

STUDENT AGENCY IN VOLUNTEER PROGRAMMES AT RHODES UNIVERSITY.

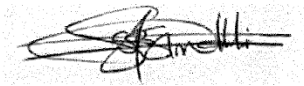
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Abstract

Student volunteer work plays a vital role in addressing local community issues such as high poverty rates, high illiteracy and high unemployment rates. Through students, tertiary institutions are able to fulfil their social responsibility. The purpose of this study was to explore the role of agency on student participation in volunteer work at Rhodes University, in Makhanda. To effectively respond to this inquiry, the research focused on the Nine Tenths Mentoring programme. Following a qualitative approach comprising a mix of an interpretivist and case study paradigms, the findings revealed that the umbrella term 'student agency' comprised mainly of moral agency, identity agency, pragmatic agency, and existential agency. These forms of agency largely contributed to a positive volunteer experience that contributed significantly to healthy relationships among community members and student volunteers, as well as advancing the student volunteers as committed agents of social change. This research highlighted the importance of involving tertiary students in community volunteer work.

Declaration

I declare that this report is my own unaided work. It is submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the degree of Master of Management (in the field of Governance) in the University of Witwatersrand Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before for any degree or examination in any other university.



Siphwayinkosi

Mdluli

29

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Dedication

This work is for God, Sbuso Patrick Mdluli, Nombulelo Maria Mdluli, and Telamisile Precious Mdluli.

In the words of Kanye West, “Everybody wants to know what I would do if I didn’t win...I GUESS WE’LL NEVER KNOW.”

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Murray for his continuous support throughout this journey. It might have been a rocky start, but we made it.

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Glossary of terms

- **Agency** - the phenomenon that is associated with an individual being responsible for their own actions and the consequent effects associated with these.
- **Collective agency** - the capacity for a group to act and achieve the desired outcomes as a collective (Adeyeri, 2012; Bandura, 2001).
- **Existential agency** - the self-initiated automatic capacity for self-empowerment that all individuals possess (Hitlin & Elder, 2007).
- **Identity agency** - the capacity to act that is based on patterns of behaviour based on the role that one takes in a certain institution or structure, such as a specific profession (Hitlin & Elder, 2007).
- **Life-course agency** - a mix of identities and a collection of choices taken over the course of one's life.
- **Moral agency** - the capacity of individuals to act ethically or morally towards what may be considered as something that is good (Fortier & Malloy, 2019; Sugarman, 2005).
- **Personal agency** - refers to the actions that an individual takes of their own volition, with the intention of attaining a desired outcome (Adeyeri, 2012).
- **Pragmatic agency** - the capacity to exert influence on novel or sudden situations, thereby giving the agent the power to decide on how to react in that present moment based on the immediate environment (Hitlin & Elder, 2007).
- **Proxy Agency** - the capacity to act on behalf of someone else.
- **Social agency** - a sense of agency that exists outside the individual and contributes to the establishment of certain social structures and cultural practices (Billett, 2008a; Markus, 2020).
- **Student agency** - the quality of student's self-reflective and intentional action, and interaction with the environment.
- **Volunteerism or volunteer work** - unpaid efforts of work to members of a community, for their empowerment and alleviation of social issues, to which the volunteer has no form of obligation towards (Silver et al., 2020; Stirling & Bull, 2011).

Chapter 1: Introduction

This research sought to explore the role that agency plays in the student uptake of volunteer work at Rhodes University. Rhodes University is located in Makhanda, a small town in the Eastern Cape. The town has been affected by social ills such as poverty and high rates of unemployment. The institution, Rhodes, can be described as the heart of the town. Through Rhodes University, many members of the community are employed, and many local businesses and initiatives are supported through their partnerships with the university. Adding to this, the institution is involved in various community outreach programmes that aim to redress the social issues faced by the town and its surrounding community (RUCE, 2021).

As part of its Institutional Development Plan (IDP) dated 2018 to 2022, Rhodes University strives to

produce outstanding graduates who are innovative, analytical, articulate, balanced and adaptable, with a life-long love of learning; and to strive, through teaching, research and community service, to contribute to the advancement of international scholarship and the development of the Eastern Cape and Southern Africa (Institutional Planning Unit 2018, p. 20).

To provide improved access to higher education, the creation of qualified graduates and research for the knowledge requirements for the nation's socio-economic progress, the system must be transformed (Institutional Planning Unit, 2018). The system must be transformed to allow everyone the right to a basic education. Volunteerism through community engagement and research plays a vital role in this transformation.

According to the Rhodes IDP, one of the institution's core values is for the advancement of the public good by developing capable graduates by actively engaging with society, to fulfill its duty for social justice in Higher Education. One of the university's distinctive qualities is demonstrated in the intersection of community engagement and volunteerism, research and teaching (Institutional Planning Unit, 2018). All community involvement and volunteer programmes are informed by theory, and research is being done to support this scholarship of engagement. As a result, Rhodes University prides itself on having one of the highest research outputs per academic staff member and exceptional postgraduate success rates in South Africa (Institutional Planning Unit, 2018).

One of the core ways that Rhodes University facilitates community outreach is through the student volunteer initiatives which are run by the Rhodes University Community Engagement Division (RUCE). This division seeks to grow and foster social responsibility in students by working with student volunteers and community partner organizations. Several of the programmes run by the division include service-learning programmes, volunteerism–citizenship programmes, engaged scholarship programmes, and social innovation programmes. Through these, the university responds to the community's needs and contributes to knowledge on community engagement (RUCE, 2021). The Engaged Citizen programme is the biggest of the volunteer programmes. It comprises a range of sub-programmes that focus on community needs such as literacy and homework, high school student mentoring and tutoring, arts, and alternative education (which focuses on extra-curricular-related activities). The programmes are facilitated by student volunteer leaders who have prior experience as engaged and active citizens through the many programmes (Bobo, 2021).

Through the Engaged Scholarship and Research programme, research is used for knowledge creation, to identify and address needs faced by the community as a means of advocating for societal change and the improvement of people's lives. Service learning through RUCE aims to support academics in learning through service activities in collaboration with community partner organizations (RUCE, 2023b). Some of the programmes run as part of community engagement focus on early childhood development through enjoyable, fun, physical activities aimed at nurturing their intellectual development. This is with the aim of increasing the literacy rate of children, as most of them (about 80%) are not able to read and write by the third grade (RUCE, 2023a). Available as well are programmes that assist students in establishing initiatives that will help improve the town in various and innovative ways, in partnership with local organizations.

RUCE, neighborhood high schools, and a nearby non-profit organization called GADRA Education jointly run the Nine Tenths programme. The Nine Tenths is a matric mentoring programme and is aimed at providing matric students in a small group of local schools with the tools they need to succeed in the last year of secondary school. These matric students are provided with one-on-one and face-to-face interactive weekly sessions with Rhodes University student volunteers as a form of mentorship, where they tackle the challenges that come with completing matric, as well as preparing them for a tertiary education. The

Rhodes University student volunteers who serve as mentors to the matric learners are taken through an accredited NQF5 short course for training, to ensure that they are fully equipped to impactfully engage with their mentees. The programme assists matric mentees with improving their study skills, providing career guidance based on their lived experiences, and helping them with applying to Higher Education Institutions (HEIs)¹. The programme aims to ensure that matric learners are either enrolled into tertiary at Rhodes University, or to a Rhodes University bridging course upon completing their matric year. As part of its success, with the help of the programme in 2019, the programme boasts 32 Nine Tenths matric learners who were accepted to Rhodes for the advancement of their studies, and 21 learners who were admitted to a Rhodes affiliated bridging course (RUCE, 2023a).

The focus of inquiry for this study is the Nine Tenths programme, which has been expounded on above. This programme is underpinned by two theories, namely: the Sen's Capabilities Approach theory and the Social Capital theory for Social Change. According to the Sen's Capabilities Approach theory, human development is beyond the improvement of one's economic wellbeing, instead, it is about acquiring the freedom to be able to expand human capabilities. These capabilities are expanded with the aim of improving one's standard of living through enhancing one's knowledge and skills, as well as experiences. Therefore, the role that education and institutions of higher learning play in this enhancement of skills and knowledge is integral for this expansion of capabilities and freedom to be realized (McCann et al., 2021). The Social Capital theory emphasizes the importance of civil society and community groups to effect change in states that are constrained and not able to effectively enact such social change. This change is therefore brought about by social networks that form the social capital. This social capital is a culmination of social and economic organizations aimed at improving society's efficiency through social cohesion and oneness among citizens (McCann et al., 2021).

The social capital ideology, coupled with the advancement of education and human capital, has shown through research positive outcomes in effecting change. It is on this theoretical framework that the programme is founded (McCann et al., 2021).

Below, the 'Moseneke commission (MC) versus the Makhanda High Court Action Committee' (HCAC) case, in South Africa, is highlighted to better understand the dire socio-

¹ 'Higher Education' is used interchangeably with 'tertiary' throughout this research.

economic state of Makhanda. Furthermore, it sheds more light on the massive socio-economic role that the university and its students play in the town:

In November 2022, the government committee (the Moseneke Commission) launched to move the seat of the high court to Bhisho, the capital of the Eastern Cape province. This High Court of the Eastern Cape is currently located in the town of Makhanda, and this has been the fifth attempt at moving the seat to Bhisho with prior failed attempts in 1996 to 1998, 2003, 2006, and 2010 to 2012. The Moseneke commission's rationale behind this launch to move the high court lies in "aligning high court jurisdictions with municipal and magisterial boundaries," which would make the high court more accessible to larger cities such as Mthatha and East London, which are in closer proximity to Bhisho (Hartle, 2022).

The HCAC argued that the proposed move would cause drastic economic implications for Makhanda, especially in increasing the already high levels of unemployment from 38.3% to over 50% (Mankayi et al., 2023). Furthermore, moving the high court would result in the town losing about one-third of its businesses, most of which lie in the legal profession. Associated businesses would have to shut down as well. Professor Sizwe Mabizela, the Rhodes University Vice-Chancellor gave his input on the matter saying:

The university is the biggest employer in Makhanda, followed by the local municipality, and then the Makhanda High Court and the associated legal services. The university is also the largest contributor to municipal rates, and many business services in the city exist primarily because of the university. The municipality, already in a parlous state, would lose millions in rates revenue. The city would become less attractive and less livable for our staff and students. This would place the viability and sustainability of the town as an education center at a great, and potentially irreversible, risk. An increase in poverty, hunger, and hopelessness would be the inevitable consequence for everyone (Grocott's Mail, 2023).

Highlighting the case above emphasizes the need for Rhodes University students to play an active role in improving the state of the town. Besides its economic importance in Makhanda, Rhodes is necessary for the sustainability, improvement and growth of the town.

The Eastern Cape continues to face illiteracy among young children. The less privileged schools in the townships in Makhanda have reported a decline in the number of children who can read around the early ages. More than 80% of Grade 4 learners are said to not

have the ability to read for meaning. This is largely attributed to the overwhelming increase in student numbers, without a correlating increase in the number of staff (Human & Knoetzee, 2023).

In a report published by the Eastern Cape Socio Economic Review in 2017, the local Makana Municipality under which Makhanda falls, reported about 12,4% of the municipality's population to be living with HIV/AIDS with an annual increase rate of 3,29% since the year 2006. The number of persons living with HIV/AIDS was estimated to be well over 12 000 by the year 2021. The Makana Municipality in 2016 was reported to have an unemployment rate of 25,51%. In the very same year, it was reported that more than 47 000 (which is slightly more than 59% of the population under the Makana Municipality), were living below the poverty line (Eastern Cape Socio Economic Consultative Council, 2017).

Study Rationale

Students volunteer based on the cultural norms in their social context, as well as structural values that are promulgated through HEIs (Islary & Phungshok, 2015). This means that if HEIs do not promote student volunteerism, students are less motivated to join volunteering programmes (Mohan, 1994). The role of students in volunteer work is important because of the knowledge and skills acquired through their own tertiary learning, which can be used to help solve issues that exist as a result of social injustice (Islary & Phungshok, 2015). An example of this is assisting learners in the surrounding community with career guidance, mentoring, and academic tutoring. On the other hand, reasons for students volunteering can be to advance careers, and to gain volunteer work experience in preparation for job placements through programmes such as service-learning and internships (Knapp et al., 2022).

This research seeks to explore the role of individual student's agency as a driving factor for volunteering at Rhodes. Previous academic scholars have used agency as an analytical lens to broaden the discussions surrounding student volunteerism (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998). Their work aimed to advance academic study on student engagement by using student agency to explore the ways in which agency is expressed throughout their student life, be it within their educational context or the surrounding community. Furthermore, their work delved into the constituents of agentic behavior.

Agency as a concept can be expressed in different contexts, be it family, work or in the community (Cavazzoni et al., 2022a). Agency in the context of this research is defined in the context of social work (being volunteer work) as the understanding of the human work of an individual that is characterized by interacting and engaging with their environment (society) (Parsell et al., 2017). In the work by Emirbayer & Mische (1998), agency is understood to be oriented towards the future. By this, the authors mean that current actions tend to influence future outcomes. Agency allows the agent to make decisions in the present time, whilst being influenced by past decisions and experiences to achieve desired future goals.

Ryan & Deci (1985) argue that a person's agency is somewhat self-determined, but this is not true for all persons depending on how they are motivated to carry out a task, either extrinsically or intrinsically. The intrinsic vs extrinsic, and the self-oriented versus altruistic continuums are popular approaches to understanding what motivates people to volunteer.

Almost all studies on the causes of volunteering have identified social learning, career and altruistic motives as being the main reasons (Grönlund, 2011). Intrinsic motivation places a need on an individual to be competent and autonomous when carrying out a task (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Extrinsic motivation is different in that it usually satisfies an external demand to be rewarded for carrying out a specific task. Often, extrinsic motivation is seen as a way for an individual to rid themselves of any guilt (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

Agency can be identified as a mechanism by which members of the society become active and engaged as citizens, and understanding agency in young people may help to better understand their approach to their later roles as citizens.

Problem Statement

There is a need for more student volunteers at Rhodes University, as well as in the general South African population. Out of an estimated 8 000 plus students at Rhodes, only about 600 of them volunteer, which is nearly 8% of the student body (Mesani, 2020). According to the Volunteer Activity Survey last conducted in 2018, only 6.7% of the South African population are involved in volunteer activities (Statistics South Africa, 2018).

South Africa faces many challenges some of which include high levels of poverty, with approximately 49,2% of the adult population living below the poverty line in 2019 (StatsSA, 2019), and unemployment sitting at 33,9% in 2022 (Mukherjee, 2022). When these numbers are taken in the context of poor education outcomes, high levels of disease, inadequate service delivery including health services, they advocate for increased involvement in community engagement projects such as volunteer work within the South African context (Joseph, 2016), compared to what has already been achieved.

Volunteer programmes are an important part of addressing community needs and contribute to communities' development and sustainability. This is particularly true in a town such as Makhanda where Rhodes University plays a major socio-economic role. Given that volunteerism is crucial in responding to community needs, this research sought to understand the factors that encourage students at Rhodes University to volunteer and how their sense of agency drives this.

There is a need to build and broaden knowledge on the practice of young people being involved in volunteer work in the South African context, as it has been established that

there is a lack of youth participation in volunteer programmes. Several international studies have conducted research in broadening youth volunteerism by understanding its motivating factors (Bukhari et al., 2018; Thipp & Anuruksakul, 1989; Joseph, 2016). However, little has been done in the South African context in this regard (Trivedi & Patel, 2013). This study determined the extent to which agency played a role in student volunteer participation at Rhodes University.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of the research was to explore the role of agency in student participation in volunteer work at Rhodes University.

Research Question

How does agency influence student volunteer participation at Rhodes University?

Chapter 2: Literature review

In this section, the concepts of agency and volunteerism will be discussed and narrowed to literature pertaining to student agency and student volunteerism.

2.1 Agency

Conceptualising Agency

For Silver et al. (2020), agency is the phenomenon that is associated with an individual being responsible for their own actions and the consequent effects associated with these. An alternative definition of agency is “an intentional act that the actor knows or believes will have a particular outcome,” (Lund & Juujärvi, 2018, p. 757). In the same light, Code (2020) defines agency to be the capacity of people to make decisions, and take actions based on those decisions in ways that have an impact on their lives, which negates the fact that the decisions that one takes may potentially have an impact on others besides themselves.

An ongoing conversation regarding the topical issue of agency is the ‘agency versus structure’ debate. In this debate, the relationship between the two concepts are conceptualised as reciprocal, therefore birthing two schools of thought, the first being that: individuals are agents, and are therefore responsible for their own actions, which collectively builds social structures under which all agents abide; and secondly, that social structures are a result of an established system of relations that in turn dictate the behaviour of individuals. The latter view is widely referred to as structuralism (Walsh, 1998), and the former is referred to individualism. Both these ideas pertaining to agency and structure agree that a system of relations is built amongst members of a society in an organized manner. Other sociologists are however of the opinion that agency can occur and develop outside of the systems and social structures in which they find themselves (Mohsin, 2021).

