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Perceptions and Experiences of Teacher Professionalism Among Prospective Teachers in Trinidad and Tobago

Cheryl Maggie Bowrin
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Walden University

2024

Abstract

Perceptions and Experiences of Teacher Professionalism Among Prospective Teachers in

Trinidad and Tobago

by

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MPhil, Walden University

MEd, The University of the West Indies, St. Augustine

BA, The University of the West Indies, St. Augustine

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Assessment, Evaluation, and Accountability

Walden University

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Abstract

The debate about the nature and role of teacher professionalism in teacher education contexts has a long history but little research has been conducted in small island states of the Caribbean, especially focused on the understanding of prospective teachers. Therefore, this interpretive descriptive study engaged 16 prospective teachers from a teacher preparation program in Trinidad and Tobago to explore their perceptions and experiences about conceptualizing and operationalizing the construct of teacher professionalism. The conceptual framework was based on Hargreaves' ages of professionalism theory and Dweck's mindset theory. The three main research questions that guided the study focused on prospective teachers' perceptions of themselves as emerging teacher professionals, prospective teachers' descriptions of the experiences that contribute to the development of their ideas on teacher professionalism, and prospective teachers' operationalization of the construct of teacher professionalism. Data collection tools included 16 individual participant diaries and semi structured interviews. Thematic coding was employed for data analysis. The key findings of the study were that prospective teachers have clear but incomplete views on the nature and characteristics of teacher professionalism, which they have gained from personal experiences, not from the teacher training process. Supporting findings confirmed the growth mindset of the prospective teacher participants and their focus on unprofessional behaviors when describing teacher professionalism. The findings have potential implications for positive social change through improvements to teacher training practices that include the understanding of informally learned views of teacher professionalism.

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Dedication

The completion of this work was a massive task and a major achievement in my life. I dedicate this work to people who cared about my well-being during the process, who constantly questioned me to find out when I was finishing and what step I was at in the process, and to others who reprimanded me because they felt I could do it but was moving slowly. All the people who performed in one or more of these ways know who they are, and I love and respect you and will forever be grateful for your support.

I must thank my parents, Jacquelin Blondell and Christopher Bowrin, first. I know that they knew this was possible. Thanks! I am thankful to Devaughn Williams for being a motivator (Mammy, when will you be finishing?), Esmon Williams (for his support, especially making the completion of this thesis a reality at the end of the process when I felt to drop out and leave it alone), Kaylee Williams for being the sweet encouragement that she is, Marilyn Okaiteye (Did you do any Walden work today?), Professor Jerome De Lisle (for the constant questions, materials, and undercover encouragement; I know that you always meant good, sir), Roslyn Alexander-Benjamin, Obadiah Asher (I want a PhD friend, girl, ah never had a PhD friend yet), Gail, Sharon, Joann, Gerard, Renee, Shauna, Pamela, Sherma, Cheryl Ann, and Noel (for listening to all my complaints and doubts for a long time), Ulric Persad (you finish Chapter 4 yet?), and Charmaine Bowrin-Cottle (a faithful sister and supporter).

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I agree with the statement “it’s not about how long it took to win—it’s just about winning,” and I think that I have come to the end. I did not quit, I won. I encourage everyone I know who is pursuing goals to complete. Don’t quit. It always seems impossible until it’s done (Mandela, 2001). To be honest, I still cannot believe it, (pinching myself still) but that is another story. Thanks!

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Introduction

The definition and description of *teacher professionalism* remains an issue in teaching and learning contexts. The term is used in several ways when educators discuss topics related to teacher professionalism, and the lack of clarity might be linked to the lack of success in attempts to improve educational quality (Johnston, 2015). The contested concept of teacher professionalism concerning its main aspects and characteristics (see e.g., Mausethagen & Granlund, 2012; Morris, 2008) has been in the literature for an extended period of time. According to the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD, 2016), for more than 20 years, personnel from education systems of numerous countries and economies have been trying to define teacher professionalism and variation continues. This lack of clarity about the nature of teacher professionalism and the understandings people in the teaching profession have of it continue to hold the attention of educators, planners, and policy makers regionally and internationally, including within the education system of Trinidad and Tobago (Deosaran, 2016; OECD, 2016).

This study was an attempt to build knowledge and contribute to an understanding of the experiences of prospective teachers in developing perceptions of teacher professionalism in Trinidad and Tobago. The focus of the study was on understanding how prospective teachers develop their perceptions of what it means to be a professional teacher and how they express their understanding of teacher professionalism within the teacher education sector of Trinidad and Tobago. Prospective teachers were part of the

study, and data collected from them were analyzed within the characteristics of fixed or growth mindset (Dweck, 2006). The participating prospective teachers are students training to be teachers in a bachelor of education program, and participants were at different stages of degree completion (students from Year I to IV in the program of studies). During their educational experience, they are expected to develop and hold perceptions of teacher professionalism that, upon completing their education and moving into practice within the school systems of the country, will impact their approaches to teaching and learning and, ultimately, the quality of education perpetuated.

These perceptions and experiences are part of new teachers' educational engagement from early in the teacher development process. This study will help to increase awareness and create consciousness of the need to be professional in activities as emerging new teachers (Saleem & Zamir, 2016). The focus will also help to establish participants' beliefs, which play a significant part in teachers' work (Biesta et al., 2015). Hilton et al. (2013) suggested that teachers are required to be proactive and professionals based on the changing nature of their work so that they can respond to the uncertainty, ambiguity, and increasing complexity of their jobs. To be able to meet the requirements, Hilton et al. (2013) indicated that teachers should be exposed to the development of their individual professionalism. This development of teacher professionalism has the potential to improve teacher quality and can be facilitated by first understanding the perceptions and experiences of teacher professionalism students have in teacher training.

Darling-Hammond (2013) commented on the need to invest in teacher quality as a critical aspect of educational reform. The study of prospective teachers in training and

their views of teacher professionalism and the experiences that reflect professionalism have the potential to initiate social change in education as well. Policy makers, developers of curricula in teacher training institutions, and educational planners in general can use the information from this study to better understand the needs of prospective teachers and allow administrators to be able to offer training processes that achieve the planned outcomes for the education system.

The need to prepare prospective teachers to be teacher professionals has been addressed internationally (Creasy, 2015; Osmanoglu et al., 2015). Creasy suggested that a clear definition of teacher professionalism is not evident within teacher education programs and, generally, it is assumed that prospective teachers will just become professionals. Further, Osmanoglu et al. (2015) noted that teacher training does not prepare prospective teachers for the realities of professional work. Tan and Ng (2012) discussed research in professionalism that focused on varying issues like strengthening teacher supply and demand and teacher training programs but emphasized the need to explore teachers' perceptions of the concept of teacher professionalism. Especially important are the understandings of teacher professionalism as expressed and internalized by teachers in training (prospective teachers) as this population will have an impact on the quality of the teaching workforce (Guerriero, 2014). Information and research that can form the basis of decision making is unavailable. The major challenge is that the concept has not been clarified, and the main discussions available are not relevant to educational contexts in the Caribbean, especially in Trinidad and Tobago.

The information gained from the current study has the potential to facilitate improvement within the educational and social context of Trinidad and Tobago. The findings will help policy makers understand basic views of prospective teachers and how engagement in professional training relates to these emerging views. Further, the findings of the study could be incorporated into future decision making so that meaningful experiences that facilitate the understanding, observation, and encouragement of professional behavior in support of quality teaching can be provided to prospective teachers. Clarification of the issues identified within this study also have the potential to facilitate the professional development of teacher educators. Teacher educators need to understand and provide suitable models of teacher professionalism for learners. Education is one of the key contributors to social change, and teacher educators have been identified in the literature as key agents to transforming the profession (Margolin, 2011).

In this chapter, I present the basic issues related to the research topic, clarify the areas of focus, and outline the development of the research project. The background information, which justifies the need for the study, is presented and the key research questions are provided. Further, the significance of the study, and especially the possibilities that the results present for social change, are discussed.

Background

Professionalism, specifically teacher professionalism, is a topic that has stimulated research over a long period of time by several scholars. The topic has also been debated internationally (Dimpka, 2015; Guerriero, 2017; OECD, 2016; Vidović &

Velkovski, 2013). The discussions in the field of teacher professionalism generally consist of complex ideas related to the nature of professionalism (Demirkasimoğlu, 2010); how to identify professionals in different spheres of activity (Liakopoulou, 2011); how to improve the professional status of some occupations, especially teaching (Masters, 2015); and how professionalism relates to productivity (Wardoyo et al., 2017).

Multiple researchers have suggested the need for teacher professionalism to be examined and discussed in the context of teacher education (e.g., Dodillet et al., 2019; Margolin, 2011; Serrano Rodríguez et al., 2019). While the concept of teacher professionalism and its exploration is important at the level of practicing teachers, there is also a need to examine the perceptions of prospective teachers, their understanding of *being* or *becoming* professional, and what that understanding means to them as they prepare to enter the teaching system. During this study, I was able to engage with teachers in training (prospective teachers) and tried to understand their perceptions of teacher professionalism and their beliefs about being able to provide quality education to prospective students. I also explored how participants expressed their perceptions based on their experiences and mindsets during teacher training.

Prospective teachers' engagement with teacher professionalism has been explored in the United States (Cochran-Smith & Fries, 2005) and Sweden and Germany (Dodillet et al., 2019; Malm, 2009); attention was paid to student teachers' views of teacher professionalism as exhibited in the activities of teachers. Some researchers have investigated teacher professionalism in the Jamaican education system and focused on teacher professionalism among teacher educators (Hill-Berry, 2015; Hordatt Gentles,

2016), professionalism in the prospective teacher development context (Collins-Figueroa, 2011; Collins-Figueroa et al., 2009), and professionalism and how it relates to teacher quality (Education International, 2017; Mayne, 2014).

Collins-Figueroa (2011), working with the understanding that knowledge on teacher professionalism in Jamaica is limited, focused on Jamaican prospective teachers and their conceptualization of teacher professionalism. The study's outcomes identified some significant views of prospective teachers but emphasized gaps in their views of the professional teacher and expressed a need for further study in this area (Collins-Figueroa, 2011). Apart from the study in Jamaica, research on and exploration of the concept of teacher professionalism with prospective teachers appears to be limited in the Caribbean region, especially in Trinidad and Tobago.

Little work has been done in the Trinidad and Tobago education system to attempt to understand how prospective educators become professionals, how they recognize the importance of teacher professionalism, and the mindsets evident as they demonstrate professionalism in their behaviors. There is a need to compare the beliefs in the literature to how prospective teachers believe they should exhibit teacher professionalism. Also important are the varieties of understandings and exhibitions existing within the contexts they will experience as educators, which also need to be understood. Barrow (2007) mentioned that the discussion of teacher professionalism has become more popular in the Trinidad and Tobago education system but highlighted the lack of clarity related to the concept. Hackett (2005), of the School of Education in the University of the West Indies, St Augustine, also commented on the topic of teacher

professionalism in education in Trinidad and Tobago. Since then, there have not been other significant contributions to the clarification of this concept within Trinidad and Tobago and the Caribbean.

Teacher professionalism, and how it is understood and interpreted by prospective teachers, has otherwise not been mentioned within the literature of the field. Trinidad and Tobago is an appropriate context for the development of ideas related to the perceptions and experiences of teacher professionalism by prospective teachers. While the country is considered *developing* (World Trade Organization, 2012), there is scope for contributions to the topic coming from this context. In work on blended learning in international contexts, Spring et al. (2016) suggested that research in remote contexts facilitates the development of customized content, encourages the recognition of cultural awareness and cultural appreciation, and encourages appreciation for the fact that each country has its own style of teaching and learning. The focus on Trinidad and Tobago in this study adds new knowledge to the field.

The understanding of teacher professionalism by new entrants into the teaching profession has implications for the improvement of teaching in the Caribbean. Bruns and Luque (2014), in their work on possibilities for improving teaching in the Caribbean and Latin America, focused on quality education as an important criterion. Quality education is linked to the quality of teachers, and the authors mention critical behaviors that need to be developed. I was able to clarify the perceptions that prospective teachers have of these behaviors within the Trinidad and Tobago context through this study, which can provide support for Bruns and Luque's (2014) ideas.

The outcomes of this study help to clarify the nature of professionalism in the Trinidad and Tobago education sector within teacher education. Further, improved understanding of the perceptions of prospective teachers and their interactions in the teacher training context (with teacher educators and educational administrators) can help explore factors underlying the development of teacher professionalism in this specific level of the education system. The outcomes of this study will help form a framework for strategic educational planning and the development of meaningful educational experiences for emerging teachers.

Problem Statement

The problem addressed by this study was the lack of knowledge regarding prospective teachers' perceptions and experiences in conceptualizing and operationalizing the construct of teacher professionalism. Without having any clear evidence-based understanding of the perceptions and experiences that prospective teachers have with the construct of teacher professionalism, teacher educators have been involved in the practice of teaching prospective teachers to be professional. Teacher educators now accept that the growth of educational needs in society requires improved understanding of the beliefs underpinning teacher professionalism of their students and responding to those conceptualizations (Wardoyo et al., 2017). Teacher education requires that educators be aware of the beliefs prospective teachers have of their future profession and how those beliefs and understandings impact their behaviors in the profession (Serrano Rodríguez et al., 2019).

There have been questions in the literature about the nature of teacher professionalism (Snoek, 2010), arguments have been made about the importance of professionalism in teaching (Spence, 2007), and it has been established that teachers who exhibit professional behaviors are important to the provision of quality education within education systems (Bruns & Luque, 2014). To achieve those ends, effective teacher education can only occur if teachers are aware of the established understandings of teacher professionalism held by prospective teachers (Tarman, 2012). The need for research in the field of teacher education and especially understanding prospective teachers as professionals, was additionally confirmed recently by Rissanen et al. (2019).

Teacher training has been a part of the development of education in Trinidad and Tobago since 1823 with informal training of teachers and then the formal involvement in teacher training with the establishment of an institution in 1852 (Quamina-Aiyejina et al., 2001). The nature of practices related to the development of professionalism of prospective teachers within the training period needs in-depth investigation. The perceptions of professionalism in this teaching and learning context are not clear nor is how teachers use their acquired mindsets (De Kraker-Pauw et al., 2017) in formalizing their understanding of professionalism. There is need for research within the field of teacher education (Rissanen et al., 2019) to better understand the ideas of prospective teachers as they clarify their respective mindsets in being or becoming more aware of themselves as professionals. There is also a need to understand how the perceptions they develop lead to them being or becoming professionals.

This study was used to introduce comprehensive information on the topic of prospective teachers' experiences as they engage in becoming or being professional educators. Data were collected from prospective teachers who shared their views and experiences of teacher professionalism during teacher training. The findings of this study have the potential to contribute to the improvement of the curriculum in teacher training institutions and to make teachers in training more aware of their role in the development of educational quality based on their awareness of professionalism in education.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative interpretive descriptive study was to explore prospective teachers' perceptions and experiences about conceptualizing and operationalizing the construct of teacher professionalism. An attempt was made to clarify expressions of perceptions of teacher professionalism and experiences of teacher training among prospective teachers to help them understand the concept as they attempt to embrace it. This information has the potential to provide guidelines that can inform understanding of professionalism within teacher education in Trinidad and Tobago (Hargreaves, 2000) and the type of mindset (see Dweck, 2006) young teachers exhibit as they engage in the processes of being or becoming professionals (Nestor, 2017). The information described also has the potential to inform practices at the teacher education level. Further, the information will contribute to a clearer view of how teacher professionalism is perceived by prospective teachers and how their understanding of the concept is facilitated during their development in the teacher education context in Trinidad and Tobago.

Research Questions

RQ1: How do prospective teachers, who are students in a teacher education program in Trinidad and Tobago, perceive themselves as emerging teacher professionals?

RQ2: How do prospective teachers describe the process they are experiencing that contributes to the development of their understanding and application of the construct of teacher professionalism?

RQ3: How do prospective teachers in a teacher education program in Trinidad and Tobago describe how they operationalize the construct of teacher professionalism?

Conceptual Framework

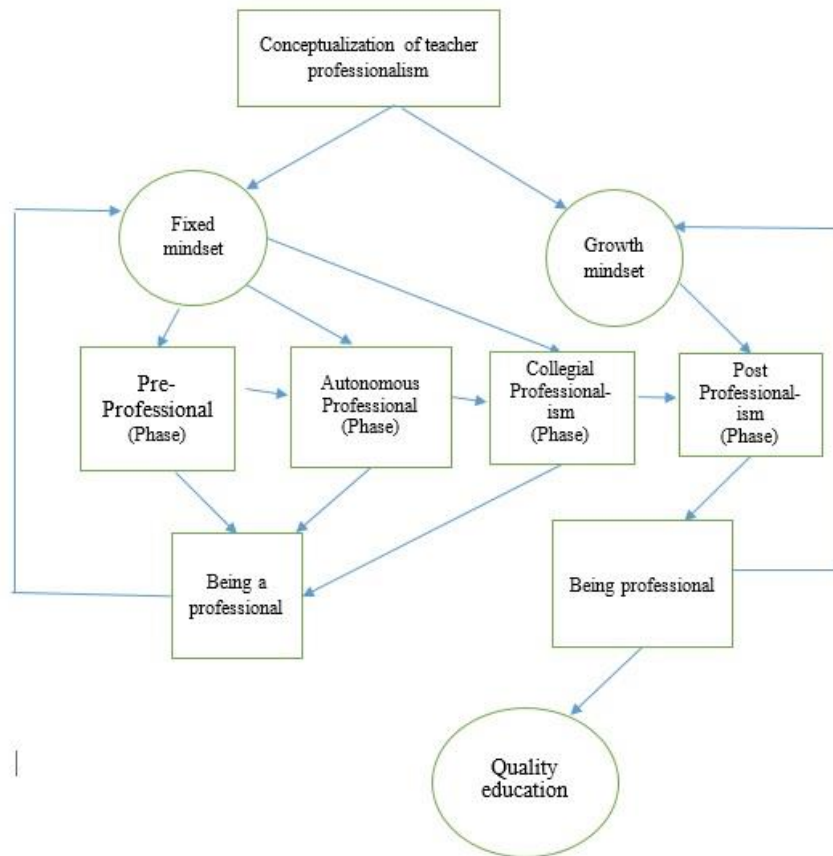
The exploration of teacher professionalism for this study was conducted using two key theories that have been part of the topic's discussion for a long time. Hargreaves (2000) presented information on being and becoming teacher professionals, and Dweck (2006) worked on the idea of mindset being a significant factor in shaping how people perceive and interact based on their understanding of a concept, such as teacher professionalism. A conceptual map (Figure 1) was developed based on the analysis of key aspects of both theories. The conceptual map was the basis of developing the research questions for the study and underlies the framework for the research.

Hargreaves (2000) provided some understanding of the field of professionalism used to better understand the essence or the basis of this study. Hargreaves discussed the work of Helsby (1995) and the difference in conceptualization between being professional, in terms of the quality of behavior demonstrated by some people who teach and claim to be professionals, and being a professional, which focuses on how teachers

are seen in the eyes of society. Hargreaves enhanced the dichotomy by presenting four historical phases in the changing nature of teacher professionalism and teacher learning: (a) the pre-professional age, (b) the age of the autonomous professional, (c) the age of the collegial professional, and (d) the age of the post-professional or postmodern. Hargreaves (2000) defined the characteristics of professionalism and professionalization in these phases, and this provided information used to organize and analyze responses from participants in this study.

Figure 1

Conceptual Framework for Teacher Professionalism in Teacher Education



Mindset theory (Dweck, 2006) contributed to the development of the framework for this study. Dweck (2016) suggested that a key factor in understanding the behavior of individuals lie in studying the views they adopt for themselves regarding the kind of life they can lead. Dweck (2016) analyzed this understanding of the world in two key frameworks: a fixed mindset and a growth mindset. People with fixed mindsets believe their characteristics are fixed traits (determined by nature), whereas people with growth mindsets believe they can change who they are by hard work and reflection. Each type of mindset is significant in guiding a person's motivation. A fixed mindset appears to lead to deficient, challenging characteristics as an individual is unable to demonstrate and facilitate personal growth or to personally align with activities related to the healthy growth of an organization. The growth mindset, on the other hand, is associated with a healthy, morally intelligent personality who understands that one cultivates success through their own efforts.

A perception of an individual, defined by Munhall (2008) as an individual interpretation of reality based on the interconnection of mind and body, was investigated by Dweck (2016) in analysis of elements of the nature of mindset that individuals demonstrate as they engage with others. The available literature (Rusznyak, 2018; Wood, 2014) on teacher professionalism in the teacher training context establishes the understanding that teacher professionalism is fluid, and this continues to be the case in Trinidad and Tobago. Prospective teachers have been identified as critical elements in the development of the education system, and understanding their views of professionalism will help improve the experiences of present and future learners (Malm, 2009).

The main issues explored in the framework presented in Figure 1 relate to exploring and generating understanding about how teacher professionalism is perceived and developed or internalized by prospective teachers in teacher education programs. These issues are the main areas of exploratory focus for this research study. The teacher mindset, located on a continuum between fixed or growth mindsets, is related to the conceptualization of teacher professionalism in teacher education. Dweck's (2016) characteristics of individuals with different mindsets was used as a guide to understand the mindsets of the participants who are part of the teacher education context. The mindsets exhibited by the prospective teachers are included in the research can be aligned to specific professional behaviors of individuals in different phases of professional development, as described by Hargreaves (2000) in his framework on teacher professionalism. Work by Hargreaves (2000) formed the basis of the examination of the tendency of teachers with fixed mindsets to describe teacher professionalism based on characteristics of the pre-professional phase.

Further, Malm (2009) suggested that the outcomes and understandings of teacher professionalism demonstrated in any professional environment can be examined to determine the competencies and qualities necessary for young teachers when discussing the issues of being a professional compared to just demonstrating professional behaviors. Prospective teachers who demonstrate fixed mindsets need further observation to determine how they reflect the need to be professionals compared to others who show the importance of being professional. The importance of being professional is related to and

emphasizes features of the postmodern age of professionalism defined by Hargreaves (2000).

The work by Helsby (1995) and Hargreaves (2000) provide critical contributions to understanding how teacher professionalism is perceived, interpreted, and experienced in the teacher education context where it is practiced. I explore these further in Chapter 2. Also important is the contribution of the mindsets (Dweck, 2016) exhibited by individuals and how these are evident as the perceptions of individuals are organized according to the era of professionalism they reflect. The conceptual framework was used to establish the basis for understanding the perceptions of teacher professionalism by prospective teachers within a teacher education program in Trinidad and Tobago. The framework was further used to facilitate the development of interview questions and prompts that guided entries in participant diaries, a main part of the data collection process.

Nature of the Study

In this qualitative study, the focus was on using the interpretative descriptive methodology (Thorne et al., 2004) to explore the development of prospective teachers' perceptions of teacher professionalism and how they experience the process of becoming teacher professionals within a specific teacher education context in the Trinidad and Tobago education system. Interpretation is based on understanding, and I acquired my understanding of the developing perceptions of teacher professionalism and views of the processes of becoming a professional, as expressed by prospective teachers, through

comparisons of the information from interviews and from entries in participant diaries prepared by and collected from participants.

These forms of data collection were used to uncover similarities and differences in the individual expressions of views related to teacher professionalism. I was able to address these areas in the study using thematic analysis (see Braun & Clarke, 2006), which allowed me to find categories of meaning and themes within the data. A more complete description of the process is provided in Chapter 3. I also needed to understand the nature of the perceptions of professionalism expressed and how these perceptions align with the mindsets demonstrated. I considered the new knowledge discovered along with the specific phase of professionalism that individuals were classified into based on their understanding of professionalism.

The interpretative descriptive approach was suitable for this study as it allowed me to use open and exploratory questions to examine the phenomenon of teacher professionalism among people aspiring to become professional teachers. Further, as people who experience the phenomenon of teacher professionalism on a daily basis, the participants had the opportunity to share and engage with their understandings of the concept without restriction. Little is known of this phenomenon, which has not been investigated or established as a published area of knowledge in Trinidad and Tobago. This demanded an approach that facilitated unlimited and emergent descriptive options (see Elliot & Timulak, 2005). The interpretive descriptive approach was especially useful in the exploration of the research questions based on the experiences of individuals and

especially those individuals embedded in a practice-based discipline (Thorne et al., 2004).

The participants of this research study were individuals engaged in preparation to be teachers (prospective teachers) at one major teacher training institution in Trinidad and Tobago. The prospective teachers of the institution were sampled purposefully and asked to engage in semistructured interviews and to develop participant diaries for the duration of the data collection period. The participant diaries were used to facilitate triangulation of data gathered from the semistructured interviews. Participant diaries were also used to support the trustworthiness of the data collected.

The data gathered were coded to facilitate the discovery of categories and themes relevant to developing perceptions of teacher professionalism and how mindsets work along with these developing perceptions. I used these categories and themes to make final conclusions about the nature of teacher professionalism in teacher education in Trinidad and Tobago. The conceptual and theoretical framework was applied as I delved into the information gained and analyzed the codes, patterns, and themes related to the mindsets, phases of professionalism, and the types of prospective professionals in the teacher education context of Trinidad and Tobago.

The understandings generated by this research will provide basic information for many aspects of the education system, including the preparation of teaching and the improvement of the quality of learner experiences. The study will contribute to defining of teacher professionalism from the perspective of prospective teachers as significant

contributors to the development of the education system. The information gained can lead to improved educational outcomes in Trinidad and Tobago.

Definitions

Description of teacher professionalism: The ability of participants to make statements about the nature of knowledge, types of performance, and basic attitudes that comprise professional behavior of teachers (Darling-Hammond, 1990).

Level of school: Schools at the primary level in Trinidad and Tobago are classified based on the level of academic performance. There are high-performing schools (sometimes called *prestige schools*), average schools, and low-performing schools that have been targeted for the Performance Enhancement Programme (PEP) developed by the Ministry of Education (Ramdass & Lewis, 2012).

Mindsets: Beliefs about the self and basic personal qualities. The inclination to one mindset or the other (fixed or growth) has a link to an individual's motivation and their ability and willingness to make a difference to an organization (Dweck, 2016).

Perception: An individual's access to experience and interpretation in the world; mediated through the interconnectedness of mind and body, it has an impact on how an individual apprehends reality (Munhall, 2008).

Prospective teachers: Outsiders coming into the field of teaching (Tarman, 2012).

Teacher professionalism: Associated with the quality and standard of teachers' works and their public image. Multiple approaches exist in the discussion of professionalism, and the understanding of this concept is highly polarized and problematic (Demirkasimoğlu, 2010). Three main studies (Evans, 2008; Hilferty, 2008;

Norlander-Case, 1999) were used as key to categorize the understandings expressed by the participants in this research study.

Teacher professionalism in the teacher education context: The examination of the concept of teacher professionalism at the tertiary level of education in an institution focused on the preparation of prospective teachers for entry to the formal teaching and learning environments in the education system.

Trinidad and Tobago: The most southern islands of the Caribbean located 7 miles from Venezuela's northeastern coast. The population is 1,329,019 people of mixed race, European, Chinese, and Middle Eastern ancestry along with people of African and East Indian descent. The islands are about 5,100 square kilometers in area and the official language is English. Trinidad and Tobago is an independent nation and a republic state within the Commonwealth (Tourism Development Company Limited, 2014).

Assumptions

Four major assumptions were used to guide the conduct and analysis of information in this study.

First, this was a small study, and I assumed the data collected regarding the experiences of individuals in the teacher education sector of Trinidad and Tobago would provide sufficient information to make a meaningful contribution to the educational landscape of the country and the general field of education.

I assumed participants would be able to articulate their perceptions of a construct as vague as teacher professionalism—a term that has created much furor in the educational field. I assumed participants would be honest and respond fully and to the

best of their ability based on their reflections of their experiences in their teacher training environment and in the education system of Trinidad and Tobago.

I assumed I was proficient and experienced enough to elicit appropriate and adequate responses from participants as related to their perceptions regarding the research topic. I assumed my analysis of the data would be comprehensive and appropriately capture the meanings of the participants.

The assumptions listed focus on some critical elements of the study that were necessary to reflect valid and reliable components of teacher professionalism in the study's context. I took a lot of time to validate each of the areas enumerated, thereby facilitating the study and contributing to its final quality. I paid attention to all the assumptions to ensure they were addressed and that the expectations related to them were maintained.

Scope and Delimitations

The research was conducted with prospective teachers in a bachelor of education program from a specific teacher training institution within the education system of Trinidad and Tobago. The study was focused on prospective teachers' descriptions of their experiences conceptualizing and operationalizing the construct of teacher professionalism. The findings from the study reflect only the views of these teachers in training and not the general teacher population of Trinidad and Tobago. I used criterion based purposeful sampling to facilitate the inclusion of different individuals from one teacher training institution in the study. There are other teacher education institutions in Trinidad and Tobago, but the data collected were limited to only one institution.

Individuals from the institution used in the study were from different age groups, different year cohorts, different genders, and from different teacher training subject specializations. Participants were included in the study using criterion-based purposeful sampling. Purposeful sampling was useful as I had to include a series of cases (individuals and their experiences) to cover a spectrum of perspectives in relation to the phenomenon being studied. I was able to identify and select information rich cases related to the phenomenon of teacher professionalism in the teacher training context. The participants of the study were individuals who were interested, experienced, and willing and able to share their views in an articulate and reflective manner (see Palinkas et al., 2015). A range of individual characteristics were used to determine final participants who were comfortable participating. Initially, I intended to engage five individuals from each year group of students once they met the criteria outlined for selection.

Participants' academic performance in the bachelor of education program was not taken into consideration when choosing individuals to participate in this study. The use of varying data collection methods over the research period ensured that the quality of data collected facilitated deep exploration and explanation based on thick descriptions (see Korstjens & Moser, 2018). The intent of the study was not to define the construct of teacher professionalism or to use theories to establish the traits of teachers as professionals (see Runte, 1995). The focus was to explore new teachers' perceptions and experiences associated with the concept of teacher professionalism in the teacher training context of Trinidad and Tobago.

Limitations

The major limitation of this study was the lack of time to delve even deeper into understanding perceptions of teacher professionalism and how the concept is experienced by teachers in training in the context of a teacher education program in Trinidad and Tobago. The narrow parameters used to choose participants for the study (prospective teachers from only one institution) along with the focus only on Trinidad and Tobago might also have limited the type of responses received. I have been previously engaged in qualitative research as part of team projects and am aware of the tendency in others and myself to exhibit biases because of engagement in the context of teacher education. I am aware that research within one's own field can become a limitation to a study and acknowledge such a possibility in this study.

All attempts were made to ensure the experiences mentioned did not interfere with the trustworthiness, consistency, and meaningfulness of the outcomes of the study. While the limitations are a reality for this qualitative study, the variability of participants in the sample helped to limit challenges to transferability and generalizability. While the teacher education institutions in Trinidad and Tobago have different characteristics and areas of focus, members of the general population can be found in any of the different institutions offering teacher education opportunities based on how a specific institution best suits their needs.

Significance

According to Connell (2009), the quality of teaching, especially what teachers believe and do in their classrooms, is an important factor in the determination of the

performance of students within the education system. The Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, Ministry of Education (2012) connected the professional behavior of teachers to the performance of learners and recognized this issue in its strategic plan. To plan for and train teachers in an effective and efficient education system, it is necessary to understand the nature of teacher professionalism within the sociocultural context (Wang & Lin, 2013) teachers will be expected to function in. This understanding will facilitate better preparation for them to be professional as they engage with all educational stakeholders (Guskey, 2002).

