

PHD AGENCY DURING TRANSITION:

UNDERSTANDING INTERNATIONAL PHD STUDENTS' PSYCHOLOGICAL WELLBEING & SOCIO-CULTURAL ADAPTATION OVER TIME

Trang Mai Tran

School of Education, University of Bristol

trang.mai.tran@bristol.ac.uk

Supervisors:

Dr Jo Rose

Dr Frances Giampapa

1

Literature

2

Research
questions

3

Theoretical
framework

4

Data
collection

5

Data
analysis

6

Findings



1

Literature

2

Research
questions

3

Theoretical
framework

4

Data
collection

5

Data
analysis

6

Findings

Agency

Doctoral student experience

A transition:
student role to professional academic role

(Laudel & Gläser, 2008)

Low levels of motivation
& financial confidence

Guilt

Anxiety

(Pychyl & Little, 1998; Schmidt & Umans, 2014)

Depression

Stress & mental
fatigue

Overwhelmed
& exhaustion

Disconnected

(Anttila et al., 2015; Cornér, Löfström, & Pyhältö, 2017; Appel & Dahlgren, 2003; Hyun, Quinn, Madon, & Lustig, 2006)

“Self”

“Agent”

“An individual
process”

“Self-care”

“Internal reflection
focusing on the individual”

(Haynes et al., 2012 ; Kumar & Cavallaro, 2018; Schmidt & Umans, 2014; Zahniser et al., 2017)

Literature

Research
questions

Theoretical
framework

Data
collection

Data
analysis

Findings

Agency

International student experience

Academic **integration**:

Problems adapting to the requirements of host country's HE institutes

(Barrie 2007; Russell et al. 2010)

Social **integration**:

Requires additional attention & effort to socialise & understand customs

(Ward et al. 2004; Zhou et al., 2008)

The role of institutional structures in supporting students' enactment of their agency

(Edward, 2011; Hopwood, 2010)

International students as active self-forming agents

(Marginson, 2014; Montgomery & McDowell, 2009; Tran, 2016; Tran & Vu, 2016)

Repositioning themselves in the new (specific and broad) contexts

(Harré & van Langenhove, 1999)

Literature

Research
questions

Theoretical
framework

Data
collection

Data
analysis

Findings

The dominant approach of the literature that sees students as the problem or simply **objects in the transition** to another higher education system fails to acknowledge the **complexities of student development** and their **potential to transform**. [They] **are unlikely to passively accept the challenges** and discriminations inscribed on them and [they] **can enact self-change**.

(Tran & Vu, 2018, p.17)

Literature

Research
questions

Theoretical
framework

Data
collection

Data
analysis

Findings

Qualitative research questions

- 1 What are some of the strategies that international doctoral students have developed to **adapt to their new ecological systems** over time?
- 2 How is their **psychological well-being** during this **adaptation process**?
- 3 What are some of the elements contributing to **their individual strategies** during this **adaptation process**?

1

Literature

2

Research
questions

3

**Theoretical
framework**

4

Data
collection

5

Data
analysis

6

Findings

Adaptation

**ACQUISITION OF ADAPTIVE SKILLS:
Socio-cultural Adaptation Theory**

(Ward & Kennedy, 1999; Wilson, 2013)

**Development
process**

**DEVELOPMENTAL PROCESS:
Ecological Systems Theory**

(Bronfenbrenner, 1979)

Psy-Wellbeing

**AFFECTIVE CHANGE:
Psychological Wellbeing Model**

(Ryff, 1989)

