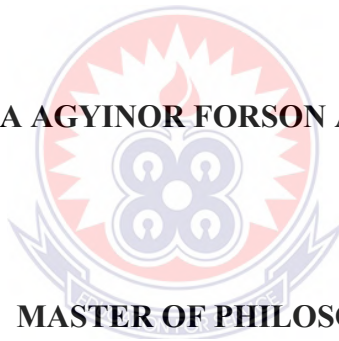


**UNIVERSITY OF EDUCATION, WINNEBA**

**IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION OF STUDENTS WITH HEARING  
IMPAIRMENT ON THE UNIVERSITY OF EDUCATION, WINNEBA  
CAMPUS: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY**

**LISA AGYINOR FORSON ABOAGYE**



**MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY**

**2022**

**UNIVERSITY OF EDUCATION, WINNEBA**

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**LISA AGYINOR FORSON ABOAGYE**



**A thesis in the Department of Communication Instruction,  
School of Communication and Media Studies, submitted to the School of  
Graduate Studies in partial fulfilment  
of the requirements for the award of the degree of  
Master of Philosophy  
(Communication Skills)  
in the University of Education, Winneba.**

**NOVEMBER, 2022**

## DECLARATION

### STUDENT'S DECLARATION

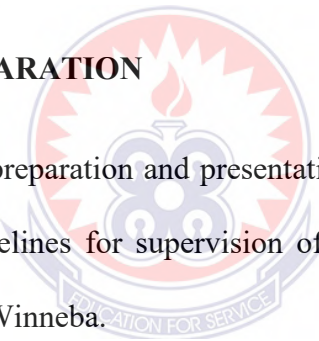
I, Lisa Agyinor Forson Aboagye, declare that this Thesis, with the exception of quotations and references contained in published works which have all been identified and duly acknowledged, is entirely my own original work, and it has not been submitted, either in part or whole, for another degree elsewhere.

SIGNATURE: .....

DATE: .....

### SUPERVISOR'S DECLARATION

I hereby declare that the preparation and presentation of this work was supervised in accordance with the guidelines for supervision of dissertation as laid down by the University of Education, Winneba.



NAME OF SUPERVISOR: **PROF. ANDY OFORI-BIRIKORANG**

SIGNATURE: .....

DATE: .....

## **DEDICATION**

I dedicate this work to my husband, daughter, parents and brother. It is also dedicated to all persons with hearing impairment, whose “voices” need to be heard, and their families.



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

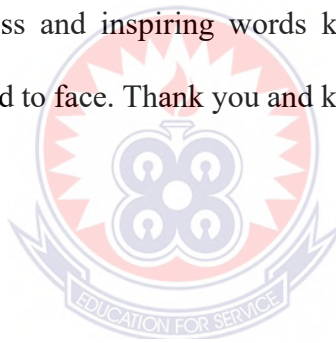
I could not have made it this far without you, Lord, and so my foremost appreciation goes to you. A number of people have contributed to the success of this thesis and deserve my appreciation as well. My greatest gratitude goes to Prof. Andy Ofori-Birikorang, my supervisor. Prof. has not just been a supervisor but a father and a mentor throughout. I want to appreciate your ever loving and tremendous support throughout. Your constructive criticisms, suggestions and input were instrumental in shaping this work. I am really grateful. God bless you.

I would also like to express my gratitude to Dr. Christiana Hammond, Mr. Kwesi Aggrey, Dr. Gifty Appiah-Adjei, Dr. Mavis Amo-Mensah, Dr. Albert Wornyo, Ms. Elizabeth Owusu Asiamah, Mr Rainbow Sackey, Mr. Nyamekye, Mr. Bismarck Odum-Sackey and Ms. Cecilia Agyapong for their academic and social support throughout my stay in the School of Communications and Media Studies. I am very grateful for your valuable contribution.

Special thanks to Mr. Mawuli Honu-Mensah of the Special Education Department, University of Education, Winneba for pushing me to pursue this topic and giving me guidance throughout this work. I would also like to appreciate my research assistant, Charles, who served as an interpreter and aided in the data transcription. I really appreciate everything. I would also like to thank all participants of this study (whose names continue to be withheld for the sake of confidentiality). Without your courage to step forward and bring to light your experiences and challenges as students with hearing impairment, this thesis would not have been a success. Thank you for availing yourselves and the candour in disclosing about such a sensitive and personal topic. I pray your “voices” are heard and your contributions make impact.

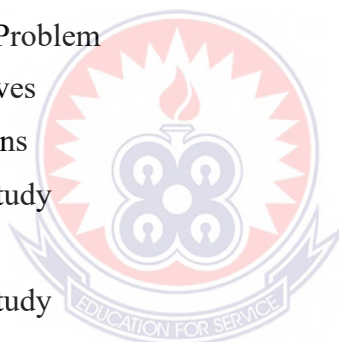
Without the support of my colleagues of COMSSA13, this entire stay in graduate school would have been a lonely one. Many and most thanks to my supportive peers; Abraham Atobrah Asiamah (my ever-loving and supportive husband), Emmanuel Nii Adama Mensah (I'm forever grateful and indebted to you my friend), Moses Eku, Ama Boatemaa and Racheal Abrokwah, whose own works have been an inspiration to do better and their kindness has surely kept me going throughout. God bless you all and my love is just deep for each one of you.

Finally, I would like to express my heartfelt gratitude to my ever-loving family - Mr. Emmanuel Agyinor, Ms Eleanor Bosompemaa Takyi, Michael Agyinor, Dr. Kwaku Peprah and all my uncles and auntie – for their limitless support and encouragement. Your belief in my success and inspiring words kept me going irrespective of the challenging moments I had to face. Thank you and kudos to each one of you. We made it!



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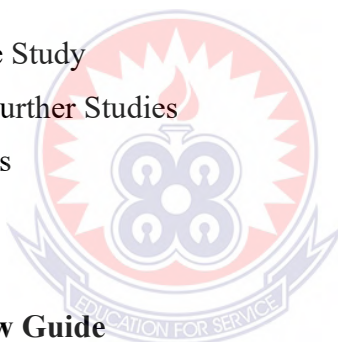


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## ABBREVIATIONS

WHO: World Health Organisation

PWD: Persons with Disability

D/HH: Deaf or Hard of Hearing

HH: Hard-of-hearing

IE: Inclusive Education

UNESCO: United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation

HEIs: Higher Educational Institutions

CTI: Communication Theory of Identity

SIT: Social Identity Theory

INT: Identity Negotiation Theory

SHIs: Students with Hearing Impairments

CHL: Conductive hearing loss

UEW: University of Education, Winneba

GSL: Ghanaian Sign Language

RCSSN: Resource Centre for Students with Special Needs

DAS: Deaf Acculturation Scale

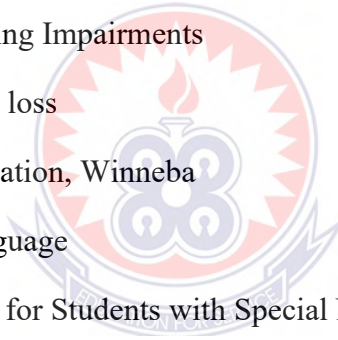
ASD: Association of Students with Disability

CHL: Conductive hearing loss

GNAD: Ghana National Association for the Deaf

GSS: Ghana Statistical Service

DIDS: Deaf Identity Development Scale



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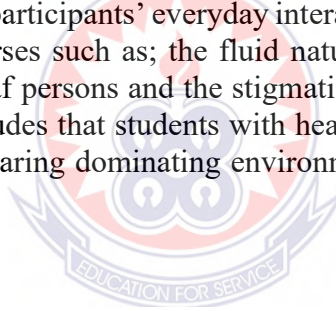
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## ABSTRACT

Identity construction and how individuals decide to navigate or portray themselves play an essential role in their communication with other individuals. The hearing impaired population is one group that encounters challenges when it comes to their identity construction in a hearing-dominant environment. This study as a result, seeks to examine the identity construction of students with hearing impairment in relation to their everyday interaction on a university campus (University of Education, Winneba). In this phenomenological study, the researcher purposively selects seven students with hearing impairment from the Special Education Department. With the aid of the Communication theory of identity, the Identity Negotiation theory and related reviewed literature, the researcher examines the identity these students construct in their communication with hearing peers and tutors. The study specifically explores the kinds of identity the students construct, how they negotiate their identity and further identifies the implication their identity has on Deaf or Hard of Hearing discourses. Through the use of interviews and observations, findings reveal that these students construct the Deaf, deaf and bicultural identities; however, the most domineering is the Deaf identity. Although participants express the challenge in fitting in, which is a revelation of identity gaps, they manage to negotiate their way through. Participants revealed that the ultimate means to negotiate in the hearing-domineering environment was through assertion of their identity using mindless behaviour, positive attitude, group association and humour. In addition, participants' everyday interaction and swing in identity, affirm assertions in deaf discourses such as; the fluid nature of deaf identity, preference of group associations by deaf persons and the stigmatisation and marginalisation of deaf persons. The study concludes that students with hearing impairment construct diverse deaf identities but in a hearing dominating environment, group association identity is most preferred.



## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

#### 1.0 Background to the Study

While in Secondary school, my peers and I wondered at the “things in the ears” of a colleague of ours. She was the odd person among us because of the things in her ears that easily identified her. Whispering to each other while covering our mouths, (because we knew she could lip-read), my peers and I would often point and laugh at her. She became the easy target – the person who was different from everyone else. We realised that anytime her family visited, they equally had similar items in their ears and that got me more curious. It was then she told me those devices were “hearing aids” which helped her to hear the sounds around her. With no one to understand her at school, we realised she was becoming extra shy and avoiding the company of many. In an attempt to hide her “disability” or difference, she quit wearing her hearing aids despite the fact that she needed them. I got closer to her and she told me she had to take a sign language class in her previous school and discovered that there was a community of Deaf individuals who appreciated their hearing loss and did not recognise it as a disability. In attempt to reach out in that community, she found out that she was an outsider even there. They referred to her as a “talkie” and considered her strange because she used spoken language and lip reading to communicate. She felt stranded, torn between two worlds and wondered where she fits in as she was different and often singled out from her hearing peers and felt unwelcomed in the Deaf community as well. That had been her battle for years; torn between the hearing world and the Deaf culture. I began to wonder about where she and others like her fit. How do they navigate their identity as individuals with hearing impairment in an otherwise hearing world? Do others

encounter similar challenges pertaining to their hearing impairment and their identity?  
How do they deal with these challenges?

According to the World Health Organisation (WHO) and World Bank (2011), an estimated one billion people or around 15 percent of the world's population have some form of disability. Talk of or think of disability and it is the person in the wheelchair, the blind, the deaf, and on rare occasions, people with intellectual impairment, that everyone pictures. Agyire-Tettey, et al., (2017) affirm the above by defining Persons with Disability (PWD) as one group of people within our environment we recognize vulnerable and persons of the minority group. However, Al Ju'beh (2015) and WHO & World Bank (2011) argue that, Persons with disability (PWDs) are diverse and cannot be defined by their disability. The identity of Persons with Disability (PWDs) is often visible (which the individual cannot deny or hide; talk of the blind) and other times hidden (which the individual will prefer to make it as such or disclose to others; talk of the hearing impaired or dyslexic).

### **1.1 Identity Construction**

Every person holds - a distinct character or personality that makes them different or stands out among others - an identity. Identity is not solely the personal traits and characteristics of an individual, but also the social relations, roles, and social group memberships that define the individual (Oyserman et al., 2012). As humans, we are naturally social beings and our lives revolve around communication, relationships and an environment (Seymour, 2016). The premise that humans are social subjects presumes that all identities are ultimately social and that the experience of 'who I am', is itself socially produced (Taylor, 2015).

Identity construction is very vital, and exists in every human and social interaction. In the construction of an identity, theories have it that, identities are necessarily multiple or fluid or both, on the basis that they are produced and could change partly by a person's interactional, situational, socio-historical, and cultural context (Taylor, 2015). An individual's identity is established through the individual's social interaction with other humans (Littlejohn et al., 2011). The concept of "identity" has become both a contested and a fertile field of research and theory in recent years (Watson, 2002). Several assumptions have come into focus: that identity can be structured upon shared social experiences; that there are fixed identities of persons with disabilities; and that the self plays a significant role in the formation of identity (Murugami, 2009). In everyday interaction, the views and reactions of others are internalised and that aid in identity construction although how we express ourselves and respond to others depict that too (Littlejohn et al., 2011). How an individual self-identifies or manages and constructs his or her personal-social identity influences many aspects of their life.

Hearing impairment (HI), at any age, has a massive impact on an individual's interaction with others, psychological wellbeing, quality of life and financial dependency (Olusanya et al., 2014). As disclosed by WHO & World Bank (2011), 430 million persons have hearing impairment of all kinds with a ratio of 91% adults and 9% children. Persons with hearing impairment are mostly categorized as deaf or hard of hearing (D/HH) based on the severity of their hearing loss which could either be permanent or fluctuating (Shemesh, 2010). According to the 2010 Population and Housing Census (PHC), in Ghana, persons with deafness are about 211,712 out of an entire population of 678,877 persons living with disabilities. Persons with hearing impairment are likely to face some challenges in relation to their social interaction because of the invisible nature of their disability and their inability to communicate like



every other individual (Wonkam-Tingang et al., 2021). Except for those whose hearing aids are noticeable, persons with hearing impairment may have to contend with people around them who are unaware of their disability. They might often witness hearing people become irritated or even disrespectful when they do not react immediately to their remarks, inquiries or commands. The hearing impaired who encounters such community reaction is likely to impose limits on their contact with the community (Ohlenforst et al., 2017), which might resort to frequent isolation. Since persons with hearing impairment report and are likely to experience some wide range of communicative experiences that relate to their identity, among persons of the hearing world, it stands to reason that these interactions shape and eventually define their deaf identity.

Identity does not simply exist on its own but is negotiated between interlocutors (Hecht, 1993; Meisenbach, 2010). Therefore, no matter how much these persons with hearing impairment identify themselves, their identity is likely to be changed or negotiated due to their interaction with others. Identity affects people's thoughts, emotions and behaviours; therefore, a consistent and stable identity is likely to experience some shifts which is key in the psychological and social well-being of the individual (Rabinovich & Morton, 2016). Nonetheless, when there is a change in an individual's setting, or the person is exposed to unfamiliar social circles, or has to cope with the stress of life, there is the likelihood of experiencing some identity conflicts and crisis (Elsayed, 2021). Individuals with hearing impairment, for example, are likely to be susceptible to these identity challenges as they transit to an environment dominated by hearing people who may have different views and reactions of them. Brown and Holloway (2008) assert that, a shift to a new environment could be "one of the most traumatic events in a person's life". It involves identity conflicts which can undermine the individual's

wellbeing and self-esteem, while exacerbating anger, defensiveness, and depression (Costigan et al., 2010; Jung & Hecht, 2008).

Education as a social welfare service has been provided so persons with hearing impairment could equally enjoy privileges and opportunities and become productive, employable and have successful and independent future (Agyire-Tettey et al., 2017). The Salamanca Statement of 1994, paved way for the introduction of Inclusive Education (IE) policy in various countries including Ghana. Inclusive Education (IE) is defined by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) as a process of addressing and responding to the various needs of all learners by increasing participation in learning and reducing exclusion within and from education. Due to IE, persons with diverse disability are able to interact with persons without disability in regular school environments. As learning communities, universities have over the years, given opportunities to people of different educational, cultural and social backgrounds, to develop their knowledge, competencies, skills, understandings and experiences (Kendall, 2016; Majoko, 2018). It has not just been another level in the learning process but, an environment for social networking and interaction, and an arena for young persons with disability to help construct an adult identity (Fordyce et al., 2013). Israelite et al. (2002) posit that, educational environments provide opportunities for social connection with peers as well as an opportunity to learn social standards that are acceptable in interaction. According to Yon (2000), the daily contacts and behaviours that characterize school life is a determinant of one's identity to a considerable extent. As young people begin to move away from their families because of education, their social acceptance and "fitting in" with peer groups become extremely important.

For the past sixty years, Ghana has strived to make it possible for deaf or hard-of-hearing (D/HH) individuals to attain formal education through an improvement in their school participation rates and lifelong learning for their independent living and sustainable development. Thus, persons with disability (PWD), including the hearing impaired, are increasingly gaining admissions into universities (Fobi & Opong, 2019). Finding themselves between two worlds (hearing and the deaf), students with hearing impairment (SHIs) are likely to assume or perform certain identities so as to fit in. In their social interaction, these students with hearing impairment (SHIs) are likely to create impressions on others that will enable them achieve their goals; what Goffman (1959) terms “impression management”, and they may join or coordinate with others to create collective performances in doing so (Buckingham, 2011). Goffman (1959) asserts that, “we are actors on a stage performing our identities for a specific audience.” According to Goffman, the individual exhibits himself on the “front-stage” and “back-stage” (Buckingham, 2011). When “on stage,” which in the case of these students, involves being in the classroom with hearing colleagues or in social gatherings, they may tend to conform to certain ways that their hearing peers assume for them so they could fit in. At the back stage, they have the opportunity to be more honest with themselves: the impressions created while on the stage (with hearing peers) may be directly contradictory. These students who are prone to performing their identities before hearing people may assume an identity worth praising before their audiences even though they may not accept that identity when behind closed doors. Since these students find themselves in a new environment, there is the likelihood of being victims of what Brown and Holloway (2008) assert as a shift in environment which could be one of the most traumatic events in a person’s life. Having others approve of one’s identity matters, therefore people tend to change their conduct so others view them as

they view themselves (Oyserman et al., 2012). As indicated earlier, identity is socially constructed therefore; persons are likely to act in ways that differ from how they see themselves. A clear way indicating identity as a social construct is through acting in ways that are (stereotypically) congruent with society's expectations (Oyserman et al., 2012). This is to say, the hearing impaired who do not see his impairment as a challenge or disability, might have to act in the opposite way thereby assuming a different identity, while on campus.