While teacher training is linked to the quality and success of an education system (Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, Ministry of Education, 2012; Mark et al., 2005), there is no evidence that issues related to the developing understandings of the nature of professionalism and its perception by practitioners have been examined using research in this context. Hackett (2005, p. 1), an educator in Trinidad and Tobago, spoke of the need to “create and maintain greater professionalism among teachers” as a critical factor in the development of the education system of Trinidad and Tobago. Exploration into the perceptions of teacher professionalism as held by individuals within the system of teacher training will allow teacher educators and planners to understand the notion of teaching and training that young teachers have as they start their journeys in the education system.

Understanding the views and experiences of prospective teacher professionalism and the link to what is happening in the teacher education context will provide opportunities for the development of education in society (see Deosaran, 2016) in

Trinidad and Tobago. This will allow educational planners and teacher educators to make relevant changes in curriculum for teacher training so that graduate teachers are better prepared and able to make a difference to the experiences of the learners they interact with. Teachers having a high awareness of professionalism will have implications for the learners in the education system and for the product that goes out into society. Better trained and qualified citizens, with a greater awareness of the role of professional teachers, will lead to a more satisfied society and to positive change, growth, and development. This positive growth and change have the potential to be beneficial across the globe as teachers from the Trinidad and Tobago context also find themselves teaching in many different countries (Express, 2019).

The scope for the development of new knowledge is also evident as the discussion of prospective teachers and their conceptualizations of professionalism is weakly represented in the literature. This completed study adds information needed in the teacher training context and provides a framework for developing teacher training opportunities. This information and revised conceptual framework add ways to explore and organize new and meaningful learning experiences for teachers in training and suggestions to improve responses when they become full-fledged members of the education system responsible for the delivery of curriculum. The findings provide a framework for significant learning experiences within teacher training in Trinidad and Tobago and possible models for other Caribbean institutions involved in teacher training.

The justifications provided for this study and the engagement with the outcomes provided suggest that positive social change will be facilitated by the knowledge

available from the study. The completion of the study and the clarification of the views and experiences of prospective teachers has the potential to facilitate change in the system as attempts can be made to improve the experiences of teachers in training. Better trained and focused teachers will be able to contribute to improved educational experiences for learners, and this type of action (ensuring trained and focused teachers in the system) has the potential to improve society in the long term.

Summary

Challenges in the international education system related to understanding the concept of teacher professionalism (Mausethagen & Granlund, 2012) exist in Trinidad and Tobago. While attempts are being made within the education system to improve the quality of teaching and learning (Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, Ministry of Education, 2012; Mark et al., 2005), there have been no attempts to clarify key concepts that make teaching and learning experiences meaningful and positively related to the goals of education. Teacher professionalism in teacher education is one of the concepts that needs to be clarified, and research in this area is limited. This study adds valuable information by analyzing the understanding of this key concept within the context of teacher training and allows for the sharing of understandings of prospective teachers and how they develop these understandings.

In Chapter 1, the main challenges related to developing understanding of the nature of teacher professionalism were discussed. The purpose of the study, research questions, and possible benefits of engaging in the research project were outlined. In Chapter 2, I present an analysis of theories related to the understanding of teacher

professionalism and explore different types of research done in this area. I present the philosophical and procedural methods included in the interpretative descriptive approach, which was best suited to the objectives of this study based on the processes it involves and the purposes established for studies that use interpretative description. In Chapter 3, I explore the research methodology for the study. I present the research design, along with a justification for the use of this approach and the methods of data collection and data analysis. The context of the study is clarified and appropriate details are provided. In Chapter 4, I outline the results of the data collection process and the analysis procedures along with a discussion of the findings of the study. In Chapter 5, I summarize the results of the research and the conclusions and recommendations related to the study.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

The research problem addressed in this study is that little is known about prospective teachers' perceptions and experiences in the conceptualization and operationalization of the construct of teacher professionalism. The lack of clarity is reflected in the experiences of prospective teachers as they are trained to be professionals with a focus on subject content, pedagogic content knowledge, education studies, and teaching practice (Lewin, 2004). The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore prospective teachers' perspectives about becoming and being teacher professionals. Prospective teachers shared their views on becoming professional teachers and demonstrated their perceptions of the concept of professionalism.

Much of the existing research has established the need to better understand how teachers understand teacher professionalism. For example, Edwards and Nuttall (2014) discussed the nature of teacher professionalism in teacher education, its importance and how it impacts teacher development. Creasy (2015) looked at the definition of teacher professionalism as elusive, even to teacher educators, and spoke of the need for clarification. Murray (2014) highlighted the need for research in teacher education as this field is the lever for change in the school sector.

Researchers within the Caribbean, specifically, have highlighted the need for research in the field of teacher education that emphasizes teacher education and teacher professionalism. Hill-Berry (2015) highlighted the dwindling professionalism among Jamaican educators as a need to pay attention to the issue, and the National Advisory

Committee in Education, since 2004 (Hill-Berry, 2015), suggested a need for policy reform in teacher education as this area of development was necessary to develop practitioners who exhibit professionalism.

This section of the study is organized in a sequenced manner analyzing first the nature of teacher professionalism as complex and contested. Much work has been done as researchers attempt to better understand teacher professionalism. The information included in this study laid the foundation for the understanding of key concepts such as professionalism and teacher professionalism, through earlier work published in the field. Some major theories and concepts that form the foundation of studies in teacher professionalism are presented and related to the focus of this study. I share the conceptual foundation and the work of researchers who investigated teacher professionalism in education. I examine teacher education specifically and establish how research has contributed to the basic understandings that guided this study. I address the relevance of the specific area of focus in this study—the understanding of professionalism in the context of teacher education in Trinidad and Tobago—linked to the literature explored.

The factors shaping teacher professionalism, and specifically professionalism in the context of teacher education, are also explored. Research has been done to explore teacher professionalism among prospective teachers and how they engage with, influence, and demonstrate professionalism. In addition, I present engagement of other participants in the field of teacher education as discussed in the literature.

In the final section, I examine work that endorses the methodology used for the study. Interpretive description is a qualitative approach to understanding the subjective

experiences and interpretations of practitioners within a specific field. The literature available (e.g., Thorne, 2016; Thorne et al., 2004) allowed me to clarify the nature of the approach and to justify the relevance and suitability of the approach to the research topic. Finally, research reports using this method (Hunt, 2009; Teodoro et al., 2018) were used as guides to facilitate the approach.

Literature Search Strategy

I searched for supportive literature in several databases assistance from people who had experience conducting research and who had access to resources not available to me. Databases used included ProQuest and Education Resources Information Center (ERIC) and other sources from libraries at the University of Minnesota; the University of New Brunswick; the University of the West Indies, St Augustine; and Walden University. A former professor who had access to the University of Minnesota library helped with access to articles, and a friend who was a student at New Brunswick University provided assistance in sourcing articles from the library at that institution.

Searches in each of the library of databases focused on *teacher professionalism*. This search continued as attempts were made to narrow the topic to the areas of *teacher professionalism and prospective teachers* and *teacher professionalism in the field of teacher education*. The readings found in the databases helped to shape my understanding of the research problem and also allowed me to start thinking about a framework for the study.

The majority of documents found were peer-reviewed. While some were theoretical treatises, the majority reflected the outcomes of research projects implemented

and analyzed data related to questions/problems of interest in the area of teacher professionalism. Some useful journals were *Asia-Pacific Journal of Teacher Education*, *Teaching and Teacher Education*, *Teachers and Teaching: Theory and Practice*, *Journal of Education and Practice*, *British Journal of Educational Studies*, *Australian Journal of Teacher Education*, and *the Caribbean Curriculum Journal*.

Articles from journals were especially helpful as searching Google Scholar allowed access to additional documents using the *cited by* option. The titles of most of the journals were entered into Google Scholar and opportunities to see the titles of other articles that had cited the same documents facilitated further access to documents related to the research topic. Also helpful in the search for supportive materials was reviewing reference lists of relevant documents. This practice often exposed additional articles relevant to the research topic. Documents were sourced and examined for additional information.

Books related to the topic were accessed at the University of the West Indies, St. Augustine, School of Education Library, and the University of Trinidad and Tobago, Centre for Education Programmes Library, while others were bought. Examples of texts purchased were Dweck (2016), Freidson (2001), Kahneman (2011), and Thorne (2016). Choices were made based on suggestions from supervisors and from library searches using the key words highlighted earlier. I also used the names of key writers in the field of teacher professionalism, like Ivor Goodson and Judyth Sachs, and articles and other writings by these authors also provided additional cues to useful information.

Two key texts, seminal works that formed basic reading for this study, included those by Lortie (1975) and Waller (1932) on the sociological analysis of teaching. Newspapers and local documents were especially helpful in gaining information related to the Trinidad and Tobago context and so provided information to establish the nature of the problem for this research project. Some podcasts and conference documents on the nature of teacher professionalism were also helpful in shaping ideas used in the study.

The topic of teacher professionalism is wide with many differing components. The topic has been researched for many years and some seminal works are dated but contain critical elements that form the framework of understanding the concept in context. These traditional discussions of teacher professionalism are included in the organization and analysis of information related to the topic and presented in this section.

Further, finding literature, especially work supported by research, and related to the topic of teacher professionalism was limited in Trinidad and Tobago. Information on teacher professionalism and prospective teachers did not exist in the searches conducted. Celestin (2019) explored the understanding of teacher professionalism from the perspective of early childhood education teachers and focused specifically on teachers' understanding of the concept from engaging with and reading documents published by the Ministry of Education of Trinidad and Tobago.

Theoretical Foundation for the Conceptual Framework

In this study, I focused on investigating the perceptions of teacher professionalism by prospective teachers in the field of teacher education. Such scholarly probing enabled me to describe understandings on the nature of professionalism held by prospective

teachers formalizing their views of teacher professionalism during teacher training. These views included their understandings of the characteristics of professional behavior and the descriptions they held of professional teachers who function within education systems. The description of the nature of teacher professionalism by prospective teachers is an important factor in the understanding of the future work and functioning of these individuals. The literature (Akarsu & Kariper, 2015; Creasy, 2015) indicates that prospective teachers have views about the nature of professionalism but these views need to be clarified. Johnston (2015) shared information on the variety of perceptions of teacher professionalism understood to influence teacher quality. De Clercq (2013) mentioned problems in understanding the nature of teacher professionalism, and Creasy (2015) suggested the importance of teacher candidates understanding what professionalism means with specific reference to practices in the field of education.

Hargreaves (2000) analyzed the development of teacher professionalism as passing through four historical phases and provided a foundational depth of knowledge for this study. This knowledge facilitated the understanding and analysis of the demonstrations of teacher professionalism in the teacher education context. Hargreaves (2000) developed the framework as a response to the need to find a working definition for teacher professionalism in a period of numerous debates on the nature and characteristics of teacher professionalism (Demirkasimoğlu, 2010).

The application of mindset theory, developed and presented by Dweck (2016), provided adequate grounding for the discussion of possible approaches, personalities, and relevant motivational factors that teachers can bring to their learning and working

environments. Dweck (2016) developed this theory to understand and explain how beliefs and characteristics people can relate to demonstration of faith in the possession of intelligence as responsible factors for success. Dweck suggested that effort, time to practice, and focus on mastery of specific skills over time are important areas of personal activity in achieving individual success goals. Dweck's theory was used as a basis for understanding the worldviews that prospective teachers hold on professionalism and the perspectives that undergird the choices they make within educational contexts. Taken together, the theories of Dweck (2016) and Hargreaves (2000) supplied the theoretical foundation to investigate the mindsets possessed by prospective teachers in the teacher education contexts of Trinidad and Tobago. I was able to interpret these mindsets within the phase/phases of professionalism exhibited in the data (see Figure 1).

Major Theoretical Positions of Works to Be Used in the Study

Characteristics of the Four Phases of Professionalism Framework

In the framework on the phases related to the development of professionalism in teaching, Hargreaves (2000) suggested that teaching is not static and passes through stages as educators and education develop: "phases were not seen as universal" (p. 153). The phases can be identified in many educational systems and do not necessarily occur in the same order. Hargreaves further suggested that understandings of teacher professionalism influence the understanding of these phases, and Hargreaves's framework is significant in making new decisions regarding the nature of teacher professionalism.

Educators attempt to focus on the issues of professionalism and professionalization and find difficulty in being able to distinguish one from the others. Helsby (1995) introduced the discussion of *being professional* and *being a professional* and how the distinction causes conflict. Hargreaves (2000) first discussed the distinction between *being professional* (the outcome is professionalism) and *being a professional* (that is, professionalization, the kind of image that the wider society has of teachers as a group compared to other professional sets of workers like doctors or lawyers) in attempting to share an understanding of teacher professionalism. Hargreaves (2000) focused on teachers' professional experiences and used information gathered to describe "four broad historical phases in the changing nature of teacher professionalism and professional learning" (p. 153). The engagement of these four phases were used to analyze and align the understandings of professionalism within the data collected from participant responses for this study (see Figure 1).

Hargreaves's (2000) description of the four phases of professionalism in teaching include (a) the pre-professional age, (b) the age of the autonomous professional, (c) the age of the collegial professional, and (d) the post-professional or postmodern age. Hargreaves explained that the stages are not evolutionary and are experienced contingent on the history of development in the specific educational situation being studied; thus, the use of the term *age*. Hargreaves's work continues to be relevant, and some researchers have used the framework as the foundation for understanding the nature of teacher professionalism in educational contexts (Buyruk, 2014; Infanti & Fotopoulou, 2011; Saqipi et al., 2014; Snoek, n.d.).

The work of Hargreaves (2000) was used as the basis for defining the concept of teacher professionalism in work presented by numerous researchers. Infanti and Fotopoulou (2011) agreed in their work that the framework developed by Hargreaves was critical in understanding the nature of teacher professionalism and especially in understanding how the nature of teaching affects teachers' notion of professionalism. Further, Sachs (2016) included the Hargreaves model in the clarification of the concept of teacher professionalism. Wardoyo et al. (2017) also examined the pattern of professionalism based on phases suggested by Hargreaves (2000) in Indonesia. Research conducted by Saqipi et al. (2014) is most common to the focus of my study as the investigators tried to understand, through the application of the *four phases of professionalism* framework, how the thinking of teachers was aligned with the phases as proposed by Hargreaves (2000). The results of the research showed that while the dominance of pre-professionalism was strong, there was weak exhibition of collegial professionalism and post-professionalism among the group of teachers who were studied.

Hargreaves' (2000) description of teaching in the pre-professional age, is simple. Teachers only need to be devoted to their tasks and carry out the requests of their more knowledgeable superiors. Teachers, in Hargreaves' view of professionalism, know their content and are aware of how they need to interact with students to get it across. Hargreaves insisted that teachers learn to teach by watching others do it and, therefore, the view exists that teachers need negligible training and preparation time. Compared to the concept of professionalism in the pre-professional age, the teachers of the autonomous professional age have a say in curriculum development and provide

suggestions for decision making in their learning contexts. Teachers of this phase demonstrate involvement in projects and experiment with new approaches to learning that are student-centered. The exercise of professional judgment and the dominance of the teacher in the classroom are evident.

This approach to teaching and engaging in school communities that are dominant in the autonomous age of professionalism resulted in negative implications for the development of teaching in general as explored by Hargreaves (2000). Overall, Hargreaves (2000, p. 162) claimed that the age of professional autonomy “provided teachers with poor preparation for coping with the dramatic changes that were headed their way and against which their classroom doors would offer little protection.” Wardoyo et al. (2017) in their work on teacher professionalism supported that the age of professional autonomy is not ideal for the development of teacher professionalism as they argued in that phase teachers were competitive and did not emphasize collaboration and group development. Infanti and Fotopoulou (2011) highlighted that it was during the collegial phase that teachers’ professionalism showed some development.

The age of collegial professionalism is manifested in the development of strong professional cultures, a focus on increasing teacher efficacy, and the replacement of the individualized focus of the teachers from the previous era. The kinds of conditions where collaboration might be encouraged are not always accommodating but educators need to be prepared so that they can build strong professional communities that are authentic, well supported, and serve the interests of teachers and students alike (DuFour, 2004). The post-professional or postmodern professional is an educator who exists in a context that is

not fixed, and sways based on political and societal decisions (Hargreaves, 2000). Educators from the postmodern professionalism age have more flexible educational experiences and focus on the concerns of different groups of people in the society (Hargreaves, 2000). They do not only benefit from or focus on the development of teachers. Hargreaves (2000) suggested that the focus on teacher professionalism has changed in the twentieth century based on issues related to economics, the marketization of education, and uncertainty in the postmodern age.

The use of Hargreaves's framework (2000) and the analysis of the characteristics of the different phases provided opportunities to interpret and analyze the nature of professionalism as it exists within a variety of individual perceptions of new teachers in the teacher education program. Although it was expected that the students would not be aware of the Hargreaves's ages of professionalism, their responses to the questions in the interview were used to interpret their innate manifestations of the behaviors and beliefs of teachers who fit into the different ages. The characteristics of each of the phases were noted and used to compare information gathered in the teacher education context where the research was done. This allowed the researcher to make decisions about the age of professionalism that existed within the group of participants in the study in Trinidad and Tobago context.

This framework was helpful in the conduct of my research as it is an explicit description of professional possibilities that exist based on the examination of teaching contexts investigated by Hargreaves (2000). The framework was well developed and provided information related to teacher professionalism and how it can be exhibited.

Another strength of the Hargreaves (2000) framework is that it has been used to understand teacher professionalism in many different research investigations (see Buyruk, 2014; Infanti & Fotopoulou, 2011; Saqipi et al., 2014). The framework by Hargreaves (2000) formed the basis of the examination of the teaching context in the current study.

Characteristics of the Mindset Framework

The other major theory that supported my attempts to address the issue of teacher professionalism in the teacher education context was the work produced by Dweck, (2016). The mindsets discussion by Dweck (2016) suggested that individuals have beliefs about themselves that make differences in the way they live their lives and how they go about their duties as individuals. People with fixed mindsets (David, 2015) exist in a world where they feel that they are constantly being forced to prove themselves and achieve high standards at all times. On the other hand, people with a growth mindset (David, 2015) tend to have the self-confidence necessary to continue to cultivate their abilities and achieve at even higher levels. Dweck's (2016) research showed that personal beliefs influence an individual's behaviors in practice and in their motivation to improve.

Dweck (2016) described educators who demonstrate a growth mindset as being fascinated with the idea of learning and focused on the facilitation of intellectual development and the fostering of talent in learning environments. Educators who possess the type of beliefs described in the growth mindset understand that they are learners themselves and so are open to new knowledge that becomes available as they interact with students and model opportunities for the students and so foster their cognitive

growth and talents. These teachers demonstrate high levels of caring for all students and ensure that high standards of achievement are set for all students, ensuring that students who encounter challenges are included and guided to achieve (Dweck, 2014; Herbert-Smith, 2018).

The behaviors of the fixed mindset educator are different as they have a clearly established understanding of responsibility and this rigidly guides performance in learning environments without much consideration for the specific needs and characteristics of the learners (Dweck, 2014). Further, a fixed mindset educator, because of the setting of standards for high levels of achievement accompanied by the need to demonstrate high levels of intelligence, focuses on achievement with great fear of failure. Learning is seen as the students' responsibility. These educators often feel powerless in learning contexts and feelings of learned helplessness characterize their behaviors (Heggart, 2015). Educators with these types of characteristics often fail to realize that they have the power to make a difference for themselves and for the learners in their teaching and learning contexts (Dweck, 2014).

Many researchers (Gero, 2013; Heggart, 2015; Nestor, 2017) engaged the concept of mindsets as significant in the demonstration of professional behavior in education. Flannery (2016) discussed the potential of the adoption of an appropriate mindset to the creation of holistic learning environments. While Nestor (2017) questioned teachers' views of themselves and their possession of fixed or growth mindsets and explored how these informed their instruction, Heggart (2015) felt that the ability to demonstrate *growth mindset* characteristics facilitated the ability of educators to focus on continued

improvement throughout their careers. Gero (2013) investigated beliefs about the influence of the growth mindset on professional learning and proposed that this was a significant variable in professional learning activities.

Liu and Tong (2022) suggested that the adoption of a growth mindset has the potential to facilitate professional development and encourage people to reflect professional behaviors. Liu and Tong further highlighted the fact that employees who demonstrate the growth mindset were more open to change and willing to venture into aspects of the unknown and that these types of behaviors were necessary for professional growth. Further, the beliefs that teachers have about mindsets has implication for “a far-reaching impact on their teaching behavior” according to De Kraker-Pauw et al. (2017, p. 1). These different views that educators hold about mindsets have a potential to be reflected in how they behave as professionals and can be linked to the phases of professionalism that were outlined by Hargreaves (2000).

Application of Theories to the Present Study

The presentation of the phases that outline the development of teacher professionalism (Hargreaves, 2000) and the discussion of mindsets by Dweck (2016) provided opportunities for organizing the conduct and completion of the current study to be conducted and were explored in the development of the Conceptual Framework for the study. Research instruments were developed to assess the mindset of the participants as well as the phases of professionalism that define and describe how they function. The data presented were also analyzed to verify the possession of characteristics as outlined by Dweck (2016), David (2015), and Hargreaves (2000). These activities provided

opportunities to answer questions critical to the study and form the basis of the analytical development of the study. The focus of the research questions in the study was to clarify the mindsets of the prospective teachers who consider themselves as training to be professionals. The need to clarify how these possible mindsets are exhibited in different phases of professionalism and if these phases are even evident in the local teacher education context was part of the study. In the end, the findings added new information on how the theories were applicable in the field of teacher education and specifically in the Trinidad and Tobago context. Teacher education and the beliefs and behaviors have not yet been investigated in relation to the idea of teacher professionalism and mindsets in the Trinidad and Tobago context.

Conceptual Framework

The examination of the developing understanding and views that prospective teachers have of teacher professionalism and its nature is the foundation of this research study. Teacher professionalism is a complex and elusive concept (Alberta Teachers' Association, 2018) and the research conducted over the years to verify its nature has still not contributed to a final statement or description of the concept. Authors and researchers on the nature of the concept described teacher professionalism as being defined by specific criteria (The Alberta Teachers' Association, 2018), as consisting of a range "of examples of what is commonly considered professional-like behaviors" (Creasy, 2015, p. 23), and not as a profession but as more of a quasiprofession or craft profession (Shon, 2006). Alexander et al. (2019) noted that despite long discourses on the topic over the years, there remains little clarity on the meaning of terms like profession and

professionalism in the context of teaching. More usefully, Hargreaves (2000) spoke of teacher professionalism as existing in phases over a time period.

The use of the model of teacher professionalism developed and published by Hargreaves (2000) served as the framework for the analysis and understanding of teacher professionalism based on data collected through interviews with the participants in the study and through the analysis of their diaries. The prospective teachers in the teacher education context were asked to share their perceptions and experiences of teacher professionalism and these ideas were compared with the descriptors of appropriate behaviors of professionals in each of the phases for teacher professionalism as described by Hargreaves (2000). Through this approach, I was able to categorize the understandings of teacher professionalism as it exists among the prospective teachers within the teacher education context in Trinidad and Tobago.

Next, I analyzed and interpreted the concept of mindsets as they are proposed by Dweck (2016). The analysis and interpretation provided a basis that I was able to use to characterize prospective teachers using the range of dispositions that the individuals who are part of the profession possess and exhibit. The characteristics, as outlined by Dweck (2016), were interpreted and related to the phases outlined by Hargreaves (2000); see Figure 1 in Chapter 1. Based upon activity shown in Figure 1, a checklist was developed (this checklist is available in Chapter 3 along with the strategies that were used to implement it during data collection, while the strategies for analysis are presented in Chapter 4) to facilitate understanding the characteristics of the specific prospective teachers (based on their mindsets) and how they perceived teacher professionalism (based

on Hargreaves, 2000). I engaged in further analysis of the information to understand how each prospective teacher understood him/herself by using the analysis of Hilferty (2008), who discussed possibilities of *being a professional* or *being professional*.

This study questioned and explored ways that the analysis of the views of the participants might be a window to better understanding their views on quality education. People who teach are assumed to be a major factor in the assessment of the quality of educational systems where they work (Nordstrum, 2016). This view of the critical nature of their views in determining quality is based on the acknowledgement that they are important in improving students' educational outcomes and Klein (2014) indicated that nothing matters more to a child in the classroom than the teacher.

Literature Review Related to Key Concepts

Development of Literature on Teacher Professionalism

According to Ackroyd (2016), research on the nature of professions and professionalism was important to sociological studies since the start of the 20th century with work by Durkheim. This research attempt to understand the nature of professionalism in teaching was part of this long quest to verify the nature of professionalism as well as separate the criteria that define different professions. Crecci and Fiorentini (2018) recognized that the essence of the term is still unclear. Their suggestion was that the professionalism of teachers was built through the process of “reflection in action” (p. 9) and that teachers learn and develop professionally by participating in communities. Over time, the discussion of professionalism in teaching has focused on different elements presented by different theorists and researchers.

The issue of teacher professionalism has been in the local and international media for a long time and local teachers have been claiming themselves to be professionals (Hackett, 2005). However, it was a painstaking task to find documented research on the conceptions of professionalism being used in these discussions. Lortie (1975), one of the early contributors to the discussion, described teaching as the root status of educational practice and suggested that teachers had a major role to play in schooling. He felt that during schooling attention was paid to prescribing guidelines for learners, but that little attention was paid to in-depth investigation and engagement. Empirical studies are needed to get a clear understanding of the contexts are basic to most teachers and the performing of their duties.

The earliest discussions of teaching as a profession saw it as a quasiprofession or semiprofession (Whitty, 2000). The areas of medicine and law were recognized as professions and practitioners in the field of teaching were always encouraged to be professionals by adopting the characteristics of people from the fields named above. People in these areas acted as professionals based on the possession of specific traits discussed by Kauchak (2017). These traits include specific entry requirements, a code of conduct, membership in professional organizations, the commitment to altruistic service, autonomy, emphasis on decision making and reflecting command of a well-defined body of knowledge and a host of other characteristics that place this conception into a technical–scientific model of teaching.

Researchers in the field also describe this traditional view of professionalism as *static* and argue that using absolute criteria to determine whether teachers are

professionals is a fruitless task (Barton, 1999). Hargreaves saw this as a descriptive use of the concept of professionalism where the quality of work and conduct and standards guide action. Researchers like Parsons (1954) would have been instrumental in the early discussions on the nature of professions and the status of teachers as professionals.

Many changes have taken place since people like Parsons (1954) discussed the issue of professionalism; for example, Bukhatir (2018) suggested that professionalism is a functional concept. Former values and relationships relating to the professions no longer have currency and what is needed is a new set of professional codes to integrate the various relationships and practices that teachers now need to get involved in, in new and exciting ways. Sachs (1999) argued that professionalism should be about more than traits.

These views are supported by Bruno (2018) who recognized that in more recent times, instead of the normative approach to understanding the concept of professionalism, it has become acceptable for people to use classroom experiences and teacher–student relationships to determine what it means to be professional. The nature and understanding of professionalism therefore differ. Bruno (2018) suggested, like Hargreaves (2000), Goodson (1996) and Sachs (1999), that it might be useful to try to understand professionalism in teaching by looking at the characteristics of teaching at present as it was not useful to examine teaching and teachers' practices to see if they live up to some ideal.

The argument is that socially constructed definitions of professionalism may be more viable in present day contexts of teaching (Demirkasımoğlu, 2010). These socially

defined constructs focus on the intrinsic as well as extrinsic nature of professional tasks and rewards, concepts of collegiality and vocation and the affective and instrumental goals and content of the work, and the central professional client relationship. Goodson (2003) emphasized that teacher professionalism is a complex issue and can never be definitive. He suggested that there is no absolute model to define professionalism and that each teacher has to construct a personal professionalism that suits his/her life history, training, context and above all, personality. Professionalism then, is something that is learned, constructed, and sustained in the everyday working environment of the school.

Other researchers examined professionalism in different ways including Sockett (cited in Norlander-Case, 1999), who saw teacher professionalism as the way that teachers interact and integrate with each other during the process of their jobs. Danielson (1996) has a particularly useful framework for understanding professional responsibilities of teachers. Her argument is that teachers are professionals when they focus on six major areas. These include the practice of reflecting on teaching, maintenance of accurate records, communicating with families, contributing to the school and district, growing and developing professionally, and showing professionalism.

Teaching is also considered to be a moral and ethical profession, and this is in sync with the ideas on the topic presented by Danielson (1996) and Norlander-Case (1999). Campbell (2008) describes teaching as an interpersonal journey that requires attention to be paid to the intangibles and that such intangibles *are morally and ethically infused*. Campbell further suggested that the voice the teacher uses, the way that the teacher justly decides among competing needs and interests in the classroom, how the

teacher selects resources with care and evaluates students' work with honesty and respect, and conducts his or her daily practice with honor, diligence, fairness, and compassion are all elements of the moral and ethical aspects of teaching as a profession. The tendency was to acknowledge the moral nature of teaching within the moral education aspect of the young teachers' ethical roles, responsibilities and practices were not seen as important. Campbell (2008) highlighted a lot of research (Fenstermacher, 2001; Hansen, 2001; Sockett, 2006; Strike, 1999) that addressed this issue as important.

Hargreaves and Goodson (1996) analyzed the issue of professionalism by looking at different forms of professionalism. These included classical professionalism, flexible professionalism, practical professionalism, extended professionalism, complex professionalism, and postmodern professionalism. In further work, Hargreaves (2000) outlined professionalism as a phenomenon that would have passed through four stages that included the pre-professional age, the age of autonomous professionalism, the age of the collegial professional and the post-professional or postmodern age.

Professionalism and Teacher Professionalism

Professionalism, and specifically teacher professionalism, and how it is perceived and exhibited in education settings, is an issue that has been researched thoroughly as well as debated internationally by countless interested people from the late 1990s (Barton, 1999; Carlgren, 1999; Creasy, 2015; Darling-Hammond, 1988; Demirkasimoğlu, 2010; Evans, 2008; Gardner & Shulman, 2005; Goodson, 2003; Hargreaves, 1997; Ilgan et al., 2015; Lilja, 2015; Perkin, 1989; Sachs, 2016). Other work (Helterbran, 2008; Infanti & Fotopoulou, 2011; Lynch et al., 2013; Tschannen-Moran,

2009) who continue NB to highlight the issues of teacher professionalism. The issues that are usually focused on in these discussions include the nature of professionalism traditionally, how to identify professionals in different spheres of activity and how to improve the professional status of some occupations.

The focus of this section of the literature review is an examination of work that has concentrated on teacher professionalism and its link to the original concept of professionalism, and professionalism in teacher education, especially the professionalism of prospective teachers. I engaged in the examination and analysis of these research reports to clarify issues related to teacher professionalism that have already been investigated and established the need for the present study. The analysis of studies done by researchers in the field highlighted the high level of interest in teacher professionalism and the need for the concept to be defined in a concise way. Analysis of the literature also established that researchers have not explored the perceptions of prospective teachers regarding teacher professionalism in teacher education contexts in any depth. This observation established the need for and importance of the present study in developing contexts like Trinidad and Tobago and for relevant perspectives on the issue of professionalism in the sphere of teacher education to be brought to the fore.

Nature of Teacher Professionalism and Link to the Concept of Professionalism

The need to distinguish between the professionalization of teachers and teacher professionalism is an important component of the discussion on the professional status of teachers (Horn, 2016). The professionalization of teachers refers to the process that outlines how an occupation becomes a profession in a sociological sense. Teacher

professionalism, on the other hand, refers to the possession of an ideology as well as the engagement in activities associated with the ideology, which can be found in different occupations, including teaching (Cottle, 2014). Teacher professionalism focuses on the attitudinal attributes of teachers as members of an occupational group, highlighting the importance of belief in the value of expertise, rigorous standards, and importance of a public service orientation. Creasy (2015) suggested the issues of competency to make decisions within the area of expertise, integrity, reliability, and empathetic humanism, and growing and developing professionally are important for the discussion of teacher professionalism.

