

Tenured academic lectureship experience at UM

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*A JOURNEY constituted by
multiple parallel, diverging, converging
ventures forming the stream of time passages ...*

Research Methods: Data Collection

The study is using 10 in-depth interviews with university academics

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Faculty Representation	
Faculty of Economics, Marketing & Accountancy	3
Faculty of Education	2
Faculty of Health Sciences	1
Faculty of Laws	3
Institute (Science & Technology)	1

Years of Experience	
more than 20 years experience	3
more than 10 years experience	3
more than 1 year experience	2
less than 1 year experience (full time employment)	2

Status	
Associate Professor	2
Senior Lecturer	3
Lecturer	3
Assistant Lecturer	2

Research Methods: Data Analysis

Thematic data analysis process aligned to the guidelines outlined by Braun & Clarke (2006) using a bottom-up approach:

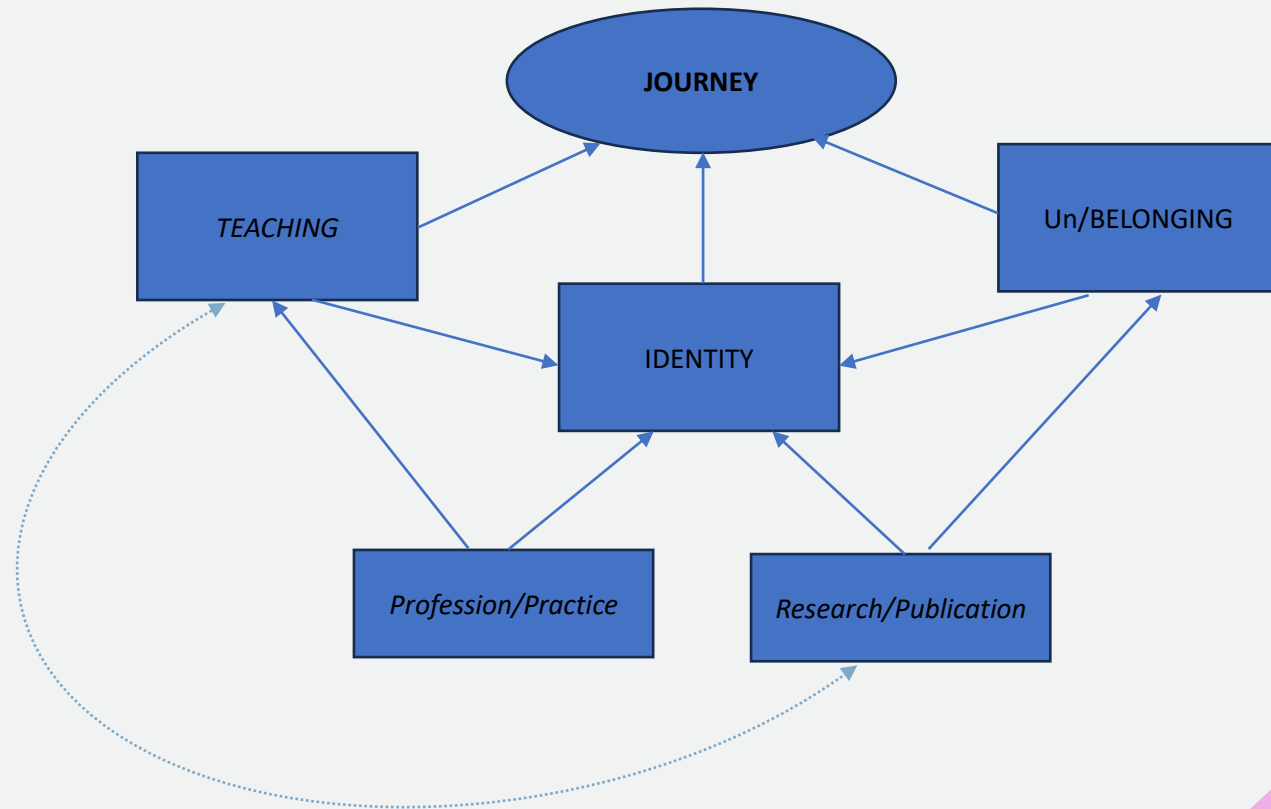
- an inductive method comprised of 6 steps was used for analysing the dataset to produce graphical representations of themes & subthemes along with narrative descriptions responding to the research questions asked.
- Stage 1 analysis: (i) familiarisation with data, (ii) coding, (iii) initial set of themes & subthemes conducted with research assistance: alongside, research officer working through these 3 steps, researcher worked alongside to help build process internal reliability and validity
- Stage 2 analysis (iv) reviewing initial themes and subthemes and re-immersion in the data (v) revising the set of themes & subthemes and the creation of thematic network mappings, (vi) writing a narrative account describing the university lectureship experience as was seen arising from this research exploration.

