

The Voice of the African Postgraduate Student in Addressing Fear of Research for Sustainable Development and Enhancing Wellness

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Abstract

The study aims to develop guidelines to assist postgraduate students in addressing research-related fear during their studies and in developing resilience, as well as social, emotional, and intellectual wellness. A qualitative design and narrative approach were used in this study. The theoretical framework that guides the study is the African philosophies of Ubuntu and wellness (Hettler, 1980). Purposive sampling was used to get the study's three participants (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). Data is collected through interviews. Data analysis indicated that the three participants experienced fear in their research journey. Recommendation of Ubuntu principle is of utmost importance; a good relationship with the supervisor help them address fear of research and develop resilience, as well as social, emotional, and intellectual wellness, for sustainable development and lifelong learning.

Keywords: postgraduate student, supervisor, +++fear, resilience, intellectual, social, emotional wellness, sustainable development

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1. Introduction

In South Africa, postgraduate students pursue master's and doctoral degrees to address the country's sustainable development challenges and enhance their wellness through research. Sustainable development and current research challenges are closely connected and exert a significant influence on both society and education. In this study, sustainable development involves responsibly managing resources to ensure their availability for both current and future generations, as explored through postgraduate research (Ozili, 2024). Research can be defined as the creation of new knowledge regarding a particular problem or concern and the generation of new concepts, solutions, or understandings of the body of knowledge (Noori, 2021). Research involves activities such as applying scientific systems, methods, and theories; it can utilise inductive or deductive methods to uncover solutions to a scholarly inquiry that addresses sustainable development and wellness (Dimitrios & Antigoni, 2018; Ozili, 2024). These research activities can provoke fear and exert tremendous stress and anxiety upon postgraduate students, which might inhibit sustainable development and hinder the postgraduate students' emotional, academic and social wellbeing.

2. Understanding the challenges

Postgraduate students often experience fear and uncertainty when embarking on research projects to address sustainable development in their lives as scholars in the making. Coss (2019) defines fear as a natural, powerful human emotion that involves a biochemical response to situations that involve danger, threats, or no threats, and can be physical, social, emotional, intellectual, or psychological. Fear can raise a reaction to non-threatening stimuli that bring excitement to learn something new and progress, which contributes to sustainable development.

In this study, the term fear implies primarily the emotional factor that includes a group of related terms such as anxiety, panic, hesitation, fright, apprehension and nervousness experienced by the postgraduate students in their research trajectory, which might impede sustainable development and wellness (White, Skokin, Carlos, & Weaver, 2016).

They advocate that fear experienced before the research trajectory may differ from fear during the research event itself. The postgraduate student may have different responses to fear on different occasions in their research trajectory. When fear of research is addressed, assessed and action taken, it can be overcome and improve social, emotional and intellectual wellness and contribute to sustainable development. Fear can enhance successful performance in research trajectory, but fear without any action can cause paralysis, hindering sustainable

development, social, emotional, and intellectual wellness (White et al, 2016).

Wilutzky (2015) asserts that fear can be perceived as positive or negative depending on the postgraduate student and the circumstances at that period. For instance, a negative fear would make one stay away from performing an activity they perceive to be scary. On the other hand, fear perceived to be positive brings about positive emotions like thrill, delight or excitement to pursue or explore research activities and contribute to sustainable development. On the contrary, the postgraduate student may experience social, psychological, intellectual or emotional symptoms of being overwhelmed, anxious or out of control to do research, ultimately quitting his research studies, which obstruct sustainable development and wellness.

Sussman, Szekely, Hajcak, and Mohanty (2015) state that fear can make it difficult for postgraduate students to take improvement measures to do research, increase anxiety and stress, and depression that can hinder progress, sustainable development, advancement of social, emotional and intellectual wellness. Before the research trajectory, the postgraduate student could feel fear or scared, but trying to conquer the feeling of fear brings fulfilment to an achievement, it adds to enjoyment and a feeling of excitement and accomplishment. He advises that constant engagement in research activities, setting goals and getting support from the supervisor reduces fear, brings improvement to research, contributes to sustainable development, and enhances social, emotional, and intellectual wellness (Buckley, 2016).

