Mapping the New Generation of Academics Programme (nGAP) to the C.O.S.T.A. Postgraduate Research Supervision and Coaching Model: A Value Proposition for New Researchers in South Africa

King Costa[0000-0001-9132-9132]

Global Centre for Academic Research, Johannesburg, South Africa
costak@researchglobal.net

Abstract

The Department of Higher Education and Training's (the Department) New Generation of Academics Programme (nGAP) is a prestigious program that involves the recruitment of highly capable scholars as new academics. These academics are recruited based on carefully designed and balanced equity considerations, as well as the most critical disciplinary areas in the higher education system. The nGAP is currently the largest program within the Staffing South Africa's Universities Framework (SSAUF), a component of the University Capacity Development Programme that focuses on university staff development (UCDP). The C.O.S.T.A. Postgraduate Research Supervision and Coaching Model is a tool that has been developed to capacitate both researchers and supervisors with a specific intent to lighten the journey of research for postgraduate students in South Africa. For students who have never been exposed to research methods, postgraduate research is a huge obstacle. Students' lack of exposure to research language was one of the challenges revealed in a recent study of postgraduate supervision. Whereas difficulties students face with methods within the positivist and realist philosophical dimensions are not insurmountable, a variety of approaches, including rigor determination in qualitative research results in complexities, which present a plethora of challenges to novice researchers. This document introduces the C.O.S.T.A. model as a tool for academics and students, with a systematic guide to understanding foundational concepts and the language of research, as well as making informed decisions about research methods and design strategy options available to the prospective researcher. Furthermore, the tool is also powerful instrument for monitoring and measuring development and performance of researchers. With five nodes that fundamentally inform application (Concepts, Objective, Situation, Tact and Assessment), the C.O.S.T.A provides a framework and a standard against which researchers should benchmark their development.

Key Words: Academics development, Higher Education, Postgraduate Research, Researcher Development

1. Introduction

The COSTA Research Coaching Model was designed to help students and those teaching research, particularly qualitative research, to structure their learning and development in a wide range of post-graduate research fields (Disney, Harowell, Mulhall & Ronayne, 2013). As an introduction to novice researchers and a tool for those who have the task of guiding novice researchers, this guide emphasizes knowledge development, intellectual support and the strengthening of behavioural characteristics and skills (Solem & Foote, 2009). Since qualitative research relies heavily on texts and themes rather than data, there is a lot of literature about the difficulties faced by postgraduate students (Medway, 2002). More and more governments around the world are recognizing the importance of acquiring research skills and capacity as essential to creating sustainable and thriving economies (Costa, 2020;nHlengwa, 2019). One of the problems for low production of research in some universities is attributed to lack of research skills. This problem was also identified by the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET), hence the introduction of New Generation of Academic Programme (nGAP).

In 2015, South African universities implemented the nGAP. The nGAP was proposed as a strategic TM initiative to grow and develop ECAs as a nationally coordinated program. The nGAP is supported by the provision of permanent positions and programs that help individuals develop their teaching, research, and social engagement abilities (DHET, 2017). The programme is phased in its development, with penalties for early termination. Salary support is provided on a sliding scale over a six-year period; tuition for doctoral or master's degrees; mentoring; participation in staff development activities; and research and international mobility costs (DHET, 2017). Participants benefit from a reduced workload; they work at 20% of their expected workload in years one to three, 50% in year four, and 100% in year five (DHET, 2017). The Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) specifies the mentors' responsibilities and recommends that mentors be senior academics who have recently retired (DHET, 2017)**.**

