

Transcript

00:00:14 Speaker 1

Welcome to conversations and made it the people behind the research.

00:00:26 Speaker 1

Hi everyone, I'm Danika Sims and I'm a senior lecturer in the Department of Education at the University of Oxford, and I'm joined by buyer today. Where would you like to introduce yourself to our listeners?

00:00:38 Speaker 2

Thank you so much, Nikki. Good morning everyone. I am Voya from South Africa. I'm working for the beauty. I work as an academic literacy literacy lecturer back at home. Thank you so much. So why are you here in Oxford? What's brought you to this university?

00:00:54 Speaker 2

I'm here in Oxford because I've got opportunity to be part of the Afor Oxx fellowship, the Afor OX Fellowship is more about recruiting the African scholars across Africa. Then I was one of being selected, and then I got the fellowship that.

00:01:15 Speaker 2

So what brought me to Oxford University?

00:01:18 Speaker 1

And what are you doing here during your time at Oxford? So during your Fox Fellowship, what research are you looking?

00:01:24 Speaker 2

At my research is more on the digital literacy. This is the research my research is is the is the gap that I've discovered during my PhD studies that.

00:01:38 Speaker 2

Our students, they don't know how to use the computer and then the time restriction from the computer labs. It makes it more to be difficult.

00:01:47 Speaker 2

And I'm doing research on base also on my story as a first generation. When I came to university, none of my family members were at the university. And then.

00:02:00 Speaker 2

I was being fortunate to be at the university, so my research is more looking at like what is it that we can be done to make sure the lives of the students are getting better in in a digital literacies as we know, is this current these days is more about AI this?

00:02:20 Speaker 2

Behind that, but are we giving our students enough training, especially our?

00:02:26 Speaker 2

Even in including our staff members, how can they navigate themselves?

00:02:31 Speaker 1

Definitely. So do you want to share a little bit more about your journey into higher education? So what's your background? How did you get to become, you know, a lecturer at?

00:02:39 Speaker 1

University.

00:02:40 Speaker 2

Oh, my background is like a interesting story. I was a student leader and then I work for student affairs. It has never crossed my mind that day I will. One day I will be lecturer.

00:02:51 Speaker 2

At the university, so when you finish my first degree, we went to Stellenbosch. I think Stellenbosch universities that time they were looking for transform.

00:03:00 Speaker 2

And and we applied syllabus university to do our owners as a group of black student from UW Double C Because there was no funding to study further Adu double C So when I get to Stellenbosch University Professor Mariana Fesser, she says I must be her student. I will be doing second language.

00:03:20 Speaker 2

In teaching.

00:03:21 Speaker 2

And then I was asking, what does this has to do? What is this career will take me one day and then she says you are going to be a lecturer. And then remember, as black people, when we grow up, the only career that we have been, it was being embraced. It was the nursing and the teacher.

00:03:42 Speaker 2

This concept of lecturing it was not something even to us to fantasise about. Who had thought that lecturers are the clever people or in high education, like when you come to Oxford, you know only people, only clever people who come to Oxford.

00:04:01 Speaker 2

So I studied that second language and teaching, and then she used to take me to the lecturer to observe. And then she also she will tell me that I must assist the International Office, the International Office there at that time. It was the late Humanis Paula, who will be give me chances to lecture.

00:04:20 Speaker 2

During her presence in her, in her or in his absence also. And then after that I studied my PhD further. Then I was a part time lecturer at Mowbray campus.

00:04:32 Speaker 2

As I was a, I was doing my pH. D This is our end up being a lecturer, but it's something that has never crossed my mind. Yes yes.

00:04:39 Speaker 1

Yeah. Then that's awesome. And you want to tell us a little bit about your PhD? So what did you look?

00:04:44 Speaker 2

At in detail, my PhD is on the fifth of first year experiences. As I've said earlier, I was a student leader at university looking at the problems that the students are coming in the transition from high school to university.

00:04:59 Speaker 2

Is always a a critical.

00:05:01 Speaker 2

Time. So I was saying my PhD. Why can't I be looking in those experiences? Specifically, students were saying on rest as most of my varsity days, I think 110%. I was staying on rest during my undergrad and postgrad. So we're looking at the concept of peer pressure like, you know, in peer pressure in high education.

00:05:22 Speaker 2

It's either positive or negative. It's up to you as a person to decide, because if you take you want to take them.

00:05:30 Speaker 2

The negative peer pressure you will end up being a dropout at the university, but you want to focus on the positive side whereby you can hook up yourself with your peers who can assist you with your academics. You can also look up for mentors who can assist you with your work. You can end up doing it. That is what my PhD story is about.

