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Chapter 1: Introduction

Background of the Study

Public health sector not only demands the workforce to demonstrate medical knowledge and skills, but also to show ethical and professional behaviour in the work role and towards patients, colleagues and other professions in the field (Tomas, et al., 2021). Professional behaviour is defined by Yamani, et al. (2015) as, a range of responsibilities and attributes, comprising honesty, integrity, punctuality, commitment towards work, ethical conduct and decision-making, professional appearance, and catering to the needs of the patients. Additionally, professional behaviour is linked with workplace etiquette that leads to respectful behaviour in the professional environment (Kowalski, 2016).

Al Gahtani, et al. (2021) explained that demand for professionalism in the health and care sector is rising and this increases the need for the postgraduate students, studying Public Health and Social Care (PHSC), to acquire professional behaviour at the university level. According to Kirschner, et al. (1997), a study environment comprising knowledge and task environment plays a significant role in the acquisition of professional competencies. Conversely, Munro, et al. (2005) stated that personality attributes, such as open-mindedness, emotional intelligence, and compliance with rules and coordination with others shapes the professional ethical behaviour. Felstead (2013) opined that role modelling and mentoring from the senior staff at the university contributes to the student's professional development. This research is therefore undertaken to assess a wide array of factors that influences the professional behaviour of the students, especially of postgraduate PHSC students at the public university.

Scope of the Research

In order to explore the factors having an impact on the professional behaviour of the postgraduate students, this research will focus on adopting a qualitative approach, particularly focus group discussion, to delve into the different aspects of these factors. This will aid in detailed understanding of the multidimensional nature of professional behaviour among the postgraduate students. However, the scope of this research is limited to postgraduate students studying PHSC courses in specific public universities. This limits generalisation of the research outcomes to other universities. However, the findings, on the other hand, can provide valuable data to the universities for designing practices, policies and resources to enhance professionalism among the future practitioners in the public healthcare sector.

Research Overview

The structure of this report is given below:

Chapter 1	Introduces the research topic and offers relevant background information.
Chapter 2	Discusses the current research in the similar areas and justifies the reason for conducting the research. It also illustrates the aim and objective of the given study.
Chapter 3	Specifies the methodology used to conduct the study as well as to collect and analyse the data.
Chapter 4	Presents the research findings and the qualitative results derived by thematically analysing the data gathered through focus group discussion. It also offers interpretation and discussion on the results.
Chapter 5	Concludes the study and gives suggestions to enhance professional behaviour of PHSC postgraduate students. It also offers recommendations for conducting future research in similar areas.

Chapter 2: Rationale and Research Questions/Aims

Research Rationale

Czabanowska and Middleton (2022) mentioned that the PHSC sector demands strong professionalism and ethical behaviour of future practitioners as the field is directly concerned with quality care and community well-being. However, Thistlethwaite (2012) explained that the early years of university education plays a pivotal role in moulding the professional attitude and traits in the future practitioners. A good knowledge of the factors impacting the postgraduate students in the university setting is essential to encourage the development of professional competence. Although past studies have delved into the topic of professional behaviour in the healthcare sector (Johnson and May, 2015; Desai and Kaadia, 2022; Patey, et al., 2022), there are limited studies focusing specifically on the postgraduate PHSC students in the public university. This study intends to fill this gap by offering an in-depth insight targeting a specific group of population. Furthermore, by exploring the factors shaping professionalism in these students, the study aims to inform the university settings to design policies and practices to nurture professional behaviour in the postgraduate students.

Research Aim and Objectives

The main aim of this research is to assess the factors that have an impact on the professionalism of postgraduate PHSC students. Based on this aim, the concrete objectives set in conducting this research includes

- To evaluate the professional and unprofessional behaviour of postgraduate PHSC students
- To explore the factors that lead to professionalism in the postgraduate PHSC students
- To identify resources at the public university that contribute to the development of professional behaviour in PHSC students

Research Questions

In line with the research aim and objectives, the following research questions are set to answer in this research:

- What professional and unprofessional behaviour are demonstrated by the postgraduate PHSC students?
- What factors lead to professionalism in the postgraduate PHSC students?

