

**EXPLORING PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY  
DEVELOPMENT IN HIGHER EDUCATION: A SOCIAL  
IDENTITY APPROACH**

**by**

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## **Abstract**

Higher education provides a platform for students to prepare themselves for the world of work. In an effort to engage students with their intended profession, this study focuses on how students in higher education develop their professional identity. The social identity approach comprises of Tajfel's (1974) Social Identity Theory (SIT) and Turner's (1985) Self-Categorisation Theory (SCT) were adopted as a guiding framework. A qualitative paradigm was employed as it allows the students' professional identity development to be examined in detail and in depth. An interpretive approach was adopted to understand the reality of the students' identity as it is perceived and experienced by the students. Studies have been done on students undergoing teacher education programmes. A total of 80 student teachers undergoing a bachelor of education and postgraduate teacher education programme in the biggest teacher education institution in Malaysia were recruited in this study. A focus group was conducted to obtain detailed information of group perception and evaluation. The interview data were transcribed verbatim, and subsequently analysed to facilitate the development of themes. This study provides an important insight on how the students define themselves as a member of one occupational group, and how the membership in the group gave their behaviour a distinct meaning. The findings of this study confer implication for practice with a particular reference on how to motivate students to achieve and maintain a positive social identity of their intended profession, and develop a professional identity during their socialisation process at higher education institutions.

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# CHAPTER ONE

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Introduction

Education is of paramount importance for personal, social and economic development of the nation. The education process may occur in both formal and informal settings where the former has been systematically executed and measured in classrooms or educational institutions. Without neglecting the importance of informal education, past research suggests that participation and quality of education in primary and secondary levels have helped provide a more progressive and higher cognitive level of human capital (Hanushek, 2013; Jones and Ramchand, 2013). Equally important, further and higher education is pivotal in providing a platform to further develop skilled and qualified human capital through a training and credentialing process in order to prepare students for the world of work (Trede, Macklin and Bridges, 2012). Well trained and skilled workforce are seen as important resources that help increase productivity, boost output, and propel growth in a wider economy.

In many countries around the world, there has been an increasing number of students enrolled in higher education due to the expansion of the higher education sector (“UNESCO Institute of Statistics”, n.d.). As a consequence, new higher education institutions are established, existing institutions are expanded, and a diverse range of courses are offered to accommodate the increasing number of students (Klien, 2016; Liu, Green and Pensiero, 2016). The intertwining of higher education expansion and the aim to develop skilled and qualified human capital has heightened the need for higher education institutions to focus on important management functions; planning, organizing, leading and controlling the student recruitment, selection, and development process, and facilitate students’ learning experience in higher education.

In this decade, higher education applicants must choose between many diversified alternative courses while deciding what to study. It is important to realise that the applicants' motive on disciplinary choices can be treated as an indicator on how students navigate their socialization process in higher education, as motives may antecede students' learning behaviour (Byrne and Flood, 2005; Hudson et. al., 2016). Higher education literatures have signalled different motives behind applicants' disciplinary choices, with the desire to work in their intended field as a leading cause for commencement in higher education (Byrne and Flood, 2005). Hence, students' recruitment and selection process to specific academic programmes become important for higher education administrators where they have to identify the appropriate candidates to enrol in different programmes of study.

It is common practice that higher education applicants will be assessed with selected recruitment and selection tools as some established disciplines such as law and medical education have certain prerequisites for those who wish to become a future professional in that field (Kyratsis, Atun, Phillips, Tracey and George, 2016). As higher education prepares students for the world of work, the prerequisites become important to enable the selection of right candidates for professional training in higher education and equip them with the essential knowledge and skills in order to maintain the social closure of the profession, thus uphold the professional status (Saks, 2010). Equally important is the different motives to enrol in higher education which indicates that higher education administrators and academics have a crucial task to plan and execute activities or programmes in order to enhance support for the new students' socialisation process in higher education, and manage their motivation and emotions throughout their studies so that they may engage in their academic programme and future profession thereafter.

Higher education becomes a place of importance as there is a requirement to develop and control students' intellectual abilities (Jones and Ramchand, 2013). Intellectual in this sense refers to the ability of students to utilise knowledge and skills for living including engagement in their future careers. Additionally, the need to obtain higher education credentials as a means to compete in the job market has become a trend in this decade. Higher education credentials also provide graduates with the right of self-government or autonomy as it should be "gathered from higher education rather than trade school or long apprenticeship" (Friedson 1937, p. 22, cited in Monteiro, 2015).

Hence, the credentials become evidence that the learning and development process has taken place at a higher education institution (Tomlinson, 2008), and it is the graduates' responsibility on how to apply the knowledge and skills obtained in higher education into their personal and professional life.

The two factors indicated above highlighted a need for higher education administrators and academics to help students navigate themselves for their future profession as research finds that higher education provides early socialisation for the students' intended professional choice (Bakar et al, 2008; Trede et al., 2012). The socialisation process includes managing students' learning experience on professional dispositions and roles as highlighted in higher education literature. Most of the studies focus on strategies to promote learning and construct a conducive learning environment in order to enhance the students' learning experience related to their future career choices (Fokken-Bruinsma and Canrinus, 2012; Fokken-Bruinsma and Canrinus, 2014; Struyven, Jacobs and Dochy, 2013).

Taking this into consideration, there are huge responsibilities for higher education administrators and academics to nurture the capacity and capabilities of the students for their future career through learning. This includes preparing the students with relevant knowledge, skills and attitude needed to become a member of their disciplinary field-related occupation. It follows that relevant knowledge, skills and attitude related to the students' intended occupational group will assist them to maintain or enhance a positive identity of the group (Saks, 2010).

## **1.2 Background of Study**

One of the most significant discussions on higher education functions is to cultivate students' identity (Bunce, Baird and Jones, 2017; Meca et al., 2015). As higher education is regarded as an important platform to prepare students for the world of work, the development of the identity of future workers becomes a crucial task for the institution. The initial professional identity development starts when students decide to choose a specific academic programme, hence the motive to choose a specific disciplinary field has become an antecedent in the process of students' identity

development (Gibney, Moore, Murphy and O' Sullivan, 2011). The students' motives explain their perceived readiness to become a member of one disciplinary field, and relevant occupational groups thereafter.

As has been previously reported in the literature, the students' identity is further developed through the socialisation process during the commencement in higher education (Fokken-Bruinsma & Canrinus, 2012; Fokken-Bruinsma & Canrinus, 2014; Struyven, Jacobs & Dochy, 2013). For instance, the literature emphasizes on teaching and learning of professional roles, understanding organisational culture and behaviour, and commencing professional socialisation (Atadero, Paguyo, Rambo-Hernandez and Henderson, 2018; Jackson, 2016; Neve, Lloyds and Collett, 2017). These work preparations are seen as contributing to the development of students' professional identity. The literature also reported that professional identity is created through students' beliefs on the values and norms of their anticipated profession, and these values and norms are shared with others in the same occupational group (Van Maanen and Barley, 1984). Despite the consistent findings that professional identity explains the students' perceptions of future occupational and professional attributes, the literature also suggests that it may explain student readiness to perform their future work. Thus, occupational or professional identity is important as it becomes the way students assign meaning to themselves, and it shapes students' aspirations on work attitude and behaviour (Siebert and Siebert, 2005).

Recently, many occupations need a higher education credential as an entry requirement to specialised work; hence, the institution helps to facilitate the socialisation process that has a significant impact on the students' knowledge, skills, and attitude as well as the autonomy to enable access towards one occupational group. Preparing students for their intended profession is very important to individual students and society. Society places hope on higher education institutions to prepare the students so that they will come back, contribute and maintain order in the society (Friedson, 1970). Thus, the role of higher education becomes much more challenging in providing students with the requirements needed by specific professions. This includes designing curriculum, preparing activities for teaching and learning as well as designing programmes outside the classroom to enhance the capability and capacity of students so that they can

become a competent member of their intended profession. This involves the academics, the administrators as well as the students' affair department.

### **1.3 Problem Statement**

As highlighted in the previous subsection, literature on higher education produced consistent evidence on the role of higher education institutions in cultivating students' professional identity towards their intended profession. However, there are two neglected areas which arise from these studies; firstly, how to develop students' professional identity for individuals who are not sure or convinced with their programme of study in higher education? This turns out to be a challenging area of inquiry on how to plan and execute the professional socialisation process and develop a professional identity for students who are alienated and excluded from their counterparts who are conscious about their intended profession. Secondly, how do students feel about their intended profession? Does the status of the intended profession in the social structure influence the way students define themselves as a member of one occupational group? These two areas need to be addressed in order to understand the students' professional identity formation and development in higher education.

In a Malaysian context, higher education<sup>1</sup> aims to achieve national needs in critical areas that are vital to the country, such as science, technology, agricultural, management and education, in the effort to form a developed country by year 2020 (Ministry of Higher Education Malaysia, 2006). Like most countries around the world, the higher education sector in Malaysia is now experiencing a significant increase in the number of students' enrolment. It has been published in the higher education statistics that in the past 10 years, students' enrolment in bachelor degree programmes has increased significantly from 333,403 to 696,899 students in year 2016 ("Ministry of Higher Education Malaysia", n.d.-a). The increasing number of student enrolment in higher education indicates that there is a concerted effort from the government through the higher education sector to enhance the capabilities of students to compete in the job market after graduation ("Ministry of Higher Education Malaysia", n.d.-b).

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<sup>1</sup> Higher education in Malaysia is offered by universities, colleges and polytechnics.

Even though access to higher education and the number of graduates are increasing, it is reported in prior research that there were students who enrolled in their programme of study not because of their interest in the field of study nor the desire to work in the area related to their academic programme, but the decision had been influenced or advised by other significant individuals. In Malaysian literature, concern has been raised on students' enrolment in teacher education programmes (Mohd Dahan and Ghazali, 2007; Harun, 2006; Mohd Ilias, 2008). The findings highlighted students' disengagement with teaching both while they are in the first year of the teacher education programme, and while commencing professional socialisation in the second and third year of study.

Issues on teacher education students who are not convinced with the teacher education programme has also been reported since the previous decade. Heretofore, teacher education programmes experienced difficulties in attracting students when a country is in an economic boom and jobs are plentiful (Lee, 1996; Matrak, 1995). Lee (1996) also claims that when Malaysia experienced an economic downturn, and employment opportunities become restricted due to economic conditions, the demand for teacher education rose. One factor that might attract applicants to enrol in teacher education programmes is the guaranteed job opportunity as has been implemented in Malaysia for decades; teacher education students in public higher education institutions are guaranteed placements at government funded schools after their graduation<sup>2</sup>, if they satisfy the minimum requirement of teacher selection (10<sup>th</sup> Malaysia Plan, 2010).

The findings remark on the challenges for teacher education programmes in two ways; firstly, higher education administrators and academics have to find ways to attract students in the teacher education programme to their academic programme of study and motivate them to remain in teaching profession thereafter. Secondly, it is a huge responsibility to develop a student's positive identity towards the profession, and therefore achieve a positive image of teaching.

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<sup>2</sup> Starting from year 2011, the Malaysian Government's 10<sup>th</sup> Malaysia Plan (2011-2015) abolished the guaranteed job privilege for students who enrolled in teacher education programmes from 2011 (Malaysia Prime Minister Department, 2010). Guaranteed placements have been removed due to the government's intention to ensure that only the best teacher candidates will be recruited and become major players in Malaysia's education system.

The centralised recruitment system for teachers which is exercised in Malaysia is a compelling reason to give attention to the development of professional identity for teacher education students. The intake for teacher education programmes at government-funded higher education institutions is based on the Ministry of Education's projection of the number of teachers needed in Malaysian public schools. It has been recorded that every year, the applications for teacher education programmes exceed the number of places offered by the Ministry of Education (Ingvarson et al., 2013). Ministry of Higher Education Malaysia (n.d.-a) report that teacher education programmes are among the five most popular programmes of study in demand by higher education candidates, followed by business and administration, engineering, and mathematics and science courses. In previous years, student intake<sup>3</sup> for the educational bachelor degree level in Malaysian public higher education institutions was 12,910 students in 2009, 11,826 in 2010, 19,883 in 2011, 17,824 in 2012, and decreased to 9,877 students in 2013. In year 2017, intake for this programme was only 9,007 students ("Ministry of Higher Education Malaysia", n.d.-a).

As the admission to teacher education programmes in Malaysia is intensely competitive and tightly controlled by the government, it is important for the higher education academics and administrators in teacher education programme to fully utilize the scarce resources and minimise students' tendency to exit the profession before the end of training or shortly after service due to not being able to value the work, or have a positive orientation towards teaching. Indeed, past studies suggest that one of the factors contribute to beginning teachers attrition is inability to value teaching work (Cladinin et al., 2015, De Neve and Devos, 2017; Struyve, Daly, Vandecandelaere, Meredith, Hannes, and De Fraine, 2016).

In addition, over many years, this programme receives new intakes with higher academic achievements in their secondary school (Admission and Registration Unit, 2010). Definitely, teacher education programmes do not want to lose 'cream of the crop students' to other professions because society needs teachers that have outstanding academic backgrounds as role models for future generations. Thus, it is important to

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<sup>3</sup> The enrolment is based on the projection by the Ministry of Education, not determined by the institutions.

understand what motivates teacher education students to teach, what values and norms that aspire them to negotiate a positive image of teachers and what is the distinctive behaviour as a result of this positive image. The inputs are very useful to strengthening teacher education programme by catering for students' needs, taking into consideration their positive aspirations towards teaching profession.

#### **1.4 Social Identity Framework**

The theoretical framework underpinning the research on professional identity in higher education mainly focuses on the learning and teaching of work preparation that will cultivate the development of professional identity (Atadero, Paguyo, Rambo-Hernandez and Henderson, 2018; Jackson, 2016; Neve, Lloyds and Collett, 2017). There are two challenging issues which arise in regard to effective teaching and learning for future professionals. Firstly, it is important to determine the learning style or approach appropriate for students to learn about their profession. Thus, it is crucial to understand the students' self-definition on their future profession prior to suggesting appropriate learning styles to suit them. This is consistent with past research that revealed people's self-definition on a specific social category can strongly influence their learning approach (Biggs, Kember and Leung, 2001; Bunce et al., 2017). In this sense, the students' definition on who they are in one occupational group will help to identify the type of learning approach that suits them to learn about the profession.

Secondly, focusing on the learning and teaching of work characteristics and dispositions have limitations in explaining the students' sense of belonging in one occupational group. The empirical evidence highlighted in Subsection 1.3 signalled that there is evidence that students disengaged with their future profession, thus it is important to identify the students' self-perception on the uniqueness of their intended profession that might attract and encourage them to become a group member.

Furthermore, in searching for the students sense of belonging to one particular group, it is important to focus on why they are attracted to one group instead of another. It will help to explain if the group will bring significant changes to the students' attitude and behaviour. It is assumed that if the group provides students with a sense of meaning,

purpose and belonging and that will build a positive sense of social identity, then the students have a tendency to have positive psychological and behavioural consequences towards the group. Therefore, the current study will examine the students' feelings when they belong to the group and the consequences of that feeling on their behaviour. Students' feelings will explain the current view of the social identity of teaching.

The status of the profession also contributes to the chosen theoretical framework. Many researches related to higher education use the term professional identity to describe a way of being, evaluate, learn and make sense of occupational practice (Hallier and Summers, 2011; Trede et al., 2012) regardless the status of the occupational group. The sociology of profession, however has demonstrated that occupational groups can be understood in a variety of ways; the most studied is the notion of what constitutes a profession and non-profession. Profession is a group of occupation that has been given a better position in the social structure compared to non-profession (Hall, 1968).

Arguably, it is necessary to differentiate profession with non-profession as both groups have different aims, principles and aspirations that explain their social identity. The professional group aims to ensure their group members maintain the professional status while the latter aspires their group members to acquire the professional status. Consequently, it is predicted that to become a member of different occupational groups (professional status and non-professional status) requires the members to act according to their group' values and norms and give their behaviour a distinct meaning compared to before they became a member of a specific group (Haslam, 2004).

The process by which a group of occupations incorporates the structural aspects and criteria required of a profession is known as professionalization (Abott, 1998). Professionalization has been debated in a variety of ways, as sociologists studied the professions from diverse theoretical viewpoints in the past decade. The traditional professional model from a sociologist's perspective, where the taxonomic approach focuses on the special traits of the occupational group to enable them to become an established profession. Barber (1963) and Hall (1968) among others, defined profession as a group of occupation with extended and rigorous training, high prestige, high levels of authority and autonomy, a professional organisation and community, good salary and serves the community interest.

However, classifying professional work based on traits have been criticised, as the definitions are not stable (Gorman and Sandefur, 2011; Klegon, 1978), and it varied over time even though it was proposed by the same scholar (Ruth, cited in Klegon, 1978). As many groups of new occupations emerged, Klegon (1978) also argued that defining the profession by using occupational traits is insufficient due to the “inability to apply the list of criteria to concrete situations” (p.4). Despite the criticism, the taxonomic approach has provided grounds to differentiate profession and non-profession work, and this has been used until recently as a combination with other sociological perspectives on profession (Gorman and Sandefur, 2011).

Besides the taxonomic approach, another traditional model, the functionalist approach has been established and argued that profession is a group of occupations that should help to maintain the order of society (Friedson, 1970). Thus, functionalists further explain that to become a profession, one occupational group with specific traits has to contribute to the society, particularly those served by the profession. Later, the new movement in sociology of profession emphasises the profession as a special group of occupation that has social closure where the expertise knowledge of the profession becomes the boundary for other occupational groups to perform similar duties (Krejsler, 2005; Saks, 2010). Hence, the study of the profession presents the social identity of one occupational group together with the significant engagement needed to form a positive social identity.

The study of professional identity development of one profession mostly focuses on how students negotiate their identity content as prescribed by the related professional standard (Monteiro, 2015). However, far too little attention has been paid on how students in a non-profession occupational group are attracted to the group, and how the occupational group can contribute to the enhancement of students’ knowledge, skills and attitudes. The latter issue brings to another question; although only occupations that are classified as an established profession has the professional standard and practice to be learnt and followed, what will be the guideline for occupations that are not rewarded the professional status? How will their future occupational group guide their behaviour?

A possible explanation for this might be where members of non-profession occupational groups might search for their occupational group norms and values that will differentiate themselves from other occupational groups. Monteiro (2015, p. 67) suggested the ‘difference approach’ to identify the identity of non-profession groups whereby “(the group) identify the characteristics peculiar to an occupation to cultivate them and advocate for improvement for its professional and social status”.

Thus, the norms and values have to be something that will become the groups’ aspiration, something to be followed and increase the groups’ self-esteem (Mehra, Kilduff and Brass, 1998), and most importantly, such norms and values are built on trust to acquire a high status, if not the full-fledged profession. Gaining a high status is workable, provided that the members of the occupational groups demonstrate high commitment in order to change the occupational status (Gorman and Sandefur, 2011, Klegon, 1978; Monteiro, 2015). Significantly, working towards the groups’ aspirations will enhance the groups’ self-esteem and consequently help in upgrading the social position of a specific occupation. This is consistent with past researches that contended a positive group performance is the outcome of integration between the group and group members’ goal (Hall, Schneider and Nygren, 1970).

This study focuses on teaching. Teaching is regarded as an old occupation and teacher education programmes have been offered in higher education for a very long time (Elliot, 1972; Monteiro, 2015). Teaching gives great influence to the development of the nation, however the teaching occupation has been regarded as a semi-profession because it meets some, but not all, of the specifications of a professional occupation (Etzioni, 1969; Krejsler, 2005; Ingersoll, 2003; Monteiro, 2015).

Even though the paradigm on what constitutes profession has changed from the taxonomic approach that highlights the traits of a profession to the capacity of social closure in the neo-Weberian approach, teaching has never been regarded as a full-fledged profession. The research conducted to date looks for evidence that justifies why the status is upheld regardless of the theoretical framework defining professions. It has been recognized from the literature that teachers’ knowledge to perform their function becomes a leading cause of teaching status (Barber, 1963; Hall, 1968; Kerchner and Cauffman, 1995; Saks, 2010). It has been argued that teaching does not involve the

development of specific knowledge, rather teachers are said as performing the function of manage and disseminate existing knowledge (Monteiro, 2015). The emergence of knowledge-based work (Gorman and Sandefur, 2011) and the revolution of technologies of information and communication have impacted teachers' knowledge and skills considerably, and these issues have negatively impacted the effort to recognize teaching as a profession. Additionally, teachers have not been given the autonomy to make decisions on educational policies (Toren, 1975), instead they are just implementing; thus making teaching powerless (Monteiro, 2015).

The social status of the profession might affect teachers' behaviour compared to the previous decade as many more challenges have emerged as a result of the new economic development. In upholding the semi-professional status, it is important for the students to identify the strength of the teaching to be identified with, and have significant values and norms that are able to guide their behaviour, thus enabling the teachers to present their positive social identity.

The proceeding paragraphs states the remarkable points for this study. Thus far, little is known on how this group of students try to understand their programme of study and future profession, particularly the type of professional identity students try to develop throughout their studies in higher education.

With these assumptions, the social identity approach will underpin the exploration of student teachers' professional identity development as this approach can explain what makes students define themselves in terms of one group membership (i.e. future teacher) rather than another group of profession. In addition, the social identity approach also provides a mechanism to identify what makes social identity salient; in other words why students choose teacher education programmes and what drive their engagement with teaching. The social identity approach also helps in determining the pride and self-esteem the members have even though they are a member of a less-privileged group. In this context, teaching is regarded as a semi-professional occupation and this might impact their sense of belonging to the group.

The social category (i.e. teaching profession) becomes salient when the student teachers can understand and assess the values and norms of teachers and the teaching profession.

The students are predicted to form and learn values and norms of teaching during their socialisation process in the teacher preparation programme. The process involves self-categorisation towards the group, how they learn the aspiration of the profession and how they assign the aspiration of teaching to themselves. Consequently, a social identity approach helps to explain the distinctive behaviour as a result of becoming a member of one specific group. This point will be discussed further in Chapter Two.

### **1.5 Aims of study**

The aims of this study are to identify the development process of teacher professional identity among students undergoing teacher education programmes in higher education institutions, explain the perception of students on teaching, and discover the process involved in the development of this identity. This study will explore the identity towards teaching that the students bring to the teacher education programme and during commencement of this programme. Additionally, this study will identify the factors that influence the development of students' identity during the commencement of the teacher education programmes offered by higher education institutions.

Firstly, the study explores the factors that influence the decision to choose teaching. It is assumed that when students choose teaching, they are influenced by the positive aspects offered by teaching. This will be their initial perception of teaching, which will influence their cognitive redefinition about themselves and guide their future behaviour. Secondly, based on the premise that the group aspirations may shape and reshape identity, the study also explores the identity that these students acquire while they are in the process of completing their preparation programme at a higher education institution, and how social factors facilitate the process of identity acquisition.

## **1.6 Objectives of study**

From the point of view of the teacher education students, this study intends to:

1. Discover what influences the students' decisions to choose teaching and the initial identity these students bring to the teacher education programmes.
2. Explore how the teacher education students acquire a professional identity in their preparation programme and the significant factors that influence the acquisition process.

## **1.7 Research questions**

This study will examine four main research questions:

1. What factors have influenced the decision to choose teaching?
2. What identity do the students bring to the teacher education programme?
3. How does group aspiration affect the professional identity development, or decline during the commencement of the teacher education programme?
4. How do the students explain their professional identity nearing to the professional practise?

## **1.8 Significance of study**

The findings of this study will redound to society by considering teacher education students who will educate the future generations of the country. The greater demand to enrol in teacher education programmes justifies the need to train students with sufficient knowledge regarding the profession. Apart from the necessary knowledge and skills to become a teacher, students must be able to adhere to the aspiration of the profession as a basis for shaping their professional identity. For parents, this study gives input on the type of future teachers that will be available to teach the young and future generations.

For higher education administrators and academics, this study will enhance the understanding of the process of the students' professional development towards the teaching profession. This understanding is useful and can be utilised to design

curriculum and plan more effective teaching and learning activities, enhance students support programme and provide a more conducive learning environment. For the researcher, this study foregrounds the present study using literature from the disciplines of management, sociology, psychology, and education, thus providing cross-disciplinary research to explain the professional identity development process among student teachers.

Additionally, this study presents scientific evidence for local authorities such as the Ministry of Education in regards to student teachers' professional identity development for future planning on teacher preparation curriculum. Also, the current study will add to the Malaysian literature on the uses of interpretive framework, rather than rely on the currently available survey instruments in exploring and understanding student teachers' professional identity development. An interpretive framework explains in depth the process of identity acquisition among students. Furthermore, the study will help researchers to uncover the role of social factors and individual self-definition (i.e. using a social identity approach) in determining the professional identity of student teachers and the process contained therein.

## **1.9 Context of the Study**

This study was conducted in Malaysia. Secondary school teachers in Malaysia must have at least a degree in education to qualify them to teach. There are multiple routes into the teaching profession in Malaysia, particularly for teachers in secondary schools. These are:

1. A Bachelor's Degree in Education or Integrated Bachelor's Degree with Education (ISMP in local acronym). This four-year programme is the dominant route into the teaching profession, conducted at public universities.
2. A Post Graduate Diploma (DPLI and KPLI in local acronym). This is a one-year full time programme (or 38 weeks, including a teaching practise at school), which prepares trainees with a degree in specialised areas. It was first introduced to prepare teachers to cater for the urgent need created by the rapid expansion of secondary education in the past decades, and still continues today

(“Ministry of Education Malaysia”, n.d.-a; Mokshein, Ahmad and Vongalis-Macrow, 2009). However, the intake for this programme is very limited.

In this study, teacher education students or student teachers refer to students who are undertaking a teacher education programme in the biggest secondary teacher training institution in Malaysia. At the time this study was conducted, this institution only offered a Bachelor’s of Education, with different areas of concentration. Among the specialisations offered are languages, special education, moral education, geography, history, Islamic education, management education, economics education, and many others. The minimum duration is four years and the curriculum consists of classroom teaching and learning, teaching practice in public secondary schools, and an undergraduate dissertation. The Ministry of Education controls the admission to this programme. Students graduating with a minimum cumulative average grade of 2.75 points over 4.00 points are qualified to apply for the post of secondary school teacher. Teacher candidates who are successful in the teacher selection process may have their posting in selected public secondary schools throughout Malaysia (“Ministry of Education Malaysia”, n.d.-b). In the past, almost all graduates that passed the minimum academic criteria from this institution, as well as other teacher education programmes, were employed after graduation (Mokhsein et al., 2009). Therefore, at the time this study was conducted, students who enrolled before 2011 (i.e. groups of students undergoing teaching practise and group of career change students) are guaranteed teaching placements, thus teaching continuously becomes a highly secure job for them. On the other hand, students who enrolled after the 2011 academic year (i.e. group of first year students) did not have privileges on teacher placements in government funded schools; however, there is always a demand for teachers in both private and public schools as the number of young people entering the education system in Malaysia keeps increasing.

Currently, there are 12 education faculties or departments in public and private universities in Malaysia. Teacher education graduates from universities will be assigned to teach at secondary schools. Additionally, there are 27 Teacher Education Institutes that offer only degrees or diplomas in education and prepare students for teaching in primary schools. The basic programme offered in teacher education faculties or departments and universities follows a common curriculum, as outlined by the Teacher

Education Division of the Ministry of Education. The six basic components are teacher dynamics, knowledge and professional competence, subject option and specialisation, self-enrichment, co-curricular activities and practicum at school (Ingvarson et al., 2013).

In Malaysia, the mainstream entry into a public higher education institution is controlled by the Ministry of Education via a centralised selection process, regardless of the new policy of teacher placement. The selection process initially uses a meritocratic screening that is based on students' academic achievements in the high school leaving exam, particularly the public examinations, Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia (Malaysia Education Certificate) and Sijil Tinggi Pelajaran Malaysia (Malaysia Higher Education Certificate). In general, public higher education institutions in Malaysia have the autonomy to set the admission requirements, as well as the number of enrolments for their institution. Despite the new regulation on teacher placements, the number of enrolments on teacher education programmes is still controlled by the Ministry of Education. Furthermore, there are only limited places offered in every academic calendar year. Previously, admission to teacher education programmes at universities was set in accordance to the forecasted number of teachers needed in Malaysian secondary schools ("School Division, Ministry of Education Malaysia", n.d.). The Ministry of Education's forecast is based on the number of secondary pupils' educational enrolment. The Ministry aims for a teacher-class ratio in typical schools that does not exceed 1.5 teachers per class. Currently, the number of pupils in Malaysian secondary school classes is 30-40. Despite the changes in the teacher placement policy, the Ministry of Education still controls the number of teacher education applicants, so as to avoid a huge surplus of teacher education graduates in the job market due to the overwhelming number of applications every year.

Despite the new regulations on teachers' recruitment, the number of applicants for teacher education programmes remains the same, regardless of the new policy on teacher placements. There are two possibilities that may explain this situation: firstly, the teaching profession is attractive as students are aware of the contribution of teaching to the development of the country and the nation. Secondly, teacher education applicants still expect job opportunities in teaching as statistics showed that the number of young people who enter education increases every year ("Ministry of Higher

Education Malaysia”, n.d.- a); thus, there will always be a demand for teachers in the Malaysian education system.

For the past 13 years, the number of applications to the teacher education programmes has increased and the Ministry has implemented more objective control mechanisms, such as interviews and psychometric tests for teacher education applicants, in order to screen the best candidates (“Malaysia Examination Council”, n.d.). This is to ensure that only those who meet the requirements and have the interest and inclination to be teachers are selected for admission into teacher education programmes. The psychometric test, known as the Malaysian Educators’ Selection Inventory (MEdSI), was introduced in year 2007, consisting 300 questions and should be answered within an hour. The candidates sit for the MEdSI tests in selected higher education institutions all over Malaysia. The items in the instrument consist of four sections: personality (110 items), career interest (60 items), value integrity (70 items), and emotional intelligence (60 items). These instruments, developed by a group of experts from Malaysia’s public higher education institutions, are based on the Personality-Programme Fit (P-P Fit). The 10<sup>th</sup> Malaysia Plan reports that among the huge number of applicants every year, many do not have the attitude and aptitude to become teachers (Prime Minister Department, 2010), which are measured in the four sections as indicated above.

Applicants who successfully pass the minimum test score will be called for an interview. Academic staff from the teacher education institutions will conduct the interviews. Successful candidates, thereafter, will undergo their teacher preparation programmes in selected higher education institutions, depending on students’ preference list of higher education institutions. Explicitly, the Ministry of Education has created a proactive system in order to produce teachers that desire to become a teacher by conducting control mechanisms towards teacher education applicants.

Until recently, there have been few studies that investigated the MEdSI test (e.g. Mat Kasim et al., 2012; Noah, Karim and Othman, 2012; Hashim, Damio and Hussin, 2013). However, the studies focus more towards instrument development rather than the effectiveness of the test that may shed a light on the students’ attitude towards teaching. Although the MEdSI test has become a tool to select the best candidates for teacher education programmes, the nature of the test is limited to explain the type of

conformity that students have with the teaching profession. Research on conformity suggests that students may conform to the profession because they are pressured to comply with the professions' aspirations, or they have information about teaching, but, to a certain extent, they may not conform to the aspirations of the profession (Abrams and Hogg, 1990).

