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Disciplinary Traditions and Cultures and how they Influence Implementation of Academic Professional Development

Raphinos Alexander Chabaya
Faculty of Education, Zimbabwe Open University, Zimbabwe

ABSTRACT

Academic professional development is an institutional tool employed to improve lecturing quality in universities. However, its effectiveness appears to be limited by academic traditions that are discipline based. The purpose of the study was to investigate the influence of discipline-based research on academic professional development implementation in universities in Zimbabwe. A qualitative research design was used for this study considering that it provides rich data required to understand the problem of academic professional development. Purpose sampling was used from which 12 participants each were sampled including 2 Deans, 8 Lecturers, 1 Teaching and Learning Centre Director and 1 Vice Chancellor from each of the institutions under study. Open-ended questionnaires, focus group discussions and interviews were used to collect data. Thematic coding of interview transcriptions was employed to analyze data. The study revealed that disciplined based traditions in faculties constrained academic professional development implementation. Academic identities are heavily influenced by disciplinary research rather than scholarship of teaching while development practitioners are described as non-academic. Findings established that disciplinary conditions led to poor implementation of academic professional development programmes. It is recommended that Boyer's model of scholarship can be used to counter lecturers' misconceptions about academic professional development. That approach will reflect the expanded role of the academic, based on both research and teaching rather than research of the discipline alone.

Key words: professional development, scholarship of teaching, community of practice, practitioner

INTRODUCTION AND

BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

Independent African countries, Zimbabwe included, invest in higher education because of its potential to bring about economic development (Bloom, Cunning and Chou, 2006). In Zimbabwe 10 universities, one for each province was built between 1989 and 1999. High budgetary allocations were made by treasury in the hope that these universities would produce human capital that would drive sustainable development for the country. Expectations on these initiatives were high.

The expected dividends from higher education institutions were, however, low. Educational quality was low attributed to challenges associated with democratization of education. Challenges that affected quality included high student enrolment and shortage of learning materials (Boughey, 2012). Key stakeholders like industry, commerce and employers expressed their concern about the low quality in universities (Abel, 2010; Beijnath, 2010) given the high investments made.

Given this development higher education needed to be transformed to improve its quality. Lecturers as members of faculty had to develop a consciousness on the challenges which affected effectiveness and efficiency of university education (Candey, 1996; Quinn, 2012). Centres of teaching and learning were set up in universities with the objective of capacitating academics with teaching skills to meet new curriculum demands in higher education. The implication was that the teaching status in a faculty had to be revised and valued. It is imperative to define academic professional development (APD) to place the study in context. It can be characterized as a deliberate plan made up of designed programmes meant to improve academics' teaching skills in faculty departments (Volbrecht, 2005; Quinn 2012). According to

Polinscar (1998:343) academic development is a form of scholarship which involves "intellectual activity" as well as "reflective practice" that professionalizes the teaching role of the academic. Classroom experiences are subjected to scholarly inquiry in which the lecturer engages in critical reflection about teaching of the discipline. This is the scholarship of teaching and learning that explores challenges associated with teaching of a discipline in a classroom as a form of inquiry (Gosling, 2008).

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Low teacher quality in universities has been identified as a major challenge in higher education institutions (HEIs). So, the transformative power of APD that can capacitate lecturers to enhance quality of their teaching in universities has been adopted as an effective strategy to address the challenge. Investments were made through the establishment of centres of Teaching and Learning as well as appointment of development practitioners to develop and implement APD programmes. However, in spite of these initiatives, interest of academics in APD programmes has been low and less encouraging. Consequently, this perpetrated low quality teaching and by implication the quality of graduates produced. There is no research which has been conducted in this critical area of APD in Zimbabwe. The study draws on a larger doctoral study conducted on APD in state universities in Zimbabwe (Author 2016).

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The study was guided by the following research questions:

Do disciplinary traditions and cultures influence implementation of APD programmes and practices in Zimbabwe's state universities?

Does lack of disciplinary identity among development practitioners influence uptake of APD programmes?

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK CRITICAL THEORY

This study is premised on critical theory since the discourse around APD is associated with bringing about change and transformation in university teaching. According to Freire (1997) critical theory concerns itself with correcting human conditions that are unjust. It also challenges power structures that disadvantage the weak. In higher education critical theory can have relevant application by capacitating university teachers to change the status quo through APD. Through it, university teaching will be delivered in a manner that does not favour students from privileged backgrounds at the expense of the disadvantaged. So, dependence on one's social background will not count but equality of educational opportunity will. That way APD embedded in critical theory will bring about change and transformation in higher education delivery. Academics would be turned into transformative intellectuals.

Scholars like Brookfield (2005), Giroux (1994) and Habermas (1997) advocate that critical pedagogy which draws from critical theory can be a basis on which higher education professional development programmes can be embedded to have transformative power. The resultant APD programmes would have an empowering content that will produce graduates with critical thinking skills with capacity to drive national development.

Boyer's (1990) four forms of scholarship

Boyer's (1990) four forms of scholarship challenged the superior status given to research of the discipline over the teaching status in a university. Boyer's model advanced that academics engage in the following activities: discover, teaching, application, and integration which he characterized as scholarships. Boyer (1990) gave these scholarships the same weight. By implication disciplinary research had the

same value and weight as teaching based inquiry (scholarship of teaching). Emerging is the view that higher education should adopt the term 'scholarship' to reflect the scholarship of teaching whose status is comparable to that of research. This interpretation suggests that APD should promote research into teaching practices associated with the teaching of a discipline that will promote the quality of teaching (Gosling, 2009). The implication would be that scholarship of teaching and learning (SoTC) would be applied as a form of APD. The consequence of such an approach would be that it will transform the quality of students' learning experiences. However, academics resist Boyer's (1990) model that treats teaching as a form of scholarship that is comparable to the scholarship of research. Academics regard research as their core business. 'Publish or perish' is an aphorism that strongly influences the behaviour of academics at research institutions which results in the marginalization of teaching in faculties.

Influence of the disciplinary identity of academics on academic professional development

In universities, disciplines have a huge influence on how academics construct their identities. Studies by Lazecky and Badger (2007), Stainforth and Herb (2006), and Henkel (2002) suggest that professional development programmes conducted in faculties are influenced by research cultures embedded in lecturers' academic practices. The basis for this reason is that APD is not based on discipline-based research. Academics view it as a non-academic activity that is not embedded in a disciplinary context. This misconceptualisation of APD by lecturers negatively affects how APD is developed and implemented (Becker, 1989; Becker and Trowler, 1997). UK academics' experiences with outstanding teaching performance have shown that, despite their teaching prowess, they are not preferred for hire in strong research-based universities compared to those candidates who are distinguished discipline-based researchers (Kilfoil, 2010). This trend points to the low status accorded to the scholarship of teaching in universities. This low status given to teaching is reflective of the strength of disciplinary traditions that are found in research-based universities. However, according to Tynan and Lee (2009) the role of a university is broader and not limited to research interests.

Using Boyer's (1990) four forms of scholarship, it appears there have been initiatives to present APD as a bona-fide disciplinary inquiry comparable to discipline-based research (Rowland, 2002). Academics should appreciate the relationship between scholarship of research and scholarship of teaching. This argument might raise the status of teaching (Kreber, 2000) since university teachers would appreciate their broader academic roles by giving equal weight to both scholarships of teaching and research.

In the UK, scholarship of teaching and learning (SoTL) is promoted by national structures. Examples of these include Continuous Professional Development Framework (CPDF) and UK Professional Framework (PSF). Professional development in these structures shows that there is no difference between scholarly approach to pedagogy and the scholarly nature of disciplinary inquiry (Thomas, 2006). Instead, the relationship between the two is emphasised.

Influence of APD programmes on practitioners' identity and credibility

In any higher education context, successful implementation of an educational programme is partly dependant on the existence of qualified personnel. As a result, practitioners should have credibility if they are to successfully implement APD activities (Quinn, 2012). However, lack of bona-fide disciplinary identity by practitioners has attracted a dim view of practitioners by lecturers, thereby compromising their capacity to drive APD implementation in universities (Gosling, 2009; Jawitz and Perez,

2014). Prevailing perceptions among academics is that APD lacks a body of knowledge that qualifies it as a legitimate discipline (Makura and Tony, 2014) with distinguishable disciplinary traits such as language and values (Henkel and Trowler, 2002). Consequently, APD fails to qualify as a bona-fide discipline (Taylor, 2005). The emerging implication is that academic development practitioners would lack recognition in the eyes of academics which would have a negative effect on their effectiveness as implementors of APD. This perspective would negatively affect their effectiveness as APD implementors. Manathunga (2007) and Lee et al. (2010) describe practitioners as discipline migrants, a view that undermines their legitimacy as agents of APD.

Internationally, there are case studies that show that lack of credibility by academic development practitioners has a negative effect on staff development. In Australia, studies by Gosling (2008) show that practitioners lacked credibility on account of both qualifications and experience in APD work. In the UK, developers are viewed as colleagues who attempt to push common sense into educational jargon that lacks its own pedagogic literature (Halstead, 2012; Haig, 2007). In South Africa, Scott's (1998) report blamed resistance to APD programmes by lecturers on the grounds of practitioners' lack of credibility. These perspectives create challenges for practitioners in the implementation of APD. Another challenge faced by academic developers is inspiring professors' confidence in their ability to develop and implement APD is a scholarship. The challenge is that professors have not bought into Boyer's (1990) scholarship of teaching as a new specialisation of knowledge (Lee, et al., 2010) that can be classified as a discipline. This lack of academic credibility has a constraining effect on APD programme implementation.

Academic development literature (Boughey, 2012; Rowland, 2002) strongly suggests that practitioners should acquire formal qualifications to address their credibility challenges.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

A qualitative research design was employed in this study. It was appropriate since it provides an in-depth understanding of the nature of a particular phenomenon (Creswell, 2013). The purpose of the study was to find out the influence of discipline specific traditions and cultures on the implementation of APD programmes in Zimbabwe's state universities.

A multi-case study approach involving two case study institutions was applied since it enabled the researcher to capture the influence of the variables in the two institutions (Dean, Fraser and Ryan, 1998) that might have impacted on APD implementation. Through convenience sampling 8 lecturers and 2 deans were selected while 1 Director of a Centre for Teaching and Learning and 1 Vice Chancellor were also selected through purposive sampling from each case study institution. A total of 24 participants was selected from the two case study institutions, X representing a group of older and established universities, and Y representing newer universities. Participants' consent was negotiated and participants' freedom to withdraw from the research for any reason was guaranteed.

Research instruments used to collect data included interviews, focus group discussions and questionnaires. The semi-structured interview instrument was chosen for this qualitative research because it had the advantage of eliciting in-depth data from participants from preset open-ended questions about APD development and its implementation (Bloom and Crabtree, 2006). The instruments had questions on the influence of academic traditions and cultures on APD implementation. Two digital voice recorders (one for each case study institution) were used for both interviews and focus group discussions. Researcher's biases on data collection and interpretation were managed through bracketing assumptions (Hein and Austin, 2001) to enhance

objectivity. Validity of the qualitative study was enhanced through two forms of triangulations involving data sources and methodological triangulation (Mounton, 2005).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Two research questions on implementation of APD programmes formed the basis on which the findings were analyzed.

Discipline-based research and academic's identity and their influence on APD implementation

Results from case study institutions X and Y revealed that discipline-based research negatively affected how APD programmes were implemented. Interview extracts showed that marginalisation of teaching, and by implication, APD programmes was a consequence of disciplinary cultures particularly discipline-based research on which academics-based construction of their identities.

In case study institution X, P_3 observed that:

Recognition and status are given to professors. Regardless of their poor rating by students.

This is clear marginalisation of teaching in favour of research. Teaching is not considered for promotion. This reflects the power and influence of disciplinary research over teaching. Disciplinary inquiry delivers research output described by Hankel (2002) as "goods" while teaching attracts no recognition on account of producing no "goods". According to Ramsden and Moses (1992) the scholarship of teaching is not considered part of academic traditions compared to discipline-based research that is embedded in such cultures and traditions. In participant P_3's view, a student is treated as a partner in disciplinary research leading to joint publication, which is reflective of the strong influence of discipline-specific cultures and traditions. This integrative approach that treats teaching as part of research becomes an interesting innovation for APD programme design and development. The emerging implication is that a student is considered an academic's partner through disciplinary research rather than in an educational encounter experienced in a teaching discourse. This strongly suggests that an academic's identity and role in a department are viewed through discipline-specific research (Clark, Hyde and Drennan, 2011; Deem, 2006).

Resistance by academics to new identities based on university teaching has been highlighted by Weller (2011) who emphasises lecturers' preference for discipline-based identities. The influence of disciplinary identity was also voiced by participants P_4 and P_5. P_4, for example, recounted that:

I aim to specialise in my discipline. I intend to be a professor.

Participant P_5's voice made the pressure exerted by disciplinary research on academics more evident. P5 recounted that:

Development of science should be at the heart of one's Philosophy. More should be done for Geography. If we die Geography in Africa won't develop.

Voices of both participants P_4 and P_5 reflect the strength and influence of the discipline. In the case of P_4 the participant aspires to be a prominent professor and not a good teacher. Developing expertise through research is associated with rewards and honours such as recognition, status, and self-esteem (Hankel, 2005) while teaching is not. On the other hand, P_5 is equally concerned about the dearth of research in geography that might affect the knowledge growth of the discipline. Low status given to teaching in universities does not worry the participant but lack of advancement in research in Geography as witnessed in universities in Africa is his concern.

However, in the same case study institution X, participant P_6 called for an expanded role of the academic. P_6 highlighted that:

The role of the lecturer was not broad to show reality.

Colleagues experience challenges to disengage in their disciplines. Lecturers are encouraged to reflect.

The emerging implication is that lecturers have a limited understanding of their academic role, which does not resonate with reality that prevails in a teaching department. The responsibility of lecturers towards students is imperative given the call for academics to disengage from disciplinary research in favour of reflective practice that places students' learning needs at the centre of their role. According to Boyer (1990) and Newman (1996) both the scholarship of teaching and the scholarship of the discipline should be promoted in APD to broaden the role of the academic in universities.

Results in case study institution Y revealed similar trends that disciplinary traditions have stronger influence on academics' identity compared to teaching. Interview extracts from participants P_9, P_{10} and P_{12} reflect this view. P9, for example, recounted that APD was viewed as an "auxiliary function" of the role of an academic if evaluated from a disciplinary perspective of "linguists.'' The discourse suggests that academic traditions embedded in departments marginalise teaching in favour of discipline-based research. Emphasizing the strength of discipline-based research over teaching-based inquiry inquiry P_{12} highlighted that:

I am not a disher of knowledge. First and foremost, I consider myself an academic.

Results reveal that the participant is averse to being a disher of knowledge. Instead, he sees himself as an academic more than a teacher. The emerging perspective is that teaching is given low status compared to research. P_{12} reflects a negative perception of teaching which he associates with "banking concept" (Giroux and Maclaren, 1996; Jeiytan and Woodrum, 1996) captured in the "disher of knowledge" discourse where students are treated as "passive receptacles of knowledge" (Freire, 1997). Passive learning is criticized by critical realists (Habermas, 1989; Jeistyan and Woodrum, 1996). Instead, they advocate problem solving approaches that are associated with critical thinking on the part of the student (Freire, 1997; Giroux, 2004). Although P_{10} recounted a similar view, workshops on teaching were not prioritised. Instead, research workshops were advocated for in APD programmes. Participant P_{10} commented that:

My research interests influence are influenced by my discipline.

Multidisciplinary research is embraced by academics.

Research collaboration is strengthened. Workshops that focus on research are preferred.

Contrary to established APD practice prevalent in Teaching and Learning Centres, research-based workshops are preferred compared to teaching-based workshops. The reason being that research is more beneficial to the growth and development of an academic's discipline in a department. There is also evidence that suggests that academics embrace multidisciplinary research approaches on account of their value in advancing the development of communities of practice (Mathias, 2005; Trowler and Knight, 2000; Viskoz, 2006) as well as the promotion of collegiality whose main academic trait is knowledge sharing.

Participant P_{13}, unlike participants P_9, P_{10} and P_{12} introduces the concept of "academic tribes" (Becher and Trowler, 2001) where members of the department are described as a "family". The implication is that departmental members see themselves as "a tribe" whose

common characteristics are "language, values, conceptual framework, and disciplinary identity" (Kongan, 2000). By comparison, teaching has no disciplinary traits found among members of the academic tribe (Gosling, 2008) and, consequently, it is marginalised in the matrix of the academic's role. In addition, P_{13} presents disciplinary interests of members of the tribe as paramount, which is detrimental to APD initiatives that might be viewed as an obstacle to the development of the discipline through research. The point was presented by participant P_{13} so well, thus:

See us as a family. As a family and something (APD) comes

along. It (APD) interferes us.

The interview extract reveals that departmental members view themselves as a tribe. Disciplinary traditions have notions of academic tribes strongly embedded in them to the extent that APD initiatives are considered peripheral and interference.

From the results there is evidence to suggest that academics construct their identies based on discipline-based research. The idea of discipline tribes that featured strengthened the notion of community of practice that is associated with departmental members who share the same disciplinary traits (Becher and Trowler, 2001). Consequently, the teaching discourse as a form of scholarship is not used by academics as a basis on which they can construct their identity. Lack of rewards associated with scholarship of teaching tends to undervalue the status of teaching in a university (Weller, 2011). The implication is that academic traditions marginalise teaching. Similarly, APD is equally peripherized. The influence of these academic traditions would be that academics would develop negative attitudes towards APD programmes which would in turn result in its constrained implementation.

Practitioners' lack of discipline-specific identity and its influence on APD programmes implementation

Results from case study institutions X and Y reveal that development practitioners were described as non-academic. However, in some cases some voices of participants displayed interesting insights in which APD activities were viewed as academic in nature. Participants' interview extracts reveal that disciplinary knowledge stands out as a significant factor in determining practitioners' credibility in faculties. Case study institution X's interview data below demonstrates this.

P_1 Philosophy is subject specialization to gain status

P_4 It's not clear if a practitioner qualifies to be an academic. Academic status is compromised.

Researcher: Is academic professional development a career you can take up?

$P_{4,}$ I have my doubts because it's for those who are less academic.

P_6 Directors of centres of teaching and learning are not seen as

academic leaders.

Focus Group Participant (XU)

Centre of Teaching and Learning is not a faculty unity. Credibility lacks in it.

Dean (D_1) Academic developers are academics. They give support and administration in their centers to faculties.

Researcher: What is the form of that support?

Dean (D_1) Supporting lecturers with module production, assessment guidelines, managing large groups of students.

This is helpful in social sciences. Induction workshops.

Vice Chancellor (XU)

A Director who understands Centre of Teaching and

Learning as an academy

It (T&LC should be a specialist area focusing on inquiry.

Data from both case study institutions particularly case study institution X show that the status of practitioners lack disciplinary identity. Against the strong voices of P_1 and P_4 who advocate for the development of subject knowledge for the purpose of attaining subject mastery, the dominant view emerging from other participants, particularly P_4, P_6 and D_1 is that APD activities are non-academic. Activities cited by D_1 are administrative in nature and, therefore, not academic in status. In case study institution X, dean (D_1) viewed APD programme content consisting of "hosting workshops" while in case study institution Y, dean (D_3) described the role of practitioners as that of "dishing out lots of teaching methods". Because of that, practitioners are described as non-academic. P_4's attitude is that he cannot work as a professional development practitioner because it's a post he alleges is reserved for those "who are less academic." It is a position that "compromises" one's academic status. Also emerging is the view that a Teaching and Learning Centre is categorized as a non-faculty unit. So, the implication of this discourse is that practitioners are an agency without a discipline. Significantly, they are viewed as paraprofessionals not academics (Rowland, 2003; McDonald, 2003) rather than academics. According to Deem (2006) and Kogan (2006) this development reflects the immense influence of the discipline in the construction of the identity of an academic. Since academics doubt the status of APD as a discipline (Gosling, 2001), practitioners are consequently described as non-academic. This compromises their legitimacy in the eyes of academics and might result in poor development and implementation of APD programmes.

Equally revealing is data from case study institution Y that is presented below. Significantly, practitioners' qualifications and other related requirements stipulated for hire, dominate participants' voices. This is what some participants said:

Participant (P_{12})

Qualifications for a director (T& LC) should be one with a

vision, buy in of a Vice Chancellor, knowledgeable, a people's person

Participant (P_{15})

Developers have a lot of experience in n high schools. Pedagogy

is suitable for high schools. Its challenging. Andragogy

is compatible with universities. Practitioners should be strongly rooted in university experience.

Dean 3 (YU)

Teaching methods are drawn from the Education Faculty. So, practitioners should be recruited from that faculty. A variety of teaching methods should be used by lecturers. Developers qualify to be academics.

Dean 4 (YU)

Academic professional development involves activities that are academic.

Researcher: Why?

Dean 4(YU)

Professional development activities have theories.

Participants' voices point to the non-academic nature of the qualifications required for practitioners to be hired. Unlike academics where

PhD training is a requirement for hire (Gosling, 2008; Volbrecht, 2003), in the case of practitioners it is not. People's skills, buy in of the Vice Chancellor's vision and loyalty are the requirements to be met for a practitioner to be hired. Disciplinary research training associated with PhD "property and power" are absent (Archer, 1995). Another dimension is that practitioner's background experience is not university based but high school based. The psychology of teaching expected in teaching in these two systems are different. High school teaching is pedagogy based while university teaching is andragogy based. There is limited connection between the two, thereby making practitioners less effective in APD implementation. Experience rooted in a university environment is more relevant. Data also reveals a common perception held by some academics that APD is about holding workshops on teaching methods and by implication that practitioners should be recruited from the Faculty of Education (Boughey, 2013; Quinn, 2012). This is a misconceptualisation of APD practice. Professionalization of the professoriate is open to all academics (Boyer, 1990) who have demonstrated scholarship in teaching of their disciplines and can demonstrate intellectual rigour in the practice of APD.

In order to counter this perspective, Ramsden (2009) and Kell (2005) suggest that APD should be packaged and presented as a discipline with its own knowledge and literature. The scholarship of teaching and learning (SoTL) as proposed by Boyer (1990) can be used in APD activities to promote their academic legitimacy and scholarship. In case study institution X, the Vice Chancellor called for a paradigm shift in approach in which APD would be presented as a scholarly inquiry in which research into the teaching of a discipline is pursued with intellectual rigour like is the case with discipline-based research. Similarly, in case study institution Y, D_4 commented that APD has a body of knowledge with its own theories like any other discipline. This resonates with studies by McDonald (2003) who advances the view that scholarly inquiry into teaching of a discipline qualifies as a scholarship. However, this perspective is resisted by participant P_4 who comments that pursuing a career in APD risked "compromising one's academic future". This perspective was highlighted by Clarke (1997) who notes that the behaviour of academics in departments was heavily influenced by bodies of knowledge of their disciplines. This suggests that academics view APD as an area that is not linked to disciplinary knowledge. Consequently, the traditional perspective of APD as a non-academic one, characterizes the interview data. The emerging implication is that lack of discipline-specific identity affects practitioners' credibility with the result of negatively affecting academics' uptake of APD programmes.

CONCLUSIONS

Practitioners are categorized as non-academic on account of lacking disciplinary knowledge of their own. Academics identity and behaviour is heavily influenced by academic traditions particularly disciplinary knowledge. Participants' views showed that academics' disciplinary identity influenced them to resist taking up APD. Practitioners viewed as non-academics were less effective as actors of APD implementation on account of lacking credibility. Clearly, disciplinary traditions and cultures affect less effectively implementation of APD.

RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that practitioners should take up studies in higher education to develop as scholars of HE. This will raise their credibity. It is also recommended that APD activities should research into the teaching of a discipline with intellectual rigour to demonstrate its status as a scholarship. These approaches will counter resistance by academics towards APD leading to higher uptake of its programmes. Finally it is recommended that Boyer's model of scholarship can be used to address lecturers'misconceptions about APD. The

approach will reflect the expanded role of the academic that includes the scholarship of teaching.

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The Effect of Discussion Classes on Students' Overall Performance at an Institute for Open and Distance Learning in South Africa: Analysis Using Mixed-Effects Models

[ab*]Maupi Eric Letsoalo and [c]Tšhegofatšo Makgakga
[a]Centre for Academic Excellence [CAE]
[b]Department of Mathematics, Science and Technology Education [DMSTE]
University of Limpopo
[c]Institute for Open and Distance Learning [IODL]
University of South Africa
Corresponding Author: MaupiELetsoalo@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

Most ODL students have had little to no exposure to the ODL environment. Therefore, institutions must assess the impact of existing support mechanisms, such as discussion classes, aimed at assisting students to succeed in the program. This exploratory quantitative study evaluated the overall effect of discussion classes on undergraduate mathematics education student academic performance. Students who registered for Measurement in Intermediate and Senior Mathematics in the 2018 academic year at the University of South Africa constituted a study population. Both crude and adjusted mixed-effects models indicated that those who attend and those who did not attend discussion classes performed insignificantly differently. However, the reduction of the estimate after adjusting for assignment score is educationally important and it has presented an opportunity to re-evaluate the importance of the intervention strategies. This paper suggested that student support in ODL has the potential to improve student success rates. Also, the interventions should be guided by an informed choice of philosophies that underpins the rationale for open and distance learning. A further in-depth study is needed to understand how various aspects of student support contribute to success in open and distance learning. Understanding student support services, their contribution, and importance from the perspective of university administration and all stakeholders may aid ODL policymakers in formulating policies and strategies for student academic assistance, as well as offering the necessary guidance to improve service quality

***Keywords**: Discussion classes, Affective factors, Support strategy, Academic performance, Open and distance learning*

INTRODUCTION

Individuals and society can participate fully in the development process by acquiring knowledge, abilities, skills, and attitudes through education. Open and distant education is seen as significant avenues for delivering education and removing barriers for as many people as possible. Many people rely on open and distance education, including those who live in remote places, those who are unable to leave their home or office to study, and those who would otherwise be unable to do so. With the availability of alternative education opportunities such as massive open online courses (Wong, 2016; Au, Li, & Wong, 2018), open and distance learning (ODL) institutions are under increasing pressure to maintain their quality of education delivery and student satisfaction to retain students, as well as to develop measures to meet the needs of a diverse student population (Au, Li, & Wong, 2018). This could be due in part to the fact that the distance learning (DL) landscape is becoming increasingly competitive.

Higher education systems are confronted with the task of addressing the differing needs of students. They address this

task by, among other ways, using learning technology that allows students to learn more openly and flexibly (Tait, 2014), and share common goals relating to access, retention, flexibility, and employability (Zuhairi, Karthikeyan, & Priyadarshana, 2020). During this corona-virus era, the use of technology for teaching and learning became a new normal for those institutions that relied on a face-to-face mode of operation. Thus, advances in technology challenge higher education further to transform themselves into addressing the changing needs of the world of work and to provide access and quality education in more flexible fashions (Zuhairi, Karthikeyan, & Priyadarshana, 2020).

In assessing the factors that affect student performance in any educational system, two aspects, which are individual factors and institutional factors, are normally considered. Individual factors are those related to the student such as interest, attitude, ability, social-economic status, gender, and the like (Letsoalo, Maoto, & Chuene, 2018). Those from the institution include the availability of the materials, behaviour, and competence of the educator or lecturer. For example, Smith and Naylor (2001) reported that degree performance is influenced significantly by personal characteristics.