- What resources at the public university contribute to the development of professional behaviour in PHSC students?

Chapter 3: Research Methodology

Research Methods

Creswell (2014) stated that research methodology encompasses various methods and techniques that are selected and used to conduct a study and to gather and analyse the data. Generally, there are three methodological choices – quantitative, qualitative and mixed methods – which the author can use based on the type of the research. This research has employed mono-qualitative research approach to examine the research topic as it allows the author to gain a deeper insight into the feeling and thoughts of the people about the real-world issues (Saunders, et al., 2019), i.e., the factors influencing professional behaviour of the postgraduate PHSC students.

Merriam and Tisdell (2016) defined qualitative research as a subjective process to gain in-depth understanding and to interpret natural phenomena occurring in the social world in a non-numeric manner.

Strengths: Qualitative research allows the participants to freely and clearly express their experiences, ideas and thoughts without any preconceived constraints. This increases the authenticity of the data used in the research. It offers flexibility to amend research questions or ask follow-up questions based on the responses of the participants in order to better understand their perspectives. Furthermore, it helps to collect large amounts of data from a relatively small sample size of 5 to 15 respondents (Hair, et al., 2020; Bryman, 2016).

Limitations: The major drawback of this method is that it consumes a lot of time to collect and analyse vast and detailed information from the participants. The researcher needs to have experience and skills for conducting interviews and ask follow-up questions when required or else in-depth information may not be generated. Additionally, small sample size can limit the generalisation of the findings for a larger population (Bryman, 2016; Rahman, 2017).

Research Design

Research design is a strategic plan used to conduct a research and to gather and interpret the information. Interviews and focus group discussion (FGD) are the common qualitative research designs used in a research (Roller and Lavrakas, 2015). However, this study has adopted the FGD approach to gather information relevant to the research topic. According to Wilkinson (2011), FGD is defined as an informal interaction on a given topic that occurs within a small group of designated individuals. The main purpose of using the FGD approach is to understand the attitudes, feelings and thoughts of the participants as well as to

encourage them to openly discuss the social issue under investigation, i.e., factors influencing professional behaviour of the public university students.

Strengths: FGD helps to gather diverse perspectives and experiences of the participants belonging to different backgrounds. It allows the participants to build their thoughts on each other's viewpoint and this results in in-depth interaction generating new ideas and insights. Researchers can gather quick and real-time data as well as observe the bodily and non-verbal gestures of the participants which further increases the validity of the data collected. Further, the researcher has the flexibility to prompt follow-up questions and build a rapport with the participants (Roller and Lavrakas, 2015).

Limitations: FGD uses small sample size which makes it challenging to generalise the results to the entire participant population. Participants having dominant voice or viewpoints may suppress the quieter participants or may influence others opinion, leading to biased responses or lack of diverse responses. Group discussion may lead to disagreements or conflicts among the participants that may be difficult to handle or resolve. Analysing data may be a complex and time-consuming task as the researcher may have to refer to lengthy recordings or transcripts to locate themes (Pope and Mays, 2020).

Recruitment

In this study, the participants were recruited from among the university students, aged 23 to 26 years, studying postgraduate PHSC course at the University of Wales Trinity Saint David (UWTSD), at London campus in the United Kingdom (UK). The researcher had approached the participants during the study hours and had gathered them in one of the classrooms to conduct face-to-face FGD.

Sampling

Sampling indicates specific sample participants, representing a larger population, who are selected for the research purpose (Cohen, et al., 2018). In this study, participants for the FGD were selected using a convenience sampling method, which is a type of non-probability sampling. This non-probability convenience sampling selects a specific unit of people in a non-random or subjective manner (Saunders, et al., 2019). This method was considered appropriate for the study as the postgraduate PHSC students at UWTSD were easily available and had shown willingness to take part in the discussion. Beins (2017) opined that convenience sampling is cost-effective and time-saving method, however, the easy

availability feature limits the sample diversity and increases selection bias as the participants chosen may not meet the research requirement.

