

Well-being needs of Master of Business Administration (MBA) students at the University of Free State

BY



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DECLARATION

*I, **Ronald Wesley Sinra**, declare that the research project hereby handed in for the qualification Master of Business Administration at the UFS Business School at the University of the Free State is my own independent work and that I have not previously submitted the same work either as a whole or in part, for a qualification at/in another university/faculty.*



Ronald Wesley Sinra

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DEDICATIONS

Gratitude and genuine appreciation for intrinsic motivation, resilience, drive and optimism were granted and showcased to ensure the successful completion of the MBA degree. For this reason, this qualification is dedicated to:

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ABSTRACT

Well-being among postgraduate students is increasingly recognised as crucial for academic success and personal development. Yet, many experienced high levels of stress, anxiety, and isolation, impacting their overall academic experience. This qualitative research study explores the well-being of Master of Business Administration (MBA) students at the University of Free State, aiming to identify the well-being needs and support required, in addition to the services provided by the institution.

The study adopted a qualitative research approach and interpretive phenomenological design. A population of 131 MBA students who were enrolled were approached to participate voluntarily. From the initial voluntary sample group of 25 MBA students, 14 semi-structured interviews were conducted, and reflexive thematic analysis was appointed to answer the main research question.

The thematic analysis led to the identification of five themes and a variety of subthemes coupled with them: ***Support, Experience of Well-Being, Needs, Demands and Resources.***

Support: Students highlighted the significance of both emotional and institutional support systems. Positive relationships with faculty and fellow students cultivated a sense of belonging and enhanced their resilience.

Experience of Well-Being is where participants reported a complex interplay of emotional, social, and academic well-being, emphasising the importance of a balanced lifestyle to maintain mental health during their studies.

Needs indicated in the findings revealed specific needs related to academic guidance, mental well-being resources, and work-life balance, emphasising the necessity for tailored support services.

Demands that refer to the demands of the MBA program, including intensive coursework and time pressures, were identified as significant stressors, contributing to feelings of being overwhelmed and burnout.

Resources relate to the students' expression of the need for better access to resources, including communication, collaboration and peer learning, information

technology, counselling services, and stress management workshops, to help them navigate their academic challenges effectively.

The findings emphasise the critical role of institutions in supporting student well-being, suggesting that a structured approach that addresses these themes can significantly enhance the overall academic experience of MBA students. This result contributes to the growing body of literature on student well-being in higher education. It offers practical to implement effective support systems for MBA students.

Various recommendations to support the well-being needs of MBA students better were identified in this study. These speak to the *inclusion of well-being topics in the MBA curriculum*, the *conduct of regular well-being workshops*, *involvement of peer support programmes*, *personalised access to counselling services*, *incorporation of faculty members in coordination of services* and lastly, *promotion of work-life balance* approaches. Ultimately, gradual implementation of the recommended initiatives will eventually enhance the overall well-being of MBA students.

Keywords: *MBA, Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis, Thematic Analysis, Support, Experience of Well-Being, Needs, Demands and Resources.*

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CHAPTER 1 : INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

1.1 Introduction

Well-being has become a growing challenge for many individuals across the world, especially post the COVID-19 pandemic and its deadly effects, leaving families with everlasting, unforgettable experiences.

Higher Education (HE) students suffer significantly from dealing with well-being and study skill complications as well as the support services rendered in institutions (Barrable et al., 2018). Alarming, Barrable et al. (2018) highlight that several studies have showcased increasing levels of depression as well as anxiety encountered by HE students, which habitually go unfounded or undetected. Conversely, budgets at HE Institutions (HEI) are trimmed related to student support services, leading to rising concerns regarding the well-being of students at HEIs.

Similarly, Shuo et al. (2022) insinuate that postgraduate students commonly encounter more challenges in life than undergraduate students, involving problems related to finances, social, well-being, and emotions. Thus, the study conducted explored the connection between the well-being and emotional intelligence of postgraduate students. This was done by inspecting the mediating influences of and the relationship between psychological resilience and social support through constructing a model of chain mediation. On the other hand, Roberts (2022) indicates that in six years, the anxiety levels of students significantly rose. A study by Healthy Minds Networks and the American College Health Association found that the percentage increased from 17%-31%. Additionally, the study's findings suggest that 76% of the students surveyed in the United States of America, Spain, United Kingdom, France, and Nordic countries alluded that well-being maintenance is a real struggle. As a result, the consequences of the former outcomes are detrimental to the well-being of the students and staff altogether.

Rockman et al. (2022) suggest that working students encounter unique predicaments, like the inability to meet study supervisors during working hours. Importantly, they have specific and complex needs, where educators have a great potential to excel by adapting their study programs by integrating the relevant topical experiences of MBA students in class and academia. On the other hand, Balroo and Al-Duwaile (2018)

posit that in recent years, students who undertake an MBA programme have been overwhelmed due to career issues and academic workload, showcasing the need to research MBA students' work-life challenges. The search for work balance with learning and life among employed students and the way to achieve success between all three while sustaining excellent performance standards remains challenging (Doble & Supriya, 2011).

Altogether, previous studies primarily focused on the family-work life interfaces of workers, and fewer researchers have examined the amalgamated equilibrium of learning balance, coupled with work-family life, productivity, studying, and well-being of employed MBA students (Balroo & Al-Duwaile, 2018).

In summary, the need for well-being studies in universities is prevalent, relevant, and valuable for adult learners, forming this research project's core focus. The next section briefly provides a background of the UFS Business School.

1.2 Background: UFS, Vision 130 and Business School

1.2.1 University of Free State (UFS) Strategy on Student Support

The University of Free State prides itself on a wide range of values that shape the institutional culture, informing organisational deeds and decisions. Care as part of the institutional values indicates the commitment of the UFS to emphasise well-being and happiness (UFS, 2022). This will be achieved by creating a conducive environment for high-quality learning, teaching, and scholarship.

Furthermore, included in the launched, adjusted strategic vision 130 are three key components that will be linked to the business school mission statement, which forms the foundation (UFS, 2022):

- Impact, distinction, and excellence in academia
- Societal maximised impact together with sustainability in relationships
- A University that is just, inclusive, and diverse

As part of the primary reason for the choice of field study, the researcher identified key strategic action items, which the UFS embarks on to support postgraduate students during their study tenure at the institution. These are:

- UFS Annual Performance Plan 2023-2025 (APP) Key Performance Indicators:

- 4.2.1 Satisfaction with Postgraduate services and support provided by the UFS
- 4.4.2 Satisfaction of Students related to academic support services
- UFS Department of Student Affairs (DSA), Student Counselling and Development (SCD) Strategic Plan (2022-2026):
 - A key area to ensure student-centeredness and vision implementation in line with Vision 130 of the UFS is student well-being. Data and analytics are integral aspects to realise and impact student needs with appropriate and accurate interventions.
- UFS Centre for Graduate Studies (CGS, 2022): Vision statement
 - Aim: To ensure the creation of an environment that empowers postgraduate students, assisting them to complete their studies effectively.

The primary reasons for the researchers' inclusion of the above strategic plans and actions are to highlight the mentioned departments' support initiatives available for postgraduate students. The SCD focuses on well-being workshops, while the CGS consistently provides training on research methods, procedures, and data analysis techniques, to name a few. In a nutshell, the UFS does provide support for postgraduate students on an institutional scale, but do MBA students make use of the support initiatives? In the following section, a summary of the background of the UFS Business School is discussed.

1.2.2 Vision 130 and Business School Mission Statement

The three UFS Vision 130 components mentioned above highlight core strategic intents, which are directly related to the Business School's mission statement. A measure of academic excellence and knowledge impact refers to theory, methods, advances in understanding and interpretation that bring positive change in various fields and disciplines (UFS, 2022).

Moreover, the UFS intends to be acknowledged for supporting development in society impactfully through unconventional research that is focused and purpose-driven (UFS, 2022). The idea is to prepare and ensure globally competitive graduates become good future leaders in society, thereby incorporating the United Nations Sustainable

Development Goals (SDGs), in particular, Goal 3: Good Health and Well-being, as the main examination lens.

Importantly, the UFS strives to pay specific attention to guarantee socio-economic capability and racial, gender and epistemological diversity. As a result, the UFS will fulfil the requirement of permitting a broad range of expressions and experiences of student life by being centred on the student. Ultimately, the UFS will showcase commitment to the diverse student community by enhancing academic support strategies, learning practices and structures that align with aspirations, concerns, and social backgrounds (UFS, 2022). Altogether, the UFS has a clear vision and similarly, the Business School aligns its mission statement to the broader institutional goals and objectives.

The UFS Business School, a standalone department under the umbrella of the Faculty of Economic and Management Sciences at the UFS, was established to (UFS, 2023):

- Contribute valuably through the impactful delivery and development of effective management and business education programmes
- Share knowledge, teach, and translate lessons into practical value-adding propositions.
- Intensely facilitate online, coupled with face-to-face, on-campus mentoring and coaching sessions
- Assist organisations and individuals in empowerment from an entrepreneurial perspective.
- ***Maximise ability, attain remarkable results and impact showcased transparently through technology, good science, and innovative contributions, adding value to sustainability, resilience, and responsible business practices.***

Furthermore, the UFS Business School offers various academic programmes ranging from Short Learning Programmes (SLPs) to Doctor of Philosophy, with specialisation in Business Administration (PhD in BA). In addition, the programmes are accredited, and the school falls part of various memberships with professional bodies in the higher education industry. The below image in Figure 1.1, depicts the schools' offerings, memberships, and accreditations as formerly alluded to.

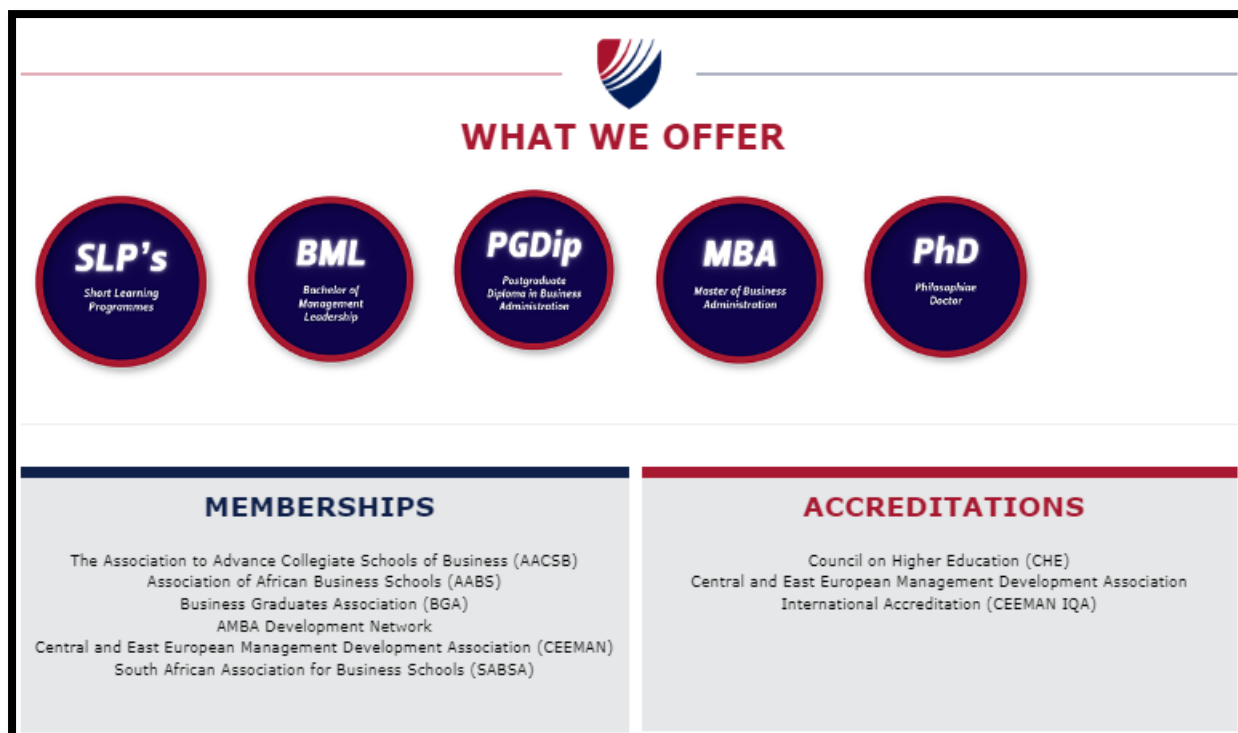


Figure 1.1: Programme offering at UFS Business School

The MBA programme content directly develops and boosts leadership and management, comprehensively covering all areas linked to 21st-century challenges encountered by today's managers and leaders. Admission to the programme is subject to meeting stipulated requirements (25+ years and a relevant NQF 8 qualification) and selection through successful completion of psychometric testing. Only selected students may proceed with the registration and studies of the MBA Programme.

The minimum duration for completion is two years, and the maximum is three years. The demands of the programme are very high in terms of the continuous assessment system approach. Typically, the MBA student profile comprises working adults, mostly in managerial positions or are self-employed. Like the traditional undergraduate student cohort, postgraduate students, as adult learners, also experience several well-being related challenges during the study. Altogether, the introduction and background of the study provide the opportunity to scrutinise aspects of well-being and support services rendered and devise the following problem statement, which directs the subsequent required steps for the field study.

Academics are reporting high stress levels, anxiety, and burnout (Zhang et al., 2024), while students in universities are more susceptible to encountering mental health challenges (Zhang et al., 2024). Moreover, Rautela et al. (2024) posit that well-being and mental health research within the literature related to management education conducted to date is presently still fragmented, although emerging. According to Deng et al. (2022), the most prevalent mental health challenge encountered by MBA students is stress. For example, working MBA students work long hours, have family or personal commitments, and experience academic pressures and work-life balance challenges. In contrast, Kanyumba et al. (2024) stated their argument that scholars in the management discipline should promote care and support for one another's well-being to foster empathy and courage in the academic industry.

According to the 2022 Student Counselling and Development (SCD) Annual report, the postgraduate degree level of service usage across all faculties is 14.05%, which is extremely low. It simply means an even lower usage rate for the EMS postgraduate cohort across all programmes. All the above clearly indicates that support for postgraduate students is inadequate, and the next topic will elaborate on the problem statement.

1.3 Problem Statement

The problem is well-being programmes or support services available are not adequately used by postgraduate students, including the MBA cohort at the UFS Business school.

If the problem is not addressed, postgraduate student retention, well-being and even graduation rates can be negatively impacted in relation to the faculty and institutional strategic plans, goals and objectives.

1.3.1 Research Questions

The subsequent research questions are intended to guide the study:

- What literature is available on well-being theories and models within the HE domain?

- What are the existing well-being support structures in place for MBA students at the UFS?
- What do MBA students need to assist them to have better well-being for conducting their studies?
- What are the MBA students' well-being needs beyond the existing services the University of Free State provides?

1.4 Research Objectives

1.4.1 Primary objective

- To identify the well-being needs of MBA students at the UFS.

1.4.2 Secondary Objectives

- To present well-being theories and models
- To analyse the well-being needs of MBA students at the UFS
- To provide interventions to support the well-being of Master of Business Administration students at the UFS.

1.5 Research Methodology

Research methodology is a systematic approach to resolving research problems involving data collection, design, and analysis. It involves learning approaches to access knowledge and helps researchers acquire knowledge about the world (Mishra and Alok, 2017). Research methodology helps researchers gather data from multiple sources, such as questionnaires, interviews, and focus groups, using qualitative methods to explain concepts and uncover themes (Taherdoost, 2022).

The research methodology section consists of a summary related research design and approach, Sampling, data collection and analysis methods and ethical considerations employed by this study. To demonstrate how the methodology relates to the research questions and why it is qualitative, each research question in relation to qualitative research approaches will be outlined.

Motivation for the Research Design

Research question one: try to search existing literature, theories, and models identified with well-being. A qualitative approach is appropriate since it deals with a non-numerical exploration of different theoretical perspectives that allow for a nuanced understanding of how well-being has been conceptualized within different domains. A literature review usually involves the qualitative analysis of text and identifies themes and patterns across different works.

The research question, related to existing well-being structures for MBA students, poses an understanding of what the current programs, services, and resources support structures are available to the MBA student population. A qualitative method is appropriate as it allows delving into the details of what types of support structures exist. Qualitative data on these structures, including accessibility and effectiveness, might be well described through either interviews with university staff or focus groups with students.

The research question, seeking to understand MBA student needs for better wellbeing, focuses on understanding the subjective needs of MBA students in relation to their well-being. A qualitative approach is again most appropriate since it prioritizes the capturing of students' personal experiences, feelings, and opinions. This could be done through methods like interviews where students can express their views in their own words. Quantitative methods, by contrast, would be more limited in capturing the depth and complexity of personal needs.

The last research question, involving MBA student needs beyond the UFS offering, attempts to search for the unmet needs of students. An effective way to do this would be by using qualitative methods, such as in-depth interviews. These approaches enable students to describe their needs in their own words and provide very rich, detailed information that might illustrate gaps in current services. The open-ended nature of qualitative methods makes it easy to delve into areas students may not have thought about or mentioned.

In summary, the research questions are exploratory, relating to experiences, needs, and existing structures; hence, the appropriateness of the qualitative research methodologies appointed. This will enable qualitative research to delve into the

subjective well-being of MBA students in-depth and bring out rich, contextual data that would not be possible through quantitative methods.

1.5.1 Research Design and Approach

Research design and approach can sometimes be used interchangeably by researchers (Sileyew, 2019). According to Smith et al. (2009), interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA) draws selectively and widely from a range of philosophical ideas. Furthermore, Smith et al. (2009) postulated that in IPA the primary focus is examining the subjective experience. Prior to the selection of the design and approach for this research project, the following section elaborates on the design, which consists of the various research paradigms and the applicable, selected design for this research project.

1.5.1.1 Types of research paradigms

A paradigm in qualitative research is the belief, system or worldview that underpins the study and, therefore, shapes how researchers approach the collection, interpretation, and analysis of data. Understanding these paradigms is essential for qualitative researchers (Kivunja and Kuyini, 2017). The chosen paradigm determined what kind of questions to be asked, how participants would be engaged, and how the findings were understood and presented (Park et al., 2020). The four paradigms that dominate qualitative research are Post-positivism, Interpretivism (constructivism), Critical theory and Pragmatism. As a result, the abovementioned qualitative paradigms will be meticulously discussed in Chapter 3.

Research paradigms guide research methodologies, allowing researchers to evaluate their chosen approach and make necessary adjustments. Grass (2024) highlights three logical facets of research philosophy, namely, 1) Ontology, 2) Methodology and 3) Epistemology.

1.5.1.2 Research philosophies

1. Ontology

This logical approach follows an exploration of empirical worldviews. These foundational presumptions relate to the in-depth causal relationship embedded in the global formations, which is the starting point of analysis (Grass, 2024). In simplified terms, ontology is the examination of being. Moreover, it focuses on the nature of life, the truth, whereby the researcher identifies various subjective realities, that are constructed in social settings (Ayton & Tsindos, 2023). Thus, ontology separates qualitative and quantitative research in the positivist paradigm. Positivists generally employ a scientific paradigm based on a cause-and-effect or problem-solving notion related to previous observations.

2. Methodology

Research methodology is a systematic approach to resolving research problems involving data collection, design, and analysis. It involves learning approaches to access knowledge and helps researchers acquire knowledge about the world (Mishra and Alok, 2017). On the other hand, Grass (2024) posits that in qualitative research, various methodological factors must be considered regardless of several single-case observations within the research project.

Furthermore, research methodology helps researchers gather data from multiple sources, such as questionnaires, interviews, and focus groups, using qualitative methods to explain concepts and uncover themes (Taherdoost, 2022). Qualitative research involves gaining rich, detailed information rather than large quantities.

3. Epistemology

Epistemology and ontology are crucial assumptions about the universe, influencing research interactions (Niebauer et al., 2020). Epistemology is a philosophy that examines what we know, how we know and what contributes to knowledge (Trivedi, 2020). Furthermore, epistemology concerns itself with issues related to the truth, explanations and beliefs. Although reality is subjectively observed under both ontological and epistemological paradigms, the difference is that ontology follows a deductive (previous observations) approach. At the same time, epistemology is an inductive (new patterns, new observations) approach to knowledge.

Altogether, the researcher chose a qualitative research approach. Thus, an epistemological philosophy with the interpretivist paradigm was employed in this study based on the approach and nature of analysis, whereby in-depth insights were

targeted to inform the Business School about the MBA students' well-being experiences and needs. These insights from participants, i.e., opinions and recommendations, subject to some specific limitations, can be used as an assurance that MBA students' well-being is very important at the Business School.

The interviews appointed consisted of 14 MBA registered students. Moreover, the interview schedule involved three categories of questions, comprising 16 questions. It is imperative to adapt and align the research design to match the distinctive attributes of the various groups of participants (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). One general wellbeing question was asked, ten wellbeing strategies questions and five MBA programme questions related to wellbeing. It was not easy to quantify phenomena because qualitative research offers greater insights into human behaviour patterns and processes (Oranga & Matere, 2023).

Moving forward, the researcher gathered crucial demographic information highlighting the gender, age, employment level and years of experience altogether. The following section focuses on the sampling of participants.

1.5.2 Sampling/selection of participants

1.5.2.1 Non-probability sampling

In qualitative research, purposeful sampling is a non-probability sampling technique that is frequently used to find and choose in-depth information from knowledgeable people or groups (Palinkas et al., 2015). For this research, the purposeful, non-probability sampling was used. Convenience, voluntary involvement, and expressive communication are emphasised, which makes it perfect for adult learners to collect rich data.

A sample of 25 actively enrolled first year from semester 2 onwards and final-year MBA students were secured because 25 is used as a practical guideline for sample size, particularly for qualitative studies that utilise interviews as their data gathering method (Hennink & Kaiser, 2022). The population of interest, thus, this qualitative study comprised 131 MBA students aged 25-65 who are actively enrolled in the program.

With reference to data saturation, it is a point in a research project where sufficient data has been gathered to draw necessary conclusions. The concept of saturation is widely used in qualitative research, where it is typically called 'data saturation' (Saunders et al., 2018). The 9-17 participants are a common range given in qualitative research for when saturation is reached. At this point, the researcher often starts hearing the same ideas, experiences, or responses across interviews (Hennink et al., 2017).

Most studies will show that this occurs after about 20-30 participants. However, for some it will happen much earlier, and for others, much later, depending on the complexity of the topic being explored and the population being examined. In this research project, data saturation was applied during interviews, with participants' responses transcribed for coding and theme generation.

The recruitment strategy included sending emails to interested participants, who must confirm their participation by September 2024. The study was monitored, and reminders were sent three times for two weeks. Students who did not respond were excluded. The study aimed to understand the experiences and perspectives of MBA students in their second semester and beyond.

