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Autobiography reflecting on academic leadership and management and doctoral supervision: From childhood to academia

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My academic leadership journey was challenged by multiple factors, ranging from underprivileged households, poor school, inadequacy of academic writing skills, heavy university loads, and full-time job responsibilities. My academic journey influenced my supervision. It was marred by delayed completion of academic projects and throughput. The primary objective of this autobiography is to reflect on my lived experiences of academic leadership and management, and doctoral supervision journey using Ubuntu Pedagogy. This autobiography is undergirded by an interpretive paradigm, adopting a qualitative case methodology to unpack my lived experiences in academic and postgraduate studies and supervision. I used a mental map to reflect on my lived experiences and revisited my previous diaries, notes, and reflexive reports to compile this autobiography. The research findings reflect a limitation and impediment to doctoral students' success caused by changes from a well-resourced research environment to a constrained one. I strongly believe in a (modified) one-to-one peer learning approach, as shaped and influenced by my lived experiences from childhood on one-to-one peer learning, as the best method of supervision pedagogy. I recommend that universities should improve the research environment and research provisioning. Furthermore, supervisors should be capacitated and encouraged to adopt Ubuntu Pedagogy in their doctoral supervision journeys.

Key words: Academia, autobiography, Ubuntu pedagogy, postgraduate supervision.

INTRODUCTION

Universities globally are facing enormous governmental pressure to increase postgraduate output, and in turn, contribute to the knowledge economy. This pressure is transferred to research supervisors, who have to navigate the complexities of research supervision to not only meet postgraduate output targets set by the university in

particular but also postgraduate output targets set by the government in general (Hendrickse, 2022: 1).

I commence with a nugget from Hendrickse (2022) who reflects on the pressure on supervisors to increase access and throughput rates and recommends some alignment with the South African government's adopted neo-liberal

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policies. These policies focus on the cost of production and knowledge economy as a profit creation engagement, without striving towards equity in educational research provisioning in the university as far as infrastructure and human capital are concerned. On the other hand, the Department of Higher Education and Training (2015: 3) identified a shortage of qualified academics for doctoral supervision, the slow pace of transformation, and the aging professoriate.

The universities of technology, that were former Technikons were tasked with mentoring and production of artisans and technology-oriented professionals and not the traditional academic researchers. McKenna and Powell (2009) reflect on higher education restructuring in South Africa through the prism of the conversion of Technikons into universities of technology and argue for the diversification of higher education rather than blanket unification. Despite resistance by scholars such as McKenna, Powell, and other colleagues, the politically influenced change of Technikons to universities of technology still happened. Consequently, the University of Technology (UoT) faces the challenge of the inability to generate a third-stream income (Mgobo 2024). Boughey and McKenna posit (2021) that Universities are struggling to understand and sustain access and success. Further, the knowledge that is forever evolving in research, teaching, and learning puts strain on the students and lecturers who may debut new modules in their careers. Furthermore, the majority of Higher Education positions are now part-time with fewer benefits, with more emphasis on creating short courses and new skills desired at the workplace. The current challenges experienced by former universities of technology reflect a lack of planning to sustain such technology-oriented institutions. It renders the change non-sensible and non-sustainable. Higher education transformation as experienced in South Africa is riven by a high shortage of artisans and technologists, calling therefore for a more rounded intervention program.

Each educational policy should come with adequate resources for successful implementation. However, a change to the Universities of Technology, coupled with Technikon merging, resulted in three core responsibilities for the UoT namely, teaching and learning, knowledge creation and dissemination through research, supervision, and community engagement. The production of competent and expert artisans has become a secondary objective, compromised by a lack of infrastructure and resources that emanates from a shift of focus to research production and dissemination.

I am working in one UoT and faced with multiple adversities, as outlined. I realized that my survival in academic leadership, tasked with teaching and learning, research and supervision, and community engagement, needed perseverance that targeted learning and personal growth opportunities. Like Owusu-Kwarteng's (2019: 4) grandmother, Lizbet, I overcame my struggles to ensure my education. Lizbet made an affirmation to her children

for future education: "Because I can't read or write, or speak any English, you are going to be able to, so you are all going to school!"