## **1.2 Statement of the Problem**

Humans are naturally social beings whose lives revolve around communication and relationships (Seymour, 2016). Therefore, in their everyday interactions with others, humans internalise people's views and reactions about them to form their identities (Murugami, 2009). It is however obvious that, in a hearing society where spoken language is the norm, persons with hearing impairment continues to find themselves in the minority. Among hearing persons, there is a lack of awareness and understanding of deafness which makes the identity of persons with hearing impairment a crucial issue. According to Mitchell and Karchmer (2014), approximately 90% of deaf children are born of hearing parents. Young et al. (2006) posit that it is a guarantee that these parents mostly feel confused and overwhelmed by the communication and education of their deaf children. These parents have to manage pressure from family members, cultural, medical and educational settings which often confuse them on the true identity of their wads and where they best fit (Moroe & Andrade, 2018). Grosjean (2010) states that there is a cultural divide within families which further complicate identity construction within the population of deaf people.

Commentaries and inconsistencies in knowledge of deafness have resorted to several researches. Deaf researches according to Marschark and Humphries (2010), initially

begun in the United Kingdom and the United States of America, focusing on the lives, culture, language, history and human rights of deaf persons. In an effort to encourage new voices and different perspectives of the phenomenon, researchers began to look at the experiences of deaf persons in a hearing environment (Hindhede, 2011) while others looked into deaf identity development (Bat-Chava, 2000; Maxwell-McCaw & Zea, 2011, Ohna, 2004). Other researchers have based on the findings of the above stated researches to also explore the identity of deaf individuals in their respective countries (Mugeere, 2015; Sari, 2005; Swanwick, 2018).

Over the last two decades, a large number of persons with hearing impairment have been attending mainstream schools (Hyde & Power, 2004) because of the initiation of inclusive education in their countries. The influx of students with hearing impairment in mainstream schools has caused researchers to investigate their experiences (Bell et al., 2016; Hyde & Power, 2004). Other researchers have also looked at the impact of mainstream school attendance, by these individuals with hearing impairment; on their deaf identity development (Brunnberg, 2010; Chen, 2014; Israelite et al., 2002; Kent, 2003; Sari, 2005). Findings of these studies revealed that students with hearing impairment experience negative reactions and feedback from hearing people which affect their identity development. Most of these studies earlier stated, have emanated from the Western setting and used quantitative method of analysis in identifying and describing the identity types of these students. Israelite et al. (2002) and Hadjidakou (2011), on the other hand resorted to using a qualitative method to analyse the educational experiences of adolescents in mainstream schools in relation to their deaf identity. Despite the fact that these studies have given critical information in advancing the understanding of deaf identity, more studies are still needed.

There seem to be scant research in Ghana in relation to the identity construction of deaf people. Existing works in Ghana have paid attention to the academic and social experiences of persons with hearing impairment (Mantey, 2017; Oppong et al., 2016; Oppong et al., 2018; Agyire-Tettey et al., 2017). From the Special Education and Disability stance, these studies have concluded that due to stigmatisation and inadequate knowledge on the part of lecturers and students on the disability phenomenon, SHIs sometimes hide their true identity which affects their academic performance in a whole. Although these findings raised issue of deaf identity among students, there appears to be no work investigating the identity construction of persons with hearing impairment in Ghana.

Evidence in the literature suggests that less is known about the identity construction of individuals with hearing impairment in Ghana. However, in other western settings, there exist studies on the identity construction or negotiation of persons with different forms of disability in educational and professional settings (Bell et al., 2016; Hindhede, 2011; Hourula, 2007; McIlroy & Storbeck, 2011; Hadjidakou & Nikolarazi, 2007). As a result, it can be argued that, undertaking a study in the Ghanaian context makes a significant contribution to this field.

Consequently, the main aim of this study therefore, is to examine the identity construction of students with hearing impairment in relation to their everyday experiences in school. Taking into account the value of international perspective on deaf identity, the lack of such research in the Ghanaian context, the value of qualitative research and the important role education plays in deaf identity development, there is the need for this study to be undertaken.

### **1.3 Research Objectives**

This research is to;

1. Identify the kinds of identity students with hearing impairments (SHIs) construct at UEW.
2. Ascertain how students with hearing impairments (SHIs) negotiate their identity at UEW.
3. Examine the implication of their identity construction on D/HH discourse.

### **1.4 Research Questions**

The study seeks to address the following questions;

1. What kinds of identity do students with hearing impairments (SHIs) construct at UEW?
2. How do students with hearing impairments (SHIs) negotiate their identities at UEW?
3. What implications do the identities of students with hearing impairments (SHIs) at UEW have on D/HH discourse?



### **1.5 Significance of Study**

Findings from this study will have significant implications for the fields of educational policy, administration, and research. This research will bring to bear the self-perception and identity of students with hearing impairment with respect to their social and academic integration in tertiary environments, and offer perspectives on the plights these students with hearing impairment experience in their daily interactions with faculty and other students. This knowledge of their experiences will prove useful to school personnel; staff, professors, administrators, other students and individuals working directly or indirectly with these students.

Further, the findings will inform policy guiding policy makers on the inclusion of interventions for streamlining learning experiences of students with hearing impairment. As such, course contents and modes of delivery will be thought through and tailored with students with hearing impairment in mind. Furthermore, findings from this research will prove useful in informing educational actors on the teaching and learning materials, language used, messages conveyed, gestures and discourses made by faculty and colleague students.

This study will also make available valuable information for hearing impaired students themselves who look forward to being enrolled in higher educational institutions (HEIs). The data gathered and analysed from the sample in this study will inform future students of HEIs who have hearing impairment on how to adapt and cope with the HEI environment. Finally, findings from this study will add valuable information to the body of literature available, not only to studies made on identity construction among students, but specifically to identity construction among students with hearing impairment.

### **1.6 Delimitation**

The study focused on identifying the kinds of identities students with hearing impairment (SHIs) construct on a university campus in Ghana. However, the study is limited to the Ghanaian context focusing on SHIs in the University of Education, Winneba. For the purpose of this study, the researcher engaged seven (7) SHIs. It is important to state that while there are other SHIs on campus, this study focused mainly on students in mainstream classroom (that is, studying in departments dominated by with hearing students). The study was also delimited to SHIs who have spent more than one academic year on campus. Therefore, level 100 students were exempted in this study. These students who were purposively sampled (level 200- 400), were selected on the basis that they were most likely to have lived diverse social and academic



experiences while on campus. Level 100 students were not included in the study because they were in their first semester and may have gained little experiences in relation to the topic under study.

### **1.7 Organisation of study**

The study is divided into five chapters. The first chapter sets the preliminary stage for the study. It comprises the background of the study, the objectives and research questions, significance of the study and the organisation of the study. The second chapter focuses on the review of related literature and the explication of the theoretical frameworks underpinning the study. The third chapter focuses on the process and procedures in data collection and analysis. It is an embodiment of the research approach and design, sample, sampling techniques, data collection instrument, process of data analysis and the method of data analysis. Chapter four provides the results and discussions of the findings. The issues were presented in themes and explained by using the theoretical framework and concepts in the literature reviewed. Chapter five offers the summary, conclusions and recommendations for further studies.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **2.0 Introduction**

This chapter evaluates, assess, reviews and critically analyses the literature which is of relevance to the study. Literature reviewed were categorised under headings such as; the concept of identity, overview of hearing impairment, Deaf culture/community, Deaf identity, and Students with hearing impairment and Identity.

#### **2.1 The Concept of Identity**

The concept of identity, aside being fluid remains an elusive area of research (Alhassan & Ridwan, 2021). In the view of Vignoles (2018), the concept of identity varies greatly making it difficult for it to be pinned down. Identity has been defined by some scholars of different studies as “unitary” or “multiple”, “real” or “constructed”, “stable” or “fluid”, “personal” or “social”, and many other ways that have often made it contradictory (Vignoles et al., 2011). However, looking at these various definitions, it could be deduced that identity is a broad term (Brubaker & Cooper, 2000). Humans construct their identities through interaction with external circumstances (Tajfel & Turner, 2004) and are subject to change due to social and cultural factors (Brandt, 2001). The social setting of an individual is not one but changes or evolves and so likely to affect the identity of the individual. Thus, identity is not static instead, has the tendency of changing depending on the situation or environment an individual finds himself/herself in (Windari, 2021). According to Bucholtz and Hall (2005), the social setting of an individual has influence on the individual’s identity. Similarly, Ofori-Birikorang (2014) asserts the possible change that might occur in an individual’s environment or culture triggers new identity formation; thereby harnessing the notion

of identity being fluid. The foregoing indicates that the fluid nature of identity makes it difficult for the phenomenon to have a general definition or one simple description.

Oyserman, et al., (2012) define identities as the traits and characteristics, the social relations, roles, and social group memberships of an individual. Oyserman et al.'s (2012) definition assumes that it is not only the physical appearance of an individual that depicts the individual's identity but also the actions the individual exhibit during interactions with others, certain responsibilities the person assumes as well as a group that the person associates with. This is to say, identity, according to Oyserman et al. (2012), is dynamic and not one. On their part, Roth (2006) and Sford and Prusak (2005) posit that identity is "man-made" and is constantly created and re-created and attained through a person's participation in social practices. Smith et al., (2017) are of the view that the various social practices individuals engage in, come to learn, the roles and culture within their environment, guide them in constructing an identity. Sford and Prusak (2005) further define identity as a collection of an individual's story which are *reifying*, *endorseable* and *significant*. According to them, the reifying quality of identity is when the individual uses verbs such as *be*, *have* or *can* and adverbs such as *always*, *never*, *usually*, among others which lay emphasis on the repetitiveness of the actions. "Endorseable" quality is when the individual's identity reflects the acceptable and approved ways of the society the individual associates with, while the "significant" quality is when change, should it occur, is likely to affect the individual's feeling. Therefore, according to their definition, identity in sum is an individual's narration of himself/herself. This standing then stipulates that, one's story might not always be the same, but will change over time depending on certain factors or situation, reiterating that identity is not one or static.

Vignoles (2018) in turn posit that identity refers to how people answer the question, “Who are you?” In his extensive study examining the interconnected nature of identity, Vignoles (2018) asserts that, schools of thought within the identity literature tend to emphasize that, identity is either solely personal or solely collective and over time when formed, could be maintained or changed. Vignoles (2018) in his study stipulates that identity is an integration of both the psychological and social being of an individual; the choices the individual makes, goals the individual is pursuing, emotional experiences, relationship with others (friendly and hostile treatment from them) and the individual’s own thought of himself. From a linguistics background, Norton (2016) on the other hand, defines identity as a way “people understand their relationship to the world, how that relationship is constructed across time and space and how people understand their possibilities for the future”. According to Norton (2016), through the use of language (communication), an individual is able to assume a certain identity. However, depending on the language used, this identity is bound to change and might not be a static one as a result of certain conditions the individual find himself/herself. Darvin and Norton (2015) assert that language constructs our sense of self, and that identity is multiple, changing, and a site of struggle.

Identity is described by Goffman (1959) as the presentation of self. That is, the action of an individual before others is his identity. In reference to Goffman’s (1959) definition, identity then is assumed to be a social construct since one develops a sense of who and what they are by observing and interpreting the responses of others (Crocker & Quinn, 2000). It is however not stable but likely to change depending on the audience or people you find yourself around. That is, before a particular individual, one can exhibit a certain identity because of who the said individual is but might not necessarily assume same in the midst of another group or before another individual. Hecht et al.,

(2005) describe identity as how an individual sees himself/herself while he/she considers other factors. Identity is a sense of self with personal, social, and communicative properties, which develops as individuals interact with others and take on different social roles across space and time (Hecht et al., 2005). That is, in our everyday interaction, whatever happens, an individual takes it into consideration and over time, see it as who he/she is.

The central focus of each of the definitions of identity given by the aforementioned scholars is that identity is unique, changes over time depending on some factors, is built through communication and is socially built. Although every individual possesses a unique identity, in instances where persons or group of people are said to have the same identity, there is that tendency of it changing in their expression due to a particular setting, experience or communication that has transpired. An example is the inconsistency in identity that may occur with hearing impaired individuals. Persons of the hearing world ascribe them one common identity – deafness - but in reality, these persons hold distinct identity. Chapman and Dammeyer (2017) posit that persons who are hearing impaired have four distinct identity; culturally deaf (Deaf), culturally hearing (deaf), bicultural (both Deaf and deaf) and the marginal (neither Deaf nor deaf). These groups of persons could individually possess any or all of these identities. However, difference in identity might come as a result of the social reactions or setting they find themselves in.

This study tries to assimilate various views on identity of hearing impaired in their social interaction with the hearing world and to synthesise ideas from different scholars. The views of scholars like Henri Tajfel, Michael Hecht, Ting-Toomey, among others, on identity, were synthesized. Postulations from Glickman and Carey (1993) and Bat-

Chava (2000) on deaf identity were equally synthesized in order to contextualize the discussion on the identity construction of students with hearing impairment.

## **2.2 Overview of Hearing Impairment**

The ear is an important part of the body that aids in perceiving sounds. Having the ability to hear is very vital to every human not only because it helps in the understanding of the world around us but also gives us the ability to interact with others. Several definitions of hearing impairment exist, however Duthey (2013) posits that for every study that seeks to have a definition of hearing impairment, the definition needs to be in line with that of World Health Organisation (WHO). WHO categorizes hearing impairment definition into adult hearing impairment and children hearing impairment. Hearing impairment in adult is a permanent unaided hearing threshold level (of an average frequency of 0.5, 1, 2, 4 kilohertz) for the better ear of 41 dB or greater while for children under 15 years, the unaided threshold level for a better ear of 31 dB or greater (Humes, 2019). Gudyanga et al. (2014) stipulate that, hearing impairment is a physical and observable condition which affects the hearing function. It is a “disability” that can affect the total being of an individual no matter the period of onset (Idris & Badzis, 2017). Hearing impairment according to Adadey et al., (2020), is the complete or partial loss of hearing in an individual. Persons with hearing impairment cannot hear sound within the normal range of hearing (Oxenham, 2018) which affects their communication (Adadey et al., 2020). Some persons with hearing impairment acquired this condition at birth which could be as a result of medical risk and diseases during pregnancy, or due to hereditary means (Mourtou, 2014).

The auditory system consists of an outer ear, the middle ear, inner ear, central auditory pathways and auditory cortex (Mourtou, 2014). Hearing occurs when sound waves enter the ear, moves down the ear canal and hits the eardrum, vibrates and pass the three

bones (ossicles) in the middle ear, picked up by small hair-like cells in the cochlea, transported to the brain and finally for the individual to interpret that sound (Felman, 2018). Several factors lead to hearing loss and every individual's hearing loss is peculiar (Mourtuou, 2014). There are three types of hearing impairment: conductive hearing loss, sensorineural hearing loss and the mixed hearing loss. Conductive hearing loss (CHL) is the condition where sound transmitted from the outer and middle ear to the inner ear is troubled (Mourtuou, 2014). It involves a reduction in the sound level or the ability of an individual to hear sounds faintly (Sataloff, 2014). It is that type of hearing that is detected medically and surgically corrected if detected early. Conditions associated with having some fluid in the middle of the ear as a result of colds, allergies, ear infections, perforated eardrum, among others, impacted earwax, infection in the ear canal, absence or malformation of the outer ear canal, or middle ear, as some conditions that place an individual's condition as conductive (Sataloff, 2014). Sensorineural hearing loss (SHL) is that kind of hearing loss that occurs due to damaged hair cells in the cochlea or long-term exposure to loud noises. Mourtuou (2014) posits that, it is the most frequent type of hearing loss where some sounds are not perceivable or distinguishable any longer. According to Rosemann and Thiel (2020), once this type of hearing loss is detected at an early age, the individual is likely to have difficulty in language development. Mixed hearing loss (MHL) is the condition where the individual has both conductive and sensorineural hearing damaged.

### **2.3 Deaf Culture/Community**

Before exploring the identity construction among deaf students or students with hearing impairment (used interchangeably) in this study, a general understanding of deafness, Deaf culture and Deaf community is needed. In the United States, according to Vohr (2003), approximately 2 to 3 of every 1000 children are born with some level of hearing

loss in either one or both ears. Out of this estimated deaf population, Mitchell and Karchmer (2014) posit that, 90% of these children are born to hearing parents. In 2011, Lin et al., also stipulated in their study in the US that, one child among eight children of 12 years and above have some form of hearing loss which is becoming a prevalence because more than 25% of people of 65 years and above also have a disabling hearing loss. In Ghana, according to the Ghana National Association for the Deaf (GNAD), approximately 0.4% of Ghana's population is deaf. The Ghana Statistical Service (GSS) gave a corresponding estimate of 211,712 deaf persons in the country during the 2010 Population and Housing Census (Nyarko, 2013).

The factors above depict the prevalence of deafness in the world; however, understanding its prevalence and severity in a way helps in getting a definition for deafness and a way to also get to understand the experiences of deaf persons within our society (Carter, 2015). According to Carter (2015), being deaf mostly involves having a unique identity, culture and community. This unique nature of deafness is seen in the various way it is spelt out; *Deaf*, referring to persons born deaf or experience this condition in early childhood and use sign language as a means of communicating, *deaf*, referring to those who see deafness as an audiological experience (Ladd, 2003). Deafness was previously seen as a pathological condition, looking at deaf persons from the lens of disability and treated as such. However, this is not the case today and deaf persons consider themselves not disabled (Carter, 2015). According to Carter (2015), although deaf individuals experience unique challenges while navigating within a hearing dominated world, deafness today, means belonging to a cultural realm (*Deaf Culture or Deaf Community*) where the individual gets recognition, support and satisfaction. Deaf community refers to a diverse group of individuals who identify themselves as hard of hearing to some degree. Carter (2015) posits that one outstanding



feature of this community or culture is the socialisation and maintenance of identity these persons derive among themselves.