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Research question 1: How do university lecturers experience themselves at the university?

The overarching conceptualisation responding to how UM university lecturers experience themselves at the university is what one might refer to as JOURNEY:

The core theme - journey, conceptualised as a series of time passages

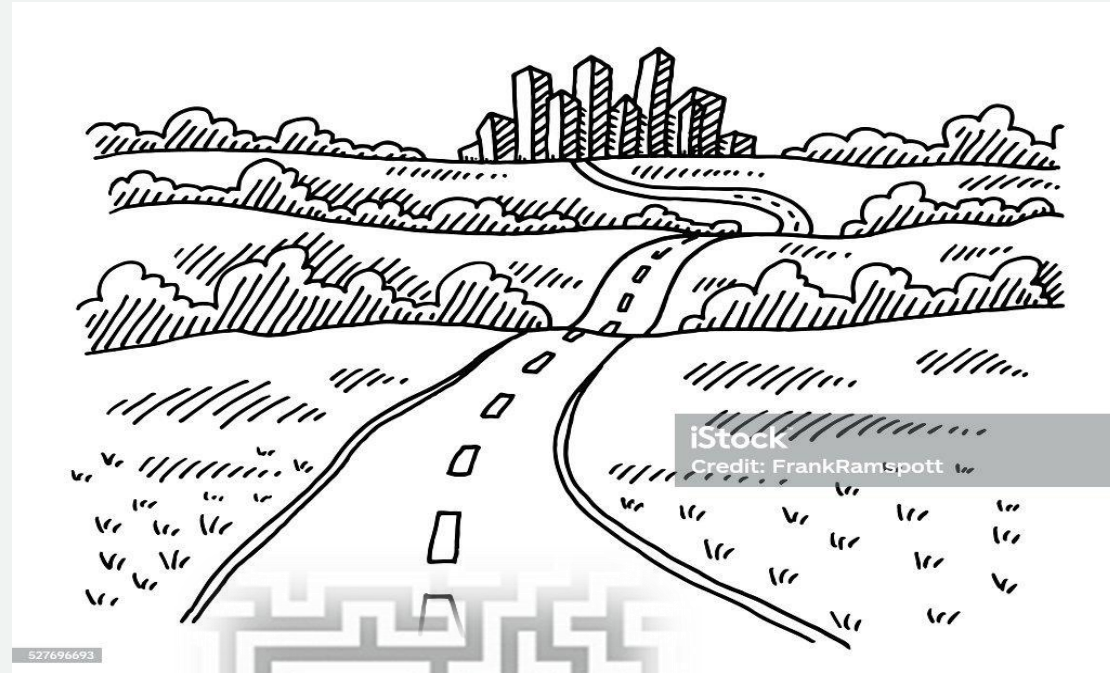


Preliminary journey: a quest for tenure

The journey starts way before securing a tenured position as a resident academic lecturer: while for some it is a matter of a few years for others it is decades ...

Participants refer to their budding interest, the anticipation of a suitable employment call, the successful application and the number of failed applications. The absolute majority talk about accepting an offer for visiting lectureship prior to an employment application.

The academics lecturers who responded to the participant call of this study were all tenured staff. Consequently, this study does not account for those who never make it through this preliminary stage no matter how deserving and hardworking they are.



Quest for Tenure

The Doctorate time passage: Quest for the Doctoral Award

Before, along with, or past the venture to secure tenure as a university lecturer, there is the doctoral journey, a requirement for tenured lectureship: New recruits who are not yet in possession of the award are offered conditional employment.

The doctoral time passage is fleetingly considered by research participants who completed the doctorate before applying for a university lectureship post.

Those who secured conditional tenured lectureship all talk about delays. The problem of extensive teaching assignments hampering completion of the doctoral thesis emerges strongly. Other issues raised include isolation, relational power tensions and restarts.

Several participants confessed being barred from availing themselves of an UM concession of reduced teaching load to dedicate more time to their doctoral research work

A participant refers to the recently established UM doctoral school for supporting academic staff

Demanding Journey of Work obligations: the experience of difficulties keeping up with the work

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- time-consuming teaching commitment hindering research engagement
 - increasing and overwhelming administration tasks:

“To be honest, um, I’ve barely, had the time to touch two papers to read apart from those I need to, to prepare my lectures, because there’s a lot of admin. It’s crazy. I never thought it would be like this, you know. I thought when I’d be a lecturer, I would have time to research. But in actual fact, I don’t really have time” (T11).