Studies have established that learning is influenced by many factors (Gentilucci & Muto, 2007; Siweya & Letsoalo, 2014; Masemola & Letsoalo, 2017), both cognitive (Hasson, 1988; Hannula, 2002; Green & Gilhooly, 2005; Simpson, 2008; Makgakga & Sepeng, 2013) and effective or non-cognitive (Abraha, et al., 1991; Letsoalo, 2017a). Cognitive factors include memory, verbal abilities, and reasoning aptitude. These can be measured by setting performance and achievement tasks, where the answers are given can be grouped as correct or incorrect, or acceptable or unacceptable (Abraha, et al., 1991). Student performance's affective factors include students attribute, institutional attributes, and home characteristics (Abraha, et al., 1991; Letsoalo, Maoto, & Chuene, 2018). The meaning of academic performance seems to be 'taken as shared' as authors do not clearly define what academic performance is (Letsoalo, Maoto, & Chuene, 2018). The authors indicated that it refers to how an individual student can demonstrate his or her intellectual abilities.

In sociological research, the relationship between family socioeconomic status (SES) and students' academic performance has been extensively documented. Considine and Zappala (2002), for example, examined the effect of social and economic disadvantages on school students' academic performance in Australia. They found that families with more affluent parents nurture higher levels of achievement in their children on social, scholastic, and economic levels. They also discovered that these parents provide their children with higher levels of psychological support by creating situations that enhance the development of abilities needed for academic achievement.

Several student characteristics are important in influencing performance (Kirk & Spector, 2006): age, gender, marital status, class attendance (Letsoalo, 2017b), semester course loads, entrance examination results, previous academic achievement (Letsoalo, 2019a), relevant learning experience (Cheung & Kan, 2002; Letsoalo, 2019a), and relevant academic background (Cheung & Kan, 2002).

Universities set up programs to help students succeed in their academic endeavours [in order to] mitigate the negative impact of the aforementioned factors. Therefore, student support helps students to

attain levels of understanding impossible for them to achieve without assistance. Student support in ODL, which is an approach that focuses on opening access to education and training provision, freeing students from constraints of time and place, and offering flexible learning opportunities to individuals and groups of learners, has been a fundamental question to address since the ODL system has existed. Despite the transformation of the ODL into a technology-based system, the principles of support services for distant students remain the same, in which students are engaged in learning and motivated to learn independently and autonomously (Zuhairi, Karthikeyan, & Priyadarshana, 2020). A key concern for all those involved in recruiting and teaching in ODL must be the effective support of their students. Distance students need support for three reasons, namely the need for support (Zuhairi, Karthikeyan, & Priyadarshana, 2020), the reduction of dropout (Bozkurt & Akbulut, 2019), and the nature of learning (Tait, 2003; Zuhairi, Karthikeyan, & Priyadarshana, 2020). Tait (2000) sees the primary functions of student support as threefold; namely, cognitive, affective, and systemic. Further, the researcher indicated that such an understanding of the role of student support comes primarily from social constructivist ideas that knowledge is in a real sense made and remade by participation in learning. To support the learners in an ODL environment, distance teachers must have adequate skills and experience to facilitate the learning process through designing and building support that will encourage learning (Dzakiria, 2005).

There are various approaches to supporting distant or at-risk students. Students are said to be at-risk or high-risk students if they are at risk of dropping out of their study programmes or are more likely not to complete their studies (Letsoalo, Maoto, & Chuene, 2018). Identifying and targeting at-risk students and then offering additional support before a programme of study runs, is one approach to improving retention (Hughes, 2007). Furthermore, the author indicated that the second approach is to support students during their course.

Universities such as the University of South Africa (Unisa), the University of Limpopo (UL), the University of Liverpool, and Witwatersrand University have taken a holistic approach to student development. Such universities have sections, centres, departments, or units that offer support for many issues that students may face, ranging from time and stress management skills to depression, anxiety, and grief counselling. For example, the Baditi Student Support Mentoring programme (BSSMP) within the Centre for Academic Excellence (CAE) at UL is aimed at mentoring students to adjust both socially and academically to university life. CAE equips students with academic skills for them to succeed academically. It provides academic development and support to students by conducting study skills workshops, such as time management, examination techniques, study methods, etc. It identifies students' academic needs and addresses them. The University of Pretoria's Student Counselling Unit (UPSCU) is a professional psychological support service. It puts a high priority on the mental health and wellness of students and therefore provides the student population with access to a counselling unit. Students are offered academic, therapeutic, and emotional support. The University of Stellenbosch's Student Support (USSS) offers advice and support to all its students on academic and/or personal and social matters. Support includes tutor programmes for students who need additional academic support, workshops (e.g., effective time management, improving study skills, stress management), and therapy and personal development sessions (e.g., relationship problems, and depression).

University of Liverpool's student services offers comprehensive support and welfare services through two teams: namely Student Welfare Advice and Guidance, and the Counselling and Mental Health Services.

The widening of access to higher education has, for many universities, resulted in the issue of retention moving to the top of the agenda. Studies, mainly in the distance learning literature, have identified the key reasons why students leave their studies. Reasons cited for leaving include those relating to personal resilience, personal identity factors, support networks, as well as finding the course badly presented, poorly supported, or too difficult (Hughes, 2007).

Though Unisa removed barriers for students to access learning, by among others, implementing programmes that support students financially - student study support still needs to be reinforced to reduce both low pass rates and dropout rates. Nsamba and Makoe (2017) argued that student support in the open and distance learning (ODL) environment is vital to help students to learn. Moreover, student support at Unisa includes feedback on summative assessment, e-tutoring, contact sessions, and online discussion forums to assist students to achieve their learning objectives (Unisa, 2008; Unisa, 2018). On the other hand, Van Zyl, Spamer, and Els (2012) advocate that student support ought to form an integral part of ODL models globally. Consequently, contact classes used as student support strategies in the ODL environment was being an important factor to reduce the transactional distance between lecturers and students. Although contact sessions are important in student support in ODL, it was found that a few departments at Unisa had suspended contact lessons as part of student support owing to a lack of resources (Olivier, 2016). Hence the need to evaluate the effect of discussion classes as carried out in this study.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

Most ODL undergraduate students come from a background whereby they had full contact with their educators or lecturers for learning. It, therefore, was their first experience in the ODL environment to learn independently without full or any contact with their educators and lecturers. Measurement in Intermediate and Senior Mathematics (MAE103L), a compulsory module for undergraduate student teachers at Unisa, is a semester module offered in the Department of Mathematics Education. The module is aimed at preparing students to understand the meaning, processes, and estimations of measurements (Unisa, 2018). To improve the design, syllabus, teaching strategies or method of delivery of content, and assessment strategy of their courses, higher education institutions must understand the factors involved in student performance. Although Unisa students receive support to access learning and improve success, no research was conducted on the effect of discussion classes on student teachers' performance in mathematics, especially MAE103L. Hence, the impetus of this study.

STUDY OBJECTIVES

The purpose of this study was to ascertain whether the implementation of face-to-face discussion classes as an intervention strategy exerted any difference on student academic performance in MAE103L at Unisa. The face-to-face discussion classes were implemented as an intervention strategy due to students' different personalities in the learning of mathematics. The study intended to answer the following research question: What is the overall effect of face-to-face discussion classes on ODL undergraduate mathematics education students' academic achievement?

To achieve this objective, the researchers evaluated the (null) hypothesis that

- *there is no significant difference in student performance between those who attended discussion classes and those who did not.*

This hypothesis was tested against the (alternative) hypothesis that

- *the difference between the two study groups was significantly different*.

LIMITATIONS

This study focused on a group that registered for the MAE103L in South Africa's Gauteng Province during the second semester of the 2018 academic year. The inclusion of students from all other provinces could have given a different perspective of results. Also, the dataset used for data analysis had no other significant covariates as reported in other studies.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study is guided by two theories: namely, the input-output theory and student attrition theory.

Input-output model

The system's theory input-output model was used to form the basis for this study. This theory was advanced by LudwigVon Bertalanffy in the early 1950s. It postulates that an organised enterprise does not exist in a vacuum or isolation, is dependent on the environment in which it is established (Koontz & Weihrich, 1988). They added that the inputs from the environment are received by the organisation which then transforms them into output after processing such inputs. Figure 1 makes this explanation more explicit.

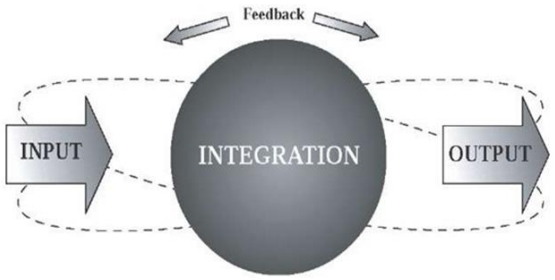

Figure 1: Input-Output model in education [Source: Letsoalo (2022)]

As adapted by this study, students (input) are admitted into the school or university (ODL) with different inherent attributes, family, and educational background; when they get into the university system, the university through its resources (both human and capital) process such students through the learning process which is aided or made easier through the resources or variables attributed to such university. The effectiveness of such variables is measured through the output of the students which is measured in terms of their academic performance. All the components of the model (system) must function in harmony to achieve the envisaged outcome. Therefore, the inter-relationship among the parts of a system must be understood by all parties to ensure the inter-dependent nature of the parts (Oso & Onen, 2005).

Student attrition theory

Bean and Metzner (1985) came up with the student attrition theory to explain the attrition of non-traditional students including distance learners. They identified four factors affecting persistence: academic variables such as study habits and course availability; background and defining variables such as age, educational goals, ethnicity; environmental variables such as finances, hours of employment, family responsibilities,

and outside encouragement; and academic and psychological outcomes while at the college. These variables can challenge students and push them out of the educational institution by putting too much pressure on their time, resources, and sense of well-being.

When both academic and environmental variables are favourable, students should persist. When both variables are unfavourable, students are likely to drop out. When academic variables are positive but environmental variables are negative, the favourable effects of academic variables on student goal attainment are suppressed. Students may drop out of college despite strong academic performance if they perceive low levels of utility, satisfaction, or goal commitment, or if they experience high levels of stress.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Student support in open and distance learning environment

Distance education institutions are facing challenges to accommodate a growing number of students nationally and globally (Krishnan, 2012; Roberts, 2014). For example, Unisa experiences such a challenge since it is one of the biggest ODL institutions in Africa. ODL is a multi-dimensional concept aimed at bridging the time, geographical, economic, social, educational, and communication distance between student and institution, student and academics, student and courseware, and student and peers. Also, ODL focuses on "removing barriers to access learning, the flexibility of learning provision, student-centeredness, support students and constructing learning programmes with the expectation that students can succeed" (Unisa, 2008, p. 2)

The ODL institutions' students are faced with different learning opportunities and challenges (Tsagari, 2013) and those challenges include the physical distance between the lecturers and students, and the technological tools that are used for interaction (Moore & Kearsley, 1996; Nsamba & Makoe, 2017). In particular, the distance between the student and lecturer in the ODL environment affects the teaching and learning, and it is this distance that contributes to students' feelings of isolation and disorientation (Moore & Kearsley, 1996). Thorpe (2002) highlighted that ODL institutions have transitioned from traditional printing and correspondence models to the use of digital technology tools because of the diverse range of practices implemented than ever before.

The relationship between the educational institution and its students is provided by student support services (Shabani & Maboe, 2021). These services are defined differently and given different names by different authors (Olivier, 2016). For example, Robinson (1995) refers to ODL student support services as registrations, advisory services, learning support services (academic), counselling, tutoring, guidance on learning, and feedback on assignments, interaction with teaching and administrative staff, career services, provision of study centres, and financial assistance. A similar definition was provided by Tait (2003) who regarded student services as providing feedback to students, face-to-face teaching, short residential schools, special texts to help students, regional learning or study centres, personal tutors, and administrative support. Unisa's (2008) operational definition refers to student support services as face-to-face contact sessions, peer support, in-text support, and administrative support. Therefore, student support is a generic term that is applied to a range of services that were developed by an institution to assist its students to meet their learning objectives and to gain the knowledge and skills to be successful in their studies (Shabani & Maboe, 2021). Accordingly, those services are

necessary for ODL environments to cater to students' cognitive, emotional, and social needs (Krishnan, 2012; Nsamba & Makoe, 2017). Arguably, student support services serve as the interface between the students and institutions (Krishnan, 2012; Shabani & Maboe, 2021).

Discussion classes as a student academic support

Olivier (2016) classified or identified discussion classes or face-to-face contact sessions as some of the ODL student support services. Face-to-face contact sessions are interactions between lecturers and students. These interactions may occur during counselling (Ushadevi, 1994), discussion classes (Olivier, 2016), or contact sessions (Van Zyl, Els, & Blignaut, 2013; Van Zyl & Spamer, 2013; Olivier, 2016).

Studies that have been conducted on the discussion classes as student support focused on the student experience (Ogina & Mampane, 2013; Tsagari, 2013; Mampane, 2015); student success (Van Zyl, Spamer, & Els, 2012; Van Zyl & Spamer, 2013; Olivier, 2016), student expectations, and students' feelings (Ushadevi, 1994; Van Zyl, Els, & Blignaut, 2013). Studies that investigated the effect of discussion classes gave mixed results. In the study that used written assignment and examination results for Organisational Behaviour of Human Resource Management (HRM) qualification, Olivier (2016) reported that those who attended contact sessions performed better than those who did not. However, the examination performance of the attended group did not differ significantly differently from those who did not attend. Van Zyl and Spamer (2013) investigated the effects of contact class - and vacation school attendances on ODL student academic performance in Advanced Certificate in Education (ACE) programmes. The study findings revealed no significant difference between students' contact classes and vacation school attendance. Bowa (2008) has investigated the effect of contact classes on student academic achievement of distance education students in Kenya. The study revealed that the cognitive, affective, and systemic learner support including contact classes did not have any effect on student academic performance. However, Mchengetwa and Ssekuma (2012) reported a significant difference in academic achievement between those who attended discussion class sessions and those who did not, with the results favouring the attended group.

Academic proficiency (AP) is the ability to read well, to understand style and argumentations, to apply what is read to problems, and for students to understand their own written text (Spencer, Lephalala, & Pienaar, 2005). AP consists of two knowledge of the academic language and knowledge of specialised subject matter (Krashen & Brown, 2007). Knowledge of academic language is knowledge of the special language used in school and the professions. In school, it is the language of story problems in mathematics, social studies, and science texts (ibid), and outside of school, it is the language of business and finance, science, and politics. Studies show that there are differences in the specific academic languages used in different areas, but similarities also exist (Biber, 2006; Krashen & Brown, 2007). Since ODL students are primarily interacting with learning material in the absence of lecturers and are expected to decode meaning from what they have read or studied, AP is critical for students to succeed in the program.

On the other hand, knowledge of specialised subject matter consists of, among others, knowledge of mathematics, science, and history. Krashen and Brown (2007) suggested a third component to AP which is

strategies. This aspect of academic proficiency includes competence in the use of strategies that aid in the acquisition of academic language and that aid in subject-matter learning. Spencer, Lephalale, and Pienaar (2005) investigated the effectiveness of contact classes on improving AP. The study revealed an improvement of 9% in writing content, a 1% increase in writing form, and an improvement of 8.6% in reading ability among students.

Students possess different personality types, particularly in mathematics. Personality is a term that includes the characteristics of a person's interests, attitudes, abilities, physical appearance, and harmony to this environment (Per & Beyoğlu, 2011). Zonash and Naqvi (2011) explored the personality traits and learning styles of mathematics, architectural and fine arts students. They reported a positive relationship between mastery learners and conscientiousness, interpersonal-students, and agreeableness, understanding learners and openness, and self-expressive learners and extroversion. The authors argued that personality type has a significant difference in learning approaches and teaching methods regarding learner reaction.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

This exploratory comparative study followed the quantitative design, which is a formal, objective, systematic process for obtaining quantifiable information about the world (Ellis-Jacobs, 2011; Creswell, 2014). A combination of Stata Release 14 (StataCorp, 2015) and Excel (Microsoft, 2013) software packages was used for data management. The statistical software package used to analyse the secondary data that was used in this study is Stata Release 14 (StataCorp, 2015).

Frequencies and percentages were used to describe categorical data. Both crude and adjusted mixed-effects models [see Letsoalo (2019b)] were used to compare the two study groups. Mixed-effects models include traditional random-effect terms and are frequently appropriate for representing clustered data, dependent data, or dependent data arising, for example, when data is collected hierarchically (Letsoalo, 2019b). They are statistical models of parameters that vary at more than one level (Letsoalo, 2017a). The effect of discussion class sessions was measured by the overall performance of students on formative assessment of assignments and tests, and the study endpoint was the overall performance in examination (expressed in percentages). The results are given in tabular format. The interpretation of the results was performed at a 95% confidence limit.

RESULTS AND INTERPRETATION

A total of 117 students who registered for MAE103L in the second semester of the 2018 academic year were considered for this study. The number of students who attend the discussion classes was lower than that of those who did not attend [44 (37.61%) vs. 73 (62.39%)].

Table 1 presents the crude estimates from the unadjusted mixed-effects model. It indicates that the performance between the attended and unattended groups was not significantly different ($\beta = 0.945$, $p = 0.636$, 95% CI: - 2.968 to 4.858). For every percentage increase in the examination result; the overall examination mark for the unattended group was expected to increase by about 0.945% as compared to that of the attended group. Therefore, there is no sufficient evidence to suggest that the two groups performed significantly differently.

Table 1: Crude estimates

Covariate	Coef.	Std. Err.	P > |z|	95% Conf. Interval
Study Group				
Attended*	0			
Unattended	0.945	1.996	0.636	(- 2.968 to 4.858)
Constant	51.932	1.577	< 0.001	(48.841 to 55.023)

*Baseline Category

Table 2 presents the results of the assignment adjusted-score mixed-effects model. That is, the assignment score was controlled for in the model. It indicates that the unattended group was expected to score marginally 0.924% more than the attended group. It shows that there was no significant difference between the two study groups after adjusting for assignment performance (β = 0.924, p = 0.644, 95%CI: - 2.998 to 4.846).

Table 2: Assignment score-adjusted model

Covariate	*Coef.*	*Std. Err.*	*P > |z|*	*95% Conf. Interval*
Study Group				
Attended*	0			
Unattended	0.924	2.001	0.644	(- 2.998 to 4.846)
Assignment score	0.001	0.010	0.883	(- 0.018 to 0.021)
Constant	51.856	1.658	< 0.001	(48.606 to 55.106)

*Baseline category

DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The effect of assignment scores on the overall student performance indicates that the unattended group was expected to score 0.924% points more than their attended counterparts. This estimate was found to be 0.021 points less than that of the crude estimates which favoured the unattended group. Although the overall performance between the two groups in the two models was not significantly different, the reduction in the estimates between the crude and adjusted models warrants an important feature for further investigation. More so that studies have shown that student performance is affected by numerous factors. Therefore, a reduction of 0.021 is educationally important to indicate that the intervention (class discussion) should be considered as one of the factors to improve student performance.

As in Van Zyl and Spamer (2013) and Bowas (2008), the overall effect of discussion classes did not show any significant difference in student performance between those who attended and those who did not attend the discussion class. Furthermore, this study findings disagreed with Spencer et al.'s (2005) which indicated that the effect of discussion classes improved students' performance. Also, this study's finding disagreed with Olivier's (2016) results that showed that students who did not attend discussion classes performed significantly better than those who did.

Scholars, such as Fadelelmoula (2018), have hypothesised that class attendance should positively correlate with academic performance. However, it remains important to note that this relationship does not subscribe to the principle of causality. Despite that there is enough evidence to suggest the benefit of class attendance, some students continue to be absent from lectures (discussion class). The reasons for being absent vary from the so-called valid reasons to the so-called less valid reasons.

In the South African context, the valid reasons may be influenced by poor transport systems, illness, language barriers, and pedagogical styles within education systems due to previous historical and political influences. Although this study did not investigate the reasons for low attendance or absenteeism during discussion classes; Van Zyl (2013) and Olivier (2016) have highlighted some reasons contributing to low attendance of discussion classes that could have affected the unattended group during discussion classes. Those reasons may include the fact that the unattended group may be the 'Intuitive and Thinking' personality type of students that have a good background in mathematics and do not have mathematics anxiety (Carpenter & Lehrer, 1999; Kise, 2007). In addition, Olivier (2016) indicated the reasons for students' low attendance as socio-economic conditions, lack of motivation and commitment, and undedicated students who may opt not to attend.

This study showed that most of the students who performed well did not attend the discussion classes. The reason may be like that of Olivier (2016), and Van Zyl and Spamer (2013) who said students may not need these discussion classes as they seem to perform well. The result from the adjusted mixed-effects model indicates that this article should support the notion that discussion class attendance is associated with improved academic performance. Also, it has provided a challenge of what exactly contributes towards the better performance of students who did not attend MAE103L discussion classes. Similarly, one may need to investigate the reasons behind a marginally better performance of the unattended group as compared to their attended counterparts. Future studies may focus on the students' experience and perceptions on the use of discussion forums as a support strategy to enhance learning. Finally, this paper suggests that future studies may model all covariates that were found to be affecting student performance to account for total variation in student performance.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study indicate that the effect of discussion classes is affected by a variety of factors that this study was unable to account for. It, therefore, indicated that crude estimates did not provide enough evidence to conclude the significance of discussion classes. The adjusted model, on the other hand, suggested that if the dataset included several important predictor variables, reliable estimates could be obtained. The input-output theory and the student attrition theory, which were supported by mixed-effects models,

acknowledged that ODL students brought their orientation and experiences into the ODL environment. Students were equipped to the point where they could be assessed at the level of students who had gone through the MAE103L material after interacting with it. In other words, mixed-effects models accounted for before-and after student's observations.

When it comes to dealing with the issues faced by at-risk students in the form of distant learning, the concept of one-size-fits-all is not always appropriate. Although contact discussion intervention appears logical, it may not be sufficient to apply such intervention while holding all other factors constant in the hopes of obtaining desired results (as illustrated the observed estimates of both crude and adjusted models). Practitioners are advised to use approaches, models, and frameworks that compensate for all effective factors to account for enhanced or expanded variation in student performance.

Open and distance education students need student support to facilitate, engage and motivate students to learn. These student support needs include areas academic, administrative, and other matters needed by distance students to succeed in learning. Any practice that is not informed by relevant theory is more likely to prove to be an exercise in self-deception. There is some evidence, then, that combining the approaches of Self Theory, the Strengths Approach, and Proactive Support may be more successful in supporting students for success than conventional approaches based on identifying weaknesses and emphasising the development of learning skills. However, much more evaluation of such an approach is needed to be certain of that. Nevertheless, the basic and plausible philosophy behind the approach is congruent with the ethical aims of open and distance learning. If a student is enabled to be fully motivated by this approach, then it is likely they will explore issues of suitable preparation and learning skills development for themselves, be more persistent when facing difficulties, and become an effective independent student, doing whatever they need to succeed. Therefore, ODL institutions have a responsibility to continue exploring strategies to empower academics by, among other ways, offering them continuous training and support to enable them to fulfil the roles required for the effective design and implementation of student-support systems.

Understanding student support services, their contribution, and importance from the perspective of university administration and all stakeholders may aid ODL policymakers in formulating policies and strategies for student academic assistance, as well as offering the necessary guidance to improve service quality.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare that they have no financial or some other form of relationship(s) that may have inappropriately influenced them in writing this article.

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Intoxicated in the classroom: Teachers' experiences of teaching drug addicted learners in KwaZulu-Natal township schools, South Africa

Themba Ralph Mkhize and Zamakhosi Shembe
Department of Educational Foundations
University of South Africa, RSA
Corresponding author: mkhiztr@unisa.ac.za

ABSTRACT

The number of drug users in Africa is projected to rise in the next decade by as much as 40 per cent, simply because of the growing youth population on the continent (UNODC,2021). Yet relatively very little is known and understood about the plight of teachers who contend with drug-addicted learners in their classrooms. The need for this study was prompted by the traumatic experiences of teachers in these drug-ridden classrooms in the KwaDabeka Township, in the KwaZulu-Natal province. Teachers are threatened, physically harmed, verbally abused, and emotionally and psychologically traumatised by learner who use drugs during class. The saddest part though, is that these teachers suffer in silence. The purpose of this study is to investigate teachers' experiences regarding teaching learners addicted to drugs in KwaZulu-Natal township schools. There is a paucity of research that explores the plight of teachers who conduct lessons in drug-ridden classrooms within the township context. This is a qualitative study located within the Interpretivist paradigm. Six teachers from three high schools in KwaDabeka were selected for the study. Purposeful sampling was utilised to select teachers with experience of teaching drug addicted learners. Interviews were conducted as data-gathering techniques. We used thematic data analysis to analyse data. This study is supported by the Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory and Critical Emancipatory Theory. Four main findings emerged from the data, which were used to make recommendations to improve teaching and learning in drug affected township schools.

Keywords: *Addicted learners, drug addiction, Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory, Critical Emancipatory Research, township school violence*

INTRODUCTION

Substance abuse is a world-wide scourge that has found its way into the classroom. This is confirmed by Canton (2021) in The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. Canton (ibid) approximates the number of people using drugs from 226 million users in 2010 to 275 million in the previous year. Research predicts that the number of substance users in Africa may escalate to forty percent as a result of the growing youth population on the continent (UNODC,2021). The World Health Organization (WHO, 2020) states that more than 42 million years of healthy life loss were attributable to drug use in 2017; that is about 1.3% of the global burden of disease. South Africa is not exempted from the scourge of drug abuse. According to the Mail and Guardian (Hunter, 2021; Mayeza & Bhana; 2021), substance abuse has emerged as a reason for the spike in crimes during the first quarter of 2021. Different scholars agree that drug abuse in South Africa has become a huge problem (Makgoke & Mofokeng, 2020; Mokwena & Sindane, 2020; Mamabolo, 2020). The necessity of this study was prompted by the realisation that when it comes to various problems, including violence created by drug addicted learners in school, many studies tend to focus mainly on the causes of such behaviour (Mahabeer, 2020; Sedibe & Hendricks, 2021), and not on the degree to which different forms of disruptions and violence actually affect teachers and non-drug using learners. These studies tend to focus more on intervention strategies rather than on the

plight of the teacher experiencing intimidation and violence caused by drug addicted learners. Furthermore, they do not take into account the "personal cost and suffering" (Fetherston & Lummis, 2012, p. 2; Hunter, 2021) experienced by teachers who are abused by learners, and sometimes by parents. In the midst of all the chaos, the teacher has the monumental task of making it possible for the entire class to obtain maximum benefit out of lessons that are due to them. At the same time, they have to discipline the drug abusers to maintain some kind of normalcy, while keeping in mind that they have to avoid the physical danger that is always a possibility under these circumstances. In South Africa, the term "township" refers to under-developed urban areas that were established for "non-whites" during the apartheid era (Mupira & Ramnarain, 2018).

BACKGROUND TO THE PROBLEM

In KwaDabeka Township, many young people are caught in the grip of drug abuse. The majority of these youths are teenagers whose school careers are suffering because of the scourge of substance use. The South African National Policy of Drug Abuse Management in Schools is a policy that acknowledges drug use as a major problem in South African schools (RSA, 2002). However, its effectiveness remains elusive and unimplemented. In KwaDabeka, many young people are addicted to whoonga. Whoonga is a highly addictive concoction of cheap heroine, cannabis and other impurities such as rat poison (Hunter, 2021).

> Learners add other things to increase its potency by adding one or more of the following household products: rat poison, milk powder, bicarbonate of soda, pool cleaner, or some type of powder found inside plasma television sets (Mamabolo, 2020, p.1).

The Department of Health in KwaZulu-Natal suggests that whoonga use is the most popular drug in this province (National Drug Master Plan, 2019). Whoonga addicted learners cause all sorts of problems in the classroom and within the school premises. These disturbances include late coming, class disruptions, and intimidation of teachers and non-drug using learners. Teachers live in constant fear of the drug-using learners because many a time, they have endured violence of some kind and humiliation at the hands of the drug-addicted learners. Since drug abuse is a national and global phenomenon, the following paragraphs discuss the violence against teachers perpetrated by drug-using learners. In KwaDabeka Township, many teachers live in fear of being attacked by learners within the school premises. This problem is not confined only to KwaDabeka schools, it occurs all over the country as well as the whole world, making for horrid news nationally and internationally. According to Botha and Zwane (2021), and Herrero Romero et al. (2021), violence in schools is "multi-dimensional", taking on various forms. Among them is the assault of teachers by learners, sometimes right in the middle of lessons and in full view of fellow learners (Botha & Zwane, 2021). The report goes on to mention that now more than ever; learners are willing to adopt physically aggressive strategies to resolve whatever conflict they face.