In the work of Cavazzoni et al. (2022), the ideas of individualism and structuralism in relation to agency are worded differently. The type of agency that falls under ‘individualism’ can be referred to as personal agency. The type of agency that is exerted under the ideology of ‘structuralism’ can otherwise be referred to as social agency, as individuals are by disposition social beings that have an impact in the creation of structures and culturally derived practices (Billett, 2008b). Personal agency is therefore defined as the capacity of an individual to achieve their desired outcomes through their own efforts and abilities.

Adding to this, it can further and simply be defined as the kind of agency that “refers to the actions directly taken by the individual” (Adeyeri et al., 2012, p. 87).

Some earlier scholars (Bruner and Valsiner) entirely negate the idea that culture, structure and the individual have an influence on each other. They suggest that society is formed by individuals and that cultures are simply ‘suggestions’ that individuals can either choose to accept or reject. With this understanding of the agency vs structure debate, the individual can effect change on their own without any collaboration with other individuals and without consequently forming culture and structure. This is in contrast to the contributions of individualism by Walsh (1998, p. 146) who argues that the idea of individualism is flawed because

social interactions and therefore social relationships arise from the fact that the satisfaction of need and the pursuit of interests requires the co-operation, collaboration or control of other individuals in a similar position. This leads to the development and construction of mutual forms of the regulation and organization of relationships.

Margaret Archer suggests that agency and structure are "co-constitutive" (Mohsin, 2021, p. 4), denoting that both influence each other, that they both co-exist and therefore cannot be separated. Archer does this with an evident bias towards individual agency stating that an individual develops traits of agency before they are socialised. Upon being socialised, the individual then develops a social self which is built upon the transmission of social information through a process of learning, which is essential to the growth and development of the self (Stirling & Bull, 2011). The self is born of the process of self-reflexivity (Mead, 1934). This process is important because it characterizes the self as possessing its own autonomy that has the ability to establish its own feelings, identities, and motives.

A ‘theory of standard conception of action’ has been used in the past to conceptualize agency. Under this conception, it is said that an agent takes an action intentionally. Unlike other theorists, it does however state that an agent of action may take an action, but consequences of the actions taken are not always intentional. This is because an action taken might have unintentional effects (Markus, 2020). The standard theory of actions is similar to the standard conception of action, but not in its entirety. The standard theory of action states that an agent takes an action intentionally, and that this action taken must be accompanied by a logical reason of why it is being done, be it a certain desire, a certain

belief, or a certain intentionality with an intended outcome in mind at the end (Billett, 2008; Davidson, 1963; Goldman, 1970; Markus, 2020).

What the above theories have in common is the theme of intentionality – that an agent performs an action with intent and usually has the desired outcome of the actions that they take. However, not all actions are intentional. Instead, some actions are done spontaneously (Bäckström, 2020) that is, without any planning, forethought, or pre-meditation. And that in such instances, the concept of agency still does apply, but not in a manner indicating that the agent took a course of action with any intentionality. Furthermore, this conception of agency would mean that agents are not necessarily driven by any desire to act or by any resonating belief system – essentially taking an action or a decision with no reason at all. This argument is contrary to the one made by Klemenčič (2022) which suggests that without any intention to act, there is no agency exerted.

Self-governance has been a recurring theme of agency that argues that an agent decides to take a course of action with the desired outcome in mind. This is bearing in mind the initial reasons for taking that action or embarking on a process may along the way change (Markus, 2020). This may be because the desired outcomes might have changed, or perhaps the motives of the agent might have changed. This is due to the need of the agent to no longer identify with the course of action taken, due to a change in the desired outcome which might have happened through a process of self-reflection and evaluation (Bandura, 2001).

In a psychological context, mental agency is derived from mental actions and capabilities such as the ability to think, reason, and decide. Markus (2020) makes a clear contrast between this notion of agency and the ones made above by other authors, denoting that these cognitive functions are never done with intentionality. This means that no one has the intention to think, but they do. In the same light, no one has the intention to reason, but they do. This puts into question whether the concept of agency applies in this regard. Fiebach & Michael (2015) argues that mental actions can also be spontaneous. Research shows that certain dynamic and intricate processes that inform decision-making do occur, however, they would not be qualified as causes of action, nor would they be classified as intentions to act (Fiebach & Michael, 2015).

Bandura (2001) shares in his work on agentic perspective, his four pillars (or characteristics) of agency, whilst naming three types of agency as well. His four core pillars

are namely: forethought, intention, self-reactiveness, and self -reflectiveness. These pillars emphasize the individualistic type of agency, which is of an individual and not that of the collective. The pillar of intention speaks to one's intention to act or having intentionality for a course of action; it is an important pillar to plan for future events, based on the desired outcome. This intention, they say, must be grounded in self-motivation. Forethought speaks to setting goals and being able to anticipate consequences for prospective actions. Worth noting is that future events are not caused by current events, rather, they are regulators and motivators of current behaviours (Bandura, 2001) which is in parallel to the theme of self-governance mentioned in the work by Markus. In having forethought, Bandura does emphasize external rewards not being motivators for the shaping of the current environment and the decision-making, but values being those motivators (Bandura, 2001).

Self-reactiveness places the agent as their motivator and regulator as well. Bandura's agentic perspective carries through the emphasis on the individual bearing the responsibility of monitoring their patterns of behaving (evaluation). In his words:

Evaluative self-engagement through goal setting is affected by the characteristics of goals, namely, their specificity, level of challenge and temporal proximity... Proximal subgoals mobilize self-influences and direct what one does in the here and now. Distal goals alone set the general course of pursuits but are too far removed in time to provide effective incentives and guides for present action, given inviting competing activities at hand (Bandura, 2001, p. 8).

Self-reflectiveness is closely tied to the pillar of self-reactiveness, however, it explicitly mentions that human beings are designed to examine and evaluate their functioning – that is their motivations and values. Under this pillar is the theme of self-efficacy, which simply states that people could execute whatever it is they choose to undertake, and that social influences can promote certain competencies and values (Bandura, 2001). Self-efficacy is influenced by past experiences emanating from one's childhood and family background and subsequently, they do have an impact on one's sense of agency. This idea correlates to Emirbayer & Mische's (1998) notion that agency is a temporal process.

Bandura brings to the fore three types of agency which are to be explored below:

Personal agency – this form of agency is conceptualized to be exercised individually, whereby an individual can choose (make decisions) and have an influence on events and how it affects their lives, with a goal in mind (Adeyeri, 2012);

Proxy agency – the idea behind proxy agency lies in firstly recognizing that an individual does not have influence over certain aspects of their life. These are mainly social institutions and institutional practices. Therefore, an individual, under this type of agency will have to use a proxy, someone with more resources (power) to act on their behalf. The agent might lack resources for specific reasons. Other scenarios where proxy agency might be exhibited is if someone is more capable and has the ability to execute a certain action, especially if someone does not want the consequences of having direct control. Using a proxy agent is also done to avoid the performance demands that comes with carrying out a certain task (Bandura, 2001; Adeyeri, 2012);

Collective agency – collective agency shifts away from the individual and focuses on a group of individuals (Bandura, 2001; Markus, 2020). In this type of agency, individual efficacy falls away and the efficacy of the group is focused on as it is a culmination of a dynamic of different people and individuals, who are also from a wide array of backgrounds, belief systems, social systems, educational systems (Bandura, 2001). Stirlin and Bull define collective agency as "having the capacity to achieve effects, to influence, on a collective basis, and the motivation to provide public goods" (Stirling & Bull, 2011, p. 194).

Temporality

In sociology, Emirbayer and Mische (1998) conceptualize agency quite uniquely. They define agency temporally, placing agency in a flow of time – in the past, present, and future. This conceptualization places emphasis on temporality (time) and gives cognizance to the fact that events can take place in the past, present, and future, and most importantly that they may have effects on each other based on their temporal standings. Agency is viewed by the authors as a variable, meaning that agency over time can and does change, depending on where they are placed in time – past, present, or future.

For Emirbayer and Mische (1998), this conceptualization of agency involves three elements, namely: the iteration element, the projective element, and the practical-evaluative element.

The Iteration element – this element of agency involves incorporating past actions and present activities. Through this element of agency, the knowledge of past events (which

would have been gained from past experiences) does affect present activities and structures that are built in the present through patterns and tendencies of behaviour established;

The Projective element – this element allows for an agent to make changes to current structures and make decisions in the present based on their desires for future outcomes. This speaks to how an agent imagines their future and makes changes to the present to make sure that it becomes a reality;

The Practical Evaluation element – this element bears some similarity to the projective element, in that changes in the present actions and trajectories are amended based on emerging dilemmas and unforeseen circumstances that emerge in the process of achieving desired outcomes.

Different situations, many of which are exigent, elicit a response and subsequently inform different forms of agency as well (Hitlin & Elder, 2007). Many of these situations happen at different times meaning that “temporal orientations are a fundamental orientation of human agency” (Hitlin & Elder, 2007, p. 171). This statement demonstrates the school of thought that is also espoused by Hitlin & Elder (2007). Hitlin & Elder (2007) place temporality at the centre of the self (the individual) and social structure. Many questions are still unanswered as to which of the two concepts (agency or structure) have more of an influence on the other (Ahearn, 1998; Mohsin, 2021; Walsh, 1998). This is even more of a complex issue to argue when putting into account temporality because some of these social structures exist long before the individual and therefore regulate the individual’s present and future behaviour without the individual being consciously aware of it.

Mead argues that the self exists in the “ever-passing present, a moment whereby an individual interprets situations and symbols as well as his or her past” (Hitlin & Elder, 2007, p. 174). The self is able to make links with their past and their future based on present time. Hitlin & Elder (2007) provide an analysis that depicts how the self exerts agency temporally, that is, in the past, present and future by moving through what is referred to as time zones. The time zone in which the self carries themselves depends on circumstantial exigencies, in other words, on what needs the most and immediate attention; whether carrying out the particular action in the present will serve a long-term goal that the self has envisioned for themselves. Based on this, the author notes that the self never experiences time passively but is always rather an active participant in their experience, which is how then agency is exerted.

The different temporal forms of agency exhibited by the self as per Hitlin & Elder (2007) are namely: existential agency, pragmatic agency, identity agency and life-course agency:

Existential agency - the self-initiated, automatic capacity for self-empowerment that all individuals possess. It is this type of agency that gives the capacity for people to defy structure or the status quo. As long as one exists, they have the ability to choose to act in certain ways, respond to certain situations and to make decisions as they see fit because they have the freedom to do so. This type of agency suggests that all human action is initiated by the self. Existential agency, or the potential for self-directed action, is a fundamental component of social action (Hitlin & Elder, 2007) ;

Pragmatic agency - the capacity to exert influence on novel or sudden situations, thereby giving the agent the power to decide how to react in that present moment, based on the immediate environment. This type of agency, in times where emergent and novel situations unveil, and decisions need to be taken whereby patterns of habitual behaviour cannot be relied upon, choices are made based on moral codes, personality traits, personal histories and predispositions. Decisions are not made at random and difficult decisions need to be taken. When instinctive responses to predicted social behaviours fail, pragmatic agency shows itself in the kinds of activities that are undertaken. As we rely on established routines to direct interactions, habit drives a significant amount of our behaviour. However, when habits fail, we must make decisions, and these decisions must always be made in the context of ongoing activity. This type of agency is usually displayed in difficult circumstances (Hitlin & Elder, 2007);

Identity agency – the capacity to act that is based on established patterns of behaviour, based on the role that one takes in a certain institution or structure, such as a specific profession. With this type of agency, past experiences and behaviour patterns shape present behaviours as the self places focus on attaining a distant goal. Therefore, taking on specific identities is a motivating factor for one's actions. Upon taking on certain identities, we then exercise our agency within the confines of these identities. When speaking to identity agency, feedback about behaviour becomes crucial so that the behaviour can be modified. Acquiring identities does not happen in a vacuum, instead they

are formed through commitments and interactions with others which then leads to the creation and establishment of structures (Hitlin & Elder, 2007);

Bringing into discussion issues surrounding agency, is the matter of identity. The identity theory as postulated Desrochers et al. (2004, p. 61) argues that "the self consists of a collection of identities, each of which is based on occupying a particular role." As per the social identity theory, an individual undergoes the process of acquiring an identity based off a collective and shared group identity. The distinctive difference between these ideologies lies in the former placing focus on solely the self, and the latter, of a collective.

Life-course agency - this type of agency encompasses the pragmatic and identity types of agency by being a mix of identities and a collection of choices taken over the course of one's life. These choices are referred to as transitions, and they are choices that one makes at turning points in their lives, such as changing identities (Hitlin & Elder, 2007) from being, as an example, an educator to being a nurse. The choices and decisions that one takes throughout the course of their lives is crucial. Adeyeri, Christopher and Kubow agree with this as they make mention that "the life course of an individual is determined by the choices the person makes, through which different interests, competencies..." (Adeyeri et al., 2012, p. 10). The life-course agency consists of two aspects: taking actions which will lead to long-term effects, and the ability to attain life-long long-term goals; and unlike the pragmatic and identity agency, it is future oriented. The life-course approach is used to study the relationship between personal experiences and social transformation. The life course approach considers the sequence of positions, which is the role and identity they carry throughout the span of one's lifetime. Every time an individual's identity and the role they take on changes, they make what is referred to as a transition, and it is this mix of transitions that is referred to as one's life course (Kok, 2007).

Social formations, structures or institutions are formed based on social relations. These social relations that humans can form can take on either a personal or impersonal form. Some examples of these impersonal forms could be structures such as politics and economics, whilst those that are personal can be family or religion (Burkitt, 2016). According to Marcus (2020), orthodox ideas on the agency have been always focused on the individual and this has brought forth the idea of relational agency. Kenelly (2009) takes on the idea that agency is relational as it takes place in the public realm and is one of the

many authors in the feminist debates that argued for this term of agency to shy away from the very individualistic idea of agency. This author argues that traditional ideas of agency negate the idea that individuals find themselves in social settings, and therefore cannot be unaffected by them. This further emphasizes the point that interpersonal relationships are constitutive of an individual and their autonomous agency (Markus, 2020) – that these two work together and cannot be isolated from each other.

Moral agency is defined as “the capacity to direct their actions to some ethical end, for example, good outcomes for patients” (Fortier & Malloy, 2019, p. 1). Persons who practice moral agency are moral agents, and they are people who have the ability to effect change in their lives because they understand the meaning and importance of what is good, as well as what it means to do good. Being a moral agent means “not only to adopt and wield social and cultural moral practices, but also to revise and transform them” (Sugarman, 2005, p. 1). As beings living in a socio-cultural context, we are shaped by the cultural norms and practices of what it means to be good, and to understand that these contexts shape our understanding of morality means to understand that everyone has different understanding of what it means to be good (Sugarman, 2005). This means that what is deemed as good by one might be seen as entirely different by another. Essentially, moral agency is seen to be a personal characteristic but is mainly driven by an institutional culture that promotes it. The more the environment enables moral agency, the more one possesses it, and the less it is enabled, the less one possesses it (Fortier & Malloy, 2019).

2.1.2 Agency development and constraints

How then is agency developed?

One of the mechanisms through which agency develops is through selectivity, whereby an individual constantly makes the choice as to which socially derived activities or tasks to partake in. This is a way in which the 'suggestions' made by structure which are referred to by Billett (2008b) are either accepted by the individual, or rejected. This agentic attribute is said to be developed from an early age where a child makes decisions to respond to certain uncertainties of the social world (Billett, 2008, p.17).

Agency can be constrained or enabled depending on the social structures and cultural contexts in which they lie. These contexts are defined based on the structures that form them and include: “access to resources, family, and community dynamics, and cultural

norms are all factors that influence how agency can be exercised and measured” (Cavazzoni et al., 2022, p. 1140). Certain regulations and power dynamics are usually limiting when it comes to the exertion of collective agency (Stirling & Bull, 2011). Institutions can refer to things such as family, religion, gender, education, law, and even systems. They are, in essence, systems of rules that have been established, and they function according to these rules (Fleetwood, 2008). These institutions, in as much as they can limit agency, can be harbours of enablement as well (Billett, 2008b).

Student agency

The definition of the student agency used in this study is derived from Bandura’s conceptualization of the term ‘agency.’ According to Bandura (1989), human agency is the process by which people interact with and influence their environment (Bandura, 1989). This paper defines student agency because the research speaks to specifically the agency of tertiary students, and the role it plays on student volunteer work. According to Emirbayer & Mische (1998), many theorists have failed to use agency as an analytical category, and this research aims to do this in the context of better understanding the driving force behind university student volunteerism within the context of South Africa.

Klemenčič (2022, p. 11) defines student agency to be the “quality of student’s self-reflective and intentional action and interaction with the environment,” whilst denoting that students are social beings in the environment. This is the definition of student agency adopted by this study. In conceptualizing agency in the context of a student, it therefore becomes imperative to ask why and how students exercise agency in a system of higher education, bearing in mind that students do not just occupy the roles of being students academically, but they also occupy spaces in social settings and their surrounding communities at large.