## **2.4 Deaf Identity**

For decades, identity construction of deaf persons has been an area of interest for Deaf studies scholars (Bat-Chava, 2000; Glickman & Carey, 1993; Holcomb, 1997; Ohna, 2004). Deaf identity continues to be a vital issue in literature and in the past years have witnessed a variety of researches examining the facet of Deaf identity (Kunnen, 2014; McIlroy & Storbeck, 2011). The concept of identity for deaf people is socially constructed, influenced by factors such as the individual's characteristics, situational conditions, social conditions, and societal conditions (Foster & Kinuthia, 2003). Some scholars (Hadjikakou & Nikolarazi, 2007; McIlroy & Storbeck, 2011) have argued that the development of the self is closely linked to the individual's present and past experiences and interactions between that individual and the surrounding social environment. To deaf persons, deaf identity is also a very crucial concept (Chen, 2014), which highlights certain characteristics that distinct the deaf community from the hearing community, giving rise to a separate cultural and linguistic identity for a deaf person (McIlroy, 2008). This crucial concept of deaf identity was proved by Glickman and Carey (1993), Bat-Chava (2000) and other researchers; pointing out the diversity and construction of deaf identity in their studies.

In 1993, Glickman and Carey developed an instrument, the Deaf Identity Development Scale (DIDS) to measure the identity of deaf people. According to Chen (2014), Glickman was the first researcher who was interested in the development of a deaf identity. Glickman and Carey (1993) identified four categories of deaf identity: the "*immersion identity*" referring to those who are of the deaf stance and accept their condition as who they are and recognise it as not a disability; the "*culturally hearing*"

referring to persons who have the understanding of deafness as a medical condition or as a disability; the “*culturally marginal*” referring to persons who shift loyalties and are often confused regarding their identity to the deaf and hearing worlds and the “*bicultural identity*” referring to those individuals who are comfortable in both worlds.

Building on Glickman’s theory of DIDS, Holcomb (1997) propounded seven deaf identities and indicated that, the kind of identity that deaf individual construct, is dependent on the individual’s degree of exposure to the deaf community. The first deaf identity was the *balanced bicultural* identity which describes the deaf person who feels equally comfortable in both deaf and hearing cultures. The second, the *deaf-dominant bicultural* identity describes persons who are mostly involved in the deaf community but can relate well to hearing persons. The third, the *hearing-dominant bicultural* identity describes those persons who have limited involvement in the deaf community but who can interact comfortably with deaf people. The fourth are the *culturally isolated* identity describing those who avoid any kind of involvement with deaf people. The fifth, the *culturally separate* identity which best describes those who interact more with deaf people and less with hearing people. The sixth, the *culturally marginal* identity describes those deaf persons who are truly not comfortable in either the deaf community or among hearing people. The final identity, the *culturally captive* identity describes deaf persons who have had no opportunity to meet other deaf people and learn about deaf culture.

Ohna (2004) in his study through interviews examined how 22 deaf persons constructed their identity while learning to live under special conditions. In his study, Ohna (2004) identified that deaf identity is constructed in four stages; a taken for granted stage, alienation stage, an affiliation stage and a bicultural stage (which he terms, “deaf-in-my-own-way” stage). Ohna’s study gives us the understanding that deaf persons keep

negotiating their identities as they mature and that these individuals adapt to the prospects of others in their environment.

Using the Social Identity theory and through the use of cluster analysis, Bat-Chava (2000), analysed d/Deaf identities of 267 deaf adults. The Social Identity theory by Tajfel and Turner (2004) posit that, an individual will remain part of a group only if the group has a positive effect on the individual. Thereby guided by this theory and notion, Bat-Chava identified three categories of identity these deaf adult constructs, out of the four developed by Glickman (1996). His findings indicated that these three deaf identities are as a result of social change and individual movement. The three deaf identities identified by Bat-Chava (2000) are; the *culturally hearing (deaf)* identity, referring to the deaf person who assimilates into the hearing world by using their residual hearing and speech-reading, the *culturally deaf identity (Deaf)*, deaf individuals who use Sign Language and recognise their deafness as a unique identity and lastly, the *bicultural identity*, those who feel comfortable in both worlds by belonging to the Deaf culture/community and the hearing people.

Hindhede (2011), using disability theory as a framework and social science theories of identity, explored empirically how working-age adults confront the medical diagnosis of hearing impairment. It is argued that, compared with other types of impairments, in its manifestation, hearing impairment is invisible, which leaves the hearing disabled identity open to perpetual negotiation. For the hearing impaired, the identification of the self as disabled or able-bodied, of being hearing or of being categorised as hearing impaired by others, are matters of negotiation. The results of this study show that, instead of expressing emotions of anger, the participants often rely on pre-acknowledged and pre-articulated feelings which are culturally available; where “shame is a central possibility” (Goffman, 1959). By avoiding regular self-disclosure

and the seeking of reasonable assistance, students with hearing impairment may not be able to enjoy full and equal participation in academic life (Hindhede, 2011). Often, according to Hindhede (2011), in order to avoid embarrassment, the culturally hearing group pretend that they have heard what has been said and in order to avoid any awkward exposure and in an attempt to 'be normal', they refrain from requesting any accommodations that would help facilitate communication. They also develop what they perceive, from their point of view, to be perfectly adequate coping strategies in an attempt to be viewed as hearing.

## **2.5 Students with Hearing Impairment and Identity**

Identity plays a key role in the academic success of every student (Bell et al., 2016) since the perception the student holds of himself/herself and their opinion of how others see them go a long way to affect their interactions. According to Estaji and Ghiasvand (2021), identity has become the bread and butter of the educational diet. Every school environment is not only for academic purpose but also an avenue for communication and socialisation. Everyday interactions exist in this learning environment domineered by hearing persons. However, due to the invisible nature of hearing impairment (Hourula, 2007), the assumed identity of students with hearing impairment is open to unending negotiation ('normal hearing' versus having a disability) (Bell, et al., 2016). For the reason that deaf adolescents find themselves among persons of the hearing world, they are confronted with some special kind of identity crises (Bat-Chava, 2000; Glickman, 1996; Kobosko, 2010). A number of studies have been carried out investigating the impact of general school attendance of deaf people's identity (Hadjikakou & Nikolarazi, 2007) and have indicated that a considerable number of deaf children have been attending mainstream schools (Hyde & Power, 2004; Moores, 2001), and these students are likely to identify with the social and cultural norms of the

hearing community (Bat-Chava, 2000; Israelite et al., 2002; Maxwell-McCaw & Zea, 2011). These research works have identified the various identities students in mainstream schools construct, and have asserted that encounters through language and communication as well as feedback from hearing peers and some school authorities push them to assume these kinds of identities.

Israelite et al., (2002) in a qualitative study, explored the identity construction of seven adolescents who were enrolled in special classes for hard of hearing students. Their findings showed that, these students suffered negative experiences which included denunciation, isolation, and discrimination. All participants identified themselves as having the hard of hearing identity and emphasised that this identity aided them to connect with others of similar identity as well as a way to explore the Deaf world. The study highlighted the importance of oneness among hard of hearing students in mainstream settings, regardless of whether they decided to participate in the Deaf or hearing world.

Kent (2003) examined identity issues and aspects of the health behaviours of 52 mainstreamed hard-of-hearing (HH) students. Majority of the participants, HH students (55.8%) denounced having a deaf or hard of hearing identity. This denial of hearing disability was as a result of the frequencies of loneliness and bully they had to face. These findings by Kent (2003) supports the view that the school experience of a significant number of mainstreamed HH students is not supportive. Those students who did hold a firm stand of having this identity are physically and psychologically at risk and face negative stigma.

Hadjikakou and Nikolarazi (2007) in a qualitative study used in-depth semi-structured interviews to explore and analyse the impact educational experiences had on the

identity formation of 25 hearing impaired adults. These participants had had experiences in both special and mainstream schools. The study indicated that when it comes to participants' identity construction in a school environment, it is mainly dependent on their interactions with hearing or deaf peers and their language of communication with their peers at school. The study revealed that participants had developed three kinds of identities: culturally Deaf (those who socialise solely with those of the Deaf culture), culturally hearing (those who identify themselves with hearing individuals) and bicultural identity (those who identify themselves with both the hearing and Deaf cultures). No participants with a marginal identity were identified. The outcome of the study was on the stand that, social relationship and language used by hearing and deaf classmates trigger the changes in their identity construction.

Brunnberg (2010), in a longitudinal study, also explored the process of identity construction for 29 hard-of-hearing (HH) children who attended special classes in Sweden. The findings support the position that a bilingual HH identity exists. HH children often construct their identity by widening their reference group to include not just HH but also those who are 'almost the same'. They can have a sense of belonging either to deaf or hearing children, or both. In the development of identity HH children make distinctions between subgroups within their reference group. There were also children in crisis or with an unclear identity (marginal identity).

Hardy (2010) using a grounded theory approach, administered a semi-structured interview to 11 deaf adolescents. The objective of the study was to investigate the identity construction in terms of the awareness ideas of these 11 adolescents who were of the severe and profound hearing loss. Hardy (2010) used Tajfel's Social Identity Theory (postulating that, part of an individual's self-concept is from his membership of a social group; internalising and showing attributes of the group's values and beliefs)

in her analysis. The study's findings were that, all 11 adolescents assumed a group identity of *Deafness*.

Mcllroy and Storbeck (2011) in an ethnographic study explored how 9 deaf persons constructed their identity. Findings of their study indicated that, identity is flexible, thereby changing over time. In the study, they stipulated that the identity of these 9 persons show multiplicity from each of them and often the experiences are relatable and repeats itself. The experiences of the participants reflect the diversity and complexity of identity (Mcllroy & Storbeck, 2011) and highlighted the struggles deaf persons go through in their navigation in a hearing dominated world.

Kunnen (2014) for a period of five years studied the identity construction of 7 deaf students who attended mainstream secondary school. His study was on the basis of a hypothesis that, "deaf students face challenges and are confronted with identity crisis or conflicts". Findings of this study revealed that, indeed, deaf students' identity construction among fellow deaf students, face no crisis or conflict, however with hearing colleagues, they often have to negotiate or change their identity.

Although the studies described and reviewed above all contribute to our understanding of Deaf identity and the experiences of the deaf people or students, their focus was on the social association of these students which defines their identity. Their analysis is in line with Tajfel and Turner (2004) that identity is socially constructed. Thus, according to these studies, for students to have a sense of belonging in an educational environment being dominated by hearing folks, the best and conducive way is to assume the sense of Deaf identity even though each of these students on an individual or personal basis might assume any of the four deaf identities propounded by Glickman (1996). This study however, decides to look at identity of students from a different theoretical stance

which synthesises the diverse perspectives of identity and places communication at the centre of identity – Communication Theory of Identity (CTI) – as posited by Hecht (1993).

## **2.6 Theoretical Framework**

### **2.6.1 Communication Theory of Identity (CTI)**

Persons with hearing impairment certainly discuss and perform their identity for both hearing persons and persons with hearing impairment alike. The possibility of having positive or negative reactions and conceptions of hearing impairment from people exist. Therefore, it stands to reason that persons with hearing impairment might be confronted with the task of often addressing and probably integrating these inconsistent reactions and conceptions. With this in mind, Hecht's (1993) Communication Theory of Identity (CTI) can serve as a valuable framework to help explore how students with hearing impairment construct their identity communicatively. According to Hecht, identity is traditionally conceptualised as a personal construct, such that each individual's true identity is from within. However, although CTI is rooted in this acceptably tradition of identity being personal and from within, it also underpins social constructivism. CTI postulates that, identity is shaped and re-shaped through communication within our everyday social interactions. In this theory, identity is not regarded as a single unit but instead, a layered component that could possibly complement or contradict each other and shifts over time. Jung and Hecht (2004) posit that, in CTI, identity is viewed as a social relation and roles performed by the individual, as well as the resulting social behaviour and self-concept of that individual. It is shaped through communication and portrayed socially through the individual's communication. According to Hecht, et al. (2005), through social interactions, an individual internalised what is communicated, develops a symbolic meaning out of it and associate those meanings with the self.



CTI was primarily attributed to Michael Hecht and his colleagues to explore the topic of personal identity as well as, how two or more areas of an individual's identity may be in opposition at any given time (Hecht, 1993). However, in subsequent works, only Hecht is attributed to this theory. CTI focuses on how identity and communication are reciprocal and conceptualises identity as communication rather than it being a mere outcome of communication or vice versa (Jung & Hecht, 2004). Hecht (1993) stipulates that identity is of four layers: personal, enacted relational and communal. These layers refer to the four loci of identity: within the individual, within interaction, within relationships and within a group.

The first frame of CTI is the *personal layer* which focuses on the individual's personal definition of self which includes; the self-concept, self-image, feelings, perception or thought and spiritual understanding of the self. It exists at the individual level of analysis as a characteristic of individuals (Jung & Hecht, 2004). This layer of identity takes place when "the individual communicates intrapersonally to himself/herself" (Daniels & Rittenour, 2018, p. 39). The second layer of identity is the *enacted layer*. This layer is the individual's performance or expression of the self among others. This is basically the identity constructed in communication or interaction. It could include certain habits of the individual, jobs, lifestyle and hairstyle, among others. For example, in an everyday communicative behaviour of cracking jokes, one can have an enacted layer of identity of a funny person. The *relational layer*, which is the third loci of identity, is the identity created through interpersonal relationships, social roles and interactions with particular people. It can be categorised into four different levels (Jung & Hecht, 2004). For the first level, the individual develops and shapes his identity on the basis of how others see him/her. According to Jung and Hecht (2004), this is referred to as the *ascribed relational identity*. The second level is the relationships that the

individual has with others and the social roles exhibited in that relationship. This relational identity could include being a spouse of or a friend to someone. The third level is the identity that exists in relationship to other identities (Jung & Hecht, 2004). This level exists because of the multiple nature of identity of an individual. For instance, one can be a mother and a teacher at the same time, a lover and a member of a hate group, among others. The final level of the relational identity; a relationship in itself can be regarded as a unit of identity. Baxter (2004) cites “a couple” as an example of this kind of relationship identity, since it is a single identity. The last layer stipulated in CTI is the *communal layer*. The communal layer illustrates how social groups like cultural, national or religious groups define and describe one’s identity. This identity layer is grounded on the principles of the Social Identity Theory (SIT) of Tajfel & Turner (2004). Drummond and Orbe (2009, p.81) describe it as the identity of a larger social group that “binds us together through collective memories, histories, rituals and practices”. The four frames describe the “location” of identity or where identity could be situated (within the individual, within relationship or within a group). According to Urban and Orbe (2010), these four layers guide appropriate and effective communication since through communication; an individual is able to absorb social perspectives and norms so as to define an identity.

Although described independently, these four layers interact and overlap sometimes with one another (Jung & Hecht, 2004; Pang & Hutchinson, 2018). An individual’s personal identity is imbued into his/her enacted or relational and other times, the communal identities. This is what CTI posits as the *interpenetration of the layers*. For instance, an individual’s personal identity of being a male or female cannot be examined without considering how society views gender roles (communal identity) or how others view this individual as a man or woman (relational identity). CTI postulates

that, these four layers may not always coexist but in some instances, prove to be inconsistent thereby causing identity gaps (Hecht et al., 2014). Identity gap may occur through external interactions and is expected during communication. Since no individual is faultless during communication and persons involved might be relating on different levels of the frames during the conversation, the result would be having different interpretations and social interactions (Jung & Hecht, 2004) thereby causing the discrepancies in identity. According to Jung et al. (2007), identity gaps are chasms, disconnects or discrepancies that occur between or among the four identities. Theoretically, there are 11 different types of identity gaps that can potentially occur within a study when using CTI (Jung & Hecht, 2008). These identity gaps may include; personal-enacted, personal-relational, personal-communal, enacted-relational, enacted-communal, relational-communal, personal-enacted-relational, personal-enacted-communal, personal-relational-communal, enacted-relational-communal and personal-enacted-relational-communal gaps. However, within literature, existing gaps that have been seen as more frequent are the personal-enacted and personal-relational gaps (Drummond & Orbe, 2009; Jung & Hecht, 2004; Nuru, 2014). The personal-enacted for instance, are recognised when people are able to detect that their messages do not match the meaning they wanted to communicate during the conversation (Jung et al., 2007). The personal-relational gap on the other hand can occur when there is a disparity between how the individual perceives himself/herself and the perception of himself/herself created in the minds of others around (Jung & Hecht, 2004).

### **2.6.2 Identity Negotiation Theory (INT)**

Many models and theories exist and have been proposed by communication researchers when it comes to dealing with group identity formation and transformation of persons of the minority group or immigrants (Ting-Toomey, 2005). One of these theories is the

Identity Negotiation theory, which postulates that the identity of every individual is at one point asserted, defined and/or changed during mutual communication (Ting-Toomey & Dorjee, 2018). The Identity Negotiation Theory (INT) by Ting-Toomey highlights the negotiations in interactional dynamics and explains how each individual carries and negotiates multiple conceptions of themselves as a result of interactions with others, societal norms as well as their personal view of themselves. Identity negotiations are unpredictable and occur as a result of an individual's ethnic, cultural, personal and situational norms. According to INT, for an individual to have a sense of being understood and respected and also have a successful balance while negotiating his/her personal and social identities, it is dependent on the individual's knowledge, mindfulness and interaction abilities (Ting-Toomey, 2005).