1.5.2.2 Inclusion and Exclusion

The inclusion criteria were males and females between the ages 25-65 years and must have been in their second semester of the MBA and beyond. Exclusion criteria were MBA students who had just started with the programme (in July 2024) and were older than 65, etc. The primary reason for excluding adults above the age of 65 years was mainly the retirement age linked the employment and the aim to focus on younger working-age adults.

1.5.3 Data Collection Method

This study used semi-structured interviews to gather rich data from participants' lived experiences (Creswell and Poth, 2018). Microsoft Teams was utilised for transcription and interviews, allowing for flexible questions and responses.

The interview process started with a demographic form being completed, followed by open-ended questions (Nathan et al., 2019). Participants could respond freely. Permission from the Business School was requested for data gathering and recruitment, with students recruited through emails from the program coordinator and faculty.

1.5.4 Data Analysis

The study used Microsoft Teams' interviews to gather data, which was transcribed and uploaded on NVivo 14 to generate codes, prominent themes, and thick data (Houghton et al., 2015). The data were analysed using reflexive thematic analysis, aiming to identify relevant patterns in the literature (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The researcher analysed transcripts and identified aspects of interest during the interview to code and generate data into themes. An inductive data-driven thematic analysis approach was utilised to identify critical areas and acquire acceptable themes from the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The six-stage process was incorporated into the data analysis section.

Online searches were used to identify relevant data for theme development. The goal was to identify scientifically useful studies for further review and to understand their patterns and themes.

Trustworthiness and Rigour

Trustworthiness is crucial for ensuring the quality of a study, encompassing reliability, credibility, transferability, and confirmability. Rigour is essential in qualitative studies, as it recognises trustworthiness in the results (Connelly, 2016). Credibility is the level of confidence readers have in a research study, ensuring accurate and honest results. Transferability is the relevance and applicability of results to various settings and contexts, ensuring data is representative of the adult learner population. Dependability refers to reliable, valid, and repeatable results. Confirmability ensures the researcher remains neutral and shaped by participants' stories (Anderson, 2017).

1.5.5 Ethical Considerations

This qualitative field research focused on MBA students required ethical approval from the General and Human Research Ethics Committee (GHREC) and DVC Academic through the RIMS application process (Neuman, 2014). The study aimed and ensure informed consent, anonymity, confidentiality, and beneficence for participants. Participants completed an electronic consent form with the study's aim, and their responses were kept confidential throughout the entire journey (Sieber, 2009).

The study considered the welfare of people, maximising benefits for prospective MBA students and the Business School. Voluntary participation was crucial, and a research summary was shared with participants to facilitate voluntary participation. The researcher, an MBA student, was also involved in the study, aiming to positively impact the Business School and the University of Free State. The Business School granted permission, and data was collected with anonymity and confidentiality. The researcher, at the time, was not in a position of power, so they were on the same level as the students.

1.6 Chapter Layout

Chapter 1: Introduction and Background

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Chapter 3: Research Methodology

Chapter 4: Data analysis and interpretation

Chapter 5: Recommendations and Conclusion

1.7 Conclusion

Well-being has become a concern for HEIs globally. According to the literature, postgraduate students are less prioritised in terms of well-being support. However, the UFS has support strategies in place that are under-utilised by postgraduate students altogether.

HEIs, on the other hand, also have challenges relating to recruitment, throughput, and retention rates regarding postgraduate students. The results aim to address and

improve awareness of support available for postgraduate students, particularly the MBA groups. Doing so has great potential to add extreme value to the programme offering, address national and international student well-being problems, and ensure a culture of caring and mindfulness, ultimately producing resilient managers, leaders, and business owners. In the next chapter, a review of literature pertaining to the well-being of adult learners is presented.

CHAPTER 2 : THE REVIEW OF LITERATURE ON ADULT LEARNERS' WELL-BEING

2.1 Introduction

Well-being is presently a construct at the centre of many educational policy plans and practices. Increasing awareness is focused on both student and employee well-being initiatives and policies. This will equip individuals with the social and emotional skills, knowledge and disposition required to operate and contribute productively within both an educational setting and the broader societal context (Kanyumba et al., 2024).

In this chapter, well-being will be discussed specifically among students. The population that is studied are adult learners.

Adult learners are defined as learners over 25, typically working full or part-time, having additional family responsibilities, and possibly having had a gap in their attendance to higher education (Johnson, 2023; Kasworm, 2018; Knowles et al., 2020).

According to Jokic et al. (2019), adult learners frequently participate in formal learning primarily due to the intention to change their lives and are determined to thrive in their respective fields. However, with that comes also emotional "cases" of early learning experiences, often challenged with a host of competing demands, financial pressure, possibly lack of support, and illness. In addition, they are facing challenges of unknown academic work, conflicting deadlines, and probably an initial lack of fundamental academic skills. As a result, the associated stressors usually intensify when they start their studies, and this section of the population experiences high stress points and low levels of well-being. The stress and concern encountered by first-year adult students have significant effects on students' attention, short-lived memory, enthusiasm, energy levels and other academic performance, like attending, underperformance, postponements or failure to submit assessments (Jokic et al., 2019).

The chapter starts with an overview of well-being, followed by well-being definitions, theories, and adult learners' well-being in Higher Education Institutions. In the next section, well-being definitions are discussed.

2.2 Well-being Definitions

Well-being is a broad construct that concerns how and why our lives have meaning and is an integral component of mental health (WHO, 2014). Originally there appeared two specific schools of thought where well-being was seen either as hedonic or eudemonic. Other philosophers held a somewhat different view, deeming that people experience happiness in the expression of their virtues engaged in what they believe is worth doing (Su & Nawijn, 2020). This view of eudemonia – being true to one's internal self can be equated with a eudemonic viewpoint of well-being. Building upon the eudemonic view of well-being is Maslow's (1970) concept of self-actualisation.

McCallum and Price (2016:3) argue that well-being has emerged as "something everyone seemingly aims for, and arguably has a right to". To compound the issue of inconsistent definitions, well-being is often used interchangeably with other terms such as 'happiness', 'flourishing', 'enjoying a good life' and 'life satisfaction', all of which have very different interpretations and underlying meanings.

The general definition of well-being as a unidimensional construct is total personal welfare and enjoyment. According to Jarden and Roache (2023), well-being is defined and understood as how people function and feel on two levels: social and personal and holistically how they assess their lives. Considering the various well-being definitions, the most suitable definition of well-being to be applied in this research is the former from Jarden and Roache. It encapsulates three aspects of well-being, namely social, personal, and holistic viewpoints. Next is an elaboration on theories and models of well-being within the HE domain.

2.3 Theories of Well-being

In this section, the various theories that are associated with well-being will be comprehensively discussed.

2.3.1 The person-environment fit theory

According to Greguras and Diefendorff (2009), the theory insinuates that well-being is a consequence of a good person-environment fit that comprises high correspondence between consistent personal attributes and qualities that produce more constructive

results from the environment. Person-environment fit theory states that in addition to having a direct impact on an individual's outcomes, an environment and an individual interact with one another to influence these outcomes. People frequently look for and construct "fitting" surroundings that enable them to express who they are (Zhang et al., 2023) fully.

Numerous fit categories have been identified by prior research, such as the fit between human abilities and environmental demands, the fit between environmental supply and individual requirements, and the match between organisational and personal ideals. Numerous favourable outcomes, including job satisfaction, organisational commitment, psychological well-being, job performance, and citizenship behaviours, have also been demonstrated in prior research that is connected to person-environment fit theory (Zhang et al., 2023). The literature suggests that employees' well-being and work outcomes are issues that must be addressed jointly rather than merely focusing on traditional notions of job satisfaction and work stress (Ahmad et al., 2023). Person-environment fit theory is widely described as the compatibility between an individual and their work environment and, more specifically, the individual-level criteria (Xiao et al., 2021).

According to Van Zyl et al. (2022), it is vital to ensure that when an individual applies for a job, they match their knowledge, skills, abilities, and values because people employ fundamental effort and time when they are seeking a job that matches their attributes. How employees fit into virtual organisations and how a good fit influences an individual outcome in virtual organisations can be better understood with the use of a person-environment fit theory (Arroyo, 2020). Similarly, the primary issue is to determine the most pertinent P and E attributes for that specific environment and whether employees leverage the person-environment fit model to predict their well-being and work performance (Arroyo, 2020).

Generally, when people feel the direct alignment of their objectives, desires, and values with the environment altogether, i.e. at work or in social groups, the outcome results are motivation, engagement, and satisfaction with one's job/career. Consequently, stress is reduced tremendously, and psychological well-being is enhanced. On the other hand, physical well-being is equally improved when there is strong, clear alignment with job demands, competence and resource availability to avoid burnout.

Lastly, the theory links with social well-being related to organisational culture. For instance, if a person fits into an organisation's culture, a sense of belonging is promoted, which leads to engagement and collaboration. To elaborate further on the connection of social well-being advantages, the Social Exchange Theory will subsequently be discussed in the next section.

2.3.2 Social exchange theory

According to Blau (1964), the impacts of work relationships on well-being can be described in view and understanding of the social exchange theory. Furthermore, Blau (1964) states that long-term relationships that are equally beneficial and reciprocal progressively enhance both party's contributions to the level of a reasonable balance related to each party's contributions as well as the value thereof. Thus, Frieder (2018) described that social exchange theory is embedded in individual perceptions around engagement within a series of symbiotic interactions with one another. These interactions referred to are dependent on each party's mutual rewarding activities, and over time, such exchange of rewards is perceived to create equally beneficial relationships. Interestingly, the use of social exchange theory can encourage employees and develop relationships by offering an honest exchange of choices depending on workers' preferences (Bos-Nehles & Meijerink, 2018).

Chernyak-Hai and Rabenu (2018) emphasised that social exchange theory requires adjustments to cater for the fluctuations in work, employees, and work environment properties. Porter (2018) reasoned that exchange rules, exchange resources, and exchange relationships persisted consistently in the new era. In addition, this changed workplace environment posits that institutional representatives must be increasingly mindful towards relationship-building with workers, incorporating the views of social exchange theory. Thus, high-quality relationships will be guided by a clear understanding of the process.

Blau (1964) further posits that, future researchers employ the conceptual model of the social exchange theory to meticulously analyse the causal relationship between organisations and their employees. Furthermore, the social exchange theory proposes that employees tend to feel that when they feel their organisations are considerate of their overall well-being, they respond with extra-role behaviours respectively in the

managerial field (Cropanzano & Greenberg, 1997). Empowerment is a multi-layered construct and is recognised to raise employees' perception of power by boosting their self-efficacy.

Empowerment is seen as a high-performance work strategy that permits staff members to satisfy client demands by making decisions immediately (Modise, 2023). Similarly, psychological empowerment is a critical component of positive employee behaviours, according to Modise (2023). Job happiness is influenced by the competence dimension of psychological empowerment, according to Modise (2023). To understand the antecedents and outcomes of the social exchange theory, dimensions contributing to the social exchange theory in relation to employee well-being, job performance and satisfaction, which are competence, meaning, self-determination and impact (Modise (2023). The next theory discussed is the Broaden-and-build theory.

2.3.3 Broaden-and-build theory

A person's positive emotions in a career journey broaden attention and thinking, whilst negative emotions have the opposite outcome, resulting in narrowed focus and thinking (Fredrickson, 2006). Furthermore, Fredrickson and Levenson (1998) further elucidate this belief by highlighting that one's thoughts are narrowed by negative emotions and following actions to specific outcomes (e.g., the fight or flight response). Oppositely, positive emotions advance thinking and the capability of widening the order of actions and responses to thoughts.

The principle of the broaden-and-build theory is equated to resilience, the process that allows people to recover from hostile events both physically and emotionally, sometimes even to a point beyond previous levels, thus enhancing overall well-being (Fredrickson, 2001). Therefore, Fredrickson's (2001) broaden-and-build theory assists scholars and researchers in relation to the understanding of instruments whereby positive emotions are valuable and the way they serve to improve individuals' lives both temporarily and over a long period.

Similarly, this theory's explicit linkage to well-being is found in the way that feeling content can encourage the growth and accumulation of these positive emotions and how it improves the individual's well-being. As a result, physical, social, and

psychological well-being are all constructs which support resilience, ultimately enhancing well-being. For this reason, the next theory aims to expand on the former well-being theory discussed, known as subjective well-being.

2.3.4 Subjective Well-being (SWB)

For many years, well-being theories have been developed, encapsulating the concept of well-being from both objective and subjective perspectives. Das et al. (2020) highlight the history associated with and the importance of well-being in establishing and sustaining productive and healthy citizens. To date, research in this field has been focusing on objective well-being such as revenue, life-expectancy and knowledge coupled with subjective events, namely life experiences and perceptions by people. The latter approach has later been categorised as subjective well-being (SWB) by Das et al. (2020), a leader in SWB research who defines SWB as someone who thinks and feels that their life is personally necessary, regardless of how others view it.

On the other hand, Lepper (1996) states that the SWB psychological construct defines the level of peoples' satisfactory, positive, and happy methods related to their life experiences. However, Diener (1984) reiterated that most empirical SWB research is not entrenched in a particular theoretical outline, hence the lack of essential empirical research that tests the numerous contexts. Scientifically, the term subjective well-being means happiness, which is a primary value in individuals' lives, and their reflections related to the meaning have ascended since ancient times (Das et al., 2020). Das et al. (2020) showcased an interest in the subject, emphasising that the well-being of people, categorised as eudaimonia ("EU" meaning good and "daimon" meaning spirit), is a soul-orientated action expressing the whole quality of life.

Importantly, Nave et al. (2008) state that eudemonic SWB viewpoints are a construct that is normative and considered as a tenure of specific desired qualities. Simultaneously, it reflects the researchers' value base and not the participants' subjective judgement. In contrast, the SWBs' hedonic viewpoint concentrates on subjective thinking and feeling situations, which is the primary reason why psychologists debate the independence of hedonic and eudemonic subjective well-being. For this reason, SWB scientific measures should be integrated with mental well-being studies. To further elaborate, we subsequently discuss the SWB dimensions.

2.3.4.1 Dimensions and measures of subjective-well-being

Researchers in the field have developed various dimensions of SWB. The definition of SWB by Diener highlights two dimensions, namely *thinking* and *feeling* (Das et.al, 2020).

- **Thinking** relates to the cognitive/evaluative dimension (EVA) of subjective well-being, meaning the greater the positive outcomes for evaluated lives of people, the greater the SWB. EVA abbreviation refers to the Evaluative dimension.
- **Feeling** relates to the affective/emotional dimension (EMO) of subjective well-being, whereby the predominance of positive against negative emotions results in greater SWB. EMO abbreviation refers to the Emotional dimension.

Empirically, SWB has been associated with social support or contact, loneliness, and social activities (Lepper, 1996). Mental and personality factors, e.g., extraversion, self-esteem and locus of control, have also been linked to SWB. Das et al. (2020) discuss the three measures of SWB linked with the above-discussed dimensions and the scientific categories of SWB, which are (1) evaluative, (2) hedonic, and (3) eudemonic.

Presently, it is now well-acknowledged that happiness is made up of two distinct elements: hedonic happiness and eudaimonic happiness (Das et al., 2020). Subjective well-being is a common term used to describe hedonic well-being (HWB). It can also be regarded as plain "happiness," and the related literature frequently conceptualises it as such, as was previously indicated. Consequently, even though hedonic welfare has been examined more than eudaimonic well-being (Nave et al., 2008). Eudaimonic well-being (EWB) has been alternatively referred to as psychological well-being (Nave et al., 2008). Moreover, it consists of the feeling of working toward one's life goals, attempting toward self-fulfilment, and living up to one's greatest potential. The Perma Theory is the next well-being theory whereby further elaboration will be provided.

2.3.5 PERMA Theory

The focus of the PERMA theory of well-being is helping people to thrive, and it promotes building skills that allow one to flourish (Kern et al., 2015). Many contemporary theories attempt to help a person reduce suffering. The PERMA theory of well-being states that well-being consists of five elements:

Positive emotion: These emotions increase our hedonic happiness. Kovich (2020) highlights the well-being theory assumption focused on feelings (life satisfaction or happiness) or, reversely, the influence of positive emotions, eventually leading to triggers such as cognitive processes, mental changes, and facial expressions. Diener (1984) elaborates on the meaning of affect related to holistic moods, situations, or capability to experience emotions, together with defining mental capital, which is the amalgamation of resilience, independence, optimism, and confidence.

Engagement: Kern et al. (2015) describe engagement, the second PERMA construct, as a pledge to an activity or a task. Moreover, the benefits of student-faculty engagement are positively correlated with engagement and additionally increase well-being and career engagement (Kovich, 2020). While the studies show that engagement boosts cognitive skills, the scrutiny on student engagement by Maguire and Delahunt (2017) revealed that affective and student engagement was predicted by emotional intelligence (EI). This posits that EI can boost college students' academic performance and engagement.

Relationships: Support is critical to our survival and emotional well-being. African American college student research by Brooks and Allen (2016) found that relationships with others granted support and enhanced academic persistence, which indicates the valuable academic results relative to relationships of family support, including academic perseverance, self-efficiency, and academic performance. Furthermore, Kovich (2020) postulates that academic and support staff service can influence the success and intent of students. In particular, the impact of relationships with counsellors as well as support programs.

Meaning: Serving or working in a capacity that contributes to something larger than ourselves gives us a sense of purpose and meaning. Bailey and Phillips (2016) focused on college students of freshman and examined the interconnected relationship between well-being, life meaning, motivation and academic performance. As a result, the outcomes showcased internal motivation was related to enhanced subjective well-being, performance academically and purpose in life.

Achievement: We enjoy pursuing accomplishments for the sake of doing so. Each of these contributes in varying degrees to a person's ability to flourish. In academia, Slinger et al. (2015) alluded that notable types of accomplishments are grade point

average (GPA), graduation and retaining. Moreover, academic struggle and dropout exposure projected increasing GPA across 10 cohort groupings during eight semesters of studies (Slanger et.al, 2015). Conversely, Liu et al. (2015) mention enthusiastic instruction, and Leland (2015) implies that mindfulness adds value in terms of enhanced positive academic results. Importantly, Samaha and Hawi (2016) refer to accomplishment barriers and risks such as smartphone addiction, which indicates a 3.9% difference in GPA according to a study conducted. Correlations with the smartphone addiction risk were conducted in line with variables such as perceived stress, academic performance, and life satisfaction, ultimately contributing to the well-being of students.

2.4 Well-being models

Well-being consists of various models, and the two specific models that will be discussed in this section are the Job demands-resources (JD-R) and the Capability (strengths-based) approach (CA) models.

2.4.1 Job demands-resources (JD-R) model

The challenges associated with satisfying and developing employees' well-being form part of the few topics that are regularly receiving enormous concerns and critical attention from both general and organisational debates worldwide. Demerouti et al. (2001) imply that all employment has certain work characteristics related to well-being. As a result, the mentioned characteristics can be modelled into two broad categories, namely Job Demands and Resources.

- **Job Demands** represent aspects of the job that could potentially cause strain in cases where they exceed the employee's adaptive capability.
- **Job Resources** refer to those psychological, social, organisational, and physical aspects of the job that reduce job demands and the associated physiological and psychological costs. These aspects are functional in achieving work goals or stimulating personal growth, learning and development.

A rapidly growing body of research focusing on the combination of job resources and job demands and analysing its influence on work-related well-being is building

theoretically and empirically on the Job Demands-Resources model (Bakker and Demerouti, 2007). Brauchi et al. (2013) indicate that the JD-R model was introduced as an alternative to other models of employee health and well-being, such as the job demand-control model and effort-reward imbalance model.

The first main assumption of the JD-R model is that in any job, two kinds of characteristics can be distinguished that are related to burnout and work engagement: **job demands** and **job resources**. According to Bakker and Demerouti (2007) and Brauchli et al. (2013), job demands refer to physical, psychological, social, or organisational aspects of the job that require sustained physical and/or psychological (cognitive and emotional) effort or skills and are therefore associated with certain psychological costs.

According to Kochhar (2020), the pandemic resulted in severe economic disruption and job losses. For those who were able to find employment, the epidemic brought about changes to their working environments. Additionally, the epidemic created new stressors for workers, including worries about their health and well-being and employment instability (Vaziri et al., 2020). For those working in the public sector, the pandemic's effects on work environments and workflow led to new and higher job expectations (Eggers et al., 2020). To gain a deeper understanding of how COVID-19-related job demands impact public sector employees and the resources available to them to safeguard their well-being, the Job Demands – Resources (JD-R) model serves as a theoretical outline. Working conditions are categorised under the JD-R paradigm as either job demands or job resources (Bakker et al., 2014). According to Demerouti et al. (2001), job resources assist employees in meeting workplace demands and goals, whereas job demands themselves require energy to handle. According to the JD-R model, job demands negatively impact workers' health and are largely linked to burnout. On the other hand, job resources are primarily associated with employee engagement and trigger a motivational process (Demerouti et al., 2001).

Furthermore, Demerouti et al. (2001) state that the JD-R model also suggests job resources have an impact on employee outcomes in addition to job demands. As they enable effective task performance under unclear work settings and can shield employees' well-being from the negative consequences of expectations, job resources are essential during crises like the COVID-19 pandemic (Demerouti and Bakker,

2023). According to Schaufeli (2017) their nature, job resources can be divided into three categories: social (such as support from co-workers, supervisors, and the team environment), organisational (such as communication, alignment, and value congruence), and personal (such as optimism, self-efficacy, and resilience). The subsequent model to be discussed is known as the capability approach, another well-being model.

2.4.2 The capability (strengths-based) approach (CA)

According to Meerman et al. (2022), an understanding of well-being requires significant focus on available opportunities to people that promote their autonomy to make valuable individual choices. On the other hand, Meerman et al. (2022) highlight that the capability approach (CA) emphasizes the value of work, which seems to be an imperative characteristic related to flourishing in work, improved well-being in the working environment and sustainable employability. Individuals' well-being capacity is strengthened by the following seven values, which transform into abilities connected to three variables: Importance, Enablement, and Effectiveness (Meerman et al., 2022).

- Skills and knowledge application
- Knowledge and skills improvement
- Critical decision-making inclusion
- Developing and maintaining valuable work relationships
- Devising your objectives
- Good income
- Contributing meaningfully to something

A model for adding values to work and employability is provided by the capability approach (CA), which was first presented by Amartya Sen. Per the CA, people must be able to envision, pursue, and modify their life goals (Meerman et al., 2022).