### **1.10 Framework of Study**

Most studies in determining the students' identity towards the teaching profession have only focused on quantitative approaches (Bakar et al., 2008; Zamri, 2011) There is a considerable amount of research that focuses on positivist approaches and tends to follow the mainstream research that uses the same, or almost the same, research instruments. Furthermore, the quantitative studies on identity development process have measured the effect of teacher preparation programmes on students' identity, such as the learning process, peer influence and social communication. As the learning process in higher education involves the learner, teachers, the environment and what is to be learned, the quantitative studies were inadequate to explain in depth the process of becoming a professional (Mohd Dahan and Ghazali, 2007; Sinclair, 2008). Recognising that the prospective teachers' live experiences are not an objective reality, in that there are multiple influences in the societal contexts shaping their identity, thus, it is inaccurate to adopt a deterministic approach when attempting to understand their experience.

This study will adapt the interpretive stance so that the social factors and their interplay can be discovered and identified. This will contribute to the literature on the teacher education students' engagement with teaching. Moreover, this study also contributes to teacher education and higher education literature, specifically as to how to explain the development of students' identity using the social identity approach. This study attempts to get inside and understand from within the students' experience on teacher education programmes. This is consistent with the findings that some higher education students, through early socialisation in preparation programmes at higher education institutions, are able to turn themselves into the kind of person that suits the situation

that they are in (Becker, 1964). Details of the methodology of the study are reported in the methodology chapter.

### **1.11 Organisation of the thesis**

The thesis is organised as follows; this introductory chapter introduces the background, aims and research questions being addressed, as well as the significance of the study. This is followed by a literature review in Chapter Two. Chapter Two analyses the factors that influence students' enrolment in teacher education programmes, and the development of the students' identity during the commencement of their academic programme at higher education institutions. This chapter focuses on the role of social identity approach as an organising and unifying approach that accounts for the students' identity development towards teaching. Following this, Chapter Three discusses the method, detailing the study approach, data collection strategy, sampling process and the management of study. Chapters Four and Five present the findings of the study. Finally, Chapter Six concludes the results and the limitations are discussed.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **2.1 Introduction**

This chapter begins with the introduction of the concept of professional identity, and how the concept will be used in this study. Firstly, the process of professional identity development among students in higher education is highlighted in order to get the commonality of the process. Secondly, reviews focus on the significance of the social identity approach underpinning this study and the categorisation process that students undergo when they decide to enrol in specific academic programmes in higher education. Finally, the review encompasses the students' learning experience that may explain the identity development process.

#### **2.2 Professional identity development in higher education**

Besides the definition by Trede et al. (2012), and Clouder (2008) on professional identity as cited in subsection 1.4, Patterson, Higgs, Wilcox and Villeneuve (2002, p.6) directly uses the term 'professional' to define professional identity as 'the sense of being a professional'. Past studies on professional identity development among students in higher education revealed how the students represent themselves as the member of one occupational group. This includes the narration about the knowledge, skills, and attitude that they get through the socialisation process in higher education (Jackson, 2016). The socialisation process happens in many forms that enables students to acquire the professional identity; this mostly comes from the interaction between students in specific communities (Jackson and Temperley, 2007; Reid, Dahlgren, Petocz, and Abrandt Dahlgren, 2008; Su and Chung, 2015), transformational learning (Bramming, 2007), and reflective learning (Cherry, 2005; Klenowski, Askew and Carnell, 2006).

Studies of students' professional identity development support the statement highlighted in subsection 1.4, that the concept of professional identity has been used interchangeably in the literature. This includes using the term 'professional' identity to represent how students see themselves as members of one occupational group (e.g. Su and Chung, 2015) even though many studies have not illustrated the elements of professionalism that must be included to ensure that professional development occurs. Arguably, previous researches have contributed to explain how students in higher education represent their readiness or unreadiness to become a member of their intended occupational group, however there is little explanation on whether their behaviour is consistent with the group norms and values. Nevertheless, the results from previous researches have given inputs to the higher education administrators and academics on the way to plan, organise, lead and control students' learning experience in higher education. Additionally, researching professional identity helps to identify students' readiness to work, as this narrates the students' perception on how they see themselves as individual workers in one occupational group.

All things considered, the current study defines professional identity as a sense of being a professional according to the professional model attribute (for professional group of occupation) and a sense of being a professional according to their perception of the groups' aspiration (for non-professional group of occupation). The term 'profession' will be used in this study to indicate one occupational group, not limited to the established profession, as defined by Hall (1968), which comprises the field of law, medicine and priest.

### **2.3 The relevance of social identity approach in interpreting the professional identity development among students in higher education**

Subsection 2.2 shows empirical evidence over the years that has provided support for the validity of the identity development process among students commencing in higher education and has demonstrated their relevance to explain who they are as a member of their intended profession. However, despite the different focus of each of these approaches to identity development, one commonality is that they have been used mainly to understand the processes underlying the intended behaviour of students as

individuals. Put it another way, research on identity development has focused on the individual process to become a member of their intended profession including their motives, personality traits and anticipation in their future professional working life (Bramming, 2007).

Hence, the focus on the previous studies is more towards defining professional identity when personal identity is salient, as it is “associated with needs to self-actualised and enhance personal self-esteem by means of personal advancement and growth” (Haslam, 2004, p. 67). Evidence from the literature also suggests that different approaches have been applied to identify the professional identity formation among students in higher education, involving both group effort (e.g. the communities of practise) and individual effort (e.g. reflective learning) to present who they are as a member of their intended profession.

However, as society will see the profession as one entity, the members of the profession have to function in concert and cannot always be seen as representing independent bodies. As a result, students are not necessarily driven by personal motive, aspiration and professional anticipation only, but informed by the norms and values of the occupational group (Haslam, 2004). To put it differently, the occupational group will act as an important drive to regulate the behaviour of group members, marked by the capacity for groups to determine and change the cognitive process of individuals (Tajfel and Turner, 1979).

It is commonly accepted that students who will become a member of established professional groups such as law and medicine, the professional standard and practice for the profession is something that needs to be learnt and followed. On the contrary, members of non-professional groups, such as teaching, their intended behaviour should support the occupational group norms and values in order to enhance the social position of teaching. As the existing traits and functions of teaching are not sufficient to bring teaching to a full-fledged profession, there should be outstanding or differentiable values and norms in teaching that will guide their members’ behaviour particularly to upgrade the teaching status in the society. In this sense, the ability of one occupational group to acquire a high status depends on how well the group members strive and share their responsibility to enhance their occupational group performances (Gunlach,

Zivnuska, and Stoner, 2006). Thus, it is predicted that the group members' behaviours are shaped and reshaped by the group's norms and values that will differentiate teaching with other occupational groups.

It has been emphasised that groups of professional occupation and groups of occupation acquiring for professional status have different aims which suit their social positions. As stated in subsection 1.4, the former aims to maintain their privilege as a professional occupation while the latter struggles to upgrade their status to acquire professional status, or at least get the recognition as a special type of occupation based on their contribution to the society. Hence, in the context of this study, the social identity approach will help to explain the students' intended behaviour, or their assumed professional identity and the process of identity development towards the intended profession. With the argument that the psychology of the individual is a product of group life, this study seeks to identify how students are bound together through their joint sense of belonging to the same social category which is their intended profession. The social identity approach suggested that a social identity associated with membership of a given organisation will make organisational behaviour possible (Haslam, 2004). In the current study, the 'organisation' refers to one's occupational group.

The social identity approach comprises of Tajfel's (1974) Social Identity Theory (SIT) and Turner's (1985) Self-Categorisation Theory (SCT). SIT was developed from Tajfel's work on intergroup processes, and Turner extended the work on group processes starting from the formation and categorisation of the group. Because these two approaches shared many key assumptions regarding group processes and intergroup relations, they are often discussed under the label of social identity approach in literature related to students and their future profession (Burford, 2012; Clouder, 2003; Hallier and Summers, 2011). These prior works deduce that the social identity approach and the model therein help to explain why students are attracted to different types of profession, and how the profession guides their behaviour accordingly. For non-established professions, it is a need to identify social identity salience among the members or future members of the profession. This in turn will help to explain how students use their occupational group for self-enhancement.

Different types of professions have different history that need to be considered in order to understand its unique norms and values (Klegon, 1978). In spite of the non-professional status accepted by most scholars, in a Malaysian context, teaching is regarded as having a high status even though the theoretical perspective on sociology of profession has excluded teaching as a type of established profession. Malaysia is a multiracial country consisting of Malays (the majority), Chinese, Indians and other small groups such as indigenous Bumiputras. Islam is the national religion and all Malays are Muslims<sup>4</sup>, but other major religions are practiced, including Buddhism, Hinduism, Christianity, Sikh and Taoism.

As a country that has a majority Muslim population, the religious and cultural values of Islam have a significant impact on social policy and practice, including education (Rassool, 2000). Following this, the position of teachers in Malaysia is influenced by the religious and cultural values of Islam. Teachers are recognised as knowledgeable people and Islam gives a high rank to a knowledgeable person, as stated in the Al-Quran<sup>5</sup>; a knowledgeable person is assumed to be able to disseminate knowledge and positive values and have a positive impact on other people through their efforts in teaching. Teachers are afforded high esteem and are viewed as role models and respected community leaders (Mogra, 2010). By being a role model, teachers are also expected to exemplify in their life the content of what they teach (Minnis, 1999). Therefore, in Islam, no other profession can compete with the teaching profession in terms of virtue (Mogra, 2010).

By taking the status of teaching into consideration and in the context of this study, two assumptions arise on how the social identity approach can help to explain students' identity development towards the teaching profession. Firstly, there is a need to identify the norms and values of the professional group that will make the social identity salient. Sachs (2003) illustrated:

“It is paramount that whatever meaning of professionalism is circulating, its meaning is generated and owned by teachers themselves in order that it

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<sup>4</sup>According to Article 160(2) Malaysia Federal Constitution, all Malays are Muslims. Malays who convert to another religion or do not have a religion are not considered as Malays (by definition).

<sup>5</sup>Central religious text of Islam.

should have currency among teachers and be useful in improving their public image and social importance.” (p.3)

Therefore, it is feasible to argue that the status of teaching perceived by the local community is treated as value owned by the teaching profession. Even though teaching is not awarded with an established professional status, there is no doubt of the contribution to the society in facilitating learning. Thus, in Malaysia, students who identify as a future Malaysian teacher must be proud because they have a great opportunity to become a member of the teaching profession, due to the higher status given by the local community (i.e. noble and respectable). The motivational attachment to the group has been defined as one of the basis of the group’s positive performance (Hogg and Abrams, 1998).

Another possible event that possibly guided the process of identifying the values and norms of the teaching profession is The National Philosophy of Education statement, which has been used in all educational activities. In a Malaysian context:

Education in Malaysia is a continuous effort towards enhancing the potential of individuals in a holistic and integrated manner in order to create individuals who are well-equipped intellectually, spiritually and emotionally. This effort aims to produce knowledgeable, ethical and responsible Malaysian citizens who can contribute towards the harmony and prosperity of the community and nation (“Ministry of Education Malaysia”, n.d-a).

This statement consequently highlighted the important factors that teachers must adhere to, thus explaining the norms and values of teaching that might guide a teacher’s behaviour.

Secondly, the identity development towards teaching occurs in intergroup and intragroup contexts. When students decide to enter teacher education programmes, they must understand that they want to be different from other students who choose different programmes of study. This is the process where members of the group define their own social identity through a discrimination process between their group and others (Turner, 2010; Haslam, Powell and Turner, 2000).

At the same time, their decision will give the impression that in order to become a member of the profession, they not only want to be seen as physically attached to the group, but they want to become part of the group which carries all the attributes of the profession. Tajfel (1978) explains this process as “the part of individual’s self-concept which derives from knowledge of membership of a certain group together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership” (p. 63). Thus, the professional identity towards the teaching profession will be framed both from the students’ motive to enter a teacher preparation programme and their socialisation process in higher education.

The initial identity development towards the profession suggests that early engagement with the occupational group starts with the student’s motive in choosing the disciplinary field as a means to become a member of a certain profession related to the field of study (Gibney et al., 2010). Students are assumed to be involved in the cognitive redefinition process of the social group, i.e. the profession (Turner, 1985), when they choose their academic programme. The choice stimulates their thinking of which group of occupation they will be in, thus provides an early conception of their future image.

Potentially, students may be attracted to a group of occupation with a positive social identity and will continue to imagine themselves as continuing the esteem of the group. However, the perception of positive social identity is varying; ranging from better positions in the society, rewards offered, opportunities for employability, the nature of work, and work autonomy. To some extent, student perception on one group’s positive social identity does not correspond with the norms and values of the group. For example, students may be attracted to one occupational group as it offers greater employment opportunity (thus, indicates positive social identity) while the group’s aspiration is to serve society to the best interest.

The reviews in the preceding paragraph implicitly suggests that the strong emotional ties between the individual and the group is commitment. According to the Social Identity Theory, identification with a social group influences the individual behaviour, and can serve as a motivator and leads the effort to achieve the group’s aspiration (Meyer and Allen, 1991). As stated in Subsection 1.3, teaching now has been critiqued

due to the unintended behaviour of its members, and this brings a negative perception about teachers, hence downgrading the status of the profession.

The downgrading or deprofessionalisation challenged the positive social identity that teaching inspires to bring towards society. Thus, it is feasible to argue that the positive social identity will be realised, and subsequently help to uphold the teaching profession's status, and enhance the self-esteem of its members if teachers as well as future teachers present their commitment in carrying out the mandate or function in society (Geer, 1966; Hord and Tobia, 2012). Thus, it is important to identify the level and types of commitment student teachers have in order to achieve a positive social identity.

Commitment is commonly defined in the literature as emotional ties between an individual and the organisation they are in (Meyer and Allen, 1991). This includes one's occupational group. Previous researches have demonstrated that commitment can predict behaviour, and engagement with the group can be a predictor of group-oriented effort (Ellemers, Gikder and Haslam, 2004), hence become a predictor of professionalism (Geer, 1966).

In the literature, teacher commitment has been found to be a crucial predictor of teachers' work performance, absenteeism, retention, burnout and turnover, as well as having an important influence on school pupils' motivation, achievement, attitudes towards learning and being in school (Day, 2002). The level of teachers' commitment is considered a key factor as it heavily influences the teachers' willingness to engage in teaching and perform their duties.

Teacher commitment also becomes one of the most critical factors for the future success of education and schools (Crosswell and Elliot, 2004). Crosswell and Elliot (2004) suggested that "while teachers do articulate a commitment to external centres (such as students) they also make significant links to personal passions which include ideology, values and beliefs" (p. 7). They suggested that there are different ways that teachers perceive, understand and conceptualise teacher commitment; one is towards maintaining professional knowledge. The importance of commitment is also highlighted by Geer (1966, p.31), "particularly in occupations aspiring to be a profession or in

doubt of their status, there may be great concern because it is considered a mark of the real profession". Thus, commitment towards acquiring and maintaining professional knowledge becomes important in determining the teachers' commitment in teaching.

One type of commitment, termed as affective commitment, explains the desire to maintain membership in an organisation (Meyer and Allen, 1991), and also understanding the members' willingness to invest effort and knowledge to achieve the organisational goal (Allen and Meyer, 1990). Arguably, affective commitment may explain further the emotional aspect of under-privileged or under-represented groups such as teaching which the social identity has been challenged with the phenomena affecting teachers nowadays.

#### **2.4 Students' motives to choose disciplinary field and occupational group**

Knowing the students' motives when they choose a disciplinary field in higher education is important for the current study as it can identify what led them to become a member of one occupational group; therefore, giving an initial perception on the social identity of one occupational group. It is also feasible to argue that motives serve as an early predictor of the students' orientation towards maintaining a positive social identity. However, when the perceived social identity is not congruent with the occupational group's norms and values, the suitability of their early identification may need to be revisited in order to identify how similar they see themselves in relation with the group's aspiration. The need to revisit is also applied in the situation where students enrol in specific academic programmes without any concrete motives, but later realise that they are becoming a member of one occupational group.

This revisitation is workable as the social categorisation theory also suggests that identification is viewed as a perceptual cognitive construct that is not necessarily associated with any specific behaviours or affective states (Ashforth and Mael, 1989, p.21). Reference to the social identity approach provides a systematic explanation of the various cognitive and behavioural strategy in which students may cope if there are any differences between early identification and recent situation (Haslam, 2004). In one such enhancement strategy, individual mobility is associated with individual belief in

the possibility of advancement by joining a higher status (occupational) group (Tajfel and Turner, 1979). Thus, students may think of changing their academic programme if they think there exists a dissimilarity between their motive and the group norms and values. Students might exit the group and search for a more higher status group, in order to become a member of a group with a more positive social identity.

However, when the chance to change the academic programme or chosen disciplinary field is impossible because of insufficient academic background or other valid reasons, students might apply a different strategy to achieve a positive social identity. The social identity theory predicts that when an existing occupational group status is perceived to be low, in order to maintain the social identity salience, students might pursue a social creativity strategy (Haslam, 2004). Social creativity enables students to create a more positive image to achieve a positive social identity. According to Haslam (2004), there are three ways students might respond to social creativity; find a new positive dimension to compare an existing group with an out-group, evaluate the existing group with new positive dimensions, or redefine the meaning of in-group membership to enhance the status. Pursuing a social creativity strategy enables the students to remain in the existing group; however, there is a need for the students to show affective commitment in order to achieve a positive social identity.

Hence, it is important to identify students' motive to enrol in a specific disciplinary field in order to assist the students to achieve a positive social identity, particularly when their motive to enrol in the field is not related to social identity salience but rather personal identity salience. Previous studies in higher education have reported the three main motives students choose a specific disciplinary field; namely altruistic, intrinsic and extrinsic. In a teacher education context, altruistic motives refer to a feeling that shows a desire to help people (i.e. young people entering the education system). It can be inferred that altruistic motives relate to the students' perception on teachers' function and status of the profession that enable them to contribute to the society while intrinsic and extrinsic motives are viewed as rewards (internal and external rewards respectively) gained from the profession.

Studies in Malaysia suggest that student teachers favour teaching because of the nature of teaching work and appreciate the status of the teaching profession (Harun, 2006;

Azman, 2013). Azman (2013), for example, finds that student teachers realise that teaching enables them to work with children, and this helps to develop the younger generations. Harun (2006) added to the Malaysian literature on student teachers' motives by reporting that students in her study were attentive and thoughtful towards teaching young children. The findings, thus far, are insufficient to explain whether students evaluate teaching work when they choose to enrol in teacher education programmes.

Subsequently, it is also reported that some students do not favour teaching work at all as they would rather approach teaching as a means to seek a permanent job (Seker, Deniz and Gorgen, 2015). Additionally, most literature focuses on the status of the teaching profession and suggests that students will show engagement with teaching when they feel proud to belong to the group and feel esteemed with the profession. In addition, students with a positive perception on teaching are expected to preserve the status of the profession by following the norms and values held by the profession. Studies on teacher education in Malaysia provide more evidence that the status of the teaching profession has stimulated their thinking and feelings towards teaching as a profession.

The positive social identity of teaching where they perceive that teaching is a noble profession becomes part of the students' evaluation of the profession (Azman, 2013; Harun, 2006; Wellington, 2012), rather than their understanding of how teaching works. Nonetheless, literature that focuses on the rewards of teaching, particularly studies conducted in Malaysia, provides ample evidence of the students' attitudes derived from their beliefs and emotional reactions towards teaching. It has been reported that students possess positive attitudes towards teaching as a result of the benefits embodied in the profession such as long holidays, monetary incentives as civil servants, job security, and the short duration of working time (Azman, 2013; Harun, 2006; Wellington, 2012). The understanding of rewards also influences the student teachers in mainland China who chose teaching as a way to work in a vibrant place such as Hong Kong (Gao and Trent, 2009).

Despite the findings, the majority of respondents in the studies conducted in Malaysia report a positive evaluation of teaching in a way that they state their willingness to approach the teaching profession after graduation. This condition is predictable as

teacher education programmes provide professional training and it can be assumed that most students choose these programmes with the intention of becoming teachers. This is consistent with the work of Berger (1988) and Teng (2008), cited earlier in this chapter. What differentiates the individual students' evaluations about teaching is their level of engagement with the work, the status they hold in the profession and the type of rewards they expect from it.

## **2.5 Socialisation process that helps in identification of teaching aspirations and identity development**

As highlighted in Subsection 1.1, higher education provides early socialisation for students towards the profession (Bakar et al., 2008; Trede et al., 2012). Prior studies reveal that the students' motive give insight into how students socialise in their professional preparation programmes (Fokken-Bruinsma and Canrinus, 2012, 2014; Struyven, Jacobs and Dochy, 2013). This subsection further explores the process of socialisation in higher education with regards to the identification process towards a specific profession. It is predicted that students will learn the professional roles and dispositions of teaching through professional socialisation, as primarily this process enables students to acquire knowledge, skills and values (Cohen, 1981) related to a specific profession. Also, through the socialisation process, students will be able to determine how similar they are to the groups that they find themselves occupying (Tajfel and Turner, 1979).

The aim for this subsection is to explore how different approaches of socialisation affect the students' process of learning professional attributes. Two approaches of the socialisation process that are most probably undertaken by the students while they are at higher education institutions will be highlighted, together with the reviews on students' perceptions towards the teaching profession in Western countries, Asian countries and Malaysia. This is to identify whether there are differences in socialising approaches among the different countries and the effect of the identification process. Arguably, the differences have taken into account identifying the occupational status which also involves the historical aspect on how one country sees the profession (Klegon, 1978). Finally, this subsection will suggest the suitability of the socialisation approach,

considering which approach will result in strong identified members that adhere to the teaching aspirations, which in this context is commitment.

### **2.5.1 Introduction to students' socialisation in higher education**

This subsection explores what higher education offers students during the socialisation process that might influence their commitment and develop a positive social identity towards teaching. Certainly, in higher education, students have an opportunity to explore the epistemological aspects or nature of knowledge in their specific discipline (Dahlgren, Hult, Dahlgren, Segerstad and Johansson, 2006; Johansson, Segerstad, Hult and Dahlgren, 2008). Dahlgren et al. (2006) further suggested that this arrangement frames the students as members of specific academic and professional cultures. It is important to realise that knowledge is treated as an important criteria for occupational groups to be regarded as professions (Barber, 1963; Hall, 1968).

The socialisation process exposes students to a different level of knowledge during their learning process in higher education. Certain commonality in the literature suggests that students in their early years of studentship are exposed to descriptive knowledge about their academic major, including the root of the discipline and related theories (Dahlgren et al., 2006). Descriptive knowledge is received by students mostly from the memorisation of facts derived from reading materials and seminars. In certain circumstances, students do not envisage a typical target job related to their discipline at this stage (Johansson et al., 2008) and their approach to learning is more oriented towards the memorisation of tacit information that focuses more on the intention of reproducing information without any further analysis (Huy, 2008).

When students progress in their studies, they become more exposed to specific knowledge related to their programmes of study (Dahlgren et al., 2006; Jackling and de Large, 2009). For example, an accounting major must have the ability to execute the technical aspects of accounting such as key accounting skills and accounting problem analysis (Jackling and de Large, 2009). For students in psychology, they are trained to be the “helper and the social engineer capable of moderating people’s behaviour” (Dahlgren et al., 2006: 578). From the studies cited above, specific knowledge can be inferred as important attributes of the students’ future professions related to the

programme of study. Although some students appreciate the knowledge and are keen to be a member of a particular academic and professional culture (Dahlgren et al., 2006), their counterparts might refuse to become a member (Chambers, Hobson and Tracey, 2010) when they feel that they are not willing to self-categorise themselves consistently with the professional attributes even though they are still commencing in the particular academic programme. For example, in teacher education, Chambers, Hobson and Tracey (2010) found that final year teacher education students decided to withdraw their intention to become teachers as they found that the teaching profession is not promising in terms of extrinsic rewards, such as pay, lack of confidence when dealing with school children, and receiving less support from schools during their internship programme.

This study implies that students potentially distance themselves from the group, as they have not adhered to one of the teaching attributes, represented by difficulties in handling school children. Consequently, this suggests that students do not possess favourable attitudes towards the teaching profession as they are not able to adhere to the teaching attribute. At this stage, students may think to pursue an individual mobility strategy if they assume that their career motivation is not in harmony with the existing group.

Besides knowledge, students in higher education, formally or informally, are trained in related skills. In a working environment, skills normally refer to technical procedures or practical tasks and people skills (Roselina, 2009). Technical procedures or practical skills are related to discipline-based knowledge, while people skills relate to generic skills that are transferable between different contexts, such as communication, leadership and decision making (Badcock, Pattison and Harris, 2010; Baik and Greig, 2009; Dahlgren et al., 2006; Reid et al., 2008; Sleaf and Reed, 2006). Higher education is the platform for students to learn the skills needed to function in specific professional roles (Borgen and Young, 1982). However, for certain professions, such as teachers and doctors, students may be able to envisage the role of the profession as a result of their socialisation as members of a society.

In conjunction with knowledge and skills, professional and generic values are also embedded in the students' teaching and learning process in higher education (Berings,

Fruyt and Bouwen, 2004; Pike, 2006; Taber, Hartung and Borges, 2011). In the learning process, students may absorb values through role models (Sleap and Reid, 2006); to some extent, students also acquire values through their interaction within formal and informal learning (Hafferty, 2008; Lui et al., 2008). Hafferty (2008), for example, suggests that medical students learn about their professional values through observing the attitude of their physician teachers.

The reviews in this subsection reveal that students will learn different types of knowledge, skills and values pertaining to the profession. It is assumed that this acquisition of knowledge, skills and values may help in the process of identification with the norms and values of the given profession.

### **2.5.2 Professional socialisation approach**

Researchers categorise students in higher education as an individual in the adulthood phase (Arnett, 2000; Brim, 1966; Mortimer and Simmons, 1978). As an adult, students are expected to become more realistic in their decisions (Clausen, 1968) because they are able to synthesise what they have learned, become more independent and proactive (Brim, 1966; Cottrell, 1969). Additionally, Knowles (1984) also suggests that adulthood is a phase whereby individuals will arrive at a self-concept of being responsible for one's own life, including their decision in a professional career. Adults, therefore, are perceived as independent and able to develop themselves according to their beliefs and feelings in their lives.

In the professional socialisation literature, there are two main socialisation approaches through which students in higher education learn about the attributes of their profession; the functionalist and interpretive approaches of socialisation. Each approach is characterised by a distinct theoretical orientation towards describing the students' learning process in higher education. The following review aims to explore both approaches and suggests how the socialisation process affects students' identification with the important attributes of their assumed professional destinations.

### **2.5.3 Functionalist approach of professional socialisation**

From a functionalist point of view, the socialisation process is seen as a platform where students have to adopt predetermined structures of the profession (Merton, 1957). The structure, however, varies accordingly in different contexts, as functionalists tend to assume that the observer (i.e. society) attempts to “relate what they observe to what they regard as important elements in the wider social context” (Burrell and Morgan, 1979. p 107). The underlying assumption behind this approach is stated by Burrell and Morgan (1979), who wrote that the social world “regards society as ontological preceding man and seek to place man and his activities within that wider social context” (p. 106). This assumption explicitly gives priority to the social structure, as its existence precedes man, and man has to fit in society. Thus, it implies that in professional socialisation, students who intend to become a member of one chosen profession must simply accept a set of professional values that are prescribed to its members (Baumeister, 1991; Hansen, 2010). The functionalist approach, therefore, results in passive learners, as students are assumed to adapt themselves to the attributes of the assumed professional destination, in order to fit in.

This approach also considers that there will be a role model for the socialisation process, as Burrell and Morgan (1979) literally state, “society comes before man” (p. 106). Van Scotter, Haas, Kraft and Schott (1985) support this view and argue that the socialisation process is similar to the process of teaching and learning where the teachers consist of the combination of society and higher education, and students are learners. The learner, therefore, will follow the teachers in order to fit into the given group in a given context. In higher education, the learning process also involves the teacher and as Merton (1957), and Radcliffe and Lester (2003) suggest, teachers become vital socialising agents for students to learn the attributes of the profession.

If students adopt this approach of socialisation, it would mean that student teachers have to follow all the predetermined knowledge, skills and values during teacher preparation programmes in order to learn about specific values and norms of teaching. Students, however, are restricted to synchronise what they learn from different people, as functionalists consider that learners must depend on the “social structure”. Different social structures (i.e. teacher educator) might have different perspectives on teaching

attributes. It may be good for the students to learn in this way but they will be filled with teaching attributes in an unconscious, passive uniform process of socialisation (Artkinson and Delamont, 1985), and the role model to follow (i.e. the teacher educator in higher education) may not produce strong identifiers for the teaching profession. This assumption is supported by the view that in order to strongly identify with the teaching values and norms, the students must conform to the attributes of the profession, not with other people (i.e. teacher educator and society) who influence them. In addition, as this approach equates students with passive objects, with no ability to react to the socialisation process, it may be questionable, as not all students in higher education will approach their assumed professional destination after graduating from higher education institutions (Sinclair, 2008).

However, it is predicted that for some students, particularly those who enrol in specific academic programmes in higher education without knowing what their direction or future profession might be, they may find that a functionalist approach to socialisation is beneficial, as they have a role model to follow and the adoption of the knowledge, skills and values are in order to prepare themselves towards certain professions. The students are assumed to develop a positive social identity towards the profession with the help of scientific learning that allows the students to seek approval and passively conform to the performance standard (Baratti, 2004).

#### **2.5.4 Interpretive approach of professional socialisation**

As opposed to the functionalist view, the interpretive approach of socialisation assumes that the students in higher education develop themselves according to nonlinear processes, which offer an opportunity to continually engage in the active learning process on which they will become (Giddens, 1991; Niemi, 1997). With this assumption, the socialisation process focuses more on human agency, rather than a predetermined structure. Human agency in this context refers to the capacity given to the students to create their own meaning in their socialisation process. Therefore, students are seen as active participants in their learning process and have the potential to actively seek the information they need. Burrell and Morgan (1979) interpret this approach as a way to seek explanation “within the realm of individual consciousness and subjectivity, within the frame of reference of the participants as opposed of the

observer of action” (p. 28). This suggests that students develop their own meanings and “do what they do because of whom they believe they are” (Forte, 2007: 167).

So, what makes students active participants? Generally, studies show that students will become active participants if they are able to use their knowledge and skills to make decisions in certain aspects (Reilly and Spratt, 2007; Wang, Shen, Novak and Pan, 2009). In an attempt to clarify why individuals become active participants in the interpretive socialisation process, Eraut (1994) tries to make a distinction between the types of knowledge that individuals have; firstly, knowledge that is socially constructed, and secondly, knowledge that “individual persons bring to situations that enable them to think, interact and perform” (Eraut, 1994; 202). The author suggests that both types of knowledge are important and facilitate the socialisation process.

Put differently, prior work suggests that both personal characteristics and social interaction are important in facilitating individual learning and becoming active participants in the socialisation process. Similarly, other scholars also emphasise traits such as commitment and motivation that help to create a meaningful and successful socialisation process (Becker, 1964). Additionally, flexible, higher self-efficacy, independent and creative students are also predicted to contribute to the definition of active participants in the socialisation process (Bandura, 1969). This contrasted with the functionalist approach that claims that students’ learning originates from outside and is derived externally. This contrasting approach implies that the motivation of students to search for their own stance in interpretive approaches are higher than for students that are involved in predetermined socialisation processes.