Literature

Research
questions

**Theoretical
framework**

Data
collection

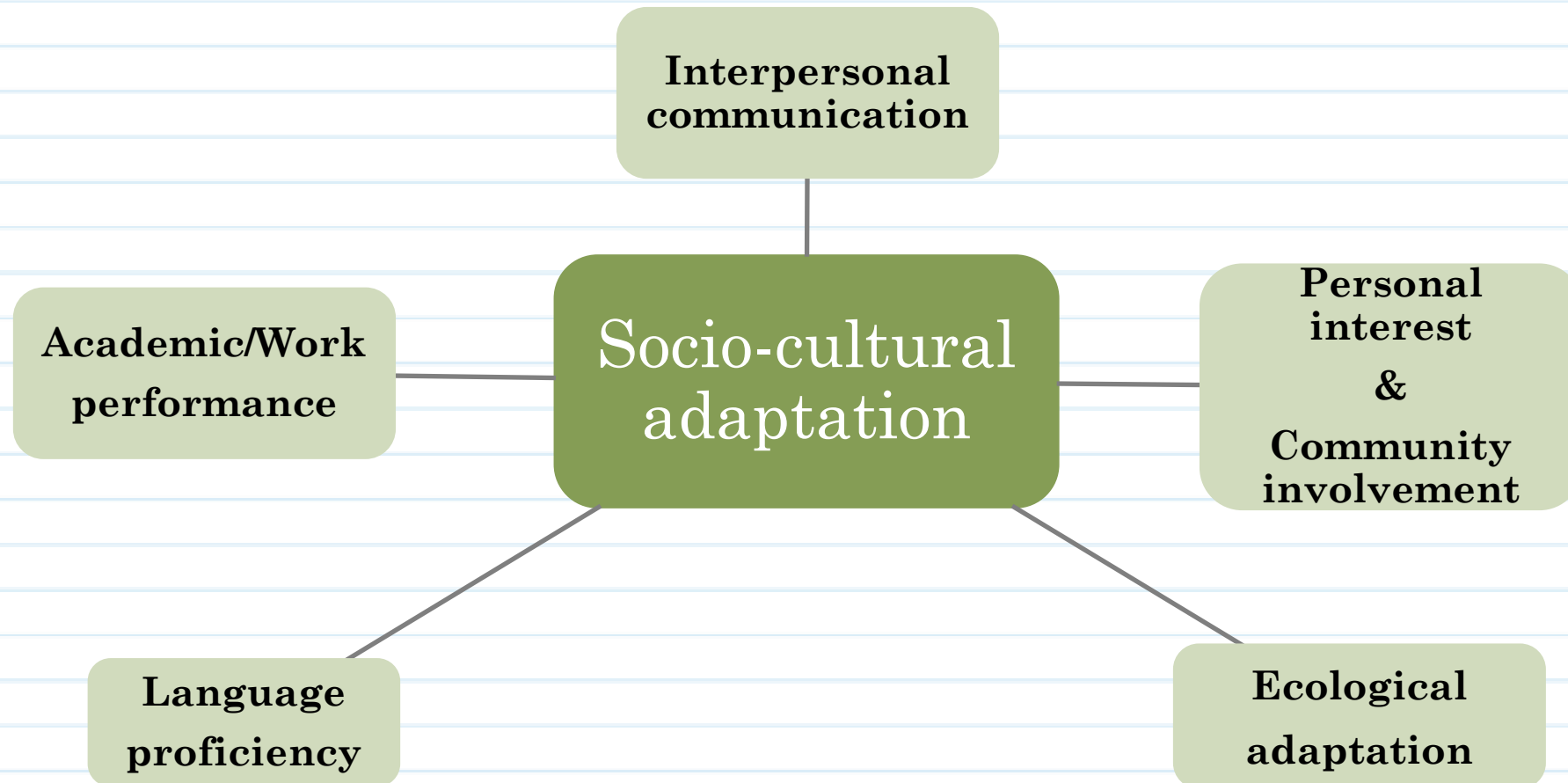
Data
analysis

Findings

Socio-cultural adaptation theory

(Ward & Kennedy, 1999; Wilson, 2013)