00:05:51 Speaker 1

Yeah, I mean that definitely makes me think of academic literacies and being, as you said, like socialised into higher education, how important that peer network and that informal.

00:06:00 Speaker 1

Learning almost like good peer pressure can be for students, so I think that's quite a nice transition into your afox work where you're looking at so academic literacy and but specifically digital literacy. So again, what sort of sparked that interest?

00:06:10

Yes.

00:06:14 Speaker 2

What spokesman that interest is that, you know, when I came to university, also as a first year, I grow up with the grandmother in the Eastern Cape. So we're not familiar with the mouse, we're even making.

00:06:27 Speaker 2

We're making a joke about the master. Right click. Don't, don't. Right. Like I remember one time. You know when you are putting the mouse wrong leg. Maybe you just highlight all of your English is gone. Imagine now you struggling even to talk the English and then now you put it down. And also I remember sometimes when you write.

00:06:47 Speaker 2

Those assignment and then we're using a floppy disc. Don't ask me about my age if you would. You were that you were that class of a floppy disc. You will understand the the frustrations of using a floppy disc. You write your essay and then you have to go to the computer lab and then you print it to find out.

00:07:05 Speaker 2

It's a loss. The floppy disc and open. That is why I'm saying these days. Can we do something better? Can we make the technology to be better for our students?

00:07:16 Speaker 1

Definitely. And I know that your research is ongoing, but what findings do you have at the moment? Like what have you found out during this project so far?

00:07:25 Speaker 2

What I found out I've sent a survey to the students but the.

00:07:28 Speaker 2

Well, the nice thing what the students are saying is that it's a good thing that I'm proposing because they are highlighting that the time restriction from the university to be trained, especially when you came as a first day, we have never used a computer like maybe now you have to use a computer once on a Wednesday. How much training?

00:07:48 Speaker 2

You will get the. So if we are proposing this our our project should be a an app that they can practise at any time. It's a thumbs up to the students so they are also advising that the policy of the university also like.

00:08:02 Speaker 2

They should be alert about the use of computer when they came to the university during the open days. Yeah. And also somebody shouldn't be asking, like, why they should be alert because they are university students. Our backgrounds are not the same. Some of the students from the serving are first generation, meaning that their parents are not.

00:08:23 Speaker 2

Exposed to what is happening in higher education. So I think those are the things that I've like.

00:08:28 Speaker 2

About the findings of of of the survey and also from the interviews students saying that the universities also they must make sure that they get the funding outside to upgrade the computers in their labs because you find out sometimes they say that you choose for 25 hours, the computers are not.

00:08:48 Speaker 2

Are not working and also the lecturers they must get training by themselves before they can ask them to.

00:08:56 Speaker 2

The to be perfect in their way because they are saying now a lecturer will say you must be perfect in using this software but the the lecturer doesn't give them enough training to do the work. So I think the training baby it can be.

00:09:14 Speaker 2

Done to both students and the lecturers.

00:09:17 Speaker 1

Definitely. I think especially in technology, when it changes so quickly and something like AI, these models are updating constantly and I think you know we need to role model. What we'd like students to do and if we're unaware.

00:09:18 Speaker 2

Yeah.

00:09:21 Speaker 2

Yeah. Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.

00:09:31 Speaker 1

Of what's happening in the take space, it's hard for us to inform students, so I do think that both students and staff need to be upskilled.

00:09:37

Skilled.

00:09:37 Speaker 2

Yeah, some students, they're saying also from the findings, the students, they the the university should employ. The more tutors that they can be involved with them. Even sorry from from during the classes.

00:09:52 Speaker 2

Even after hours at residences or other way around. But they should employ more tutors to assist with them with the technology. But what we are advocating for the the programme is that.

00:10:05 Speaker 2

They can use it without being assisted, but it may be down the line. They can need someone to assist, but what we are advocating is that the app, it will kill, it will give them the basics. Yeah. Yeah. Like how to write your assignment. If the assignment say you like.

00:10:26 Speaker 2

Simple things of writing an essay.

00:10:28 Speaker 2

Hmm, like simple things of how to open excel, what how? How can you code from Excel like all those simple things? Because I realise sometimes students they cannot do certain programmes because of the the barrier of technology.

00:10:44 Speaker 1

And it shouldn't be. It should be a facilitator, not a barrier. So I think you can't.

00:10:47 Speaker 2

Yeah, yeah, yeah.