Bandura (2006) does state that in their late adolescence (which is about the age when many students enrol for tertiary education), adolescents begin the process of positioning themselves in society and life in general, meaning that the sense of agency that they develop in this liminal stage of their lives is pivotal in who they become later in life and in the future. Formal higher education learning such as the one that tertiary education provides, stimulates students – emotionally, cognitively, and otherwise. Based on this knowledge, it is an environment that is conducive to developing a sense of agency (Klemenčič, 2022), as agency is not something that students have when coming into higher learning, but is a phenomenon that they develop (Biesta et al., 2011).

Depending on the situation, students might not be agentic at all or express agency. Not expressing agency would mean, according to Klemenčič (2022), that the student does not have any intention to act. Students are not equally placed in political, social, educational and economic contexts as they are faced with varying issues and situations that can either enhance their development of agency or restrict it. Agency can therefore be strengthened or weakened. Certain aspects of political and economic contexts that can constrain a student's agency are out of the student's control, such as a lack of funding and resources (Klemenčič, 2022) which inhibits access to certain necessities needed to fulfil the obligations of being a student. This is an example of how agency can be weakened.

Institutions of learning play a vital role in society. They function to socialize their students by equipping them with knowledge and helping to develop their individuality (Turkkahraman, 2015). In an effort to mitigate the gaps and redress societal issues, students are trained with skills to help alleviate these issues. Without a need for institutions such as aiming to help redress these societal issues, they would not exist. This statement is supported by the theory of functionalism which states that structures and institutions are produced as a response to negative societal conditions (Walsh, 1998). In essence, institutions, organizations and social structures would not exist without the collaboration of the community as a collective, nor if there were not any problems faced by the very same societies in which they occur.

Economically, institutions play significant roles globally, as well as within their geographical locations locally. HEIs are places where both international and local students from different backgrounds socialise, exchange ideas, and learn about different cultures in a process of globalization. As a type of firm, institutions of higher learning compete in global markets as they are service providers in a specific field (Pinheiro et al., 2015). Not only this, but these institutions are used to boost countries' economies through research output, widely known as Research and Development (R & D) (Pouri & Inglesi-Lotz, 2014). Locally and regionally, the role of HEIs is highly dependent on the endogenous or local pressures faced within the situational context of the institutions (Pinheiro et al., 2015). This is why within the South African context, one of the institutional goals is for social justice through education as well as producing skilled graduates who are well equipped to play an effective, participatory role in the advancement and betterment of the socio-economic conditions in the country.

Through 'knock-on' multiplier effects, universities also increase output and employment in

other economic sectors. To fund their own operations, universities buy products and services from other industries, thereby promoting growth in other sectors. To complete university orders, the providing industries also purchase from further suppliers, and those suppliers then purchase from additional suppliers, creating a feedback loop (Pouri & Inglesi-Lotz, 2014).

Measuring agency

A sense of agency constitutes an individual's capacity to be able to make decisions that affect themselves or others (Zimmerman et al., 2019), and these can be enabled by intrinsic (internal desires of the individual), or extrinsic factors (the formal and informal structures that make up the enabling environment) (Zimmerman et al., 2019). Tapal et al. (2017) refer to these factors as the direct (intrinsic) and indirect (extrinsic) measures of agency. These direct measures include autonomy, self-efficacy, and self-governance. The indirect measures on the other hand are "assumed to be contingent on a prior (unintentional, non-deliberate, seemingly unconscious) computation of one's agency in regard to a specific environmental change" (p.1).

Cavazzoni et al. (2022b) do an overview of studies that have been conducted in measuring agency across a vast demographic from different geographical locations. The adult demographic whose agency was measured across these studies were between the ages of 18 to 93. The agency herein was measured. The subjects' agency was assessed in terms of 1) self-efficacy and personal autonomy; 2) how much a subject perceives that they have the ability to achieve that which they want to; 3) and the subject's ability to cooperate with others to achieve a specific goal (Cavazzoni et al., 2022b). Direct measures of agency usually rely on the degree to which one sees themselves as the cause (an agent) of a specific action and its outcome thereof (Silver et al., 2020).

In an overview by Alkire (2009) of Sen's account of agency, the author recalls the features used to measure agency:

- i) agency is exercised with respect to goals the person values; ii) agency includes effective power as well as direct control; iii) agency may advance wellbeing or may address other-regarding goals; iv) to identify agency also entails an assessment of the value of the agent's goals; v) the agent's responsibility for a state of affairs should be incorporated into his or her

evaluation of it. The first four of these features will be useful in clarifying the distinct kinds of information that agency measures convey or do not convey (Alkire, 2009, p. 6).

It is worthwhile mentioning that the aforementioned studies conducted these surveys and inquiries quantitatively, and no literature was found to have used a qualitative methodology to measure agency.

The degree of cooperation between social actors is another factor used to determine one's sense of agency according to Silver et al. (2020). The degree of cooperation referred to in this measure of agency is that of the actor (individual) and the social environment. Different types of agency are defined by the level of cooperation between an agent and others. This cooperation determines whether one agent or the other has diminished (less) or enhanced (more) agency. A higher degree of cooperation between actors leads to a heightened sense of agency and a lack of cooperation between actors results in a decrease in social agency (Silver et al., 2020).

Linking agency to volunteer work

Volunteer work is the lens through which this study has looked into the role of agency. The concept of self that grounds the work by Mead (1934) emerges itself in agency in the form of language, which Mead suggests forms the basis of any society. The concept of the self, in tandem with the concept of identity reveals that the two co-exist, and that they shape or form society together with its structures (Mead, 1934). Personal identity explores how individuals see themselves (who they are), where they belong (self-identity), and how they fit into society. Volunteer work is therefore an important part of an individual's integration into society by offering an opportunity to acquire a sense of purpose and belonging that is greater than their own goals and ambitions. Volunteer work is also essential in developing an individual's subjective dispositions (which are inherent traits), such as norms, motives, values and personal traits (Aboramadan, 2019).

The term agency is drawn from the meaning of what it is to be an agent, which is someone who effects change. A clear connection between agency and volunteerism can be made with agency being expressed through volunteerism as a social action (which will be discussed in further detail below). Individual, as well as collective agency, are key to solving societal issues, as well as unifying communities in the process (Lengfelder & Carroll, 2019).

This research dove into the role of agency by focusing on volunteer work as a mechanism by which agency is expressed.

2.2 Volunteerism

Conceptualising volunteerism

As a form of community engagement, volunteerism is a form of engagement that is carried out voluntarily to make a positive and significant contribution towards the well-being of individuals (The United Nations Development programme, 2011). These 'positive and significant contributions' also include a "great deal for ameliorating a wide variety of social problems including unemployment, crime, loneliness, and poor health across a broad range of community and organizational contexts" (Gray & Stevenson, 2020, p. 343). Volunteerism can be defined as:

a complex phenomenon that has often defied definition, let alone measurement. Undertaken in leisure time, it is nevertheless a form of work. Pursued for no monetary compensation, it nevertheless produces both tangible and intangible benefits not only for its beneficiaries but also for the volunteer as volunteering, is supposed to be undertaken as a matter of free will, it is motivated by a sense of personal, cultural, religious, or other obligations (Salamon et al., 2011, p. 222).

Islary & Phungshok (2015, p. 11) define volunteerism to be a "distinct human characteristic that drives an individual to go beyond the self and reach out to other people thus linking an individual to the community". Alternatively, volunteerism has been defined to be unpaid efforts of work to members of a community, or parties to which the volunteer has no form of obligation towards (Silver et al., 2020; Stirling & Bull, 2011). According to Finkelstein et al. (2005, p. 404), volunteerism is "a long-term, planned, and discretionary prosocial behavior that benefits strangers and occurs within an organizational context."

Dingle et al. (2001) give three criteria listed for volunteering. First, volunteers should be involved in activities of volunteerism without any expectation of financial gain. Should there be any expenses incurred, these should be taken up by the organization facilitating the volunteer work. In this way, more people will be encouraged to volunteer without having to be restricted to do so because of a lack of financial means. Second, there should be no

form of coercion. Forms of coercion can be linked to schools that require students to participate in volunteer work or companies that have volunteer work. Lastly, the benefits of the work done should be to the third parties and the personnel to volunteer, and not to the immediate family members of volunteers.

Volunteerism is contextualized to be a social action, meaning that it is behaviours, work, or actions that one engages in for the benefit of others (Higgins & Kruglanski, 2007), be it an individual or community. Dingle et al. (2001) specify four types of volunteerism in a broader context:

Mutual aid or self-help – this is when members of a community jointly come to each other's aid to tackle a common issue or problem;

Philanthropy – involves servicing the needs of others, and is performed through an organization such as a non-profit. Additionally, those servicing the needs of a particular group usually do not belong to that group themselves;

Campaigning advocacy – this involves people who want to see the redress of certain societal issues, these are referred to as agents of social change;

Participation or self-governance – this involves people becoming part of governing bodies or committees with the intention of using these platforms to effect change (Dingle, 2001).

In the work by Snyder & Omoto (2008), certain tenets characterize volunteer work a social action. Characterizing them is beneficial to distinguish them from other types of 'social actions' that the author notes, such as philanthropy and charity work. Below is a summary of these tenets:

Volunteer work is defined as such only if the work done is not forced or coerced. This is bearing in mind that other institutions and organizations, such as universities, may require students to be a part of some volunteer work for them to be able to graduate. Other organizations require one to have a history of volunteer work as a requisite for employment (Dingle, 2001; Omoto & Snyder, 1995; The United Nations Development Programme, 2011). Salamon et al. (2011) however define volunteer work as "unpaid non-compulsory work; that is, time individuals give without pay to activities performed either through an organization or directly for others outside their household" (p. 222). This definition of volunteer work broadens the premise of volunteer work beyond working within the scope of an organization, unlike the context of volunteerism as defined by Snyder and Omoto.

Practicing volunteer work outside of the context of an organization, or a particular cause, is also a testament to the neighbourly and cultural practice of volunteerism within the African context – that it is deeply entrenched in the African culture and indicative of the moral obligations of Africans towards helping each other in communities (Mugumbate & Nyanguru, 2013) .

Dingle et al. (2001) distinguishes volunteerism into managed and unmanaged volunteerism. Similarly to what has been stated above, managed forms of volunteerism are coordinated by organizations, as are the activities of the volunteer programmes. Such organizations are in the private, non-profit and public sectors. The unmanaged type of volunteerism is more immediate and sporadic. An example of this type of volunteerism is bringing aid to persons in response to events such as natural disasters (Dingle, 2001). Volunteer work is not a once-off event, nor is it a reflexive event that is done in response to an emergency. For example, if a country were to need immediate relief aid due to a natural disaster, it would not be classified as volunteerism as it only is a response to an emergency. In other words, volunteer work is done over a period or duration of time (about two – 60 months) according to Omoto & Snyder (1995).

To distinguish from simple acts of helping such as showing ‘neighbourhood,’ voluntary work is usually done through organizations or agencies. This is usually for a certain cause or agenda that the organization might be trying to pursue. Some international organizations such as the United Nations (UN) have tried to push different agendas relating to helping persons that have been affected by HIV/AIDS, or helping persons classified as refugees at refugee camps (Omoto & Snyder, 2008). Volunteer work is undertaken without any expectation of a reward. It is done out of goodwill which in turn benefits the volunteer in many aspects as well. For example, literature shows that volunteer work allows volunteers to build networks that they might need to make use of in the future, such as securing employment. It has proven as well to increase levels of self-worth and self-confidence (Azunna & Botes, 2021; Silver et al., 2020; Stirling & Bull, 2011; The United Nations Development Programme, 2011). In the context of higher education, volunteer work as a form of community engagement helps to develop and nurture relationships between HEIs and community members. This is essential for developing trust and accountability (Bhagwan, 2020).

2.2.1 Volunteerism in the African Context

There has been a dearth of research done regarding volunteerism in Africa compared to its counterparts (Adamtey et al., 2021). According to Adamtey et al. (2021) who have written about volunteer work with a focus on the African context, there are three types of volunteer work and these are geographically categorised: north-south, south-south and volunteer tourism. The north-south form of volunteerism refers to industrialised and more developed countries (in the global north) volunteer in less developed countries (global south); the south-south volunteerism occurs when volunteers from one developing country opt to volunteer in other developing countries. The volunteerism model form of volunteerism places a focus on British students who take a break from their academic commitments usually a gap year to volunteer in developing countries (Adamtey et al., 2021).

The model surrounding volunteer work in the African context seems to imply however that developing countries are either more in need of volunteer work compared to its global counter parts, or that global counter parts do not have their own forms of volunteer work (Adamtey et al., 2021). Volunteerism as a social policy (Azunna & Botes, 2021) in developing countries can play a role in local development by mitigating the gaps where governments and local governments are not able to provide service, consequently building an alliance between local government and non-governmental organizations to meeting societal needs (Adamtey et al., 2021).

The focus on the process of development should be on the perceptions and practices of social actors (both individual and the collective) and should be shifted away from a reliance on government and state interventions. This suggestion by Long (1997) falls within their specific context of rural development. Individual actors who possess agency in their own capacity then come together as 'collective actors' with shared values, interests and goals to make a change (Long,1997). In South Africa, volunteer work has been used to meet societal demands and needs (via mutual aid), as well as with assisting the youth in penetrating the job market and securing employment. Adding to this, South African municipalities have seen a trend in the employment of unskilled and under-qualified employees which has increased necessity for volunteers. More importantly, volunteerism for the youth has been seen to have a positive intake in reducing the amount of leisure time that they have, which many of the youth end up using to engage in drugs and alcohol,

which has a direct correlation with the increase in sexually transmitted diseases (Azunna & Botes, 2021).

Mugumbate & Nyanguru (2013) suggest that in the African context specifically, volunteerism is deeply entrenched in its culture as suggested by the phrase '*umuntu ngumuntu wabantu*,²' whilst using the theoretical framework presented by Wilson & Musick (1997). For Wilson & Musick (1997), volunteerism is a collective action and is influenced by the behaviour and actions of others. In their view, a lot of volunteer work is guided by a set of ethics and values that have been instilled through culture and its social institutions. These social institutions differ, they may be faith-based institutions, families (which also speaks to cultural backgrounds and upbringings), and educational institutions such as schools and institutions of higher learning (Seabe, 2014). Essentially, volunteer work is influenced by the issues faced in the social, cultural, economic and political contexts to try to redress the problems faced in these aspects (Dingle et al., 2001).

Conditions for volunteers are affected by both pre-existing structures such as social constructs, like collective identities and people's capacity to effect change intentionally, which is agency. Even though people create society, social structures exist before the current actions of individuals. Volunteers can alter these social structures which include their roles and collective identities, but these same pre-existing structures also determine how effectively they can effect change (Stirling & Bull, 2011).

2.2.2 Theories of volunteerism

Snyder & Omoto (2008) frame volunteerism as a temporal and sequential process, which is similar to Emirbayer and Mische's model of agency. According to them, volunteerism occurs across three stages, namely: the antecedent stage, the experiences stage, and lastly, the consequences stage. The antecedent stage mainly asks the question 'why does one wish to volunteer?' In this stage, the purpose is established and defined. Many groups or individuals choose to volunteer for a wide range of reasons, varying from personal development to acquiring skills, as well as networking opportunities to bolster their careers. People are better persuaded to be involved in volunteer work if the circumstances surrounding the volunteer work are more suited to their purposes, whatever those may be. In this stage personality traits and attributes have been seen to be essential in getting

² 'Umuntu ngumuntu wabantu' is of the Nguni language isiZulu and translates to "I am because we are."

involved in volunteer work, such as being empathic and having a general sense of care toward others (Omoto & Snyder, 2008).

The experiences stage is the duration of volunteer work. It explores the behavioural and psychological aspects of volunteer work, most specifically the state of relationships and interrelationships that volunteers would have developed during that time. This is of course bearing in mind that some experiences can be negative and positive. In this stage, the correlation behind the reasons for joining volunteer work and the duration of their service in volunteer work is clearer to see, be it for a long or short duration. Studies have found that the more congruent the motivations for getting into volunteer work are with their experiences, the more positive the experiences (Omoto & Snyder, 2008).

The experiences stage speaks to the changes that might have occurred, particularly regarding the knowledge and change in attitudes as well, including the impact that these changes might also have had on the recipients of volunteer work. This stage determines that indeed, the longevity of a volunteer in service is based on the levels of their satisfaction throughout the process (Omoto & Snyder, 1995). Omoto and Snyder show that if volunteers have something to gain from volunteer work, the longer the duration of their service as compared to altruistic reasons, such as values and concerns for the community and societal issues (Omoto & Snyder, 2008).

Student Volunteerism

The role of students in institutions of higher learning and specifically student volunteering, involves their impact on people's lives and communities through their application of skills, or probably even knowledge in different fields altogether (Knapp et al., 2022). Student volunteerism is categorized broadly as a form of student engagement. Other forms of student engagement in institutions of higher learning include service learning and internships (Knapp et al., 2022). The author defines student volunteerism as "being of service to others in either the academic community or to citizens outside the university in extracurricular activities" (Resch et al., 2022, p. 196), and student volunteerism ends when students have either graduated or completed their education. It also goes without saying that whilst students tend to volunteer for the benefit of others, they become partners and co-creators in the work surrounding volunteerism in the space of higher education.