Therefore, fear can be adapted and overcome through regular engagement in research activities, positive personal attitudes, getting social support from the family, supervisor and the institution as a result of improved social, emotional and intellectual wellness (White et al, 2016). In this study, the focus is on the fear perceived to be positive, which brings enthusiasm to the postgraduate student to progress in their research trajectory and contribute to sustainable development and wellness. The study attempts to understand the voice of the postgraduate student as to how fear of research is addressed, assessed and what could be the appropriate action taken to overcome it, enhance the successful completion of the research trajectory, and contribute positively to sustainable development, and improve social, emotional and intellectual wellness.

3. Phases of Fear to Do Research

Studies have identified that postgraduate students experience fear at different phases of their research trajectory; it can be at the initial phase, during the research trajectory itself and at the final phase (Pickard, McKenna, Brunton & Utley, 2017).

In the initial phase, the postgraduate students experience fears as follows: intrapersonal stress, anxiety, uncertainty, fear of the unknown or frustration, which might hamper emotional wellness. Their fear is based mostly on questions such as the completion of their studies within the stipulated time. However, Higher Education Institutions try to encourage and support postgraduate students to complete their postgraduate studies on time. The master's postgraduate student takes an average of two years and an average of three years for doctoral-level studies (Ndayambaje, 2018); secondly, how to balance time for work and research studies. Bitzer and Withering (2020) pointed out that postgraduate students need sufficient time to bring out quality research and contribute to sustainable development, and improve social, intellectual and emotional wellness. Therefore, it is up to the postgraduate student to create, prioritise and balance time between work and research. Thirdly, find a suitable supervisor to support, guide and mentor them throughout the research trajectory, yet improve their social wellness. Conversely, van Rensburg, Mayers, & Roets (2016) confirmed that postgraduate students need research skills, professional development, and expertise from the supervisor for the successful completion of their research studies to enhance academic wellness (van Rensburg et al, 2016). Hence, the relationship between the student and the supervisor plays an important role in contributing to sustainable development, improving social, emotional and intellectual wellness. While meant to support, develop, guide and impart research skills to the postgraduate student to be an independent researcher (Woolderink, Putnik, van der Boom & Klabbbers, 2015).

Lastly, to balance family responsibilities and research studies. Wilutzky (2015) revealed that family and friends are the first source of social support that has a significant influence on the achievement of their research studies and on improving social wellness. Yet, the challenge is how to balance social support, focus on their research trajectory and improve intellectual and emotional wellness without distraction. Yet, Saul and Simon (2016) indicated that a deficit of social support harms emotional wellness, such as depression, anxiety and psychological problems, which might also hinder the progress of completing the research trajectory and obstruct sustainable development.

During the research trajectory

At this phase, the postgraduate student faces the fears of the research itself. Fears are provoked by the following:

- how to do quality research,
- research aims and objectives are impossible to achieve;
- filter scientific literature that is meaningful,
- apply real-world data collected in the research paper
- articulate written arguments of the research evenly
- demonstrate the application of concepts' deeper synthesis and bring up new solutions

However, Dimitrios and Antigoni (2019) emphasise the fact that, before the postgraduate student embarks on the research trajectory, he has to grasp the basic principles that make the research study suitable and accepted by the academic community.

The last phase

The fear related to the last phase is the submission of the final research chapters for final evaluation, whereby their writing has to be criticised. Besides, the research chapters ought to be rewritten at the point the postgraduate student feels emotionally and intellectually exhausted (Ndayambaje 2018). Yet, the qualification could be awarded to the postgraduate student when they demonstrate originality in the application of knowledge, be systematic, understand new knowledge and methods applicable to their research, advance through research and improve social, emotional and intellectual wellness (Dimitrios & Antigoni, 2019; Bitzer & Withering, 2020).

4. Approaches to overcome the fear of research

The fear of research can be overcome through various approaches. This study discusses some of the approaches as follows:

4.1 Building Resilience

Building Resilience, the postgraduate student needs to build resilience to contribute positively to sustainable development and improve their emotional, social and intellectual wellness. In this study, resilience implies the capacity of the postgraduate student to thrive back from any experiences of fear, panic, anxiety, and nervousness or any adverse experiences encountered on the research trajectory (Pickard, McKenna, Brunton & Utley, 2017).

Schwartz (2019) ascertained that resilience improves self-confidence, coping strategies and self-efficacy, which are needed to assist postgraduate students in overcoming the fear of research. Resilient students see the fear of research positively; they are curious and courageous to contribute to sustainable development and improve social, emotional and intellectual wellness. They adapt by learning something new from the adversities in research, finding their strength and focusing on improving research skills, engaging actively in research activities, pushing against negative thoughts and thriving, progressing positively, improving emotionally and intellectually.