The capacity method is composed of three key components: freedom, functioning (which emphasises values), and capabilities. An individual's capabilities are the varied permutations of what she/he can do or be and the various functions that person is able to achieve based on their unique circumstances (Meerman et al., 2022). They argue that a person's well-being should be evaluated in terms of their capacities since

functioning can indicate limitations in choices or be the outcome of choices that are restricted.

It's critical to examine what an individual can or is able to achieve rather than just what they do to comprehend their circumstances and create effective remedies. Sen (2009) defines freedom as having the ability to design one's life and surroundings (process) and having the chance to pursue worthwhile objectives (opportunity). In addition, Sen (2009) compares freedom with capacities, saying that the former represents people's freedom to be and do as they like. Hence, a person's capabilities are their potential and ability to attain worthwhile goals while accounting for pertinent personal traits and other influences: they are their ability and enablement.

Altogether, the most relevant well-being model identified for this research is the **JD-R model**. The researcher will examine the students' well-being through the application of job demands and resource aspects, potentially affecting MBA students' academic achievement. Ultimately, the primary aim of the field study will be addressed. In the next section, adult learners' well-being in higher education is discussed.

2.5 Adult learner's well-being in Higher Education Institutions

A person's capacity to think, express emotions, work, and enjoy life all depend on their well-being (Chaudhry et al., 2024). In higher education settings, this is concerning because students' well-being has a direct impact on their capacity to learn and engage fully in degree programmes and may influence their career and other possibilities following graduation (Chaudhry et al., 2024).

Higher education institutions are being urged to create initiatives to cater to different students as the country's demographics continue to shift to boost graduation rates and student achievement. Alyahyan and Dustegor (2020) specified that the MBA degree is an essential managerial learning programme. Since three in four candidates consider an MBA programme compared to only a business master's programme, retaining must be a major factor in student success (Alyahyan & Dustegor, 2020). While online learning gradually dominates, student dropout rates equally become vital and increased substantially (Alyahyan & Dustegor, 2020). Academic barriers are barriers that hinder students from obtaining a college degree or succeeding in their educational careers (Sala-Bars et al., 2023). A study conducted discovered that 44% of students

abandoned their programmes because of job demands, while just 25% indicated personal issues too overwhelming for them to devote time and energy to studying.

The Master of Business Administration (MBA) degree has undergone much research, criticism, and evaluation. Both academics and practitioners have drawn attention to the difficulties that business universities are encountering as they attempt to address the present situation and plan for the future of the MBA. The following section is a discussion related to work, family life and learning balance.

2.5.1 Work, Family life and learning balance

Modernisation of human lives evolved to greater complexities, leading to better awareness and focus on locating appropriate strategies to assist people in achieving and preserving a good state of well-being. However, accomplishing good well-being is challenging as the obstacle keeps mounting and the types of challenges become more complex (Badri, 2019). Numerous factors can affect one's well-being, which comprises personal or family life as well as work life, representing the most substantial spectrum within the choice of human relations. According to Feldt et al. (2013), empirical evidence has pointed out that conditions such as low work engagement, workaholism, burnout and poor job satisfaction as part of various factors that are often associated with employees' poor well-being.

Adult students are unique compared to traditional learners based on their daily responsibilities, which impact their learning experiences (Fiorini & Debono, 2022). A great focus on the work-life balance relationships has been placed on working adults and full-time students. Hence, the study of Balroo and Al-Duwaile (2018) explored the balance, including an additional variable, namely learning, specifically for MBA students.

In support of the former, Rockman et al. (2022) highlighted the progress attained in research, particularly related to work-life balance and its effect on people and organisations. Furthermore, Balroo and Al-Duwaile (2018) suggest that the work-life balance expression is constantly utilised in the context of workers. However, working professionals also enrolled on the MBA programme are overworked by career problems and academic workload, indicating why a need to research the work-life challenges of employed MBA students.

Several factors play a crucial role in online adult education, which are internet and computer self-effectiveness (Fiorini & Debono, 2022). Older students or those with low competency levels are more likely to drop out, leading to student support issues as adult learners are not privileged with similar support structures compared to undergraduate students in terms of induction programs and resources. Although the former focuses on the online education challenges, Balroo and Al-Duwaile (2018) allude that limited scholarly opinions are available which explicitly outline the effect of MBA programmes on employed students related to balancing work and life. Maintaining a balance between work, family, and learning, simultaneously keeping extraordinary performance standards, continues to be an interesting topic (Doble & Supriya, 2011).

Interestingly, Rautela et al. (2024) point out that the culture of business schools is greatly competitive, and extreme workloads can intensify mental well-being challenges. Various reasons apply to the well-being challenges of graduate students, predominantly attributed to supervisor relationships and ineffective balancing of work and life (Rautela et al., 2024).

2.6 Conclusion

Altogether, the literature clearly indicates the need to study the well-being of adult learners to gain deeper insights into experiences and, for this research, MBA students specifically. The various theories of well-being cover a wide range of perspectives and elements of well-being.

Furthermore, the JD-R model to be employed, incorporating the challenge for adult learners, will be the basis of the of the data collection instrument of the study. Hence, the subsequent topic addresses the research methodology that will be employed in this research project.

CHAPTER 3 : RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

Research Methodology refers to a method that aims to resolve research problems systematically (Mishra & Alok, 2017). Similarly, Taherdoost (2022) suggests that research methodology is a method of solving a challenge methodically. Basically, it is the learning of approaches that grants access to knowledge for the researcher.

Various methodologies are utilised and different types of studies, where the term normally includes, data collection, research design and data analysis, which are the next items that will be presented. Moreover, research methodology is concerned with the process and the method by which the researcher acquires knowledge about the world (Sutton & Austin, 2015). Conversely, Sutton and Austin (2015) state that research methodology helps the researcher to get data through multiple sources, e.g., questionnaires, face-to-face interviews, focus group interviews, etc. Therefore, to explain concepts, define categories, or uncover themes to comprehend specific phenomena, the research used a qualitative methodological approach (Sutton & Austin, 2015). Subsequently, the sections that will be discussed in this chapter are *Epistemological stance, Research Design, Sampling and Population, Data Collection Method, Data Analysis, Trustworthiness and rigour, and Ethical Considerations*.

3.2 Research Design and Approach

Research design and approach can sometimes be used interchangeably by researchers (Sileyew, 2019). According to Smith et al. (2009), interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA) draws selectively and widely from a range of philosophical ideas. Furthermore, Smith et al. (2009) postulated that in IPA the primary focus is examining the subjective experience. Prior to the selection of the design and approach for this research project, the following section elaborates on the design, which consists of the various research paradigms and the applicable, selected design for this research project. There are three types of research designs: exploratory study, descriptive study and explanatory study.

3.2.1 Types of research paradigms

A paradigm in qualitative research is the belief, system or worldview that underpins the study and, therefore, shapes how researchers approach the collection, interpretation, and analysis of data. Understanding these paradigms is essential for qualitative researchers (Kivunja and Kuyini, 2017). The chosen paradigm determined what kind of questions to be asked, how participants would be engaged, and how the findings were understood and presented (Park et al., 2020). The four paradigms that dominate qualitative research are Post-positivism, Interpretivism (constructivism), Critical theory and Pragmatism, which will be further discussed below.

- **Post-positivism**, this paradigm assumes that reality is an objective existence and, therefore, can be observed and measured. It emphasises quantitative methods but, when used in qualitative research, seeks generalisable patterns or truths about human behaviour (Park et al., 2020).
- **Interpretivism** is the approach to understanding the subjective experiences and meanings that individuals attach to their world. Researchers within this paradigm typically assume that reality is constructed from the experiences of humans and that it is impossible to understand social phenomena without considering people's perspectives (Saunders et al., 2018).
- **Critical theory** is a search for power dynamics and social injustices that affect either an individual or a group of people. Those researchers adopting this paradigm often seek to challenge and transform the structures in society by highlighting issues related to inequality, oppression, and marginalization (Park et al., 2020).
- **Pragmatism** is a paradigm that is flexible and practical, oriented toward the solution of real-life problems. It often mixes qualitative and quantitative approaches in seeking what works best to answer the research questions.

Research paradigms guide research methodologies, allowing researchers to evaluate their chosen approach and make necessary adjustments. Grass (2024) highlights three logical facets of research philosophy, namely, 1) Ontology, 2) Methodology and 3) Epistemology.

3.2.2 Research philosophy

1. Epistemology

Epistemology and ontology are crucial assumptions about the universe, influencing research interactions (Niebauer et al., 2020). Epistemology is a philosophy that examines what we know, how we know, and what contributes to knowledge (Trivedi, 2020). Furthermore, epistemology concerns itself with issues related to the truth, explanations and beliefs.

Although reality is subjectively observed under both ontological and epistemological paradigms, the difference is that ontology follows a deductive (previous observations) approach. At the same time, epistemology is an inductive (new patterns, new observations) approach to knowledge.

2. Interpretivism

This paradigm is the approach to understanding the subjective experiences and meanings that individuals attach to their world. Researchers within this paradigm typically assume that reality is constructed from the experiences of humans and that it is impossible to understand social phenomena without considering people's perspectives (Saunders et al., 2018). Studies on performance management, leadership, organisational work-life balance practices, sustainable human resource management and others are frequently examined using the interpretive approach (Godinho et al., 2018). Given the focus on well-being needs, including the exploration of personal experiences, perceptions, and the meanings students attach to their well-being, the most appropriate paradigm would likely be **Interpretivism (or Constructivism)**.

The reason why interpretivism is the suitable paradigm for the adopted qualitative study is that the subjectivity of well-being is inherently subjective, relating to individual perceptions of happiness, stress, work-life balance, mental health, and social connections. Interpretivism is well-suited for the exploration of such personal and social constructions of well-being. Contextual understanding: MBA students occupy a specific academic and social world. Therefore, interpretivism allows one to understand how students perceive their well-being in this context of academic and social life and how those perceptions vary from one individual to another. Furthermore, well-being is

such a personal and complex experience that interpretivist research would prioritize this aspect, going into detail regarding the meanings behind behaviors and experiences something quite essential in researching such phenomena.

Subsequently, this paradigm would allow the researcher to explore how MBA students at the University of the Free State perceive and experience well-being and how these two factors interact with their academic, personal, and professional lives. You can also explore how their social and cultural contexts mould their perceptions of well-being.

3. Methodology/Approach

Research methodology is a systematic approach to resolving research problems involving data collection, design, and analysis. It involves learning approaches to access knowledge and helps researchers acquire knowledge about the world (Mishra and Alok, 2017). On the other hand, Grass (2024) posits that in qualitative research, various methodological factors must be considered regardless of several single-case observations within the research project.

Furthermore, research methodology helps researchers gather data from multiple sources, such as questionnaires, interviews, and focus groups, using qualitative methods to explain concepts and uncover themes (Taherdoost, 2022). Qualitative research involves gaining rich, detailed information rather than large quantities.

The researcher adopted a qualitative approach utilising an interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA) to gather data for the study and provide a rich, in-depth understanding of the title: "Well-being needs of Master of Business Administration (MBA) students at the University of Free State". Through an integrated approach, qualitative research enables researchers to delve deeply into behaviours, various viewpoints, and life experiences to uncover the nuances of the situation (Tenny et al., 2022). Qualitative research is a main research approach that explores and provides deeper insights into real-world problems (Tenny et al., 2022). This study followed a qualitative approach (Oranga & Matere, 2023). Tenny et al. (2022) reiterate that participants' experiences, viewpoints, and behaviours are gathered for qualitative research.

One of the advantages of qualitative research is its capacity to clarify human behaviour patterns and processes, which can be challenging to measure. While it might be

challenging to quantify phenomena like experiences, attitudes, and behaviours precisely, a qualitative method enables participants to describe their thoughts, feelings, and experiences at a particular moment or during an interesting event (Tenny et al., 2022).

According to Tenny et al. (2022), the definition of phenomenology is the study of the particular or the study of the meaning of phenomena. While grounded theory and phenomenology appear to be very similar at first, some notable distinctions should be noted. Fundamentally, phenomenology seeks to explore events from the viewpoint of the individual. Phenomenology is basically studying the "lived experiences" of individuals to investigate, from their point of view, how and why the individuals behaved in a particular manner. Research regarding measuring attitudes, psychological constructs, and the way individuals perceive their work environments is important to a phenomenology design.

According to Bryman and Bell (2014), phenomenological research design entails researching the world through the eyes of those with direct lived experience to discover how they interpret their experiences and make sense of their world. In addition, the aim of qualitative studies is for the researcher to unpack the complex meaning that participants have around a similar issue (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Analysing and elucidating human experience can be a difficult task due to the complexity of human nature and the multidimensionality of an individual's experience, which is psychologically oriented, culturally driven, and socially structured.

Applying a qualitative approach permitted the researcher to answer the research questions and grasp the complex well-being experiences of MBA students.

These were the objectives that the study's qualitative and interpretive approach addressed:

Primary objective

- To identify the well-being needs of MBA students at the UFS.

Secondary objectives

In achieving the primary objective, specific objectives have been established:

- ❖ To present well-being theories and models
- ❖ To analyse the well-being needs of MBA students at the UFS
- ❖ To provide interventions to support the well-being of Master of Business Administration students at the UFS.

The interviews appointed consisted of 14 MBA registered students. Moreover, the interview schedule involved three categories of questions, comprising 16 questions. It is imperative to adapt and align the research design to match the distinctive attributes of the various groups of participants (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015).

One general wellbeing question was asked, ten wellbeing strategies questions and five MBA programme questions related to wellbeing. It was not easy to quantify phenomena because qualitative research offers greater insights into human behaviour patterns and processes (Oranga & Matere, 2023).

Moving forward, the researcher gathered crucial demographic information highlighting the gender, age, employment level and years of experience altogether.

3.3 Sampling/Selection of Participants

3.3.1 Non-probability sampling

One non-probability sampling method that is frequently utilised in qualitative research is called judgmental or purposive sampling. Purposeful sampling is a broadly utilised technique that qualitative researchers use to identify and select participants based on lived experiences and characteristics to gather rich data (Patton, 2002). It encompasses the identification and selection of individuals or groups incredibly experienced (Palinkas et al., 2015). Purposeful sampling was utilised to gather rich and thick data from the participants who are adult learners. As a result, the study was limited to actively enrolled MBA adult learners. It, therefore, excluded the Bachelor of Management Leadership (BML), Postgraduate Diploma in Business Administration (PGDip BA) and PhD student cohorts.

A voluntary sample of 25 actively enrolled first year from semester 2 onwards and final-year MBA students were secured because 25 is used as a practical guideline for sample size, particularly for qualitative studies that utilise interviews as their data gathering method (Hennink & Kaiser, 2022). The population of interest, thus, this

qualitative study comprised 131 MBA students aged 25-65 who are actively enrolled in the program.

3.3.2 Inclusion and exclusion

The inclusion criteria were males and females between the ages 25-65 years and must have been in their second semester of the MBA and beyond. Exclusion criteria were MBA students who had just started with the programme (in July 2024) and were older than 65, etc. The primary reason for excluding adults above the age of 65 years was mainly the retirement age linked the employment and the aim to focus on younger working-age adults.

3.3.3 Data saturation

According to Creswell (2013), data saturation is defined as a point in a research project where sufficient data has been gathered to draw necessary conclusions. As a result, any further data gathering from the instrument of research will not produce insights or responses that are valuable.

With reference to data saturation, it is a point in a research project where sufficient data has been gathered to draw necessary conclusions. Although most qualitative research does not follow a grounded theory approach, the concept of saturation is widely used in other approaches to qualitative research, where it is typically called 'data saturation' (Saunders et al., 2018).

Therefore, data saturation was applied extensively during the interview process, because the responses that participants granted were sufficient as part of the data collected. Moreover, it was utilised to draw the necessary conclusions. Thus, no further data were collected or analysed for thematic analysis purposes. According to Sarfo et al. (2021) data saturation is usually reached with between 9-17 participants. In the next section, the data collection method for this study is discussed.

3.4 Data Collection Method

The data collection instrument that was employed for this study is interviews to collect rich and thick data from participant's lived experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Microsoft Teams is the tool the researcher used to conduct interviews and record for transcription purposes.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted to discover new emerging patterns of inquiry (Nathan et al., 2019). The semi-structured interview allows the researcher to create more flexible questions, and the researcher can be flexible in responding to questions in a structured and less structured way (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). As a result, participants could provide extensive responses to the open-ended questions.

According to Oakley (1998), a qualitative interview is a type of framework in which the practices and standards are not only recorded, but also achieved, challenged and as well as reinforced. Semi-structured, in-depth interviews are utilized extensively as interviewing format, possibly with an individual or sometimes even with a group (Brett & Wheeler, 2022). These types of interviews are conducted once only, with an individual or with a group and generally cover 30 min to more than an hour. Semi-structured interviews are based on a semi-structured interview guide, which is a schematic presentation of questions or topics that need to be explored by the interviewer (Oakley, 1998).

According to Fitzpatrick (2022), the interview process starts directly after the short demographic form, via a questionnaire that is completed, followed by open-ended questions related to research questions. Importantly, the participants were permitted to respond to the questions for as long and as freely as they liked.

Furthermore, the interview schedule consisted of a total of 16 questions related to well-being under three categories, namely, a general question about well-being perception, 10 well-being strategies questions and five questions focusing on well-being in the MBA programme. The ten questions under well-being strategies derive directly from the literature discussed in Chapter 2 above of this study. The interview schedule can be found in Appendix B: Interview Schedule: Questions on Well-being of MBA students.

The recruitment strategy entailed a template (see Appendix A) designed for the emails that were sent out to the 131 adult learners (enrolled MBA students) by the MBA programme coordinator of the Business School to ask for permission on behalf of the principal investigator, to participate in the study. The email and student information were provided by the Business School as permission was granted to conduct the study. Interested participants responded to the researchers' email to confirm voluntary participation after the approval process from the GHREC during the first week of September 2024.

3.5 Data Analysis

Recordings of the interviews were made to obtain the data from the stored Microsoft Teams conducted interviews. The interview recordings were transcribed and uploaded on NVivo 14 to generate codes, prominent themes, and thick data (Houghton et al., 2015). The former introduces the data analysis tool and approach, which will further be discussed in the subsequent section.

The method that was utilised to analyse the data was reflexive thematic analysis, the process which the researcher used to identify prominent themes that originate within the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The goal of thematic analysis is to identify themes or patterns in the literature that are relevant for use (Maguire & Delahun, 2017). The research questions were answered and interpreted through the coding technique, which greatly assisted in detecting prominent themes and data patterns the researcher intended to collect (Bryman & Bell, 2014). Furthermore, the responses of the participants were verbatim transcribed for coding purposes and to generate prominent themes.

This approach expected the researcher to analyse the transcripts and recognise aspects of interest that transpired during the interview to code and generate data into themes. For this reason, an inductive data-driven thematic analysis approach was deemed as the most appropriate approach for identifying and summarising critical areas in the data to acquire acceptable themes from clear, external meanings of the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Consequently, the reflexive thematic analysis that was carried out for this research was steered by the guidelines devised. Similarly, the

former thematic analysis guidelines have a six-stage process listed below, which the researcher incorporated in the data analysis section (Naeem et al., 2023):

1. Acquaintance with the data by the researcher
2. Preliminary codes' generalisation
3. Seeking for themes
4. Appraisal of themes
5. Theme naming and explanations
6. Generating the report

3.6 Trustworthiness and Rigour

Trustworthiness is essential to ensure the quality of the study (Connelly, 2016). Moreover, trustworthiness in evaluating a researcher's worth involves specific criteria but is not limited to reliability, credibility, transferability as well as confirmability (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). Rigour is essential to qualitative studies mainly because of the way in which trustworthiness is recognised in the results of a study (Anderson, 2017).

Credibility refers to the level of confidence readers have in a research study because the results reported are precise and honest and consider the views contained within the study by interpreting the experiences of participants (Thomas & Magilvy, 2011). According to Bryman and Bell (2014), internal validity, which is a synergy between theoretical concepts and investigator observation, is parallel to credibility. Therefore, credibility was ensured via continued and adapted engagement when consulting with the research, thus enhancing the collected data's trustworthiness (Shenton, 2016).

The criterion of **transferability** entails the relevance and possible applicability of results relating to various settings and contexts with a diverse set of participants (Thomas & Magilvy, 2011). Bryman and Bell (2014) equally define transferability as the former author and suggest it is equivalent to external validity. On that note, transferability was attained by making sure that the data gathered was representative of the adult learner population (Johnson et al., 2020).

Dependability refers to the results of research that are reliable, valid and could be repeated (Cohen & Crabtree, 2006). This essentially equates to reliability, as mentioned by (Bryman & Bell, 2014).

Confirmability is the extent the researcher becomes neutral and ensures that the findings they embark on are shaped by the participants' stories and not any reason, interest, or unfairness of the researcher (Cohen & Crabtree, 2006). Three concise techniques were used to create support for the research results, namely, reflexivity, a trail of audit and triangulation.

3.7 Ethical Considerations

Permission from the university (see Appendix C: Permission Letter from the Business School) was requested for ethical approval. Ethics is defined as a direction that governs the behaviours and choices of people (Neuman, 2014). An ethically responsible researcher plans skilfully and communicates effectively with stakeholders and gatekeepers in the research, employs sound, trustworthy research designs and procedures, can carry out those procedures in a rigorous, trustworthy manner, assesses risks and benefits, and adjusts procedures to minimise risk and maximise benefit (Sieber, 2009). Selects the most suitable and appropriate number of research participants.

Privacy: An individual's right to control access to their personal information and obtain voluntary informed consent/assent (Sieber, 2009).

Permission was obtained from the director of the Business School as well as the Vice-rector to research through the RIMS process to conduct the study. Ethical approval (see Appendix D: Ethical clearance letter)) for the study was from the General and Human Research Ethics Committee (GHREC). The proposed study focused on MBA students, comprising the cohort of students currently studying for their MBA. All the sources used in this study are cited correctly in the text, and the reference list is in line with edition 7 of the American Psychology Association referencing guidelines (American Psychological Association, 2020).

Badampudi et al. (2022) elucidates the ethical issues meticulously, which are:

Informed consent suggests that participants should be made aware of the research in which they intend to participate and given the choice to decline participation. Participants in this study had to sign an electronic consent form linked to the information leaflet before they could be interviewed.

Anonymity comprises not gathering data that can identify an individual. All participant information, in line with the POPI Act of 2013, Section 4, indicates the lawful processing of personal information conditions by the party responsible, which was used for the research purpose on an aggregate level. Demographical and biographical information were used as a mix to generate the coding that will enable thematic analysis. Thus, all participant information was anonymised in line with the POPI Act of 2013, Section 4.

Confidentiality, responses, and participant information were processed confidentially, ensuring adherence to the ethical guidelines and POPI Act. Confidentiality was not breached as the participant's information remained private (Davies, 2009).