I appreciate how Mesuwini (2024: 766) embraced this new UoT's academic leadership and research supervision when he says: "Research showed that academic challenges could be turned into learning opportunities for career development, networking and collaboration, and personal growth, resulting in meaningful research contributions. The lessons learned, challenges overcome, and contributions made during the journey lay the foundation for future academics to focus on academic excellence during their academic wilderness".

Mesuwini believes in changing the tide of stressful UoT workplaces into learning and research spaces for personal and career growth, networking, and collaboration. I strongly support his perspective in building my mental health and personal well-being, otherwise, I foresee job-related stress, depression, and related illnesses.

As I wrote this article, like Hannon (2018), I started understanding my role as an educator, a supervisor, and a manager at HEI. I joined the education profession from the Postgraduate Certificate of Education (PGCE) and assumed a lectureship role after acquiring my doctoral degree. In this autobiography, I reflect on my lived experiences of academic leadership, postgraduate studies, and supervision journeys, and further reflect how Ubuntu Pedagogy contributes to doctoral students' success. I relate how my leadership skills from childhood cascaded into my supervision role. I describe my journey as a doctoral student, and how I supervise as largely influenced by how I was supervised as a doctoral student. Hove and Nkamta (2017:1) also argue that the doctoral space limns the 'metaphor of journeying towards a horizon in order to signal the strides that push forward the boundaries of knowledge evidenced in the originality and systematicity of doctoral studies.' Due to the paucity of research on black females' voices on issues related to school culture and environment, particularly their experiences from their own perspective, this article contributes to discourses on black females' experiences as told by them. In addition, this paper contributes to challenges faced by individual lecturers, drawing from literature. However, the use of one-person self-study approach used in this article is a limitation as opposed to multiple voices. I reiterate the questions asked by Carter Andrews et al. (2019) on a similar topic to describe my experiences as a black female in academia. I ask the following three main research questions:

- 1) How does my childhood leadership skill transfer to my academic postgraduate studies and supervision?
- 2) What are my academic and supervision journey experiences?
- 3) How does the Ubuntu Pedagogy lens influence my academic leadership and supervision journey?

In the following sections of this article, I provide a

literature evaluation about the terms: academic leadership and management, postgraduate study, and doctorate supervision. I then explain the research and methodology aspects before concluding the study by presenting findings and discussion.

Literature Review

The literature conceptualised academic leadership and management, postgraduate studies, and doctorate supervision. I chose to include my positionality in this autobiography research.

Conceptualizing academic leadership and management in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs)

Leadership roles at HEIs refer to those roles where the manager is responsible for other staff members. Academic leadership and governance play a crucial role in overcoming problems and fostering institutional success. As the HEI landscape changes, academic leadership impact the quality and direction of educational institutions (Kamala and Kamalakar, 2023). Further, decision making processes need be adaptive, transparent and inclusive due to multifaceted nature of HEI challenges.

Postgraduate studies: A qualification and developmental process in HEIs

A doctorate is the highest academic degree the HEI offers at National Qualification Framework (NQF) level 10 according to the Minimum Requirements for Teacher Education Qualification (MRTEQ). The NQF level 10 outcomes are called doctoral attributes. A candidate at that level must acquire the ability to produce new knowledge, write a publication, give a presentation, read, and write for research. After graduation, the candidate gets bestowed a title as he/she joins the profession of his/her specialization. Most academic scholars highly regard 'doctorate-ness' as an honour since it comes with a title and many potential benefits for leadership positions.

According to Varghese (2024: 1), out of 10 NQF levels, a Doctorate or PhD "represents the most advanced academic achievement. Individuals earning NQF level 10 can access various career opportunities." NQF Level 10 qualification represents the pinnacle of academic achievement, indicating that one possesses advanced knowledge and skills to conduct original research in one's field. With this qualification, one can pursue high-level academic, senior research, and leadership roles across various industries.

After completing my PhD degree, I joined a traditional University as a postdoctoral fellow. This brief temporary position marked my real venture into academia as a part-time lecturer, researcher and a mentor in a real University

Mentoring Program. I later joined a UoT on permanent basis.

