

## A DIFFERENTIAL EFFECT OF RESEARCH TEACHING INNOVATION ON DISSERTATION COMPLETION RATE AND PASS MARK AT TGSL

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### Abstract

*This research examines the differential effect of research-writing teaching innovation on proposal and dissertation completion rates at the Turfloop Graduate School of Leadership (TGSL). The method combined a review with a longitudinal quantitative secondary data design. The data on proposal and dissertation completion rates were compared using a t-test statistics. Findings show that at an alpha level of 0.05, a significant difference (at  $P < 0.05$ ) exists in the proposal and dissertation completion rates between the pre-innovation teaching period and within the innovation teaching period – with improved completion rate occurring during the teaching innovation period. Results also depict a mean difference in research methodology pass marks (albeit insignificance). Based on the findings, the paper contributes by developing an agency-based inclusive framework for teaching dissertation research writing. This framework provides an agenda for further research on teacher and student agency, and hence inclusive teaching of academic writing.*

**Keywords:** Teaching innovation; teaching agency; academic writing; teaching research writing; dissertation writing; inclusive teaching; teaching and learning

### 1. Introduction

Master students struggle with the writing of their dissertation and often causes a backlog of uncompleted students in an academic programme with attendant negative impact on throughput and attrition. International literature does show that this is not unique to any institution, rather it appears like a widespread problem across many institutions of higher

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learning (van Rooij, et al, 2021; Ngozi & Kayode, 2014; McCulloch, 2007). Similarly, the course work and mini-dissertation master programmes experience the same backlog problem. Students complete their modules but often get stuck in the mini dissertation writing and completion phase of their programme. Comparatively, South Africa ranks lower amongst others in the level of post-graduate production (Manyike, 2017). This contributes to the concern regarding deficiency of post-graduate work force in South Africa (Hayward & Ncayiyana, 2014). There is therefore a drive by the department of higher education to improve post-graduate level productivity, as this will improve the country's economic and educational profile (Dominguez-Whitehead, 2017). Albeit this important drive, there is a worrying trend that many masters students have difficulty in completing their research writing. Within a structured master programme, some extant researchers have found that many students are stuck in the research component (Massyn, 2018; Annamarie, 2018). Aside from the unique problem in Africa, previous research does indicate there is a wider global concern of increase in attrition and low completion rate of master students including in the USA and the UK (McCulloch, 2007).

Since the improvement in post-graduate throughput is a vital component of university's strategic goals, it portends that the dwindling rate of masters' throughput might thwart this important university and national academic strategic goal. It becomes therefore of essence to develop an inclusive research teaching innovation that could serve as guide toward alleviating the current problem of difficulty with completion of the research component of master programmes. Accordingly, this research contributes to this important national and university strategy as the developed inclusive model of teaching research will assist lecturers who teach dissertation research writing. Until this moment, although ubiquitous national and international literatures barrage the existence of this problem, but there is a paucity of agency-based inclusive framework, which exists as a guiding tool to alleviate this problem. Therefore, based on the results from data analysis and insights from extant literature, this research contributes by developing a conceptual framework for inclusive research teaching strategy, which the authors hope will be a guide for academics and supervisors involved in the teaching of academic writing at the master level.

### **The Problem**

In the realm of physical product manufacturing, the producer bears responsibility for the product performance, hence the constant innovation in production designs (Subramanian, Gupta, & Talbot, 2009). However, in the sphere of intangible products such as knowledge and/or skill, the student often bears certain percentage responsibility of learning (Carless, 2006) and the teacher provides agency to assist the student to achieve learning goal whilst engaging in self-directed activities that boosts life-long learning (OECD, 2019). Therefore, this research slants slightly different toward the teaching aspect to consider if inclusive innovation in the teaching of dissertation research writing in a manner that offers inbuilt agency, humanism, and social justice affects dissertation completion rate and performance score. Therefore, this research does relate to and/or ingrains in social justice education dictum. This is because the masters' class is a combination of students from

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diverse social, economic, and family backgrounds; a research teaching strategy, which is insensitive to the students' background considerations, may be tantamount to inequity and lack of social justice in the teaching of research writing and may thus constitute a barrier to students' educational research aspiration. However, an agentic teaching approach is *sine qua none* for instilling social justice in teaching and learning, wherein the teacher assumes the role of a change agent.

Hence creating an inclusive dissertation research writing teaching strategy helps to offer agency to the student towards breaking whatever barrier might limit the graduate student from achieving their dissertation research-writing goal. Therefore, the concept of inclusivity in this research relates to the two dimensions of inclusion which agentic teaching offers. Firstly, inclusivity is used because agency embraces all students' backgrounds (Pantić et al, 2022); secondly and notably, agency includes the student as a vital co-player in the teaching and learning process and positions the learner to own the process (Florian, et al, 2017).