The interplay between the students’ characteristics and social interaction in facilitating the socialisation process, as discussed in the preceding paragraph, emphasises that even though personal factors dominate the definition of oneself, individuals will also act differently according to the context where they construct their identification towards certain objects. As mentioned in the preceding paragraphs, individuals still hold their own perceptions about themselves in a different context, but as Heggen (2008) suggests, the reflective skills that individuals have will enable them to socialise in a different context.

Tomlinson (2007) also supports this assumption in the professional stance and suggests that profession is not only a technical matter, “it is also a personal matter which involves the location of self in an on-going process of engagement within which they operate” (p.287). Drawing on Tomlinson (2007), many studies emphasise how student teachers’ engagement with significant others affect their self-definition on the teaching profession (McPherson, 2007; Rots, Aelterman, Vlerick and Vermeulen, 2007; Whitehead, 2007). The studies implicitly claim that teachers become active participants in the socialisation process; however, there is no evidence in the literature detailing how the socialisation process occurs.

The studies cited above suggest that becoming active participants implies that the students in higher education are not simply accepting replication or enacting teachers as dominant role models, but they also learn about their profession through interaction with the environment (Niemi, 1997). Interaction with the environment takes place from self-learning and students’ agency, thus minimising the condition to simply accept any predetermined values and norms about the profession. As reviewed in the preceding paragraph, social environment might consist of significant others, such as teachers, faculty members, school children and peer students; however, the students do not conform to others but rather treat them as information providers (Baglin and Rugg, 2010).

The interpretive approach of socialisation fits in the social identity framework in determining the students’ engagement with their assumed professional destination in a way that the students, as active participants in the socialisation process, can consciously determine which group they will be in. The students that envision themselves as members of a specific social group are motivated to differentiate between in-group and out-group members (Glaser-Segura, Mudge, Bratianu and Dumitru, 2010; Owens, Robinson and Smith-Lovin, 2010); therefore, undergoing the process of self-categorisation. The interpretive approach also gives greater flexibility to develop positive attitudes towards the profession, as by becoming active participants, the students have the opportunity to develop themselves, not to the extent that they only have a favourable or unfavourable attitude towards the group (i.e., profession), but to a certain extent explain how far they internalised the aspiration of the profession.

Professional socialisation literature continuously highlights the process of identification for certain professions among students in higher education from Western countries (Hong, 2010; Levine-Rasky, 1998). However, only limited studies from Eastern countries find that an interpretive approach is used extensively in the professional socialisation process (Ahmad, Anantharaman and Ismail, 2012; Pauline, 2013). However, the indicated studies focus more on how students become independent in their learning process to acquire general knowledge and skills in higher education; although they do not explicitly relate this with the learning of attributes of a specific profession.

In summary, the students' professional socialisation, regardless of the approach, helps the students to learn about the attributes of their assumed professional destination. Nonetheless, the students that prefer the functionalist approach of socialisation might have less opportunities to further explore the attributes of their assumed professional destinations, as compared to the students that have the opportunity to become an active participant in their socialisation process. In addition, it is predicted that the students undergoing the interpretive socialisation process internalise more professional attributes than the students undergoing the functionalist socialisation process.

This prediction is based on the underlying assumption that students are influenced by significant others, rather than trying to conform to professional attributes if they are engaged in the functionalist socialisation approach. Thus, low identifiers with professional members might result from this socialisation approach. Another important thing that emerges in the review is that interpretive socialisation does not always result in positive perception towards the profession. This is because to some extent, students with an interpretive approach of socialisation may leave the profession related to their programme of study, as their self-categorisation is consistent with the social categorisation of other social groups.

To date, research on interpretive approaches of socialisation dominates the professional socialisation of students from Western countries. Subsection 2.6 explores the factors that contribute to the unpopularity of the interpretive approach to professional socialisation in Eastern countries, including Malaysia.

## **2.6 Interpretive approach of socialisation: Malaysian perspective**

Prior discussion in Subsection 2.5 implicitly highlighted that students undergo the socialisation process based on their learning preferences and the opportunities provided by the higher education institution. It can also be inferred that students' learning reflects the culture where they belong (Bragg, 1976). Thus, this means that culture has a significant impact on how students in higher education undergo their learning process. There is some debate about the differences between how students originating from Western cultures differ in their learning approach compared to students in the East (Liu, 1998; Richardson, 2004). A common argument is that Westerners are more inclined to learn independently, whereas Easterners prefer to depend on the teacher as a medium of knowledge transfer (Liu, 1998). Western learning models, such as the Constructivist Theory (Piaget, 1972) and Kolb Theory of Learning (Kolb, 1984) have been developed and designed for a Western culture. These theories, among others, posit that students synthesise their new experiences from interaction with the environment to make sense of the world (Brooks and Brooks, 1999).

This approach is contrary with the traditional beliefs of students from Eastern countries. Liu (1998) proposes that students from China refer to their culture as a “long tradition of unconditional obedience to authority” (p.5); therefore, teachers are credited as people that students have to obey. Socialisation literature in Middle Eastern countries also suggests the same results, as students do not welcome reflexive approaches as part of the learning process (Clarke and Otaky, 2006; Richardson, 2004). This implies that students from Eastern countries are passive learners who are reticent and taught to obey (Morris and Leung, 2010).

Additionally, the acceptance of a higher power creates distance between teachers and students (Hofstede, 1984), which also contributes to a passive learning environment. According to Hofstede, the higher power distance means that there is a formal relationship between teachers and students, and teachers are perceived as individuals who outline the path to be followed by students (Hofstede and Hofstede, 2005). As a result, students prefer teachers to make decisions on their behalf. One criticism of this learning style is that it hinders student creativity (Morris and Leung, 2010), and makes students passive followers; thus, they accept the professional socialisation process as

determined by the profession (Merton, 1957). So, how does this condition relate to the students' identification process? It is assumed that there is a high probability that students in Eastern countries identify themselves as members of the group because of influence from others. In contrast, students who have the opportunity to become active participants will become more realistic in determining the common attributes shared by the members of the profession.

Malaysian students, as Eastern learners, are also predicted to have the same attributes as students in China and the Middle East. Although there are no studies that clearly suggest that Malaysian students are traditionally inclined towards the functionalist approach, a considerable amount of studies in higher education are geared towards this approach. For example, studies on uses of Information Technology show that students in one Malaysian higher education institution are more satisfied and confident when they have instructor-led learning during their technology courses (Hong, 2002). Besides that, teacher education students are reported to depend on their teacher educator or their cooperating teacher at school when they want to perform their teaching tasks during their teaching practise at school (Hamid, Zolkifli, Rajuddin, Zakaria and Zahiri, 2007). Co-operating teachers are perceived as knowledge providers at school and they are expected to tell the students what to do. Thus, the socialisation process between co-operating teachers and the students are more inclined towards a one-way communication, rather than a collaborative approach that will give students the opportunity to conform with the professional attributes, not with the people who deliver the attributes.

The differences in professional socialisation processes between Western and Eastern countries are less influenced by the structure of curriculum. There are not many differences in the basic structure of the curriculum between Western and Eastern learners, which provide them with accessibility to the profession. Professional socialisation in higher education primarily involves two main components: academic (or clinical) and fieldwork components (practical). Fieldwork, mainly an internship, is part of the socialisation structure in professional education that offers students a chance to apply knowledge and skills and develop their attitude (Baretti, 2004).

Recently, the professional socialisation process of medical students in both West and Eastern contexts has been viewed as being similar. However, for teacher education programmes, there were slightly different cases where students in the West were found to be more flexible in terms of values, norms and their role definition of teachers (Kyriacou and Kunc, 2007; Levine-Rasky, 1998; McPherson, 2007; Rots et al., 2007). Students in the West are able to reflect on different teaching attributes, however, there is a barrier with students from the East. Students from the East are more tied to the cultural differences from the West and do not welcome reflection (Clark and Otaky, 2006).

Research suggests that Asian students commencing their higher education in Western countries are inclined to change their learning approach in line with their Western counterparts in the same university (Richardson, 2004). According to Richardson, the students show a positive attitude towards the changes, yet they lack the skills to do so as they are not trained to be reflective in their local education system. Furthermore, a considerable amount of recent studies try to challenge the traditional approach that differentiates Western and Eastern learners. Studies, particularly in Hong Kong, found that students who study in local higher education institutions also realise that the traditional approach of learning limits their development process as students (Gao and Trent, 2009). This implies that the interpretive approach helps to enhance students' learning.

In summary, the reviews highlight that different learning approaches will impact how students internalise the knowledge, skills and values pertaining to their chosen profession. The interpretive learning approach has many things to offer, particularly the opportunity to internalise the professional roles and dispositions, as the students have to understand the attributes of the profession if they want to become a member of the group. In contrast, the functionalist approach enables students to conform more to the people, rather than the professional attributes. Many studies in Western countries implicitly claim that student teachers undergo the interpretive learning process; nonetheless, the detailed processes have not been explicitly presented in the literature. Thus, it is difficult to identify whether the significant others become the "teacher", as imposed by the functionalist approach, or whether they are the socialising agents that facilitate the process of attitude development among student teachers.

## **2.7 Malaysian students and the interpretive approach to learning.**

The previous subsection highlighted that the interpretive approach of learning gives more promising evidence on the way students can internalise the attributes of the profession, and at the same time proposed new attributes based on shared understanding among the members of the same group. This might help to enhance students' commitment towards future profession and construct a more positive social identity. Studies, although very limited, signal that higher education students in Malaysia are prepared to move from the restrictions of a functionalist approach in professional socialisation towards building a more flexible learning approach, thus making students have greater flexibility to learn and form the new attributes of the profession. Moving towards a new approach of learning does not mean that students will lose the essence of the profession, instead it offers more flexibility towards students' attitude development. It becomes a challenge to implement the interpretive approach, as Malaysian society is categorised as high in uncertainty avoidance (Hofstede, 1984). Societies with uncertainty avoidance show more emotion and intolerance of dissent because they feel threatened by change.

The assumptions of the transition from the traditional learning approach towards a more interpretive one are drawn from several national circumstances. The first one is associated with the educational reform implemented in Malaysia. Malaysia aims to be a developed country by 2020. In year 1999, the Vision of 2020 (a plan to build Malaysia into a developed country) was published; listing nine challenges to Malaysia becoming a developed country. The challenges are:

1. Establishing a united Malaysian nation made up of one Bangsa Malaysia (Malaysian nation);
2. Creating a psychologically liberated, secure and developed Malaysian society;
3. Fostering and developing a mature democratic society;
4. Establishing a fully moral and ethical society;
5. Establishing a mature, liberal and tolerant society;
6. Establishing a scientific and progressive society;
7. Establishing a fully caring society;
8. Ensuring an economically just society, in which there is fair and equitable distribution of wealth of the nation; and

9. Establishing a prosperous society with an economy that is fully competitive, dynamic, robust and resilient.

(“Malaysia Prime Minister Department”, n.d.)

Underpinning the expectation to achieve the challenges of Vision 2020 is the development of education at all levels in Malaysia (Lee, 1999). Students are encouraged to be remarkably independent in learning, rather than hoping that the knowledge, skills and values will be derived externally from teachers. The traditional paradigms, whereby teachers focus on transmitting knowledge and students simply adapt, have begun to be criticised (Pauline, 2013; Kasim, Aini and Furbish, 2010). The approach for life-long-learning that requires the participation of both learners and teachers has been voiced as an important shift in the education system.

Pauline (2013), among others, proposes that the education system in Malaysia has to create an opportunity for students to do self-reflection, rather than adapt the information and knowledge from teachers. If this is the case, there will be major changes in belief and practice, as traditionally teachers in Malaysia are seen not as facilitators, but a “fount of knowledge to be delivered” (Liu, 1998, p.5). Thus, this new approach will assist students with their learning of the attributes of the profession, and to conform to the attributes as a way to become a member of the profession.

Furthermore, studies extensively find that some of the students’ beliefs have changed, and they responded positively to the new active role of students, which involves self-reflection, being active participants in the learning process, and implementing a constructivist approach in the learning process (Kasim and Aini, 2012). Kasim and colleague researched a group of teacher education students in one university in Malaysia. The trend of being active participants is promising, as in 1988, Zubir’s study (Zubir, 1988) found that half of her participants, who were also teacher education students, were capable of learning on their own, but the dependency on teachers was high. Although there have been efforts to identify the shift towards an interpretive approach in students’ learning process, most of the studies focus on the interpretive approach to learn the subject matter and skills and focus less on building the identity towards the profession. Only a few studies try to relate the interpretive approach in the

development of the students' professional socialisation. Among others are Ahmad, et al. (2012), Elias (2008) and Liau, Liau, Teoh and Liau. (2003).

Ahmad et al. (2012), for example, found that the Malaysian accounting students' motivation, perceived environment and involvement, reflect that the students are ready to make a move towards a more interpretive learning, as they showed a tendency to form a social group according to their interest. It is assumed that highly socialised students are more committed towards the profession that they wish to become, as they participate actively and increase their involvement in the classroom and out of class experiences; therefore, they enhance their knowledge-seeking and boost the internalisation of professional values (Elias, 2008). Teacher education students also agree that by having self-reflection they are able to solve problems that they encounter when they undergo their teaching practise in schools (Liau et al., 2003). However, previous studies lack discussion as to how the socialisation process takes place and the details are not clearly presented.

In summary, this subsection justified that the interpretive approach to learning has the potential to be implemented in Malaysia for the given reasons. Thus, this study will analyse to what extent teacher education students become active participants in the socialisation process in teacher preparation programmes.

## **2.8 Conclusion**

This chapter justified the significance of social identity approaches in determining the students' identity development toward the teaching profession. Students' identity towards the teaching profession are viewed on how students possibly respond to the aspiration of the profession. Social identity (i.e. member of teaching profession) becomes salient when students are emotionally attached to the teaching aspiration, and this attachment brings the distinct meaning of their behaviour compared to their initial enrolment motives.

This subsection argues that in order to identify how the student teachers try to build commitment towards the profession and develop a more positive social identity towards

the group that they belong to, then the way they socialise in higher education should be made explicit. There are evidences that the interpretive approach of socialisation helps to develop strong identifiers among the students. Strong identifiers are assumed to be active participants to adhere to the aspirations of the profession.

There are only a few studies of professional socialisation factors in the development of professional identity towards the profession. Of the few done, many of the studies are of medical, dental or nursing students. Investigation on the development of attitude among student teachers has been limited. Furthermore, the existing literature has restricted the scope of the studies, whether towards the traditional approach or interpretive approach. There are limited studies that aim to hear the professional socialisation approach from students' perspectives, whether they are undergoing functionalist or interpretive approaches of socialisation. This study challenges the dominance of a functionalist approach over the interpretive approach and identifies the influence of these changes.

The socialisation approach has helped to identify the extent to which students respond to social influence in determining their identity in a Malaysian context. From the literature, it is obvious that the current students are influenced by significant others in determining their identity. However, the reviews are restricted by a lack of information as to whether the student teachers perceive the significant others as people that they have to conform with, or as the socialising agents that will facilitate their identity development process.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **METHODOLOGY**

#### **3.1 Introduction**

This chapter outlines the methodology and method used to conduct this study, and how they have guided the research strategy and selection of techniques to gather and analyse data related to the research questions. The chapter starts with the methodological rationale that underpins the research paradigm of this study. This includes the overview of the research methodology; an explanation of social constructionism epistemology that underpins the study and the interpretive framework that has shaped my social inquiry. The next subsection of the chapter discusses the research method and techniques and modes of analysing and interpreting data. The final subsection presents the issues of ethics and triangulation of the study.

#### **3.2 Methodology**

Researchers define methodology as a way or approach to conduct research in order to find answers for social phenomena (Barbour, 2014; Corbin and Strauss, 2008; Cresswell, 2013; Crotty, 1998). Some researchers, such as Cresswell (2013) and Silverman (2009), refer to methodology as a research paradigm. There are a variety of ways as to how researchers should conduct their studies, and there are different methodologies that help them to find the best way of acquiring knowledge about the world we live in (Denzin and Lincoln, 2011). Crotty (1998) suggests “different ways of viewing the world shape different ways of researching the world” (p.66).

Barbour (2014) further suggests that to enable researchers to answer the inquiry or research question, they will search for an approach or employ a paradigm that allows greater opportunities to understand the social phenomena being studied and its complexities.

As outlined in Chapter One, this study aims to explore the development of identity among student teachers, and the context is in Malaysia. In a bigger framework, the identity development process towards the profession suggests that it is important to identify how students express their perception of the teaching profession, and how the perception, particularly related to cognitive components, establish the teaching values and norms. As teaching values and norms are important factors in determining the social identity salience, exploring the factors will give the answer about social identity of teaching as perceived by the future members of the profession. The teaching values and norms will guide the students' behaviour thereafter. The students' cognitive definition on behaviour will explain their professional identity, which is the main construct in this study.

It is vital in this study to determine how teacher education students categorise themselves as future teachers according to the perceived values and norms and the role of social context in the development of identity towards the teaching profession. In summary, the students' efforts to develop their identity can be viewed as a continuous and complex process of determining the common characteristics (i.e. values and norms) of the teaching profession.

Correspondingly, this study also aims to explore the effect of social influence in the process of identity development. Chapter One has highlighted that the perception of teacher education students towards the teaching profession in Malaysia has not actively been researched, despite its status as a noble profession perceived by society, and the concern about the motive of current prospective teachers that choose to teach. Thus, the aims for this study suit the qualitative paradigm that focuses on the exploration and investigation of the social phenomena (Sarantakos, 2005). The next subsection explains further the qualitative paradigm.

### **3.2.1 Qualitative paradigm perspective of the methodology**

The decision to employ the qualitative paradigm emerged as I intend to discover the evaluation that students have about values and norms of the teaching profession and their experiences in teacher education programmes as a platform to become a teacher.

As stated in Chapter One, the opportunity to get a job in teaching compares highly to other professions, regardless of the new policy of teacher placements as there is an increasing number of children entering primary and secondary education every year. Thus, I assume that employing a qualitative research paradigm, particularly through the stories, will give me an explanation of the students' perception of social identity related to their future profession.

Denzin and Lincoln (2011) explain that qualitative research "is a situated activity that locates the observer in the world [...] consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that make the world visible" (p. 3). They further explain, "qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of or interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them" (p.3). Thus, it is assumed that exploring and investigating teacher education students' socialisation experiences and social realities can reveal their lived experiences.

The term qualitative, as stressed by scholars, refers to processes that are not involved in the experiment and statistically significant relationships between variables (Barbour, 2014; Denzin and Lincoln, 2011; Miles and Huberman, 1994); instead looking at the explanation provided by the subjects involved in the research (Barbour, 2014). Therefore, the process of qualitative research suggests that there is an intimate relationship between the researcher and the object of study (Denzin and Lincoln, 2011). Consistent with the essence of the qualitative paradigm, current studies explore and investigate teacher education students' identity development towards the teaching profession and the process of identifying the social identity salience among students.

This includes gathering the views of the participants' world in order to understand their lived experiences, and the resulting identity, based on their perception of the teaching profession. ten Dam and Bloom (2006) argue that the dynamic nature of student teachers' identity formation is better explained by the students' reflection on the process of becoming a teacher. Furthermore, Antonek, McCormick and Donato (2007) suggest that the qualitative research paradigm allows researchers to get wider information regarding teacher education students' identity development. Antonek et al. (2007) use a student's online reflective journal as a research tool and find that their participants continuously develop their identity via feedback from the online user. Similarly,

Walling and Lewis (2000) appreciate the qualitative paradigm on identity development because this paradigm offers in-depth information about the process from the students' point of view.

The present study employs a qualitative research paradigm; specifically, the study is informed by the social constructionism epistemology that calls for an interpretive framework to social inquiry. The subsequent subsection outlines how a social constructionist epistemological perspective informs the research investigation. The explanation of the interpretive framework follows the explanation of social constructionism.

### **3.2.2 Social constructionism**

This subsection outlines my assumption about the nature and characteristics of human knowledge. I believe that knowledge associated with social behaviour is intentionally built through lived experiences and social constructions of the world. This assumption guides my thinking as to how to get the answer for the social phenomena studied. Social constructionist perspectives outline that processes of knowledge formation are based on social interactions, where meanings are produced and reproduced, rather than constructed within the individual (Burr, 2003).

Social constructionist perspectives underline that our understanding of the world is based on the premise that there is no such thing as an objective fact (Barbour, 2014; Burr, 2003), and that knowledge is the product of continuous sense-making and interpretation that individuals use to interpret their social environment (Crotty, 1998). Within these perspectives, the participants are free to make their own assumptions about the object of study. Social constructionism, therefore, suggests that knowledge is best acquired by the induction or a bottom-up process where there is no predetermined hypotheses that need to be tested (Ormston, Spencer, Bernard and Snape, 2013).

In this study, I attempt to explore the student teachers' identity towards the teaching profession. Although the teaching profession in Malaysia is perceived as a noble profession, however, sociological works on profession have never regarded teaching as an established profession. Additionally, consistent with the economic and technology

development, some teacher education applicants have a different interpretation of the teaching profession (Ahmad, 2003; Harun, 2006). Some of them perceive that teaching is the least preferred choice of profession. As stated in Chapter One, the development of other industries in Malaysia, which offers opportunities for employment in private and industrial sectors, may contribute to this perception. The negative issues such as teachers' commitment have challenged the social identity perceived of teachers in the previous decade, hence this might impact teachers' behaviour considerably, as their intended behaviour is determined by the group they belong to. Thus, the need to identify the students' perception on teaching where the norms and values will depend solely on students and the understanding about their own world.

As a researcher, I am extremely aware that the students' identity development is highly subjective and can be assessed from different perspectives. As highlighted in Chapter Two, the students' identity, which are the main social inquiry in this study, are assumed to develop through student interaction with an object around them, including their environment. As the students' identity is assumed to be derived from the participation in the (teaching) group, therefore, identifying the groups values and norms are of paramount importance as the students' behaviour are predicted to follow the group aspiration (in terms of values and norms). In this sense, the students may refer to the accepted teaching traits, differentiate teaching with other professions, or issues surrounding them in order to identify the values and norms of teaching. The students are expected to construct and reconstruct their identity mostly during their teacher education programme, which provides them with the opportunity to access various information. The social constructionist perspective also allows the students to freely decide their information gathering approach as there are multiple social realities guiding their experiences as students. This premise outlines that students use the process of gathering information and knowledge to allow them to construct their own meaning, rather than accept the predetermined measure of their social world.

Correspondingly, social constructionist perspectives also emphasise the significance of the interaction between the researcher and the participants in the construction of meanings and interpretations (Crotty, 1998; Denzin and Lincoln, 2011; Lincoln and Guba, 1985). The interactions enable the researcher to analyse the participants' construction of meaning in their social world, through their experiences and the way

they gather information. Scholars argue that knowledge (from experiences and accessible information) is not value-free, and there are numerous interpretations of realities (Denzin and Lincoln, 2011).

Furthermore, Charmaz (2000) illustrates that “social reality does not exist independently of human action” (p.521), hence providing the ontological stance for this study. It is assumed that participants are able to interpret different meanings of their social world because there are multiple social realities that are attached to their everyday life. Boeije (2009) posits “human beings attach meanings to their social reality and that as a result; human action should be considered meaningful” (p.6). Thus, in this study, the categorisation of students into different groups provides the researcher with the assumptions that the students have multiple social realities and construct different meanings from their experiences, thus shaping their identity accordingly.

### **3.2.3 The interpretive framework**

Based on the social constructionist epistemological perspective, this study adopts an interpretive framework of the study of teacher education students. Max Weber’s views have shaped the interpretive approach in social research (Crotty, 1998). According to Weber (cited in Crotty, 1998), the understanding of why people do something will help to explain their actions in more detail. This is consistent with the main research questions addressed in this study: an interpretive framework allows the researcher to identify the ‘why’ aspect, which is the evaluation of the profession to be used among other researchers, to use attitude as a construct that will affect something else, such as behaviour.

In addition, Crotty (1998) posits that the important aspect in an interpretive framework is the concept of ‘understanding’ rather than ‘explaining’ the social phenomena. Denzin (1989) explains that the process of understanding involves “identifying different definitions of the problem being evaluated through the use of personal experience stories and thick description of lived experiences” (p.11). Interpretive framework works on the basis whereby the researcher has to understand the individuals’ subjective experience (Bryman, 2012) and how the participants attach meanings to certain phenomena. To find meaning in a particular situation requires understanding of the

action, and as stated by Denzin (1989), by “identifying different definitions” or simply the effort to interpret a specific action (Schwandt, 2003).

It is necessary to understand that the interpretations that emerge from interpretive research “are constructed [...] there is no single interpretive truth” (Lincoln and Denzin, 2003, p. 37). Therefore, the analysis of this study reflects my attempts to make sense of the interview data in order to understand the phenomena being researched. This is to explore the participants’ subjective experiences and perspectives, rather than generalise the participants’ perspectives according to dominant literatures. Thus, there may be unexpected realities discovered in the process of interpretation.

In the following subsection, I acknowledge the position as a researcher and how it affects my epistemological and ontological beliefs. Following this, I lay out in detail the steps taken in the data collection and analysis process in Subsection 3.3.

### **3.3 Participants and methods of data collection**

This subsection discusses the primary method of data collection in this study. Generally, this study uses qualitative data from interviews to understand and explain the development of teacher education students’ attitudes towards the teaching profession.

#### **3.3.1 Participants**

The sources of information for this study were teacher education students in the biggest secondary teacher training institution in Malaysia. The institution is designated as a ‘University of Education’ and prior to 2011, it exclusively offered degrees in education, with a variety of areas of concentration that enabled graduates to apply for positions as a secondary school teacher after graduation. However, from 2011, this institution started to offer other non-education degrees as a way to optimise the expertise of the academic staff, particularly those who have academic certificates in non-education areas. In the interim, the academic staff with non-education backgrounds in this institution focus on the teaching of content knowledge while their counterparts with education backgrounds use their expertise to teach teaching methods.

In this institution, the students are known as student teachers as the majority of them choose to apply for the teaching profession after graduation. In Malaysia, teachers are referred to as ‘guru’, and are given a distinctive title, which is ‘Cikgu’. The teacher education students in this institution are often called ‘Cikgu’ (teacher) by the society even though they are not yet teachers. An important point to note is that the majority of participants are Malays, as the Malays dominate the teaching profession in Malaysia. Additionally, the number of Malay students in public higher education outnumbers other ethnicities due to the Malaysian Federal Constitution 1953, which implements the affirmative action policies that benefit the indigenous groups, including the Malays. Other ethnicities involved in this study were indigenous ethnic<sup>6</sup> from East Malaysia (10), Chinese (2) and Indian (1).

The selection of the sample is based on the purposive sampling method. Purposive sampling involves the selection of participants based on important characteristics under study (Bryman, 2012). In the first place, the samples were selected from teacher education students in a university that offers a wide range of degrees in education. The inclusion characteristics, as suggested by Daniel (2012) and Sarantakos (2005), were taken into account when the decision on the sample had been made.

The characteristics, which refer to the essential attributes pertaining to the study, were considered in order to assist a detailed exploration and understanding of the central themes and questions regarding the phenomena being studied. Thus, the students’ route to teacher education programmes (undergraduate level and post undergraduate level) and year of study (first year or fourth year) were included. These characteristics enabled the provision of an explanation as to whether there will be differences in identity development according to the students’ characteristics and experiences, as the basis of their perception of values and norms in the teaching profession.

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<sup>6</sup> In East Malaysia (State of Sabah and Sarawak), there are indigenous ethnic groups practicing their own unique cultures and heritages. Among the largest groups are Dayak, Iban, Bidayuh and Kadazan.

The composition of each group was homogenous in terms of their route to the teacher education programme and their year of study. The number of participants are summarised in the following table :

Members of groups	Group 1 (Students in teaching practise)	Group 2 (Mature students, career change, Semester 1)	Group 3 (First year students)
Number	54	14	12

Table 3.1 : Number of research participants

In detail, there were three different groups of participants that contributed to this study. Group 1 was the primary focus for this study as they are nearing their graduation. Group 2 was chosen with the assumption that they have pursued individual mobility strategy and changed occupational groups for some reason. Group 3 was chosen as they are the first batch of students who entered the teacher education programme with no guarantee to be offered a place as a teacher after graduation (as highlighted in Subsection 1.9). This group was selected in order to explore the differences in their perception of values and norms (if any) as a result of the new teaching recruitment policy.

The first group consisted of 54 teacher education students undergoing their teaching practice (practicum) at secondary schools as part of their training process. Teaching practice serves as the culminating requirement in completing the teacher preparation programmes and teacher education students undergo their practice during their seventh semester (out of eight) (Universiti Pendidikan Sultan Idris, 2011). During their teaching practice, teacher education students begin to test their position as classroom teachers based on what had they learn in the teacher education programmes, as well as their informal learning from the environment (Schepens, Alterman and Van Keer, 2007).

All participants had their teaching practice in the state of Perak. Perak is situated in the west of Malaysia. The selection of this state was made because at the time of conducting the study, Perak had the biggest number of teacher education students

undergoing their teaching practice; hence, it provided a fair distribution of different programmes of study. I chose eight secondary schools where many students were undergoing their teaching practise. The schools are located in the rural area. Data on the participants were obtained from the university’s practicum unit, and letters were sent to prospective participants to invite them for a focus group session (detail of the focus group session is discussed in the subsequent section). A letter was also sent to the school administrator to ask for permission to conduct the study on their premises. Participants who agreed to participate informed the researcher via text messages. The distribution of participants was as follows.

Area/School	Number of participants
1	7
2	3
1	7
2	11
3	5
3	3
4	9
4	9

Table 3.2. Distribution of participants undergoing their teaching practice

At the end of each session, the researcher asked the participants, who volunteered to be contacted after the session, for any clarification and to leave their contact number. Ten of the participants agreed to supply additional information if needed; however, only four of them volunteered to participate in an individual interview.

Moreover, participants in the second group consisted of 14 mature and career changed teacher education students. They came from diverse occupational backgrounds before enrolling in the teacher education programme. Some of them were administrators or trainers, and some had been in school as untrained or substitute teachers. Untrained or substitute teachers teach a school class when the regular teacher is unavailable because of illness, maternity leave or other reasons. They had been in school for a short period

of time. This group consists of first (out of three) semester students. This group of students will undergo their teaching practice during their third semester.

Finally, the third group of participants was included in the study. This group consists of twelve teacher education students in their first (out of eight) semester of the teacher education programme. Their route of entry into the teacher education programme is similar with the first group. The difference between the participants in the third group compared to the first group is that this group consists of students enrolled in the 2011 session, and they are the first batch of student teachers who are not guaranteed placement after graduating from the teacher preparation programme.

### **3.3.2 Methods of data collection**

Data was collected using a narrative method. Narrative methods concern personal narratives or stories (Czarniawska-Joerges, 1998) and allow “participants to recall what has happened, put the experience into sequence and find possible explanations” (Jovchelovitch and Bauer, 2000: 58). The experience that the individuals convey through the story is able to determine their meaning towards certain phenomena (Crotty, 1998). This method is appropriate for exploring the students’ perceptions of teaching values and norms, as it is predicted that the students’ perception is built from various dimensions and have different structures and functions, as described in Chapter Two. The students had the opportunity to tell their own story directly as they are consciously engaged in the socialisation process, particularly during the teacher education programme as well as from the life experiences.