- recent recruits toil to learn about procedures, regulations and unwritten organisational culture:

“And I think, every day, I encounter new things that I didn't know ... and I learn. And that's the journey, I suppose at the moment” (T8, p.1).

University lecturers' commitment extending beyond the Dimensions of UM work obligations of teaching, research, and administration

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- Teaching (in foreground of discernment)
 - student research supervision
 - the provision of student support including "pastoral care"
 - doing research
 - engaging in writing and publication
 - making oneself visible in the profession
 - participating in community outreach

A positive constructive viewpoint:

A long-established participant reflected on these three distinct work obligations compelling the university lecturer to become an all-rounder:

"[they are] opportunities to grow ... like, an academic becomes a bit of an all-rounder" (T9, p.11)

and serving as a means of well-being:

"It stresses me when I feel a bit overwhelmed with this volume, you know. But generally, I have a sense of wellbeing, and as we said, as I said before, the fact that we change what we're doing. It's a bit of research, a bit of admin, and a bit of teaching. There's a lot of variety" (T9, p.10).

Primary Theme: Teaching

Teaching surfaced as a substantial preoccupation of the university lecturers participating in this study.

All participants in some way referred to teaching enjoyment. A few participants (3) talked about “the mission of teaching”, “the passion for teaching”, and being “a “natural teacher”.

Especially new recruits talk about being overwhelmed by the teaching load whereas more established university academics see themselves taking on a substantial teaching load because of departmental demands due to student numbers.

Participants talked about their teaching approaches and methods of teaching shifted from the traditional lecture (of teacher oration at silent students). A participant described a role play learning scenario.

A new recruit who confessed putting the research obligation on hold while focusing on learning how to teach lamented that a knowledge field expert cannot be expected to know how to teach.

A number of participants elaborated on how they are using digital technologies for teaching, and for supporting students on the learning journey.

Intriguingly, when prompted to comment on well-being participants of this study focused on the well-being of the students they teach.

Primary Theme: Un/Belonging

Un/BELONGING surfaces with reference to the academy and has a flipside to it so in its full configuration referring to the notion of being a member of the academic community

Expressly, participants declared the university evoking a feeling like “home” and academic colleagues as “one family”. Other participants confessed that they have never been away from the university except for a few days for all their working life, or of being happy to be back after a short spell away. More half of the participant group emphasised their association with the institution going back to their undergraduate years as university students.

Disillusioned participant comments exposed sentiments related to faltering belonging either coming from within or without such as a feeling like “suffering from an impostor syndrome”, and colleagues’ comments pointing out otherness in consideration of one’s knowledge viewpoints and one’s ways of re/actions, comments hinting at marginalisation by faculty colleagues, lament disconnection from the academy and its resources.

There is greater critical reflexivity considering self in relation to colleagues and broadened community.

All participants reflected on the relations and connectedness to academic colleagues and the university more broadly.

Primary Theme: Identity

University lectureship spurring navigation of multiple identities

Teaching is one of the several roles university lectureship obliges ... but a strong one

In navigating different academic assignments, commitments and missions, there is discernment of different identities as selfhood shifts and deepens.

Two participants who explicitly talked about the university academic assuming multiple identities focused on the identity in being a university teacher and in being a field professional. A participant argued that the different identities complement each other in the sense of one informing the other