The practice of student agency by teachers refers to a learning process that is guided by activities, which are pertinent and evocative to students' learning (OECD, 2019). Given the backlog of students, which emanates chiefly from uncompleted mini-dissertation, two programmes at the TGSL namely the Master of Development Programme (MDEV) and the Master of Public Administration (MPA) Programme initiated an innovative approach to the teaching of research writing. This approach hinges on two key pedagogical strategies – *learning discussion*, and *scoring and inclusion of proposal mark in the year mark for research methodology module*.

Given that these two departments stand out from others in this research teaching approach, it therefore becomes imperative to conduct a quantitative differential analysis of whether this innovation in dissertation research teaching has significantly bolstered student proposal and dissertation completion rate, and the attendant performance on research methodology and dissertation assessment scores.

In the realm of physical products, production engineers engage in constant research to find the most efficient production turnaround time (Bevilacqua et al, 2013). Thus, this research is analogous to conventional researching of the efficiency of a new production process toward a quicker turnaround time for completing new products. In the academia, whilst delay and attrition in dissertation completion is a problem (van Rooij, et al, 2021), there seem to be a paucity of research and a framework on how teaching agency may catalyse improved dissertation turnaround time, particularly in an institution with a dominant black population. This research contributes by bridging this gap in the literature. Accordingly, the research focusses on how agency application to research teaching may make a difference in dissertation completion in a business school with black student population. This research also contributes by developing the apparently missing framework in this milieu.

Results from this research will have the prospect to encourage other departments to apply the agency approach to the teaching of research writing. Hence, the authors envisage a

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broader change in research teaching approach in the faculty, which will draw from this research. With this spin-off in view, the authors hopes that this research will be a tool for change toward social justice in the teaching and learning of dissertation research writing.

### **Aim and Objective**

This paper aims to ascertain if the implementation of innovative teaching approach to dissertation research writing has made a significant difference in the proposal and dissertation completion rate and dissertation assessment mark at the Turfloop Graduate School of Leadership hereinafter referred to as (TGSL). In addition, based on insights from theoretical literature and results from this paper, the research develops an agency-based conceptual framework for an inclusive teaching of research writing to postgraduate students.

Therefore, the objectives of this research are:

- To analyse the significant difference in proposal completion rate and pass marks between pre and within innovation in teaching of dissertation research writing at TGSL
- To evaluate the significant difference in dissertation completion rate and pass marks between pre and within innovation in teaching of dissertation research writing at TGSL
- Based on the results from the above two objectives and insights from the literature, develop a conceptual framework for inclusive teaching of dissertation research writing

## **2. Theoretical Framework**

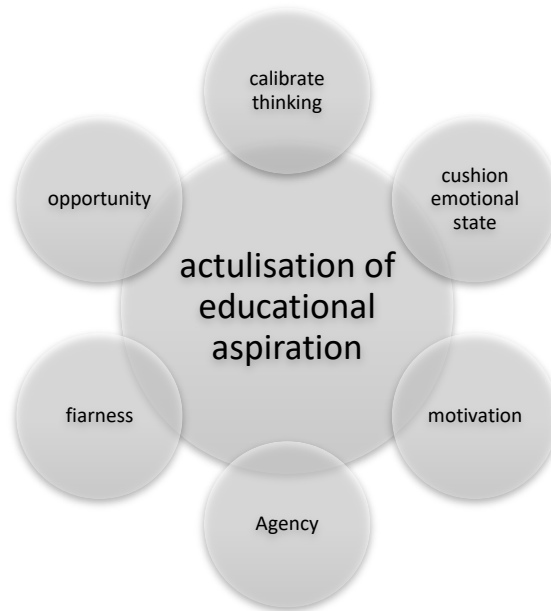
A pragmatic recognition of diversity amongst graduate students constitutes academic writing social justice in the teaching of dissertation research writing. This is because the research teaching strategy should aspire to accommodate rather than exclude any graduate student due to their background. Accordingly, this research reclines on a confluence of teaching philosophy which the authors refers to as a confluence of humanism and social justice pedagogic theory. This coinage draws from the author's belief that ideas in humanism philosophy of teaching (Jingna, 2012) criss-cross with the ideas of social justice philosophy of teaching (Javadi & Tahmasbi, 2020). This confluence of teaching is briefly highlighted below as follows:

### **2.1. A Confluence of Humanism and Social Justice Pedagogic Theory**

This project inclines on the confluence of social justice and humanistic pedagogic theory. Humanism theory of teaching asserts that humans are intelligent beings and possesses the capacity to achieve learning if their innate motivation is calibrated to think under a balanced emotional state (Jingna, 2012). The social justice theory of pedagogy bolsters the humanistic theory by advocating that the scholastic pedagogy should offer students equal and just access irrespective of background (Javadi & Tahmasbi, 2020; 3Rs, 2021). It

follows therefore that a humanistic and socially just pedagogy would have an inbuilt mechanism that cushions learners’ emotional state and calibrates their innate power of thought. Furthermore, affording fair and just access to students of all background enhances their motivation to educational actualisation. Accordingly, the author constructs the following schematic frame (Figure 1) of confluence of humanism and social justice pedagogic theory, wherein this project is located. This framework (Figure 1) constructed by the author based on the literature will be developed to an expanded conceptual framework at the end of this research.

Figure 1 Confluence of Humanism and Social Justice Pedagogic Theory



Source: Designed by the Authors – with insight from the literature

### **2.2 The Central Theory for This Research: Student Agency**

A synthesis of the above confluence of humanism and social justice pedagogic philosophies dovetail in a central theory, namely ‘Agency’ as mentioned in the foregoing sections. This is because a study of teacher agency philosophy reveals that teacher agency effuse the physiognomies engrafted in a confluence of humanism and social justice (Lemberger, 2010). In practical application, teaching agency exudes a fair treatment of students through inclusion, fairness, and motivation that catalyses the calibration of students’ innate thinking rooted in autonomy and hence improved opportunity to participate in the learning process. Inclusion plays a fundamental role in teacher agency given the dual inference, which is the embracing of all students’ backgrounds (Pantić et al, 2022) and inclusion of the student as a co-player (hence an agent) in the teaching and learning process (Florian, et al, 2017). Accordingly, the OECD, describes the practice of teacher agency as the learning process whereby the teacher targets moulding the learner

as an agent in the learning process by engaging the learner with learning activities that evocates students' learning (OECD, 2019). At the finale, this nurtures student agency, which experts perceive as key to social justice teaching (Bender-Slack, 2010). The attendant student agency instils learning independence and learning creativity in students (OECD, 2019), with the capacity to prepare students to succeed beyond the current learning confines to succeed in future learning, and to excel in social and workplace cognitive challenges (Long and Lampen, 2014).

### **3. Literature Review**

#### ***3.1 Concern about Post-graduate Students' Research Writing***

Some groups of researchers found that graduate students' background, (in terms of race, financial ability, family background, age, and social background) does impact graduate students' research completion rate (Bopape, 2018; North and Murray, 2015; Jiranek, 2010; Lewin, 2009;). Other researchers discover that language barrier and unpreparedness for post-graduate research is a contributing factor that hamper dissertation completion rate (Adamson, Coulson, and Fujimoto-Adamson, 2019; Zewotir, North and Murray (2015). There is also a belief from other quarters of research that graduate students' access to lectures and supervisors is a factor that may improve or mar research completion rate (Kangai & Mapolisa, 2012; Azila-Gbetteor, Mensah & Kwodjo, 2015). In recognition of the graduate research writing on graduate study completion, researchers have called for improved solution such as teaching solution to provide improvement in research completion rate (Massyn, 2018; North & Murray, 2015). This is because provision of equal access and/or social justice embedded academic writing course should strive to accommodate all backgrounds of students. Relying on this premise, Mills (2021) cautions that making academic mentors to stick to a single set of guides elevates the anticipation that students from all backgrounds might fit into a prefabricated teaching guide (Mills, 2021). Other closely related previous research include Majiza (2019), who researched on factors affecting postgraduate scientific writing at UFS, and Yeats (2020) who sought to implement active learning component in teaching.

To strive toward reducing the foregoing problem of delay in dissertation writing and completion, other cluster of researchers have turned the solution lens to innovation in the teaching of dissertation research writing (Yamagata-Lynch, Skutnik, Garty & Do, 2016; Park, 2003; DeLyser, 2003; Samuel & Vithal, (2011). Accordingly, some academic writing researchers (Switzer and Perdue, 2011; Paltridge, 2003 DeLyser, 2003; Brian, 2017) have experimented and found that a dissertation writing approach, which inclines on teaching of writing skill, presentation/discussion by students and writing helps in promoting the writing skill of graduate students from disadvantaged backgrounds. Some of the reasons the researchers adduce include that seminar research writing teaching approach affords all students the opportunity to engage and discuss with their research-writing teachers on a one-on-one basis. Integrating interaction in teaching dissertation research writing is receiving current literature suggestion – some authors recognise that whilst the teaching of research writing could be a semiotic process, associating the teaching with action

bestows the pragmatism and writer engagement with the teacher (Yamagata-Lynch et al. 2003). Accordingly, DeLyser (2003) explores the interactive dimension of teaching dissertation writing through a seminar approach and found impressive improvement in students' ability to complete their dissertation research and in addition gain positive life-long research writing skill.