INT was first introduced by Ting-Toomey in 1896, as a chapter in a book edited by William B. Gudykunst, with the focus on emphasising the importance of affirming both sociocultural group membership and personal identity issues developed during intergroup-interpersonal relationships (Tin-Toomey, 2015). In INT, "identity" makes reference to the multiplicity of identity of an individual; be it cultural, ethnical, religious, social classification, gender, sexual orientation, professional, family/relational roles, and personal images based on the individual's view or other social factors or people (Ting-Toomey, 2015). The term "negotiation" in INT also means the exchange of verbal and non-verbal messages between two or more communicators in maintaining, threatening or uplifting the various socio-cultural group-based or unique personal-based identity images of the other in a situation (Ting-Toomey, 2015). In sum, INT is about how an individual's identity when threatened, maintained or uplifted within a conversation, changes. Relevant to this study is then the view that, in a multicultural environment, which is an educational environment

encompassing hearing and persons with hearing impairment and having the hearing culture dominating, ‘‘ethnic and cultural identity salience issues and intergroup concerns play a prominent role in the INT framework’’ (Ting-Toomey, 2015).

INT is of similar view to CTI’s assumption that, identity is constructed, maintained and re-created through a communicative process (Hecht et al., 2005). INT posits that, humans in all cultures desire positive identity affirmation in a variety of communication situations. However, identity affirmation varies and is dependent on the cultural or social setting the communication is done. In the recent version of INT, Ting-Toomey presents ten core assumptions;

1. The core dynamic of an individual’s group membership identity and personal identity is as a result of symbolic communication with others.
2. Individuals within a group are expectant of some *motivation needs* for their identity to be protected, some form of belonging, predictability, connection and consistency on both the group and the individual as well. If these needs are not met, it can lead to out-group or emotional insecurity.
3. Once an individual is within a familiar cultural environment, he/she experiences *emotional security* but once within an unfamiliar environment, experience *emotional vulnerability*.
4. Individuals have some sense of *belonging or inclusion* when their group is endorsed positively but experience *differentiations* when stigmatised.
5. When communicating with people of similar culture, *interaction predictability* occurs while *interaction unpredictability* occurs when communicating with people of different or unfamiliar culture.

Interaction predictability builds trust while unpredictability leads to mistrust.

6. Persons who do not stick to only their group relationships but desire interpersonal connections, experience *identity autonomy* which create an additional emotional security for them.
7. *Identity consistency* occurs among persons who routinely perform cultural roles in their family setting while *identity change and transformation* occurs once the individual moves into a new or unfamiliar cultural setting.
8. Cultural-ethnic, personal and situational variability dimensions influence the meanings, interpretations and evaluations of these identity-related themes.
9. *Competent* identity-negotiation occurs when the necessary intercultural identity-based knowledge, mindfulness and interaction skills are appropriately applied during communication in an unfamiliar environment.
10. *Satisfactory* identity negotiation is as a result of the individual feeling understood, respected and valued in the unfamiliar setting.

In a hastened multicultural or multiracial identity formation society, there will be an increasingly integrative or uneven crucial point for identity negotiation and re-negotiation. Persons, like immigrants, persons of the minority group, among others, who fill up new or unfamiliar cultural settings need to learn to swing between various dialectical-thematic poles adaptively and creatively by strategically going through the identity negotiation process (Ting-Toomey, 2015). INT stipulates some strategies an individual can use to achieve a competent and satisfactory identity negotiation. The first

strategy is *Identity-support* strategy, which could be employed by the individual that will promote quality intergroup and interpersonal relationship satisfaction outcome (Ting-Toomey, 2015). These strategies she spelt out as; mindful listening and dialogue, shared empowerment and alliance formation, positive identity validation and empathetic inclusion behaviours. Another strategy proposed by INT is the *Identity-rejection behaviours* which include mindless attendance and ego-focused monologue, power dominance or patronization, indifferent attitudes or identity minimization messages. According to Ting-Toomey (2015), these identity-rejection behaviours can maximise intergroup distance spectrum.

## **2.7 Application of the Theories in Literature**

CTI suggests four layers of identity – personal, relational, enacted and communal. Hecht et al. (2005) contend in this theory that the inward, outward and social enacted identity of an individual is perpetuated by and through communication. Several researchers (Brooks & Pitts, 2016; Hecht et al., 2002; Orbe, 2004; Pang & Hutchinson, 2018) have employed CTI in their studies, when looking at the intercultural and intracultural reactions of people. Brooks and Pitts (2016) in their aim to identify students' conception of themselves relative to others and the perception of identity in cross-cultural conversations employed the CTI. They employed CTI on the basis that identity is built through communication and it is layered. Their use of CTI was to help understand how their selected 27 students use communication to position themselves when interacting with others and convey versions of themselves and their identities during communication. Hecht et al. (2002) uses CTI to analyse the bi-cultural identity of persons of Jewish-American background. The study mainly focused on the communal expression of their identity and the interpenetration of this identity with the personal, relational and enacted layers. Pang and Hutchinson (2018) in their quest to

better understand Third Culture Kids (TCK) employed the CTI as a framework. Their aim was to identify the gaps in identity construction of these 50 university-aged TCK. Orbe (2004) in his study on 79 first-generation college (FGC) students also employed CTI. His findings captured the complex nature of identity constructed by the students. Identity gaps were identified among the students studied.

Several studies have used Ting-Toomey's Identity Negotiation theory to explore the experiences of persons who have moved into new or unfamiliar cultural setting. Matusitz (2015) in an ethnographic study, explored the lives of eight French students in a US university using INT. Findings of the study proved that these foreign students face some stress due to cultural adjustment and handled it best by sticking together. This strategy of these foreign students is in line with INT's identity emotional security and emotional vulnerability. Brown (2009) also in an ethnographic study investigated the experiences of international students in an England university. Employing interviews, the dominant theme for the study was friendship; as these foreign students had the desire and need to integrate with persons of similar background so they could have some comfort and avoid discrimination (Brown, 2009). These students bond together so they could deal with the difficulties of being a stranger in a foreign land. This bonding together is in line with INT's identity trust-distrust, which is interaction predictability and interaction unpredictability (Ting-Toomey, 2015). Collie et al., (2010) explored in an ethnographic study how young Assyrian women in New Zealand get to manage and negotiate identity dilemmas in everyday situation. In the study, Collie et al., (2010) observed that these women had complex feelings about their attachment to Iraq, New Zealand and Assyrian community and to obtain an optimal inclusion, they redefined their identity with these communities when one of them faced some threat. This is in line with INT's inclusion-differentiation assumption. In Hotta



and Ting-Toomey's study (2013) using INT as a guide, they examined the adjustment narratives and friendship stories of 20 international students. Findings of the study revealed that these students made some identity adjustment and shift in communication styles so to have more understanding and increase cooperation on campus. This outcome is in tune with INT's stability-change; such that, these students go through a shift towards a complex, multifaceted understanding of what it means to be an "international student" in the school.

Although most of these studies made reference to or studied students of different cultural backgrounds who found themselves in new environment, one thing was key; their identity built through communication. The application of CTI and INT in their studies, assert the communication factor in identity formation.

## **2.8 Relevance of the Theories to the Study**

The purpose of this study is to explore the identity construction of students with hearing impairment using CTI and how their identity is negotiated using INT. According to the literature reviewed, the use of these theories as framework for their studies have not only revealed the communication factor in identity formation, but has also revealed identity gaps and the need to negotiate in other to fit into a new or unfamiliar environment.

Using CTI will enable the researcher gain answers to Research Question one. The use of CTI will enable the researcher gain insight into what contributes to the self-concept (the personal thought, feeling and beliefs) of the students about their hearing impairment (personal identity). The researcher will be able to know and understand the relationships students with hearing impairment have with their peers (both hearing and hearing impaired) and their tutors (relational identity). CTI will also help the researcher

identify the identity build as a result of the students' behaviour, expressions and actions during communicative interactions (enacted identity). Lastly, the use of CTI will help know and understand students' involvement with groups while on campus, their experiences within the group and the influence this group membership has on their identity (communal identity).

CTI posits the existence of identity gaps; hence the introduction of INT. the use of INT will aid the researcher in answering Research Question two. It was of relevance for this study to use INT to explain the identity negotiation behaviours that occurs as a result of the identity gaps that arise during interaction among these students with hearing impairment and their hearing peers and tutors. INT points how an individual can achieve a satisfactory communication outcome – being understood, respected and valued – through increase in intercultural identity-based knowledge, mindfulness and adaptive interactive negotiation skills (Ting-Toomey, 2015).

Thus, the use of these two theories is considered appropriate to help understand the experience and shift that occurs among the identity of these students with hearing impairment and know whether they achieve satisfaction or completeness in their identity negotiation.

## **2.9 Summary**

This chapter focused on the fundamental premise of identity construction of hearing impaired students: discussing what identity is in general, what identity means to the deaf individual and the experiences in identity construction among hearing impaired students in mainstream schooling environment. This study is premised on the Communication theory of Identity and the Identity Negotiation theory to help explore

how students with hearing impairment construct their identities communicatively and how the gaps in their identity formation is negotiated.



## CHAPTER THREE

### METHODOLOGY

#### 3.0 Introduction

This study seeks to explore the identity construction of students with hearing impairments (SHIs) in the University of Education, Winneba (UEW). This chapter outlines the methods and processes used in the data collection and analysis to achieve the research objectives. It discusses the research's approach, design, sampling process and size, data collection methods and process, data analysis and ethical consideration, as well as the rationale behind their selection.

#### 3.1 Research Approach

Three approaches exist when conducting research; quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods. In the past few decades, when it came to researches on identity, different methodological approaches emerged and often, the quantitative methods were employed (Watzlawik & Born, 2007). However, for this study, the qualitative method approach was employed to help address the research objectives.

Qualitative research, according to Creswell (2014) is an approach to research that seeks to explore and get the understanding people assign to social challenges. This approach permits the researcher to make interpretation of the data gathered from within the setting of participants. With research on identity construction, qualitative method is appropriate since it better explores the complex nature of it through individual experiences and subsequently gives a more holistic view of the phenomenon (Kroger, 2007; Marcia, 2007). It also recognizes the fact that different life experiences of researchers influence the interpretation of research data (Kroger, 2007).

Denzin and Lincoln (2007), suggests that qualitative research involves an interpretive, naturalistic approach. This means that in a researcher's quest to study something in its natural setting, have an understanding of it, or interpret the sense people make of the phenomenon, it is appropriate to use the qualitative research approach. This study saw it fit to use this approach because the researcher aimed at getting an understanding and get the interpretation students with hearing impairment make of their identity.

Again, Lindlof and Taylor (2017) posit that qualitative research aids in identifying, exploring and explaining attitudes, actions and perceptions of people within a social setting and the meanings they make of their actions, without any mathematical computations. The current study which sought to explore the identity construction among students with hearing impairment through interviews, within the school setting did not make meanings of their actions through calculations or numbers but through the use of their own words that were coded and put into themes.

### **3.2 Research Design**

Aside having a research approach to conduct the study, the researcher also has to decide on a type of study within the selected approach. The selected study within the approach is what is termed, research design. According to Creswell (2014), research design is the strategy, plan or models that provide specific direction for a research. In simple terms, research design is the general ways of collecting data or the very nature the research will take. In qualitative research, there exists several types of approaches which include; ethnography, phenomenology and case study. The design chosen for this study is phenomenology.

### 3.2.1 Phenomenological Study

Vagle (2014) defines phenomenology as an approach to research that explores the everyday experiences of people of a particular phenomenon. In Creswell's (2014) view, it is a strategy of inquiry of a phenomenon in which the researcher identifies the lived experiences of a participant. It is basically about the lived experiences of participants and often, the procedure involves studying a small number of persons through extensive and prolonged engagement (Creswell, 2014). This study employed a phenomenological design because participants were to describe their experiences as hearing impaired students at the University of Education, Winneba, when it comes to their identity construction.

According to Johnson and Christensen (2008), phenomenological design permits the researcher to uncover the feelings and personal understanding participants make concerning their current experiences. Streubert and Carpenter (2007), from the health background, posit that, in phenomenological study, the aim is for the researcher to learn and construct meanings of the lived experiences of persons through a discourse. It is through this discourse that the researcher gets to uncover the feelings and personal understanding of the participants, as indicated by Johnson and Christensen (2008). The objective of the researcher in this study was to discover how students with hearing impairment felt about their navigation of identity on campus and so a phenomenological design was appropriate.

This research approach helps the researcher gain in-depth knowledge and understanding of the experiences of the individuals (Hellman, 2016). Creswell (2014) emphasises that in a phenomenological study, the researcher brackets or sets aside his or her own experiences in order to understand those of the participants in the study. With previous and little experience, the researcher had with a hearing impaired person,

that experience was put aside and the researcher accepted all responses and feelings of respondents in the study.

### **3.3 Sampling Strategy**

In every research, the researcher aims at a particular group that are affected or concerned with the phenomenon and then investigate. This target group is the population. For this research, the population for the researcher is students with hearing impairment at the University of Education, Winneba. Not all elements within this population could be used therefore the researcher needed to sample. This study therefore drew on the purposive sampling strategy.

Purposive sampling, according to Yin (2014), is the process whereby the researcher with a deliberate intent, chooses a particular or certain persons as target population so to produce quality data of high relevance. In similar view, Lindlof and Taylor (2017) define it as a process of selecting a portion of units from the population that is available to the researcher. Sampling aids the researcher to know the group to observe or interview to help deepen the understanding of the phenomenon. In sum, purposive sampling limits the researcher to what to observe and from whom.

Patton (2002) asserts that in purposive sampling, the researcher identifies a population of interest and develops a systematic way of selecting cases not basing it on advanced knowledge of how the outcomes might turnout. The purpose is to increase credibility and not to foster representativeness. Purposive sampling starts with a purpose in mind and the sample is thus selected to include people of interest and exclude those who do not suit the purpose (Patton, 2002). Subjects are selected because of some characteristics they bear. Furthermore, with regards to the types of purposive sampling, Patton (2002) advances that homogenous purposive sampling allows the researcher to

make use of a sample whose units or characteristics are similar. To warrant the use of homogenous purposive sampling, the research question(s) to be addressed in a study will need to be specific to the characteristics of the particular group of interest.

In tandem with the postulations above, this study employed the homogenous purposive sampling to recruit SHIs of the University of Education Winneba. These participants must have experienced their everyday navigation on campus and be able to reflect on and be willing to share their experiences about this phenomenon. Seven SHIs were approached by the researcher based on the above criteria to be a part of the study. All seven SHIs, agreed to join the study. A significant data was derived from these participants and was sufficient to construe themes and concepts for this research. Selected participants were students whose preferred mode of communication was Ghanaian Sign Language (GSL) or lip reading and were capable of articulating the experiences of their identity navigation among hearing students. The SHIs were required to have spent more than one academic year in the school and belonged to a class with hearing students as majority. This therefore made the researcher purposively sampled SHIs who majored in other programmes aside Special Education. This inclusion criterion was used to ensure greater depth and richness of the data provided from those with the greatest experience and exposure to the identity navigation in this hearing-dominated environment.

### **3.4 Sampling Size**

According to Omona (2013), sample sizes in qualitative research should not be small so it is not difficult to achieve saturation. However, Malterud et al. (2015) posit that, sample size should not be too large since its large population will make it difficult to make case-orientation. Creswell (2002) recommended that in qualitative sampling, the researcher is supposed to be guided by any of these if applicable to the study: a) for an



ethnographic study, sample size should be one cultural-sharing group, b) for a case study, three to five cases should be looked at, c) when using a grounded theory, the researcher is to use 15-20 people, d) in a narrative research, 1 individual's narration or story could be used. In Creswell (1998), he recommended that for a phenomenological study, sample size of 10 participants should be used for interviews while for a grounded theory research, 20-30 people is recommended. In view of this, the researcher of this study engaged 7 participants since the study is a phenomenological study.

However, Omona (2013) posits that although these guidelines are helpful, Creswell (1998) did not state how he arrived at these estimated number of sampling. Gentles et al. (2015) posits that, there is no fixed rule for a sample size of a research and Lindlof and Taylor (2017) are of a similar view, indicating that, there is no rule or criteria that guarantee a sample size as big enough. It is for this reason that Daymon and Holloway (2011) state that for a qualitative study, the sample size if large, is not a determinant of data quality of the study. A comparatively small sample size if utilised in a qualitative research, gives the researcher the opportunity to have rich information from participants (Ayres, 2007). Gentles et al. (2015) stated that, a small sample size gives the researcher the opportunity to capture participants' exact responses and experiences of the phenomenon. Mason (2002) is of the view that since there is no determinant of a sample size in research; the researcher is to always consider how convenient the selected size is to the study. It is on this premise that Emmel (2014) postulates that, in determining the sample size of the study, the researcher should consider the resources available as qualitative data consumes large hard-drive space. Ayres (2007) posits that a relatively small sample size is required due to the large volume of information generated and collected from participants.

It is based on the assumptions of these authorities (Ayres, 2007; Daymon & Holloway, 2011; Emmel, 2014; Gentles et al., 2015; Lindlof & Taylor, 2017; Mason, 2002; Omona, 2013) that, the researcher for this study, interviewed seven participants; three males and four females. Through the Head of the Special Education Department and a lecturer, data of all SHIs were retrieved from the Resource Centre for Students with Special Needs (RCSSN). The data retrieved comprised all SHIs in the school of all levels from the 2019/2020 to 2021/2022 academic year. The researcher purposively selected the 2020/2021 academic year as reference period of the study. For that academic year, there were twenty nine (29) SHIs in all. Out of these eight fell into the category of persons required for the study. All eight were contacted but one (male) dropped out of the study for personal reasons. The final participants for the study were seven (7). Participants offered programmes such as Basic Education, Early Grade, Graphic Design and Rehab. SHIs that majored in the Department of Special Education were excluded from the study because their everyday classroom interaction is with hearing impaired colleagues. Two of the participants were in Level 400 (two females), 2 in Level 300 (one male and one female), and 3 in Level 200 (two males and one female). All the participants had more than one-year experience in the university and were accessible during the time of the study. Their communication mode at UEW was Ghanaian Sign Language and lip reading. Some respondents depended on interpreting services during lecture and examinations while others used their hearing aids and did lip reading.