Considering the various risk factors that are likely to occur during the research project, i.e. emotional distress due to the sensitive nature of the well-being topic, participants could contact either Student Counselling and Development services or use the student care line, as approval was granted (see Appendix E: SCD Approval letter for assistance during Interviews).

The Student Counselling and Development services were available for all participants who required psychological or emotional support for referral if they deemed it necessary after the interview was conducted.

Beneficence: the study considers the welfare of people. Individuals were compelled to take excessive risks, and advantages were maximised. The intention is for prospective MBA students and the Business School to mutually benefit in terms of student, staff, and business welfare altogether (Varkey, 2021). In terms of the value of the study, the participants will have access to the insights generated from the study and be able to reflect on their personal experiences and overall well-being.

In voluntary participation, subjects voluntarily and consciously choose whether to participate. The researcher's desire to advance knowledge and their duty to protect participants are at odds when subjects are included in a study without their agreement

(Strydom, 2011). An information leaflet was compiled and shared with participants to facilitate voluntary participation, addressing the informed consent linked to participation. Voluntary participation was clearly outlined in the information leaflet. Participants who were not comfortable taking part in the research project were not obliged and could opt out of the study without any consequences.

Conflict of Interest - According to Romain (2015), situations that raise the possibility that a secondary one will inappropriately influence professional decisions or actions pertaining to a main interest are known as conflicts of interest. As the researcher in this field study, I was also an MBA student, and the study aimed to positively impact the Business School and the University of Free State at large. Importantly, I was not occupying a position of power. Thus, I was on the same level as the students from which I collected the data.

3.8 Conclusion

An outline of the most crucial research design and methodology components was utilised to ensure an effective and thorough research process was employed. Moreover, an epistemological stance was discussed, followed by the sampling and population size, data collection and analysis methods. A qualitative design, with a post-positivist paradigm, purposive, non-probability sample and semi-structured interviews were the methods selected to ensure rich and thick data and the objectives of the research project were achieved. It was of utmost importance to apply and select the best suitable research design, methodology, strategy, and philosophy which produced relevant and eloquent findings.

Inclusion and exclusion criteria equally imperative requirements were clearly indicated, and conflict of interest was addressed accordingly by the principal investigator as an active, enrolled MBA student. The purpose and implications of trustworthiness and rigour in research are explicitly emphasised as ethical considerations. Effective application of the methods, techniques and compliance with the ethical requirements can successfully lead to addressing the primary aim of the research, which is a unique, constructed well-being programme or initiative to support the well-being of MBA students of UFS Business school. In the subsequent chapter four, the key themes, insights and findings are presented.

CHAPTER 4 : DATA ANALYSIS, FINDINGS AND INTERPRETATION

4.1 Introduction

In this chapter, the analysis of the data attained from the semi-structured interviews conducted with MBA-enrolled participants and the interpretation of their responses will be provided.

Importantly, the primary objective was to identify the well-being needs of Master of Business Administration (MBA) students at the University of Free State (UFS). The secondary research questions that were specifically applicable to the data analysis are:

- What are the existing well-being support structures for MBA students at the UFS?
- What are the MBA students' well-being needs beyond the existing services the University of Free State provides, to have better well-being?

A principal intention of this chapter is also to delve deeper into the rich data collected by use of coding and thematic analysis in NVivo 14, to detect the patterns, themes and core findings. A detailed process of the 6-step thematic analysis is discussed in detail under Section B: Data Analysis, Findings and Interpretation. By so doing, the MBA student perspective and lived experiences related to well-being is presented.

For data accuracy and transcription, demographic information was collected using a password-protected Google form, and the interviews were recorded via the Microsoft Teams platform. Informed consent forms were signed and collected, accompanied by the completed demographic information form, before the start of each interview session conducted.

The subsequent sections will focus on presenting Section A, a Demographic profile of participants and Section B, the analysis, interpretation and findings.

4.2 Section A: Demographic Profile of MBA Participants

In this section, the demographic profile of the MBA participants is presented. Table 4.1 below showcases the list of participants' demographic details, including the employment level and years of experience of the interviewed participants.

Table 4.1: Demographic Profile of Participants

Participant ID	Gender	Age	Employment Level	Years of Experience in employment or business
1	Male	25-34 years	Executive/Top Management	11-15 years
2	Male	45-54 years	Manager/Supervisor - Junior Management	16-20 years
3	Female	35-44 years	Manager/Supervisor - Junior Management	21 years and above
4	Male	45-54 years	Senior Management/Middle Management	21 years and above
5	Female	25-34 years	Senior Management/Middle Management	11-15 years
6	Female	35-44 years	Senior Management/Middle Management	11-15 years
7	Female	35-44 years	Owner/Director in my business	11-15 years
8	Female	35-44 years	Manager/Supervisor - Junior Management	11-15 years
9	Female	45-54 years	Executive/Top Management	16-20 years
10	Female	25-34 years	Senior Management/Middle Management	6-10 years
11	Male	35-44 years	Senior Management/Middle Management	11-15 years
12	Male	45-54 years	Senior Management/Middle Management	21 years and above
13	Female	35-44 years	Senior Management/Middle Management	16-20 years
14	Female	35-44 years	Manager/Supervisor - Junior Management	11-15 years

The primary reasons for the demographic profile analysis and presentation are, first, to verify adherence to the inclusion criteria, which was participants should be between the ages of 25-65. Secondly, the population attributes such as years of experience, gender and employment level are highlighted, which will aid greatly in drawing from the various participant experiences and knowledge related to the topic of the field study.

From the table, it is evident that most of the participants were females. Furthermore, the years of experience of MBA students indicates that most have above 11 years of work experience in Senior Management/Middle Management or Manager/Supervisor - Junior Management levels in the respective organisations.

A few of the participants are self-employed as directors and shareholders in their businesses. In the next section, the data collected will be analysed and interpreted to address the research question of this research project.

4.3 Section B: Data Analysis, Findings and Interpretation

4.3.1 Overview

The phenomenological study aimed to understand, in a better way, the lived experiences of Master of Business Administration students and the distinct nuances they have encountered pertaining to their overall well-being within the MBA program. Data analysis is central to qualitative research, as this pertains to the interpretation of the collected data to create meaningful insights into the respective data. Thematic analysis was thus utilised to identify, analyse, and report the prominent themes generated within the data. Five themes were identified.

The researcher followed the six steps of thematic analysis, namely *(1) gathering data and becoming familiarised with the concepts related to the research question and how these concepts relate to each other, (2) identifying preliminary data codes that correspond across the collected data, (3) outlining and organising the most critical findings and patterns into different coherent themes, (4) refining and connecting the most appropriate themes, (5) structuring and naming the themes concerning the research question, and (6) producing the thematic analysis report* (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

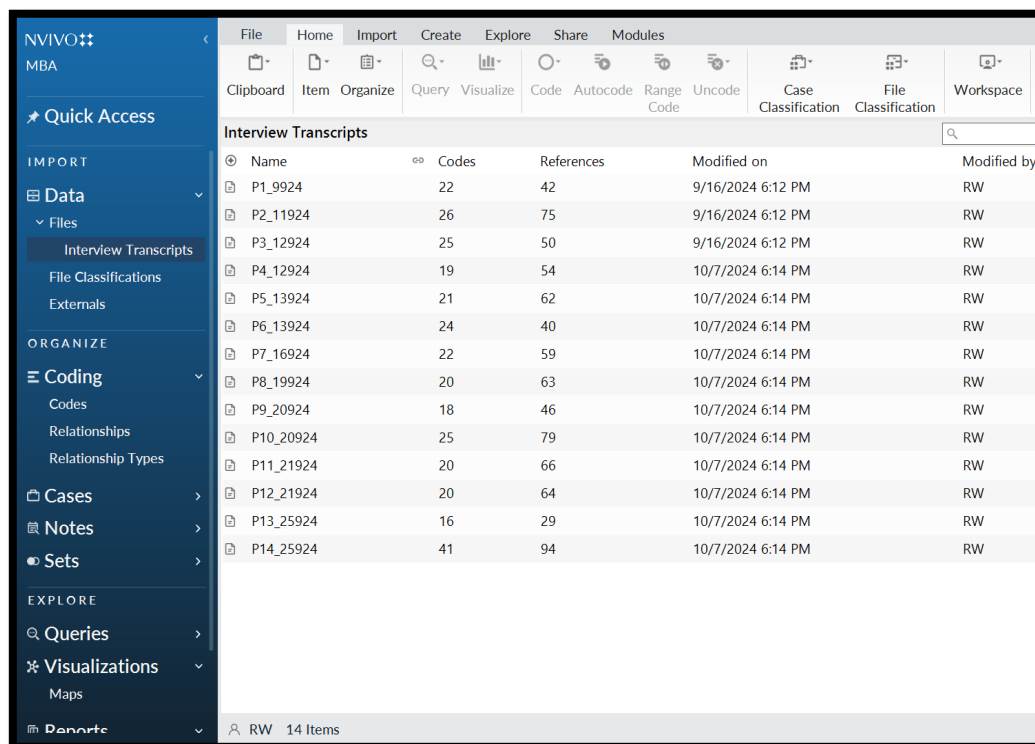
4.3.1.1 Steps of Thematic Analysis

Prior to uploading the interview transcripts in NVivo 14, below are the initial activities the researcher actioned:

Cleaning and Preprocessing of Data: Each transcript had to be verbatim transcribed and saved in the new, updated version in preparation for NVivo analysis.

Ensure participant anonymity and confidentiality: The researcher removed all participant names and references made to support academic staff to comply with POPIA and research ethics.

Uploaded cleaned and unidentifiable transcripts: A total of 14 transcripts were uploaded for analysis. Below is Figure 4.1 depicts the interview transcripts uploaded in NVivo for analysis



Name	Codes	References	Modified on	Modified by
P1_9924	22	42	9/16/2024 6:12 PM	RW
P2_11924	26	75	9/16/2024 6:12 PM	RW
P3_12924	25	50	9/16/2024 6:12 PM	RW
P4_12924	19	54	10/7/2024 6:14 PM	RW
P5_13924	21	62	10/7/2024 6:14 PM	RW
P6_13924	24	40	10/7/2024 6:14 PM	RW
P7_16924	22	59	10/7/2024 6:14 PM	RW
P8_19924	20	63	10/7/2024 6:14 PM	RW
P9_20924	18	46	10/7/2024 6:14 PM	RW
P10_20924	25	79	10/7/2024 6:14 PM	RW
P11_21924	20	66	10/7/2024 6:14 PM	RW
P12_21924	20	64	10/7/2024 6:14 PM	RW
P13_25924	16	29	10/7/2024 6:14 PM	RW
P14_25924	41	94	10/7/2024 6:14 PM	RW

Figure 4.1: Interview Transcripts in Nvivo

a) Familiarisation with the Data

This first step involves a need for immersion in the data to comprehend the breadth and applicability of the data. In this study, semi-structured interviews conducted by the

researcher determined the relevance of the step through experiences of students about wellbeing for the MBA study.

According to Braun and Clark (2006), this first step in the process involves data transcribing where needed and continuous reading to note and document initial suggestions. The researcher also familiarized himself with the information provided by the students and their responses for identifying the background of their difficulties and what was needed to enhance their general well-being.

In this phase, the researcher only read responses from the first five interviews to get a sense of the data and how the participants perceive well-being in general.

b) Generating Initial Codes

At this stage, the researchers code the data by identifying from the participant's responses specific codes that seem interesting (Braun & Clark, 2006). The data is simply broken down into manageable sections. Code the students' responses by highlighting recurring phrases, keywords, or sentiments related to well-being. For each of these developed codes, the researcher brought forth the relations and references against the responses made by participants on the questions asked during the interview. For example, codes might include "academic pressure" or "work-life balance.", with actual examples provided below of each code respectively.

***Participant 10:** But I think it's just the pressure of having to meet the deadlines, maybe been closing the sometimes the tightness of the schedule in and looking at how like the days in between exams where you'd be writing on a Monday, the other one is on a Wednesday. – Academic Pressure*

***Participant 12:** I do try to maintain a work-life balance, although it is really, really tough. – Work-life balance*

No containers were created in NVivo at this stage. The researcher initially created broad codes in line with the research's primary objective. An interpretation-focused coding strategy was employed, where relevant words and concepts were extracted and interpreted, followed by labelling/categorising of each code. A total of 95 codes were generated from the 14 files. In Figure 4.2 below, a number of the initially generated codes in NVivo is presented.

The screenshot shows the NVivo software interface. On the left is a navigation pane with categories like 'Data', 'Coding', 'Cases', 'Notes', 'Sets', 'Queries', 'Visualizations', and 'Reports'. The main window displays a table of generated codes. The table has three columns: 'Name', 'Files', and 'References'. The data is as follows:

Name	Files	References
Equilibrium (Work-Life Balance)	14	56
Research	14	52
Time Management	13	40
Support	12	60
Academic Pressure	11	41
Job (Workload)	11	22
Relationships	10	34
Communication	10	38
Exercise	8	16
Achievement	8	18
Resilience	8	23
Counselling	8	10
Burnout	8	22
Spiritual Connection	7	16
Stressful Environment	7	26
Technology	7	15
Group Dynamics	7	21
Strategic Planning	6	9
Supervision	6	10

Figure 4.2: Generating Codes in Nvivo

c) Searching for Themes

After coding, the researchers search for broader patterns in data. It is the step where grouping codes are done into probable themes (Braun & Clark 2006). The codes developed initially are grouped into themes representing the overall sentiments or experiences of the targeted group of MBA students. The researcher reviewed all developed codes and grouped associated codes to develop themes for discussion.

The research questions were used as a guide for the initial themes. Containers for each research question were created, and the codes generated were aligned with themes through a drag-and-drop exercise. The themes were categorised as follows:

- (RQ 1) Wellbeing Support
- (RQ 2) MBA Student Needs for Better Wellbeing by the Institution
- (RQ 3) Specific wellbeing needs not offered by the Institution

Subsequently, figure 4.3 highlights the three initial themes generated in NVivo, as alluded to above.

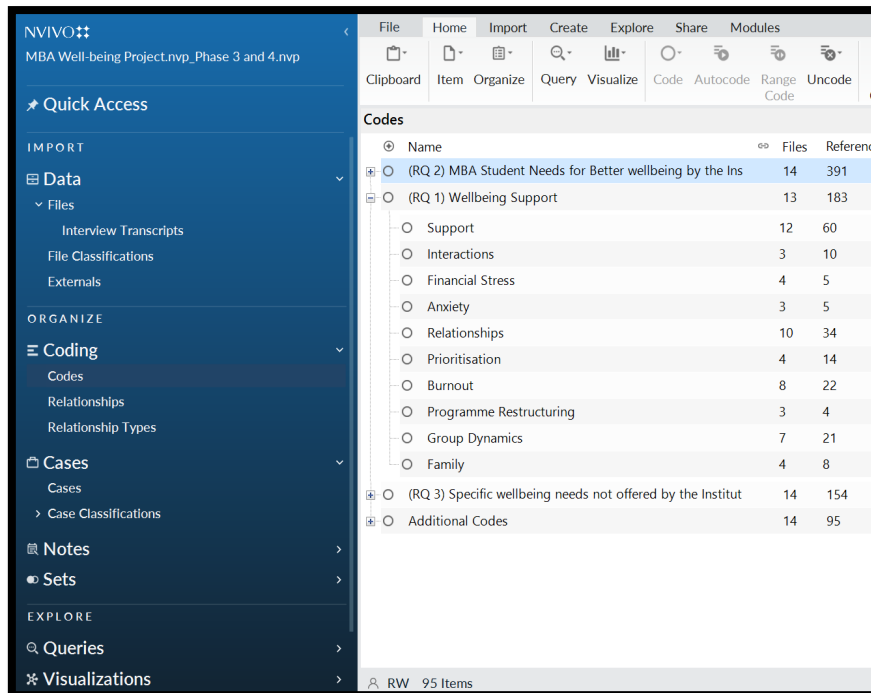


Figure 4.3: Searching for Themes

d) Reviewing Themes

This step involves refining the themes to ensure they accurately reflect the data and are coherent. It often requires checking back with the coded data to ensure no significant themes are overlooked. Review themes in the context of the collected data. In this step, the researcher identified all the pertinent themes that are related to well-being and reviewed them to check the correlation with the generated codes from the data that was collected from participants' responses.

The researcher reviewed all the codes under each theme to ensure alignment and the additional findings file/container, as indicated in Figure 4.3, just to verify if significant information was not omitted.

e) Defining and Naming Themes

Here, researchers define what each theme is and what the aspect of the data it captures. Names are given to each theme clearly and concisely. Clearly state what each theme means with regard to well-being. At this stage, the researcher looked, for example, at Support and Needs as the main themes, with multiple subthemes assigned to each theme. None of the codes under additional findings contributed to

the three research questions of the study. Figure 4.4, Defining and Naming Themes, depicts the five main themes generated from the initial themes and codes.

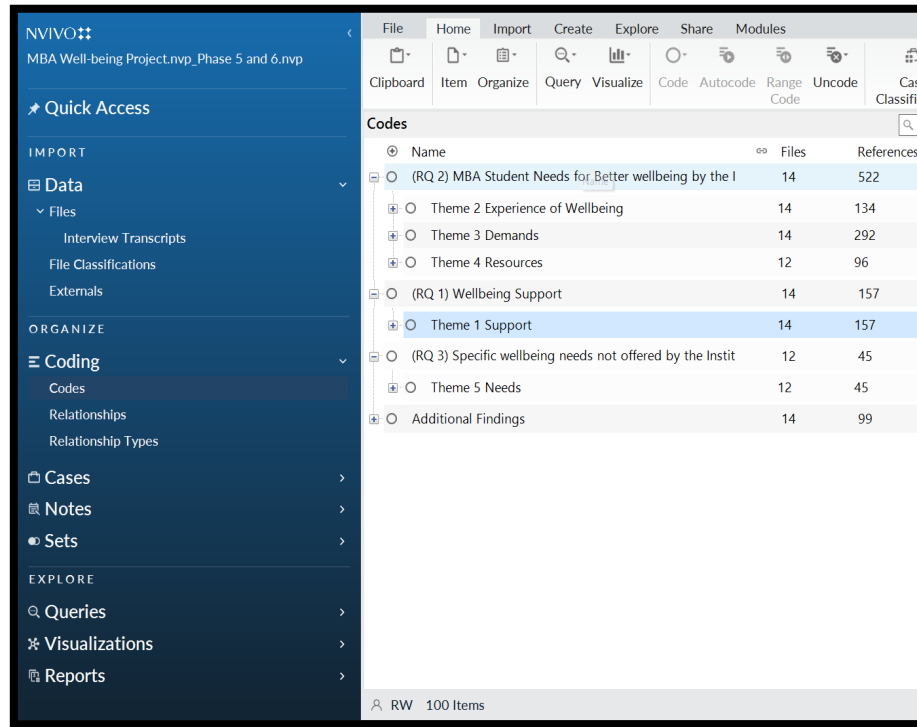


Figure 4.4: Defining and Naming Themes

For a detailed summary of codes and themes extracted from NVivo, refer to APPENDIX F.

f) Producing the Report

The last step is to assemble the themes so that a clear story of the data can be told. This step involves the quotes supporting the themes and complex, written findings, and the output of the final analysis is derived from the researcher himself (Braun and Clarke, 2006). At the final stage of thematic analysis, direct quotes from participants were used to elaborate on points, such as how peer support contributes to resilience and academic success.

From this, the research will then be able to offer insight into the lives of MBA students by helping develop a caring environment that addresses their academic and personal success.

The section below presents the resonating themes about the literature and data collected from respondents. The identified themes were existing well-being support structures for MBA students at the UFS, what MBA students need to assist them in order to have improved well-being and the well-being needs of MBA students beyond existing services offered by the University of Free State. The identified themes and sub-themes are discussed next

4.4 Conclusion

In conclusion, the data analysis and interpretations in Chapter 4 provide essential insights into the experiences of MBA students at the University of the Free State (UFS) through five principal themes: **Experience of Well-being:** Many students reported varying levels of well-being, influenced by their ability to balance academic and personal lives, suggesting a need for enhanced support systems. **Demands:** The rigorous academic environment presents considerable demands, leading to stress and time management challenges that students must navigate effectively. **Support:** Students mentioned that a need for academic and emotional support from other peers and staff would provide a great contribution to one's coping and continuing in college. **Resources:** The availability of resources like study materials and counselling services shapes students' academic life and well-being. **Needs:** The identification of unmet needs suggests that it is incumbent upon the institution to ascertain such areas to enable the facilitation of a more supportive learning environment with regard to the provision of, for example, guidance on careers or mental health.

Altogether, the findings clearly postulate that MBA students' well-being needs must be considered for programme enhancement, potentially leading to a competitive advantage for the Business School by becoming increasingly student-centric, in line with Vision 130, which will be thoroughly discussed in subsequent Chapter 5, Recommendations and Conclusions.

4.3.2 Well-being Themes and Subthemes

Table 4.2 below provides a summary of the identified themes based on the analysis of the interview data.

Table 4.2: A Summary of Themes and Subthemes

THEMES	SUBTHEMES
Experience of Well-being	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Well-being and Mental wellbeing ➤ Coping mechanisms ➤ Stress and support
Demands	<p>Academic demands</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Workload and rigour ➤ Research and Supervision ➤ Peer competition ➤ High expectations <p>Job demands</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Job demands and workload <p>Other demands</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Time management ➤ Work-Life Balance
Support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Emotional support ➤ Sense of belonging ➤ Institutional support ➤ Programme (admin staff) support, Peer support and social relationships ➤ Family support ➤ Work support
Resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Information Technology ➤ Communication ➤ Collaboration and peer learning
Needs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Well-being Services ➤ Mentorship ➤ Engagement

4.3.2.1 Theme 1: Experience of Well-being

The focus on well-being has increasingly become imperative in institutions of higher learning, especially among graduate studies such as the Master of Business Administration at the University of the Free State. Students go through different levels of stressors associated with pursuing their studies that eventually affect their performance. Well-being is investigated to mean subtle comprehension of personal experiences, feelings, and support networks that are important in the development of the student's life (John et al., 2018).

It would thus be argued that their MBA experience of well-being might be multifaceted, with academic pressures, personal aspirations, and the social environment all making their mark. A well-structured support system for well-being would also try to enhance their experiences by having good mental, emotional, and social well-being (Backhaus et al., 2020).

When examining the subthemes that are related to one another in the major theme of experience of well-being stress, coping mechanism, well-being, and mental well-being- the researcher has sequenced the themes in order based upon their relationship to one another. The description of each subtheme and the rationale behind their sequencing is as follows: Stress acts as a type of initial stimulus in this chain of cause and effect. These sources of stress can range from work and relationships right down to the daily challenges faced in life. The concept of stress, therefore, becomes such an important factor in understanding because it develops into depression, which affects not just the emotional state but the physical health of an individual as well. We can talk about the beginning of addressing this theme, which gives the scene in understanding challenges faced by individuals.