Nzama and Ajani (2021) observe that South African schools have rapidly and increasingly become arenas of violence. This violence is not only among learners but between teachers and learners, interschool rivalries as well as gang conflict. Teachers and learners have a good reason to fear for their safety on the school premises. This is due to aggression and violence that appears to be the norm nowadays in some schools, caused by the unruly behaviour exhibited by some learners, who are usually under the

influence of drugs (Sedibe & Hendricks, 2021). According to Hunter (2021), and Mayeza and Bhana (2021), the culture of school-based violence is increasingly undermining the climate and environment conducive to effective teaching and learning. This means that the precious time that is meant for lesson delivery is spent on trying to solve problems associated with drug addiction and school violence, and therefore, effective teaching and learning suffers as a result (Wolhuter & Van der Walt, 2020).

In the next section we explore the literature on drug abuse in schools.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, with its 17 goals and 169 targets, is considered to be a universal policy agenda that provides a plan of action for people, planet, and prosperity (UN, 2015). South Africa is a signatory of the Sustainable Development Goals (SGDs). UNODC's work on drugs and health is inextricably linked to multiple targets of Sustainable Development Goals including target 3.5, which aims to strengthen the prevention and treatment of substance abuse (UN, 2015).

Acknowledging the problem of substance abuse among in-school youth, the South African National Policy of Drug Abuse Management in Schools was published in 2002, which provides a roadmap to increase the capacity of schools to manage drug abuse in the school environment (Mokwena et al., 2020). Furthermore, the National Drug Management Plan 2019-2024 (NDMP, 2019) in South Africa recognises that the relationship between drug control and human development is complex and requires a coordinated and multi-sectoral approach. Despite the promising international and national policies, there remains a dearth of literature and effective strategies and approaches to assist teachers in drug-ridden schools to cope in their challenged teaching environments (Mokwena et al., 2020). We argue for the need to understand the experiences of teachers, thus triggering a dialogue about the required intervention strategies that acknowledge the social, economic, and cultural contexts of both learners and teachers when dealing with drug addiction in township schools.

Abdullahi and Sarmast (2019) define substance abuse as a chronic debilitating illness with serious morbidity and mortality, which affects drug users and their families. They also define substance addiction as a compulsive sequence of drug abuse characterised by a loss of control over the use of the substance, and prolonged use, regardless of the considerable substance-related problems and the emergence of a physiological need when withdrawal occurs. The World Drug Report (2018) reveals that surveys on drug abuse conducted among the general population depicts that the degree of drug abuse among young people remains higher than that of older people. South Africa is no exception. The picture regarding drug abuse in South Africa is unsettling. Zinyama (2019), using the UN World Drug Report (2014), maintains that substance dependency statistics indicate that drug consumption (cannabis, cocaine and tik) in South Africa is twice the global average and second to none in Africa. Zinyama (2019) further offers that the average age of drug dependency in South Africa is twelve years and decreasing. South Africa is among the top ten narcotics and alcohol abusers in the world. Tshitangano and Oni (2016) concur with Zinyama (2019) by stating that over 15% of the population in South Africa suffers from a drug problem. Over and above the tremendous emotional and social cost of drug abuse, Walton, Avenant and van Schalkwyk (2016) point out that the annual cost to the South African economy is as much as R130 billion. The implications of substance abuse are enormous and varied. These are *social*

implications, physical implications and academic implications.

Social implications

In the United States (US), 7.4 million people aged 12 years or older reported symptoms of a drug use disorder in 2016 (Kendler et al., 2018). According to Ritchie and Roser (2019), one in five deaths globally is attributed to substance use. The National Institute of Drug Abuse (NIDA, 2020) states that the substance abuse annual cost is over $600 billion annually (NIDA,2020) in the United States. In Kenya, "drug abuse also carries an economic cost since the users become less productive and more dependent with time and the government has to spend a lot of resources in trying to curb the drug menace and provide health care for those already afflicted" (Muhia, 2021, p. 2).

Walton, Avenant and van Schalkwyk (2016), explain that the annual cost of substance abuse to the South African economy is as much as R130 billion. Therefore, we maintain that substance abuse places a huge burden on the state budget, thus limiting critical government social spending. Young people involved in drugs are usually treated as pariahs by the communities they live in, where even the drug abusers' families are normally disliked, and their parents viewed in almost the same light as their drug-using offspring (Shembe, 2013; Botha & Zwane, 2021). Abdullahi and Sarmast (2019) posit that there is a pronounced link between consumption of illegal substances and an increase in the crime rate among drug abusers.

Physical implications

According to Grelotti et al. (2014), smoked heroin (whoonga) is perceived to be easily accessible and inexpensive, and increasingly prevalent among school-aged youth. Young people experience a lot of pain when they are suffering from withdrawals. They mention stomach cramps, loss of appetite and many other physical discomforts (Shembe, 2013; Tyree et al., 2020). The National Institute on Drug Abuse (2020) says that when someone stops using a drug, common symptoms include sickness, the urge to use again, and fear. Abdullahi and Sarmast (2019), highlight the fact that drug-abusing youth are also vulnerable to various forms of physical abuse such as beatings and rapes, which result in various physical injuries. Some of these injuries may even be self-inflicted such as cutting, bruising or burns.

In South Africa, whoonga or nyaope addicts can be characterised by their meagre personal cleanliness, sluggish movement, and half-dazed appearance (Mbanjwa, 2014). According to Mabokela and Muswede (2021), Whoonga is extremely addictive, and addicts who want to stop using it have a difficult time doing so.

Academic implication

Kendler et al. (2018) explain that an increase in drug use and abuse results in poor academic performance in adolescents the United States of America (US). According to Okafor (2019), drug abuse has adverse effects on students' education in different academic institutions globally, and is a major concern in Nigeria because of the effects on the youth and the nation. Abiodun (2021) posits that the earlier young people start to abuse drugs, the greater their chances of becoming addicted to them are, and this impacts on academic focus achievement. Studies in South Africa (Shembe, 2013; Hunter, 2020; Nzama & Ajani, 2021) confirm that drug abusers hardly ever attend school, and this results in them not coping with their schoolwork. In fact, they fail and have to repeat the year in almost every grade, moving to the next grade only because they are condoned (Shembe, 2013; Sedibe & Hendricks, 2021). Mokwena and Sindane (2020) add that many young learners are dropping out due to alcohol and substance abuse. We

argue that this means drug addicted learners contribute a lot to poor academic results in schools globally and in sub-Saharan Africa (WHO, 2020; UNODC, 2021). Hunter and Morrell (2021), report the disruptive behaviours of South African high school learners who use dangerous weapons to threaten other learners and teachers, or resort to vandalism, theft, and other crimes while under the influence of drugs. In the next section we explore the theoretical framework utilised in this article.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

To achieve the purpose of this study, we decided to integrate the Bronfenbrenner's (1979,2005) Bio-ecological Theory and Critical Emancipatory Research (CER). The discussion focusses specifically on the explanation of theories and their application and relevance to this study.

Bronfenbrenner's Bio-ecological Theory

The study employed Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Theory. This theory is about the different environments that affect the child directly or indirectly, in a positive or negative way within the family environment in which the child lives. This theory argues that if stakeholders are to succeed in their quest to fight drug use and abuse in schools, they need to include the child's family and community background. As Bronfenbrenner (1979) puts it, "the child is studied in the context of family, which lies in the context of community". Each family or community setting is different, which means that KwaDabeka township learners need to be studied in their specific context in order to identify solutions that will work for their specific context. The Ecological Systems Theory was selected as a way of situating and illuminating the causes of drug abuse amongst young people in South Africa (van Zyl, 2013). This abuse leads to the struggles of teachers trying to conduct typical teaching and learning in an environment that is not conducive to the activity of teaching and learning. The use of Bronfenbrenner's Theory brought to light the importance of the relationship of various systems in the forming of adolescents' identities and their need to belong (Sedibe & Hendricks, 2020).

Joshi (2018) posits that Bronfenbrenner's belief was that everything that surrounds students in their environment has an effect on them. In agreement with Joshi, Taylor and Gebre (2016) point out that Bronfenbrenner believes that human development occurs through an intricate exchange between an active and evolving human organism and the people and objects in the surrounding environment. The essence of these interchanges (for example, their form, power, and content) that affect the development, may vary according to the traits of the developing person (Taylor & Gebre, 2016). This revelation may assist teachers to better analyse the leaners' environment, which may lead to a better understanding of how to handle the situation they find themselves in.

Using Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory, the World Drug Report (2018) establishes that the route from initiation to harmful drugs among the youth is influenced by different factors, which are usually out of their control. Personal level factors include behavioural and mental health, neurological developments, and gene variations resulting from social influences. The micro level factors include parental and family functioning, schools and peer influences. The macro level factors, which include socio-economic and the physical environment, can leave adolescents vulnerable to substance abuse.

Critical Emancipatory Research

This research is underpinned by Critical Emancipatory Research (CER), which has its foundations in the Critical Theory paradigm. The Critical Theory epistemology in this study suggests that the researcher and the researched are presumed to be connected, with the values of the researcher "impacting the inquiry" (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p. 110). Historically linked

to Critical theorists from the Frankfurt School, namely Horkheimer, Adorno and Marcuse, Critical Theory refined and tested Marxist underpinnings (Asghar, 2013). Horkheimer (1982, p. 244) states, "critical theory seeks human emancipation to liberate human beings from the circumstances that enslave them". Critical theory is favoured in this paper because, contrary to traditional theory that investigates and endorses the status quo, critical theory interrogates the status quo and aims for a just and free world, which is what teachers who teach drug-addicted learners in township schools need. CER encompasses the principles of peace, emancipation and equal rights for all (McGregor, 2017). The CER principles of equality, participation, social justice and human emancipation ensure that the marginalised voices of teachers who work in schools with drug addiction, are acknowledged (Mahlomaholo, 2009). Next we discuss the research methodology utilised in this study.

METHODOLOGY

The main research question that guided this study is the following: "*What are the teachers' experiences of teaching drug addicted learners in KwaZulu-Natal township schools".* To achieve this goal, the qualitative method was selected for the study. The qualitative method can help researchers to access the thoughts and feelings of research participants, which can enable the development of an understanding of the meaning that people ascribe to their experiences (Sutton & Austin, 2015). The researcher opted to adopt the Interpretive paradigm to find common problems facing teachers in drug-ridden classrooms in KwaDabeka. Thanh and Thanh (2015) explain that the Interpretive paradigm allows researchers to view the world through the perceptions and experiences of the participants. Six participants from three high schools in KwaDabeka were selected for the study. Purposeful sampling was the choice for the study. Interviews were conducted as data-gathering techniques. We used thematic data analysis to identify, analyse, and report patterns (themes) within data (Clarke & Braun, 2017). To ensure rigour, we used reflective journals and member-checking to ensure that what emerged from our interactions with school stakeholders in this study, was not influenced by our own personal interpretations and biases (Guba & Lincoln,1984).

According to Bless et al. (2006), research ethics assists in avoiding research pitfalls and misuse; it also promotes the accountability of researchers, who need to be guided by, and respect, ethics. Permission to conduct the study was granted by the institution ethical clearance committee in the College of Education. Further approval for conducting the research was obtained from the Department of Basic Education (DBE) in KwaZulu-Natal. The study is informed by ethical principles that include non-maleficence, autonomy of research participants, informed consent, anonymity, and confidentiality (Creswell & Clark, 2019). The findings and discussion of this study are presented in the next section.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

In this section, teachers' experiences of teaching drug addicted learners in KwaZulu-Natal township schools are discussed. The experiences discussed under this section are. *Loss of valuable teaching time, Loss of concentration, Teachers' demotivation, and Fear.*

Loss of valuable time

All participants lamented the fact that the time that is spent dealing with cases of drug abuse, theft, bullying, and disruptions of any kind, takes a big portion out of the time that is meant for effective teaching and learning.

> Learners attend classes, not in the good state of mind. Learners who are on drugs are always disruptive. Teachers cannot teach or run the lesson smoothly because learners who use drugs are very aggressive and violent. Drug-addicted learners are always absent from school. They never do their homework. They are very chaotic in the classroom. (Teacher 1)

> During lessons, they look at the teacher as if they do not even know him/her. They have this look of uncertainty as if they are trying to understand why they are in class in the first place. (Teacher 3)

> We do not have ways and means to recover the lost time. The result is that teachers are always behind schedule with their work. We feel disorganised, and not sure whether to continue with the syllabus or go back to try and patch up the work that was never done or finished due to specific disruptions. (Teacher 2)

Nemati and Matlabi (2017) concur that disruptive behaviour on the part of learners who abuse substances include a lack of concentration, disrespect for school authority, vandalism, physical violence, rejection, theft, graffiti spraying and verbal abuse. These authors argue that these disruptive behaviours contribute to the loss of valuable teaching and learning time. Bronfenbrenner (1979, 2005) proposed that individual development and behaviour can be influenced by the ecological environment, which is regarded as a set of interrelated, nested structures. We agree with Msimanga (2017), that CER is critical in the academic space because it enables dialogue among teachers and learners about difficult issues, including the topic of substance abuse.

Loss of concentration

Concentration is the key to success in any learning and teaching situation. There is no compelling teaching and learning without concentration. However, this is precisely the scenario that faces participants who have drug-using learners in their classes. The loss of concentration according to the participants, occurs for both teachers and learners.

> Drug- addicted learners in class seem very lost. During lessons, they look at the teacher as if they do not even know him/her. They have this look of uncertainty as if they are trying to understand why they are in class in the first place. (Teacher 4)

> Anything can cause drug addicts to laugh, sometimes hysterically, as if whatever they look at is humorous, or what the teacher is teaching in front of the class is utterly amusing and hilarious. When the teacher asks these learners, what is it that they find so funny, they are usually not able to explain it. Most of the time their standard response is "nothing". (Teacher 5)

> Drug-addicted learners do not concentrate in class when they are high or stoned. They get into all kinds of mischief, including stealing whatever they come across. They sleep during lessons. They are disruptive in classes. They sometimes laugh at nothing during lessons. (Teacher 2)

According to Mokwena and Sindane (2020), controlling substance abuse in school learners has remained a critical challenge in South Africa, as some school premises are infiltrated with various drugs. Mamabolo (2020) posits that one out of three young learners aged between 13

and 18 years, engage in various substance abuse activities within school premises. Loss of concentration, violent behaviour and criminality has become the order of the day in schools with drug-addicted learners (Hlomani-Nyawasha & Meyer-Weitz, 2020). We concur with Bronfenbrenner's (1979) belief that everything that surrounds students in their environment has an effect on them. This is important in creating intervention programmes for addicted learners in township schools.

Teachers' demotivation

All participants reported that motivation at the present moment, is at its lowest.

> As teachers we dread waking up each school day, knowing what awaits us at school in the form of the fearsome [sic] drug addicts who want to take over the school. We find it difficult to look forward to uncertainty. Uncertainty because we are not sure if we will be able to perform our duties as per our work schedules, that is, plan the delivery of lessons, tests, assessments, issuing of projects and homework. (Teacher 4)

Another teacher expressed a sense of demotivation among teaching staff and had this to say:

> Teaching and learning depend on the mercy of drug using learners, who decide when to disrupt any class or school activity, whether they attended the lessons or not. (Teacher 6)

> One of the most de-motivating factors is the reality that virtually nothing stops the drug using learners from proceeding with whatever kind of disturbance they put their mind to, and the teachers feel as if their hands are tied. (Teacher 1)

Nzama and Ajani (2021) aver that despite several interventions that have been undertaken to fight the scourge of substance abuse among the youths, particularly among learners, there has been a significant increase in substance abuse in schools. We argue in this study that this situation has demotivated many teachers who are constantly interrupted and threatened by violent addicted learners. CER is relevant for couching this article because it provides a theoretical basis for collaborative planning and sharing strategies that will enhance the culture of teaching and learning in township schools (Dube & Hlalele, 2018). CER in this study further questions why the DBE has provided no support for teachers who teach learners in drug-ridden schools.

Fear

Most participants mentioned fear as one of the crippling factors with regard to the execution of effective teaching and learning. The violence witnessed by both teachers and learners within the school premises seemed to instil much fear, with good reason. One participant commented on the situation of violence in schools as follows:

> Learners who use drugs bully teachers and fellow learners. They misbehave in assorted ways and never take the teacher's instructions. They use a lot of vulgar language, which negatively affects other learners. These learners always get poor academic results, which contributes to the high failure rate in school. They steal other learners' belongings such as bags, money and even pens. What is also scary is that they bring dangerous weapons to school. (Teacher 3)

Other participants in the study highlighted fear caused by violence and threats from drug-addicted learners and said:

> I have witnessed serious fights where learners used different types of dangerous weapons. I once witnessed an incident where a learner pulled a knife with the intention of stabbing a fellow learner. The prospective victim jumped through the window and ran away. (Teacher 4)

> Learners who are using drugs are disruptive and violent. They have no respect for teachers as well as fellow learners. They do not want to participate in the learning activities. They are mostly absent from school. When they do appear in [sic] the school premises, they do not attend classes. They are seen loitering up and down the school verandas and hiding in the toilets. In the toilet, they wait for younger learners so that they can bully them into parting with whatever possessions they have, especially the tuck money. Learners are terrified of drug users because they carry all sorts of dangerous weapons. (Teacher 1)

Mokwena and Sindane (2020) posit that many young learners are dropping out of school due to alcohol and substance abuse. Violence, fighting and crime is on the increase in schools, with physical attacks on learners and teachers by learners under substance influence (Mokwena et al., 2020; Nzama & Ajani, 2021). Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory, and the World Drug Report (2018), established an increase in drug use and abuse results in poor academic performance in adolescents that the route from initiation to harmful drugs among the youth is influenced by different factors that are usually out of their control. We argue that personal factors, micro, and macro factors should be taken into consideration when the DBE and teachers address the problem of addictive learners in township schools (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Horkheimer (1982, p. 244) states, "critical theory seeks human emancipation to liberate human beings from the circumstances that enslave them". Therefore, CER principles of social justice, equality and human emancipation in this study argue for the safety and human rights of teachers in drug addicted township schools, and schools free of violence, physical attacks and crime (Mahlomaholo, 2010; Dube & Hlalele, 2018).

The diagramme below (*Figure 1)* presents a summary of our findings and discussion under this section.

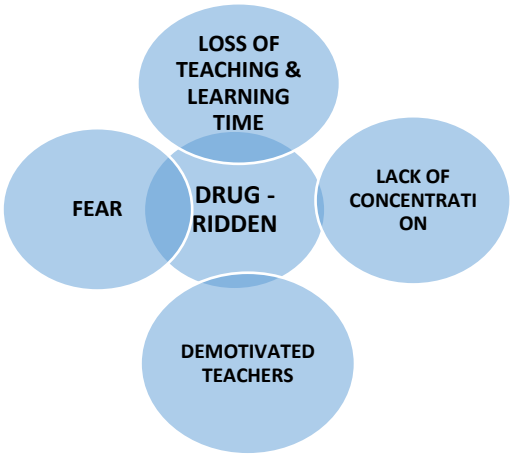

FIGURE 1: Experiences of teachers in drug-ridden township schools

CONCLUSION

Our research is a qualitative study conducted in three schools within the township context. Thus, our findings cannot be extended to other schools. However, we argue that the intention of this study was not to generalise its findings but, rather, to understand a practical case that can be used to encourage discourse about the experiences of teachers in drug-ridden township schools. It is also meant to trigger intervention strategies to curb and cope with this challenge. In response to the research question formulated to guide this research, and based on our findings, we conclude that:

First, there is a need to challenge the false consciousness that claims that learners are the only people within the school system that are impacted by substance abuse and school violence inflicted by addicted learners (Asghar, 2013). We argue that educators are also highly affected by substance abuse in township schools (Mabokela & Muswede, 2021; Sedibe & Hendricks, 2021). For example, in 2017, a deputy principal was shot dead at Edalinceba Primary School in Nigel when teaching and learning was interrupted (Magwedze, 2017); the killing happened on the school premises and it traumatised both learners and teachers.

Second, the social-ecological system theory posits that learners can be empowered with knowledge and skills that will enable them not to surrender to pressures from their peers or family to engage in substance abuse (Bronfenbrenner's Theory, 1979, 2005). We recommend that the DBE should encourage workshops and motivational talks about substance abuse and engage NGOs to assist schools. Thus, "the involvement of all the stakeholders in curbing substance abuse by learners will help the education system in South Africa to address substance abuse in schools" (Nzama & Ajani, 2021).

Third, the DBE should allocate experienced school counsellors who visit regularly to monitor substance abuse among learners, and also provide support to educators. However, we caution that schools and educators should not rely heavily on government for support in dealing and coping with substance abuse.

RECOMMENDATIONS

First, we recommend that schools and educators in townships need to speak with one voice and start mobilising resources (Mkhize 2018; Mkhize & Davids, 2021) aimed at advancing safety and security in their schools and creating drug free learning environments.

Second, the increasing prevalence of substance abuse in township schools demand the application of available policies that guide interventions to combat substance abuse, and therefore, enable policy reviews and amendments to improve interventions. We acknowledge the existence of the National Policy of Drug Abuse Management in Schools in South Africa (2002), however, its effective implementation in schools remain elusive. Therefore, we recommend policy reviews and amendments on substance abuse to improve interventions that are not only focussed on learners, but also acknowledge the existence of teachers within the social-ecological system.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this study.

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Access to Digital Media and Devices and their Impact on the Use of Technology in the Teaching of African Literature in Gauteng Classrooms

*Mahao Mahao and **Toni Gennrich
*Department of Language and Social Education
National University of Lesotho
**Division of Languages, Literacies and Literatures
Wits School of Education, University of the Witwatersrand
Corresponding author: mahaomahao05@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

This study investigates the factors that enable or constrain teachers' access to digital media and devices and how these impact the use of technology in African literature lessons in selected Gauteng schools. The South African Department of Basic Education's (DBE) plan to incorporate technology in education coupled with their desire to include more African texts in the literature syllabus may be in tune with fast changing digital landscapes and a drive towards the decolonisation of teaching and learning, but the reality of some school contexts and how this impacts access to digital technology makes these ideas difficult to implement. The study is drawn from a larger one that examined the technology ideals, primarily how they related to the use of digital media and devices in the researching and teaching of African literary texts, of the Department of Basic Education and the disconnect between these and the existing realities in some school contexts. The study focuses on two teachers' use of technology in two very different contexts in the same province, Gauteng. The study used qualitative methodology, relying on interviews and contextual scans. The findings revealed a disharmony between the (2004) proposals by the DBE to transform learning and teaching using ICTs and, 20 years later, how the reality of teachers' contexts makes these proposals seem difficult to attain. Some teachers are resistant and appear frustrated by their access to both technology and information on the internet. In certain contexts, where the proposals are implementable, other societal ills counter the DBE's good intentions. Recommendations of this study are that there should be support and training of teachers to ensure that they develop the confidence to use technology generally and to use collaborative digital tools to bring an African lens to African literary texts. There needs to be support from the DBE to provide access and security, and there should be transparency in these processes.

Key words: *access, African literature, decolonisation, mindsets, technology in education*

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

The South African Department of Basic Education (DBE) has, for some time, aspired to digitise classrooms to develop skills required by an increasingly digitally demanding workplace. In 2004, the Department (then known as the Department of Education) published the *White Paper on e-Education* titled "Transforming learning and teaching through information and communication technologies (ICTs)." It proposed an ambitious statement reflecting the intent of the Department: "Every South African learner in the general and further education and training bands will be ICT capable (that is, use ICTs confidently and creatively to help develop the skills and knowledge they need to achieve personal goals and to be full participants in the global community by 2013" (p.17). From the wording of the DBE document, this was a determined promise by the Department. However, an ambitious plan comes to fruition not through promises but by rigorous implementation.

In addition, the reported drive by the DBE to include more African texts in the literature syllabus (*Sunday Times,*

November 29, 2015, p.5) is a necessary move in light of calls for the decolonisation of teaching and learning and the need for curricula to tap into the thoughts, wishes, languages and practices of local communities and in this way create a sense of belonging to those who have been 'othered' in the past (Higgs, 2000; 2008; Tuhiwai Smith, 2018). This call is supported by the National Curriculum Statement for English Home Language and English First Additional Language (Grades 10-12), where the aim of the South African curriculum is set out as being to "to promote knowledge in local contexts, while being sensitive to global imperatives" (National Curriculum Statement, 2011, p.4). The desire for an inclusive curriculum, one that promotes African literature, is genuine and should be applauded. However, when coupled with the use of digital technology in the classroom, one might argue that access to digital commentaries, study guides and teacher guides that provide a South African lens for analysis, as well as being grounded in the South African context, might not be that prevalent or easily available to teachers on the internet. It is in the light of these two priorities asserted by the Department of Education that we consider the following research questions:

- What are the factors that enable or constrain teachers' access to digital technology?

- How does this limit or facilitate the teaching and learning of African literary texts?

Access to classroom technology

Classroom technology is understood to be any digital technology which is available and commonly used in classrooms, such as: digital texts, videos and games, wikis, blogs, e-books, podcasts, tablets, smartphones, and online resources (Howard, Ma & Yang, 2016). Some of these are more useful for teaching, such as a data projector or a smart interactive board, while others provide opportunities for learning, such as blogs or wikis.

While the Gauteng Province appears to be making steady progress with technology rollout, most visibly through smartboards, overall advancement seems to be slow (Mahao, 2019) considering that 2004, when this promise was made, is almost two decades in the past. The White Paper highlights six key factors in promoting ICTs in the classroom: 1. creating access to learning opportunities; 2. redressing inequalities; 3. improving the quality of learning and teaching; 4. delivering life-long learning; 5. accommodating differences in learning styles; and 6. removing barriers to learning (p.16). The first two factors imply that everyone has access to digital technology, despite the diverse socio-economic backgrounds that must be accommodated (Mahao, 2019).

The type of classroom technologies used in different learning contexts may depend on affordability and availability. In addition, the physical location of teachers and learners could mean unequal opportunities are available to access technology (Janks et al., 2014; Lembani et al., 2020), and this is a reality across the world, not only in the South African context (Waller, 2008).

A Botswana study also found some reluctance to use technology among pre-service teachers who were on Teaching Experience. They cited that the environment in the schools was not conducive as the technologies were not readily available for use in the classrooms but were housed elsewhere (Batane & Ngwako, 2017). The pre-service teachers found the process of gaining access to the technology tedious and discouraging. This demonstrates that even where technology

is available for use, if it is time-consuming to get it to the classrooms or there is not enough support in the use of it, such a context is not enabling.

Access to technology at school is even more important in contexts where socio-economic realities at home deny learners the opportunity for digital exposure, and schools should compensate for this unequal access (Reddick et al., 2020; Warschauer & Matuchniak, 2010). A digitally equipped school, therefore, can help break down the barriers that increase the digital divide. The DBE's proposals regarding the use of technology in schools is a way to ensure that teachers do not continue to teach in the same old ways but that they embrace the digital tools and pedagogy that learners can connect with (Jukes, McCain & Crocket, 2010). Apart from their lesson-based value, general skills and competencies in different technologies are sought after by the modern workplace (Karsenti & Kouawo, 2015) and this is another reason to strive for digitally rich classrooms. Sarker et al., (2019) suggest that "technology should be integrated at all levels of curriculum development, input of learning process, procedure of learning process, and delivery method for getting full benefits from technology leveraged learning methods" (p.457). This calls for alignment between government policies on technology and the school settings where they are implemented. Access to technology is complicated and schools might not have equal access to the physical, digital, human, and social resources necessary to impact the learning, skills and knowledge required to succeed in the 21st century globalised world (Buckingham, 2007; Jenkins et al., 2007; Seiter, 2005). The need for this alignment attained a much higher significance in 2020 when Covid-19 shut schools worldwide and heightened the prominence of digitalisation prompting teachers to adapt to online teaching to maintain connection with their learners (Konig, Jager-Biela & Glutsch, 2020).