- Cognitive and behavioural adjustments: **Acquiring skills** to adapt



Literature

Research
questions

Theoretical
framework

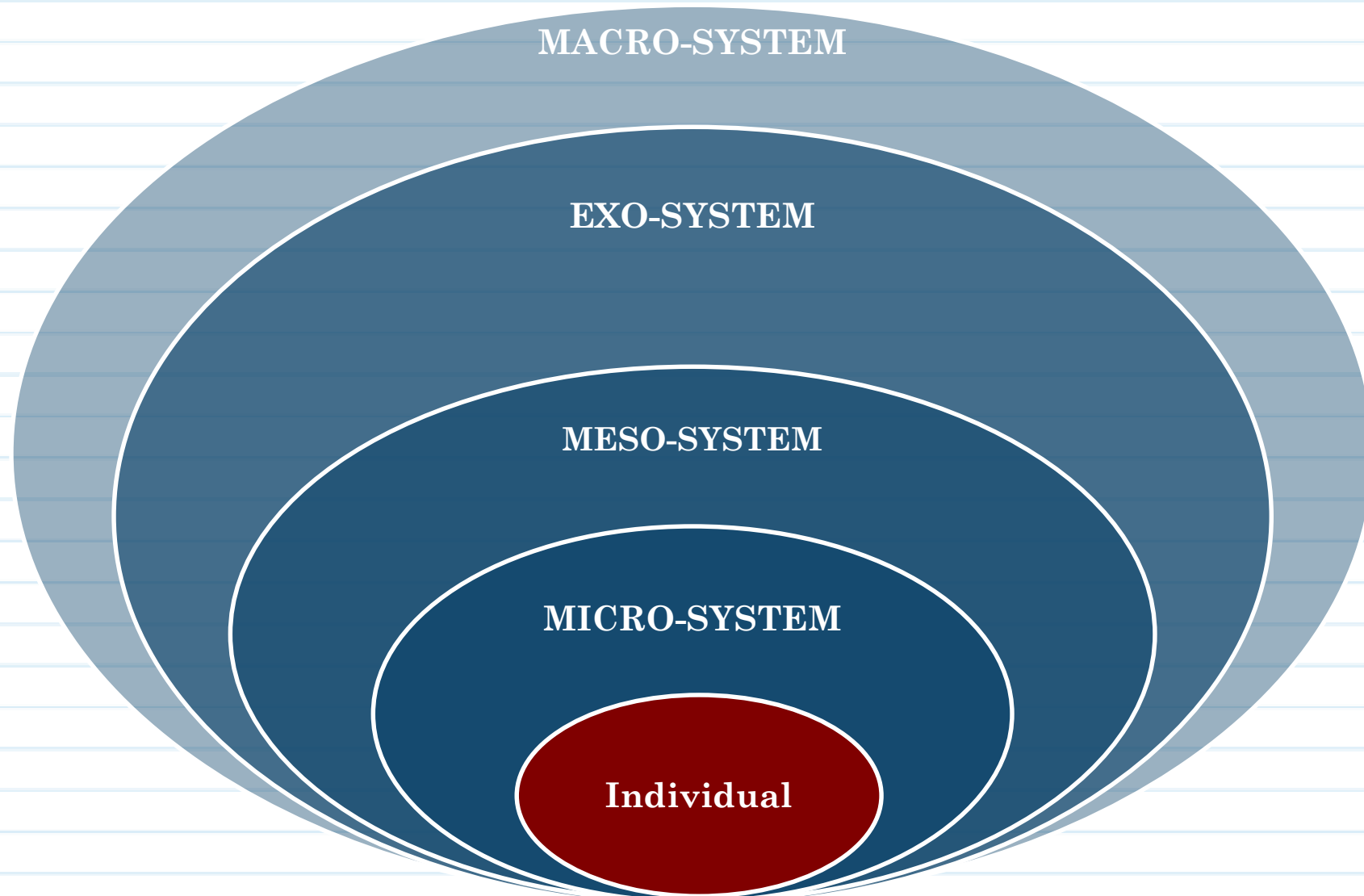
Data
collection

Data
analysis

Findings

Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory

(Bronfenbrenner, 1979)