Participants for the Study

A total of 6 participants were selected for the FGD. These participants showed their willingness to participate, were undertaking postgraduate PHSC subjects at public (UWSTD) university, and were easily accessible and available to the researcher.

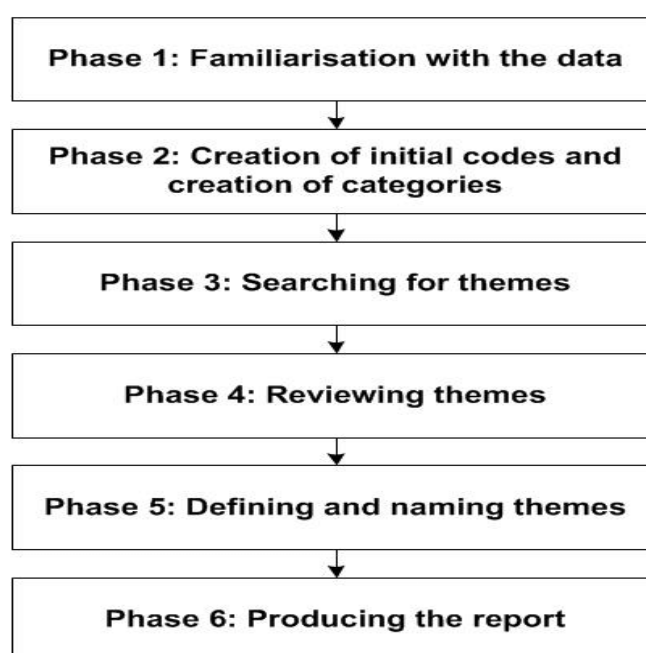
Data Collection Methods

Data was collected in this study using FGD which took place in a quiet room within UWSTD University. This research location was easy for the university students to access and was favourable to conduct open group interaction. The discussion was directed by the chairperson (researcher) who informed the participants about the research topic, the duration of the session (45 mins to 1 hour) and had asked their consent before beginning the discussion. To gather topic-related information, a guided questionnaire, consisting of 14 open-ended semi-structured questions, was used (Refer to Appendix for a copy of the questionnaire). During the discussion, the chairperson prompted additional questions to clearly understand the perspective of the participants and to gain deeper insight into the research topic (Roller and Lavrakas, 2015). The entire discussion was recorded on the smartphone of the researcher.

Data Analysis Technique

In order to analyse the data gathered through FGD, the recorded data of the students was converted into verbal transcription using the 'transcript tool' of Microsoft 365. This allowed the researcher to easily scan the data, while retaining their authentic responses. Further to analyse the transcribed data from the FGD, the researcher had adopted thematic analysis method. According to Nowell, et al. (2017), aids in flexible and accurate analysis of the given data, which can be performed using 6 phases (See Fig. 1) as suggested by Braun and Clarke (2006). These steps allowed the researcher to find patterns and themes within the data and in relation to factors that influence professionalism among the postgraduate PHSC students. Clarke and Braun (2014) explained that these themes can be regarded as thoughts, words or discussion that constantly appeared throughout the conversation or the transcript.

Figure 1: Phases in Thematic Analysis



Source: Clarke and Braun (2014)

Using thematic analysis steps, the researcher engaged in thorough reading of the transcript to get **familiarised with the data**. Then the researcher had marked professional behaviour-related important data from the text to **generate the codes**. These initial codes were combined together to **form themes** that specified factors influencing professional behaviour of the students. These **themes were further reviewed, redefined and renamed** in such a way that they not only represented the responses of the participants related to the topic, but also helped to accomplish the study aims and objectives. Lastly, the themes were **used in the report** to discuss the research topic from the participant's perspective and to meet the study purpose (Nowell, et al., 2017).

The main strength of thematic analysis is that it offers flexibility to analyse large data in step-by-step manner. This further helps to identify recurring themes related to the study topic, leading to the accomplishment of study aim and objectives (Kiger and Varpio, 2020). However, the major limitation of thematic analysis is that it may result in biased and inaccurate findings as the researcher may use his/her perspective, personal experience or judgement to generate codes and themes. Additionally, dealing with complex and large data can be a time-consuming task (Kiger and Varpio, 2020).

