have been involved with research at a school and/or a district/head office level, the Director concerned must also be supplied with a brief summary of the purpose, findings and recommendations of the research study.

The Gauteng Department of Education wishes you well in this important undertaking and looks forward to examining the findings of your research study.

Kind regards



Dr. G. Mani Mukatuni

Acting CES: Education Research and Knowledge Management

DATE: 11/09/2023

2

Making education a societal priority

Office of the Director: Education Research and Knowledge Management

7th Floor, 17 Simmonds Street, Johannesburg, 2001

Tel: (011) 355 0488

Email: Faith.Tshabalala@gauteng.gov.za

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Annexure 3: Permission to collect data from students and documents



RESEARCH PERMISSION SUB-COMMITTEE (RPSC) OF THE SENATE RESEARCH, INNOVATION, POSTGRADUATE DEGREES AND COMMERCIALISATION COMMITTEE (SRIPCC)

23 February 2023

Decision: Permission approval 23
February 2023 to 24 February 2025

Ref #: 2023_RPC_008
Mrs Christy Jean Kotze
Student #:
Employee #: 90228952

Principal Investigator:

Mrs Christy Jean Kotze
Department of Curriculum and Instructional Studies
College of Education
50839500@mylife.unisa.ac.za; 0827710606

Supervisor: Prof PL Mbunda; mabunpl@unisa.ac.za; 0827710606

Mentoring in the Initial Teacher Education Open Distance eLearning Context

Your application regarding permission to involve Unisa staff, students and data in respect of the above study has been received and was considered by the Research Permission Subcommittee (RPSC) of the UNISA Senate, Research, Innovation, Postgraduate Degrees and Commercialisation Committee (SRIPCC) on 17 February 2023.

It is my pleasure to inform you that permission has been granted for the study. You may invite final year B. Ed students in voluntary online interviews (n=10). You may include age and gender and photovoice and reflective pieces as part of your data collection. You may also obtain access to the Teaching Practice policies and study guides used for the final year B. Ed students.

Adherence to the National Statement on Ethical Research and Publication practices, principle 7 referring to Social awareness, must be promoted: " Researchers and institutions must be sensitive to the potential impact of their research on society, marginal groups or individuals, and must



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consider these when weighing the benefits of the research against any harmful effects, with a view to minimising or avoiding the latter where possible."

The personal information made available to the researcher(s)/gatekeeper(s) will only be used for the advancement of this research project as indicated and for the purpose as described in this permission letter. The researcher(s)/gatekeeper(s) must take all appropriate precautionary measures to protect the personal information given to him/her/them in good faith and it must not be passed on to third parties. The dissemination of research instruments through the use of electronic mail should strictly be through blind copying, so as to protect the participants' right of privacy. The researcher hereby indemnifies UNISA from any claim or action arising from or due to the researcher's breach of his/her information protection obligations.

You are requested to submit a report of the study to the Research Permission Subcommittee (RPSC@unisa.ac.za) within 3 months of completion of the study.

Note: The reference number 2023_RPC_008 should be clearly indicated on all forms of communication with the intended research participants and the Research Permission Subcommittee.

Kind regards,



Dr Retha Visagie – Deputy Chairperson

Email: visargr@unisa.ac.za, Tel: (012) 429-2478

Prof Lessing Labuschagne – Chairperson

Email: llabus@unisa.ac.za, Tel: (012) 429-6368



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Annexure 4: Written invitation to participate in study and informed consent STs and MTs

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET



Ethics clearance reference number: **2022/11/09/ 50839500/22/AM**

Research permission reference number:

24 August 2024

Title: Mentoring in the Initial Teacher Education Open Distance eLearning Context: An Ubuntu-orientated mentoring perspective.

Dear Prospective Participant

My name is Christy Jean Kotze, and I am PhD student, studying at the University of South Africa in the Department of curriculum and instructional studies. I am completing my PhD in the field of Teacher Education with a specialisation in Curriculum Studies. The title of my study is "*Mentoring in the Initial Teacher Education Open Distance eLearning Context: An Ubuntu-orientated mentoring perspective*".

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THE STUDY?

I am conducting this research to establish the needs, expectations and experiences of mentor teacher and student teachers during teaching practice, using the Ubuntu orientated mentoring framework.

WHY HAVE YOU BEEN INVITED TO PARTICIPATE?

You were selected to participate in this research because you have recently mentored a Unisa student completing their teaching practice. We have also selected willing fourth year student teachers to participate in this study. It is anticipated that the information we gain from this interview will help us to explore and improve the teaching practice mentoring experiences of mentor teachers and student teachers in Unisa and South Africa. Your views and experiences will greatly contribute to the relevant Department and College of Education gaining valuable insights into the teaching practice mentoring needs, experiences and expectations of mentor and student student teachers.

WHAT IS THE NATURE OF YOUR PARTICIPATION IN THIS STUDY?