Literature

Research
questions

**Theoretical
framework**

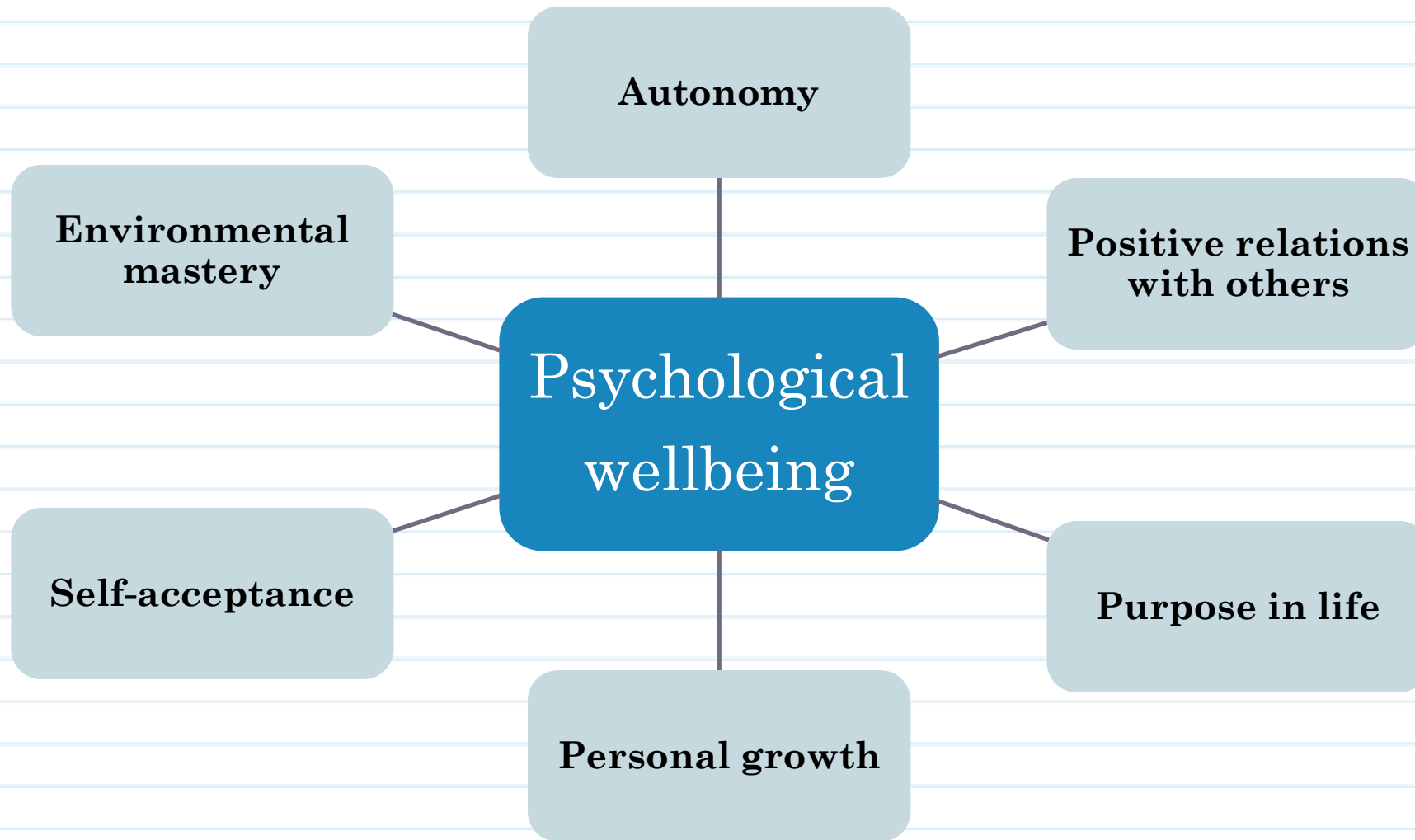
Data
collection

Data
analysis

Findings

Psychological Wellbeing Model

(Ryff, 1989)



Literature

Research
questions

**Theoretical
framework**

Data
collection

Data
analysis

Findings

1

Literature

2

Research
questions

3

Theoretical
framework

4

**Data
collection**

5

Data
analysis

6

Findings

Longitudinal and mixed methods approach:

- Quantitative psychological wellbeing and socio-cultural adaptation questionnaires (3-wave)
- **Qualitative semi-structured interviews**
8 participants, **3 x 1 – 1.5 hour interviews each**



Literature

Research
questions

Theoretical
framework

Data
collection

Data
analysis

Findings

1

Literature

2

Research
questions

3

Theoretical
framework

4

Data
collection

5

**Data
analysis**

6

Findings

QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS PLAN

- **Hybrid approach of thematic analysis:**
(Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006)

Template approach based on theoretical framework

(King, 2004)

developed a priori, based on the research questions and the theoretical framework

Anything unexpected by the theories, or data that are context-specific

Theory-driven thematic analysis

Data-driven thematic analysis

- **Narrative analysis of three participants: Jade, Red, Purple**
(Clandinin, 2007; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000)

Within participants
(between time points)