Doctoral supervision: Perspectives from supervisors and students

Doctoral supervision entails a supervisor being responsible for doctoral students, teaching them doctoral attributes, and mentoring them to succeed. Khene (2014) describes supervision in academia as a form of teaching that requires sensitivity to the human challenges' students face, which can impact the research process. Literature emphasizes that supervisors expect personal and professional qualities of the students while the students expect supervisors to provide guidance and support in addition to research (Friedrich-Nel and Mackinnon, 2013). For success, I navigated my doctoral studies with my supervisor's support. I continue to support my doctoral students in like manner. Haley, Holmqvist and Johansson (2024) discovered gaps in supervision literature. These include supervisor professional development programs aimed at improving the quality of doctoral supervision and supervisors' knowledge. According to Haley, Holmqvist and Johansson (2024), doctoral students believe that supervisors' theoretical and methodological knowledge is key in enhancing the quality of supervision. Hence, in this article I reflect on my lived experiences of academic leadership and management, and doctoral supervision using Ubuntu Pedagogy as I believe this framework has the potential of enhancing the quality of doctorate supervision.

My positionality in this autobiography research

My childhood was filled with a passion for educational success against all odds. I was raised in a culturally rich upbringing characterized by respect for family and collective. However, I was struck by family and community poverty that extended to my primary and secondary schooling in the Maloti Mountains of Lesotho. My academic leadership journey was challenged by multiple factors, ranging from an underprivileged household, poor school, inadequacy of academic writing skills, heavy university loads, and full-time job responsibilities. The difficulties of under-privileged students are supported by Chiramba and Ndofirepi (2023), who expound on the need for HEIs to teach and boost resilience in students from disadvantaged backgrounds to enable these students to succeed against the challenges they face, some of which are financial. Through funding, I was fortunate to navigate passed such challenges. Deng et al. (2022), expose the relationship between family and academic stress as the precursors of depression and low academic achievement. On the contrary, I did not develop any depression, and I was a top achiever at school. Additionally, the common literacy problems may be solved through collaboration.

Bilikozen (2019) discovered collaboration between the lecturers, students, English language/writing experts, and academic staff in disciplines as the most suitable to develop sound academic literacy skills. I continue to improve my academic literacies and undergo training to develop my leadership skills as good managers are needed in HEI for effective leadership and to produce adaptive graduates with the ability to contribute to the needs of societies.

Although there were many adversities that impeded my academic journey, I soldiered on with ample family support. In this academic leadership journey, from childhood to university as a student, and later as a lecturer who is required to possess disciplinary academic leadership, I was also afforded an opportunity to serve as a curriculum champion, program coordinator, and acting head of the school. This all started with primary and secondary school teachers affording me a teaching space. I was immersed as a teacher and created peer learning spaces. Playing a mentor and providing peer teaching from an early age boosted my confidence and bred my strength in peer learning. This further, prepared me as a future mentor to my students and subordinates as well as remain in the teaching profession. In line with Sachs et al. (2011), I built mutual benefits through respect, a sense of individual responsibility, and professionalism during mentoring. Smith-Washington (2023) recommends mentoring novice teachers during early career years and beyond, for support in real-world classroom and management as a motivation for them to remain in the profession.

I recently noticed an oversight in my schooling and university years that in my sciences particularly my chemistry classes and lectures, development of the writing skills, and later academic writing skills were not given the necessary attention. I still battle with this skill to date. I also did not notice the importance of this academic writing skill, as it was not emphasized in sciences and chemistry because we were focused on the use of mathematical equations and formulae. My tenure in the school of education was a paradigm shift in itself, as I had to learn a lot of educational jargon including methodological and theoretical philosophical underpinnings of the educational field.

My appointment as a disciplinary academic leader and research supervisor in the UoT was marred by multiple challenges, emanating from a lack of mentorship and support from the old academic staff members. Smith-Washington (2022) lists the challenges faced by novice teachers who lack mentoring and may abandon the profession as characterized by a lack of resources, planning skills, work ethic, or meaningful observations. Lack of mentoring results from the crisis in HEI, which is mostly exacerbated by a lack of succession planning, skills training needs analysis, and a lack of calling to the profession (Mentz, 2018). Regardless of these challenges, my love for the teaching profession continues. As I

commenced my career as a lecturer, the academic composition of the staff was from Technikons and former teacher colleges who were assimilated in this new space of UoT. Unfortunately, the new order of organizing UoT came with university teething challenges. In the main, the UoT was experiencing understaffing which resulted in an increased workload for staff. At the time, many of the universities were also undergoing massification. My appointment from a research-based university to UoT was a nightmare of challenges.

