

**FROM DAWN TO DUSK:  
STORIES OF THE  
POSTGRADUATE LIFE**

**VOLUME THREE**



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**EDITORS:  
VENOSHA RAVANA  
SARALA THULASI PALPANADAN**



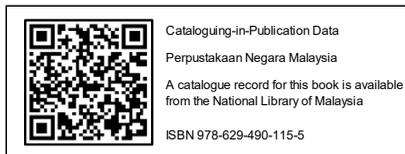
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First Published 2024

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Published & Printed by:  
Penerbit UTHM  
Universiti Tun Hussein Onn Malaysia  
86400 Parit Raja,  
Batu Pahat, Johor  
Tel: 07-453 8529/8698  
Fax: 07-453 6145

Website: <http://penerbit.uthm.edu.my>  
E-mail: [pt@uthm.edu.my](mailto:pt@uthm.edu.my)  
<http://e-bookstore.uthm.edu.my>  
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# FOREWORD

“From Dawn to Dusk: Stories of the Postgraduate Life (Volume 3)” is a compelling collection of personal narratives that delve into the daily lives of past and current postgraduate students. Extending from the first and second volumes which published 13 personal narratives collectively, this book also provides an intimate look at the journey of academia, offering readers a glimpse into the routines, challenges, triumphs, and reflections that define the postgraduate experience. Through a series of thoughtfully curated stories, this book captures the essence of what it means to pursue advanced studies, highlighting both the universal and unique aspects of academic life. This book is aimed at a broad audience, including current and prospective postgraduate students, educators, academic professionals, and anyone interested in the personal side of higher education. It appeals to those who are curious about the realities of postgraduate life and those seeking inspiration, guidance, or simply a sense of shared experience. The book has the potential to build a sense of community among postgraduate students and alumni. In short, this book is a big shoutout to postgraduate students who have survived and are surviving this magical journey from dawn to dusk.

Venosha Ravana  
Sarala Thulasi Palpanadan



# SUMMARY OF CHAPTERS

In **CHAPTER ONE**, Menaga Suseelan recounts her intense PhD data collection journey during the Covid-19 pandemic. Faced with halted progress and safety concerns, she adapts by conducting home visits, overcoming numerous obstacles, and ultimately completing her study successfully amidst unprecedented challenges.

In **CHAPTER TWO**, Ahmar Sanip explores his PhD journey, highlighting how food, holidays, and conferences played key roles in balancing academic pressure and personal growth. From a celebratory feast, to cultural festivals, and presenting research at international forums, each experience enriched his postgraduate life.

In *Opportunity Comes To Those Who Recognize It* (**CHAPTER THREE**), Tuan Muhammad Hanif reflects on the struggles of balancing a PhD journey, professional challenges, and personal growth. Despite initial optimism, unforeseen obstacles—both academic and personal—tested his resilience. Through persistence and seizing new opportunities, he navigates these hardships, highlighting the unpredictability and endurance required in the doctoral process.

In **CHAPTER FOUR**, Syazuin Sazali reflects on the intense struggles and delayed success of her Master's degree journey. Initially pursuing career growth, she encountered unexpected obstacles but found fulfillment through perseverance. Her experience highlights the importance of resilience, self-compassion, and embracing continuous learning.

In **CHAPTER FIVE**, Thilip Kumar Moorthy shares his challenging yet rewarding PhD journey, marked by setbacks like online learning during the pandemic, difficult coursework, and supervisor issues. Despite these struggles, perseverance led to success, proving the value of resilience and determination.

In **CHAPTER SIX**, Charlou A. Bautista reflects on his transformative journey pursuing an MBA in Entrepreneurship, overcoming personal and financial challenges. His experience reshaped him professionally and personally, inspiring his commitment to community development and social entrepreneurship in the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao.

In **CHAPTER SEVEN**, Johara D. Alangca-Azis reflects on her postgraduate journey, balancing motherhood, teaching, and academic responsibilities. Despite the challenges, she persevered through comprehensive exams and dissertation writing, drawing strength from her faith, resilience, and the joy of motherhood to achieve her goals.

In **CHAPTER EIGHT**, Komalata narrates her challenging Master's journey, marked by initial setbacks, an unhelpful supervisor, and eventual personal growth, highlighting resilience, self-reliance, and the importance of support.

**CHAPTER NINE** explores Justina's reflections on the challenges of balancing work and PhD studies after a long academic break, highlighting personal growth, the importance of support, and learning to prioritize well-being.

**CHAPTER TEN** explores Yogerisham's journey as a postgraduate student which was challenging, marked by juggling work, studies, and personal commitments. Despite facing setbacks like car accidents and emotional challenges, he persevered and completed his studies successfully. His journey taught him valuable lessons about resilience, determination, and the importance of support from loved ones.

In **CHAPTER ELEVEN**, Cheng Wei Fong shares the challenges of balancing a full-time job with PhD studies, highlighting the importance of a supportive study environment, self-care, and mindfulness. Persistence and resilience are key themes, emphasizing that the PhD journey, though tough, is ultimately rewarding.

In **CHAPTER TWELVE** Sarala and Venosha reflect on their PhD journey across generations in terms of time and resources. They also note the need for current supervisors to practice a more humanistic approach to supervision to create a conducive environment for postgraduate students who may be coping with mental health issues.



## CHAPTER 1

# On the Brink of a Pandemic: My PhD Data Collection Journey

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For all postgraduate research students, the most crucial period would be data collection and analysis. It was the same for me. The moment I prepared my instruments for data collection after a tough process of validation, approval from my supervisor, and a successful pilot study, I began my real data collection process. Since my research was structured in a way that required a pre-test to be given to Year 4 students, followed by the implementation of my approach and immediately after that, a post-test was to be administered. This entire application of my approach on each student had to be completed within five consecutive days.

The data collection was to be done in the students' respective schools. Consent from both the schools and parents was also obtained. It was a fairly safe study, as only papers, stationery, and small wooden and metal model objects were used. Moreover, it was conducted in their own schools. Since audio and video recordings were required, the schools provided a conducive environment upon request. The study was successfully completed in the first few schools.

The data collection process went smoothly until the day Covid-19 shook the world! The calm before the storm had been the days of smooth progress, but now, the pandemic brought everything to a halt. I contacted the headmistress of the next school I planned to visit, but no outsiders were allowed to enter the school for health and safety reasons. Moreover, she also told me that the parents were no longer sending their children to school. The fear of Covid-19 was everywhere! A shiver ran down my spine. The only thing I could do was to seek advice from my supervisor. Covid-19 was amateur to the world, and so was it to my supervisor. However, he did not let me down. He advised me to come up with backup plans to collect data. I immediately contacted one of my PhD mates, and we brainstormed via video call.

One alternative that we immediately thought of was conducting the study online. That sounded brilliant but it might introduce bias or inconsistency in the results. The thought of how I was going to prove whatever I did face-to-face would match what I did online kept appearing at the back of my mind. For example, if I pointed at something physically during the study with one student, would it be the same when I showed the object and pointed it to another student online? Was it fair that some students in the study were allowed to touch, feel, and manipulate the objects while others could only watch them online?

How about the instruments? Studies conducted online have a different set of validation criteria compared to those conducted physically. Therefore, I needed to modify my instruments and revalidate them. This process alone might take months to complete. Even so, it would be another major challenge to compare results obtained from two different instruments, one offline and the other online.

I spoke to myself. If I were to do it online, I would have to tailor the whole study, create models and instruments, and apply them to all participants. This simply meant redoing the study with a new set of respondents. The most worrying part of all was that my study was based on the effect of concrete objects on mathematics learning. Displaying objects online defeated the entire purpose of the study since looking at and manipulating physical objects was a crucial part of my approach. Online sessions might lead to little to no effect on the post-test, which could declare my entire study a failure. Time waits for no one, and I had to act quickly.

My approach required five sessions with each student, with each session lasting around an hour. Furthermore, my study was conducted on low-performing students, most of whom came from low socioeconomic backgrounds. From my conversation with the teachers of the schools participating in the study, if the study were conducted online, several issues might arise. Among them were internet connection problems, parental interference, lack of suitable gadgets for video calls, absenteeism, noise, and many more. As a researcher, I was a little heartbroken for a short while but came back stronger afterward.

At that point in time, the public was still allowed to move around with minimal restrictions. I still remember the hesitation I felt when the thought of visiting my respondents directly at their homes struck me. It was a difficult decision to make amidst all the uncertainties and fears surrounding the pandemic. A thousand questions lingered in my mind. Was it worth the risk? Could I ensure both my safety and the students'? What would happen if a complete lockdown was suddenly implemented while I was midway through the study? After a deep thought, I looked at myself

in the mirror, gathered my courage, and decided to go ahead, realizing that there was no other feasible option. I quickly wrote to my supervisor, obtained the necessary permissions, and made the necessary arrangements to meet my respondents directly at their homes. Luckily, both the school authorities and the students' parents cooperated.

Those two weeks were the toughest period of my PhD journey. I started early each morning because the locations involved in my study were all in rural areas, and it took around an hour to reach each of them from my home. The travel duration between the students' houses ranged from half an hour to an hour. My safety was at stake as I was going alone to strangers' homes and the fear of Covid-19 was haunting me as well. I made sure I wore a proper mask and sanitized my hands thoroughly before and after entering each home. I knew that was not a guaranteed way to keep the virus at bay, but it was my last resort. This was not just for a day though. I had to visit each home multiple times a week.