It is not clear now what monitoring and evaluation is used to ensure that participants reach maximum requirements of the programme at the time of programme completion. However, an explicit representation indicates the programme structure over a period of 6 years. In this representation, the first three years of the programme) are designed to allow the incumbent to maximize developmental opportunities while also creating space for postgraduate study. This is accomplished by reducing an academic's role and responsibilities by 20%. The nGAP documentation presents the 20% - 80% workload split as a foregone conclusion for institutions that share a common conception and practice around workload models. However, given the

significant differences in institutional expertise and practices related to teaching and research (Moyo, 2018), the implementation of a 20% workload varies significantly across institutions. While the nGAP workload clearly involves teaching and research, the Integration of the COSTA Postgraduate Research Model is proposed at the first three years of the and mapped to the research activities of the academics. The Ministerial Task Team Report on Academic staff participation and progression patterns at South African universities in 2019 noted the gaps in research capacity and supervision (MTT Report, 2019). Figure 1 below is a high level depiction of how the COSTA Postgraduate Research Model could be a suitable tool to close the gaps.
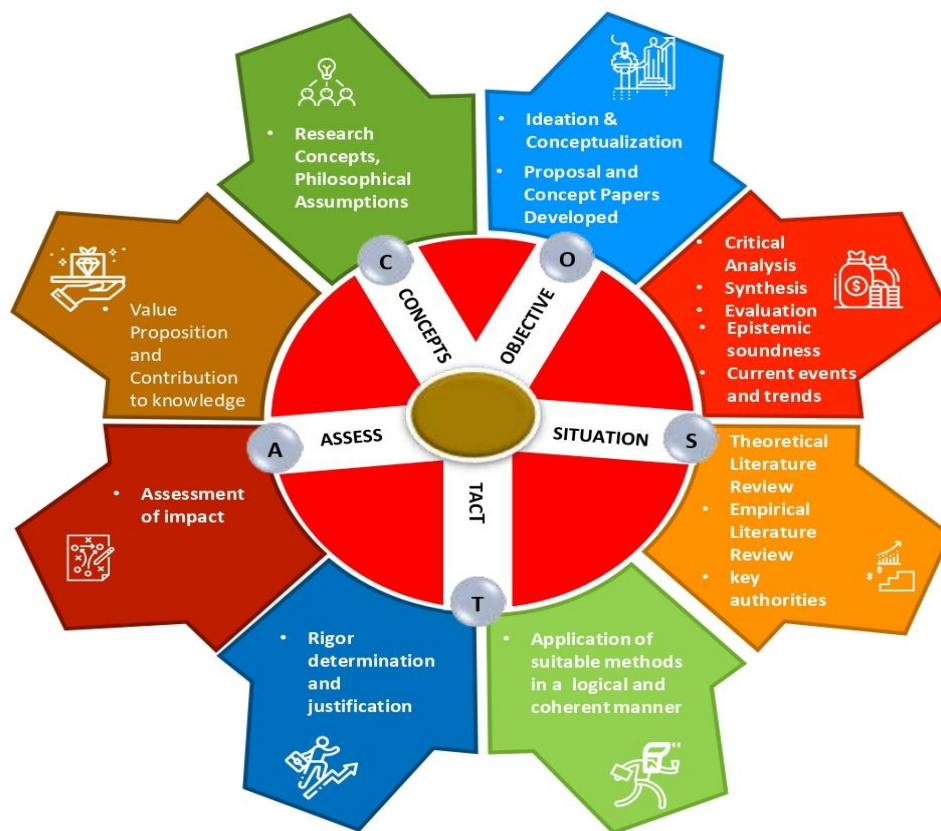
Figure 1: COSTA Research Model (Created by author)

2. The Structure of the COSTA Postgraduate Research Model

Step 1

The C.O.S.T.A Model's first stage begins with the application of the Grow Model to map the coaching relationship between the student and supervisor, as proposed by Whitmore (1996). Coaching, as a non-directive, solution-oriented, and developmental intervention, is critical in postgraduate supervision (Keane, 2016). There is a substantial body of research supporting

coaching as a means of increasing self-efficacy and personal confidence in goal attainment, as well as the role coaching plays in educational settings (Rhodes, 2013). While the C.O.S.T.A Model places a premium on coaching (the process), it also emphasizes mentoring (the relationship) as two complementary helping behaviours used by supervisors to enhance students' abilities to achieve their academic goals (Pearson & Brew, 2002).