The availability of technology at a school does not imply that everyone is adept at using it or that things can shift in positive ways. As Sutherland, Robertson & John (2009, p.6) observe, "truckloads of hardware (however shiny) arriving at a school will not necessarily change much for the better. Teachers are key and effective; professional development is the crucial element." Unless teachers are trained in the use of technology and are also willing to experiment with its use in their classrooms, its presence in schools means little.

Research shows that while some teachers in South African schools have received some digital professional development, others have never (Olika, Moses & Sibongile, 2019). The lack of assistance when needed adds to what has been termed 'technology anxiety' which has been observed to be one of the factors leading to non-use of technology by teachers (Adukaite, van Zyl & Cantoni, 2016).

Access to African literature online

African literature in this paper refers to texts prescribed by the DBE, written by African authors, and set primarily in Africa. Sometimes the settings may be transcontinental. An African writer in the context of this study is a citizen of the African continent regardless of colour or race. There is a perception that there are fewer online resources available relating to African and South African literary texts. One of the purposes of the PhD study on which this paper is based, was to examine the reality of this perception and to assess whether teachers of English can access texts and resources online to support their teaching of literature. If technology is linked to power in the ways in which it shapes knowledge (Janks et al., 2014) it should

play an important role in increasing access to knowledge of African literary texts, particularly providing access to African ways of analysing and focusing on these texts. To embrace decolonisation, critical questions about whose knowledge, history and creativity are important as these contribute to decolonial thinking (d'Abdon, Byrne & Newfield, 2021; Gray, 2017) and the availability of these African texts online, along with discussions on the context and history of these texts, are essential.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The DBE's proposal for technology use in schools is perhaps due to the realisation that the social realities and cultural experiences of young people have become increasingly digital and that their futures will involve technology, irrespective of career paths (Beavis, Dezuanni & O'Mara, 2017; Ra et al., 2019). This suggests that these realities and experiences of young people require technologically savvy teachers to tap into the opportunities provided by digital media and devices. Digitally connected educational communities further enhance these prospects as the theory proposes. Connectivism, although contested as a recognised learning theory, was drawn on to guide the study, as it was found to be able to accommodate teaching and learning where digital media / online resources are used. It creates a space to locate both in-school and out-of-school environments where teaching and learning can occur as long as the digital settings are conducive. According to Dunaway (2011), connectivism

> emphasizes the importance of networked information resources throughout the process of learning. Connectivism acknowledges the role of information technology in the process of accessing information from multiple sources and the development of skills for evaluating connections between different information sources in a dynamic information network (p.676).

Connectivism is situated in the belief that the digital environment requires a fresh perspective on how learning takes place in view of the non-linear manner in which it occurs, and the inextricable link between technology and today's lifestyle. Teachers are also able to harness the power and opportunities provided by digital media to prepare for and execute their lessons. Likewise, learners' access to multiple sources of information means that they develop the ability to weave together bits and pieces from all accessible digital sources to make meaning, provided they have been guided on how to do so and are aware of this benefit. In addition, they need to learn to be critical of the sources of the information they work with.

Siemens (2005), the originator of the theory, believes it is worth considering as a learning theory because, unlike other established learning theories, it shows the relevance of digital devices and media in the classroom. He believes that learning theories should reflect the age in which they are being applied and connectivism, in the context of this study, seems the most applicable theory, especially due to the prevalence of technology in education and life in general.

Although they do not refer directly to connectivism, Whitehead, Jensen and Boschee (2013) also recognise the need to review the common learning theories because of technology penetrating pedagogy like never before. They state that,

> What is required, perhaps, are modern technological pedagogies that are consistent with the technological space we now inhabit. A key for transformation is

> to research and discover how future educators will be able to learn and adapt to tomorrow's pedagogical challenges and opportunities (p.9).

Their stance supports what Siemens suggests, that established learning theories do not speak to the modern technologically assisted pedagogies hence the need to consider emerging theories which connect learning with the technologies that are becoming increasingly available in and outside of the classroom. While connectivism does not suggest that the older theories are obsolete, it appears to imply that a new angle could be more useful in teaching and learning considering current developments where technologies are becoming more common features of the classroom. It is for this reason that it was used to ground this study.

Another important aspect to consider theoretically is that of "mindsets" (Lankshear & Knobel, 2011) to describe how there are differences in competences and practices in relation to the use of digital technology. Some teachers and their learners might display the characteristics of an "insider mindset" in that they are open to the necessary changes and transformation in their practices and communication because of the use of digital technology. Others struggle to change their practice in meaningful ways and have an "outsider mindset." As more demands are made on teachers to become digitally literate, they are being asked to teach learners who have differing levels of digital skills and are often more adept at the use of digital technology than they, themselves, are. Prensky (2001, p.2) argues that teachers can be called "digital immigrants" in relation to their learners who are "digital natives." Brown and Czerniewicz (2010, p.357) however, argue that the binary and othering set up by Prensky's terms are concerning as "this polarisation makes the concept less flexible and more determinist in that it implies that if a person falls into one category, they cannot exhibit characteristics of the other category." Many teachers are anxious about their use of technology (Lei, 2009) and, because they are on the wrong side of the digital divide, do not feel comfortable in using classroom technology (Gennrich & Janks, 2013).

RESEARCH METHODS

As indicated, this paper is based on a larger study which explored the use of digital media and devices in the teaching and learning of African literature (in English) texts in selected Gauteng schools. The research method adopted for this study was a qualitative case study approach which follows the interpretivist paradigm. It constructs the experiences of individuals (Merriam, 2001) and positions these experiences within the field of the intended curriculum by the Department of Basic Education and the provision of digital equipment by the Gauteng Department of Education. Using the interpretivist paradigm allowed us to come to a deeper understanding of participants' perceptions (Thanh & Thanh, 2015). It helped us to understand how the teachers construct their own meanings from their experiences within their contexts and this gave us insight into the phenomena involved in teachers' engagement with digital technologies to research African literature and to help them in enabling learning about African literature using digital technologies (Sefotho & du Plessis, 2018).

Data collection and analysis

Data was collected primarily through semi-structured interviews and environmental assessments during 2017 and 2018. While the larger study had employed questionnaires and observations as well, the data focused on in this paper is

based on interviews and environmental scans. These environmental scans were conducted to establish both the digital tools available at the two schools under study and security issues around the tools. The interviews were recorded and analysed using thematic and content analysis.

The participants and study context

This study centres around the stories of two teachers working in different schools, Lephuthi and Justina, and their use of digital technology in the teaching of African literature. They were selected for discussion due to the differing nature of their schools' advances in digital tools and the fact that they have different challenges regarding technology implementation in their respective schools. During data collection, Lephuthi was 42 years old and had been teaching at Lepae Secondary School for nine years. Lepae is a public, no-fee-paying school in Orange Farm, a township situated 45 km south of Johannesburg. Lephuthi's highest qualification is a Bachelor of Arts (B.A) degree with a PGCE and also holds a qualification in Public Relations. Justina was 29 years old and holds a B.A in Psychology. She was teaching at a fee-paying school, Johnson High School, and had six years of teaching experience. Johnson High School is in Winchester Hills, about 10 km south of Johannesburg. The environmental scan showed that both schools were fenced and had security check points at the main gate where visitors had to report before proceeding to the office.

Being a no-fee-paying school, Lepae's financial requirements are catered for by the Gauteng Department of Education (GDE). During data collection, the school had the following digital/technological equipment:

- smartboards in Grade 12 classrooms
- media centre with two partitioned sections housing a library and a room with a digital projector; and laptops and tablets.

From the listed items above, it may appear as if Lepae Secondary School is well-equipped with digital devices, but the reality paints a different picture as discussed in the Findings section of this paper.

Johnson High School, unlike Lepae, is a fee-paying school. Fee-paying schools also rely on the fees they charge to provide additional equipment. The Wi-Fi connectivity at Johnson is subsidised by the GDE. Johnson High School invests heavily in technology. They have the following equipment:

- laptops
- well-resourced-computer laboratories with Wi-Fi access
- digital projectors – travelling and fixed
- desktops
- whiteboards.

Justina's view of the equipment provided at her school is as follows:

> *Our school management team works exceptionally hard to ensure that educators have all the electronic resources that they need. Whiteboards are available for installation should the educator need it. We have access to laptops and travelling projectors should our classrooms not have one installed.*

The technological gap between the two schools is clearly visible, especially regarding Wi-Fi connectivity which places Johnson High School at an advantage as far as quick access to information is concerned.

FINDINGS

Because this study focuses on the importance of access to technology and access to information about African literature on the internet in the way it enables teaching and learning, it is these themes that are emphasised in the following discussion.

Access to the Internet

Fees are an important variable in thinking about the capital the school has, as without them, it could mean a school could be wholly dependent on the DBE to supply and upgrade facilities and equipment. Additional income, in the form of fees, could give a school increased leverage to provide more digital facilities for staff and learners. The observation that wealthier schools (such as Johnson High School) spend more on technological resources than poorer schools (Zucker, 2008) is a relevant consideration in the discussion about these two schools and reflects what happens in terms of access more broadly.

Lepae Secondary School has no access to Wi-Fi or broadband internet. All facilities at the school are supplied by the GDE which, hierarchically, is answerable to the DBE. The undertaking made in the 2004 White paper on e-Education would reasonably raise expectations that internet connection would be one of the key priorities by the DBE to enable more meaningful and functional access to technology by teachers and learners. The access to technology, however, is limited by the fact that Lepae is a no-fee school implying it has a small pool of resources and is thus unable to finance internet roll-out. This could also be because Lepae is situated in a township where basic infrastructure is limited. The lack of internet access is reflective of the general environment in which the school is located. The poor infrastructure in the environment in which the school is situated and the mismanagement of resources is frustrating as Lephuthi indicates:

> *We are just entering the digital world in our schools and there are still challenges like electricity cuts, theft and general lack of management of the resources we already have.*

The image he creates in this statement is one of being new and only now *"entering the digital world"*. Also, instead of the environment being viewed as enabling he positions himself (and others) as being blocked by the many challenges faced in his context.

Lack of confidence and uncertainty

Lephuthi's confessed lack of confidence and uncertainty accompany his use of technology for teaching. This appears to be related to the level of access he feels he has to support and training. He says:

> *Since I am not very advanced, my confidence is still not very perfect. I do have a laptop and I use a smartboard but when I am using a smartboard, I feel like maybe I am not sure of certain things.*

The repetition of the words *"not very"* and *"not sure"* emphasise Lephuthi's insecurity in relation to the use of the smartboard. Upon being questioned further on whether his school provides any kind of assistance, he continued:

> *We were given some lessons in the past so that we could learn the basics of using the smartboards going forward, but the people who are here are not helping us. They are just here to control or manage the use of the smartboards.*

Judging by his tone and grim facial expression, Lephuthi mirrored a sense of frustration and helplessness that he and the other teachers were not able to get immediate assistance with the smartboards whenever they required it, suggesting reliance on others. The 'people' that he is referring to are those that teachers can call upon whenever there are technical issues or repairs required for the smartboards. Control of technology appears to be more important than support and development for teachers in the use of technology.

Justina, on the other hand, appears to find technology useful in both planning and delivery of her lessons:

> *These tools are extremely useful in lesson planning and delivery because they provide a perspective (at least some do) that is different to one's own and thus supplement what one already knows. This enables me to be fully prepared and to provide every opportunity for the learners to learn effectively*.

Her use of *"extremely useful*" and *"enables me"* suggest her confidence in the use of the technology and her mindset shows how she is open to the affordances the technology gives her. She also, however, hints at a critical stance she takes in relation to the information she accesses: *"they provide a perspective (at least some do) that is different to one's own."* This suggests that she does not blindly accept the views she reads and is able to assess whether the information she finds on the internet is useful – an important digital literacy skill. She goes into more detail about the importance of being discerning in dealing with information from digital sources: *"You always have to check the resources carefully because some contain false and misleading information as nobody regulates what is posted."* This suggests that access to material on the internet, in her view, might add to the teacher's workload as the concerted cross-checking and verification of the truthfulness of the information, before it can be disseminated in class, can be demanding.

Resistance to the use of technology

Apart from lack of technology in schools, open resistance to it may exist even where it is plentiful. Managing attitudes is another important variable apart from ensuring that all schools have access to technology. On whether there is any resistance to using technology among some teachers at his school, Lephuthi said the following:

> *Yes, I have seen it, it is there. They try to criticise the government or the department saying they are behind tenderpreneurship. But when they mention tenderpreneurship it shows that they are refusing but usually it's about ignorance that they don't use technology. Some teachers feel like it's hard to change. But once you are using it, it is interesting.*

Lephuthi raises some interesting issues here. Firstly, the use of the word *'tenderpreneurship'* reflects negativity, and the term usually refers to business dealings where certain people are favoured to supply government departments with goods or services. The belief is that suppliers win the tender because they are close to influential people in government. Whether or not this is true is another matter, but the fact that it is mentioned implies that the perception is held among some teachers that the introduction and provision of technology by the DBE is based on corrupt and opportunistic imperatives rather than those that lead to real change that can benefit teachers and learners. This seems to affect teachers' attitudes towards openly embracing government's attempts to provide technological facilities at schools. Lephuthi seems to imply that this attitude

is just an excuse used by teachers who find it *'hard to change'*, in other words, those with a "closed mindset" (Lankshear & Knobel, 2011). By using 'they' he appears to be setting himself apart from this kind of thinking. He ends by indicating that using technology '*is interesting'* suggesting a contrast in his view of technology as opposed to other teachers, 'they'.

The ubiquitous presence of technology, particularly powered by the wider accessibility of smartphones, may give the impression that everyone has embraced it and its use (Mahao, 2019). However, Lephuthi's response, even though it represents an individual viewpoint, shows that there is still some resistance to technology either driven by ignorance in teachers' use of it or more complex and underlying perceptions of the politics of tendering for the supply of digital facilities.

Justina discussed teachers' attitudes to technology in her school. When asked whether resistance to its use is related to the age of teachers, she responded:

> *I think that it is not age but proficiency that determines one's attitude towards the use of technology. People who do not have adequate knowledge of how to use it will be less enthusiastic about using it regardless of age. If a person is exposed to something and the benefits of using it, they will develop the confidence to use it as often as they can.*

Justina seems to link an "insider mindset" (Lankshear & Knobel, 2011) to proficiency, knowledge, exposure to benefits which will develop confidence, rather than age or what Prensky (2001) refers to as being a "digital immigrant." Because the management of the school invests in technology and appears to value it as a tool to enable connectivity and thus to facilitate teaching and learning, she focuses on teachers who can develop confidence. It appears that there is a link between the school's provision and attitude to technology and that of the teachers.

It is interesting to note the different attitudes and how they relate to whether the technology has been provided by the DBE or not. When provided by the DBE, the technology is viewed with suspicion but when the school management has shown a willingness to use fees to provide technology, the exposure to technology seems to enable a more positive mindset.

Crime and vandalism

While the situation at Lepae Secondary School suggests challenges with access to technology, the socio-economic reality of the school and its environment also appear to have their own negative ramifications. A follow-up email inquiry with the head of the English department at the school revealed a lot more on why digital facilities were lacking. The HOD wrote an email which shared the following information:

> *The school is well looked after by the state. The only hiccup that I have noticed is the scourge of vandalism. There have been multiple incidents of vandalism at Lepae. In 2012 to be precise, a security guard was shot dead, and sixty computers were looted. In 2016, fifty tablets were stolen. Basically, that is the reason why the school appears not to be improving in terms of technology or rather IT.*

It is ironic that the HOD starts by saying that the school is *"well looked after."* During the environmental scan taken at the school when data was collected, the dilapidation of classroom furniture, along with missing desks and

chairs, was visible. The explanation provided was that it was the result of vandalism by the community. This reflects the broader location in which the school is situated. What is noticeable in this account from the HOD is how vandalism and even violence seem to have become the norm. It is described as a *"hiccup."* The shocking details of the death of the security guard and the looting of so much equipment is almost glossed over and seen as part of the reality of the school's context. While the GDE was doing its bit to ensure the school was well-looked after, some community members seemed determined to deprive the teachers and learners of facilities they could not function optimally without, and this was seen as a norm.

Lephuthi's situation at Lepae Secondary School may represent many others where policies and goals at government level are unsynchronised with the realities on the ground where these have to be operationalised.

Access to African texts and information on these texts

Justina laments the scarcity of online resources on African literature in comparison to Western literature. She thinks the lack of resources on African literature works against its inclusion when it comes to selection of texts by the teachers:

> *When teachers choose set books, they usually choose basing themselves on availability of resources because it's very difficult to teach when you don't have resources as that means you are relying on your own interpretation and there is no standardisation for learners. We used to teach 'Four Plays' and 'Cry Freedom' and it was so difficult to get resources for those texts and when we did moderation with other schools, the answers differed.*

What appears to be at issue here is a perception that the lack of standardisation and differing answers are a challenge in the moderation of examinations and tests. Justina seems to think that having resources available on the internet on African literary texts might overcome this. She appears not to consider that there might be resources available with differing perspectives and interpretations.

This is seemingly contradictory of what Justina expressed earlier, that the online tools provide "*a perspective ... that is different to one's own and thus supplement what one already knows."* She seems to be conflicted between wanting to access different points of view and interpretations of the texts she teaches but notes the challenges this brings in standardisation of answers for examination purposes. She appears to advocate that the resources that teachers should refer to online should be provided by the DBE which would alleviate the challenges faced with the lack of consistency in interpretation.

Despite these difficulties, Justina is happy that the DBE has chosen more African texts:

> *Actually, I like that the department is prescribing more African literature, but what I have a problem with is not availing resources because if you prescribe something, you need to make sure that resources are available for teachers to use in the classroom.*

Justina, at the time of the study, was teaching *Things Fall Apart* by Chinua Achebe to the Grade 11 Home Language (HL) group, and *Mother to Mother* by Sindiwe Magona to the Grade 10 HL class. She claimed difficulty in accessing resource material on both texts. A random internet search on these two texts found that there are several resources and study guides available online for both texts. This

is understandable in the case of *Things Fall Apart* as it was written in 1958 and is considered a classic. The novel's long-time presence and status in African and world literature has resulted in various commentaries being available for it. For *Mother to Mother*, there are fewer guides available but there appear to be study guides posted by other teachers on the internet.

What these online searches demonstrate is that while there are many free study guides to download for some texts, others are not freely available and have to be bought. This means that teachers may be inclined to use free material if it is available and only buy if the schools assist financially to purchase material issued by publishing companies. Also, none of these study guides appear to be endorsed or supported by the DBE.

DISCUSSION.

The findings of this study confirm the importance of access to digital technology in supporting the inclusion of African literary texts in classrooms in South Africa. The well-intentioned policies of the DBE in South Africa are counteracted by the realities that exist in some schools. A school like Lepae Secondary School, which relies heavily on government subsidy due to its no-fee-paying status, may not be able to acquire much technology on its own without government assistance. Johnson High School on the other hand, is an example of a school with self-generated funds to spend. Although the school has access to fewer examples of classroom technology, it appears to thrive more because of the reliable provision of Wi-Fi and the internet and there also seem to be no noticeable examples of vandalism of property or the theft of the technology at this school. For this reason, the digital divide may continue to widen between the haves and have-nots with consequential realities of exposing learners to dissimilar technological contexts albeit within the same city or province.

One of the key factors in why not everyone has access considering this, is the physical location and socio-economic status of schools, which results in unequal opportunities for both teachers and learners to access technology (Ribble & Bailey, 2007; Akman & Mishra, 2010). In a poor socio-economic environment where schools are expected to support learners who may not have access to digital technology at home, schools need more than government support in the supply of technology.

Another important constraint is the exposure to crime and violence that comes from the increased use of digital technology in schools. Schools need support in dealing with the security issues that arise. They need support in protecting the technology from criminals and vandals.

Government support can be viewed with suspicion as corruption is associated with the acquisition of the technology and might extend to the provision of security. Teachers seem suspicious and this is used as an excuse to avoid using the technology with confidence. There needs to be more transparency in the processes followed to acquire technology.

Teachers' mindsets need to shift in relation to the availability of resources on African texts online. There needs to be more openness to collaboration in the creation of online texts and less reliance on being provided with standard, uniform answers. Teachers themselves should be enabled and given the confidence to provide insights from an African perspective on the history, context, and interpretation of the set texts. Teachers should tap into the learning that Connectivism argues is enabled by digital technology. One of the key principles suggested by Siemens (2005) is that learning and knowledge rests in the diversity of opinions and that teachers and

their learners should make connections between these information sources. Teachers who have long taught in environments where 'correct' answers are provided and clear guidelines given on how and what to teach might find themselves floundering when encountering the variety and wealth of information available online. It is the skill of making connections, evaluating sources, and creating knowledge and sources themselves that needs to be nurtured moving forward. Teachers need to shift from being reliant on others' knowledge to being co-creators (with their learners) of new knowledge of the interpretation of the African texts which is what the digital sphere enables. The use of collaborative digital tools such as Wikis, blogs and WhatsApp groups should be tapped into in order to build this knowledge and expedite the inclusion of African texts in literature lessons.

Whoever may end up taking the lead in this regard, it is observable – based on the sampled teachers' responses – that there is the general perception that there is a gap to fill to give African literary texts more online presence to help teachers and learners as they navigate their way through the texts. While government's decision to prescribe more African literary texts is a positive move towards affirming the significance of home-grown content, the snag could be that teachers may overlook their own power and continue to rely on others and so will choose to teach African texts where there is set and approved online resources available to avoid the frustration of having to choose a route that is filled with uncertainty and doubt.

CONCLUSION

This paper has recognised the value of the imperatives to include more African literary texts in the curriculum and the importance of the increased use of digital technology by teachers to support their teaching and learning. The connection between these two priorities is clear. However, the constraints faced by teachers in both the use of technology and the access to resources on African literary texts continues to constrain. Limited funding, limited support, crime and violence are contextual factors which continue to make the use of digital technology to support the inclusion of African literary texts difficult. The mindset shift that is required for teachers to embrace the use of digital technology is seemingly hampered by their perceptions on the integrity of the processes used to procure technology, their insecurities about the use of digital technology and a limited understanding of the value in accessing a range of resources, each presenting differing perspectives and lenses with which to approach the texts. It appears that government policies are not synchronised with the availability of resources and teachers' digital competencies. A lot more is required to translate the technology policy into a functioning document that is cognisant of South Africa's different socio-economic settings and teachers' mindsets and abilities.

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School Leadership in Neurotic Contexts: Surviving or Drowning?

Paul Mupa
Faculty of Education-Department of Educational Studies
Zimbabwe Open University
Corresponding author: mupapaul@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

This paper seeks to bring forth into the contemporary education landscape the issue of institutional neurosis based on schools in the Zimbabwean context. There are a lot of disorders and disengaged gears in schools that have crippled the provision of quality education to learners who are in dire need of it. Broken educational bridges are a common feature and this is failing to take education to greater heights. The study was undergirded by the interpretivist philosophy. Qualitative research methodology was thus employed. Purposive sampling was used to select participants who were school leaders and school teachers because they were the information-rich cases for study. Semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions were employed to generate data. The major findings were that there is serious lack of communication in schools. Leadership is not instructional at all and such lack of direction results in neurotic conditions in the schools. Teachers lack deep cutting approaches to teaching and employ information processing approaches which scratch the surface. There is high level of burnout by teachers due to eroded salaries and poor working conditions, the situation which culminates into neurotic conditions. The study thus recommends a series of capacity building workshops on issues to deal with instructional leadership, morale for teachers and school leadership, technology use, ethics and professionalism, leadership development, among others. These will go a long way towards dissolving neurotic circumstances that have found a home in most schools.

Key terms: neuroticism, school leadership, dilemma, quality education, neurotic context

INTRODUCTION

Neuroticism promotes dysfunctional cultures that cost the effective functioning in organisations (Motamedi, 2006). In schools, the cost of neuroticism is unbearable and results in ineffectiveness if school leadership is weak. School principals have long been thought of as important figures within a school and community but today school principals are facing tremendous pressures from both inside and outside the school building (Hansen, 2016). It is also argued that:

> Only principals who are equipped to handle a complex, rapidly changing environment can implement the reforms that lead to sustained improvement in student achievement (Fullan, 2002, p. 1).

The argument advanced from the work of Fullan emphasises the need for school leaders to be able, and not just to cope with rapid changes, but also to adapt and bring about sanity to neurotic conditions and circumstances in schools.

School leaders are the life-forces that animate the schools they lead. School principals are expected to play a pivotal role in enhancing quality teaching and learning in their schools (Huong, 2020) but they are finding themselves in difficult contexts today (Raae, 2020). An expanding base of research and practice shows that school leaders exert influence on student achievement by creating

challenging environments, caring for students, and providing supportive conditions conducive to each student's learning. They are expected to relentlessly develop and support teachers, create positive working conditions, effectively allocate resources, construct appropriate organisational policies and systems, and engage in other deep and meaningful work outside of the classroom that has a powerful impact on what happens inside (National Association of Elementary School Principals, 2020).

School leadership is considered as the bolt and nut, most advanced and resolute section of the school organisation, that section which pushes forward all others. In a 1977 U.S. Senate Committee Report on Equal Educational Opportunity, the principal was identified as the single most influential person in a school. "If a school […] has a reputation for excellence in teaching, if students are performing to the best of their ability, one can almost always point to the principal's leadership as the key to success" (U.S. Congress, 1970, p. 56). In the same vein, Wallace Foundation (2009) recognised that effective leadership is vital to the success of a school. Research and practice confirm that there is a slim chance of creating and sustaining high-quality learning environments without a skilled and committed leader to help shape teaching and learning.

There is growing evidence that successful school leadership influences the practice and implementation of school issues (Davis, Darling-Hammond, LaPointe & Meyerson, 2005). The link between high-quality leadership and school improvement is also acknowledged by the National College for School Leadership (NCSL):

> The evidence on school effectiveness and improvement during the last 15 years has consistently shown the pivotal role of effective leadership in securing high quality provision and high standards…effective leadership is a key to both continuous improvement and major system transformation (NCSL, 2001, p. 5).

However, in a neurotic school system, this becomes utopia. Neurosis is the result of complex interrelations between the individual and his/her environment (Christozov, Bozhanov & Yonchev, 1976, p. 64). Institutional neurosis is creeping into schools with a myriad of challenges being experienced by school leadership. Most schools are now characterised by apathy, lack of initiative, loss of interest by parents, teachers and school leadership in the school issues, submissiveness, and no expression of feelings for hard work and diligence (Tobin, 2014; Barton, 1976). The need to investigate the lived realities and pressing concerns among school leadership should take agenda status in the education landscape. Disjuncture in schools leads to more than disengagement and results in institutional neurosis which depicts lack of positive disposition born out of disturbing discourses among educational institutions. The education of learners is so important that we cannot leave it to chance in neurotic institutions. Ignorance of factors that contribute to such kind of neurosis is likely to lead schools into doldrums and decadence.

The state in which most schools are functioning demonstrates that they are in a disengaged gear. There is institutional neurosis, illness which makes schools defunct. Misbehaviour by students, teachers and even school leadership is rampant, and schools survive upon chance. Bad contact between teachers and the community, among teachers themselves and between teachers and school management, loss of contact with the outside world, brutality among students

and enforced idleness among teachers, bossiness of staff, among others, characterise most schools today. The concept of neurosis does not have a very high priority in the history of school leadership and management. Institutional neurosis is not popular in the field of school leadership. Schools can be likened to organisms which have the nervous system that feed into the other body organs. In that view, the ineffective functioning of each body part leads to poor performance of the total system. For a person who is observing this kind of failure, it sounds like neurosis in schools.

