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Brown-Bag Research Framework for Nurturing Early-Stage Graduate Students: the Ubuntu Perspective

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Research Article

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Abstract

Background/purpose. Transitioning from coursework to an independent, complex inquiry has constantly been a challenge in advanced scientific programs, which often presents numerous barriers arising from limited research knowledge, experience, and skills necessary to navigate the contemporary research environment. This conspicuous gap breeds frustration, delays, poor performance, and, in many cases, dropouts, mostly among early-stage graduate research students. Consequently, there is a need for a strategy to empower nascent researchers, stimulate essential competencies, foster progress, and enhance graduate efficacy.

Materials/methods. This qualitative research, conducted through an integrative desktop narrative review, summarises empirical and theoretical discourses to inform the conceptualisation of a pragmatic intervention. The sample comprises secondary data, specifically published materials on higher education, graduate research, the brown bag concept, and Ubuntu philosophy. The content analysis illustrates that brown-bag seminars, grounded in the Ubuntu philosophical foundations, promise a flexible and cohesive atmosphere that energises discussions more effectively, leading to attendees' broader comprehension and competencies.

Results. The delivery of the brownbag seminars, which is structured through three distinct stages (peers-to-peers, peers-to-mentors, and peers-to-broader audience), will potentially enhance learning outcomes and graduate research efficacy.

Conclusion. The findings provide a blueprint for a comprehensive Ubuntu-centred brown-bag research framework in higher education. It will guide reforms tailored to strengthen internal agencies that inherently possess the attributes conducive to fostering graduate research efficacy, particularly at the early stages.

1. Introduction

Research engagements can be overwhelming and challenging for early-stage postgraduate students, especially at honours and master's degree levels, who frequently experience difficulty transitioning from coursework to independent, complex inquiries required in advanced academic endeavours. Stemming from limited research experience, knowledge and skills (Wang *et al.,* 2023), and lack of exposure to the research environment, and deficiencies in contemporary methodologies (Crismon *et al.,* 2023; Oloniruha *et al.,* 2023), top-down post-graduate development strategies are necessary to foster research aspirations for emerging researchers, in their nascent stage. The initial research phase often requires a profound knowledge and understanding of theoretical frameworks, research design, approaches, and techniques (Daniel, Kumar, & Omar, 2018), which many early-stage graduate cohorts find challenging to grasp. In addition, the complexity of synthesising vast scientific literature, coupled with the pressure to identify gaps and niche areas, establish value propositions, and conduct original, societal-relevant research, constitutes part of the challenge (Iwara, 2023). It results in intellectual paralysis, wherein emerging researchers feel overwhelmed by the sheer magnitude of research expectations at their nascent stage (Amani, Myeya & Mhewa, 2022), consequently leading to heightened anxiety, procrastination, and even a decrease in productivity.

Lack of proper supervision and mentorship may also be present in some tertiary institutions, significantly contributing to the uneasiness in research among early-stage graduate students. Inadequate attention and guidance from supervisors, and insufficient interaction with research studies due to diverse academic responsibilities, often leave graduate students isolated and unsure of the appropriate methodologies to navigate, resulting in poor progress (Iwara, Mwale & Obadire, 2018). Supervision strategies, particularly timely and effective feedback, have a profound positive impact on learning and teaching capabilities. Providing effective research feedback to graduate students is often, however, a challenge for supervisors, and this frequently leads to a negative supervisory experience for both the students and their performance (Chugh, Macht & Harreveld, 2022). The graduate student-research supervisor relationship is critical in determining a student's success or failure. When graduate students lack proper supervision and mentorship in their early stages of conducting research, their ability to conceptualise their research appropriately becomes impaired. This lack of academic guidance frequently leads to prolonged graduation timelines, and beyond university residency periods, if not dropping out.