Mohan (1994) contextualized student volunteerism as an important part of the political process. The implementation of student engagement was a drive to introduce a participatory role of students in democracy (which involved moving away from private affairs to the pursuit of the common good), whereby students played an active role in service to their communities and as citizens. According to them, at the time when the agendas of student volunteerism and service learning were still being promulgated, their stance on the issue was that the education system in the United States of America was not doing enough to engage students as active members in a democratic state, and that the educational system “reduced students to passive servile consumers and reinforced tendencies within the larger culture towards pursuing individual interest” (Mohan, 1994, p. 330).

Islary & Phungshok (2015) also propose an approach to student volunteerism that is aimed at adjusting and influencing behaviours and attitudes of students towards different people and communities. This, the authors define to be an inter-cultural process where the impetus falls on volunteers to reach out to other people and submerge themselves in those communities. Not only would this allow for a better understanding of one another, but it would also ensure the sustainability of these programmes, as more ownership would be given to the members of the community (Islary & Phungshok, 2015). There is little knowledge of the involvement and study of the role of students in higher education in volunteer work on a global scale (Islary & Phungshok, 2015). The reasons behind this are attributed to organizations being uncoordinated in the work that they set out to do, meaning that the work that these organizations do is usually done in isolation. A lot of organizations in countries such as the USA have more well-developed volunteering programmes compared to others. In Africa, it has been written that information on volunteerism programmes is loosely gathered and therefore sparse (Islary & Phungshok, 2015).

The volunteer activity survey (VAS) is an instrument that is used to collect data on volunteer activity, conducted by the Department of Statistics South Africa every four years as a module linked to the Quarterly Labour Force Survey (QLS). Its latest findings were reported in 2018 and these results were from findings 12 months preceding the publication of the findings of the survey as a report. According to the VAS, out of a population of 41 million people aged 15 years and older, only 6,7% (which is an approximated 2 756 000 people) were engaged in volunteer activities. Of these an estimated 519 000 people volunteered through organizations and 2 074 00 volunteered directly, meaning that more than 75% of

volunteers in South Africa volunteered directly (Statistics South Africa, 2018). According to the StatsSA report, from a list of organization-based volunteer work, educational institutions placed third in terms of hours volunteered. The contribution by educational institutions was 7,6% of the total hours volunteered by organizations in the country. The number of hours referred to in these statistics are the number of hours volunteered in the 12 months preceding the time the survey was collected (Statistics South Africa, 2018). The report with latest findings is yet to be released.

The statistics above would suggest that HEIs can do more in terms of activating their students in volunteer work. The literature, having illuminated on the concepts of agency and volunteerism, allowed the researcher to extract different types of agency for the purposes of investigating the most expressed types of agency by students in the Nine Tenths programme at Rhodes University. The discussion and analysis of the study also illuminated the intersectionality of the different forms of agency in the student volunteers, and the many factors that enabled the manifestation of these different, intersecting and co-existing forms of agency.

Chapter summary

Agency in this study referred to the capacity for action of one's free-will. Literature about agency has for the longest time mainly presented two fronts regarding the agency versus structure debate, the first being that structures dictates agency, and the second being that individual actions and agency overtime result in the establishment of social structures. Based on the purposes of in the research, the research leaned towards the position that established social structures dictated the form or forms of agency that were exerted by individuals within that context. These types of agency could be expressed by more than one individual, which is a collective. The types of agency presented from the literature are: identity agency, pragmatic agency, collective agency, social agency, life-course agency, proxy agency, existential agency and moral agency, and personal agency.

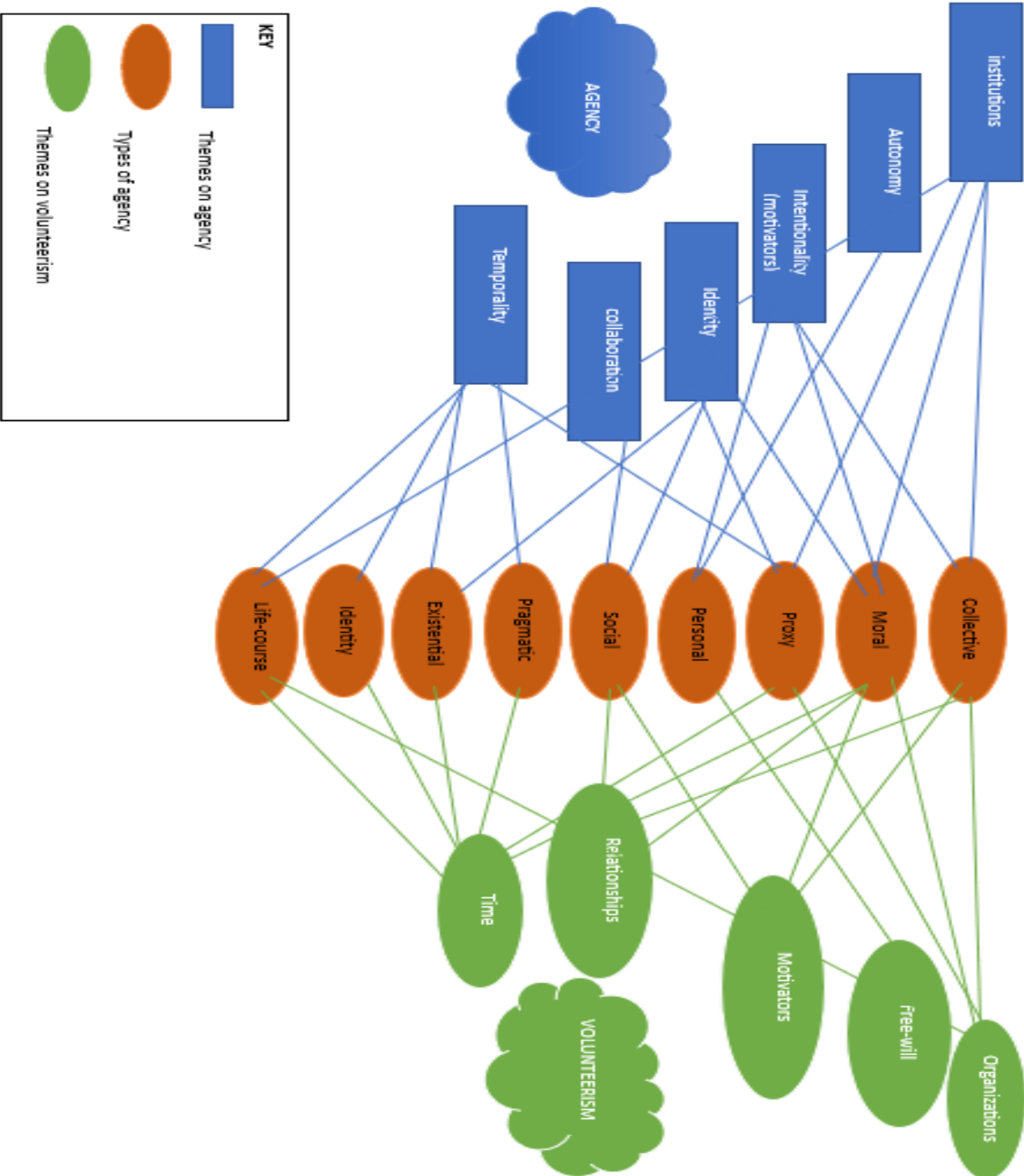
Student volunteer work is necessary to effectively respond to community needs. HEIs need students to fulfil their obligation towards social responsibility, and students decide to volunteer for various reasons, some out of goodwill, but many for job security purposes after receiving a tertiary education. At Rhodes university, this mandate is fulfilled through RUCE, which provides support to student volunteers. Nevertheless, it is crucial for a sense

of agency to be developed to increase student involvement in volunteer work. South Africa, being situated on the African continent, is known to teach children from a young age how to be treat others with respect and kindness, as well as to give back, which is referred to as Ubuntu. It is expected that because of this, a lot of student volunteers would have become volunteers because of the teaching they would have received in the environments that they grew up in.

Looking at the socio-economic situation in South Africa, more can be done in terms of volunteer work, and getting more young people involved.

Conceptual framework

Figure 1: Conceptual framework developed from literature



Source: Author's own, 2023

The figure above suggests that the themes surrounding agency and volunteerism respectively, overlap and intersect in more ways than one. The model above suggests that 'student agency' is an umbrella term that constitutes a number of different types of agency that can be expressed simultaneously by individuals. Using the model above, the researcher developed a set of questions (see *appendix 1*) with the aim of investigating the types of agency expressed among student volunteers.

Chapter 3: Research methodology and data collection

This section elaborates on the approach design and methods that were applied in this research.

A research design can be defined as a process, or a plan of action carried out by the researcher that involves the collection, analysis and storage of data. This is done with the aim of acquiring credible and quality results. For the purposes of this research, a qualitative approach was taken to learn about the experience of the student participants as volunteers at the university. The role of the researcher was to, in an orderly manner, interpret the information so as to make sense of it (Hancock et al., 2009a). Data analysis is a continuous process, and the role of this process was to interpret and give meaning to the information given by respondents and the data collected. Merriam & Tisdell (2016) proposes that researchers devise a systematic way to manage data that has been collected from interviews.

Research design

This research followed the methodology of a qualitative study. Qualitative research allowed for the broadened and deepened understanding of why certain things are the way they are, and how they came to be that way. It was very useful in exploring matters regarding people's experiences, their views and opinions on these subject matters that were not fully understood. The qualitative approach was appreciative of how the interviewees view things differently and used the interviewees' accounts as actual data. People's accounts of things are used as data in a qualitative study (Hancock et al., 2009b), whereas in quantitative studies, the focus is more on cause and effect in an attempt to refute a hypothesis. Unlike a quantitative study whose methodology can be determined in advance, the qualitative study is much more flexible and the emergent processes and methods that are employed in the research cannot be definitively mapped out in advance, or prior the research. Instead, these processes are determined throughout the process (Hancock et al., 2009b).

A paradigm is known as a "basic belief system or worldview that guides the researcher" (Guba Yvonn & Lincoln, 1994, p. 105). The research process that a researcher carries out

is ultimately guided by the paradigm that they have decided to adopt (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). A mix of an interpretive and case study paradigm was used in this research. An interpretive study was conducted as the researcher used information obtained from the participants to interpret their experiences in an iterative and continuous process (Patton, 2015). The interpretivist paradigm appreciated that human beings have unique experiences and make sense of them in unique ways. Even though they may experience the same phenomenon, their reasoning in relation to these experiences are not the same but are rather subjective (Alharahsheh & Pius, 2020).

Adding to the interpretivist paradigm, the research made use of a case study approach as the research solely focused on the Nine Tenths programme at Rhodes University. These paradigms suited the aims and intentions of this research as the experiences of student volunteers at Rhodes University were explored. Their experiences surrounding volunteerism were therefore interpreted with an aim to answer the main research question of inquiry.

Data collection process and methods

The data collection process on its own took about two weeks. After the process of interviewing the participants, each interview was transcribed on Microsoft Word for the data analysis process. Thematic analysis was used to code for themes that would be used to produce a narrative from the information gathered from the participants, which would later be cross referenced and discussed in relation to the literature.

The instrument of data collection was selected based on the purposes of the research (Leavy, 2017). Selecting the correct tool and instrument for data collection was also crucial for the reliability and validity of the study being conducted (Bairagi & Munot, 2019). As in any research, the researcher is the main instrument for collecting the data or information (Teherani et al., 2015). The role of the researcher was to determine what the experiences of the participants meant to them using semi-structured interviews in the analysis process.

This research made use of a semi-structured interview to gain extensive information about the subject of student agency in volunteerism. Semi-structured interviews allowed for a less rigid line of questioning, which meant that the responses of the participants were more likely to be more truthful and subsequently, more insightful (Doody & Noonan, 2013). Additionally, a semi-structured interview allowed for comparability among the responses

given by the different participants (Doody & Noonan, 2013). The questions for the interview were drafted by the researcher using the conceptual framework developed from the literature review (see *chapter 2*).

During the semi-structured interviews, there was a free flow of conversation. As the researcher I found myself prompting more answers from the interviewees based on something that they mentioned that I picked up on (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Even though there were pre-determined questions, I found that prompting them further with spontaneous follow-up questions revealed much more important information than I had anticipated. This made the interviews much more fun and engaged.

Before the start of any interview, I did not rush to begin the interview, instead, I started off with easy going and casual questions. This helped to build some sort of trust between the participant (Rubin & Rubin, 2012) and myself, which would later help them open up to me more freely. At times, this led to the participant and I sharing personal information off the record. This not only made the participant feel more comfortable, but I found myself feeling more relaxed and much more confident about how the interview would pan out. One important thing that I picked up from the participants in all that they mentioned, even when it was not concerning volunteer work, was that they certainly wanted to be model citizens (which is evident in more detail in *chapter 4*).

After the necessary data was collected from the interview process, as part of the data analysis process of the research, the initially developed conceptual framework was then re-conceptualised to capture the reality of the role that student agency plays in student volunteer work at Rhodes University. More importantly, the re-conceptualised framework (see *Figure 3*) reveals the enablers of these different types of agency expressed by student volunteers. All face-to-face interviews were recorded with a cellular device. Some interviews had to be done telephonically as some participants were not willing to meet face-to-face. For other participants, their study schedules could not permit them to travel across campus to meet me for an interview. In such cases, I made sure to have an extra cellular device with me to record and store our conversations for later transcription.

Challenges faced during the data collection process

The data collection process was not as smooth as one would expect. Being a former alumnus, I expected for students to be more forthcoming after presenting myself as such, however, I was met with more scepticism than enthusiasm. The only way to get the participants to feel less sceptical about participating in the interview was to reassure them that the questions asked were strictly regarding their volunteer experience, and that no harm would befall them as a result of participating.

The data collection process was heavily dependent on the availability of the student participants. The data collection process, which was conducted on Rhodes University campus was conducted about a week before what is known as SWOT (strengths, weakness, opportunities and threats) week. SWOT week is the week before the official commencement of exams at the university, allocated for examination preparations. This indicates that there shouldn't be any lectures or practical classes in the duration of this week because that time is reserved for exam preparations. Because of this many potential participants could not participate because of their hectic study schedules. As a result of this I ended up with a total of 10 participants. Nevertheless, I do believe that the data that was collected was rich as a result of an engaged and meaningful conversation with the participants.

(See appendix 1)

Sampling of participants

This research made use of purposive sampling. The participants selected for the study were students currently (at the time of data collection) attending Rhodes University, which comprised of student volunteers as well as student volunteer leaders. Student volunteers are well-versed in matters related to community engagement and the social issues that inflict themselves upon the surrounding community of Makhanda. Patton (2015) does state that suitable participants should be selected based on their appropriateness to the inquiry of research, which I do believe the selection of participants possessed. Being students themselves, they were able to give deeper insight into understanding the student experience within volunteer work, and what motivated them to be a part of such work.

Out of 25 plus students that were approached, a total number of ten students participated. These participants were student volunteers. They were sought and found through snowballing. The first few participants were located on campus awaiting transportation that

would take them to the different schools at which they volunteered. The participants were so kind as to contact their volunteer colleagues to seek their permission to share their contact details with me. Consent in obtaining their contact details was very important from the get-go. Prior to the interviews, the volunteer programmes that they were involved in as volunteers were not known and were only revealed to the researcher during the interviews. To the researcher's surprise all ten of the participants volunteered for the Nine Tenths programme, with most of them having started out their volunteer experience in other programmes. This was another significant moment of the research. At the start of the research process, as the researcher, it was difficult to select a volunteer programme that would be the focus of my research. The initial *modus operandi* was to select the programme which most of the participants that I would have had at the time, were a part of, and to request from those participants to request their colleagues to participate. Having all the participants part of the same programme made this process seamless.

Data analysis process

The data analysis phase refers to "segmenting the data into parts and reassembling the parts into a coherent whole" (Boeije, 2011, p. 76). The data in this study was analysed using the technique of thematic analysis. Thematic analysis looks for patterns in the data gathered in response to the research question (Boeije, 2011).

The data analysis process began with a verbatim transcription on Microsoft Word of all the interviews. The second phase of this was coding. At the start of the process of coding, it was important to familiarize myself with the transcribed text. Coding as a tool is used to break down or separate data into smaller components so that they are later built up into themes based on similarity (Richards, 2009). A code is a label that describes a piece of information. In a qualitative study, coding is the process of creating and assigning codes to categorize data extracts. It groups similar type of data (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006; Linneberg & Korsgaard, 2019). This process was made less cumbersome as transcription was done in the same order in which the questions were asked, which made coding and labelling less discombobulated. For the purposes of this research, I made use of descriptive coding. Descriptive coding aimed to summarize extracts by using a single word that encapsulated the general idea of the data.

The hybrid coding approach is a mix of both the deductive form of analysis as well as the

inductive form of analysis. In the deductive approach there is already set priori codes or themes (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006). The type of analysis used depends heavily on the research aims and the research questions (Boeije, 2011). The analysis of this research took on both a deductive approach as well as an inductive approach of coding to establish themes. The reason for the deductive approach was because the researcher had already established a set of themes from the literature which were used to draw up the initial conceptual framework. The reason for using the inductive approach was because some themes did not emanate from the developed conceptual framework, but from the participant responses. In the final stages of analysis, the newly generated themes were then compared with the existing themes.