Literature

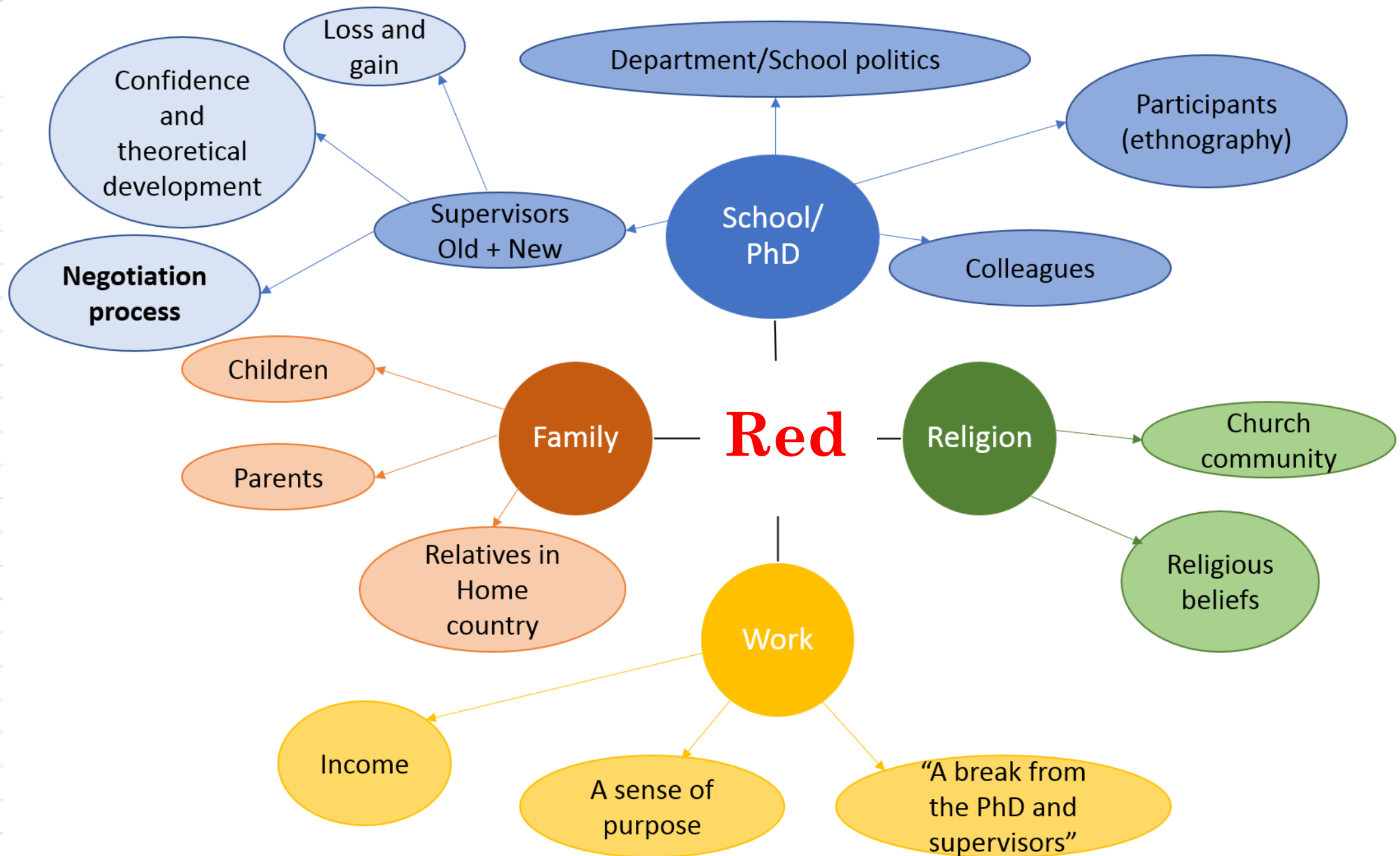
Research questions

Theoretical framework

Data collection

Data analysis

Findings



Literature

Research questions

Theoretical framework

Data collection

Data analysis

Findings

How I used theory to interpret narratives:

How the student's
development and strategy
can be affected
by **psychological wellbeing elements**
and **acquisition of socio-cultural skills**