Although prior researchers have recognised the importance of innovative teaching in improving post-graduate students' research writing prowess, but they have not yet conducted a quantitative analysis of the extent to which research-teaching innovation may make a difference in students' proposal and dissertation completion rate and their marks scored in dissertation assessment. This current research adds to existing literature and contributes a conceptual framework that will be useful for further research and practical application in the teaching of dissertation writing.

### ***3.2 Agency Standpoint in Teaching and Learning***

Pedagogy scholars posit that learners can be shaped to become their agent of learning; this means that learners can accomplish their learning aspirations through their individual thoughtful actions (Bandura, 2001; Robertson et al 2020). However, teachers have a role to play in shaping student agency because through their training, teachers are pliable regarding educational curriculum – they can create, reconstruct, or adapt curriculum to accommodate student agency approach to teaching (Vaughn, 2021; Deed et al, 2014). This is why scholars opine there is mutuality between teacher and student agency, since agency is characterised by both the teacher and the student towards the enhancement of action-oriented personalised learning (Deed et al, 2014). An agency-imbued approach to teaching and learning recognises the distinctiveness of teachers, the need to recognise and respect strengths and imperative to respect experiences as knowledge is derivable through social construction (Christian-Smith, 2021; Robbins, 2021; Saykili, 2019).

Consequently, agency has begun to occupy an important discussion trajectory in contemporary pedagogical literature (Vaughn, 2020). This is happening as educators are becoming increasingly aware of the immense learning benefit from including learners in their learning process. Hence, educators are probing different approaches that can assist toward empowering students to cultivate ownership of their learning (Adie et al, 2018). Towards achieving this, it is becoming clearer how teacher agency is pivotal for student agency (Scanlon & Connolly, 2021). On the one hand, student agency involves students' ability to take actions in owning, improving, and achieving their learning goals. On the other hand, teacher agency involves the steps that teachers take to assume change agent role through their personal professional development and ability to act purposefully to make informed classroom decisions, which emanate from identified classroom challenges, needs, and attendant teacher action toward making changes that capacitate student agency (Priestley et al, 2015; Pantić et al, 2022). Therefore, student agency literature brings to the fore the important role of teacher agency in spurring student agency to improve learning outcomes. Educators can (through their professional training and classroom experience) adapt and innovate the curriculum to solve identified

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classroom learning challenges, which management may not achieve based on *one-size-fits-all* curriculum. Through this approach, agentive teaching untwines apparent rigidity implicit in standardised curriculum to bestow social justice in learning as agency accommodates individual student differences to bring out the best of their innate learning capabilities (Gregory & Higgins, 2017). Agency assists learners to develop their tacit position in society because it provides learners with skills for social and workplace decorum – hence life-long benefits (Little, 2014).

## **4. Method**

### **4.1 The Context**

To enhance product performance, the physical product designers engage in constant designs that enhance customer experience (Subramanian, Gupta, & Talbot, 2009). Furthermore, production engineers engage in a relentless investigation to find the most efficient production turnaround time for the company (Bevilacqua et al, 2013).

Similarly, this research hinges on quantifying the benefit of inclusive innovation in transferring the skill of academic writing to enable timeous completion of proposal and dissertation. This is because one area of concern at the TGSL has been the backlog in the completion rate of research proposals and the attendant mini dissertation. The teachers of dissertation writing embarked on an in inclusive innovation in the teaching of dissertation research writing. Chief amongst the innovation is initiation of a “*learning discussion*” in research teaching, and the assessment of proposal with assigned marks that count toward the year mark for research methodology module. Accordingly, it becomes pertinent, to engage in a quantitative analysis to ascertain if this innovation has made a statistically significant difference in the rate of proposal and mini-dissertation completion and pass mark performance on mini-dissertation assessments (before and after application of the teaching innovation). Accordingly, the authors deemed the following research philosophy and method as apposite in navigating this research.