Teacher professionalism is associated with the continued focus on the improving standards of teachers' work and their public image. Demirkasimoğlu (2010) aligned this concept of teacher professionalism as emerging from a field of specializations including sociology, ideology, and education. He used a range of documents on the nature of teachers as professionals to make this statement. As such, elements of professionalism and professionalization as discussed in the literature continue to be incorporated within the nature of teacher professionalism as it exists. Demirkasimoğlu (2010) raised the idea that, based on the range of different scholarly arguments that have been indulged in as attempts were made to describe teacher professionalism and professionalization, it is obvious that the concept of teacher professionalism is one that is dynamic.

Professions and Professionalism

McCulloch et al. (2000, p. 6) took the view that *profession* is “a socially constructed, dynamic and contested term.” Other researchers like Hilferty (2007),

Kennedy (2007), and Lawn (1989) supported this research. The need to clarify exactly what is meant when teachers are described as professionals is one of the important challenges of teacher education reform in Trinidad and Tobago. Arguments about professionalism range from the notion of professionals as having specific characteristics, the possession of more or less of these characteristics making a person more or less professional, to the understanding of professionalism as a practical phenomenon that is “a historically situated concept susceptible to different constructions according to time, place, policy environment and discursive disposition” (Locke et al., 2005, p. 558).

Using the experience of Anglophone countries, Hargreaves (2000) theorized that four stages of professionalism can be discerned, namely: (a) a pre-professional stage that is technically focused in terms of pedagogical demands, (b) an autonomous stage that focused on the individual development of teachers and opportunity for teachers to engage in decision making and to challenge uniform views of pedagogy, (c) a collegial stage that is focused on the building of culture along with role expansion, and (d) the final post-professional stage when teachers are engaged in struggles against attempts to implement centralized curricula and with types of external domination. This final stage can be seen as one in where teachers must fend off attempts to de-professionalize their work. In the final stage, according to Hargreaves, “If teachers are to maintain and pursue their professionalism at this point, they will, at the very least, need to defend themselves against these powerful forces of de-professionalization” (p. 169). Hargreaves explained that countries may be at different points along this historical continuum in the way they conceptualize their respective ideas of professionalism.

Models of Professionalism

Beyond the stage theory of professionalism offered by Hargreaves (2000), models of professionalism that offer distinctive conceptions of the nature of professionalism can be discerned in the literature. The trait model and the social construct model, two of the models discussed, appear to find greater support than others based on the number of times that they were encountered in texts and research reports related to the topic of teacher professionalism. These models were used to describe professionalism in several research studies (Cruess & Cruess, 2016; Hilferty, 2007; Kauchak & Eggen, 2013; Lai & Lo, 2007; Shauffer, 2016) and, accordingly, are described in this overview.

Trait Model. The trait model (Gardner & Shulman, 2005; Runte, 1995) is a traditional understanding of the nature of professionalism and was used to describe a professional since the earliest discussions on the nature of this concept. Fundamentally, the trait approach describes set criteria that individuals must possess to be considered a professional. Locke et al. (2005, p. 558) spoke of an *essentialist approach* in characterizing traits, while Hoyle and John (1995) offered the idea of a criterion approach. Authors who subscribe to the trait view see professionals as traditionally being awarded a great amount of power and prestige because of the services that they offer, in a disinterested fashion, to members of that society.

Day (2002) declared that the trait view of professionalism is characterized by a strong technical culture, service ethic, professional commitment, and professional autonomy. The set of characteristics that define a profession include statements that focus on the clarification of its central purpose and function: the length of training attached to

establishment of the skill level, a body of knowledge, levels of skills, a code of ethical conduct, client-centeredness, autonomy, independent decision making and adaptability, self-governance, and the requirement that these play a central role in relevant public policy making. Other factors relevant to the trait model include the uncertainty, novelty, and unpredictability that characterize professional work and the need to learn how to grow smarter and wiser from one's experience. In addition, there is the need to reflectively establish and renew standards of practice and continuous professional education. Kauchak and Eggen (2013) have a shorter list of traits that includes a specialized body of knowledge, autonomy, emphasis on decision making and reflection, and ethical standards of conduct.

There is broad consensus that physicians, lawyers, accountants, architects, engineers, and clergy are among the established professionals in society (Gardner & Shulman, 2005). Freidson (1970) attested that law, medicine, and the clergy are the three original learned professions. The markers that are characteristic of these professions like the Hippocratic Oath, training, membership, and exclusion, are of long standing. While the status of the groups identified is settled in most societies, other groups find themselves in a quandary: Are they professionals or not? Nurses, teachers, and social workers are considered critically important in society but their standing as professionals remains in question. They are generally afforded lower status than the established professions, perhaps because of the gendered nature of their work (Zufiaurre & Perez de Villarreal (2018) and the perceived lack of rigor involved in the performance of their tasks.

Social Construct Model. Unlike the trait model that is somewhat prescriptive, the social construct model is open-ended, argues against exactness, and allows for variation in the conceptualization of professionalism. Reflecting a consensus position, Lai and Lo (2007) took the view that “teacher professionalism is a socially constructed concept that remains variable due to ever-changing conditions” (p. 54) and emphasized that it was a contextual and multi-dimensional issue. Sockett (1996) took the view that “professionalism describes the quality of practice” (p. 23). He described professionalism as a moral undertaking. To Sockett, professional status described the manner and conduct of members within an occupation, including consideration of the ways that they integrate their obligations with their competence, in the context of contractual and ethical relations with clients. This analysis of professionalism by Sockett (1996) clearly outlined a common position on professionalism today. Thus, it is suggested that qualifications, rank, position, years of service or any of the indices identified by advocates of the trait model are insufficient in characterizing the essence of what makes a professional. Rather, it is the ability to earn the described status as an individual that makes a person a professional. In addition, being reliable and competent, having integrity, and showing genuine caring are critical aspects of being a professional.

An example of a case in where teacher professionalism is conceptualized as a social construct can be found in work by Hilferty (2008). Hilferty (2008) reported on the conception of professionalism by organizationally active teachers and mentioned how their concepts “were reflected in organization practice” (p. 161). This work was done with teachers of professional subject-based associations titled the History Teachers’

Association of New South Wales and the Science Teachers' Association of New South Wales. Further, analysis of the idea of teacher professionalism treated the concept as *enacted discourse* (Hilferty, 2008, p. 162). The idea of discourse is a basic concept in Foucault's discussion of power, seen as encompassing what is said and thought, and with what kind of authority. Teacher professionalism is then envisaged as "an enacted discourse of power" (p. 164).

The focus was on teacher professionalism as context specific and based on a process where the teachers attempted to influence the curriculum. Hilferty (2008), in this work, attempted to demonstrate the meaning of professionalism by using the teachers' own words, intentions, actions and relationships. The definition of professionalism considered the way that the teachers were able to assert and develop their expertise, how they were able to support teachers like themselves, and how they resisted managerial control, and claimed the right to contribute to curriculum development (Hilferty, 2007). This was unlike the prescriptive, traditional type of understanding of professionalism that exists in the literature. The emphasis was on what teachers did, and not the attributes they possessed, that made them professional.

Professionalism and Teacher Identity

Recent research has been highlighting the fact that being a professional has much to do with how teachers conduct their lives with special emphasis being placed upon value positions held about the profession and the changing nature of teacher professionalism (Wu et al., 2017). Teachers want to be perceived favorably by members of the community that they live in, including parents of children in their care; and further,

they wish to be held in esteem as competent practitioners by their peers. This brings into focus the question of teacher professional identity. Hamman et al. (2010) drew on possible-selves' theory to direct attention to the importance of identity formation among teachers. How do teachers view themselves; and how do they wish to be viewed by others? Teachers' professional identity may be conceived as encompassing individual as well as social dimensions. Individual identity speaks to the teacher's own sense of self, given his/her occupational status. The job may confer standing and social rewards.

Kelchtermans (1993) analyzed this aspect of the teacher's professional self in terms of self-image, self-esteem, job motivation, task perception, and future perspectives of the teachers considered to be professionals. The research has shown that teachers' sense of personal identity is a major factor in their motivation, job fulfillment, commitment, and self-efficacy (Hargreaves, 2000). In Trinidad and Tobago, to be a teacher is to hold a job of respect. Teaching marks one as being middle class, and there are historical expectations in society as to how one should act. Teaching as an occupation confers social standing on its individual members.

The social dimension of professional identity speaks to the strength of attachment of the teachers to their peers in the occupation. Social identity here means that the teacher is willing to become a part of the in-group, and to accept and conform to the traditions, values, and norms of the group (Tajfel, 1974; Worchel & Coutant, 2004). For the traditional professions, social identity is critical to status maintenance. Membership in the group is tightly controlled, with the professionals themselves having their own testing procedures to determine suitability for entry. Group members also set forth standards of

ethical and technical practice and have sanctioning power over those who fall short. In the Caribbean, as elsewhere, we see lawyers and doctors regulating the work lives of members. This is not quite the case among teachers.

Debate Related to Teachers and Professionalism

Parsons (1954) recognized teaching as one of the professions in his study on the topic, along with law, medicine, and engineering. The status of teaching as a profession is now in question more than fifty years later. Teaching is more reachable as a form of work than are the established professions, a point dramatized by the home school movement seen in the United States where parents themselves take on the role of teachers. Wilensky (1964) suggested that some occupations would find it more difficult to be granted professional autonomy as their knowledge bases are “too general or vague” or too “narrow and specific” (p. 157). He argued that if the vocabulary of the occupation sounds familiar to everyone or if the base is scientific so that it can be learned as a set of rules, then the occupation will have difficulty claiming the kind of monopoly over the knowledge that professionals are able to do. This makes it quite difficult for occupations (artists, politicians, journalists, athletes, entertainers) that are not perceived to be reliant on special esoteric knowledge not readily accessible to nonmembers to claim to be professionals.

Teaching has the challenge of being perceived as requiring special knowledge. There has been some question as to the importance of pedagogic preparation, leaving open the prospect that teachers could be hired based on their disciplinary preparation only. Alternative certification approaches are evident across countries, including models

where people are accepted into teaching based on subject matter credentials only.

Teaching is generally judged against the other established professions, and because it is not perceived to be of similar standing, is considered in some cases to be “not categorized as a full profession” (Ingersoll & Merrill, 2011, p. 186) or treated as a semi-profession according to Ingersoll and Collins (2018).

Teaching is challenged worldwide regarding its status as a profession on many counts. First, there is the issue of a body of knowledge that is specific to teachers. There is no agreed upon understanding about the nature of the knowledge that teachers must possess to do their jobs well (Winch, 2004). This view persists even though increasingly, there is the understanding that content knowledge, general and specific pedagogical knowledge, as well as clinical knowledge is important to teachers’ expertise (Hart & Marshall, 1992). All of this exists in an environment where researchers such as Shulman (1986, 1987) and Voss et al. (2011) presented pedagogical content knowledge as a body of knowledge unique to teachers. In addition, teachers generally have been criticized for demonstrating lack of commitment to their jobs, not adhering to any particular code of ethics and having serious challenges with attaining the opportunity to practice autonomy in the conduct of their daily duties. Gardner and Shulman (2005) suggested that any individual or group can behave as a professional. Indeed, an increasing number of occupational groups consider themselves to be professionals and organize and behave in ways akin to the accepted professions.

Mindsets of Teachers and Link to Professionalism

The availability of field research on the nature of professionalism and how it aligns with the mindset that a teacher exhibits is very scarce (Seaton, 2018). What some researchers have paid attention to is understanding how teachers perceive the mindset that they possess and how that understanding influences instruction (Nestor, 2017). Nestor, in doctoral work completed in 2017, highlighted the fact that there is a strong link between growth mindset of teachers and positive outcomes for teaching and learning. Further, there was an indication that teachers with positive growth mindsets were more likely to foster growth mindsets in their classrooms. Seaton (2018) highlighted research on implementing training to influence teacher mindsets and noted that training did lead to positive and improved practices by educators who demonstrated growth mindsets. The recognition of a positive relationship between the nature of teacher mindset and behaviors in classrooms was previously noted by Gero (2013), who found that the mindset exhibited by a teacher influenced his/her goals and beliefs.

Dweck (2015) shared her ideas on the nature of growth mindset and her observations of educators who claimed to understand and possess the characteristics of the growth mindset. Her observation was that these people did not often exhibit the actions of growth mindset behaviors. In an interview with Christine Gros-Loh (Gros-Loh, 2016), Dweck further highlighted the fact that it could be limiting to learners when educators misunderstand the nature of the growth mindset. She supported her observations with work by Sun (2015), who also felt that the growth mindset was claimed by but not practiced by some educators.

Dweck (2015) further explained that the growth mindset was a journey that teachers travelled and not simply characteristics that they possessed as part of their personality. Macnamara (2018) suggested that growth mindset messages being delivered to children has a significant impact on their attainment. Teachers' mindsets are related to how they consider themselves as responsible for learners and the learners' achievement (Rissanen et al., 2019). The need for research on prospective teachers and the exploration of the mindsets that they possess was evident as there was not research available to read on this specific group of educators. Prospective teachers have great potential to influence the nature of teaching (Sirotová, 2013).

Prospective Teachers and Teacher Professionalism

Multiple researchers (see e.g., Dodillet et al., 2019; Ezer et al., 2011; Okas et al., 2014; Sirotová, 2013; Tarman, 2012) engaged in investigations of the perceptions of professionalism of prospective teachers from many different angles. The general focus of these studies was to understand the perceptions of professionalism of prospective teachers before they get into the teacher training process. The teacher training process is understood to have a major role in defining teacher professionalism. One study of particular interest, and similar in focus to the one being conducted here, is the work by Dodillet et al. (2019), who were interested in understanding the notions of professionalism that prospective teachers held based on their exposure to different types of teacher training programs. Their findings demonstrated that different types of institutions had different foci in their programs and so the prospective teachers in their

study either saw teacher professionalism as a *science-based* professionalism or a *pedagogic professionalism* (p. 2).

Evans (2010) and Sirotová (2013) also recognized that teacher training as a significant experience for teachers in the making. While Evans (2010) reviewed the concept of occupational socialization as relevant to the types of ideologies and expected behaviors that new teachers see as important, Sirotová (2013) emphasized the ideas of habits formed during teacher training as a determinant in the eventual contributions that trained teachers can provide in quality school systems. Yuksel and Kircicek (2019) noted that the views of prospective teachers change as they experience the teacher training program. Prospective teachers claimed that they gained important experiences for the teaching profession. These authors (Yuksel & Kircicek, 2019) are some of the key researchers who have contributed to the discussion of teacher professionalism and prospective teachers.

The description of the key concept of this study, teacher professionalism, has been discussed in the literature over time. The focus on prospective teachers, while available in a few studies, was not extensive internationally and almost non-existent in the local context but the literature available formed the basis of the discussion of the understandings of the prospective teachers in Trinidad and Tobago. The intention was to use the work of Hargreaves (2000) as the basis for trying to understand what exists with regards to teacher professionalism in teacher education in the Trinidad and Tobago context. The additional materials provided a basis for understanding how the concept of teacher professionalism developed within the teacher training context up to this time.

Prospective Teachers as Future Professionals

The focus of this study was prospective teachers and their understanding of and experiences of becoming teacher professionals. I engaged the prospective teachers in the sharing of their experiences to explore how they formulated the perceptions that they expressed. Previous research that focused on how prospective teachers relate to the issue of professionalism include Loewenberg Ball and Forzani (2009), who highlighted that teachers in training need to have focus placed on understanding their knowledge, beliefs, commitments, and orientations. In a somewhat related study, Hatlevik (2017) concluded that prospective teachers' engagement in teacher preparation programs had an impact on the prospective teachers' view of themselves as professionals, a view that eventually makes a difference to the prospective teachers' ability to perform as teachers within the education system.

Nenty et al. (2015) dealt specifically with the idea of teacher professionalism in the context of teacher education and with prospective teachers. Nenty et al. focused on the importance of the perception of professionalism among prospective teachers. Their work consisted of the conduct of a survey with prospective teachers in the University of Botswana teacher training program. The outcomes of the study demonstrated that the prospective teachers did, in fact, view teaching as a profession and this view was more popular among the female participants than among the male participants. The researchers (Nenty et al., 2015) expressed the view that the stronger the belief that teaching was a profession among the prospective teachers, the greater was the expression of motivation to do well in the teacher training program and to excel in teaching activities. Eren (2012),

who saw the idea of how prospective teachers perceived professionalism as important, mentioned that few studies have focused on teachers' interest in their teaching. There has also been an acknowledgement of the need to assess professionalism in candidates who were part of the teacher training contexts (Kim, Grisby, & Micek, 2013).

While some quantitative research has been used in trying to understand teacher professionalism, research methodologies that are aligned to the qualitative research method have been most popular in the attempts to understand different elements of professionalism and how it is exhibited in teacher education contexts. The main approaches mentioned included a life history ethnographic approach (Cottle, 2014; Lawy & Tedder, 2009), the use of critical incident analysis (Kim, Micek, & Grigsby, 2013), exploratory studies using the content analysis of policy documents (Snoek et al., 2011), a multiple case study approach (Vanassche & Kelchtermans, 2014), and, in the recent past, the use of mixed methods designs. Tarman (2012), for example, used a variety of data collection strategies, including information sheets, weekly field notes taken by the author after seminars, copies of reflections from participants, and copies of online discussions. These modes of data collection all reflect a qualitative approach used by the author to explore his interest in the beliefs and perceptions that prospective teachers have of teaching as a profession.

The essence of Tarman's (2012) investigation was about understanding important elements of teacher professionalism at the level of teacher education and establishing how prospective teachers envisage teacher professionalism in the context of teacher education. The use of qualitative research facilitated the exploration of the key concepts

related to teacher professionalism, allowed the examination of the views of the participants in the studies reported, and gave in-depth understanding of the idea of professionalism in teaching. Multiple researchers (Bahr & Mellor, 2016; Snoek et al., 2011) have mentioned the need to examine the key issues using qualitative research. Further, the use of qualitative studies allowed the exploration of experiences and events that required the participants to shape their views of professionalism and then share their understandings.

The research done on prospective teachers and their understanding and description of issues related to teacher professionalism leave some important areas still to be examined. The key understandings that were established are that professionalism is an issue in teacher training; its definition has not been clarified within this context, and that the conceptualization has implications for the quality of teachers that prospective teachers turn out to be in the system. A study like the one conducted was important as it added information to the clarity of teacher professionalism among prospective teachers and how they contribute to the understanding of teacher professionalism in the teacher training process.

Use of Interpretive Description in Research Studies

Interpretive descriptive research is described by Draper (2015, p. i) as *a second generation qualitative methodology* that originated from phenomenology, ethnography, and grounded theory. This approach emphasizes a constructivist and naturalistic orientation to inquiry (Hunt, 2009) and was especially developed to generate knowledge relevant to the clinical context of practical and applied health disciplines. The guidelines

suggested by researchers who have used interpretive description (Bertero, 2015; Draper, 2015; Nkulu Kalengayi et al., 2012; Teodoro et al., 2018) encourage the use of this method for understanding the key concepts and perspectives being pursued in a study like the one I planned and conducted, which is being described here.

Hunt (2009) used interpretive description to examine the moral dimensions of humanitarian work in the experiences of health workers. The researcher outlined the opportunity to engage in in-depth interviews and use different sampling procedures to identify and engage participants who were able to contribute to the understanding of the key issues of focus in the study. This approach allowed for the consistent reorganization of the inquiry according to the new insights being gained in the process of the research.

Hunt's (2009) work, similar to the work of Nkulu Kalengayi et al. (2012), emphasized the exploration of perspectives and experiences of caregivers through interpretive description as well. The use of interviews and participant observation was the basis of the study with the analysis of key themes to come up with new areas of knowledge for discussion. Draper's (2015) work was also important for the exploration of experiences of multiple participants who were mature aged females with dependent children as well as university students. This approach allowed the researcher to contribute to the body of knowledge related to the topic by exploring the interests of the people of the named population and contributed information to inform, guide and improve decisions related to education in this field. This field is a relatively new area of study, and the use of interpretive descriptive research facilitated the study of this topic.

Overall, the use of the interpretive descriptive approach within qualitative research has specific characteristics (that are explored in detail in Chapter 3) that make it a feasible approach to studying the perspectives of professionalism expressed and justified by prospective teachers in the teacher education context identified for this study. Further, the opportunity to use and adapt a variety of data collection methods and incorporate a range of participants in the study allowed the researcher to collect information to improve comprehensive understanding of the concepts and ideas related to teacher professionalism. The interpretive descriptive approach is relatively new to the field of qualitative research, but it provided contained the potential to support an in-depth understanding of teacher professionalism in teacher education in Trinidad and Tobago.

Summary and Conclusions

Numerous studies were identified in the literature as an attempt was made to understand where researchers have probed and presented ideas on the issue of teacher professionalism. The topic was well researched but there is still some indecision about the nature of the concept. Several of the studies highlighted the variety of possibilities regarding the nature of teacher professionalism including it being defined by traits, professionalism being a social construct, factors shaping teacher professionalism, and the idea of professionalism as developing through a variety of stages (Hargreaves, 2000). There was an attempt to examine key concepts related to professionalism through the examination of key theories related to the topic of professionalism and mindsets, the two theories were used to guide the theoretical and conceptual framework of present research study. The forms of professionalism were also examined, and the applications of the

research studies found were applied to the present study. Another important aspect of the literature review was the examination of research studies that used the proposed methodology of this study to see how the characteristics suited the focus of the present study.

The information gathered made it clear that the issue of professionalism, and especially professionalism among teachers, was examined in depth. Final decisions were not made about how professionalism is exhibited but countless presentations have been done so that options are available for examination and decision making regarding the need for future research. What is missing in the available research is the nature of professionalism in the context of teacher education and especially how the mindsets of prospective teachers are related to the understandings of professionalism expressed. There is little information on the examination of the mindsets of the prospective teachers in the first place and this study addressed that aspect of development of prospective teachers and related it to professionalism, which is an area that also needed to be examined in the context of tertiary education.

The exploration of the topic of prospective teachers' mindset and teacher professionalism is a relatively new topic in the field of education. This study has the potential, now that new information is available on the topic, to offer options for the development of quality in the teacher training process and in the professional development of educators. The use of the interpretive descriptive method of qualitative research facilitated opportunities to explore the perceptions and exhibition of behaviors of stakeholders in the teacher education context indicated for the study. The interpretive

descriptive method of qualitative research was explored and justified as appropriate for this study in Chapter 3.

Chapter 3: Research Method

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative interpretive descriptive study was to explore prospective teachers' perceptions and experiences conceptualizing and operationalizing the construct of teacher professionalism. This was done by exploring the views, understandings, and experiences of prospective teachers within the teacher education context. The teacher education context in this case was an established teacher education institution in Trinidad and Tobago, and the participants of the study were prospective teachers in the bachelor of education program offered by that institution. The methodology adopted in the study focused on engaging the participants so they were comfortable to share their perceptions of professionalism and to interpret, expand upon, and reflect on how they formulated their views so they could contribute to the knowledge building component of this study.

This chapter outlines critical elements in the conduct of the study. These elements are emphasized to ensure the processes of the qualitative interpretive descriptive approach were best suited to the purpose of the study and demonstrate the approach adopted with fidelity within the research context. The nature of the qualitative interpretive descriptive approach is explored and the suitability of the approach to the focus of the study is justified. Further, I explore the role of the researcher in this qualitative study and factors guiding participant selection, use of instruments for data collection, and procedures for a pilot study. As the chapter ends, I highlight the procedures for data collection and analysis and guiding ethical principles. The in-depth

exploration of these critical elements establishes a strong foundation for a critical study of teacher education in Trinidad and Tobago.

Research Design and Rationale

A focus on the problem and purpose of this study led to three key research questions used to direct the study:

RQ1: How do prospective teachers, who are students in a teacher education program in Trinidad and Tobago, perceive themselves as emerging teacher professionals?

RQ2: How do prospective teachers describe the process they are experiencing that contributes to the development of their understanding and application of the construct of teacher professionalism?

RQ3: How do prospective teachers in a teacher education program in Trinidad and Tobago describe how they operationalize the construct of teacher professionalism?

Exploration of these questions facilitates an understanding of teacher professionalism. I explored the research questions by placing extended focus in the teacher education context of an institution training prospective teachers. Engagement with participants' responses facilitated an improved understanding of teacher professionalism. Analysis and understanding of the outcomes of the research allowed for the development of a document outlining specific behaviors relevant to professionals in the context of the institution that formed the basis of the study.

The qualitative research tradition was best suited to explore the concept of professionalism in teacher education in the context described. The qualitative research tradition endorses a process of naturalistic inquiry into specific phenomena with a focus

on the in-depth understanding of the given issue. Hammarberg et al. (2016) suggested using qualitative research methods to allow a researcher to answer questions about experiences, meanings, and perspectives of numerous participants using a range of sources. Denzin and Lincoln (2011) stated, “qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings that people bring to them” (p. 3), which is supportive of Hammarberg et al.’s view about the focus and value of qualitative research. The completion of this study was facilitated largely using qualitative research.

These key areas of emphasis in qualitative research suited the focus of this study. The general ideas of professionalism in the field of education have been researched, but a need exists for the clarification of the concepts (Tate, 2010). The qualitative approach is used by researchers to make sense of phenomena, especially in the natural setting, and to attempt to understand how relevant participants see them. This is exactly what I was attempting to bring to the fore in the context of professionalism in teacher education in Trinidad and Tobago in this study.

Emanating from the general qualitative tradition are many options that allow for the examination of phenomena in in-depth and meaningful ways. I considered the narrative approach as one option for this study as the approach would allow participants to report individual stories and have these stories ordered based on the meanings of those experiences (McAlpine, 2016). Examination of other qualitative approaches (phenomenology, discourse analysis, and grounded theory) highlighted the meaningfulness and suitability of the interpretative descriptive approach to the focus of

this study. While phenomenology emphasizes the firsthand experiences of participants, it was not the most suitable approach based on the emphasis of this study, as a conceptual understanding in a specific context. The phenomenological approach does not emphasize a conceptual approach and is more concerned with subjective observation or engagement of participants.

Discourse analysis, and its emphasis on the spoken language (Alsoraihi, 2019) and the analysis of language across several disciplines, was not best to bring out the focus of this study as the participants of the study are prospective teachers. The focus of the study did not facilitate investigation of students' language competencies across varying disciplines. The nature of grounded theory, which focuses on developing theoretical understandings of social issues and how they could be resolved, was not suitable for this study. Numerous theoretical statements have been presented on the nature of professionalism but the in-depth examination of individual perceptions at the teacher education level still needed to be examined.

Draper (2015), a researcher in the field of education, recognized the value of interpretative descriptive research for use in education. The approach was described as second-generation qualitative methodology and, prior to this, was generally used in health sciences (Oliver, 2012). The emphasis of this approach was to explore the experiences of multiple participants in a particular social setting. Draper, however, used the approach in an attempt to understand the experiences of mothers who had dependent children while being students in a university program. Draper claimed this approach facilitated the research in the most natural setting, and this was the type of characteristic

needed for the success of this study. The interpretive descriptive approach was especially useful in the consideration of context as a critical factor in research and the facilitation of flexibility during the research process. Further, the ability of this interpretive descriptive approach to generate better understandings of the clinical practices of the teacher education context, such as in the field of nursing (Teodoro et al., 2018), was a plus to the study of professionalism in teacher education in Trinidad and Tobago.

Role of the Researcher

I chose the qualitative interpretive descriptive methodology because of its potential to facilitate my interests as a researcher for the duration of the research process. The interpretive descriptive design has been used in clinical contexts before, and I considered the opportunity to examine teacher professionalism within the teacher education context as clinical. The clinical element was included in the project by ensuring the engagement and exploration of the concepts related to teacher professionalism in teacher education and allowed for an understanding of its effectiveness and engaging outcomes to facilitate positive results (Blanchard et al., 2014). This interpretive descriptive methodology is a relatively new research approach (Hunt, 2009) that made it easier to apply findings to the functioning of the institution and the improvement of professional practices. Understanding the concept of teacher professionalism in the context of teacher education will provide valuable information to the designers of the teacher education program, policy makers, and other stakeholders. This information may contribute to the functioning of the institution where the research was conducted and to other educational institutions at all levels.

I am not familiar with the functioning of the institution where the research was conducted. This allowed me to have an open mind about engaging in data collection at the institution, and I was able to acknowledge and accept the types of experiences the prospective teachers described. Additionally, I reflected carefully on how I was positioned regarding the institution. I engaged in responsible practices when I was developing interview schedules, I asked relevant questions to participants, I provided suitable guidelines for the completion of participant diaries, and I used appropriate software and strategies for analyzing the data.

The choice of data collection strategies in the study was beneficial to me because they allowed me to be engaged with the participants on a regular basis and to pay attention to different methods of communication. Further, I had opportunities to examine statements made by participants, and I engaged in probing and further exploration to clarify any issues that arose in the data. The opportunities identified in the data collection process were important in verifying the quality of data collected and used to establish the validity of conclusions of the study.

I have been functioning as part of a teacher education institution for 17 years. I work in the capacity of senior instructor and course coordinator (course leader) for three practicum courses. As senior instructor, I also deliver at least four courses (sometimes five different courses) in any semester as part of the bachelor of education program, including the three practicum courses I coordinate. This experience does had the potential to influence my engagement with prospective teachers and teacher educators and my

expectations and data collection practices at the research institution, but I remained attentive to the possibilities of bias in the interpretations of the data.

The possibility of bias in the interpretation of data due to previous experiences and expectations was addressed using a reflexive journal. I maintained a reflective journal during the data collection process to facilitate a wealth of positive experiences and enhanced the research process (see Lutz & Paretti, 2019). My engagement in the reflective journal was important to facilitate reflexivity in the process of knowledge development related to the research topic. Reflexivity forces a researcher to take time to engage in a personal self-examination to ensure they take responsibility for their own position in relation to others involved in the research (see Finefter-Rosenbluh, 2017).

Other issues that contribute to researcher bias in a qualitative study include the discomforts a researcher might have about a project, not being prepared for the field research, and conducting inappropriate interviews (Chenail, 2011). I was able to address these issues by preparing myself fully for the research tasks. I read widely on the research topic and the methodology chosen to ensure understanding. I also engaged other teacher educators in the review and validation of the guides for the participant diary entries. The interview questions were validated by my committee chair and the institutional review board (IRB). I also ensured that all the processes engaged in the research were obvious and all attempts were made to reflect consistently on the research process and address important issues as they emerged. Galdas (2017) emphasized the need to be transparent and reflexive in addressing issues of bias in the qualitative research process.

In the organization of the processes necessary to conduct the data collection for this study, I was vigilant and ensured that all ethical procedures were incorporated in the project. I reflected on my role as researcher and discussed this with all the study participants. I also took time to explore the nature and purpose of the project with participants so they had a clear understanding of the need for the research and its focus. The participants were allowed to ask and answer questions before data collection began. Participants were also assured of confidentiality regarding their contributions to the research. I took the required steps to ensure confidentiality and anonymity of participants until the data are destroyed.

Context of the Study

The data for this study were collected from students at a university that provides educational opportunities at the tertiary level within a variety of disciplines. The university is located in the northern part of Trinidad and Tobago and has been functioning for more than 90 years. The School of Education and Humanities has been providing training experiences for 71 years. The School of Education and Humanities from the university will be referred to as Teacher Education Department A (TEDA) in this study. The School of Education and Humanities is one of the key schools in the institution and is where the bachelor of education degree, as well as other educational qualifications, is offered.