Schools are social systems with complex properties and subsystems (parts of the larger whole) and supra-systems with permeable boundaries (Bowen, 2007, p. 2). The effective functioning of each subsystem leads to the smooth running of the school. If any part of the school malfunctions, the net effect of all this is institutional neurosis. The malfunctioning becomes a neurotic condition that needs diagnosis and treatment for the school to continuously function effectively. Senge (2011) argues that teachers, administrators, and other stakeholders who lack capacity build neurotic conditions within their environments. The principal thesis is that the organisational structure, associated work and technologies, key operational systems should evolve, be unique, and expect to be impermanent in response to emerging knowledge and the environment (Gortner, Nichols, & Ball, 2007).

Delivering high quality education in a dynamic and challenging environment and in poorly resourced conditions is a big challenge particularly in schools in developing countries. As the Commonwealth Secretariat's report has stated:

> This is certainly a problem in much of Africa where: without the necessary skills, many heads are overwhelmed by the task...strategies for training and supporting schools' heads are generally inadequate throughout Africa (Commonwealth Secretariat, 1996, p. 418).

Governments might not achieve effective schools' standards if there is disorder. Developing countries like Zimbabwe are struggling to reach the standards of effective schools. Tchombe (1998) summarised the characteristics of effective schools in a developing country context as:

> level of performance, infrastructure, teacher/pupil ratio, community involvement, financial autonomy, progress rate of students, healthy competition between male and female students and attendance. While, government tries to ensure access, its policy recognises and protects the diverse educational heritage from the different colonial culture and educational values. It attempts to make the beneficiaries of education to be more involved in the management of education and reduce cost, encourage efficiency, transparency, and quality education (Tchombe, 1998, p. 2).

Lack of the characteristics identified above brings about disorder in schools which cripples the education system.

Leadership development in rich school experiences is fundamental in removing neurosis in schools. The approach should be underpinned by a philosophy that

links leadership development to personal and professional learning. It is argued that:

> The primary criterion for leadership is the ability to learn from experiences in order to enhance … capability … If leadership is to be developed in everyone then they have to be helped to process their personal and professional experiences through a value system and in response to others in order to evolve a growing understanding of what it means to be a leader (West-Burnham & O'Sullivan, 1998, p. 24).

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Research seems to be ignoring the prevalence of neurosis in schools, yet some schools need therapeutic interventions. Poor quality results characterise most schools. There are high cases of poor relationships between students and teachers, teachers and school leadership, teachers and co-workers, school staff and parents, among others, and this seems to be affecting the effective functioning of schools in many ways. Newspapers talk of students beating up one another to death and beating up even teachers. Teachers are complaining of poor working conditions against the large classes which they teach highlighting that handling a class of 92 learners is abnormal. In many schools, it is argued that the system of education and finance management is very weak (Ministry of Education and Training, Vietnam, 2012 cited in Atkinson, 2013). Against this background, students are producing poor results and parents are complaining strongly against that. There is need to investigate the lived realities and pressing concerns for schools and ensure that the issue of institutional neurosis takes agenda status in the discourse of school leadership. It is the object of this study to look closely at the source of the disjuncture and disengagement resulting from the many situations in schools. Very few studies have been carried out on factors that cause neurosis in schools. This study seeks to fill the void. The problem can be sated thus: **What factors cause institutional neurosis in schools?**

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK:

THE CONCEPT INSTITUTIONAL NEUROSIS

The concept of neurosis has to do with some kind of paralysis (Koppe, 2009). Some works dealing with the concept of neurosis are said to have been done J. M. L. Pienero (1983) and an earlier one by J. S. Maier (1948). Sigmund Freud (1856–1939) is said to have defined the modern concept of neurosis but it is argued that it was not Freud who coined the term 'neurosis' (Andkjaer Olsen and Koppe, 1986). The origin of this concept leads back to the Scottish physician William Cullen (1710–90) who introduced neurosis as a concept in connection with his classification of diseases (Cullen, 1769). Cullen looked at 'the neuroses' as the broad designation for all disorders of the nerves as well as the designation within the clinical side of neurology, or neuropathology, which had existed at least since the time of the English physician Thomas Willis (1621–75). It is also frequently mentioned that the neuroses slowly changed character from being identical with nerve diseases to covering the group of nerve diseases that do not have any demonstrable anatomical basis (Koppe, 2009). These diseases are also called functional in that they are apparently a function of conditions in the nervous system which remain concealed (Hunter and

Macalpine, 1963; Porter, 1997). Romberg wrote the first German textbook on neurology and divided neurological symptoms into *sensory neurosis* and *motor neurosis* (Romberg, 1846).

Cullen said (as quoted by Pienero):

> In this place I propose comprehending under the title neuroses, all those preternatural affections of sense and motion, which are without pyrexia as a part of the primary disease; and all those which do not depend upon a topical affection of the organs, but upon a more general affection of the nervous system and of those powers of the system upon which the sense and motion more specially depend (Pienero, 1983: 14; original italics).

From the preceding discussion, it can be argued that neurosis affects the individual's thinking skills and behaviour. In a school system, neurosis thus affects the nerve system of the school which include teachers, parents, learners, school leadership, among others. Neurosis also affects the parts of the organisation and affects its efficiency and effectiveness. What people see institutions failing to do is a result of many disorders inside the organisation that are sometimes concealed but have a negative impact on the smooth running of the schools. Disorders in institutions result in loss of skills development among members of staff, loss of networks and communication and total disengagement of the working gear, among others. From the foregoing discussion, it appears that institutional neurosis is common language to psychiatric institutions, but it is proving with no doubt that features of neurosis also appear in schools where disorder is the order of the day. Diagnosis into the causes of such disorders in schools is important to see the etiologic, treatment and preventive measures for the provision of quality education.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS:

Neurotic Leadership theory

This study is premised on the neurotic leadership theory. Neurotic leadership lies within the framework of psychodynamic theory that applies psychoanalytic theories to the study of organisations (Motamedi, 2006; Stacey, 2005; Czander, 1993; DeBord, 1978; Kets deVries, 1991). The focal point concerning neurotic leadership is the idea that organisations portray similar behavioural pathologies as those shown among individuals receiving psychoanalytic counselling (Kets De Vries & Miller, 1984). Schools are not spared. Furthermore, it is the psychological pathologies (illness of the mind) of individuals with power that permeate organisation with their personality orientation.

This study utilises four categories of neuroticism as presented within the work of Kets De Vries & Miller, 1984). The categories are paranoid, compulsive, depressive and narcissistic. These constructs influence the behaviour of school leadership, teachers, and parents within the school, especially people who have power in the school. Paranoid category refers to a school leader or teacher who is suspicious and exhibits mistrust of others. The individual is very secretive about things related to the work unit and uses others to find out what others are doing. The individual creates an atmosphere of apathy among other staff members. Such behaviour patterns are a recipe for institutional neurosis in schools. The second category is the compulsive.

School staff displaying compulsive behaviour shows a preoccupation with trivial details before deciding especially school leaders. The individual is overly concerned with teachers submitting to organisational rules and procedures and is obsessed with controlling people and concerned with rank and status. Over-emphasising on rules, regulations, status, rank, among others, might result in disobedience by teachers and other staff members, which becomes a neurotic situation. The depressive pattern of behaviour in the school suppresses new ideas of other teachers and does not encourage people to think without a box. The individual does not look for new ways of doing things to improve organisational performance but insists on doing things according to the book. The dramatic pattern of doing things is shown by individuals who express their emotions and draw attention to themselves and appear to have a craving for excitement. The individual is overly concerned with impressing others (Bellamy & Bellamy, 2016).

Justification of the Neurotic leadership theory

The neurotic leadership theory is of value to this study as it explains the complex interactions that happen in schools that must be understood by school leadership. The theory helps the school leaders to dissect and see the inner theatre of the school with clinical lenses which then give proper remedy to unwanted situations. Schools need proper identity, and the school leaders should act as the motivating drivers.

Transactional Analysis

In this study it is also important to look at transactional analysis as one of the theories that undergirded the study. In addition to the analysis of the interactions between individuals, Transactional Analysis also involves the identification of the ego states behind every transaction. Berne (1961. P. 4) defines an ego state as "a consistent pattern of feeling and experience directly related to a corresponding consistent pattern of behaviour". Transactions are a critical and fundamental communication processes that can cause a deficit in a system if they are not properly done. Deficit arises when school leaders, teachers and parents operate in a wrong ego state or hold inappropriate transactions. The three fundamental ego states are Child-Adult-Parent. However, not all transactions between humans are healthy or normal. In such cases the transaction is classified as a crossed transaction. Problems arise with crossed transactions. Crossed transactions are messages from one ego state that are responded to with messages from an inappropriate or unexpected ego state, for instance, Adult to Child or Parent to Child (French & Bell, 1978). In a crossed transaction, an ego state different than the ego state which received the stimuli is the one that responds (Berne, 1964). For a school system to operate smoothly it requires transactions that are not crossed, and this prevents neurosis in the school system.

LITERATURE

Today's school leaders are confronted, on a daily basis, with a variety of issues from how to implement curriculum and standards, to handling irate parents, to supporting overwhelmed teachers (Tobin, 2014). School organisations are getting complex due to complicated policy, practice, diverse workforces who lack requisite knowledge and skills of teaching particularly the early childhood education classes, and unanticipated world events (Gibbs et al., 2019), such as the COVID-19 pandemic. The scope of leadership tasks has been broadened, and individual schools are facing higher demands regarding self-organisation and responsibility of their operations

(Brauckmann-Sajkiwicz, Pashiardis & Goldring, 2021). School leaders need to keep a balance between the external and the internal operations of the school, by looking both outside and inside the school, as they are responsible for the school in its entirety. Such antecedents bring in neurosis in schools.

It is also argued that today's principals have a very heavy workload and work at a rapid pace that is both hectic and taxing (Lunenburg, 2011). School principals work for countless hours every day. Leithwwod & Riehl (2003) add to the list of tasks done by school leaders and argue that educational leaders face complex environments of meeting curriculum standards, policy directives from many sources, diverse student characteristics, income disparities, physical and mental disabilities, variation in teaching and learning capacities, rapid developments in technology, planning and implanting school budget, among others. How school leaders react to these issues determines the level of institutional neurosis.

School leaders are assumed to primarily possess pedagogical leadership potential, but also to be fully committed to and held responsible for a high-quality development of the organisation and its staff. Leaders need to take into perspective the increasing accountability and the consequences of public education systems being granted more autonomy for decision making at the school level (Brauckmann-Sajkiwicz, Pashiardis & Goldring, 2021). Thus, school leaders who lack staff development and school development skills cause neurotic situations to surface in the school.

Some schools are failing to come up with a culture of hard work. They fail to observe the pillars that build a positive culture for excellence. Literature points to four pillars that can foster a culture in school. Loyalty and commitment, transparency and efficiency, trust and then finally teamwork (Madden, 2017) are the driving pillars that are missing in most schools and makes them less effective. This becomes a source of school neurosis.

Velma, Vijay & Arasu, (2018) carried out a study on reasons for lack of commitment among teachers in government schools in North Kancheepuram District in India and point out that teachers in government schools lack commitment, motivation, and skills. They are not interested to take effort to learn new teaching methodologies and do not want to take risk by implementing new ideas to their teaching system. This kind of practice is a recipe for school neurosis and disorder.

One of the biggest challenges in male led schools is that of women who are expressing themselves so that they also take chances in leadership. Women have been largely absent from positions of formal authority. Such posts were routinely led by men. Women now want to exercise leadership in the most visible public settings like schools. They become stubborn so that they are recognised because they want power (Keohane, 2020). What is beyond doubt is that women want to emancipate themselves from the bondages of isolation because their possibilities have been stifled and lost to humanity and in their interest, it is high time to take their own chances. Such situations breed neurotic conditions in schools.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study was informed by the interpretivist philosophy. The central endeavour of the interpretivist philosophy is to understand the subjective world of human experience. The approach makes an effort to get into the head of the subjects being

studied, and to understand and interpret what the subject is thinking or the meaning s/he is making of the content (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017). This was relevant to the study as it sought to find out what teachers see as causes of institutional neurosis in schools. The study emphasised understanding of individual participants and their interpretation of neurosis in their schools, hence reality was socially constructed (Levitt et al., 2018; Creswell & Hirose, 2019). In line with the interpretivist philosophy, qualitative research methodology was utilised. Creswell (2012, p. 16) noted "qualitative research is best suited to address a research problem in which you do not know the variables and need to explore". Purposive sampling was employed to select the participants. Purposive sampling is one way of achieving a manageable amount of data (Ames, Glenton & Lewin, 2019). The participants included five school heads, five deputy heads, five senior teachers and ten classroom teachers who were selected purposefully from various schools in Masvingo district. The logic and power of purposeful sampling lies in selecting information-rich cases for study in depth (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Information-rich cases are those from which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the research (Patton, 1990, p. 169). For data generation, semi-structured interviews as well as focus group discussions were employed. Both focus group discussion and semi-structured interviews were used since they are widely used in conversation social science and participatory research (Nyumba et al., 2017). Thematic analysis was used in this study because it was considered as a systematic and comprehensive process of identifying themes and patterns to address the qualitative data (Maguire & Delahunt, 2017).

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Quite a number of themes were generated from the semi-structured interviews that were carried out with teachers and school leaders from both rural and urban schools in Masvingo district. These are presented and discussed below.

Lack of balance between the demands that are put on school leadership and their ability to perform the tasks

The inability to perform tasks and meet the demands of the job is an issue of concern. Participants had this to say:

> School Leader 1: Sometimes the tasks that are given to a person become an overload and there is no consideration of one's capability and capacity.

> School leader 4: Our duties have just become undefined, and one is expected to teach, supervise, attend and organise meetings, among the many responsibilities. It becomes difficult to balance out.

Craft competence is a necessary condition for effective school leadership and lack of it results in the malfunctioning of the school. Rhodes et al. (2009) have conducted a detailed assessment of head teachers' experience of the NPQH and have argued that some aspirant heads are overwhelmed by "deeply rooted perceptions of the difficulties associated with headship" (Rhodes, et al, 2009, p. 449) and that the NPQH does not provide sufficient confidence building, networking and contact with incumbent heads to address these perceptual concerns.

Stress caused by excessive demands of the work

The issue of excessive demands was raised as a critical factor causing institutional neurosis. This was pointed out by participants when they said:

> School leader 3: You get stressed by being given excessive demands from every office at the top. Our classes are just too large to cope with and marking such large piles of exercise books leads to surface marking. Interpreting the new curriculum that you were not part of its design is a mammoth task. The life of a classroom teacher has been made difficult really.

> School teacher 2: Demands on teachers have reached unsustainable levels particularly due to the introduction of the updated curriculum. One really becomes overwhelmed with these tasks without any guidance at all.

> School teacher 1: The workload constitutes a serious risk to our mental and physical health, and you just get stressed by such volumes of work. The updated curriculum is very demanding and almost undefined. You do not seem to understand its boundaries and scope.

Saaranen, Tossavainen, Turunen & Naumanen (2006) show that Finnish school teachers suffer from occupational well-being problems in the form of urgency and pace of work, problems in working space and inadequate supporting resources. In the same vein, it is argued that where there is no personal commitment by teachers and school leadership to achieve the vision and objectives of the organisation (Senge, 2006; Lunenburg, 2011), the situation becomes neurotic.

Lack of cognitive complexity by school leaders

The importance of intelligence and possession of cognitive complexity is undeniable among school leadership to guard against institutional neurosis. Participants had this to say:

> School teacher 2: School leaders get large volumes of information at the same time which they need to manage and process. To do that, they need to think in abstract terms and lack of such abstract thinking results in mental disorders, I think.

> School teacher 1: Schools need people with higher levels of cognitive abilities. Lack of such complex cognitive skills is tantamount to poor patterns of doing work. Leadership has tended to be very demanding today with several challenges haunting the landscape of education and one needs high levels of cognition.

> School teacher 4: Schools today are becoming so dynamic and require leaders who possess some considerable amount of

> abstract thinking ability. There is no substitute for dynamic and intelligent school leaders who face issues head on.

The possession of an intellectual capacity is being considered as fundamental by participants as a strategy to rub off school neurosis. The higher the level of thinking, the more a school leader can step back from the immediate situation and see long term, large-scale patterns and trends (Smith & Piele, 1996, p. 21).

Poor quality leadership in schools due to lack of structured leadership development programmes

It is being noted that lack of structured leadership development programmes is a condition that brings neurotic conditions in schools. This was pointed out by participants when they said:

> School teacher 4: The quality of school leaders that are being deployed in schools is just questionable. You wonder whether we will get there.

> School teacher 2: I think the major cause for concern is the lack of leadership development programmes that lack within the education system in our country. We need structured leadership development programmes that give not only newly appointed school leaders capacity but even those who have been there so that they do their old jobs in new ways.

The above findings are in line with a belief that the quality of leadership makes a significant difference to the effectiveness of schools by deepening the knowledge, expertise and behaviours of school leaders (Brungardt, 1996; Collins, 2002; Rhodes, Brundrett & Nevill 2009). In the same vein, it is argued that lack of structured leadership development programmes is one of the contributing factors to poor school performance (Ashu, 2014).

Lack of equipment and materials to implement the updated curriculum

The issue of inadequate resources and equipment was raised as a subject of concern by the participants. Their voices were loud and clear as follows:

> School teacher 3: There is a general lack of equipment to teach subjects like computers in rural areas. One is just told to teach the subject but there are no provisions at all.

> School teacher 1: We are really in trouble trying to teach some matter that we do not know. The crafting of the new curriculum left out the implementers and there is the source of apathy and confusion in schools.

> School teacher 4: There is need for people to realise the complexities and limitations of their environments before they craft a new curriculum otherwise it becomes utopia.

> School teacher 2: The challenge is that policies are

> made at a broad level, yet challenges are place specific. Although national policy makers think globally rather than the local school level, this is not serving the specific school-based needs of most communities that are in deprived contexts.

The above voices resonate deeply with the Education Amendment Act, 1991, which stipulates that each school should have a School Development Committee to run the financial affairs of the school. This showed that the government philosophy of redistributive equity was weaning out. This placed schools in poor environments in a complex shortage of resources without the government support. Disorder in schools is perpetrated by lack of adequate equipment and resources for teachers and school leadership to act purposefully on the stage. Wallace Stegner captured the issue of being conscious of your environment when he advanced the argument that, "if you do not know where you are, you do not know who you are" (Stegner, 1992 as cited in Maringe, Masinire & Nkambule, 2015, p. 366). Standard 5 of the Professional Standards for Educational Leaders of NPBEA notes that "Effective educational leaders cultivate an inclusive, caring, and supportive school community that promotes the academic success and well-being of each student" (National Policy Board for Educational Administration, 2015, p. 13).

Lack of commitment to teaching and learning by teachers

Participants raised concern over lack of commitment to serious business in schools. They had this to say:

> School teacher 2: You see, people do not show any serious commitment to teaching and learning. They spend a lot of time pursuing personal goals and very little time to serious business.

> School teacher 1: When you walk past the classrooms, you hear lots of noise in the classrooms. Learners will be like orphans without a guardian.

> School teacher 3: There is very little learning in most schools these days. There is no commitment at all.

Madden (2017) pointed to commitment as one of the pillars of building an effective school culture. Where commitment lacks, teachers also do not take up responsibility with efficacy.

Too many unprofessional fingers determining the school curriculum

Teachers and school leaders are worried over implementing a curriculum they did not craft. One of the participants clearly pointed this out and said:

> School teacher 1: When the updated Zimbabwean curriculum was put in place, the process involved civil society who in some cases did not even know what must be learnt and what must be taught in schools. Such unprofessional fingers might not be the very best source to determine the future of the country. Now when the teachers and school

> leadership try to implement what has been determined by lay people, it becomes chaotic and disorderly.

Pinar points to the intricate relationship between society, politics and education when laying out the foundations of a curriculum. He had this to say:

> The educational point of the public-school curriculum is understanding, understanding the relations among academic knowledge, the state of society, the processes of self-formation, and the character of the historical moment in which we live, in which others have lived, and in which our descendants will someday live (Pinar, 2004, p. 187).

Lack of instructional leadership

The situation becomes neurotic in a school if the school leader does not devote adequate instructional time to improve school effectiveness. These were the sentiments of participants:

> School teacher 3: It is the role of the school leader to ensure that teachers are supervised, and their teaching skills are developed. Supervision should be used as a critical tool to develop the teachers' instructional abilities. Lack of such is tantamount to a crisis in school performance.

> School teacher 1: Schools need to make an ex-ray on how best instruction should be given. Leadership has this critical function.

Instructional time include utilising school meetings, planning, facilitating professional development for teachers, developing an educational programme across the school evaluating curriculum, using assessment results for programme evaluation and development, among others (Loeb, Horng & Klasik, 2010). When school leaders fail to devote time for instructional activities this causes disorder and disengagement because that is the fountain of school effectiveness. This is the kind of neurosis that arises.

Poor decision making

In schools, decision making is a central part of daily interactions and school leadership is tasked with that responsibility. In a neurotic environment school leaders fail to engage in meaningful decision making. Participants had this to say:

> School teacher 1: The school leader needs a moral mind to make effective decisions. Some seem not to understand the role of moral considerations in decision making.

> School teacher 4: In a neurotic school environment, the school leader does not even seek for advice, guidance and support from colleagues on issues affecting the school.

> School teacher 2: it seems school leaders do not deepen their knowledge and minds

It is argued that some school leaders lack efficacy in the decision-making process because they do not employ much effort, they do weigh their options analytically and rely on their instinct **(**Scott and Bruce, 1995 as cited in Othman, Othman, Hallit, Obeid & Hallit, 2020**).**

Hostile teachers, parents, and communities

The issue of hostility was pointed out by participants as one of the causes of neurosis in schools. They had this to say:

> School teacher 4: At some schools, l notice that teachers, parents, and communities are generally hostile and there is no peace at all. Parents always think that school heads mismanage funds. Relationships are sour and there is no trust between one another. That is neurosis. How can the business of the school be done in such an environment?

> School teacher 3: Hostility is a common phenomenon affecting the ease at which schools are run. Some parents fail to cooperate and only come to school for showdown. They threaten teachers, school heads and even School Development Committees.

Neutroticism is characterised by anxiety, anger, insecurity, impulsiveness, self-consciousness, and vulnerability (McCrae & Costa, 1990, p. 2). High neurotic individuals have high levels of negative affect, are easily irritated, and more likely to inappropriate coping responses, such as interpersonal hostility (Camps, Stouten & Euwema, 2016, p. 117).

High levels of teacher burnout in schools

Teachers are a major cause of neurosis in the school through burnout. The sentiments by teachers capture it all when they said:

> School teacher 1: Teachers are causing lots of problems these days. Their salaries are very low, and they absent themselves arguing that they are looking for money to meet life demands. They dislike their working conditions and feel that they are working for peanuts. Some teachers say that their status has been reduced to that of a popper.

> School teacher 3: When teachers would gather for tea break and lunch time, they normally talked about problems that learners face during teaching and learning. They would also discuss strategies and solutions to such problems. These days they share ways of how to survive in the complex environment. Work issues do not matter anymore.

Researchers have concluded that teacher burnout and lack of motivation can cause anger, anxiety, depression, boredom, a high absentee and/or turnover rate, cynical attitudes, decreased performance, a reduced tolerance for classroom behaviour problems, and, in extreme cases, nervous breakdowns (Acevedo, 2018; Friedman, 1991; Grayson & Alvarez, 2008). Teacher burnout can also

lead to feelings that "their work is meaningless and that they are powerless, alienated, and isolated" (Howard & Johnson, 2004, p. 400). Given the influence teachers can have on a school's climate, school administrators must be aware of what factors can lead to teacher burnout and what actions could be taken to decrease or eliminate teacher burnout.

Changes in the lifestyles of learners

Some learners are used to doing what they want in their homes and some parents just leave such behaviour uncontrolled to the extent that it becomes their pattern of doing things. When such learners get to school, they might find themselves being misfits. Schools cause changes in the lifestyles of learners and such changes cause hostility among the learners. Participants had this to say:

> School teacher 4: The school environment brings in a lot of changes in the life of learners particularly those in the early years. They are used to free play which becomes controlled now. Their time is also controlled. Young learners do not easily accept such changes.

> School teacher 1: Demands become more complex for the child in the new school environment.

> School teacher 3: You normally hear some children fighting, pulling one another, taking some other's food, threatening one another and the like. Some show high levels of indiscipline even those in the upper classes. They go for break and never come back. Given individual work, they do not attempt, given homework, they never do it till we meet next day. This is typical of neurosis in a school.

Christozov, Bozhanov & Yonchev (1976) opine that the school places the child in a new and much more complicated social environment. Each of these transitions from one stage of life to another has its own tensions and conflicts which result in neurotic behaviours.

Lack of an ethical culture in schools

There are a lot of unethical practices that are being noticed in schools and participants are worried that if these are not corrected schools remain neurotic and thus lack effectiveness. They had this to say:

> School teacher 2: We need a revolution to clear off unethical practices that we see in schools.

> School teacher 4: School heads are engaging in financial embezzlement. Teachers are stealing whatever comes their way, be it vegetables, maize for feeding learners, in fact whatever they can get. That culture must stop.

> School teacher 3: School staff no longer fear to engage in unethical practices. It is surprising.

The issue of lack of ethics is worrisome and school leadership is thus encouraged to develop a culture that people believe is ethical and sustain the school environment because it leads to

organisational effectiveness. A culture of hard work should be created by school leadership. It is argued that school leaders are confronted with a variety of issues as they provide leadership and organisation to their schools. Donaldson concluded, "Principals shape the culture and interpersonal dynamics of their school" therefore, "have the most leverage to create the conditions for cultural change" (Donaldson, 2013, p. 872).

CONCLUSIONS

The study concludes that in schools that lack proper communication and have crossed transactions, institutional neurosis becomes rampant. Schools lack ethical standards and that results in neurotic environments. Schools are posing a lot of demands for both school leadership and teachers, and this is causing illness of the institution. Lack of structured school leadership development training is a cause for concern. Schools have paucity of materials and equipment for use to effectively implement the updated curriculum and this causes neuroticism in schools. Leadership is not instructional at all in schools and such lack of direction results in neurotic conditions in the schools. There is high level of burnout by teachers due to eroded salaries and poor working conditions, the situation which culminates into institutional neurosis.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The study thus recommends a series of capacity building workshops on issues to deal with instructional leadership in schools. There is need to capacitate school leadership with pedagogical leadership so that they can meet leadership challenges with zeal and destroy elements of neuroticism in schools. There is need by the government to boost the morale for both teachers and school leadership so that they become effective in their practices in a bid to improve school performance. Several workshops must be run on technology use, ethics and professionalism, leadership development, among others. Staff development programmes that help school leaders to care, see over and beyond, respond to the needs of teachers and learners so that no one is left behind, are critical. These will go a long way towards dissolving neurotic circumstances that have found a home in most schools.