I encountered a myriad challenges during the data collection process. Each home I visited had its unique story and settings. Each of it was a normal household. Sometimes, there would be someone cooking in the kitchen and the smell of the food would cause momentary distractions to both my respondent and me. Sometimes, the television volume would force me to pause my explanation midway and continue after a while. Sometimes, the lighting of the entire place would be unsuitable for reading, writing, and most critically, video recording. Sometimes, there were no tables or chairs to sit on and conduct the study, as some students lived in poverty. Sometimes, unrelated people would sit nearby, watching and listening to what I was doing and every word I was saying. Sometimes, people would walk around, or kids would play and run everywhere, interrupting the video recordings. Sometimes there would be nobody at home except the student and me, which

was scary since I was to be fully responsible for the student. Sometimes, the family members of the students would want to create a conversation with me and some even offered me meals as a gesture of hospitality. It was difficult for me to explain that I was on a tight schedule and could not afford to waste even a minute anywhere. Lastly, I had to remember to get them snacks or gifts while visiting, as it is considered discourteous not to do so while visiting Asian homes, even when it is for research purposes. Despite all these challenges, I finally managed to collect the necessary data. I took a deep breath and literally felt a weight lifted off my chest that I had not even realized I was carrying all along. I felt like a survivor of an academic storm. The very next day after my data collection was completed, the Malaysian government announced the Covid-19 lockdown! If I had wasted even a day in the process of data collection, I would have ended up in severe trouble. I felt accomplished when my supervisor congratulated me for my efforts and for successfully completing the data collection within the planned timeframe. The only thought in my mind was to analyze the data obtained and generate the results. There was no turning back. If any errors occur, I would not be able to repeat the study.

Time went on, and everyone was stuck at home for months. Those were the days where I slogged day and night to analyze the data obtained and produce the final write-up of the results. Luckily, the results turned out well. The light at the end of the tunnel shone brightly as the lockdown was used to my advantage, allowing me to finish writing my thesis shortly after it ended. It was a crazy journey, but it was worth it.

From Dawn to Dusk: Stories of the Postgraduate Life (VOL 3)  
No. ISBN 978-629-490-115-5 | 2024

## CHAPTER 2

# Feast, Festivities, And Forums: Navigating Postgraduate Life Through Food, Holidays And Conferences!

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### The Feast of New Beginnings

Embarking on a PhD journey is like stepping into a grand banquet, where each course represents a new challenge, discovery, and experience. For myself, the beginning of my postgraduate life was marked by a modest yet symbolic feast—a small gathering with my family members. The table was laden with dishes that reflected my multicultural background: my mother’s special Malay style chicken rice, chicken and beef satay with delicious homemade peanut sauce, chicken rendang served with *nasi himpit*, and a few home-made desserts including my own signature Basque-burnt cheesecake, lychee pudding and sweet porridge.

The meal was more than just food; it was a celebration of the beginning of a new chapter, a feast to fuel myself for the long journey ahead. As my father recite the prayers, I couldn't help but feel a mixture of excitement and trepidation. The PhD program was demanding, with long hours in the library, endless readings, and the daunting task of contributing original research to my field. Yet, as I savored the flavors of the feast, I realized that this journey would be about more than just academics—it would be about balance, community, and finding joy in the little moments.

### **The Festivities of Balance**

The first semester was a whirlwind of classes, research proposal, and independent study sessions. But I quickly learned that to survive and thrive in the rigorous environment of a PhD program, I needed to find balance. This balance came in the form of holidays and celebrations.

During the semester holidays, I found solace in the warmth of beaches and the comfort of familiar traditions. I spent my time travelling at different places – from feasting seafood at Kota Kinabalu, napping underneath the coconut tree in Langkawi, and even went to Japan to explore the country beautiful culture and traditions. It was a time to step away from my research and recharge. The holidays were a reminder that life was happening outside the walls of academia, and that it was essential to remain connected to the world beyond my studies.

I also embraced cultural festivals from around the world, attending Diwali celebrations with my friends, joining in on the Lunar New Year festivities, and participating in local fairs and parades. Each festival brought a sense of joy and renewal, helping myself to maintain my mental and emotional well-being amidst the pressures of my PhD work.

## **The Forums of Knowledge**

As the second year of my PhD program began, I have started to present my research at a number of prestigious international conferences - from Indonesia to Japan, Thailand as well as China. My presentation in Bukit Tinggi, Padang, Indonesia was my first major academic forum for my PhD journey, and it was both thrilling and intimidating. The conference was indeed exciting, and the prospect of meeting and networking with renowned scholars was nerve-wracking.

I prepared meticulously, spending weeks refining my presentation and rehearsing my speech. When the day finally arrived, I stood before a room full of experts, my heart pounding with anticipation. As I began to speak, I realized that this forum was more than just an opportunity to share my work—it was a space for dialogue, collaboration, and learning.

The conference was a turning point in my postgraduate life. I connected with scholars from different countries, exchanging ideas and forging friendships. Additionally, it was also among my most memorable conference as I managed to bagged my first ever Best Presenter Award in an international conference, followed by a few other awards at other conferences. These forums of knowledge, whether they were international conferences, departmental seminars, or informal study groups, became vital to my own academic growth. Somehow it also provided me with the support and inspiration I needed to push the boundaries of my research.

## **A Journey of Feasts, Festivities, and Forums**

As I progressed through my PhD program, I have come to understand that the journey was not a solitary one. It was a path enriched by the feasts of new beginnings, the festivities that brought balance to my life, and the forums that fostered intellectual growth. Each aspect of my life—food, holidays, and conferences—played a crucial role in shaping my postgraduate experience.

In the end, it wasn't just the degree that defined my journey, but the memories of shared meals with friends, the joy of holiday celebrations, and the knowledge gained from engaging with a global academic community. I've realized that the PhD was as much about personal growth as it was about academic achievement, and that the feasts, festivities, and forums I have encountered along the way were the true markers of my success.

As I prepared for my final viva voce, I looked back on my PhD journey with a sense of fulfilment. I am truly grateful with all the experiences that I have encountered throughout my study. I had navigated the challenges of postgraduate life not just with diligence, but with a deep appreciation for the experiences that had nourished my mind, body, and spirit. And as I stood before the committee to present my thesis, I knew that I had not only completed a PhD but had also woven a rich tapestry of memories that would stay with myself long after the degree was conferred.

## CHAPTER 3

# Opportunity Comes To Those Who Recognize It

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Opportunity comes to those who recognize it—a preface to my long encounter with this endeavor, which I will name “unrelenting” as it has been living in every existing moment since the first day of this journey. It feeds itself on my conscience, where it resoundingly reminds: “you still haven’t done \_\_\_\_” where the blank can be substituted with any unfinished work one may have, including personal ones. Some encounters can be unmenacing, especially at the offset where things still appear as potential rather than realities. It is further unmenacing if you have similar encounters in the past, and falsely equip yourself with a preparedness which will render insufficient.

The journey has not been of wonder, but of lessons, a lot of lessons. People tend to attach prestige to the doctorate itself, rather than the journey. Definitely, there exist moments which carves onto the spirit ergo improving our potential and ability to an extent, where it distinguishes us from the rest. However, the

prestige cannot disguise the unrelenting nature of the journey towards it. The memories of good impressions prior to embarking on the journey do not seem to explain the complexities of the obstacles laid along the way. In the intention of being more precise, and to not beat around the bush too much, my postgraduate journey initially did not concern me academically, where the terms or concepts might bamboozle the uninitiated—rather the things orbiting postgraduate studies especially at the doctoral level, seemed to be a world’s away from my experience at the postgraduate masters’ level and the undergraduate level. Strenuous effort is demanded, as you age, in all things you enroll yourself in—from menial things such as lifting yourself from the bed, or in greater things such as committing to a choice you made when the circumstances still favor your youth. I embarked on the PhD trail at the (arguably) tender age of 28 years old, where I was still licking my wounds from finishing my masters; wounded by the COVID virus as it shackled many institutions from operating in its norm. Imposed (and tightened) SOPs made the final components of the master’s journey needlessly exhausting. Then, being an unemployed master’s graduate who disseminated the resume like a leaflet to a crowd of indifferent passerby grew the desperation for validation in some way. The path is clearly defined in my mind; be employed or pursue the next level of education (since I was faced with the same path after my undergraduate was completed). The impending doom of worthlessness seemed to attend my absence of choice; if I did not take any of the two paths, I will be viewed as an utter failure and waste of resource. However, opportunity comes to those who recognizes it—a quote I have acquainted myself too well with, became the echo which may had influenced my decision when my father asked the golden question “Now that you have done your master’s at the age of 28, why not continue all the way to PhD? I will cover your fees for the first semesters.”. In that moment of avoiding the abyss, I climbed the rope of reasons (or maybe excuses) to assure myself that I can

and I need to do this. I need to do my doctorate. In hindsight, after all of the storms, it is still a questionable decision, and until today, I am still uncertain of what fortified my assurance in saying yes; the prestige of having a doctorate in my late 20s, or the financial incentive provided by my (pensioned) father or recognizing the opportunity might never reappear if I undermine its availability; like this offer is just another day in the sun, abundant and is rarely absent. However, currently it has been 3 years and a half of committing to this opportunity, and exit is the only thing I wish from the program.

There is a reason to believe in yourself, especially when you are boarding an experience which feels all too familiar in the last decade of your life: higher education. It felt as if there are no more learning curves to be experienced in regards to the process of the postgraduate study. It can be a pain point for people who have left tertiary education, to return to it after a considerably long time, and to be reacquainted with all the distant familiar phases of tertiary education. However, the sequence (as I have experienced from my Masters) would be: concept paper submission, audit classes, supervisor nomination, research defense, data collection and lastly viva (plus corrections and resubmission post viva). I have defended proposals and attended proposal defense, I understand the expectations for each research chapters, I have a good supervisor (a great one, if I may sing my praises) whom I have known since my undergraduate, and supervised my master's as well. I have a well-framed topic and title which tied back to my master's research, which means I don't have to adopt a new topic entirely, I can simply add another component to the existing framework I composed from my master's thesis, and my SV approved of this method and the topic. Even before the journey, it

felt as if everything was falling into place, like a completed jigsaw puzzle. It felt as if the journey had all its supplies ready and navigating it would be undemanding. But confidence rarely gets a person to the destination.