For data collection, **I will visit you at your school** where you are completing your TP (or working) **at a time that is most convenient to you** and host a confidential private interview session. The data collection phase of the study will involve voice recorded semi-structured interviews. I will be asking questions based on your personal experiences of being mentored during your teaching practice. These will be open-ended questions and I hope that you will feel comfortable to share your views and personal experiences on the broad topic. The **duration of the interview is planned to be 30 minutes – 1 hour.**

CAN I WITHDRAW FROM THIS STUDY EVEN AFTER HAVING AGREED TO PARTICIPATE?

Participating in this study is voluntary and you are under no obligation to consent to participation. If you do decide to take part, you will be given this information sheet to keep and be asked to sign a written consent form. You are free to withdraw at any time and without giving a reason.

WHAT ARE THE POTENTIAL BENEFITS OF TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY?

You may not benefit from your participation as an individual. However, it is envisioned that the findings of this study may benefit our larger community of student teachers being mentored during their teaching practice. This study would also supply new information to the researcher and others. The findings will also assist the institutions that provide initial

teacher education to understand student teachers' views and experiences and they can be beneficial and add value to the field of Curriculum Studies especially for the important teaching practice component.

ARE THERE ANY NEGATIVE CONSEQUENCES FOR ME IF I PARTICIPATE IN THE RESEARCH PROJECT?

We do not foresee that you will experience any negative consequences.

WILL THE INFORMATION THAT I CONVEY TO THE RESEARCHER AND MY IDENTITY BE KEPT CONFIDENTIAL?

The researcher undertakes to keep any information provided herein confidential. No one, apart from the researcher and identified supervisor of this study, will know about your involvement in this research (this measure refers to confidentiality). Your name will not be recorded anywhere and no one will be able to connect you to the answers you give (this measure refers to anonymity). Your answers will be given a code number, or a pseudonym and you will be referred to in this way in the data, any publications, or other research reporting methods such as conference proceedings (this measure refers to confidentiality).

HOW WILL THE RESEARCHER(S) PROTECT THE SECURITY OF DATA?

The records will be kept for five years for audit purposes where after it will be permanently destroyed. Hard copies will be shredded, and electronic versions will be permanently deleted from the hard drive of the computer.

WILL I RECEIVE PAYMENT OR ANY INCENTIVES FOR PARTICIPATING IN THIS STUDY?

There will be no direct benefits or financial benefits to participants. Therefore, no payment or incentives will be offered for participating in this study.

HAS THE STUDY RECEIVED ETHICS APPROVAL

This study has received written approval from the Research Ethics Committee of the College of Education, Unisa. A copy of the approval letter can be obtained from the researcher if you so wish.

HOW WILL I BE INFORMED OF THE FINDINGS/RESULTS OF THE RESEARCH?

If you would like to be informed of the final research findings, please contact Christy Jean Kotze on ekotzecj@unisa.ac.za. Should you require any further information or want to contact the researcher about any aspect of this study, please contact Christy Jean Kotze at ekotzecj@unisa.ac.za

Should you have concerns about the way in which the research has been conducted, you may contact Prof PL Mabunda at mabunpl@unisa.ac.za.

Thank you for taking time to read this information sheet and for participating in this study.

Thank you.

Mrs. CJ Kotze



Email address: ekotzecj@unisa.ac.za

Student number: 50839500

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS STUDY

I, _____ (participant name), confirm that the person asking my consent to take part in this research has told me about the nature, procedure, potential benefits and anticipated inconvenience of participation.

I have read (or had explained to me) and understood the study as explained in the information sheet.

I have had sufficient opportunity to ask questions and am prepared to participate in the study.

I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without penalty (if applicable).

I am aware that the findings of this study will be processed into a research report, journal publications and/or conference proceedings, but that my participation will be kept confidential unless otherwise specified.

I agree to the recording of the <insert specific data collection method>.

I have received a signed copy of the informed consent agreement.

Participant Name & Surname..... (please print)

Participant Signature.....Date.....

Researcher's Name & Surname: Christy Jean Kotze

Researcher's signature  Date.....



PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET MENTOR TEACHERS

Ethics clearance reference number: **2022/11/09/ 50839500/22/AM**

18 November 2024

Title: Mentoring in the Initial Teacher Education Open Distance eLearning Context: An Ubuntu-orientated mentoring perspective.

Dear Prospective Participant

My name is Christy Jean Kotze, and I am PhD student, studying at the University of South Africa in the Department of curriculum and instructional studies. I am completing my PhD in the field of Teacher Education with a specialisation in Curriculum Studies. The title of my study is "*Mentoring in the Initial Teacher Education Open Distance eLearning Context: An Ubuntu-orientated mentoring perspective*".

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THE STUDY?

I am conducting this research to establish the needs, expectations and experiences of mentor teacher and student teachers during teaching practice, using the Ubuntu orientated mentoring framework.

WHY HAVE YOU BEEN INVITED TO PARTICIPATE?

You were selected to participate in this research because you have recently mentored a Unisa student completing their teaching practice. We have also selected willing fourth year student teachers to participate in this study. It is anticipated that the information we gain from this interview will help us to explore and improve the teaching practice mentoring experiences of mentor teachers and student teachers in Unisa and South Africa. Your views and experiences will greatly contribute to the relevant Department and College of Education gaining valuable insights into the teaching practice mentoring needs, experiences and expectations of mentor and student student teachers.