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Reconceptualising Education in Sub-Saharan Africa: Realising Equity and Social Justice

F.R. Aluko, M.F. Omidire & M.R. Mampane
Faculty of Education, University of Pretoria
Corresponding author: ruth.aluko@up.ac.za

ABSTRACT

Although the sub-Saharan Africa region has made giant strides in education, the quality still requires improvement. Linked to this is the high unemployment rate among youth, which has led to migration, with dire consequences. Apart from training people to be literate and numerate, education prepares individuals for life. In this article, the authors present teachers' ideas on a proposed conceptual framework that synthesises the current education system with the traditional African system of education and training. To capture the complexity of the challenge and evaluate its relevance, the authors have adopted the Capabilities Approach Theory, using the explanatory sequential mixed-methods approach. The main research question that guided this study is: "To what extent is the evidence-based conceptual framework feasible for the reconceptualisation of education in the sub-Saharan Africa region, and what are the implications of the findings for education in this and similar contexts? Purposively selected participants made up a sample of 200 teachers for the survey and 10 teachers for the focus group discussion. Data analysis involved descriptive and thematic analysis. Findings revealed that all participants agreed on the need to reconceptualise education in the region and complimented the suggested framework. However, ideas were divergent on how to implement the reconceptualisation of education. The study recommends the need for an African formal education curriculum to be functional, and to focus more on contextualised skills training and job creation, among other things.

Keywords*: Education systems, sub-Saharan Africa, social justice, capabilities approach*

INTRODUCTION

The United Nations Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4 (quality education) is a far cry from reality for almost all African countries (Nalugala, 2020). SDG 4 (quality education) means "ensuring inclusive and quality education for all and promote lifelong learning" (UNESCO, 2016). Although giant strides have been made, the quality of education in Africa remains undesirable. Sub-Saharan Africa continues to fall behind the rest of the world in terms of educational attainment, despite recent advancements in economic development (Baxter, 2017). The introduction of the SDG on education is designed to provide inclusive and quality education for every child (United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA), 2015). The rate of unemployment has led to the migration of youth to seek greener pastures, with dire consequences. One of the reasons for unemployment among this group stems from a mismatch between acquired skills and labour market demands, which depict a poor quality of education (Amadeo, 2022). To support this, a recent World Bank (2022) report that covers 22 Western and Central African countries, indicates the region is presently at the lowest end of the global human capital development rankings, and cites low quality of education as a key hindrance to job creation. Both formal and informal education are deemed critical to the continuity of any society. In an era of global reform and technological innovation, education is the key tool for sustaining and enhancing the development of the African continent. Although giant strides have been made on the continent regarding formal education (Bennel, 2021), the challenges

confronting Africa's education system demand the reconceptualisation of education if education is to meet the needs of society in Africa.

In this article authors suggest a framework, tagged "the best of two worlds", which comprises some elements of Africa's traditional system of education and training, combined with some of the elements that comprise 21st-century education. The framework was developed based on previous research and published work to address the challenges of education across the African continent in line with the United Nations SDGs (Mampane, Omidire & Aluko, 2018; Omidire, Aluko & Mampane, 2021). The aim is to present an eclectic approach by probing the relevance of Sen's Capabilities Approach Theory (Sen, 1993) and using this as a framework by obtaining teachers' perspectives. Hence, the main research question that guided this study was: To what extent is the evidence-based conceptual framework feasible for the reconceptualisation of education in sub-Saharan Africa, and what are the implications of the findings for education in this and similar contexts? The theory adopted for the study helped the researchers interrogate the extent to which Africans are given the opportunity to be and to do what they really value and what has value in their society.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The countries in sub-Saharan Africa share similarities in the post-colonial development of their education sectors. The region has witnessed significant progress in the provision of access to education (Bennel, 2021), as driven by the United Nations. Despite access to education, there are still low levels of literacy, high numbers of early school leavers (dropout rates) and high levels of youth unemployment within the region. These are signposts of a poor-quality education (Education Encyclopaedia, 2021; Fox, Senbet & Simbanegavi, 2016). Countries within the region grapple with similar challenges, resulting from unactualised expectations from the education systems (Baxter, 2017). A different approach to addressing education should thus be explored. This should encourage relevance to the global context without losing sight of local applicability (Featherston, 2017; Ndille, 2018).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Education is largely accepted as being the process of acquiring or developing knowledge and skills through structured or unstructured formal or informal learning. It is also the process of transferring the values and traditions of one generation to another. The members of communities and society are educated to ensure that, in adulthood, they can meaningfully contribute to the sustainability of the societies to which they belong. Education plays a key role in elevating the socioeconomic standard of persons around the globe (Arifin, 2017).

Prior to the advent of the formal education system in Africa, these were the goals of education. According to Ezeanya-Esiobu (2019), although in the olden days, on the continent, education among ethnic groups differed, there was a noticeable uniformity in the way of learning and passing on knowledge." Moumouni (1968, p. 16), cited in Ezeanya-Esiobu (2019, p. 22), asserts that "far from being undecided and incoherent, education in Africa is so structured that, from the time of birth until adulthood, the individual is subjected to a well-thought-out plan of inculcating values, discipline, education and all that is needed to ensure an adult who will be useful to the overall growth and development of society".

According to Labé, Dembélé, Sirois, Motivans and Bruneforth (2013, p. 30), most African countries obtained their independence in the 1960s, which generally "marks the end of education provision oriented to the needs of colonial countries

and the start of a more Euro-centric education system tailored to native traditions and needs". Since then, giant strides have been made on the continent, despite the poverty that is prevalent across the region (Education Encyclopaedia, 2021). The available World Bank analysis of basic education in sub-Saharan Africa, conducted in 2012, indicates that the general progress in attaining the goal of universal primary education has been "nothing short of astounding" (Bashir, Lockheed, Ninan & Tan, 2018, p. xxxi). For instance, despite its shortcomings, "total primary school enrolments increased from 63 million in 1990 to 152 million in 2015" (Bennel, 2021, p. 1).
There have also been sharp increases in both secondary and tertiary school enrolments, although this has been in poorer countries (Burns, 2021).

Despite this progress, diverse challenges confront education in the sub-Saharan African region. For instance, the dream of realising universal primary education, which should be the right of every child, is still being inhibited by "large populations, high annual child population growth, low GDP growth per capita, high inequality, high share of population in poverty, high linguistic diversity index, and high conflict" (Bennel, 2021, p 1). Other features are elitism, which "only rewards the few candidates who perform well in high stakes national examinations while ignoring the rest" (Fox, Senbet & Simbanegavi, 2016, p. 34), too few facilities that are in a poor state of repair, instructional materials that are in desperately short supply, and underpaid and underqualified teachers who are under-supervised and under-supported (Education Encyclopaedia, 2021). In addition, scholars have identified gender inequalities, which are still prevalent because the schooling of the male child is considered more important than the schooling of the female child, "granting that the girl is considered as the property of another family after marriage" (Asongu, Orim & Nting, 2019, p. 386). Elu (2018) agrees with this view.

Of significance to this article is the relevance of education to the context of students (Featherston, 2017). Although, according to the author, in about a decade, the number of people joining the workforce will be the highest in the world, the sub-Saharan African education system is still below the workforce's needs. Linked to this is the use of mother tongue education. Although research has persistently shown the value of using the mother tongue in education, which contextualises teaching and learning, most parents are not in support of its use because of the perceived value and life opportunities "metropolitan colonial language competency" … bring to their children (Bennel, 2021, p. 7).

Given the above, it appears that the region has lost the alignment between education and its purpose. It becomes imperative to reconceptualise education. According to Ndille (2018, p. 4), "worthwhile education should grow out of the environment and the learning process should be directly related to the pattern of life in the society concerned". This, Ndille argues, involves developing "local contents curricula, and proliferating the use of African mother tongues in the development and dissemination of knowledge in African institutions of learning and in the establishment of unique structures of education based on African indigenously established purposes making African institutions, and not merely institutions in Africa" (p. 5).

Reconceptualising education will help Africa to "give life turning opportunities to the youth, who drop out of school at different ages" because this will play "a major role in the economic, social, political development of any country by contributing to improved quality of life of every person" (Nalugala, 2020, p. 40, 43). According to the author, this will help the

region achieve SDG 4. Therefore, to help with this, authors of this article have developed a conceptual framework that embraces the best of two worlds: the African traditional education system and the 21st century education system.

Proposed conceptual framework for reconceptualising education in sub-Saharan Africa

Miles and Huberman (1994, p. 18) defined a conceptual framework as a visual or written product; one that "explains, either graphically or in narrative form, the main things to be studied – the key factors, concepts, or variables – and the presumed relationships among them".

Figure 1 tagged "the best of two worlds", depicts the proposed conceptual framework for reconceptualising education in sub-Saharan Africa. The term, as used in this article, refers to the best ideas from both the African (traditional) education system and the 21st-century education system.

Figure 1: Conceptual framework: The best of two worlds

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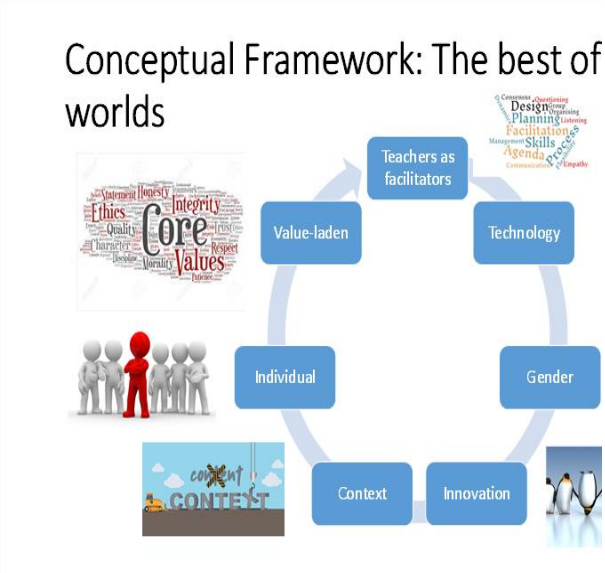

According to Shields and Rangarajan (2013), conceptual frameworks are connected to a research study's purpose. Although the concepts in the suggested framework are not entirely new ideas, l they have not previously been brought together as a whole to address the problem of education systems in the sub-Saharan African context. Thus, the framework is made up of elements that each country can focus on in the reconceptualisation of its education system without losing sight of its local environment. While the concepts are not simply descriptive (Miles & Huberman, 1994), they have been put together to critically examine the phenomenon and suggest a way forward. The proposed framework assisted the researchers to synthesise the 21st-century education system with the system of education and training African societies used to know (the traditional African education system). It also guided the question items of the survey.

The seven concepts that make up the framework are given below, with a brief description of each.

- *Teachers as facilitators*

"In the arena of teaching, facilitation as an engaged practice is best appreciated when the teacher subscribes to the experiential learning method. This means that the teacher departs from the traditional lecture method. The teacher treats the learners as having responsibility for their own learning" (Purnama, 2015, p. 365–366).

- *Value-laden education*

The Open Education Sociology Dictionary (OESD) (2021) defines "value" as "an ideal or principle that determines what is correct, desirable, or morally proper". Examples are honesty and strong work ethic. "Depending on social and cultural contexts, different terms may be used instead of "attitudes and values". These terms include "affective outcomes", "aptitudes", "attributes", "beliefs",

"dispositions", "ethics", "morality", "mindset", "social and emotional skills", "soft skills" and "virtues" (or "character qualities")" (Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), 2019, p. 4).

- *Context-specific*

Although hazy in its definition, scholars agree that education is context-dependent and very important for learning (Dohn, Hansen & Klausen, 2018). According to the authors, it encompasses location (both physical-geographical and institutional), knowledge domain, sequence of occurrences, activity, historical period, social relationship, and an individual's set of experiences. Education is expected to get people ready for life, work, and citizenship (Strauss, 2015).

- *Technology*

Technology in education refers to "the use of machines and educational equipment of different sorts (e.g., language laboratories, tape recorders and video) to assist teachers and learners" (Richards & Schmidt, 2010, p. 190). "Technology cannot be effective in the classroom without teachers who are knowledgeable about both the technology itself and its implementation to meet educational goals" (DeCoito & Richardson, 2018, p. 362).

- *Individual needs*

According to Thiele, Mai and Sherri (2014, p. 80), student-centredness describes "the ability of the teachers to actively engage students so that they could learn, discover, and/or be trained". Some of its benefits include "student motivation, critical thinking, and academic skills" (Keiler, 2018).

- *Gender*

The United States Agency for International Development (USAID) EducationLinks (2021) describes gender as "the socially constructed roles and relationships, personality traits, attitudes, behaviours, values, relative power and influence that society ascribes to sexes. Gender refers not simply to women or men, but to the relationship(s) between them". The Education Agenda 2030 "ensures that girls and boys, women and men not only gain access to and complete education cycles but are empowered equally in and through education" (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), 2019).

- *Innovation*

According to Serdyukov (2017, p. 8), innovation in education refers to looking "beyond what we are currently doing" and developing "a novel idea that helps us to do our job in a new way" with the aim of creating "something different from what we have been doing, be it in quality or quantity or both". Hattori and Wycoff (2004), cited in Van der Elst (2016, p. 9), identified the four components of innovation in education as "people", "creating value", "new ideas" and "implementation". To bring about an effective change, innovation must be diffused and implemented on a large scale (Serdyukov, 2017).

The authors of this article are of the opinion that the conceptual framework will enable Africa and other developing countries to meet the conditions for global competitiveness. Detailed discussion about each of the concepts that form part of the framework will be integrated into the discussion section of this article in relation to the theory adopted for the study.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The Capabilities Approach Theory propounded by Sen (1993) and developed by the philosopher Martha Nussbaum (Nussbaum, 2011) guided this study.

Sen (1993, p. 90), who popularised the Capability Approach Theory, defines

capability as "a person's ability to do valuable acts or reach valuable states of being; it represents the alternative combinations of things a person is able to do or be". This invariably determines the sort of life they are effectively able to lead (Robeyns, 2020). Therefore, the states of human beings and activities we can undertake are referred to as "Functionings", which determine the value of life (Sen, 1993; Robeyns, 2005; Nussbaum, 2011).

On the other hand, according to the authors, capabilities become the real freedom to achieve functioning. Freedom is conceived as a valuable option that is made available to the agent. Nonetheless, the idea of freedom embraces "ethical individualism" (Robeyns, 2005, p. 108), although not in a selfish way. Therefore, the question is: "What is each person able to do or be?" It does not just ask about a person's total or average wellbeing, but about the opportunities (freedom) available to each person. This shifts the axis of analysis to establishing and evaluating the conditions that enable individuals to take decisions based on what they have reason to value (Walter & Unterhalter, 2007). Therefore, capabilities evaluate policies based on their impact on people's lives.

In 2005, Robeyns (2005) introduced the term "conversion factors" to the debate, in which he identified personal conversion factors (internal to a person, e.g., intelligence and disability), social conversion factors (e.g., public policies, social norms and power relations) and environmental conversion factors (e.g., the physical or built environment). These tie in with Sen's view that capabilities are opportunities made feasible and constrained by both internal and external conversion factors. In essence, we are being compelled to now view development less and less in economic terms, but to be more concerned about human beings by placing them in the centre (Chikunda, 2013).

In this study, the authors focused on the three core ideas of the approach – functioning, capabilities, and conversion factors – to examine the extent to which formal education on the African continent has prepared individuals for life and work by equipping them with the skills required to succeed and be productive, functional members of society. The teachers that participated in this study were invited to assess the validity of the proposed framework by the researchers to mitigate the challenges faced by the formal education system on the continent using an eclectic approach.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The explanatory sequential mixed-methods approach in which the quantitative data was first collected was adopted for this study, followed by the qualitative approach. However, the emphasis was on the latter (quan + QUAL) (Edmonds & Kennedy, 2017). The purpose of adopting this design was to clarify the findings of the quantitative instrument.

Data collection

In the first phase of the study, the authors developed a survey questionnaire, using purposive sampling, which was distributed to 200 teachers from Ghana, Nigeria, Rwanda and South Africa. The second phase involved a focus group discussion with 10 teachers (from diverse African countries) in Gauteng, South Africa. A focus group discussion was deemed necessary to gain further insights and elaboration on the survey findings from the teachers. The focus discussion questions were formatted as open-ended questions.

Ethics approval to conduct the study was granted by the authors' institution. The researchers adhered to all the research ethics guidelines, such as informed consent, voluntary participation, anonymity, and confidentiality. There was no risk of harm

to any of the participants. The participants granted permission to audio record the discussion session.

Description of questionnaire

The questionnaire comprised two sections and seven subcategories. Section 1 dealt with the demographic details of the participants, while Section 2 contained the subcategories of the conceptual framework (teachers as facilitators, value-laden education, context-specific, technology, individual needs, gender, and innovation).

Each of the subsections had three questions, except for the subsection on gender, which had two questions. There were four demographic questions and 20 questions based on the conceptual framework. The questionnaire was designed on a five-point scale, which required responses ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree. Survey data was analysed using Microsoft Excel to generate descriptive data, while the focus group data was analysed using thematic analysis. The audio-recorded data was transcribed, coded and categorised to arrive at the emergent themes.

FINDINGS

The participants' demographic information reveals that most of the participants from Nigeria and South Africa were between 41 and 50 years of age. The participants from Rwanda and Ghana were between 21 and 40 years of age. The educational attainment of the teachers also differed across the countries, with Nigeria and Ghana having the most teachers with a tertiary education.

The findings revealed several similarities in the curriculum content and delivery modes across sub-Saharan Africa. Participants' comments reflected consensus on the need to reconceptualise education in sub-Saharan Africa. Most of the participants also agreed with the concepts included in the suggested conceptual framework. However, there were divergent views on how the reconceptualisation could be implemented in the various aspects of the framework.

- *Teachers as facilitators*

The findings demonstrated that teachers believe that they play a significant role in the stability of the education system and in educating students. The teachers unanimously concurred, with about 98% agreeing and strongly agreeing that it is necessary to transform education in Africa. They furthermore agreed that teachers play an important role as facilitators in the transformation of education. In addition, the findings show that teachers admit that they need structured support to transform education in Africa.

- *Value-laden education*

Although 96% of the teachers agreed and strongly agreed that African values and indigenous knowledge systems are relevant to 21st-century education, it is worth noting that 4% of them disagreed with this statement. This warrants further investigation. The findings indicated that 31% of the teachers were either neutral or strongly disagreed with the fact that African values and indigenous knowledge systems should be more visibly incorporated into education. Furthermore, they disagreed that traditional ancestral African values have a strong influence on multicultural education. Although 69% agreed and strongly agreed that African values, traditions and indigenous knowledge systems are important and should be incorporated into the education system, the 31% disagreement is worth further investigation.

- *Context-specific*

With context-specific education, the survey questions explored whether the African education curriculum should only

address African concerns, whether it should only address Western concerns, or whether the curriculum should combine issues relating to both contexts. In this section, 89% agreed or strongly agreed that the African education curriculum should address both African and Western concerns. Those who were neutral constituted 9% of the group and 2% disagreed.

The following are relevant quotes from the focus group discussion.

> *"But we can align the skills that we think that we need as a country and train them in that way."*
>
> (FGP8)

> *"At the end of the day, we have a graduate in Limpopo roaming around the street, no jobs. Why? Because that person has no skill that is relevant to the economy of the environment."*
>
> (FGP1)

- *Technology*

Regarding the place of technology, 94% of the teachers agreed and strongly agreed that technology creates avenues for education transformation, while 99% believed that teachers and students need support to use technology in education. In terms of whether teachers hinder the implementation of technology in education, 54% disagreed and strongly disagreed with this statement, but surprisingly, 46% were neutral or strongly agreed with this statement. These findings are reflected in the participants' comments below.

> *"I think technology is good because the learners should start there, but grow up with it, we must see them as engineers. We must see them planning our countries."*
>
> (FGP3)

> *"With technology, it gives the child the opportunity to see how things are done."*

> *"I think we need to introduce technology from especially primary."*
>
> (FGP9)

> *"Then the role of teachers, I think we need to put it in their mind. Its mindset…, I think the attitude to technology depends on that teacher's exposure also."*
>
> (FGP6)

- *Individual needs*

The findings showed that the teachers were divided on the statement that "all students' needs are the same in the same environment". A total of 31% of teachers agreed with this statement. They were mainly from Nigeria and South Africa. However, 69% believed that students have various individual needs, even within the same environment. In addition, 79% of the teachers strongly agreed that 21st-century education can be made relevant to individuals' needs in Africa, while 88% believe that access to student support is the greatest and most urgent need.

> *"There is not enough personnel in that area. Even if they say you are very skilful, you cannot teach 40 learners and attend to their individual needs in one class. Those 40 learners can be constituted of eight different groups."*
>
> (FGP1)

- *Gender*

In terms of gender, most of the teachers disagree and strongly disagree that females enjoy more access to education

than males in Africa, and conversely, they agree that males enjoy more access to education than females in Africa.

> "*The general behaviour with our learners, they say I am a man, I need to be a manager. I am a lady, (being a receptionist) is fine for me. Now, there is physical science where you can even burn your toe and get cut and no one will pay for you.*"
>
> (FGP3)

- *Innovation*

The majority of the teachers (98%) concur that education innovation requires incorporating contact and online activities in the hybrid learning format. However, 15% of the teachers disagreed and strongly disagreed that education innovation in Africa means incorporating other cultures, and 16% were neutral regarding this question. Finally, 83% of the teachers agreed and strongly agreed that African students need 21st-century skills to survive.

> *"The African education system is not innovative and that is why it seems our education, we are pushing the learner."*
>
> (FGP2)

From the above, we can deduce that teachers are key facilitators in the transformation of education, but they need structured support. In addition, African values and indigenous knowledge systems are relevant to 21st-century education and should therefore be more visible in the education system. The African education curriculum should address both African and Western concerns. Furthermore, teachers and students need support to use technology in education, and 21st-century education can be made relevant to the individual needs of Africa, but students need support regarding access. It was strongly agreed that males enjoy greater access to education than females in Africa, and that education innovation is critical. African students need 21st-century skills to incorporate contact and online activities (hybrid learning) to survive and thrive in their studies.

DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS CONSIDERING THE CAPABILITIES APPROACH THEORY WITH IMPLICATIONS FOR EDUCATION IN SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA AND OTHER SIMILAR CONTEXTS

The Capabilities Approach Theory that guided this study takes the attention of society away from viewing development as largely economic but emphasises the need to place human beings at the centre of development (Chikunda, 2013). Therefore, the theory accentuates three major aspects: functioning, capabilities, and conversion factors. The discussion in this section will revolve around these aspects in relation to the suggested conceptual framework and the findings of the study.

According to Jacobson and Chang (2019, p. 113), "the concept of *functioning*, which has distinctly Aristotelian roots, reflects the various things a person may value doing or being". These sum up the various states of human beings and activities that a person can undertake (Robeyns, 2020). Findings from this study strongly suggest that the formal education system in sub-Saharan Africa is not paying adequate attention to these aspects. An example, as provided by the participants, is the education curriculum that is not context-specific, which is what the 21st-century education system advocates. They have buttressed this with the high number of jobless graduates – as is also supported by literature (Trading Economics, 2021). This invariably means that many people could be doing menial jobs that are not commensurate with their qualifications, just to keep body and soul together. According to Hamilton-Ekeke and Dorgu (2015),

joblessness is a result of education not embedding indigenous local knowledge into school curricula that leads to a misalignment, coupled with the failure of education to foster economic self-sufficiency. Therefore, the African formal education curriculum needs to be functional by focusing more on skills training and job creation.

The participants further argued that it is necessary to align acquired skills to the African environment by providing more entrepreneurial and vocational education. However, according to them, for this to work, African communities need to return to the concept of dignity of labour, which a former Deputy General of the International Labour Organisation (ILO), Somavia (2014, p. 67), refers to as "decent work" and defines as "a foundation of personal dignity, as a source of stability and development of families or as a contribution to communities at peace". Nonetheless, because of its lack of "societal significance" (Somavia, 2014, p. 67), Cruddas (2021) argues that dignity of labour needs rethinking, especially after the global COVID-19 pandemic. Consequently, it is not enough for Africans to have formal qualifications; these should be able to support the African economy. The authors of this article argue that this could be a major reason for the low level of development in Africa. The authors think that the tenets of the Capabilities Approach Theory (Sen 1992, p. 39) – that valuing what one does leads to a flourishing life – are generally absent in Africa. This theory further argues that functioning is constitutive of a person's being, which "means that one cannot be a human being without having at least a range of functionings", which makes one's life different from that of innate objects and animals (Robeyns, 2020, Sec. 2.6, par 2).

Closely related to this is the teacher, who the participants see as playing a significant role in the stability of the education system and in educating students. In support of this assertion, Chikunda (2013, p. 136) shows that the "teacher is a crucial resource in any learning environment". However, teachers need to become facilitators so that learners can learn how to do things for themselves. African teachers need to focus more on hands-on teaching; there is a need for an attitude change that stems from a changed mindset. They need to move away from being the sage on the stage. In their study, Muganga and Ssenkusu (2019) assert that there is ample evidence that most developing countries still rely mainly on teacher-centred learning in contrast to the Western world.

In addition, according to Tsindoli (2018), teachers often push their own culture and that of their students to the background because they have not been trained to diversify their curricula to teach students from diverse cultures. Abah, Mashebe and Denuga (2015, p. 668) assert that it is necessary to consider "whose and what knowledge is considered worthwhile", especially in developing countries where "formal education continues to be Euro-centric in outlook and academic in orientation, reflecting Western scientific cultures rather than the cultures of learners and the teachers". Therefore, scholars aver that there is a need to revamp teacher training curricula, with less reliance on Western textbooks for the dissemination of knowledge and information; finding a balance between globalisation and Africanisation, and the management of multiculturalism that embraces varied philosophical narratives (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2016; Ndille, 2018).

For Africans to be actualising their functioning in the 21st century, the participants stressed the relevance of technology. Therefore, they advocated the early exposure of learners to technology so that they can get used to it, and to boost collaboration. The authors of this article

argue that the current COVID-19 pandemic has made this argument more solid, where most schools on the continent had to shut down and could not continue their core business of teaching and learning due to a lack of resources (UNESCO, 2020). The participants also sometimes lamented the prevalence of technology that is irrelevant to the environment and rather advocated tailor-made technology. According to Ezeanya-Esiobu (2019, p. 99), "for technology to be considered appropriate, it must be founded on certain fundamental principles, which include accessibility and affordability; ease of utilisation and maintenance; meeting real needs of end-users; and effectiveness."

In relation to the relevance of the 21st-century education system to the African context, most of the participants in this study frowned on the idea of the previous Western education system teaching Africans to live an individual life, which is quite different from Africans' communal life. They argue that the African value system should be infused into the formal education system. The first concept stressed is Ubuntu, the African philosophy where the community is more important than the European concept of individualism.

It is interesting to note that the 21st-century education system now focuses on "non-cognitive skills", known as "character strengths or developmental assets such as motivation, delayed gratification, self-discipline, and grit" (Ball, Joyce & Anderson-Butcher, 2016, p. 1). According to OECD (2019, p. 4, 7), "international bodies have identified attitudes and values as integral to individual and social wellbeing…and those competencies go beyond knowledge and skills".

The participants also identified gender stereotyping as a major concern in the African traditional system of education, which they asserted stems from society. To buttress this, the United Nations Children's Fund (Unicef) (2020) confirms that, although most countries have achieved gender parity in, for instance, primary enrolment, in many countries, inequalities that do not favour the girl-child continue. This assertion is buttressed by other scholars (Chikunda, 2013; Mwalongo & Mwalongo, 2018).

Capabilities refer to the real opportunities provided to citizens to be or to do. The emphasis here is on opportunities, which Sen (1985) also refers to as freedoms – the availability of prized options or alternatives. Findings from this study show that, in some instances, where the curriculum has been improved upon, the participants complained about inadequate resources at schools, citing the example of bio-fertilizers in agriculture. According to the respondents, although African students have the theoretical knowledge, they have no practical experience. Therefore, they are not provided with diverse options to choose from. The lack of resources limits students' options, which can also be linked to innovation, which the 21st-century education system advocates. Although technology transfer has helped the continent, technological innovation has not really been based on the pre-existing indigenous knowledge of Africa (Ezeanya-Esiobu, 2019). "In nowadays knowledge-based society, the local embedded knowledge and innovation are considered as the core competence of the curriculum of the region" (Hamilton-Ekeke & Dorgu, 2015, p. 32). Therefore, Ezeanya-Esiobu (2019, p. 100) asserts it is time to bridge the gap between what is researched on the continent and what it needs because Africa "records the lowest patent applications around the world". To be functional in society, students need exposure to diverse combinations or sets of potential functionings (Robeyns, 2020). The Capabilities Approach Theory asserts that a society cannot talk about development if citizens do not have the freedom to choose from "among preferred development

options…that may range from development priorities to cultural values, preferences to individual identity options or various sustainability efforts", which Sen advocates (Jacobson & Chang, 2019, p. 111).