Ethical Considerations

The following ethical considerations were ensured by the researcher:

- Before the FGD, the participants were informed about the research topic and the duration of the session. Additionally, their verbal consent was taken prior to the discussion.
- The researcher ensured that safe, quiet, easily accessible and comfortable space is provided to the participants to conduct the group discussion openly.
- The researcher treated all the participants with respect and allowed each one to share their perspective. Further, the participants were encouraged to share their opinion and clarify their views by asking probing questions.
- FGD was recorded on the researcher's smartphone which was password protected and used and accessed only by the researcher.
- The transcript generated of the audio recording was saved in the password locked laptop of the researcher.
- To preserve the confidentiality of the participants, personal information (name, age, occupation, income, etc.) were not asked before or during the FGD.
- Adhering to Data Protection Act 2018 in relation to gathering, using and processing data (Gov.UK, n. d.), the researcher intends to use the participants' responses for the study purpose and later discharge it after the completion of the course.

Chapter 4: Results and Discussion

Theme 1: Characteristics of Professional and Unprofessional Behaviour

Table 1: Codes and Themes extracted from the Data

Data Extraction	Codes	Theme
"Professional behaviours involve the too many things. ... integrity, respect, accountability, and, uh, there are too ethical standards in the workplace." (Participant 5)	Integrity, respect, accountability, ethical behaviour	Characteristics of professional behaviour
"... professional behaviour means, uh, professional persons should be punctual." (Participant 2)	Punctuality	Characteristics of professional behaviour
"...some of the Dressing sense is also important in the professional behavior." (Participant 3)	Professional appearance	Characteristics of professional behaviour
"...teamwork, effective teamworking is very important and interpersonal skills and, um, critical thinking is important and communication (Participant 1)	Working collaborative, interpersonal skills	Characteristics of professional behaviour
"...well coming in class. I always get late..." (Participant 6)	Not being punctual	Characteristics of unprofessional behaviour
"...little standard and, uh, have some, uh, respect, uh, boundaries" (Participant 3)	Not working ethically, disrespect towards others	Characteristics of unprofessional behaviour
"...I think I need more, be more inter interactive of the lessons..." (Participant 4)	Lack of communication skills	Characteristics of unprofessional behaviour

Source: Researcher's Creation

Discussion: With regards to the characteristics of professional behaviour as described in Table 1, participants regarded punctuality as the most important trait of a healthcare professional. Another attribute of professionalism, as mentioned by the participants, included interpersonal skills, like leadership, time management, communication skills, critical thinking, team-work and listening skills. Besides, ethical conduct, integrity, accountability and respect

towards teachers and peers at the university and seniors and peers at the workplace, were also noted by the participants as important characteristics of professional behaviour.

In terms of unprofessional behaviour, the participants stated that traits like, unpunctuality, lack of interpersonal skills (especially communication skills), disrespecting others, and showing unethical behaviour are the indicators of unprofessionalism.

These research findings relate to the previous study by Yamani, et al. (2015) and Kowalski (2016) who defined that professional behaviour consists of elements like professional appearance, respect towards others, ethical conduct, integrity, punctuality and so on. Moreover, in an unprofessionalism context, the findings related with the study by MacKenzie, et al. (2020) who found disrespectful behaviour, disengagement with others, dishonesty, and lack of awareness about personal attributes as the characteristics of unprofessional behaviour.

Theme 2: Contributing Elements of Professional Behaviour

Table 2: Codes extracted from the Data

Data Extracted	Code
"Um, professional ~~behavior~~ can be similar or different between younger and the older workplace due to generational variation in a work style and communication preferences..." (Participant 5) "...younger generation, they probably prefer in communication through like email or games or some social media. For me, I prefer face to face..." (Participant 4) "...generation gap plays a role in professionalism because the older ones have more experience and they have more skills as compared to the younger ones..." (Participant 6)	Age
"Yeah, I think professional ~~behavior~~ is important both side at the workplace, like we need to maintain respect and need ethics, and in university also need to punctuality, respect and collaborative work." (Participant 2) "...in both workspace and in the university, professionalism is much more important because if there is no professionalism in the workspace, it is difficult for to conduct the work more easily. There will be conflicts and there can be like misunderstandings...university. Uh, if we can't maintain the respect and good communication, the learning will not go smooth." (Participant 6)	Place