WHAT IS THE NATURE OF YOUR PARTICIPATION IN THIS STUDY?

For data collection, **I will ask you to complete a qualitative online questionnaire that requires you to respond to questions about mentoring student teachers.** These will be open-ended questions and I hope that you will feel comfortable to share your views and personal experiences on the broad topic.

CAN YOU WITHDRAW FROM THIS STUDY EVEN AFTER HAVING AGREED TO PARTICIPATE?

Participating in this study is voluntary and you are under no obligation to consent to participation. If you do decide to take part, you will be given this information sheet to keep and be asked to sign a written consent form. You are free to withdraw at any time and without giving a reason.

WHAT ARE THE POTENTIAL BENEFITS OF TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY?

You may not benefit from your participation as an individual. However, it is envisioned that the findings of this study may benefit our larger community of student teachers being mentored during their teaching practice. This study would also supply new information to the researcher and others. The findings will also assist the institutions that provide initial teacher education to understand mentor and student teachers' views and experiences

and they can be beneficial and add value to the field of Curriculum Studies especially for the important teaching practice component.

ARE THERE ANY NEGATIVE CONSEQUENCES FOR YOU IF YOU PARTICIPATE IN THE RESEARCH PROJECT?

We do not foresee that you will experience any negative consequences.

WILL THE INFORMATION THAT YOU CONVEY TO THE RESEARCHER AND YOUR IDENTITY BE KEPT CONFIDENTIAL?

The researcher undertakes to keep any information provided herein confidential. No one, apart from the researcher and identified supervisor of this study, will know about your involvement in this research (this measure refers to confidentiality). Your name will not be recorded anywhere and no one will be able to connect you to the answers you give (this measure refers to anonymity). Your answers will be given a code number, or a pseudonym and you will be referred to in this way in the data, any publications, or other research reporting methods such as conference proceedings (this measure refers to confidentiality).

HOW WILL THE RESEARCHER(S) PROTECT THE SECURITY OF DATA?

The records will be kept for five years for audit purposes where after it will be permanently destroyed. Hard copies will be shredded, and electronic versions will be permanently deleted from the hard drive of the computer.

WILL YOU RECEIVE PAYMENT OR ANY INCENTIVES FOR PARTICIPATING IN THIS STUDY?

There will be no direct benefits or financial benefits to participants. Therefore, no payment or incentives will be offered for participating in this study.

HAS THE STUDY RECEIVED ETHICS APPROVAL

This study has received written approval from the Research Ethics Committee of the College of Education, Unisa. A copy of the approval letter can be obtained from the researcher if you so wish.

HOW WILL YOU BE INFORMED OF THE FINDINGS/RESULTS OF THE RESEARCH?

If you would like to be informed of the final research findings, please contact Christy Jean Kotze on ekotzeczj@unisa.ac.za. Should you require any further information or want to contact the researcher about any aspect of this study, please contact Christy Jean Kotze at ekotzeczj@unisa.ac.za

Should you have concerns about the way in which the research has been conducted, you may contact Prof PL Mabunda at mabunpl@unisa.ac.za.

Thank you for taking time to read this information sheet and for participating in this study.

Thank you.

Mrs. CJ Kotze



Email address: ekotzeczj@unisa.ac.za

Student number: 50839500

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS STUDY

I, _____ (participant name), confirm that the person asking my consent to take part in this research has told me about the nature, procedure, potential benefits and anticipated inconvenience of participation.

I have read (or had explained to me) and understood the study as explained in the information sheet.

I have had sufficient opportunity to ask questions and am prepared to participate in the study.

I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without penalty (if applicable).

I am aware that the findings of this study will be processed into a research report, journal publications and/or conference proceedings, but that my participation will be kept confidential unless otherwise specified.

I agree to the recording of the <insert specific data collection method>.

I have received a signed copy of the informed consent agreement.

Participant Name & Surname..... (please print)

Participant Signature.....Date.....

Researcher's Name & Surname: Christy Jean Kotze

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'CJ Kotze', enclosed within a light gray rectangular box.

Researcher's signature.....Date.....

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE STUDENT TEACHER

Participant code: _____

Date: _____ Time started: _____ Time ended: _____

Question
1. Please provide information such as; your age, gender, teaching qualification you are currently completing?
2. Tell me a bit about your most recent TP?
3. Tell me about your most challenging TP and what TP challenges experienced as a student teacher in general?
4. How does teaching practice (TP) prepare you to apply the content and theory you learn from university to real life settings in the classroom and the other way around?
5. Why is mentoring important for student teachers?
6. Why is mentoring important for mentor teachers?
7. How has mentorship benefitted you?
8. Reflect on your relationship with your mentor teacher in your most recent teaching practice period.
9. What are the needs you have from a mentor teacher during your teaching practice time?