### **3.5 Data Collection Method**

Methods are the techniques or procedures used to collect the data. There are a variety of methods of data collection in qualitative research, which includes observations, textual or visual analysis and interviews (individual or group) (Silverman, 2013). The

researcher's role is to have an understanding of participants' expression of the phenomenon and to also engage the participant in away so as to have a rich in-depth description (O'Brien, 2005). Therefore, for this study, two data collection methods were employed; interviews and observation.

### **3.5.1 Interviews**

Anyan (2013) defines interview as a form of conversation which seeks to gather information on the life-world of a person with respect to making a meaning of a particular phenomenon. Interviews provide a 'deeper' understanding of social phenomena and an appropriate method for exploring sensitive topics (Silverman, 2013). According to Braun and Clarke (2013), it is a professional conversation with participants in order to get them to talk about their experiences and perspectives and to capture their language and concepts, in relation to a particular phenomenon.

Creswell (2014) posits that in qualitative interviews, the researcher could either have face-to-face, telephone, online or focus group discussions about the phenomenon. In this study, due to COVID-19, the first bits of interviews were conducted online via zoom. Subsequent interviews were face-to-face, when school came back to session. There are three fundamental types of research interviews according to Braun and Clarke (2013): structured, semi-structured and unstructured. For the purpose of this research, the semi-structured interview method was employed.

Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) define semi-structured interview as a form of interview designed to “obtain descriptions of the life world of the interviewee in order to interpret the meaning of the described phenomena” (p.3). According to Braun and Clarke (2013), this approach to interview is such that the researcher prepares an interview guide before the interview but is not mandated to rigidly adhere to it, either in terms of exact words

of the questions or the order in which the questions are posed. This data collection method is a dialogue between the researcher and participant guided by a flexible interview guide where the interviewer can use follow-up questions, probes or comments (DeJonckheere & Vaughn, 2019).

Semi-structured interviews allow the interviewer or interviewee to diverge in order to pursue an idea or response in more detail (Pope, et al., 2000). The flexibility of this approach allows for the discovery or elaboration of information that is important to participants but may not have previously been thought of as pertinent by the researcher. DeJonckheere and Vaughn (2019) postulate that, this type of interview allows the researcher to best explore the participants thought, feeling and beliefs of the phenomenon and often delving into the personal and sometimes sensitive bit of their experiences. In order to best know how hearing impaired students construct their identity and how they navigate this identity on campus semi-structured interviews were conducted.

DeJonckheere and Vaughn (2019) posit that for a semi-structured interview, the researcher needs to have a relational focus and exhibit these skills; determining the purpose and scope of the study, identify the eligible participants for the study, have ethical considerations, plan for logistics that will be needed, develop an interview guide, establish trust and rapport with participants, start the interview process, memorise certain actions of the participant and reflect on them, analyse the data gathered, demonstrate trustworthiness of the research and finally present the findings. The researcher made sure that these guidelines spelt out by DeJonckheere and Vaughn (2019) was adhered to.

The researcher prepared open-ended interview questions. These questions served as a guide to help obtain a vivid description of the phenomenon among the students. The interview questions were such that, participants had the flexibility of expressing themselves in the form of everyday conversations. Interviews with these participants were guided by Seidman (2013) phenomenological interviewing techniques. According to Seidman (2013), phenomenological interview should address the past experiences of participants, the present experience and lastly, the overall descriptions of the interviewee's experience. Even though making reference to the past experiences of participants was a period of one year in the school (level 100 experience), the researcher deemed it fit to refer participants to that experience and how it influenced their current identity.

### **3.5.2 Observation**

In qualitative research, observation is one of the most common methods used. Creswell (2014) defines observation "as the process of gathering open-ended, first-hand information by taking field notes on the behaviours and activities of individuals at a research site" (p.33). According to Wahyuni (2012), observation as a research method, provides better understanding which enriches the researcher's knowledge of the current event or phenomena. In this study, observation done was aimed at identifying how students with hearing impairment navigate among hearing students and the Deaf community.

Observation method in research is of two types and is on basis of the role the researcher plays. Wahyuni (2012) outlines the two types of observation as direct observation (participant) and indirect observation (non-participant). In this study, the researcher employed the non-participant type of observation. According to Creswell (2014), non-participant observer is the researcher who watches and records the situation under study

without any involvements with the participants or current setting. Williams (2008) describes it as unobtrusive strategy for gathering data where the researcher does not directly interact with the participants but physically presents himself at participants' natural setting. Researcher can use this form of observation if there exist any of these instances; have limited or no access to a particular group, the research setting might be unsafe, dangerous or difficult for participant observation and or has much interest in getting the real, practical, actual or reified patterns that emerge from certain actions of participants rather than the general experiences participants are likely to narrate (Williams, 2008).

The researcher conducted non-participant observation in and outside lecture halls to ascertain how these students with hearing impairment navigate in the hearing world vis-à-vis the Deaf community. Through observation, the researcher was able to check for the nonverbal expression of feelings, determine who interacts with whom and how participants communicate with each other. Observation gave the researcher the opportunity to identify appropriate terms that participants used, observe events that participants were unable or unwilling to share during the face-to-face or online interviews and also observe situations participants had described during the interview.

### **3.6.0 Data Collection Procedure**

In qualitative studies, researchers spend considerable amount of time gathering data from the natural setting (Creswell, 2014). Qualitative researchers follow procedures that enable them to gather data for answering their research questions (Wahyuni, 2012). "The data collection steps include setting the boundaries for the study, collecting information through unstructured or semi-structured observations and interviews, documents and visual materials, as well as establishing the protocol for recording information" (Creswell, 2014, p. 239).

### 3.6.1 Procedure for Interviews

The researcher sought permission from head of the Department of Special Education in the school who is in charge of these SHIs. The purpose of the study was explained to the participants. The researcher gave a two-week prior notice to participants and made them aware of the focus and objectives of the study. The sign language interpreters who were assigned to these students were equally notified. However, during the first phase, only one interpreter was available to help in the conducting of the interview. The other could not make it because of personal issues beyond his control. Three days were scheduled for the interview at students' convenient times and the availability of the sign language interpreter. Participants were interviewed individually. Each interview lasted between 30 to 45 minutes via ZOOM and each session was recorded. ZOOM is an application that could either be installed on a mobile device or a laptop. It has an audio and video feature. The researcher employed the video feature and recorded the interview via the researcher's Samsung Galaxy A50 mobile phone and an HP laptop. The participants were given the opportunity to express their feelings without any pressure. The sign language interpreter was tasked to transcribe the recorded session into a written document with Microsoft Word. After the transcriptions, the trained interpreter and the researcher met to cross-check each of the transcriptions to ensure they depicted what was said in the interview. Participants were occasionally contacted for reviews.

When school reopened and was back to session, the face-to-face interviews were conducted. This time around, both sign language interpreters were available and aided in the conducting of the interviews. Interviews were done at the convenience of both the interpreter and the participant. The interview aimed to increase understanding of SHIs identity on campus and how they navigate in this hearing environment. There

were a number of questions prepared by the researcher which focused on their identity formation and how they communicated their identity and the experiences they have had. The researcher recorded the interviews in form of note-taking.

### **3.6.2 Procedure for Observations**

Observations were conducted inside and outside the lecture halls, as well as on the WhatsApp platform used by students with hearing impairment on UEW campus. The lecture hall observation was conducted twice within a week for two months. Time chosen was by the help of participants' sign language interpreters. However, participants who could lip read and talk were observed at random times. The in-and-out lecture hall observations started right after COVID-19 break when classes resumed. The observation aimed to gather the information of their navigation between the hearing and the Deaf community. With the help of the observation guide specifically designed for the study, the researcher gathered data on how SHIs carry themselves, who they associated with and their non-verbal expressions. The data obtained from the observation, were analysed together with the responses participants gave during the interview.

### **3.7 Data Analysis**

Data analysis is a crucial part of research work. It is the process of making meaning out of the data collected. According to Corbin and Strauss (2008), data analysis is the act of giving meaning to data. There are several complex phases that are required in qualitative data analysis. Creswell (2014) states that, data analysis is the process of segmenting and putting apart data in order to make meaning. According to Ary et al. (2010), qualitative data analysis “involves reducing and organizing the data, synthesizing, searching for significant patterns, and discovering what is important”. That is what Creswell (2014) similarly points out that, the researcher needs to



“winnow” the data. Winnowing is the process of sieving the data gathered, to extract that which is of more importance to the researcher and disregarding other parts of it. The essence of this process according to Creswell (2014) is to collectively put the data into a small number of themes. In this study, the researcher analysed the data gathered from interviews conducted and the observations made. In order to do a detailed and in-depth analysis of the identity of students with hearing impairment on campus, the researcher employed thematic analysis in this study.

### **3.7. 1 Thematic Analysis**

Thematic analysis is widely used in qualitative research. According to Nowell et al. (2017), thematic analysis is a *translator* for a qualitative study as well as a quantitative study which aids researchers to communicate their findings of a phenomenon. Braun and Clarke (2012) delineate thematic analysis as a method for identifying, analysing, organizing, describing, and reporting themes found within a data set. It is the process of grouping similar and recurring words into codes and themes. Theme, according to Braun and Clarke (2013), is a representation of patterned features, responses or meanings about the data relevant to the purpose of study. Thematic analysis is a useful method for examining the perspectives of different research participants, highlighting similarities and differences, and generating unanticipated insights (Braun & Clarke, 2012). It is also useful for summarizing key features of a large data set, as it forces the researcher to take a well-structured approach to handling data, helping to produce a clear and organized final report (King, 2004).

In analysing the data for this study, the researcher established themes from repetitive statements and phrases as well as commonly used terminologies which highlighted similar ideas when it comes to the identity held by SHIs on campus. The researcher

noted the common issues and categorized them under various themes and sub-themes (where needed) within specific research questions for easy interpretation of the data.

Braun and Clarke (2013) introduced two ways of thematic analysis - inductive and deductive. The deductive (theory-driven) method is the approach to analysis whereby the researcher produces codes or themes relative to existing conceptual framework or theory. Conversely, the inductive (data-driven) approach is the instance where the researcher generates codes or themes solely from the data gathered on the field of study. In this instance, data is not coded to fit pre-existing frame but are open-coded, which according to Braun and Clarke (2013), is the best representation of what participants have communicated during the study. These two thematic approaches were employed during this study. For research question one which sought to identify the kinds of identity constructed by SHIs, the researcher employed the deductive approach. Guided by Hecht et al.'s (2005) Communication Theory of Identity's four layers, the identities of participants were generated from existing deaf identity types by Bat-Chava (2000) and Glickman (1996) - the "Deaf culture identity", the "deaf identity" and the "bicultural identity". In the case of research question two which sought to identify how SHIs negotiated their identity the researcher was guided by the Ting-Toomey's (2015) Identity Negotiation theory strategies. The use of these existing strategies made data analysis for research question two, deductive. For the final research question which sought to identify the implications the deaf identities have on D/HH discourses, the researcher employed the inductive method of analysis. Answers to this research question were not seeded in any theory or existing concept but instead were deduced from what participants communicated.

### **3.8 Ethical issues**

In any type of research that is conducted with human subjects, ethical concerns relating to participants' safety are of utmost importance. Ethical consideration helps to ensure that participants' rights, dignity and privacy are protected and helps minimise potential risk of each participant (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). Formal ethics approval for this research was sort from the Head of Department of the Special Education Unit of the school, since they are responsible for these students. When granted the permission, recruitment and the subsequent data collection process did not commence until formal ethics approval was sought from participants as well.

To ensure that participants' safety, respect, and fidelity were upheld, the researcher discussed with participants to voluntarily participate in the study without any form of coercion. The researcher was aware that the experiences to be shared by participants may not be similar to the researcher's existing knowledge or some one-time experience. It was therefore critical that the researcher remained non-judgemental throughout the interview process and to also not display any form of body language or facial expressions that would suggest censure. Participants were guaranteed confidentiality of every information given and were assured of the replacement of their names with pseudonyms. The researcher informed participants regarding authorities who would have access to information in the study and explained the purpose of each person having the information. Participants were finally issued a consent form to sign before the commencement of the interview.

### **3.9 Trustworthiness**

For this study to be given the needed consideration and worth attending to, the researcher had to ensure trustworthiness. The researcher had to ensure the authenticity of all procedures undertaken to arrive at the findings in order to make the study worth

it. Trustworthiness according to Pilot and Beck (2014) is the degree of assurance in data interpretation and method that warrant the quality of a study undertaken. Amankwaa (2016) posits that, there is the need for every researcher to establish some protocols and procedures in order to give the research the guarantee for consideration. Creswell (2014) postulates that findings of qualitative studies should be verifiable; outlining eight procedures - triangulation, member check, rich, thick description, clarifying bias, negative or discrepant information, spending prolonged time in the field, external auditor and peer debriefing. The application of more than one of these strategies in a study guarantees the researcher's ability to access accuracy and also convince readers of those accuracies (Creswell, 2014). Lincoln and Guba (2000) equally outlined some criteria to ensure data trustworthiness. The criteria included credibility, dependability, confirmability and transferability. According to Anney (2014) ensuring these criteria spelt out by Lincoln and Guba (2000), in a study, ensures trustworthiness and credibility of every data gathered.

To ensure high level of trustworthiness, this study employed the verification strategies of Creswell (2014). Out of the eight strategies, the researcher employed five; rich, thick description, prolonged time in the field, triangulation, member checking and peer debriefing. Creswell (2014) indicates that when a researcher provides a vivid view of the setting and discusses related elements within that environment of study, findings become more realistic and richer. Therefore, in this study, the researcher deemed it necessary to transport readers into the lecture room, meeting grounds and platforms of these SHIs. These various settings offered diverse perspectives of themes for the study. Secondly, the researcher employed different methods of data collection. Creswell (2014) states that the use of multiple data collection sources (triangulation) or the perspectives from participants adds validity to the study. The researcher however, did

not only employ interviews and observations but also validated and linked findings to existing literature and theoretical underpinnings.

To ensure trustworthiness, the researcher also spent prolonged time in the field. According to Creswell (2014), spending enough time within the setting of study and with participants, is a guarantee that the researcher has developed a deeper understanding of the phenomenon and will be able to give a detailed description of the people as well as their setting. Participants for this study were not engaged once but over a longer period through interviews and observations. Findings were also gone through over and over again by the researcher. These processes helped the researcher familiarise with the everyday in- and- out lecturer room encounter of the SHIs.

Finally, validity was ensured by the researcher while using two other strategies – member checking and peer debriefing – concurrently. According to Creswell (2014), a study becomes trustworthy once the researcher reengages participants by making them go through the study’s final report, descriptions made or themes generated, for their acceptance. Before final submission of the study, the researcher made participants aware of major findings and representation of their names. This strategy employed, gave participants the opportunity to comment on the findings. The researcher was able to achieve that through the use of the sign language interpreter. The interpreter reviewed and asked questions about the study in general and the outcome so that the researchers account will produce a positive feeling, response or opinion with other people as well as participants rather than only the researcher. According to Creswell (2014), this strategy adds validity to the study referring to it as “peer debriefing” (p. 252).

### **3.10 Summary**

This chapter focused on outlining the research methods employed by the researcher in conducting this phenomenological study. The sample size, the purposive sampling technique and the use of semi-structured interviews and observations for the data collection were discussed. Ethical considerations which addressed participants' information and safety, privacy, consent and anonymity were equally discussed in this chapter. Data analysis method – thematic analysis – was discussed, illustrating how data was analysed with the extraction of significant statements, and frequent words/phrases and dominant terminologies employed by participants were also set apart. The issue of trustworthiness surrounding the study was also discussed in this chapter.



## CHAPTER FOUR

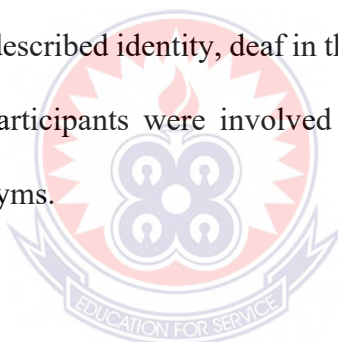
### FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

#### 4.0 Introduction

This chapter presents the findings and discussion from the analysis of data collected from the interviews from students with hearing impairment and observation made during their class meetings as well as on their WhatsApp platform. The data gathered were simplified into several themes to ensure easy analysis and interpretation.

#### 4.1 Demographics

The demographics of participants were ascertained for familiarization and also for validation during observation. The demographics covered sex, age, educational level, programme offered, self-described identity, deaf in the family and sign language as yes (1<sup>st</sup>) or not. Seven (7) participants were involved in this study, and they were all represented with pseudonyms.



**Table 1: Demographics and background of participants**

<b>LEVEL</b>	<b>PSEUDONYMS</b>	<b>AGE</b>	<b>SEX</b>	<b>PROGRAMME</b>	<b>SELF-DEFINED IDENTITY</b>	<b>DEAF IN THE FAMILY</b>	<b>SIGN LANGUAGE YES / NO</b>
200	Fee	21	M	Graphic Design	D/deaf	Deaf parents	Yes, 1 <sup>st</sup>
	Bee	25	F	Early Grade	Hard of hearing	D/deaf sister	Yes, 2 <sup>nd</sup>
	Hee	23	M	Basic Education	D/deaf	None	No
300	Dee	26	F	Graphic Design	Hard of hearing	None	Yes, 2 <sup>nd</sup>
	Pee	32	M	Rehab	D/deaf	None	No
400	Vee	28	F	Graphic Design	D/deaf	Deaf parents	Yes, 1 <sup>st</sup>
	Gee	34	F	Rehab	Hard of hearing	None	Yes, 2 <sup>nd</sup>

**Source: Field Data, 2021**



All seven participants experienced some level of hearing loss. All of them had been in UEW for over a year and consented to sharing their identity construction as students with hearing impairment (SHIs). Of the seven (7) participants, four (4) were females and three were males. Participants selected for the study were students who were in mainstream classroom and had regular contact with hearing peers and lecturers. Participants offered Basic Education, Early Grade, Graphic Design and Community based Rehabilitation and Disability Studies (Rehab). Participants were made to self-define their identities. That is, the researcher sought to know how participants identified themselves in their own way or term. Participants' answers were either being D/deaf or Hard-of-hearing. The researcher resorted to 'D/deaf' as self-defined identity because participants from the start could not make a distinction of their identity with existing literature. All participants would say they identify as 'deaf'. In order not to create confusion from the start, the researcher resorted to 'D/deaf' to be able to identify students who were not hard-of-hearing but self-defined as deaf.