"...encourage professional ~~behavior~~ among classmates by leading, by, uh, leading by example, fostering open communication, highlight benefits, provide, uh, constructive feedback, sharing, uh, resources, promoting collaboration, setting expectation, and, uh, celebrating successes." (Participant 5) "Working part of a team understanding each other and, um, listening to everyone's views" (Participant 1)	Peer group
"Discourage unprofessional ~~behavior~~ in the university by setting a clear expectation, implementing a code of conduct, providing training program, fostering open communication outline consequences, promoting role modelling and encouraging collaboration." (Participant 5) "Such as, uh, making a policy or rules for the students..." (Participant 2) "Postgraduate students can acquire professional ~~behavior~~ through the, uh, ~~mentonship~~, mentorship, intensive networking, uh, workshops, industry specific training, through more observation and embracing continuous learning." (Participant 5)	Training, workshop, role modelling, observation, and setting policies
"If someone is come late or submit their assignment late, then uh, it'll be like, cut their marks or put the absence, like this kind of rules make or strict rules make for the student. So students may be more punctual." ""I think at the workplace the manager should be give reward to the person who have a good, uh, professional behaviour." "Like if someone have a good score in the professionalism, then at the end of the year at the workplace or university should give a reward to that person. So, all the people encouraged for to join the professionalism." (Participant 2)	Rewards and Punishment

Source: Researcher's Creation

Discussion: FGD examined various factors that may contribute to the development of professional behaviour in the postgraduate PHSC students. As shown in Table 2, participants 4, 5 and 6 stated an individual's 'age' determines how they will behave professionally, like the younger generation may prefer communication via email or social media, while the older population may prefer face-to-face communication. Participants 2 and 6 mentioned 'place' has an influence on professionalism and people may behave differently depending on whether they are at workspace or university. This result correlates with the study conducted by Kirschner, et al. (1997) who identified study environment plays a role in the acquisition of professional competencies.

As per the responses of participant 1 and 5, open communication, constructive feedback and collaborative working among the 'peer group' enhances professional behaviour. A study by Munro, et al. (2005) also stated that compliance with rules and coordination with others as well as personal attributes shaped professionalism. Further, participants 2 and 5 mentioned training, seminars and workshops on professionalism, observation, role modelling and coaching, setting rules and policies at the university can contribute to the development of professional behaviour. Similarly, Felstead (2013) opined that role modelling and mentoring from seniors lead to professional development. Lastly, participant 2 mentioned reward for good professional behaviour and punishment for unprofessionalism can encourage PHSC students to behave professionally.

Theme 3: Enhance Professional Competences at the University Level

Table 3: Codes extracted from the Data

Data Extracted	Codes
"...a person who is senior can give the guidance about professionalism." (Participant 6) "...mentor or teacher also helpful for it..." (Participant 2)	Coaching and mentoring
"...This kind of information from the academic articles, journals, books." (Participant 4) "...get information by some online resources, like a website, some applications, also the books and journals that will be helpful for that." (Participant 3) "...good understanding and knowledge, um, about professional <u>behavior</u> through like, you know, um, books, article journals or, you know, online resources. (Participant 1)	Online and academic resources
"To promote professional <u>behavior</u> , the university, university can establish clear policies, offer training programs, encourage mentorship, create a positive environment to, uh, provide resources, highlight successful alumni, and integrate profess of professional development into a curriculum." (Participant 5) "University can, professional <u>behavior</u> by incorporating into the courses and offering professional development workshops and seminars." (Participant 4)	Training, workshops and seminars, and academic courses

"...university can promote the professional behaviour by, uh, setting some career fares, and also some providing internship, or providing mentorship program..." (Participant 3)	Career fairs and internship
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Source: Researcher's Creation

Discussion: Based on the FGD, Table 3 illustrates that professional competencies at the university level can be enhanced through coaching and mentoring from the senior authority or tutors, seminars and workshops by external authorities, arranging career fairs, offering internship opportunities, providing courses or adding module in the curriculum to teach professional behaviour. Besides, online websites and academic resources, like books, journals, and academic articles can promote professional development. The results of this study relates with the findings of Mak-van der Vossen, et al. (2013) training, assessment of behaviour, and productive teaching can enhance professionalism in students.