There is a significant amount of literature on student identity formation that has employed narrative as a data collection method (Alsup, 2003; Estola, 2003; Luehmann, 2007). Alsup (2003) finds that the student teachers’ storytelling makes them aware that the preconception of the teaching profession is not suited to their current beliefs about the profession; therefore, this gives them an opportunity to develop themselves consistently with their beliefs and characteristics, particularly if it involves the values and norms of the profession. Furthermore, Beauchamp and Thomas (2009), in their review to strengthen teacher education programmes, also give credit to student teachers’ stories that “to provide opportunities for exploring and revealing aspects of the

teachers' self' (p. 181). Thus, narrative as a data collection method is able to provide a rich and thick description of the students' perception of teaching values and norms, and the identity, as it provides a story of their experiences in teacher education programmes.

In addition to the participants' stories, data was also collected through observation. The main observations included the participants' non-verbal signals such as body language, facial expressions and intonations of voices, which convey a story. The observations captured the emotions and important points of the participants' stories. The observations were undertaken through the interpretation of a video captured in several interviews.

### **3.3.3 Research tools**

The participants relate their own story directly to the researcher through two types of interview; (focus) group and individual interviews.

#### **Focus group discussions**

The first tool for data collection was focus group discussions among the three groups of teacher education students. The interviews provided rich and detailed descriptions. The first question asked was about the way in which the students are expected to see himself or herself as a member of the teaching profession. For the first semester students (Group 2 and 3), they are assumed to visualise their teaching image. For the students who were undergoing their teaching practice (Group 1), their narrative about themselves as a member of the teaching profession may come from their learning at the higher education institution and how they transfer learning into concrete situations, which is the teaching practice. The question was "who I am as a teacher". Through this, the essential prerequisites for understanding the theme are by referring to the dominant traditions of sociology of the profession.

The next question asked was to capture the dynamics that the students developed and act as teachers. The question was "share the journey from the decision to enrol in the teacher education programme until today". The participants were requested to share their feelings and experiences before and during their enrolment as teacher education students. A few questions were asked to establish a trust and comfort level within the

group, and the remaining questions served to guide the discussion towards the attitude towards the teaching profession. The participants were very comfortable in relating their stories and sharing experiences, and treated me as one of their group members as sometimes they used the phrase “as you are aware” or “you might experience the same” in their narrative.

The advantages of conducting focus group discussions are that participants have the opportunity to learn from each other and develop ideas together as a group (Jackson, 2003). This is consistent with the argument that the social identity approach underpins this study. Sarantakos (2005) further explains that a group environment encourages discussion and increases the motivation to address critical issues. Self-representation of the participants are minimised by creating a permissive environment in the group that encourages participants to share perceptions and points of view without pressuring them to vote or reach a consensus. Focus group discussions also encourage group interactions to produce data and insights that would be less accessible without the interaction found in a group because every participant has a different experience and background (Morgan, 1997). The focus group sessions were non-directive, allowing the participants to give voice to their experiences, which in turn fosters the emergence of themes from the participants.

The participants were asked to take part in in-group interaction sessions of about an hour in duration. Scholars suggest that the ideal amount of people in one focus group is six to ten people (Morgan, 1997; Vaughn, Schumm and Sinagub, 1996). Additionally, the New York State Teacher Centres<sup>7</sup> suggest conducting three to five focus groups to gather information about the research project. All sessions were audiotaped, and most of the sessions were videotaped. Some were not videotaped due to a technical problem that could not be avoided. During the discussion, reflective notes were taken to record the activity and action of participants, which could not be captured by the video recorder.

For the first group, all the teacher education students attached to the selected schools were invited to the focus group discussion although not all were present due to teaching

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<sup>7</sup> <http://www.programevaluation.org/focusgroups.htm>

commitments. The group interview was held after the end of a morning school session; however, some schools have two teaching sessions due to a large number of school pupils. Most interviews were held in the schools' meeting rooms, but some used empty classrooms as a meeting room that were also used by the school's management team at the same time. Other than that, one focus group was held in the students' flat, as all of them rented the same property while undertaking their teaching practice.

For the second group, the participants were selected among their batch, and I took into consideration their previous occupations, their cumulative grades in their previous undergraduate credential programmes and their ages. The variables were selected as it helped to link the experiences and the anticipated identity, as reviewed in the literature. The focus group sessions were conducted in an institution's meeting room. For the third group, which was the first year students, I selected them based on their entry-level grades and their qualifications entering the teacher education programme, whether they were fresh from school or held a diploma certificate from another higher learning institution. The focus group sessions were carried out in a meeting room and an empty seminar room.

The focus group sessions were carried out in the Malay language. The participants were asked to comfortably sit around the table and the researcher started the group discussion by introducing herself to the group. Then the researcher started the discussion by asking the questions. The participants freely took turns to speak, and most of the participants had a chance to speak more than once. However, there was a participant who chose to be silent during the session after she mentioned that "I do not want to be a teacher". Further discussions on this issue are presented in Chapter Four.

The schedule and details of the focus group sessions are provided in Table 3.3

Area/School/Class	Number of participants	Interview venue	Duration (hour/minute/sec)
1 (BJ)	7	Classroom	1.10.44
2 (HD)	3	Conference room	1.02.26
1 (SP)	7	Meeting room	1.05.20
2 (AB)	11	Library	1.18.53
3 (TIWA)	5	Meeting room	1.42.55
3 (BK)	3	Meeting room	0.57.09
4 (SK)	9	Students' flat	1.49.06
4 (TP)	9	Meeting room	1.09.00
DPLI 1	7	Meeting room	1.34.50
DPLI 2	7	Meeting room	1.03.05
FY 1	6	Meeting room	0.43.33
FY 2	6	Seminar room	0.54.51

Table 3.3. Schedule of focus group sessions<sup>8</sup>

### **Individual interview**

Individual interviews were conducted over the phone. It was a semi-structured interview. The interview was conducted six months after completing the group interview. The researcher used the six-month interval between the group and individual interview to do an initial analysis and determine the interview questions. The purpose of the interview was to gather more in-depth data on the participants' views on the teaching profession. Participants were asked about their self-perception, a teacher's life and experience to become a teacher. When prompted by relevant questions, the participants gave meaning to their experiences, thus providing an interpretation of the phenomena under study. There were four participants involved in the individual interviews and all participants were from the first group. Similar to the group interview, each individual interview was recorded, transcribed and analysed. The transcriptions were sent back to the participants via email in order to make sure that their stories were transcribed accurately.

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<sup>8</sup> DPLI refers to participants in the second group and FY refers to participants in the third group.

The advantage of the individual and in-depth interview is that it empowers the researcher with the freedom of questioning (Denzin and Lincoln, 2011). Thus, the individual interview is considered an appropriate procedure to obtain richness in the data through a detailed and frank conversation between the researcher and the research participants.

Thus, data collected for this study consists of the participants' stories from the interview, and the video footage recorded during the group interview.

### **3.4 Data analysis**

This study embraces a constructionist approach that affirms meaning as being socially constructed rather than given. This study adopted a thematic analysis (Attride-Stirling, 2001) to analyse data from the interview. The thematic analysis used in this study is inductively derived from the meaning extracted from the participants' stories. The strategy used in the analysis was informed (but not constrained) by the literature, building an emergent framework from the data. Attention is given to the story of the student teachers in constructing their identity during the teacher education programmes. Braun and Clarke (2006) define thematic analysis as a "method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns or themes within data" (p. 79). The themes describe and organize possible observations and interpret aspects of the phenomenon found in the information gathered from the participants' stories (Boyatzis, 1998). With the narrative method of data collection, the thematic analysis yields a rich and detailed amount of data.

The qualitative data analysis software, NVivo 9, was used to help organise and manage the data and its analysis. The interviews were all recorded and transcribed verbatim, using Malay language by the researcher, in order to facilitate immersion in the data. The interviews in Malay language that will be used as a quote were translated as best as possible so that the original intentions were not lost. The translation process is guided by a native speaker (Malay) who teaches the English subject at school. There were cases where words or phrases in the Malay language did not have direct equivalents in

the English language. For these cases, the researcher had to paraphrase to convey the precise meaning of the original Malay content.

After the transcribing process, all transcriptions were uploading to the NVivo 9 package and sixteen data sets (twelve data sets from the focus group sessions and four data sets from the individual interviews) were created.

The coding process started with the transcription from the first group, which was the participants undergoing teaching practice. Codes are identified through “semantic content or latent” (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p. 88) that may appear interesting to the researcher and help in answering the research questions. Researchers search for a meaning (Miles and Humberman, 1994) rather than focusing solely on words or phrases that appear in the text to develop initial codes. The data was coded according to the participants’ stories where each participant was given a pseudonym to ensure confidentiality and to protect their anonymity.

Early coding was descriptive and involved open and line by line coding. I employed an ongoing iterative process, identified the category of students according to their initial perception towards the teaching profession, sought patterns in the process of becoming and unbecoming a teacher, and tested whether there were differences among the sample group. The development of codes was completely based on salient issues that arise from the transcript itself, and most of the code labels were taken from the participants’ own words. Codes were used to identify the initial phenomena and produce a list of themes from the data set. Constant comparisons from previous codes helped to further develop new codes from the transcription. Constant comparison means that every time a passage of text was selected for coding, a comparison was made between the new code and all those passages that were already being coded that way (Corbin and Strauss, 2008). This procedure helped to create significant patterns in the data. From the three groups of participants, 118 codes altogether emerged from all data sets, and the list of codes included behaviours, specific acts, events, activities, strategies, meanings, relationships, constraints, settings, and metaphors.

Then, the exploration of the themes began by setting up groups or clusters for the codes. Similar codes were grouped together to make it meaningful for further exploration.

Identification issues that were discussed by the participants facilitated this process. There were 48 issues identified, and data sets relating to these issues were grouped together to facilitate the process of identifying themes. The data sets were re-read within the context of the codes under which they had been grouped together. This step allowed the researcher to identify the underlying patterns and structures. The data sets were arranged by assembling them into similar and coherent groupings and were named. This process refers to the development of the basic theme (Attride-Stirling, 2001). The data set in a basic theme then were re-read again in order to reduce data and create more specific themes, termed as a global theme (Attride-Stirling, 2001). The process produced a web-like diagram that summarised the main theme evident in the data. The table below shows the example of the process of grouping together the issues, basic themes, specific themes and the research questions to be answered:

Issue	Basic themes	Specific themes	No. of quote	Possibility to answer selected research questions
Enrol	Motive	Parents and siblings	43	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Motive</li> <li>• Group norms and values</li> </ul>
Learning	Play games	Knowledge	14	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Group norms and values</li> <li>• Identity</li> </ul>

Table 3.4 : An extract of an analysis process

Finally, five main themes were identified from the data set reading. Three themes represented the social identity salience and the others represented strategies the students pursued during the socialisation process that may explain their social identity. Therefore, the process of creating both the basic themes and more specific themes helped in data reduction (Miles and Humberman, 1994) and resulted in important themes from the overall data; it involved working inwards starting from the basic themes to the global themes.

### **3.5 Ethics, reliability and validity**

#### **3.5.1 Ethics**

Participation in this study was voluntary. Letters were sent to the prospective participants to invite them for this study, indicating the aims and study objectives. The participants who agreed to participate sent their consent to participate via text message to the researcher. The participants were given an explanation of the study that was to be carried out, and they were also given an opportunity to ask the researcher about the interview procedure. In addition, the participants also were informed that at any time, they could withdraw from the interview session without any prejudice and their choice to contribute in the sessions would not affect their academic result in any way.

During the interview, all the communication was audiotaped and some of the interview sessions were videotaped for research purposes. The data management process including the anonymity of participants was handled with care. All the transcripts were labelled with abbreviated names that could only be understood by the researcher and were kept safely and locked in the researcher's filing cabinet. Due to the low proportion of male participants in the sample, all participants were referred as female to minimise the potential of their identification.

#### **3.5.2 Reliability and validity in qualitative research**

Trustworthiness and credibility of the explanation given in the study description are important for reliability and validity in qualitative research (Janesick, 1998). For the purpose of this study, the researcher followed the validity procedures suggested by Cresswell and Miller (2000). The first procedure is the disconfirming evidence. This process is similar to the constant comparison described in Section 3.4. It is the process whereby the researcher establishes preliminary themes or categories and checks for consistency in the data set. The NVivo 9 package facilitates this procedure by offering a query menu that allows the researcher to check for word consistency and word count (Bazeley, 2013). The words that mostly appear in the query menu are compared to the preliminary themes and categories established by the researcher.

Secondly, Cresswell and Miller (2000) also suggest that researchers describe the setting, the participants and the themes of the qualitative study in rich detail so that readers can ‘feel’ the situation experienced by the researcher. According to the authors, thick and rich descriptions allow the readers to “understand that the account is credible” (p. 129) and may help the reader to apply the findings in another similar context.

Additionally, Cresswell and Miller (2000) also suggested that using different techniques of data collection and comparing the results of different groups towards specific issues highlighted in the study will maintain the validity of this study. As highlighted in Subsection 3.4.2, a different method of data collection has been applied to all focus group participants, which is video capture. These videos capture the body language and the intonation used to support the students’ narratives.

### **3.6 Conclusion**

In this chapter, I have presented a theoretical perspective of this study, and outlined the methodology that guided data collection and analysis. The qualitative method allowed me to obtain a rich description of the subjective experiences of the teacher education students on their perceptions towards the teaching profession and the identity development. This chapter also outlined the research process, from sample selection criteria, data collection and analysis. Chapters Four and Five, which follow, presents the findings from the thematic analysis.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS**

#### **4.0 Introduction**

Chapter Four and Five focus on reporting and discussing the findings of the thematic analysis as outlined in Chapter Three. To recap, the aim of this study is to identify students' self-definition on teaching by identifying their motives to enter a teacher education programme and their image of self. Based on the premise that a teacher preparation programme which offers early socialisation towards the profession has a significant impact on student's identity formation, this study explores the social factors that may contribute to the process of identity acquisition during the student's commencement in higher education. Students developing or declining the engagement with the teaching profession are identified by contrasting the initial motive that students have towards the profession at the time they decide to choose the teacher preparation programme with the identity that they currently hold at the time this study was conducted.

This chapter's focus is to answer the first research question; what influenced the students decision to choose the teaching profession. This chapter is also structured in a way to answer the second research question; what is the identity that the students bring to the teacher education programme. Subsequently, Chapter Five focuses on the student's socialisation process in the teacher preparation programme. The student's experiences during the socialisation process provide input to answer the third and fourth research questions; how social factors affect the development, or declining of student's identity towards teaching during commencement at the teacher education programme? It is also highlighted how the students try to achieve a positive social identity, and how they pursue different strategies to achieve that purpose. And finally, what is the professional identity that the students imagine of themselves. It is important to note that although the analysis and discussions in Chapter Four are related to the student's

socialisation process, this chapter focuses to answer only the three research questions as indicated above.

#### **4.1 Important themes that describe student teacher's identity towards teaching**

Important themes that capture profound issues in relation to answer two questions in this study, research question 1 and 2 are derived from the student's expressions on the reason why they chose a teacher preparation programme that primarily trains students to become teachers. The reason to enrol in a teacher preparation programme gives input of a student's knowledge and beliefs of teaching, the emotional reaction regarding teaching, and behavioural intentions towards teaching. To answer this question, the response from all three groups were taken into account. There are two themes that describe the student's evaluation towards teaching which emerged from the data, labelled as favourable and unfavourable motives.

The favourable and unfavourable motives have been interpreted from the student's expression of "Yes, I want to be a teacher", "I do not know", or "Maybe not". The favourable and unfavourable motives towards teaching are consistent with the earliest study indicated in Subsection 1.1 that suggests a favourable motive can be defined as student's intention to approach the given profession. The students who are in the first category, "Yes, I want to be a teacher", possess favourable motive towards teaching, and narrate their image of teaching together with their narrative. Meanwhile, their peer colleagues who are in the second and third categories possess the unfavourable motive, hence no identity or intended behaviour can be explained.

Furthermore, the student's early motive towards the profession is derived from their expressions on "who I am as a (future) teacher" in order to explore why they still commenced in the teacher preparation programme at the time this study was conducted. It is apparent from the data that during their commencement in the teacher preparation programme, the students were able to self-categorise themselves as future teachers. The process of self-categorisation will be detailed in Chapter Five; the thematic analysis also reveals that the students narrated both favourable and unfavourable motives and positive social identity at this stage. However, the favourable and unfavourable motives

are described in three different categories; general evaluation towards the teaching profession, professional relationship, and understanding of learning.

The discussions in this chapter are divided into two main subsections. The first subsection describes the identity that the student's hold at the time they decide to enrol in the teacher preparation programme. This identity emerged from how the students perceived their image as teachers while narrating their initial motive to enrol in the teacher education programme. Subsequently, the second subsection of this chapter interprets the student's expressions on their experiences during their commencement in the teacher preparation programme. The experiences explicitly describe a student's self-definition on teaching; consequently, explaining how they try to fit in to the attributes of the teaching profession. The conclusion of this chapter sums up the relationship between the student's initial self-definition towards the teaching profession, and the identity they currently hold about teaching.

#### **4.2 Students' reason for entering teacher education programme**

This subsection presents the findings and possible explanations regarding the students' reasons for entering a teacher education programme and their initial professional identity. It should be acknowledged that teacher education students in Malaysia have gone through comprehensive objective assessments for admission including screening on academic qualification, personality, career interest, value integrity, and emotional intelligence as outlined in Subsection 1.9. The students also undergo an admission interview that is purposely conducted to meet the applicants behind their application. In general, the students involved in this study had passed the minimum qualifications to embark on a teacher education programme that aims to train them to become teachers.

This implies that from the objective assessments, the students have teacher-related personalities and values, interest to pursue a career as a teacher, the ability to manage their own and other people's emotions, along with adequate academic qualifications. In social identity terms, the students possess more personal identity salience as they define themselves in terms of their personality, not in terms of their group membership. However, as argued in Subsection 1.9, the test is not sufficient to determine the

student's level of engagement with the profession. The qualitative paradigm employed in this study has disassembled more details about the teacher education student's level of engagement with teaching and its relation to their identity development.

As indicated earlier in this chapter, the results from the thematic analysis revealed three initial motives towards the teaching profession; "Yes, I want to be a teacher", "I do not know", and "Maybe not". Regardless of the groups of students (i.e. students in teaching practise, career change students, and first year students), the main finding from this study discovered that 87.5% of the students chose the teacher education programme because they aim for a teaching certificate which enables them to apply for a post as a secondary teacher after graduation. The rest of the students (12.5%) or 10 students had no clear direction after completing their teacher education programme. Out of 10 students, 9 of them are undergoing their teaching practise at different schools and one student is a career change student. As indicated in Subsection 1.9, the minimum requirement to apply for a secondary teacher position in Malaysia is to have a degree or graduate certificate in teaching. Students who enrolled before the academic year of 2011 will have the opportunity after graduation (Mokshein et al., 2009).

Thus, the enrolment in the teacher education programme means that the students are 'in the bag' of the teaching profession. However, this privilege was abolished in year 2011 when the Ministry of Education started to introduce a new policy in teacher recruitment whereby teacher education students have to apply for the post and are carefully selected, and only competent graduates will be chosen (Malaysia Prime Minister Department, 2010). This means that teacher education students who enrolled in 2011 are not automatically guaranteed a placement at schools after graduation. This policy applies only for the first year students involved in this study.

Table 4.1 presents the summary of themes from the thematic analysis with regard to the students' reason to embark on a teacher education programme and early identification with regard to become a group in the teaching profession.

Factors		No. of response		
	Details	Yes, I want to be a teacher	I do not know	Maybe not
Individual attribute	Person-job fit	/ (10)	/ (2)	/ (1)
Influences from significant others	Parent/siblings	/ (15)	/ (3)	/ (2)
	Former teachers	/ (5)		/ (1)
	Friends	/ (2)	/ (1)	/ (2)
Former life experiences	Experiences in society	/ (4)	/ (1)	/ (2)
	Informal teaching experiences	/ (5)		/ (1)
	Positive/negative experiences as students	/ (6)	/ (2)	
Vocational reasons	Always wanted to teach	/ (4)		
	Reward	/ (8)	/ (3)	
Others	Mistakenly chose academic programme		/ (3)	

Table 4.1 : Students' motives<sup>9</sup> to enter teacher education programme

<sup>9</sup> There are students who narrated more than one motive

In general, the result from the thematic analysis suggests that regardless of the reason to enrol in a teacher preparation programme, all students shared a common aim for enrolment, which is to get the credential or teaching certificate. Nonetheless, as presented in Table 4.1, the students' initial motive varies. There are students who intend to use the certificate to apply for a teaching post, students who are not sure, and students who intend not to use the academic credential for teaching purposes. Students who want to teach believe that their motive is influenced by personal characteristics, influences from others, former life experiences and vocational reasons.

The students who are undecided in teaching believe that their decision is influenced by the social environment. Ten students who clearly withdrew from the early group membership described that they are in a teacher preparation programme because of a technical mistake when choosing an academic major in higher education as well as influences from significant others particularly parents and former teachers. As students who successfully enrolled in the teacher preparation programme after undergoing the objective assessment, they are predicted as having the criteria to become a teacher as assessed in the MEdSI inventory (refer to Subsection 1.9); nonetheless, for reasons that will be discussed in the following paragraph, the students favour other professions rather than teaching.

The thematic analysis also provides evidence that identity formation is associated with both personal characteristics and social factors. Thirteen of the students claimed that they are attracted to teaching as they believe that teaching is congruent with their personality; this explains that identity is grounded in personal individuality such as interest, traits and personality. However, as stated in Subsection 2.5, student's individuality also stems from a long term socialisation process (Petty, Tormala, Brinol and Jarvis, 2006; Rudman, 2004) which involves long term socialisation. It is apparent from the students' expressions that their interest, traits and personality are influenced by the social environment as these are developed from observations and experiences. Furthermore, model influences, former life experiences and vocational reasons suggest that significant others have a significant impact on the students' motive. It is apparent from the data that family members have a significant influence on the student's decision to choose teaching. Besides that, vocational reasons in particular involves the student's interpretation that their identity is grounded in the group membership as they mentioned

that they are attracted to become a member of the teaching profession because of the professional attributes of teaching. This categorisation will be described further in Chapter Five.

The following subsections describe how identity is affected by both factors; student's individuality and social factors.

#### **4.2.1 Compatibility between students' characteristics and teaching attributes**

Holland (1985) suggests that professional decision making that is in line with an individual's personality, skills and interest are able to ensure that people stay longer in the profession they undertake. Holland suggests different dimensions of professional activities where each dimension has a different requirement and will suit certain individual attributes. The closer the compatibility between the attribute of a person and the requirement needed for a profession, the more likely that the person is successful in the field.

In detail, the trait theory such as Parson (1909), cited in O'Brein (2001), asserts that in order to make a rational career decision making, individuals have to know their own self and match that with the personality and skills needed in a certain profession. According to Parson, a person begins with exploring his or her interests, then recognises his or her values and abilities, and eventually determines a realistic career to pursue. In this study, 13 of the students expressed that they chose teaching as the nature of the profession matched their personal characteristics. There are no significant differences among the three groups of students regarding this response. The students relate their personal characteristics with the values and norms of teaching that are derived from experiences as school pupils in order to define the explicit nature of teaching activities and requirement as a teacher. A number of students expressed their beliefs about the compatibility between their attributes and characteristics of the teaching profession such as:

“I like teaching and sharing knowledge.” [S9 TP<sup>10</sup>]

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<sup>10</sup> Student codes: S9 = student number 9 in the focus group conducted at TP school. S is for the student's number and the other characters refer to the school's name, DPLI stands for group of career change students, and FY indicates group of first year students.

“I love children and look forward to working with them.” [S5 SP]

S2 TP and S5 SP were undergoing their teaching practise at the time the interview was conducted. They exhibited a sense of pride and joy when sharing their interests during a group interview. In the same fashion, their junior in her first year also mentioned the personal quality that she has as a push factor to apply for the teacher education programme. With strong eye contact with the researcher she mentioned,

“When I enrolled in a pre-university programme, I was always engaged in community services particularly programmes that involved school pupils. I taught them accounting and mathematics. I was immensely satisfied when I was able to help out young children that have difficulties in these two subjects. I am able to motivate people to get the job done.” [S1 FY2]

It is obvious that these students eagerly expressed that they approached teaching as the nature of the profession suit their interest (i.e. serve the young people). However, one of their colleagues in the DPLI programme mentioned that:

“I am eager to learn new things and do things differently. The teaching profession offers an opportunity for continuous learning.”  
[S5 DPLI1]

This fellow student has an interest in teaching but she relates the interest with the intrinsic rewards offered by the profession which seems more individualistic in nature, compared to the other two students who related their interests with the group of people (i.e. young people) that they will serve throughout the profession. However, as argued in Subsection 2.4, intrinsic rewards are internally derived and can promote engagement with the teaching profession. Further expression from S5 DPLI may explain the level of her engagement towards teaching, “we learn and we teach what we have learnt”.

It is apparent from the three quotes above that the students try to conceptualise their individual differences and their ability, and relate them with the perceived norms and values of the teaching profession, importance of knowledge, and function in the society.

The quotes also explain some of the traits that sociologists claim as essential for teaching to become a profession.

Their interest starts with identification of their strengths and attempts to relate with the profession that they are familiar with. Although Holland (1985) and Parson (1909) suggest that it is important to identify the people – profession suitability, only 13 students emphasized the reason to become a teacher with personal characteristics. Furthermore, the students' narratives about their attributes highlighted two significant factors that became a focus of interest. Firstly, the students mentioned about liking and working with children. Liking children has a significant relation with a student's decision to become a teacher both in the Western and Eastern countries (e.g. Brookhart and Freeman, 1992; Harun, 2006). The teaching profession provides plenty of space to interact with children, thus be able to understand them better. Secondly, the student's personality, interest and ability are associated with their personal needs of achievements. The students expression of their desire for continuous learning (S5 DPLI1) and sharing knowledge (S9 TP) is explained by Giddens (1991) as a choice of lifestyle that influences the students' decision on their professional choice. In this sense, the students saw the teaching profession as not benefitting only the students but also for their self-development. The student's ability to represent their personal attributes in conjunction with the profession also suggests that they showed their connectedness, sense of care and pride in their professional choice.

S9 TP, S5 SP, S1 FY2, and S5 DPLI1 expressed that they were interested in teaching and intend to apply for the teaching profession after graduating; however, one of their colleagues undergoing teaching practise stated that she was not sure of her future undertakings. This student, S10 AB intends to become a member of the teaching profession but does not fully adhere to what is imposed on teaching, which is inspired to teach. This situation is explained by Bruinsma and Jansen (2010) that people have different levels of engagement with the profession. S10 AB indicated that:

“Initially, I was not interested in teaching but the nature of profession suits my personality. I mean, teaching offers opportunities to meet other people and become the centre of attention. I love to socialise, work with other people and get people's attention.” [S10 AB]

S10 AB has stereotyped the teaching profession as a profession that is social in nature and offers the opportunity to meet other people, and she tried to relate her personality with the 'requirement' of the job thereafter. It is proven that the school years have a strong influence on a student's experience. Through experiences as school children, a student learns the main activities in a teaching profession and begins to stereotype the profession as they experienced it before. This situation is also explained by researchers in sociology who suggested that people tend to make an occupational decision based on their knowledge about the job and to some extent their first job was the only one that they knew about (e.g. Bendix, Lipset and Malm, 1953, cited in Chinoy, 1955).

The relationship between personal attributes and assumed professional destination gives one important input for this study; the student's decision to approach the teaching profession is not always related to the identification with teaching if the level of engagement is considered. This subsection suggests that while the students expressed that they will approach teaching, the level of engagement with teaching varies.

Only 13 of the students expressed their reason to embark on a teacher education programme as related to their personal attribute that influences them to choose the teaching profession; however, 30 of their peer colleagues expressed the influence from significant others as having an enormous impact on how they view the teaching profession. The next subsection explores the role of significant others, or termed as a model in influencing the student's decision.

#### **4.2.2 Model influences**

Besides the compatibility between the students' characteristics and the nature of the teaching profession, the thematic analysis revealed that almost 38% of the students in this study pointed out that they favour the teaching profession because of influences from other people, such as their parents and former teachers. This process is explained by Ginzberg, Ginsburg, Axelrad and Herma (1951) through the theory of occupational choice; they posit that there are many phases involved in career decision making, which begins in childhood whereby children try out various occupations through role play or pretend play and the use of their imagination. Ericson's (1968) view cited in Smith and Hogg (2008) on the socialisation process posits that children start to build their own

image and continue to develop during adolescence and early adulthood. He also stressed that powerful and attractive role models provide the children with a prototypical of the profession. The explanation by Mead (1934) of the concept of “playing at” occupational role also supports the influence of role models into the development of an individual’s attribute. This concept, according to Mead, is the idea where “the child plays at being a mother, at being a teacher, at being a policeman...” (p. 150). Thus, parental or family members’ occupation as well as other occupations occur in a social setting such as teachers, police officer, nurse and doctor are often imagined when children are asked about their occupational aspirations (Lee, 2012; Slocum, 1959). One student implicitly mentioned about the significance of a model in their decision:

“I wanted to be a teacher since I was small. When playing with my friend, I chose to be a teacher. My neighbour called me *cikgu* (teacher) too! (laughing)” [S4 FY2]

In this study, 26 students from Group 1 (undergoing teaching practise), two students from Group 2 (career change), and two students from Group 3 (on their first year) consistently expressed that parental influence was the single most important influence for them when choosing this programme. Some students whom parents are or were teachers, are inspired by the recognition from the society towards teachers. They mentioned that the respect that the members of society gives to teachers are spectacular. For example, one student whose mother was a retired teacher stated that,

“... no matter where, people that recognised my mother will greet her with *Assalamualaikum* (peace upon you) *cikgu* (teacher) or good day *cikgu*. I have no offence when my mum asked me to become a teacher. I feel blessed!” [S5 BJ]

Furthermore, S5 BJ admired the teaching profession and perceived that the profession is favourable due to the positive scenario which she experienced with her parent. She observed from social learning how society appreciates teachers’ work and that experience served as a motivation for her to choose teaching. Her colleague, S9 AB also expressed that:

“.. teaching is a noble profession. My dad is always remembered by his former students.”

Similarly, S2AB expressed that,

“My father and three of my sisters are teachers. They are very respected by the society.”

These three quotes are among the students’ expressions on how family members who are, or previously were teachers, influenced their decision to enrol in a teacher preparation programme. This situation is explained by Albert Bandura through the Social Learning Theory. Bandura (1969) posits that people naturally learn from imitation or observation of certain people whom they treat as a model. In this case, the students learn to discriminate the status of the teaching profession when they observed the recognition received by people they modelled. They applied for a teacher education programme to imitate the model (parents) that is respected by the society. However, while society recognition is a motivation for some students to embark on teaching, a small number of their colleagues tried to understand their model in a highly technical manner.

Some students, through observation and experiences expressed that they do not aspire to follow their parental footsteps in becoming a teacher. These students, S1 SP and S3 DPLI1 mentioned the following; “busy profession” and “always spend more time to teach the other person rather than their own child”, as reasons to refuse teaching, hence they try to escape from becoming a member of the profession. Their refusal, however was overcome with strong influence and pressure from their parents which led to the willingness to choose a teacher education programme. In this case, parental influences became the reason for students to comply with the profession but was not able to persuade the students to voluntarily become a member of the teaching profession.