4.2 Supervisor- postgraduate student relationship

Supervisor- postgraduate student relationship plays a vital role in overcoming the fear of research and improving social and intellectual wellness. They both have to play their role in overcoming the fear of research, completing on time, producing the highest quality research output and improving sustainable development, social, emotional and intellectual wellness (Shumaila, Muhammad & Umair, 2019). While Higher Education Institutions assign supervisors to postgraduate students, however, in some cases, a student chooses the supervisor, depending on the Institution's policy. Yet, the Ubuntu principle embraces the sharing of knowledge and expertise to support and teach for continuity as information is transferred from the supervisor to the postgraduate student; hence the saying "fundisa simunye" (teach, we are one), meaning the self-fulfilled through others (Mulaudzi, 2014). Ndayambaje (2018) advises that to overcome fear, it is crucial to find a supervisor based on knowledge or expertise in the research topic and research methodologies, supportive and give feedback timely on the research study. Moreover, the relationship between the supervisor-postgraduate student should not be based on friendship or personal needs but professionally, treated as a junior colleague who needs advice, support, mentoring and monitoring throughout the research trajectory for successful completion. Le, Pham and Bui (2021) outline that the relationship style of the supervisor-postgraduate student must be open, objective, constructive, and supportive; identify student needs, help and guidance; and have significant counselling aspects to overcome fear. The qualities of a supervisor towards the postgraduate student are enthusiasm, reliability, confidence to listen, encouragement and willingness to share his expertise, understanding, approachability, and ease of contact or access (Dimitrova, 2016). In addition, the supervisor should maintain their authority throughout the research

trajectory whilst he facilitates, assist and manage the progress of the research, eventually certifying the readiness of final submission for evaluation and awarding the student with a qualification or becoming an independent researcher that contributes positively to sustainable development (Derricks, Thompson, Roberts & Phua, 2018).

Yet, Derricks et al (2018) articulated that it is the responsibility of the postgraduate student to positively manage or deal with their personality to overcome fear. They urge that a negative personality might hinder the capacity to progress in research and impede social, emotional and intellectual wellness. The Sepedi proverb “Ditau tsa hloka seboka di shitwa ke nare e hlotsa” means that if the student and the supervisor lack unity, they fail to work together to accomplish even a minor assignment (Rakoma, 1975). Positive personalities include a positive attitude towards their supervisor, openness to receiving feedback and criticism, the ability to do self-reflection, flexibility, the ability to deal with stress and coping mechanisms to complete their research and improve their wellness. Moreover, to overcome the fear of research, the postgraduate student must be self-motivated, creative, intuitive, and learn to be an independent researcher by taking the initiative to improve their research skills. Woolderink, Putnik, van der Boom and Klabbers (2015) warn that students who are dependent on their supervisor tend to be passive, lack confidence in engaging in research activities, wait for solutions from their supervisor, and obstruct progress to overcome fear, and obstruct sustainable development. Therefore, students need to be willing to increase their knowledge of their topic, improve their writing skills and analytical skills, and improve intellectual and emotional wellness (Woolderink, Putnik, van der Boom & Klabbers, 2015).

4.3 Basic training and continual workshops

Basic training and continual workshops develop confidence to engage in research activities and improve emotional and intellectual wellness. Marchan, Delgado and Stefanos (2017) urge that basic training and course attendance assist students in developing their research skills, improving methodological skills, analytical expertise, and academic writing skills, and developing article-writing skills for publishing purposes. This becomes apparent considering the Sepedi proverb “Rutang bana ditaola le se ye le tsona badimong” meaning experts should teach and share knowledge with novices before it is too late (Rakoma, 1975). In addition, Bitzer and Withering (2020) point out that institutions that provide adequate induction in research have significant quality research output since it offers students the opportunity to address peculiar needs in good time and improve their research skills, strengthen their motivational level and enhance intellectual and emotional wellness.