Beyond research skills and effective supervision, financial constraints and the need to balance academic responsibilities and personal commitments further exacerbate the research-related challenges faced by graduate students. Economic instability, particularly for graduate students who rely on individual income or limited external funding or stipends, often results in students taking on part-time jobs to supplement their financial base, at the expense of their studies (Badrie, MacDonnell, & Patel, 2023; Makola & Ntoyanto-Tyatyantsi, 2023). This implies that pursuing additional income leaves the students with limited time to devote to their research work, ultimately impeding progress. Without disregarding other critical factors, such as language barriers (Alebaikan, Bain & Cornelius, 2023), cultural adjustments (Showunmi, Younas & Gutman, 2024), and homesickness (Yang, 2022), which affect mostly foreign graduate students' productivity, these combined factors (academic, financial, and personal stressors) can cause burnout, and, in severe cases, lead to students dropping out from their research programs.

The global graduate dropout rate is not frequently reported in academic literature as it significantly varies across regions, disciplines and institutions; however, scholars have expounded on its rising levels and how it poses a significant challenge to the students, higher institutions and local economies (Amutabi, 2023; Bahnson & Berdanier, 2023; Kitaka, 2023; Alves, Lopes, Cruz-Correia & Menezes, 2024; Valencia Quecano, Guzmán Rincón & Barragán Moreno, 2024). This disturbing insight motivates the need for this theoretical synthesis, proposing that brown-bag seminars

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delivered through Ubuntu philosophical foundations may present a pragmatic intervention. This study posits that the embedded concept inherently possesses the attributes conducive to strategically shaping graduate students' research experiences and thereby fostering success in their academic pursuits. While the focus here is on early-stage graduate students, the methodology developed in this study can be applied to other research contexts to enhance outcomes and mitigate the attrition rate.

The subsequent sections outline the problem statement, objectives, and justification for the concept. Afterwards, the methodology is described, progressing towards integrating the brown bag idea with the philosophical basis of Ubuntu and demonstrating the intersection of these two concepts. It additionally offers a conclusion drawn from the theoretical discussion and essential suggestions for practice, research and policy reforms.

1.1. Problem Statement

The current educational model in African countries is overly narrow, promoting a competitive environment that hampers collective advancement. Considering the varied nature of learners, each equipped with different intellectual capacities, learning styles, and socio-cultural backgrounds, a single, standardised system fails to accommodate this inherent diversity. This approach sustains a uniform model rooted in Western educational ideologies, which aims to foster individual achievement but often undermines social cohesion and communal progress. While institutions tend to highlight and praise high-performing students, the systemic oversight of those who struggle within these demanding settings results in a significant loss of potential, fostering disenchantment and marginalisation. A shift toward a more cooperative, inclusive, and support-focused educational model, especially at the postgraduate level, where students struggle to navigate research, is crucial; one that acknowledges and cultivates varied talents, encourages peer learning, and emphasises communal advancement. This approach would broaden educational access and enhance social resilience and collective progress within societies.

1.2. Research Objectives

This study sought to articulate a conceptual framework that elucidates the brownbag concept and the Ubuntu philosophy, positioning them as strategic resources for empowering graduate students and nascent researchers.

1.3. Rationale/Significance of the Study

This scholarly inquiry holds considerable importance, as it seeks to cultivate more equitable, inclusive, and adaptable educational frameworks, directly advancing the attainment of Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4 (Quality Education). Exploring innovative, context-specific strategies to accommodate the varying needs of learners and promoting collaborative pedagogical methods, this research could initiate systemic changes that improve educational accessibility and quality, especially in marginalised or underserved regions. Such progress ameliorates graduate attrition, equips individuals with essential skills for meaningful social and economic engagement, and advances broader SDGs related to reducing inequalities (Goal 10) and promoting decent work and economic growth (Goal 8). Ultimately, this study could act as a catalyst for transforming education into a vehicle for sustainable development, fostering resilient communities capable of addressing multifaceted societal challenges.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Brown-Bag Concept

The concept of “brown bag”, often called “lunch and learn” meetings or sessions, emerged in the 1970s as a pragmatic approach to employee training and development. The phrase “brown bag”