Another important aspect of the analysis was the 'presentation of findings' chapter where the researcher was able to further break down different participant responses by nuancing the differences in their responses. It is these nuanced differences in responses that provided a slate on which to objectively dissect how these different elements/codes interact, or rather, intersect with each other. These nuanced differences were then further explored in more depth in the 'analysis of data' chapter.

Validity and trustworthiness

Validity can refer to the trustworthiness and integrity of the research (Merriam, 2009). Qualitative researchers as a norm, prefer to use the term credibility (Merriam, 2009) and credibility in qualitative research is established by comprehending the participant's reality from their point of view. A person typically has preconceived notions about a scenario based on their past encounters values and belief systems, as well as the environment in which they were raised including culture and other structures. I made an effort to combat researcher subjectivity or bias by sharing personal information that would be pertinent to the subject at hand (Maxwell, 2015).

This qualitative research focused on smaller sample sizes as compared to quantitative research which uses larger sample sizes. The trustworthiness of the research tested if the research study and its findings were confirmable, dependable, credible and transferable. The trustworthiness of the findings put into question the researcher's trust in their findings. The quality of the data was also measured by its truthfulness and therefore its authenticity.

Ensuring that the right methods and the correct procedures were taken, the findings of the study were credible (Cypress, 2017). To further make the study more credible during the process, the process of triangulation was used whereby the data presented in the study was cross-checked with the information attained from other participants in the study. This was intended to accurately present the experiences of the participants in the study (Cypress, 2017).

To ensure that the results and data of the research were accurate and that the tool to be used was effective, pre-testing was done. Pre-testing is usually done on a smaller scale of participants, and it aimed to ensure that there were little to no practical problems when the actual interviews were conducted and to make sure that the tools used were free from error (Leavy, 2022). The numerous advantages of pre-testing included: 1) the researcher gaining more confidence in using the tool knowing that the tool has a higher chance of being effective; 2) there was less chance of participants of the research giving biased answers which would have a negative outcome on the results of the research 3) pre-testing allowed the researcher to determine the quality of the questions as some of the questions might not have been suited for the purposes of the research (Buschle et al., 2022).

For this research, pre-testing was done using the first participant, where the researcher found it necessary to then re-frame a few questions and ask them differently, as the first participant found some of the initial questions confusing, and therefore difficult to respond to.

Ethical considerations

Patton (2015) introduces the phenomenon of reciprocity when speaking to the matter of ethical issues in research. When agreeing to participate in interviews, respondents allow the researcher to enter their space and disrupt their routines. Furthermore, they give their time, which they might have allocated to do other things. Therefore, the “researcher is indebted and sensitive to this” (Patton, 2015, p. 588). In practicing reciprocity, the researcher can pay back the participant’s efforts in small but meaningful ways such as “making coffee or being a good listener” (Patton, 2015, p. 588). These acts of reciprocity should be carried out as long as they are in the bounds of ethical practices. Reciprocity by the researcher in this study was carried out - participants were allowed to select any time and place of the interview; before the start of every interview I took about five to ten minutes

to check in on how they were coping with their studies and the pressure of their upcoming exams; and I offered to get them a drink or snack for the duration of the interview as a sign of appreciation of their time.

Prospective participants were not forced to partake in the research inquiry. Before participating in the interview, they were requested to give informal consent which was recorded via audio recording devices. During this time, there was full disclosure to the participants as to the details of the inquiry of the research. The participants were informed prior to the interviews, the purposes of the research, the intentions for the information collected, the risks associated with participating in the interview, as well as the main scope of the questions to be asked (Patton, 2015).

Furthermore, the participants were assured that no harm would come to them by participating in the study, nor would their identities or that of any other mentioned persons such as a close relative, be disclosed for any reason. Information gathered was solely used for the purposes of the research (Patton, 2015). All information gathered was securely stored. This information was not shared; it was not used for purposes outside those of benefit to the inquiry. Lastly, participants had the right to withdraw from the process if they felt the need to do so or if they felt uncomfortable, threatened or unsafe at any point in time of the interview.

Assumptions

Below are the assumptions that the researcher made before entering the field and commencing the process of data collection. :

- For most of the participants who are student volunteers, getting involved in volunteer work plays a huge role in how they see themselves (personal identity) as members of and within society.
- All of the student volunteers volunteer mainly because it is an academic requirement for them to do so, or because volunteering will help them in their career and job prospects post university.
- Some participants will feel that they have limited autonomy and limited leeway in decision-making within volunteer programmes due to strict rules and regulations. It is expected that the reasons for participants who are in volunteer programmes will

have significantly changed from when they started out as volunteers for several reasons, most of which have to do with their one-on-one engagements with community members over time.

- For many of the participants who volunteer, it will be expected that their decisions to volunteer will be greatly informed by their cultural backgrounds, which involve a culture of giving back the community and acting out of goodwill.
- Lastly, several participants will not share the same goals and vision in relation to volunteer work, and this will negatively affect the completion of necessary tasks.

Reflexivity

Reflexivity in part expresses the idea that the researcher has a special and important function to perform throughout the entire research process. It recognizes that the research both influences and is influenced by the researcher (Silverman, 2010). Therefore, it is important to reflect on this influence as a researcher as it does play a role in the research output. As a researcher, it was important to recognise that my feelings political beliefs and theoretical knowledge all significantly influence how I approach the research and how it turns out (King & Horrocks, 2010). Reflexivity recognises that as the main inquirer, I had an inevitable impact on the evolution and course of the research (King & Horrocks, 2010).

Before entering the field and beginning the data collection phase, I had assumptions of the information that I would gather when conducting interviews.

Below are extracts of some of the assumptions I had made and my reaction to them immediately after the end of the data collection process:

For most of the participants who are student volunteers getting involved in volunteer work plays a huge role in how they see themselves (personal identity) as members of and within society.

This assumption was true, but the participants did not use the terms “personal identity.” Most of the participants saw themselves as members of the community who wanted to make a change and make an impact within their volunteer programmes by making sure that the high school students they mentored were enrolled in into a HEI. They saw themselves as agents of social change.

All of the student volunteers volunteer mainly because it is an academic requirement for them to do so or because volunteering will help them in their career and job prospects post university.

This assumption was not true. To the researcher's surprise, all of the participants' reasons had some altruistic element to them. Most of them wanted to help, and the one recurring reason for their need to 'help' was that they never got any assistance with their own transition from high school to tertiary. They never got mentored; they did not receive any assistance applying for university, which was quite daunting for them at the time. And because of this, they wanted to make sure that the high school learners that they mentored did not face the same hardships that they did.

Some participants will feel that they have limited autonomy and limited leeway in decision-making within volunteer programmes due to strict rules and regulations.

This was not the case at all. The participants did not feel restricted in any way. They did however mention that there were guidelines that they received from RUCE in the form of a booklet, but they were not forced to stick to these guidelines in terms of how they conducted their weekly sessions with their mentees. They were therefore able to practice a high level of autonomy. They further mentioned that being able to conduct their sessions autonomously allowed for genuine interactions between themselves and their mentees.

It is expected that the reasons for participants who are in volunteer programmes will have significantly changed from when they started out as volunteers for several reasons, most of which have to do with their one-on-one engagements with community members over time.

This was not the case as was initially expected, somehow, all the participants maintained the same reasons throughout their time volunteering. What did change, however, was the fact that for some who, for example, wanted to gain some volunteer experience to add onto their resume, found that they ended up developing the feeling of wanting to make an actual change in the lives of those they were helping. This was indicative of the fact that their

sense of agency had somehow developed over time in the volunteer programme.

For a majority of the participants who volunteer it will be expected that their decisions to volunteer will be greatly informed by their backgrounds which involve a culture of giving back to the community.

This statement was not entirely true. From the interviews conducted, all the participants had different reasons for volunteering. For some, it did involve their upbringing, but this was not the case for the majority.

Lastly, a number of participants will not have the same shared goals and vision in relation to volunteer work, and this will negatively affect the completion of necessary tasks.

The statement above is not true in the sense that even though it was perceived that volunteers did not share the same goals and vision in relation to their volunteer work, in most instances, it did not appear to negatively affect the quality of their work as individual volunteers.

As I underwent the process of inquiry especially during the data collection process on the field, I had time to reflect on my past experiences as a student and my exposure or lack thereof to volunteer work at the university. I also made a lot of effort to win the participants' trust. They needed reassurance that I had not intended to glorify my own alma mater, but to present the actual findings of my research truthfully, which has been done to the fullest extent. One of the first things that I quickly became aware of was the potential bias in the interpretation of data because I had somewhat, an idea of how the community engagement and volunteer programmes are structured at Rhodes based off my prior knowledge.

As an alumnus, it was important to delve deeper into the ways in which tertiary students in South Africa can practice good citizenship in preparation for the real world, post tertiary, and as tools for social redress. I became aware of my own various identities while conducting the research through the reflective process. I became conscious of the many different hats I was wearing during the study process and the effect they had on the

research process. It was easy to relate to the students and have conversations at ease, in fact, it felt as if I were still a student there at times.

Positionality Statement

I am a black, African male who has previously attended Rhodes University from 2017 to the year 2020, as both an undergraduate and postgraduate student. I served in many student leadership positions at the institutions, the highest of these being the Student Representative Council (SRC) in 2019 as the Residence Councillor, which made me aware of the astounding work done by RUCE through their community engagement initiatives, and the work that is done in the surrounding community of Makhanda. I was raised in a very religious Christian home, where I was indoctrinated with the importance of 'ubuntu.' I have always believed in the power of giving back to the community and lending a hand to those who need it the most. Even though I was raised in such a background, I was not heavily involved in community outreach programmes as well as volunteer programmes in tertiary, as the focus of my service was more towards the Rhodes University student body. I sincerely believe that volunteer work is essential to the growth of any community, its economy, and its people, and it is important to perpetually encourage such practice in South African HEIs.

Limitations of the research

This was a cross-sectional study conducted among student volunteers at Rhodes University. I believe that the findings would have been more reliable had the study been longitudinal, as the responses given to the question "why did you start volunteering," would have been captured around about the time when they started volunteering, in real time. Some participants, when asked this question, seemed to have forgotten the actual reasons as to why they started volunteering.

This study was undertaken at a formerly white institution that is renowned for its contribution in the student volunteer space. This study, however, did not give much input on student agency in volunteerism in 'less-privileged' tertiary institutions that do not necessarily advocate and prioritize for the course, as much as Rhodes University.

Chapter summary

This research took on a qualitative approach. The information gathered from participants was to give a perspective of their experience as student volunteers. The research made use of a case study of Rhodes University student volunteers, with a specific focus into the Nine Tenths programme. The interpretivist paradigm was used in conjunction, for a flexible approach, which allowed participants to freely express their opinions regarding the needs of the research.

A total of ten participants were interviewed. The interviews took on a semi-structure style for the purposes of gathering insightful and in-depth meaning into responses regarding their student volunteer experience. As per the nature of semi-structured interviews, the conversations were free flowing, which allowed for penetrating discussions. The approaches taken produced reliable and revealing information, whilst valuing the participants' willingness to participate.

Throughout the whole process, from beginning to the end, the researcher made certain to follow ethical etiquette and guidelines, for the integrity of the research. Participants throughout the whole process participated voluntarily, and had fun while doing so, as did the researcher.

Chapter 4: Presentation of research data

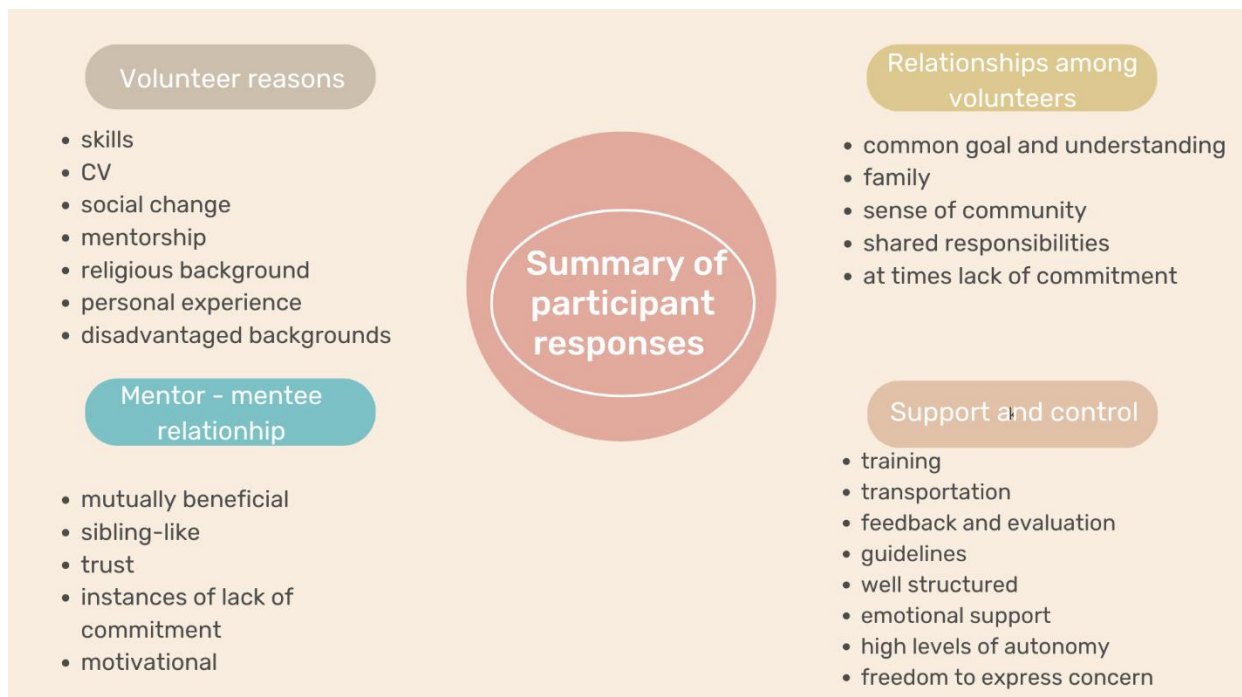
The purpose of this study was to explore the role of agency in student participation in community volunteer work at Rhodes University. Ten student volunteers participated in a semi-structured interview, each lasting approximately thirty minutes. The data presented here was transcribed from recorded interviews, and they take the narrative form. The narrative form made use of direct quotes from the transcription. The findings of the study were based on questions developed from the initial conceptual framework (*see Figure 1*).

The data collected was presented in three forms: 1) visual representation through a diagram depicting a summary of participant's responses, 2) narrative quotes based on the agency themes developed from the conceptual framework (deductive approach), and 3) narrative quotes based on newly developed themes from participant responses (inductive approach).

The participants in this research were current student volunteers at Rhodes University, and all the interviewees volunteered in the Nine Tenths Mentoring programme, which facilitates the mentorship of specifically matriculants from different schools in the surrounding community of Makhanda (*see chapter 1 for more information on the Nine Tenths programme*).

1.

Figure 2: Summary of participant responses



Source: Author's own, 2023

The image above captures a summary of the data from participant responses.

1.

Below are brief descriptions of the different types of agency drawn from literature, as well as narrative quotes used to support the expression of these types of agency.

Moral agency refers to the capacity of individuals to act ethically, or morally towards what may be considered as something that is good (Fortier & Malloy, 2019; Sugarman, 2005). Moral agency can either be diminished or enhanced by structural institutions, meaning that the right support systems need to be in place for one to be an effective moral agent.

The data shows that for three of the respondents, volunteering was a way of 'giving back':

“I really like that I can help someone in matric in the same way that I would have wanted to be helped in matric.” (Participant 3, May)

“I want to be a part of someone’s success journey, I want to know that I helped out someone get into university.” (Participant 6, May)

“One of the reasons why is because I have seen myself as part of the community, and I desire a better community where everything is going well. If there is a gap, where can I contribute to make the community better...” (Participant 4, May)

For one participant, volunteering was seen more specifically as providing guidance to young people to support them with getting enrolled into university and making a success of their lives:

“I help matriculants as a mentor to matriculants and assist them with their journey and how to structure their lives, and personal assistance...so it is more of giving back.” (Participant 5, May)

One participant articulated volunteering as a way of giving support to young people:

“I’ve realised how much the students mostly from the township need guidance. Most of them are from poverty-stricken homes, a lot of them have lost the drive to succeed in life and mentoring them is just life changing for them. And I want to be a part of it.” (Participant 10, May)

For others, volunteering was about being an agent for social change:

“So, I volunteer because I recognise that there is a need for student agency, for students to take part in bringing about change, and that can be done through student volunteerism.” (Participant 1, May)

“I was just volunteering because I wanted something to do, right” (Participant 2, May)

“I want to make a difference in their lives, make a positive impact. Just be a guide, to help that individual in the school and community, especially in a country like ours where we are not going through the best of times.” (Participant 7, May)

“Since I never had the opportunity to have a mentor when I was in grade 12, I feel like being part of Nine Tenths mentoring programme would make a change.” (Participant 9, May)

Other participants expressed that they wanted their mentees to have some level of guidance in the direction they would take in applying for tertiary studies:

“It is a very good initiative because the students in public schools do not get enough exposure to career guidance and how to go about applying for tertiary.” (Participant 8, May)

There was a clear theme of moral agency that emerged from all participants. For some, volunteering was articulated as a way of supporting young people and guiding them in their transition from secondary school to college, or university. For others, moral agency was expressed as giving back, being an agent of social change, and the need to make a difference. For all, the sense of moral agency was expressed as a need to make a difference in individual's lives.