Coping mechanisms are the different ways people actively operate to reduce and regulate stress. This theme is important in that it captures what people make in active strategies against their stressors. In this regard, coping mechanisms can be adaptive, such as exercise and mindfulness, or maladaptive, which includes substance use. By looking at these coping mechanisms, we will be in a better position to understand how individuals could generally relate to stress and use various instruments in doing so.

Coping mechanisms leading to well-being and mental well-being: we introduce in this section the theme of well-being and mental well-being that hosts a wider view of life

satisfaction and quality of life. Well-being is not merely defined as the absence of stress but also entails positive experiences and fulfilment. Under this subtheme, we can draw out how more effective coping mechanisms may be developed that lead to improvements in overall well-being. The sub-theme of being in good mental shape further elaborates on the importance of the mind towards a life of wellness. It creates awareness and the need for measures of precautionary practice in order to keep the mind sound.

These subthemes are organized in such a way that they create a logical flow, somehow similar to the journey from stress to well-being. Every subtheme is linked with the previous one and allows the researcher to learn about how stress affects the life of the student, the ways of coping, and finally, how these contribute to well-being. This clears the relationship of these subthemes and thus allows readers to reflect on their personal experiences with the emergence of stress and how vital the maintenance of their well-being is.

Subtheme 1: Stress

Stress is a pervasive element in the life of an MBA student, often stemming from academic expectations, time management challenges, and balancing personal commitments. Studies highlight that the level of stress experienced can significantly vary based on individual coping mechanisms and available support systems (Elias et al., 2011).

Participant 11: *As much as you love your family and coworkers and friends, there's, they're not going through the same stresses, and demands like the syndicate that you're in.*

Participant 12: *Adds to the stress and anxiety, and of course, the general mood of a person, of a person. I'm talking about myself now. I think starting the MBA and then being put into a group of other members was quite stressful, alright.*

Participant 2: *I think I can say I've encountered program stress rather than job stress*

Participant 7: *And then, uhm, another difficulty that I encountered during my, you know, since I registered for my MBA was just financial difficulties as well, where I was struggling to pay my tuition, and I didn't know where to go to get some help or advice. That also really affected me mentally because, you know, as you would know if you're studying. You're having financial problems, you know it isn't easy to deliver as a student or actually finances obviously affect every part of your life.*

Participant 12: *Also, for those who are paying for their own studies, I think once again, a reality check of do your financial forecasting and make sure that it fits into your financial plan at that can cause a lot of financial stress.*

Participant 14: *So yeah, stress-related work is work-related stress is quite, is quite real, and it exists. And yeah, and then it does lead to burnout, unfortunately.*

Financial support, peer support, and access to counselling services are critical in alleviating stress. Understanding how students perceive and utilize these support systems is vital for developing effective interventions (Yuhuan et al., 2022). As a result, the voices and experiences of students can inform the development of strategies that not only mitigate stress but also cultivate a thriving, supportive environment conducive to both academic success and personal growth (Wilks & Spivey, 2010).

Subtheme 2: Coping mechanisms

Identifying strategies that students employ to cope with stress and maintain balance, such as mindfulness practices, physical activities, or social engagement, can inform institutional support initiatives (Feldt et al., 2013).

Moreover, Ding et al. (2021) distinguish between two coping strategies, namely Adaptive and Maladaptive strategies. Adaptive strategies are positive ways to aid in managing stress and to enhance holistic well-being i.e., adequate sleep, constant exercise and joyful activities. In contrast, maladaptive strategies refer to temporary, ineffective and destructive strategies such as refusal, avoidance and unhealthy habits like substance abuse.

Adaptive coping strategies are constructive and effective ways of managing stress. These strategies promote psychological well-being and help individuals deal with problems in a healthy manner (Gratz & Roemer, 2004). Characteristics problem-focused directly addressing the stressor, for example, problem-solving and seeking information. Emotion-focused, regulating emotions associated with stress, for example, seeking social support and practising mindfulness (Hayes et al., 1999).

In contrast, maladaptive coping strategies are ineffective responses to stress that can exacerbate problems or create new issues. These methods may provide temporary relief but often lead to negative long-term consequences. Characteristics, avoidance ignoring the stressor or denying its existence. Substance use relies on drugs or alcohol to escape from stress (Carver et al., 1989; Folkman & Lazarus, 1980).

Participant 10: *Sometimes getting a helper, you know I needed to get a helper to be able to cope with certain things. You know what can another person say apart from what I'm thinking and how I'm trying to cope with life in general, while I also have this to deal with.*

Participant 5: *I think there's a very big element of the fact that your mental health or your mental stability needs to be very strong for you to be able to also progress with the degree, in addition to balancing everything else in your life.*

Participant 8: *And then the other coping mechanism, I think the other one is I try to fit in my social life when it gets too much, then I know I need to see a friend you know.*

Participant 2: *Where I felt like it's getting too much and I can't cope with everything, and I had to cut some of the modules, not complete some for that semester, and then I thought I'll do them later on. Be realistic about your personal life, your work environment and your coping mechanism for MBA.*

Participant 13: *The fact that a person actually has to go on to prescribed medication just to be able to get through the day,*

Participant 11: *I think time definitely is a common denominator right through all of them. I've seen in my professional capacity that my production has decreased. And working with, you know, looking at my previous years, year*

on year growth and stability that that I have, time is definitely it's been an impact on my professional side.

Coping styles applied forecast psychological distress, poor correction, and coping to result in dissatisfactory academic performance among students (Cherkil et al., 2013). Pandya et al. (2012) in their research stated that the high prevalence of depression, anxiety and stress symptoms among MBA students is alarming.

Interestingly, responses from participants under this subtheme all point to adaptive strategies employed by MBA students through the reduction of modules enrolled, social activities, and support in the form of domestic services. However, one participant, 13, refers to the application of maladaptive strategies through prescribed medication to cope with the demands of the programme, which is very dangerous and highly ineffective in the long run from a health perspective.

This paper also highlights academic and psychological stressors that impact MBA students' performances. Researchers study the complexities of balancing work, personal, and academic responsibilities to add to knowledge about the challenges MBA students face and help in strategizing how to support their success and overall well-being. In sum, this theme encourages the development of an increasingly effective learning environment, better tailored to meet the needs of MBA participants, in addition to enhancing academic debate. Literature related to coping strategies often suggests that these can be usefully differentiated into adaptive and maladaptive categories as a function of their specific impacts on psychological well-being. Studies suggest that maladaptive coping is linked to higher levels of psychological distress, poor physical health, and an increased risk of developing mental health disorders (Wadsworth, 2015).

Various factors, including personality, social support, and the nature of the stressor, can influence the choice between adaptive and maladaptive strategies. Interventions aimed at promoting adaptive coping strategies, such as cognitive-behavioural therapy (CBT), have been effective in helping individuals develop healthier coping mechanisms (Wadsworth, 2015).

Subtheme 3: Well-being and mental well-being

Students experience increased levels of anxiety, depression, and burnout due to academic pressure. Many students report feeling anxious and stressed, which can negatively affect their mental well-being. Studies from various countries have indicated that the well-being and mental health of students appear to be under pressure (Backhaus et al., 2020).

This was evident from the following participants:

Participant 7: *For me, I think well-being is actually central to, you know, the entire journey as an MBA student because you have so many things to juggle between school, work, your job and family as well.*

Participant 13: *Have anxiety is a massive, massive thing that a student is faced with and need to make peace with and accept.*

Participant 4: *I personally I think well-being encompasses a few things. It's about my my mental health, it's about my physical health, it's my psychological health, and it's about how I feel on a daily basis.*

Participant 7: *So, anything in those things that are that we have responsibilities in can actually affect you mentally, it can affect you emotionally.*

The pressure to perform can lead to stress and burnout. Understanding how students prioritise well-being amidst their academic pursuits is essential for fostering a supportive educational environment (Dopmeijer, 2021). According to Douwes et al. (2023), studies report that a substantial number of students in higher education are dealing with well-being issues such as psychological and emotional distress, feelings of anxiety and depression, and an increased risk of burnout.

For this reason, the student perspective indicates that well-being is a holistic sensation that requires nurturing daily. It is not only physical or mental well-being that matters but all the whole aspects that relate to the well-being of a person in totality, as alluded to by Participant 4.

4.3.2.2 Theme 2: Demands

In the context of higher education, particularly within Master of Business Administration (MBA) programs, student well-being is increasingly recognised as a critical factor influencing academic success and overall life satisfaction (Hossain et al., 2023). These demands from the MBA student are multidimensional and include academic, time pressures, and personal and professional development.

Besides, the demands involved are of three types: Academic, Job, and Other demands. These categories are segregated to make it clear which particular demands exert the most amount of pressure on MBA students.

Academic demands include five sub-themes, which are workload and rigour, research, high expectations, peer competition and achievement, as well as performance.

The overarching theme emerged since most participants referred to the above-mentioned academic demands. The second subtheme, job demands, will provide further insight into the pressures and demands coming from the employment perspective, which greatly affect well-being. Finally, the other demand's theme touches on the time-management factor and the work-life balance predicament that most MBA students are finding themselves in. This will be further supported through a detailed discussion and quotes, as required, with their needed interpretation.

Academic demands

The broader subtheme of academic pressures and structures to support the well-being of UFS MBA students underlines a link between hard academic pressures and available supportive channels put in place in a bid to promote student well-being. Rigorous curriculum: The phenomenon of rigorous curricula remains common in all MBA programs, given that the curriculum covers areas such as finance, marketing, data analytics, and strategic management, among many other aspects (Bedewy & Gabriel, 2015).

This rigorous coursework can, therefore, induce a lot of stress and anxiety in students as they try to balance academic excellence with personal commitments.

The issue of well-being at work has been, for some time now, assuming a most recent era of importance since this is a fundamental factor relating to overall employee

satisfaction and productivity, and intention to stay. First, the heavy workload and time pressure university employees are often confronted with a heavy workload. Most staff have various responsibilities, like teaching, research, administrative tasks, student support, and community service. This pressure to meet deadlines and achieve academic perfection can raise stress levels and reduce well-being (Corpuz, 2023).

Subtheme 1: Workload and Rigour

Students become overwhelmed with a very demanding curriculum that includes heavy case studies, group projects, and testing. This is further compounded by the expectations to balance networking, internships, and academic responsibilities.

Participants in this study generally alluded that little lenience or empathy is granted to MBA students in the workplace. Similarly, there are pressures at the workplace where expectations and key performance indicators need to be achieved, while having to manage people with diverse personalities and backgrounds.

Importantly, support from the employer is regarded as critically vital, which leads to burnout if there is none is provided. In addition, performance at work decreased for some of the participants mainly due to the pursuit and desire to obtain an MBA degree. Interestingly, there are business owner demands, and workload challenges faced by participants, however, partners and spouses as co-owners do play a crucial role in ensuring business continuity. In contrast, the MBA content had a positive impact related to career advancement amidst the daily pressures in the workplace, thus highlighting the value added to personal and professional growth.

Participant 1: *You have a high workload either at work*

Participant 12: *Right at work, I think that the challenge that I experience is the pressures, the work doesn't get less. I think as an MBA student, there isn't a lot of compassion for you at a in a working environment. They still expecting you to deliver on the same results or more.*

Let's start from a working perspective, the demands are, of course, my KPIs. I have to achieve my KPIs irrespective. And it's a standard every month. Another demand is that I am a people manager, and I've got 15 people

reporting to me. I also have to manage each of those personalities and make sure that they achieve their KPIs, which rolls into mine.

Participant 13: *that they be honest with you about the ups and their downs, and you know it's two years go for us quickly, but it's two years off, quite intense work and sacrifice.*

It's, they need to realize the full reality, and you can't do your job 100% if you're an MBA student as well, it's impossible. You need to be honest with yourself, knowing that you're not going to be able to deliver the quality of work that you usually would have done at your workplace.

Participant 14: *So, from a work perspective, so it work does contribute to the to the burnout, especially if you don't have the support. With me, with my two roles that I changed from, it was one of those things. It was. I had a very I had a lot of stress, a work-related stress, which then poured into my MBA, poured into my life as well,*

Participant 4: *however, besides me being a father and, a husband and an employee, and I also have my personal businesses. That demands of me that in most cases, if I'm not if when I knock off on Friday, on a Saturday, Sunday, I'm busy looking at my business interest, which are very, very demanding for example, I own a bakery business which is in Limpopo. Sometimes, I have to drive a Limpopo. I own a pharmacy around Gauteng, which is about 100 kilometres from my home. So, I think those are the other things.*

Participant 5: *There was a lot that was needed for me from work, and obviously, there is pressure with the MBA.*

Participant 7: *You know, any help that I can get from my partner as well my husband. And then, with regards to work, because I work with my husband, it is easy for me to most of the responsibilities that I may not be able to attend to at work. He is able to cover for me.*

From an interpretation perspective, the MBA programme clearly adds pressure from a work viewpoint. It has often been reported that the intense workloads of MBA programs lead to a decrease in well-being and, hence, to burnout and job-related stress; when no employer support is given, it affects work performance holistically.

Managing businesses as owners while undergoing the MBA also carries its problems with regard to juggling the demands, delegation, and support where given.

Knowledge and value acquired during the MBA expose students to career growth and development opportunities. This becomes a tangible way of return on investment in earnings, time, and effort. In sum, the work for the MBA, in addition to the job workload is clearly heavy and hectic over the two years and requires support from either the employer or spouse/ partner that may influence well-being and coping, addressed separately in the previous theme. The second subtheme addresses research as part of the academic demands.

Subtheme 2: Research and Supervision

Undertaking a research project can be a daunting experience for students, probably because of the requirement to adopt an academic stance while undertaking the project, which is intended to be practice-based.

The role of mentorship, as part of the supervision, is critical in the enhancement of success and everlasting impact on MBA graduates' well-being. In contrast, the relationship between students and supervisors can be detrimental, and some participants alluded to the need for mentorship and perhaps a change to the word supervision. Additionally, time for proper engagement with supervisors during the research project was deemed a necessary consideration because of the iteration that comes with the journey.

Postgraduate learners in HEIs have supervisory requirements, which is the form of academic support given to students by supervisors. Those needs include mentoring, nurturing and guiding. Wiegman (2013) claims that by its nature, supervision is technically mentoring. The supervision definition cited sheds light on the all-inclusive nature of supervision, which connects supervision with mentoring (Chamberlain, 2016).

More than just guiding research, super-vision also addresses assistance in the provision of personal and professional life management which directly impacts postgraduate students' research study performance (Ali et al., 2016). It is very important to highlight that supervisor feedback is crucial, as it plays a pivotal role with

regard to supporting postgraduate students' learning and development throughout the academic field study journey (Saleem & Mehmood, 2018).

Mullins (2018) stipulates that over the past four decades, there have been a reasonable number of studies on the challenges associated with research, as well as suggestions on how to encourage students to become more engaged and less anxious while undertaking their research projects. Data interpretation in Chapter 4 of the research project was perceived to be easy until practical application was required. Not only that but also the ethical clearance process, as part of the prerequisites in the project, created unintended stress for participants. Thus, research is regarded as totally different, especially in terms of demands and support needed, i.e., mentorship or extension of the research duration for MBA students.

Participant 6: *Yeah. So, I'm stuck in a rock and a hard place, and that's why I've applied for continuation now for next year for my research because I doubt I will have everything in which is even more detrimental for me emotionally cause it's not in within my timeline, so I need to make peace with that.*

Also, I would appreciate that when students are allocated supervisors for the research in the MBA program that, there is a preliminary assessment of the relationship between the supervisor and the supervisee. I have realized in a number of occasions where they are failing, relations between supervisor supervisees at an early stage and then the students only become the victims in the end or the sour relationship they have had with their supervisors.

Participant 1: *And there was that curveball that came in from the research module.*

Participant 5: *I think that applied a lot of pressure and also kind of, I would say, impacted the balance of my well-being because it's a different kind of module as opposed to what we're used to. So, balancing that research, along with everything else has been, I think, something that in this year, I've kind of had to grapple with a lot.*

Participant 10: *So yeah, school-wise, it's research. You know where you are now having to do the analysis of the data that has been collected. And one thing in that chapter four and five would be the easiest and you realize that interpretation of data is not as easy as it you thought it is.*

Probably, maybe, when we look into the research aspect of things and how we then deal with our research and now as having to deal with the pressure of having to submit and meeting deadlines.

Perhaps they could look into allowing students to start their research proposal a year before, where this module of the first six months, you are working as a group, and then you'll break into it and announce that you're new research proposal.

So yeah, like the full year just being allocated to you doing your research, not the first six months, now it makes it one year, six months of research while on paper is just a 12-month module that could be beneficial, particularly to the MBA students.

Participant 11: *The dissertation side again is a is a problem for me in the sense that I am struggling to maintain, to be resilient and be optimally focused, to get through this.*

I think, I think mentorship support would definitely, and I'm not just referring to what I've been discussing the whole time about the dissertation.

There is situations where think that just a little bit of more administrative assistance when it comes to the normal even flows on dissertation over the studies.

And that's why, in the previous question, I said, well, the big enhancement would be mentorship, that's not just there for an academic small portion of dissertation, but actually have a mentor to walk with you and through this whole process, by keeping you accountable for certain things and checking in on you, you know, on a regular basis.

Participant 12: *Another one is of course having, going through your scientific review and your ethical clearance. Scientific review was quite smooth. Ethical clearance, specifically, I think I was on the doorstep of Tara or Weskoppies a few times. It is a really, stressful.*

I think that role definition between mentor and academic supervisor we should be going away from supervisor and rather call it academic mentor because that supervisor for me already puts me in a lower level than my supervisor,

and what I experience in my own life with my academic supervisor is that mindset that I am your supervisor may treat you like a work supervisor.

You will do this. This is this. This is the deadline. No exception. And that for me didn't sit well, so maybe changing that to mentorship will help change the mindset of the academic supervisor and be a little bit more supportive during the process.

Participant 14: *So, I think one instead of try starting the research in the second semester. Start the research at the beginning, when you when we starting with our coursework in the first semester. Introduce research at that time as well.*

Participant 9: *I think for me, I felt it mostly this year 2024, because that's when I did the research project and still have coursework. So. So I would say mostly definitely add a research project most definitely.*

Do not offer coursework the same year that you offer in research. The fieldwork, the research, it's intense on its own, especially majority of us. We first time doing research in this way.

So the amount of time that we take, and the speed is not as fast as somebody that has done research previously. So, there's still understanding where you need to read, refer, understand the terminologies and how you go about and conduct this research.

It's managing the relationship with the supervisor getting that feedback. Ability to work on the feedback. Take it back. You get the back and forth, and the timing is so short.

I'm at research stage, and the back and forth with the supervisor and the corrections and the assignments, and you look at the time we're sitting now, almost the end of September.

A time extension of the research duration, more support from supervisors in the form of mentorship and meeting coursework and mini-dissertation deadlines were some of the challenges referred to and experienced by MBA students. Extreme focus and readiness of students prior to embarking on the research project, are additional need areas highlighted by participants.

With a particular focus on qualitative research approaches, Cassell (2018) discussed the challenges faced by over 200 MBA students in conducting their business and management research. Cassell (2018) demonstrated the need for students to develop the knowledge, skills and competences required for undertaking qualitative research, which can be used for effective management practice. Altogether, improved support is highlighted by MBA students as a need, which will be discussed later in themes 3 and 5 of the chapter.

Subtheme 3: Peer Competition and Achievement

Students in MBA schools are usually accomplished persons. Anxiety and tension can be exacerbated by the competitive environment, which can result in peers constantly comparing themselves. Goal setting and being realistic are some suggestions participants granted as part of the journey to attain the MBA degree. For this reason, programme extension, like the research project duration extension discussed in the previous subtheme, was postulated by participants. Subsequently, the quotes to substantiate the former are showcased.

Participant 12: *I think the second years been flawless, but in the first year trying to get people to submit on time, managing those personalities, that was really, really stressful.*

Participant 4: *If you are able to achieve for example, the work that you do within six months and on a 24-month program, it can be sometime, it can be the extension of an MBA.*

I think having to have a goal specifically with regard to studies, I knew that I wanted an MBA. I had heard how hectic it is, but I was not, personally, I did not personally knew how hectic it can be until I've been there.

Participant 2: *Well, my advice can be, be realistic. We all want to achieve. We all want to grow, but be realistic about your personal life, your work environment and your coping mechanism for MBA.*

When I'm done with my work, I'll go back to my other things, I'll go back to my studies because, at the end of the day, you want to succeed as a employee.

I know what I want. I want to complete my MBA, and I know that I can fulfil certain things, but I do my best to reach what I can reach.

Participant 1: *the deliverables right within your role and your function, and from a personal point of view, its achieving more.*

Participant 14: *I'm now in the consulting space because someone believes that because I have an MBA and I've had this experience that I have, I could lead their company to greener pastures, right? So it's knowing why I'm doing it. It's also knowing what it can do for me.*

Interpreting the subtheme of peer competition within the context of support structures for MBA students at the University of the Free State (UFS) involves examining the dynamics of competition among peers, the need to obtain the degree even with an extended timeline and how the institution's support systems either mitigate or exacerbate these dynamics. Considering students' happiness and well-being supports the positivity of the learning environment and assists in enhancing students' academic success at the university level (Moussa & Ali, 2022).

The impact of peer competition and the 24-month minimum required duration on mental well-being, stress, and well-being necessitates that intense peer competition and demanding, pressured timelines can negatively impact mental health well-being, leading to burnout. Support structures that include counselling services and mental health resources are crucial to addressing peer competition that can adversely affect the overall well-being of MBA students to a greater degree (Topping, 2022).

Lastly, the participant refers to the SMART acronym, linked to goal setting being realistic regard the demands and timelines of the programme. MBA candidates should always incorporate this basic advice, and the next subtheme to be discussed will perhaps uncover the interconnection between competition, achievement and high expectations.

Subtheme 4: High Expectations

Expectations play an important role, both internal and external. Many students often do the work to live up to their expectations and those of their families, teachers, and future employers.

The University of the Free State's MBA follows a sound program in which all career issues relevant to business leaders are addressed. The high expectations placed on MBA students are only a reflection of the high standards that have come to be expected from this program, thus adequately preparing its graduates for the trials and tribulations of the business world. High expectations can be a two-edged sword: on the one hand, it may serve as motivation, while on the other hand, it may also present challenges (Navarro, 2008).