The forms were filled, the fees were settled. Four months after registration, the first semester ended. The subjects were a tad bit demanding intellectually, but at this point, nothing is challenging enough if it's just an escalation of a well understood basic concept. I do apologize if this is perceived as boastful, but I felt too familiar with the research process as I also worked as a research assistant for over 2 years during my master's undertaking. In between the classes, I tasked myself for a position as a substitute teacher in an international private school. The calling was answered to avoid the abyss; the feeling of worthlessness due to absence of income generation. It is also in part due to guilt over the unproductivity my day offers other than going to the library and read research articles. Even then, I would still manage to do all the assignments and attend all the classes (virtually) and submit the assignments. Then, as life feels redundant and confidence unwavering in finishing the doctorate, another exciting opportunity surfaced. A prospect of becoming a lecturer at an established private university seemed heaven-sent (then). Hundreds of resume have been disseminated at this point. Each unreturned email felt like a layer of despair laid onto my self-esteem, which at this point has made light impenetrable. To let light in again, and for my sole chance to prove to my parents my master's degree was not a waste of everyone's time and attention, I went for the interview. Lo and behold, fate recognized my hands as I reached for it, and I got my first job in academia, as lecturer cum academician.

Movement Control Order has been lifted at this point in time; COVID was a name which everyone dismissed its fearful connotation. However, lectures proceeded virtually for a year. In

that one year, it felt as if the dream of achieving everything before 30 was getting closer. A point of pride, and to an extent, a boastful achievement if realized. I began questioning anecdotes of people finishing their doctorates in 5 to 10 years, which also became a point of pride as well, as tales of the unending journey often involves long periods of study was common and it appeared as if I will not be another one of its chapters. Motivation was not lost on me; every waking day was spent at my university, specifically in the library. Reliving my masters' routine even after my lecturing/tutoring hours, it feels as if everything is falling tightly into place. There was the comfort of my previous university, where all the tools I needed to finish this journey; the offices, the resource centers, the cafes, the library, all of this are not a riddle compared to, if I pursued my PhD in another university. There was also the good relationship with my SV, working alongside her every week where she would monitor my progress firsthand. Additionally, holding a position as a lecturer in this whole endeavor is a flattering complement to the goal; a lecturer who is pursuing a fulltime PhD before the age of 30 and it seemed destiny had written my name for a greater path; as a doctorate lecturer by 30 years old, or rather, being called Dr Hanif at 30 years old of age; a fantasy which soon will be haunting the latter part of my journey.

News of physical reopening of universities in Malaysia had been rumbling for a few months. It seemed the Higher Education Ministry confided in the nature of COVID at that moment of time; an endemic disease preventable through the (strict) procedures prescribed by the government. Elation knocked on my conscience as the thought of physically lecturing; the classroom, the students, the ability to show my capabilities and prove my worth to peers and colleagues alike after one year of virtual classroom,

overwhelmed my focus. Initially, it was homed in to finish my chapter 3 of the proposal. Configuring the intricacies which will make the research viable for a doctorate study took longer than I would have expected, as my supervisor strictly reminded me that my previous quantitative method for my master's will fail me in passing the proposal defence; there must be a doctorate worth methodology. Since physical working is to be resumed in June 2022, this configuration encountered a massive halt; my focus was fully shifted to what was immediate, work. This was, in retrospect, the start of the whirlwind. What started as excitement eventually and gradually morphed into unnerving anxieties and a drifted sense of importance. Scheduled lectures overtook my waking conscience. The daily commute plus the workload I (foolishly) cherished at that moment became a bane of progress for my research proposal. Days turn into months, and as oblivious as watching the sun set, before I could realize it, darkness loomed over my head.

December 2022 was a vivid memory (after a blur of working for a few months), where I passed my proposal defense (with minor correction). The months in between were war zones. During those warring periods, I would apply for a one day leave on Friday to do consultation with my supervisor bi-weekly, if the stars aligned. If the heavens disproved, I would spend my leave in the library, trying my best to move the gears in my brain and in my fingers for the proposal. My contact hour with the it is lesser than the probability of lightning striking twice in the same place. Gradually, the thought of "when will I finish this proposal" repelled any initiatives I tried to conjure in facing the document frontally, as lecturing workload threatened to supplant any other approaching endeavor other than itself. Daily problems of the workplace seemed more urgent and immediate than the research proposal's impediment. Fueled by the feeling of recompense by the wage at the end of the month, it fortified my efforts in prioritizing work over

the proposal. The absence of immediate consequence (or reward) mounted my motivation and subdued it. Pre-June 2022 PhD journey was a false image (or falsely perceived) of the destination. The destination seemed not only illusive, but almost an imagination, a fever dream. The confidence bubble sustained throughout the first year of PhD burst, and there it was, the painful epiphany of helplessness, staring at me at the end of it all. I gazed back, and conceded.

The path to ascension still begins from the bottom. The hike was not the relief I sought, as it still required me to endure incoming inclines. Currently on an extended semester after failing to obey the “holy” Gantt chart of graduation, doubts creep around behind curtains of certainty. Although I managed to revive writing routines to type out my thesis, prioritize tasks, do supervision occasionally, my work condition worsen. My appointment as head of department at the tender age of 30 seemed an omen rather than a blessing retrospectively. The post was offered on a mutual basis; I was willing to hold the post, and the former head was (gladly) willing to release the post. The allure of being a head of department at 30 years old, was further enhanced by an allowance which would increase my salary by 15% (maybe greed would be a testament to my second downfall). Although unhindered by academic load (due to reduced teaching load as virtue of the post), my waking moment was a pursuit of management deadlines. What was a prospective quality to be inserted in the resume, consequently forced the thesis a few leaps backward, after a brief push. Managing the department included interactions and transactions with multiple parties of the academia; students, staff, and the main governing body of the university. “One more storm conjured in my path by God”, a monologue whispered in my conscience. It seemed determination

is not only to be achieved, but also to be tested by Him. After finding my way out of the darkness, another storm was ready to blow me into it again. Demanding contacts, student of fellow colleague and admins express their desires in the blaring of my phone, asking from me what is in my authority and what is not. I was a jar sugar, and they were a colony of ants, ready to take parts of my existence, grain by grain. There are only requests but never replies. Only demands, no explanations. No negation, just adherence. One would be misinformed, to opine a higher position as possessing authority (and more freedom as the teaching workload reduced) but in my circumstance, it meant managing what others would not. It meant dealing with students as clients rather than as an instructor (an interaction I think shifted my being to a customer service staff). The previous storm was indeed only a prelude to a greater storm. Undertaking full-time PhD, working full-time as a lecturer and holding a post in the department ruptured my ability to even exist as a normal human being. My days were not marked by calendar, they were marked by the tasks I have not finished. Bruised and battered, I learned the meaning of persistence as well as capacity, where both were absent in my being. This concludes to the shackling of the thesis' progress and brought impending doom on my already delayed study year. The journey from the bottom only escalated as far as the width of a hair.

Ascension is an exerted effort for any human being. From the ground, we sought through inspiration a path to the heavens. Icarus and the Wright brothers might have felt, as well as strained equally to soar the skies. My inspiration to ascend arrived at the end of one year as head of department. The thesis progressed no greater than a snail's crawl on a mosaic floor. Only sympathies and condolences were offered by my close circle of families and friends as well as my supervisor who understood my struggle (although at one point, she remarked "I don't want excuses

anymore. I want chapters”; a human’s patience will always be tested). Any idle time was spent on recuperating, rather than producing paragraphs in the thesis (which at frequent points in time I managed to greet the thesis but only with a few sentences, as if we were growing into strangers. Despite all the tragedy, with a heavy huff and puff, I incompletely completed my qualitative data collection and analysis, which completed half of my chapter 4. It did not hint of accomplishment, rather it intensified my desire to cross the finishing line. It is a feeling of urgency, rather than of achievement. Amidst the harrowing struggle, another epiphany peered into my conscience. Maybe, there’s a possibility that the challenges of completing the doctorate were never about the intellect, but life around it. The years taken were not spent on the thesis, but priorities which, may overtake the thesis. Maybe the person who exceeded three years of completion was not riddled by the thesis or the “high-level” analysis of the data, but by family priorities or grief from the loss of a loved one, or maybe life came at them fast, akin to my situation. I could imagine if I was provided a sabbatical leave for this period and was privileged with undisturbed time to schedule my day accordingly to solely focus on completing the thesis, without any major issue from any sphere of life, it would be a bit brighter, and I would view my doctorate journey in a better light. Maybe the journey was not demanding on the intellect, but rather on the human, and all that it entails.

Three years and a half later, I can vividly feel the blooming realization of my underserving perception towards fellow comrades who exceeded their GoT (graduate on time) projection. The blooming of the realization, at least for me, metamorphosed from the culmination of all the hardship I experienced up to that point in time, with all the unending challenges as well as

understanding that the delay of progress by the PhD candidate in the stories I have heard, is not of indifference or indolence, but due to, quite literally, unavoidable circumstances. No oracles could have prepared me for this experience, nor could they help me avoid it. Underestimating these hardships outside of the doctorate certainly cratered my conscience in the postgraduate doctorate journey, that there is more than just the doctorate itself. However, reflection only serves its purpose once acted upon. The mounting feeling of suffocation and being limited in my current circumstances propelled me to urgently update my resume and proceeded my job application to other higher education institutes around Klang Valley, looking to escape the deep hole I am in currently. Probably coping with my failure to escape the unending tasks of a head of department and the university itself, I convinced myself that this is the only way to salvage my once more stalled doctorate; a more conducive working environment. Prioritizing my thesis and PhD (as well as better working terms and salary) incentivized my effort to fly from the nest I might have overgrown from (where I do not find any more space to grow into). Any inspiration which propels progress is divine intervention in my view. Maybe this reason, the job change for the doctorate completion, became a prayer to the heavens, which awaited an answer.