Personal agency refers to the actions that an individual takes of their own volition, with the intention of having a have a desired outcome (Adeyeri, 2012).

Some of the participants saw volunteering as an opportunity to contributing towards making a change as members of the community in solving societal issues:

“I wish to create a space for empowerment... The university exists within the Makhanda community, and it needs to contribute to addressing some of the issues with the assets that it has, and how we can come together to address those issues which are socio-economic.” (Participant 1, May)

All the participants had altruistic reasons for volunteering:

“...so, I volunteer because I recognise that there is a need for student agency, for students to take part in bringing about change, and that can be done through student volunteerism.” (Participant 1, May)

“I want to see the younger people prosper and do even better than me.” (Participant 2, May)

I really like that I can help someone in matric in the same way that I would have wanted to be helped in matric. I never got that support, I never got that encouragement to do better in my exams.” (Participant 3, May)

“My goal is to get more grade 12 learners to get access into the university, and more of them to be qualified for a bachelor's degree.” (Participant 4, May)

So, it is more of giving back and being able to receive at the same time.” (Participant 5, May)

“I want to be a part of someone's success journey, I want to know that I

helped someone get into university.” (Participant 6, May)

“I wanted to join the Nine Tenths programme because you deal with matriculants and at that stage of your life is pivotal and can drastically change your life.” (Participant 7, May)

“My aim is to see them in university, even if it is not Rhodes. I want to see them further their studies as they said they wish to.” (Participant 8, May)

I feel like being part of Nine Tenths programme would make a change because I know the challenges that come with being in grade 12 and having to worry about varsity. If I am part of the programme, I will be able to help people navigate the entire matric space and preparing for the future.” (Participant 9, May)

“I’ve realised how much the students mostly from the township need guidance. Most of them are from poverty-stricken homes, a lot of them have lost the drive to succeed in life and mentoring them is just life changing for them. And I want to be a part of it.” (Participant 10, May)

Some of the participants, in their quest to helping their mentees, were cognisant of the dire state of the socio-economic situation of the country, and wanted to instil a sense of hope in the lives of their mentees:

“I want to make a difference in their lives, make a positive impact. Just to be a guide, to help that individual in the school and community, especially in a country like ours where we are not going through the best of times.” (Participant 7, May)

Some participants were mindful that the mentees were part of the programme only for a year. They therefore mentioned that they were still willing to mentor their mentees well after the programme had ended:

“To see my mentors being part of Rhodes or any other university. So, every time I volunteer, I want to make sure that my mentees actually make it to any varsity regardless of what programme. If they want my help they can hit me up with anything, they do not have to be restricted to the programme because after grade 12 they are no longer part of the programme.” (Participant 9, May)

One participant did make it clear that securing employment was one of the main reasons for volunteering:

“I have to have something on my CV because employers do not just look

at your academic transcript, they also look at what you did outside university and academics.” (Participant 8, May)

Someone told me to join so that I could put it on my CV and that I need to do something else besides being academic. I was told that it would help me get a job.” (Participant 3, May)

Well, when I started, I was only about doing something to add to my CV.” (Participant 10, May)

On the other hand, one other participant mentioned that volunteering had a positive impact on her mental health:

“It is not about the CV; it is more about building relationship. I gain a lot from it, and it helps me with my mental health, and when I feel like I am in a dump I remember that I have so much and other people have so little as compared to me.” (Participant 5, May)

Of the participants above, all of the participants indicated at least one altruistic reason for volunteering, which is the majority. Very few participants volunteered for personal reasons such as volunteering to add something to their CV. The majority wanted to lend a helping hand to their mentees.

Identity agency refers to the capacity to act that is based patterns of behaviour, based on the role that one takes in a certain institution or structure, such as a specific profession (Hitlin & Elder, 2007). Important aspects of identity agency include receiving feedback on one’s behaviour so that one can act according to the acquired identity, as well as the formation of commitments and interactions with others.

Two participants mentioned that there were feedback and evaluation systems available which played a huge role in the improvement of the quality of their weekly sessions with mentees. These systems were essential in ensuring that student volunteers maintained appropriate conduct and interaction with their mentees:

“There is transport provided, training provided, and there is a feedback system to see how the mentees are progressing.” (Participant 4, May)

“Every week there is a feedback system, and we are encouraged to give feedback. At the end of the semester, we have an evaluation exercise of the experiences we have had throughout the semester and are taught on how to better handle situations going forward.” (Participant 5, May)

Relationship building was an important factor for some participants amongst other volunteers as some of them seemed to form their identities based on mutual and shared goals, visions and aims:

“We appreciate the principle and teamwork in relationship building...we are able to work through our differences, we are able to work through divergences. We are able to work through those differences because of a common goal and common understanding. We know what the vision is.” (Participant 1, May)

“We have a good working relationship because we seem to want the same thing. Volunteering with my peers provides a sense of community.” (Participant 8, May)

“It is very encouraging to be with other mentors in the programme because they push you as well.” (Participant 5, May)

“I have noticed that the people I work with want to make an impact because they were also once mentees, they want to help.” (Participant 3, May)

For some participants, creating a sense of community amongst fellow student volunteers meant being able to help in the execution of duties in instances where one was not able to do so:

“If there are instances where I am not able to be at the schools where I volunteer, I know that other volunteers will cover up for me. It is encouraging to see that others can pick up your slack. I can cover up for someone if they are not there and they can do the same for me, so it is a good working relationship.” (Participant 9, May)

There seemed to be a difference of opinion amongst some participants who felt that some student volunteers certainly did not share similar visions and goals regarding their work:

“It is ok. There is a sense of community as volunteers. It’s fun being involved with them. But definitely, we don’t volunteer for the same reasons.” (Participant 10, May)

Some participants mentioned that volunteering is not only beneficial for the mentees, but it was also mutually beneficial for themselves as volunteers:

“The relationship is beautiful...I specifically worked with high school

learners, and there is a shared understanding of what we are doing and why...there was an establishment of what we were doing and how it is beneficial to both parties.” (Participant 1, May)

The relationship between mentors and mentees signified a deeper connection between both parties. It was evident from the responses, that the mentors invest a lot into their relationships with their mentees, and that these relationships also motivated them to continue volunteering:

“Oh yes I do, and you know what? They keep me going now. The relationship I have with them is more of a sibling relationship. It really helps that I am not that much older than them, so I think that I am relatable. We are able to talk to them mostly about anything and everything really, and because I they see that I am in university, I think they aspire to get to where I am. It’s just sad to see the situations they come from at times because all of them are just beautiful souls. I want the very best for them.” (Participant 10, May)

“The relationship with my mentees is very good.” (Participant 2, May)

“It has always been good, and two of my mentees went to my high school, and because of that it strengthened our relationship because they were dealing with someone, they are familiar with.” (Participant 8, May)

“I would like to believe that we have a good relationship... I see my mentees as my younger brothers and sisters.” (Participant 3, May)

Some participants shared on some of their struggles regarding their mentor-mentee relationships:

“Some mentees are not open to the full journey of the programme...but the good experiences outweigh the bad.” (Participant 4, May)

“It is great but there is a bit of a language barrier, but we are able to navigate or way around it. As a white girl it is a bit different because I get asked if it is not weird for me to come into their spaces, they have so many questions about the white culture.” (Participant 5, May)

Most of the participants valued their relationships, amongst themselves as well as with their mentees. It was evident that a huge part of their identity and who they considered themselves to be as volunteers, was based off their relations with others. All the participants expressed identity agency.

Existential agency refers to the self-initiated, automatic capacity for self-empowerment that all individuals possess. Existential agency, or the potential for self-directed action, is a fundamental component of social action (Hitlin & Elder, 2007).

A few participants decided to volunteer to empower the community, most especially the youth. The importance of education was a common theme in their responses:

“I wish to create a space for empowerment...The university exists within the Makhanda community, and it needs to contribute to addressing some of the issues with the assets that it has, and how we can come together to address those issues which are socio-economic.” (Participant 1, May)

“I want to see the younger people prosper and do even better than me.” (Participant 2, May)

“My goal is to get more grade 12 learners to get access into the university, and more of them to be qualified for a bachelor's degree.” (Participant 4, May)

“I want to be a part of someone's success journey, I want to know that I helped out someone get into university.” (Participant 6, May)

“I want to make a difference in their lives, make a positive impact.” (Participant 7, May)

In as much as some student volunteers volunteered with the aim of empowering their mentees, it was evident that through their volunteer work, they were self-empowering as well. What is, however, most important in understanding existential agency is the capacity to act out of one's own free-will. The participants, all ten of them, made conscious decisions to volunteer. This was self-directed and expressed existential agency from all participants.

Pragmatic agency refers to the capacity to exert influence on novel or sudden situations, thereby giving the agent the power to decide how to react in that present moment, based on the immediate environment. When instinctive responses to predicted social behaviours fail, pragmatic agency shows itself in the kinds of activities that are undertaken. As we rely on established routines to direct interactions, habit drives a significant amount of our behaviour. However, when habits fail, we must make choices, and these decisions must always be made in the context of ongoing activity (Hitlin & Elder, 2007).

Whilst there weren't any narrative quotes from participants overtly expressing pragmatic agency, based off the definition given about this type of agency, it was evident that all participants expressed pragmatic agency. As per the definition given (also refer to the literature review), the world of volunteering for most of the participants was once something new, something of a 'novel situation,' as the majority of them started volunteering at Rhodes. Even though participants found themselves in the volunteer space of their own accord and volition, they found themselves having to exert pragmatic agency which means to take actions, and respond to a new routine, which was once outside off their norm.

Life-course agency - the type of agency that encompasses the pragmatic and pragmatic types of agency, by being a mix of identities and choices taken over the course of one's life (Hitlin & Elder, 2007).

Only one participant expressed the exertion of life-course agency:

"I have realized how much the matriculants need help from someone who is at a higher level, someone who is attending a higher-level education institution because I realize that there is a lot that they do not know. It is a very good initiative because the students in public schools do not get enough exposure to career guidance and how to go about applying for tertiary. I realize that is what I want to continue doing, and this probably won't be my last time volunteering, even after Rhodes I will continue to volunteer." (Participant 8, May)

One participant mentioned that they saw themselves volunteering post tertiary education. What the findings above suggested under this form of agency was that volunteering for students at Rhodes University was tied to their student identity; it is something that they will not involve themselves in after graduating. The majority of participants did not seem to see volunteering as a life-course activity.

Collective agency refers to the capacity for a group to act and achieve the desired outcome, as a collective (Adeyeri, 2012; Bandura, 2001). It shifts the focus from the actions of an individual to that of a collective who have the same aims and goals. Collective agency also consists of different people from varied backgrounds and cultures, with a difference in opinions on views on subject matters.

A few participants appreciated the team effort that they put into working together for a common goal, and the shared values and interests in being volunteers:

“My experience in community engagement is that we appreciate the principle and teamwork in relationship building... We are able to work through those differences because of a common goal and common understanding. We know what the vision is.” (Participant 1, May)

“I have noticed that the people I work with want to make an impact.” (Participant 3, May)

One participant made mention that one factor that other participants had in common is their backgrounds, and that this influenced their shared interests in becoming volunteers:

“I do think we have the same goals. I think that most of the people who volunteer are somewhat from a disadvantaged background and because they know the pain of not having the right resources to get into higher education, they want to be the support system for others as well. Others might be doing it for their own personal reasons, but I would not know much about that unfortunately.” (Participant 6, May)

“I think most people who do it do so because they genuinely care and not just for their CV.” (Participant 7, May)

Some participants made it clear that not everyone in the programme was in it for the same reasons, and there was no consensus that there were any shared goals or interests. Some made mention that there were lot of different reasons why each of them volunteered:

“It is very encouraging to be with other mentors in the programme because they push you as well. I think everyone has different goals, definitely. Some people want to give back, some people are doing it to get jobs after university. Also, some volunteers are not as enthusiastic about being mentors....” (Participant 5, May)

“I would believe that each and everyone has their own agenda. I have never had the opportunity to ask why they are volunteering but I would believe that they are doing it for their own personal reasons. In the nine tenths programme, I would believe that most of them want to be role models to the matriculants.” (Participant 9, May)

One participant noticed that there was a shift in dedication with some volunteers which happened gradually overtime:

“Basically, last year, we had the same reasons for volunteering. We were like family, we were focused, stuck to what we were doing. But this year, things seem to have changed. We do not have that bond that we used to have. Things are more steep, as in, I now have to sort of beg for things to get done. I think people are now doing it to get a certificate at the end of the year because it shows that you have gained soft skills.” (Participant 2, May)

There was an apparent lack of commitment from some volunteers, which was a sign to some participants that not everyone had shared interests in the volunteer work that they did; nor that they shared any common interests and goals:

“I do not think we share similar goals, some mentors are not as committed to the programmes. There is a need to be committed as some mentors are not fully committed for the whole year.” (Participant 4, May)

“It’s fun being involved with them. But definitely, we don’t volunteer for the same reasons. And you can tell with how committed some are compared to others. Some are very excited most of the times, some seem that they are at times forced and I wonder why because they really aren’t.” (Participant 10, May)

Out of the ten participants, only four seemed to suggest that their fellow volunteers shared common interests, and shared the same goal or vision when it came to what they wanted to achieve through volunteering. Three of the participants noticed that not all their fellow volunteers had a shared goal in mind when it came to volunteering.

Proxy agency - under this type of agency, a proxy is used by someone because they are not able to take a certain action due to a lack of resources or power; therefore, someone acts on their behalf. Proxy agency can also be used if someone does not want to face the consequences that come with having direct control over a situation (Bandura, 2001; Adeyeri, 2012).

According to the definitions of proxy agency provided above, it is unclear if the student volunteers are acting in a proxy capacity. According to the definitions, because the RUCE office uses the student volunteers to carry out their work and to advance their mandate, they can be considered as proxy agents of the RUCE office. Bandura’s definition suggests that one negates the responsibility and consequences of action by using a proxy, and this

is not the case with the relationship between RUC and its student volunteers, as ultimately, RUC is accountable for their volunteers, and this does not align with the parameters of proxy agency set out in the definition above.

Social agency refers to another kind of agency that exists outside the individual and contributes to the establishment of certain social structures and cultural practices (Billett, 2008a; Markus, 2020). An important aspect of social agency is indicative of the level of cooperation and the relationship that exists between social agents in a context. The higher the level of cooperation and interaction amongst these actors, the more enhanced the level of social agency. The lesser the level of cooperation, the less enhanced the level of social agency. Collective agency and social agency are very similar.

Participant nine suggested that there was a high level of coordination and cooperation amongst volunteers. According to this participant, there was a mutual understanding of roles and responsibilities amongst student volunteers:

“If there are instances where I am not able to be at the schools where I volunteer, I know that other volunteers will cover up for me. It is encouraging to see that others can pick up your slack. I can cover up for someone if they are not there and they can do the same for me, so it is a good working relationship.” (Participant 9, May)

Some of the responses made mention of teamwork and relationship building, which was indicative of high cooperation levels amongst volunteers:

“My experience in community engagement is that we appreciate the principle and teamwork in relationship building... We are able to work through those differences because of a common goal and common understanding. We know what the vision is.” (Participant 1, May)

Some participants felt that there was a lack of commitment amongst volunteers, and this was indicative of lower levels of cooperation and coordination:

“I do not think we share similar goals; some mentors are not as committed to the programmes. There is a need to be committed as some mentors are not fully committed for the whole year...” (Participant 4, May)

“It’s fun being involved with them. But definitely, we don’t volunteer for the same reasons. And you can tell with how committed some are compared to others. Some are very excited most of the times, some seem that they are at times forced and I wonder why because they really aren’t.” (Participant 10, May)

A few participants mentioned the lack of commitment starting to show amongst fellow volunteers after a period of time. Some also mentioned that their relationships and bonds were no longer the same over a period time, which influenced the level of coordination amongst them negatively:

“Basically, last year, we had the same reasons for volunteering. We were like family, we were focused, stuck to what we were doing. But this year, things seem to have changed. We do not have that bond that we used to have. Things are more steep, as in, I now have to sort of beg for things to get done. I think people are now doing it to get a certificate at the end of the year because it shows that you have gained soft skills.” (Participant 2, May)

“It is very encouraging to be with other mentors in the programme because they push you as well. I think everyone has different goals, definitely. Some people want to give back, some people are doing it to get jobs after university. Also, some volunteers are not as enthusiastic about being mentors...” (Participant 5, May).