Many students report feeling stressed and overwhelmed by the demands of the program. These resources help students manage their workload and maintain a healthy work-life balance. The summation below puts together the salient features of high expectations for MBA students at UFS: academic rigour, professional development, leadership, diversity, and support systems (Wong and Chapman, 2023).

***Participant 14:** there are so many expectations when you are married, etcetera. And then you come back to your professional life. There are also expectations there as well because you have you know you want to climb the ladder. You have said I can do this. And therefore, expectations are quite high as well.*

***Participant 2:** Therefore, on my side, even though its demanding, one cannot run away from the fact that it is a quite a demanding degree or course, where there's lots of reading, lots of research, writing and submissions, which indeed can put pressure on an individual.*

High expectations among MBA students can stem from various sources: Personal Ambition, many MBA students have a clear vision for their careers and expect their education to significantly enhance their professional prospects (Lipson & Eisenberg, 2018).

Peer Influence: the competitive nature of MBA programs often leads to high expectations as students compare themselves with their peers. Institutional Reputation, UFS's standing in the academic community can create an expectation that the support structures are robust and tailored to facilitate student success.

Job Demands

Job demands in the MBA programme are part of the journey, mainly because management, leadership or business owner positions require equal attention, focus and time. As presented in the demographic profile of participants in Table 4.1 above, most of the participants are in senior positions, clearly indicating high-level occupations.

In this section, job demands, and workload will be discussed with the incorporation of the JDR-model application.

Subtheme 5: Job demands and workload

The Job Demand-Resource (JDR) model is widely recognised in occupational health psychology and helps analyse how various job demands and resources influence employee well-being. When applied to MBA students, this model can provide valuable insights into their unique experiences, challenges, and overall well-being (Bakker et al., 2014).

Job Demands refer to the physical, psychological, or social aspects of the job that require sustained effort or skills and are associated with certain psychological or physical costs. For MBA students, demands may include academic pressure, high expectations, intensive coursework, and deadlines can lead to stress and burnout. Time management challenges balancing studies, projects, and personal life can be overwhelming.

***Participant 4:** For for example, from 8:00 to 5 pm, I had to ensure that I concentrate strictly on my on my work as much at times, it will go beyond five, but mostly I'll structure my work to be around 8:00 to 5:00. So, it's very critical that we always on our toes, it's a very demanding job that and what is expected of any individual who works for the National Treasure is that you have to be perfect and whatever that work that you do has to be thoroughly researched, thoroughly articulated. You have to be, always be prepared at all times. That demands of me that in most cases, if I'm not if when I knock off on Friday, on a Saturday, Sunday, I'm busy looking at my business interest, which are very, very demanding for example, I own a bakery business which*

is in Limpopo. Sometimes, I have to drive a Limpopo. I own a pharmacy around Gauteng, which is about 100 kilometres from my home.

Participant 8: *there've been times when I thought I'm very close to burning out, in terms of while I've been doing the MBA, but for me, because I've burned out only once before and that one was job-related*

Participant 12: *Job-related stress is once again, it's in our industry, its fast-moving industry is really, it's a really, really fast industry. It's the stress there is, it comes as a standard almost.*

Participant 14: *So yeah, stress-related work is work-related stress is quite, is quite real, and it exists. And yeah, and then it does lead to burnout, unfortunately.*

Various factors contribute to the well-being of MBA students at the UFS, including the demands of their jobs and workload. During the study, students faced many predicaments that resulted from being in a demanding academic programme; thus, understanding these issues becomes very important. Job demands refer to the various psychological and physical challenges which students experience, whereas workload refers to the volume of work set, and the time needed to complete this work (Bakker et al., 2014).

UFS has implemented various initiatives aimed at fostering student resilience and well-being, but continuous evaluation and adaptation of these resources are necessary to meet the evolving needs of students. Brauchi et al. (2013) posit that by addressing job demands and workload through targeted support, UFS can promote a healthier and more conducive academic environment that enhances student academic success.

In summary, high job demands and workloads can lead to increased stress, burnout, and decreased academic performance among MBA students. Effective support structures, such as mentorship programs, counselling services, and time management workshops, are essential in mitigating these effects.

Other demands

Well-being is a complex construct of MBA students and includes other demands such as time management and work-life balance. Both factors are important features that

allow the students to maintain a healthy academic environment and guarantee the ability of the students to study and feel satisfactory, both at a personal and academic level. Faced with rigorous academics, networking events, internships, and personal life, it is common for MBA students to be confronted with issues regarding time management and work-life balance (Gragnano et al., 2020). However, these are not the only challenges that have to be encountered. It is immense in the implication it has on their being or well-being.

This is because quality time management and work-life balance affect the well-being of the MBA student enormously on a cumulative basis.

These types of emotional and psychological stressors can indeed adversely impact academic performance but, if not recognized and resolved, can also have long-term health implications. It thus becomes incumbent that any MBA program systematically offers both the recognition of such problems, along with support mechanisms designed to ensure effective strategies related to time management and work/life balance. In totality, the need for time management and work-life balance are amongst those derivatives that bear special importance for the survival of a student at an MBA level (Gragnano et al., 2020). In summary, the demands of time management and work-life balance are critical to the well-being of MBA students. All this understanding and addressing the needs becomes personally and academically imperative to strive for success. With each passing year, as the MBA programs go on evolving, paying due attention to such aspects of students' lives will not only raise the bar for educational experience but also ready them for the complex times they will go through during their professional careers.

Subtheme 6: Time management

It is an imperative skill in the life of every MBA student, particularly here at the UFS, where academics are somewhat demanding and personal commitments overwhelming. Effective time management not only contributes to improved academic performance but also has positive effects on well-being by balancing studies and personal life.

In short, the need for time management skills among students pursuing an MBA at UFS is emphasized by the intensive nature of their programmes, wherein they have

to attend to many responsibilities. It has been found in various studies that students using structured time management strategies show lower levels of stress and improved academic performance. Similarly, well-being initiatives at UFS, such as access to counselling and coping skills regarding stress management workshops, will equally help to equip the students with the ability to handle the stress associated with their studies better (Misra & McKean, 2000).

The integration of time management training in these support systems offers a holistic approach toward student well-being. It enables the MBA student to manage their time optimally while experiencing a balanced lifestyle. This resource will enable the UFS MBA students to manage their time more effectively; this, in turn, will support academic success and personal well-being for an enriching educational experience (Misra & McKean, 2000).

Participant 12: *OK, I think the first challenge would be time, I think for myself having enough time to make sure that I have enough for work, play, and for studies is the biggest challenge for me because that touches on all three aspects of work, home and study life.*

Participant 10: *OK, I think time management was the first one enrolling in an MBA as a fully employed person with a family, Friends you know. Time management became an issue.*

Participant 3: *like the exam, and I forgot what we call it, is it a formative assessment or something like, where they give you where, where we given a time constraint. That for me definitely impacts my well-being because I am stressed from 9:00 the morning till maybe 9:00 the evening.*

Participant 8: *Yes, it challenges you, but is not extremely difficult, but it does require a lot of time dedicated to it, so you need to work hard. The workload is a lot, so you need to work hard. You need to, you know, make time for it.*

Participant 2: *I can say it's integrated. It becomes part and parcel of one's work and personal life because one has to put aside time to do the programs work away from family away from work. But that does not, like I said, make it easier just the fact that one has already find found a way to say this is how time management should work.*

Participant 13: *Sure, the greatest demand, time, time, that I must say time is the biggest amount that I've got, which is just not there. You can do as much time management as you want. It's difficult, and it's not the MBA program that is intense on your time.*

Most MBA students balance intensive academics, networking events, and part-time employment. Good time management skills are the cement that holds being balanced together. For students in an Accelerated Master of Business Administration program, time is a critical and scarce commodity. Accelerated courses are classes that offer an opportunity to earn an MBA in less than one year. However, the intensive nature of such programs puts pressure on students to juggle work, school, and family commitments efficiently, or they risk not completing their education (Jackson, 2009).

Key steps to effective time management include 1) setting realistic goals, 2) getting organized, 3) delegating, 4) relaxing and recharging, and 5) stopping guilt. Two major time management stumbling blocks exist: procrastination and perfectionism. When we procrastinate on a task, often our anxiety about the task increases further, delaying our work on the task. Another reason is that perfection may not be helpful. If we insist on being perfect in every task, we minimize the chance that we will complete the task (Jackson, 2009).

Subtheme 7: Work-Life Balance

Work-life balance is a vital aspect of the general lifestyle, especially among the MBA students at the University of the Free State. This category of students normally has to struggle between the hectic academic calendar and professional responsibilities of demands with personal obligations, which consequently results in huge stress and burnout. Work-life balance refers to an instance where there is the appropriate use of time and expenditure of energy on work and personal life to enhance well-being and productivity. These components balance well and provide a very great avenue for students to perform optimally both academically and personally during MBA programs. Such components include coursework, networking, interpersonal connections, and self-care. Finding balance is extremely important to both academic performance and the general well-being of students (Ahmady et al., 2021).

Participant 5: *But I think for me it's striving towards trying to be present in both areas, let me say as much as you can. Sometimes you fail, sometimes it doesn't look as perfect as you'd like it to, but I think for me, work-life balance is constantly striving towards it, right?*

Participant 12: *And yeah, I think overall it's just a good balance, life work balance where you are feeling in control and that you are, that you can focus. I do try to maintain a work-life balance, although it is really, really tough.*

Participant 10: *Thanks, I think well-being is actually quite an important thing for a human being, you know, to actually have the balance. So, trying to find the balance between the two actually became a challenge for one, which also, in a result, affected one's well-being to some extent.*

Participant 6: *Of course, so having sort of painted a picture in the previous question to say as a mom, as an executive and MBA student who's also doing the research, it impacted my life where I found myself not being able to cope, and I had to resign from a full-time employment to be able to focus on the MBA because I wanted it more and I also needed time for the family.*

Participant 1: *So, that work-life balance, being able to take the knowledge base from the community of professionals and academia helps quite significantly, but also being able to embrace when it's time to turn off.*

Participant 13: *I had a change in employment. Which meant a much more senior job with a different employer, which put much more strain on me. And then spilling over to my personal life even more so. Yeah, there's no balance, and it's chaos.*

Participant 11: *There, the professional side of their life, and so getting to a place of well-being, I would define well-being as a balanced approach to looking at you, not just in a psychological fact, way or an economical way or in financial situation or professional situation. And then studies in itself to balance, you know from we briefly mentioned just before starting this that one of the biggest challenges I've had or actually we didn't talk about it.*

And then, in terms of my family wise, I made the decision to actually leave my family behind in South Africa until I finish my studies. It's, you know, they were in Vietnam, and I actually sent them back purely for the sake that I just can't

emotionally and physically split myself into so many areas of taking care of all the demands that's why it weighed on this and prior to the move to Vietnam.

Participant 2: *Well, Ronald, the reality of the situation on my side is that one of the three must suffer one way or the other. You can have it all balanced, 100% yes, one tries, but I find that I sacrifice a lot on my personal to feed more on studies and work, so I don't have much of time for my personal things, friends, family and other activities that I used to do. I think its part and parcel of the sacrifice of managing the program and time. So out of these three, you tend, I tend to find that personal life is one way neglected or suffers or is sacrificed?*

According to Gragnano, Simbula and Miglioretti (2020), in the context of MBA students' studies, equilibrium refers to the harmony that the students endeavour to attain among a variety of conflicting demands, academic obligations, personal life, and career goals. Furthermore, the theme is especially pertinent since it enables a more thorough comprehension of the details and complexity that characterise MBA students' experiences. A state of balance among the different factors affecting an MBA student's life is another way to conceptualise equilibrium. Coursework, networking, interpersonal connections, and self-care are some of these components. Finding balance is essential for students' academic performance and general well-being (Badri, 2019).

Counselling services, wellness workshops, and peer support groups form part of the wellbeing support structures for MBA students at UFS and are integral components in creating a supportive community. Ahmady et al. (2021) establish such facilities address specific needs which the student may have during their studies for managing time, reducing stress, and integrating their personal and professional lives. It has been proven through research that students with proper support systems have increased resilience, better academic performance, and a general sense of satisfaction.

4.3.2.3 Theme 3: Support

Worldwide, campus support services are available to students in educational institutes, national and international, to facilitate student performance (Johnson et al., 2022) and contribute to students' success in their academic and career plans (Johnson

et al., 2022). Similarly, Al-Maskari et al. (2021) indicated that support services were established to increase the chances of students continuing in college and meeting their academic needs, ultimately leading to completing their studies and enriching the skills necessary for college success. While institutions are extensively working on students' positive experiences and launching several student support services programs, the success of these programs depends mainly on the student's help-seeking behaviour (Al-Maskari et al., 2020).

Interestingly, in a study focusing on well-being support structures for MBA students at the University of Free State, the theme of support is likely to be pivotal. Thus, support can be understood in various contexts emotional, social, and financial. Support can take many forms and is basically important in individual and collective well-being. Support systems-from emotional resilience to social connectivity-become significant in treading life's challenges.

In summary, the theme identifies the unique challenges faced by these students, such as stress, workload, and the balancing of personal and professional commitments. This includes interventions and resources that address these challenges, promoting a holistic approach to student well-being. This theme focuses on the availability of support services that encompass various dimensions, including emotional and institutional support, that individuals receive in navigating their experiences within the MBA programme (Lipson et al., 2022). Furthermore, the theme is critical as it influences participants' well-being, coping mechanisms, and overall outcomes in various contexts, such as at home, in class, and working environments.

Subtheme 1: Emotional Support

Emotional support involves providing empathy, care, love, and trust. It helps individuals cope with stress, anxiety, or difficult situations (Cohen & Wills, 1985). Moreover, this includes the encouragement and empathy received from family, friends, and peers. Researchers often explore how emotional support helps individuals cope with stressors and enhances resilience (Duffy et al., 2019).

With reference to Participant 11, much emphasis is placed on the lack of emotional support and how it can be to the detriment of one's studies because the MBA programme is stressful and emotionally draining. In addition, in participant 7, due to

lack of emotional support, the participant's studies were adversely affected to the extent that the participant had to discontinue their studies. As a result, this depicts that there are many shortcomings when it comes to the well-being needs of MBA students, and it should be considered to seek various measures that will address the support structures to enhance student well-being but, most importantly, academic success in their MBA tenure.

Participant 11: *Not emotionally draining to be so emotionally drained, and that could lead to a full-on burnout and, you know, pulling out of the program in total and especially, like you said, it's we really near the end. Because I'm not getting the support from the outside, so I'm anyway going to have to pull this together myself. Sorry, I know that a bit of a confusing answer, but I hope you get the just of it that a little bit of support, a little bit more support, would really help.*

Participant 7: *I wasn't emotionally well, right, I immediately had to discontinue. I didn't know if, number one, I didn't know where to go. Remember I said I studied last year, first semester, I had to stop because of my dad's passing because emotionally I was unstable.*

With the discussion mentioned above pertaining to emotional support and sense of belonging subtheme, we can infer that it confirms the findings elucidated and analysed in the literature. According to Jokic et al. (2019), adult learners frequently participate in formal learning primarily due to the intention to change their lives and are determined to thrive in their respective fields. However, with that comes also emotional "cases" of early learning experiences, often challenged with a host of competing demands, financial pressure, possibly lack of support, and illness. In addition, they are facing challenges of unknown academic work, conflicting deadlines, and probably an initial lack of fundamental academic skills.

The definition of SWB by Diener highlights two dimensions, namely thinking and feeling (Das et.al, 2020). Thinking relates to the cognitive/evaluative dimension (EVA) of subjective well-being, meaning the greater the positive outcomes for evaluated lives of people, the greater the SWB. EVA abbreviation refers to the Evaluative dimension. Feeling relates to the affective/emotional dimension (EMO) of subjective well-being, whereby the predominance of positive against negative emotions results in greater

SWB. EMO abbreviation refers to the Emotional dimension. Empirically, SWB has been associated with emotional and social support or contact, loneliness, and social activities (Lepper, 1996).

Mental and personality factors, e.g., extraversion, self-esteem and locus of control, have also been linked to SWB. Moreover, the PERMA theory, particularly the relationships component, reiterates that support is critical to our survival and emotional well-being. African American college student research by Brooks and Allen (2016) found that relationships with others granted support and enhanced academic persistence, which indicates the valuable academic results relative to relationships of family support, including academic perseverance, self-efficiency, and academic performance. Furthermore, Kovich (2020) postulates that academic and support staff service can influence the success and intent of students. In particular, the impact of relationships with counsellors as well as support programs.

Subtheme 2: Sense of belonging

The pursuit of the MBA is a journey of transformation within which the academic and professional competencies of students are improved; even more, their well-being is profoundly changed. A critical subtheme within this context is the sense of belonging, which significantly influences students' overall experience. The feeling of belonging encompasses emotional connection, social integration, and a supportive community, all of which are essential for fostering resilience and coping strategies among MBA students. Despite the predicaments, the present study scrutinises the importance of feeling a sense of fitting in groups within universities and how it influences academic performance outcomes and general well-being (Maunder, 2018).

This introduction explores how a strong sense of belonging interlinks with the overarching theme of support, ultimately enhancing the well-being of MBA students. Evidently, participant 7 alluded that group work brings a special connection and bond towards her. Thus, it equates to what sense of belonging necessitates that can predominantly enhance student well-being. Similarly, participant 1 reiterated that building a strong connection with family members and the student community within the MBA programme enhances the well-being of students to a large extent. Subsequently, it alleviates stress, burnout and possible discontinuation of studies due

to having a strong sense of belonging within the student community. While going through these problems, the sense of belonging helps a student in attaining emotional and psychological strengths.

Participant 7: *With my MBA group, I feel like because while I'm connecting with the group, I only met them recently. I am, sort of, we are building a bond except for obviously, maybe certain members.*

Participant 1: *First one would be family, second one would be the community within the MBA programme.*

According to Mahar et al. (2013), a sense of belonging is more of a subjective feeling emphasising value and respect stemming from a joint association with a shared outward referent, such as encounters, beliefs, or individual attributes. In the context of a university, a sense of belonging could be defined as the feeling of being valued and respected among peers, being appreciated and inclusive of the university community, and having a sense of empathy and reception within the university family (Knifsend, 2020). According to Ahn and Davis (2023), a strong sense of belonging is a necessity extremely imperative for learners at universities to flourish and stay in higher education. It is broadly assumed that creating social ties with peers and staff is essential for students to feel a sense of belonging in learning environments (Pedler et al., 2022).

This sense of fitting in relates to strong energies, attention, self-esteem, purpose, and enjoyment of learning activities (Karaman & Cirak, 2017). Students' emotional involvement in learning is pivotal to university learners' sense of belonging to the learning community (Gillen-O'Neel, 2021), and failing to create this link could result in disconnection, decreased academic success, and an increased probability of study discontinuation (Wilson et al., 2018). For this reason, developing emotional connections with higher education institutions is of paramount significance, as university learners who feel a sense of belonging are more inspired to learn and develop compared to those who feel detached (Lawson & Lawson, 2013).

To culminate, it naturally follows that when students feel connected to their peers and the wider academic environment, they are more likely to seek out help or use whatever resources are available to them in doing well academically when their general welfare is appealed to.

This connection not only eases feelings of loneliness and disconnection but also inspires collaboration and shared learning, which is essential in the competitive academic setting. Besides, belonging can contribute to a greater level of engagement, motivation, and resilience, hence moulding the students as full-fledged leaders who can work out the intricacies of the business world with more ease once they graduate.

Subtheme 3: Institutional Support

Pollard *et al.* (2021) suggest that this pertains to the resources and services offered by organisations, such as healthcare systems or educational institutions. It is of paramount importance to investigate often how effectively these institutions provide support and how that impacts participants' experiences. This includes student health and counselling services that will aid in the enhancement of well-being, particularly among MBA students (Barrable *et al.*, 2018). Evidently, participant 3 postulates that the institution offers support services. However, MBA students are not informed about them, also the participant firmly posits that these support services can help pertaining to student wellness. In contrast, participant 10 argues that the support services are available but not beneficial and engaging this insinuates that they are not considering the well-being of the overall student population and that is quite detrimental to the studies.

Participant 3: *And then, also like setting try and get a support group, maybe that you can attend. I know the UFS has got lots of these wellness support groups, so maybe try to attend one or a few of those so that you can get some help.*

Participant 10: *So, I have attended one or two, you know, sessions, just to, I don't know, increase my knowledge on how to find the balance and, you know well-being issues. There were quite beneficial to some extent, but it's non-engaging because there's one person talking, but they always say if there's a need for you to reach out to support services that you offered, that option is made available.*

Interpreting institutional support for MBA students' well-being needs at the University of the Free State (UFS) involves understanding how the university addresses various aspects of student life, especially concerning well-being, academic pressures, and

personal development. In summary, effective institutional support at UFS for MBA students' well-being should encompass a holistic approach that addresses mental health, well-being, academic challenges, and career readiness. This comprehensive support can significantly enhance the overall student experience and academic success.

Subtheme 4: Programme (Administrative Staff), Peer support and Social Relationships

The subtheme of Programme (Administrative Staff), Peer Support, and Social Relationships is essential for fostering a supportive educational environment. Programme (Administrative Staff) **Administrative** staff play a crucial role in the student experience. They are the first point of contact for students and are essential in facilitating various services, from academic advising to mental health support (Guchait et al., 2015). Role of Administrative Staff: they can help create a welcoming environment, assist with academic issues, and provide resources for personal development and growth. Support Strategies Regular training for administrative staff on student well-being and communication can enhance their ability to support students effectively, and empirical studies in the literature indicate that administrative support reduces job stress (Özlok, 2024).

Peer support is vital for MBA students, who often face significant stress due to the demanding nature of their studies. Benefits of Peer Support: establishing peer mentorship programs can promote academic success, improve retention rates, and enhance social connections among students (John et al., 2018). Interestingly, Twomey (1991) found that the effect of peer support, was not significant with regards to variations in negative affect or quality of life measures. Still, one-to-one support was highly essential for a positive effect. In contrast, Loane (2015) reported that peer support involvement was beneficial in connecting students to student services, which can come in handy in times of crisis.

Participant 3: *personal life is a bit difficult for me because I don't have many friends in Bloemfontein and those that I that I do have, we don't really, we don't really have social gatherings, maybe on a birthday and so forth, but other*

than that we just talk on the phone. So that's the only way I stay connected to with them or maintain that relationship.