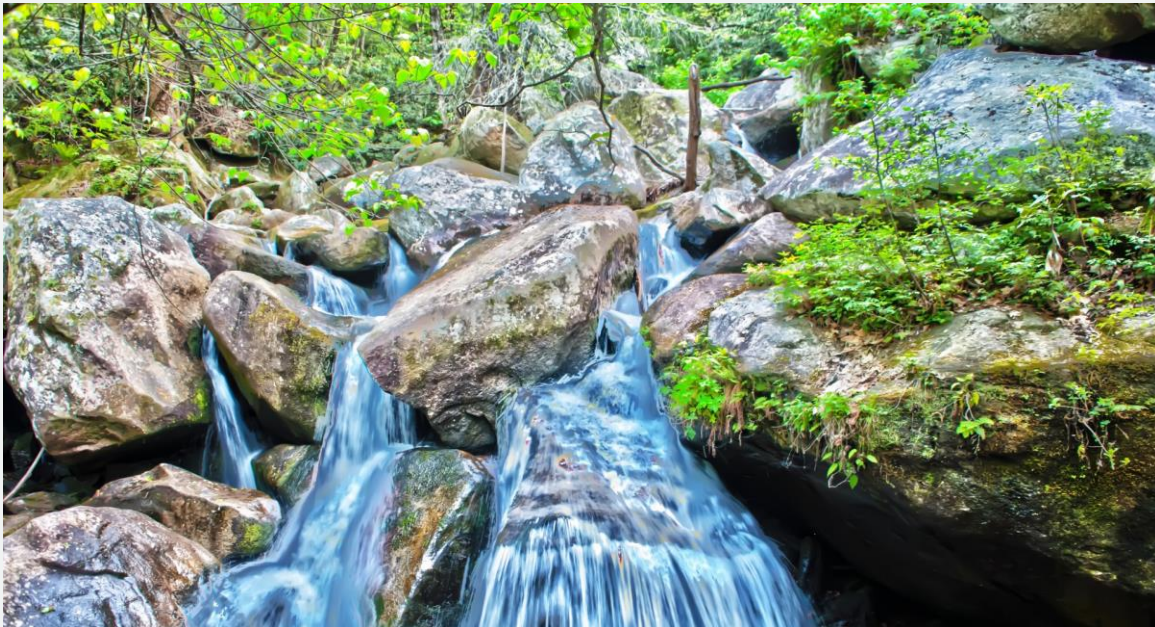
Several participants link the profession identity to credibility as a knowledge expert

All participants are found prioritising the teaching role.

Most participants (7/10) had to be explicitly prompted to talk about research endeavour

Despite significant attention to administrative tasks across the dataset, there is little consideration of the administrator role; and mostly in consideration of the employment contract obligation

University lecturer Experience in short



<https://www.publicdomainpictures.net/>

the university lecturer experience surfaces as a journey in the space of time suggesting a forever transient state of being

- navigating membership in being a teacher at the university,
- in developing a sense of belonging being part of the university & the university community, and
- in navigating multiple identities in realising also a sense of all-rounded self as profession expert, knowledge area expert, educator & (student pastoral) carer, (and less pronouncedly as) researcher, research author, and administrator.

Discussion

Doctoral research alongside tenured academic lectureship commitment is gruelling and risky

Prevalent focus of teaching within & across transcripts confirms UM a teaching university:

Heavy teaching and/or administration duties hamper the possibilities to do research leaving the university academic struggling to find time to do research. [it is becoming increasingly unfair that professorial grades are heavily dependent on research publication counts and the respect of international recognised academics who directly and indirectly bring back the focus almost entirely on publication and the sharing of research undertakings on the international podium.

Belonging surfaces more in the sense of enculturation and acculturation - becoming assimilated into the system. For university academics who are critically reflective and reflexive on being a university lectureship experience and their knowledge expertise relative to others, this may lead to a feeling of un-belonging. The Un/belonging is a forever transient and changing state of being. Perhaps as academics we need to be adopting that critical reflective and reflexive attitude but importantly it needs to be infused with an attitude of kindness and mattering for ourselves and others.

Other observations:

Entry and navigating being an academic is politically imbued

There is a fair amount of consideration given to digital technologies for teaching and learning; and recognition of needed academic competence development and the development of learning provision & support

It is mostly women (not exclusively) who find themselves at the receiving end of upsetting situations and subtle misuse power.

When asked, a participant was not sure about the well-being unit services applying to academic staff alongside the services for students.

Implications and Recommendations

Consider being more considerate on conditional tenure track recruits still in the process of starting or completing the doctorate. This is by no means intended as a call to an elitist stance making access to tenured track job opportunities more competitive than they are but there needs to be considered ways how early researchers on the conditional tenure track are saved from a long slippery road of distress ... so not withholding them from the promised reduced teaching load!

Mentoring may serve give support to recent recruits on the tenure academic track as they grapple with the different responsibilities of being a university academic, developing as an educator beyond being a knowledge expert, familiarising oneself with the instrumental and expressive cultural aspects of the specific university and university culture, and getting one's feet on the ground in being a university academic. Invisibly this may be happening a lot. Giving more visibility to mentoring can help boost collegial relations and relationships among academic staff

Well-being services - possibly more outreach to academic staff, emerges as an issue. This can be considered as a prevue of the specific research question asked as part of this broader investigative study.

It may make better sense to closely consider criteria for promotion to professorial grades and possibly revise in order to counterbalance the impedance created by the very same institution and work demands that hinder research and publication pursuit on which career progression is measured.

Teaching and administration commitment demanded top-down and bottom-up should be given due work recognition. Broadly, all three commitment strands of teaching, research and administration efforts should be considered when counting the work efforts of university lecturers.

*Fading privileges of being a
university academic if there ever were?*