Background check by the researcher to know if participants were the only persons with hearing impairment in their family generated different responses. Out of the seven (7) respondents, four (4) did not have any member of their family with hearing impairment. Two participants were recorded to have had both parents with hearing loss while the remaining one (1) had a sibling with hearing loss. In the researcher's quest to know if all participants resorted to sign language, only two out of the seven (7) could not sign. However, three regarded sign language as their second language while the remaining two (2) having sign language as their first means of communication. The two participants who

could not sign disclosed that during interaction with other SHIs who could only sign, they used their interpreters or call on colleagues who could do both.

#### **4.2. RQ1. What kind of identity do students with hearing impairment construct at UEW?**

When it comes to deaf identity, several studies have taken place in deaf studies using the Deaf Identity Development Scale (DIDS) by Glickman (1996), Glickman and Carey (1993) and the Deaf Acculturation Scale (DAS) by Maxwell–McCaw (2001) which have all been well established and used by many researchers. These scales by these authorities produced four (4) distinct identity of hearing loss: (a) Deaf or immersion identity, (b) hearing or deaf identity, (c) bicultural identity and (d) marginal identity.

For this study, this research question sought to identify the kinds of deaf identity students with hearing impairment in UEW construct. Glickman's (1996) four (4) deaf identity types (Deaf, deaf, bicultural and marginal) were used to analyse data for this research question. The identities of these participants were also analysed using the identity layers proposed by CTI. Such that, the researcher sought to know the kinds of identities these participants constructed on the personal, relational, enacted and communal layers. Findings revealed that all participants on an individual level (personal layer), constructed distinct identities falling under any of the deaf identities proposed by Glickman (1996). Although participants had already self-identified (as shown in the demographic table), their responses during the interviews as well as what the researcher observed were different. Out of the four (4) identity types, three (3) deaf identity types were identified among participants used for this

study; Deaf/immersion identity, hearing/deaf identity and bicultural identity. No participants recorded marginal identity.

Using CTI, the research revealed that, on a personal layer level, participants with Deaf identity were two (2), those with deaf identity were also two (2) while there remaining three (3) were of a bicultural identity. On the Enacted and Relational layers of identity, these seven participants had to switch identities depending on their circumstance or setting. However, on the communal level, all participants (n=7) constructed a Deaf identity (as a result of reactions, circumstances and settings they found themselves in while on a hearing dominating environment).



**Table 2: Participants' identity type and corresponding narrative**

RECCURING NARRATIVE THEME	CORRESPONDING IDENTITY
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Sign language as first language</li> <li>- Comfortable with deaf people</li> <li>- Associate mainly with Deaf Family</li> <li>- Use interpreter in class and with hearing people</li> <li>- Condition not a disability</li> </ul>	Deaf
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Use hearing aids</li> <li>- Do lip reading</li> <li>- Condition a disability</li> <li>- Needs to be treated / fixed</li> </ul>	deaf
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Can sign and speak as well</li> <li>- Feel comfortable with both hearing and deaf people</li> <li>- Keep friends in both</li> </ul>	Bicultural

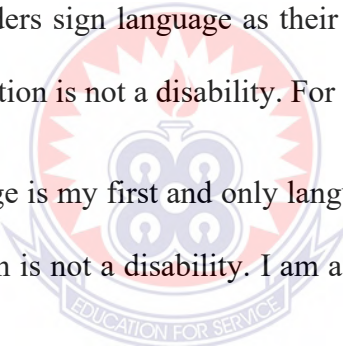
**Source: Field Data, 2021**

#### **4.2.1 Deaf identity**

Analysis of data gathered established that participants construct a Deaf Identity. Deaf identity has several indicators. Most of these indicators were present during the data analysis of the interviews conducted and the observations made. This identity type emerged

when participants had to describe how they identified themselves on a personal note, how they had to assume such identity because hearing colleagues did not best relate, and how comfortable it was to join the Deaf Community on campus because of some benefits you get as SHIs. Key indicators were the fact that all these SHIs respondents belonged to the Deaf Family on campus, resorted to sign language as their means of communication, indicated they will never trade their condition for hearing, and accepted deafness as being part of who-they-are.

To put this into perspective, the researcher's analysis of data from the interviews revealed that, before any of these students assumed this kind of identity, they are/were either born deaf to deaf parents, considers sign language as their first means of communication and also believe that their condition is not a disability. For example, Fee describes,



Sign language is my first and only language. I see nothing wrong with me. My condition is not a disability. I am a proud member of the Deaf Family on campus.

Another respondent, Vee who sided with Fee also expressed, “even if I have to go for a free surgery so I can speak or hear and be ‘normal’ like how hearing people say or want, I will not. I love who I am.” Both participants of a background of parents having a hearing loss agreed that sign language is their only means of communication and their main group of association is people of similar conditions. Respondents disclosed that their means of communication becomes challenging in instances where they had to deal with hearing people. Vee expressed, “I have to get an interpreter with me each time I am going for lecturers and each time he is not available, I will have to skip class.” Fee also gives an

instance where he had to call in his sign language interpreter in group discussions. This indicator (need of an interpreter when among hearing people) proves that participants are of a Deaf identity.

Besides the aforementioned indicators, some students had to assume this kind of identity (Deaf identity) on campus because of negative reactions from hearing colleagues as well as lecturers and other member of staff, benefits derived from the disability group on campus (Association of Students with Disability –ASD) and Deaf Family, having more hearing loss friends than hearing friends and those who had to always show proof of their deafness. Pee for example said,

Whenever deaf students are called, I join in and am part of the ASD. I attend their meetings and I am registered with them. I have to join them because the hearing students are selective and annoying.

In the researcher's quest to know how these students expressed themselves as SHIs in their day-to-day interactions on campus, it came to fore that some participants assumed the Deaf identity. Some participants disclosed that reactions from hearing people on campus let them assume a Deaf identity. Hee shared, "I do not know how to sign but only lip read and reactions from some hearing colleagues over the years have made me join the Deaf Family. They are picky so most of my friends now belong to the Deaf Family". Gee, another participant also echoed,

They (the hearing colleagues) always want me to proof that I am not deaf because there are instances I struggle to hear them. Their doubt in who I am has pushed me to just associate more with the Deaf Family and forget that

I can hear a little and join in their conversations. I am also a part of the ASD group on campus.

The final indicator was that students assumed this kind of identity because they received support, have some sense of belongingness and have some collective beliefs with others of similar condition. Members of the Deaf Community share a language, organization networks, values, and norms that are unique to the group (Bat-Chava 2000). For example, Bee shared,

I have never liked some of their (Deaf Family) ways because they have a problem that I can sign and talk as well, but it is much better being here with them because I get others to defend me compared to being with hearing people.

Another kind of support disclosed was the financial aid the individual gets once he/she becomes part of the Deaf Family. Dee, just like the others mentioned,

I am both here and there and once I am part of the Deaf Family, I receive some financial support of about GHC345 every year. It may be a little money but goes a long way to help me.

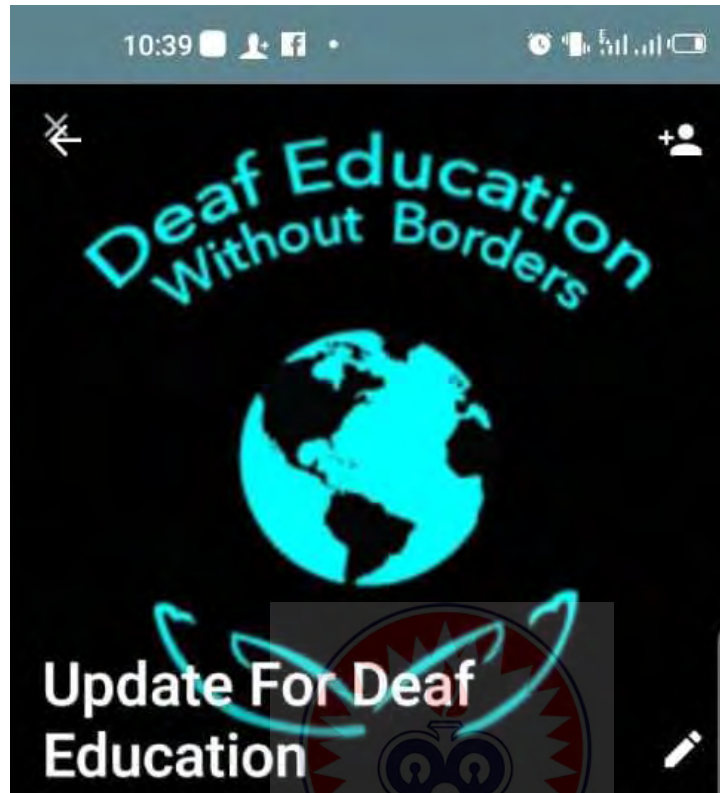
Gee emphasized, “that money does me a lot of good. It has it has helped many of us because we registered with the Deaf Family on campus”. All seven participants echoed on the benefit of being part of the ASD and the Deaf Family mainly because of the sense of belongingness, no stigmatisation and the remuneration of GHC345 every year.

Findings through observation revealed that participants were all part of the Association of Students with Disability (ASD) on campus. Members of the association comprised all

students that were physically challenged, blind, hearing impaired, among others who considered themselves to have a disability. SHIs that allied with the association were equally part of the Deaf Family on campus. The Deaf Family is a group made up of SHIs with different hearing loss condition. According to participants, being part of these two groups give them some sense of belonging because they stand for each other and do not their impairment identify or distinct them from one another. This attests to Jambor and Elliot's (2005) assertion that, deaf people belong to a unique community that is mainly made up of individuals who share a common sense of identity as Deaf. This Deaf Family group do not meet in person but have a WhatsApp platform where they discuss issues. Through observations, the researcher gathered that all participants of the study were a part of these two (2) groups. The researcher observed much giggling among the SHIs during the ASD meeting. During the meeting, the researcher observed that SHIs were lively and welcoming. They expressed themselves freely and teased each other. On the WhatsApp platform, members were at liberty to also express themselves without fear of judgment of how bad their English was.



**Figure 1: (Display picture of Deaf Family WhatsApp group).**



Source: Field Data, 2021

#### 4.2.2 Deaf identity

It was also discovered through data analysis that participants constructed a deaf identity. The researcher realized that this kind of identity was constructed often on a personal level and other times during the enacted and relational layers of identity. In constructing this identity, participants spoke to some indicators like identifying with the hearing culture and seeing deafness as a disability. This is due to the fact that, few of these students who saw their deafness as a disability, were ready to have their hearing loss fixed. They lip read, used hearing aids, could hear (little sounds) and acknowledged that they were part of the hearing community. Participants articulated that their condition was a disadvantage and

that if they were given an opportunity of a free surgery or even surgery at a lower cost, so they could hear again, they will go in for it. Pee expressed,

I was born to hearing parents and so I believe my health condition at birth caused my hearing loss and whatever I can do to have my hearing ability back, I will.

Sharing their everyday experience in classroom and social interactions, participants expressed how they had to manage to cope with interactions.

Since level 100, I had to sit in the front seat so I can lip read the lecturer. Although some lecturers are able to keep visual contact with me, it's difficult to do so for them throughout the class. Hee shared his classroom experience.

Pee also shared his interaction with class mates during sporting activities, illustrating his deaf identity.

I use my hearing aids more often to help interact with my classmates. It feels normal but when it comes to sporting activities on the pitch, most of them will not let me join their team. They will say my hearing aid will spoil and that it will be difficult to pass a ball if am not closer.

He added that, if he can play or be with hearing students on the pitch, then indeed he is a “hearing person” compared to the one who cannot speak at all but signing only.

Both participants expressed discomfort in how hearing peers tease and make fun of them. To them, it is possibly because of hearing students' lack of awareness and knowledge of their condition. However, Pee also disclosed how embarrassing it is sometimes; but those

negative reactions do not deter them from assuming a deaf identity (seeing themselves as hearing people just like them). He said, “I was raised among hearing people. I forget about them. I have to watch the person’s lips and I can hear everything”. Hee also disclosed how embarrassing it is sometimes when assuming a hearing/deaf identity. He expressed,

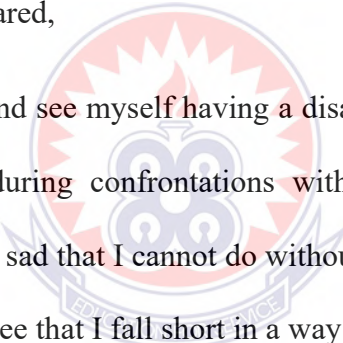
I am sometimes sure of myself when asked a question but it most often happens that my answers are contrary. Hearing colleagues will burst out and laugh and that makes me have to accept that my condition is indeed a disability.

Through the data analysis, the researcher realised that although these two participants, Pee and Hee constructed a deaf identity because they could lip read, use hearing aids and interact more with their hearing colleagues, there were instances their setting and circumstance made them assume a Deaf identity. These two participants indicated that when among persons of the Deaf Family, they had to seek the help of sign language interpreters to aid communication. “I have kept some friends who can sign and speak as well so whenever I am among the ASD or the Deaf Family group, they sign for me and I easily fit in”.

Two other participants also constructed this identity. Participants indicated that although they did not recognise their condition as a disability, interactions with hearing people make them accept that they have a disability. Indicators these participants highlighted were for the sake of security and also their need for interpreters in order to best fit in the hearing world. Fee, who is one of these participants, narrates,

I don't use hearing aids so I hear no sound. The other time, it was until the next morning my roommate through my interpreter told me why he asked me to go under the bed. He says there were some gunshots. Since then, for security reasons, I have to act vulnerable so I can get help.

Fee explained that although he does not prefer to be identified as “deaf and dumb” and that needs help from hearing people, when it comes to security purposes, he assumes the deaf identity; accepting to be classified as having a challenge. Vee, the other participant also stated that because sign language as her only means of communication when around hearing colleagues, she always need the assistance of a sign language interpreter. This was also echoed by Fee. Vee shared,



I have to consider and see myself having a disability anytime I have to call in my interpreter. Often during confrontations with classmates and interaction with lecturers, I feel very sad that I cannot do without the interpreter. It is embarrassing and that makes me see that I fall short in a way as an individual.

#### **4.2.3 Bicultural identity**

The final kind of identity of SHIs at UEW was the bicultural identity. A person with hearing loss is considered bicultural when he/she is bilingual (spoken language and sign language), recognizes the strengths and weakness of both deaf and hearing people while achieving a sense of inner security with his/her own deafness (Fischer & McWhirter, 2001). Students who participated in this study assumed this identity on a personal note. Out of the 7 participants for this study, 3 of them assumed this kind of identity. Gee for instance narrates;

I have gotten to that point where I feel comfortable with both hearing and deaf colleagues. It is a relief often because I can switch no matter the circumstances. I get to even interpret for my deaf friends sometimes. I am unique. She ended.

One other participant Bee stated how sometimes the social context determines whether she is 'deaf' or 'Deaf'.

I feel I belong to both hearing and Deaf world. When I am among deaf students, I don't feel I have any problem and similarly among hearing students, I am able to relate well with them.

In terms of language, participants that assumed bicultural identity communicated in both spoken language and sign language. They respect and use both languages at appropriate moment (through observation). They however accepted that spoken language poses some difficulties for them (because of wrong grammar, and the tone it comes out) compared to sign language.

I communicate in both languages but sign languages draw me closer to the Deaf family. Sign language is so fascinating and full of emotions. When it is spoken language, it can be done with one person at a time but with signing, it just feels normal. Hearing people are concentrating on my English construction and make funny facial expressions when I speak. But I ignore them.

Dee shared her personal and social relationship experience and those experiences demonstrated a bicultural type of identity. She had the chance just like her other colleagues

Gee and Bee to keep friends of both worlds (hearing and deaf). All these participants acknowledged that they have close friends from the hearing world whom they shared most encounters. They also kept SHIs too as friends in the school. Dee shared,

I have a best friend who I have known since childhood. She is hearing. We are very close and even though she is not in the same department with me, we get to share lots of things. I have a close friend too who is in the Deaf Family here on campus. I value the friendship I have with the two very much.

Social participation experience in classroom was shared by bicultural deaf participants. Some participants indicated that some reactions were positive, encouraging them to hold on that identity.

Many students did not want me around them because they couldn't understand the way I communicated and thought I was being a nuisance. But gradually they got used to it and I had to frequently prove that I am one of them (hearing person).

The findings of this research question are in tune with findings of existing studies (Bat-Chava, 2000; Holcomb, 1997; Israelite et al., 2002; Kent 2003; Maxwell–McCaw, 2001) indicate that educational experience, especially in mainstream schools as influencing the kind of identity deaf individuals assume. Three identities were dominant among participants; a deaf, a Deaf and a bicultural identity. None of the participants assumed a marginal identity. Most researchers (be it quantitative or qualitative) recorded very few or no participant with a marginal deaf identity. Maxwell–McCaw (2001) in his study recorded

only 27 out of the 3,070 deaf persons who participated in his study, to have marginal deaf identity. Similarly, in Bat-Chava (2000) where he studied 267 deaf individuals identified only 22 of them assuming a marginal identity. Hadjidakou and Nikolarazi (2007) in their study of 25 deaf students recorded no student with a marginal identity. These findings in addition to the finding of the current study possibly imply that deaf persons who assume marginal identity are hard to come by or may possibly be unwilling to participate in these kinds of study (Hadjidakou & Nikolarazi, 2007).