4.4 Social support

Social support has a significant impact in assisting students to overcome fear and influence positive academic achievement and social wellness (Pickard, McKenna, Bruton & Utley, 2017). Carr, Colthurst, Coyle and Elliot (2013) refer to social support as family, friends and/or peers with whom the postgraduate students interact positively; they are a source of encouragement, listen to their problems and provide moral and emotional support. Yet, the Ubuntu principle emphasises that the student forms part of a collective community, hence collective responsibility and collective empowerment and relies on interrelation and interdependence for support, hence the Sepedi saying “motho ke motho ka batho”, meaning a person is a person through others (Ntseane, 2011; Wiredu, 1998). This approach motivates, encourages persistence, and gives social and emotional support, especially when the student struggles in the research trajectory. Social support attained from networking with peer students and experts in the academic community at research conferences or seminars lessens anxiety, stress and psychological problems encountered in the research trajectory (Garcia-Parra, Negre, and Verger, 2021). Conversely, Walsh (2016) points out that student who lacks social support tend to suffer from psychological, social and emotional problems such as depression, loneliness, and anxiety, which increase fear of research and hamper sustainable development, social, emotional and intellectual wellness.

4.5 Initiate a community of practice

Initiating a community of practice is essential for overcoming the fear of research and enhancing resilience, as well as social and intellectual wellness. Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner (2020), define a community of practice as a formal or informal group and network formed by postgraduate students who share a domain of interest to engage in collective learning through shared discussions, exchange information and assist one another. This notion of community of practice is also prominent in Ubuntu principles of collaboration, interconnectedness, solidarity and teamwork to support one another (Gyekye, 1997). Thus, postgraduate students at the master's or doctoral level can develop relationships that enable them to support each other and improve their research skills, ultimately overcoming their fear of research and promoting resilience and overall wellness.

The above discussion leads to the research question as follows:

5. Research Question

What is the voice of the postgraduate student in addressing fear to research for sustainable development and enhanced wellness?

6.1 Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework that guided the study integrated the African philosophies of Ubuntu and the wellness model (Hettler, 1980). The wellness model consists of six dimensions namely intellectual, emotional, physical, social, occupational, and spiritual wellness (Hettler, 1980). These dimensions describe the person in totally improving the quality of life proactively and positively. While one dimension may influence the other, the current study focuses on social, emotional and intellectual wellness. Intellectual wellness involves engaging creative and critical thinking to enhance knowledge and skills (Hettler, 1980; Gurung, 2006). Emotional wellness focuses on feeling cared for, bolstering the sense of self-worth, talking over a problem, providing encouragement or positive feedback and the ability to manage emotions appropriately (Dzulkifli & Yasin, 2010). The model has enabled me to understand the voice of a postgraduate student in addressing fear of research for sustainable development, improving wellness, and being successful in their postgraduate studies. I also used the African philosophies of Ubuntu to understand the voice of a postgraduate student in addressing the fear of research. Mbiti (1992), Metz (2007) and Gyekye (1997) posit that African philosophy is characterised by a communal interdependency that is called 'Ubuntu'. The community collaborates, acts as social security and takes responsibility that impacts positively on every aspect of people's well-being in the community (Mbiti, 1992). For this study, the Ubuntu lens enabled me to listen to all factors which brought fears to research and how the supervisor applied Ubuntu to assist the postgraduate student in addressing those fears in their research trajectory, mainly focusing on sustainable development, intellectual, social and emotional aspects.

6.2 Research Design

The study used a qualitative research design and narrative approach because the participants told their stories, that is, about their fears of research and how to overcome them at the postgraduate level (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). I used purposive sampling since I knew the participants. For the past six years, I studied with one of the participants; she is 48 years old and managed to complete her doctoral degree within 3 years. The other participant is my senior at work, a 52-year-old male who studied in three different institutions and took six years to complete his master's degree. The third participant is my co-worker, a 54-year-old male, who changed two supervisors due to atrocious relationships between them. He completed his master's degree after 5 years. It is usually common in South African communities that postgraduate students in the age group ranging between 35 and more, study through distance learning. In most cases, the postgraduate students are working and taking care of families; hence, they prefer to study through distance learning. Ethical measures were considered; all participants signed the consent form and were informed that the interviews were recorded. They all permitted me to capture data in the tape recorder. I conducted Interviews for 30 to 45 minutes at their homes to allow the participants to be in their natural setting. I assured them of confidentiality and anonymity and that they participate on a volunteer basis and are free to withdraw from the study at any time. The questions I asked the participants were "Take me through your research trajectory, experiences, and fears; it can be at the university, home or work. How did you overcome your fear of research? What advice could you give to other students who are intending to venture into the postgraduate level? The questions enabled the participants to narrate in detail their story of postgraduate research trajectory from the registration phase up to the completion of the degree. During their narration, I used words such as "oh," "hmm", "interesting", and nodding to encourage detailed descriptions of their story.