Opportunity comes to those who recognize it. On an assuming evening, amidst the zenith of daily chaos, an email nestled into my inbox, inquiring of my interest in a position of lecturer at a university I did my part-time lecturing in (yes, in between all of these, I somehow managed to further impair my sanity by lecturing part-time after work hours). Funnily, hesitancy seeped into my conscience briefly, whispering “a known trouble is much better than an unknown one” implying the new university, if accepted, will have unknown trouble waiting. However, after three years of PhD, and three years of fretting how this working environment affected

my doctorate progress, I decided, an unknown trouble might favor progress, as the known one hinders. Necessary documents were submitted, and once more, fate recognized my hands as I reached for it. Three levels of interview in three weeks, and on my birthday, the offer letter came. I am now an employed lecturer in a different university, and escaped what I thought was the most arduous three years in my life; pursuing PhD, having a full-time job (with part-time lecturing after work hours), as well as holding a position in the faculty. The university seemed keen on hiring me due to the progress of my PhD chapters (one that I cannot share my enthusiasm with as it is still very much halted rather than towards completion). Upon acceptance of the new university, everything felt as if it is starting to fall into place again. The timetable seemed to be reasonable with flexible working hours. Gaps between classes in the schedule were ample, which the dean advised to utilize it as spaces for completing my PhD as the department hired me due to that reason; someone who is nearing completion. I assured the dean, my concern is not only completing the doctorate, but escaping it, in which she chuckled and uttered "I totally understand." The news of transfer reached my supervisor, and delight beamed on her face. Prospect supervision plans were in queue, and I finally have a weekly schedule for completing the thesis. My life now seemed to mimic my master's routine; frequent visits to the library and honing my thesis as well as being able to read article journals in surplus, rather than referring only to identify the year it was published (as was the case in the previous 3 years of working at the previous university. Finally, it felt like the first light of dawn streaked through the sky. I can hear the finishing line calling my name. Maybe this is the way out. The hike has only so much stones left to turn. The summit closes itself to me. I can take

this easy. However, maturity intervened in conjuring false confidence; nothing is guaranteed until it is done.

The trail ahead is an undefined unknown. One can contend that the finishing line is almost visible for my current situation. Yet, one storm can alter a sailor's perception of a rainy day. It seemed as if the heavens again favor my endeavor though wariness linger in possible future storms. This can feel contrarian; to be apprehensive in the face of favorable circumstances. Subsequently, I learned that life finds a way to instill doubt in your mind regarding your choices. The condition was vastly different when I began the PhD to where I am currently situated in, although much better than it has been for the past 3 years. My doctorate journey is safer to be termed as far from over, as there is still distance between my efforts and its completion, but there is a better sense of direction, and pleasant weather is approaching. Nevertheless, imprinted in my core being after these three years is the obstacles confronted along the journey; bemused and bewildered because the nature of the problem was never from the doctorate program, but from everything around it. The main lesson was the doctorate program is still ultimately and entirely experienced by a human, and a person rarely exists as only his/her intellect. A person is a collection of itself along with his/her entire experience; psychologically, socially, along with all his troubles and relief. This collection pieces a person into its being, and this being undergoes the doctorate program along with all that makes him human, for better or for worse.

## CHAPTER 4

# Master's Degree Journey: A Story of Struggle, Passion and Success

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Lots and lots of struggle. Lots and lots of frustration. A great deal of disappointment. A whole load of a much long-awaited success. A whole load of a much-delayed success. Let me repeat that again. D-E-L-A-Y-E-D victory and triumph. If you were to ask my reflection in a paragraph: That was the answer. Sweet, momentous victory that is so worth the pain and struggle. Thankfully, the success after that erased and vanquished all the previous distress and torture. All worth it now. Every single part of it. Yet, it took quite some time. Who would have felt that positive feeling of gratification when all you could see previously was pure darkness and no way out?

When I first enrolled myself in my Master's Degree course in Educational Leadership and Management in 2016, my initial plan was to enhance my skill sets, and be able to not only work a 9-5 job but perhaps be able to start a business. Initially, I planned to finish it in a year. My mission to attain my master's degree focuses

on increasing my thinking skills; to seek novelty, challenge myself to think creatively and network with those in the education industry. Along the way, obstacles after obstacles slowly present themselves.

I have always spent a lot of time with my parents, and they have always had a passion for education and learning. Me, on the other hand, I promised myself to not follow in my parent's footsteps. Hence, ever since graduating from high school and finishing my Bachelor's Degree, I couldn't wait to start working in numerous industries and trying to excel at everything that I could get my hands on. In short, I cannot wait to be in the corporate world. Proud to say, I have also had the chance of trying out different positions in numerous sectors. That, thankfully, I am successful at. I even managed to secure permanent employment even before I finished my studies. Having good university results alongside additional skills gained definitely helps. I climbed that ladder I thought I wanted so much. Why would I then need to further my education formally, right?

My parents never stopped me from working in different areas and industries, or attending events with other professionals. I didn't mention they were truly supportive of it too. Nevertheless, at times you will still feel incomplete and that there are just some things you wish to accomplish. Massive hole appeared. Hence, I decided to further my studies after around five years of completing my degree. I seem to like that five year gap each time I further my studies.

I have also always enjoyed meeting new people as it is really nurturing because I always learn something new. I always liked to have conversations with people who could teach me things, and I personally believe that every human has something to teach and offer. I am not saying all of this for you to get to know me, but for

you to understand why I chose my pathway despite being surrounded by industrial players who sometimes have the impression that those who continue to pursue their Master's Degree is for the reason of not being able to secure a job after they have graduated. I know I am not the only one who has been told about the deceiving university pyramid scheme.

Does pursuing postgraduate studies really torture students? Perhaps there may be some truth in that question when the majority of students become stressed to complete their studies on time while juggling other responsibilities simultaneously. This enchanting experience however, can definitely make you become a superhero after polishing on important life skills such as discipline, grit and perseverance.

In my humble opinion, everyone in this world faces life challenges and difficulties and hence being a postgraduate student is no different, it is generally common to go through days feeling constantly worried and nervous of not knowing what to write, loss for words and ideas, stressed out and struggled horrendously but finding a good support system or people of the same herd on board the same ship will definitely help. Ensure to keep your positivity and productivity up after going through any turbulence or barrier. Organise your thoughts and actions better soon after as you move along.

The reality is that you will never know anything in its true essence until you begin to experience it yourself. So, even your story is going to be different from mine no matter how much preparation has been done beforehand. Wait no more, start your journey now if you have not! As human beings, we are constantly changing our

interests and goals. Hence, the most important thing is to enjoy the different processes we go through and learn as much as we can. Today, after five years of graduating, I realise that going through the Master's Degree journey has taught me much more than just being able to teach and lead better, being a leadership and management major. It has taught me the importance of recognizing opportunities and taking advantage of them.

The one advice I wish someone had given me earlier: Do not worry too much about the quality of your work while in progress because there will always be room for improvement. Learn to build yourself up, don't be too hard on yourself and give yourself grace during hard times.

So, yes indeed, dear all. You can do anything when you put your mind to it despite any disabilities or barriers you have. It may take longer or give you heartaches and headaches along the way, but you can go through it.

Where am I right now? Perhaps you have guessed it right. Ironically, nothing feeds my soul as much as the education and training industry could. Thank God for this amazing life and every single soul who has made me who I am today. Life is short, time is fast, no replay, no rewind, so perhaps now is a good time to further my studies again? Now is always a good time! I believe it is now the right time to embark on a new one. Off we go! Let's get started right away.

## CHAPTER 5

# Tough Road, Great Reward

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“It is only your darkest hours that we may discover the true strength of the brilliant lights within ourselves that can never, ever, be dimmed. A quote by the famous Doe Zantamanta, author of the book “Karma”. The quote best depicts the 4 years race in my PhD completion.

My journey started with an early hiccup as my classes went into online mode because I registered two days before Covid lockdown was announced. I thought to myself “what a start to my journey”. Online learning was never my thing, I can guarantee that many of them were struggling with the entire process as it was very new for us. I had to juggle in learning few platforms as my working institution is not using the same platform as the one that my PhD institution is using. The learning of managing multiple tools took a toll on us. On top of that, I didn’t get to know who are my classmates as it was only two days since I registered, and with that, insightful ideas or opinions were not able to be shared well as all of them tend to be quiet during the online learning classes.

Sem 1 was already a disaster for me. It was on research methodology. The course which requires us to produce a proposal which will eventually be the foundation of my proposal defense. Everything was on PPT slides mode and the lecturer was talking, talking and talking and I was dreaming, dreaming and dreaming. Nothing went into my small tiny lazy brain as the classes is on every gloomy Saturday morning and all I wanted to do is to sleep. For once, I regretted starting but unfortunately things cannot be predicted, so, what I did was I just try to cope with my knowledge that I got from my masters and try to merge with the “information” that I am getting from my so-called online classes. The best part was there were assignments to be completed and it was so difficult to work alone as I have been “locked” in the house and the urge of doing it was not there. I told myself only one thing “One semester is 3 thousand plus”, I must do something about it or else it will only take up the cost for nothing. I put myself up and try to complete everything that I could. Semester 1 was not a breeze, it was breathtaking but somehow, I completed and had some break in between the semester.