Despite the aforementioned findings, the research further showed existing gaps in the way SHIs constructed their identities on the various layers. Hecht et al. (2005) posit that, identity is perpetuated by and through communication and in an environment. In an environment where diverse interaction exists among diverse people, the identity of an individual will be formed through interpersonal communication (Pang & Hutchinson, 2018). Findings of this research question prove that the identity of these students with hearing impairment were as a result of communication and interaction with both hearing and deaf individuals on campus. These interactions end up creating some inconsistencies or overlapping in the identity held by each of these students. The Communication Theory of Identity proposes four (4) layers of identity and concludes that these layers of identity interpenetrate one another causing identity gaps. In this study, it was evident that these students experience some gaps and inconsistencies in their identities through communication. The identity gaps identified were; personal-relational gaps, personal-enacted gaps and personal-communal gaps.

### **Personal-relational gap**

This identity gap refers to the discrepancy that occurs between how an individual thinks of himself/herself and the perception he/she holds of how others see him/her (Amado et al., 2020). This kind of gap was identified among participants. Through interaction with others, these participants saw how others viewed them. They internalised these perceptions of others and made it form part of their identity. Some participants who recognized their hearing impairment as not being a disability or handicap were worried that in some circumstances and in communication, their reactions to hearing colleagues and lecturers create an otherwise impression. That is, their personal layered identity.

I am worried of how my hearing colleagues think of me. I often have to ask them to repeat whatever they say. Other times, I will have to turn one particular ear to them so that they won't repeat. This I get worried because it is a proof that I have a disability.

The above instance represents the inconsistency in identity. Pee shows how her secured personal identity as a deaf/hearing student contradicts the perception, she has created among her hearing colleagues, making them view her as a person of Deaf Identity (that in her view). This creates the inconsistency in her relationship layer of identity. Other participants also shared an experience of how uncomfortable it is when sometimes communicating with hearing peers or lecturers. Hee highlights the embarrassment he creates for himself sometimes just because he wants to prove to hearing people that he is one of them. He recalls an instance in class with a new lecturer.

I put up my hands to answer a question and just as I began, the lecturer asked, what are you saying? Speak up, your English construction is poor



and how are you speaking? I was really embarrassed and my colleagues had to shout that he is a deaf but can speak a little.

Gee explained that although over the years she had to convince her colleagues that she was equally a hearing person, they still held that notion of she fitting in and considered a “deaf and dumb” person. She expressed, “because they always see me among the Deaf Family and also my English doesn’t sound like them, they have put me in that zone”.

Another inconsistency in the personal and relational identity was when Pee had stated earlier that he was a hearing/deaf student (personal layer) but was worried about how others see him.

Just because I can’t speak clearly like them, I am just worried that most of them see me not capable. Some don’t want me even in their group. They see me less of myself because of my impairment so I often have to act as such when among them.

This instance and concern is a proof of the conflict between her personal identity and the identity created in her mind pertaining to her hearing peers as a result of her impairment.

According to Wadsworth et al. (2008), personal–relational identity gap occurs when others perceive individuals differently from the way the individuals see themselves. In this study, participants revealed that hearing people view SHIs differently from how the SHIs themselves view who they are. As a result, there is always the presence of this personal-relational identity gap. For the hearing group, every student with hearing loss is ‘deaf and dumb’ but among these students, who have hearing loss, they have some differences and distinct features.

### **Personal-Enacted Gap**

Another identity gap displayed by participant of this study is the personal-enacted gap. According to Amado et al. (2020) this gap occurs when there is a discrepancy between an individual's personal self-concept and what or how the individual expresses that identity to others during communication. Findings of this study shared a gap that exists between how participants saw themselves and how they expressed that identity (enacted layer). For example, Hee who recognized his hearing impairment as a disability (deaf identity) had to join the 'Deaf Family' on campus so to have some sense of belongings.

Although I don't like some of their ways, it feels more comfortable to join them than to be with hearing peers.

This reaction was echoed by Pee who also added that for the sake of defence and reassurance, he joins the Deaf Family. Both participants also expressed that for financial gains too, they had to join the Deaf Family. Pee shared,

I don't know how to sign, I see my condition as a disability and may not accept all the things Deaf students do, but I just join the Deaf Family because when I am with them, I get the financial benefits.

Another instance that portrayed personal-enacted gap was where students had to assume another identity because of security reasons. Vee for example that did not recognize her impairment as a disability, because of safety had to accept it so to get help. Vee expressed,

I have to let those around me know that I can't hear when they speak. Their reactions always are, "you are deaf and dumb?" Although, not comfortable with that reaction, I just have to nod and smile so I can get the help I need.

Participants expressed that this assumed identity that differs from how they see themselves is as a result of negative reactions from hearing peers and members of staff. They emphasized, that although they were not happy with such reactions and that those reactions reduce their self-esteem, they have no choice than to accept it. According to the participants, as an SHI, you will have to assume that identity of 'deaf and dumb', if you want to have your way and fit in among hearing peers. Fee for instance described how often he has to seek for lecturers to teach at a slower pace so that his sign language interpreter could get what the lecturer is saying so to explain to him.

Some lecturers will do it but for a short period and forget I have asked. Hearing students too will complain and moan because I am dragging the entire class back so I will just ask that we continue.

Fee and Vee, who are SHIs with Deaf identity (personal layer) at this point, demonstrate a different identity (deaf identity) in class, confirming a personal-enacted identity gap. There is therefore a contradiction between who these participants believed they were and the acts they put up sometimes.

### **Personal–Communal Gap**

Majority of the participants in this study demonstrated this kind of gap, where there is inconsistency in their personal view of themselves and the group identity they had to assume. Except the two (2) participants, who identified as Deaf in their personal layer of identity, the remaining 5 irrespective of their identity in the personal layer reported to have had a different identity in the communal layer. In the communal layer of identity, all participants assumed Deaf identity. The first category of students who had demonstrated the personal-communal gap was the deaf students. These students considered themselves

to be hearing and succumb to the hearing/deaf culture. However, they expressed that to have a sense of belonging, they best fit into the Deaf culture (Deaf Family) on campus. These students also expressed that they had to assume a Deaf identity because they stand on common grounds with the other SHIs compared to the hearing students. Hee shared,

I may not identify with everything that the Deaf Family does but if I compare, I am in the world more than in the world of the hearing people.

Students who assumed bicultural identity where they are comfortable in both worlds, also assumed more of Deaf identity. Participants explained that although they are aware of their weaknesses and strengths of both worlds, they feel more comfortable when they join the Deaf Family. Aside the reassurance and sense of belongingness, participants equally emphasized that joining the Deaf Family is much beneficial to them so they prefer to be more acquainted to the Deaf Identity than the deaf identity. Gee expressed,

The money is important. If I should say I am more of a deaf person than a Deaf person, I won't get any financial benefit meanwhile I am a post lingual deaf.

#### **4.3 RQ2: How do students with hearing impairment negotiate their identity?**

Data collected revealed that students with hearing impairment negotiated their identities through diverse means which included positive attitudes, mindless behaviours, group association and humour. These strategies are discussed with reference to the Identity Negotiation Theory (INT).

**Table 3: Summary of how participants negotiate their identity**

<b>MEANS OF NEGOTIATION</b>	<b>INDICATORS BY TING TOOMEY</b>	<b>NEGOTIATION STRATEGY</b>
Mindless Behaviour		
Positive Attitude	Mindless attendance & ego-focused	Identity – rejection strategy
Group Association	Positive dominance	
Humour	Indifferent attitude	

**Source: Field Data, 2021**

#### **4.3.1 Positive Attitude**

Finding of this research question revealed that in order to fit in, participants had to always have a positive attitude towards their identity. In having a positive attitude, participants had to hold up their self-image as well as the communal image identity. Despite the negative reactions and differences from hearing people on campus, they had to support their identity positively without focusing more on other's perception of how they are. Participants expressed how staying positive despite the challenges and obstacles keeps them going. Vee for instance described her condition as “a part of who I am” and “cannot be changed”. I am okay being like this. No stressing myself and explaining always that I can't hear. I am proud of how God created me “she expressed”. Another participant expressed that, it would be of no help to cry because he is hearing impaired instead,

I need to hold myself up high and tell the world I may have a challenge but

I am still human and can do many things even hearing people cannot do.

Positive attitude was also expressed through confidence and having some form of admiration for themselves. Dee expressed,

I am beautiful with or without hearing. I am confident and believe I can speak anytime I am called upon. They might laugh anytime at how I sound or give me some face, but I don't care.

Majority of the participants also shared that although some colleagues of theirs use their impairment to their disadvantage or abuse it, they disgraced and that it was best to always keep a positive attitude. Pee shared,

It could have been worst condition but its best to look at it from a brighter side and be thankful than to always use that as an excuse and had pity on or discriminated against.

Participants also indicated that, these positive attitudes are often kept around the hearing peers because “most of them have less knowledge about hearing impairment while others for the sake of fun, tease us”. Cee shared. Fee emphasized that such reactions from hearing people makes them feel vulnerable compared to when in their own Deaf Family circle. This confirms the security–vulnerability dialectics postulated by Ting-Toomey (2005). According to the participants, when among the Deaf Family, their identities are secured, strong and safe so they are always comfortable being vulnerable around them. However, they have to hold themselves up high to have that sense of belongingness to fit in when relating to the “hearing”.

### 4.3.2 Mindless Behaviour

Participants shared experiences of how they had to always ignore negative reactions as well as disappointments they receive from hearing people. They expressed that they exhibit those behaviours because they believe hearing people continue to be ignorant of their condition and other times too some deliberately do it. Gee shared his experience,

I felt disappointed in a hearing friend. He knew my condition and when we got before a new lecturer, he ignored me leaving me to express myself before the lecturer. All I did at the point was smile at the lecturer and walk away.

Another respondent expressed that when among people of the Deaf Family, he needs not struggle in getting their trust to defend him because they know and understand the condition but when among hearing people, “no matter how angry I get with their reaction, I just brush them off and move on”. Bee said. Hee also expressed how much his roommate sometimes annoys him and all he had to do is turn mute his hearing aids.

He thinks am listening while looking at him but no, have turned it off and wouldn't hear all he says till he is gone.

Another participant shared an experience where he had to exhibit a mindless behaviour by uplifting his ego and proving to friends (classmates) that he was equally fit to join them for a party. Fee expressed,

I love to party but this friend in class kept insisting that I couldn't join them at 'The Stage' because I wouldn't hear anything. I felt bad but just to prove

him wrong and that I can enjoy music while having a hearing loss, I went with them. He was amazed at the end when I danced at the place.

Dee shared her experience with the lecturer stating how much the lecturer did not want her in the class but she continually went. She narrated,

She had said I always drag the class back and she preferred I stay out of class while she gives her notes to look at. I never paid attention on what she asked and whenever I entered the class, her facial expression is not positive but I never mind. I stayed throughout the semester for that course.

Participant's expression of mindless behaviours such as ignoring comments, smiling, walking away and turning off hearing aids demonstrated their distrust (unpredictability) of their identity among hearing people. They however stated that these actions were not found in not, common, among them when they met as a 'Deaf Family'. They had some trust because of their shared norms and daily actions. These findings are in time with predictability–unpredictability dialectic proposed by Ting-Toomey (2005).

#### **4.3.3 Group Association (Deaf Family)**

Another finding for this research question was participants' group association helping them in their everyday navigation on campus. Aside the group association giving them some sense of belonging, security, trust and positive self-esteem, it also gives them some form of consistency in their identity. They stressed that, they did not have to change identity (who they were as hearing impaired, whether deaf or Deaf or bicultural) while part of the association. They were accepted as one no matter the circumstances or environment they found themselves in. Bee for instance shared her experience comparing classroom



experience with hearing mates to experience with members of the Deaf Family. She recounts how much hearing mates will single her out when there is a group assignment and say “you don’t worry. We will do it and add your name to it”. However, in the Deaf family, she is called upon most often to even lead discussions. Bee stated,

In the hearing classroom, I just have to accept that I have a challenge of hearing loss but when with the Deaf family, my hearing loss is not the focus.

Hee, another participant, also gave an account of how much his hearing mates during physical education practical will single him out and will not allow him to join their team but when with the Deaf Family he is allowed to take part when there is a competition among the members of the Association of Students with Disability (ASD). Hee expressed,

I don’t need to feel out when with the Deaf family, they are aware and share my conditions but with the hearing people, I have to look at myself as a “disabled” who cannot play like the “abled”.

Some participants also shared their experiences on how easy it is to communicate among persons of the Deaf family as compared to hearing people. Dee had earlier stated how much signing as a language if ‘spoken’ among members of the Deaf family is fascinating and full of emotions and how much it could be done with many at the same time. However, if compared to speaking with hearing people, “it is a struggle” and their facial expressions confirmed how much being a part of the Deaf Family and ASD, caused no change to the identity they held for themselves. Fee indicated,

As a group, we are one and defend each other against the hearing people and their actions. We may be few and have some differences but together, we become one to fight all forms of obstacles.

This negotiation strategy employed by respondents conforms to the consistency–change dialectics proposed by Ting-Toomey. With these findings, respondents confirm that there is consistency in their identity because they are in a familiar environment but once they enter into the hearing environment, they experience a change in their identity.

#### **4.3.4 Humour**

The final means of negotiating identity by SHIs on campus is the use of humour. Participants expressed how humour played major role in their everyday interactions among hearing people. They mentioned the use of jokes, laughter and personal mimicking to wave away negative reactions, stigma and everyday disclosure of the deaf identity. Although they mentioned that humour is not always the best way out, its positivity outweighs its negativity. Gee disclosed that making fun of or bringing out the fun aspect of being called “deaf and dumb” is his ultimate defence mechanism.

It’s very offensive to hear someone say I am ‘deaf and dumb’. I may have some hearing loss but I am not ‘dumb’ so just to move on, will just move my lips up and down with a funny look, shake my head and dance around so they will burst out and laugh, then off I go!

Hee also shared his expression saying that cracking jokes most often keeps him going. “It is a huge way for me to shelf my feelings when hearing people react negatively to me”, he said. Another participant, Dee also gave an encounter at an ice cream shop outside campus

and further stated that although she was a little embarrassed about the vendor's reaction, she just had to mime with a smile. She expressed,

I saw their lips moving saying can't you talk or you are deaf and dumb? I had to nod with a smile, get the ice cream and step out.

Pee also shared how much he has learnt to laugh about every comment passed by hearing people in making fun of him. He uttered,

Although I feel offended and disrespected sometimes, I keep it within, make some funny gestures, and laugh together with them, then move on. If I should take offense with every reaction or jokes from hearing people, I cannot make friends or get to know lots of secrets of hearing friends.

All participants also affirmed how much humour is used among them when they meet as Deaf Family. They acknowledged that when hearing people give them negative reactions, they feel offended but they repeat those reactions among themselves so to encourage them and mock the hearing people too. Vee shared,

We sometimes tease each other during meetings using some reactions or words hearing people say to us. We laugh about it and encourage each other. We don't always take offense with their actions.

Findings reveal that participants are stigmatized and so experience differentiations in identity but when compared to being in the Deaf family environment, they get recognition and positive reactions, feeling some form of inclusion. This experience is in tandem with Ting-Toomey's (2015) inclusion-differentiation dialectics.

In total, findings of how participants negotiated their identity by employing positive attitudes, mindless behaviours, group association and humour fall under the identity-rejections strategy proposed by Ting-Toomey (2015). Ting-Toomey (2015) proposes two set of identity interactions moves that can be employed by individuals to achieve the three (3) negotiations outcome. Findings of this study attested that, participants employed the identity-rejection strategy so they could achieve the three (3) negotiation outcomes (being understood, respected and successful balance) as proposed by Ting-Toomey (2005). Participants' use of positive attitude is a sign of mindless attendance towards negative reactions from hearing people. Mindless behaviours such as turning off hearing aids, walking away, smiling also falls under the mindless attendance of reactions from hearing people. Their employment of group association relates best to the power dominance behaviour since together they are able to fight obstacles from hearing people. Finally, their use of humour can be related to indifferent attitudes which also help them best in their negotiations. This strategy also confirms the SHIs experience identity rejection from hearing people.

During interactions with other individuals, it is obvious that one will need to modify and refine his or her multiple identities (Eguchi, 2011) and this transactional communication process is what Ting-Toomey (2005) term as "negotiation". Identity negotiation is a mutual activity during communication whereby communicators at the same time attempt to evoke their own desired identities, also attempts to challenge or support the others identities (Ting-Toomey, 2005). According to Ting-Toomey (2015) the term 'negotiation' in INT refers to the exchange of verbal and non-verbal messages between the two (2) or more

communicators in maintaining, threatening or uplifting the various sociocultural group-based or unique personal-based identity images of the other in situations.

Kaye et al. (2018) posit that a range of discipline and a suitable theoretical framework is appropriate in helping to answer how persons negotiate their identity. They argue that the theory needs to be applicable and must be flexible enough of the themes emerged from the study. It is for these reasons that the researcher employed the identity negotiation theory to help answer the second research question of the study: how SHIs negotiate their identities.

Ting-Toomey (2005) introduces five (5) identity dialectics (boundary-crossing identity themes). The security-vulnerability dialectic assumes that when in a familiar environment, an individual's identity is secured; the individual is strong and safe but in an unfamiliar environment, the individual is vulnerable. During interaction, an individual feels 'inclusion' when his/her identity is in high esteem and regarded positively but in an unfamiliar environment there is 'differentiation' once the identity is stigmatized (inclusion-differentiation dialectics). The third is, predictability - unpredictability where an individual have some sense of trust (predictability) during interaction in a familiar and similar environment because of routine norms but experiences identity distrust (unpredictability) during interactions in an unfamiliar environment. The autonomy – connection dialectic is the contradiction that occurs in personal relations with others which brings some identity connection but once there is a halt or break in the relationship, there is identity autonomy. Lastly, is the consistency-change dialectics; which assumes that there is stability (consistency) in identity once an interaction is done in a familiar environment but in an unfamiliar environment, there is chaos (change).