6.3 Data Analysis

For data analysis, I used narrative analysis. Shortly after the interviews, I listened to the tape recorder and transcribed the data for each interview. The participant's identity was removed and allocated a pseudonym for anonymous purposes. While transcribing, I listened again and noted any patterns on the transcript margins, and then the coding process was the next step, in which data was colour-coded manually. I chose coding manually since it gave me the chance to re-read and re-read the narrated transcript and identify and highlight recurring words, ideas or patterns generated from the data. Codes were condensed into major categories, and then four themes were developed as follows:

- *Importance of building resilience*
- *Supervisor-Student relationship*
- *Communication and Feedback*

- *Induction training and Workshops*

Community of practice

Below are the transcripts of the narrated stories of the three participants:

Interview with Ms Phumelela

Initially, I had fear and was nervous but excited to venture into the world of academia. My fear and anxiety were about matching the standards of academic writing. I managed to overcome my fears by doing a lot of research about my study and got support and encouragement from my supervisor, peers and my family. I chose a topic by myself based on the background of my previous study in my master's degree. My supervisor also helped and guided me to rephrase the topic to be researchable and managed to complete my studies within three years.

I had intrinsic motivation and wanted to get the highest qualification that could pave my upward movement in the world of academia. Moreover, I was motivated by peer students who engaged tirelessly in their studies.

My Institution allocated supervisors to students, and I was lucky to get a supportive mentor and a life coach supervisor. She cared about my wellness since she understood my topic. A good relationship with the supervisor is of paramount importance. My supervisor was so helpful, approachable, willing to share her expertise and went beyond the call of duty to make my doctoral journey very smooth. Moreover, as a student towards the supervisor, I always show commitment, stick to the set time, listen to advice and always be willing to learn new knowledge.

I overcame my fears and anxiety about research language by interacting with fellow research students, attending workshops and having one-on-one contact with my supervisor. She created time to meet with me if I had any questions or misunderstandings. My biggest challenge was the pressure to submit and meet deadlines. I had to adjust my time to balance my studies, work and family.

My advice to prospective students who want to embark on a postgraduate trajectory is that they must be prepared to work hard, get relevant support and be prepared to learn at all times. In my Sepedi language, we say, 'kodumela moepa tuse gagu lehumo letshwang kgaufi'.

Interview with Persistence Bambelela

My experience was quite intimidating initially. I yearned for a higher-level degree, so I registered for my master's degree. It took me five years to complete it. I changed the supervisor in the middle of my studies on the same topic.

My first supervisor was a white male who was assigned by the institution. My experience with him was ok, then we had some misunderstandings along the way. He was quite a busy man. He assumed that I had a background or knowledge of research basics, so he went directly to big research terms that I had not been exposed to before. It was difficult and intimidating to ask simple questions. Then there was a gap between us. I felt like I was in a dark area, hindering progress. However, he wanted the submission of assignments and reports, but I had no clue. It felt awkward or silly to ask simple but important questions. There is a huge gap between undergraduate and postgraduate students, especially if there is no module training on research to bridge the gap between research and academic writing. Our relationship was too formal and professional; we could not communicate my challenges or any other issues outside the research arena. When experiencing problems in my research, I had to formally write the questions and email him, but he took forever to respond. There was no way to carry on without getting feedback. Another factor he was unfamiliar with my quantitative study; he opposed it but preferred a qualitative approach. Hence was not supportive enough on how to do quantitative data analysis. I was not progressing; I got to the point of frustration and was behind the stipulated time of completing. So I believed in my Sepedi proverb "leboella le a ja", meaning perseverance pays; hence, I had to write a formal letter to change the supervisor to one comfortable with my research methodology. Then the institution intervened.

We had a good rapport with my second supervisor; a female professor knowledgeable in quantitative research. She was approachable, willing to assist at any time, understood my challenges, and our engagements were effective and productive. Our relationship was less formal but professional, which helped to allay fears and anxiety and to get clarity on some grey areas. A healthy relationship with the supervisor makes communication easy and effective because we engage easily outside the research arena. She took me through the basics of academic writing and was supportive throughout to completion without any hassle.