Although participants in this study attested to the availability of education policy in their respective countries and there appear to be similarities in the content and delivery modes, they lamented the non-involvement of stakeholders (for example, teachers and society in policy making). As a result of this, teachers felt left out and complained that policies with their implementation are left to the whims and caprices of politicians, who politicise education. In addition, Ezeanya-Esiobu (2019, p. 103) avows those policies have often been formulated on behalf of African leaders "by external parties, and/or copied from other nations". Therefore, generally, there is not much prevalence of "authentic public policy formulation and implementation based on local and contextual knowledge".

According to the Capabilities Approach Theory, opportunities should be selected by those affected, which is contrary to the findings of the authors of this paper. Alkire (n.d.) refers to this as "authentic self-direction…which is the ability to shape one's own destiny as a person and a part of various communities". Where this is absent, this means that others determine what citizens should value or what a good life must entail (Jacobson & Chang, 2019). Citizen "agency", according to the authors, is a related concept that builds on the feature of capabilities. However, it does not refer to "the narrow meaning in which an agent represents someone else" (Jacobson & Chang, 2019, p. 115). Rather, "it is a person's ability to act on what they value and have reason to value" (Sen, 1999, p. 19).

Lastly, the conversion factors introduced by Robeyns (2005) show that the theory is not oblivious of individual differences in students and the effect of inherent personal abilities. However, it argues that at least all students are presented with diverse opportunities (social and environmental conversion factors) to convert these into functionings. Although participants also acknowledge diverse innate differences in students, they lamented the absence of career counselling offered in most schools that could have assisted students to make the right choice for their lives.

Therefore, the participants in this study stress the need for Africa to go back to the drawing board, which Jacobson and Chang (2019, p. 116) refer to as "government by discussion". According to the authors, "Sen's overall theory holds that public communication should lead to more effective government understanding of public interests" (p. 116). Overall, each of the sub-categories of the conceptual framework interrogated by this study speaks to the core beliefs of the Capabilities Approach Theory.

CONCLUSION

There is ample evidence in literature and from the findings of this study to support the fact that there is a yawning gap between what the current formal education system in sub-Saharan Africa has to offer and what the African society needs. Although this article does not advocate for a unified education system due to the complexities and uniqueness of each country, the suggested framework contains elements that can be applied within the region and beyond. This is more so because it advocates for a blend of both the local and global paradigms. Ndille (2018, p. 4) rightly argues that the "content of education is the school curriculum, and its choice is primarily determined by the aims of education set by the society concerned, which, in turn, determines the structure of the education system and its sustainability. These are expected to be unique as societies

are unique in their composition, past experiences, daily challenges, world view and future".

The Capabilities Approach Theory adopted for this study has helped the authors to focus on the quality of the opportunities, education has to offer society on the continent. As advocated by the theory, we should not just be interested in the number of graduates educational institutions produce every year. It is high time we started asking the right question: To what extent are individuals given the opportunity **to be** and **to do** what they have reason to value, which, in turn, will positively impact their society? The authors believe that the conceptual framework interrogated in this study will go a long way to contributing to the holistic approach needed to reconceptualise education on the continent.

Lastly based on the findings from this study, the authors recommend the following:

- The African formal education curriculum needs to be functional by focusing more on contextualised skills training that leads to job creation and establishing counselling units in schools to guide students.
- Teachers need more training on their roles as facilitators of learning and how to integrate societal values and contextual realities based on collective experiences into their teaching and delivery of curriculum content.
- Increased access to technology should be prioritised; contextually relevant innovations should be promoted.
- Sub-Saharan Africa needs to return to its value system, now recognised in the 21st-century education system as non-cognitive skills.
- The region still needs to do more to remove prevalent gender-stereotyping.
- The involvement of key stakeholders in policy making is paramount.
- The framework should be applied in a longitudinal intervention study in representative countries across the sub-Saharan African region.

DISCLOSURE

There is not any actual or potential conflict of interest including any financial, personal or other relationships with other people or organizations which could inappropriately influence, or be perceived to influence, our work. All authors have approved the final article.

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The Potency of Ubuntugogy as a Decolonised Pedagogy in Universities: Challenges and Solutions

Bunmi Isaiah Omodan
bomodan@wsu.ac.za
CAPTD, Faculty of Education
Butterworth Campus
Walter Sisulu University

ABSTRACT

Pedagogy, a subset of modernity that could be regarded as the supremacy of Western epistemology, has been the major core of curricula implementation in the university system. This includes but is not limited to teaching, learning, and the teaching and learning process. However, this article argues that pedagogy and its implementation process are too Westernised, thereby rendering the teaching-learning process in rural classrooms ineffective because the Western epistemic process portends a pseudo-process with complicated pedagogical contour. This article challenges the impotence of pedagogy to reinvigorate the potency of Ubuntugogy as an alternative to the current pedagogical process in university classrooms. Ubuntugogy as a decolonial classroom technique underpinned the study. This study is located in the Transformative Paradigm (TP), informed by Participatory Research (PR) design in order to transform the assumed colonial Western epistemology using the views of university students and lecturers in a selected rural university in South Africa. A convenient selection method was used to select ten participants: five postgraduate students and five lecturers. An unstructured interview was used to elicit information from the participants while the data were subjected to Thematic Analysis (TA). The study discovered that the major challenges of Ubuntugogy are that university stakeholders lack interest in indigenous knowledge production and its implementation, and that the stereotypical mentality of people hinders the proposition of ubuntugogy. While collaborative instruction and Africanisation of things are a dimension of promoting ubuntugogy in the university system, all stakeholders must collaborate to ensure that knowledge is all-inclusive and culturally valued to enhance students' participation.

***Keywords**: Pedagogy, modernity, ubuntugogy, rural universities, Africanised pedagogy*

INTRODUCTION

Perusing the current decoloniality movement in Africa and beyond, various allegations and counter-allegations have been made against the hegemony of the Western epistemological process imposed on the education system, especially in the teaching and learning process, otherwise called pedagogy. Among various decolonial arguments and propositions are the need to inject indigenous content into the teaching and learning process (Bangura, 2005), the need for university transformation, experiential knowledge construction and respect for socially inclined knowledge production that caters to students' social and cultural background (Crossman & Devisch, 2002; Breidlid, 2009; Lee, 2009; Ronoh, 2017). On the other hand, agitations have been made for curriculum reconstruction to accommodate local and indigenous environmentalism in order to ensure that the teaching-learning process is laced from the known to the unknown. This idea is a contest against the western structured process of knowledge that does not accommodate students' social, cultural and indigenous contradictions across board (Seleti & Kaya, 2013; Ezeanya-Esiobu, 2019; Madimabe, 2020). This study is limited to the trajectory

around the impotence of pedagogy, the westernised teaching-learning system, and the potency of ubuntugogy, an Africanised teaching-learning system that accommodates the injection of local, social and environmental knowledge into the process of knowledge generation.

Literature confirms that students in rurally located universities find it difficult to relate the classroom teaching process with their social and cultural backgrounds (Vaccarino, 2009; Smit, Hyry-Beihammer & Raggl, 2015; du Plessis & Mestry, 2019). Even most of the recommended textbooks, at the time, were embedded with foreign contents which are not directly related to the background and experience of the users (Duan, 2013). Knowledge in such textbooks is not indigenous; therefore, students find it difficult to relate them with their socio-cultural and environmental experiences. This lacuna forms the argument that pedagogy has not provided lasting solutions to the teaching and learning problem because of its unilateral power allotted to teachers/lecturers, thereby making them so powerful in the process of knowledge construction (Bangura, 2017). Featherstone (2020) argues that pedagogy also rendered students passive and independent. In such a pedagogical process, where students are rendered passive and left alone to construct knowledge from their lonesome spaces, the place of social, cultural and environmental influence becomes imminent. This trajectory may be connected with the deficiencies of the national curriculum and educational policies, which have been the yardstick for university planning and teaching objectives. It is linked to national directions because, in most cases, universities are there to implement national policies. The argument is that a national curriculum and educational policies to ameliorate the vacuum of curriculum reconstruction are fundamental and unavoidable in challenging anti-indigenous classroom construction. It further confirms that decoloniality in the education system, mostly in university classrooms, needs to be intensified.

Problematising the Hegemony of Pedagogy within Decoloniality

Decoloniality, as a concept, is a movement against the leftover of coloniality (decolonisation). Various scholars use the former as a force to erase the systematic colonisation bedevilling African systems (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2015; Dube, 2020), while the latter is the devil that must be challenged (Mignolo, 2011). These systems include the education sector and its agencies, such as higher institutions, and secondary and primary schools. However, decolonial agitations in the South African education system, according to Fataar (2018, p.vii), includes a call for an all-inclusive education approach that accommodates inter-cultural knowledge and the "heterodox of being human," which promotes openness in human beings. He further argues that such an approach will eradicate "knowledge parochialism" and decongest the idea of knowledge superiority. From this perspective, one could conceptualise decoloniality, according to the study, as an agitation against superiority in knowledge construction where students and all the participants share their responsibilities without power differential or knowledge imposition between the participants (teachers/lecturers and the students). Perhaps, this is what Davids (2018) means by a decolonised pedagogy with the potential to emancipate students from unethical colonial teaching. This also found its place in the argument of Aliakbari and Faraji (2011) that an emancipatory teaching and learning process empowers students to think critically in order to transform their academic predicaments for the better. Waghid (2018, p. 61) states that such self-decency is

participatory and allows students to develop a "sense of agency." Based on the above, one could say that a decolonial classroom process is fair, democratic, humane and expedient for the success and progress of university students.

Based on the above explorations, one could argue that university classrooms, most especially in the rurally located communities, are not yet decolonised, or better say, the agitation of decoloniality is still a concept that needs to be translated into reality. Grosser and Nel's (2013) argument supports the view that students lack the critical skill to think independently. That is, a lack of critical thinking skills is still prevalent in underdeveloped and developing countries. South African rural schools are not exceptions, as Rademeyer (2007) found out that students' lack of critical thinking skills is responsible for their poor academic performance.

Although language ability was also part of the extraneous variables responsible for poor performance (Howie, 2007), this has generated the unanswered question of whether students in South Africa are exposed to teaching practices that enhance their critical thinking abilities. This, perhaps, is why Hoffman, Duffield and Donoghue (2004), Lombard and Grosser (2004), and Grosser and Nel (2013) recommend that students should be made to acquire critical thinking skills to enable them to solve problems with reflective practice techniques. Based on this lacuna, one could deduce that the university teaching-learning space is yet to be decolonised, which necessitated the proposition to explore the potency of ubuntugogy as an Africanised teaching-learning system to unravel the decadence of modernity hidden under the implementation of teaching and learning space.

Ubuntugogy as a Theoretical Framework

Ubuntugogy, taking ahead of pedagogy, is a science of teaching and learning derived from an Africanised philosophy called Ubuntu (Bangura, 2017). Ubuntu, which precipitates humanity, love, compassion, oneness and kindness, informed the origin that defined the coinage of ubuntugogy (Bangura, 2005). Ubuntu, in its etymology, is traceable to many African languages and cultures such as Shona, IsiNdebele, IsiSwati/IsiSwazi, IsiXhosa, Yoruba and IsiZulu, which literarily means humanity and "being humane," fellowship, kindness, and brotherliness, among others (Samkange & Samkange, 1980; Mugumbate & Nyanguru, 2013; Omodan & Ige, 2021). It was seen to be peculiar to the African community (Tutu, 1999); perhaps this is why Omodan and Dube (2020) referred to ubuntu as Africanism. This also surfaces in the Zulu adage "umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu" meaning a person is a person through others (Lefa, 2015). The aphorism typified the saying that the existence of a human being is not for self alone but for others. That is, human beings are created because of others. This is not far from the argument that ubuntu believes that "I am because we are" (Lefa, 2015; Tsotetsi & Omodan, 2020). One could then deduce that ubuntu strengthens people's togetherness, mutualism, empathy, openness and commitment to one another. Perhaps, this is why Mthiyane and Mudadigwa (2021) concluded that ubuntu as a philosophy "goes beyond spiritual aspects which address the inner being and sensitivity in response to different situations."

Having explicated the origin of ubuntugogy as an extract from the Africanised philosophy of ubuntu, it is quintessential to conceptualise ubuntugogy, an educational paradigm that was first used exposed in 2005 as superior to pedagogy, andragogy, heutogogy and ergonagogy (Bangura, 2005). Pedagogy,

andragogy, heutogogy and ergonagogy, according to Ganyi and Owan (2016), were founded with reflection from multi-faceted and pluralistic background alien to Africanism. However, the superiority of ubuntugogy lies in the fact that it takes its principles from the existential viewpoint of ubuntu. The idea here is that if the ubuntu that gave birth to ubuntugogy, preaches oneness, togetherness, collaboration, cooperation and collectivism (Tutu, 1999, Samkange, 1980); one could then argue that ubuntugogy, is a teaching and learning system that take solace in collaborative learning which could be seen as a way to bridge the power differentials between teachers/lecturers, and students, as the case may be. This is practically one of the principles of ubuntu that every process of development is rooted in the collective responsibilities of all. This argument is corroborated by Ganyi and Owan (2016, p. 36) that the "model of traditional African knowledge dissemination system through communal education carried on by the narration of folktales, myths, legends and other traditional festival enactments that contain the wisdom of our traditional communities". Ubuntugogy, as an Africanised teaching and learning system, possesses the indigenous knowledge potency to proclaim people's culture and identities needed to unravel classroom issues.

As the theoretical framework of this study, ubuntugogy is relevant not only because it bridges the classroom power differentials but because it is relevant to decolonised societal ingenuity towards the educational advancement of African societies. The argument here is that modernity, which has dominated the core and periphery of university education, including its teaching and learning processes, portends the operational supremacy of Western epistemology. This pedagogical imposition of Western epistemology from its etymological and traditional views is expected to promote democratic education in its full flag. Ironically, the specie of democracy that exists in the experimentation of the same Western epistemology is being viewed as only a pseudo-democratic classroom hegemony invented along a complicated pedagogical contour, which must be challenged to pave the way for an indigenous process of knowledge construction. This argument is laced with decoloniality, focusing on ubuntugogy, defined as the science and art of teaching and learning underpinned by humanity, collaboration, togetherness, cooperation and Afrocentricism. ubuntugogy as a decolonised classroom technique is illuminated here to contest the hegemony of pedagogy (Western epistemology). Decoloniality in the context of Ubuntugogy agrees that the pedagogy of western epistemology is good, but it does not make the Africanised body of knowledge construction, knowledge process and knowledge development inferior or less good. Instead, ubuntugogy is better in the university classroom.

RESEARCH QUESTION

In order to unravel the potency of ubuntugogy as a teaching and learning decoloniality system, the following question was raised to guide the study:

- How can the views of lecturers and students on ubuntugogy be incorporated into university teaching and learning decoloniality strategies?

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

In order to answer the research question, the following research objectives were formulated to pilot the study. Therefore, the study:

- Explores the challenges hindering the use of humane and indigenous practices, otherwise regarded as ubuntugogy.

- Investigates the possible solutions that could enhance the potency of ubuntugogy in university classrooms.

METHODOLOGY

The study is located in the Transformative Paradigm (TP) informed by Participatory Research (PR). A convenient selection method was used to select participants. An unstructured interview was used to elicit information from the participants while the data were subjected to thematic analysis. Below is the methodological process.

Research Paradigm and Design

This study adopted a transformative paradigm to lens the study. This paradigm is relevant because its major assumption is transforming people's predicament from the status quo for the better (Mertens, 2017). Therefore, this study intends to emancipate university students from the colonial classroom hegemony into a transformed teaching-learning system where students' voices and ideas are recognised in knowledge generation. Besides, the epistemology and ontology informing the study can not be divorced from the historical nature of marginalisation (Chilisa, 2011) emanated from the existing pedagogical practices. Therefore, TP is relevant because it unlocks human beings into freedom (Scott & Usher, 2011). This paradigm could be argued as best for this study because its emancipatory mission challenges social incongruity by advocating for change in this study and education change through collaborative and cooperative practices (Shah & Al-Bargi, 2013). In order to implement the collaborative tendencies of the transformative paradigm, the study adopted Participatory Research as a research design. This design derived its principles from people's collaborative and participatory nature (the researcher and the researched). The design enables the researcher and the people facing the problem to work together jointly to find a solution (de Vos, Strydom, Founch & Delport, 2011). This design is relevant to the research process because it enables equal involvement and opportunities for other researchers and the researched. It also values the experiences and ideas of the people facing the problem under investigation. Hence, the selected lecturers and students were made co-researchers in this study, and their participation remained inclusive without discrimination.

Participants and Participants' Selection

The participants in the study were university students and lecturers. The selected students have at least two years of experience in the university setting. At the same time, the selected lecturers have at least two years of experience teaching and learning in the university community. The assumption here is that both the selected students and the lecturers might have gained enough experience to give them adequate knowledge regarding the use of Africanised teaching and learning, which is ubuntugogy. Since there is no special characteristic in the targeted participants, a convenient selection method was used to select both students and lecturers. This method was used because it enables the researcher to use easily approachable participants without any special rigour. This, perhaps, is why it is called the accidental sampling technique (Alvi, 2016).

Method of Data Collection and Data Collection Process

An electronic interview was adopted to elicit information from the selected participants. Electronic interviews such as email, WhatsApp and telephonic were employed to get information from the students and the lecturer. This method was appropriate because, at the time of the study, most of the universities in South Africa, including the selected university, still worked from home due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Hence, the

participants were not available on campus but could be reached electronically. A letter containing the problem, the purpose and the research question, including the design and paradigmatic lens, were sent to the participants. This was done to make them aware of the nitty-gritty of the study as co-researchers and they were made to respond to the interview question, which were derived from the objectives of the study. Some of them agreed to respond in writing, some gave a voice note, and others preferred to be called telephonically. Their responses were gathered, transcribed and collated within the principles of researcher ethics.

Data Analysis and Ethical Consideration

Thematic analysis (TA) was used to interpret the data collected from the participant through a participatory process. Thematic analysis is relevant to respond to the objectives of the study, which formed the interview questions. According to Keevash, Norman, Forrest and Mortimer (2018), TA allows researchers to categorise data into themes and sub-themes to ensure the coherent presentation of data. That is, the data collected were categorised into themes based on the study's objectives. Sub-themes also emerged from the larger themes. This process enabled the researcher to be better familiar with the data (Mohammadpur, 2013). To do this, six steps of doing thematic analysis propounded by Braun and Clarke (2006) were followed. They are: familiarisation with the transcribed data, coding the data, identifying the relevant themes, reviewing the themes, naming the themes, and producing the result (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Braun & Clarke, 2013). Ethics was also observed to protect the researcher's and participants' identities from potential harm (Dube, 2016). The researcher sought the participants' consent and ensured they were aware of the study process with no potential harm. They were informed that their participation was not under any force or obligation; therefore, they were allowed to decline or withdraw their participation at any time. Their identities were also protected with pseudonyms during the data analysis process. The participants were represented with the following codes: lecturers were L1, L2, L3, L4 and L5, while the students were S1, S2, S3, S4, and S5. The result is presented below.

Presentation and Data Analysis

The above-mentioned methodological process was implemented in this session. The data collected within the purview of the transformative paradigm were analysed using the Thematic Analysis. The data were presented in line with the study's objectives: to explore the challenges hindering the use of indigenous practices, otherwise regarded as Ubuntugogy, and investigate the possible solutions that could enhance the potency of Ubuntugogy in university classrooms. According to the data, each objective was categorised into two sub-themes; the sub-themes under objective 1 are stakeholders' lack of interest and stereotypical mentality. The sub-themes under objective 2 are collaborative instruction and Africanisation of things. See the table below for more clarity.

Table 1: Thematic representation of data based on the research question and objectives

Research Question: How can ubuntugogy be explored as an alternative to decolonise the university teaching and learning space?	
Objectives	**Analysis of Sub-themes**
To explore the challenges hindering the use of indigenous practices, otherwise regarded as ubuntugogy.	1. Stakeholders' lack of interest 2. Stereotypical mentality
To investigate the possible solutions that could enhance the potency of ubuntugogy in university classrooms.	1. Collaborative instruction 2. Africanisation of things

Objective 1, theme 1: Stakeholders' lack of interest

Based on the data collected, the indication exists that stakeholders such as students and educators demonstrate a lack of interest in implementing indigenous knowledge systems in schools, mostly in universities. Ngulube, Dube and Mhlongo (2015) also confirmed that the university system in Southern Africa is yet to be decolonised because the local content in the knowledge production has been neglected to nothing. The current study also confirms the trajectory and these suffixes in the following participants' statements:

> ***L1:*** *"Ubuntugogy being what it is (an indigenous method of teaching) is presumed to be bedevilled by many local obstacles even from within as not all scholars (local) agree to the processes/steps embedded in the method."*
>
> ***L2:*** *"Lecturer's interest or otherwise, goes a long way in stampeding the effective utilisation of indigenous teaching-learning process."*
>
> ***L3:*** *"… once there's no mutual agreement between the main actors of the indigenous teaching/learning process, the take-off suffers a major setback, which has been observed in the past. Even many of those indigenous processes are not explainable."*
>
> ***S2:*** *"The other thing that hinders is the fixed mindset of educators, especially those who are old and do not want to retire."*

L1's statement confirms that many scholars, including university lecturers, might not agree with implementing the indigenous method of teaching that accommodates local and environmental knowledge in the teaching-learning process. This appears to be an issue when the supposed implementers disagree with the proposition of ubuntugogy in the system. This, perhaps, is why L2 said that the interest of the lecturers is sacrosanct in the process. It is not far from L3's experiences and observations that the place of agreement among the actors, the lecturers and other classroom practitioners is not negotiable in implementing ubuntugogy. L3 also reiterated that many of those indigenous

contents are not explainable. In our opinion, this could be why stakeholders differ in the implementation process. Not only this, but S2 also argued that the mindset of the educators is not also fixed into the current hegemony of pedagogy and probably does not see any reason for the deviation. To further justify this, the issue of interest among stakeholders is a challenge, and the following participants have these to say.

> *S5: "I think that one of the major challenges is the curriculum/content itself. What we are learning is mostly based on research from European countries and as students, we cannot relate to what the lecturer teaches. Only a few modules capture local and indigenous content, but it does not accommodate all students."*
>
> ***S3:*** *"Then, indigenous practices are left with nobody to support. Lecturers are the drivers at the tertiary level to ensure that the knowledge and information are transferred in a well-mannered form from generation to generation. So, if lecturers ignore our indigenous practices and their invaluable knowledge, the students will also regard them as ineffective because students will imitate what they observed from their lecturers."*

As an abstract stakeholder in teaching and learning, the curriculum also has its own share of the challenges of ubuntugogy. This was reflected by participant S5 above that the curriculum is designed to accommodate the westernisation of knowledge ahead of localised knowledge. Thus, the participants also recognised that few modules are designed to promote indigenous knowledge. This indicates that the implementation of ubuntugogy is implementable, though it may take the concerted effort of stakeholders to make it happen. S3's statement also stated the importance of lecturers in implementing ubuntugogy and that if lecturers continue to disrespect the local system, this attitude will also inform the students' actions and may be passed from generation to generation.

Objective 1, theme 2: Stereotypical mentality

The unethical stereotypical mentality is a situation in Africa where people do not value their own product and production process. This is not far from the fact that Africans have been made to believe that westernised or imported knowledge is better than self-made or indigenously made knowledge. Perhaps, this is what Mitova (2020) intends to unravel to pave the way for the trustworthiness of Africanised knowledge. The participants' statements below demonstrate a mentality among university classroom participants that localised knowledge is not valued.

> ***S1:*** *".... because we people who are in authority to rule what is right and wrong about the way teaching has revolutionised their lifestyles in a way that they think everyone should try to evolve to what they imagine as civilised."*
>
> ***L4:*** *"Secondly, people do not trust or value what was and think it is outdated. This means that the ways that were followed before are not adaptable to our current lives. For instance, back then, corporal punishment was allowed in schools and now it is impossible to do it."*
>
> ***L5:*** *"Students cannot relate to the teaching content because there is a lot of negativity from people who do not understand the*

> *importance of learning in some local communities. If you display what you have learnt in an indigenous way, you will be bullied."*
> ***S5**: "The environment, in general, is negative as there is a lot of bullying or threats made to students in case they reveal their social and local experiences."*

Deducing from the statement made by S1, it is believed that people in the teaching profession who have learned from the Westernised system mostly believe that the Westernised system is the civilised one that must also be adopted and continued. S4 also corroborates S1 that the introduction of indigenous knowledge is outdated and, therefore, it does not value it, emphasising the previously used method of instilling discipline in children, which has been taken away by the assumed civilisation. In the same vein, S5 also corroborates the argument that students find it difficult to promote and relate learning to their indigenous lives because such students will be tagged local and primitive. This still boils down to the fact that people valued westernised knowledge systems because of the attachment of assumed civility. S5's statement also corroborates the above statements and argument that a display of local knowledge construction attracts bullying and unclosed stereotype among learners. S5 further confirms that society does not, to some extent, support the promotion of the indigenous knowledge system.

Objective 2, theme 1: Collaborative Instruction

The data collected based on the second objective is presented below. The participants' statement indicates that the full implementation of collaborative instruction will go a long way in ensuring indigenous knowledge practices, otherwise called ubuntugogy. The idea of a collectivising effort is not far from the principle of ubuntu; that human beings are created because of others (Lefa, 2015) from the belief that "I am because we are" (Tsotetsi & Omodan, 2020). These statements below show the importance of collaborative instructions as a solution to the challenges of ubuntugogy in rural universities:

> ***L1:** "Promoting a common ground on which all scholars/major actors of the teaching-learning process would agree to start the new method would go a long way in helping the process as it is meant to ameliorate the problems being encountered by students in the classroom.*
> ***L2:** "Critical social engagement and knowledge related to real-life events which will encourage critical/reflective thinking as what is learnt in class can be related to what is happening to the individual learner in the society/environment in which they live."*
> ***L4:** "The techniques and procedures of operationalising teaching and learning in the universities must be easy, collaborative, and reflective to accommodate students' environmental experience and lifestyle."*
> ***L3:** "In our classroom, we could have embraced different cultures; we also need to give our students a voice in their learning and allow them to share their experiences; classrooms should allow for freedom of expression."*
> ***S4:** "Lecturers should consolidate local ways of knowing and*

> *teaching in their work. Local environment and community resources should be used on a standard premise to interface what they teach to the ordinary lives of the students; this will help students in their critical thinking as they will be focusing on what happens daily."*

The statement from L1 indicates that the major actors, such as students and lecturers, probably other stakeholders in the university system, need a concerted effort to ensure that students are exposed to an all-encompassing indigenous knowledge. To support the above, L2 also recommended that a critical social engagement where students will be allowed to relate classroom activities to life events is needed with an assumption that it will assist students in overcoming the problem of a lack of critical thinking abilities. L4's statement also reiterated the place of a collaborative and reflective method of teaching where students' environmental experiences and lifestyles will be accommodated in the process. L3 also supported the above by recommending that learning should be done so that students' voices would matter. This commonality, as argued by the participants, according to S4, is not limited to the classroom alone but also extends to the utilisation of the environmental and community resources in the teaching exemplification with the assumption that it will assist students in thinking critically. This confirms that the implementation of ubuntugogy is limitless to students and lecturers; all stakeholders are involved. See the statements below:

> ***S1:*** *"Collaboration amidst diversities will help students upgrade or even be more competitive in class as well as in some topics, and their different cultures will be included. Lecturers should work closely with guardians to realise a high level of complementary instructive expectations between domestic and school and lastly recognise the full educational potential for each student and give challenges vital for them to realise that potential."*
>
> ***S3:*** *"Teachers should come up with topics that will help students easily engage in class, like creating a topic of cultural or maybe social differences. This will help students come up with ideas or solutions to the states they live in, solutions that they think might help them better understand the content."*

The statement made by S1 is a clear indication that collectivism and collaborative knowledge construction remain a style that could be used to implement and sustain ubuntugogy in the university system. According to him, this will enable them to identify various diversities and cultural differences with a complementary instructional method from parents, students, and universities. To support this, S3 also recommended that university classrooms be structured to enable students to engage with themselves from various diversities, such as cultural and social differences. According to S3, *"this will help students come up with ideas or solutions to the states they live in and solutions that they think might help them better understand the content."*

Objective 2, theme 2: Africanisation of things

The second solution provided by the participants is the Africanisation of issues, things and the process of making things. This means that Africans should start thinking and using their knowledge system to ameliorate issues. This may be why Davids (2018) suggested decolonising knowledge by promoting Africanised epistemology.