Semester 2 came in within split of seconds, it was on research seminar, this course was a killer. Again, classes were like someone preaching about a content, the lecturer keep talking, talking and talking, no responses from anyone of us, I remember seeing one of my classmates taking a puff and relaxing at a garden while listening to the lecture, can you imagine that research seminar class for Phd students were so relaxing? I wish in reality it was like that! Things became serious when the lecturer mentioned about something that is related to proposal defense, we tried our best to understand as the questioning platform was not ready for us to post questions as it was only few weeks into the lockdown week. We told the lecturer; can we get some consultation hours after class so that we can show what we have

completed. Thank god, she was a gem, she guided us through. We managed the course with her consultation hours input!

Many people believes this term “Time Flies” but for me , I can feel every single minute and moment as two semester has surpassed , I am still clueless, on top of that, my lecturer was like”banyaklah doa” “doa membawa berkat”. I was like If I “Doa” also, work is not going anywhere. Who will help my “doa”? With that 3rd Semester kick in with two major courses, multivariate data analysis and qualitative research methods. These two courses play an important role in my methodology chapter. Since I am using mixed mode, both the lectures were so important for me. One will number and one with words. Can you imagine, learning spss via online teaching with no face to face guidance? It was very tough , and on top of that final exam for multivariate data analysis, It was a disaster , T-test, Anova, Pearson Correlation , you name it . The days of memorizing is over for me. I just did what I can and somehow, I cross it with an average score. I just pepped myself and told myself that average is ok la for me.

So, with all the courses over, the next stage is to get prepared for proposal defense, I am given 1 year to get prepared for it. My supervisor first statement to me is that “You are not going to change the world with your thesis” so do on a title which there is a GAP. The word GAP! It was a nightmare during my proposal defense, every time I go for consultation, it will be “where is the GAP?” My title was related to writing so, the GAP was a difficult task to look for as there are many matters that is related to my research has been done by someone, after struggling for the next 6 months, the GAP has been discovered! Falalalaaa! So, with the GAP being covered, I then moved on in sorting everything else

within the time frame given. I didn't want to be missed out on the deadline as such, my only motivation was if I am able to complete this, I will get promoted in my workplace, that was the only motivation I had and I wanted to finish it as much as I could. I followed another wisdom word of my supervisor "Write 2 page daily". I tried. sometimes, I just couldn't, but I did try and completed it by the timeline for my defense.

Proposal Defense day, nothing much was the setting, the entire thing is done via online, I had two externals looking at my work. I would say that it was a smooth proposal defense for me as I didn't know that a bigger atomic bomb would be dropped in my viva. I was happily thinking that everything is so well done and I can proceed with the data collection. Things were looking great till that moment.

3 months after proposal defense, there were no responses from my supervisors, there were some issues among her and the institution and she kind of boycotted all her work. In other words, she left us all hanging and she went MIA. I panicked, no help from anyone, thematic analysis is left after data collection has been gathered, and I need to administer my pre-test and posttest and I am not sure whether I am in the right track. I had to let it go and halt for more than 3 months because I was busy looking for her! After a few rounds of search, I found out that she is now attached with another university. I then went and look for her.

It was already on a crucial stage of my thesis, I hope I did the right choice by looking for her before proceeding with my research work. Her room is situated over a hill. I went looking for her walking over the hill. Trust me, the hill journey was like my PhD journey, so tiring until you feel like, ah! It's ok, drop it! That was like my darkest day in my thesis work. I went and meet her, she told me, lot to change, this change, that change, you need a stronger data

analysis, you need to get guidance from a statistic lecture, blah blah blah and blah. I only can hear her the three first statement, the remaining parts were all cloudy in my brains. One thing I know that I am far away from completing and because of me halting my work, it created an even worse disaster by missing out the deadline. What to do? Do it again, do you have a choice? No, I am already 75% there, I never give up, I keep writing and got an assistance from a statistic lecturer and he was helpful enough in helping me with the data analysis and things were going on the right track. The main thing here I would say it, carrying yourself again is very important and after spending 4 years inclusive of 2 semester extensions, I am then ready for my viva.

Viva day, first statement during the statement “Thilip, are you that dumb?” My laptop doesn’t have Word application and I used a software called WPS which doesn’t pop the slides on the google meet site. They say never mind just proceed, with a stern tone, I was given 30 mins, after that, for the next 2 hours, I was bombarded, left and right, up and down, imagine Bruce Lee coming back alive, give you those imaginary punches. I was going through that feeling, I keep quiet and let it sail through. Somehow, the entire torture was over, I was then asking to leave to wait for my verdict.

“Thilip, we are happy to announce that your thesis is for minor correction and you are given three months for corrections and we wish you the best of luck!”

At that moment, I was like “that’s all?” why so much of bombarding for a passed viva, I continue with my smile and said thank you very much and yeah, it was a journey but as how I have stated in my first

line, the darkest days are the days which will test you to the core and if you are able to go through that, there won't be any more days that you can't get through in life. Wishing all readers, who plan or doing your Phd the best in your future endeavors!

## CHAPTER 6

# A Journey To The Opportunity Of A Lifetime

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For many years since my hiring at Mindanao State University (MSU), it was only in 2017 that I got the opportunity to pursue my Master in Business Administration in Entrepreneurship. This milestone was not one I took lightly because it was the opportunity of a lifetime. It was a journey driven by my desire to make a lasting impact in business and entrepreneurship, particularly in the community through social entrepreneurship. However, I did not anticipate how much this journey would challenge and reshape me not just as a professional, but as an individual.

As the only degree holder in a family of nine siblings, and the second youngest, I soon understood that financial aid through a scholarship would be crucial for me to pursue a postgraduate degree. This realization set me on the journey toward a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. I owe a debt of gratitude to the Commission

on Higher Education (CHED) for enabling me to attend Jose Rizal University in Mandaluyong City, Philippines, full-time under their K–12 Transition Scholarship Program. My studies would not have been feasible without the kind permission of Mindanao State University through the generous recommendation of the Vice President for Academic Affairs, Dr. Alma E. Berowa who made this priceless scholarship possible.

I knew that embarking on this journey would not be easy, but I had no idea that it would test my mental and emotional limits to some extent. Making the transition to being a full-time postgraduate student required increased focus and discipline. It was incredibly difficult for me to juggle my personal and academic obligations as I was trying to support my family financially despite the frequent delays of my monthly stipends which made me wait for almost a year to receive them. Nonetheless, I was able to manage to endure, constantly reminding myself not to waste this precious opportunity that had been given to me.

Fulfilling my master's program's academic requirements was both a challenge and an impetus for my personal growth. There were times when academic papers, coursework, and serious project development became too much for me to handle. I even doubted my ability to achieve my goals, especially when my father died because of nasopharyngeal cancer which was discovered late and there was no way for my family to save him after we had exhausted all our means. I thought that was the end of my journey since I blamed myself for my father's death. If only I had all the money in the world, I could have saved him. Nevertheless, I mustered all the courage to be resilient throughout those trying times of my life. I realized then that every obstacle I overcame served as my inspiration for my continued development as a postgraduate student and as a calibrated business and entrepreneurship educator.

One of the turning points in my postgraduate studies was my strategic management course which required me to write a paper. This strategic management paper was more than a prerequisite for my classes. It was a way for me to hone my academic writing skills and apply my knowledge about the core functions of businesses from years of experience as an educator combined with the new advanced learning I gained from my MBA courses. My experience in writing my strategic management paper effectively was rewarding as it allowed me to mentor my classmates in writing their papers. Watching my hard work and dedication come to fruition gave me an unmatched sense of satisfaction.

Further, my experiences in my MBA program strengthened my desire to create an impact not just on my colleagues but also on my community through entrepreneurship. I spearheaded certain projects for the extension programs of my Department of Marketing at MSU which provided underrepresented populations with economic opportunities.

The value of support networks and mentorship was one of the most important things I got from this experience. Even though the obstacles seemed overwhelming at times, I was fortunate enough to have mentors, professors, and colleagues in the Department of Marketing, who gave me priceless counsel and support. My immediate family helped me see past my current problems by making me understand that I was not to blame for my father's passing and by making me realize that our lives are just borrowed from God who created us.

Moreover, my voyage was greatly reinforced by my friendship with my postgraduate classmates. We supported one another and forged a sense of community by having similar goals and experiences, which helped me get through the most difficult times academically and professionally.

As I reflect on this precious journey, I realize that by reshaping my perspective, I will be able to serve the communities around me better. My challenges and milestones and the relationships I established along the way have molded me into a stronger, more determined individual.

Looking forward, I am excited to continue developing initiatives that can make more tangible differences in the lives of communities that I have been serving, particularly the micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs), aspiring entrepreneurs, students, and underserved people in the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM), Philippines. This journey, supported by the generosity of the CHED scholarship and Mindanao State University, has been the foundation of everything I hope to continue to achieve in the future. I now understand that my journey is an opportunity of a lifetime and a lifetime of commitment to transform communities and make a lasting impact on them.

## CHAPTER 7

### Indeed, With Hardship Comes Ease

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As I look back on my postgraduate journey, I often reflect on my life's whirlwind experiences, encompassing my comprehensive examinations and dissertation writing. Balancing my obligations as a full-time faculty member at a Community High School in Lanao del Sur, Philippines, while raising my one-year-old son and attending to my husband's needs presented challenges I had never imagined.

Every day, I would commute from home to my workplace, which requires approximately one hour or more to sit on public transport. It was a journey that not only became an integral part of my routine but also a source of exhaustion. With a toddler at home and no baby-sitter to help, the demands were overwhelming. My husband, also a government employee, worked long hours, leaving me to juggle my roles as both a mother and dedicated academic.

When it came time for my comprehensive examinations, I felt the weight of my responsibilities more than ever. I was dealing with postpartum challenges, struggling with fatigue, and emotional disturbance. Yet I knew that I had to push through. The pressure of the examinations was high, but there was little time for

traditional study methods. I could not spend hours in the library, immersed in books; instead, I found myself taking moments to read and review, often late at night after my son had finally fallen asleep.