Furthermore, the parents that never actually taught or expressed a wish to become a teacher provided more pressure for students to choose teaching. Many students expressed that either their mother or father, or both, insisted that they apply for a teacher education programme. Two students stated,

“... discuss with family, my dad asked me to apply for the teacher education programme. Becoming a teacher is just to satisfy my family’s aspiration.” [S6 AB]

“I have loved architecture since I can remember. I love arts. My parents, however urged me to apply for teaching training.” [S1 TP]

The students’ narrative clearly distinguished their interest and motivation towards teaching before they embarked on this programme. It is apparent from the stories that the students who admired the recognition from the society showed more identification with teaching compared to the other students who had parental pressures. The latter indicated that they had no interest in teaching at the time they decided to apply for the teacher education programme. As a consequence, students such as S6 AB and S1 TP did not have any idea on what type of teacher they will be in the future and activities that they will encounter during their teacher education programme. Their motivation to become a teacher is lower compared to the students in the previous group who believed there was compatibility between their personal attributes and the nature of the teaching profession, and the students who believed that they were positively influenced by their parent who is or was a teacher. Ginzberg et al. (1951) posits that the process of professional choice often involves compromise as there are so many aspects to consider regarding the future profession. In this case, the students are seen as compromising their disinterest with the employment opportunity after graduating. In social identity terms, the students may pursue social mobility as they try to identify with another group of occupation that suits their motivation.

Further investigation and understanding of the situation of parental influence suggest that the encouragement stems from the parents’ desire to maintain or move from the current social class to a higher social class. It is apparent from the data that the majority of students in this study are from the working class income. Again, the employment opportunities after graduation became a main contributor of parental influence. A story from S6 SP confirmed that the socioeconomic status influences the parental aspiration:

“I planned to pursue a degree in business management. My mum discouraged my choice because she said that there are no job guarantees, no future.” [S6 SP]

Concomitantly, these findings suggest that students followed their parent’s aspirations without themselves becoming an active student and expressed their values in their own decision making. The parents appeared as neither reinforcing nor expanding the

students' desire to teach, rather just making a decision on behalf of their teenage child. Except for the group of students who perceived teaching as a respectable profession, the other students who conformed to parental desire to become a teacher showed that parental aspirations became an external influence for the students' decision making, rather than embedded with the students' values in deciding their future undertakings.

The findings also suggest that work on structuralism dominated the reason for students to embark on a teacher education programme. Structuralism echoed that students do not make rational decisions towards their career choices. They were inclined to follow the tradition of the society or socioeconomic status to make a choice to embark on a teacher education programme. The concept of habitués also explains the role of parents in determining their teenage child's future undertakings. Young people in Malaysia, particularly females, still are dependent on their parents until they get married (Tan and Rey, 2005). Therefore, a secure attachment relationship between parents and a teenage child creates a habitués for most Malaysians. Nonetheless, Ginzberg et al. (1951) claimed that young people explicitly make rational decision making because when they agree with the structural influence such as from parents, they actually have compromised their interest, capacities, values, and employment opportunities towards other professions. These findings are contrary to the Western studies of students becoming active students in the learning process.

Besides parental influence, former teachers considerably affected the students' decision to become a teacher. The influence comes from both sides, whether they honour or dishonour their former teachers. As a sign of honour, the students indicated that they admired their former teachers and aspired to capture some of the qualities that they valued in the teachers who positively impacted their interest. The students mentioned teachers that had a profound and meaningful impact on their life. They also appreciate their experiences with 'good' and 'effective' teachers during their school years. As a result, the students feel that they would like to offer the same opportunities to the new generation that will have their education in schools. One of the students happily stated:

“My former teacher during secondary school just loved her job, and she truly cared. Seeing that was the biggest thing... I want to be a teacher, be like her (former teacher).” [S7 TP]

Although some students described the values of the referent group that made them choose a teacher education programme, a number of their colleagues expressed the contrast. Quite a number of students expressed their frustration of unfortunately becoming a victim of social inequality during their school years:

“She (the teacher) rarely paid attention to me because I was not excellent in mathematics. My friend with good mathematics was very lucky.” [S5 DPLI2]

They felt upset when some of their former teachers neglected their right to learn. This phenomenon challenged the social identity brought by the teaching group. For decades the Malaysian education system applied an exam-oriented approach whereby students are assessed solely based on their academic achievements (Hwang and Embi, 2007). Thus, some of the teaching approach is advantageous to school pupils with high academic abilities. Bourdieu, cited in Herr and Anderson (2003) explained that this situation, termed as “symbolic violence”, is one way to create social inequality through the teaching and learning process. Bourdieu uses this concept to explain the mechanism used by dominating a social class to impose an ideology, habit or lifestyle to another lower social group. As a result, the lower social group will have difficulty to be content with their lives. In an educational platform, pupils with a lower academic ability are struggling in their academic lives. The situation becomes worse when there are cases where teachers focus on high achievers and are less focused towards the low achievers. One of the students related her memory as:

“I wanted to be a teacher since I was in secondary school, after experiencing an unfavourable moment with my former teachers. Teachers refused to teach our class. Yes, we were not smart as our peers in the advanced class. But we want to learn as well.” [S7 TP]

To add, most Malaysian primary and secondary classroom in typical<sup>11</sup> schools implement the streaming system. Streaming refers to separating the school pupils according to their academic abilities. Pupils attend classes only with their peers who have the same academic achievement as them (“Ministry of Education Malaysia”, n.d.-c). Although this system has a positive affect because it allows teachers to implement

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<sup>11</sup>Typical schools refer to regular schools that offer comprehensive national curriculum.

the teaching and learning process within the pupils' ability in the classroom (Zevenbergen, Whitehurst and Zevenbergen, 2003), the effort to neglect pupils with lower achievement is unacceptable.

There are two factors that cause teachers to discriminate their pupils according to streamed classes. Firstly, it is a stressful task for the teachers to raise the school's academic achievement; hence the focus on the high achievers will help to ensure that schools have a good achievement. Secondly, the majority of pupils in the lower achievement classes are from low income families compared to their counterparts in the high achiever classes (Hyland, 2006). Researches consistently suggest that pupils from a lower socio-economic status are problematic pupils in school (Sirin, 2005). As a result, some teachers may be less interested to teach in these classes. Students in this study voiced their dissatisfaction with these discriminating teachers during their school years.

Furthermore, the students also dishonoured their former teachers who did not show professional characteristics as teachers. This student expressed anger on what she experienced during her school years:

“She (former teacher) was so emotional. She brings her personal problems to school. She is not professional!” [S3 AB]

The unfavourable moments with former teachers had motivated the students to choose teaching with the aspiration to ensure that their unpleasant experiences with former teachers are not repeated. In this case, the students willingly approached the teaching profession with the enthusiasm to fix the negative social identity caused by their former teachers.

To conclude, this subsection highlights the influence of models towards the students' decision to embark on the teacher education programme. As discussed in this subsection, parental influences have a significant effect on the students' professional choice particularly among the first group compared to the third group of students (students in their teaching practise and first year students). It is assumed that first year students have a lesser parental influence as a result of the new teacher placement policy imposed on them (refer to Subsection 1.9).

Implicitly, students that rely heavily on their structure pay less attention to their self advantage, and rely more on the structure. Furthermore, some of the students appreciate their former teachers and aspire to take in the positive qualities of the teachers who impacted their interest to become a teacher. Some other students voiced their depreciation towards their former teachers, and stated that their decision to embark on a teacher education programme was to show their former teachers that they could also be successful even though they were once low achiever students in school. The students with an unfavourable experience also vowed not to allow social inequalities to dominate the educational system. Thus, it can be summarised that with the model influences, the students try to achieve a positive social identity by explaining their intention to approach the profession, but in some cases, there is more room for improvement as the level of engagement is still low and the enthusiasm has to be improved particularly in relation to the acquisition of knowledge.

#### **4.2.3 Former life experiences**

The most influential factor for students to choose the teaching profession is related to their beliefs about the recognition of teaching, as opposed to other professions. As mentioned in Subsection 2.4, the Malaysian society perceives the teaching profession as a traditional and non-prestigious profession, yet the virtue of teaching cannot compete against other professions. The status of teaching is in harmony with most sociological perspectives on teaching as a profession; however, the virtue of teaching has turned teaching into having a positive social identity, even though it is only to the eyes of the local community. Society appreciates teachers because they believe teachers are a professional group that gives priority to the service rather than monetary incentives, and responsible in all actions and consequences made (Sufean Hussin, 2004). Quite a few students sustained these beliefs while acknowledging their reason to become a teacher. The students relate the virtue of the profession with their experiences in society. One career change student expressed the experiences with the youth in the society and believes that the teaching profession is able to help to develop positive values among young people:

“Starting in the 90s, the situation of young people was so alarming. Social problems are more glaring especially amongst the Malays. Drug abuse, sex before marriage<sup>12</sup>, smoking and bullying. Being a teacher and having a connection with the young people at school is a way to further educate them with Muslims as well as Malaysian values.” [S4 DPLI1]

S4 DPLI1 believes that basic education starts at home and parents are responsible for their children’s well-being. However, she conveyed the message that teachers are important people who are responsible to take over the parents’ responsibility while the children are at school. She believes that the legitimate and expert power that a teacher holds is able to help the school pupils development. In the teaching profession, teachers as social agents have legitimate power inherent in the role of teachers. Additionally, teachers should have expert power because school pupils view teachers as someone who is knowledgeable and can help them in their learning process. Cheng (1994) posits that the power that teachers have may be used as tools to influence school pupils’ values and behaviour. The students’ commitment to develop school pupils’ values is consistent with Malaysia’s Rukun Negara (Pillars of Country). Rukun Negara provides guidelines for Malaysians especially in creating unity among the different ethnics in Malaysia. The students mentioned schools as a social platform to develop school pupils’ values consistent with the Rukun Negara.

Besides developing values, most of the students believe that knowledge acquisition is the main agenda in an educational process. One student with working experience shared the consequence of not having adequate knowledge in this new era. The student [S5 DPLI1] worked in the financial sector before deciding to apply for the teacher education programme. She expressed her uncomfortable feelings regarding her previous job. She mentioned that there was discrimination whereby Malay customers were not given appropriate advice compared to Chinese<sup>13</sup> customers in financial services. The

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<sup>12</sup>Islam prohibits Muslims from having sex before marriage. It is stated in the Al-Quran (sacred book for the Muslims) ‘... and do not approach unlawful sexual intercourse. Indeed, it is ever immorality and is evil as a way’. [17, Verse 32]

<sup>13</sup> Chinese is second largest ethnic group in Malaysia. The present multi-ethnic climate of Malaysia is marked by the prominence of the Chinese in business and trading. The Chinese owns most of the private financial services institutions.

lack of information by Malay customers affected their chances to fully utilise the financial institution's facilities:

“I want to be a teacher so that I can strengthen the young people's knowledge, especially the Malays so that they will be competent in business and trading like the Chinese.” [S5 DPLI1]

A colleague of S5 DPLI1, of Indian ethnicity seconded that there exists an inequality in the educational process. She expressed:

“I am involved in an Indian non-government organisation (NGO), providing help and motivation for unfortunate Indian youth. It is very sad that some of them are left behind. Being a teacher gives me more chances to contribute to the development of young people especially the Indians.” [S6 DPLI2]

Besides experiences within the society, a number of students indicated that their experiences in teaching had given them some intangible and positive feelings which were very motivational. This is inconsistent with their colleagues who shared their experiences in helping the society; these students conveyed that the feeling they got when working with school pupils in the classroom was frustrating. For example, S4 DPLI2 sadly stated:

“My experiences as a substitute teacher at a secondary school were particularly frustrating. Many young people are not interested in learning, not interested in their own education. Some struggle to succeed.”

The students saw themselves as potential educators who could make a difference in the society, particularly with young people. Regardless of the students' experiences, they were among many other students in this study that experienced the social reproduction and believed the educational process influenced the construction of social inequality in a society. From the narrative, it is apparent that the students assumed that young people's knowledge is in the form of cultural capital as stated by Bourdieu. The students strongly believe that the teaching profession offers an opportunity for them to contribute to the process of reproducing the cultural capital through the educational process, with teachers as the main contributor. The students have intentions to minimise

the social inequality that has been transferred from one generation to another. The inequality, according to the students, provides more harm than good. The students' intention also suggests that they are inclined to help the society through their profession. Harun (2006) also suggests that an individual with an inclination in the teaching profession has the quality of altruistic motive, that is seeing the profession as socially worthwhile and beneficial.

Besides the experiences with young people and teaching familiarities, their experiences as students also influenced the students' reason to embark on a teacher education programme. As presented in Subsection 4.1.2, the experiences of having inequality in education enhanced the enthusiasm to become a teacher. To add, student S1 FY2 emotionally narrated:

“Teachers must be fair to their pupils regardless of their academic achievement. During my secondary school years, pupils with satisfactory academic performance will get more attention from teachers as their academic excellence will increase the school reputation<sup>14</sup>. What about the unfortunate pupils that were academically left behind? The teachers should focus or give more attention to this group of pupils.”

S1 FY2 is not alone. A few students mentioned that they were students who struggled in school. Their unpleasant experiences with former teachers increased their desire to teach. As mentioned above, an unfavourable experience with former teachers served as a motivational factor for the students to choose teaching. It may be concluded that the students tried to pursue a social creativity strategy in order to enhance their group self-esteem by defining more positive characteristics of teaching.

This subsection describes how the students' experiences during their school years influenced their attitude perception about teaching. Most experiences became the

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<sup>14</sup> The Malaysian Education system is dominated by an exam-oriented system whereby the assessment system is more towards the *assessment of learning* which gives an advantage to high academic performers, instead of *assessment for learning* (Ministry of Education, n.d.-b). However, there are several changes to improve the assessment system and make education more accessible to all. The new assessment system, namely the School Based System (PBS) has been implemented by phases in both primary and secondary schools throughout Malaysia.

motivation for the students to favour teaching, and showed a more positive emotional reaction towards approaching the profession, thus maintaining the salience of social identity.

The next subsection discusses the most popular reason for the students to embark on a teacher education programme. The vocational reasons comprise the students' passion to teach, content driven and the extrinsic reward offered by the profession.

#### **4.2.4 Vocational reasons**

Analysis on the students' stories in all three groups consistently suggest that the desire to become a teacher began in childhood and was described by students as a 'passion':

“My passion to become a teacher since my childhood.” [S2 AB, S3 BK]

“I have wanted to be a teacher since as far back as I can remember.” [S2 SK]

The passion to teach was also felt by their juniors in the first year and career change students. One of the career change students mentioned that she applied for the teacher education programme since she completed her secondary school. Since the admission to the teacher education programme in Malaysia is highly in demand, and admission to Malaysia's public higher education institutions are based on a meritocracy<sup>15</sup> system, she was never successful with her application due to non-promising results during secondary school:

“I was interested in teaching since primary school, but my (secondary leaving exam) result did not qualify me to apply for a teacher education programme. I enrolled in a business management programme and graduated. After graduating, I always found an

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<sup>15</sup> Meritocracy is a selection system to the public higher education institutions based on the academic performance during the leaving exam in secondary school.

opportunity to become a substitute<sup>16</sup> teacher at school. Every year I applied for the graduate teaching certificate programme. My last employment before I enrolled in this programme was a preschool key worker. My passion is in teaching.” [S1 DPLI 2]

Further investigation of the students’ passion to teach revealed that activities in the teaching profession had attracted the students towards the teacher education programme with the intention to apply for teaching thereafter. The students through their stories expressed different situations on how they appreciate the nature of the teaching profession and decide to become a member in this group. There is evidence that the students related the motives with religious belief. One of the students added:

“In Islam, man is created to be a caliph, the leader.... Teacher is one of the leaders in a society.” [S4 DPLI2]

Islam sees religion as an encompassing way of life (Hassan Farooqi, 2006; Rice, 1999). This suggests that a Muslim’s everyday life includes the social, economic, political aspect and human relations which must be based on the teaching of Islam. One of the Islamic teachings related to the social aspect is performing a task or job that will benefit themselves and others. This behaviour is treated as *ibadah* (performing a religious duty, a good deed). In this case, the students related their reason to become a teacher as a way to fulfil their obligation as a Muslim. The practice is different with Western cultures which tend to regard religion as a private matter (Rice, 1999). Consistent with the image of a teacher as a role model for the young generation’s development, society has not given much choice on who should become<sup>17</sup> a teacher. Teachers, according to the Malaysian society should be knowledgeable and obedient to religion in order to become a role model for students. It is consistent with the first pillar of the Rukun Negara,

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<sup>16</sup> Substitute teacher is a person who teaches a school class when the regular teacher is unavailable for a short period of time because of maternity leave, illness and other reasons. Paid maternity leave in Malaysia is three months.

<sup>17</sup>The basic beliefs for a Muslim falls into six main pillars of faith, the first of which is called the article of faith, namely belief in Allah, His Angels, His Books, His Prophets, and the Day of Judgment or the Day of Resurrection (life after death), and the belief in Destiny or Fate (Qadar) (Kayed, 2007). The main duty as a caliph, among others stated in the Al Quran [2, Verse 30]: “And [mention, o Muhammad], when your Lord said to the angels, “Indeed, I will make upon the earth a successive authority.” They said, “Will you place upon it one that causes corruption therein and sheds blood, while we declared Your praise and sanctify You.” Allah said, “Indeed, I know that which you do not know.””

which is a belief in God. The religious obedient means that the teacher should have faith in their life.

Besides religious beliefs, the students indicated that they personally valued education and positioned themselves as someone who has the ability to facilitate the learning process among the younger generation. Representative statements included “opportunity to educate”, “take care of the younger generation”, and “opportunity to share knowledge”. Many also indicate that teaching is a noble profession. Research on motives to become a teacher particularly in Islamic countries has consistently found that the teaching status dominated the factors that influence the prospective teachers to choose teaching (e.g. Mogra, 2010).

Besides their peer students who have a passion in teaching, a small number of students expressed that they are attracted to the teacher education programme because of the extrinsic rewards offered by the profession. This includes guaranteed employment opportunity, long holiday, short working hours, and job security. As suggested in Subsection 2.4, research in higher education consistently found that extrinsic rewards are a popular reason for students to choose teaching as a profession. Although only a small number of students are inclined to relate their reason to embark on a teacher education programme with rewards, this situation was very worrying because the students were perceived to become a member of a group with the ‘wrong’ motives (Sinclair, Dowson, and McInerney, 2006). Sinclair and colleagues posit that material reasons for teaching will negatively affect the students’ desire to teach and remain in this profession. This is consistent with other literature that relates a negative relationship between rewards and engagement in teaching. A few students perceived the teaching profession as vocational in nature, without any emotional attachment. One student undergoing her teaching practise stated that:

“Schools are everywhere..... so I will still have a job.” [S2 HD]

Similarly, her colleagues mentioned about one specific benefit of being a teacher:

“Long holiday.” [S3 SP]

Others mentioned about the shortest working hours compared to other professions and the job guaranteed after graduation as pull factors of choosing teaching as a profession. Influence from external factors towards the professional decision making can be related with the individual requirement to meet their needs. The Maslow Needs Theory for example, posits that an individual will meet the requirement of a lower level of their need, which is physiology before moving to other higher hierarchical needs (Robbins, Judge and Vohra, 2013). The students' decision to become a teacher because of the rewards seem to fulfil their lower level needs before they go to a higher level that offers more opportunities for them to be emotionally attached to the teaching profession. They also seem to possess more individual salience rather than social identity salience.

#### **4.2.5 Other reasons to embark on a teacher education programme**

Miller and Form, in Slocum (1959) claim that a majority of people do not make a rational decision on their professional choice. They argued that people accidentally make their decision because they compromise their interest, capacity, values and opportunities offered by a specific profession, but are not motivated to become part of the profession. The students may have a genuine interest in another field and employment opportunities, however the guaranteed place offered for a graduate from the teacher education programme attracts them to apply and embark on this programme. The student seems to not compromise as they have excellent secondary academic qualification:

“I have no idea. I just follow my friend. We filled the online application form (for university admission) together.” [S6 TP]

Some students however, do not see the teaching profession intrinsically. They only want a job offer, and by enrolling in a teacher education programme, the students have made themselves as an individual “who is soon to get a job”. A student in her first year expressed:

“My mission is to get a place in the undergraduate programme and graduate, and enjoy the privilege of a graduate job.” [S2 FY2]

Furthermore, there were a small number of students who embarked on the teacher education programme due to a technical mistake. As the admission in higher education

is coordinated by the Ministry of Education, the chances for students to change to other academic majors or higher education institutions is a hassle. Quite a lot of students accepted the offer as it is a chance for them to get a place at a higher education institution. There are two students in this study who expressed that they applied for the teacher preparation programme due to a technical mistake<sup>18</sup>, and they chose to accept the offer and have been part of the teacher education programme community. The students in this group had made a rational decision by accessing their own abilities and interests, evaluate the range of opportunities, and then made a choice which matched ability to opportunity. One of students in the teaching practise expressed:

“I am aiming for a legal qualification. During my school years, I was involved in debates. I applied for a law degree and courses....” [S1 SK]

However, this student by mistake chose the teacher education programme as her first and second choice of study programme<sup>19</sup>:

“..... it was a misunderstanding, I put teacher education programme as the first and second choice of concentration area. That is why I am here.”

The student S1 SK embarked on teacher education by chance. However, her initial decision to enrol and get a law degree is influenced more on her belief of the ability to pursue law related courses. This student has the tendency to pursue individual mobility as they perceive the outgroup as having a more positive social identity. However, she has to sacrifice her interest towards law at the moment because the process of changing higher institutions is a hassle in Malaysia. The current institution does not offer law related courses.

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<sup>18</sup> Misunderstanding while filling in the application form.

<sup>19</sup> Application for admission to undergraduate programmes in Malaysia’s public higher education institution is coordinated by the Ministry of Education. To apply, candidates must fill in the online application opened between January and March every year. There are eight choices of degree courses for the candidates to choose. Candidates must choose the courses based on priority, and those who are interested to apply for the teacher education programme must choose the degree courses in education in their first and second place.

#### 4.2.6 Subsection summary

Results from the thematic analysis suggest that the teacher education students' reasons to embark on the teacher education programme can justify their initial teaching identity. Not just the thematic analysis, at certain circumstances the student's body language give meaningful inputs regarding the identity that they possess. In general, the majority of students expressed that they have a positive feeling towards the teaching profession at the time they decided to apply for admission to the teacher education programme. The thematic analysis helps to classify students that have an intention to approach teaching profession after graduating by "Yes, I want to be in a teacher's group". Video recording also captured that the students in this category are happier to express their positive views on teaching. The body language presented by the students are added to the quotes by expressions such as 'eagerly', 'happily' and 'emotionally'.

The students in this group believe that their enrolment in the teacher education programme is influenced by many factors such as their personal attribute, influences from the social environment and the nature of the profession itself. It is apparent from the data that the students create their own meaning of a teaching job by presenting the stereotype of the teaching profession. However, the students' positive social identity is influenced differently by those factors, and some of the factors may become a challenge to maintain a positive social identity. From the quotes presented throughout this subsection, there are students who are attracted to the employment opportunity offered by this profession, hence this becomes a major source of motivation to enrol in this programme; thus, their intended behaviour cannot be explained using the Social Identity Approach.

Additionally, there are quite a lot of students who were influenced by significant others, particularly parents, but did not have any interest to become a teacher. This group of students indicated that they approached teaching because of pressure from others, particularly because of the employment opportunities contained therein. This situation is consistent with the concern that society imposed towards a new generation of prospective teachers, where the genuine reason to embark on a teacher education programme has been overshadowed by the employment opportunities after graduation,

not because of the greatest inspiration to become a group member of the teaching profession.

The findings of this study also revealed that there are a small number of students who are not sure whether they will apply for the teaching profession after graduation. This second category of students, who implicitly expressed, “I do not know”, consists of students who embarked on this programme mostly by chance. This includes students that have no clear reason of why they embarked on the teacher education programme. Students with peer influence are most likely to categorise themselves in this group. Finally, the third category, may indicate that the students possess an unfavourable attitude towards teaching as they may not continue with teaching after graduating. This group consists of students who are in the teacher education programme due to a technical mistake. These students aim for the academic credential offered, which is a Bachelor of Education, and may decide on other employment opportunities after graduating.

Furthermore, the findings on the students’ reason to enter a teacher education programme suggest two major issues. The first important issue revealed that the students’ decision to embark on a teacher education programme was influenced by different factors. There are personal factors, structural factors as well as external influences. These influences accumulate and develop the students’ identity towards the teaching profession. As discussed in Subsection 2.4, the values and norms of teaching are hard to identify as the profession itself is not regarded as a profession. Apparently, the student’s evaluation towards the teaching profession as presented in this subsection is linked with the assumption that the stereotype of teaching will be used as the norms and values of teaching. They aligned themselves with many admirable traits that they believed teachers possess according to their beliefs of teachers; ambition, optimism, ability to inspire, to lead, and to change lives. Nonetheless, their counterparts who embarked on the teacher education programme with parental influences had not viewed themselves as a teacher when accepted into this programme, thus bringing an unfavourable acceptance of teaching as a profession. Furthermore, the students with experiences with young people, whether within teaching activities or not, have a more favourable perception towards teaching.

Moreover, as mentioned in Subsection 1.9, the students have undergone a variety of assessments and selection criteria to enter the teacher education programme; however, their effort to achieve a positive social identity in teaching as presented in this subsection is not shown as always promising. It is apparent from the findings as discussed in this subsection that the students can be classified into three different categories. Among these three categories, the students included in the second group seemed to be passive entrants, and there is a possibility that they become a virtual tabula rasa or blank slates, which means prepared to absorb whatever is given to them during the professional socialisation process (Artkinson, 1985).

Apparently, the differences in the reason to embark on a teacher education programme among the three groups in this study are related to their experiences and interaction with the environment, not on their understanding of the national policy imposed on teachers, or any rules and regulations. The reason for students in Group 1 (undergoing teaching practise) and Group 3 (first year students) to embark on a teacher education programme is less realistic compared to the reason stated by the majority of the career change students. Career change students viewed the teaching profession more in terms of what the profession offered as opposed to other professions. Their working experience in other industries before deciding to apply for a teacher education programme is influenced by the positive reinforcement on what teaching offered as opposed to “my previous work or job” (i.e. S5 DPLI1). In contrast, their counterparts in Group 1 and 3 perceived that teaching is a platform for them to get a job.

The next subsection explores students’ self-definition on teaching at the time this study was conducted.

### **4.3 Student’s identity during commencement in teacher education programme**

This subsection continues to search for answers related to student’s identity towards teaching; focusing on the emotional attachment and behaviour students possess after undergoing the socialisation process at the teacher preparation programme. It is important to note that the students from different groups have undergone different types of socialisation process depending on the semester they are in and the route to the

teacher education programme. As mentioned in the introduction of this chapter, results from the thematic analysis revealed two major themes of how the students viewed teaching; favourable (positive social identity) and unfavourable.

Besides the reasons to embark on the teacher education programme, the students' narrative discovered that their commencement in the teacher preparation programme and holding the status as a 'prospective teacher' have a significant effect on their perception towards the teaching profession and their subsequent attachment and intended behaviour as a member of the profession. A majority of the students communicated the persuasive messages that induced the categorisation process as members of the teaching profession which will be detailed in Chapter Five, as this chapter will focus on the identity students hold and not the process of identity acquisition. The discussions of these factors, where appropriate, are presented according to the students' initial motive to enrol in the teacher education programme. A possible explanation for this arrangement is to identify the students' effort to achieve a positive social identity or to decline the group membership in the midst of the teacher education programme as compared to their initial motive at the entrance of the programme. The students' narrative on "who am I as a (future) teacher" gives the richest data on their identity and level of attachment to the teaching profession. The level of attachment is added to determine the identity as when the student progresses in their study, they are not just expected to possess a positive social identity by their decision to approach teaching, but must be able to determine the intended behaviour as a consequence of being in the teaching profession. The thematic analysis suggests three different categories to describe students' attitude; general evaluation of teaching profession, professional relationship and understanding of learning.

#### **4.3.1 Evaluation of teaching profession.**

There is consistency in the students' narratives from across the groups about the status of the teaching profession. It is generally accepted by the students that teaching is a noble profession. Noble profession, according to the students, refers to a profession that bring an enormous impact to the younger generation's future and well-being. Representative statements include "transform the knowledge", "work hard for the sake of students", and "treat students as we treat our own children". The findings from

Muslim students showed their beliefs of an obligation to spread the dakwah (calling and making an invitation to Islamic faith) to Muslim students. They invoked the hadith<sup>20</sup> statement “Convey from me, even one verse” (Bukhari). Muslims believe that conveying a dakwah is part of their obligation as a Muslim. The current situation in Malaysia shows that there are many social problems particularly among Muslim teenagers. Muslim students in this study believe that they can play a role in educating the young people, regardless the religion and ethnic, towards a better generation. Their non-Muslim counterparts also mentioned that “it is important to develop the young generation spiritually” [S6 DPLI2], which refers to educating the younger generation not only in academics but also in the way of life.

The students’ perception is influenced by their experiences as students where they were involved with teachers. The students with teaching experience, both career change and students undergoing their teaching training, have in depth involvements in exercising the role of teachers in a real setting. One of the students, S3 AB who is undergoing teaching practise mentioned eagerly about her valuable experiences and how proud she was when attending her first class:

“I cannot tell you how satisfied I am when I stand up in front of the class, looking in their (students) eyes. You cannot have that feeling unless you experience it yourself!”

Additionally, the perception is also derived from interaction with the society. There is evidence that the Malaysian society perceives that all teacher education students soon will become teachers. The perception comes from the previous practise of teachers’ recruitment in Malaysia where almost all teacher education students were offered a position as a teacher after graduation. One of the students, S6 AB in her teaching practise shared the moment that her neighbours called her ‘cikgu’ (teacher) since they know that she is in the teacher education programme. S6 AB expressed that she felt overwhelmed with the appreciation from her neighbours even though she is not yet a

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<sup>20</sup>Hadith are collective sayings of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), a messenger of Allah. Islam does not separate public and private life, and the Islamic values are based on the Qur’an and Hadith.

teacher. This appreciation, according to S6 AB becomes a source of development of favourable attitude towards the teaching profession.