Research Limitations

The following limitations were identified in this research:

- This study identified the variables impacting professional behaviour however, it fails to examine the extent to which each variable has an impact on the university students studying postgraduate PHSC.
- The study considered the views of only 6 participants from one specific university (UWTSD) and therefore it limits the generalisation to other universities.
- In this study, most of the factors impacting professionalism were identified, however, it failed to take into account variables, like gender and specific age group that may have an impact on student's professional behaviour.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

On reflection of the research, this study answered the research questions by conducting FGD and analysing the responses using a thematic analysis.

What professional and unprofessional behaviour are demonstrated by the postgraduate PHSC students?

On analysis of the data collected through FGD and based on the discussion offered in Chapter 4, the professional behaviour demonstrated by postgraduate students included, respect for others, accountability, integrity, interpersonal skills and ethical conduct, whereas unprofessional behaviour was characterised by disrespecting behaviour, unethical conduct, unpunctuality, and lack of interpersonal skills.

What factors lead to professionalism in the postgraduate PHSC students?

The answer to the main question related to factors impacting professional behaviour illustrated that age, place of working and learning, reward and punishment system, peers, role modelling, training and mentoring, and rules and policies are the crucial factors shaping professional behaviour in the postgraduate PHSC students

What resources at the public university contribute to the development of professional behaviour in PHSC students?

In order to develop professionalism in the students studying postgraduate PHSC at the university, the study identified coaching and mentoring by the tutors, workshops and seminars by external professionals, online and academic resources, and career fairs and internship opportunity can be offered to the university students which plays a significant role in enhancement of professional competencies.

Recommendations

Recommendations to the University

- The university should consider offering online and one-on-one training programmes by the faculty members, as well as coaching and mentoring sessions by the professionals within the university for professional development of PHSC students.
- Collaboration with experts in the field and arranging guest lectures, workshops and seminars on development of interpersonal skills and ethical conduct can aid in overall personality development of the students.

- Offering internship opportunities and conducting business simulation games can prepare postgraduate PHSC students for professional roles in the future.
- The university should include personality development and professional behaviour modules in the curriculum of postgraduate PHSC students
- Giving rewards and recognition to the students showing professional behaviour can future motivate other students to imitate professionalism in every task they undertake.
- Sharing the research findings across educational institutions can help the professionals and policymakers to design effective practices for enhancement of professionalism in the PHSC field.

Recommendation for Future Research

This research identified only the factors influencing professional behaviour of postgraduate PHSC students. However, future research can examine the extent to which each identified factor has an impact on students. Additionally, future studies can also focus on other universities or on higher academic level (masters or degree) students to gain a better understanding about multifaceted factors influencing professionalism in the students.

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Appendix

Focus Group Discussion Questionnaire

- How would you define professional behaviour?
- What does professional behaviour look and feels like in practice?
- When you think about professional behaviour, which core characteristics you think about?
- Which ones are represented at university? Which ones are represented in working practice?
- Do you think professional behaviour is displayed similarly or differently between younger and older workers and why (not)?
- Would you classify yourself as behaving professionally at the university or the workplace?
- How would you encourage classmates/peers to engage in professional behaviour?
- How do you define unprofessional behaviour and what can be reasons for this behaviour?
- Do you engage in unprofessional behaviour and why yes or no?
- How can you discourage unprofessional behaviour in the university?
- How can you discourage unprofessional behaviour in the workplace?
- How can PHSCiP students acquire professional behaviour?
- What kind of information do you need to learn more about professional behaviour?
- Where would you look for information about acquiring professional behaviour?
- What can your university do to promote professional behaviour?