Interview of Mr Hluphekile

It was not easy; I did not believe that I would ever complete it. I registered in three different institutions and took six years to complete. At my first institution, was given a male supervisor who was not interested or

knowledgeable about my topic. You see, it was my first exposure to the world of research. Our relationship was awful; he asked questions that made me feel like he disliked me. He asked about how I planned to approach my research topic, using research language that I did not understand at all, so it was confusing and frustrating. I felt like I had never learned English at all. I needed him to help, guide and take me through the ropes of research writing. Instead, I felt belittled and incompetent to acquire this qualification, and my hope of obtaining my master's degree was shattered. I suspended studying for two years. Yet, my heart yearns for a postgraduate qualification; therefore, I registered at the second institution again. I was given a black male supervisor; I thought it would be better because we are of the same race, culture and background. You know, it is important to understand that "maleka gase makgona, makgona ke maboetsa". By saying so, I mean that I had to persevere and try repeatedly.

However, it was worse; he negatively judged my topic without any support and wanted it to be changed to one he wanted. Fear of choosing a new topic that I do not understand might lead to studying for the sake of a paper that I do not like or would not work for me, but hang it on the wall. The supervisor dropped me, and I felt like he undermined my intelligence. Regardless of my challenges and fears about research, deep down I needed to have a master's degree, so I registered at this third institution. I had more fears and anxiety, wondering what would happen, and what the expectations of the supervisor and the institution were; curious about the type of supervisor who will s/he understand and accept my topic; Would I ever understand the language of research?

Fortunately, at that stage, my colleague was studying for a master's and my manager graduated with his doctoral degree. Seeing the two as my role models since they are people I know from the same race, culture and background achieving postgraduate levels, then it means it is doable. They motivated me; I had to learn resilience, persevere and continue on acquiring my master's qualification. I got a male white supervisor, and I feared that I would come across bad experiences that happened at the first institution in Gauteng Province. It was the opposite; the supervisor liked my topic and told me it was researchable. He invited me to attend a workshop on how to approach research. He started building a good relationship, but focused on research matters, which encouraged more effort to submit and meet the respective due dates. He listened to my challenges, assisted, motivated, supported and remarked on my study in the isiZulu proverb saying "Lena akusi ingwe yakho yedwa ingwe yethu," meaning it is "our' project, 'we' should accomplish it together. I felt so capable, managed to complete my research, and received positive results from examiners. Then I understood better what it means by the Ubuntu principle "umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu" I would not have achieved without the assistance of others"

7. Findings And Discussion

The data collected from the narratives of the participants aimed to answer the research question: What is the voice of the postgraduate student in addressing fear of research for sustainable development and enhanced wellness?

I presented quotes in narrative form for each of the four themes to provide evidence of my findings. This allowed me to provide rich, thick descriptions of data and keep narratives intact to ensure clarity and meaning. The discussion of the findings encompasses social, intellectual and emotional wellness and Ubuntu's theoretical framework to overcome the fear of research. Themes discussed are as follows:

7.1 Importance of building resilience

The findings of the study revealed that the participants encountered fears of research in the three phases of their research trajectory. In the initial phase, they were not sure if they would succeed in postgraduate studies. The quote below shows apprehensive, anxious and nervous narratives, yet it has an element of determination that could be termed resilience. This is illustrated when participants narrate that:

...initially, I had fear, was nervous but excited to venture into the world of academia... fear and anxiety to match the standards of academic writing...

... it was not easy; I did not believe that I would ever complete it. I registered in three different institutions and took six years to complete... I suspended studying for two years. Yet, my heart yearned for a postgraduate qualification, so again I registered at the second institution ... regardless of my challenges and fears about research, deep down I needed to have a master's degree, so I registered at this third institution. I learnt resilience, was motivated to continue, persevere and persist in acquiring my master's qualification...

It is clear that by having resilience, one can overcome the fear to research, and persist to complete his research. Moreover, they used their Ubuntu proverb and idioms to help carry through the journey of research, such as

“Maleka gase makgona, makgona ke maboeletsa”. Means ‘If you do not succeed at first keep trying again until you do’. In the initial phase, the postgraduate students experienced fears such as intrapersonal stress, anxiety, fear of the unknown or frustration (Pickard, McKenna, Brunton & Utley, 2017). It includes anxious feelings about completing their studies within the stipulated time and balancing time for work and research studies. Postgraduate students need intervention in research activities to enhance resilience that could provide them with the personal skills to succeed in research adversities (Bitzer & Withering, 2020).

7.2 Supervisor-Student relationship

Findings revealed that a strong relationship between supervisor and student is associated with advising, encouraging, guiding, mentoring, and confident listening, and a supportive supervisor willing to share his expertise, understanding, and approachability is crucial for overcoming fear in research and improving emotional and intellectual wellness. Participants narrated that:

... lucky I got a supportive supervisor, mentor and life coach, who cared about my wellness, was approachable, willing to share her expertise and went beyond the call of duty to make my doctoral journey very smooth... helped, and guided me to rephrase the topic to be researchable and managed to complete my PhD within three years...