Participant 14: *OK. It was my coordinator. I built a very, very good relationship with her. I think. She was a great source of support. The best, the best if I if I could, if I could give a medal, I would literally give it to her. She stepped in in spaces where she didn't need to step in, you know, and guided me.*

Participant 12: *I think once again the biggest source of supports through the MBA is my group because those are the people that understand what you're going through. They're going through the same thing. So, your biggest source of support really is your MBA team and also the connections that you've made with other members.*

Participant 14: *So, I think for me that was the biggest one because I do remember even with my syndicate team, they were very supportive, you know, they're very supportive. But I do remember the second semester of my studies, I dropped from a usual level academia.*

Participant 11: *And it would really, really, really be, I think, beneficial for the university side to even just have like a small Braai, Social gathering, something right after class, even if it's between 4:00 and 5:00 or something and give everybody a hotdog, have a couple of drinks, you know it doesn't have to be alcoholic.*

Participant 8: *then in my personal life, the only thing is I would say I don't think it's a challenge, but I think because I'm a social butterfly a little bit. And so, the cutting or the minimal social life that I experienced in the past two years. For me, that was the biggest challenge in my personal life, yeah, that's what I would say.*

Strong social relationships among students contribute to a sense of belonging and emotional well-being. Importance of Social Connections: social relationships can mitigate stress and improve overall mental health, which is crucial for maintaining focus and motivation during the MBA program. Numerous studies indicate that people with spouses, friends, and family members who provide psychological, and material resources are better in health than those with fewer supportive social connections

(Cohen & Wills, 1985). In addition, a generalized beneficial effect of social support could occur because large networks provide persons with regular positive experiences and a set of stable, socially rewarded roles in the community.

This kind of support is related to overall well-being because it provides a positive affect (Cohen & Wills, 1985). The focus on academic achievement can strain relationships. Students may neglect social connections or find it challenging to collaborate effectively in group settings, leading to further isolation. COVID-19 pandemic and its consequences, such as social distancing, lockdowns, and online education, have further boosted this attention because of the negative impact on the well-being of students in higher education (Doolan, 2021).

Subtheme 5: Family support

Family support plays a crucial role in the well-being of MBA students, significantly impacting their academic performance, mental health, and overall satisfaction during their studies. Moreover, family socioeconomic status (SES), interrelated developmental resources (including parent support, expectations, and reading resources), and students' reading inspiration (including reading engagement and reading confidence) also affect adolescents' learning results (including academic accomplishment, school grades, and reading skill) (Mudrak et al., 2020).

Family support provides emotional reassurance and stability, which is essential for students navigating the pressures of an MBA program. Research indicates that strong familial relationships can reduce stress and anxiety, promoting better mental health outcomes (Krauss et al., 2020). Support from family members can lead to improved academic performance and can facilitate social connections within the academic community. When students feel supported at home, they are more likely to engage in networking and collaboration, which are crucial components of MBA programs (Benner et al., 2016).

Academic success is an essential goal for higher education students. Feeling happy and being satisfied with the individuals' lives could help students achieve their academic goals (Moussa & Ali, 2022). A study found that conversant and effective families are advantageous to children's non-cognitive aptitude and communal development, and a good family setting and a parent-child relationship add value to

the expansion of physical and mental health (Zhao and Zhao, 2022; Obimakinde et al., 2019).

Participant 12: *Of course, also, having the support of your family or friends that the days where you do feel I can't anymore.*

Participant 4: *Firstly, you need to have good support system that's very, is the foundation of whether you'll succeed in MBA or not. A good support system talking about family support, people that are going to understand that my brother or my sister or my wife or my husband, he's actually studying, so therefore we have to forgo a lot of things. We need to be able to assist him or her in whatever that that she's doing.*

Participant 5: *Family gives me perspective, I think in times when I'm a little bit, what is it stuck in in the whirlwind of everything, they at least are able to pull me out and give me that perspective, but also the support that I receive from them is also invaluable.*

In summary, family support plays a vital role in the well-being of MBA students at UFS by providing emotional, practical, and social resources that help navigate the challenges of graduate education. Furthermore, familial support plays an imperative role in students' academic performance because it helps students alleviate stress and practice resilience in their studies.

Subtheme 6: Work support

This is of paramount importance for students of MBA both in their academic excellence and personal development. As a result, several dimensions emerge to concern this subtheme, including emotional, social, and academic support, with a focus on unique challenges faced by MBA students. The importance of work support encompasses the resources and assistance available to students in their academic and professional pursuits. For MBA students, who often juggle studies, work, and personal commitments, effective work support is vital for reducing stress. Work-related stress can lead to burnout and negatively impact academic performance.

Supportive environments help mitigate these effects (Kivlighan et al., 2021). A well-structured work support system is integral to enhancing the well-being of MBA

students at the University of Free State. By addressing emotional, social, academic, and needs, the university can adopt a supportive environment that promotes student success holistically. Evidently, participant 12 emphasised that work support is crucial as it will help students navigate their studies while working (being employed). Furthermore, participant 14 stated that the company she was working for was very supportive and that played a vital role in enhancing her overall well-being needs.

Participant 12: *Another one is to make sure that you have a support system in in place at work, firstly because it's 8 hours of your life is spent there and then of course at your, at home with your family and friends.*

Participant 14: *So that had its own challenges, but all of the companies that I was working work for were supportive.*

To summarize, the study highlights the importance of support and access to resources that help students manage and navigate their coursework (studies) effectively. Additionally, this support cultivates a conducive learning environment and can lead to improved academic performance. Thus, recognizing the mental well-being challenges that often accompany graduate studies, the theme likely includes counselling services and peer support groups. In addition, emotional well-being would support sustained motivation and resilience due to the competitive nature of the program.

In effect, considerable emphasis has been placed on the role of social relationships in suggesting that strong social relationships may act to buffer stress and improve well-being. Group activities and socialisation can produce a sense of belonging among students. As a result, the theme of support extends beyond academic resources to encompass a comprehensive well-being strategy. This includes physical health initiatives, time management workshops, and work-life balance guidance, aiming to create a well-rounded support system. The findings may advocate for institutional changes that prioritize student well-being, influencing future policies and practices at the University of Free State and potentially other institutions.

4.3.2.4 Theme 4: Resources

There has been much in recent years on the importance of wellbeing support structures within higher education, with particular emphasis on business administration programs. The University of the Free State realizes that MBA students

have pressures unlike any others. Three such subthemes were identified as Communication, Information Technology, and Collaboration and Peer Learning.

Each of these subthemes plays a vital role in shaping the educational experience of MBA students, enhancing their capacity to navigate academic challenges while cultivating a supportive and conducive learning environment.

Subtheme 1: Communication

Effective communication, therefore, involves the sharing of ideas, thoughts, opinions, knowledge, and data in a manner that the messages received are clearly and specifically understood (Anon., 2007).

According to Nasukah et al. (2020), regular channels of communication among students, staff, and management instil an enabling atmosphere that promotes learning and development in pursuit of the MBA program. This includes information sharing on academic facilities and support services, plus avenues for feedback through which learners may express concerns and suggestions. Evidently, participants 11, 10, and 5 reiterated the importance and maintenance of communication within the MBA program since this underpins the need for students to communicate with each other to build meaningful relationships amongst one another and have better well-being and student engagement ultimately. On the other hand, participant 13 postulates communication between students and supervisors is not good. Obviously, that has adverse effects on the student's research journey.

Participant 11: *I think it's important that communication is very important from the get-go. But yes, I think it's to maintain it, its communication and the only way to sustain any form of the relationship, even with your wife you know a lot of aspects fall on the floor, but to really, really work on communication. There is, I've seen some mails come through for you know student support, student support but at the end of the day I'm sorry, I've, you can call me stubborn, but I will communicate with somebody I trust.*

Participant 13: *And if I have to look at my research, my study supervisor, yeah, it's more difficult. It's you know, communication is not good clarity is not good.*

Participant 10: *And maybe sorry, also having personalized communication at times, I've realized I don't know for other students that engagement between the students and also the Business School, it's not so easy to get hold of them via phone calls.*

Participant 5: *I think constant communication and really carrying people along maybe is what I would say is really, really important. People understand that we all go through some kind of pressure, and this is like a time investment that we've taken, but I guess we just need to communicate with each other. And like I mentioned also very important it's the communication and aligning the people that are around you, but it's a journey. It's a crazy journey, but I don't think it's impossible.*

It is an intentional and strategic activity employed by an individual to attain personal and social objectives. It is here that a well-being support structure will need to create a culture of transparency and inclusivity that will help in fostering emotional and psychological health among students, leading to better academic performance (Anon., 2007).

Effective communication is a high-order competency sought from MBA students amidst dynamic changes in business environments. The University of the Free State strongly focuses on the development of communication skills necessary for leadership and teamwork within its MBA program. In this aspect, the focus will be on preparing the student for increasingly complex business challenges and diverse stakeholder liaisons (Banwart, 2020).

Communication in the UFS MBA program encompasses aspects of interpersonal skills, public speaking, and written communication. The program integrates group projects and presentations to facilitate further learning of collaborative skills in real business scenarios. In addition, through discussions and networking, students have been motivated to develop further their capabilities to present ideas with brevity and conviction.

Subtheme 2: Information Technology

Information technology will clearly play an important role in supporting students' well-being. These days, technology is a strong means of improving learning experiences

and making resources more accessible. In this context, integrated information technologies in the MBA at UFS may support students in the following ways: enabling online access to course materials, virtual counselling, and mobile applications targeting mindfulness and stress management.

Participants 11 and 6 both indicated and elucidated that information technology plays a crucial role in helping students perform well academically and reduce dropout rates. With this said, we can clearly determine the importance of having technological resources because they alleviate academic stress and burnout. Also, with these resources in place, students' well-being can be well taken care of.

Participant 11: *You know you've now seen the people in person, and it's not just a voice on the other side of a PC. Or a Zoom session teams, you know, training Blackboard sessions. It actually brings alive the whole course and get response.*

Participant 6: *The primary source that I use to pursue my studies is the Internet as I use it to connect with my peers and I use it also to remotely attend classes. And also, to do my general Internet search for the scholarly articles and for support of academic writings that support my submissions and writing of assignments and even supporting me in disseminating some of the concepts or theories that I learn in my classes.*

The integration of technology in communication, especially in the context of hybrid or online MBA programs, affects how students interact. The use of digital platforms like Teams, Zoom, and discussion forums facilitates constant communication, enabling students to seek help and share resources efficiently.

Subtheme 3: Collaboration and Peer Learning

The MBA experience inherently involves collaboration and peer learning, which creates community and support among the students. These variables enable students to share knowledge, resources, and experiences in a manner that truly enhances the learning environment, reaching beyond the confines of traditional classroom interactions. Collaborative activities, including group projects and programs for peer mentoring, can further enhance the well-being of students.

MBA programs often emphasise teamwork and collaboration. Communication among students can enhance learning through the sharing of diverse perspectives. With evidence from both participants 7 and 8, emphasis is placed more on group dynamics and the effectiveness of it in student's academic journey and how it interlinks with the enhancement of student well-being overall.

Overall, this research aims to find a robust structure that not only addresses the immediate needs of MBA students but also prepares them for future challenges in their professional lives. Through a comprehensive understanding of these subthemes, the UFS can implement strategies that not only enhance academic success but also prioritize student well-being, ultimately contributing to the holistic development of future business leaders.

Participant 7: *Now, I started this year in July, begin and the dynamics of being thrown into a new group that was not assigned to me originally from the assessments that's also been a very difficult like it. Its also affected me mentally, not mentally, but just emotionally and participating in the group. So, I didn't know who to go to. I didn't know what to do about my group because they told when I enrolled again when I registered this year, they told me, you have to find a group. You just have to find yourself a group. Bear in mind, I have to find a group in a class that I don't even know. One person. I don't know the assessments of those people because I know my assessments, but I don't know how I'm going to contribute to another group, you understand?*

So that's one of the challenges I'm facing currently now where because, remember, in the first semester, you assigned to a group based on your assessments when you discontinue and start again, you have to go around and look for your own group. So that's been very difficult.

Participant 8: *I think it was for me the biggest challenge was working in groups and number one, I was not prepared for that, I think, or my expectation was that somebody should have told me. OK, for the MBA, you are most or half of the things are going to be doing. You're going to be doing it in groups.*

Group Projects: Students frequently engage in group assignments, necessitating effective communication skills to coordinate tasks and integrate different viewpoints. Group activities are the first step towards developing communication skills in students.

Teachers should ask students to complete assignments in equally divided groups rather than just including group activities only in the classroom (Rathee & Rajain, 2018). *Study Groups*: Informal study groups can foster deeper understanding, with students discussing concepts and challenging each other's ideas. Also, to increase the interaction among the students, the teacher should continuously change the groups. In the long run this process helps a lot (Rathee & Rajain, 2018).

4.3.2.5 Theme 5: Needs

In Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, belonging is considered vital when positioned between basic psychological and safety needs, the desire for self-actualization, and feelings of esteem. Figure 4.5 below illustrates Maslow's hierarchy of needs pyramid.

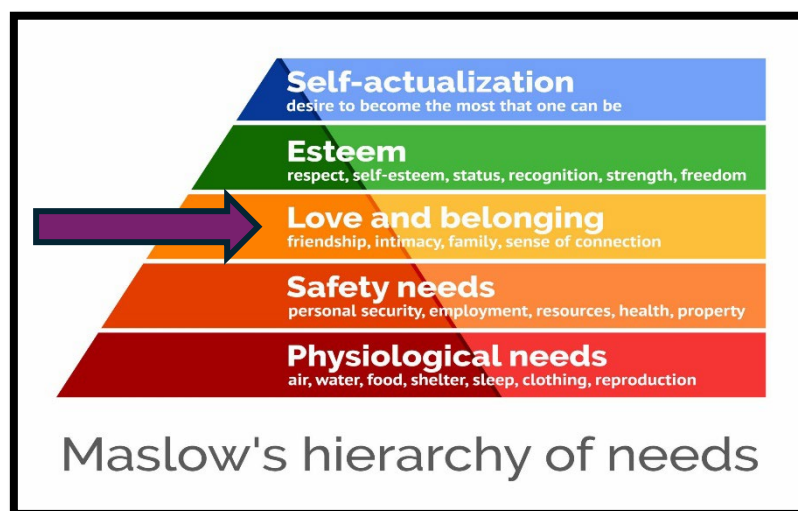


Figure 4.5: Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

Positive and static emotional relations are required to fulfil the need for belongingness, which is connected to health, well-being, and rational, emotional, and behavioural processes (Waller, 2020). Within the last few years, there has been a growing awareness of the need to emphasize well-being in academic settings among graduate students. Because the MBA programs are so advanced, both in theoretical and applied terms, the challenges students face often tend to be unlike those of other courses of study and involve factors that influence mental, emotional, and social well-being. The

study, therefore, tries to ascertain what these challenges are and present a formalized approach towards guiding the students in balancing their educational experience.

The theme of "Needs" in qualitative research brings out the essence of understanding the lived experiences of individuals in particular contexts. In the case of MBA students at UFS, the needs identified through qualitative methods reflect a complex interplay of personal, academic, and social factors. The qualitative approach enables the in-depth exploration of these needs, providing rich and contextual insights that perhaps other quantitative methods have not unravelled.

The key findings show that students of the MBA face a high level of stress, anxiety, and tension because of performance demands emanating both from academic and business competitiveness. Thus, the needs identified as subthemes in this section are 1) Well-being services and 2) Mentorship and Engagement, which is subsequently discussed in detail.

Subtheme 1: Well-being Services

In recent times, however, increasing emphasis has been put on student wellbeing as a key educational outcome. As Govorova et al. (2020) state, it follows from the findings that well-being is not a uniform concept.

Each student has his or her challenges and ways of coping. Similarly, academic well-being will involve factors that act in concert in the process of ensuring excellence academically. These include academic achievements, academic stress, and academic satisfaction (Shek & Chai, 2020).

Participant 13 emphasised that MBA students are deemed important in the business world because the programme equips students to become better leaders and managers. Thus, well-being services should be prioritised to address the well-being needs of these students to ensure increased pass rate, resilience, and motivation. As a result, **participant 7** alluded that the Business School should implement effective mental wellness rounded services that will help students deal with mental well-being challenges in their studies and personal, to a great extent.

Participant 13: *my idea around that is they focus on that type of student. An MBA student is much different than your usual pre and postgrad student we*

of a total different cut. And we've got basic demands, you know emotional and psychological wise is technically the same, but from there it totally differs from us. So that's why I say specific something for the MBA students would go a long way.

Participant 7: *So, I think if they had to make it more of a personal program like for mental Wellness, emotional stability, if they had to make it more of an internal e-mail in the Business School. I would, I think that would help a lot of people, especially if you're going through a period of maybe depression or you're not well.*

Mental Health Resources: UFS provides counselling for stress, anxiety, and other conditions that affect the mental well-being of students. Individual and group therapy, workshop sessions on how to manage stress, and sensitization on mental health awareness are all handled by the Counseling Centre at the university.

Work-Life Balance Initiatives: UFS should encourage such initiatives whereby students strike a balance between their academic compulsions and personal lives. This can include time management workshops and wellness days.

Subtheme 2: Mentorship

Mentorship is vital in MBA programs, as it enhances students' professional growth and networking opportunities. UFS's mentorship programs connect students with experienced professionals and alumni. Given that optimistic relations, personal control, and advancement are foundational to well-being, increased prominence has lately been placed on mentoring associations as probable structures of support for encouraging well-being among university learners and faculties in higher education (Kutsyuruba & Godden, 2019).

Haider and Dasti (2022) later found that mentoring coupled with work-life balance and self-efficiency justified 38% of the variance in mental well-being in doctoral learners in HEIs. Evidently, **participant 11** reiterates the significance of mentorship in the world of academia at large because mentors play an imperative role in guiding postgraduate students through their academic tenure, mainly their research journey, to ensure the enhancement of student well-being. Interestingly, **participant 14** stated that

mentorship is essential for MBA students to support them in their studies and address their well-being needs, which can result in less stress, burnout and retention rate.

Participant 11: *And that's why, in the previous question I said, well, the big enhancement would be mentorship, that's not just there for an academic small portion of dissertation, but actually have a mentor to walk with you and through this whole process, by keeping you accountable for certain things and checking in on you, you know, on a regular basis.*

Participant 14: *That was also one thing that helped me a lot, and in some instances, people offered to mentor me, right. And therefore, you know the why is not only the vision does not become yours alone anymore.*

Despite the theoretical association, there is an incomplete body of research linking mentoring as well as well-being (Squires, 2019). In a nutshell, mentorship is likely to involve a robust working coalition, high degrees of societal support, and, preferably, a transformational affiliation where the mentor stimulates, transmutes, and encourages their mentee, which is theorised to support well-being (Mann et al., 2023). Al Makhamreh and Stockley (2020) demonstrated that the stated mentoring affairs' quality with supervisory faculty was projecting well-being through enhanced mental health and higher efficient work engagement.

Subtheme 3: Engagement

The focus on social engagement expresses the need for community among MBA students. On the other hand, the well-being of students not only addresses their needs while they study but also equips them with resilient and coping abilities that will be highly helpful in their future careers.

Reference from Participant 10 encapsulates the key factor that student engagement is an important factor in enhancing student well-being because there is direct interaction with the Business School that can alleviate stress and increase academic success. Similarly, participant 1 stated that engagement with other students is vital because it allows the participant to share invaluable experiences and engage more with other peers.

Participant 10: *I've realized I don't know for other students that engagement between the students and also the Business School, it's not so easy to get hold of them via phone calls.*

Participant 1: *My ability to relate to those personnel or that group and share my experience with them is one aspect, right.*

Student engagement is an important component of their success in higher education (Kahu & Nelson, 2018) and acts as a mirror of their educational experiences. At a time when students' needs and preferences in higher education are increasingly diverse, and the sources of information and ways of learning are multiplying, measures of student agentic engagement will make it possible to ascertain the actions students take to enhance their learning environment (Reeve & Jang, 2022).

CHAPTER 5 : RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION

5.1 Introduction

In recent years, the mental and emotional well-being of students, particularly those enrolled in rigorous programs like the Master of Business Administration (MBA), has gained increasing attention (Flinchbaugh et al., 2012). This focus is crucial, as MBA programs often present significant academic and personal challenges that can impact students' overall well-being (Klussman et al., 2020).

Consequently, in this chapter an explanation will be given about recommendations on which further research could be done with the limitations that accompany it. The remainder of the chapter discusses the findings in relation to the research questions and objectives outlined for this study.

5.2 Revisiting the Objectives of the Study

The primary objective of this study was to identify the well-being needs of MBA students at the UFS. To achieve the primary objective, the following secondary objectives were set:

- To present well-being theories and models
- To analyse the well-being needs of MBA students at the UFS
- To provide interventions to support the well-being of Master of Business Administration students at the UFS.

Subsequently, the main findings of what the existing body of literature elucidated will be provided in coherence with what was mentioned above.

The main findings from Chapter Two firstly established what wellbeing is and how it is differentiated from the distinct dimensions of well-being such as mental, social, psychological and emotional well-being. According to Kanyumba et al. (2024), well-being is presently a construct at the centre of many educational policy plans and practices. Increasing awareness is focused on both student and employee well-being initiatives and policies. This will equip individuals with the social and emotional skills, knowledge and disposition required to operate and contribute productively within both an educational setting and the broader societal context.

Secondly, the definitions of well-being were described by different authors and how these constructs are intertwined to formulate a specific definition of well-being. Moreover, the general definition of well-being as a unidimensional construct is total personal welfare and enjoyment. According to Jarden and Roache (2023), well-being is defined and understood as how people function and feel on two levels: social and personal and holistically how they assess their lives.

Thirdly, well-being theories were discussed. **The person-environment fit theory** is the fit between the individual and their environment that determines variation in well-being. According to this theory, good fit increases satisfaction and well-being because the demands and resources in one's environment satisfy peoples' needs, goals, and values. Poor fit can be associated with stress, dissatisfaction, and decreased well-being (Greguras and Diefendorff, 2009).

Social exchange theory is the theory where well-being arises from a cost-benefit calculation of social relationships. People aim to maximise rewards-support affection, while minimising costs-conflict and effort. There are social exchanges which, when perceived as equitable and mutually rewarding, tend to build up well-being imbalances in social exchanges, creating dissatisfaction and, therefore, low well-being (Blau, 1964).

Broaden-and-Build Theory suggests that positive emotions like joy, gratitude, and hope broaden an individual's thought-action repertoires, which in turn build resources for creativity, resilience, and social connections, which in turn enhances long-term well-being (Fredrickson, 2006). **Subjective Well-Being (SWB)** is founded on the very principles of self-evaluations of one's life circumstances, happiness and emotional well-being. **PERMA theory** highlights the most crucial components that are equated to the general theory, which are *positive emotion, engagement, relationships, meaning and achievement*. According to Seligman (2011), all these five components simultaneously determine optimal well-being and life satisfaction.