There is a correlation between this stage and the nGAP programme, which also requires that novice researchers be supported by experienced academics, preferably retired professors (Hlengwa, 2019). Although the support required at nGAP level is mentoring, the content of that mentoring programme has elements of coaching, whereby goals are set up and achievement of these goals is the focus of the mentoring relationship. Some of areas that need to be strengthened in the nGAP are related to training and development. According to Hlengwa (2019), institutionalised induction programme is centred around three variants, which encompass a situation whereby there is or non-existent development programme, while in other institutions there is a professional development programme whereby beneficiaries may or may not attend. The last variant of induction of nGAP is characterised by a formal teaching and learning programme.

Step 2

The second step focuses on a student's goal (proposal) and the steps they need to take to get there. At this point, the novice researcher has the foundational skills (theory and practice) needed to be a postgraduate scholar. He or she can talk about concepts, write down a theoretical framework, and show how it is different from the conceptual framework while making connections between the two research approaches. The novice researcher further talks about and understands how language is used in different situations. Students learn how to write proposals that show a clear road map and include the whole idea. At this point, writing starts and coaching takes place. With regard to the mentoring practice, both the nGAP academic and the student researcher benefit out of a triad of relationship between the three parties involved, although the connection is primarily the nGAP academic.

Step 3

After reading the literature and assessing its scope, a scholar must be able to clearly articulate a gap in knowledge, write a problem statement, and draft research questions in order to understand the problem (Affero, Abiddin & Aminuddin,2011). These facts necessitate the need for a literature review prior to the submission of a proposal. To help students develop their

critical reading and writing skills, supervisors introduce students to concepts such as critical thinking; synthesis; and summarization as depicted (Costa, 2020).

Step 4

According to Costa (2020), Step 4 of the process may be summed up as TACT (Trustworthiness, Auditability, Credibility and Transferability). TACT is a demonstration of the ability to gather, analyze, present, discuss, and formulate a conclusion based on the findings. The study's validity, reliability, or trustworthiness can then be proven by demonstrating these concepts. This is the first time we have encountered the term TACU. Qualitative research rigor is measured by the TACU, which includes four quality criteria: *truth value*, *applicability value*, *consistency value*, and *Unbiasness*/n*eutrality valu*e. In line with postulations by leading qualitative research theorists like Kothari & Garg (2016), Neuman (2014)and Creswell and Miller (2002), the TACU was created by Costa (2020) to ensure that quality criteria are aligned (1985).

Step 5

The last step of the COSTA Postgraduate Research Model focusses on the impact of the output of the researcher. Whether it is the academic on nGAP or the student being supervised by nGAP academic, it is important to ensure that the output results in a pragmatic framework or model that solves a particular problem. This is known as research utility, as posited by Beutler and Howard (1998, apud Costa, 2020). Key areas of emphasis here are value proposition of the study and contribution to knowledge. According to the National Development Plan (NDP), the problem faced by South Africa is low production of scholarship that informs economic and social development of the country – leaving South Africa as a resourced-based economy, as opposed to the idea knowledge-based economy (Costa, 2020).

3. Impact of COSTA Model since 2019 – Direct Comments from beneficiaries

Arguments presented herein this document indicate that the proposed that the COSTA Postgraduate Research Programme may be a suitable developmental programme with binary benefits for academic and students at the same time. It is very important to combine supervision and coaching in the C.O.S.T.A Model to help students become well-developed, independent thinkers who will be able to work in the field of their choice. Whitmore (1996) says that coaching is a process of unlocking one is potential in order to maximize one's untapped potential. This way of thinking is also shown in the way coaching is thought of as a process that includes a series of activities with a specific goal for growing, improving, and achieving an outcome (Passmore & Fillery-Travis, 2011).

