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RESEARCH ARTICLE

STUDENTS' RESILIENCE STRATEGIES IN RESPONSE TO THE CHALLENGES OF ONLINE TEACHING AND LEARNING DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

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ABSTRACT

Online teaching and learning started to be increasingly adopted by many Institutions of higher learning as a result of the Covid-19 outbreak. Several studies show that online teaching and learning can provide multiple benefits for both staff and students. It support students' learning experiences in conditions where contact learning is not feasible. However some studies argues that teaching with technology pose a serious challenge for some students as it is not a one size fits all approach. Some Students are left out and experience quite a number of challenges when being taught and learning online. Thus this study aimed to contextually explore the resilience strategies of students in response to the challenges they faced during Online Learning. 'Non-empirical research design was applied in the methodology of this study. Documents from Search engines such as 'Google scholar, South African Electronic Thesis or Dissertation (ETD) portal were sampled and reviewed using keywords and phrases that are related to online teaching and learning during the COVID-19 pandemic to filter relevant data, restricted to 2002-2022. The inductive Thematic Content Analysis (TCA) was used to analyze the collected data. Findings shows that some students cope with the challenges of online learning and teaching by employing positive strategies such as seeking for support. Findings also shows that some resort to negative coping strategies such as using drugs and alcohol. Recommendations are developed in this study.

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INTRODUCTION

Online teaching and learning takes place partially or completely over the Internet (Bakia, Shear, Toyama & Lasseter, 2012; Means, Toyama, Murphy, Bakia, Jones K, 2009).. In the same breath, Allen and Seaman (2015) and Casanova and Price (2018) asserts that online course is the one which at least 80% of the course content is delivered online. Online platforms allows students to be taught, learn and receive direct feedback about activities and assessments over the internet (Bakia *et al*, 2012). Governments across the globe were forced to close down learning institutions due to the emergence and rapid spread of the COVID-19 virus which required strategies such as online learning to continue with the teaching and learning process (Azzahra, 2020). Corona Virus Disease (COVID-19) outbreak has provided challenges for educational institutions, especially higher education. Studies shows that online teaching and virtual meetings were used to replace face-to-face meetings and learning (Owolabi, 2020; Simanora, 2020; Toquero, 2020).

This was used as an alternative although online learning cannot fully replace traditional face to face learning (Toth, 2019). Moreover Heeks (2002) and Rajesh (2003) found that developing countries as opposed to developed countries face more challenges during online-learning. This made the researchers to develop a hunch to explore how students cope with the challenges.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

There is quite a number of challenges that were faced by students whilst being taught and learning online during the COVID-19 Pandemic. Due to the nature of learning of learning over the internet, some students misunderstand task instructions and do not complete tasks on time (Friedman, 2020). In addition, Gillett-Swan (2017) report that some students cannot actively participate in some activities such as group work activities when being taught and learning online. Due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on individuals, some students experience pandemic related anxiety and stress and challenges such as proper time management,

communication and use of online learning tools (Anderson, 2008). COVID-19 instilled fear in many individuals including students. This is in line with Rajab, Gazal and Alkattan(2020) who reported that the emergence of COVID-19 left students with fear of academic failure. During Online learning and teaching, students can easily get distracted or have no social interaction or find it difficult to keep up with lessons (Chandra, 2020). Several studies shows that some students during online teaching and learning face technological challenges such as internet connectivity issues (Sadeghi, 2019; Tamrat&Teferra, 2020).

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK APPLICATIONS

The resilience Theory: One of the pioneers of resilience theory is Norman Garmezy, who founded it in 1974. Garmezy defines resilience as the capacity for recovery and to maintain adaptive behaviour upon initiating a stressful event (Garmezy, 1974). The resilience theory provides lenses for research that closes the micro-macro gap (Patel, 2015). This means that the resilience theory serves as a guide in understanding the micro and macro spheres of individuals. Resilience is centered on people's capacity to rebound from hardships strengthened and more capable (Walsh, 2006). In the context of this study, this means that the resilience is achieved when students cope with the challenges that they face during the online learning and teaching in the midst of the Covid-19 Pandemic. In a system perspective, Masten (2015) holds that the adaptation to disturbances that threaten the functionality or development of a system can be termed resilience. In the context of this study, online learning as a system is functional when students can participate in it and survive its challenges. Van-Breda (2001) argued that the important part of resilience lies in achieving better-than expected results in the event of hardships. This theory is relevant to the study because the study sought to contextually explore the resilience strategies of students.

APPLIED METHODOLOGY: Research is categorized into empirical and non-empirical. This study adopted non-empirical research wherein we reviewed existing literature on online-teaching and learning during the Covid-19 pandemic. Furthermore, a narrative literature review was utilised as a research design due to its ability to identify and synthesize different books and journal articles about a chosen topic (Campbell Collaboration, 2018). Considering this, researchers gathered secondary data from various journals using a purposive sampling technique since there are promenade papers on online teaching and learning. This secondary data was sourced from research engines such as the Google scholar and South African National ETD portal that focused on the topic in question. For purposes of relevancy and data saturation data was restricted to the year 2002 to 2022 (Maluleke, 2020; and Mokwena & Maluleke, 2020). As Creswell (2014) confirmed that researchers may collect qualitative documents, for example; accredited journals, internet sources, public documents, newspapers, minutes of meetings or official documents, dissertations and thesis, amongst others. Furthermore, the collected data could be qualitative in nature, for example; to determine 'what ideas expressed in document, what is underlying approach or 'agenda' of document?' (Matthews & Ross, 2010). Moreover, the search was limited to work on Online teaching and learning during the Covid-19 Pandemic. The data was analysed thematically using the inductive TCA. This method allowed the researchers to identify, analyse and report patterns within data set, allowing

for descriptive organisation of the data in a way that facilitates interpretation of various aspects as (O'Reilly &Kiyimba, 2015) postulates.