### **4.2 The Research Paradigm**

Sequel to the above context, this research draws its philosophical stance on the intersection between ontology, epistemology, and paradigm. The paper’s philosophical stance is on the ontology of a single reality (*ceteris paribus*) based on specific location of research and on the epistemological stance, that knowledge can be measured (Demuro & Gurney, 2021; Lee et al, 2021). Accordingly, these two philosophical stances (ontology of single reality and the epistemology of measurability) dovetails firmly with the positivist paradigm, which relies on the quantitative measurement of research variables by applying statistical techniques (Brierley, 2017; Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). Hence, this philosophical stance lends credence to the following espoused research method.

### **4.3 Design and Method**

Based on the above context and philosophical stance, the paper applied a longitudinal research design whereby prior data on students’ proposal and dissertation completion



rates and pass marks were collected for the same group of individuals over time and compared with another longitudinal set of data. This design is apposite given that longitudinal approach permits repeated observation of the same variables and/or people over a short or long period; it also allows for retrospective investigation of the phenomenon using existing data (Demetriou et al, 2019; Weng et al, 2021). Drawing from the specified positivist paradigm above, the research applied a quantitative research method. The researchers collected quantitative data (proposal and dissertation completion rate and pass marks in research methodology and dissertation) from documented research performance of graduated students in the Master of Development (MDEV) and Master of Public Administration (MPA) programmes at the Turfloop Graduate School of Leadership. Hence, data collection was from the (MDEV & MPA) class cohorts for four years within the innovative research teaching approach and four years before the innovative teaching approach. This was therefore suitable to longitudinal data characteristics, which affords a repeated observation of the same variables and/or people over a period. The data analysis applied the statistical t-test of mean difference to ascertain possibility of any significant difference in two sets of data under different approaches of teaching research writing. Following the results from the analysis and with insights from the literature on the pedagogy of teaching dissertation writing, the authors develop a conceptual framework for an agency based inclusive teaching of dissertation research writing (Figure 2).

In compliance with the teacher agency expectations, the teachers of dissertation research writing at the MDEV and MPA programmes at TGSL identified a problem in their research teaching class, namely research writing difficulty with attendant delay in proposal and dissertation completion. The educators follow up with informed action by going beyond the curriculum to innovate research-teaching approach, which focusses on involving individual students to get more involved in their research learning and writing. The educators in these two programmes introduced learner discussion of research even before the title selection, and continuous discussion with presentations within each section of proposal writing. In addition, students are motivated through a proposal achievement reward, which is a mark awarded to the extent of proposal completion and quality towards the research method year mark.

Therefore, as indicated in the objectives of this research, the following section presents the results from the analysis that sought to measure whether the application of student agency in the teaching of dissertation research writing had a significant effect on students' research completion rate.

## **5. Results and Discussion**

Table 1 presents the first result regarding the differential significance between the proposal completion rate in the two phases of research teaching (within the teaching innovation and before teaching innovation). The analysis was conducted at an alpha of 0.05 (5%). Alpha in quantitative analysis is a threshold value (a probability), which a researcher uses to evaluate if a statistic test is statistically significant. It signifies an

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acceptable level of probability of the occurrence of error. Research alpha range between 0% and 10%, and a researcher chooses a level of alpha most suitable for research (Lavrakas, 2008). Hence, a p-value of less than 5% signifies that a significant differential effect on proposal completion exists between the two teaching phases. Table 1 result show a P-value of 0.00158, which is less than 5% alpha level. Therefore, given that, the test p-value is less than 5% alpha, this indicates that students' proposal completion time during the teaching innovation period is significantly different from the proposal completion time before the teaching innovation. This difference is made clearer in Figure 2 (pie chart), which shows that proposal completion time during the teaching innovation has a mean of 6.65 months, and the proposal completion time before the teaching innovation higher mean of 9.45 months. This is an indication that students completed their proposal faster within an average period of 6.65 months during the teaching innovation stage, against the average completion time of 9.45 months before the teaching innovation phase.

Similarly, Table 2 presents the result regarding the significant differential effect on dissertation completion rate in the two phases of research teaching (within the teaching innovation and before teaching innovation).

Table 2 result shows a P-value of 0.0029, which is less than 5% alpha level. Therefore, given that, the test p-value is less than 5% alpha, this indicates that students' dissertation completion time during the teaching innovation period is significantly different from the dissertation completion time before the teaching innovation. This difference is made clearer in Figure 3 (pie chart), which shows a reduction in the mean dissertation completion time during the teaching innovation to 3.5 years; on the contrary, the dissertation completion time before the teaching innovation indicates an average of 4.2 years. This shows that teaching innovation phase yielded a seven months' timesaving.