10. Describe the successes you experienced with regards to participating in the mentoring relationship with your mentor teacher during your teaching practice. 11. Please provide reasons/recommendations you believe these successes were possible?
12. Describe the challenges you experienced with regards to participating in the mentoring relationship with your mentor teacher during your teaching practice? 13. Why do you believe these challenges occurred? 14. Please describe how best you can be supported by university and school/school district/province to mitigate these challenges?
15. Reflection is an important stage in mentoring and being mentored. How did you approach self-reflection during and after your teaching practice? 16. How did you approach reflection with your mentor teacher during and after your TP?
17. What is your understanding of 'Ubuntu' with regards to mentoring during teaching practice?
18. Do you believe the mentoring you received during your TP was based on the Ubuntu Philosophy? Why/Why not?
19. What can a mentor teacher do to offer a more Ubuntu orientated supportive role in their mentoring?
20. What strategies and or plans are currently put in place to enhance the mentorship preparation programme by the school, district, department of Education and university? If none, please provide recommendations on strategies that could be put in place by the school/district/department of Education / University?

21. What can the university do to support you in promoting Ubuntu orientated mentoring during your teaching practice?
22. How do you believe the Ubuntu philosophy can be applied to mentoring in your TP (especially within the teaching practice student – mentor relationship)?
23. Additional questions, comments or remarks?

Annexure 6: Qualitative Questions asked in Questerview to MTs

Questerview questions MT



Participant code: _____

	Question
1	How does teaching practice (TP) prepare student teachers (STs) to apply the content and theory they learn from university to real life settings in the classroom and the other way around?
2	Why is mentoring important for student teachers?
3	Why is mentoring important for mentor teachers?
4	How/why were you selected to be a mentor teacher?
5	How were you prepared/trained/inducted to be a mentor teacher (by the school, district, national department of Education or University)?
6	How has being a mentor to a student teacher benefitted you?
7	Reflect on your relationship with your mentee student teacher in their most recent teaching practice period. Was it a positive or negative relationship? Why do you say so?
8	Describe the successes you experienced with regards to participating in the mentoring relationship with your mentee student teacher during their teaching practice.
9	Please provide reasons/recommendations you believe these successes were possible?

	Question
10	Describe the challenges you experienced with regards to participating in the mentoring relationship with your mentee student teacher during their teaching practice.
11	Why do you believe these challenges occurred?
12	Please provide recommendations on how these challenges can be mitigated in the future?
13	Please describe how best you can be supported by university and school/school district/province to mitigate these challenges?
14	How did you approach reflection with your student teacher during and after their teaching practice?
15	What is your understanding of 'Ubuntu' with regards to the mentoring of student teachers?
16	What do you believe you can do as a mentor teacher to offer a more Ubuntu orientated supportive role during mentoring?
17	What can the university do to support you in promoting Ubuntu orientated mentoring during student teachers' teaching practice?
18	How do you believe the Ubuntu philosophy can be applied to mentoring during a ST's TP (especially within the teaching practice student – mentor relationship)?
19	Is there anything else you would like to share with us regarding student teacher mentoring of Distance Education students, that we can use to improve student teacher training in South Africa at our university?

Annexure 7: Example of Transcribed SSI with initial theme identification (ST3)

20Participant code	Research question	Theme	Subtheme	Interview extract:
	Age, gender, degree	The impact of age, gender, qualification and experience on perspectives		
ST3				
	1. How does teaching practice (TP) prepare you to apply the content and theory you learn from university to real life settings in the classroom and the other way around?	TP theory to practice gap	1. Positive experiences a) enjoyable and fruitful learning experience as a teacher. b) Getting more exposure from a contract position to teach more full time	
ST3				- - I like I inquired for extra practise like I requested that. Can I please do it in practise at the school. And then they said to me we are in need of a teacher. Like we can even create an SGB post for you. I said no, it's fine whatever like you are offering I will take, BUT MY AIM WAS FOR TEACHING PRACTICE - From there they gave me a contract of two years with them. I enjoyed the practice and teaching at the same time. - Right now I am working at a Varsity College

				- and then I was privileged. I was given. I was also given a Grade 12 class whereby I ended up a a resulting like a. - Ohh yeah a 60 [% average], so I was proud of myself and I was like, wow.
				-
	2. Why is mentoring important for student teachers during your TP?	Importance of mentoring for ST	a) Support – Someone to have my back (even /especially when I make mistakes) b) Guidance c) Help with discipline, classroom management and time management	
ST3				- It gives them courage to stand free and do things in the right way. To make sure that they are planning and management of the classroom and time management as well. To ensure the time is well occupied - A mentor is needed to make sure we as ST's don't mess around. That we get each and every support. To know how to discipline learners, how to make classroom arrangements, how to do lesson plans. All that needs mentoring. Without mentoring, we cannot do all that is required of us. - If we can get proper mentoring, if we can get mentoring each and every day., even if it is not every day, but if we can be mentored for that specific period, we can be able to stand on our own, but from there we can collaborate even with other teachers, like to ask for guidance and stuff. - Mentoring is important so that we can be able to stand firm and teach with boldness in the class.
				-
	3. Why is mentoring important for mentor teachers?	Importance of mentoring for MT's	a) Improving own practice	
ST3				- She or he can get some of the things right, like for example if he is mentoring me about discipline in a class that there is no discipline or learners are disrespectful, she can find a better strategy by mentoring me to discipline the learners in the class or in a proper way. There are some