Fourthly, two models of well-being were explained, which are: **Job demands-resources (JD-R) and the Capability (strengths-based) approach (CA)** models. Demerouti et al. (2001) imply that all employment has certain work characteristics related to well-being. As a result, the mentioned characteristics can be modelled into two broad categories, namely Job Demands and Resources. On the other hand,

Meerman et al. (2022) highlight that the capability approach (CA) emphasises the value of work, which seems to be an imperative characteristic related to flourishing in work, improved well-being in the working environment and sustainable employability.

Subsequently, the findings in the literature further reiterated adult learners' well-being in Higher Education Institutions. Notably, students' well-being has a direct impact on their capacity to learn and engage fully in degree programmes and may influence their career and other possibilities following graduation (Chaudhry et al., 2024).

Lastly, the findings in the literature in terms of work, family life and learning balance interestingly pointed out that conditions such as low work engagement, workaholism, burnout and poor job satisfaction as part of various factors that are often associated with employees' poor well-being. In addition, adult students are unique compared to traditional learners based on their daily responsibilities, which impact their learning experiences. As a result, a great focus on work-life balance relationships has been placed on working adults and full-time students (Fiorini & Debono, 2022).

To research the next secondary objectives, Chapter 3 provided an overview of the research methodology used by the researcher in performing the study. The researcher followed an inductive reasoning research approach, using a qualitative research method and a phenomenological research design. Furthermore, non-probability sampling, specifically purposeful sampling, was utilised to identify and select participants based on lived experiences and characteristics. Actively enrolled MBA students in their second semester and final-year MBA students were cordially invited via emails to participate in the research project through semi-structured interviews.

The interview schedule consisted of 16 questions related to well-being under three categories, namely, one general question about well-being perception, ten well-being strategies questions and five questions focusing on well-being in the MBA programme. The ten questions under well-being strategies derived directly from the literature that was discussed in Chapter 2. Data was gathered using Microsoft Teams to record and transcribe verbatim. NVivo 14 was used to upload the transcriptions and assist in analysing the data collected to identify prominent themes by generating codes from the participants' responses.

For this study, Chapter 4 set out to explore the following secondary research objectives:

- ✓ **To investigate the existing support structures available to MBA students related to well-being needs:** The main findings established were current Support Structures like the counselling Services. The university does provide counselling services such as SCD, including but not limited to individual group sessions and workshops focused on stress management and mental well-being awareness. Academic Support Programs which could involve academic stressors wherein tutoring and mentoring would be provided to build academic resilience. Student Organisations focused on peer support systems involved in personal development and networking add to a sense of belonging among MBA students.
- ✓ **To analyse the well-being needs of MBA students at the UFS:** Needs Beyond current services at the UFS include improved peer support programs that are structured and peer mentorship programs that help establish a network of relationships and emotional support among the students. Feedback Mechanisms and the establishment of channels through which students may provide feedback on a routine basis regarding needs concerning well-being and the efficacy of available services. The well-being needs of MBA students uncovered by the study emphasise additional support initiatives, namely:
 - **Well-being services** and the well-being of students have always been important within business school communities. There are many reasons why student well-being is important, but from a business school perspective, the well-being of students also directly correlates with academic achievement. After all, when students feel physically, mentally and emotionally healthy, they are better able to concentrate, engage with learning materials, and perform well in their studies. Aside from academia, students who feel supported and valued are also more likely to develop resilience and coping skills, which are essential for navigating life's challenges. In addition, Mental Health Resources such as counselling services will help students better cope with well-being challenges. Thus, the students emphasised that mental wellness programs should be in place for when MBA students are depressed or are not well. Work-Life Balance Initiatives: UFS should promote initiatives that encourage students to maintain a balance between academic responsibilities and personal life.
 - The second need is **Mentorship**. Given that positive relationships, personal mastery, and growth are foundational to well-being, more emphasis has

recently been placed on mentoring relationships as potential support structures for promoting well-being among students and faculty in higher education. Notably, students reiterated that mentorship is a big enhancer and that it helped them a lot to maintain resilience and to perform academically.

- The third need students identified was **Engagement**, the emphasis on social engagement highlights the necessity of community among MBA students. Addressing the well-being needs of students not only benefits them during their studies but also equips them with resilience and coping strategies that are invaluable in their future careers. Interestingly, students stipulated that student engagement enhances well-being through group activities, and engagement allows students to share when they are not feeling well.

5.3 Recommendations

The recommendations are arranged according to the themes that emerged from Chapter 4. Support for MBA students at the UFS must be multilevel, taking into consideration academic and personal needs. The following gives an idea of the recommendations on how well-being can be enhanced.

5.3.1 Expand the services related to well-being by Student Counselling and Development (SCD)

In the view that well-being services do exist at UFS, I would recommend SCD work and collaborate with the Business School for a wellbeing program catering to MBA students specifically. This is because its mission clearly exists to provide free and confidential services to all registered UFS students, support programs, and workshops. It also provides a plethora of psycho-educational material across all staff and students and contributes to providing activities that help enhance the well-being of the students. Importantly, the Business School can ensure that students are aware of wellbeing services and workshops, which can be communicated on various social media and communication platforms i.e., WhatsApp, Telegram, Instagram, YouTube, Facebook, student and personal emails. The former has the potential to create a

competitive advantage for the UFS MBA programme, especially referring to one participant, who mentioned that a counterpart at another South African university compared and said UFS at least considers the well-being of MBA students.

The Business School should value the well-being of MBA students by taking the initiative to reach the students and emphasise the importance of attending the well-being services and workshops that the SCD organises for the development of all-round well-being. This will, in turn, help and enable the MBA students to take better care of their well-being so they to perform academically and reduce stress. It also increases resilience when one attends a workshop and, services are made available to them, and dropout rates are lowered; that means discontinuing studies.

5.3.2 Develop a mentoring programme

Mentorship is vital in MBA programs, as it enhances students' professional growth and networking opportunities. UFS's mentorship programs connect students with experienced professionals and alumni. Given that positive relationships, personal mastery, and growth are foundational to well-being, more emphasis has recently been placed on mentoring relationships as potential support structures for promoting well-being among students and faculty in higher education (Kutsyuruba & Godden, 2019).

Mentorship will act as a strong recommendation for the incorporation of the strategy in support of the well-being needs of the MBA students at the UFS, both academically and emotionally, during their study journey. Most students find the MBA program very intensive and demanding. For this reason, some of the challenges facing many students include stress, burnout, and isolation. These challenges can be reduced, if not completely wiped out, through structured mentorship offering guidance, encouragement, and a sense of community. Have a personal mentor for every MBA student, which will help in guiding and supporting the student on an individual basis throughout the academic tenure. These could be senior MBA students, alumni, faculty, or professionals in the field with much experience and knowledge worth sharing.

Indeed, mentors should ideally possess a combination of academic experience, industry experience, and emotional awareness of the student experience. The volume of stress that MBA students face is contributed by academic pressures, balancing work and studies, and personal challenges. A mentor will be able to offer a conducive

environment where students can express concerns or frustrations and even offer advice on the best way of managing stress and maintaining mental health and overall well-being. Thus, healthy coping mechanisms can be modelled and encouraged while at the same time allowing students to work out their resilience. Some of these students are difficult to motivate, especially in particularly tough times, but providing emotional support can keep them even and focused. Besides faculty or professional mentors, peer mentorship is also helpful. Advanced MBA students may mentor first-year students through academic and social issues concerning the program. In such cases, a community feeling is developed in a cohort, and relationships among the students arise.

Mentorship, when combined with the UFS MBA program, could be among the most important supporting mechanisms with respect to academic success and personal well-being for the students. In relation to pressures from graduate school, mentorship guides and offers emotional support and career advice while fostering a sense of belonging and resilience among the students. A well-designed mentorship program is an investment in the success of the students during their tenure at the UFS.

5.3.3 Orientation Programme for MBA

An orientation or onboarding programme is imperative for the preparation and welcoming of student cohorts into university programmes, both on undergraduate and postgraduate levels. Most of the participants alluded to the need for orientation, which can include preparing students in terms of the programme demands for the minimum required two years, e.g., group work requirements, family (spouse or relatives) and peer support among students (the next recommendation), including well-being services available.

Furthermore, the orientation should include only registered students with their partners, spouses or extended families mainly because MBA students who participated in the study mostly referred to loved ones, not genuinely relating and understanding MBA programme demands. This approach or strategy can potentially reduce or eliminate unnecessary stress, conflicts, divorces in extreme circumstances and misunderstandings. Conversely, the result may probably lead to increased

engagement, commitment, improved academic performance experience and enhanced well-being for all stakeholders involved.

In this current era of digitalisation and emerging technologies, online orientation sessions prior to the official commencement of lectures/classes should be considered and implemented. Similarly, MBA alumni (graduates) should be the guest speakers or invitees that the Business School works with, as they are relevant, experienced and better positioned to share the MBA journey with first-time entrants. Lastly, an integrated approach to the MBA orientation programme is needed to improve and promote the well-being of MBA students.

5.3.4 Peer support amongst students

Peer support amongst students is a vital support mechanism, as mentioned by participants, as syndicate members share similar stresses, demands, and responsibilities, personally and professionally. Nurturing these relationships between students and engagement becomes a critical aspect of the MBA journey. Thus, students need to be advised about the importance of communication, group dynamics and empathy because of various life events and situations.

Consideration, diversity, planning and execution in a collaborative approach are key techniques that promote a good and effective team. For this reason, peer support must be incorporated into the orientation programme, ultimately promoting well-being for MBA cohorts and gradually addressing Sustainable Development Goal 3, Good Health and Well-being.

5.4 Limitations of the study

In this study, the researcher identified three pertinent limitations. Firstly, subjectivity was part of the process, as the researcher is also an MBA student.

Secondly, the findings in this study are based on a specific sample, which is MBA students at UFS. The study may not be fully applicable to other universities or colleges, also limited participation, which necessitates underrepresented groups may not be as willing to participate in this research project. The unique characteristics of each

university and the diversity in the MBA demographics should be considered in generalising the results.

Thirdly, there is always a time restriction in collecting data or in interviewing the participants, which is also another form of limitation. The researcher continued with interviews till data saturation was reached.

Recognising these limitations is of utmost importance to interpret the findings of the study and apply them cautiously in distinct contexts. Therefore, future research should always consider addressing these limitations and motivate the next cohort of MBA students to enhance the robustness and applicability of insights gained from exploring the well-being needs of Master of Business Administration (MBA) students at the University of Free State.

5.5 Conclusion

The well-being of Master of Business Administration students at the University of the Free State forms an integral factor that influences both their academic success and personal development. The multi-faceted nature of the MBA programs, which are designed to challenge students both intellectually and emotionally, becomes of vital importance as it calls for addressing well-being needs within this particular student population. The study consequently explored and researched the challenges of MBA students related to support of well-being needs, evaluated existing resources, and devised a strategic well-being needs initiative that improves engagement with the services provided. In addressing these issues, the broader institutional bodies on mental well-being in higher education will further contribute to the improvement of student well-being.

The section on data analysis and interpretation has been enlightening in understanding the experiences of the well-being of MBA students at UFS. Five main themes were obtained through reflexive thematic analysis from the qualitative data collected through semi-structured interviews,

Altogether, the findings clearly postulate that MBA students' well-being needs must be considered for programme enhancement, potentially leading to a competitive advantage for the Business School by becoming increasingly student-centric, in line with Vision 130.

By understanding well-being needs through informed decision-making, the UFS will make decisions based on data that helps improve support services. Improved student retention, since the well-being of the students is being taken good care of, increases student satisfaction and improves retention rates; in fact, several other institutions show an improvement in their retention rate after giving importance to the student's well-being. Again, this would provide a better opportunity for the University of Free State to develop a supportive environment by reducing the rate of retention or discontinuation for MBA students.

To conclude, the University of the Free State testifies to the power of advanced business education through its transformed MBA alumni, which is vital for the next cohort of MBA students to comprehend the lived experiences pertaining to the demands and expectations of the programme. Similarly, their success stories point to a strong and all-rounded curriculum that not only equips graduates with technical and strategic skills but also nurtures critical thinking, ethical leadership, and a global outlook. Now it is time for the next class of MBA students to add to this legacy, learn from the experiences shared by those who have gone before them, and continue contributing toward the continued growth and success of the UFS Business School.

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APPENDIX A: RECRUITMENT EMAIL

EMAIL SUBJECT: MBA Research Study

Good day, MBA Student

My name is Ronald Wesley Sinra, and I am currently enrolled as a Master of Business Administration (MBA) student at the Business School of the University of the Free State. I am cordially inviting you to participate voluntarily in a research study about "**Well-being needs of Master of Business Administration (MBA) students at the University of Free State**". The University of the Free State General/Human Research Ethics Committee has reviewed and approved this research study.

GHREC Approval Number: UFS-HSD2024/0590

The primary purpose of the research is to identify the well-being needs of MBA students at the UFS. If you are enrolled for 2024 Semester 2 in the MBA programme and are between the ages of 25-65 years, you are eligible to participate in the study.

Please read, complete and sign the attached MBA_INFORMATION LEAFLET AND CONSENT FORM as part of the research study requirements. Microsoft Teams will be used for the interviews from 13-30 September 2024. Upon receipt (researcher) of the completed consent form, more information will be provided in relation to the meeting/interview details (joining ID and passcode), date and time. In addition, please find the attached steps of how to access the interview for simplicity.

Kindly respond to SinraRW@ufs.ac.za or contact Mr Ronald Sinra – at 082 504 1232 if you are interested in volunteering or seeking more information about the research study.

Yours sincerely,



.....

Principal Investigator: Mr. Ronald Sinra (MBA: Candidate – 2012 150 922)

APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW SCHEDULE: QUESTIONS ON THE WELL-BEING OF MBA STUDENTS

1. General questions

Well-being is a broad construct that concerns how and why our lives have meaning and is an integral component of mental health (World Health Organisation, 2014).

1.1. How do you perceive well-being and its importance as an MBA student?

2. Well-being strategies

2.1. What are the challenges that you have encountered in your studies, work and personal life that influenced your well-being as an MBA student?

2.2. Was there any specific event that influenced your well-being as an MBA student directly?

2.3. What are the major demands in your life currently, in your work, personal life and studies?

2.4. What are the resources that you use the most to cope with the demands in your work, personal life and studies?

2.5. What do you do to maintain a work-life balance?

2.6. What are your perceptions and suggestions on burnout and job-related stress as an MBA student?

2.7. How do you preserve and sustain long-term relationships, i.e. personal (family, friends) and professional (work, MBA group) relationships?

2.8. What are the strategies you employ to manage personal setbacks and challenges?

2.9. How do you maintain resilience as an MBA student when encountering academic challenges?

2.10. What advice can you give to other MBA students to enhance their well-being?

3. MBA programme

3.1 Which demands in the MBA programme put the most pressure on your well-being?

3.2 What are the major sources of support that you use to maintain your well-being in the MBA programme? (any source of support)

3.3 What can be changed in the MBA programme to enhance the well-being of MBA students?

3.4 Are there any current support services on campus (physical or virtual) that you find useful in supporting your well-being as an MBA student?

3.5 Are there any suggestions that you can make to the Business School or the university to support the well-being of MBA students better?

APPENDIX C: PERMISSION LETTER FROM THE UFS BUSINESS SCHOOL



Dear Prof. Nicolene Barkhuizen (Director – UFS: Business School)

RE: Preliminary permission to conduct research at your organization

I am doing research and would like to request permission to conduct my research at the University of Free State Business School.

DATE

16 March 2024

PRELIMINARY TITLE OF RESEARCH PROJECT*

Well-being needs of Master of Business Administration (MBA) students at the University of Free State

PRINCIPLE INVESTIGATOR

Ronald Wesley Simra

2012 150 922

051 401 3879/082 504 1232

FACULTY AND DEPARTMENT

Economic and Management Sciences Faculty
Business School

STUDY LEADER NAME AND CONTACT

Prof. Liezel Massyn

051 401 7305/ MassynL@ufs.ac.za

APPROVAL NEEDED

This study still needs ethical approval from the General Human Research Ethics (GHREC) committee at the University of the Free State. As part of the application for ethical clearance I need temporary approval from you to conduct the research in your organization. Once the Ethical Clearance certificate has been issued by the GHREC, the formal and final permission document and the data collection instruments will be provided to you for final consideration and approval.

Therefore, in order for me to complete my research, I need your permission to:

	Permission Requested (YES,NO, N/A)	Request Approved (YES, NO)
Collect data from <i>Masters of Business Administration (MBA)</i>	YES	YES

* The Title and objective of the study may change, based on the reviews performed by the supervisor and scientific committee and the UFS. If the changes made has a significant impact on the permission requested, you will be informed as soon as possible

<i>students enrolled at the UFS Business School</i>		
Access to internal data <i>specifically enrolment status and year level</i>	YES	YES
Access to internal documentation <i>describe all the documents that you need access to in order to perform your study</i>	N/A	N/A
Including your organization's name in the study and the title of the study. If the answer is no, please also indicate whether I can still get access to the above if the study results are anonymized.	YES	YES
Using the data collected for future conference proceedings and or article publication.	YES	YES

ADDITIONAL STIPULATIONS

If you have any additional stipulations about the temporary request for permission to conduct research in your organization, please include those stipulations in the space provided.

Yours sincerely



Ronald Simra

Approval Granted by:
Prof EN Barkhuizen



Date

18/06/2024



APPENDIX D: ETHICAL CLEARANCE LETTER



GENERAL/HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE (GHREC)

Registration Number: REC-112922-058

02-Sep-2024

Dear Mr Ronald Sinra

Application Approved

Research Project Title:

Well-being needs of Master of Business Administration (MBA) students at the University of Free State

Ethical Clearance number:

UFS-HSD2024/0590

We are pleased to inform you that your application for ethical clearance has been approved. Your ethical clearance is valid for twelve (12) months from the date of issue. We request that any changes that may take place during the course of your study/research project be submitted via an Amendment on RIMS to the ethics office to ensure ethical transparency. Furthermore, you are requested to submit a Final Report on RIMS for your study/research project to the ethics office once the project has concluded. Should you require more time than the allotted 12 months to complete this research, please apply for an extension by submitting a Continuation/Report on RIMS. Thank you for submitting your proposal for ethical clearance. We wish you success with your research.

Yours sincerely,

Dr Adri Du Plessis

Chairperson: General/Human Research Ethics Committee

Dr Adri
du
Plessis

Digitally
signed by Dr
Adri du Plessis
Date:
2024.09.03
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APPENDIX E: SCD APPROVAL LETTER FOR STUDENT ASSISTANCE DURING INTERVIEWS

UNIVERSITY OF THE
FREE STATE
UNIVERSITEIT VAN DIE
VRYSTAAT
YUNIVESITHI YA
FREISTATA



UFS·UV
STUDENT COUNSELLING &
DEVELOPMENT (SCD)
STUDENTE VOORLICHTING &
ONTWIKKELING (SVO)

24 June 2024

Ronald Wesley Sinra
Student number: 2012150922

REQUEST FOR STUDENT COUNSELLING & DEVELOPMENT ASSISTANCE

Your request has reference.

We take note of your study entitled "*Well-being needs of Master of Business Administration (MBA) students at the University of Free State*" and will assist students that might need psychological assistance.

Please note that no students will receive preferential treatment.

Contact details:

Bloem Campus

scd@ufs.ac.za
051 401 2853

QQ Campus

scdQQ@ufs.ac.za
058 718 5125

South Campus

scdsouth@ufs.ac.za
051 505 1989

Best wishes with your study!

Kind regards

Dr M DUNN-COETZEE
DIRECTOR: STUDENT COUNSELLING & DEVELOPMENT



APPENDIX F: MBA WELLBEING NVIVO PROJECT - CODEBOOK

MBA Well-being Project (Phase 1 to 6)

Codes and Themes

Name	Description	Files	References
(RQ 1) Wellbeing Support	1. What are the existing well-being support structures in place for MBA students at the UFS?	14	157
Theme 1 Support		14	157
Connection		3	4
Emotional Stability		2	5
Family		4	8
General Support		12	60
Perspective		4	12
Prioritisation		4	14
Programme Restructuring		3	4
Relationships		10	34
Spiritual Connection		7	16

Name	Description	Files	References
(RQ 2) MBA Student Needs for Better Wellbeing by the Institution	2. What do MBA students need to assist them to have better well-being for conducting their studies?	14	522
Theme 2 Experience of Wellbeing		14	134
Anxiety		3	5
Burnout		8	22
Coping		5	21
Counselling		8	10
Enhancement of Well-being		3	7
Exercise		8	16
Financial Stress		4	5
Health		4	7
Sleep		4	8

Name	Description	Files	References
Stressful Environment		7	26
Transitioning		2	7
Theme 3 Demands		14	292
Academic Pressure		11	41
Achievement		8	18
Energy		3	3
Equilibrium (Work-Life Balance)		14	56
High Demands		5	12
Job (Workload)		11	22
Knowledge		4	6
Research		14	52
Resilience		8	23
Strategic Planning		6	9

Name	Description	Files	References
Supervision		6	10
Time Management		13	40
Theme 4 Resources		12	96
Communication		10	38
Group Dynamics		7	21
Interactions		3	10
Resources		4	12
Technology		7	15
(RQ 3) Specific wellbeing needs not offered by the Institution.	3. What are the MBA students' well-being needs beyond the existing services the University of Free State provides?	12	45
Theme 5 Needs		12	45
Engagement		4	6
Growth		4	8
Mentorship		2	4

Name	Description	Files	References
Social Life		5	14
Well-being Services		5	13
Additional Findings	Codes <5 with references <7, with no significant contribution to research questions	14	99
Ability to voice up		1	1
Acceptance		1	2
Administration		1	3
Attendance		1	1
Availability		1	3
Awareness		1	1
Beneficial Platforms		1	1
Boundaries		1	1
Cognition		1	2
Competency		1	3

Name	Description	Files	References
Concentration		1	1
Content Familiarisation		1	1
Discipline		1	4
Discontinuation of Studies		2	2
Effort		1	1
Exhaustion		1	1
Expectations		1	1
Extra-curricular activity		1	1
Flexibility		2	4
Frustration		1	1
Grief		1	1
Holistic Leadership		1	1
Integration		1	1
Leisure Time		2	2

Name	Description	Files	References
Meditation		1	1
Money		1	1
Motivation		1	2
Multitasking		1	1
Music		1	1
Navigation		1	3
Negotiation		1	1
Networking		1	5
Nurturing		1	2
Opportunities		1	2
Optimism		3	3
Peer Focus		1	1
Proactive Approach		5	6
Programme Effectiveness		1	3

Name	Description	Files	References
Recommendations		1	1
Reflection		2	3
Responsibility		2	2
Routine		1	2
Self-motivation		1	2
Therapy		1	4
Training		1	2
Value Orientated		1	2
Vulnerability		1	3
Work Environment		1	2
Workshops		1	4