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derives from employees bringing their lunches, typically packed in brown paper bags, to informal engagements or training sessions during lunch breaks (Allen *et al.,* 2018). This method was initially designed and adopted in corporate environments to maximise productivity by utilising lunch hours for educational purposes without disrupting employees' regular work schedules. Over time, the concept evolved and expanded beyond its traditional corporate roots, finding applications in various facets of human endeavours, including education (Adedayo et al., 2024) and health (Murtha et al., 2020) (see Table 1). The principles underlying brown-bag sessions centre on continuous learning, knowledge sharing, and organisational growth. Usually, these engagements are held informally and are interactive and inclusive, encouraging participation from all attendees regardless of their hierarchical position within an organisation. The informal nature of the meetings fosters a relaxed atmosphere where individuals involved feel more comfortable debriefing, sharing ideas, and asking and answering questions. The sessions frequently focus on practical, hands-on learning, making them an effective mechanism for knowledge building, skills development, and problem-solving within an organisation. This setup emphasises community learning and collaboration, fostering collective ideation and critical thinking.

Table 1. A Synthesis of Existing Brown-Bag Concepts

Author	Discipline	Purpose	Approach
Adedayo *et al.* (2024).	Education	*The need to create an inclusive environment where scholars engage in exchange and interdisciplinary dialogue, interact with emerging research themes, share findings, and stimulate collaborative problem-solving across disciplines, in academia.*	*Experts and early-career researchers convene in an accessible location, creating an atmosphere of mentorship and knowledge-sharing. This helps to bridge gaps in academic communication and enhance the scholarly output of participants.*
Murtha *et al.* (2020).	Health	*To improve medication safety and adherence, thereby solving medication discrepancies and adverse drug reactions, particularly in vulnerable populations.*	*Patients bring their medications, prescription over the counter, and supplements to a healthcare provider for a comprehensive review.*
Allen *et al.* (2018).	Informal education	*Building the skills of educators in non-traditional environments like museums, zoos, and science centres.*	*Informal discussions during lunchtime, as well as structured, targeted workshops.*
Frye (2023)	Education	*Solving issues associated with rigid, traditional teaching of intellectual property law.*	*Dynamic, participatory real-time intellectual engagement across different settings.*
O'Connell (2015)	Health	*Mitigating medication-related risks, particularly among geriatric populations.* *Ensuring safer healthcare practices.*	*Personalised consultations entail patients bringing their medications with prescription and over-the-counter drugs to a pharmacist for a comprehensive review.*

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Author	Discipline	Purpose	Approach
Olsen *et al.* (2009).	Education	*Addressing the pressing challenges that graduate students face in navigating the complex academic writing and the publishing world.*	*Informal lunchtime learning sessions, where faculty and graduate students engage in research dialogue to gain valuable insights without the intimidation or formality of traditional academic conferences.*
Kaping & McKeag (1983).	Education	*To address the persistent challenges of in-service training for educators.*	*Educators bring their lunch and participate in informal, peer-led discussions during breaks.*

Source: Author's illustration

The brown-bag format, which traditionally began as informal lunch-hour meetings for employee training and development, has been increasingly applied in various facets of professional endeavour to address diverse challenges. For instance, Adedayo et al. (2024) conceptualised brown-bag sessions in the context of higher education, illustrating how these present flexible platforms for interdisciplinary dialogue, intellectual discourses, and scholarly knowledge exchange. The engagement is primarily tailored to create an inclusive environment where scholars engage informally with emerging research themes, to debrief, share findings, stimulate collaborative problem-solving across disciplines, and overcome the logistics and time constraints often associated with formal academic conferences.

Before these findings, Olsen, Boulton, Freedman, and Adamick (2009) highlighted the role of the concept in fostering academic efficacy, specifically graduate student publishing. These scholars conceived that the brown-bag format provides an informal yet structured platform for graduate students to interact with faculty, publishing professionals, and peers in a more relaxed manner to discuss the intricacies of the publishing process, thus mitigating the complexities of academic writing. These scholars believe that brown-bag seminars demystify aspects like journal selection, manuscript preparation, and reviewer feedback while facilitating an open dialogue on the difficulties of publishing in competitive academic fields. The approach also empowered students to take a more strategic and confident approach to conducting and disseminating research, making an invaluable enhancement to competence and outcomes.