As someone who believes in a collaborative approach to supervision, the C.O.S.T.A Model encourages processes that help people learn and grow, which leads to better performance and researcher competence. It is very important to combine supervision and coaching in the C.O.S.T.A Model to help students become well-developed, independent thinkers who will be able to work in the field of their choice. Whitmore (1996) argued that coaching is a process of unlocking one's potential in order to maximize one's untapped potential. This way of thinking is also shown in the way coaching is thought of as a process that includes a series of activities with a specific goal for growing, improving, and achieving an outcome (Passmore & Fillery-Travis, 2011). This forms the basis of the costa model.

A number of students and faculty from different universities in South Africa have benefited from the programme. Some of them have not only benefitted, but have applied the C.O.S.T.A. Model to their different settings and contexts, either on their studies of helping others through their studies. The author has provided feedback selection of some of programme beneficiaries or participants' testimonies regarding the programme and its impact in their lives. According to Al-Bashir and Kabir (2016), students feedback in higher education is considered as a critical tool for learning delivery and assessment of the impact of that delivery. There is a substantial and growing body of research in higher education environments on feedback and its value and effectiveness in student learning. Feedback is regarded as an essential strategy for assisting students' development as independent learners, allowing them to monitor, evaluate, and regulate their own learning (Al-Bashir & Kabir, 2016).

Received: 3 August 2020 **Commenter:** Benevolent Brown-Tumagole **Comment:** An academic Research is extremely challenging especially for students who have not been exposed to research methods. A C.O.S.T.A model is a tool that is designed to help either undergraduate, postgraduates or academics to better understand the language and the fundamentals of research as well to make informed choices on the research methods and design strategy options. I would like to thank Dr. King Costa for developing such a helpful research tool and making our academic research journey easier and exciting. Dr. Brown-Tumagole, Pretoria.	**Received:** 3 August 2020 **Commenter:** Dr Nisi Thusi **Comment:** COSTA model hold you by hand though the journey of Research. Its gives students who has never had opportunity of exposure to research methods to have an understanding of what research is and how to do research in a step by step manner. These elements has added to the normal supervision programme at postgraduate level. This tool promotes collaboration and collegiality using a multi-disciplinary approach to making a research journey of students an exciting one. C.O.S.T.A model is a great tool suitable for use by academics and students it helps with a panoramic view of steps to be taken first to understand foundational concepts and the language of research.The researcher has produced a complete Guide to Qualitative Research. This model help deal with problems and challenges in research.

Received: 14 August 2020 **Commenter:** Rajesh Mahabeer **Comment:** I am a PhD student at the University of Witwatersrand. I am coached by Dr King Costa who took me through the rigor of developing my proposal, which I defended at the Panel. I found the C.O.S.T.A. Model to be well researched and very effective in guiding me through my research. It is highly recommended for researchers alike (rookies, advanced students and academics). The model uncluttered my understanding of the concepts and empowered me to craft a clear defendable proposal supported by the expert academic coaching of Dr King Costa. I highly recommend the use of the model by all researchers.	**Received:** 16 August 2020 **Commenter:** Matsiri Sebati **Comment:** I recommend the COSTA Research Model as a tool for postgraduate researchers, novice researchers, and even established researchers. This model helps demystify difficult concepts about research as an activity and as a discipline. I have completed my MBA recently, supervised by Dr Costa who used the model. Before using this model I had already given up, BUT when my university appointed him as my supervisor, he became my coach and took me through Concepts, Objective, Situational assessment through Literature Review, Tact through Research Methodology and as such I was able to Assess the value of my output, an MBA using a Qualitative Systematic Review (or Qualitative Evidence Synthesis) methodology. Thank you for developing such a great tool.