00:10:48 Speaker 1

Build a house without a strong.

00:10:50 Speaker 1

So give them the basics, give them the tools that they can succeed in.

00:10:54 Speaker 1

Yeah, yeah, yes. So today is the 16th of June, which is Youth Day in South Africa. And as someone who works in South African higher education, what message do you have for the youth of South Africa?

00:11:06 Speaker 2

I want to say today to the youth of South Africa, they must make use of the opportunities. Opportunities are they in in high education, they must always make sure that this they are always being busy with Facebook, always checking the celebrities news, who's dating what? Who's dating.

00:11:26 Speaker 2

That so they must make use of those opportunities also as we as a as a black, as a black academics who've been.

00:11:40 Speaker 2

Who wants to close the gap of the students of 1976? Remember the story those students they found a gap saying that we don't want to be taught in Africans. We want to use English as a medium of instruction. So what is it that we are doing now to use that English to be English thing? So I will, I will.

00:11:59 Speaker 2

Edge to all the students like there are times in high education that you you find that.

00:12:06 Speaker 2

Students, they don't see eye to eye with the management. That is the case. It's not. It is something that is continuously, but I urge them saying then students burning material and the buildings in high education is not the solution because some of us we strive towards. But let's create a better future.

00:12:28 Speaker 2

For our students, let's close the gap. Is there anything that we can?

00:12:32 Speaker 2

Talk with people outside in other countries to come and sponsor our students. So if now they're banning ashes, is ashes is not nice, it's not because if something is as bad it it is being banned, it means that it can't come.

00:12:45 Speaker 2

Back.

00:12:46 Speaker 2

It will take time so that banning mentality from our students, I think it should be.

00:12:52 Speaker 1

Respond. Yeah. So instead of being destructive, trying to be constructive, how can we build something instead of breaking down what we have? But how can we sort of move forward instead?

00:13:03 Speaker 2

Yes, I think there's there's better ways of negotiating with the management. I was also a student leader. I remember our our time, our SRC.

00:13:12 Speaker 2

They will lock the management up. They will bring those big, big keys as if they are from the prison. They will lock them up and then do those negotiations. But that there was no banning, nobody was harmed at that time.

00:13:26 Speaker 2

But what I've observed these days, the students are burning. You'll find that over the night is it was a mess. What was happening over the night? People's cars are burned. Yeah, maybe some students are being injured. Some of them they end up being gaoled. So you don't want to have such a record as a A as a university students.

00:13:45 Speaker 2

Because now if you have such criminal records, meaning that you cannot qualify to come and start in Oxford, we don't want people building the Oxford management. I don't think they want.

00:13:57 Speaker 2

To bring someone who will bend their buildings because those buildings here they have a history to tell. Yeah, yeah.

00:14:05 Speaker 1

Yeah. I mean, I think anger can be justified, of course. And there's a time and a place for perhaps strong action, but, you know, even just linking back to student voice with your own digital literacy project, you are sort of an ally or a teammate for the students. You are aligning their needs. You know, your research with their needs. So do you think.

00:14:11 Speaker 2

Yes.

00:14:25 Speaker 1

Maybe students might sometimes feel like academics are against them.

00:14:29 Speaker 1

But often there are academics who are trying to help and to be allies and to help change and transform higher education like like you're doing and at CPUT.

00:14:37

Hmm.

00:14:39 Speaker 1

So you also mentioned being sort of proactive and looking for opportunities and that includes perhaps looking for mentors, maybe you want to look back on your own journey. Have there been people who have helped you or the lessons that you've learned? What advice can you give to students who sort of don't know where to start in terms of looking for opportunities or finding someone who has achieved, you know that the African dream?

00:15:02 Speaker 1

What advice would you give to to South African youth today?

00:15:06 Speaker 2

I will.

00:15:07 Speaker 2

I will tell them like the the best advice I could tell them they take, you know, the smartphones that they're using, the opportunities that they and then if you find that if if.

00:15:19 Speaker 2

Whatever you don't understand, go and knock to any door that you think you can be assisted. Like sometimes I'm very active in the social media, then there will be students who are reaching out to me and say doctor buyer, can you assist me with ABC? Then I'm willing to assist but I believe also I'm not the only one I was thinking.

00:15:40 Speaker 2

In the future, maybe you and me, Danica. Sometimes we have.

00:15:45 Speaker 2

We have a workshop online telling them like this is how do you make a successful application? What is it that is needed for in that application to make sure that you succeed in the future, so they must be looking up on those opportunities and then getting mentors.