Besides the status of the teaching profession, the students also perceived that teaching is an immensely challenging profession. The students from Group 1 and 3 could foresee that challenges will come from the students and expectations from educational stakeholders such as parents and society. In contrast, a career change student tries to justify the challenge in terms of the characteristics of teaching. Among all, they anticipated that teaching no longer offers short working hours. Data from this study suggests that the students perceived these challenges as part and parcel of the profession, and interestingly the challenges have increased their engagement with teaching. The responses from the students implicitly indicated that they tried to understand the reality of the teaching profession. As described in the preceding paragraphs, career change students with teaching experience shared their understanding of teachers' work based on their previous experience. Likewise, the students in teaching practise narrated their experience during the teaching training. Other students who did not have any teaching experience imagined teaching as they had experienced during their school years. One significant challenge highlighted by the students regardless of the group, is to teach students who attend below average classrooms, as described in Subsection 4.1.2. One student in her first year expressed that:

“.. with the low achievers, we have to be patient, need to know how to handle (the students). Be sincere to teach, do not underestimate their (students) ability, keep it up, do not be too depressed.” [S2 FY1]

Challenges are also associated with the prospective teachers' self. One of the students in her teaching practise stated that future teachers must accept that some of the students nowadays are very technological literate. Thus, future teachers must equip themselves with knowledge beyond their content knowledge that is taught in school:

“Students nowadays are exceptionally advanced. They are information seekers. Teachers these days do not have a lot of information compared to their students. Sometimes teachers have to admit their weakness.” [S1 SK]

This statement challenges the traditional perception that the teacher is a know-how person and always recognised as a role model of students. However, findings in this study revealed that the majority of students conjointly perceived themselves as an example of a successful adult for their students. The majority of the students expressed their inspiration to become a role model for the students. They believed that a teacher's manners is a critical factor in school life and serves as implicit values education for students. The majority of the students in this study expressed this aspiration in their narrative. For example, S1 FY2 in her first year stated that:

“Teachers are an important icon in the society. They are always observed by the society, the way they talk, dress, their manners. Teachers are important to develop the society.”

Likewise, her colleague in teaching training shared the following experience:

“Students show no respect if you are not good. They will not inspire you too.” [S9 TP]

Students' perception on teachers' role as explained by Giddens (1991), posits that the modernity of the society depends on the agent who can lead to such changes. The students believe that they can become an agent through their important role in the development of the young generation. One of the important roles in being an agent is being a person whose behaviour, example or success can be emulated by others, particularly their students. Indirectly, the students believe that they have to develop themselves continuously to be a better person. Some students perceive that the teaching profession offers opportunities to develop potential and life essential skills for the prospective teachers. One student undergoing her teaching practice stated:

“I am happy and proud when people call me ‘cikgu’. I see myself as a leader, as a mentor. I have to be a better person from day to day, because before I change other people (student), I have to start with myself.” [P5 TP]

### **What are the perceptions of students with the intention to teach say about the teaching profession**

The students who believe that they have interest in teaching at the time they enrolled in the teacher education programme expressed that they see themselves as ‘progressing well’ in the teacher preparation programme. Progressing well refers to their ability in categorising themselves as future teachers by imagining and demonstrating the image of the teacher that they will be, and develop a positive attitude towards teaching. However, there is one student in the teaching practise who feels that she will not apply for a teaching position after graduating. She feels that teaching is not challenging enough, hence it does not suit her personality. She expressed that:

“I was working part time before I enrolled in this programme. I feel that teaching is less challenging because it involves a routine job.” [S7 SK].

S7 SK decided to embark on the teacher education programme driven by her interest in teaching. However, her experience in teaching practise reduced her motivation to teach. Further investigation on her stories revealed that her decision is related to the frustration of teaching. She mentioned that she loves to teach, but feels frustrated as the students rely more on the teaching of tuition<sup>21</sup> teachers rather than their teachers at school. She mentioned in her story that: “I feel sad. Some of them (students) have no initiative to learn at school. They said that they will learn during their tuition classes.”

### **What are the perceptions of students who do not intend to be teachers say about the teaching profession**

The students who do not intend to become a teacher have similar beliefs with their colleagues regarding the status of the teaching profession, the challenges of the profession and being a role model for students. However, they refuse to teach as it is not the choice since they enrolled in the teacher education programme. This group consists

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<sup>21</sup> It is common in Malaysia for school students to attend tuition classes on top of their ordinary classes in school. It is assumed that the pressure to get good grades in the examination influences the students to attend tuition classes provided by private individuals or organisation. Tuition classes are charged.

of only a small number of students and all of them were undergoing teaching practise at the time the interview was conducted. These students made extraordinary efforts in teaching even though they are not preparing themselves to be a member of the teaching profession. The details of the efforts are described in Subsection 5.2.3.

### **What are the perceptions of students who are unsure to be teachers say about the teaching profession**

Some of the students who initially had no interest in teaching have strived to understand teaching and the teaching components during the teacher preparation programme. For students in teaching practise, the experiences at school have a significant effect on their attachment to teaching. They are aware about the virtue of the profession and their role to meet the challenges in teaching for the sake of the students. Surprisingly, they perceive the challenges as something that increase their motivation to become a teacher. For example, one student, S2 TP who initially embarked on the teacher education programme because of parental influence, had difficulties when she went for teaching practise in a school. She teaches fine arts and found that the most challenging task in teaching is to control students in the classroom. However, she found that the challenge made her more creative, in terms of finding a way to control her students in the classroom.

Her colleague, S2 HD who had no interest in teaching when she started the teacher education programme expressed that the biggest challenge in teaching is how to influence the students to learn. She underwent teaching practise in a small town, with the majority of students living in the village, where their fathers work as either farmers or lorry and truck drivers. The area is surrounded by paddy fields, a flooded parcel of arable land used to grow semi aquatic rice. S2 HD expressed the challenge of being a teacher trainee at this school:

“Quite a few students come from a poor family; farmers and truck drivers. Truck drivers are seldom at home. Who wants to help with their children’s learning?”

These two stories are among the cases of how students perceived teaching as a noble profession, but immensely challenging. Their motivation to teach, however was

amplified by the concern for students who are the product of social inequality at school. It is apparent from the findings that the students who had no interest in teaching tried to accept the challenges positively and change their initial attitude towards teaching.

As a conclusion, the students with an interest in teaching have developed their image as a teacher starting from the initial programme of teacher education until teaching practise. However, their colleagues with the initial intention not to teach, have learned from their interaction during teaching practise, and decided to pursue a teaching career as they can cope with the challenges during their teaching practise.

#### **4.3.2 Professional relationship**

The second variable which emerged from the thematic analysis refers to the students' beliefs on the professional relationship between teachers and educational stakeholders, particularly the pupils, colleagues and parents. The narrative of student-teacher relationship dominated the students' stories about their experiences and inspirations as prospective teachers. It is apparent from the data that the majority of the students believe that pupils come to school with different characters, inspirations and limitations. With this uniqueness, the students are aware that they must be sensitive to the individual pupils' needs. They are most aware with below average pupils in school. One of the students emotionally expressed;

“... try to understand their (student) emotion in the classroom. What creates a barrier for them to learn?” [S1 BK]

S1 BK is among the students that aspire to eliminate the social reproduction that is extensively developed in a school context. The students are aware that schools are working more towards academic excellence, however they feel that it is unfair to neglect the below average pupils. The students who initially have little interest in teaching assumed that this situation boosts their motivation to teach:

“... I feel attached to this (teacher) profession while I started my teaching practise. The pupils out there need a teacher not just to teach, but motivate them to learn.” [S9 SK]

S9 SK imagines that the relationship between teacher and student has to be beyond the formal relationship at school. Although there is commonly a barrier between teachers and students because of the higher power distance as mentioned in Subsection 2.5, the students believe that they should lower the distance in order to maintain close relations with the pupils. The majority of students across the groups shared S9 SK's aspiration as a teacher. Surprisingly, many of them do not intend to focus on students' academic development, rather they insist on developing the young generations in terms of emotional and spiritual aspects.

“For me, if the students do not have the capability in academic achievement, or are experiencing learning difficulties, that is not the end of the world. There are a lot of opportunities for this group of students. I like the proverb – do not give a fish to our student. Teach them how to fish and they can use the skill forever. Motivate them, give them the appropriate skill.” (S4 SK)

The students mentioned about the development of values among students twice then only they brought up academic issues. It can be reflected that most Muslim students relate the teaching profession to the role of a caliph as discussed in Subsection 4.1.4.

In addition to teacher-student relationship, the students in teaching practise and career change students also relate the role of current in-service teachers in the development of their beliefs towards teaching. The students that were undergoing their teaching practise had the opportunity to work with in-service teachers during the teaching practise. However, they perceived that the relationship ‘is not going smoothly’. Findings from this study found that the majority of the students have no consensus with their in-service colleagues in terms of the way teaching takes place in school. They are consciously aware that there are a lot of cases whereby the in-service teachers promoted social inequality in school. For instance, one student in her teaching practise stated:

“I asked senior teachers what should I do to the students that are left behind academically. They said – use your creativity, or just teach them as you teach other students. Oh! I should teach them in a way that they will understand.” [S1 TIWA]

One of the students who worked as a substitute teacher before embarking in the teacher education programme also expressed her frustration at the absence of support from her former in-service teacher colleagues. For these students, she experienced the gap between the novice teacher and the senior teachers. However, from the students' narrative, the absence of support did not demotivate them to search for the meaning of being a teacher.

S9 TP who evaluated her attribute as consistent with the needs of the teaching profession embarked on a Guidance and Counselling<sup>22</sup> programme. Although she feels frustrated because a counsellor will not teach at school as she aspired to, she perceived that she can do the job better by sharing the knowledge with students during a counselling session. She mentioned her experience with young children in teaching training:

“.. narrowing or closing the gap between teacher and students.”

She expressed concern about the students' future:

“.. this school is situated in a rural area. Majority of the parents work as security guards, operational line in a factory, and farmers. Most of them live below the poverty line. They do not see themselves beyond what their parents have.”

She mentioned the following:

“I am willing to help them, but I only meet them at school.”

Unlike the findings from the previous subsection which suggests that students from different groups have different perceptions about teaching, the findings on professional relationship found no distinct differences on the perception of the professional relationship among groups. All students perceived that there should be a close relationship between students and teachers, at and beyond a school context. One career change student mentioned that teachers carry a job title as a teacher for 24 hours a day,

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<sup>22</sup> Students with a Guidance and Counselling major are trained to become a counsellor in school. It is compulsory for Malaysian schools to have at least one trained counsellor. The counselling services in Malaysian schools gained momentum with the setting up of the Guidance and Counselling section in the Education Planning and Research division in 1963.

which showed her enormous commitment towards teaching. These findings suggest that there are positive perceptions on the nature of teaching from the students, particularly those who initially expressed no interest in teaching.

### **4.3.3 Understanding of learning**

Understanding the learning refers to the epistemological and ontological beliefs about learning. The students' view on what constitutes knowledge and how to acquire knowledge affect their aspiration and belief on their teaching style. The literatures reviewed in this study suggest that Malaysian higher education students tend to memorise facts and their learning depends on the teachers. The findings from this study support the reviewed literature, where students suggest that the teacher education programme must provide comprehensive knowledge and skills for their trainees. One student mentioned that she lacks socialisation skills and has a problem to mingle during their teaching practise. She expressed:

“It should be better if there are courses on how to socialise with a colleague of different ages at school. It will help the trainee to communicate and socialise well during their teacher training.” [S3 BK]

Similarly, her colleague put forward that other courses such as managing emotion is important for prospective teachers. This finding suggests that some students assume that the image of the teacher should be prescribed, rather than acquired through interaction with the environment. However, there is no evidence that students imitate their teacher educator as their role model, thus rejecting the assumption that teacher education students' professional socialisation process is determined by the functionalism approach.

However, the findings from this study found that the students' aspirations towards learning contrast from what has been reviewed in the literature. The students believe that there are multiple social realities, and knowledge is not static. These beliefs influence their teaching inspiration. One of the students shared her experience during teaching practise:

“Even though I am in my teaching training, I rarely use text or reference books in my class. I do not want my students to rely only on books that were written two or three years back. I am using current newspaper cuttings. Let’s say, in a syllabus, students should know about landslides. We have a landslide phenomena over here (Malaysia). Give students the relevant paper cutting, ask them to try to understand what was written by the reporter on that phenomena, think and tell their friends what they think caused the landslide. Discuss! I believe students will remember what they are discussing rather than reading from a book, and trying to understand.” [S1 TIWA]

As S1 TIWA shared her teaching experience, the students in their first year and some career change students who do not have teaching experience expressed their inspiration towards students’ learning based on their experience as students:

“Say never to text books.” [S5 FY1]

“I think teaching aids will help the learning process.” [S6 DPLI 2]

These findings suggest that the students refuse to use textbooks as the only medium for teaching and learning process. The excessive use of textbooks in schools and Malaysian higher education contribute to the functionalism socialisation process where students are more dependent on textbooks and minimise the effort in discovering their own knowledge.

The students, regardless of their initial motive to embark on a teacher education programme, believe that students nowadays should be encouraged towards self-learning where they have to search for their own meaning. The concepts that the students highlight refers to the constructivist approach of learning. The students believe that the constructivist approach gives equal chance for students to learn. They believe that some students have the capability to remember the facts while their counterparts preferred the ‘learning by doing’ approach.

#### **4.3.4 Subsection summary**

This subsection presents the students' identity after they embark on the teacher education programme. In accordance with the normal practices in Malaysia whereby teacher education students will be offered a post as a teacher after graduation, these groups of students already perceived themselves as a member of the teaching profession. The first year students who do not have the privilege of a guaranteed job also reported as considering themselves as future teachers. As prospective teachers, they voiced their beliefs of their future profession and related matters. There are three factors identified from the thematic analysis associated with the student's identity that might guide their behaviour; perception about the teaching profession, professional relationship and understanding of learning. These views help them to evaluate the teaching profession accordingly. Most of the students are seen as trying to build a genuine interest towards teaching. However, there are quite a number of students still finding a way to build genuine interest, thus leaving them with the perception that teaching is just an occupation, without feeling attached to the profession, and behaving according to the teaching values and norms.

It is also apparent from the findings that the young generation, represented by 'school pupil' in this subsection, becomes an important agent for the students' identity development. The students' aim for social mobility among the young generation, and that becomes their main motivation that translates from their beliefs of teaching. It is apparent from the data that the students expressed the socialisation agents that help them to develop their attitude. The socialisation agents, however are not treated as significant others that pressure the students to conform to the profession, rather they exist as an agent of change.

#### **4.4 Socialising agents who influence students beliefs about teaching**

##### **4.4.1 Environment**

The findings discussed thus far suggest that the social environment and the students' interaction with the environment are central to the process of professional socialisation. In this process, the students become active students in their own learning and

professional socialisation. This framework explains that professional identity development is a process that is socially constructed rather than individually constructed as the knowledge acquisition is dependent upon the context in which it occurs. The environment that the students experienced are the students themselves that shaped their knowledge about the profession. This finding contrasts with a small scale study in Malaysia that found teacher education students are more inclined towards their co-operative teachers or teacher educators at the teacher training institution. The students benefit from the positive knowledge that they get from the environment.

#### **4.4.2 Former teachers**

It is a matter of fact that the students have a set of beliefs about teaching before they embarked on the teacher education programme. Their experience as students for more than ten years has a much bigger effect compared to their four years in the teacher education programme. This study found that the students who lost their direction in becoming a teacher try to adapt to the identity of the referent group. Most students indicate that they are more likely to follow their former teachers' practices during the teaching and learning process. This situation is explained by Giddens (1991) in his Theory of Structuration, that people's actions are based on their existing knowledge.

“The basic domain of study of the social sciences, according to the theory of structuration, is neither the experience of the individual actor, nor the existence of any form of societal totality, but social practices ordered across space and time.” (1991; 2)

It is apparent from the findings as discussed in the preceding subsection that the students reflect on the practices of their former teachers in order to act for certain uncertainties. To some extent, the students modified the practices according to their current beliefs on teaching.

#### **4.4.3 School pupil**

The main finding in this study highlights the students' consciousness that the school is a place that promotes the development of social reproduction. The students described how their experiences during the school years had taught them about social inequality

among school pupils which became a source of motivation to proceed with teaching. The students who are in their teaching practise described in further detail about this situation compared with their juniors in the first year of study. The students from the second group who are career change and mature students described their experience during the school years and have the advantage to describe the consequences of social inequality in a very practical way. They described their experiences at work and how social inequality affects the young people considerably.

#### **4.4.4 Subsection summary**

This subsection explores the students' experiences after they enrolled as teacher education students, particularly their belief of teaching and the level of attachment to become a member of the teaching profession. The main variables that explain the students' experiences are perception about teaching, professional relationship and understanding of learning. It is a noteworthy fact to remember that the students come from three distinct backgrounds; first year students, career change students who have teaching related and non-teaching working experience, and final year students undergoing their teaching practise at schools as part of the requirement to graduate. Thus, their experiences vary according to their engagement in the teacher education programme and working experiences. The students in their first year generally conveyed their beliefs and aspirations mostly from the experiences with teachers back in their school years as students. Their counterparts in teaching training and career change group with teaching experiences have a more realistic involvement in teaching. Being teacher education students in Malaysia generally makes them a part of the teaching profession members, as the society perceives that all of the students will graduate as teachers. This subsection explores the answer as to what extent the students think of who they are and who they will be as a future teacher.

The main finding in this study revealed that students, regardless of their initial reason to embark on a teacher education programme, expressed their concerns on social inequality among children and young people, and that became a main motivation to discriminate against the teaching profession. Their perception of the status of the teaching profession, their belief on professional relationship and understanding of the nature of learning showed their concern on social inequality and the education system

that produces such differences. The students aspire to be an agent for social mobility among children and young people.

Past literature on professional socialisation predicted that Malaysian teacher education students are inclined to have minimal interaction with the environment in the process of professional identity construction. The students also have a greater possibility to depend on significant others and their role models in order to learn about the norms and values of the profession. This is inconsistent with the literature reviewed for this study; a majority of the students are seen as trying to reduce the structural influence in the construction of themselves towards the teaching profession. In contrast with the strong dependency on the structure that potentially prevents them to search for their own meaning of teaching, the students voluntarily move from their status quo and become active students in the system that they become a member of, which refers to the teacher education programme. The students are seen as trying to interact with the environment and fully utilise their experiences in order to develop a positive attitude towards the teaching profession.

This study also found that a majority of the students developed their positive attitude as a future member of the teaching profession during their professional socialisation process. Even though the findings revealed that the students involved in this study are active and constructive in the learning process, however, their active process is guided by the structural culture that dominates the profession. Thus, it can be concluded that the teaching profession is still a profession that is important in Malaysia regardless of the new professions' evolvement as a result of economic development in Malaysia. The students that initially did not have a positive perception in entering the teacher education programme have learnt from their professional socialisation and are aware that they have the related cultural capital. This situation is explained by Bourdieu; an individual who enters a specific sphere, they actually have the capital ownership on the arena, although they are not aware of its existence.

It can also be concluded that the overall students' motivation to teach is relatively higher, particularly for the students undergoing their teaching practise. The teaching practise seems to provide a context to enhance the students' motivation to teach, and build their positive attitude towards the teaching profession. The students that are

emotionally attached to the teaching profession from the start (at entrance level) possess more commitment towards teaching. There are also isolated cases where students sustain or decrease their motivation during the teaching practise at school. This is the limitation of this study that provides an opportunity for further exploration. The students in teaching practise who struggle with their student's behaviour expressed a higher motivation to teach. This finding is contrary with most of the literature which found that a student's unfavourable behaviour can easily discourage a prospective teacher's motivation as their primary goal to become a teacher is related to an intrinsic desire to help students (e.g. Sinclair, 2008).

The investigation on how the students acquire the attitude during their socialisation process also suggested that the students and young generation are the most influential socialising agents. This is consistent with the study from the West which suggests that students are the most influential socialisation agent to develop pre-service teachers' professional identity (e.g. Chambers et. al., 2010; Sinclair, 2008).

#### **4.5 Conclusion of chapter**

This chapter discusses the findings related to the first, second and fourth research questions. Two major themes of how the students acquired the identity emerged through the analysis process; firstly they possess the initial identity at the time they decided to apply for the teacher education programme, and secondly, the students developed, organised and changed their identity during the professional socialisation process at the higher education institution. The findings suggest that the majority of the students have a positive attitude towards the teaching profession at the time they decided to choose the teacher preparation programme. Most of them aim for the teaching certificate offered by the teacher education programme which enables them to apply for the teaching profession. However, the perception is not promising as the genuine reasons do not show that the students are genuinely attached to the teaching profession. The analysis found that some students perceived there was a compatibility between their attribute and nature of teaching, and others claimed that they were influenced by parents and former teachers. Additionally, there were students who

decided to apply for the teacher education programme as a result of their positive or negative experiences related to themselves and other young people. The results also suggested that many of the students were attracted to teaching for vocational reasons. As a consequence, the motivation to teach is higher among the students who perceive there is a compatibility between themselves and teaching, the students who have had enjoyable and unpleasant experiences as students with their former teachers, and the students with a passion to teach. Their other colleagues were attracted to teaching because of extrinsic factors and the others do not have an attachment to teaching. Thus, their motive is extremely external, which is to have a job.

Furthermore, the exploration on the ways where the students develop their teacher identity focused on the stages when they became a community of the teacher education programme. Correspondingly, the findings suggest that the students' beliefs of teaching after they became a community of the teacher education programme explained their development or withdrawal of interest in teaching. Thus, the student's attachment to the group (which is teaching profession) has a significant impact on how they view themselves as a member of the group and this reflects their intended behaviour. However, the students who were attached to the profession from their initial entry to the teacher education programme showed more commitment to teach. Their counterparts on the other hand, are in the process of developing the commitment to teach.

To conclude, the students acquired the teacher identity mainly when they become a member of the 'teaching profession' and tried to achieve or maintain a positive social identity; in this case become a member of the teacher education programme. The students that have been admitted to the teacher education programme try to adapt to the demands and characteristics of the group, and are influenced by the socialising agents; environment, former teacher, and students. Although the students' entrance to the teacher education programme involves a very rigid selection process, the students' narrative showed that their professional socialisation process is not determined by the profession, as suggested by Merton (1957).

The subsequent chapter presents the answer for the third research question, particularly in describing the process of self-categorisation among the students during their commencement at the teacher preparation programme.

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS**

#### **5.0 Introduction**

The previous chapter described the students' identity towards teaching in two different phases; firstly, when they decided to embark on a teacher preparation programme, and secondly, when they became a member of the teacher preparation programme community, where they underwent their socialisation process to become a teacher. It is apparent from the previous discussion that the formation of identity is an ongoing process of change embedded in the context (i.e. the teacher preparation programme). Some changes were evident in the data, whereby the students in the midst of their teacher preparation programme, particularly the students undergoing teaching practice, showed more positive identity changes towards teaching compared to their initial reasons for embarking on the programme. A positive social identity captured from the thematic analysis came from one category of the students, as described in Subsection 4.1, which are those who initially wanted to approach teaching after graduation.

The findings also found that the attitudes, in fact, can be conceptualised from both personal and social perspectives. Chapter Four generally described both personal and social factors that influenced the development of teachers' identity in both context; before and during their commencement in the teacher preparation programme. This chapter extends the discussion of the research findings related to the third research question: How do social factors affect the effort to maintain or achieve positive social identity, or encourage individual mobility among students? Following the argument presented in Subsection 2.4, this chapter explores the students' socialisation process framed by the social identity approach. It is assumed that when the students are in the teacher preparation programme, their social identity as future teachers becomes salient if they try to learn and adhere to the teaching norms and values. Thus, it is important to explore how the students undergo the process of self-categorisation. It is important to note that during the interview, the students also mentioned other social categories in

their narratives such as “as a Muslim”, “as an Indian”, “as an indigenous group from East Malaysia”, “comes from poor background”, and “low income”. As these themes emerged from the data, special attention has been given to find the significance of these social categories towards the students’ identity development.

Furthermore, Subsection 2.3 also presented the argument that through the self-categorisation process, the students will adopt the teaching values and norms in order to differentiate themselves from the out-group (i.e. students who do not want to be a teacher). It is argued here that the students will possess a positive social identity towards the profession if they conform to the values and norms of the teaching profession, rather than having been pressured by others to comply with it. The following subsection describes the extent to which the students try to conform to the teaching profession. The discussion includes the process of self-categorisation, how the students learn about the values and norms of teaching and how they assimilate the values and norms of teaching to themselves.

### **5.1 Students’ self definition on teaching**

The discussion on how the students define teaching starts with an exploration as to how the students acknowledge the values and norms of the profession. This is consistent with Subsection 4.2, which highlighted the general values and norms perceived by the students. The students perceived that teaching is a noble and respected profession for various reasons, one of the most common being that teachers help to educate younger generations. Besides this, the students implicitly expressed that their behaviour is guided by the National Philosophy of Education, as they mentioned that they have a responsibility to develop the potential of young generations in a holistic and integrated manner, as stipulated in the philosophy. These features serve as a standard of teaching, or the values and norms perceived by the students. Besides these features, it is apparent from the data that the students assigned their former teachers as role models of the profession. As expressed by S7 TP (Subsection 4.1.2), she adored her former teacher as being a very generous teacher and hoped that she would become like her. However, the data also showed that the students did not always view their teachers as role models. Some of them indicated a negative image of teachers, such as an “unfavourable moment

with an irresponsible teacher” [S7 TP], and “a tactless teacher, did not teach properly” [S3 AB], which the students tried to avoid. Other students also mentioned that their parents, who are teachers, also became role models. They acknowledged that their mother or father, who is or was a teacher, is very patient, hard working and helpful with the school children. S9 AB described her father, who was once a teacher saying “He loved what he was doing. He had great enthusiasm for teaching”.

The thematic analysis also helped to determine how the students self-categorised themselves towards the norms and values of teaching. Subsection 4.2 described how the students evaluated the teaching profession while progressing in the teacher preparation programme. It is apparent that when the students evaluated the teaching profession, they put themselves as “who am I as a teacher?”. The evaluation, however, was different across the groups. The students who were undergoing teaching practice evaluated teaching more in terms of their emotional reaction towards the profession. For example, one student mentioned how satisfied she was when she had the opportunity to teach. S3 AB eagerly expressed that “you cannot have that feeling unless you experience it”. Her colleague, S1 BK, stated how she tried to understand the school children in class and “what creates barriers for them (school children) to learn”.

Two students who were initially unsure whether to approach teaching or not at the time they enrolled in the teacher preparation programme, developed a positive social identity towards teaching as they felt that they were very important to the school children. One of the students, S10 AB, with open palms and face upward stated:

“Yes, initially, I wasn’t interested in teaching. However, during teaching practice, I felt guilty when the school children in my class hoped to learn something from me, but I was not interested to teach. Oh God. Slowly, I forced myself to love teaching. Now I can’t wait to become a teacher!”

Similarly, her colleague, S6 AB, had an unfavourable attitude towards teaching at the time she chose the teacher preparation programme. As discussed in Subsection 5.1.2, S6 AB chose this programme of study due to her mother’s influence. However, in contrast with S10 AB and S1 TP, the socialisation process had no impact on her engagement

with teaching. With arms crossed in front of her chest, exhibiting defensiveness, S6 AB stated,

“Until now I am not interested in teaching, but I will soon be a teacher, as I will get the credential in teaching. My mother will be very happy. I will do all the teaching work, that is the responsibility, but I am sure I will not enjoy my work.”

The students in their first year tried to self-categorise themselves according to their knowledge and beliefs of teaching, which were gathered from the socialisation process and their experiences during the school day. For example, 11 students out of 12 expressed their behavioural intention of becoming a teacher. Among others, some students stated that they should be role models for school children: “responsible to teach the children” [S6 FY2], “exhibit good manners” [S1 FY1], and “determined in teaching” [S3 FY1]. Furthermore, their counterparts, the career change students expressed in more detail what differentiated them from the previous profession when the teaching profession became salient. One student, S6 DPLI1, expressed with tears in her eyes:

“I worked in a bank before, the workload [...]. Oooo, it was very stressful and I was getting very grumpy and over-sensitive. I quit and applied to be a substitute teacher at school. Teaching teaches me how to be more patient. How could you get mad with children who come to school with hope and just want to learn?”

Similarly, her colleague, S1 DPLI2, stated:

“People will change when they become a teacher. Becoming a teacher means that they become a role model for school children. It is different when you are involved in another profession.”

The statement presented above gives insight into the factors that may motivate students to self-categorise themselves as future teachers and achieve a positive social identity. Most of the students’ narration indicates several strategies to achieve a positive social identity. The students pursued social creativity strategies by evaluating the in-group in a more flattering dimension by highlighting the function of teaching in the society. This has been done by mentioning the advantages of becoming a teacher, ranging from

developing the young generation and becoming a role model. To pursue the strategies, another theme emerges, which is commitment. It is implicitly stated that the students' commitment differentiates how they categorise themselves into specific groups and learn the norms and values of the group. The following subsection highlights the commitment as an important variable in the categorisation process. This commitment implies that the students adopted the interpretive approach of socialization as this approach allows them to become active participants. The strong identifiers give greater commitment to learn about teaching norms and values.

## **5.2 Students' commitment**

There is evidence from the literature review that a positive social identity can be achieved by enhancing an individual's work commitment (Chen and Chiu, 2009; Joireman, Kamdar, Daniels and Duell 2006). Further analysis of the students' narratives found that commitment exists among the student teachers towards the teaching profession. The sense of commitment was observed from the students' narratives on their sense of responsibility and attachment towards the profession, and their body language while delivering the stories. The students were then asked relevant questions in order to validate their stories, particularly related to their sense of commitment towards the teaching profession. Again, the thematic analysis helped to classify the different levels of students' attachment towards the teaching profession. In general, the students with a positive social identity had all three levels of attachment towards teaching; higher, moderate and lower levels of attachment. Interestingly, the students who decided not to teach also envisaged a higher level of commitment to teaching. However, students who had not made a decision whether or not to teach, expressed moderate and lower levels of commitment to teaching. Given these points, almost all students in this study constructed their anticipated professional identity based on the same platform, which was a commitment towards the teaching profession.

The narratives showed that the students envisaged their sense of engagement through their inspiration to take responsibility towards three different parties, namely, the students, society and the profession itself. The prominent findings of this study revealed that the students' higher levels of attachment were related to the desire to serve others,

particularly students and society. These findings are consistent with the students' beliefs, as discussed in Chapter Four, where students considered themselves as agents for social mobility who would try to minimise the social reproduction resulting from the educational process. The findings suggest that accessibility to the profession is very important in developing a positive social identity.

### **5.2.1 Commitment towards prospective students**

The students voiced different degrees of responsibility and attachment towards their main audience, i.e. the prospective students. The main themes that emerged from the analysis on commitment towards the students related to the process of educating are the desire to act as secondary parents to their students, the desire to attract students to learn, and the perception that teachers must be fair in their relationships with the students.

#### **5.2.1.1 I want to educate the younger generation**

The overall response related to the students' commitment with regard to their perception is that they have a responsibility to educate prospective students. The students, regardless of the group, agreed that they were responsible for 'educating' the students rather than 'teaching'. For instance, one student in her first year stated that "For me, the teacher is not just teaching, but is educating the young generation." (S2 FY1)

There was consensus among all students on the definitions of 'educating' and 'teaching'. Students perceived that 'teaching' is related to disseminating knowledge and giving information about the subject matter. In contrast, students referred to 'educating' as a process of building the human capabilities of the students, thus focusing on the development of physical, emotional and spiritual aspects, rather only on cognition. During the focus group discussions, the students from all groups repeatedly expressed their desire to educate students. One of the intended outcomes of the educating process is to develop students with positive values and accepted behaviours. The students stated several values such as good *akhlaq* (Arabic term referring to virtue and morality), spirituality, generosity, courtesy and respect, which they expect to promote and disseminate among their prospective students. One of the students in teaching practice

expressed, “It is my intention to change the students, particularly their character.” [S9 SK].