MODEL OF ACADEMIC RESEARCH COACHING

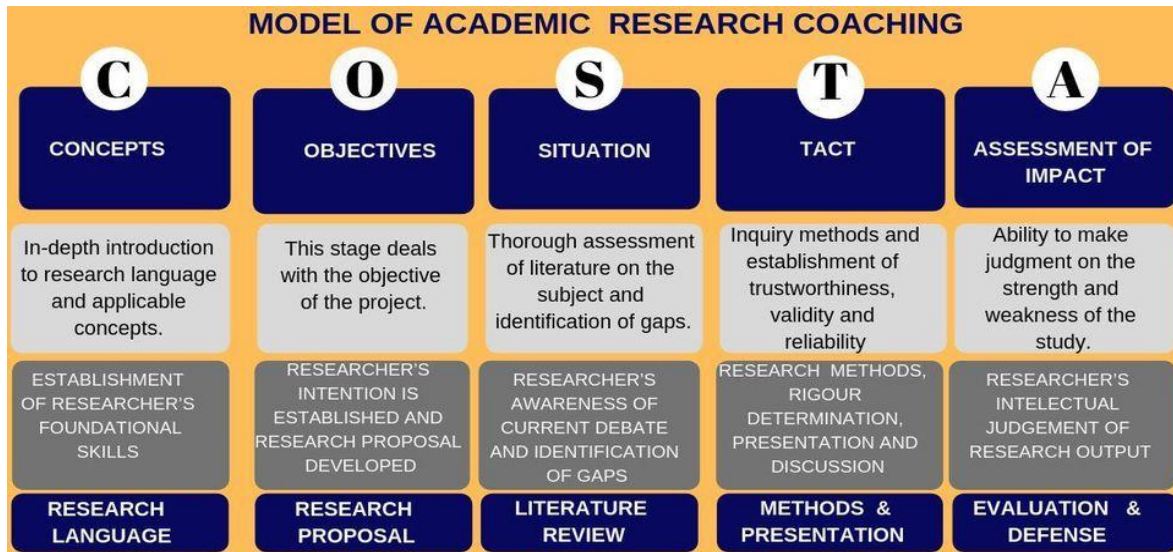| **C** CONCEPTS	**O** OBJECTIVES	**S** SITUATION	**T** TACT	**A** ASSESSMENT OF IMPACT
In-depth introduction to research language and applicable concepts.	This stage deals with the objective of the project.	Thorough assessment of literature on the subject and identification of gaps.	Inquiry methods and establishment of trustworthiness, validity and reliability	Ability to make judgment on the strength and weakness of the study.
ESTABLISHMENT OF RESEARCHER'S FOUNDATIONAL SKILLS	RESEARCHER'S INTENTION IS ESTABLISHED AND RESEARCH PROPOSAL DEVELOPED	RESEARCHER'S AWARENESS OF CURRENT DEBATE AND IDENTIFICATION OF GAPS	RESEARCH METHODS, RIGOUR DETERMINATION, PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION	RESEARCHER'S INTELECTUAL JUDGEMENT OF RESEARCH OUTPUT
RESEARCH LANGUAGE	RESEARCH PROPOSAL	LITERATURE REVIEW	METHODS & PRESENTATION	EVALUATION & DEFENSE

Figure 2: Structure of the COSTA Model of Academic Research Coaching (Created by author)

4. Conclusion

This document presented a method for integrating nGAP and similar programmes to the COSTA Postgraduate Research Coaching Model. Elements of the model were briefly discussed and suggestions for integration and common elements presented. It has been established that research coaching in postgraduate supervision is essential and transformational for both supervisors and students alike. Since the COSTA Model is based on teamwork, it can help students become better communicators and problem solvers, which in turn helps them achieve their academic objectives on time and on budget. While being held accountable for their own growth, it encourages them to become more independent and relevant in their respective economic professional activities. Many postgraduate students who took part in sessions and used the COSTA Model in their research reported that they felt more confident about their research, were able to better understand abstract concepts, and were given a framework for approaching difficult problems. Some of their comments have been presented in this document.

The programme can contribute to knowledge and professional practice by offering a framework for andragogical and pedagogical tools in research teaching and learning. The Model could also encourage and create a growth environment for both students and supervisors whereby learning follows a collaborative drive as opposed to current Master Apprentice Model (MAM) used in most universities. Furthermore, it is envisaged that

implementation of a model like this can help improve throughputs and transform institutions as centres of research excellence.

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