The existing literature has made substantial contributions to advancing scholarship on the brown bag concept; however, this study diverges from previously established insights into two key dimensions. Firstly, the narrative that brown-bag formats, grounded in Ubuntu philosophical foundations, can energise discussions more effectively. Secondly, the delivery of the brown-bag seminars, structured through three distinct stages, will potentially enhance learning outcomes and engagement levels.

2.2. Ubuntu Philosophy

Ubuntu, a Nguni Bantu term meaning "humanity," is a philosophical model deeply rooted in African culture, particularly among the Zulu and Xhosa peoples of Southern Africa (Metz, 2021). The term "Ubuntu" is often translated as "I am because we are," demonstrating the idea that an individual's identity and well-being are intrinsically connected to the community (Mangaliso, 2001). Ubuntu emerged from traditional African societies where individualism is frowned upon; communal living and mutual support are essential for survival, prosperity, and sustenance. This philosophical foundation gained international recognition, particularly in post-conflict reconciliation in South Africa in the 90s, where it was harnessed to foster restorative justice, tranquillity, and nation-building

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efforts following apartheid. It was championed by African patriots like Nelson Mandela and Desmond Tutu, who emphasised the principles for reconciliation and nation-building. The philosophical foundations of Ubuntu focus primarily on the ideas of interconnectedness, compassion, and collective responsibility, positing that every individual is part of a larger whole; hence, one's actions have a ripple effect on the entire community (Mupedziswa et al., 2019). This interconnectedness breeds empathy and solidarity, imploring individuals to act ethically with kindness and consideration towards others. Prioritising the well-being of the larger whole over individual interests, Ubuntu promotes social harmony and cohesion among groups.

The philosophy of Ubuntu, deeply embedded in the African ethos of communalism and interconnectedness, has been widely utilised as a theoretical framework across numerous disciplines to promote dialogues on social justice, governance, and human development. Within corporate management, academics have investigated the potential of Ubuntu principles to enhance organisational performance by integrating sociocultural elements into business models, notably critiquing established paradigms like the Balanced Scorecard, which frequently overlook communal values (Khomba et al., 2013; Mashasha, 2014). In political science, Ubuntu's impact is apparent in shaping foreign policy, particularly in South Africa's diplomatic efforts at peace, reconciliation, and regional stability throughout the African continent (Mwipikeni, 2018; Emelianenko, 2023). In healthcare and the social sciences, Ubuntu has played a crucial role in promoting a patient-centered care system that prioritises collective well-being, thereby challenging the Western focus on individualism and informing ethical medical practices (Nicolaides, 2023). Furthermore, scholars have explored the significance of Ubuntu in environmental sustainability, proposing that its fundamental emphasis on interdependence resonates with ecological conservation initiatives and sustainable resource management (Kyei-Nuamah & Peng, 2024). These multifaceted applications showcase Ubuntu's adaptability as an analytical framework that can advance ethical, inclusive, and community-oriented policies across various sectors. Although empirical evidence regarding its incorporation into advanced research undertakings within higher education remains scarce, its demonstrated impact across multiple phenomena implies that, if properly leveraged, Ubuntu can act as a valuable tool for empowering graduate researchers and emerging academics, fostering a more holistic and ethically grounded approach to scholarly inquiry.

3. Methodology

A qualitative research methodology, grounded in an integrative narrative review, was followed in this study. A narrative review is a qualitative research approach that summarises and critiques existing literature discourse to establish a new perspective on a subject matter. It enables the exploration and synthesis of diverse perspectives on a complex phenomenon, highlighting thematic connections and contextual insights that may not be captured in scoping and systematic reviews or quantitative analyses. This research method facilitates the integration of findings from various studies, leading to a better understanding of a perspective. The choice of the methodology was particularly well-suited for the current study, which interrogated two existing models (brown-bag and Ubuntu) to conceptualise a framework for early-stage graduate research efficacy.