S9 SK stated that she was aware that some of her current students came to school with inappropriate manners, thus she aimed to shape her students in cultivating moral values. This student observed inappropriate behaviour including irresponsible learning, and a tendency to show negative behaviour such as smoking and absent from school. Moreover, the students aim to educate their students to be better people, even though they realise that some of these students are less academically able. One of the students expressed her passion to educate her current students in the classroom during the teaching process:

“There are students (during teaching practice) who do not perform well in their examination. Yes, they are not competent academically, but I tried to develop them to be useful human beings.” [S1 BK]

The students’ intention to educate rather than teach implies that they reject the current national practice that puts academic excellence as an important factor in determining students’ success and the prerequisite for admission to the next phase of education level, thus promoting social reproduction in school. Even though the majority of the students had good final exam results (during their school years) or satisfactory grades (during their undergraduate years), being in the professional teaching community made them aware that outstanding results would not help to prevent students from being trapped in the social problems that are plaguing the Malaysian society.

Moreover, the findings of the current study do not support the previous research on the students’ approaches to learning. The literature reviewed in this study suggests that the majority of Malaysian students, both in school and higher education institutions, still demonstrate rote learning, which refers to the memorisation of facts, despite continuous efforts to promote a constructivist approach to learning. Explicitly, the traditional approach focuses more on the cognitive aspects. It is apparent that the majority of the students in this study declined the tradition of rote learning, and suggested that students had to be induced by educating them with different values in order to foster their own learning.

Although the majority of the students eagerly expressed their sense of attachment towards the teaching profession, there was evidence that a small number of their colleagues were not actually enjoying their status as a prospective teacher. They had a positive feeling towards the teaching profession; however, they were unwilling to actively get involved in teaching activities, such as approaching students with new learning methods. There were two students who voiced a negative sense of dedication towards teaching. Both of them were undergoing teaching practice in school:

“I do not love my teaching job. Nonetheless, I consider myself as a responsible person. I do my work (during teaching practice), I prepare my teaching material, and I teach students the content of the subject, to which I was entrusted. I am just responsible for my title as a teacher.” (S7 AB)

“Teaching is not my first choice, yet it is a secure profession. Schools are everywhere; young generations need to go to school, so I will still have a job. If I am posted in any school, I will do my job. I will do it because I have to do that. Children need to learn something from school. I will make sure they will learn something.” (S2 HD)

It was noted that both S7 AB and S2 HD did not have an initial interest towards teaching, and their decision to embark on a teacher preparation programme was influenced by their parents. In the case of commitment, S7 AB related her desire to teach with the status of the profession itself. This situation demonstrated that the professional status of the teaching profession, as reviewed in this study, provided the main motivation for the teacher preparation students, despite their low levels of commitment, to become part of the profession. Her peer colleague, S2 HD, also expressed a low degree of attachment towards the profession; however, her disengagement was moderated by a desire to serve the students. This was shown when S2 HD mentioned “children need to learn something from school” in her narrative. These two situations suggest that even though the students had a low level of attachment towards the teaching profession, there were internal forces in the profession that bound them to it. However, these two students were not inclined towards the ‘educate’ aspect, unlike the majority of their colleagues involved in this study. Reviews

of other professions in this study have not found such internal binding, excepting the employment opportunities and rewards offered by the profession.

### **5.2.1.2 I am a second parent to the students**

Besides the determination to educate their prospective students, the students also expressed the responsibility to become *in loco parentis*<sup>23</sup> (in the place of the parent) while at school. The students in their teaching practice understood that they have a responsibility for their students' safety and well-being at school, as underlined in the Malaysia Child Act 2001<sup>24</sup>. S7 SK, who was undergoing the teaching practice, stated that, "Teachers are students' parents when they are at school. We (teachers) must take reasonable care of them." (S7 SK).

The expression of 'must' in the statement above suggests that the student was committed to her potential role as a teacher. S7 SK's perception of her role as a second parent, also seen from the perspective of 'to educate', thus suggests the strength of the 'education' rather than 'teaching' process. Similar with S7 SK, who was undergoing her teaching practice, the students who did not yet have teaching experience also understood that they have a responsibility towards their prospective students. For instance, one first year student, S5 FY1, expressed that, "Teachers are the mother or father of students at school". Similarly, one career change student, S1 DPLI1, added that, "We have to treat students the way we treat our own children".

The representative statements from the students showed that they understand the importance of maintaining a safe and family atmosphere, particularly in the classroom. There are a few implications related to the students' desire to educate and become *in loco parentis* to the students. Firstly, the students expressed their motivation to like and love the children. The findings showed that the students' understanding of this trait was consistent with the literature reviewed in this study, which suggests that teaching is a

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<sup>23</sup> Teachers as students' guardians. The Malaysia Child Act 2001 (Act 601): 'Guardian' in relation to a child, includes any person who, in the opinion of the Court for children having cognisance of any case in relation to the child or in which is concerned, has for the time being the charge of and control over the child. 'Child', means a person under the age of eighteen years.

<sup>24</sup> The Child Act 2001 is a main law related to children.

profession that requires its members to love the children (Aldemir and Sezer, 2009). Secondly, the students indicated that they would develop and keep their positive values, behaviours, and accepted appearance as determined by society, in order to motivate their prospective students to follow their positive attributes. As discussed in Chapter Four, the students perceived that they are a role model for their students. The students, through their narratives, expressed their commitment to be a role model for their students, as described in the preceding chapter. One of the students cynically stated:

“There is no place for people with unacceptable behaviour<sup>25</sup> to become a teacher. Do you want to be like a mother crab teaching her children how to walk straight<sup>26</sup>?” [S3 AB]

The findings of this current study are consistent with those of other research in Muslim countries (Mohd Dahan and Ghazali, 2007; Goh and Atputhasamy, 2001; Kahveci, 2009; Minnis, 1999; Mogra, 2010; Tok, 2011), which award the teaching profession and teachers as having considerable virtue in society.

### **5.2.1.3 I want to attract students’ attention to learn**

Another prominent theme that described the students’ commitment was their inspiration to make learning meaningful for their prospective students. In conjunction with the students’ beliefs on learning, as described in the preceding chapter, they expressed in detail their inspiration to reinforce the learning process, particularly for the group of students who have lower academic abilities. The students indicated their enthusiasm to help in learning the subject matter and also to motivate their prospective students to learn. The students identified five main interrelated approaches to attract their students’ attention: encouragement, friendliness, sense of humour, creativity and forcefulness.

First of all, most of the students believed that they had to encourage their students to be more self-confident in learning and minimise their despair if they could not yet do something. The students used different strategies to encourage their students’ learning. Some of them thought that words of encouragement would assist the students’ learning process. Some other students thought that friendly eye contact, smiling, helping

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<sup>25</sup> Unacceptable behaviour according to Malaysian culture and customs.

<sup>26</sup> The Malay idiom, meaning teaching by example.

behaviour and facial expressions would make their prospective students feel comfortable and take an active role in the process of learning. One of the students in her first year shared an unfavourable experience of learning. She expressed that she was not interested in a certain subject because her former teacher did not encourage her or her friends to learn. She mentioned that one of her former teachers just stood at the blackboard and taught: “She never tried to understand and encourage students to learn. Until now, I am not interested in the subject matter taught by that teacher” [S5 FY1]. S5 FY1’s unpleasant experience in her school years had stifled her interest in exploring certain topics, and strengthened the argument that teacher based learning is still practised in Malaysia.

Besides direct encouragement, the students intended to bridge the gap between teacher and students. As reviewed in this study, there is a significant power distance between teachers and students in Malaysia (Hofstede and Bond, 1984). The students agreed that this situation still happens, based on their experience in their school years and their observations during teaching practice at school. For example, one student undergoing her teaching practice expressed that senior in-service teachers gave more concentration to teaching and learning the subject matter. S3 AB, expressed that:

“Some of the senior teachers do not care about the students in lower ability classes. Yes, it is hard to teach the students in this class. I believe that I should take an interest in those students, being warm and courteous.”

Her counterpart, S10 AB, who initially did not have an interest in teaching, also felt overwhelmed when appreciated by the students during her teaching practise: “They (students) say that I am very kind! I realised that they are always happy when I enter the classroom”.

Similarly, students in their first year, including the career change students, also imagined that they would be teachers who could “cheer a student’s soul”, support their learning and care for their needs. They also mentioned the need to “help as many students as you can” [S5 DPLI2], and that “teachers should know students’ personal problems that hinder them from learning” [S5 FY2]. Equally important, students also agreed that teachers with a sense of humour had the ability to engage, activate and

connect with students in ways that allowed them to present memorable learning experiences. Consequently, the students also believed that a sense of humour would evoke laughter, smiles and excitement for the teachers. S5 SP expressed that:

“I believe that, as a teacher, I need to have a sense of humour to relieve tense classroom situations before they become disruptions, and build a strong relationship with my (prospective) students.”

Additionally, some of the students were tremendously aware that in certain circumstances, teachers have a personal attachment with students, including giving them support when they have problems related to their private life, which may affect their learning process. The students’ perceived that they needed to know their students and the lives their students live. Furthermore, the students also declared their intention to help their prospective students with learning beyond school hours. For example, one student stated that:

“Teachers’ efforts are not only applicable in school, but outside the school hours. I will allocate time if students wish to come to my house and ask about homework, or stay longer at school. It is for their own sake.” (S2 HD)

The overall response to the willingness to work beyond the prescribed task was tremendously positive. Another student, S1 DPLI1, a career change student, voiced that she literally foresaw teachers working for 24 hours a day. Explicitly, she believed that the title of teacher was not only applicable when they were at school, but it extended into the teacher’s personal life. This implied that teachers are always expected to help students, even though it is not directly related to the teaching and learning process. Furthermore, teachers need to promote ethical behaviour even beyond the school premises. This is consistent with the students’ perceptions that recognised teachers as a role model for the students. Thus, the second theme that resulted from the thematic analysis suggested that in order to help students, the students assumed that teachers have to prepare themselves for working beyond the designated working hours. Moreover, they also believed that teachers who are favourably disposed, and intend to help and support their students would be successful in attracting the students towards learning. In other words, the students had a desire to do their best for the sake of their

prospective students. This is consistent with the famous Malaysian quote related to teachers; “a good teacher is like a candle, it consumes itself to light the way for others.”

Thirdly, the findings from the thematic analysis also suggested that the students communicated their willingness to transcend traditional ideas in teaching to create meaningful new ideas, which help their prospective students’ learning. One of the efforts that appeared in the narrative was the act of being creative. For instance, one of the students shared her experience in her teaching practice:

“We have to be creative. I am not a creative person, but I will try my best. When I first came to this school for teaching training, I tried to be a fierce teacher because I wanted students to listen to me and learn. Yes, they were listening, but it seemed that they did not understand anything. Then I changed my approach [...].” [S2 SK]

S2 SK is among many of the students that responded to the need to be creative in the teaching and learning process. The majority of the students were aware that students at school have different learning abilities, thus teachers have to use their expertise and creativity to determine teaching and learning strategies. The strategies, according to the students, must stimulate their students to be active and interactive. The students also felt that they must act fast when they find that their students are not attracted to learn. The students’ expressions of their efforts were consistent with their vision of becoming an agent of social mobility. Another student in teaching training shared her efforts to encourage students to learn. S2 BK, majoring in mathematics education, and who had her teaching practice in an urban school, expressed that her students did not enjoy mathematics because they perceived that it is an unexciting and hard subject. S2 BK stated that:

“I think there is no fun in teaching mathematics. Mathematic deals with facts and figures. But applying mathematical games helped the students to understand complex equations and problem solving. I started to surf for mathematical games on the Internet, bought relevant books and thought about new games related to my topic.”

Similarly, one of the career change students who had been a substitute teacher before enrolling in the teacher preparation programme stated:

“I had the experience of teaching students in a lower academic ability class. It is a shame that some of them still cannot read, at the age of 13! It was extremely challenging to teach them a science subject. What I did was I put all the teaching material in diagrams. Yes, students very easily recognised the diagram and started considering the things charted in the diagram.” [S1 DPLI2]

Although some students expressed that being creative was an immense challenge for them, their body language and facial expressions when narrating their passion about their role and image as a teacher teaching demonstrated positive signs that they were prepared for the profession. They presented themselves as ‘blissful’, ‘radiant’ and ‘appealing’ when sharing their inspiration during the interview. S2 TP, who initially had no interest in teaching at the start of the teacher preparation programme, suggested that the desire to sacrifice guided her to work hard for the betterment of the students. She expressed:

“I am never satisfied if they (students) do not get what I am trying to get across. I keep thinking of a way that would be easy for them to understand.”

Furthermore, one of the students expressed that:

“It is very enjoyable being a teacher (trainee). It is not a routine job. You think about something new every day in order to help students develop themselves.” [S1 BJ]

The group discussion among the first year students also found that they were aware of the requirement to be creative when they become a teacher. Their awareness came from their experiences in their school years. Some of the students whispered that their unsatisfactory experiences with their former teachers’ teaching approach affected their motivation to learn. Hence, the majority of them were determined to find an approach that suited students’ learning and will deliver meaningful outcomes:

“I remember one of my teachers, being possibly the most uninteresting person I had met. Every day our learning activities were the same: reading a chapter, copying down notes from the blackboard.

[...] I just memorised information, took a test on it and then forget everything.” [S4 FY1]

The students quoted above eagerly narrated their plan to implement various strategies that would attract their prospective students to learn. It is apparent from the narrative that the students were concerned about how to support students with academic difficulties. They signalled that this group of students would learn better if the teaching approach was more towards the ‘teaching by doing’, rather than ‘teaching by telling’. The students’ inspiration to attract students to learn suggested that there was a sense of commitment among them in encouraging students’ learning. In particular, the students’ views on encouragement, creativity, and their willingness to help and motivate prospective students helped the students to construct their own knowledge. It is apparent from the findings that some of these students were inspired to promote or consistently promoted the element of constructive learning by encouraging the students’ self-learning; this is something that is formerly not well implemented in Malaysia. Besides that, encouragement in learning also helped the students to become motivated in learning, thus facilitating the social mobility process at school.

#### **5.2.1.4 Education for all**

The previous chapter discussed how the students realised that school institutions became a context that promoted social reproduction among the young generation. They believed that the current practice at school gave an advantage to students with high academic abilities. They also believed that some of the teachers became agents that promoted the process of social imbalance. This finding supported the statement that Malaysia continuously focuses on academic achievement to measure students’ success. One career change student stated that:

“Our philosophy of education<sup>27</sup> states the aim to produce students that are balanced in terms of intellectual, physical, emotion, spiritual and

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<sup>27</sup>Malaysian Philosophy of Education: Education in Malaysia is an on-going effort towards further developing the potential of individuals in a holistic and integrated manner, so as to produce individuals who are intellectually, spiritually, emotionally and physically balanced and harmonic, based on a firm belief in and devotion to God. Such an effort is designed to produce Malaysian citizens who are knowledgeable and competent, who possess high moral standards and who are responsible and capable of achieving high levels of personal well

social aspects. The philosophy is perfect for students' development, but the implementation (for me) is more towards the development of intellect alone. Teachers need to think about it.” (S1 DPLI1)

So far it seems from the findings discussed that most of the students were inspired to promote social mobility through their commitment to educate, being a second parent for students, and attracting them to learn. Above all, the findings also suggested that the students have a desire to be fair to their students, regardless of their academic achievement in school. They believed that by not discriminating against the student, the chances for them to succeed were promising:

“For me, if the students do not have the capability for academic achievement, or are experiencing learning difficulties, that is not the end of the world. There are a lot of opportunities for this group of students. I like the proverb – do not give a fish to our student. Teach them how to fish and they can use the skill forever. Motivate them and give them the appropriate skills.” (S4 SK)

S4 SK's counterparts shared an experience in her classroom during the teaching practice that she termed as a 'fresh start' for students to have an equal chance in their self development:

“Unfortunately, I got a class full of 'undesired students' in the school. They are not capable academically or respectful to teachers. Speechless, I tried exceptionally hard to be their friend, not just a teacher. I found that this group of students is extraordinarily creative. They have been left out because they did not get any 'A's in their subjects. School nowadays really focuses on academic aspects. We try to do something that will make the school proud of us. We did it! We made a mural, and won a competition in a recycling campaign. Aha, I realised that the students only need attention and motivation.” (S5 TIWA)

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being as well as being able to contribute to the harmony and betterment of the family, the society and the nation at large.

One student, S1 SK, who decided not to teach after graduation, also voiced her concern about the ways teachers approach students with lower academic achievements. She stressed that students must be treated equally, regardless of their academic level. Furthermore, she was also concerned about equality in education among multi-ethnic students at school. She is from an indigenous ethnic group from East Malaysia. Even if she decides not to teach, she expressed uncommonly strong convictions that fair treatment and education for students is mandatory, and not a choice. Moreover, one student majoring in special education expressed her concern regarding special needs students:

“[...] students with special needs are not able to pursue their studies to a higher level, so what they need is skills, so that they can survive in the future.” (S3 BJ)

S3 BJ, however, was extremely pessimistic about the opportunities for students with special needs to further their education at a higher level. The Person with Disability Act (2008) established that people with special needs cannot be excluded from formal and public education despite their disability. Although there are not many disabled students entering higher education, they increase every year<sup>28</sup> (“Ministry of Education Malaysia”, n.d-b). Thus, the support from the teacher during their school years is crucial to help them qualify for entry in higher education, which in turn will provide more opportunities for them in terms of cultivating their knowledge, developing social skills, and obtain higher academic qualification. S3 BJ’s perception of the ability of students with special needs has developed since she enrolled in the teacher preparation programme. Her experience in teaching practice made her more responsible to students with special needs. She mentioned that, “I love the students, and I hope that I will make a difference in their lives”.

### **5.2.1.5 Conclusion for the subsection**

This subsection described and discussed the students’ commitment towards their prospective students. There were four main themes that emerged from the students’ narratives on their perception and depiction of their attachment and responsibility as a prospective teacher. Firstly, the majority of the students expressed their commitment to

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<sup>28</sup>Total of disabled students enrolled in higher education institutions was 979 (2009), and 1115 (2010) (Ministry of Education Malaysia, n.d.-b)

comprehensively develop their prospective students. Secondly, they were willing to act as second parents while their students were at school. Thirdly, the students were also committed to applying a different approach in order to attract their prospective students to learn. Finally, the students expressed their commitment to be fair to students regardless of their academic ability and their ethnicity. The next subsection describes the students' sense of commitment towards society, with reference to parents, the local community and the nation.

### **5.2.2 Commitment towards society**

In addition to the students' expressions regarding their commitment towards their prospective students, several themes on the commitment towards society and the country also emerged from the thematic analysis. Generally, students believed that a teacher is a member of the community, thus in addition to the formal role prescribed for a teacher, their intended behaviour is also influenced by the needs of society. The students believed that teachers' actions and gestures are always observed by the society, consistent with the status of a role model that society has conferred on the teachers. First year students, S1 FY2 and S5 FY2 believed that "teachers have to be involved in the community activities in order to build a close relationship with the local community in the area which they work". According to the students, the advantage of having a close relationship between the community and teachers helps teachers to understand their students more. Some of them expressed how they felt entrusted as a teacher, for instance:

"Parents and society are the school's clients. They should have confidence in the services offered by the school. They invest their 'belief' that a teacher will educate their children. Yes, we will. Tell them we will." (S3 AB)

Her counterparts, who were in their first year, also had a positive feeling about their commitment towards society, particularly the parents: "Effective parent and teacher communication is essential for a teacher to be successful" [S2 HD].

Moreover, the students perceived that the teaching profession is unique because it directly contributes to the community as well as the nation. The students believed that

the greatest contribution of teachers towards society is being agents in delivering national values that are essential for living in a collective society. As mentioned in Subsection 3.2.3, Malaysia is a multiracial country and its education policy indicates that all residents of Malaysia have equal access to formal education provided by the state. Despite some students' desire to help their own ethnic group, as previously stated by S5 DPLI1 in Subsection 4.13, they believed that students should be treated equally in the classroom. This was consistent with the students' belief that education is for all, as described in the Subsection 5.1.1.4.

The narrative provided strong evidence of the students' inspiration regarding their role as agents in delivering national values; for example, "Without education, the process of nation-building cannot be achieved. Teachers have a crucial role" [S2 BJ]. S2 BJ was aware that teachers are necessary to build or structure the national identity of future generations. As a multiracial country, it is extremely important that formal education in Malaysia assists the process of developing and sustaining a united and integrated society, consistent with the national inspirations. This responsibility shows the role shouldered by the teachers. One of the students, S3 BJ, expressed her enthusiasm regarding this matter, with the statement, "emphasising values across the curriculum". According to S3 BJ, apart from educating the students towards being a successful person, teachers must promote and internalise the values of a caring attitude, ethnic tolerance, mutual respect and cooperation among the students, regardless of ethnicity and religion, in order to foster unity.

Other responses on this issue were expressed by S3 SP, who was also undergoing teaching practice at school. Contrary to S3 BJ, who believed that instructional medium in the classroom would help to promote a sense of unity among multiracial students, S3 SP considered active involvement in co-curricular activities as more significant to constructive nation building, as well as creating unity. Co-curricular activities<sup>29</sup> refers to any non-academic activities that gives students the opportunity to increase, consolidate, and practise skills and values learned in the classroom. S3 SP was actively involved in a physical development activity, the 'Girl Guides', during her teaching

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<sup>29</sup> It is compulsory for each student in Malaysian primary and secondary schools to be involved in at least one co-curricular activity offered by the school.

practice; she expressed that, “the activities emphasise teamwork and a sense of unity both within the school and local community”.

### **5.2.3 Commitment towards the profession**

The students expressed their loyalty and sense of belonging towards the profession itself. They expressed a responsibility to elevate the teaching profession. The majority of those interviewed suggested that they would sustain the status and reputation of the teaching profession as perceived by society. As reviewed in this study, society views teachers as role models and respected community leaders (Mogra, 2010). The overall response from the students showed that they understood the responsibility to sustain the privilege awarded to the teaching profession. The students expressed their awareness of the accountability towards the profession with a promise that they would carry out the responsibilities with full dedication. Representative statements included, “honest and trustworthy in carrying out the responsibilities” [S8 TP], “sacrifice for the sake of the students’ [S2 TP], and “proactive” [S9 SK].

Other responses included the students’ determination for self development, as they believed that they would be their students’ source of reference. The students described themselves as a source of reference, instead of an information provider or content expert, as normally described in the literature regarding the function of teachers in school (Merton, 1957). This implied that the students realised that the teacher is not a primary source of knowledge, thus rejecting the functionalist approach to learning reviewed in this study. One excerpt from student S1 SK clearly stated her beliefs on a teacher’s role:

“We must realise that the new generation of teachers are no longer perceived as ‘expert people’. In the new era of information technology, sometimes students know more than their teacher, regardless of the accuracy of the information. Teachers nowadays have to prepare themselves to be challenged by students. This is the beauty of learning, when there are arguments and both teachers and students have to use their critical thinking to build new knowledge and solve problems.”

This prominent point expressed by the students showed their understanding that commitment towards the profession is important to the teachers' subject knowledge. The majority of the students felt that teachers have well developed subject knowledge, which is used to inspire most students and contribute to their satisfactory progress. However, some of the students expressed their difficulty in managing and delivering the subject knowledge. One student majoring in mathematics expressed the challenges with regards to subject related knowledge:

“We are trained (during teacher training) in a higher level of mathematics calculation. It is difficult for me to teach a lower level of mathematics, though.” [S2 BK]

Although S1 SK's comment suggested that the teacher preparation students were preparing themselves towards self-learning, S2 BK was more inclined to suggest that teacher preparation programmes should prepare their trainees with sufficient subject knowledge, but that this should be restricted to the syllabus offered in school. In this case, it was suggested that some teacher preparation students were inclined to absorb only the relevant information during the teacher preparation programme, thus the functionalist approach of socialisation was more desirable. Treating this case in isolation, the majority of the students, however, communicated their commitment for long life learning and assumed that teachers' creativity, as described in the preceding subsection, could overcome the discrepancy related to subject knowledge.

The thematic analysis also revealed that a majority of the students understood that they were responsible for their own career development, which in turn would give them a competitive advantage in performing their role as a future teacher. The students mentioned the following among others: “sharpened the thinking skills” [S6 AB], “set up a learning community with experienced teachers” [S3 HD], and “proceed to second degree” [S6 AB]. The overall response to career development suggested that the students agreed that by setting up a learning community, their commitment to become a member of the teaching profession increased. One of the students mentioned that, “While in the teacher preparation institution, the environment set our minds that this is the place to develop a teacher community. The local community started to address us as

‘cikgu’, the institution dress code, all together have motivated me to think of teaching as a profession” [S1 HD].

Furthermore, some students rewarded the profession as something that gave them challenges, excitement, and personal rewards, and these positive values enhanced their commitment to become an outstanding teacher, thus contributing to the growth of the teaching profession:

“I am looking forward to coming to school every day [...] I am very anxious to wait for the next day, I appreciate students’ feedback and I am really happy when we can achieve the learning outcomes together.” [S6 TP]

S6 TP embarked on the teacher preparation programme without any interest in the profession, and her decision to apply for this programme was solely influenced by her friend. Towards the end of the teacher preparation programme, she felt an attachment to the profession and the main socialisation agents, which increased her motivation to teach, were the students during her teaching practice at school. Furthermore, her counterparts, who initially did not have an interest in teaching also gave highly compelling statements that motivated her to do better as a teacher; for example, “Do not concentrate too much on what we will get from this profession. It is better if we think of what we can contribute to it” [S3 SP].

Likewise, students who were inclined to teach for vocational reasons, also stated their sense of accountability; however, the element of teaching with ‘heart and soul’ was missing from this group of students. As stated in the previous subsection, S7 AB<sup>30</sup> has no interest in teaching, although she is in the final year of her teacher preparation programme. S7 AB stated that she tried to inculcate the interest to teach, however, she failed, as she does not have the ability to sacrifice her interest in other professions. As a note, these students typically enter the teacher preparation programme because of great parental influence. She, however, survived until her fourth year, as she had a lot of interest in her major subject matter, which was physical education. This finding

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<sup>30</sup> As described in Chapter Five, this student was offered a place in a teacher preparation programme by chance, as she mistakenly put an educational course on her electronic application form for admission to higher education institutions.

supports Arja Virta's (2002) study, which finds that the subject area precedes the teacher preparation students' decision to become a teacher, rather than an interest in the profession itself.

#### **5.2.4 Challenges for students' nurturing sense of commitment**

The thematic analysis also revealed the pattern of the students' commitment, and suggested that the most destructive challenge for some students to develop their commitment was a lack of support from the in-service teachers, particularly during the students' teaching practice. Society and practicing teachers have doubts about the interest of the new generation of teacher preparation students in the profession. This stigma continues up until this group of trainees had their teaching practice in school. One of the students in teaching training sadly shared her experience:

“When I want to do something different in the teaching approach, such as presenting a new type of teaching aid, they (senior teacher) said that I did that purposely to get an excellent grade in my teaching practice. Did they really know why I did that? I did that to assist students' learning.” [S5 BJ]

The other students also claimed the same situation whereby, “Senior teachers underestimate our ability to teach” [S4 SK].

From the interviews, it was found that the students felt distracted and demotivated by such destructive challenges. They described the challenges as ‘turning down’ their inspiration to develop themselves to become a teacher. Equally important, this stigma created a gap between trainee and practicing teachers at school. Thus, it can be concluded that the practicing teachers in school at some point may neglect the teacher preparation students' sense of commitment to become a teacher, thus rejecting the assumption that they are the main socialising agents for the students' professional socialisation. Indeed, one student mentioned that:

“Senior teachers add a layer of complexity to me to learn about teaching. Rather, their behaviours are more stressful than students' behaviour in the classroom.” [S3 BK]

### **5.2.5 Conclusion of the subsection**

Prior reviewed studies have noted the relationship between the motives to enter the teacher preparation programme with a commitment to teaching. Contrary with the findings from most of the past studies reviewed, this study found significant differences in the relationship of motive to embark on a teacher preparation programme and the students' commitment. Most of the studies found that the teacher preparation students' initial interest in teaching was positively related to a strong commitment towards teaching; however, this study found that the students' understanding of the needs of young people, their own experiences as a school student, and the image of their former teachers, all had a significant impact on their commitment to teach. These findings support the assumption that the development of a professional self-concept is constructed in the social sphere.

The findings also revealed that in terms of the level of attachment, the students in teaching practice developed more realistic views and opportunities to assume the role of teachers. However, some of them felt that they did not develop their subject knowledge well, even though they had nearly finished their teaching practice at school. In contrast, their counterparts in their first year appeared to have limited opportunities to assume the role of teachers. This was evident when only a few of the first year students, including their career change counterparts, responded to the discussion on commitment to the profession. Thus, it can be concluded that being a member of the teaching community, and the trajectory of holding a title of prospective teacher, had enhanced the students' commitment to the profession. This situation explained why the students undergoing teaching practice felt more attached to the profession, rather than their counterparts in their first year.

Furthermore, in response to the fourth research question, further analysis of the students' experiences found that they not only expressed their perception of teaching, but also the social identity that they had built and negotiated, based on their attributes, motives, beliefs, experiences and a favourable or unfavourable attitude towards the profession. In particular, students expressed their feelings about their abilities, and expectations as to what they would encounter as a future teacher. In the next subsection, I analyse the students anticipated social identity as teachers, or the professional identity

and how they tried to construct and negotiate their identity as a future teacher and a member of the teaching profession. This is consistent with the findings from the thematic analysis, which grouped together the students' attitudes to the teaching profession with themes on how they understood their relationship to teaching, how this relationship was constructed over time and context, and how they understood possibilities in the future. The students' abilities to understand future possibilities meant that they tried to negotiate and improvise aspects of their anticipated professional identity, as a future teacher (O'Connor, 2008).

The analysis of students' narratives suggested that the teacher preparation students' sense of professional identity was built on their commitment towards the teaching profession. The students explained that a strong sense of responsibility and attachment to the teaching profession was a prominent feature of expecting and demonstrating their commitment, and explained the construction of their professional identity. The next subsection describes how the students' sense of commitment, as indicated in this subsection, relate to five professional identities that the students tried to negotiate based on this commitment: 1) professional orientation, 2) personality, 3) self-efficacy, 4) autonomy, and 5) emotion. All these variables emerged from the data. These identities either strengthened or weakened the commitment to teach, thus they were immensely influential in shaping and reshaping the students' sense of becoming future teachers.

### **5.3 Sense of professional identity that fostered the students' commitment**

Further exploration in the thematic analysis revealed five key characteristics of professional identity that students tried to negotiate, based on their statements of commitment, as described in Subsection 5.1. They are professional orientation, personality, self-efficacy, autonomy and emotion.

#### **5.3.1 Professional orientation**

The first characteristic of professional identity that the students tried to negotiate was related to their professional orientation. Within this study, professional orientation refers to what teacher preparation expects of students' contributions and their role in the

teaching profession. Previous studies, such as those of Schepens, Aelterman and Van Keer (2007), and Lamote and Engels (2010), suggest that professional orientation is one of the products of professional socialisation process that informs the prospective teachers' sense of identity. At the entrance level of a teacher preparation programme, professional orientation describes individual commitment as to why the students chose the programme. The framework of work orientation drawn by Rose (2005), perfectly fits with the findings of this study. Rose classifies work orientation among university students into three categories: whether students aim to seek work for self-actualisation, to support everyday life, or for its economic return. It is apparent from the data of this study that the most prevailing commitment was related to the students' perception that the teacher preparation programme provided access to become a teacher and the privilege that offered teacher preparation graduates a guaranteed post as a teacher. Thus, the majority of the students inclined towards the second and third point of Rose's work orientation framework. As the students engaged in the teaching profession community by becoming teacher preparation students, they were more inclined to describe their commitment in terms of the role of teacher. The students' commitment, found in the preceding subsection, confirmed the classification of extended professional orientation, as Hoyle (1974) posits.