During those quiet hours, I would sit at the kitchen table, surrounded by my son's toys, browsing through notes and textbooks, and my mind racing with theories and concepts. The weight of motherhood and academic pressure felt like a heavy cloak, covering my shoulders, yet I embraced my dreams of completing my degree. I learned to accept chaos and used it to fuel my motivation. Every exam question I confronted was a small victory and each completed section demonstrated my resilience and perseverance.

As I came closer to the dissertation phase, my life became a delicate balancing act. The demands of writing, researching, and teaching were intensified by the constant need to care for my son. I often worked in fragments, restoring my dissertation together in stolen moments, while he snoozed or played contentedly on the floor nearby. The soft and beautiful sounds of his laughter became my background music, gently reminding me of why I was striving so hard.

Every day felt like a battle, but with each challenge, I discovered new strengths. I learned the art of multitasking in ways that I never thought were possible. I would draft sections of my dissertation while preparing meals or watching my son, transforming mundane moments into productive ones.

Alhamdulillah! Praise be to God! I survived the turbulent period. ***Indeed, Allah, the Almighty, is right in saying in the Holy Quran that "Verily, with hardship, comes ease (94:6).*** The comprehensive exams became a stepping stone, a test of my

resilience that I passed against all the odds. Each late night, every moment of doubt only served to strengthen my commitment to my goals. Similarly, completing my dissertation felt like reaching the summit of a mountain after a strenuous climb.

Reflecting on this journey, I realize that it was not just about earning a degree; it was about faith, growth, strength, and the firm spirit of a mother, wife and educator. This experience taught me invaluable lessons about time management, dedication, and the power of perseverance and strong faith in the Almighty. I emerged not only as a graduate, but also as a more profound version of myself, ready to embrace whatever challenges lay ahead.



## CHAPTER 8

# Master's Journey: A Roller Coaster Ride

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### Introduction: Sailing Slowly

Embarking on a Master's journey is often filled with a mix of excitement and trepidation. I am not exceptional in it. I was eager to delve into doing a Master's as my seniors started to do them in different universities. At first, I went to UPM with my senior for the entrance exam but failed, and with that frustration, I applied to UM and got it within weeks. I was on cloud nine because I always aimed to pursue my studies at UM, and that finally made my dream come true. With great enthusiasm, I started my journey in a Research Methodology class. In the class, I felt that I failed to meet the requirements because the lecturer was talking about research, and I didn't know ABC about it because no prior research background from my degree. The lecturer assigns us to come up with titles and research ideas to explain the class. In the first semester, I failed both subjects. I felt that I had chosen the wrong road and felt devastated. Then, I decided not to take more subjects but only one for one semester to focus and learn. Mini research,

finding and reading journals became part of my life. The journey became struggling because there was no Godmother or Godfather who would guide me through the complexities of academic life. Little did I know that this journey would be more of a roller coaster ride than a smooth sail. The next semester, I chose Morphology accidentally in Malay. But that accident taught me a lesson in life and strategies for studying at UM. I met a saviour, Dr Ong Shyi Nian, who taught me Morphology and Research Methodology and made my journey smooth and scored an A for the subject. With that confidence, I took two subjects in the next semesters and scored As. By then, I kept four pieces of research to choose from as the final research for a dissertation. However, I realised that I am more of a Morphologist and took Morphology mini-research to draft as a dissertation.

### **Ticket to the Roller Coaster Ride: Meeting the Supervisor**

It was my fault to choose her as my supervisor. The supervisor who I have chosen was the ticket for the roller coaster ride. My first meeting with my supervisor was filled with promise. She seemed knowledgeable and enthusiastic about my research topic. We set ambitious goals and outlined a plan that seemed both challenging and achievable. I left that meeting feeling confident and ready to tackle the tasks ahead.

### **Early Challenges**

However, it didn't take long for cracks to appear. As I began my research, I noticed that my supervisor was often unavailable and unresponsive. Emails went unanswered for weeks, and scheduled meetings were frequently postponed. The initial excitement began to wane as I realised that I was largely on my own. For a 5-minute meet-up, I will wait for hours outside the corridor, waiting for her

email. Every meetup, change of topics, comments and insults for my work.

### **Mid-Journey Struggles**

The middle of my journey was particularly tough. There were several instances where I felt completely helpless. One such example was when I needed critical feedback on my literature review. My supervisor failed to provide any input but always passed negative comments, which delayed my reading, finding and writing. This delay set me back significantly, and I found myself questioning my abilities and the feasibility of my research. The emotional and mental toll was immense. I felt isolated and overwhelmed, often doubting whether I could complete my Master's. The lack of guidance and support from my supervisor made every obstacle seem insurmountable. Finally, I made a self-commitment that I would decide on my topic and materials to read to start the writing.

### **Finding Support**

In my darkest moments, I realised that I needed to seek support elsewhere. I tried to reach out to my peers unfortunately, almost all were sailing the same boat. I took some of their experience and offered valuable advice. Additionally, I turned to online resources and academic forums to fill the gaps left by my supervisor. These strategies proved to be lifesavers. I learned to be more self-reliant and resourceful. The support from my peers helped me regain my confidence and stay on track.

## **Turning Points**

There were several turning points in my journey. One significant moment was when I failed to present my research proposal due to the lack of feedback from my supervisor and findings. On top of it, my mother was ill, and she needed my full attention. On that day, I put my paper in front of the panel, sought for apologies and promised to bounce back. The panel understood my situation and wished me to do my best. I must mention here that Dr Surin called to pass comfort words to focus on my mother first. That was healing for me, and I took a break and worked sincerely on my findings and writing. The break refreshed my mind and boosted my confidence. This achievement boosted my morale and reaffirmed my belief in my capabilities. Another turning point was when I decided to take control of my research timeline. I set my deadlines and created a detailed plan to ensure steady progress. This proactive approach helped me stay focused and motivated. On the second round of proposal defence, I saw Dr Ong Shyi Nian, with that confidence, present successfully. With his help, I refined my writing and passed my dissertation. He became my support pillar and Master to guide and assist until the day I submitted my bound copies.

## **Personal Growth**

Throughout this journey, I experienced significant personal growth. I developed a strong sense of resilience and learned to navigate challenges independently. The lack of support from my supervisor forced me to become more proactive and resourceful. I honed my problem-solving skills and learned to seek out and utilise various resources effectively. I also grew emotionally and mentally. The isolation and struggles taught me the importance of self-care and maintaining a positive mindset. I learned to manage stress better and developed a deeper understanding of my

strengths and weaknesses. Most important, I learned to write journal articles with the guidance and assistance of Dr Ong Shyi Nian.

## **Conclusion**

Reflecting on my Master's journey, I realise that it was a test of resilience and determination. Despite the challenges posed by a helpless supervisor, I managed to navigate through the ups and downs and emerge stronger. I learned the importance of seeking support, being resourceful, and believing in oneself. To future students, my advice is to be proactive and seek help when needed. Don't be afraid to reach out to peers, other lecturers, or external resources. Remember, your journey is unique, and every challenge is an opportunity for growth. Every phase of our life is challenging and teaches us lessons for the better of us. On this roller coaster ride, I cried, screamed, and laughed, but it emphasised my personal growth more effectively. This ride was a once-in-a-lifetime experience.



## CHAPTER 9

### Balancing Dual Roles

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I completed my master's degree in 2010 – approximately 14 years ago, and that was the last time I undertook formal education. If you had asked a younger me whether I planned to pursue a PhD, the answer would have been definitely not. My plans for my life were significantly different, yet here I am, in the midst of my PhD journey.

My decision to pursue a PhD was difficult because I wondered how I would manage work and studies simultaneously; and I simply questioned my ability to study since the last time I pursued formal education was in my 20s. After much consideration, I finally decided to pursue my higher education at the institution that I am working in. Many thoughts ran through my mind at this time - colleagues would soon become supervisors; I would be part of a system I helped manage; and most of all, I would be a student, just like the students I was teaching.

I set my mind to understand that although I was studying at the same institution where I was teaching, I had different roles - one as a student and the other as a staff member. My superiors ensured that there was a clear boundary to safeguard against any conflict of interest. I was truly relieved! So I took up the challenge and decided to pursue my studies at the same place that I was working at.

Initially, there was some getting used to. In addition to the research component, there were required courses to complete as a prerequisite. These courses were taught by colleagues, who were also my friends. Perhaps it was as awkward for them as it was for me during those sessions. However, I always reminded myself that the moment I entered the classroom, my status changed from their colleague and friend to their student. I was mindful in my interactions with them, always remembering to use proper salutations. I did not want to offend them and make other students wonder why I was referring to our lecturers informally.

Attending lectures, tutorials and practical sessions were quite a challenge. Classes were in the evening and also on weekends. Before going to class, I had to remind myself that I was now entering the classroom as a student and not a lecturer. Interestingly, some of my classmates were also my ex-students. It was a really big change in our interaction - we were now peers and faced similar challenges. Apart from classes to attend, there were also assignments to complete throughout the semester. As a working adult who also needed to complete assignments which required reading, analysis and applications, it was indeed a challenge. However, this was a great opportunity to learn how to prioritise tasks and manage my time more effectively. Eventually, I completed these courses successfully and was satisfied with the work that I completed.

The supervisors that I was assigned to were also my colleagues. So again, there was this period of adjustment where I had to remember my position as a student. Supervisions were done frequently and there were some growing pains on my part in the initial stages. Perhaps the expectation was that I could complete my work seamlessly as I was a lecturer. However, that was not the case as I stumbled many times. There was a period of adjustment where I had to be brave enough to admit my lack of knowledge and also ask questions on matters that I was unsure of. Through this researching phase I had the opportunity to explore many different topics and utilise different software that I was previously not exposed to. This has enhanced my teaching skills as I am now able to discuss various topics and techniques with my students.