				maybe loopholes that she can get, and make sure things are right in the class by mentoring a student teacher.
				-
	4. What are the needs you have from a mentor teacher during your teaching practice time?	Mentoring needs of ST's	a) Guidance b) Allow ST to Observe you teaching/ good practice c) Support and encouragement d) Kindness and caring e) Physical Mentoring (to really be there in the class) f) Confidence	
ST3				- Kindness and support and to be caring for me to have courage in the class. I will learn and be independent and manage the class. - To share with me what she or he knows and I can learn. - I had a mentor (but not permanent mentor teacher whose class he fell under and could observe),
				-
	5. How has mentorship benefitted you?	Benefits of mentorship for ST's	a) Being more prepared for the classroom b) Learning how to do lesson planning. c) Learning how to use Blooms, ATP and CAPS d) Learning how to teach(??) Learning how to set objectives and queisotns e) Feeling more positive and	
				-
ST3				- While teaching full time (<i>school was short staffed and gave him a contract 2 year position as the teacher when he first ever approached the school for a practical placement</i>), I had a mentor (but not permanent mentor teacher whose class he fell-under and could observe), she was the HOD and she encouraged me to do lesson planning each and every day so that I can be able to stand in front of learners with courage and with no fear at all. - What helped me to grow, what I learnt from her was she was always early for the class and she was sharing most things with me. - Most importantly, we were using Blooms taxonomy. She gave me

			passionate about teaching	sample questions so I can teach and introduce the topic, and then set learning objectives to the learners, and from there, then she stepped in. - She was encouraging me to be positive at all times in our co-teaching lesson
				-
	6. Reflect on your relationship with your mentor teacher in your most recent teaching practice period.	Relationship with mentor teacher	a) Very good. Supportive and open. Invites ST to communicate b) Ubuntu (like a mother to me) c) Based on positive critique	
ST3	Go back to ST1 Q4 here she says no mentorship? Also add this to the challenges she experienced.			- My mentor at Naledi High left the school and I was assigned to the HOD who was very helpful and helped me with a lot of things. - We had a good relationship. She was like a mother to me honestly speaking. She was always there. - Like whenever I need something or struggle with something she will say we are doing things like that. - She was always supportive and encouraging and always correcting. - She was like a shoulder to cry on when I needed something. Until on my week 2, that was when she said now you need to be independent, and you need to be on your own. You need to stand on your feet and make sure you are going to prove me wrong. You are going to be so good at this. If you don't understand, I will be there, you can ask anything. She will even call me like after school and say, no don't forget to plan and don't hesitate to call me if you are struggling with something or you need clarity. Call me, I'm always here for you.
				-
	7. Describe the successes you experienced with regards to participating in the	Mentoring successes	a) Learning classroom management techniques and good practice b) Learning good teaching strategies	
ST3				- What I learnt from her was she was always early for the class. She was sharing most of the things with me.

	mentoring relationship with your mentor teacher during your teaching practice		c) Learning to teach independently d) More positive about teaching	- The second day, she asked me, can you do this? And I was like, yes. And she sat and planned with me and the next day we did co-teaching. She let me do the one part and she stepped in and did the next part of the lesson. Most importantly, we were using Blooms taxonomy. She gave me sample questions so I can teach and introduce the topic, and then set learning objectives to the learners, and from there, then she stepped in. - She was encouraging me to be positive at all times in our co-teaching lesson -
				-
	8. Please provide reasons/recommendations you believe these successes were possible?	Reasons for successes		
			a) Passionate mentor teacher	
ST3				No response recorded but responded in questions above or below
				-
	9. Describe the challenges you experienced with regards to participating in the mentoring relationship with your mentor teacher during your teaching practice?			
ST3			a) Student lack of resources to travel to 'good' schools. b) Teachers only care to do effort when Unis supervisor is coming c) Expecting ST to do what is not within their scope of learning d) 'Power' influence on relationship ? e) Mentors reluctant to	- Then the ohh I like I inquired for for extra practise like I requested that. Can I please do it in practise at the school. And then they said to me we are in need of a teacher. Like we can even create an SGB post for you. I said no, it's fine whatever like you are offering I will take, BUT MY AIM WAS FOR TEACHING PRACTICE. From there they gave me a contract of two years with them. I enjoyed the practice and teaching at the same time. - I have never had a bad experience with the mentor teachers because I always like depend on them in information sharing. So even if I can