I was able to surf my doctoral journey without challenges at Rhodes University. But my appointment at the UoT was different. I was familiar with the context of best doctoral supervision and my university was one of the research powerhouses in South Africa, with prominent professors in different disciplines. My mentors and university support systems enabled me to publish my work in accredited journals. I was able to read papers at conferences and I was involved in the supervision of honours and master's students.

In this autobiographic study, which reflects on my lived experiences, I used the research question, 'What do lived experiences mean?' This research question informs the discourse in understanding my lived experiences. In this paper, lived experiences refer to the qualitative approach that captures participants' perceptions, narratives, and life histories. This definition of lived experiences is in line with Ntinda (2019: 411), who argues that "narrative research aims to unravel *consequential stories* of people's lives as told by them in their own words and worlds." It is the focus on the consequential narrative that anchors this self-reflexive account. In support, Sharp et al. (2019: 861) highlight those narratives to "have the capacity to reveal the complexity of human experience and to understand how people make sense of their lives within social, cultural, and historical contexts." This autobiography contributes to the body of knowledge in the field of education, specifically autobiographic inquiry. This autobiography offers a methodological philosophy that is undergirded by person-centric investigation and a teller-informant view (Ntinda, 2019). Having conceptualized lived experiences, I then want to explore what autobiographic study is and how is it used in this paper.

Autobiography is a research method in constructivist and interpretivist methodological philosophy that aims at a teller narrating their own lived experiences from one's perception. Autobiographic research inquiry is related to narrative, diaristic, life history, and reflective essay inquiry methods in seeking to understand a phenomenon through personal reflection and perspectives on lived experiences. In addition, autobiography is related to "oral history, or narrative approaches to sociological discourse" (Okyerefo, 2023: 229). Similar to Méndez (2013), and Hove and Masemola (2014: iii) who argue that autobiographical selves and representations validate, confirm, interrogate, and pervade conversations with issues of identity, nation, and history. Autobiography offers the multidimensionality

of new ways of reading and analyzing specific perspectives and views inherently expressed through the re-imagined, re-membered, and re-constructed self that speaks through the pages of autobiographical scripting. In this autoethnography, I explored my positionality, lived experiences, and my journey from childhood to academia.

METHODOLOGY

This paper used an interpretivist qualitative paradigm and a self-study to explore my lived experiences in academia, postgraduate studies, and supervision. Using self-study research allowed me to reflect on my experiences from the teller-informant perspective (Ntinda, 2019). Aside from telling my own story, I used my past journals, notes, and reports to produce my autobiography. As research confirms the relationship between interpretivism and qualitative research, self-study research is associated with textual narratives.

FINDINGS

Major adversities and opportunities in the journey from childhood to researcher

This topic was guided by the research question, 'What are my childhood academic experiences?' I had a positive childhood experience where I was always happy and loved both at home and school. I came from an underprivileged household; however, my family was able to offer adequate food, love, and care. I was always my teacher's favorite, and I loved school. Regardless of my underprivileged household, poor school, and inadequacy of academic writing skills, I aimed to succeed in my studies and become an academic researcher. My childhood experience finds resonance with Narayan et al. (2018: 20), who discovered through empirical evidence that favorable childhood experiences promote positive functioning in adulthood. As a result, I succeeded in life from early childhood to completing my university studies without any social ills or teenage pregnancy.

This resilience in life claim is supported by Hillis et al. (2010), who observes that "increases in the number of childhood family strengths were associated with progressive reductions in long-term psychosocial problems that have been attributed to adolescent pregnancy, including serious problems with jobs, family, finances, and uncontrollable anger." As an adult, I came to notice the importance of caring and support environments necessary for an individual's success. Hurley (2024) defines resilience as the ability to adapt to challenging life experiences, requiring skill that develops with time. The caring support is extended to my relationships with colleagues and students in creating a conducive learning environment for students and a flourishing work environment for colleagues. I used the research question, 'What are my academic experiences,' to reflect on my childhood experiences in my academic journey.