In the researcher's quest to know how SHIs negotiate their identity, it became needful to check if any of these 5 boundaries occurred vis-à-vis how they negotiated their identities. Ting-Toomey (2015) also suggested two (2) major strategies for negotiations outcomes (feeling understood, respected and affirming value). The researcher checked finding of this research question to these strategies proposed by Ting-Toomey.

#### **4.4 RQ3. What implications do these identities constructed by SHIs on UEW**

##### **Campus have on D/HH discourse?**

When it comes to discourses on deaf identities, it varies ranging from whether or not it should be pluralized, the existing diverse theoretical perspectives, diverse definitions and views on deaf diversities (Bat-Chava, 2000; McCaw et al., 2000; McIlroy & Storbeck 2011). This research question sought to identify some conclusions drawn from the identity construction of these SHIs. Findings may support and also add on to existing discourses surrounding deafness. Several deductions were made by the researcher during the interviews and observation period. Findings included; fluidity of deaf identity, deaf persons experience stigmatization and lastly, deaf people prefer to identify with other persons with hearing impaired.

##### **4.4.1 Deaf Identity Is Fluid**

When it comes to deaf identity, Glickman (1996) proposed four (4) main types stating that, these deaf identities are cultural. Pioneering study from Bat-Chava (2000) and Ohna (2004) also provided four similar static deaf identities. Ohna (2004) however specified that the fourth deaf identity 'Deaf-in-my-own-way, represents the fact that deaf identity has to be negotiated discursively and cannot be tied to social category. McIlroy and Storbeck (2011) in their study concluded that deaf identity is not static as Glickman and others had stated,

but it is a complex on-going quest of the deaf individual to have some sense of belonging while accepting his/her deafness and finding a “voice” in a hearing-dominant society. Findings of this study provide that, participants on regular basis had to switch identity in order to fit in. Although each of these participants held a personal identity they cherished and wished remained so among hearing peers, there were instances they had to lay that aside and assume a whole new different identity. From their narratives and expressions, as well as observations made by the researcher, it was obvious that changes in identity was as a result of interactions with hearing people, the setting and other times, the context. In instances where there was change in identity, participants shared experience when interacting with hearing people. For example, Bee who is a bicultural expressed that, during interactions with students of similar condition, holding a “deaf identity” is what works for her best but have to switch to a “hearing identity” once among hearing peers and sometimes be an interpreter for them. Another participant, Hee, who recognizes himself as hearing (that is, deaf identity), shared an instance where he had to assume a Deaf identity. His narrations support the claim that deaf identity is fluid and not static. He shared that he assumes a deaf identity once trouble arises. It sounded amusing how he always had to escape punishment but said that was only way out.

Hearing people cause a lot of troubles so wherever an issue arises and I foresee punishment, I just switch to not being able to hear anything and then I am freed. He voiced.

There were instances participant said they had to switch identity but did so not deliberately. Participants, who used hearing aids in order to hear speech, account that there are instances their devices ceased to function and so had to assume a deaf identity. Pee shared,

With my hearing aids, I am able to hear some degree of speech and take part in conversations with hearing mates. But when it spoils or run low on battery, I have to seek assistance by getting an interpreter. When it happens like that, my hearing mates think I am not deaf and that I pretend to be.

The fluid nature of deaf identity is also realized among participants who are bicultural. They expressed that once they do not belong to just one side it was obvious that circumstances will make them change identity.

I belong to both worlds and so I will not say I have one identity. Some students will say I am deaf because they know I can't speak. Others will also see me as able to speak because when I am around them, I speak. So for me, I am here and there depending on the people and the place. Dee shared.

All participants stated that they had to change their identities mostly because of negative reactions from hearing people. They reported that those negative comments like “deaf and dumb” and facial expressions that depict “you can't join us” or “you don't belong here” or “you are not one of us” push them to change who they see themselves to be. They acknowledged that some hearing people are welcoming and would not let them feel less of themselves but majority of the reactions are always negative. Pee shared,

Over the years I have convinced myself that I belong to the hearing world but being a part of people in my class, I have to accept that I have a hearing challenge. They say I am not like them because I can't speak clearly like



them. When it happens like that I just accept and go to the deaf people to find comfort.

The last statement by Pee made, was emphasized by almost all the participants, leading to the next implication gathered from this study; that SHIs prefer to identify with persons of similar conditions.

#### **4.4.2 Identify with other persons with hearing impairment**

Findings from this study provided evidence that persons with hearing loss are of different categories and held different identity. However, participants disclosed that, despite their differences, they came under umbrella. Findings attested that whether the individual held a deaf or bicultural identity, they all had to assume a Deaf identity at the end by being part of the Deaf Family on campus. Participants insinuated that being part of the Deaf Family gave them security, a sense of belonging as well as a positive self-esteem. It was evident that a sense of threat wove through their experiences on campus and that being part of the Deaf Family was the surest way of fitting in a school environment as such. Bee uttered,

If I can't fit in when hearing people are called, then the best place to feel welcomed and join in is by being with the Deaf Family. They can't say I am not one of them.

Another participant shared how much he can't trust hearing people and that some use him to cover up their dirty dealings to escape punishment. Fee also shared how the regular marginalization by hearing people makes it unsafe for him but rather safer to join the Deaf Family. He intoned,

I have completely accepted to be deaf among hearing mates although I hate to accept it but among the deaf family, I feel normal and can't see myself having any disability.

All participants used the pronoun “we” in referring to the Deaf Family. Irrespective of their differences, the use of “we” indeed brought them under one umbrella and made them a powerful group that was ready to defend each other.

#### **4.4.3 Stigmatization and marginalisation of Deaf persons**

The issue of stigmatization and marginalization continue to reign among persons of minority the group. Stigma according to Goffman (1959) is a socially devalued identity that renders an individual less than fully human in the eyes of others. Mousley and Chaudoir (2018) posit deaf stigma as a social consequence of living within a society that labels deafness as a weakness and operates in a way that excludes and devalues the deaf individual. Findings of this study were evident that SHIs in tertiary institution face stigmatization. Participants highlighted how much stigma is attached to their deafness and often this stigmatisation hinders their involvement in class and general school activities. Some participants pointed out that, just because they could not speak or express themselves well like the hearing students and resort to sign language, many of the hearing people focus on their communication and accessibility needs and side-line them. A participant shared an experience in the narrative on how he was neglected in the library. According to the participant, the individual said “you are a special case so wait till everyone is done then I can attend to you”. Dee continued, “after the long wait, he told me he was tired and that I should come the next day but with someone who could speak.” Another participant narrated that a member of staff said he was a disruption to his class and that his presence

together with his interpreter dragged the class backwards. He further explained that he earlier took offense but convinced himself to accept that “he said that out of ignorance and that he considers my deafness an incapacity and that he needs to be isolated or be in a special class rather than being around hearing people”. When asked why he had those harsh thoughts about the member of staff, Fee said he hadn’t said that from his own thoughts but the words came right from the lecturer. This attitude of deafness as a disability is confirmed by Padden and Humphries (2009) stating that persons of hearing world see deafness as a disability or a condition that prompt hardship and isolation, rather than it being considered an identity that brings opportunity for personal and community growth. It was evident that participants experienced negative reactions from lecturers and students who were hearing. In an encounter with students, a participant gave an account of a hearing student’s reaction when he was to join their group for an assignment.

I don’t need one of these people in my group. They will always delay the work and say they need their interpreter around. We can’t wait for him. I have worked with one before and it was very difficult. Gee accounted.

Gee said, he could still recall the facial expression and the exact manner the student spoke. He felt embarrassed as he lip-read him say all those words. A similar encounter was recounted by Pee concerning his hearing colleagues who will not let him join in their conversations. According to him, they will turn their backs to him so he would not read their lips and other times, they resort to whispering. “These actions make me uncomfortable so I will always be in my one corner till I am asked to join in” Pee added. This action of not adjusting to the communication needs of persons with hearing impairment were evident in Erdil and Ertosun (2011) and Hauser et al.’s (2010) studies.

These researchers affirmed that deaf individuals experience significant isolation during interactions when hearing people ignore and refuse to adjust to their communication needs.

#### **4.5 Summary of Chapter**

This chapter captures the findings and analyses of the research questions for the study. Data gathered on the three research questions were explained critically, described and analysed through the lenses of the Communication Identity Theory, Identity Negotiation Theory and existing literature. The first question which sought to identify the kinds of identities constructed by SHIs at UEW revealed three themes; Deaf identity, deaf identity and bicultural identity. Identity gaps were observed among participants' identity which included the personal-relational gap, personal-enacted gap and the personal-communal gap. With regard to research question two (2), which sought to know how students negotiated their deaf identity, four themes emerged; positive attitude, mindless behaviours, group association and lastly humour. Three themes emerged as findings for the final research question; deaf identity is fluid, identify with other persons with hearing impairment and finally, deaf persons experience stigmatization.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### 5.0 Introduction

This chapter presents a summary of the main findings of this study, draws conclusions and make some recommendations on the identity construction of students with hearing impairments in UEW. This chapter similarly captures limitations of the study as well as areas for further research.

#### 5.1 Summary

There has been an on-going debate among researchers on the diverse identity constructed and held by persons with hearing loss. Existing literature have stated that deaf identity is static because deaf people belonged to a linguistic minority whereas others have contended notion stating that deaf identity is fluid and changes overtime. In Ghana existing literature has centered solely on the experiences of persons with hearing impairment in educational and professional setting. This background information affirms that in Ghana deafness and deaf education is nothing new and so deems it important to look into the identity of students with hearing impairment who school in the mainstream educational environment.

For the research to realise its objectives, three major research questions were asked;

1. What kinds of identity do students with hearing impairment in UEW construct?
2. How do students with hearing impairment negotiate their identities at UEW?
3. What implications do the identities of students with hearing impairment at UEW have on D/HH discourses?

There was an extensive review of literature for this study which served as the basis for findings of this research. The reviewed literature was organised under the concept of identity, overview of hearing impairment, Deaf culture, Deaf identity and lastly students with hearing impairment and identity. This reviewed literature helped the researcher in familiarizing with existing studies pertaining to the phenomenon. It also aided the researcher in identifying the gap in the area of research. Theories that were related to the phenomenon were also identified and employed by the researcher. The theories employed during the study were the Communication Theory of Identity (CTI) propounded by Hecht (1993) and the Identity Negotiation Theory by Ting-Toomey (2005). These theories aided the researcher in making meaning of the data gathered.

The researcher approach for the study was qualitative (Creswell, 2014) while the design was a phenomenology (Creswell & Poth, 2016). These gave the researcher the opportunity to study students with hearing impairment at the University of Education, Winneba and also their identity construction and daily experiences in their natural school setting. Participants for the study were purposely selected (Yin, 2014). Methods used in data collection were interviews and observation. The researcher engaged seven (7) participants in the study. Through semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions and observations (Braun & Clarke, 2013) the researcher was able to identify the lived experiences of these students with hearing impairment while in school and associating with hearing people.

Thematic analyses of the data gathered through interviews and observation produced ten themes in all for the three (3) research questions posed. Themes that answered the first research questions were; Deaf identity, deaf identity and bicultural identity. Positive

attitude, mindless behaviour, group association and humour were themes that emerged for research question two (2). Finally, research question three produced three answers; deaf identity is fluid, identity with other persons with hearing impairment and deaf persons experience stigmatization.

## **5.2 Main findings**

In answering the first research question which sought to identify the kinds of identities students with hearing impairment construct, three main themes emerged Deaf identity, deaf identity and bicultural identity. The data revealed that each participant has their own self-identity of belonging to any of these three identities. However, it was concluded that all seven participants assumed a Deaf identity in terms of their social group identification. All participants belonged and associated themselves with the Deaf Family on campus as well as being a part of the Association of Students with Disability (ASD) on campus. It was evident from this finding that students to switch identities in their day-to-day interaction on campus confirming that deaf identities are not a static one.

The everyday navigation within a hearing-dominant environment, ascertained the researchers' quest to know how these students with hearing impairment negotiated the various identities they constructed. Findings of research question two proved that all participants negotiated their identities using diverse strategies. These strategies included having a positive attitude towards their identity and reactions from people, exhibiting mindless behaviours, having group association as well as using humour. Those strategies included having a positive attitude towards their identity and reactions from hearing people, exhibiting mindless behaviours, having group association as well as using humour. Those strategies employed by participants in negotiating their identities supported Ting-Toomey

(2015) notion that, in culturally familiar environment, individuals of minority experience emotional security, endorsement, satisfaction and also have some consistency in their in their identity; where as in unfamiliar environment, they experience vulnerability and discomfort. Littlejohn et al. (2011) emphasise that in vulnerable and discomfoting environment, persons of minority will need to devise means through which they can negotiate their identities. Therefore, students with hearing impairment, because they find themselves in the minority experience identity rejection, had to negotiate their identities.

Findings from the last research question which sought to identify the implications the identities constructed by students with hearing impairment at UEW will have on deaf discourse did not debunk existing findings but rather confirmed. Three themes that emerged as a result of this research question included the fluid nature of deaf identity students with hearing impaired associating mostly with persons and deaf persons experiencing stigmatization. Those findings provide empirical evidence of deaf identity among students with hearing impairment in Ghana, which has been lacking in literature.

### **5.3 Limitations of the Study**

The first limitation of this study was related to the available literature. Literature on deaf identity in Ghana as well as the African context was hard to come across. Most literature reviewed on this phenomenon was from the western context whereas those identified in Ghana focused on the education experiences of students with hearing impairment. It was however deduced that little or no research has been done on the identity of development of students with hearing impairment within a Ghanaian context. It is hoped that the study contributes to the minimal literature on identity construction of students with hearing impairment.



Finally, time allocated for this research study was also a limitation. The period and time within which the research began did not permit the researcher to have enough moments of observation with participants. This constraint did not however deter the researcher from gathering adequate data from participants.

#### **5.4 Suggestions for Further Studies**

The researcher suggests that comparative studies should be done to ascertain the similarities and differences in the identity constructed by students in different university environments. Further studies could be conducted in other higher educational environment in order to ascertain the kinds of identities they also construct. Further studies could also be done to include hearing impaired students outside the mainstream classroom because the researcher believes that these students outside the classroom setting have relations with other hearing people on campus.

A similar work can also be done to examine the perspectives of hearing people who share programmes with these students with hearing impairment to assess the identity they ascribe to them as well as their experiences.

#### **5.5 Recommendations**

Based on the findings of this study, the researcher seeks to make the following recommendations.

1. Lecturers and students should all be given orientation on hearing impairment. This training will aid in giving hearing people the knowledge in the phenomenon; deafness and shifting hearing people's notion of deaf identities beyond the individual being labelled as 'deaf and dumb'.

2. There should be more dialogue among students with hearing impairments and school authorities. There are students with hearing loss who are bicultural. Therefore, the ability to communicate with SHIs should be possible in order for them to have some sense of belonging while on campus.
3. More scholarly attention should be directed towards exploring identity construction and negotiation among persons with hearing impairment in Ghana as a whole.



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## **APPENDIX A**

### **INTERVIEW GUIDE**

#### **INTRODUCTION**

My name is Lisa Forson, an M.Phil. student at the Communications and Media Studies Department of the University of Education, Winneba. I would like to interview you about how you construct your identity as a student with hearing impairment on campus. I will like to assure you that, all responses gathered for this study will be kept confidential. This means that your responses will only be shared in my academic institution and produced as part of my M.Phil. thesis. Please remember that it is not mandatory to talk about an experience you are not comfortable with.

Thank you for accepting to be a part of this study.

#### **Demographic Information**

- Age
- Sex/gender
- Current level of education
- Programme currently offered

#### **Opening Questions**

- How long have you had this impairment?
- How will you self-identify? Deaf, deaf or hard of hearing?
- Is any family member hearing impaired? If yes, specify.
- Is sign language your first means of communication?

## Main Interview Questions

- Do you consider your hearing loss to be a handicap or a disability? Why or why not?
- If someone offered you “normal hearing” (without surgery or costs), how would you take it?
- Can you tell me a little bit about how you display your deaf identity?
- What are your personal relationships like as a hearing impaired student on campus?
- Are you a part of any deaf community on campus? If so, what is your involvement with them?
- How do you navigate your hearing impairment in your day-to-day activities/life on campus?
- Can you tell me about a positive and negative reaction you got when you told someone you were deaf?
- Can you tell me about a time when you’ve tried to hide or share with others that you are deaf?
- Can you tell me about some of the biggest communication challenges you have faced as a student with hearing impairment on campus?

**Possible probes:** How often do you experience challenging situations like this?  
With whom do you most often experience these challenging situations?

- What have been the outcomes of these interactions?

- Can you tell me what it feels like to be a hearing impaired in a primarily hearing schooling environment?

**Possible probes:** What was it about this situation that made you feel this way?

How did you behave in this situation?

- Did this change the way you feel or behave as a hearing impaired?

**Closing Questions:**

- What makes your life easier or more enjoyable as a hearing impaired student?
- Is there anything else you would like me to know about?



## APPENDIX B

### OBSERVATION GUIDE

Participant.....Observer(s).....

Date or time of observation.....

Location/venue.....

Number of students present.....

Observation notes (open ended observation notes focusing on SHIs.....)

- 1) **Nonverbal expression of feelings:** participant's reactions to comments by hearing colleagues (anger, smile or humour, walking away, etc.)
- 2) **Interacts with whom:** participants interact solely with hearing colleagues, solely SHIs or both hearing and SHIs
- 3) **How participants communicate with hearing colleagues:** using interpreters, lip reading, hearing aids or any other means
- 4) **How participants communicate with fellow SHIs:** sign language, interpreters, any other means
- 5) **Terms that participants used:** any existing jargons when referring to hearing colleagues or SHIs
- 6) **Events that participants were unable or unwilling to share:** scenarios or instances participants forgot to share