It was evident that a good relationship has a positive impact on overcoming fear and the successful completion of the research study. It should be of a junior colleague who needs advice, support, and monitoring throughout the research trajectory to completion and contribute to sustainable development, improve social, emotional and intellectual wellness (Le, Pham, & Bui, 2021). Hence, this good relationship embraces the principle of Ubuntu (Mbiti, 1992).

... He listened to my challenges, assisted, motivated me, and remarked on my study in the isiZulu proverb saying “Lena akusi ingwe yakho yedwa ingwe yethu,” meaning it is “‘our’ project, ‘we’ should accomplish it together”.

However, an appalling relationship between the supervisor and student might hinder progress in completing the research study. It is evident from the narrative:

... “had some misunderstanding ... It was difficult and intimidating to ask simple questions. Then there was a gap between us. I felt like I was in a dark area, hindering progress... even so, he wanted the submission of assignments and reports, but I had no clue. It felt awkward or silly to ask simple but important questions...

The current findings on the appalling relationship between supervisor and student diverge from Le, Pham, and Bui (2021), who emphasised that the relationship style of the supervisor and the postgraduate student must be open, objective, constructive, and supportive, to identify student needs, provide help and guidance, have significant counselling aspect to overcome fear. In this case, the student was having trouble, hardship and fear, but the supervisor was unable to identify those needs. Fear can make it difficult for postgraduate students to take improvement measures to do research, increase anxiety, stress, and depression, which can hinder progress (Sussman, Szekely, Hajcak, & Mohanty, 2015).

It emerged from the findings that the relationship between supervisor and student could overcome fear by assisting the student to improve research expertise, knowledge of the topic, methodologies, and research skills. It was clear from the participant’s narrative:

... “was knowledgeable in quantitative research, approachable, willing to assist at any time, and understood my challenges and that made our engagements effective and productive. Our relationship was less formal but professional, which helped to allay fears and anxiety and helped me to get clarity on some grey areas.

Ndayambaje (2018) also advises that to overcome fear, it is crucial to find a supervisor based on knowledge or expertise in the research topic, research methodologies, and timely support and feedback on the research study. Therefore, the relationship between the supervisor and postgraduate student should be professional, treated as a junior colleague who needs advice, support, mentoring and monitoring throughout the research trajectory to successful completion and improve sustainable development, social, emotional and intellectual wellness.

7.3 Communication and Feedback

By looking at specific comments and responses from the participants, these narratives highlighted the theme of communication and feedback. From the participants, it was evident that they preferred their supervisor to communicate and give feedback on time on their research work to gain confidence and lessen anxiety, fear and depression in research.

... “A healthy relationship with the supervisor makes communication easy and effective” ...

...He listened to my challenges, assisted, motivated, and supported and remarked on my study as “‘our’ project, ‘we’ should accomplish.” I felt so capable, managed to complete my research, and received positive results from examiners...

The current finding confirmed Ndayambaje’s (2018) advice that to overcome fear, the supervisor must be supportive and give feedback in a timely manner on the research study. It concurs with the framework of Ubuntu by Mbiti (1992), Metz (2007) and Gyekye (1997), which posits that Ubuntu is a communal interdependency that includes communication to impact positively on every aspect of the student’s wellness. Hence, it improves self-efficacy and confidence and motivates the student to complete their research study within the stipulated time.

Conversely, the narrative from participants indicated that lack of communication and feedback hinders the progress of addressing fear, and the successful completion of the research study and impedes sustainable development, intellectual and emotional wellness. He said:

... we could not communicate my challenges or any other issues outside the research arena. When I had problems in my research, I had to formally write the questions and email him, but he took forever to respond to those questions; there was no way to carry on if I did not get feedback.

This current narrative opposes the advice by Derricks, Thompson, Roberts and Phua (2018), who maintained that the supervisor should sustain their authority throughout the research trajectory whilst facilitating, assisting and managing the progress, eventually certifying the readiness of final submission for evaluation and awarding the student qualification or becoming an independent researcher. Therefore, it is important to keep communication open and provide regular feedback to improve their research skills and overcome fear.