I started my career as a science school educator at my former school. Having fallen in love with the profession, I joined the education profession through a PGCE. Eager to become a university staff member, I continued with my postgraduate studies to the doctoral level. Being the pride of my family and community motivated me to emerge as the first graduate of my family. Burger and Naude (2020) list motivators of success as being the first in one's family to attend higher education and overcoming financial stressors. In addition, I always performed at my best with no negative attitudes such as reported by Clark et al. (2006), where certain race, gender, and culture traits are expected to perform poorly on assessments due to stress. On the contrary, Thomas (2014), attests to communication, cooperation, and compassion as traits that female students may exploit in order to achieve successful careers, and strong family relationships, simultaneously. I was following in the footsteps of community members who were academically successful. My academic success became a motivation for my family and community. After my university graduation, many of my family members followed suit. I continue to encourage and inspire more members of society to further their studies by being their role models.

I persisted with my degree despite the financial strain that surfaced after all my family livestock was stolen. I completed all my degrees in record time through hard work, doing all the work that was expected of me such as going to the library, tutorials, and forming student study groups. This is in line with previous reports that showed chances of student's success at university increasing with attending tutorials, using previous examination papers, engaging in self-directed homework, student-run study groups, and use of the library (Khumalo and Utete, 2023). I continue to offer these services for my students' success.

I have a productive academic experience. According to de Vries and Martínez (2019), "performance and productivity have become central goals in higher education reforms since the 1970s where graduates should quickly find a well-paid job that matches their field of study." However, finding a job became a challenge with a doctorate as most managers, responsible for hiring me did not have such a high qualification. I realized that I would have been advantaged if I had studied part-time and kept my former employment. I am currently a Senior Lecturer, Programme Coordinator, former acting head of the School, and a postgraduate supervisor in a UoT. My bigger challenge is to supervise full-time employed teachers, with additional roles as principal or head of department. They have to support their families and carry the stress of working while studying. This is confirmed by Balacuit and Lopio (2022: 748), who asserts that "the primary academic challenge of working scholars in their daily lives is financial problems, which are attributed to school-related expenses (requirements), needs, and wants. In addition, working scholars are also psychologically challenged because of external discouragement and a lack of moral support from

their families. However, I envy them for furthering their studies, keeping their employment, and not falling into the same trap as mine, of becoming overqualified and becoming a threat to existing personnel in the workplace.

Academic leadership and management

In reflecting on my academic leadership and management journey, I posed a research question, 'what challenges did I face as a manager at a HEI?'

I occupied the positions for four people simultaneously, as there was no budget for lecturer relief according to the human resources partner. These were the senior lecturer, curriculum champion, program coordinator, and acting head of school. As the senior lecturer, my job entails a full teaching load of 16 h per week, attending tutorials, doing experiments, setting examinations, tests, assessments, marking, invigilating assessments, and entering marks in the information technology system. From the curriculum champion position, I developed four bachelors of education specializations in the senior phase and further education and training. As acting head of the school and a program coordinator, I took the role of leading the department. I was responsible for more than 30 staff members, held departmental staff meetings, and attended executive meetings of the faculty and senate. To manage these responsibilities, I made my days longer and only slept for two hours every day. My roles constituted heavy loads and full-time job responsibilities where I became the departmental acting-head while I held my normal teaching load at the same time.

The three-legged pot system names the key functions in HEI as teaching, learning and assessment, research, community engagement, and general administration (to list a few: registration, students' queries, employing part-time staff from advertising to interviewing). Houston et al. (2006) and Varela and Premeaux (2023) emphasize the key roles of an academic as teaching and learning, research and service, or administration. Davidovitch and Cohen (2024) maintain fewer research output measures and teaching survey scores for academics who assume administrative roles. Varela and Premeaux (2023), further defend research as job-fulfilling and an indicator of success in academia while teaching and service are not elevated.