Published materials were retrieved from databases such as Sabinet, Science Direct, EBSCOhost and PubMed, using search strategies like Boolean operators, truncations, and subject heading terms. A backwards and forward search on Google Scholar and Google Chrome was further performed to retrieve more materials like bulletins, theses, and magazines, ensuring the saturation threshold. The search strategy for the relevant materials during data collection includes "((((("Brown-bad seminars") OR ("brown bag")) AND (Ubuntu)) AND ("higher education")) AND (graduate research*)) OR ("graduate students")). The inclusion criteria were limited to full-text publications in the subject matter.

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During the data acquisition phase, 82 publications were compiled from diverse sources; however, only 41 met the inclusion criteria for examination. This represents the actual sample for the study. These comprised published works about Ubuntu, brownbag, and post-graduate research, strategically assessed for bias risk, result consistency, direct relevance to the outcome of interest, precision, applicability, and reliability.

The collected publications were coded and systematically analysed using content analysis. Content qualitative analysis is a technique that systematically scrutinises and interprets textual or visual information to reveal underlying themes, patterns, and interpretations. Researchers typically engage in coding, wherein they categorise pertinent information into thematic groups, subsequently recognising patterns to discern trends within the content. Coding qualitative data for thematic analysis entails acquainting oneself with the data by reading and re-reading the publications to gain immersion in the content. The pertinent portions of the captured data were highlighted and tentatively labelled to convey their significance. Subsequently, the labels were examined to identify and classify commonalities. This coding framework was consistently applied across the entire publication, ensuring all pertinent segments were labelled and categorised into various themes. In summary, the thematic analysis method employed in this study involves segmenting gathered information into manageable parts, assigning labels, and consolidating labels into structures that reflect patterns across the dataset.

Three themes were conceptualised during the analysis, borrowing ideas from Vygotsky's Social Development Theory (SDT) or strategy. This methodology emphasises the fundamental role of social interaction and cultural context in the cognitive development of students or learners (Vygotsky, 1978). Central to this methodology is the narrative that cognitive growth occurs through social dialogue, peer interactions, collaborative learning, and the internalisation of cultural tools and language. Like the Ubuntu concept, Vygotsky's epistemological worldview highlights that learning is inherently a social process, where meaningful development is facilitated through interactive engagement rather than solitary effort alone. This concept is particularly imperative as a strategy for mentoring nascent researchers in a contemporary academic environment where postgraduate students and emerging researchers struggle; it illustrates the importance of scaffolding, providing tailored support that helps emerging researchers advance through their Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). Mentors or supervisors can assess graduate students' current capabilities and gradually allocate more advanced and complex tasks, offering guidance and encouragement along the way.

4. Results

Three pivotal stages of brown-bag engagements: 1) peers-to-peers, 2) peers-to-mentors, and 3) peers-to-broader audience were outlined (see Table 2). These stages provide a structured framework for understanding how researchers interact strategically through optimising their actions to achieve desired outcomes at each level. Peers in this context refer to individuals confronting similar research hurdles, specifically early-stage graduate researchers. Mentors are academics, be they supervisors, promoters, or experts in related disciplines, saddled with shaping students' research endeavours, while the broader audience refers to the extended communities of knowledge holders in academia and beyond. The result structure reflects the SDT standpoints, explaining that learning occurs through interactions with more knowledgeable others (MKOs), such as teachers, mentors, parents, and peers.

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Table 2: Brownbag Research Nurturing Framework

Stages	Orientation	Deliverables
Peers-to-peers	*A collaborative educational approach where a group of graduate students engage informally to ideate, share knowledge, solve problems, and develop skills, often without any formal instructor-led guidance.*	*Liberty to engage freely to **build**, share insights, improve skills, enhance critical thinking, and distil knowledge points from diverse perspectives. A basic understanding of the material/content is gained through active participation and mutual support.*
Peers-to-mentors	*An educational approach where early-stage researchers engage with experienced mentors informally to interact and receive guidance, feedback, and expertise in specific subject areas about their research endeavours.*	*Personalised and robust engagement to **confirm** knowledge acquired, unlearn and relearn. Gain **deeper** insight into complex topics and accelerated skill development through the mentors' direct support and expertise.*
Peers-to-broader audience	*This involves early-stage researchers sharing their acquired knowledge and insights with external stakeholders, such as faculty drawn from various disciplines, industry professionals, and community members, to gain diverse perspectives and real-world feedback.*	*Research skills and knowledge **validation**, building confidence, and **strengthening** insights necessary for applying knowledge to practical, societal contexts, while promoting knowledge dissemination.*