Table 3 presents the result regarding the differential significance between the research methodology mark in the two phases of research teaching (within the teaching innovation and before teaching innovation). Although the mean pass mark differential is not statistically significant with a p-value of 0.13418 (higher than 5% alpha), however, the pie chart in Figure 4, does show a slight improvement in mean mark differential for research method module – higher during the teaching innovation phase. This increase shows the likelihood that with continuous improvement in agentive approaches to teaching research writing, there could be a significance difference in future. The dissertation pass mark could not be compared as the assessment results are not yet available as of the time of writing up these results.

This study results confirm earlier findings by (Luo et al, 2019) that teaching enhanced student agency leads to significant improvement in learner academic performance and learning experience in a flipped classroom. The findings from this paper also confirms (Boaler, 2000) who reports improvement in students' performance in mathematics after the application of student discussion in mathematics class, which positioned the learners as active agents in their learning process. However, this current research stands out

regarding the subject where student agency is applied, which is, dissertation research writing. This implies that teaching and student agency may have the propensity to yield positive results if applied in postgraduate dissertation research teaching classes. Perhaps this could be a potential recipe to assist in alleviating proposal and dissertation completion backlogs in business schools and perhaps other departments in the faculty of management with taught masters and dissertation curriculum. It will therefore be apposite to apply the teaching and student agency approach to research class in other departments in the faculty and to repeat this research in such departments to ascertain the extent of research writing and completion improvement.

Table 1: t-Test: Paired Two Sample for Means (Proposal Completion Rate Prior and within Research Writing Teaching Innovation)

	<i>Proposal Completion Rate During Teaching Innovation</i>	<i>Proposal Completion Rate During Teaching Innovation</i>
Mean	9.45	6.65
Variance	10.89210526	2.765789474
Observations	20	20
Hypothesized Mean Difference	0	
df	19	
t Stat	3.377250257	
P(T<=t) one-tail	0.001581522	
t Critical one-tail	1.729132812	
P(T<=t) two-tail	0.003163044	
t Critical two-tail	2.093024054	

Figure 2 Mean Proposal Completion Time Before & During Teaching Innovation

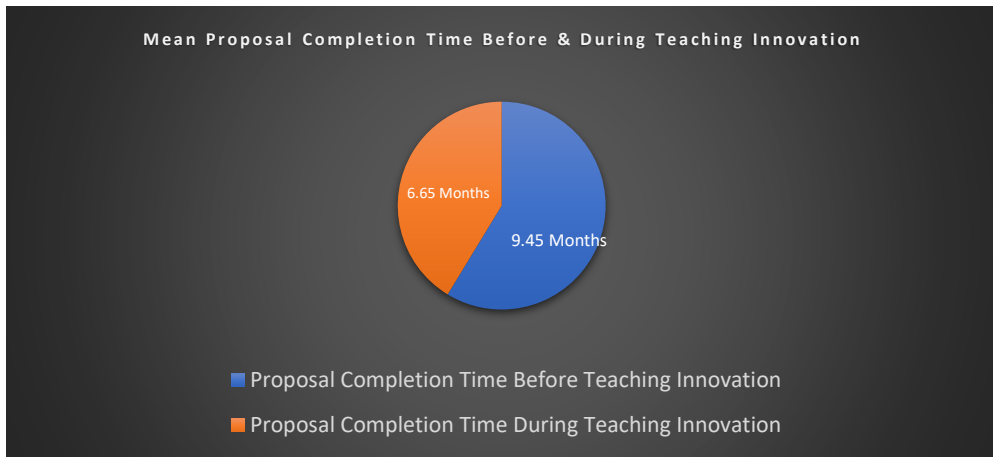


Table 2: t-Test: Paired Two Sample for Means (Dissertation Completion Rate Prior and within Research Writing Teaching Innovation)

	<i>Dissertation Complete Before Teaching Innovation</i>	<i>D.complete2019&amp;2020 During Teaching Innovation</i>
Mean	4.285714286	3.5
Variance	0.21978022	0.269230769
Observations	14	14
Hypothesized Mean Difference	0	
df	13	
t Stat	3.293672094	
P(T<=t) one-tail	0.002909062	
t Critical one-tail	1.770933396	
P(T<=t) two-tail	0.005818125	
t Critical two-tail	2.160368656	