			share information or knowledge	see that they are wrong, I am not going to say anything, but I will just listen to what they are saying in order to avoid conflict. - The only bad experience I had was when I was teaching at the school that I was at. I don't want to talk about it. But there was a teacher I was working with, but she didn't want to share like most of the information. We were using the same ATP and I was asking if we are at the same track and she responded with a negative attitude , but later on I told her when we were together and we resolved the matter. - Sometimes teachers only attend to Unisa students later on. They first attend WITS or UJ students because our supervisors are not coming, - Our supervisors they do as they please, but they don't come to supervise us. But not like after a month they can't say they are coming. - Maybe the university can check and see there are like 15 000 students in Soweto we can place 10 or 20 supervisors to come and visit the student teachers around the schools of Soweto. That strategy could positively work for us. - That's why you can find that Unisa students always have conflict with their mentors. Because you can find that the supervisors, they are not coming. - I remember the first time when I was looking for a school to do the practical. I couldn't find the school that I had my measures like it was tough, like experience that I had, but I fortunate enough. I was able to find the school I think 20 kilometres away from me going in 20km metres are away coming back home.
				-
	10. Why do you believe these challenges occurred?		a) ST3 mentor teachers see ST's as a threat to their jobs.	
			b) Mentors are only concerned with	
ST3				- I think with some mentor teachers, some are seeing us as a threat,

			when supervisor is coming. c) Mentor teachers 'misusing their power in the relationship (NOT UBUNTU)	honestly speaking. Because some of them, our qualification is not the same. There are those that entered with a diploma, and then new students are coming with a degree, so they feel threatened. - Maybe they think we can steal the position from them, because they are pay level 1 resulted in pay level 2, whereas we are working together. - Even though you come with a diploma and I come with a degree, even if you are experienced enough, the department will always recognise someone with a higher qualification. I am not sure if I am right or wrong. <i>Nervous laughter and nervous body language.</i> - So maybe that is the reason they don't want to share with student teachers. NB – UBUNTU HERE. Is DBE recognising experience as well as qualification? Does this aggravate the situation of poor mentorship/threatened teachers not wanting to mentor.
				-
	11. Please provide recommendations on how these challenges can be mitigated in the future?		a) Training and info for mentors (for mentors or student teachers? What to do/what to expect?)	-
				-
ST3			b) University visits at school. c) Feedback page where students can voice their negative experiences. Make procedures of how to deal with negative mentoring more accessible . d) Platform for more fast/current time integration between lecturers and students.	- Visibility is key. The supervisors must come visit us. - Training of teachers. - If negative mentoring: - As a university I think you need to have a review page whereby a student did a TP at a certain school and she or he was not treated nicely, she can write a feedback. - I think even if we get the supervisors involved. - There must be a platform where we can engage ourselves with our supervisors or the lecturers for the modules. So I can say ; today I experienced this unfair treatment at school and I want to know what are the procedures to apply or you will be able to talk to them in advance., And if a student is saying he is not feeling well and cannot be able to continue or

				I don't think the environment is still safe for me because I might be bad-mouthed by the other teachers and I don't know what to do, should I look for another school for practice. - We need to have that checklist or suggestion list whereby we put our grievances so that can be fully attended as soon as possible. - If I do TP at a school and after day 25, I am done with my TP and a supervisor comes after a month and asks me I am coming to you tomorrow at 11, will you be able to make it to school But how, I am working how can I leave my work and go attend his or her observation or supervision. No, its not fair. We need to treat my work fairly as he or she does too. If my placement is done, then within two weeks, the supervisor must come to supervise me while I am doing TP. - We need to feel like we also as students, we need to be treated fairly. - A supervisor can visit me and my friend if we are doing TP at the same school and not tell my friend after his TP that he will come again. -
				-
	12. Please describe how best you can be supported by university and school/school district/province to mitigate these challenges?			-
				-
ST3			Same as above d) Platform for more fast/current time integration between lecturers and students. A)Physical or online classes for live real-time connection between lecturer and student.	- Communication. If we receive better communication form the university, especially from our module lecturers. - With our supervisors, I can tell you now, I never had any supervision since I started my teaching practice even now, I am still waiting. - My TPS3704 placement is not yet confirmed as we are speaking <i>(September shortly before portfolios are due)</i> and I sent two or three emails to the teaching practice department and even now its not yet confirmed. The online placement tool is not working and I ask the school can they send me OTP's so I can do another placement but still today I

			1. COMMUNICATION a) better and faster communication from lecturer. b) Better and faster communication from placement office; Assistance from TPO with placement c) Better online tools d) More effective and timeous communication from supervisor e) students and schools/mentors need more access to information about TP and what to expect exactly.	haven't received anything form the university about the placement. - I got a contact detail for my supervisor, and when I tried to call, they are invalid, they are not going through, I tried to send a text and its not going through, because he is not engaging, but I don't know... - But communication is the key focus thing that we need to have as a student teacher, and we need to be informed. - And also, the lecturer can send different schools where we can find our majors. Like lets say for example I am majoring with Consumer or Hospitality and Tourism, so if ask, ma'am can I please have the list of the schools that are offering this subject, she should be able to check and say a list of the schools in Gauteng like around my area. Then I will be able to look at het school that I can go and do my teaching practice, but none of that has been happening. - It is time that we get that kinds of information that we need to know because there are some of the students that are struggling to get the placement. And we are going through the most, - and when I sent an email to my lecturer, she said she is not around and gave me another email address to contact for the new acting head of the module but even now I haven't received any feedback. I tried checking on my own and it said it must be my didactic module that I did but it is not on the list here. - My portfolio is finished but I am scared of submitting because I don't know if they will mark it or what, that is why I'm scared of submitting.
				-
	13. Reflection is an important stage in mentoring and being mentored. How did you		a)reflective journal from previous TP's to help with next years one.	
				-
ST3				- For TPS3703, I was writing a reflecting journal and then form there,