I chose this institution because it is one of the four main teacher education institutions in Trinidad and Tobago. The institution is separate from the institution I am employed with but provides similar offerings regarding educational preparation of

teachers. The institution has a long history of providing educational teacher training and provides qualified graduates from the bachelor of education program for schools in Trinidad and Tobago at both primary and secondary levels. These characteristics established its suitability as a site for data collection for this study. Additionally, I chose the institution because of its convenience regarding my official access to it (a letter was sent to the dean of the faculty of humanities and education and permission to engage in the research process at the institution was given; see Appendix A) and because of physical access given my place of employment and the opportunity for ease of access when traveling to its location.

Methodology

Participation Selection Logic

Identification of the Participants

The participants of this study included the members of the student population of the School of Humanities and Education at one of the four major teacher education institutions of Trinidad and Tobago. The individuals who were asked to be part of the study were prospective teachers in training at the School of Humanities and Education who are pursuing the bachelor of education program. This bachelor of education degree is offered through a four-year program. The participants were selected from cohorts that entered the program in 2017 (these are considered to be Year IV students at the time of data collection), those who entered the bachelor of education in 2018 (Year III students at the time of data collection), those who entered the program in 2019 (Year II students at the time of data collection), and those who entered the program in 2020 (Year I students

at the time of data collection). Prospective teachers from each current annual (year's) group were included in the study as participants. The availability of participants determined the people who were included in the study, but attempts were made to encourage people of different genders, age groups, from different specializations and from the different year groups to participate in the study. The sampling strategy and criteria for selection are described further in the following sections of this chapter.

Justification of Sampling Strategy

Criterion-based purposeful sampling was used to guide the selection of participants from the population available for this study. The population for the study consisted of all the prospective teachers who were part of the teacher education context of the TEDA at the university. The use of criterion-based purposeful sampling to establish the sampling frame facilitated the collection of data based on the qualities of the participants who were significant to the nature of the study being conducted. The information provided by this strategy is rich and it also facilitated the engagement of participants who were suitable for the proper utilization of available resources (Etikan et al., 2016).

Purposive sampling further ensured that the people who were selected to be part of the study were able to provide the information to address the research questions and ensured enhanced understanding of the issue being researched (Creswell, 2008). Benoot et al. (2016) spoke of the value of purposeful sampling to facilitate data collection that supports the examination of a complexity of different conceptualizations of the concept or phenomenon of interest. In the case of this study, the individuals being selected to

participate were prospective teachers of different ages, genders, and from different year groups within the teacher education program at the data gathering for this study who were interested, articulate and willing to engage in the sharing of ideas during the conduct of the study.

Criteria of Selection for Participants

The focus of this study was on understanding the nature of becoming a teacher professional within teacher education and on the perceptions and experiences associated with it, exploring the types of mindsets that were exhibited by the prospective teachers, and examining how these are interpreted and understood by the prospective teachers themselves in the teacher education context. The teacher education context consisted of the bachelor of education program and the teacher educators, the prospective teachers who were engaged in the bachelor of education program during the data collection process period, and the administrators from the institution who were functioning in the program during the period of the study. Of all the people within the context, the prospective teachers comprised the overall population of this study. Members of this group, based on the criteria established (see Table 1), were significant contributors to understanding the nature of teacher professionalism, establishing the prospective teachers' mindsets, and sharing ideas on how teacher professionalism is understood, experienced, and exhibited.

Table 1*Sampling Criteria*

Participation criteria
1. The prospective teacher must be a student registered at the institution to become a teacher.
2. The prospective teacher must also be a student in at least one class related to the bachelor of education program during the semester when data are being collected.
3. The prospective teachers will be informed of the nature and purpose of the study and will be expected to give their permission to participate in the study.
4. The prospective teacher, as a participant of this study, must be willing and able to participate in one interview session related to the content of the study.
5. The prospective teacher will be willing and able to participate in the research process. This means they will attend and complete one interview and also produce one entry in the participant diary per week based on their improved understanding of the meaning of teacher professionalism and how they are better able to appreciate it in the teaching and learning context of teacher training.

The incorporation of participants into the sample from each annual group of the bachelor of education students (full time as well as part time) allowed me to track emerging perceptions and experiences of teacher professionalism in the teacher training context. As participants expressed their understandings of the concept, and these were analyzed, I was able to relate the statements to the available conceptual framework. I was able to gain some new knowledge and provide an enriched discussion of the idea of teacher professionalism from the perspectives of the prospective teachers.

The purposeful sampling method was used to select participants and the data collection process continued until the 16 confirmed and ready to share participants were interviewed. I was able to get confirmation from 21 participants but when it was time to begin the data collection process, there were people who asked to leave the study based on different challenges that they expressed. The 16 participants provided enough data to

arrive at the point of data saturation. Data saturation is described as the point when the researcher is assured that the research questions are adequately addressed (Fawcett & Garity, 2009). The expectation that these participants would be able to provide adequate data rested on the fact that specific criteria would have been used based on a sampling frame to include people in the sample and ensure that only information rich cases were included (Bradshaw et al., 2017). The choice of including information rich cases in a sample is supported by work presented by Malterud et al. (2016) who suggest that when a study is narrowly defined and the members of the sample are accurately defined, these characteristics add information power to the size of the sample and small samples fulfill the needs of the researcher. Further, a study that is guided by established theory and a strong communication between the researcher and interviewees facilitates the ability of the research to gain rich information from a small sample.

The members of the initial sample who were unwilling to be part of the study when it was time to begin the data collection process were not enticed in any way to participate. They provided explanations and these were accepted, and I wished them well as they continued their studies. All the target population members, once informed of the nature of study, were allowed to choose to avail themselves to be part of the research project and included in the sampling frame. All confirmed participants were informed that they are free to express their discomfort if they were uneasy during the data collection process. Individuals who could not continue were allowed to discontinue active involvement in the research processes related to the study.

Recruitment of Participants and Saturation of Data Collection

I made the initial contact with participants through discussion with the administration of the teacher education institution. I sent a formal letter (Appendix A) to the Dean of the School of Education and Humanities seeking official permission to engage in data collection at the institution. Further contact was sought so I was able to provide additional information on the nature of the research to members of the administration. In addition, the purpose of this initial administrative contact was to get information on the members of the participant group and attain possible contacts (email addresses and telephone contacts) for them. The nature of the research and the participants who were being asked to be part of the study was explained to the administrators of the institution. Once the approval was received from the dean of the research site university, I completed and submitted documents to the IRB of Walden University to ensure all ethical standards were being observed and I was able to get the other steps of the approval process completed.

After, I asked the dean of TEDA to grant permission for me to meet with the staff of the education department to introduce the research topic, share the requirements for data collection with the prospective teachers, and to ask for their support based on the criteria outlined (see Table 1). I was provided with email contacts for all the members of the department and so I emailed and got responses. In some cases, I was able to call lecturers who agreed to let me join their classes online and share the nature of the research and the research focus with possible participants. Other lecturers agreed to share the research poster (Appendix B) in their classes and students from different

specializations and year bodies responded and indicated their interest in participating in the study.

The nature of the study was explained to people who indicated their interest and they were asked to give their permission to be included in the list of possible participants who will engage in the interviewing process and share their thoughts through the completion of entries in a diary. The participants chosen for the study were informed as soon as the decision was made. The participants were asked to give their approval to participate in the study. They were also asked to share further contact information (telephone contact and the times that they would be available for communication regarding the study) that was used at the start of the data collection process.

The final number of participants for the study was guided by suggestions from the work of Vasileiou et al. (2018) who stated that qualitative studies should engage at least 12 participants to reach the point of data saturation. Therefore, the initial estimate of participants was five people from each of the four cohorts (20 participants) that comprise the different annual bodies in the bachelor of education program. By the end of the study, substantive information was gained from 16 participants. Participant selection was finalized using the sampling criterion protocol developed for the study (see Table 1).

I aimed, through engagement with the research participants, to acquire in-depth data that was rich and thick in terms of quality and quantity of information. The data collection process continued until sufficient information was gathered. The information gathered helped to clarify the prospective teachers' perceptions and experiences in relation to conceptualizing the construction of teacher professionalism (Thorne, 2020).

The data collection period lasted for one year after approval was granted by Walden's IRB.

Instrumentation

Data Collection Instruments

Key data collection techniques served as the basis for gathering information in this qualitative study. The techniques or approaches to data collection included face-to-face interviews and participant diaries. These two main approaches formed the key sources for the search for rich, thick data necessary for interpreting the complex issues of teacher professionalism in the teacher education context of Trinidad and Tobago. The strategies mentioned provided great insight into the topic of teacher professionalism as perceived by prospective teachers and also supported each other as different forms of evidence. According to Thorne et al. (2004), the use of the interpretive descriptive research approach is well supported by multiple data collection strategies and provided the groundwork for the articulation of "meaningful accounts of experiential data" (p. 5) by the participants involved in the study and were useful in my attempt to avoid challenges with the incomprehensive and inappropriate interpretations of the findings of the study.

Face-to-Face Interviews. The engagement in face-to-face interviews with the key participants of this study was included in the research plan as the major approach to data collection. This was not possible due to the restrictions connected to the COVID-19 pandemic during the period of data collection and this issue is explained in depth in

Chapter 4. I was still able to conduct the interviews, but these were conducted using Zoom Meeting sessions supported by the audio and video recording of all the sessions.

The interview questions (see Appendix C) were based on the literature that guided the development of the study. The responses from the interviews contributed data for responding to the research questions that are important to the knowledge building process of the study. Relevant probes were used to expand the focus of the questions and provided opportunities to enrich the responses of the interview participants (see Appendix D).

The face-to-face interview is one of the most common forms of data collection used in qualitative research (Jamshed, 2014). While there are different formats of face-to-face interviews, most suitable to the qualitative approach chosen to guide data collection processes in this study, is the semi-structured interview. Jamshed (2014) further highlights that the semi-structured form of interview is used in most qualitative research as most qualitative interviewing still requires some structure. The semi-structured interview requires the participants to respond to preset questions (Jamshed, 2014) compiled by the researcher in an interview protocol document that will be conducted using the guide of an interview schedule. I developed the interview schedule for this study using the key ideas that are part of the literature review and that guided the development of ideas that were used to address the research questions of the study.

Further, the questions that were built into an interview schedule are open-ended and were designed to facilitate further discussion using probe questions that are developed to stimulate participation from the participants. The semi-structured interviews

for this study were organized to last from anywhere between 60 minutes to 75 minutes. I also requested permission to record interviews to assist with the accuracy of the information being collected and to engage in an effective data collection process.

I conducted the semi-structured interviews using the one-to-one format and asked the participants to relax and feel free to respond to the questions being asked. I informed the participants that they were required to engage in one formal interview. An additional member checking (see Birt et al., 2016) session was scheduled to ensure that the information gathered from the interview was accurate as transcribed. The purpose of this session was to allow the participants to review the content recorded in the session and confirm that what was understood and noted by the researcher was aligned with their meanings and intentions.

The option of conducting interviews virtually was also included in this methodology. The safety measures implemented within society due to the experience of the COVID-19 crisis have been put in place worldwide and have implications for conducting interviews (Jowett, 2020). The option of video-calling was used when the data collection process began. There were still restrictions related to social distancing and gathering in crowds in places of social contexts. The social distances restrictions continued in Trinidad and Tobago even after the data collection process was completed in August 2022.

The video calling was facilitated based on the nature of the participants in the research. They were studying at tertiary level and were accustomed to using technology for other teaching and learning purposes. They had access to the relevant technologies

and possessed the relevant skills to engage in video-calling and to provide the information required for the interviews. Jowett (2020) suggested that video-calling is a close substitute to the type of interviewing suggested as the first option for the study (face-to-face) and further, it facilitates the collection of data over large geographical areas.

Participant Diaries. Personal diaries written by participants of a research study constitute a legitimate source of information and create detailed and reliable data (Turner, 2016) in the conduct of qualitative research. The diaries were solicited and completed in an online Google document that I created for each participant. The use of the online diary allowed me to guide the participants of the research based on topics that were important to resolving the research questions (Jacelon & Imperio, 2005). The development of the diaries involves the study participants in the process of sharing their ideas, views, and experiences of a specific event over a given time. The participants were given guidelines, including prompts (see Appendix E), on how to reflect as they developed the entries in the diaries and then they were left to share their thoughts related to each weekly topic. These diaries were scheduled to be completed in the teaching semester prior to the conduct of the interviews with the participants.

The use of the participant diary as a data collection tool was beneficial to the conduct of this study. Through the reflective responses that were presented by the participants, I was able to access the thoughts and feelings of the participants as suggested by Snowden (2014). I was able to experience the connection to the views, feelings and experiences of the participants as indicated by Jacelon and Imperio (2005)

when they wrote on the value of using participant diaries as part of the research process. The participants were asked to make one entry per week, and these entries I checked for responses regularly. I provided a new prompt for each week but only when the specific participant had completed the response to the previous prompt. I attempted to check responses and provide a prompt for each week (see Appendix E) but this was not always possible based on the commitments that students had at different periods during the semester. The use of this tool (participant diary) also allowed me to follow and note changes in the views of the participants (Turner, 2016) over the period of data collection.

Sufficiency of Data Collection Instruments

Data collection strategies were chosen for the study based on reflection upon the nature of the research questions that guided the study and the kind of information needed to support the ideas being sought. The strength of the data collection plan was in the variability of methods being proposed to collect data to support the study. The use of interviews and the examination of participants' diaries developed in teaching and learning environments represent the two viable sources of information for the study. The use of participant diaries for data collection followed by face-to-face interviews was endorsed by Jacelon and Imperio (2005) as valuable sources of data as these methods of data collection (participant diaries and face-to-face interviews) can be approximated to using participant observation.

Further, the literature used to guide the development of the research study was also used to establish the concepts that were pursued in the interviews. This information was then used to foster development of the data collection instruments. All the

instruments were developed using the same guidelines to ensure that the focus of the study was evident. This will further ensure that the information gathered was valid in the discussion of teacher professionalism and professionalism issues that were outlined in the research problem and the research questions.

Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection Permission

I requested permission from the administration of the TEDA (the proposed data collection site at the time) to gain access to and meet with the participants who made up the population for the study, and to present the focus of this study to them. Once the approval of the possible participants for the final/main study was granted, the interested individuals were asked to identify themselves and the requirements of engagement in the study were explored with that group. Two different meetings were held with prospective teachers from different groups to present ideas related to the focus of the research. The research emailed the consent forms to the interested people and they were required to respond to the invitation by saying *I consent* in the reply email. The participants were informed that while they made a commitment to participate in the study, they were free to withdraw at any time that they did not feel comfortable with the demands being made of them in the study.

Data Collection

I collected data using the interview schedule and the guidelines and probes developed for participant diaries, included as Appendix D and Appendix E, respectively. The protocol for the interviews was established with the administration of the institution and the participants were informed of the procedures and the time for each interview was

negotiated with the specific participant involved. The participants were also given links to documents (individual participant diaries) and guidelines for the completion of their diary entries.

The plan for data collection involved the completion of the participants' diaries and the conduct of one interview (and a member checking session). The interviews were conducted with each individual interviewee (at least 2 participants per week) until all the established participants were interviewed. The interview sessions with the prospective teachers lasted up to 75 minutes for each session with the shortest interview being 45 minutes long. The participant and I experienced internet challenges and were unable to continue the interview. The diaries were reviewed weekly during the data collection period and then the interviews took place with individual prospective teachers.

The data collected through the interviews with the prospective teachers was recorded using audio and video in the Zoom Meeting room. The plan was to engage multiple recordings of the sessions in the event of possible challenges with any individual source. The recordings gathered were then transcribed for reading and familiarization with the content. The data gathered using the participant diaries were organized using the key points in the checklist (Appendix F) as the guidelines for analysis. Additional notes were recorded in writing during the interviews and others were maintained in my reflective journal on all the relevant points that are highlighted on the checklist.

I considered the possibility that enough participants might not have been willing to participate in the study and the need to deal with low numbers of people engaging in the research activities. I included specific steps in my research plan to address the

possibility of low numbers of people responding to the research invitation. I communicated with and sought the support of *gatekeepers* in the educational institution to address such a situation, people in administration (Roulston, 2018) as well as others who are familiar with the institution, its history, and the staff. I depended upon these individuals to provide reminders to the participants on the purpose of the project and to encourage them to contact me to gain clarification for any questions that they had about the project and their involvement. Yet a third consideration, which I used regularly was to contact the participants personally on a one-on-one basis and explore the nature of the research with them and the relevance and importance of their individual contributions. I always assured the participants of my awareness of their hectic schedules and advised them to complete the activities when it best suited them. The strategies described allowed me to get 16 functional participants who contributed the data for this study. I did not need any additional strategies for recruiting participants.

Debriefing Procedures

One of the main strategies put in place to facilitate the exit of participants from the study will be peer debriefing. The process of peer debriefing allowed me to engage other credible and qualified research colleagues to examine the data collected up to the end of the data collection period. These peers were people familiar with the topic of teacher professionalism and with the implementation of descriptive interpretive research. They supported the study by reviewing and commenting on the research questions and their importance to the study. I also shared the transcripts, handwritten notes and recorded interviews used in the data collection process to get expert assessment on how

much that statements that I made as a researcher were valid. The research participants were not engaged in the formal debriefing procedures as originally planned.

Data Analysis Plan

I used data gained from interviews with prospective teachers from the bachelor of education program at TEDA in Trinidad and Tobago as the main source of data gathering for this study. I also used additional information gained from the participant diaries of the prospective teachers. I provided the participants with the necessary guidelines to ensure that the contexts of the teaching and learning environment of TEDA were considered in their responses. The information gathered from the different sources was used to address the three research questions.

The data collected from the two different data collection instruments included in the study were analyzed using thematic analysis based on suggestions from Braun and Clarke (2006). The use of this approach allowed me to engage the data with the intention of uncovering themes and categories from the data. Nowell et al. (2017) suggested a series of steps that can be used to guide the use of thematic analysis successfully in a qualitative research study and I implemented these as I engaged in the data analysis. The process started with familiarizing myself with the data, generating codes to identify key elements within the data, and grouping similar data into conceptual categories. The process continued with me locating patterns among categories and their contents, and searching for themes among the categories, reviewing themes within the context of the study research questions, defining and naming the themes, and ended, finally, with me

using the themes to organize an interpretation of data within the context of the study parameters.

After the data were collected, the categorization of data, described as the process of coding, began. There are different approaches to coding including open coding, axial coding, and selective coding. Each of these processes ensure that the raw data are organized to make sense of it, that there is the interconnecting of codes to see how the codes can be linked into categories, and then the attempt will be made to formulate a legitimate story of sensible ideas based on the organization of all the information. Each step in this approach was incorporated into the data analysis process for this study.

The engagement in the open coding process (Blair, 2015) allowed me to constantly examine the information gained and segment it into meaningful groups that describe, name, or classify common elements of the data. The purpose was to establish initial codes that were guided by cues taken from the literature, especially the theories supporting the conceptual framework of the study. This open coding process continued until the codes gathered allowed for deeper analysis and provided greater understanding of the research topic than would have been evident in the literature. As the process progressed, the information gained from each interview transcription and entry into the diaries facilitated the recognition of commonalities and allowed me to create labels for information that appeared to be similar.

I engaged in the axial coding process explained by Blair (2015) as I attempted to establish relationships between and among the open codes that were identified in the earlier process. Finally, I engaged in selective coding (Blair, 2015), working with the

available information to establish some core data or variables as rich and supportive contributions to meeting the focus of the research. These rich pieces of data were used to facilitate the process of interpretation and connected discussion of how the various understandings and experiences are important to the concept of teacher professionalism expressed by the prospective teachers.

The MAXQDA program is a software used on Windows computers to analyze qualitative, quantitative, as well as mixed methods data. Godau (2004) declared that the program was easy to learn and to use. The program allows the researcher to transcribe data directly into its system and facilitates a range of opportunities for engaging with data input. Further, it is suitable for organizing, analyzing, and finding insights in qualitative information from unstructured data sets. The MAXQDA program also provides various strategies for the exporting of coded segments of the data. This program facilitates the establishment of rigor when researchers deal with qualitative types of data. Researchers from Cascade Insights (2016) suggest that the MAXQDA software was extremely useful in working with qualitative data and highlighted several factors explaining why this was so, including the fact that it facilitated the editing of texts during coding.

I used the MAXQDA software package to enter the transcripts of all the participant diaries and interview transcripts on the electronic computer system. I was able to organize information from each source of data into files that were addressed individually within the program. Each named file was connected to a specific interview or diary entry shared by the research participants. The MAXQDA folder was created based on the individual files uploaded into the system. The data in each file were

analyzed and ideas were developed and connected to the different elements in the form of codes, categories, and themes. Elaldi and Yerliyurt (2017) shared how similar types of processes were used in the analysis of data in their study and how this was done effectively. They endorse the MAXQDA as a viable resource that enhances the data analysis process.

I had to consider the possibility of negative or discrepant cases becoming evident in the analysis of the data. While the focus of the research was evident from the start, the discovery and acceptance of differences were used to strengthen the presentations and understandings of ideas related to the study. This was done by providing appropriate explanations for any differences in Chapters 4 and 5. Differences in relation to all the key aspects of the research were entertained in the discussion and interpretation of the results.

Issues of Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness refers to the extent that the findings of a research study, when published, can be considered true. Trustworthiness in qualitative research can be addressed by paying attention to four key issues: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Guba, 1981). Billups (2014) also discussed the emphasis on authenticity as an important area of focus when establishing trustworthiness in qualitative research. The emphasis on key areas discussed by Guba (1981) and Billups (2014) engaged these concepts comfortably with the emphasis on the validity and reliability issues that are used to validate the focus of quantitative research studies.

Different strategies are used to address the issue of credibility in qualitative research (Shenton, 2004) and some of these were emphasized in this study. For example,

the choice of the methodological design ensured that the research approach was one that is well known and was successfully employed by researchers (Thorne et al., 2004) to establish new knowledge, especially in the field of nursing but also, according to Hunt (2009), in studies aligned with constructivist and naturalistic underpinnings. In addition, it was my intention as the researcher to become familiar with the context where the data was collected before the actual data collection process began. This familiarity with the research context provided an opportunity for me to better understand the context and so I think that I was not influenced by bias. This attempt to engender familiarity also helped to reduce the possibility of misinterpretation during data collection (see Shenton, 2004).

The use of member checks as a key process and including debriefing sessions with the participants within the study's methodological design was accepted as an important measure to further establish credibility within the research process. Aluwihare-Samaranayake (2012) suggested the need for this type of shared dialogue and as well as a critical consciousness approach to facilitate the incorporation of peoples' voices and experiences in the qualitative study. The use of this approach ensured that the interpretations of participants' statements reflected their views as noted by Knapik (2006), who saw the importance of participants' recollections in clarifying ideas gained in the study. Peer debriefing, using the support of experienced colleagues, also ensured that interpretations were appropriate and that the research strategies were being properly implemented.

The population for this study consisted of participants from one institution in the Trinidad and Tobago's teacher training context. The focus of this research work was to

improve understandings of teacher professionalism in this localized content (Trinidad and Tobago), which can redound to the benefit of teacher education quality in the country. In line with this understanding, the approach to collecting and analyzing data was pragmatic. This pragmatic approach suggests that the views of members of the institution would be used to guide the study and would be taken as most important in establishing the final statements about teacher professionalism in this context. This philosophy and approach were honored in the data collection and data analysis processes. Attempts were also made to incorporate strategies that allowed for the transferability of data in contexts where applicable.

To ensure that the findings of this study can be applied to other contexts (transferability), there was a focus on the in-depth exploration of the research context. The engagement in the process of data analysis was only initiated when the data collection process appeared to have been saturated. Thick description was pursued, and this allowed me to examine how the findings of the study were similar to other teacher training contexts, especially in Trinidad and Tobago. The development of suitable data collection instruments and engagement in in-depth interviews with probing and field notes rubrics (see Appendix C and Appendix E) facilitate greater transferability as discussed in the work of Billups (2014).

Great attention was paid to ensuring dependability within this study. The procedures for conducting the research, starting from the focus of the study and going into how these have been aligned with the methodology, were established in detail. The data gathering procedures were established and were justified; and steps were provided in

the form of an inquiry audit so that any other researchers, as well as people interested in the findings of the study, can assess the truthfulness of the research findings. The strategies suggested to establish dependability were endorsed by the published recommendations of Anney (2014).

Confirmability reflects the concern, in qualitative research, for the objectivity (Center for Innovation in Research and Teaching, n.d.) of the research results. The findings should reflect the views and experiences of the participants of the study instead of what the researcher was interested in or his/her preferences and attention must be paid to this issue in the conducted of a qualitative study. This position was facilitated in this study by the triangulation of data and by the establishment of an audit trail. Information on the data collection procedures and how the strategies worked was recorded and I always paid attention to my views and views experienced in the data collection context that were different from the realities of the situation.

Billups (2014) described authenticity as the ultimate goal of qualitative research. A qualitative researcher needs to emphasize that the benefits of the research are aligned with the needs of the participants. Further, the realities of the participants and the meanings that are important to them must be represented. The issues of authenticity were addressed in the study through the presentation of the findings. The collection of data emphasized the voices of the participants, and their voices were significant in the establishment of the final statements of the report. The publication of the report will also identify the contributions of the different groups (participants from different year bodies

of the bachelor of education program at TEDA) and how the findings are related to their interests in the study.

Ethical Issues

The focus on high quality ethical practices was important for the presentation of a credible study. I had a responsibility, as the researcher, to protect all the participants in this study. The ability to demonstrate this level of responsibility is necessary in a study that is “methodologically intact and ethically sound is exhilarating” according to Drew et al. (2008, p. 56). I paid attention to many factors to ensure this quality of work in the implementation of the research processes.

A critical element of the research was the need to gain the consent of participants of the study and ensure that they were aware that they can withdraw from the study at any time during the process. The permission for me to engage in the formal study at the institution and to contact and involve members of staff and students was one of the first procedures taken within the participant organization (see Appendix A). The participants were given information on the nature and purpose of the study before they were asked to be volunteers as part of the data collection process. Further, they were asked to reply to the official consent documents sharing their agreement to be part of the study.

The nature of the research (research topic on teacher professionalism in teacher education contexts) and the attention to ethical and social concerns of the participants were designed to ensure that participants were exposed to the lowest levels of harm possible. During the sharing of information on the nature of the study, participants were informed that the interviews will be conducted in a private setting (once the face-to-face

mode is used) or attempts will be made to secure the confidentiality of the information provided (if online). They were assured that the information collected from any other source of data used in the study (participant diaries) will be kept private. The participants were advised that they would be asked to review the information gained from the data collection process to ensure that the interpretations that I made were correct based on their understandings, beliefs, and views of the topic.

Files were created for the storing of information provided and these will be protected by codes that will be developed by me and secured for throughout the process of the study and after. These files contain all the recordings of the interviews, the transcriptions from the interviews and all the information recorded from the participants' diary entries. The participants were informed that while the data would be secure and confidential, the researcher is bound by Walden University to provide the research committee with access to the data to ensure the validity of the research process. The name of the institution where the data were collected will be kept anonymous in the final presentation of the study. The data will be destroyed at the end of the 5-year storage period that is required by the university.

Finally, Walden University's IRB established the usefulness and adequacy of the procedures being presented in this document. The IRB gave permission to pursue the study in August 2021. I provided my IRB approval number #08-30-21-0409315 to the students as well as the administration of the research site, and possible beneficiaries of the study, as an assurance of the quality of the work pursued and being presented in the study.

Summary

Chapter 3 explored the main areas of focus of the methodology of the research in-depth. The suitability of the topic to qualitative research and the guidelines for the use of interpretive descriptive research was presented along with the examination of my role as the researcher in an unfamiliar institution that agreed to serve as the data source for the study. The development of the steps involved in the study (choosing the sample and establishing how the point of data saturation will be recognized) along with the instruments that were used to collect data were presented. The development of the main components of the study along with the debriefing strategies for the participants of the study, and the procedures for analysis of the data to be collected were presented.

The focus of Chapter 4 reflects the deep involvement of the researcher with the information collected in the field. The data collected were analyzed and are shared using legitimate strategies that facilitate the ability of researchers to gain information from qualitative data. The information from this Chapter 4 formed the basis of the responses to the research questions that guided the study.

Chapter 4: Results

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative interpretive descriptive study was to explore prospective teachers' perceptions and experiences about conceptualizing and operationalizing the construct of teacher professionalism. The focus was on engaging the participants in the study so they could reflect on and share their experiences and understandings of teacher professionalism. Three research questions were used to organize all aspects of the study:

RQ1: How do prospective teachers, who are students in a teacher education program in Trinidad and Tobago, perceive themselves as emerging teacher professionals?

RQ2: How do prospective teachers describe the process they are experiencing that contributes to the development of their understanding and application of the construct of teacher professionalism?

RQ3: How do prospective teachers in a teacher education program in Trinidad and Tobago describe how they operationalize the construct of teacher professionalism?

The content of Chapter 4 starts with a description of the university setting where participants were recruited and data were acquired. Demographic characteristics of the participants are then provided. I share the data collection and data analysis processes along with strategies incorporated into the research process that ensured the trustworthiness of the data explored in the results section of the chapter. The results are organized based on the information relevant to each of the research questions that guided

the study and incorporate important aspects of the theoretical framework considered in the analysis of the data.

The results consist of the presentation of data related to the key ideas that became evident during the study and that formed the basis of the further analysis and interpretations that comprised the findings regarding the perceptions and experiences of teacher professionalism shared by study participants. I present the findings of the study using relevant quotations, codes, categories, and themes observed during the data analysis process. The chapter concludes with a summary of the findings and a transitional description of the connection of the content in Chapter 4 to the discussion shared in Chapter 5.

Setting

The participants in this study were prospective teachers in one of the three major teacher education institutions in Trinidad and Tobago. These participants were pursuing a bachelor of education degree and were at different stages in the completion of the 4-year degree. My original intention, as expressed in Chapter 3, was to engage students in a face-to-face data collection process, but challenges arose related to the onset and continued experience of the COVID-19 pandemic. These experiences (lockdowns, social distancing protocols, severe illnesses, and deaths of relatives in some cases) were critical and resulted in changes made to the nature and format of the data collection procedures.

All data were collected online using virtual tools such as Google Docs (participant diaries) and Zoom video conferencing (interviews). Zoom is a virtual communications platform that uses video, audio, phone, and chat media to facilitate the interactions of

participants. Evans (2020) suggested that Zoom is the best option for conferencing during a pandemic. Additionally, all the participants were familiar with this mode of communication. Further, I was able to maintain contact with the participants throughout the data collection process using telephone calls and text messaging via Short Message Service and WhatsApp Messenger.

I contacted the program leader in the bachelor of education program to arrange contact with possible participants. The first contact with the program leader occurred September 10, 2021, through email. I followed up the initial contact with telephone calls to discuss my need for support from the institution. I shared the research plan with the program leader along with the poster created to provide information to members of the TEDA bachelor of education fraternity and to invite participants to be part of the study.

Members of the education faculty at the data collection site were supportive of my research plans and provided opportunities for me to share the research proposal in their classes. Faculty members also shared the research brochure in some cases and provided names of interested participants for the study to me. The friendly attitude of the staff and their support in the recruitment of participants made this environment comfortable to work in as I attempted to complete the data collection.