Since starting this pursuit, I believe one of the most important factors in continuing and sustaining this journey has been having a strong support system. I have been very blessed with many people by my side who continue to journey with me. They are my cheerleaders, idea generators and source of comfort. There were times I found myself feeling like I was stuck in a rut with no way to move forward. This sometimes lasted for days or weeks. It helped to have friends whom I could bounce ideas with – friends both from the same and different fields. Sometimes, I just needed to talk to someone to vent my frustrations. They have sent me countless messages of encouragement, cheered me on, upheld me in prayer and were always willing to listen to my latest grievances. It is these people who have taken me thus far in this journey.

Completing the data analysis was one of the most challenging parts of my studies. I had to learn how to use software I was not familiar with, but I was fortunate enough to have friends stand by

me. Apart from learning things from scratch, there were days when they used to teach me patiently and also help with troubleshooting when I was totally out of ideas. On days when I thought there was no hope for my model and all the results generated were just not good enough, they were by my side to encourage me and help me move forward. At this time, it was helpful to have people from the same background as me because they could offer me some perspective and also confirm my ideas. On days when I just needed a break, friends were ready to go out for a simple meal or even for a holiday.

Another thing that I learnt in this academic journey is the need to sometimes say “no”. At the start of my studies, I thought I could do it all. I thought I could be involved in work, family and religion related matters and also study at the same time. The general perception society has is that I am a person with few commitments and as such, I was expected to take on many responsibilities. Eventually, I became too tired of having to do it all. I had to learn to say “no” to many things and prioritise my mental and physical well-being. I realised that this academic journey was a marathon and so I had to learn to pace myself. This was a struggle for me and felt guilty as I am usually a person who says “yes” to many things. This was a change to some of my friends and family but after explaining my struggles to them, they eventually understood my stand.

Looking back at who I was three years ago, and the who I am now, I believe I have changed for the better. While there have been many ups and downs in this academic journey, I am thankful for having a good support system to carry me through. I look forward to completing my studies and move on to the next phase in this academic career.

## CHAPTER 10

### Leap of Faith

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I knocked on the door at 6.15 p.m. for a 6.00 p.m. class and the first thing I heard was, “You are early for next week’s class.”

That was how my lecturer greeted me on the first day of my postgraduate class. It was the first week for me as a postgraduate student as well as a lecturer at a new workplace. I knew I was late and I also understood the sarcasm embedded in my lecturer’s words. But what happened an hour before that?

I embarked on two new journeys in the same week with both at different places, far from where I lived. My journey began with a drive from Shah Alam to Nilai in the morning for work and then to Serdang in the evening to study. With both places being new to me, the navigation application on the mobile device was of great help to me. On the first day of the class, as I drove around a roundabout and exited onto a lane as instructed by the navigator, I heard a bang at the back of my car that jolted me. I panicked and pulled over to the side of the road. I got down from the car to

understand what had happened, and to my surprise, I saw an elderly man pushing his motorcycle to the side of the road while limping.

I suddenly felt butterflies in my stomach and began to feel sweat droplets rolling down from my temples. The question that flashed in my mind was, have I hit that man? I approached him to ensure he was fine, but he started accusing me of hitting him. After a short while of trying to calm him down, I managed to crack a deal with him without bringing the matter to the police station. I paid for the damage to his motorcycle and medical costs before continuing my journey. While I was back on my journey to campus, it struck my mind that if he had hit my car from the back, wasn't that his fault? It was indeed his fault! So why did I pay him? Fear and pity turned into anger for being panicky without thinking with a calm mind and that was how I reached the class a quarter past six.

I had to explain the situation to my lecturer before I was permitted into the class and soon I was in the learning environment once again as a student after a couple of years. The lesson went on well till 9 p.m., and it was time to leave back to Shah Alam. With that, the routine of me driving in a triangle to juggle between working and studying began.

Weeks passed and the constant travelling began to take a toll on my health. I began to constantly feel exhausted and sleep deprived. The level of exhaustion increased with the amount of assignments to be completed as a student as well as to be marked as a lecturer at the same time. Weekdays were spent driving around to earn and study, while weekends were for me to sit in front of the laptop for hours. The lines beside my lips from my bright smile began to fade and new lines became more visible on my forehead. I became colder towards people around me as I was constantly in the run to complete the race which seemed to have

an invisible finishing line. I even got into arguments with my family members. I avoided social gatherings which included parties and celebrations among relatives. If I was forced to attend, I would be typing assignments on my mobile phone, causing relatives to frown upon my so-called “dedication”.

It was towards the end of Semester 1 and I was bogged down with assignments—to be marked and submitted. I requested a time extension from both sides, which made my superior and lecturer sulk. Day by day, I began to lose the drive in me. I was losing hope about continuing and completing my studies. With no choice, I pushed myself harder towards completing the tasks. Despite managing to submit everything on time, I knew I did not put in my best effort in completing my assignments. It was done merely for the sake of completing the task.

When the results were out, I found out that I managed to score A’s. Surprised with the result, I began to think of how I was going to survive every semester with a full-time job on one hand and education on the other. Should I quit my job? Should I defer the following semester and take a break? Will people judge me if I quit my job or studies? How will I pay the bills and loans? Questions were clouding my mind. It was risky for me to do any one of the options as a working adult in my late 20’s with commitments to deal with. Fortunately, my scholarship application was approved during my first semester break and I found my solution. Lines from Idina Menzel’s ‘Let it Go’ began to play in my mind. After giving a deep thought about the solution, I took the leap of faith by letting go of my job as a full-time lecturer. When I was asked about my decision, my reply was:

“If I quit my job and focus more on my studies, I can perform better and get good results. With that, I can get a good job. But if I try to juggle and underperform in both my job and studies, my future is at stake. I'd rather let go of my job now to secure a better future.”

Despite being the eldest child, deciding to let go of a full-time job while having a handful of commitments can be quite stressful, but with the support from my family members since the beginning, the journey was smoother than I had expected. I guess that was where I had my faith—my family.

I have always held on to the meaning of a Tamil phrase, which means ‘knowledge brings greatness wherever it goes.’ I knew the future ahead of me is uncertain, but with good education, I will be able to carve my own path. I was confident about being able to perform better if I reduced the journey from travelling in a triangle to a more productive path.

Semester 2 began and I was a full-time student. I had more time to relax, and that made me concentrate better in my classes. I was able to engage more actively in class discussions as I had time to do my readings prior to class hours. I took up a part-time lecturing position at a university that has branches all over the country and this particular branch was just behind my house. What had initially been a forty-minute journey became just 10 minutes away from where I lived. With such distance, I was able to come home after my work, relax and study before heading to class. I no longer had to stay up late at night to work on my assignments because I can work on them in the morning when I have no classes to conduct.

With fewer responsibilities and reduced travelling, the balance between work and study became more manageable. This also improved my social skills with people around me, especially my family members. Assignments were completed ahead of time and

weekends were spent doing leisure activities with family and coursemates became close friends. I was even able to go out for dinner and play bowling with my new friends after attending classes. Having the opportunity to relax and stay happy despite juggling between work and studies was indeed a bliss for someone in their late 20s.

Moving on to the following semester, it was full of new experiences for me. From story writing for compilation and publication to attending conferences for poster presentation. Coming from a teaching university background, research was something mind-boggling to me initially, but with the assistance and support from friends who are familiar with it, I was able to work with them and publish my first scholarly article. I was on cloud nine when my name was on published materials as an author. Till then, little did I know about research articles, publications and conferences.

Semesters went on well until I reached the fourth semester when I was offered a part-time job as a language teacher, or more conveniently known as the guru bahasa in the tertiary education environment at the university where I was already doing my postgraduate studies. This happened just when the contract period of the earlier part-time job had ended. I saw it as a blessing in disguise and without a second thought, I accepted the offer. It became more convenient for me to teach and study at the same place. I became familiar not only with the learning environment but also with the working environment. I was able to gather better insights from the teaching which gave me better understanding in completing my assignments.

Soon came the end of the roller coaster journey and there I stood on the stage as the proud first postgraduate degree holder in my family. The thought of stress, sacrifice, and emotional breakdown was no longer there. Tears and laughter of achievement with fellow coursemates, wishes from family members and not to forget the 'mortarbot in the air' picture posing were all around the university campus. It was the end of the race and I had successfully crossed the once invisible finishing line. I managed to secure a job at a well-established university soon upon graduating and ever since then, my journey as a full-time lecturer began once again.

Trials and tribulations were definitely there throughout the journey. Each challenge taught a new lesson. Some broke me to rebuild me, while some enhanced the potential in me. As I reminisce about my journey, I smile and remind myself that had I not taken the leap of faith, I probably would not have achieved the triumph.

## CHAPTER 11

### Embarking on a PhD Journey

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Embarking on a path to pursue a PhD programme is a significant step forward in my career. However, with my full-time job, toiling long hours often makes me feel tired, with limited energy to focus on my studies. At the initial stage of the PhD process, my biggest challenge was struggling to stay awake while trying to read through academic journal articles in the late evenings. Soon, I realised that if I wanted to fall asleep faster, I just needed to read a journal article with a lot of technical jargon, which I could hardly make it past the fourth page. Still, reading academic journals is essential if we want to make any progress in our studies, especially in the research proposal stage.

One of my lecturers emphasised that 20 hours per week is necessary to progress our studies or research work. However, with my heavy workload and long hours, staying focused on my studies seems impossible and hard. As a result, weekends become precious to me.