Of the six participants quoted above, it was not clear that there was a definite level of understanding, co-operation, and coordination amongst volunteers. Two of the participants were of the opinions that the level of commitment of fellow student volunteers waned overtime, and a further two commented that they did not think that some volunteers were committed enough to the course. Two of the participants indicated that there were high levels of commitment and understanding amongst the volunteers.

3.

The following excerpt narrative quotes do not fall into the developed agency thematic framework but are pertinent responses from the participants.

Cultural background

There was mention of a few participants' religious backgrounds having an impact on their motivation to volunteer. One participant mentioned that they were indoctrinated to possess altruistic qualities as part of the Christian religion:

"What pushed me was my religious background and my wish to help."

(Participant 2, May)

"My motivation came from my Christian background because we were taught to serve one another and to offer help where there is a gap. I have always been a Sunday school child, and these are the things that contributed. At my church, we were involved in cleaning activities in the community, and I made sure to keep that trait." (Participant 4, May)

"For me, religion did play a part because of it I know that giving back is a good thing. Even back home, I have seen my parents help other people, so I felt that if I carry on the tradition even if it is not financial help, it will be a good thing." (Participant 9, May)

A few participants did make mention that the manner in which they were brought up, their experiences, and the impact of people in their lives, played a role in their decisions to volunteer:

"It is influenced by the way I grew up. I was raised in a multicultural environment and was raised by my second mother, Mama Thenjiwe³, who taught myself and my brothers that if you are eating others should eat as well. So, it is more of giving back and being able to receive at the same time. I am learning a lot about different people, and it is more of a mutual relationship." (Participant 5, May)

"I come from a family background where I was taught to help others. So perhaps that does play a role." (Participant 6, May)

It was not all the participants that thought their upbringing influenced their decision to volunteer:

"I cannot say that my upbringing has in anyway impacted my decision to volunteer." (Participant 7, May)

"Truly speaking, I would not say that my upbringing or background has a role. Someone told me to join so that I could put it on my CV and that I need to do something else besides being academic." (Participant 3, May)

³ "Thenjiwe" is a pseudonym used to protect the identity of the participant.

The matters referred to by the participants spoke to structural influences on the student volunteers, most of which were surrounding family and culture. Only two participants said that their upbringing had not influenced their decision to volunteer. Five of these participants mentioned that their family and cultural background influenced them to volunteer.

Longevity of service

A majority of the participants have been volunteering for more than one year:

“I have been in the programme for three years.” (Participant 1, May)

“I started with Budding Q. Last year was my first year in this specific programme...this is my second year in the programme.” (Participant 2, May)

“This is my second year in Nine Tenths.” (Participant 3, May)

“I started volunteering since 2017 but joined this programme in 2018.” (Participant 4, May)

“I have been volunteering for two years.” (Participant, 6 May)

“I started with Budding Q and came to Nine tenths in 2021 and this is my third year.” (Participant 7, May)

Quite a handful of participants mentioned that the Nine-Tenths programme was not the first volunteer programme they were a part of. Some participants were previously enrolled into other programmes such as the Tutoring Mentoring programme, and others from the Budding Q programme:

“I was just volunteering because I wanted something to do, that was back in 2021 I started with Budding Q. Last year was my first year in this specific programme.” (Participant 1, May)

“Last year I did Budding Q, and I also was part of a tutoring programme. Personally, what I like is to mentor the youth.” (Participant 3, May)

“Started with Budding Q but then transitioned to the Nine tenths programme.” (Participant 5, May)

Two of the participants who had previously been in the Budding Q programme mentioned that they did not feel too comfortable working with children of a younger age, since the

focus of the Budding Q programme is early childhood development. Instead, they felt that they related more with the matriculants partly due to shared experiences:

“I started with Budding Q and came to Nine tenths in 2021. I felt limited with younger children with Budding Q, and I felt I was not having as much of an impact. I wanted to join Nine tenths programme because you deal with matriculants and at that stage of your life is pivotal and can drastically change your life.” (Participant 7, May)

“I chose this programme because with other programmes such as Budding Q, I can relate more to matriculants because I myself was in their shoes not so long ago.” (Participant 8, May)

Some participants spoke about the lack of support that their mentees received in secondary school. A lot of them did not have the support from both family members, as well as the school support systems, in their transitions from secondary school to tertiary education. There was a trend of a lack of career guidance in most of the secondary schools, which in turn, negatively affected the enthusiasm of the learners who wanted to enrol for tertiary education:

“I come from a disadvantaged school, and we did not have access to tutors and all that. So, I wanted to do for others what I did not get when I needed it.” (Participant 6, May)

“I am involved in the nine tenths programme, and I have noticed that the learners that are in grade 12. Many of these learners do not stay with their parents but rather their grandparents. As a result, their grandparents are not able to help them with their schoolwork especially in their transition from high school to university, they are not able to help them and counsel them, things that are supposed to be done by parents who are more exposed because if you are not exposed or gone to university before it will not make sense to you. A lot of the older generations did not have the opportunity to attend university or higher education. What you do not know or have you cannot explain. A lot of the children in the community do not have ambition. When they do not get to the pass mark they end up on the streets. When the energy is not diverted energy, they end up cutting cables and those who are in university such as myself end up being the one who is affected.” (Participant 4, May)

“I have realised how much the matriculants need help from someone who is at a higher level, someone who is attending a higher-level education institution because I realise that there is a lot that they do not know. It is a very good initiative because the students in public schools do not get enough exposure to career guidance and how to go about applying for tertiary.” (Participant 8, May)

Six of the participants mentioned that they had volunteering for more than a year, which was indicative of a good retention of volunteers by RUCE, even if some of them changed volunteering programmes to those that they felt most comfortable in. Also importantly was the four student volunteers who mentioned that their own experiences of not having received guidance and mentorship when they were in secondary school, heavily influenced their passion for volunteering.

Support from RUCE and level of autonomy

There was a feedback system, according to the participants, that allowed them to make suggestions to the division. Training was also provided to the student volunteers at the start of every year:

“We are supported by RUCE. All the support that we need is provided. There is transport provided, training provided, and there is a feedback system to see how the mentees are progressing. There is so much support from RUCE. There is a booklet given that we can go through to guide you as a mentor. There are restrictions on what can and cannot be done.”
(Participant 4, May)

“Yes, we do. I feel protected and you can speak to the coordinators if I ever feel unsafe. Every week there is a feedback system, and we are encouraged to give feedback. At the end of the semester, we have an evaluation exercise of the experiences we have had throughout the semester and are taught on how to better handle situations going forward.”
(Participant 5, May)

Yes. They really do the best that they can. Transport is provided to the places and schools we volunteer at. There is training at the start of the year. They are available if they need to talk. So there is support, I don't think there is much more they can do.” (Participant 10, May)

“We have the freedom to suggest things. We can tell them of things to do differently. We are listened to, definitely.” (Participant 2, May)

Participants have the leeway to conduct sessions as they see fit, and are not restricted to the guidelines:

There is structure to the programme. If you would like to go beyond the scope of the programme, you are allowed to. You are given a certain level of autonomy to decide what you think is best for your mentees.”
(Participant 3, May)

“It is not that strict. You are able to adjust activities to what suits yourself

and your mentees, but that weekly sessions when I can meet my mentees is fixed and can't be changed." (Participant 6)

"There is a lot of autonomy we are given. We do receive guidelines, but we can approach them in any way comfortable for us. So you do have agency because there is no staff member that tells you that this is how you are supposed to do things." (Participant 7, May)

"We do have a booklet that guides us on what you do each session, but it is not strict. And obviously if you have a good relationship with your mentees, sometimes when having conversations, and you find yourselves talking about something else other than what the booklet tells you to. We have never been told not to derail from the guidelines, and we are only asked if we delivered that which we were supposed." (Participant 8, May)

"We are given guidelines but how you handle the session depends on the method you believe is best for you and your mentees, because I might have a method that I think would work for me at the same time my mentees would have a different approach. So RUCE does provide us with guidelines and they tell us that in this session we are doing this and that. So from there, as a mentor in agreement with the mentees, you develop a method of how to handle the session. I believe that we as volunteers are given an opportunity our own way of handling sessions. What you do with the guidelines is up to you." (Participant 9, May)

One participant was of the opinion that the guidelines were necessary to creating boundaries between them and their mentees:

All programmes are structured. There are regulations and guidelines of how to do things. There are certain rules. There is a distinction between personal and professional, and having so much freedom in such a programme would not work because the focus is on education, school and bettering themselves. If there is much freedom, the lines between professional and personal are blurred. You are allowed to share ideas on how to better the programme at the end of the year, and even assist the RUCE research group on how to make the programmes better. There is a space for one to engage and contribute to the growth of the programme." (Participant 1, May)

All participants indicated that they were heavily supported by RUCE in their volunteer work.

Worth further mentioning is that some of the narrative quotes were used more than once, some to indicate more than one expression of certain type of agency from a particular quote. This is evidence indicating that indeed, different forms of agency can be simultaneously expressed, by a single individual.

Chapter summary

All participants expressed **moral agency**; All the participants indicated **altruistic reasons** for volunteering, and four participants mentioned volunteering for their CV; all participants expressed **identity agency**; regarding the **life-course agency**, only one participant mentioned that they saw themselves volunteering post tertiary education; all participants made conscious, self-directed decisions to volunteer which was expressive of **existential agency**; based off the definition of **pragmatic agency**, it was evident that all participants expressed it; regarding **collective agency**, out of the 10 participants, only four seemed to suggest that their fellow volunteers shared common interests; in terms of **social agency**, only two of the participants indicated that there was high levels of cooperation and understanding amongst the volunteers; only two participants said that their upbringing had not influenced their decision to volunteer. Five of these participants said that their **family and cultural background** influenced them to volunteer; six of the participants mentioned that they had volunteering for **more than a year**; and all participants indicated that they were supported by RUC and indicated **high levels of autonomy** in their volunteer work.

Chapter 5: Analysis of agency in student volunteerism

Key arguments

"How does agency influence student volunteer participation at Rhodes University?" was the primary research question. It was essential to inquire the extent to which agency influences student volunteerism for this investigation by employing the analytical lens of student agency, which had not been thoroughly examined within the South African setting. A more in-depth discussion of student volunteering, its thematic components, and how various forms of student agency fit within these was used to address the research question. The researcher in this study suggested that 'student agency' was an umbrella term that was an integration of different types of agency. The aim of the discussion was to therefore explore how more than one form of agency can integrate into student agency, how these forms of agency are interlinked, as well as the structures/ factors that enable these expressions of agency.

It was crucial to provide an overview of volunteer work characteristics as proposed by different literature to set the context for the ensuing discussion:

Volunteerism by literature has been defined to be work that is done with the aim of addressing societal issues (Gray & Stevenson, 2020; Higgins & Kruglanski, 2007), that are often done without any form of monetary compensation or reward (Dingle, 2001; Omoto & Snyder, 1995). No one must be coerced or forced into volunteer work, and one must engage in volunteer work out of free-will (Salamon et al., 2011), regardless of their motivations which may be personal reasons or otherwise (Salamon et al., 2011). According to Finkelstein et al. (2005), the longevity of volunteer service must be long-term rather than short-term and can be done individually or via an organization (Salamon et al., 2011). Within the context of student volunteerism, this service is towards community members outside of a tertiary institution, in extracurricular activities (Knapp et al., 2022).

Discussion

Only one participant considered volunteering to be an activity that they would participate in post their tertiary education, which indicated that in the volunteer context, the life-course agency expressed by student volunteers was extremely low. Tertiary students found

themselves in a liminal stage of their lives, in which they had to make decisions that would most definitely affect the trajectory of the rest of their lives. Distinguishing between what one deems to be a long-term goal versus what they deem to be a short-term goal, is imperative in understanding present behaviour (Kok, 2007). As the life-course agency expressed was very low, it implied that student volunteers generally viewed volunteering as a short-term practice (Hitlin & Elder, 2007).

Hitlin & Elder (2007) define the life-course agency to be a mix of a change in identities that one takes throughout the course of their lives. Based on the life-course approach, the identity of a student volunteer is one of the many roles that one plays throughout the course of their lifetime (Desrochers et al., 2004), which indicates an intersection between the life-course and identity agency. The identity agency was expressed by all the participants. Identity agency places focus on an individual acquiring an identity for themselves, and within this research, the identity was that of a student volunteer.

The discussion in this research inquiry added to the ongoing conversation about how individual experiences of volunteers and their values are linked to their identity. In literature, there has been a gap in providing such insights, which needed to be conducted by investigating personal experiences and values against one's identity (Grönlund, 2011), which is a gap in knowledge that this research contributed towards as well. There have been some studies that have investigated the relationship between the role of identity and the commitment towards volunteering (Finkelstein et al., 2005; Grönlund, 2011), but these have not looked into the specific role of a student volunteer through a qualitative approach, which brings into discussion the theme of commitment.

A lack of commitment towards one's role as a volunteer might also indicate that a volunteer might not have fully immersed themselves in their role (Finkelstein et al., 2005; Grönlund, 2011). Four participants mentioned what they deemed to be a lack of commitment towards volunteering by other student volunteers. This can be indicative of the level of commitment a volunteer would have towards volunteer programmes. It would be expected that if volunteering is a long-term goal, that more effort, time and passion would be invested towards volunteer work (Desrochers et al., 2004; Finkelstein et al., 2005). High levels of commitment to goals are achieved when the individual believes the goal to be worthwhile or attainable. The noticeable lack of commitment mentioned by the four participants would

explain why only one participant foresaw volunteering as a long-term practice, it would also explain why some student volunteers might have indicated losing enthusiasm for their volunteer work.

According to the above school of thought, if volunteering is viewed to be a short-term goal by a student, they would not be as committed in effort, and it would reflect in the longevity of their service. It is also otherwise noted that a volunteer's longevity of service is determined by whether their needs and motivations have been satisfied. Upon the satisfaction of their motives, volunteers tend to stop (Finkelstein et al., 2005). Based on the duration the different student volunteers have been involved in the programme, it would be safe to assume that a number of their motivations were being satisfied. This assumption was based on the volunteers all having been in the programme for longer than one year. As has been shown, all the students in the programme said that they volunteered out of goodwill, and it could be that the Nine Tenths programme satisfied their needs of wanting to play an active role in the surrounding community. This satisfaction was evident in the remarks of one participants that cited what one would refer to as 'the fruits of their labour.' This participant (participant 2) mentioned that some of their former mentees had enrolled as students at Rhodes University because of their efforts, saying "The relationship with my mentees is very good. My previous mentees are now students at Rhodes!"

It was expected that because the life-course agency expressed was low, that the participants' reasons for volunteering would be more self-serving in nature, which was not the case with these participants. The data showed that all the participants mentioned that some of the reasons for volunteering were largely altruistic in nature, or what can otherwise be referred to as 'goodwill.' This is a trait that can be referred to as an intrinsic motivation as it is inherent and is done purely because the individual wants to. Intrinsic motivation describes the inherent intentions one has towards a cause and why they seek to exercise their capacities in a designated area. Intrinsic motivators are as a result of genuine, innate interests in certain areas (Ryan & Deci, 2000), and people.

The development of a person's subjective dispositions, which are innate features including norms, motives, values, and personal attributes, is also crucial and are developed by volunteer work (Aboramadan, 2019). Only four of the participants (Participants 3, 8, 9, 10) admitted to volunteering for the purposes of securing employment after their tertiary

education. When asked if their reasons for volunteering had changed since incipency, two of them said they had been conscientized throughout their volunteering experience and had therefore leaned towards more altruistic reasons for volunteering. This demonstrates the value of deep and meaningful connections that were made between volunteers and mentees, and the role they can play in retaining volunteers and changing attitudes in the process (Omoto & Snyder, 1995). Additionally, the division (RUCE) had shown to enable effective interactions between mentors and mentees, and its interventions proved to be essential in sustaining the volunteer programmes (Reinklou & Rosén, 2013).

An important aspect of acquiring an identity is being able to regulate behaviour so that it is aligned to the identity. We see agency playing out in volunteerism when one is able to take charge of their decisions and choices, whereby individuals obtain the ability to self-regulate their influences, be it external, that contribute to the self and agency (Code, 2020). A strong motivating factor for volunteer work is therefore necessary to self-regulate and shape behaviour accordingly to achieve their desired goal, whatever it may be (Reinklou & Rosén, 2013). Setting attainable goals is most effective when these goals are evaluated, and feedback is given to demonstrate effective progress towards the objective. Positive feedback helps in cultivating a belief in oneself, as well as one's self-efficacy (Adeyeri, 2012). These goals and aims coupled with self-efficacy use the knowledge from past performances to adapt future performance to increase the chances of achieving the goal (Reinklou & Rosén, 2013). This again helps shape behaviour accordingly. Self-efficacy reflects how much belief an individual has in making an impact, and achieving a desired outcome (Adeyeri, 2012).

The participants reflected a high level of self-efficacy and the ability to achieve the goals they had outlined for themselves. This was noticeable in how they spoke about their mentees confidently as they mentioned the ways in which they carried out their weekly sessions. Participant 1 mentioned that volunteering for him began when he was a community engagement representative in his student residence and how occupying that position equipped him with leadership skills. His exact words were "I was able to be equipped with leadership skills... It is the realisation of those skills that I have and that I have gotten as a mentor that make me think I am capable of making change."