The prospective teachers, who were face-to-face students before the pandemic, were affected by the change from face-to-face teaching (with some discretionary and irregular online engagements) to the fully online teaching system. This was a challenge for many of them because of the lack of or inefficiency of the equipment and internet services. Although participants expressed willingness to be part of the research, they were

often unhappy about the need to complete assignments and often shared the range of other life issues they were dealing with at the same time.

The organization of the semesters within the year also affected the freedom and willingness of participants to contribute their time to completing the research project activities I requested of them. There were times during regular semesters (midterm and end of semester) when students had assignments due and examinations upcoming, and it was difficult for them to dedicate time to the research activities. Very often, the attitude of the students changed, and they became more willing to share when there were semester breaks or at the end of the semester.

Demographics

Sixteen participants were involved in the data collection stage of the study. The 16 participants became involved in the study over a period of 1 year and during that period of time, I made multiple renewed attempts to recruit participants for the study. The challenges connected to the pandemic and the students' status (some were part-time students) were significant in the recruitment of participants and in the extended duration of time for data collection. The majority of consenting participants were female (87.5%); only two men engaged in the data collection process. Most of the participants were registered in the bachelor of education program with a primary education specialization at the time of data collection. Two participants identified their specialization as education/linguistics.

The participants were prospective teachers from different years of study in the program: one Year 1 student, six Year 2 students, three Year 3 students, three Year 4

students, and one Year 5 student who was attempting to complete the degree by doing courses to attain the credits needed for certification. Two prospective teachers, even after consenting, did not participate in the data collection process. Table 2 includes the characteristics of the participants who engaged in the data collection process. The characteristics of the participants appropriately reflect the requirements outlined in Chapter 3.

Table 2

Demographic Characteristics of the Research Participants

	Gender	Year of study	Working student	Parent	Specialization
1	Female	4	No	No	Education/linguistics
2	Female	4	Yes	No	Primary education
3	Female	2	Yes	No	Primary education
4	Female	2	No	No	Primary education
5	Male	5	No	No	Primary education
6	Female	NA	No	No	NA
7	Female	3	No	No	Primary education
8	Female	3	No	Yes	Primary education
9	Female	4	Yes	Yes	Primary education
10	Female	2	Yes	No	Primary education
11	Female	1	No	No	Primary education
12	Female	2	NA	NA	NA
13	Female	2	Yes	No	Primary education
14	Female	NA	NA	NA	NA
15	Female	2	No	No	Primary education
16	Male	3	Yes	Yes	Education/linguistics

Two of the students did not identify their year of study initially and did not complete the contributions to the data collection process. I was unable to establish their year of study because they did not respond to communication once they stopped participating in the study. Several of the participants were working students, and others

(male and female) were parents who had children whose needs limited the time participants had to work on their assignments. Palinkas et al. (2015) noted that people who express willingness and interest and who can share their experiences and views would be suitable participants in a study designed to be information rich and use thick description in the final research report. Participants who demonstrated the noted characteristics in initial contacts were encouraged to be part of the study.

Data Collection

The representative of the Walden IRB shared the necessary official permission to initiate the data collection process on August 30, 2021 (#08-30-21-0409315). Once I received this approval, I contacted the dean of the data collection institution and finalized my attempts to contact potential participants for the study. The dean and other members of the teaching team also agreed to share the brochure for the study on their course pages and within the online environment related to the institution.

Processes Used in Data Collection

The data collection process was conducted starting with initial attempts to contact participants in September 2021. The data collection process consisted of the prospective teachers completing participant diaries along with engaging in an interview session. The completion of the participant diary was supported by prompts (see Appendix E) for each of the 10 requested entries from the participants. These prompts were developed from key ideas gained from the literature and were subjected to expert review by teacher educators in my department. The participants were provided with one prompt at a time and were encouraged to provide a response. Once a response was provided, I noted the information

and saved it in a file, notified the participant via email that I received it using, and entered a new prompt in the diary. I informed the participant I posted a new prompt in the diary and requested a response. This approach continued with all participants to the end of the data collection process.

Data were also collected through individual interviews. The interviews were scheduled at the end of the participant diary process for most participants. In a few cases, participants who did not complete responses to all 10 prompts were invited to participate in the interview process. This was closer to the end of the data collection period. The interviews were guided by a semistructured protocol developed as part of the planning process for the research (see Appendix C). Collecting data proceeded slowly at the beginning, and the actual sharing of responses did not begin until December 2021 (at the end of the teaching period in that semester).

Completion of the Data Collection Processes

The data collection strategy was revisited in April 2022 when I recognized that students were challenged with their academic work and had problems responding. I made another attempt to contact students in the bachelor of education program through establishing contact with additional lecturers and asking for their support and through asking participating students to suggest other qualifying students who might be interested in sharing their experiences. The results of this attempt were that additional consenting participants were added to the pool of participants and the data were collected in two phases.

The use of two phases of data collection was not part of the initial plans for conducting the study. I decided to adjust the data collection approach after consideration of the initial plans. The modification of the plans was required based on challenges with gaining access to research participants and in some cases, from the lack of responses from the participants who were initially available. I received some responses from nine participants of the study, but these were not consistent or extensive. After the slow response rate and inadequate responses to requests for entries in the participant diaries from the initial nine willing participants, I addressed the issue of lack of participation with my committee chairperson and was advised that I needed more participants to substantiate the findings of the study. I expressed interest in making further contact with members of the participant pool, and I got approval for an amended second attempt for recruiting participants for the study.

A second attempt was made to recruit participants for the study. The second attempt to collect data resulted in the engagement of seven additional participants. All the individuals who gave their approval did not participate in the study and, in the end, there were 16 active participants. One participant explained that, after reflecting on her commitment to participate in the study, she realized that the research process demanded too much of her and she preferred to focus on the requirements of her school assignments.

I maintained constant communication (emails, phone calls, and text messages) with the participants in each phase of the data collection process to remind them to complete the prompts as they had promised. The students always responded and shared

the particular challenge preventing them from completing the task. On most occasions, participants reported being overwhelmed with assignments. In other cases, some were mothers and had other challenges apart from academic commitments. Most of the participants tried to provide what I requested, with three participants of the initial nine (members of the initial set of participants) completing all the prompts and individual interviews by April 2022.

Once I engaged in the amended approach to recruiting participants, several other participants completed responses to the prompts and engaged in the interview process. The additional attempts to engage participants facilitated the increase in participants as some people who initially agreed to be part of the study responded and other new participants were included in the data collection process. The final number of participants in the study was 15 (one opted out at the last minute), and Table 3 presents information on their contributions to the completion of the data requirements of the study. TEDA 12 agreed to participate in the study and submitted her consent form. A participant diary was created and shared with this participant, but after a few weeks, the participant asked to be relieved of commitment to participate in the study. Table 3 shows the some of the 15 participants did not complete all the participant diary entries or the interview, but all data that were collected were used to inform the findings and interpretations in the study.

Eight participants completed all 10 of the participant diary entries and the other participants contributed varying numbers of entries ranging from one to eight. I obtained responses from 15 students, and these added up to 103 responses out of the expected 160. All participants who completed all the entries in the participant diaries also contributed

their views and experiences through the interview process. Additionally, those participants who were actively involved in sharing in the participant diaries but had not completed the 10 entries, were invited to be interviewees in the study, but by that stage the time for the completion of the data collection process was drawing to a close based on the IRB regulations provided with the permission to collect data.

Table 3

Total Participation in the Data Collection Process

Participants	Diary entries completed	Interview completed
TEDA 1	10	Yes
TEDA 2	8	Yes
TEDA 3	3	Yes
TEDA 4	10	Yes
TEDA 5	10	Yes
TEDA 6	1	No
TEDA 7	1	No
TEDA 8	5	Yes
TEDA 9	10	Yes
TEDA 10	10	Yes
TEDA 11	10	Yes
TEDA 12	0	No
TEDA 13	10	Yes
TEDA 14	4	No
TEDA 15	1	No
TEDA 16	10	Yes

The first interview was completed on February 25, 2022, and the interview process continued once participants had completed their diary entries. In the last few days of data collection, some participants who had not completed their diary entries were asked to contribute to the data pool by responding to the interview questions. The last interview was conducted on August 21, 2022. Overall, 11 interviews were completed.

All responses in the participant diaries were downloaded into Microsoft Word documents related to the specific participant and named accordingly, (e.g., TEDA 1 – Participant Diary). I also saved all participant diary documents in an individual file that was protected by a secure password. The file was saved on the computer used as the main equipment to complete work for this study and on my personal external hard drive. I included these security measures to facilitate the constant accessibility of the data and to ensure the confidentiality of the contributions from the participants.

The information from the interviews (Zoom recordings including audio, video, and chat files) were downloaded and transcribed using the Otter.ai software and saved on the same equipment and in the same file as the responses from the participant diaries. The files from the transcripts were titled using a similar format as the participant diary information (TEDA 1 – Interview Transcript) and saved securely on the computer and on the external hard drive. The transcripts were also removed from the Otter.ai program to the trash file on the computer and then erased from the trash file on the computer.

Variations From Research Plan

The main variation in the data collection process was the use of fully online modes of data collection. The data collection plan was approved during a period of international turmoil regarding the COVID-19 pandemic and acceptable practices for congregating. The educational institutions in Trinidad and Tobago did not open doors to face-to-face teaching during the pandemic, and during the period of data collection, students at tertiary level institutions were not being hosted onsite for classes. The virtual option for communication was—and remained—the only one available during the

pandemic. The possibility of limitations during the COVID-19 pandemic was anticipated and mentioned in my original research plan; however, I did not expect that I would be adopting a virtual communications plan to begin the data collection process.

There was also a need to make decisions regarding the response rate from participants in the initial stages of the data collection. There was no initial plan to engage in a second attempt at recruiting participants, but this was necessary when it was obvious that some participants were not able to dedicate time and energy to completing the participant diaries. I shared the challenge with my committee chairperson and was given advice on how to try to recruit new participants. The advice was useful and was implemented in my attempt to get additional prospective teachers from the bachelor of education program to respond to the request to engage in the research and share their time, energy, and experiences to support the understanding of the issue of teacher professionalism in their teaching and learning context.

I accommodated requests from three students who were consistent in their completion of the participant diaries when they indicated that they did not have time to write out the responses to the prompts and asked if they could create audio recording of their responses and share with me. I presented this request to my committee chairperson and received permission to accommodate the participants. TEDA 9 and TEDA 16 were able to share responses to all participant diary prompts using this approach. TEDA 2 was able to add four entries to the participant diary. I transcribed the recordings and added them to the Microsoft Word documents where these participants' contributions were being maintained.

I was unable to complete the member checks during the period allocated for data collection because of slow response rate and emphasis on the recruitment of participants, but I asked questions at the end of the interviews to clarify my understanding of what people suggested during the interview process. The participants responded positively to my statements and questions regarding the clarity of their statements and confirmed my representation of their ideas. Moreover, I included some other approaches to establish the trustworthiness of the study, and these will be included in that aspect of the discussion for Chapter 4.

Unusual Circumstances Encountered in Data Collection

The occurrence of the COVID-19 pandemic changed the experiences of teachers, prospective teachers, and students within the education system of Trinidad and Tobago as they tried to readjust to the necessary requirements to protect their families and themselves during this period. Some students found themselves being at home students and babysitters for their own children and siblings, and these were not common experiences for them. Others had to find work to maintain their homes as partners and parents lost their jobs. Some people had relatives who died. Many students were unable to continue with the research project even though, initially, they were excited and committed to be part of the data collection process.

I experienced my own challenges as a teacher educator who worked daily in a face-to-face environment. As soon as safety protocols were put in place, I was also required to make immediate adjustments to the regular mode of presentation and change to online delivery. This required that I become familiar with new technologies for the

delivery of online learning and prepare documents to support students in the range of courses that I teach. In addition, the demands on my time were overwhelming and it was more difficult to stay in touch with the participants in the research process. The effort to maintain contact, provide motivation, and ensure consistent encouragement within the team of participants were tremendous.

Data Analysis

The initial approach to the data analysis process was to review all the raw data provided by participants in the diary entries and in the transcripts from the interviews. I engaged in this process by reading the responses to become familiar with the ideas presented by the participants. I looked for words and statements that reflected expressions and ideas noted in the theoretical and conceptual framework for the study and that were specific to the research questions that guided the collection of data. The purpose of this initial deductive analysis was to explore the nature of the data related to the concepts in the conceptual framework such as teacher professionalism, being a professional, possible descriptions of mindsets, variations in the descriptions of professionalism as envisaged by the participants, and their sources of knowledge of professionalism. According to Bingham and Witkowsky (2022), deductive analysis facilitates the organization of data based on different categories of information as well as facilitating the checking and maintaining of alignment with the research questions. Although useful in providing me with a working overview of the data, this deductive preview was not part of the formal data coding process for the research.

I also reviewed the research questions to see the possibilities about being able to develop codes, categories, and themes from the responses. Some areas of content seemed to be prominent in the responses related to perceptions of participants as professional teachers and descriptions of their understandings of teacher professionalism (the focus of Research Questions 1 and 3), but I was concerned about being able to develop an answer for Research Question 2 because I felt that I was not seeing enough about experiences in the teacher training process, which was the focus of that question. Overall, my initial review of the data satisfied personal questions about the possibility of being able to answer the research questions with the data gained, and I was then comfortable to continue with the coding processes described in Chapter 3.

The data analysis process chosen for this study involved different levels of coding used to move from inductively coded units to larger representations including categories and themes. The coding methods applied included open, axial, and selective coding. I used a process described by Williams and Moser (2019) to move from 15 sets of participant diary entries and 11 interviews, containing many responses to prompts and interview questions, to an organized set of codes, categories, and themes. The codes, categories, and themes derived from the data analysis process were related to the research questions that guided the study and the conceptual framework that I used to organize and guide the construction of knowledge for the study. I was able to gain some meaningful ideas from the continuous engagement with the data through the processes of categorizing, sorting, and establishing meaningful themes. These codes, categories, and

themes connected the research questions to the perceptions of prospective teachers in the teacher training context that was used to conduct the study.

The coding of the collected data started when I was comfortable with the contents of the files I created to store the raw data. The constant reading and rereading of the collected data were critical to establishing the comfort level required. I managed the process of establishing codes by reading examples of studies (Ali, 2022; Foltz-Rea, 2021; Ikemba, 2022) where researchers used similar coding processes, as well as by reading texts on the topic of coding and thematic analysis (Saldana, 2021; Vanover et al., 2022), and especially by studying texts (Amanfi, 2019; Gizzi & Radiker, 2021; VERBI Software, 2021a) and videos (Delve et al., 2022; MAXQDA VERBI, 2022) related to coding using the MAXQDA software, which was the main software program used to engage in the coding processes.

Using the MAXQDA Analytics Pro 2022 (VERBI Software, 2021b) program, I uploaded all of the data gathered from the participant diary entries and the transcripts from all of the interviews. These documents were organized into different independent files within the program before the start of the coding process. The different documents were labeled to reflect the contributions of each participant and coded individually through the method of open coding.

Open Coding

Open coding involved my constant interaction with the data to organize raw data and to begin a comparative process of discretely coded segments that would lead to useful categorization of the data. Through this process of open coding, I reviewed each of

the participant diaries, as well as each of the interview transcripts, and searched each individually for responses that described the nature of teacher professionalism from the perspective of the prospective teachers. Some key concepts and ideas related to teacher professionalism that I used to guide this aspect of the process included the descriptions of professional teachers using traits such as belonging to a professional group, being knowledgeable about their subject area and teaching methods, and being confident about the tasks they are required to complete. I also focused on ideas of the professional as a lifelong learner, someone with agency and willingness to initiate and respond to changes in the system, and someone who understands teaching as a humanistic process that requires commitment.

I was able to gather these responses through a thorough reading of the transcripts and noting relevant information using codes and memos within the MAXQDA software. I initiated the search for relevant statements and chunks of data by reviewing the suggestions on the nature of professionalism from the conceptual framework developed for the study. I created codes for each of these ideas generated within the MAXQDA program as soon as I was able to mentally create a word or short phrase (see Saldana, 2021) to describe my understanding of the idea. Once I had words, phrases, or paragraphs that looked like the theoretical descriptions of professionalism or engaged examples of characteristics of professional behavior, I created a code to reflect the idea. I tried to ensure that the codes used captured the essence of the statements being made by the participants. Some examples of the initial codes developed through this process and the

statements of the participants that led to the decision to use the code can be seen in Table

4.

Table 4

Participants' Statements on the Nature of Teacher Professionalism With Open Codes

	Participant's statement	First attempt at coding
1	And you are empowered to teach them so we can help each other as a symbiotic relationship...	Teaching is symbiotic
2	Nobody is going to do that. You understand? So teach them about life because other teachers don't teach students about life.	Requirements of professional teachers
3	I believe to be able to get paid is on think. I believe that you wouldn't be surprised if you are not in a paid job.	Teaching is not a paying job
4	If you know you want to teach and you feel it in your heart and mind and soul and you know that you are passionate about wanting to teach, I think you should do it and go for it.	How teachers should feel about teaching
5	A lot of people are doing it. It is easier to get into teaching than the jobs that they want to do.	Reason for teaching
6	The teacher must put the students as a priority.	Students are teachers' priority
7	They make the environment very comfortable for students, like the example when I said when a teacher makes a mistake, and she sees that she made this mistake, she is not upset at herself. She says, oh, I made this mistake.	Professional teachers make mistakes

In some cases, I had to change codes after reflecting on the initial code that I chose. Item 4 in Table 4 reflects an example of one code that I had to review as I became more familiar with the coding process. In this case, I chose the initial code of "how teachers feel about teaching" to reflect the statement from the participant, but when I had another opportunity to review the content of this transcript, I decided that saying "teacher feelings about teaching" would be enough. I then changed this code in all the other places

that it was found in the data that I was using. Throughout the process, I revised the codes to keep them in line with earlier codes that were developed, and this approach of reviewing seemed to be more suitable to the data that were being considered.

Table 5 contains some additional examples of the revision of the coding process. The examples at Items 2 and 3 in Table 5 demonstrate times when the same idea was expressed but two different codes were used to identify the feeling being shared. I was able to find multiple examples like this and reduce the number of codes emerging. The reduction of the codes coming out of the open coding process, from 816 in the first stage of the process to substantially fewer with the revision of the coding, contributed to better management of the axial coding process.

Table 5

Participants' Statements Used to Show Initial and Revised Codes

	Participant's statement	Code from first attempt at coding	Revised codes
1	If you know you want to teach and you feel it in your heart and mind and soul and you know that you are passionate and want to teach, I think you should do it and go for it.	How teachers should feel about teaching	Teachers' feelings about teaching
2	Um, I wouldn't think so. I wouldn't think so. Ahm, a lot of teachers, as most people are in their careers for money.	Teachers are in teaching for the money.	Motivation for teaching
3	A lot of people are doing it as it is easier to get into teaching than the jobs or what they want to do.	Reasons for becoming teachers	Motivation for teaching

Although I was responsible for the decision on the labels provided to the codes, there were a few cases where the words of the participants were used to establish the code in the process of in vivo coding (see Manning, 2017). TEDA 10, in the transcript of the

interview, noted that “We teach and create. We lay the foundation for people to step into those positions” and this statement was used to create the code “teachers teach and create.” I included this code in the compilation of codes related to the transcripts. I engaged in the compilation of a codebook that I used as I continued in the data analysis process. Screenshots of the organization of the codebook are available in Appendix I.

I also paid attention to the contexts and people to whom the participants attributed their understanding of teacher professionalism and to any suggestions about the characteristics of a professional teacher. I noted participants’ descriptions of their intentions when given the opportunity to perform as professional teachers at the end of training. Table 6 provides information on the initial codes that were established through the open coding process and that connect the statements that were used to establish some of the codes.

Table 6

Key Areas of Focus at the End of the Open Coding Process

Areas of focus at the end of open coding and at the start of establishing categories	Key codes connected to this aspect of focus
Perception of professional teachers	Teachers need to teach; they cannot do anything else Teachers need to love what they are doing Serious role of professional teachers Relaxed open attitude is also important

Table continues...

Areas of focus at the end of open coding and at the start of establishing categories	Key codes connected to this aspect of focus
The nature of teacher professionalism	Professionalism is about this - equipping others Professionalism is - sharing knowledge Being a professional teacher is genetic Professionalism - balance between fun and seriousness
Prospective teachers explore their professionalism	Prospective teacher goal - remain as a teacher Choose teaching as the option Love for teaching comes from persistence Being a professional teacher is not a paying job Persistence in the prospective teacher's life
Description of non-professional teacher behaviors	Teachers are in teaching for the money Teachers do not focus on persistence Administration is a part of professionalism Lack of professional behavior in the system Administration cannot even explain themselves

Several other key areas arose in this initial coding process including discussion on the sources of knowledge regarding teacher professionalism, contexts related to the development of teacher professionalism concepts, professional goals of teacher professionalism, professional behavior in the classroom, and models of professionalism in the lives of prospective teachers. The participants responded differently to the various questions. They expressed deeper feelings for some issues and spoke much more broadly

on others. This variety in responses was apparent with the greater detail contained in participants' statements, which were used to establish the codes that were finally chosen.

Once I completed the open coding process, I reviewed the codes to ensure clear definitions of codes chosen. I reorganized the codes to manage situations where different codes were used for information that seemed to reflect similar ideas and intents, and this led to the observations of categories in the coding. The open coding process took the most time in this data analysis process, and the result was that 816 codes were established in the initial stages of coding (see Appendix I).

The screenshot provided in Appendix I demonstrates the status of the data analysis process at the end of the first phase of coding. The screenshot indicates the available number of codes that were based on the review of all the participant diaries and transcripts that I used in the first phase of analysis. Further, the screenshot provides evidence of some of the codes that were uncovered and established in this first phase of coding. These initial codes were further explored in the second phase of coding: axial coding.

Axial Coding

Axial coding involves the process of connecting different aspects of the data to construct linkages (Simmons, 2017). This process is built on establishing connections using the participants' words as the foundation for understanding their perceptions and experiences about conceptualizing and operationalizing the construct of teacher professionalism. The established connections resulted in formulating new knowledge related to the content. I conducted the organization and management of the major

segments of texts or patterns in the data using Microsoft Excel as well as the MAXQDA program.

The initial codes were reconsidered independently and organized into categories using the Microsoft Excel program. Columns were used to collect all codes that focused on specific issues even though there might have been slight variations in the initial name assigned to the code. The columns were named to reflect one common trend in the perceptions and experiences of teacher professionalism shared by the participant in each case. Several categories were developed based on the organization of the varying codes.

I derived all the codes from the data contained in the interviews as well as the participant diaries. These main codes from the open coding process were assigned to representative categories such as the exploration of the nature of teacher professionalism, many descriptions of teacher professionalism, the feelings of prospective teachers regarding professionalism, and some statements on models of professionalism in the lives of the prospective teachers. I created these categories by reflecting on the codes and trying to identify underlying aspects of the perceptions and commonalities that were evident in the experiences of the participants.

The discussion of the experience of teacher training and how this discussion reflected the participants' understanding of the nature of professionalism led to the development of a final category entitled "critiques of the teacher training program," which was also a final category of content evident in the data presented in Table 7. Some of the codes that led to the organization of information in this category included specific statements suggesting that teacher training was not the main source of ideas related to

learning about or endorsing teacher professionalism along with other suggestions that professional behaviors were not always evident in classrooms. One significant code that contributed to establishment of this category was that there were many “missing experiences that are important to being a professional.” This code was endorsed on eight occasions in participants’ diaries and in analysis of the interview data.

Table 7

Important Emerging Categories at the End of the Axial Coding Process

	Emerging category	Key code
1	No ideas on the nature of teacher professionalism	No definition for the meaning of teacher professionalism Prospective teachers unaware of professionalism
2	Ideas of professionalism exist; different understandings are evident	Professionalism observed in teacher behavior Research provided information on the nature of teacher professionalism
3	Nature of professional behaviors	Relating to children is the core of professional behavior Motivation is important in professionalism
4	Professional behaviors in the classroom	Persistence is important to deal with children Teachers must be patient Confidence is important to the professional teacher
5	Ideas of teacher professionalism are not available from observed practices in the teacher training program	Teachers who train are not professionals—no models available Unprofessional teachers at the university University presents teacher professionalism in theory
6	Critiques of the teacher training program	Teacher training is discouraging prospective teachers Teacher training is difficult Difficulties with the teacher training process Missing experiences that are important to being a professional teacher

Table continues...

Emerging category	Key code
7 Evidence of professionalism in teacher training program	What teacher training endorses about teacher professionalism Professional behaviors of teacher educators Instructional content that endorses professionalism
8 Expressions of commitment to professional development	Intent on being an exemplar Prospective teacher hopes to make a difference Prospective teacher needs to work on speech
9 Motivation for teaching	It is my calling People said that I should be a teacher Want to be the type of teacher missing in the system
10 Non-professional behaviors	Teachers are teaching for the money Teachers are not persistent – not professional Lack of professional behaviors in the education system
11 Absence of teacher professionalism in classes	Professional as well as unprofessional teachers are in the classrooms Professionalism is missing in the classrooms

On the other hand, there was one code, “instructional content that endorses professionalism,” which highlighted that exposure to teacher training did provide some ideas on the nature of professional behaviors and experiences. The participants who highlighted this different view indicated that planning was an important component of professional behavior, and the teacher training program provided the knowledge and examples of professional behavior that were important to the development of prospective teachers. Another participant indicated that the observation of instructors involved in teaching with a purpose was a valuable cue to professional behavior. Several participants also mentioned the observation of punctuality in the teaching and learning context and found this to be significant in the exhibition of professional behavior. The “punctuality as evidence of professionalism” code was repeatedly encountered in the exploration of

teacher professional behaviors in the research context. This was evident on four occasions.

The reason for joining the teaching profession was also highlighted as a substantive category for consideration in understanding the perceptions, development of ideas, and exhortations on teacher professionalism from the prospective teachers. Codes like “reason for teaching is important to being a professional,” “professional teachers need to love what they are doing,” and “need for control of entries into the profession” all coalesced into the idea that a key aspect for discussion in this study should be the topic of reasons for joining the teaching profession and its value in defining and understanding professional behavior.

The recognition of the nature of the prospective teachers and their own beliefs about teacher professionalism as well as the potential for further development as a teacher were highlighted often in the data. These ideas were organized around notable codes like “beliefs of prospective teachers regarding teacher professionalism,” “prospective teacher goals – remain a teacher,” and “teaching is my calling.” This major area of content will be described in the Results section of this chapter as well as in Chapter 5.

The views of prospective teachers on the nonprofessional behaviors (see Item 10 in Table 7) of teachers need to be described as I was able to establish numerous codes to highlight to this major area of discussion. Codes that were important included “teachers are in teaching for the money,” “teachers do not focus on persistence,” “lack of professional teacher behavior in the system,” and “administration is part of the problem

with teacher professionalism.” The extended emphasis on nonprofessional behaviors of teachers was an informative and interesting aspect of data uncovered during the data analysis process. The organization of the final categories established from the axial coding, and some of the codes that supported the establishment of the said categories can be seen in Table 7.

Selective Coding

The categories observed during the process of axial coding formed the basis for the development and decisions about the themes that will be shared in this section of the study. Once I completed the observation of the categories mentioned at the end of the axial coding (see Table 7), the next step involved the process of reflecting on the categories at the end of the axial coding (see Table 7), the next step involved the process of reflecting on the categories and connecting them to see how they could be defined and organized to make some explicit statements about the outcome of the research in the form of themes. This process required the reading and rereading of the codes and categories and exploring ideas to describe the nature of the connection between them, and then trying to find a single phrase or statement, related to the research topic, to define the connection. As a result of this process, I identified four major themes during the selective coding process. These themes had to be revised and other connections considered before the final themes were established. These themes will be discussed, with examples and illustrations in the following paragraphs and a table is used at the end of the discussion (see Table 8) to highlight the logical connection and organization of the codes, categories and themes that were identified through the data analysis process.

The first theme to be highlighted is related to the construct of teacher professionalism. Teacher professionalism as a construct exists in the beliefs and discussions of prospective teachers. The research participants provided definitions, descriptions, and understandings of the concept of teacher professionalism. They have different explanations and characteristics associated with the concept, but each participant endorsed the concept of professionalism as important in the field of teaching. The range of codes connected to this final decision regarding the status of professionalism as a construct for prospective teachers included codes like “no definition for the meaning of professionalism,” “prospective teachers are unaware of professionalism,” “professionalism observed in teacher behavior,” and “research provided information on the nature of the professional teacher.” These codes contributed to the establishment of categories like “no ideas of the nature of professionalism” and “ideas of professional exist – different understandings evident.” Finally, I was able to conclude that the construct of teacher professionalism was familiar to the prospective teachers but how the construct is defined and understood by the participants does not reflect a holistic or standardized perspective.

The exploration of the theme related to the existence of the construct of professionalism among the prospective teachers was my next focus. I recognized that the perceptions of the professional teacher shared by the participants indicated variations in understandings, descriptions, or reflections. Some prospective teachers agreed with the thought that “anyone can be a teacher” while others outlined some serious roles for professional teachers including the need for teachers to be respectful and do their jobs, to

be committed and dedicated, and love what they do. One view of the characteristics or roles of the professional teacher was captured when one participant's contribution was coded as "teachers who feel that they can't do the job exhibit a backward mindset" and do not demonstrate professional behavior. The final theme comprised two categories that addressed opposing positions being presented by the participants with one group emphasizing characteristics that support an individual's claim to professionalism and the other showing their awareness of issues that detract from professionalism.

Participants' understandings and definitions of the concept of teacher professionalism were connected to preconceived expectations of teachers in the education system of Trinidad and Tobago. This statement was the second main theme identified in the data analysis process. A variety of statements of preconceived expectations were coded in the open-coding phase and these were categorized to include major groups of ideas such as the nature of professional behavior, nature of teacher professionalism, and professional behaviors in the classroom. Some of the codes related to the category of "the nature of professional behavior" include "relating to children is the core of professional behavior and "motivation is important in professionalism." Another key area that contributed to the development of this theme on "expectations of teacher professionalism existed in the minds and beliefs of prospective teachers" included the category related to "professional behaviors in the classroom." Some of the basic codes used to develop this aspect of the analysis included "persistence is important to deal with children," "teachers must be patient," and "confidence is important to the professional teacher."

Teacher training had little connection to the beliefs and views of teacher professionalism shared by the prospective teachers. This theme also emerged from the analysis of the data. The analysis of the data confirmed that the participants minimally linked their understandings of the construct of teacher professionalism to the experiences and examples gained in the teacher training program.

The view that teacher professionalism was not supported by the teacher training program arose from codes such as “teachers who train are not professionals – no models available,” “unprofessional teachers at the university” and “university presents teacher professionalism in theory.” These codes were connected to each other and were expressed in the category of “ideas of teacher professionalism are not available from the teacher training program.” This major category was combined with another significant observation from the data, which indicated that some challenges exist within the teacher training program regarding the transmission of ideas related to teacher professionalism.

This category was titled “critiques of the teacher training program,” and it indicated that many experiences that the prospective teachers considered to be important to being a teacher professional were not emphasized in the program. One important code identified the “missing experiences” that were mentioned by the participants. In the case of the missing experiences, participants shared that they were not exposed to content on conflict resolution, especially in dealing with parents or the experience of interacting with students in the real-life teaching setting of a classroom. In the organization of ideas that were categorized as critiques, other codes such as “teacher training is discouraging prospective teachers” and “teacher training is difficult” as well as “difficulties with the

teacher training program” were used. The two categories that composed this theme were coalesced to develop a significant and surprising understanding that teacher training had little connection to the views and beliefs of professionalism shared by the prospective teachers.