Figure 3 Mean Dissertation Completion Time Before & During Teaching Innovation

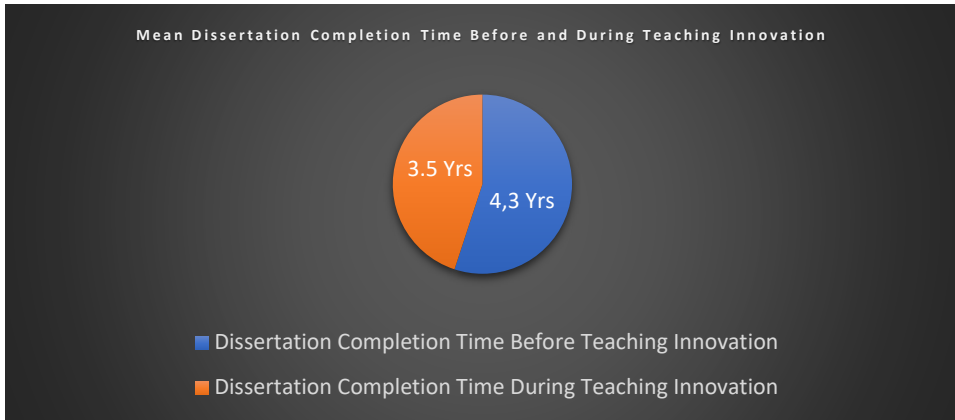
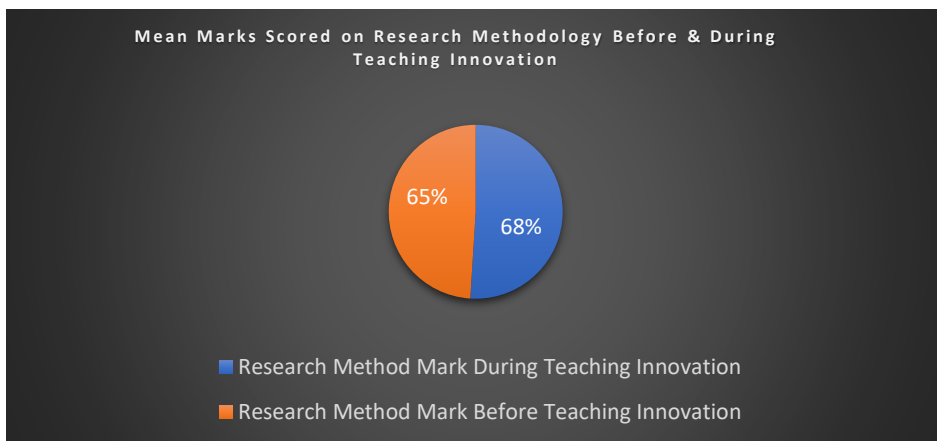


Table 3: t-Test: Paired Two Sample for Means (Research Methodology Scores Prior and within Research Writing Teaching Innovation)

	<i>RM-Pass% During Teaching Innovation</i>	<i>RM-Pass% Before Teaching Innovation</i>
Mean	68	65
Variance	51.78947368	30.97631579
Observations	20	20
Hypothesized Mean Difference	0	
df	19	
t Stat	1.140225632	
P(T<=t) one-tail	0.134181207	
t Critical one-tail	1.729132812	
P(T<=t) two-tail	0.268362413	
t Critical two-tail	2.093024054	

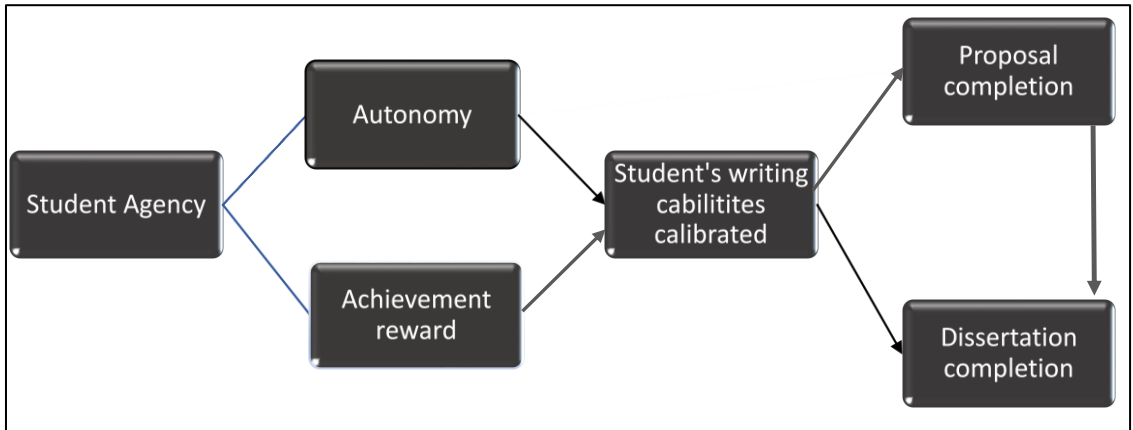
Figure 4 Mean Dissertation Completion Time Before & During Teaching Innovation