Motivated by core academic and disciplinary interests, HEI staff members are challenged by increased accountability and workloads. They stretch their working time to accommodate the demands of their job, working more than 10 h beyond full-time in some instances (Houston et al., 2006). It is beneficial to complete each day's tasks so that by the end of the year, most objectives are met. The frustration of not completing tasks may come at a price as deadlines are not met and objectives are not met. In order to complete most of the daily tasks, I am proactive and manage my time through little sleep, waking up at four or five in the morning, and focusing my time on

doing only what is on my to-do list. I refuse to resort to a culture of blame (Houston et al., 2006). I was a bit relieved when I finally enrolled in a leadership academy course where other program coordinators and heads of departments seemed to have similar issues related to stress and incomplete tasks.

At the end of my 6-month tenure as the acting head of school, 'I was lucky to be alive'. Those were the words of my medical practitioner, after numerous consultations where the medical specialist was unable to diagnose my illness. I later upgraded myself with an advanced diploma in business management, and business administration, which is very useful in guiding my execution of managerial tasks.

This segment responds to the second question, 'How am I treated at a HEI as a female leader? Academic leadership has unique demands, where academics must be effective as they fulfill various demands (Rehbock, 2020). However, as a female leader, I constantly watch my back as colleagues undermine my authority. I survive the HEI through my emotional intelligence. My ability to notice the source of my emotions enables me to control my emotions using emotional intelligence. "Emotional intelligence is associated with effective leadership qualities, creativity, and innovation, as well as empathetic communication, needed in the challenging HEI workplaces" (Mayer et al., 2017: 1). It is critical to understand the emotional intelligence of women leaders as only a few of them do manage to occupy HEI positions (Khumalo and Zhou, 2019) and Emotional intelligence seems to be the determinant of success in their leadership roles. I constantly communicate with colleagues about what has to happen. I confront colleagues who engage in sabotage activities and give positive or negative feedback to colleagues as necessary.

The doctoral journey

I respond to the research question, 'What contributed to my doctoral success?'. I worked hard to obtain my doctoral degree in record time. I used the slogan, 'If I was not in the chemistry laboratory, it means that I was on my way to the chemistry laboratory.' This slogan meant I spent 24 h researching in the Chemistry laboratory. I also earned a 'night owl award' from the Rhodes University Honours Students' Society for spending my nights in the chemistry laboratory. I developed new knowledge in Chemistry and received my PhD degree through the Mellon Foundation Scholarship.

My success in Chemistry PhD may also be attributed to the research-rich environment of my alma mater, Rhodes University.

Fung et al. (2017) define a research-rich environment as a university providing students with cutting-edge research that incorporates complex problem-solving and awareness of ethical considerations. Additionally, a research university recruits the 'cream of the crop' and focuses on producing

new knowledge. A good PhD gave me leverage in terms of knowing what one has to do in order to succeed in doctoral studies. Further, the country needs more doctoral graduates for more knowledge production. I acquired most of the doctoral attributes where I could read and write papers for publications, presented at conferences, and mentored new master and doctoral students in our research laboratory (S22) using a one-on-one approach. I used a one-on-one approach to mentoring in the same manner that I tutored my siblings and classmates while still in primary school. During this period, I produced four articles in accredited journals and presented at five conferences nationally/internationally. My research in physical/analytical chemistry incorporated researching catalysts to recover waste materials. I also acquired some knowledge of photodynamic therapy, which my laboratory mates embarked on. Here, the research-rich environment helped me complete my doctorate on time. As a supervisor, I use limited resources. I remembered how I was supervised as a doctoral student and supervised my students in a manner that helped them complete their doctoral studies on time.

The availability, support, and care of my supervisor were other attributes of my doctoral success. My supervisor gave support in the chemistry laboratory for experiments in research, provided journal articles on my topic, and was available on call or personally 24 h a day. In her dedication to our success, my PhD supervisor is quoted as follows:

When I mentor my students, I give them not just knowledge, but also the care and support they need to become the best versions of themselves. You cannot achieve greatness unless you are nurtured along the way....” (Rhodes University, 2024: para 17 line 1).