I paid attention to the contributions of some participants who expressed seeing evidence of professionalism in the teacher training program. They shared ideas of specific behaviors of teacher educators that helped them to understand teacher professionalism, and these ideas were captured using the codes “what teacher training endorses about teacher professionalism” and “professional behaviors of teacher educators.” The discussion of the minimal contributions of teacher training to the understanding and development of ideas related to teacher professionalism will be explored further in the discussion of the results of the study.

The teachers in training demonstrated evidence of growth perspectives in their beliefs, expressions, and understandings about the teaching profession. This theme was validated by reviewing the comments of the participants to understand the meanings of their statements. The prospective teachers, in sharing about themselves as teachers who will continue in the profession, highlighted views about growing as professionals. Numerous codes were created that contributed to this theme being established as an important outcome in this study. The codes that I considered relevant included “intent on being an exemplar,” “prospective teacher hopes to make a difference,” and “prospective teacher needs to work on speech.” I organized all these codes into a category entitled “expressions of commitment to professional development.” I included another category

of codes called “motivation for teaching” in this decision to identify the focus of prospective teachers exhibiting growth perspectives as a theme.

Some prospective teachers expressed the idea that being a professional teacher “is my calling” and another one mentioned that “people said that I should be a teacher.” The statement by one prospective teacher coded as “wanting to be the type of teacher missing in the system” was another code that helped to solidify the understanding that the prospective teachers understood the need to continue to develop to make a difference in the education system. These three codes were categorized as “motivation for teaching” and contributed to the final decision that an important theme was that “the teachers in training demonstrated evidence of growth perspectives in their beliefs, expressions, and understandings about the teaching profession.” This idea is an important factor in the conceptualization of professionalism among prospective teachers. Being a teacher professional, in their descriptions, was something that they had not yet achieved, and it was clear that they understood that they had to keep working towards achieving the status of teacher professional in the education system.

Discrepant Cases

Some of the codes, categories, and one theme that were finalized through the coding process did not align with the focus and expected outcomes of this study. The information gained in this area made it evident that prospective teachers had views of teaching and teacher professionalism that did not complement other ideas of being a professional or the nature of professionalism. Prospective teachers are more aware of what does not define teacher professionalism as compared to what defines the construct

of professionalism in teaching. The existence of unprofessional behaviors was highlighted by 12 out of the 16 participants in the study. This focus on unprofessional behaviors was interesting and unexpected theme but was highly evident during the data analysis process and it was supported by several codes and at least two categories of ideas. The prospective teachers made statements that were coded using phrases such as “teachers are in teaching for the money”, “teachers are not persistent – not professional”, and the existence of a “lack of professional behaviors in the education system.” The category titled “non-professional behaviors” was established using these codes.

Another significant category in this sphere of the discussion was the “absence of teacher professionalism in classes” and this category was developed from codes including “professional as well as unprofessional teachers are in the classroom” and “professionalism is missing in classrooms”. The prospective teachers were able to identify more experiences with unprofessional behaviors in the teacher training context as well as in their interaction with teachers at other levels of the education system. They identified several descriptors of unprofessionalism in teaching in the Trinidad and Tobago education system.

Attention must also be paid to the contributions of some participants who expressed seeing evidence of professionalism in the teacher training program. They shared ideas of specific behaviors of teacher educators that helped them to understand teacher professionalism and these ideas were captured using the code “what teacher training endorses about teacher professionalism” and “professional behaviors of teacher educators”. The discussion of the contribution of the teacher training experience to the

conceptualization of teacher professionalism and understanding how it functions in teaching and learning contexts was minimal but noted in the data analysis. A few codes were identified, and this facilitated the development of a category related to the contributions of the teacher education experience understanding professionalism. No theme was developed from this area, but it will be discussed in the results of the study as an important reality that should be noted in future discussion on this topic.

Summary of the Findings of the Data Analysis Process

At the end of the data analysis process, there were multiple codes, categories, and themes relevant to understanding the key questions that framed this study. Some of these codes, categories, and themes and how they were connected are shown in Table 8. These major themes formed the basis for developing responses to the three research questions that guided the study. The codes and categories were used in the rich description of the phenomenon of teacher professionalism as it exists and was formulated in the minds of the prospective teachers of the teaching training program of TEDA.

Table 8

Codes, Categories and Themes at the End of the Coding Process

Key codes	Emerging categories at the end of axial coding	Final themes
No definition for the meaning of teacher professionalism Prospective teachers unaware of professionalism	No ideas on the nature of teacher professionalism	Teacher professionalism as a construct exists in the beliefs and discussions of prospective teachers
Relating to children is the core of professional behavior. Motivation is important in professionalism.	Nature of professional behaviors	Participants' understandings and definitions of the concept of teacher professionalism were connected to preconceived expectations of teachers

Table continues...

Key codes	Emerging categories at the end of axial coding	Final themes
		in the education system of Trinidad and Tobago.
Confidence is important to the professional teacher Teachers must be patient Persistence is important to deal with children	Professional behaviors in the classroom	Participants' understandings and definitions of the concept of teacher professionalism were connected to Table continues preconceived expectations of teachers in the education system of Trinidad and Tobago
Teachers who train are not professionals—no models available Unprofessional teachers at the university University presents teacher professionalism in theory	Ideas of teacher professionalism are not available from observed practices in the teacher training program	Prospective teachers have varying experiences with developing any understanding of professionalism during teacher training
Missing experiences that are important to being a professional teacher Teacher training is discouraging prospective teachers Teacher training is difficult Difficulties with the teacher training process	Critiques of the teacher training program	Prospective teachers have varying experiences with developing any understanding of professionalism during teacher training
Professional behaviors of teacher educators Ideas on professional behavior gained from teacher training Teacher educators had professional skills to work online	Some evidence of professionalism in teacher training program	Prospective teachers have varying experiences with developing any understanding of professionalism during teacher training
Intent on being an exemplar Prospective teacher hopes to make a difference Prospective teacher needs to work on speech	Expressions of commitment to professional development	The teachers in training demonstrated evidence of growth perspectives in their beliefs, expressions, and understandings about the teaching profession
It is my calling People said that I should be a teacher Want to be the type of teacher missing in the system	Motivation for teaching	The teachers in training demonstrated evidence of growth perspectives in their beliefs, expressions, and understandings about the teaching profession <i>Table continues...</i>

Key codes	Emerging categories at the end of axial coding	Final themes
Professional as well as unprofessional teachers are in the classrooms Professionalism is missing in the classrooms	Absence of teacher professionalism in classes	Prospective teachers are more aware of what does not define teacher professionalism as compared to what defines the construct of professionalism in teaching
Teachers are teaching for the money Teachers are not persistent—not professional Lack of professional behaviors in the education system	Non-professional behaviors	Prospective teachers are more aware of what does not define teacher professionalism as compared to what defines the construct of professionalism in teaching

Evidence of Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness in a qualitative study addresses the ability of a researcher to identify the rigor involved in a research study. The researcher also establishes confidence in the collected data, the methods used to understand the key issues, and the interpretation gained from the procedures (Polit & Beck, 2014). The constant attention to issues of trustworthiness during a study ensures that at the end, the researcher can establish the quality of the study and defend the results that were established. The key areas that were the focus of the study in an attempt to establish and maintain trustworthiness included credibility, transferability, dependability, confirmability, and authenticity as outlined by Guba and Lincoln (1994).

Credibility

The credibility of any research study reflects the way that the information provided by the researcher at the end of the study can be considered truthful and reflect what exists in the context regarding the problem or focus of the study. To increase credibility the researcher must ensure that the research strategies are suitable, and that the

data uncover relevant truths. I was careful with the credibility of the study and tried to address all the issues identified in the proposal's data collection and data analysis sections. This was not always possible due to restrictions brought to the fore by the COVID-19 pandemic, but I am satisfied that the maximum attention was paid to issues of credibility. This was possible through the choice of the research methodology and adherence to the guidelines provided for the interpretive descriptive methodology (Thorne, 2016). I used multiple research reports including the text on interpretive description published by Thorne (2016) as sources of information for guidelines during the study. The use of the guidelines ensured that the main emphases of interpretive descriptive research were addressed in the study's data collection and data analysis steps.

Further, I took time to understand the research context and the expectations that guided the participants as prospective teachers in the teacher training institution used as the site for the study. I reviewed the bachelor of education program for the institution, visited the course page, and became familiar with the institution's online activities. This made it possible for me to understand the participants' explanations of issues and limited the introduction of bias into the interpretation and analysis of the data as I was aware of the requirements of the course and of the issues students mentioned.

The use of multiple forms of data collection facilitates the credibility of a research study. In this study, the research participants were engaged in the data collection process through two data collection instruments: interviews and the contribution of entries into participant diaries. The interview schedule (along with the probes) and the prompts for the participant diaries were developed as part of the proposal and approved by my

research committee and the Walden IRB before the data collection process began. The interviews were recorded, and the transcripts are available for review, if necessary. All the entries to the participant diaries are available but were secured to facilitate the ethical procedures that are part of the research process. The two forms of data collection were used to increase the opportunities for the participants to share their understandings and experiences regarding teacher professionalism. The actual data gathered through each instrument reinforced the other and helped in the verification of the ideas gained and facilitated the achievement of saturation within the data analysis process.

I identified member checking as one strategy that would be used to establish credibility, but this was not conducted as planned in the proposal. I had expected to review the transcripts of each participant and send a one-page synopsis of the data to the participants for review. This was not possible due to challenges with the recruitment of participants and the limited time for data collection (the last interview was conducted one day before the end of the data collection period as outlined in the Walden IRB approval for data collection).

The only member checking that took place was the debriefing that happened at the end of each interview. The participants were asked to clarify any statements that were not clear to the researcher. They were also asked to reflect on what they shared and to identify if there was any information that they were unsure about or statements that they wanted to change before the completion of the interview. All participants were given the opportunity to make changes at the end of the interviews, but they seemed comfortable

about the content shared in each case. There were no participants who asked to make changes to the original contributions in response to the interview questions and probes.

I engaged in peer debriefing with two credible and qualified qualitative researchers and data analysts. The first attempt at peer debriefing took place at the end of the open coding process. I attended a Zoom Meeting with my colleague (who is an expert at using the MAXQDA software) to discuss the coding process that I used. I shared my initial codes and demonstrated how they were developed using the qualitative software and the process of coming up with the names of the codes. I was given approval and further advice to improve the use of the MAXQDA and engage in further data analysis.

At the end of the coding process, I shared my codebook with a professor from another local teacher training institution who has several years of experience working with doctoral students and has worked with many graduates in the Doctor of Philosophy in Educator from The University of the West Indies. The professor has written and published research reports in several international journals as well. I was able to get guidance and feedback that allowed me to improve the coding process. Finally, it was the chair of my research committee who was most helpful in supporting and advising on the development of the codes, categories, and themes and in making suggestions for the trustworthiness of the suggestions that I had for the completion of the process.

The emphasis of reaching saturation in the data analysis process was one of the most credible practices engaged in during this research process. The interview transcripts and the participant diary entries were analyzed using the MAXQDA software and the processes of open, axial, and selective coding. The open coding process was completed

and reviewed a second time to verify the nature of the codes and to ensure that all key ideas were included in the discussion. Once the initial coding process was completed, the codes were transferred from the MAXQDA software to an MS Excel codebook where the main codes and categories were reviewed again and until I was satisfied that I had covered all the key ideas that were evident in the data. Once no new ideas were emerging, the saturation point was established, and the coding process was closed.

Transferability

Transferability, the consideration of how the findings of this qualitative study can be applied to similar context, was given high priority in the context of this research. I have taught at two other teacher education institutions with programs similar to the one being studied as well as with students who are of varying diversities and in different years of study. These personal experiences have engendered characteristics that are similar to those exhibited by the participants in this research study as well. The plans for the research study (the goals and the research questions) were shared with the teacher educators of the participating institution and teacher educators from the other institutions in Trinidad and Tobago who supported the study by engaging in the peer debriefing process and even in the examination and critique of the final codes, categories, and themes for the study.

The final themes and findings for the study were examined by a research professor at one of the local educational teacher training institutions. This professor is experienced in working with postgraduate doctoral students and has also conducted and published research reports internationally. There were no complaints about the nature or

value of the information shared by the participants. The lecturers, prospective teachers and other interested stakeholders within the education system will be able to identify with the topic for this study and explore the findings that will be shared. Hopefully, they will also use elements in the development of aspects of teacher professionalism in the future.

Dependability

The dependability of a qualitative study allows readers and reviewers of the study to be comfortable that the actual findings and evidence available in the data is what is presented by the researcher in the final report. I was meticulous in the outlining of the processes involved in the research and in maintaining records of all engagements with the participants of the study. The views and statements of the participants are available in the discussion of the data analysis process and in the presentation of the results of the study. In both cases, the use of thick description and the voices of the participants, as reflected in the use of direct quotations, support the findings of the study. The constant examination of the findings and alignment of statements with actual documented evidence within the presentation of the study increases the dependability and worth of the final report.

Confirmability

The confirmability of a research study is linked to the rigor and attention that would have been paid to ensuring credibility, transferability, and dependability issues within the study. Multiple actions taken during the research process ensured that credibility was a major concern in the study. I ensured that the views and experiences of the participants were uppermost in the exploration of the data and so more than one

method of data collection was used. Amin et al. (2020) suggested that this process of methodological triangulation was a suitable approach to address the limitations of any one method of data collection and ensured that limitations and strengths of different approaches could be used to improve the confirmability of a study.

The incorporation of views from the participant diaries as well as the interviews with the same participants allowed for the corroboration of statements and allowed me to see the consistency of the expressions of the participants not only in what they said in the interviews but in their personal written statements on each matter. These views are documented throughout the presentation of the data collection and data analysis phases of the study. Further, all statements made about the conceptualization, experiences, and expressions of teacher professionalism by prospective teachers were based on the statements of the participants. I reviewed the data collection multiple times to verify what was being said by the participants. The participants' responses were coded, and codes were reviewed rigorously to ensure alignment with the views of the various participants.

The maintenance of an audit trail was established to support the work of this study. The original records were always available to the committee chair who was provided with examples of information from the transcripts and monitored the coding process and decisions taken regarding the meanings and possibilities being shared by participants. The coding of the data was also an iterative process and I used different methods of coding to support confirmability. I used the MAXQDA software to review and organize the codes, patterns, and then themes related to the study. The information from MAXQDA was then transferred to a Microsoft Excel file where it was reviewed

again. This process of constant review facilitated the verification of interpretations and ideas that I would have established as important in the data analysis process. Finally, I explained all methods of coding fully in the research report and indicated changes that were made to the original plans for the study and how they were implemented during the conduct and completion of data collection and data analysis.

Authenticity

Attention to authenticity was one of the strengths of the data collection and data analysis processes. The participants in the study were not chosen from any specific group within the bachelor of education program but rather all students were invited and the ones who were interested contacted me and were advised of the nature of the study and of the need to give their consent as participants. All participants consented to be part of the study and some even shared contacts of other members of the program who demonstrated interest in the study. The engagement in the study was a free process and there was an opportunity for people to discontinue engagement without any threats, as happened with one student who decided to end her participation due to the pressures of her work, study and home life.

Fairness, an essential ingredient in establishing authenticity as guided by the work Amin (2020), was endorsed in the study. Apart from participants having the opportunity to leave the study when and if they chose to do so, they were allowed to be open during the processes of completing the participant diaries and the interviews. Many of the participants had strong views on the questions asked and prompts used, and they were allowed the freedom to share these views with some probing questions used to further

address their thoughts and clarify the statements being shared. All participants had equal opportunities to share their ideas and all the ideas were incorporated into the thick description of details that are characteristic of this research study. The descriptions used in the study indicate the needs, interests, and possibilities that the research participants expressed based on their sharing on the topic of teacher professionalism and how it is conceptualized in the specific teacher training program in Trinidad and Tobago.

The data collection and data analysis processes engaged in this study were chosen as the best approaches to provide an understanding of the perspective of prospective teachers on the conceptualization and understanding of teacher professionalism. These processes were varied and implemented to ensure that the research questions that framed the study could be answered appropriately and to add new knowledge in the area of facilitating the development of teacher professionalism in prospective teachers. This final section of the chapter will explore the results of the study and indicate how these assisted in addressing the research questions that guided the study.

Results

The results of the study are organized around a discussion of one main theme and other subthemes that emanated from the data collection and data analysis processes. The results were finalized through a process of continuous interaction with the data and prolonged engagement. I engaged with the data using the processes of analysis, exploration, and examination of each of the thoughts and ideas regarding the conceptualization and understanding of teacher professionalism as shared by the prospective teachers. The study's original findings represent the ideas, experiences, and

understandings of the participant prospective teachers at the institution where the data were collected. The emphasis of each question and how the response was generated from the main theme and various subthemes will be the focus of the last major area of the results section.

The study's major finding was that prospective teachers had personally predetermined ideas about the nature of professionalism and how it should be exhibited in educational contexts. This finding was supported by all the other main understandings and themes from the data analysis. The prospective teachers shared a variety of experiences that they considered to be the basis of their understandings and conceptualizations of teacher professionalism. They shared experiences and models of professionalism that were part of their daily lives, their own experiences as children or based on their interactions with and observations of relatives who were teachers. Learning about teacher professionalism can be categorized as an informal learning experience for the prospective teachers and little formal learning experience is connected to their descriptions and sharing. This finding was evident from the data analysis and confirmed by the development of themes one and two as shared in Table 8.

Some additional subthemes were derived from the exploration of the data. These themes include the idea that prospective teachers demonstrated a need to continue growing as professionals. They were clear that being a professional teacher did not happen immediately when someone starts to teach but explained the need for teachers to continue to build their knowledge and to learn from mentors in their educational contexts. The view that many unprofessional behaviors (as described by the participants) were

evident in the teacher training program and that these were mentioned much more often in the experiences of the prospective teachers than examples of professionalism in the program is another subtheme that will be discussed.

Major Findings of the Study

Prospective Teachers' Views of Teacher Professionalism Are Based on Their Personal Informal Learning Experiences

The realization that the prospective teachers expressed views of teacher professionalism but indicated that those views were not related to teacher training experiences was compelling. While there were two prospective teachers who were unclear about the concept of teacher professionalism, others shared ideas related to the origin of their views on professionalism and how they saw their ideas exhibited in people who taught them as well as other people that they were in contact with during their years of learning. They provided examples of informal contexts and experiences that they thought provided them with meaningful experiences of the nature of teacher professionalism and examples of teachers exhibiting professionalism.

TEDA 16 spoke about experiencing teacher professionalism as a child. He confirmed that he remembers that when he was a kid, there were certain teachers that he used to be drawn to:

You know, you wanted to go to their class, you wanted to be around them.

Because they used to teach you something different than teaching. You understand the teaching aspect is one thing but then it does have the other teacher, who has another side of them that makes them drawn to you.

His explanation was that these teachers that he encountered in his early life exhibited professionalism and had “the understanding aspect, the love aspect, the kindness aspect, the humility aspect. I call it the popo [the term popo is slang for baby] aspect, yes, popo, alright popo, okay.” He saw teacher professionalism as evident in the way teachers responded to students and defined it based on his experiences. He was not the only participant who described teacher professionalism as part of their early interaction in social and learning environments and that definitions of the construct were formed early in life.

One prospective teacher, TEDA 10, shared that her understanding of teacher professionalism was gained from her aunt. Her comment was that she had

an aunt who is a primary school teacher and her advice was “A teacher is someone who is always in the spotlight, so make sure that people see what you want them to see. Don’t give them a chance to peek behind the curtains.” Ever since then, I have taken her advice to heart, and I always behave in a manner that reflects such an ideal.

TEDA 10 emphasized that her understanding of “teacher professionalism was derived from my personal experience as a student, both primary and secondary and now tertiary education.” This view was reinforced by TEDA 9 in her participant diary entry response to Prompt 10. She described her experience of teacher professionalism in the following way:

I have seen it exhibited in the teachers I look up to, right, the teachers I looked up to from primary to secondary that given their street appearance, these things stood

out every time because when you asked me, I really was not thinking about my teachers coming up in the system.

The prospective teachers engaged in personal research to understand the idea of teacher professionalism even though they were advised (when they agreed to be part of the study) that they could share openly and did not need to research to share any formal or academic responses to the diary prompts and research questions. TEDA 11 confessed, during the interview process, that she got most of what she knows about teacher professionalism from experiences but “while doing this, I did some research because I want to know, what is really a professional teacher.” When TEDA 11 shared this experience of trying to gain an understanding of professionalism, she provided further evidence for the prominence of informal learning experiences in the interaction with and substantiation of the concept of teacher professionalism as a prospective teacher.

The research participants expressed different but clear statements on the nature of teacher professionalism. These views included the focus by one participant, TEDA 16, on teacher professionalism being related to teacher interaction and engagement with students when she shared that “professionalism for me is being able to talk clearly, give exact instructions to students.” TEDA 9 shared another view on teacher professionalism with her description of the requirements for being professional. She described her understanding of teacher professionalism as “being able to be on time, to be willing to be liked, when I mean willing to be liked, open up yourself to your students and having them see, okay, I’m somebody too, you know.” TEDA 9 further expanded her understanding of the nature of teaching as a profession by exploring what she considered to be some of the

key characteristics of the construct of teacher professionalism as she understood it. She indicated in her statement that,

Okay, I chose teaching as a profession, because this is something that is a profession, it is not a little job, it is not a little thing on the side, my little side thing. It's a profession, something that you need, you need be real, let's say. You need to be current, you need to have wits, you need to have information in your head, you cannot be empty, you have to because the children come at you and they expect you to know everything. You have to have comebacks too, you have to, you know, you cannot be dull.

TEDA 5 expressed his views on the nature of teacher professionalism by saying that he found teacher professionalism to be a multi-dimensional construct. He said that "being a professional teacher to me is not any one-dimensional thing. There is a lot of different aspects, to me, that makes you a professional teacher." The exploration of the views shared indicate that the prospective teachers had views of professionalism, but it is evident that there is no consistency among them of the key concepts of teacher professionalism from the quotations shared.

This finding about teacher professionalism being a reality for the prospective teachers and being linked to their experiences outside of teacher training and not learned formally from the teacher training experience is connected to all the other important themes that were derived from the data. The other subthemes identified in the introduction to these results will be explored and connected to the understandings and experiences of professionalism that the prospective teachers shared during the data

collection process. Quotations from the participants' diary and as well as the interview data will be used to show how the subthemes are connected to this main finding that the prospective teachers have predetermined views of professionalism, and these views are based on their individual personal informal learning experiences.

Subtheme: Expectations of Teacher Professionalism in Others Were Expressed by Prospective Teachers

Participants' understandings and definitions of the concept of teacher professionalism were connected to preconceived expectations of teachers in the education system of Trinidad and Tobago. The prospective teachers shared their views on what professionalism looked like when displayed by teachers. They were able to identify specific behaviors that they felt demonstrated the behaviors of professional teachers. The views shared were not supported by any theory or literature gained from courses in the teacher training program but were based on the ideas of the participants from their early learning experiences and on what they had seen happening within the education system. They formed their own descriptions of professional behaviors.

TEDA 11 expressed the view that the classroom teacher is professional when there is a demonstration of concern for students. The specific idea shared was that the student has to be the first priority of the teacher if the teacher is to be considered a professional. TEDA 11, in response to the interview question on what being a professional teacher means, declared that "as a teacher, you are the student's parents at school. So, the students must be your first priority." TEDA 11 also indicated that "the teacher must put the students as a priority." TEDA 9 supported this view with the

statement that professional teachers need “to make sure that children get what they have to in order to build our country.”

Further support for the critical concern for students and their well-being by professional teachers came from TEDA 16 who endorsed this view using different words to share the same understanding of the nature of teacher professionalism. TEDA 16 said :

the children are the key, we have to prepare them for what is to come because we will, we will die, we will fade away, but the legacy of our words and the legacy of our work will live on. So therefore, we have to prepare them for what is out there.

TEDA 1 offered ideas about the nature of teacher professionalism by sharing some of the characteristics of a professional teacher but ended by emphasizing the importance of the students and how teachers, in their demonstration of professionalism, should relate to students. TEDA 1 expounded on this issue by sharing the following view:

I consider some important components of teacher professionalism are patience, kindness, punctuality, and being able to adapt to different situations without losing their cool. I also think that teacher professionalism calls for respect for their students and the many backgrounds/cultures they come from.

The prospective teachers also emphasized the importance of motivation in describing the nature of teacher professionalism. TEDA 16 insisted that if teachers were to be professional, they must remember why they wanted to teach in the first place. This view was expressed when the participant emphasized that as a teacher “you have to remember in the first place, why you wanted to be a teacher. The main reason” and this view was endorsed further by TEDA 16 with the statement that “I think you have to have

a love for what you're doing. And persistence has to come with a knowledge or love for what you are doing." TEDA 5 proclaimed that "motivation is part of me being a professional."

The exploration of the expectations of the prospective teachers included statements on what they (prospective teachers) considered to be appropriate behaviors in the classroom. The prospective teachers focused on many teacher characteristics that they considered to be appropriate reflections of professional behaviors and explored these as important in the classrooms of professional teachers. The prospective teachers identified confidence, patience, and persistence as key behaviors. TEDA 11 supported the view that professional teachers must be confident. This participant noted that confidence was important and explained that,

Because you could be smart but have a lack of confidence and your students will see that in you and be like Miss, you are doing the work but you are not looking like if you are sure, so you must be able to have that level of confidence.

TEDA 11 went further indicating an important characteristic that a professional teacher must possess is patience, expressing this view: "Patience, you need to have patience, every child learns at a different speed and teachers must be able to have patience." The need to demonstrate persistence was also identified as critical in teachers' professionalism. TEDA 3 explained that persistence was important in the demonstration of professional behavior,

Because, for example, you have different students with different strengths or weaknesses. You have to be persistent in the approaches that are given to

students. Different teaching approaches to ensure to meet each student's needs to promote success. To promote success for each student, different approaches need to be persistent in meeting students' needs.

These prospective teachers spoke about their expectations of professionalism in teachers using their examples of behaviors that they had observed in people that they considered to be professionals. They used some of their own ideas about how professionals should behave to provide their views on "teacher professionalism in action." There was also discussion of varying experiences of professionalism from the participants. Some participants felt that they were able to identify teacher professionalism in their experiences and even mentioned course content in the bachelor of education program where the concept was noted. Other prospective teachers felt that the concept and exhibitions of teacher professionalism were missing in their experiences.

Subtheme: Prospective Teachers Have Varying Experiences in Developing the Concept of Teacher Professionalism in Teacher Training Contexts

The prospective teachers described a range of experiences with the concept of *teacher professionalism* during the teacher training experience. Some prospective teachers felt that the experiences with teachers in the institution did not add value to their understanding of teacher professionalism and in some cases, they indicated that the ideas of teacher professionalism were presented only in theory in the teacher training program. Other participants shared a range of criticisms of the teacher training program and linked these to the ability to gain appropriate understandings of teacher professionalism in the specific teacher training context.

TEDA 13 expressed the view that “in terms of teacher training, the only thing that is overlooked is if the teachers that train are not professionals, there will be no one to model after” and when the participants were questioned about their views on how the school was incorporating teacher professionalism in their preparation to be teachers, TEDA 8 noted that “I would say some, the school, not the school, but it’s some teachers, some lecturers are professionals.” TEDA 16 was adamant in his expression of the views that the demonstration of professionalism is questionable within the institution. This participant indicated (in the quotation that follows with the entire statement in the exact words of the participant, including capital letters, from the participant diary) that “without a doubt the female teachers at this institution could learn a thing or two from their male counterparts in the arts of proper teaching, understanding, logical teaching and grading papers on time which counts as unprofessional squared.” TEDA 16 went on further to express that “the majority of teaching is modeled where they just take one or two of their texts into the classroom.”

TEDA 13, in a participant diary entry, reinforced the fact that teacher professionalism was not part of the focus of the training and suggested that it might be related to the level of completion of the program that she experienced up to the time of the data collection process. Her view was that,

Honestly, I have not experienced any concepts on teacher professionalism.

I am not sure if this is because I have only completed half of my training but no courses has yet to discuss this topic. I believe this is because how our program is

structured. It focus on content knowledge during the first few years. I could only hope that as I continue this topic would be addressed.

TEDA 4, a Year II student in the bachelor of education program indicated that she was not familiar with the concept of teacher professionalism. Her thoughts were that “as of this moment, there are a few things that I need to know and understand about teacher professionalism, but the knowledge that I am privy to, I intend to use to help me in becoming the best teacher I can become.” TEDA 10 made a clear statement on teacher professionalism in the institution by saying that,

One thing I dislike, even to this day, is when some teacher walks into a classroom and have no idea what they know and they haven’t organized anything for the lesson. So it’s kind of unfortunate I have met it at the university level and as a student. Now it throws me off because the teacher is all over the place.

Some prospective teachers provided comments that they felt reflected major areas of the program that need to be addressed so that the level of teacher professionalism experienced could be improved for the prospective teachers. One of the main issues identified by the prospective teachers “was missing experiences in the program” these people in training felt were important to their understanding and development of teacher professionalism. TEDA 10 indicated that the exposure to the practical teaching environment was a major issue in the development of professionalism and that this was not part of the teacher training experience. She suggested that,

One experience I have not had thus far that I think is beneficial to me as a teacher is encountering the actual experience in a primary school setting. My teaching

practice thus far has been within my school, with my classmates or virtually with students. However the professional teacher meets more than this in the classroom, they meet the system both classroom and administrative. I think being exposed to this also shapes the teacher.

Participants provided many other discomforts with the program that they connected to their understanding and comfort with the concept of teacher professionalism and how it is formulated in their minds based on their respective experiences. The prospective teachers commented on the difficulty of the opportunities to learn from experiences and, as TEDA 13 stated it, even suggested that teacher training was a challenge as prospective “teachers have actual work or the difficulty of the program” to contend with as teachers in training. Other codes were used to describe experiences related to the teacher training program and opportunities to develop and understand professionalism. Two examples of such codes include “teacher training is difficult” and “teacher training is discouraging prospective teachers.”

While one set of participants complained about the exhibition of professionalism within the institution, the varying experiences related to teacher professionalism are highlighted by responses from other participants who expressed their observations about learning and understanding teacher professionalism during their training. TEDA 5 felt that the interaction with a specific teacher/instructor helped with the development and understanding of teacher professionalism. This participant mentioned that “Sir had this impact on me as Sir was a being professional. And this is the same effect that I would want to have on those that I encounter.” The position of TEDA 1 was similar, with the

statement that the exposure to the content of the courses in the bachelor of education program at the institution provided some support for the development of teacher professionalism. TEDA 1 shared thoughts on the experience saying that “I also think that the courses that I did in my time at the University have given me the necessary resources that would enable me to understand what teacher professionalism is in theory.” TEDA 1 and TEDA 5 were prospective teachers who were in their final year of the teacher training program during the data collection process.

TEDA 2, in response to a question about the experiences in the teacher training program that helped with understanding professionalism, suggested that the focus on interpersonal relationships and how these can be used to facilitate teaching and learning was most valuable. TEDA 3 identified a specific instructor in the program who was considered a professional in her demonstration of appropriate behaviors and interaction with prospective teachers. This participant noted that she had an opportunity to interact with a professional teacher during her training at TEDA. She confirmed that the female teacher educator “has the qualities of a professional teacher because she demonstrates herself to always be prepared. She is prepared by always providing relevant resources and always prepared to adapt to each of her students’ learning capabilities.” There was further endorsement of the experience of professionalism within the institution as TEDA 4 shared information on the development of ideas related to teacher professionalism. TEDA 4 provided information related to the development of ideas important to professionalism by indicating that,

My idea of teacher professionalism came about when I decided that I wanted to become a teacher, however my understanding of what teacher professionalism really meant came about when I came to TEDA. I have learnt quite a bit. I am also fortunate to have my professors' model teacher professionalism, they exhibit teacher professionalism in and out of the classroom.