## 6. Conceptual Framework for Teaching Dissertation Writing

Based on the findings from the preceding data analysis and, coupled with insights from theory and the literature, the researchers contribute by developing an agency-based inclusive framework for teaching dissertation research writing (Figure 5). Advocates of teaching agency posit that agency imbued teaching has the propensity to instil ownership of learning process (student agency); it also assists in student's independent thinking, creativity, and learning goal actualisation (Florian, et al, 2017; OECD, 2019; Bender-Slack, 2010; Long and Lampen, 2014). Accordingly, the authors applied a quantitative test of this theoretical assertion on the teaching of dissertation writing and analysed the effectiveness of this theory toward expediting proposal and dissertation completion rate at the Graduate School of Leadership. Innovation in the teaching of dissertation research writing in the Graduate School resulted to a measure of autonomy to students toward owning a key role in their research writing (agency), through practical continuous learning discussion and presentations. The students were motivation with a proposal achievement reward (in form of mark awarded to the extent and quality of proposal completion) toward the year mark. These combined, proved to have calibrated students' writing capabilities, which (as confirmed by the statistical analysis) resulted to an improved proposal and dissertation completion time as seen in the significant results in Table 1 and Table 2. Accordingly, the researchers frame an amalgam of these practical analysis results with the existing theory and literature to develop an "Agency-Based Inclusive Framework" for teaching dissertation research writing (Figure 5). This is to accentuate that agency based teaching can also be applied to the teaching of dissertation research writing with attendant positive results on completion time. This framework hopes to provoke academic discourse on agency and inclusive teaching of dissertation writing. Further research may apply this framework to an empirical and expanded pedagogical research on the teaching of dissertation research writing.

Figure 5: Agency-Based Inclusive Framework for Teaching Dissertation Research Writing



Source: Author' Original Framework

## 7. Conclusion

The delay in completing the dissertation component of master's programme contributes to delayed graduation and throughput amongst postgraduate students. Therefore, this research set out to analyse the effect of agency-imbued innovative research teaching approach on the completion rate of proposal and dissertation in two programmes at the TGSL, UL. The grand philosophical inclination of the paper is on the confluence of humanism and social justice pedagogy, and this funnelled to student agency. The differential analysis results from statistical data analysis indicate a significant difference in proposal and dissertation completion rates – with reduced completion time occurring during the innovative teaching period. Although the pass mark differential is not significant, but the results show an improved mean pass mark in research methodology during innovative teaching period. At the time of writing this conclusion, the marks for dissertation assessment were not yet available – hence conclusion could not be reached for dissertation mark differential. Albeit this though, the key objective of this research was achieved, which is on proposal and dissertation completion time. The results corroborate the agentic-based teaching literature, which shows positive spinoff on proposal and dissertation completion time, when students are capacitated to assume ownership of their research learning and the attendant writing. Furthermore, as pointed in the literature, given that agentic teaching approach accommodates students' strengths, weakness and backgrounds, this encourages student agency, which experts see as key to social justice teaching and learning (Bender-Slack, 2010).

Therefore, this research has provided a brief and important analysis, which illustrates the learning value accruable from an agentic research writing teaching, which contributed to the facilitation of students' agentic engagement with proposal and dissertation research writing at the TGSL. Based on the findings from the preceding data analysis and, coupled with insights from the literature, this research contributes by developing an inclusive framework for teaching dissertation research writing (Figure 5). This framework

hopes to provoke academic discourse on teaching and student agency, and inclusive teaching of academic research writing. Furthermore, this framework paves agenda for further research to apply the framework in both empirical and conceptual research on the pedagogy of academic research writing.

Some limitations implicit in the research are worth highlighting for improving further research. Firstly, the research was conducted in a business school with 100% black students' population as of the time of research; hence, the research could not compare students from diverse racial groups, which chiefly characterise South African students' backgrounds. Secondly, it was not possible to compare dissertation marks since the 2020 and 2021 students' dissertation were undergoing assessments. In addition, this research was limited to two programmes; hence a wider application of this research method to more programmes is recommended for future research.

### **Acknowledgement**

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### **Ethical Consideration**

Although the key data used in this research analysis was secondary data, ethical consideration was apposite for bestowing ethical credibility to the research. This research made use of secondary data on completion rate of proposals and dissertations and the pass marks respectively. Therefore, before commencing the research, an application for ethics permission to proceed with this research was made and obtained from the Turfloop Research Ethics Committee (TREC).

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