7.4 Induction training and Workshops

From the participants’ narratives emerged the theme of induction and training workshops. Induction to basic training research and workshops in research programmes, develop confidence to engage in research activities, overcome fear and improve emotional and intellectual wellness. It was evident from their claims:

...” invited me to attend workshop training on how to approach research, taking me through the basics in academic writing” ...

From these findings, it was clear that it is important to undertake induction before embarking on the research trajectory to boost self-efficacy and confidence to engage in research activities, lessen anxiety and psychological problems encountered in the research trajectory and improve intellectual and emotional wellness. This current finding corroborates with Marchan, Delgado and Stefos (2017), who recommend that basic training and course attendance assist students to develop their research skills, improve methodological skills, analytical expertise, and academic writing skills, and develop article-writing skills for publishing purposes. The current findings confirm the theoretical framework by Hettler (1997), who urges that intellectual wellness involves engaging in creative and critical thinking to enhance knowledge and skills in research (Hettler, 1980; Gurung, 2006). Therefore, the supervisor must engage their student in regular workshop training to enhance research skills and to expose them to conferences, seminars, and to network with peer students and experts in the academic community.

Listening specifically to the narrative of the participants before research induction shows that a lack of induction and research training on basic research skills led to psychological, intellectual or emotional symptoms of being overwhelmed, feeling anxious or out of control, ultimately quitting his research studies. They said:

...He assumed that I had a background or knowledge of research basics, so he went directly to big research terms that I was not exposed to... I got confused...

... He used difficult research language hard to understand, confusing and frustrating... I felt belittled and incompetent to acquire this qualification...

The current findings on lack of induction and workshop training corroborate with Woolderink, Putnik, van der Boom and Klabbbers (2015), who articulate that the students who lack training are passive, lack confidence in engaging in research activities, are dependent and wait for solutions from their supervisor, and that obstruct the progress to overcome fear and complete their postgraduate studies. Ironically, an institution that provides adequate induction in research has significant quality research output; it offers students the opportunity to address peculiar needs in good time and improve research skills, strengthen motivational levels and enhance intellectual and emotional wellness (Bitzer & Withering, 2020).

7.5 Initiate a Community of Practice

By looking at specific comments and responses from the participants, these narratives highlighted the theme of

initiating a community of practice. The participants expressed a sense of interdependence and collaboration in learning research skills. They emphasised the importance of teamwork, highlighting how sharing skills, knowledge, and information supports one another. They said...

...” Fortunately, at the stage when studying master's....Seeing my colleague and line manager embarking on postgraduate studies and ultimately graduating... it served as my role models since they are people I know from the same race, culture and background ... I engaged with them frequently...achieving “At postgraduate levels, it is doable.”

The findings align with Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner (2020), who recommend that postgraduate students who share domain interests can engage in collective learning through shared discussions, exchange information, assist and support each other, and improve their research skills, ultimately overcoming fear of research and promoting resilience and wellness. Thus, community of practice collaboration not only enhances social wellness but also contributes to intellectual and emotional wellness, as it fosters confidence in engaging with the research process and overcoming fear of research for sustainable development.

8. Conclusion and Recommendations

In conclusion, it was clear that participants experienced fear of research at different stages of their research journey, which impedes their wellness and positive contribution to sustainable development. By integrating wellness practices and Ubuntu to address the fear of research, postgraduate students can enhance their resilience, productivity, and creativity, enabling them to contribute to sustainable development with confidence as scholars firmly grounded in research skills. To empower postgraduate students to address the fear of research, supervisors and postgraduate students ought to embrace Ubuntu principles of communication and build an open, constructive relationship that includes counselling to overcome fear, produce the highest-quality research output, contribute meaningfully to sustainable development and society at large, and improve wellness.

To address the fear of research, we need researchers who are able to conduct research even beyond formal qualifications, for the Sustainable Development Goals to be achieved in all sectors. Therefore, the University can cultivate a supportive and nurturing environment that fosters resilience by creating more induction training and continual workshops in research programmes to address specific needs in good time and improve research skills. To strengthen postgraduate students' self-motivation, creativity, intuition, and independence, and to encourage them to take the initiative to enhance their research skills, unlock their full potential as change-makers in pursuit of sustainable development, and improve their wellness, I argue that universities can embrace the Ubuntu principle of communal interdependency and solidarity by encouraging postgraduate students at the master's or doctoral level to develop a community of practice that enables them to support each other and strengthen their research skills, ultimately overcoming their fear of research and promoting resilience and wellness.

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