Literature

Research
questions

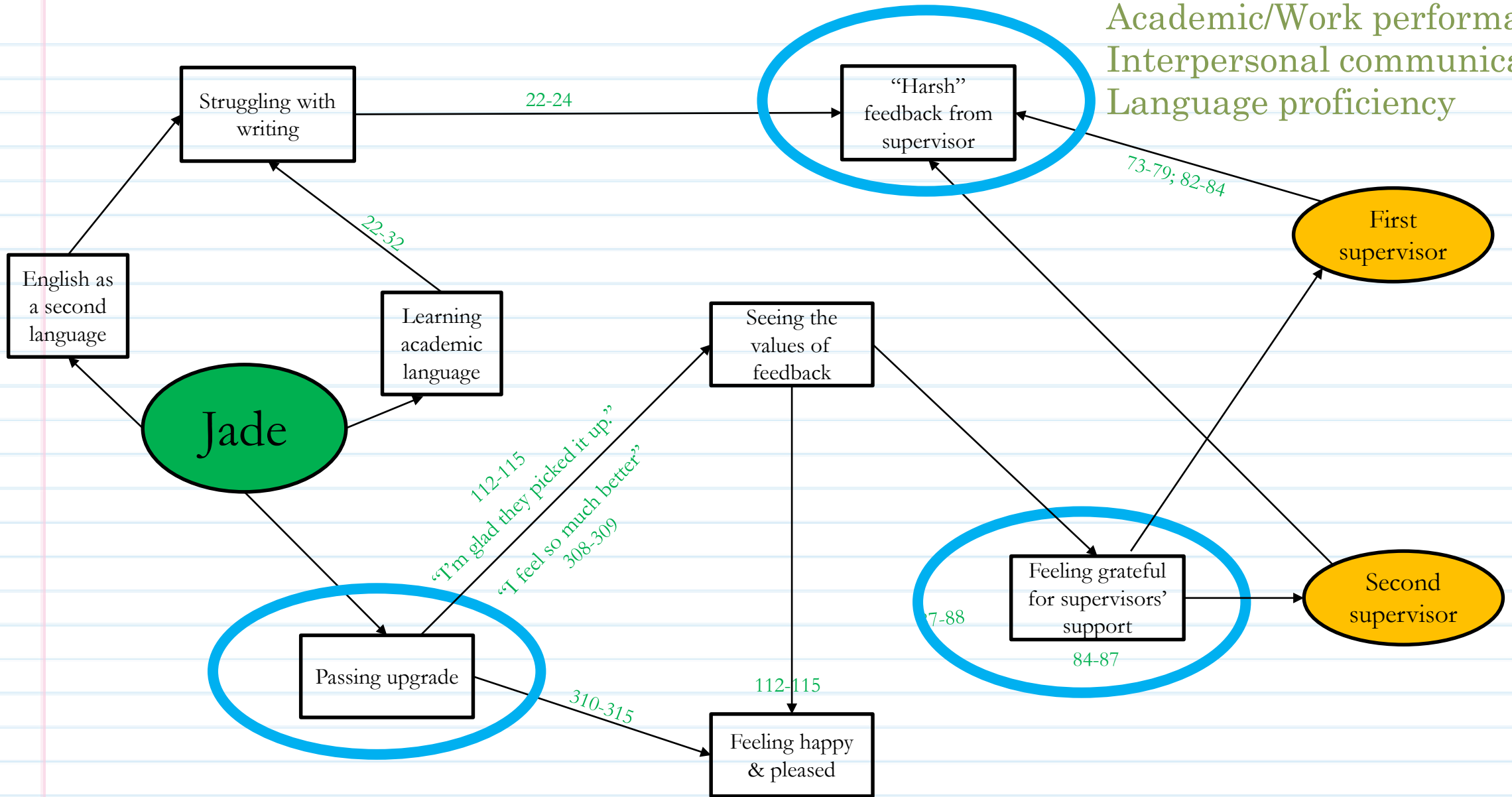
Theoretical
framework

Data
collection

Data
analysis

Findings

Positive relations
 Academic/Work performance
 Interpersonal communication
 Language proficiency