	approach self-reflection during and after your teaching practice?			I also applied the reflective journal on TPS3704.
				-
	14. How did you approach reflection with your mentor teacher during and after your TP?		c) Discussions – St helping mentor who was in her first year and ST had previous TP experience (mutually beneficial)	
ST3				- I communicated with her and we were showing our difference with each other, and some advice I gave her and she took it. I told her when we plan a lesson, we need to engage the learners... remember I'm also having some background at another school, like I learnt that from another mentor, she applied that knowledge to me and then I used it and I see that this method its working. - I told her we must collaborate with learners and make the lesson interesting and she took that idea and it worked, learners were no longer making noise, no longer disruptive in the class, because of the idea that I gave her. - I gave her some ideas where she was lacking. I am not saying she is not perfect, but like, point of view, I said that if we can do this, then we will be able to achieve that, and she also said that if you can do this, you will be able to do that.
				-
	15. What is your understanding of 'Ubuntu' with regards to mentoring during teaching practice?		WHAT IS UBUNTU	-
			a) It takes a village to raise a child. My child is your child.	-
ST3			b) Humanity/humanness c) We are a family / together we benefit/grow (we rise	- <i>This question had the participant really grinning widely and again, his body language spoke with excitement and passion. While at times he struggled to find the exact words, he really seemed to know what Ubuntu feels like.</i>

			by lifting others/togetherness – working toward a common goal) d) RESPECT e) Positive impact of respect and Ubuntu on learning and experiences of ST's	- Ubuntu regarding TP, like, it emphasise the humanness within us. Like we need to respect learners. We need to share. We need to be, like since there is a lack of local parenting in the schools, a lack of parental involvement in the schools, we need to care for these learners, so that they can feel safe and protected. - We must show the learners we might not be the biological parents, but we can share these ideas with you so that you can be able to be better people at the end of the day. - We may not be your biological parents, but we can give you the knowledge and skill that you can turn the world around and be able to solve the problems that we are facing in the country. - We must influence the minds of this young generation to make sure they become better people.
				-
	16. Do you believe the mentoring you received during your TP was based on the Ubuntu Philosophy? Why/Why not?			-
			<u>YES</u>	-
ST3			a) because of respect	- I think my kindness made everything possible for me and my mentor to get along. - I respected her with everything, and I was always showing her respect that she deserved because she is a mother. I respected her as my own mother. Mbokodo. They say Mbokodo. I respected her as my own mother. - I don't need someone to disrespect a human. Any human, I respect, whenever it is a child older person, always make sure I respect them. - I could imagine if she was my mother standing Infront of someone disrespecting her, how was I going to feel. I was going to feel bad. - I was always respectful, kind and caring and I said to myself, if I can do this I will be able to get her attention.

				-
	17. What can a mentor teacher do to offer a more Ubuntu orientated supportive role in their mentoring?			-
				-
ST3				- No response recorded or participant responded to this in other questions
				-
	18. What strategies and or plans are currently put in place to enhance the mentorship preparation programme by the school, district, department of Education and university? If none, please provide recommendations on strategies that could be put in place by the school/district /department of Education / University?			-
				-
ST3				- On the placement form there a letter to the school asking for placement. Then from there they assigned me to my mentor and I gave her that letter that was coming from the university and she filled it in.
				-
	19. What can the university do to support you in promoting Ubuntu orientated		B) Limit / Set expectation for workload and expectation of ST's to protect them. c) Open line of communication	-
				-
ST3				- If negative mentoring: As a university I think you need to have a review page whereby a

	mentoring during your teaching practice? <i>What can we do to make it a better experience for the ones who are having negative experiences?</i>		where students can review the school and get support for negative mentoring. D) More supervision/physical presence of university staff at schools. e) A platform for encouragement and advice between students and staff.	student did a TP at a certain school and she or he was not treated nicely, she can write a feedback. - I think even if we get the supervisors involved. - There must be a platform where we can engage ourselves with our supervisors or the lecturers for the modules. So I can say ; today I experienced this unfair treatment at school and I want to know what are the procedures to apply or you will be able to talk to them in advance,. And if a student is saying he is not feeling well and cannot be able to continue or I don't think the environment is still safe for me because I might be bad-mouthed by the other teachers and I don't know what to do, should I look for another school for practice. - We need to have that checklist or suggestion list whereby we put our grievances so that can be fully attended as soon as possible. - If I do TP at a school and after day 25, I am done with my TP and a supervisor comes after a month and asks me I am coming to you tomorrow at 11, will you be able to make it to school But how, I am working how can I leave my work and go attend his or her observation or supervision. No, its not fair. We need to treat my work fairly as he or she does too. If my placement is done, then within two weeks, the supervisor must come to supervise me while I am doing TP. - We need to feel like we also as students, we need to be treated fairly. - A supervisor can visit me and my friend if we are doing TP at the same school and not tell my friend after his TP that he will come again. - If the school (university?) implement funded strategies that they can be able to help students or the mentors like for example, - visibility is the thing a student needs to see. Sometimes students from UJ and WITS and their mentors are always coming, but then they ask me
--	---	--	--	--

				from Unisa when is your mentor coming? Are you sure you are a student teacher? - But with us, its different, I don't know why. - But if we can be assigned to supervisors so that we can also feel like we are future teachers. -
				-
				-
ST3	Other inputs			- Online training might disadvantage many teachers. Some don't have access to internet or using phones that don't support internet connection. -