Stage 1: Peers-to-Peers Brown-Bag Platform

The first stage of brown-bag seminars is by engagement with peers to ideate, share knowledge, strive to solve problems, and develop complex skills; these are often conducted without formal instructor-led guidance and are embedded in social interaction. According to Vygotsky, learning is primarily a social activity, and peers act in (the gap) ZPD by helping each other through collaboration and shared problem-solving, thus enhancing collective learning (Vygotsky, 1978). In addition to knowledge creation, which is inevitable in this phase of engagement, peer-to-peer sessions foster critical thinking, creativity, resilience, and the exchange of diverse ideas and perspectives, ultimately broadening the scope of understanding and handling complex issues. With a sense of Ubuntu - solidarity and shared responsibility among students, this form of learning activity can challenge peers to nurture an atmosphere that values every learner's dignity, encourages active participation and mutual development. Collectively, students can develop perseverance and confidence in their research abilities, preparing them for real-world situations where they must navigate complex problems without immediate assistance being available.

Stage 2: Peers-to-Mentors Brown-Bag Format

The "peers-to-mentors" stage of the concept, where brown-bag engagements involve interaction between graduate students and their mentors, is consistent with the notion of scaffolding in the SDT. In education, scaffolding refers to a learning approach wherein instructors provide successive levels of temporary support that enable learners to achieve higher levels of understanding

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and skill development (Gonulal & Loewen, 2018). However, support diminishes gradually as learners become more competent, capable and independent in undertaking tasks. This concept is underpinned by the ZPD domain of the SDT, demystifying the margin between what a learner can do independently against working closely with experts - MKO. This form of engagement provides a learning atmosphere that enables graduate students to confirm initial knowledge points, relearn and apply perspectives, with the guidance of MKO. Consequently, stage two is a significant learning phase, where mentors engage informally to push graduate students beyond their current abilities.

Stage 3: Peers-to-Broader Audience Brown-Bag Format

In the third and last stage of the brown-bag engagement, where the learning environment expands to include external stakeholders, the 'cultural tools and mediated learning' proponents of the SDT become significant. At this stage, students are expected to have advanced beyond the initial phase of their research abilities, demonstrating growth and maturity in articulating methodologies. Thus, they can be exposed to a broader audience - faculty members from related disciplines, industry professionals, community members, or global stakeholders, which helps contextualise the emerging researchers' learning within the real world. External stakeholders are drawn from different entities; therefore, graduate students are bound to receive constructive, multifaceted critiques (Holbrook, Bourke, Fairbairn & Lovat, 2014; Iwara & Kilonzo, 2022), although with greater ease, that can shape research experience, and the application of knowledge in diverse and practical settings.

5. Discussion

Brown-bag platforms, grounded in Ubuntu philosophical foundations, offer an enriching environment for early-stage graduate students to engage more flexibly in collaborative learning and research development. Within the Ubuntu framework, brown-bag engagements are not merely platforms for presenting research but spaces where researchers can interact casually with a sense of solidarity, contributing to and benefiting from a collective knowledge pool. This assumption is legitimised in Tutu's quote:

> *"A person with Ubuntu is open and available to others, affirming of others, does not feel threatened that others are able and good, for he or she has a proper self-assurance that comes from knowing that he or she belongs in a greater whole and is diminished when others are humiliated or diminished when others are tortured or oppressed"* (Tutu, 2012).

This philosophical grounding will encourage graduate students to approach research not as isolated individuals but as part of an academic community that thrives on mutual support, shared insights, and the continuous exchange of ideas. Insights from literature illustrate that the conception derives from the narrative that Ubuntu promotes an understanding of the self (Matolino & Kwindingwi, 2013) to others, which can significantly facilitate post-graduate research experience, by encouraging students to view their academic journey as part of a larger, communal effort to advance knowledge, in the academic community.