00:16:05 Speaker 2

To teach them like how to make it.

00:16:08 Speaker 2

How can you write a successful proposal for for a, for a, a scholarship, or a fellowship? Because I've been studying with NRF and then NRF is the National Research Fund. So NRF throughout I have to give feedback. I have to give feedback. I have to apply.

00:16:17

Hmm.

00:16:29 Speaker 2

And give feedback I have to apply and give feedback. That is why the money keeps on coming to me. Yeah, so I I always being curious to know. I remember there was this.

00:16:39 Speaker 2

I had some I think that time I was doing my first year at the university, there was this guy from Errato. I think that was when I can't recall who was saying you will never know if that door is open until you go and prove it by yourself. So they mustn't just passing.

00:17:00 Speaker 2

Because they must.

00:17:01 Speaker 2

Be curious to know what is happening.

00:17:03 Speaker 1

There. Yeah, you miss all the opportunities. You don't take, you know.

00:17:05 Speaker 2

Yes, yes. And also in order for us to work together to transform high education, it's not about the lecturers, it's about the lecturers working hand in hand with the students. So it's it, it's a, it's a team work because I can't do anything without them. For instance, in this programme.

00:17:24 Speaker 2

Project I was supposed to collect a data, a data working hand in hand with them. Yeah. So it's it. It's it's a two way thing. Yeah. Yeah.

00:17:34 Speaker 1

Yeah, exactly. Yeah. Students need to take responsibility and be proactive. But lecturers also need to listen to students and be partners with them.

00:17:39 Speaker 2

Yes. Yeah, their voice is. Our voices are are important in influencing the policies and high education as much as their voices. But I think most of the time they are voices because they are the clients of higher education.

00:17:54 Speaker 1

Yeah. And it comes back to not to be cliché, but Ubuntu, you know, being a collectivist community where it's about.

00:18:00 Speaker 1

Want. You know, I benefit. So you benefit and together we benefit and looking out for each.

00:18:04 Speaker 2

Yes.

00:18:05 Speaker 2

Other yes, I think it's I think some of the projects that we are doing as as as lecturers maybe even talking about me, the concept of a bond to that we care about the the others that is why we are we we're trying to get. So such an opportunities.

00:18:22 Speaker 2

In high education.

00:18:23 Speaker 2

Like university, like Oxford. You, you, you, you, you always tap yourself in the shoulder. Like, did I make it? Really. Is it me who's here or what? So you don't want that dream just to be faded over the night because of the students? Because now what I'm doing in Oxford, I I I believe like when I go back in my country.

00:18:44 Speaker 2

Maybe even this project. It won't materialise over the night, but we are looking at the long term goal maybe in two years to three years. This project will materialise and then we'll say to our student this, this, this is the legacy that we want to see.

00:19:00 Speaker 2

Because one day when I came, I become a professor. We were. I want to be known of that Professor who have done ABC for their students. The legacy that I've left.

00:19:12 Speaker 1

Yeah. Well, I feel like your vision, your passion for students is very clear. And the legacy you want to leave, you will be successful in leaving.

00:19:16 Speaker 2

Yes.

00:19:20 Speaker 1

Yes. Well, thank you for your for your time. Do you have any loss of comments or messages for our listeners?

00:19:26 Speaker 2

Yes, I want to say to our students like let's make education accessible and fashionable and then we want to say to high education.

00:19:38 Speaker 2

Let's do away.

00:19:41 Speaker 2

Of depriving students.

00:19:45 Speaker 2

Of not giving them access because they are not, they don't have a digital literacy background, so we want we want to take that stigma away. We want to build a culture

whereby before those students, they came to the university in high school, we want them to know the digital literacies.

00:20:06 Speaker 2

Before they came, so the culture of saying we are going to be deprived of access to high education before because of your.

00:20:13 Speaker 2

Digital literacies background that culture should be cutted away. And then let's make education fashionable and accessible. Thank you so much, yeah.

00:20:23 Speaker 1

I agree. I agree. The doors to education are always open. Thank you so much for you.

00:20:26 Speaker 2

Yet they are always open.

00:20:29 Speaker 2

Thank you so much, Nikki. I'm so privileged to be here.

00:20:33 Speaker 1

Such a pleasure. We're glad to.

00:20:34 Speaker 2

Have you thank you.

00:20:39 Speaker 1

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00:21:02 Speaker 1

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00:21:30 Speaker 1

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00:21:37 Speaker 1

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00:21:46 Speaker 1

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