Literature

Research questions

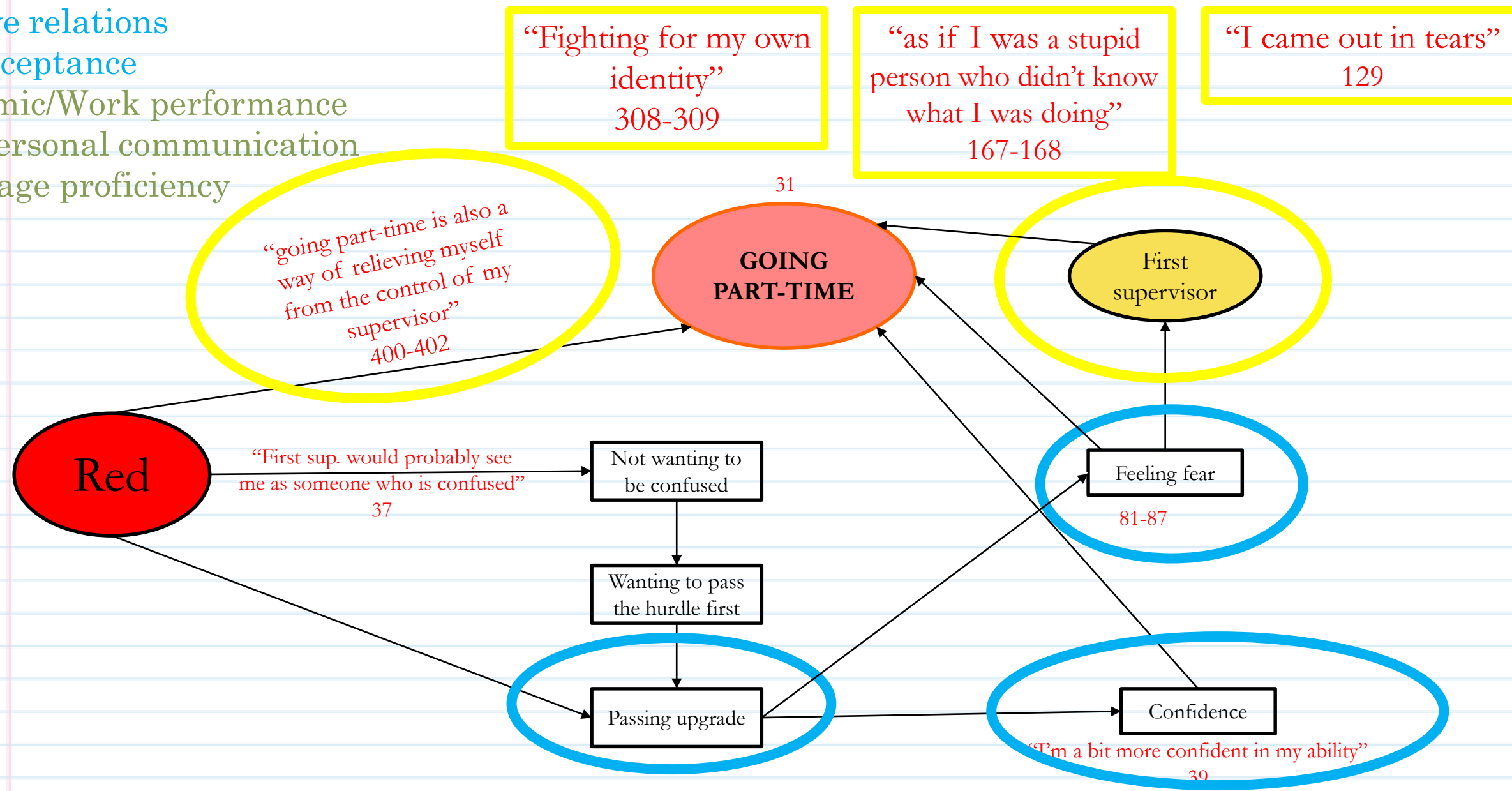
Theoretical framework

Data collection

Data analysis

Findings

- Autonomy
- Positive relations
- Self-acceptance
- Academic/Work performance
- Interpersonal communication
- Language proficiency



The quantity vs quality of the challenges

Psychological wellbeing elements

Acquisition of socio-culturally adaptive skills

Student's development over time

Student's strategy over time

Thank you.

Trang Mai Tran
School of Education
University of Bristol



trang.mai.tran@bristol.ac.uk



@trang_mai_tran

Supervisors:

Dr Jo Rose

Dr Frances Giampapa

- Anttila, H., Lindblom-Ylänne, S., Lonka, K., & Pyhältö, K. (2015). The added value of a PhD in medicine- PhD students' perceptions of acquired competences. *International Journal of Higher Education*, 4(2), 172-180.
- Appel, M.L., & Dahlgren, L.G. (2003). Swedish doctoral students' experiences on their journey towards a PhD: Obstacles and opportunities inside and outside the academic building. *Scandinavian Journal of Educational Research*, 47(1), 89-110.
- Barrie, S. C. (2007). A conceptual framework for the teaching and learning of generic graduate attributes. *Studies in Higher Education*, 32(4), 439–458.
- Cornér, S., Löfström, E., & Pyhältö, K. (2017). The Relationships between Doctoral Students' Perceptions of Supervision and Burnout. *International Journal of Doctoral Studies*, 12, 91-106.
- Edwards, A. 2011. Building common knowledge at the boundaries between professional practices: Relational agency and relational expertise in systems of distributed expertise. *International Journal of Educational Research*, 50, 33–39.
- Fereday, J., & Muir-Cochrane, E. (2006). Demonstrating Rigor Using Thematic Analysis: A Hybrid Approach of Inductive and Deductive Coding and Theme Development. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 5(1), 80-92.
- Harré, R., & van Langenhove, L. (1999). The dynamics of social episodes. In R. Harré and L. van Langenhove (Ed.), *Positioning Theory: Moral Contexts of Intentional Action* (pp. 1–13). Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Ltd.
- Haynes, L., Service, O., Goldacre, B., & Torgerson, D. (2012). *Test, learn, adapt: Developing public policy with randomised controlled trials — cabinet office*. Technical Report. Cabinet Office Behavioural Insights Team, UK.
- Hopwood, N. (2010). A sociocultural view of doctoral students' relationships and agency. *Studies in Continuing Education*, 32(2).
- Hyun, J. K., Quinn, B. C., Madon, T., & Lustig, S. (2006). Graduate student mental health: Needs assessment and utilization of counseling services. *Journal of College Student Development*, 47, 247- 266.
- King, N. (2004). Using templates in the thematic analysis of text In C. Cassell & G. Symon (Ed.), *Essential Guide to Qualitative Methods in Organizational Research* (pp. 256-270). London: Sage Publications Ltd.
- Kumar, S., & Cavallaro, L. (2018). Researcher self-care in emotionally demanding research: A proposed conceptual framework. *Qualitative Health Research*, 28(4), 648-658.
- Laudel, G., & Gläser, J. (2008). From apprentice to colleague: The metamorphosis of early career researchers. *Higher Education*, 55(3), 387-406.
- Marginson, S. (2014). Student self-formation in international education. *Journal of Studies in International Education*, 18(1), 6–22.
- Montgomery, C., and L. McDowell. 2009. “Social networks and the international student experience: An international community of practice?” *Journal of Studies in International Education*, 13(4), 455–466.

References (cont.)

- Pychyl, T.A., & Little, B.R. (1998). Dimensional specificity in the prediction of subjective well-being: Personal projects in pursuit of the PhD. *Social Indicators Research*, 45, 423-473.
- Russell, J., Rosenthal, D., & Thomson, G. (2010). The international student experience: Three styles of adaptation. *Higher Education*, 60(2), 235–249.
- Ryff, C. (1989). Happiness is everything, or is it? Explorations on the meaning of psychological well-being. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 57(6), 1069-1081.
- Schmidt, M., & Umans, T. (2014). Experiences of well-being among female doctoral students in Sweden. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies on Health and Well-being*, 9.
- Tran, L. T. (2016). ‘Mobility as becoming’: A Bourdieuan analysis of the factors shaping international student mobility. *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 37(8), 1268–1289.
- Tran, L.T., & Vu, T.T.P. (2016). ‘I’m not like that, why treat me the same way?’ The impact of stereotyping international students on their learning, employability and connectedness with the workplace. *The Australian Educational Researcher*, 43(2), 203–220.
- Tran, L.T., & Vu, T.T.P. (2018). ‘Agency in mobility’: Towards a conceptualisation of international student agency in transnational mobility, *Educational Review*, 70(2), 167-187.
- Ward, C., & Kennedy, A. (1999). The measurement of sociocultural adaptation. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 23(4), 659–677.
- Ward, C., Leong, C. -H., & Low, M. (2004). Personality and sojourner adjustment. *Journal of Cross Cultural Psychology*, 35(2), 137–151.
- Wilson, J. (2013). *Exploring the past, present and future of cultural competency research: The revision and expansion of the sociocultural adaptation construct*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation. Victoria University of Wellington.
- Zahniser, E., Rupert, P.A., & Dorociak, K. (2017). *Self-care in clinical psychology graduate training*. *Training and Education in Professional Psychology*, 11(4).
- Zhou, Y., Jindal-Snape, D., Topping, K., & Todman, J. (2008). Theoretical models of culture shock and adaptation in international students in higher education. *Studies in Higher Education*, 33(1), 63–75.