TEDA 5 indicated that there was interaction with "a lot of teachers at the TEDA that deemed to be extremely professional" and one participant included that the focus on the content of the curriculum was beneficial in the development of professional understanding. TEDA 1's response to professionalism within the teacher training program was that "one of the areas of instructional content that I have encountered in my training to become a professional teacher that has helped me understand the concept of teacher professionalism would have to be planning."

There were many participants of the study who expressed the view that the teacher training experience was not a major contributor to their understanding of the concept of teacher professionalism. Some students felt that there was need for greater emphasis on this concept during the teacher training program and others even suggested that the engagement in this study was an introduction to the concept for them and expressed the need to learn more about the topic. On the other hand, there were two participants who indicated that they were exposed to the concept of teacher professionalism in the teacher training program but that there was need for greater clarity in the discussion of the concept and the exploration of its relevance to young teachers.

The idea shared by participants was that understanding and exploring teacher professionalism was not a formal part of the teacher training experience of the prospective teachers. TEDA 13 indicated that it was not obvious to her that the teachers demonstrated professionalism when she shared that,

In terms of teacher training, the only thing that is overlooked in our development is that if the teachers that train are not professional teachers, there will be no one to model after. The majority of teaching is modeled in a way that simply take one or two of their texts and come into your classroom.

On the other hand, there was TEDA 10 who shared that she was “training to be a teacher at the university...and unknowingly this have been influencing my concept of what it means to be a professional teacher.” Further, TEDA 16 was convinced when he shared his view that “we are teaching ourselves right now, at any point in time, you are not coming out and letting us know that so in our minds, we are thinking about it now” where he emphasized the lack of teacher professionalism in the teaching context of the university.

TEDA 1, similar to some other participants, was confident in her expression of the view that her “time at the University, has helped foster an in depth knowledge of teacher professionalism that I think I will carry into my profession as a teacher in the future.” TEDA 3 was also convinced about her exposure to the concept of teacher professionalism in the teacher training program when she provided her views through sharing that “I didn’t have much knowledge about how to teach or the ways and the

approaches of how to teach a student. For my improvement in this field, I will like to acknowledge or thank my instructors.”

Two prospective teachers indicated that they were not aware of the idea of teacher professionalism. One participant (TEDA 11) shared her views on teacher professionalism in one interview questions and when asked to expand further on her thoughts on the nature of teacher professionalism or share any information that she felt should have been included in the discussion, she responded by saying “I think I emphasized a lot to begin with, I did not know what was teacher professionalism, I did not know that it was a thing.” TEDA 11 indicated that she was at the end of year one in the completion of the bachelor of education program.

TEDA 13, a prospective teacher who completed year two of the bachelor of education program, shared her lack of awareness of the construct of teacher professionalism and issues related to teacher professionalism:

Honestly, I have not experienced any concepts on teacher professionalism. I am not sure if this is because I have only completed half of my training but no courses yet discussed this topic. I believe this is because how our program is structured. It focus [sic] on content knowledge during the first few years. I could only hope that as I continue this topic would be addressed.

TEDA 13 was one of eight participants who completed all the diary entries and shared views of teacher professionalism in the interview process. She indicated awareness of a variety of perceptions, but these were from her educational experiences as a student at the primary and secondary school level and from her interaction with some

advisors at the teacher training institution. She was unable to identify any formal exposure to the concept and characteristics of teacher professionalism.

The prospective teachers indicated varying ideas about the teacher education program and how it impacted their individual sense professionalism and general understanding of the concept. Further, there were some people who were unclear about the nature of professionalism even though they had completed one year of the program. The participants who contributed the data for the study were unanimous in their expressions of their understanding that professionalism was not static. They all shared beliefs and understandings that as budding professionals, they had to focus on self-improvement if they were to make any difference in the lives of children.

Subtheme: Prospective Teachers Demonstrate Evidence of Growth Perspectives When Considering Teacher Professionalism

An important aspect of the discussion related to teacher professionalism and how prospective teachers conceptualize and verbalize its meaning is the type of mindset that undergirds the understanding of teacher professionalism exhibited. All participants highlighted the understanding that professional behaviors were not fixed or fully developed and expressed, in various ways, the understanding of the need for continuous professional development if a prospective teacher envisaged becoming a professional teacher. The characteristics identified by participants range from personal willingness to learn and grow as professionals up to the commitment to serving communities and enhancing their professional development to ensure that the benefits of the students and community are served effectively.

The prospective teachers indicated their willingness to make conscious attempts to become professional teachers. The views were that they were willing to present themselves like teachers in terms of professional attire but more so, their focus was on the constant need to behave like professionals based on their understanding of the concept. TEDA 1 thought it was appropriate to always “present myself in a manner that is befitting of my prospective profession. I do not have the luxury of losing my patience with others, even strangers on the street I have never met.” TEDA 1 further expressed the view that “it will not always go according to plan but as a teacher, you have to be able to magnify your lesson plan to suit the situation in your classroom at the time.”

TEDA 16 expressed that as a teacher, there was a great hope, “you know, I can make a difference” when he considered his possibilities as a prospective professional teacher. Following this trend of thought, TEDA 11 demonstrated commitment, in her expression of possibilities regarding becoming a professional teacher in the future was to “never give up. Because you could start one place and reach a next place and you are in the center, and you want to give up because you feel that you can’t make it.” TEDA 11 went on to express the view that she was interested in being a committed and dedicated teacher to help students by going the extra mile for them. TEDA 9 paid attention to the challenges that are involved in becoming a professional teacher when it was mentioned that “the road is not an easy one, I will emphasize that you have to always keep learning and to keep current with what is out there.” While TEDA 9 recognized that challenges were involved in being a professional teacher, she noted that as a professional, she had to

be innovative. She mentioned that “every single day, the information coming is different” and was clear that “I cannot go there every day and do the same thing.”

TEDA 9 also indicated her goal as a prospective teacher noting that “I will be able to erect the school that I would really like and will be teaching head, heart and hand, exactly how each child would learn.” One participant, TEDA 13, mentioned that she thinks “in five years, I will still be a teacher” and TEDA 5 added to this understanding of growth by sharing that “I would just, in general, want to be a role model to change the way things are done in my community.”

The prospective teachers also demonstrated a high level of motivation with regards to their views of teaching as a profession. TEDA 13 felt that teaching was her calling and suggested that “I think I’ve got my calling, I think I’ve got my calling, you know, I mean.” The happiness of this response incorporates a willingness to make the sacrifices that the teaching profession demands to ensure the calling of the person speaking in the statement. TEDA 10 spoke about how people viewed her as a prospective teacher when she gave lessons to students. She claimed that “I don’t know why, they knew I was not a teacher, but they would always bring children and approach me for some type of Maths lessons.” TEDA 10 also emphasized that people recognized her as a teacher and “everyone tells me TEDA 10, you should be a teacher.”

Discrepant Case: One Nonconfirming Subtheme

The data analysis did not only allow me to see the conceptualizations of teacher professionalism that prospective teachers internalized. Further attempts to explore their foundational ideas regarding the concept of teacher professionalism were not

substantiated with references to the nature of the concept or examples of how they developed it. Instead, it was obvious that the prospective teachers were able to say more about unprofessional teacher behaviors in the responses provided. The ability to identify unprofessional teacher behaviors was related to early learning experiences as well as some gained during the teacher training program.

Subtheme: Prospective Teachers Demonstrate a High Level of Awareness of Unprofessional Teacher Behaviors

The recognition that many of the prospective teachers emphasized their experiences of teacher behaviors that they considered to be unprofessional was evident in the findings and was a major area of discussion. Prospective teachers were more aware of what did not define teacher professionalism as compared to what defines the construct of professionalism in teaching. The ability to identify unprofessional behaviors was developed at different phases in their experiences with teachers and teaching and, so, their statements were related to a range of contexts when the lack of professionalism was evident to them. The prospective teachers also noted their observations on the existence of unprofessional justifications for becoming teachers in some cases. TEDA 16 was clear in his conviction that “a lot of teachers, as most people, are interested in their careers for money.” The idea was that generally, teachers in the education system do not demonstrate professionalism and in fact, “does greet you and talk to you like you know, like you are smelling bad. Yes, that is not professionalism.”

TEDA 9 explained that “more and more as jobs get hard, one of the most secure jobs that exists is being a teacher because children are always being born and all these

things, so they grab at it. They grab it, and it's not for the correct reasons." TEDA 9 spoke about teachers who are unkind and unwilling to work in the best interest of learners. They are content to maintain monotonous classrooms that lack motivation for the students. TEDA 5 supported the idea that the existence of non-professional teachers within the education system is a reality with the expression that "there are, how to put it, teachers who are not professional, you know."

The identification of unprofessional behaviors of teachers was also mentioned regarding the conduct of classrooms. The prospective teachers shared their thoughts on the issue of exhibitions of professionalism that were missing in the teaching and learning spaces where they were being prepared to be teachers. TEDA 10 complained about the lack of professionalism at the teacher education institution, TEDA, where some instructors were not prepared to teach. In an expression of frustration, TEDA 10 noted that "it throws me off, because the teacher is all over the place, and I am like, how am I supposed to grasp from this session?" TEDA 5 also shared the lack of comfort with the demonstration of professionalism when she indicated that "it is not a good thing to see a teacher go to a class and not know what they have to do for the day; that is very unprofessional."

Association of Research Findings and Research Questions

This study was guided by three main research questions:

RQ1: How do prospective teachers, who are students in a teacher education program in Trinidad and Tobago, perceive themselves as emerging teacher professionals?

RQ2: How do prospective teachers describe the process they are experiencing that contributes to the development of their understanding and application of the construct of teacher professionalism?

RQ3: How do prospective teachers in a teacher education program in Trinidad and Tobago describe how they operationalize the construct of teacher professionalism?

The main theme explored in the data analysis consists of many subthemes and overall, these subthemes provided answers for the various research questions. The key understanding coming out of the data analysis was that prospective teachers have varying views of teacher professionalism but that these views were not the outcome of or even associated with the teacher training experience. Table 9 illustrates the connection between individual research questions and the main subthemes that were discussed in the results component of Chapter 4.

Table 9

Findings Gained From the Study and Their Relationship to the Research Questions

Finding	Connection to research question
Prospective teachers' enter teacher training with experientially determined ideas of teacher professionalism. Teacher training contributed minimally to the descriptions and experiences of teacher professionalism shared by prospective teachers.	RQ2. How do prospective teachers describe the process they are experiencing that contributes to the development of their understanding and application of the construct of teacher professionalism?
Prospective teachers were able to share personalized descriptions of the nature of teacher professionalism as a construct. Prospective teachers' understanding of teacher professionalism is founded more in what is not professional than what is professional.	RQ3. How do prospective teachers in a teacher education program in Trinidad and Tobago describe how they operationalize the construct of teacher professionalism?
Prospective teachers' informal self-determination of what comprises teacher professionalism appears to underpin a growth mindset toward becoming a professional.	RQ1. How do prospective teachers, who are students in a teacher education program in Trinidad and Tobago, perceive themselves as emerging teacher professionals?

Summary

Chapter 4 is a critical aspect in the presentation of the new knowledge related to the topic of prospective teachers and their conceptualizations, understanding, and experiences of teacher professionalism. The completion of this chapter facilitated the sharing of key areas of information regarding the process used to gain and substantiate the evidence presented in this research study and strategies used to establish the quality of conclusions, recommendations, and implications that will be addressed in Chapter 5. Some of the key aspects addressed in this chapter included the confirmation and description of the settings, demographics, data collection and data analysis procedures as were proposed in Chapter 3. There were three main variations from the proposed research plan, and these were presented as: online strategies for data collection due to the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic, the revision of the approach to data collection, and a change in the process for member checking.

The presentation of the data analysis process, the issues regarding establishing the trustworthiness of the study, and the presentation of the results were the key aspects of discussion in this chapter. These sections of Chapter 4 were presented with depth of discussion using the information gathered from the data provided by the participants. The emphasis was on the analysis of the data to uncover major characteristics of the prospective teachers and their sharing on the conceptualization of teacher professionalism. The use of the two different forms of data collection, participant diaries and individual interviews, helped to solidify the information gained and strengthen the evidence for the findings noted in this chapter.

The research questions that guided the study were key considerations during the completion of Chapter 4 and especially during the data analysis. The uncovering of the codes, categories, and themes in relation to the conceptualization, understanding, and experiences of teacher professionalism facilitated the development of responses to the research questions. The responses are supported by statements of the participants along with related findings.

The results of the study consist of a main theme and many subthemes that were developed through the thematic coding process resulting in a main theme and five subthemes presented with appropriate quotations to support the ideas that were accepted as responses to the research questions. These results are relevant to the research questions as shown in Table 9.

Response to Research Question 1

The first research question attempted to understand how prospective teachers perceived themselves as emerging teacher professionals. The responses from the participants were aligned and all participants provided responses that showed that they were accepting of the view of “becoming professionals.” The prospective teachers recognized and acknowledged the need to keep on “growing as professionals” and all of the participants were comfortable with this view. Some of the responses that were used to develop this theme include the statement by TEDA 9 that “as an emerging teacher professional, I see myself as an involved teacher. I love to engage and inspire the young to reach their full potential in all areas of cognitive learning and personal-social development.”

TEDA 10 noted that growing as a professional teacher was on her agenda. She acknowledged that “as an emerging teacher professional, I view myself as one with innovation. Education in the Caribbean is evolving rapidly, the world itself is a global village and we must adapt personally and professionally” and this view was supported by TEDA 9 who said “I strive to be a good teacher. I crave the chance to be all things to the little ones that I would be entrusted with one day. I want to give back to them what I was blessed to finally have at this leg of my academic experience – the opportunity to have a good teacher.” TEDA 3 showed that she was experiencing growth during the teacher training process through her statement that “as a prospective teacher at this very moment I am breaking out of my shy little shell becoming an outspoken and a confident individual.”

The main finding from the data made it clear that the prospective teachers’ informal self-determination of what comprises teacher professionalism appears to underpin a growth mindset toward becoming a professional. They were comfortable with the idea that professionals need to continue growing and learning and demonstrated a commitment to follow that path in their respective careers as teachers. They also identified some spheres of development that they understood were important to developing as a professional teacher.

Response to Research Question 2

The second research question required exploration of the descriptions of the prospective teachers as they outlined the factors that contributed to their understanding and application of the construct of teacher professionalism. Three different themes

contributed to the development of key findings to address this research question. A major finding in relation to this question was that prospective teachers enter teacher training with experientially determined ideas of teacher professionalism. They were able to share experiences from seeing relatives behave in ways they described as professional and, from their perspectives, highlighted interactions with teachers in their primary and secondary education who displayed professionalism. They had their views of teachers and professional characteristics long before entry into the teacher training program and this was evident from the analysis of the data.

Another major finding that is related to this question involved the understanding that teacher training contributed minimally to the descriptions and experiences of professionalism shared by prospective teachers. While two teachers were able to associate teacher professionalism with course content or with the behavior of a teacher who they found impressive, most of the participants were unable to link teacher professionalism to their courses during the teacher training program or to models of professional behaviors within the formal teaching and learning setting.

Response to Research Question 3

The final research question required the researcher to delve into the ability of the prospective teachers to describe their understandings or operationalization of the concept of teacher professionalism. The main finding is that the prospective teachers were able to share personalized descriptions of the nature of teacher professionalism as a construct. First, the prospective teachers were able to share their views on the nature of teacher professionalism. The understandings of teacher professionalism ranged from two views

that indicated, on one hand, an absence of understanding of the concept to, on the other hand, all the other participants being able to define and describe in some cases, their own views of teacher professionalism and include personalized definitions in their statements. The descriptions included a range of varying conceptualizations including teacher behaviors in the classroom as indicative of teacher professionalism and teacher characteristics and emotional connection to students as also being indicative of the demonstration of teacher professionalism.

A second major finding was that prospective teachers' understanding of teacher professionalism is founded more in what is not professional than what is professional. This was described as a discrepant case in the findings as the participants focused their responses and explanations to a much larger extent on what they thought was unprofessional and provided examples from their experiences of what they described as *unprofessionalism* in the teaching and learning context that they experienced as students of earlier educational contexts as well as within the teacher training program.

The contents of Chapter 4 provide information on the implementation and outcomes of the major research processes that were used in this study. The setting, demographics, sourcing of research participants, and the engagement in data collection and analysis were all explored. Deviations from the process and details of the research that were shared in Chapter 3 were outlined and the results of the study were shared.

The development of Chapter 4 provides the basis for the discussions that will take place in Chapter 5. Now that the key findings for the study have been established and responses for each of the research questions highlighted, I will return to the literature

review and the conceptual framework to explore how the existing information on the topic of prospective teachers and conceptualizations of teacher professionalism is supported by the data gathered in the context of this study. I will establish any new knowledge that is obvious from the findings and considering the context for this study, present the limitations for the study, draw my final conclusions, and make recommendations for future work in relation to this research topic.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Introduction

In this chapter, I summarize the main findings of the study and relate them to the original purpose of the study and the research questions. As a teacher educator and a former primary and secondary school teacher, I felt a need to pay more attention to professionalism in teaching. I recognized that understanding this concept could improve the practice of teachers. My review of the available literature substantiated this need to better understand teacher professionalism and highlighted that this concept is not well researched in the context of prospective teachers, especially in the Caribbean. The lack of easy access to information on the topic formed the foundation for the development of my study. The examination and attempt to validate these issues in teacher professionalism led to the development of the purpose of the study to explore prospective teachers' perceptions and experiences about conceptualizing and operationalizing the construct of teacher professionalism.

The content of Chapter 5 will highlight the key areas of the research problem and purpose of the study and relate the findings to the research questions. Interpretations of the findings in relation to the literature used to ground the study as well as the conceptual framework used in the design will be shared. The limitations of the study, recommendations, and implications will be explored as the final elements of the research report are completed.

The main finding of this study was that prospective teachers who are part of the bachelor of education program at the TEDA have informally acquired personally

predetermined conceptualizations of the nature of teacher professionalism. Participants' views of the concept were overwhelmingly connected to their experiences as students in primary and secondary educational institutions and, in some cases, were related to experiences within their families. Other issues gleaned from the data were identified as subthemes and include some areas of focus explored later in this chapter. These areas are: (a) expectations of teacher professionalism in others expressed by prospective teachers; (b) prospective teachers have varying experiences in developing the concept of teacher professionalism in the teacher training context; (c) prospective teachers demonstrate evidence of growth perspectives when considering teacher professionalism; and (d) prospective teachers demonstrate a high level of awareness of unprofessional teacher behaviors.

These findings form the basis of the discussion for the interpretation of the findings section of this chapter. This section includes the exploration of the ways that the findings confirm or enhance the peer-reviewed literature as well as an exploration of the findings in relation to the conceptual framework used to develop the key areas of the study. This section on the interpretation of the findings facilitates the discussion of the results of the study and how they fit with the literature, theory, and practice relevant to the topic of the conceptualization of teacher professionalism by prospective teachers in teacher training contexts.

Interpretation of the Findings

Interpretations of the findings in a research study involve making sense of the data in relation to the research context and exploring the findings to gain larger meanings.

Researchers engage in this process by focusing on the literature and making comparisons with past studies and by relating the findings to some personal views. In this section of the study, I focus first on in-depth engagement of new knowledge uncovered during the data collection and data analysis process as well as the confirmation of existing knowledge regarding the topic available in the literature. The exploration of ideas will be based on discussions of the conceptualization of teacher professionalism (conceptual framework) among prospective teachers in Trinidad and Tobago. Once the discussion of the conceptual framework is completed, a revision of that framework will be provided based on the consideration of the findings of the study. Further, I will engage in and share an exploration of the literature presented in Chapter 2 with some discussion of how the findings align or vary based on the existence of the knowledge available on the topic.

Study Findings and the Theories and Conceptual Framework

The theories used in the development of the conceptual framework enabled me to explore connections among key areas of knowledge related to teacher professionalism. Some of these areas include the nature of the mindset of prospective teachers (fixed or growth) and how the demonstration of a specific mindset relates to the perception of teacher professionalism and professional teacher behaviors. Varli and Yilmaz (2020) suggested that the type of mindset a teacher possesses relates to the types of activities and behaviors demonstrated in teaching and learning environments. Hargreaves (2000) explored varying teacher behaviors in a discussion of the eras of teacher professionalism. Teachers' views of professionalism could be recognized by identifying details of their behaviors and relating those details to eras (see Hargreaves, 2000) of professionalism.

Helsby (1995) further proposed that once definitions and conceptualizations allow participants to be categorized, they could be seen as fitting into the major types of conceptualizations related to teacher professionalism. These conceptualizations include the distinction of being a professional or being professional (Helsby, 1995).

The completion of the data collection and data analysis process helped me establish a revision of the relationships of key concepts depicted in the initial conceptual framework related to the discussion of how those concepts. The most important revision was my determination that prospective teachers' conceptualization of teaching in the context of this study was related to informal personal learning experiences as the foundation for their definitions and descriptions of teacher professionalism. Further, these informal personal learning experiences were of three main types: experiences with former teachers, experiences with people they perceived as professional educators in their families, and to a minimal extent, experiences with teacher educators within the teacher training program.

While the initial development of the framework based on the exploration of the literature linked the conceptualization of teacher professionalism to the mindset of the prospective teacher, the data I collected suggested that conceptualizations of professionalism are initially linked to the prior personal experiences of the prospective teachers. Analysis of the prior personal informal experiences of participants were linked to discussions of perceptions of teacher professionalism. The analysis of these prior personal informal experiences also highlights the participants' perceptions of

unprofessional teacher behaviors, which they described as pervasive within their experiences.

One key aspect incorporated in the conceptual framework included the phases of development of teacher professionalism (Hargreaves, 2000). The variety of teacher behaviors outlined in the different phases were not evident in the data collected. The only conclusion possible based on the characteristics of the participants and the responses presented is that prospective teachers possess qualities of people Hargreaves described as belonging to the post-professionalism phase in the development of professionalism. The post-professionalism phase is characterized by educators (prospective teachers in this case) who are more flexible in the teaching and learning context and focused on fulfilling the needs of the different students and other members of society.

There was an overwhelming alignment of the characteristics of the prospective teachers who were participants in the study with the expectations of professional teachers in the post-professionalism phase as described by Hargreaves (2000). Hargreaves mentioned the flexibility of the educational environment where teachers from the post-professional phase function. The prospective teachers who contributed to the data collection were flexible and demonstrated a variety of understandings of who professional teachers appear to be and what they do. TEDA 16 said, “Teachers need to love what they are doing, they must have a relaxed open attitude, and they should always be ready to do new stuff.”

Other participants highlighted the need for teachers to recognize children as their priority and focus on teacher improvement. TEDA 11 highlighted teacher improvement

as a specific area of focus and this approach was identified in the views of other participants. TEDA 11 also spoke about the fact that teacher behaviors are not fixed and that “professional teachers make mistakes” in their activities and need to be aware of and willing to change as necessary. All the participants were supportive of the view of being a teacher professional as an area of growth and continuous development, which further solidifies the connection of the prospective teacher characteristics to the post-professionalism era.

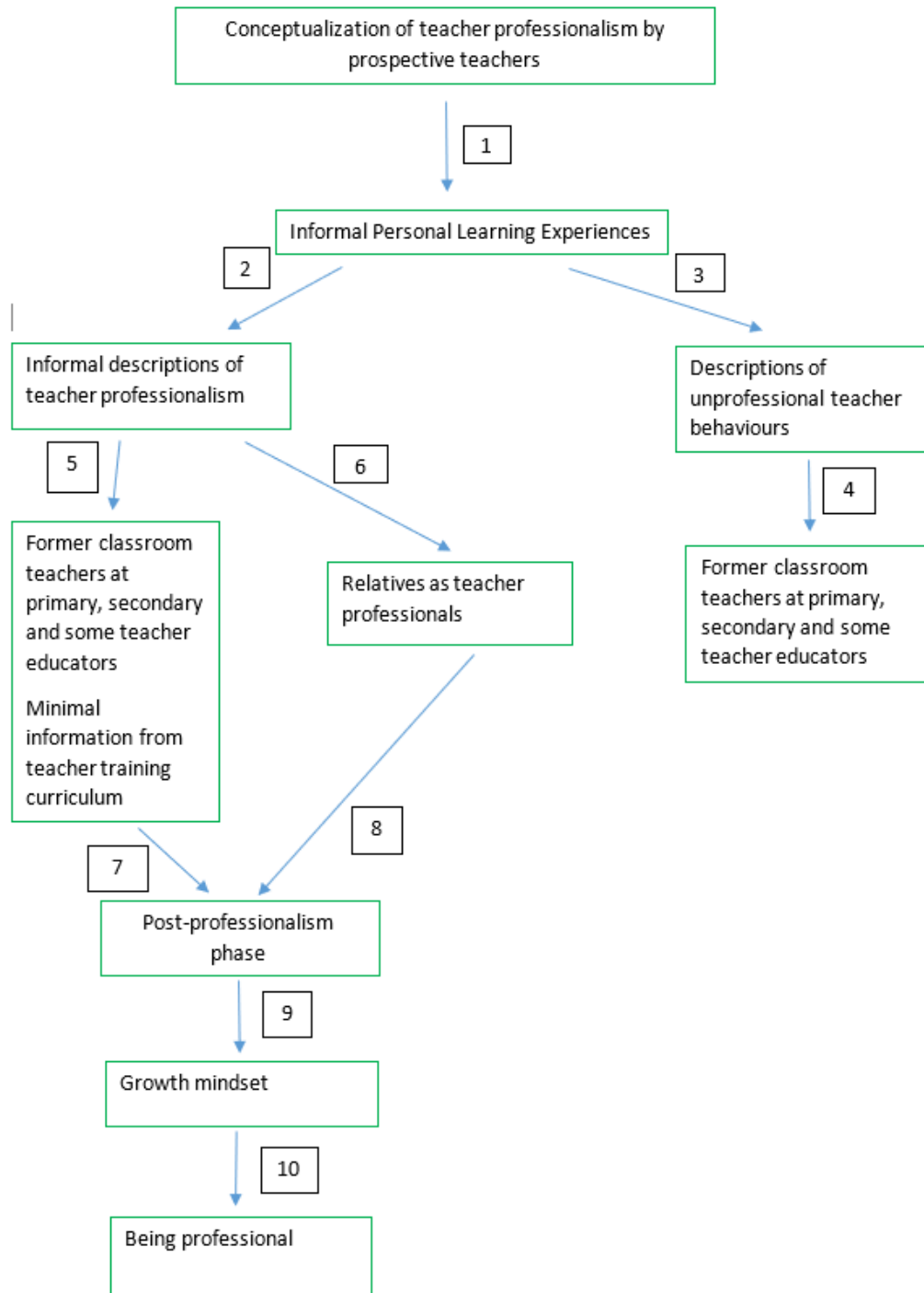
The identified beliefs and behaviors of the prospective teachers that characterize them as being in the post-professionalism phase (see Hargreaves, 2000) also reflect evidence of a growth mindset (see Dweck, 2016). The prospective teachers who contributed to the data collection process expressed the view that being a professional teacher was not a static experience but acknowledged and identified that a professional teacher is someone who recognizes the need to continue growing and learning. All participants were committed to continued professional development as prospective teachers.

The exhibition of the growth mindset by the participants of the study is connected to being professional as compared to being a professional. When Hargreaves (2000) explored the phases of teacher professionalism, he debated the understanding of being a professional against being professional. The process of teacher professionalization is characterized by being a professional and is exhibited by a different understanding of who a professional teacher is based on the characteristics the teacher exhibits. The

prospective teachers, in their responses to questions and probes during the data collection process, demonstrated their focus on being professional.

They identified the need to be open to understanding new requirements of teachers and teaching and fulfilling the needs of the students as well as being able to interact with students on a level that is appropriate to the characteristics of the specific group. Being professional is connected to the observation that prospective teachers understand their respective roles as individuals who need to adapt and adjust to the teaching and learning context and to ensure that their students are facilitated in a way that will support their holistic development. Based on my understanding of the analysis of the data collected in the study, the connection of theories and concepts in the initial conceptual framework has been revised and the new illustration is available in Figure 2.

As a revision of Figure 1, Figure 2 demonstrates that some concepts in the original illustration were not evident from the data collected and analyzed within the Trinidad and Tobago context. Figure 2 represents an original way of conceptualizing teacher professionalism from the combined perspectives of prospective teachers in training within the Trinidad and Tobago education system. The organization and illustration of the concepts and the connection of ideas presented in Figure 2 are more appropriate to the beliefs and views of prospective teachers in Trinidad and Tobago.

Figure 2*Revised Conceptual Framework for Teacher Professionalism in Teacher Education*

The organization of information in Figure 2 is different from Figure 1 as the conceptualization of teacher professionalism of the prospective teachers in the Trinidad and Tobago context is directly related to their experiences, therefore, the diagram was reorganized to reflect these connections. For example, in Figure 2, the first linking arrow (labeled 1) shows that all the data collected linked the thoughts and views of the prospective teachers to their previous individual learning experiences. The exploration of mindset was important but not the immediate consideration illustrated in Figure 1. Instead, as the first set of diverging arrows (2 and 3) demonstrates, I was able to explore two main categories of thought in the previous personal individual learning experiences. These two areas include informal descriptions of teacher professionalism and descriptions of teacher professionalism as unprofessional behavior.

The analysis of the description of teacher professionalism as unprofessional behaviors was linked to the sources of information from the participants. The participants were able to verbalize and describe many experiences and observations that they considered to be unprofessional. These experiences and observations were connected to things personally observed from former classroom teachers at the primary and secondary school level and in some cases to experiences with teacher educators. This aspect of teacher professionalism was not addressed in Chapter 2, but it was evident in my data analysis, and I included it in the illustration of the relationships that explore teacher professionalism from the conceptualization of the prospective teachers.

The exploration of the informal descriptions of teacher professionalism was linked to the same sources of information (former classroom teachers at the primary and

secondary school level and in some cases to experiences with teacher educators) but included the linked perceptions of professional experiences from relatives who were teachers as well and this information is reflected by arrows 5 and 6. None of the participants mentioned a lack of professionalism in their relatives who were teachers. The prospective teachers, in their informal descriptions of teacher professionalism provided descriptions that reflected the characteristics of the post-professionalism phase. The descriptions that the prospective teachers had of themselves as future teacher professionals also reflect characteristics of post-professionalism. Arrows 7 and 8 are used to link the essence and characteristics of professionalism emerging from these important sources identified to the discussion on and nature of post-professionalism. The analysis of the mindset of the prospective teachers, interpreted through their responses in the participant diaries and the interviews, was relocated, as shown by the final two arrows (9 and 10), and connected to the growth mindset and further linked to the idea of being professional.

Study Findings and Literature Reviewed

The literature used as the foundation of the study was firm and convincing on the position that the conceptualization and definition of teacher professionalism was unclear among teachers (Crecci & Fiorentini, 2018; Goodson, 2003; Whitty 2000), and especially in the context of prospective teachers in training. The information gathered from the data collection process of this study confirmed, in the context of a teacher training institution in Trinidad and Tobago, that prospective teachers do not possess clear personal definitions of teacher professionalism. The prospective teachers were unable to provide

formal or meaningful definitions of professionalism and those who tried to share their views instead reflected on their personal experiences, and then suggested their thoughts on the topic.