My weekends are now spent attending research-related methodology workshops, studying at the main library, or studying in the PhD room. Although I have to drive around 40 to 50 minutes every weekend to the main library, I would still do it. Some of my colleagues asked me, "Why bother travelling that far? You could study at home, right?" Having a conducive environment helps me focus, as I'm surrounded by people who are also studying, and that sort of motivates me. Another reason is spending time in the PhD room at times leads to the discussion of other people's work, and it helps as a constructive discussion for me to go deeper into understanding the research work. As my lecturer said, "We should go depth instead of breadth" in our research work.

I realise that everyone has their own pace in the PhD journey, and we shouldn't compare ourselves with others. We all have our issues and challenges, and we must be careful not to get burnt out. Occasionally, I take some time off my studies, indulging in good food and good company where the focus isn't on work or studies. Taking time off to unwind helps, especially when we reach a roadblock in our work or thinking. I have also found solace in practising mindfulness, which, with the support of like-minded people, has proven essential in this challenging academic journey. Staying focused has become my top priority to move forward in my journey. It's always like taking two to three steps forward and one backwards. Moving past every challenge brings me closer to my goal. It's a constant reminder that the "struggle" is part of the process. It's what every PhD student goes through.

Ultimately, the process is about patience, persistence, resilience, maintaining a positive mindset, and staying committed to what matters most. This PhD journey is not easy, but it's incredibly rewarding.

## CHAPTER 12

### Across Generations

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When we first conceived this book, we had no idea that we would receive so many submissions, necessitating its division into two volumes. This can only mean one thing: scholars who have embarked on postgraduate journeys have countless stories to share, but often lack a suitable platform.

As editors from different generations, Sarala and Venosha's experiences were vastly dissimilar. While Sarala's journey involved extensive travel and countless hours in the library, Venosha's was primarily confined to her home, working tirelessly on her laptop. Sarala delved into the rich and reliable resources of the library, while Venosha faced the challenge of discerning the credibility of online journal articles. While Sarala thrived in the company of fellow scholars, Venosha spent much of her research journey alone, relying solely on her supervisors for guidance.

Despite these differences, both Sarala and Venosha successfully completed their PhDs through sheer determination and perseverance.

The diverse experiences of Sarala and Venosha and other scholars in this book, underscore the unique challenges and rewards of postgraduate study. Sarala's remarkable achievement of completing her PhD in a mere two years serves as a testament to the profound impact a supportive supervisor can have on a student's academic journey. In contrast, Venosha's struggles with communication breakdown with her supervisors during the Covid-19 pandemic and other personal issues highlight the critical role of external support systems in navigating the challenges of postgraduate study.

Many recent studies have come out to reveal that the current generation of postgraduate students reported of experiencing significant levels of stress and anxiety during their studies. Such emotional distress can significantly impede academic progress and overall well-being.

Supervisors play a pivotal role in guiding both Master's and PhD students. They provide mentorship, offer academic guidance, and serve as critical sources of support. However, as the stories shared in the volume 1 and 2 of this book further underscore, not all supervisors are created equal. A supportive and empathetic supervisor can create a conducive learning environment, fostering students' intellectual growth and personal development.

With this book, we aim to inspire future supervisors to adopt a more compassionate and understanding approach. As mental health issues like depression, anxiety, ADHD, and autism become increasingly prevalent among students, it is imperative that postgraduate level supervisors equip themselves with the

necessary skills to support those facing these challenges. It is crucial for supervisors to create a safe and welcoming space where university students feel comfortable discussing their mental health concerns that may influence their masters or PhD study.

Furthermore, the experiences of many students in this book, who have fallen victim to egoistic and power-hungry supervisors highlight the urgent need for a shift in supervision styles, particularly in Asian countries where hierarchical relationships and authoritarian leadership are often prevalent. By bringing these stories to light, we hope to foster a culture of respect, empathy, and collaboration between supervisors and students.

Our stories highlight the importance of adaptability, perseverance, and a strong support network in navigating the academic journey. By sharing these insights, we hope to inspire and guide future scholars as they embark on their own intellectual adventures.



## Biography of Editors



Venosha Ravana is a lecturer at the Department of Languages, Tunku Abdul Rahman University of Management and Technology, where she also serves as a course leader. She completed her PhD in 2024 from the University of Malaya, following a master's from the same institution and a bachelor's in English for Professionals with a minor in computer science from Universiti Sains Malaysia.

Venosha is an expert in design and developmental research, particularly in instructional design and technology. She has published over 10 peer-reviewed journal articles and 2 books in this field. In her role as course leader, she manages course coordinators while also teaching diploma and bachelor-level courses.

Her interests extend to creative writing, for which she won awards during her high school days writing for the *New Straits Times*. Now, she enjoys researching on model development and gardening in her spare time.

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Assoc. Prof. Dr. Sarala is an English language lecturer. Her areas of expertise include TESL, writing instructions, mixed-method research, teacher education, and teaching literature. She has vast experience in teaching English at primary and secondary schools as well as tertiary level including Teacher Education Institute and Public University. She is also involved in module and program development for schools and university students. She has conducted several courses and delivered talks to teachers and lecturers with regard to enhancing English language proficiency and research activities.

Thus far, Dr. Sarala has graduated more than four PhD students and is currently supervising several post graduate candidates. She has done more than a hundred publications including books, book chapters, indexed and non-indexed journals, newspaper articles, and university news articles. She has clinched many awards including best speaker award, best presenter award, best book award, best paper award and excellent service awards.

In her current role as the Deputy Dean of Research and Innovation at Centre of Language Studies at University Tun Hussein Onn, she is actively involved in research activities not only within her own interests but also in enhancing her centre's publication and innovation activities. She loves being an educator, trainer, researcher, and writer.

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## Glossary of Terms

### A

**Adaptation** (Chapter 1): Adjusting methods and strategies to complete PhD research during unexpected challenges like the pandemic.

**Academic break** (Chapter 9): A period of time away from studies before resuming a postgraduate degree.

### B

**Balance** (Chapter 2, Chapter 7, Chapter 9): The ability to manage multiple aspects of life such as studies, work, and personal responsibilities.

**Breakthrough** (Chapter 4): A significant achievement following challenges in a postgraduate journey.

### C

**Challenges** (Chapter 1, Chapter 5, Chapter 11): The various difficulties faced by students, including personal, academic, and situational struggles.

**Conferences** (Chapter 2): Academic events where students present their research, contributing to their professional development.

## D

**Data collection** (Chapter 1): The systematic gathering of information for research purposes, particularly challenging during the pandemic.

**Determination** (Chapter 5, Chapter 10): The quality of persisting in a task or goal despite obstacles.

## E

**Entrepreneurship** (Chapter 6): The process of starting businesses or projects, particularly in a community development context.

## F

**Faith** (Chapter 7): Personal belief systems that provide strength and guidance throughout the postgraduate journey.

**Financial challenges** (Chapter 6): Economic difficulties faced while pursuing academic goals.

**Fulfillment** (Chapter 4, Chapter 7): The sense of accomplishment and satisfaction achieved through perseverance in postgraduate studies.

## G

**Growth** (Chapter 2, Chapter 3, Chapter 4): Personal and academic development that occurs through overcoming challenges.

**Goal-setting** (Chapter 10): The process of defining and striving toward academic and personal milestones.

## H

**Health** (Chapter 1, Chapter 11): The importance of maintaining physical and mental well-being during academic pursuits.

**Holidays** (Chapter 2): Time away from academic responsibilities, contributing to mental and emotional rejuvenation.

**Humanistic supervision** (Chapter 12): A supportive, empathetic approach to mentoring postgraduate students, especially those facing mental health issues.

## I

**International forums** (Chapter 2): Global academic platforms for sharing research and connecting with peers.

**Interruption** (Chapter 5): Unexpected events, such as the pandemic, that disrupt academic progress.

## J

**Joy of motherhood** (Chapter 7): The happiness and fulfillment derived from raising a child while pursuing academic goals.

**Journey** (Chapter 1, Chapter 3, Chapter 6): The overall experience of postgraduate studies, marked by highs, lows, and personal transformation.

## K

**Kindness** (Chapter 9): Acts of support and understanding from mentors or loved ones that aid in overcoming academic struggles.

## L

**Life balance** (Chapter 3, Chapter 9): The management of personal, academic, and professional aspects of life.

**Long-term goals** (Chapter 11): Objectives that guide the direction of one's academic and personal journey.

## M

**Mentorship** (Chapter 9): The guidance provided by experienced individuals, like Dr. Sarala, who support postgraduate students.

**Mental health** (Chapter 12): The importance of psychological well-being during the often stressful postgraduate journey.

## N

**Networking** (Chapter 6, Chapter 8): The development of professional relationships and collaborations that enhance career growth.

## O

**Obstacles** (Chapter 1, Chapter 3, Chapter 5): Challenges that impede academic progress and personal growth.

**Online learning** (Chapter 5): Remote education methods adopted during the pandemic, presenting unique challenges.

## P

**Persistence** (Chapter 3, Chapter 10): The determination to continue in the face of difficulties throughout the PhD journey.

**Productivity** (Chapter 1, Chapter 11): The ability to produce meaningful academic output, often balanced with personal well-being.

## R

**Resilience** (Chapter 4, Chapter 5, Chapter 6): The ability to recover from setbacks and continue progressing in academic pursuits.

**Research** (Chapter 1, Chapter 2): The academic work undertaken during postgraduate studies, particularly during challenging times.

**Resources** (Chapter 12): The tools and support systems available to students across different generations during their PhD journeys.

## S

**Setbacks** (Chapter 5, Chapter 6, Chapter 10): Difficulties that temporarily delay progress but can be overcome with perseverance.

**Self-care** (Chapter 11): Taking time to manage one's physical and mental health while pursuing academic goals.

## T

**Transformative journey** (Chapter 6): The significant personal and professional growth that occurs throughout postgraduate studies.

**Trust** (Chapter 9): Confidence in one's mentor, supervisor, or support system, crucial for navigating challenges in postgraduate life.