According to Anttila et al. (2024), high-quality supervision is characterized by informational, emotional, instrumental, and co-constructional support. Additionally, Sverdlík et al. (2018: 1) undertook a review of doctoral experiences and discovered the “factors that can be readily categorized as external and internal to the doctoral student; external factors include supervision, personal/social lives, the department and socialization, and financial support opportunities, while internal factors comprise motivation, writing skills, self-regulatory strategies, and academic identity.” There was no time wasted waiting for the supervisor’s availability. Hence, much work was timeous. I worked for long hours in the chemistry laboratory, immediately showing my supervisor any new results, I obtained from the chemical reactions. She would immediately guide me on the analysis, advising me on how to proceed and how much data I would need to complete a research paper. She drafted my first article, the postdoctoral fellow drafted the second paper, and I drafted two last papers to make four.

The doctoral supervision

In reflecting on my doctoral supervision, I answer the

question, what are my experiences in doctoral supervision and how does the Ubuntu pedagogy lens influence my academic and supervision journey? My doctoral students are full-time employees who do not have enough time to engage with their studies, which could lead to a low graduation rate. Therefore, I use Ubuntu pedagogy for my doctoral students to succeed. I use a modified one-on-one supervision model as I have tutored family and friends from school and mentored peers from university. The modification recognizes the changing HEI landscape and offers quality supervision. As already discussed, while I guide my doctoral students one-on-one, I receive extra support from the co-supervisor, faculty, and department when the student’s work is reviewed.

One of the challenges in doctoral supervision is the lack of resources at the UoT. Due to the unavailability of resources, most doctoral supervisors do not have the capacity to do the supervision. Lategan et al. (2023) expose the deficit in UoT supervisors to increased throughputs and graduation rates. On the other hand, Fung et al. (2017) conscientise universities into producing more research outputs for financial gain and international rankings. Seasoned supervisors are able to produce more research outputs and more doctoral students over a short period, increasing university revenue, throughput, graduation rate, and world rankings. I attended most of the supervision training workshops and a course that UoT has to offer on doctoral supervision to improve my supervisory skills. Further, I got more exposure to supervision from main supervisors, and co-supervisors, writing and reading research articles, and reviewing some research work.

Intrinsic motivation, the research-rich environment, and the availability of supervisors contributed to my success. From my lived experiences, I know that a research-rich environment and supervisor accessibility can contribute to doctoral students’ throughput in record time (Thaba-Nkadimene, 2020).

Co-supervision that fosters “collaborative cohort supervision model needs to be adopted by deprived universities to improve supervision capacity and students through-put” (Thaba-Nkadimene, 2020: 5). Similarly, as a doctoral supervisor, I ensure that my doctoral students are exposed to the same success triggers, despite all odds. However, my effort is crippled by limitations to research-based resources.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The primary objective of this autobiography was to reflect on my lived experiences of academic leadership, postgraduate studies, and my supervision journey, as well as to explore how Ubuntu pedagogy contributes to doctoral students’ success. There is a scarcity of research on how Ubuntu pedagogy may contribute to doctoral students’ success, and this autobiography closes that gap and further contributes to education and autobiographic inquiry. My success story in academia and supervision of

doctoral students emanates from my good childhood, and the inviting home, and educational environment.

From my lived experiences, I know that intrinsic motivation, a research-rich environment, and supervisor care and accessibility, can improve supervision capacity and contribute to doctoral students' throughput in a record time. Moving from mono- to co-supervision has the capacity to foster a collaborative cohort supervision model by UoT to improve supervision capacity and student's throughput. As my doctoral studies were not delayed, I made sure my students graduated in a record time. As a supervisor, I dedicate enough time to my doctoral students for their success, as informed by Ubuntu pedagogy. This study recommends that universities of technology put more resources into improving research-rich environments and supervision by capacitating the supervisors. Furthermore, the study suggests co-supervision with its capacity to 'foster collaborative cohort supervision model.'

In this autoethnography, I explored my positionality, lived experiences, and my journey from childhood to academia as a female. Future research studies may focus on a person's world of work in academia with a main emphasis on teaching, learning, and assessment or research in HEI. Moreover, studies may incorporate journeys from childhood to academia in secondary school learning or teaching in High School.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

The author has declared no conflict of interests.

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