Similarly, integrating Ubuntu into brown-bag engagements will cultivate a spirit of inclusiveness and support, which is vital for early-stage graduate students who may experience uncertainty and lack confidence in their research abilities. The Ubuntu ethic of "I am because we are" encourages individuals to embrace vulnerability, share challenges, and seek advice without fear of judgment, knowing that their peers and mentors are equally invested in their success:

> *"Ubuntu sees community rather than self-determination as the essential aspect of personhood. People are distinctive beings, able to recognise and acknowledge each other through mutual encounter and cultural integration…*
>
> *…Values and processes geared toward seeking consensus and mutual understanding and maintaining harmony are a part of African culture. These include leadership and healing*

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> *skills, as well as simple interpersonal processes, such as how to greet someone in the morning, how a person leads a group to improvise together in dance, how a chief makes decisions, or how war healers reduce vengeance among people who have been at war* (Nussbaum, 2003).

This sense of solidarity is especially crucial during the nascent research stages, where graduate students frequently confront perplexing challenges in research methodologies, academic writing, and conceptual frameworks. In embedding Ubuntu philosophical foundations into these engagements, facilitators can create a nurturing atmosphere where graduate students are encouraged to participate fully, acknowledging that each contribution enriches the collective learning process, no matter how rudimentary. Consequently, the supportive learning environment can mitigate feelings of isolation, promoting intellectual competence and the emotional well-being of the students.

In addition, Ubuntu-driven brown-bags engagements can reinforce understanding of the urgency of ethical considerations and socially responsible research, critical values for graduate students embarking on participatory community-led action research initiatives. Ubuntu's core tenet of human dignity and respect for all life (Murithi, 2007) translates into a research ethos that prioritises the collective good against individualism and emphasises the societal impact of academic inquiry. In this sense, graduate students are encouraged to collectively conceptualise innovative research initiatives and ensure that the outcomes translate into substantial social surpluses.

6. Conclusion

This theoretical discourse, based on integrative desktop literature synthesis, illustrates how brown-bag seminars, centred on Ubuntu philosophical foundations, possess the capacity to provide a flexible and cohesive atmosphere that energises discussions more effectively, leading to a broader comprehension and development of competencies. Within the academic sphere, this integrated framework can potentially address research-related barriers - limited research knowledge, experience, and skills to navigate contemporary contexts - frequently observed in students transitioning from coursework to research-based post-graduate studies. These seminars are structured through three distinct levels, each designed to shape specific learning outcomes. The first level entails informal, cohesive interactions among peers to ideate, share knowledge, solve problems, and develop complex research skills. In the second phase, the process becomes more focused as peers formally interact with their mentors in a calm manner, confirm initial knowledge points, and relearn. In the last stage, the learning environment expands to include external experts, like the faculty, experts in related disciplines and other interested stakeholders. This stage enables students to validate their accumulated competencies on a broader scale, thereby strengthening their confidence in research in general. The brown-bag seminars, delivered through Ubuntu, serve as platforms for enhancing cohesive learning and cultivating socially conscious researchers who demonstrate skills in their respective disciplines and are committed to the broader ethical responsibilities of research.

7. Suggestion

An awareness of Ubuntu principles in higher education research will foster a more cohesive environment that accommodates nascent researchers and communities. Empirical research tailored to triangulating the articulated theoretical discourses in this study with grassroots communities will be invaluable for developing a comprehensive Ubuntu-driven brown-bag framework for institutions of higher learning. Institutional reforms aimed at integrating the concept into the post-graduate research curriculum are imperative for higher learning institutions striving to maximise graduate student retention and research output.

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8. Limitations

Empirical evidence conceptualising the brown bag concept and Ubuntu philosophy into advanced research undertakings within higher education remains scarce, making it difficult to source materials for either scoping or systematic review. The current study employed a narrative review approach with a limited sample size; the resultant strategies can be tested on a broader scale using exploratory research approaches to ensure quality assurance.

Declarations

Author Contributions. I.O.: Literature review, conceptualisation, methodology, data analysis, review-editing and writing, original manuscript preparation. The author has read and approved the published on the final version of the article.
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