Further, the expressions of the definition and conceptualizations of teacher professionalism by the prospective teachers lacked clarity. The prospective teachers spoke about examples of professional behavior as well as examples of unprofessional behaviors in their attempts to define the concept. They provided personally observed characteristics of teacher professionals as definitions and not one participant gave a definition that was aligned with any example shared by a theorist or researcher whose work was mentioned in the literature review section of this study.

I was able to conclude, based on the analysis of the interview transcripts and notes added to the transcripts from participant diaries, that the concept of teacher professionalism is in fact one that is elusive and needs clarification, including in the Trinidad and Tobago context. I think that the data collected and analyzed in this study supports the position of Creasy (2015) who indicated that a clear definition of teacher professionalism was not evident in teacher training programs. However, as the story told by the data unfolds within the context of the literature review, it becomes apparent that conceptual clarity is not beyond reach.

An interesting and original finding of this study was that prospective teachers seemed to be more aware of and able to describe the understanding of what was conceptualized as unprofessional teacher behaviors in the data analysis process. This topic is one of the major findings of the study and was highlighted and described by 12

out of 16 of the participants in the study. The prospective teachers commented on the purposes that individuals used to describe why they became teachers, the behaviors of teachers in schools and classrooms, and the poor outcomes of the teaching process as evidenced from the performance of students in schools.

Loewenberg Ball and Forzani (2009) suggested that teacher training was a critical experience in the lives of prospective teachers and contributed to how they relate teacher professionalism. Eren (2012) and Hatleik (2017) further shared that the engagement in the teacher preparation program had an impact on how prospective teachers perceive teacher professionalism and on their views of themselves as professionals. The idea was projected that what happened in teacher training had the potential to affect the professional behaviors of prospective teachers in the future.

The views of Loewenberg Ball and Forzani (2009), Eren (2012), and Hatleik (2017) would need further exploration (possibly in another study that could be the outcome of this research) to verify some of the findings that were evident in the context of this study. The prospective teachers who were participants of this study appeared to be committed to being professional teachers and appeared not to be disoriented or otherwise affected because of the lack of clear focus on teacher professionalism during their training experience. They expressed clear statements of interest in teaching as well as a willingness to grow professionally but these expressions were related to the personalized understanding of teacher professionalism shared. The prospective teachers exhibited growth mindsets according to the description of the concept by Dweck (2016). While they were unaware of the ideals of teacher professionalism and unable to provide a clear

understanding of generalized professional teacher characteristics, they indicated that they were committed to being professional teachers once they graduated and were able to practice within the education system of Trinidad and Tobago.

The discussion of the nature of teacher professionalism as static (Barton, 1999) compared to being a functional concept (Bukhatir, 2018) is highlighted in Chapter 2 of this study. The findings of the current study demonstrate that only a small number of the participants understood teacher professionalism, which appeared to be static. This view is different from the perspective provided by Barton (1999) as the context of Barton's research is different from the context of the Bukhatir's (2018) study. The participants who saw teacher professionalism as static emphasized the completion of studies in the bachelor of education as being important to teacher professionalism (TEDA 9), saw being professional as being organized (TEDA 8) and noted that the modeling of professional dress characterized professional teacher behaviors (TEDA 5).

Many of the participants, though, expressed views that teacher professionalism was a functional concept (see Bukhatir, 2018). These participants described teacher professionalism as a characteristic of teachers that changes and is connected to continuous experiences of the teachers in their teaching and learning environments. The participants were not comfortable with sharing views of teacher professionalism using static characteristics. They were much more engaged in speaking about growing as professionals and building individual characteristics to satisfy their anticipated responsibilities as classroom teachers.

Demirkasimoğlu (2010) suggested that socially constructed definitions of teacher professionalism might be more viable in present day teaching contexts. He felt that this approach addressed the intrinsic and extrinsic nature of professional tasks. This approach to understanding teacher professionalism was evident among the prospective teachers who participated in this study, thus driving the study toward supporting Demirkasimoğlu's conclusions. The definitions and explanations provided by participants in this study were individualistic and brought out the prospective teachers' concern and love for teachers, their recognition of the need for teachers to be caring beings who focus on the needs of students, and their agreement with the view that managing and implementing the curriculum and continuous professional growth are all part of being a professional teacher. Demirkasimoğlu noted that there is no absolute model to define professionalism and that each teacher has to construct a personal professionalism that suits their life history. He suggested that there is no agreement on the conceptualization of the term teacher professionalism. The findings of the study confirmed that the prospective teachers had varying and individualistic views of what it means to be a professional teacher.

Bruno (2018) suggested that it would be valuable to understand the concept of professionalism by adopting an exploration of classroom experiences and teacher–student relationships to get an appropriate idea of what it means to be professional. The findings of the present study show that this approach was in fact what the participants of the study used to internalize their understandings of teacher professionalism. The definitions and conceptualizations of teacher professionalism that the participants focused on were based

on their prior, experientially determined understandings of the characteristics of professional teachers. The prospective teachers reflected on people who had taught them in previous contexts to describe teacher professionals. They also depended on their experiences with and views of the teacher educators within the TEDA institution to describe teacher professionals. The findings of this study confirm the suggestions of Bruno (2018) are relevant to understanding the views of prospective teachers in Trinidad and Tobago. The participants indicated that some of the characteristics of professional teachers included being concerned about children, being motivated to teach, and being confident in the teaching and learning context.

Other researchers (e.g., Goodson, 1996; Sachs, 1999; Hilferty, 2007) felt that it was not useful to try to understand teacher professionalism by using ideals shared in published documents that define teacher professionalism to see how the teachers' professionalism can be measured based on these published standards. They felt that the nature and understanding of teacher professionalism would be different based on who was sharing the position and where the pronouncements on the topic were made. The results of this study demonstrate that without even being aware of the existing standards for measuring professionalism, the prospective teachers had formulated their own understanding and used their respective contexts and experiences as the basis for their expressions on the nature and conceptualization of teacher professionalism.

One participant of the study described her personal experiences of engaging in online searches to formulate her definition of teacher professionalism. Many other participants shared that their experiences with past teachers and relatives who were

teachers to be the critical factors that were used to develop their understandings. The prescriptive and traditional approach to understanding teacher professionalism (Hilferty, 2007) was not evident in this exploration of the conceptualization of teacher professionalism. The analysis of the data from the present study confirms the presentation by Hilferty (2008) that the conceptualization of teacher professionalism is not standard, but rather changes based on social contexts, groups, and the interests that the groups represent.

Some researchers (e.g., Evans, 2010; Hatlevik, 2017; Sirotová, 2013; Yuksel & Kircicek, 2019) recognized the teacher training process as a significant contributor to the ability of prospective teachers to define and conceptualize teacher professionalism. Their view was that the understanding of the nature of teacher professionalism and the relevant behaviors were important experiences gained during the teacher training program. The outcomes of the current study showed that, in the context of TEDA, this was not the case. The participants indicated limited exposure to the concept of teacher professionalism and the models of teacher professional within the teacher training context. The understandings related to the nature of teacher professionalism were only minimally connected to the teacher training experiences that were available to the research participants of the present study.

The consensus among study participants was a belief that the teacher training context they were participating in was not a major contributor to any of the perceptions or conceptualizations they expressed in this study. These participants, who are now experiencing the process of teacher training during the conduct of this study, used their

previously developed notions of teacher professionalism to establish their positions. The participants of the study felt that their predetermined views teacher professionalism as a concept and supportive behaviors became mixed and unclear within the teacher training context. These conclusions were generated as the participants tried to externalize their previously internalized understandings of teacher professionalism in the participant diaries and interviews.

Although aware that their respective concepts of teacher professionalism were individually determined and colored by the lens of their own unique experiences, they were of the contrasting view in their criticism that the teacher educators did not present unified models of teacher professionalism. This observation was the same regardless of the year of study noted for the participant. Only two of the 16 participants indicated that the concept of teacher professionalism was included in the content of a course completed during the teacher training process. The prospective teachers who participated in the study were connected to each of the four years of the program and they all (except for two participants) verbalized the inconsistencies between what they had personally come to believe represented teacher professionalism and what they were or were not encountering during their training as teachers.

The prospective teachers did not demonstrate any theoretical or formal knowledge of the concept of teacher professionalism. Since they were not aware of the components discussed in the literature, they might not have been able to identify professional behaviors or might have ignored them because of their preconceived notions of teacher professionalism and its characteristics. As a result, the prospective teachers indicated that

there was a need for more content (theoretical) focused on teacher professionalism and more examples of teacher professionalism incorporated into the teacher training program.

Overall, I was able to analyze the information presented in my review of the literature and create a comparison with the specific findings of the study. The analysis allowed me to confirm some of the findings but in the majority of the cases, I was able to disconfirm the findings shared by specific researchers/theorists and I was also able to establish some areas of new knowledge. The content of Table 10 reflects the information from the literature review and a comparison to the findings of the study as well as the status of the finding based on the literature used to support the development and completion of this study.

Table 10

Findings From the Literature Addressed in the Present Study

No.	Finding	Theorist/researcher	Status
1	The definition and conceptualization of teacher professionalism is unclear	Crecci & Fiorentini, 2018 Goodson, 2003 Whitty, 2015	Confirmed
2	Clear definition of teacher professionalism is not evident in teacher training programs	Creasy, 2015	Confirmed
3	Prospective teachers are aware of and able to define unprofessional behavior	New knowledge	Confirmed
4	Teacher training is critical to understanding teacher professionalism	Loewenberg Ball & Forzani, 2009 Eren & Hatleik, 2017	Unconfirmed

Table continues...

No.	Finding	Theorist/researcher	Status
5	Teacher professionalism is static	Barton, 1999	Disconfirmed
6	Teacher professionalism is a functional concept	Bukhatir, 2018	Confirmed
7	Socially constructed concepts of teacher professionalism are more viable in trying to conceptualize the concept	Demirkasimoğlu, 2010	Confirmed
8	Teacher professionalism is best understood by exploring students' experiences and teacher–student relationships	Bruno, 2018	Confirmed
9	Teacher professionalism is not based on ideals	Goodson, 1996 Sachs, 1999 Hilferty, 2007	Confirmed
10	Professionalism is something that is learnt, constructed and sustained in the everyday working environment of the school	Goodson, 2003	Unconfirmed

Limitations of the Study

I encountered numerous challenges as I attempted to complete this study and so I have limitations to share at this point. The first major challenge was incorporated into the data collection process as the initial proposal plan was to visit the data collection site and interact with the participants while they completed their diaries and then conduct the interviews. I could not proceed with these plans as the approval for the collection of data was granted in August 2021 during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic. All major public institutions were required to enforce isolation practices in the engagement of all stakeholders at that time to ensure the safety of citizens. The teacher training institution

implemented online teaching and learning methods in response to the international call for isolation in response to the threat of the virus being spread. I had to use online measures to contact the students and to complete the data collection process. I anticipate that if I had interacted with the participants on a personal and face-to-face level, I might have been able to get more participants to engage in the study and build the levels of credibility established in the discussion and interpretation of the findings.

Another challenge was the difficulty getting the participants to focus on the completion of the entries in the participant diaries. All the participants were students with responsibilities for the completion of tasks related to the bachelor of education program. Some of them were part time students with full time employment and so they found it difficult to dedicate the time for the completion of the diaries and to engage in the interviews. Almost all the data collection took place during the period when the students had a semester break or in between semesters. The data collection took one year and some of the interviews took place during the last few days of the period that the Walden IRB allowed for data collection. I had initial plans to summarize the data collected and share with individual students but I was unable to do this given the limited time and so I resorted to reviewing the information provided at the end of the interviews. This process allowed me to confirm some of the statements made and cater for some level of trustworthiness regarding the data that I was able to collect.

Recommendations

The main recommendations coming out of this study relate to two major areas of concern. The first is the need to address and understand that prospective teachers have

views of teacher professionalism before they start the bachelor of education program. The curriculum of the institution needs to be formalized with the ideas that teacher professionalism should be included as an important topic and that discussions should begin from the perspectives of the prospective teachers. There is scope, over the period of four years of teacher training, for the development of ideas of teacher professionalism but these ideas have to be introduced to the prospective teachers and the ideas that they come to the program with needs to be addressed and put into the context of teacher training.

The need for additional research to better understand the perceptions and conceptualizations of prospective teachers to validate the findings of this study is also evident. The information presented in this study is limited to one of the teacher education institutions in Trinidad and Tobago. The use of another type of sampling and a larger sample of prospective students taking part in the study might result in different and clearer understandings of the conceptualization of teacher professionalism. Further research would be required to establish the applicability of the information presented in this study to the experiences and understanding of teacher professionalism among prospective teachers in the other institutions.

Including prospective teachers from other institutions might have resulted in different conceptualizations and experiences to share. There is also some scope for exploring the curriculum of teacher education institutions to see how the content related to professionalism is addressed. Teacher professionalism was identified as a significant contributor to the quality of education (Riadi et al., 2022) and there needs to be some

attempt to increase the awareness, relevance, and ownership of the idea of teacher professionalism in teacher training institutions.

I think that a study of similar nature should be conducted using other methods of data collection. There are several factors that can affect the expressions of participants in a research study including the focus of the study and the data collection tools used. The prompts in the participant diary or the interview questions could be reviewed and improved for another attempt at understanding the conceptualization of teacher professionalism. Further research conducted using other methods of data collection like observation, document analysis, and focus group sessions to corroborate the information shared by the prospective teachers in this study also has the potential to improve understanding in this area of knowledge.

I would also suggest that consideration be given to the choice of participants who engage in the description and sharing of understandings of teacher professionalism. The use of students from a variety of year bodies (Years I to IV) during the bachelor of education program might also have been responsible for the lack of firmness and unity in the discussion of teacher professionalism. This study might have yielded different results if conducted with final year students or recent graduates of the bachelor of education program. This is an important issue to be considered in further attempts to understand the conceptualization of teacher professionalism in the context of teacher training.

I would also advocate that the teacher educators at local teacher training institutions be engaged, as participants, in a similar study where the definitions and conceptualizations are also explored to see how their views relate to what would have

been shared by the students/prospective teachers. The prospective teachers, based on their inexperience could be limited in their ability to observe and identify teacher professionalism in the teaching and learning context. The comparison of findings from this study to the views of teacher educators in the different teacher training institutions could help to resolve teacher professionalism issues identified by the prospective teachers and improve the level of professionalism at the institutions. The potential also exists for the engagement in studies of personal explorations and explanations of teacher professional that would allow prospective teachers and teacher educators to better understand people as individuals with personalized experiences and view of professionalism. I consider the future investigations in this area of study to be limitless, exciting, and contributing to the building of knowledge in this field.

Implications

This study has great potential to contribute to positive social change in the teacher education context of Trinidad and Tobago, throughout the Caribbean, and among other small island states. This study is the first research attempt that tried to address the understanding and conceptualizations of teacher professionalism from the perspective of teachers in training. The teachers in training are acknowledged to be the people to build and develop the education future education system and so it is necessary to understand how they are thinking and what their plans are for the future engagements as professional teachers. The participants indicated that while they did not have specific definitions of teacher professionalism, they had ideas about the concepts that were gained from

different life experiences. The views and perspectives of the prospective teachers should be considered in any decision making.

Further, the prospective teachers acknowledged interest in and commitment to working towards becoming professional teachers. They want to understand the concept so that they will be able to demonstrate accepted professional behaviors. Future prospective teachers have the potential to benefit from understanding themselves as future teachers and being aware of how their own thoughts about professionalism related to those expressed by the participants in this study. They can use the findings presented to reflect on their views of teacher professionalism and even pay attention to their professional development and behaviors as a critical part of their growth as teachers.

There is a need for change within the system to recognize the characteristics of and facilitate the growth of participants within the teacher training context. Teacher training institutions and ministries of education or education departments would benefit from paying attention to the findings of the study. These organizations are entrusted with the responsibility for teacher development. The organizations' aims are focused on preparing teachers who will be able to function effectively in the education systems and so, the findings presented in this study will allow those responsible for training teachers to identify areas of need in addressing the growth of prospective teachers as professionals. The exploration of their ideas (ideas of the prospective teachers) contained in this study could be used as the basis for further curriculum development as well as policy decision making in the area of teacher training for improved teacher professionalism. The possibilities are great as some attempt to review the curriculum for

teacher training to incorporate elements of content related to teacher professionalism could be addressed. There is also the need for the modeling of professional behaviors within the faculty of the teacher training institutions and the encouragement of the modeling of the same behaviors by prospective teachers within teacher training contexts. The attention to provision of support for developing teacher professionalism within teacher training programs can also be revised and enhanced.

Overall, the findings of this study provide new and definitive information on teacher professionalism among prospective teachers in Trinidad and Tobago. I hope that people who can impact decision making and policy development in education will pay some attention to the analysis of the data and especially to the voices of the participants as they express interest in understanding the concept of teacher professionalism fully and commit to trying to be professional teachers as they get opportunities to perform in the roles of teachers. Teachers are considered the backbone of society (Popovski, 2020) and investing in the development of professional teachers to support the education system has the potential for social change that is positive and limitless.

Conclusion

The major outcome of this study is confirmation that the prospective teachers of this study were not blank slates when it came to the concept of teacher professionalism; they have informally determined perceptions and conceptualizations of teacher professionalism. They were not specifically taught about professionalism in any formal context. They came into the teacher training program with strong experiential beliefs of what it means to them to be a professional teacher, and, at the completion of the four year

teacher training program, if their beliefs have not been acknowledged, the chance is potentially good that they will have gained little in content or from potential exemplars to enhance their thoughts about teacher professionalism.

There is a need for educators and other professionals to pay attention to the views and conceptualizations of teacher professionalism among people new to the teaching fraternity. The data showed that prospective teachers have views of professionalism that they can explain but these are not theoretical or related to the explanations found in the literature on the topic. These views of teacher professional were developed personally and related to their experiences as students and to their interaction with individuals who were teachers in other contexts. Teachers in the making need to be made aware of becoming and being professional. This will be useful if these behaviors are discussed with them (key features and appropriate behaviors), demonstrated to them, but there is also need for them to have opportunities to learn about professionalism from an informed perspective (theories and research findings on the topic).

I agree that teacher professionalism is considered as a lever for change in the school and so the highlight by Murray (2014) indicating the need for research on the topic was fulfilled in this study. Research on the topic of teacher professionalism was and continues to be limited in Caribbean contexts, including Trinidad and Tobago. The completion of this study and the development and publication of the report will be a major contribution in the academic context. The exploration of teacher professionalism within teacher training contexts needs to be continued. Further, there is need for urgent and constructive action in teacher training contexts to ensure that appropriate action is

paid to building the professional understandings and competencies of teachers who are being prepared to function within the education system. The attention that can be paid to the professional conceptualizations and capabilities of prospective teachers has the potential to engender extensive benefits for all members of the societies where the teachers will be employed in the future.

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Appendix A: Letter of Proposal to Data Source

34 Ramsaran Street,
Broadway,
San Fernando

November 27, 2018.

.....
Dean, School of Education & Humanities,
.....,
Trinidad and Tobago

Re: Permission to Conduct Research Study

Dear,

My name is Cheryl M. Bowrin and I am a member of the faculty at the University of Trinidad and Tobago. I am a Senior Instructor attached to the Centre for Education Programmes. I have been part of that team for the past twelve years and I worked at the Valsayn Teachers' College before the teacher education programme was attached to the university.

I am writing to request permission to conduct a research study at your institution. I am currently enrolled in the PhD in Education programme (Specialization: Accountability, Assessment, and Evaluation) at the Walden University. I am in the process of writing my dissertation. The study is focussed on teacher professionalism in the context of teacher education and is entitled "Perceptions of Professionalism within Teacher Education in Trinidad and Tobago".

I hope that the administration of the university will allow me to recruit some members of the school population involved in teacher education and including teacher educators, administrators and prospective teachers to collect the relevant data and complete the study. The planned methodology for the study (interpretive description) involves the use of interviews, focus group sessions and observation to gather data. People who agree to be part of the study will be given the required assurances related to anonymity and confidentiality.

Your approval to conduct this study will be greatly appreciated and I will be happy to answer any questions that you may have about the study. I can be contacted using any of the following means:

Cheryl Bowrin – xxx-xxxx (cell)

My research Committee Chair at Walden, Dr. Ronald Paige, has informed me the university will provide any necessary assurances about my tenure as a student at Walden and the nature of the study as developed up to this time. Please note that no costs will be incurred by your institution as the study is conducted if permission is granted to do so.


I thank you in advance for your consideration and I look forward to a positive response from your institution. My commitment is to engage in quality research and contribute much needed information on the topic to the teacher education fraternity in Trinidad and Tobago.

Again, thanks for your time and consideration in this matter.

Cheryl M. Bowrin,
Walden University (PhD Candidate)

NB: Please note that I have attached a document with the topic, purpose of the study, and research questions.

Appendix B: Poster to be shared with Data Source



Study Title – Perceptions and Experiences of Prospective Teachers in Trinidad and Tobago

Question - Are you a member of the Bachelor of Education programme? You can contribute to this study!

This study is designed to engage prospective teachers who have experienced and have strong views about the nature and exhibition of teacher professionalism in the teacher training programme.

Once you are a member of the Bachelor of Education programme-feel free to contact me

- Participants will be asked to complete diary entries - you will be given key topics to focus
- Engage in an interview on the topic of teacher professionalism
- Engage in a discussion based on the information gained from your interview

Participants will be contacted by email **(phone contacts after)** and all the sessions regarding the sharing of ideas **(participant diary entries and interviews)** will be conducted online.

If you think that your views and experiences are important to this study, contact

Cheryl Bowrin

Walden University PhD Candidate

Email address – cheryl.bowrin@waldenu.edu

Phone contact – 1-868-772-5692

Appendix C: Alignment of Research Questions with Interview Questions

Question 1

How do prospective teachers, who are students in a teacher education program in Trinidad and Tobago, perceive of themselves as emerging teacher professionals?

1. Given the characteristics of intelligence, confidence, and persistence, explain which one you believe is most important to your becoming a professional teacher?
2. You are in this program because you want to be a teacher, but it is not always easy, so I want you to share your views on what has made you want to give up on pursuing a career in the teaching profession.
3. For you as a prospective teacher, what does being a professional teacher mean?

Question 2

How do prospective teachers describe the process they are experiencing that contributes to the development of their understanding and application of the construct of teacher professionalism?

4. Which observations or experiences in your life do you think have most influenced your motivation to be a professional educator?
5. As part of an award acceptance for most improved new teacher, you have to prepare a short speech to deliver to your professional peers. What are the main points you will include?

Question 3

How do prospective teachers in a teacher education program in Trinidad and Tobago describe how they operationalize the construct of teacher professionalism?

6. As you prepare to enter the ranks of professional teachers, what are your performance goals over the next 5 years?
7. In his play *Man and Superman*, the famous playwright George Bernard Shaw included the line: “Don’t listen to her Bob. **Remember those who can, do; those who can’t, teach.**” As an emerging professional teacher, explain your reaction to that line?
8. As you look forward to stepping into the classroom, please summarize for me what you believe teacher professionalism is?”

Closing question:

9. As we get to the end of the interview, I want to invite you to share any additional information that you consider relevant to the topic.

Appendix D: An Interview Question and Probes

Research Question	Interview Question	Probes
1. How do prospective teachers, who are students in a teacher education program in Trinidad and Tobago, perceive of themselves as emerging teacher professionals?	1. Given the characteristics of intelligence, confidence, and persistence, explain which one you believe is most important to your becoming a professional teacher?	1. What do you understand by the concept of professional teacher? 2. Give some details related to your choice of characteristics and how it is important to teacher professionalism

Appendix E: Prompts for Participant Diaries

The participants in the research study will be given a slim notebook (or online google document space, if the data has to be collected virtually) that they will be asked to maintain during the period of data collection related to the research project (1 semester). They will be asked to make entries in the journal one time in each week for a period of ten (10) weeks and guidelines on the issues that they should reflect on will be included on the cover of the journal provided. The participants will be free to complete the entry at any point in time during the project but will be encouraged not to engage with more than one entry at any point in time. Participants will be advised that the issue of completing the entry in the diary is not necessarily based on the use of language or spelling but that the focus will be on in-depth true expressions of feelings and experiences related to the specific element of teacher professionalism being shared in the particular entry.

Table 2

Guidelines for Developing the Diary

Weeks	Focus of Participant Entries
1	Describe yourself as an emerging teacher professional. Share your views on how you think and behave and how these things make you think that you are “becoming” a professional.
2	Share your view of teacher professionalism. Include an explanation of where you got the view of teacher professionalism expressed.
3	Share your views of a professional teacher that you interact with during your training. Be clear about why you consider the teacher to be professional.

Table continues...

- | | |
|----|--|
| 4 | Please reflect on and share an experience which you think has reinforced any ONE critical idea that you have about teacher professionalism. |
| 5 | Describe some of the factors/features of the environment in which you are training to be a teacher that influences what it means to be a professional teacher for you. |
| 6 | Share some ways in which the behaviors of professional teachers in your school encourage you to be a professional teacher. |
| 7 | Of the instructional content you have encountered in your training to become a professional teacher, describe the one that stands out as helping you best understand the concept of teacher professionalism? |
| 8 | Reflect on your teacher training experiences up to this time. Describe one experience that you have not yet had that you think is important to making you into the ideal teacher professional. |
| 9 | Share your definition of teacher professionalism. What do you consider to be the important components of teacher professionalism? |
| 10 | Share your understanding of how you came up (arrived at) the explanation of teacher professionalism that you have at this time |

Appendix F: Components of the Participant Diary Checklist

Prospective Teacher:

Date:

Participant Diary Checklist

	Areas of focus during Journal Reading	Recordings/Notes
A	Types of Mindset Demonstrated	
	<p>What kind of mindset does the individual prospective teacher demonstrate through reflections?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - complains about classroom issues all the time? - suggests that being a prospective teacher is a challenging experience? - There is a lot of focus on mastery of skills in the classroom? How is this focus demonstrated? - Prospective teacher is inclined to discuss with students how issues can be resolved? - Prospective teacher believes that success is based on attempts to understand goals as a teacher? - Prospective teacher demonstrates a willingness to engage in activities with the other students? - Prospective teacher demonstrates the ability to learn along with students? How is this ability demonstrated in the journal? 	
B	Being Professional or Being a Professional	
	<p>What is the focus on professionalism in the teaching and learning context?</p>	

Table continues...

-
- What kinds of references are made to teacher professionalism in the teaching and learning context?
 - How does the prospective teacher describe professionalism as being exhibited in the institution?

C Phases of Professionalism

- What phase of professionalism is demonstrated in the teaching and learning context through the writing of the prospective teacher?
- Prospective teacher attends only to assigned tasks related to role as an educator? What are the tasks which are seen as important?
 - What views does the prospective teacher hold of the content that is taught? How is the view noted demonstrated?

D

Nature of Professionalism Described

- What is the nature of professionalism observed and described in the teaching and learning context?
- What professional characteristics are exhibited in the classroom? Describe these characteristics.
 - What professional traits does the Teacher Educator display? Outline these traits as noted by the prospective teachers.
-

Appendix G: Formal Letter to Program Leader Regarding Data Collection

Data collection process at the TEDA Teacher Education Institution - Cheryl Bowrin

Yahoo/Inbox

On Fri, 10 Sep 2021 at 8:16 AM, Cheryl Bowrin <xxxxxxx@yahoo.com> wrote:

Hello Mr. Xxxxxxx,

Good morning and I trust that you and your family are doing well.

I am happy to share my progress with the research process related to the completion of the PhD and to indicate my need for support that we discussed previously. I am trusting that you do remember our discussion on the need for me to connect with the students in the Education Department and to get some of them to participate in the study.

I was stumped for a bit with my research as Walden University insisted that although I had the permission letter from the Dean of the School of Education and the Humanities, I had to go through the XXX IRB to get formal permission. I took some time off from work at Walden to work with the XXX IRB and I was able to get the approval in August. I completed my Walden IRB process and was able to get permission within days of submission of the final documents. I am now ready to begin the data collection process.

I sent a letter to the IRB Lead - Professor XXXXXX indicating that I was able to get the Walden IRB approval and I asked for her notification that I can begin the research process. I also asked about any other processes which need to be completed before I begin the data collection.

Will it be okay for me to call you on Monday to share a bit more about the data collection process? I will appreciate your support in connecting with students to engage in the study.

Thanks again for indicating your willingness to support and blessings to you today and always.

Regards,

Cheryl Bowrin

xxxxxx@gmail.com

To: Cheryl Bowrin

Tue, Sep 14, 2021 at 7:43 PM

Hi Cheryl,

Sorry for the late reply but I was waiting for my replacement glasses and just got them today. Please feel free to call me anytime.

Appendix H: Introductory Letter to Research Participants

Cheryl Bowrin

To: xxxxxxxx

Fri 22/10/2021 17:52

CBflyer (Invitation Flyer-Poster).pdf

3 MB



Hello to you,

My name is Cheryl Bowrin and I trust that all is well with each of you.

I visited one of your sessions recently to introduce my research topic and plans for data collection. Mr. XXXXXX was the instructor for the class on Tuesday 5th October, 2021. I visited again on Tuesday 12th October, 2021. You attended one of these sessions and several students expressed interest in participating in the research data collection process and contributing to the building of knowledge in the areas of teacher professionalism as it concerns prospective teachers. I need to thank you for the expression of interest in the research and assure you that all efforts will be taken to ensure that your engagement in this research process will be one that is fulfilling and memorable.

I attached a copy of the poster sharing the research topic to this message. My phone and email contacts are included in the poster so that you can contact me if you have questions. I would also like to discuss the research with you. I trust that you will be able to spare a few minutes for me to tell you a bit more about the study.

I thank you again for listening to the presentation ask that you share a telephone contact with me. I will call you to discuss your involvement and possible contributions to the final outcomes of the study. I think that your contribution will be valuable.

I look forward to hearing from you on this matter soon.

Thanks, and best to you always.

Regards,

Appendix I: MAXQDA Results of Open Coding

C:/Users/cherlylowrin/OneDrive - University of Trinidad and Tobago/Desktop/Walden/Data Analysis/Data Analysis - Research Questions (January 22, 2022).mx22 - MAXQDA Analytics Pro 2022 (Release 22.3.0)

Home Import Codes Memos Variables Analysis Mixed Methods Visual Tools Reports MAXDictio Stats

New Project Open Project Reset Activations Document System Code System Document Browser Retrieved Segments Logbook Teamwork Merge Projects Save Project As Save Anonymized Project As Project from Activated Documents External Files Archive Data

Document Browser: TEDA 10 - Interview Transcript (Clean) (272 Paragraphs)

Documents 816

- Data - Related to RQs
 - Question 1 0
 - Question 3 0
 - Question 2 0
- Individual Data 816
 - Individual Data - Diaries 375
 - TEDA 1 - Participant Diary 48
 - TEDA 2 - Participant Diary 39
 - TEDA 3 - Participant Diary 12

Code Sys...

- description of confidence 1
- importance of confidence in teacher profesio... 1
- important to teacher professionalis... 1
- teachers need retraining 1
- skills of professional teachers 1
- experience of teacher professionalism from te... 1
- teachers teach and create 1
- a teacher creates 1
- teachers equip persons to be able to do 1
- professionalism is about this - equipping others 1

reason for teaching

those who can't teach, we cannot become a doctor. We may not be able to become a lawyer. We may not be able to become the next prime minister. But we teach and create we lay the foundation for persons to step into those positions. I love this statement.

1

Speaker 1

24:39

As you look forward to stepping into the classroom summarize for me what you believe teacher professionalism is we spoke about the teachers or professionals before but let me know about teacher professionalism. What do you believe teacher professionalism is?

2

Speaker 2

Simple Coding Query (OR combination of codes)

Address Desktop 11:08 PM 05/02/2023