LITERATURE REVIEW, DISCUSSION AND FINDINGS

In this section, the researchers present the literature that issynchronised or dissected with the aid of the study theory. From literature, the following themes emerged, Access to online Teaching and learning and challenges of online teaching and learnings well as the coping strategies applied by Students.

Theme 1: Access to Online teaching and learning: The world experience disasters which disturbs the learning process of students from time to time and the solution to continue the learning process such events is through technological platforms (Meyer & Wilson, 2011). However, access is the most important step to online teaching and learning (Salman, 2002). This means that a central concern of whether the technologies such as the online-learning and teaching platforms are accessible arises. The researchers are of the view that access is indeed key in online teaching and learning. This is supported by Liang and Chen (2012) who believes that factors such as financial or physical constraints prevent students from accessing online teaching and learning platforms. When students have access to online learning platforms they have various advantages such as low cost and following the latest developments (Sukmadinata, 2003). In the same breath, Singh and Thurman (2019) asserts that online learning platforms allows students to be anywhere while learning and interacting with instructors and other students. Dhawan (2020) found that access to online learning platforms can be a challenge to some students who lack resources and knowledge of technology. In light of the above it is clear that if students do not have access to the online teaching and learning platforms or resources, online learning becomes none-beneficial to students.

Theme 2: Challenges of online teaching and learning: The online learning and teaching process is relatively new to some individuals and therefore it becomes a challenge for some students and instructors to adapt to it. This is supported by Jaques and Salmon (2007) and Kirkwood and Price (2014) who postulates that both students and educators experience challenges in adapting to online learning and teaching. The researchers are of the view that despite the fact that students attended at the same institution they do not share equal resources and capacities to fully participate in online learning and teaching. This result in some students experiencing challenges. In addition, Kusumo, Staples, Zhu, Zhang and Jeffery (2012) found that one of the challenges that are faced by students has to do with internet connectivity. Ali, Uppal, and Gulliver (2017) holds that there major barriers to the successful implementation of online teaching and learning such as the used pedagogy and enabling conditions. Behaviour can pose a challenge during online teaching and learning for both educators and students (Muthuprasad, Aiswarya, Aditya & Jha, 2021). According to Munezero, Irura, Kirongo, Etiegni and Suhonen (2016), students and lectures who are not motivated and supported are unlikely to successfully participate in online teaching and learning. Islam, Beer and Slack (2015) concurs by alluding that academics from time to time face challenges when participating in online teaching and learning.

Theme 3: Coping strategies applied by Students: In the event of stress and psychological distress coping strategy is a key variable (Dooley & Fitzgerald, 2015). The stressor and the person attempting to cope with it determine the type of coping strategy that individuals are to employ to cope with their faced challenges (Newman, Holden & Delville, 2011). This study sought to explore the resilience strategies of students in response to the challenges of online learning and teaching. Some students cope with the challenges of online learning by accepting their responsibilities and seeking for social support (Gore, Bloem, Patton, Ferguson & Joseph, 2014). Liang and Chen (2012) postulates that some students resort to consultations with their college ICT departments for skills on the use of online platforms, googling for notes and consultations with colleagues to cope with the challenges of online-learning and teaching. Barrot, Llenares and Del Rosario (2021) found that students who lacked resources to participate in online teaching and learning resorted to joining groups that share free resources and consulted with teachers to overcome the challenges. Barrot *et al* also found that some students dealt with the challenges that they face in online-teaching and learning by asking for help from their families and using resources available at home. Liang and Chen (2012) found that some students in his study engaged in negative coping strategies such as self- isolation, taking alcohol and taking drugs to cope with the stress brought by the challenges of online-teaching and learning.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The concept of online learning is understood differently in various contexts and the understanding of this phrase is associated with learning that takes place on the internet. The challenges of online teaching and learning differ from one institution to another. The resilience strategies that students employ to cope with the challenges of online teaching and learning varies from one student to the other. Students use coping strategies such as seeking social support, hard work and consulting the ICT [Information, Communication and Technology] departments of their institutions for help when experiencing technological difficulties. Thus the following recommendations are presented by this study:

- Future research should focus on generating more resilient strategies that can be employed by students who face online teaching and learning challenges during pandemics.
- Introduction of programs that equip students to actively participate in online teaching and learning without experiencing challenges.
- Institutions of higher learning must mobile resources' for students who do not have resources' such as learning devices.
- Institutions of higher learning must have emotional and social support programs to help students who use negative coping strategies such as taking drugs.

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Author Contributions

All The Authors have contributed to the development of this manuscript.

Informed Consent Statement: The researchers took the following into account to ensure ethicality: University of Limpopo research ethics policies and exercising honesty in terms of acknowledging 'all' sources used in this study, aided by the list of references and avoiding of plagiarism.

Data Availability Statement: The data presented in this study are available on request from the corresponding author.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest

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