Annexure 8: Example of Member Checking

From: ONALENNA GREGORY PLATO MOOKETSI
To: Kotze, Christy
Subject: Re: Interview checking to confirm data is accurately presented ST2
Date: 10 December 2024 19:32:41

Good day

You welcome.

I've went through it everything looks good.

And congratulations once again for giving me an opportunity to assist you throughout with the research.

Kinds
Onalemma

From: Kotze, Christy <ekotze@unisa.ac.za>
Sent: Tuesday, 26 November 2024 14:18
To: ONALENNA GREGORY PLATO MOOKETSI <67170730@mylife.unisa.ac.za>
Subject: Interview checking to confirm data is accurately presented ST2

Dear ONALENNA GREGORY PLATO MOOKETSI,

I hope this message finds you well. I am writing to thank you once again for your valuable participation in my PhD study conducted via MS Teams interviews late last year. I am nearing the end of my study, and it wouldn't have been possible without your inputs. Your insights and experiences are critical to the success of this research, and I am immensely grateful for your contribution. Please keep in mind that your anonymity is guaranteed in this study, and you will not be identifiable in any of the research I present. You will simply be referred to as Student Teacher (ST) 1.

As part of the research process, I am conducting member checking (also known as participant validation) to ensure the accuracy and credibility of the data collected. Member checking involves asking you to verify the information and interpretations gathered during our interviews to ensure that they accurately reflect your perspectives and experiences. This step is crucial in maintaining the integrity of the research and enhancing the validity of the findings.

Why Member Checking is Necessary:

1. **Accuracy:** To confirm that the data accurately represents your views and experiences.
2. **Validity:** To enhance the credibility of the research findings.
3. **Transparency:** To ensure that the interpretations made by the researcher are accurate and free from bias.

4. **Collaboration:** To involve participants in the research process and acknowledge their role in the study.

What is Required from You:

1. **Review the Summary:** I have attached a summary of the key points from our interview. Please read through this document carefully.
2. **Provide Feedback:** If you notice any inaccuracies or misinterpretations, kindly provide your feedback. You can highlight sections or add comments directly to the document.
3. **Confirm Accuracy:** If the summary accurately reflects your experiences and viewpoints, please indicate your approval (By simply replying to this email indicating if you agree with the representation of our interview that I have attached)

Your feedback is invaluable, and I kindly request that you complete this member checking process **within the next two weeks**.

If you have any questions or require further clarification, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Thank you once again for your time and effort in contributing to this important research. I look forward to your response.

Warm Regards

Annexure 9: Turnitin Similarity Report Summary

Similarity Report	
PAPER NAME	AUTHOR
Kotze full phd study for Tii report 25FEB2 6.docx	CHRISTY JEAN KOTZE
WORD COUNT	CHARACTER COUNT
99916 Words	584747 Characters
PAGE COUNT	FILE SIZE
334 Pages	1.2MB
SUBMISSION DATE	REPORT DATE
Feb 25, 2026 12:26 PM GMT+2	Feb 25, 2026 12:32 PM GMT+2
14% Overall Similarity	
The combined total of all matches, including overlapping sources, for each database.	
• 8% Internet database • 10% Publications database • Crossref database • Crossref Posted Content database • 9% Submitted Works database	
Excluded from Similarity Report	
• Manually excluded sources	

Annexure 10: Language Editing Report

Write Skills

CK No: 2006/185158/23
P O Box 884, Jukskei Park, 2153
Tel: 010 220 5066
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Email: julietg@icon.co.za
Website: www.writeskills.co.za
SA Government CSD No: MAAA0034048
UJ supplier no.: 30011990
<https://www.linkedin.com/company/82619665/>

30 March 2026

To whom it may concern

DOCUMENT EDITING

This serves to confirm that an academic report was submitted for the standard editing service, as follows:

- Editing date: 12 – 30 March 2026
- Title: Mentoring in the initial teacher education open distance e-Learning context
- Length: 373 pages; 95164 words
- Correction allowance: 9516C
- Corrections made: 9534C
- Author: Christy Jean Kotze
- Comments: The standard editing service was provided, and detailed comments have been provided to guide the student on how to revise and finalise the document, i.e. formatting, references, acronyms, writing, language.

Gillies

Member: J C Gillies BA (Eng, Comm, Psych), Postgrad.Dip. (Marketing), BA Hons (English)