Regulation by the division was an important aspect of the student volunteer work. In the

responses captured from the participants, a majority mentioned the support that they received from the RUCE in the form of training, transportation, as well as emotional support from coordinators of the programmes. There was an established feedback and evaluation system aimed at refining and improving the volunteer programmes. The manner in which participants responded indicated that their behaviour and their role as student volunteers was to a great extent shaped by the support they received from RUCE, and the positive feedback they received from the division. Volunteers' performance along with their own feelings of satisfaction, when monitored by the division, affected their identities, attitudes, and behaviours, as well as their future commitment to volunteering (Gray & Stevenson, 2020). The opposite of positive feedback would be negative feedback, and these would be "threats, deadlines, directives, pressured evaluations, and imposed goals diminish intrinsic motivation because, like tangible rewards, they conduce toward an external perceived locus of causality" (Ryan & Deci, 1985, p.70). These types of negative feedback would not be viable in a volunteer space as it is not compulsory for student volunteers to volunteer, unless it be an academic requirement.

Despite the programme being well structured and organized, there was a perceived high level of autonomy among all the participants. The level of autonomy is relative in cases of receiving an external reward (such as a certificate of recognition), in the sense that an individual who is intrinsically motivated tends to take more initiative and autonomy over that particular activity. In instances where they do the work simply to achieve a certain goal which is usually due to an external reward, they tend to exert less autonomy and initiative (Ryan & Deci, 2000). In the case of the participants, their level of autonomy was highly influenced by RUCE. There was a lot of perceived trust between the division and the participants. Participant 7 mentioned that "there is a lot of autonomy we are given. We do receive guidelines, but we can approach them in any way comfortable for us..." According to the participants, guidelines set out for them were merely to guide them through their sessions with mentees, but they were not an absolute manual and directive that had to be strictly followed. One participant mentioned that the leniency they are provided in following the guidelines allowed for a more natural, humane and interactive approach, which would not be possible if they had to strictly stick to the guidelines.

There was not a perceived high sense of collective and social agency from the participant responses. These two forms of agency were measured based on the perceived levels of

cooperation between participants, as well as a perceived level of common interests among them. Only four seemed to suggest that their fellow volunteers shared common interests, and only two suggested that there were high levels of cooperation and interaction among student volunteers. The power of the collective has always been understated as much focus in volunteer work has been on the individual (Gray & Stevenson, 2020). What was evident from the study, as supported by (Gray & Stevenson, 2020), was that certain situations are better managed when handled by more than an individual, which is, by a collective or group. A collective, shared identity among volunteers goes a long way in keeping each other accountable for their behaviour, as well as executing tasks efficiently, or taking on someone else's tasks if they are unable to execute them. Participant 9 mentioned that if they were unable to carry out certain tasks or were not available to conduct their sessions, their fellow student volunteers would do so on their behalf. Despite this, the findings revealed that a group effort among volunteers does not always imply that individual goals are the same. This was evident from participants 2, 4, 5 and 10, who mentioned that not every student volunteer exerted the same effort into their work, which could be translated as a lack of interest and diminishing commitment towards the course.

The relationships the participants were involved in – those among themselves as well as their mentees, were very crucial in developing and regulating their sense of agency in volunteer work. Bandura (1986) lists these relationships as external rewards that are important in motivating one's behaviour, and in this context, contributing to volunteer work. Without these relationships, it is easier to be deterred and discouraged to continue with volunteer work. Another key relationship which played a significant supporting role was once again, that of the participants and the division. The division was portrayed by the participants as being heavily involved in their activities and genuinely concerned about their welfare, emotionally and otherwise. It goes without saying that without this support and general encouragement from RUCE, participants would not volunteer for the duration they do, no matter how long or short.

The drive to finish what one has set out to do to achieve their goals is driven by their motivation. According to Maslow's hierarchy of needs, the basic needs are the first and leading motivating factors in fulfilling one's goals, which could include a sense of belonging; or even literal basic needs such as housing and shelter (Reinklou & Rosén, 2013). Ryan &

Deci, (1985) refer to these as intrinsic motivators. Reinklou & Rosén (2013) postulate that motivating factors differ based on social settings and drives these factors. In instances where one's needs are more necessary for survival, the drive is significantly higher. In instances where the needs are not as urgent and not necessarily life-threatening, the drive and motivation is significantly less.

The theory above can be used to analyse why it is that some participants noticed a lack of enthusiasm and commitment towards their volunteer work, compared to others. Volunteering for the participants was certainly not a compulsory activity necessary for their survival. In fact, it was not the primary reason for their enrolment into Rhodes University, which was to receive an education. As previously mentioned, it was an activity they got involved in of their own volition for either altruistic reasons, or as something to add to their resumes to impress a prospective employer in the imminent future. The effort they exert in such an instance would purely depend on what it is they truly want to achieve through volunteer work, and how badly they want to achieve this goal, whatever the reason for their involvement may be.

All the participants expressed moral agency. These participants wanted to achieve something good, for the benefits of others, even though some of them had added alternative reasons for volunteering. It was revealed from the findings that religious institutions (as a social structure) played a significant role in fostering moral agency. Three participants (2,4 and 9) mentioned that their religious backgrounds played a role in cultivating their inclination towards volunteer work, with participant 4 saying “my motivation came from my Christian background because we were taught to serve one another and to offer help where there is a gap.” Even though the number of participants that acknowledged the role of religious institutions fall toward the lower margin, it was interesting to see how values that were instilled in them at a younger age still heavily influenced their behaviour as young adult scholars.

Whilst there have been assumptions that religious people are inherently moral, this assumption cannot hold with certainty for several reasons. Some of these reasons being the widespread number of religious denominations that might have a difference in ideology between what is right and wrong, as well as a growing deviation, among religious people, from their religious ideologies and the behaviour they encourage their followers to

subscribe to (Kelechi Iwuagwu, 2018). It is quite possible that some participants were raised in religious backgrounds, but do not subscribe to those beliefs. In fact, two participants (7 and 3) mentioned that their upbringings played no role in fostering their desire to volunteer, with participant 7 stating that “I cannot say that my upbringing has in anyway impacted my decision to volunteer.”

Morality from an African perspective, as cited by a plethora of authors on African morality, suggests that moral judgements are made in light of standards and values that have been outlined by societal customs, practices and family norms (Iwuagwu, 2018). As social structures, according to Fleetwood (2008), the family that one is raised in plays a significant role in how their agency is shaped and developed. Participants 9, 5 and 6 stated that the families that they grew up in instilled in them values of helping others and giving back to the community, with participant 6 stating that “I come from a family background where I was taught to help others.” They were evidence of the importance of establishing healthy, moulding environments from which children would eventually grow into being agents of social change. This is important to note because the way in which an individual sees themselves as part of a community bears influence toward how they relate to and treat others (Grönlund, 2011).

South Africa is a diverse country with people from different backgrounds and is constituted of different beliefs and religion. There is a close relation between morality and family, or community (Iwuagwu, 2018). Morality is fostered through families and is heavily influenced by these family belief systems and values. Whilst literature suggested that social structures such as family and religious institutions are crucial for the development of agency, the findings could not confirm these suggestions as a total of five participants did not attribute their agency to either social structure, and a further two overtly expressed that family and religious institutions played no role in developing their volunteer agency.

Other social structures (educational institutions) such as secondary schools (Fleetwood, 2008) were not identified as playing an active role in building agents of social change. Some of the participants in this research were previous learners in the township secondary schools in the surrounding communities, and they mentioned not having had adequate support with their transition from secondary to tertiary institutions. A total of four participants indicated not receiving any support with their transition in secondary school, and only one

reported receiving this support. This, for some of the participants, as has been previously stated, was the main reason for joining the Nine Tenths programme volunteer work at Rhodes. This speaks to a grave social ill in schools in the surrounding communities, and the need to equip such schools with the right tools and capacity to provide career guidance and mentorship to learners. It was clear, therefore, that these students developing an affinity for volunteer work emanated from a negative experience.

Emirbayer & Mische (1998) mention that the past does influence decisions taken at present, and we see this in the above, whereby student volunteers' sense of agency has been influenced by the past. However, the manner in which Emirbayer and Mische conceptualize past experiences does not necessarily apply in this study as their conceptualization involves maintaining an identity and meaning through repetition and habit that has been established in the past. This was not the case for participants as they were responding to a past negative experience, with a positive attitude, mindset and behaviour.

Chapter summary

The analysis responded to the key arguments of the study by revealing that indeed, more than one form of agency was exhibited by the student volunteers, which were enabled by certain social structures throughout their life.

The previous literature has revealed the different types of agency that are expressed in volunteer work, and the discussion has shown how these are expressed through student volunteers. Moreover, what the discussion also reveals is that this sense of agency, which is evident in most of the volunteers, is cultivated even before enrolling into a tertiary institution. Acquiring the agency to help other people and the community at large is cultivated early on in life, by the community one grows up, the family they are brought up in, and the schools they attend, essentially their environment. Even though it is not a majority that mentioned that their upbringings played a role in their willingness to volunteer, it is important to start the foundation and teachings of giving back at a young age. And the few participants that mentioned this are a testament to this.

What was most evident, which was an ongoing point made throughout the discussion was the support from RUC. This speaks to the necessity of having divisions, offices,

departments, and organizations as a whole playing a role in ensuring that their volunteers are well taken care of. As evidenced in this study, without this support, there is no chance of retaining volunteers. In as much as RUCES scores exceptionally high in supporting their student volunteers, there seems to be a perfect balance between the support they give to their volunteers and the level of autonomy and individuality given to them. As has been previously mentioned, this has provided for a more human approach. Within the context of volunteer work, where volunteers are there of their own freewill, this is an important factor to always consider because had there been strict rules and harsh guidelines on how to act or say, there is a high chance that there would be more volunteers exiting the programme than those entering.

Lastly, on the very important matter of commitment is firstly the innate desire for a volunteer to want to be committed to a course such as volunteer work. In developing this commitment, organizational support as has been discussed is crucial. Additionally, are the relationships amongst the volunteers themselves, as well as the relationships build with their mentees and community. These relationships serve as a form of motivation when volunteers feel demotivated to carry on their tasks. Yes, developing a strong sense of agency is important, but with the right support and enablers.

Re-defining student agency in the context of volunteerism

Below is a re-conceptualised diagram of the initial conceptual framework, based on the findings and analysis.

Figure 3: The umbrella of student agency



Source: Author's own, 2023

Figure 3 depicts a breakdown of student agency into the different forms of agency that inform it, which are: moral agency, identity agency, existential agency, and pragmatic agency. These are the most evident types of agency expressed in student volunteers.

Conclusion

The purpose of the research was to explore the role of agency in student participation in volunteer work at Rhodes University, whilst responding to the main research question, “How does agency influence student volunteer participation at Rhodes University?” The research therefore answered this research question by focusing on volunteer work as an avenue through which agency is expressed.

In concluding the study, Gray & Stevenson (2020) submit that “there is currently little research on the specific role played by volunteering organizations and communities in encouraging, sustaining, and enhancing the effects of volunteering.” (p.344). This research covers this gap by exploring the extent to which agency plays a role in student volunteer participation in a volunteer programme, at Rhodes University. Moreover, having nuanced the role agency plays in volunteerism uptake, it was made clearer as to how these programmes (as well as the organizations referred to by Gray & Stevenson) could be further sustained and improved.

Some of the early policies on which volunteer work is founded on in South Africa includes the South African Higher Education Policy White Paper of 1997, which widely referred to any work that includes any responsiveness to community needs as ‘community engagement.’ When introducing the research, the author made reference to other types of initiatives (such as service-learning programmes), that fall under the wide umbrella of community engagement (see *chapter 1*). This speaks to the need for institutions in the country to collaborate more in establishing effective programmes that would have a wider impact on communities. South African policy as well needs to delineate and prescribe adequately, the role and responsibilities that different institutions across all sectors, can play towards contributing towards the needs of the immediate communities in the areas in which they are situated. This would work towards establishing an effective response towards communities.

The author of the research hopes that the relevance of volunteer work has been highlighted, with more light shed on the importance of building responsible citizens that are responsive to the needs of their immediate, surrounding communities. The responsiveness of the youth, particularly those in tertiary Institutions proves effective because of their knowledge in their different fields of study. Building this interest in

volunteer work, and developing an affinity for it in HEIs is largely the responsibility of these educational institutions by playing an active role in ensuring that there are opportunities created for students to actively contribute and engage. Adding to this, higher education students, as has been reflected in the participant responses (see *chapter 4*), some participants did mention that their mentees see them as role models. This is an indication that there is a need for young people receiving an education at tertiary institutions to model exemplary behavior in their responsiveness towards societal matters, because it does have an inevitable impact on those coming after. Students are a key tool and resource in the effective responsiveness of tertiary institutions towards social responsibility, as was mandated by the SA Higher Education Policy White Paper of 1997. Without the student body, Higher Education Institutions cannot even begin to fulfil this responsibility.

Does the sense of agency to volunteer then start to develop at tertiary level? The literature provided (see *chapter 2*) brings about varying arguments. Some arguments mention that, sometimes an agent does not possess agency at all, and others have argued that agency can be developed or weakened. This research has illuminated that agency can be developed or weakened depending on the enabling factors. The sense of agency to volunteer can be developed way before an individual enroll into a tertiary institution. When appropriately developed, having a sense of agency serves as a motivator and driving force to make an impact. This sense of agency is developed by positive relationships, organizational support and social structures such as family, religious institutions and schools.

The findings of the study can be summarized as follows:

Agency was an integral part of student volunteerism first and foremost, because a student must be willing, of their own volition, to take part in volunteer work. This required for a certain level of agency, that was informed by culture, family, institutions of learning and social structures. The student volunteers' expression of student agency was an integration of several forms of agency which were: moral agency, identity agency, existential agency, and pragmatic agency. Student agency was sustained through organizational support, relationships formed with colleagues and mentees, as well as communal support, regardless of whether the student's initial intentions were to volunteer for personal reasons

or out of goodwill. Student agency therefore contributed to a positive volunteer experience that comprised healthy community-building relationships, intentional and committed agents of social change, and a strong organizational support system.

The researcher, through this process of inquiry was more than convinced in the power of volunteer work and the power of the collective towards a common goal. Through volunteer work, communities are empowered, lives are changed, and societal issues are better addressed. It is important for students in tertiary institutions to take up the baton as they prepare for adulthood by being intentional agents of social justice and social change.

Recommendations and future research

This study provided an optimistic start on research on student agency in volunteer programmes in South Africa. As previously mentioned, one of the shortfalls of the research was making an inquiry at an institution that boasts years of volunteer work advocacy; Rhodes University is also a historically white institution, which one can argue to be largely privileged compared to its counterpart institutions. Comparative studies between historically black and white institutions would make for a more interesting read and more nuanced research into the role of student agency within tertiary institutions in the broader South African context. With this comparison study, student volunteerism in HEIs in South Africa would be more accurately portrayed.

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Appendices

Appendix 1

Interview Questions

1. Why do you volunteer?
 - what was your childhood like growing up and do you think it played a role in making the decision to be a student volunteer?
2. Do you think the reasons you became a student volunteer still apply after the period of time for which you have been a volunteer?
3. How would you describe your working relationship with other volunteers and how do your goals and interest differ or resemble each other?
4. How would you describe your relationship with members of the surrounding community? How has this relationship affected your work as a volunteer?
5. How would you describe your level of autonomy as a student volunteer? Are there strict rules and guidelines to follow?
6. What support do you receive with respect to your volunteer work?
7. What do you want to achieve by volunteering – for yourself and the people that you interact with in your volunteer work?

Appendix 2

Ethics letter



SCHOOL OF GOVERNANCE ETHICS COMMITTEE

CONSTITUTED UNDER THE UNIVERSITY HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE (NON-MEDICAL)

CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE: WSG-2023-28

PROJECT TITLE: Student agency in volunteer programmes at Rhodes University.

INVESTIGATOR

Siphiwayinkosi Mdluli

SCHOOL/DEPARTMENT OF INVESTIGATOR School of Governance

DATE CONSIDERED

22 March 2023

DECISION OF THE COMMITTEE

Approved Unconditionally

RISK LEVEL

Low Risk

EXPIRY DATE

Report

Date of submission of the Research

ISSUE DATE OF CERTIFICATE 30 March 2023

CHAIRPERSON

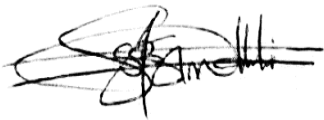
Rekgotsofetse Chikane

cc: Supervisor: Murray Cairns

DECLARATION OF INVESTIGATOR

To be completed in duplicate and **ONE COPY** returned to the Chairperson of the School/Department ethicscommittee.

I fully understand the conditions under which I am are authorized to carry out the abovementioned research and I guarantee to ensure compliance with these conditions. Should any departure to be contemplated from the researchprocedure as approved I/we undertake to resubmit the protocol to the Committee.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'S. J. Smith', written over a horizontal line.

Signature

Date

12/04/20223

**PLEASE QUOTE THE PROTOCOL NUMBER ON ALL
ENQUIRIES**