Subsection 5.2 discussed the findings that the majority of the students for this study perceived that their role was becoming more extended from what is traditionally posited by Hoyle (1969); a teacher's role is to place emphasis on moral training and instruction. There are prevailing characteristics that showed the students movement into the extended professional orientation. Some of the students communicated their willingness to work with their students after the school day. It suggested that the students viewed themselves as not only working to meet the teaching and learning needs in the classroom, but continuously working on the development of students' emotional and spiritual aspects. The students also perceived that their role had shifted from emphasising what and how to teach in the classroom, to a more extended role with greater autonomy. For instance, the students' inspiration to become second parents for their students was beyond a traditional teacher's core professional activities, which focused on immediate responsibilities and classroom concerns. Additionally, the students' inspiration to unite the students in a multiracial society was also seen as resulting from their extended professional orientation. Their inspiration to be involved

with the society also indicated that they were willing to support their extended professional orientation.

However, there were a few weaknesses that restricted the students from fully shifting to the extended professional orientation. The students were found to have limited abilities to acquire a wide range of knowledge and skills to cope with the new demand. This was evident when the students were in the process of developing themselves to become an active learner. Being in an education system that promotes rote learning for all ages, the definition of extended profession may not be the same as it is in Western research. Furthermore, the students also imagined that performing other roles that were not associated with students created a burden for themselves. The majority of the students from all three groups of respondents stated that they did not aspire to contribute to the administrative or decision making process in school. However, they were aware that teachers would have to do clerical and administrative work. The students expressed that “I do not want to spend less time with students because of being scheduled to do administrative work” [S3 TIWA].

### **5.3.2 Personality**

Secondly, students tried to relate their professional identity with the unique qualities that every teacher should have. As described in Subsection 5.2, the students continuously expressed characteristics such as liking children, having a sense of humour, caring, and being friendly. One interesting point observed from these findings was that the students seemed less inclined to separate their personal and professional self-concept as a teacher. It was apparent from the narratives that the majority of them were determined to bring the professional self-concept into their private lives. This was evident when the students consistently stated that teachers are role models for their students, and their perception that teachers work beyond the designated hours and school premise.

Furthermore, the students were also determined to change their personalities to suit the description of teachers, as perceived by society. This was clear when some of the students perceived that the teaching profession allowed them to change towards a more

positive image, as they would become a role model, as described in the preceding paragraph.

### **5.3.3 Self-efficacy**

The third characteristic that the students tried to negotiate was a sense of efficacy. The students' sense of commitment revealed the sigh of effort and persistence that students shared in their narratives. The students' efforts mostly came from their desire to help others, particularly the students and society. Tschannen-Moran and Hoy (2001) define teachers' self-efficacy as a "judgement of his or her capabilities to bring about desired outcomes of student engagement and learning, even among those students who may be difficult and unmotivated" (p. 783).

There were varieties of effort that the students expressed in their narratives. The main motivation for such efforts came from the students' desires to minimise social reproduction at school.

### **5.3.4 Autonomy**

The students also believed that, as a teacher, they would have a certain autonomy to work as a teacher. Autonomy refers to an individual feeling that they have control over an aspect of their life (Bogler and Somech, 2004). In the literature, autonomous people are defined as being intrinsically motivated, believing that they can control their decision making and take responsibility for their outcomes (Grolnick and Ryan, 1989; Niemiec and Ryan, 2009). The students expected that they would be given the autonomy to conduct their teaching and learning process. They communicated this desire by voicing the importance of creativity to assist students' learning. Autonomy is also associated with learning outcomes, in that support will result in better learning outcomes, and frustration when there are poorer learning outcomes (Niemiec and Ryan, 2009). Thus, the destructive challenge expressed by the students could be a barrier to becoming an autonomous teacher.

The students in the teaching practice believed that their teaching practice or practicum gave them great experience of teachers' autonomy and the school climate, which may

shape their identity. Hakanen, Bakker and Schaufeli (2006) suggest that a lack of significant job resources for prospective teachers, such as job control, access to information, supervisory support, innovative school climate and social climate to meet the job demand (e.g. disruptive pupil behaviour, work overload and poor physical work environment), may be associated with burnout, which may further decrease the students' sense of commitment.

### **5.3.5 Emotion**

The students consistently stated that the heart and soul of teaching were very important to every teacher candidate. This was evident when they consistently mentioned the nature of teachers' work (i.e. dealing with individual human beings), which may negotiate with emotions. Hargreaves (1998) suggests that teachers should smile even when one is not happy. Following this, Flores and Day (2006) suggest that emotion is crucial to identity formation and emphasise the need for emotional labour – a term introduced by Hochschild (1983), as cited in Abstract (1989). Hochschild argues that common expectations exist concerning the appropriate emotional reactions of individuals in a certain profession. The regulation of emotion in response to these expectations is carried out in two ways: surface acting (changing one's outward emotional expressions without attempting to feel the emotion displayed), and deep acting (changing one's outward emotional expressions while attempting to feel the emotion displayed).

One way that the students intended to show their emotions was through empathy. Empathy is the ability to mutually experience the thoughts and emotions of another person. Joireman et al. (2006) suggest that individuals who show empathy may exhibit altruism, civic virtue, conscientiousness and courtesy. A sense of empathy can be investigated through cognitive empathy, which relates to an individual's capacity to understand another person's perspective, rather than being exclusively self-oriented (Hogan, 1969). Thus, the students' abilities to be pleasant, charming, friendly, cheerful, sociable, sentimental, imaginative, discreet and tactful may describe their sense of empathy. In this sense, the students were trying to develop awareness towards their prospective students, their parents and local community.

### **5.3.6 Conclusion of the subsection**

This subsection discusses the courses of teacher preparation students in negotiating their professional identity. Generally the findings suggest that students responded to their attributes, motives, beliefs, and attitudes towards the profession by creating imagined professional identities. It is also apparent from the data that the students were building their identities based on negotiations between the social context and their agency. Social context, such as a society and prospective students, informed the student teachers as to what they expected from their teachers. Subsequently, student teachers' own attributes, motives, beliefs, and attitudes towards the profession responded to the needs of the society and students through their agency. It was apparent that the students aspired to have enough agency and opportunities to practice their own orientation, thus have more commitment and positive attitudes towards the profession. In particular, this subsection suggests that the students differentiated different professional identities, based on individual professional orientation, personality, self-efficacy, autonomy and emotion. These five factors became a reference when people were asked about "who are you as a teacher".

### **5.4 Social identity intersectionality**

As stated in Subsection 5.0, student teachers mentioned various social categories during the interview and relate their membership on those categories such as ethnic group and socio economic group with their desire to become a teacher (refer to Subsections 5.1.3, 5.1.4, 5.2.1). This implies that the student teachers have multiple social identity dimensions, and it intersects when the students try to self-categorise themselves as members of the teaching profession. Much research on social identity intersectionality involves the gender and ethnic (e.g. Crenshaw, 1991; Yuval-Davis, 2006); however, the thematic analysis of this study suggests the unexpected results where student teachers expressed a more positive attitude towards the teaching profession when both categories (profession and ethnic or socio economic group) become salient. It is apparent from the data that student teachers (i.e. S7 TP, S4 DPLI1, S5 DPLI1, S6 DPLI2) have more

desire and enthusiasm to educate the young generation when they perceive that the young generation is a member of the social category that they belong to.

## **5.5 Conclusion of chapter**

As a conclusion, this chapter provides the answer to the fourth research question: How social factors affect the development, or decline of students' attitudes towards teaching during the commencement of the teacher education programme? This chapter describes the self-categorisation process among student teachers and it is apparent from the data that students respond to the values and norms of the profession in order to develop their identity as future teachers. Significant others exist as influencers, however, they become a member and not as somebody that students must conform to. Furthermore, as discussed in the two major subsections in this chapter, the students' narrations on their evaluation of the teaching profession explicitly explained that they are negotiating their professional identity as a teacher.

Based on their attributes, motives, beliefs, experiences, and a favourable or unfavourable attitude towards the profession, the students began to explore the meaning of their self and their aspirations of the profession. It was suggested from the thematic analysis that students placed their commitment as the basis for negotiating their sense of professional identity. There were five categories of anticipated professional identity found from the students' narratives. The characteristics were related to students' professional orientation, personality, self-efficacy, autonomy, and emotion.

Additionally, this chapter implicitly revealed that the attitude towards the teaching profession varied among the teacher preparation students at their entrance level to the teacher preparation programme. However, when they became a member of the teaching community by engaging in the teacher preparation programme, the majority of the students moved into a more positive attitude towards the profession. Thus, it can be suggested that being a member of the teacher preparation community provided more accessibility towards the nature of the teaching profession, thus bringing a positive impact on the students' evaluation of teaching.

Finally, the discussion in this chapter, as an extension from the previous chapter, also provided an answer for the last research question. The students, through their narratives, consistently suggested that they tried to engage in the socialisation process based on their professional expectations. The students' awareness of the education system, as promoting social reproduction, increased their determination to help the students by becoming agents of social mobility. Hence, the main socialisation agent for the majority of the students in this study was their own students, or their prospective students.

This chapter also concludes that student teachers not only acquire their professional identity through the socialization process, but the multiple social categories also have an influence on their identity development.

## CHAPTER SIX

### CONCLUSION

#### 6.0 Summarising the findings

This study has analysed students' professional identity development at higher education institutions, and the significance of group membership in determining the students' attitude and behaviour towards their intended profession. In particular, this study highlights the socialisation process in higher education which helps teacher education students define themselves as future teachers, and how the definition influences the decision to remain in the profession after graduation. The first half of this concluding chapter reflects the key findings of the study and outlines how it contributes to the knowledge about the identity development process among teacher education students during the commencement of the teacher preparation programme. In the second half of the chapter, I clarify the theoretical and practical implication of this study, including the limitation and make suggestions for future research that would be built on this study. This chapter concludes with a personal reflection on the value added obtained during the process of completing the study.

Retaining teacher education students in the teacher education programme until graduation, motivate them to become teachers, and uphold their commitment towards teaching have become crucial to teacher educators particularly when the entrance to the teacher education programme is restricted and controlled by the government. As higher education becomes a platform for students to cultivate the qualities of themselves, this study aims to identify the student teacher's self-definition on teaching. This aim resulted from consistent evidence from research on higher education; students' self-definition about specific social categories and social group has been shown to strongly influence attitude and behaviour relevant to their self-definition (Bennet, Rowly, Dunbart-Hall, Hitchcock & Blom, 2016; Hermann, Bager-Elsborg and McCune, 2016; Platow, Masica & Jones, 2016; Maxwell-Stuart & Huisman, 2018; Smyth, Mavor & Platow, 2018). Thus, it is crucial to identify how students define themselves as teachers,

particularly nearing to professional practice as this would explain their level of engagement with the teaching profession.

This study has given an account of the use of the social identity approach to acquire student's self-definition of teaching. This approach provides a useful lens to explain how teacher education students give their self-definition as a member of a group that they belong, together with their sense of belonging to the group. Students become attached to the group if they feel that their group is a source of pride and self-esteem. This includes the norms and values of teaching that might differentiate teaching from other professions. This approach yields good results in data as through the narratives, the students try to negotiate a positive social identity of teaching. Their commitments towards teaching are presented well in the data. This is an important finding in the understanding of an underrepresented group in the social structure. As written in Subsection 1.4, teaching is never regarded as a full-fledged profession, and students with a positive social identity try to negotiate as emerged from the data, and are seen as the motivation and commitment of the group members to upgrade their group status. This study also furthers the understanding of professional socialisation among higher education students in Malaysia, which assume that they have undergone the functionalist approach of socialisation, thus limiting the opportunity for students to interact with the environment in order to construct their own identity.

The findings of this study suggest that teacher education students generally perceive themselves as part of the teaching professional once they enrol in the teacher education programme. This perception arises based on the teacher recruitment practice in which all teacher education students are guaranteed a post as a teacher after graduation, except for the second group consisting of first year students who are excluded from this privilege. Furthermore, the social identity approach helps to explore the development of teacher education students' identity towards the teaching profession. This approach provides answers on how teacher education students discriminate themselves in a teaching group, and how they define themselves as a future member of the profession. This study has found that the majority of teacher education students are influenced by the desire to teach when they decided to apply for a teacher education programme although their genuine interest for teaching varies. The early categorisation process to become a member of the teaching profession comes from the students' perception that

their attributes fit with the characteristics needed in the teaching profession, influence from significant others such as parents, young people and former teachers, and solely because of vocational reasons. The findings also suggest that students' initial self-definition on teaching are influenced by their experiences as a school pupil, and not based on teachers' characteristics as outlined in formal documents by Ministry of Education such as Malaysia Teachers' Standard document.

It was shown from the data that at the beginning of the journey to become a teacher, more than half of the teacher education students interviewed expressed that their genuine reason to apply for a teacher education programme was not related to the interest of teaching, rather they were attracted to the privilege offered to graduate from this academic programme. These findings corroborate with previous results (Mohd Dahan and Ghazali, 2007; Harun, 2006; Mohd Ilias, 2008) on prospective teachers' disinterest and less commitment on teaching. The rest of the teacher education students either do not have the decision whether to teach or not, or do not plan to teach as their enrolment in this programme was not by their own choice.

Furthermore, the students' narrative confirmed that the self-categorisation process becomes more apparent when the teacher education students socialise in a teacher preparation programme. The students, through their beliefs and perception of the teaching profession, are aware that they are now part of the teaching group and try to negotiate their social identity based on their subjective experiences, before and during the teacher preparation programme. The perception that they will become a teacher after graduating and expectations from the society of the role and behaviour of teachers become significant factors that influence the students' identification in teaching.

What is surprising from the data is the relevance of school pupils as a socialisation agent. Teacher education students with teaching experience prior to their enrolment in the teacher education programme, and those who underwent the teaching practise describe a realistic influence of school pupils on their self-definition as a teacher. Their counterparts, which in the first year of the teacher education programme are not left to imagine the influence of their prospective school pupils in the construction of their self-definition towards teaching. A majority of the teacher education students expressed their concern on social reproduction emerging from the national educational system.

Their initiative to cease the practice that promotes social reproduction conveyed their commitment to become an agent of social mobility in school.

The result of the analysis showed that teacher education students interact with their environment to construct self-definition as a teacher, but at the same time have preserved the structural expectation imposed to the teaching profession. Thus, the socialisation process rejects the assumption that their socialisation process is solely determined by the functionalist approach. On the other hand, teacher education students bring their agency into their socialisation process to construct their identity. This is consistent with S. Bolster (1983) who claimed that individuals “must be considered both as a product and creator of which they live” (p. 303). Therefore, it seems that the findings also answer the question from the society whether the teacher is self-made or is born. The former explains the identity towards the teaching profession is subject to change with active participants from the teacher education students.

One of the more significant findings that emerged from this study is the five main characteristics of professional identity which teacher education students try to negotiate. Professional orientation, personality, self-efficacy, autonomy and emotion emerged from the students’ sense of commitment derived from their narratives. Teacher education students give a different impression regarding these characteristics, as a result of their subjective experience before and during the teacher education programme. These characteristics suggest that the teacher education students’ negotiation take into account their private lives, professional lives, as well as their relationship with the society. Thus, it has been recognised that the teacher education students’ negotiation on the professional identity as a future teacher also intersects with other social identities, such as religion and ethnic group.

Returning to the research questions posed in Chapter One, it is now possible to state that 1) the teacher education students’ decision to teach is influenced mostly by social factors such as significant others, former life experiences and vocational reasons; 2) these motives bring the students to imagine their intended behaviour of becoming a member of the teaching profession; 3) a majority of the teacher education students possess a more positive social identity towards teaching. The teacher education students’ commitment towards teaching is driven mainly by a sense of responsibility

towards the school pupils. Additionally, other parties such as the society and a sense of responsibility towards the country also influence the students' self-definition on teaching; and 4) the teacher education students develop their professional identity mostly from their understanding of the function of the teaching profession, not because of the pressure to comply with other people. Furthermore, a positive social identity becomes the foundation for the teacher education students to express their sense of commitment towards the profession, and stimulate negotiation among the students on whom they want to be as a teacher. It is apparent from the findings that the teacher education students respond to the structural characteristics determined by the society, and nurtured by their self-agency.

The findings from this study suggest that generally there are differences between the socialisation process for teacher education students and their counterparts majoring in a different field at higher education institutions as reviewed in this study. The most significant aspect is the role and influence of prospective clients, which are the school pupils as an important source of motivation to remain in the teacher education programme. Teacher education students perceive that the school pupils influence their commitment towards the profession, whereas other students described that more attention has to be given towards the nature of the job as a way to determine a positive social identity in their chosen profession. This finding is not expected; however, this provides the indicators that the students are motivated to upgrade the social status of teaching. So far, the students believe that social status is determined by the function of teaching; however, as stated in Chapter One, teachers' knowledge and autonomy have to be given special attention in order to enable teaching as an established profession.

## **6.1 Theoretical implication**

It is the contention for the researcher that some aspects of the present study be regarded as contributory to new knowledge. The current findings add to the growing body of literature on the professional identity formation, social identity approach and interpretive approach.

### **6.1.1 Professional identity formation and development**

As discussed in Subsection 1.4, the theoretical framework underpinning the research on professional identity formation and development among higher education students mostly focuses on learning and teaching about professional work. Besides learning and teaching approaches, a number of studies applied different perspectives such as Lave and Wenger's work on community of practice (Jackson, 2016), reflective practice (Simmons & Dicks, 2018) and self-determination theory (Mylrea, Sen Gupta & Glass, 2017). These approaches comprehensively explain how higher education students get to know their anticipated profession, particularly the work characteristics, roles and attributes.

However, as some professions are tightly controlled in terms of the numbers admitted, there is a need to identify students' professional identity development beyond the work preparations. Importantly, it is crucial to inspire students to remain in their intended profession and have a positive orientation with their future works and responsibilities. It is predicted that individuals will remain in the profession if they believe that the profession itself is an important source of pride and self-esteem. The social identity approach underlines the assumption that individuals are just not proud of themselves as members of a group, rather they try to act accordingly to maintain the group's positive social identity, and they are also inclined to seek positive values and norms that will differentiate their group from others. Thus, applying the social identity approach on a professional identity study gives input on how the profession itself become important to students. This approach explains what constitutes the profession, the motivation of the members of the profession, and their commitment to achieve, maintain, or enhance the positive social identity of the profession.

### **6.1.2 Social Identity Approach**

In previous years, Social Identity Approach is used in different context to investigate group processes and intergroup relations such as in socio-political conflict (Colvin, Witt and Lacey, 2015), consumer brand identification (Rather, 2018), cultural identity (Chung, Jetten, Cruwys and Haslam, 2017), leadership development (Haslam, et. al., 2017) and firm's social performance (Nason, Bacq and Gras, 2018). It has been

suggested by scholars in group processes and intergroup relations to further investigate group-based emotions, particularly on how people represent emotions of their own groups (Abrams and Hogg, 2017; Mackie and Smith, 2018). Thus, current study measured group-based emotions on one occupational group. Firstly, Social Identity Approach provides a practical framework to figure out the characteristics of one occupational group that becomes a sense of pride and self-esteem of its members. This study signalled that the intended occupational group becomes the students' referent group, and may explain why they are attached to the group even though they have not yet become a member of the profession. The findings give a better understanding on the result of the minimal group studies by Tajfel (1974) that proposed perceived membership in one group regardless of the status, which will result in a distinct behaviour among the group members.

Secondly, it has been revealed the significance of the Social Identity Approach in determining the motivation factors to remain in what is called the member of the underrepresented groups in a social structure. As stated in Subsection 1.4, teaching is never regarded as a full-fledged profession, and this status might affect the students' pride and self-esteem of becoming a member of such a group. However, the findings of this study signalled that students are able to define their group's norms and values which clearly differentiate teaching from other professions. In other words, the findings clearly showed the strategies underlined in the Social Identity Approach have been fully utilised by students to show their self-definition of teaching. The students that appreciate the group norms and values used the social creativity strategy to upgrade the position of the group in the social structure by narrating the ultimate contribution that they can offer to the society by becoming a teacher. The students who were undecided seemed to search for new professions that suited their professional aspirations, thus indicating that the social mobility strategy works for individuals who view other professions which have more distinctiveness norms and values.

Additionally, this approach explains how the students identify their own group aspirations, mostly from their experiences as school pupils. The findings of this study also revealed how the assumption underlined in the social identity approach helps to identify factors that increase the group members' self-esteem and pride of an underrepresented group. The findings showed that the values and norms are not

necessarily gathered from formal rules, procedures and guidelines, but it may come from other sources such as the environment and significant others. Thus, future research aiming to identify the strength of underrepresented groups may apply the social identity approach as this approach helps to give the answer for what makes people attached to one particular group.

Thirdly, it has been revealed that there are different social identities interwoven in the formation of the teacher education students' identity towards the teaching profession. The findings of this study are able to present the multiple realities when the students narrated the underlying norms and values of the teaching profession which originated from cultural and religious beliefs. The study has gone some way towards enhancing the understanding that social identity related to the professional, cultural and religious groups intersect to strengthen the construction of professional identity among future teachers in a Malaysian context. This may add to the growing body of literature on social identity intersectionality as most of the studies thus far research the experiences of marginalised individuals of groups such as race, social class and gender (Carrim & Nkomo, 2016; Rogers, Scott and Way, 2015; Kim & Hong, 2019).

### **6.1.3 Interpretive approach**

Additionally, this study devised a methodology of using the interpretive approach in researching the professional identity development in higher education. The interpretive approach is steadily gaining momentum as it may explain in depth the students' socialisation process, not limited to the predetermined factors offered by a positivist approach. This predominant quantitative approach has a tendency to limit the understanding on how teacher education students acquire their identity, and try to maintain or achieve a positive social identity. It has been revealed from the findings that the students narrative on teaching is based on their experiences. As the experiences may vary from one person to another, the interpretive approach helps to explain the undiscovered reality of the students' professional identity formation and development.

## 6.2 Practical implication

This study has gone somewhere towards enhancing the understanding of professional identity development among teacher education students in higher education. Generally, the findings suggest that it is possible for higher education administrator and academics to support and enhance students' professional identity development. The study also provides a glimpse on how perceived membership in one occupational group explains the student's intended behaviour. In particular, the findings of this study have a number of important implications for future practises; firstly, it has been shown that students value teaching from different perspectives. To recap, the findings clearly revealed that there were three distinctive groups of students commencing in the teacher education programme; students who want to teach, students who are undecided, and students who do not want to teach. Regardless of the group, students teachers need specific support and professional development that goes beyond learning and teaching the professional roles. It becomes a crucial task for higher education administrators and teacher educators to understand the variability of students and treat them accordingly.

Obviously, there will be a need to address different approaches to each group of students in order to achieve, enhance or maintain their positive social identity. As the teacher education programme aims to retain students in the profession, and produce teachers with a positive orientation towards teaching, the teaching and learning on professional work and attributes are not sufficient to develop their positive social identity. Teacher educators have to focus on the values and norms of teaching that will foster the students' commitment and provide a conducive environment for them to assimilate the teaching values and norms. In addition, teacher education programme needs to create cultures where students feel welcome to the group consists of future teachers. Positive cultures have strong effects on students' attraction and retention, and conducive to develop students' commitment (Kontoghiorghes, 2016).

Secondly, the findings suggested that the students, regardless of the group have a limited definition on what constitutes teaching. To clarify, there are more positive values and norms required for teachers and subsequently makes teaching different from other professions. This is consistent with the literature reviewed on the professionalism that highlighted the needs to enhance the teacher's knowledge related to their

profession. This includes the pedagogy of teaching, managing school pupil's emotions, classroom management and assessments (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2012). Thus, it becomes a responsibility for teacher educators to enhance the student's knowledge on professional dispositions and roles as documented by the Ministry of Education. Additionally, the higher education administrators should help in cultivating students' professional identity by encouraging them to engage in multiple communities within higher education in a way to make students make sense of their future profession. This includes professional associations, students' societies and career services (Jackson, 2016).

Thirdly, this study has suggested that a trait-oriented approach used by prior studies as a way to predict a positive social identity among students in higher education institutions is no longer successful to mould students in a particular way; however, this must be accompanied by an approach that highlights the lived experiences of students. In other words, the professional socialisation not only depends on the attributes of the students, but their interaction with the environment and perception on group distinctiveness will make a difference on how they evaluate their future profession. This is consistent with the fact that students enter higher education institutions with different motives and abilities, thus this makes a difference in self-definition towards the profession and how they negotiated their future professional identity. Repeatedly, these findings provide crucial input for teacher preparation course design and delivery. Specifically, the input from the findings can be used to develop relevant non-academic programmes for teacher education students as this effort will help them to have more interactions with significant others and the environment (Jackson, 2016). The structure of the teacher education programme will not be revisited as recent research reveals that the current university-based course is aligned with real classroom practices (Goh, Canrinus & Wong, 2019).

Course delivery will focus more on deep and active learning, as research suggests that deep learning has a strong connection with the students' achievement and understanding about the subject. The literature in learning indicates a clear relationship between the characteristics of individual learner social self-concept with the learning approach and positive learning outcomes (Biggs, Kember & Leung, 2001; Bunce et al., 2017). In particular, a deep learning approach associated with students' intentions to

understand and to engage appropriately in meaningful learning, ‘focusing on the main theme and principles, and using strategies that are appropriate for creating such meaning’ (Asikainen and Giibels, 2017, p.209). Additionally, students should be encouraged to attend lectures regularly, read related materials, boost an effort to study, spend a lot of time studying, enjoy learning and being at the university to learn about the profession (Bunce et al., 2017). These efforts are predicted to attract the undecided group to re-think of their existence in the teacher education programme and nurture their interest and sense of belonging towards teaching. Nonetheless, this will help to re-attract the third group who decide to leave to make a comeback.

Moreover, the findings also support the beliefs in students’ involvement in the interpretive approach of socialisation. The beliefs that teachers have a close relationship with the young generation imply that teachers are required to play a role to their utmost capabilities. There is evidence from this study which suggest that student’s motivation to learn is impacted from their teacher’s attitude in the classroom [for example, refer Subsection 5.2.1: S5 FY1 and S4 FY1]. Thus, it is crucial for teacher educators to become a mentor to teacher education students and regularly communicate the importance of teaching profession in society in order to motivate students to engage with the profession. Mentoring is widely used in higher education particularly to nurture students’ identity and enhance academic performance (Hagler, 2018; Ligadu, 2012). Referring to this study, mentoring for teacher education students will help to minimise the negative consequences when the students’ views and beliefs on teaching are confronted or even challenged during their commencement in the teacher education programme, resulting in students who either have to find their own way to assimilate the new construct with their existing beliefs and cultural models, or struggle to sustain their beliefs they brought along.

To summarise, the present study confirms that students' identity is subject to change, depending on the socialisation process and the agents perceived as important to the teacher education students. Thus, a positive yet challenging environment is needed in order to promote a positive social identity, which in this context refers to the teachers’ professional identity. With the understanding of the group values and norms that will motivate the teacher education students to acquire a positive social identity, teacher educators and the teacher training institution have to fully utilise their expertise and

facilities, as well as re-design the teaching and learning approach in higher education towards a deeper learning approach. The students need to be encouraged to get involved in different communities within higher education and become an active learner, as the professional identity should have to be learnt both in and outside the classroom.

### **6.3 Limitation of the study**

The study has a number of limitations. To begin with, the research paradigm and approach. Being a qualitative research study, the small sample size of teacher education students (80 participants) from one of the largest teacher education institution may imply that the results cannot be readily generalised, although they are likely to have wider relevance and applicability especially in other teacher preparation institutions and other Muslim majority countries.

Furthermore, there is the intervention of admission tools described in this study. One of the tools, MEdSI, is used to raise the admission requirements and increase the value of the teaching profession for many undecided higher education applicants. This is the limitation for this study to go further on the test; however, it is worth to note the two consequences of the MEdSI test in this study. Firstly, when referred to the genuine reason to embark on the teacher education programme as expressed by the participants, one could relate to the reliability and validity of the test. The participants' genuine interests that do not favour the teaching profession at the time they decide to apply for the teacher preparation programme have an effect on the effectiveness of the test for admission purposes. Looking back at the participants' narratives, it is apparent that not all participants are aware that they have the positive qualities measured by the test. Although this issue is not the main concern of the study, the effectiveness of the test should be attended to; therefore, it becomes a limitation of this study.

Secondly, students might possess the minimum requirement to become a teacher in terms of personality, career interest, integrity value and emotional intelligence, yet they do not realise these qualities in themselves. It is clearly stated by the undecided participants that they do not have a clear direction of what they want to be, thus influences from significant others are very important. From the narrative, the

participants with extrinsic motives and external influences have moved towards becoming more passionate towards the teaching profession. Thus, it can be concluded that the participants who applied for the teacher education programme, consciously and unconsciously have qualities to be a teacher, and their behaviour might change according to the norms and values of the profession. Furthermore, the students who tend to agree with their parents denote that the structuralism factor is dominant in the Malaysian society. Participants also can be said as having less ability in career decision making because all the decisions are influenced by external factors, and not embedded in themselves.

#### **6.4 Future studies**

This study has identified the importance of societal factors, particularly young people at school as the main socialising agent who influences the teacher education student's motivation on teaching, and the development of their sense of professional identity, thus rejecting the assumption that professional socialisation in Malaysia's higher education is determined solely by profession. However, considerably more work will need to be done to determine the relationship between the admission tools and identity, as well as their professional identity negotiation during their commencement in the teacher education programme.

A number of possible future studies using the same paradigm and framework are apparent. It would be interesting to access the breadth and depth of insight into, and appreciation of the professional socialisation process of students from different academic specialisations in higher education institutions in Malaysia. Although the teacher education programme is dominated by Malay students, other academic programmes offered in higher education institutions have multiracial students, including the Chinese, Indians and other ethnics in Malaysia. Future research might explore the development of professional identity among the students undergoing different academic specialisation in order to identify whether they respond to the interaction with the environment, or rigidly place them in a position that the teacher or academic staff are the most influential socialising agents.

Further explorations are needed to identify whether there are intersections of different social identities such as gender and ethnic, having an impact on the socialisation process. This result will provide a perspective on the professional socialisation approach among higher education students in Malaysia, and their attitude towards their chosen profession. It is noteworthy that the result will enhance the landscape of the development of professional identity among higher education students particularly in Malaysia. In addition, the exploration on new academic programmes offered in Malaysia's higher education such as entrepreneurship, and more specialised academic programmes such as human resource management and quality management will contribute to the new knowledge of the higher education evaluation on the new programme, and their construction of professional identity related to their future careers in the related field.

As a concluding remark, I appreciate my experience of using the interpretive paradigm of research in conducting this study. By adopting this paradigm, I am able to obtain rich and in-depth data, thus providing the explanation of the subject being studied. However, future studies could fruitfully explore students' professional identity development further by using both quantitative and qualitative approach to allow both exploration and statistical analysis in the same study, and gather more comprehensive data.

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