Africanised epistemology is not far from the agitation of ubuntugogy where local and cultural values are intuited in knowledge production. These statements also corroborate the argument:

> ***S2:*** *"I am not an expert in implementation, but I think we should look into those old pedagogical ways and transform them to fit into our society, like basing our knowledge in Africa because Africa is rich in many things and yet it is painted with a brush of being barbaric."*
> ***S5:*** *"…however, if we can get our economy on track...Universities will be able to increase the number of lecturers who offer local content in different languages with expertise in curriculum refinement. And they will get people who will translate the foreign content into African languages."*
> ***L1:*** *"Lets us go back to our roots (azibuyele emasisweni); instead of modifying Western tradition, let us praise our African identity. Let us be proud of our Africanity; other practices may be oppressing but we are the ones who should modify them to make it fit into our current life."*
> ***S3:*** *"Lecturers and teachers should stop ignoring these practices and pay more attention to them and their usefulness. Once our lecturers change their mindset and attitude, then our African practices will remain alive forever."*
> ***L5:*** *"We need to liberate and cherish our spirit and practices every day. We are Africans, not Westerners, so our classroom behaviour should reflect African identity, not Western, especially when making examples in class."*

When asked to share a possible solution to ubuntugogy, S2 recommends that the teaching-learning system be transformed and redirect the knowledge process to take solace in Africanism because Africa is rich in knowledge. S5's statement also supported the need to translate local content into learnable content towards curriculum refinement. It suggested that experts are needed to translate foreign content into an African language. Perhaps, the participants viewed ubuntugogy as having a language problem. L1 also suggested Africans' need to return to their roots instead of modifying Western tradition. This may mean that Africans must explore their hidden values and inject them into the knowledge production process. S3 also suggested that African practices need more attention from scholars. In the same vein, L5 recommended that liberation from coloniality towards cherishing indigenous practices is needed to implement Ubuntugogy.

DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS

Based on the above data presentation and analysis, the following findings emerged. The findings were presented according to the two objectives. The findings under the first objectives are stakeholders' lack of interest and the stereotypical mentality of people. At the same time, the findings under the second objective are collaborative instruction Africanisation of things.

Stakeholders' lack of interest

Based on the above data, one could deduce that the stakeholders' lack of interest is a major challenge to the smooth and acceptable promotion of ubuntugogy in the university system, especially in the rural ecology of South Africa, where the system is needed most. This finding is practically against ubuntu's proposition, which preaches oneness, togetherness, collaboration,

cooperation, and collectivism (Tutu, 1999; Samkange, 1980) among communal endeavours. This finding contradicts Fataar's (2018, p. vii) argument that a decolonised agitation in South Africa should include an all-inclusive education approach that accommodates inter-cultural knowledge, the "heterodox of being human" promotes openness in human beings. In the same vein, perhaps, this is why Gunstone (2008) recommended an unavoidable implementation of the indigenous knowledge curriculum. Moahi (2012), in his research, also recommended that indigenous knowledge production must be made compulsory for first-year students.

Stereotypical mentality

Based on the above data analysis, it has been confirmed that the stereotypical mentality is a challenge to developing and promoting an Africanised knowledge system. This finding confirms that the university system in Africa needs to be transformed and decolonised (le Grange, du Preez, Ramrathan & Blignaut, 2020; Mitova, 2020). This transformation is not limited to teaching and learning but also promotes an ingenious knowledge system where students will relate their environmental happenings, culture and value with classroom activities (Macqueen, 2019). This finding, however, negates the argument that decolonised pedagogy poses the potential to emancipate students from unethical colonial teaching. Therefore, there is a need to introduce ubuntugogy, where classroom hegemony will be reduced to humanity to emancipate students and their predicament regarding lagging in gaining critical thinking skills.

Collaborative instruction

Based on the above analysis, it was discovered that collaborative effort among all the stakeholders, whether in the teaching and learning process and the administrative and social engagement, is vital to implementing ubuntugogy in the university system. It is consistent with Omodan and Tsotetsi's (2020) findings that engagement and team spirit towards productivity are practical ways of ensuring classroom decoloniality. They are tantamount to the indigenous practices aimed to ensure ubuntugogy as a means of decoloniality. The finding also conforms with the principles of ubuntu that preach unity of purpose, collaboration, oneness, togetherness, mutualism, empathy, openness and commitment to one another, which "goes beyond the spiritual aspects of being, rather the sensitivity in response to different situations" (Samkange, 1980; Mthiyane & Mudadigwa, 2021). Perhaps, this could be argued to have complemented Aliakbari and Faraji's (2011) emancipatory teaching and learning process, which enhances students' critical thinking skills.

Africanisation of things

Based on the above analysis, we found out that the Africanisation of things is a way to promote ubuntugogy in the university system. This finding aligns with Hountondji (2002) that Africans must continue to see things in Africanised ways. It also supports Seleti and Kaya (2013), who argue that Africans must start to promote African products, including recognising an indigenous epistemology that could be regarded as a process of Ubuntugogy. This, according to Seleti and Kaya (2013), Ezeanya-Esiobu (2019), and Madimabe (2020), will challenge the Western structured process of knowledge, which does not accommodate the social, cultural and indigenous contradistinctions of students across the board. Therefore, when the contradictions and contradictions along with students' cultural hegemony are recognised before, during and after knowledge

production, it will enhance their criticalness towards emancipation.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study was akin to ensuring that ubuntugogy is promoted among university stakeholders in order to ensure that all learners are accommodated in the process of knowledge construction. This was done by expositing the challenges of ubuntugogy as an Africanised teaching and learning system to provide viable solutions to the challenges. Based on the findings, it was concluded that the major challenges are stakeholders' lack of interest in the indigenous knowledge production and its implementation and the stereotypical mentality of people hindering the proposition of ubuntugogy. Therefore, collaborative instruction and the Africanisation of things promote Ubuntugogy in the university system. Based on this, this study recommends that all stakeholders must ensure that there is a collaborative effort that knowledge is all-inclusive and culturally valued to enhance students' interest in making African knowledge worthwhile and superior in the university system. Lastly, further studies could be initiated to explore possible correlations between ubuntugogy curriculum reform.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The author declares no conflict of interest whatsoever.

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The Virtual Classroom: Challenges of COVID-19 Pandemic in Accounting Subject Classrooms in the Eastern Cape Province, South Africa

Melikhaya Skhephe
School of Commerce and Social Studies in Education
North-West University
Potchefstroom Campus
Corresponding author:Sikepemk@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

The COVID-19 pandemic issues in South Africa's Eastern Cape area are discussed in the study. The article uses a case study layout as part of its qualitative study approach. To collect the data, semi-structured interviews were used. The selection of the ten accounting teachers was deliberate. The examination of the data was thematic. The article details the difficulties triggered by the COVID-19 pandemic in the Accounting field, including infrastructure, data accessibility and lack of readiness for the virtual classroom. Educators of Accounting subjects are advised by the study not to view their work as routine business. The Network industry should participate with the departments of education to resolve data, connectivity, and convenience challenges so that virtual classroom learning is supported. All educators should be persuaded to participate in numerous types of online seminars after the COVID-19 to develop.

Keywords: *Accounting classroom; challenges; COVID-19; online teaching; teaching and learning*

INTRODUCTION

Dhama, Sharun, Tiwari, Dadar, Malik, Singh, and Chaicumpa (2020) claim that, in 2019 in Wuhan, Hubei Province of China, the Covid-19 strain of coronavirus started as pneumonia of unknown origins and that it has since spread to far too many other nations. In the past few decades, attempts have been made to create vaccines to protect against human coronavirus (CoV) diseases like MERS and SARS, according to Dhama et al. (2020). Despite extensive attempts by WHO and governments to restrict the illness, COVID-19 virus has spread to 188 nations and 25 territories worldwide since its discovery in November 2019 (Anon, 2020a; Anon, 2020b). This is mostly because the virus is extremely contagious. 10,533,779 cases and 512,842 deaths have been documented globally as of 2 July 2020 (World Health Organisation, 2020). As of 2 July 2020 (Anon, 2020), the number of contaminated patients has dramatically increased, with a 7-day turning standard of 210, 209 cases a day. SARS-CoV-2, a highly contagious virus, often spreads by direct human contact, respiratory aerosols, and fomites (Anon, 2020a). Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) (2020) have established creative methods to stop the increase of the infection, including public seclusion, individual cleanliness, repeated hand cleaning or disinfecting with spirits-established hand-sanitizers, banning all appearance contact of any kind, and disinfecting surfaces These measures can prevent people from becoming infected. Global health emergency status has been given to the pandemic coronavirus epidemic because it has become shocking and disturbing in every way (Dhama et al. 2020). Due to the Fourth Industrial Revolution, there was a call for Bangkok, Thailand to adopt the usage of modern Information Communication Technology facilities in the education and other sectors prior to the COVID-19 outbreak. Some institutions are still having difficulty implementing this call, especially in nations with low resources (Adu et al., 2020). As a result, the breakout of COVID-19 caused enormous confusion at these institutions,

which were forced to abandon face-to-face teaching in support of virtual learning (UNESCO, 2020). South Africa is a growing nation with sluggish growth caused by poverty, unemployment, and illiteracy (Skhephe, 2022). The abrupt transfer to online learning due to the Covid-19 epidemic, which has an impact on students' performance, is one of the side effects of the pandemic in the Accounting classroom. According to Zarret (2020), the COVID-19 epidemic disrupted Accounting instruction because the move to online learning came at a hefty expense. Due to the exorbitant expense, students have missed out on the classroom. However, there have been several difficulties with Accounting education throughout the current crisis that may have an impact on the effectiveness of the results. This covers the evaluation process for students, instructor efficacy, digitizing Accounting education, as well as instructional time and techniques. During the crisis, students in Accounting classes have faced a lot of uncertainty and stress related to their work (Sangster, Greg, Stoner & Flood, 2020). Additionally, throughout the pandemic, Accounting professors had to deal with a lack of institutional support, a lack of knowledge or competency with online learning platforms and tools, worries about the wellbeing of students, and issues linked to technology. Because of this, several schools still struggle to provide modern technology infrastructure and an internet connection, which makes using 4IR tools a challenge. However, some schools are well off when it comes to using 4IR, therefore throughout this time of COVID-19, virtual learning runs almost without a hitch. Considering this context, the author sought to examine the difficulties posed by the COVID-19 pandemic in Accounting classes in South Africa's Eastern Cape.

RESEARCH QUESTION

The focal examination problem being tackled in the study is:

What are the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic in Accounting Subject Classrooms in the Eastern Cape Province, South Africa?

Sub-research question

- What challenges do Accounting teachers encounter during the COVID-19 pandemic?
- How does the COVID-19 pandemic affect implementation of virtual classrooms in the teaching of Accounting?
- What are the benefits of Accounting virtual classrooms during and after COVID-19 pandemic?

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Virtual Classroom

Virtual learning is described by Gallacher (2015) as an online system that allows teachers to provide learning resources and connect with their pupils online. Rachiva (2018) and Ferriman (2019) concur with Gallacher and add that, because synchronous learning occurs in both, the virtual classroom and traditional face-to-face teaching are closely related. Everyone participates in learning simultaneously in a process known as synchronous learning (Racheva, 2018; Ferriman, 2019). They only vary in approach because a simulated classroom is a collaborative online learning space where professors and students work side by side. Video recorder conferencing, an online whiteboard (for real-time collaboration), instant messaging capabilities, contribution limits, and getaway rooms are frequently used in the simulated classroom learning process (Racheva, 2018). In addition, Moodle and Blackboard are involved (Gallacher, 2015). Students must be introduced to independent learning and the 4IR practice, which are fundamental requirements for this type of learning. The online learning method, which will be

covered in this essay, may provide difficulties for developing nations like South Africa. A virtual learning environment (VLE), corresponding to Loureiro and Bettencourt (2014), is a gathering of teaching and learning resources created to improve pupils' learning skills by integrating computers and the Internet. Since all students were required to have laptops during the lockdown period, the use of online instruction became a common alternative. This is a significant hardship for pupils from low-income families. Even though not all the institutions were prepared for virtual learning, South Africa did not fall behind. Laptops and the internet are mostly used in the learning process with a VLE (Loureiro & Bettencourt, 2014). It is envisioned to improve pupils' learning experiences by encouraging them to take ownership of their education outside of the traditional classroom setting. According to Latif (2016), e-learning is flourishing in the numerical age of education because it allows for richer interaction and engagement between professors and students for successful learning. Teachers can exchange links to internet resources with students, embed YouTube videos, share articles with them, and set up podcasting platforms using a VLE.

Benefits of the virtual classroom

Since the twenty first century is characterised by the quick administering of technology, the area of teaching has no alternative but then, to embrace the virtual classroom if it wants to keep up (Sangrà, Vlachopoulos & Cabrera, 2012). The advantages of using a virtual classroom, according to Sangrà, Vlachopoulos and Cabrera, include the capacity to instantly offer knowledge, everywhere and at any time. Smythe (2012) claims that when the virtual teaching space is used properly, mixed learning can be facilitated. According to Alajmi (2013), all societies are trying to change into e-learning communities on a global scale. Alajmi states that virtual teaching space can help learners gain the knowledge, skills, and expertise they need to navigate the world's constant change and make a positive impact on society. In a virtual classroom, talent may be produced that will help students enter the global market and enhance their lives, according to Kiilu and Muema (2012). Additionally, Kiilu and Muema note that pupils who study through technology exhibit increased creativity, motivation, and a desire to push their limits. Many students can even go on to become technology designers, which enables them to contribute to the output and productivity of their nation. Keramati, Afshari-Mofrad, and Kamrani (2011) observe that early integration of e-learning into the educational system has led to many technological advancements and gains in many industrialised countries. These advancements are a direct outcome of the usage of innovative technology.

Challenges of Virtual Classrooms during COVID-19

Mehtar, et al. (2020) state that on March 11, 2020, the World Health Organization designated the Coronavirus of 2019 to be an epidemic. Following the declaration, there was discontent, and fear spread, which led to significant changes everywhere. Worldwide, several severe measures were implemented, including complete lockdown, campaigns urging people to stay at home to preserve lives, and travel and movement restrictions (Skhephe & Matashu, 2021). Additionally, all schools in South Africa were instructed to close, and students, instructors, and some non-teaching staff members whose services were not necessary were given the go-ahead to work from home. Due to this approach, all educational institutions were forced to adopt online learning (Adu et al. 2020). The leader of the nation, Mr. Ramaphosa, and education experts emphasised the idea of developing alternate methods of using online teaching and learning and other distance learning methods (Jacob, Abigeal

& Lydia, 2020). For the first time ever in South Africa, face-to-face teaching contact sessions were discontinued in favour of online instruction (Jacob, Abigeal & Lydia, 2020). Due to the socioeconomic circumstances present in South Africa, where most students come from underprivileged families and consequently cannot afford data to access the internet unless provided cost-free, online instruction will never be very effective in this country (Adu et al. 2020).

Internet connectivity challenges

In many schools in impoverished countries, the absence of internet connectivity is a major obstacle (Jacob, Abigeal & Lydia, 2020). The growth of an information society depends on having access to the internet and enough bandwidth (Clement, 2020). According to Clement (2020), insufficient broadband approach is preventing extensive internet use in public schools and other spheres of daily life. However, for access to be effective, it must also be inexpensive for both schools and individuals, and for instructors and pupils to effectively use a variety of platforms, they must develop their digital literacy and other skills. Educators and learners must locate and use regionally relevant materials and content because not all internet content is necessarily appropriate. According to Santos (2016), the internet offers high-quality education in many ways, providing doors to a plethora of knowledge, information, and learning assets, and enhancing users' ability to learn both inside and outside of the classroom. Santos (2016) makes the additional observation that, although learners use online resources to broaden their horizons of knowledge, teachers use them to plan classes. Internet-based interactive teaching techniques enable teachers to focus more on the needs of specific students while fostering group studying (Santos, 2016).

Lack of virtual classroom platforms in South African schools

Due to the pervasive use of Web 2.0 or "soft software," such as Sakai and DrupalEd, Moodle, Blackboard, TurnItIn, and many more, most schools in the United Kingdom are virtual education environments (VLEs) (Beetham & Sharpe, 2007). VLEs are a part of web-based software that gives educators the capability to quickly conduct online searches for certain subjects. Such learning environments typically feature a chat room, an online debate board, daily notices, and online tests with explicit instructions outlining what pupils need to do while completing (and then submitting) such tests (Beetham & Sharpe, 2007). Educators can access and display syllabus-related data through multiple platforms, as well as track their pupils' activity in the VLE (Beetham & Sharpe, 2007). These platforms give access to several integrated resources for both educators and pupils, enabling the former to direct learning while the latter are studying and to choose the most effective methods of teaching and learning a particular subject even before either side enters the classroom (Beetham & Sharpe, 2007). E-learning systems are quickly turning into a crucial component of 21st-century teaching and learning processes, as Pituch and Lee (2006) note.

Technology readiness index (TRI)

Parasuraman and Colby (2015) note that a technology willingness index can be used to assess the effectiveness of technology-based learning (TRI). However, it should be noted that an individual's cardinal skills may affect his or her state of mind. Such an index assesses the amount to which individuals adapt and use technology, mostly based on their state-of-mind readiness, to this persistence, Parasuraman and Colby (2015) define four factors—optimism, innovativeness, discomfort, and insecurity—that each

institution or person must consider before introducing any form of e-learning. These factors are discussed below. In the TRI, Optimism is defined as the presence of a positive mindset, particularly the conviction that, by utilising technology, one may achieve intended goals (Hennessy, Harrison, & Wamakote, 2010). Optimism raises learner engagement levels and can enhance students' outcomes and digital abilities (Partin & Lauderdale, 2013). In the context of the TRI, Innovation is defined as behaviours such as being the first in a cohort to buy technology, demonstrating a commitment to execute and use technology, and constantly seeking out information about new technologies (Falloon, 2013). Thus, an inventive person is one who actively engages with information sources to learn about emerging technologies and the effects they are anticipated to have on society and education. Discomfort, in the setting of the TRI, is in testimony when individuals battle, for example, to comprehend how technology is used (Ifenthaler & Schweinbenz, 2013) and they struggle to adopt such novelties. In this article, the authors sought to establish whether learners experience Discomfort based on being unable to use technology for its educational benefits.

Insecurity is seen because of mistrust based on, for example, concerns about security and privacy Irritation and uncertainty can impact both learners and educators' experiences of technology and reduce the possible value of technology diffusion.

Teachers' roles in supporting the virtual classroom

Virtual learning necessitates the use of the internet both within and outside of the classroom, which may help with the development of strategies for switching from the traditional technique of teaching to more contemporary ones (online). Teachers must take on new roles and duties during this process, some of which may be shared by multiple people (Fowler & Mayes, 2004). According to Fowler and Mayes, an online course might, for instance, have the following features:

- A teacher who consistently uses the best technologies to produce an engaging curriculum.
- An e-learning instructor who acts as a class assistant and oversees keeping up with the conversation on a daily basis.
- A teacher who is tasked with carrying out administrative duties as well as supervising students' work and offering direction while they engage in practical tasks.
- A neutral moderator who has been invited by the school to evaluate the sincerity of the students' efforts.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The Connectivism hypothesis is used in the text. The theory known as Connectivism describes how connectivity in classrooms gives students the chance to explore and develop new learning possibilities, as well as for users to exchange information via the Internet. To suggest a wider and more comprehensive structure for learning in today's "open" and "connected" learning environment, which is made possible by interactive Web 2.0 technology, Siemens' (2005) Theory of Connectivism combines elements of cognitivism and constructivism. The core tenet of the connectivism approach is that learning happens not only individually but also in groups that use the internet and engage in peer-to-peer interaction. Learning is made more enjoyable, talents are fostered, and students work at their own pace and on their own schedules without feeling compelled to learn, when connectivity is fully operational and performing at its peak. According to Siemens' idea, the teacher's role in connectivism is to lead students in the classroom by simply responding to any pertinent questions they may have, mostly

leaving the network to support students' learning. Before sharing their knowledge with their classmates in the classroom, pupils are also encouraged to independently research topics online. According to this theory, learning allows people to blend their prior experiences, needs, emotions, and experientially acquired knowledge into the present-day process of learning. This theory was chosen since it allows a community of people to legitimise what they are doing, so knowledge can be spread more quickly through multiple communities. Furthermore, this theory is used to underpin the study since it empowers teachers, by means of shifting the learning responsibilities from the teachers to the learners.

METHODOLOGY

Research paradigm

This article employed interpretivism. It was selected because it used an interview plan and a qualitative method (Creswell, 2014). Interpretivism is linked to subjectivity and many realities, according to Creswell. This paradigm frequently examines problems from the perspective of personal experience (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011). Their results are frequently localised to certain settings and conditions rather than being generalisable to entire populations (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011). Observations, document and narrative analysis, case studies, interviews, and audio-visual sources are all used by interpretivism to collect data. They discuss their results in extended descriptions (Cohen et al. 2011; Creswell, 2014).

Research approach

To define, recognise, and comprehend the human phenomenon, relationships and discourse in this paper, a qualitative research approach was applied. According to Creswell (2014), qualitative research is most helpful in addressing queries about what, why and how of specific events. By using a range of research techniques, the researcher will be able to develop narrative solutions to the research questions created for this inquiry (Maree, 2015).

Research design

An analysis of case study research was used in the publication. A case study, as explained by Maree (2013), is a form of qualitative evaluation that concentrates on offering a thorough explanation of one or more enquiries.

Sample/sampling techniques

The article's sample included 10 Accounting educators. These educators were specifically chosen for the investigation since they were the sources of the information required. Situated in the Eastern Cape Province of South Africa, they were chosen from among 5 high schools.

Data-collection techniques/Instrument

Semi-structured interviews were performed to gather information from the individuals. Participants were nevertheless contacted by telephone for the interviews because of COVID-19 restrictions. The participants were questioned about their thoughts on the difficulties of using online accounting courses in South Africa during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Ethical Consideration

The author first sought permission from the university at which she was enrolled, followed by the provincial office of the Department of Education for access to the author's target schools.

Data Trustworthiness

Maree (2015) reaffirms that data trustworthiness is a credibility or stakeholder check as well as consistency checking (having another coder use the type

descriptions to discover the content that belongs in those categories, for instance). According to Creswell (2013), trustworthiness refers to conclusions that are eligible for consideration. The research complied with Creswell's (2013) list of the four qualities of qualitative research, which are reliability, confirmability, authentication, and transferability. Here, the author stressed that there was no bias in the data collection process.

Data analysis

Data analysis is the procedure of condensing and analysing the gathered information such that a "narrative" emerges (Kawulich, 2009). Themes derived from the study questions were used to analyse the interviews. Since the interviews were recorded, transcription of the data from the recordings was the initial stage in data analysis. This made it easier for the researcher to engage deeply with the data. The participants' firsthand accounts and written transcriptions were combined.

Ethical considerations

Approval was requested and received from the acting Superintendent General to carry out the research in the Eastern Cape Province. Before they took part, participants had the chance to give informed consent after having been fully told about the details of voluntary participation, informed consent, confidentiality, anonymity, non-maleficence, and the advantage of the investigation to them.

Limitations

Finance was a major constraint in this paper because the writer was completely reliant on and utilising their own funds to carry out the study because they were not supported by any financial sponsors. Geographical restrictions were another major barrier because the research was only done in one province and not the whole nation. Although the authors were willing to travel across the nation to conduct this study and collect data from other regions of the nation, they were not capable of doing so for financial reasons.

Results and Discussion

Coded Information about the participants

In this article, interviews with 10 samples totalling 10 Accounting teachers were conducted. T1 stands for teacher number 1, T2 for teacher number 2, T3 for teacher number 3, etc. The three research questions led to the creation of themes.

Theme 1: Challenges confronted in accounting classrooms during COVID-19 pandemic.

The teachers' responses are listed below. The teachers all concurred that there are difficulties they confront in the accounting classroom during the Covid-19 pandemic since there is no face-to-face instruction because Covid-19 regulations forbid any physical contact.

T1: "To implement Virtual classroom learning is a challenge to me even today. Remember when it comes to teaching, teachers are only aware of face-face method. Now I am expected to quickly shift to online teaching without being properly prepared; that is the big problem. At the same time, I must make sure I am protected from the pandemic and that alone is strenuous to me".

T3: "I doubt if the is any learner who was aware and ready for the virtual classroom as they are also used to face-to-face just like teachers. In that way you must make sure that learners are properly prepared for a virtual classroom; in our case our learners were never prepared for it, and it means it is pointless as a teacher to say let's have virtual classroom while learners don't know anything about it".

T4 "Data accessibility is a big problem in the implementation of a virtual classroom. When issues of data

have been sorted then teachers can start to roll out virtual classroom learning".

T 6: "Student connectivity and data are still hindering online learning in South Africa".

These results support the assertion made by Adu et al. (2020), who claim that, as most students in South Africa originate from underprivileged homes and cannot afford data to access the internet unless provided, online instruction will never be very effective here. As pointed out by Jacob, Abigeal, and Lydia (2020), a significant barrier in many schools in impoverished countries is a lack of internet connectivity. The results go counter to Siemens' (2005) assertions that when connectivity is fully operational and performing at its best, learning is more enjoyable, talents are fostered, and students work at their own pace and in their own time without being pressured to learn. According to Clement (2020), the growth of an information society depends on having access to the internet and sufficient bandwidth. The widespread use of the internet in education and other spheres of life is further hindered by the absence of broadband connectivity. According to Santos (2016), the internet, which is required for the implementation of virtual classrooms, offers high-quality education in many ways. It opens doors to a wealth of knowledge, information, and educational resources and increases users' opportunities to learn both inside and outside of the classroom. Santos (2016) makes the further observation that although learners use online resources to broaden their horizons of knowledge, teachers use them to plan classes. Internet-based interactive teaching techniques enable teachers to focus more on the needs of specific students while fostering group learning (Santos, 2016). Santo's findings concur with Siemens' thesis that the role of the instructor in the classroom should primarily consist of supporting students' learning by responding to important questions they may have.

Theme 2: COVID-19 pandemic impacted the application of virtual classrooms in the teaching of accounting.

The teachers' responses are listed below. All the participants concurred that COVID-19 had an impact on the deployment of virtual learning because neither the virtual classroom nor the pandemic had adequate preparation.

T2 "In my case I was totally unprepared for virtual classroom since I am used to face-to-face, and when the education officials were opting for virtual classrooms, my attentions were only focused on the pandemic since I was so shocked to see many deaths".

T 5: "COVID-19 disturbed me badly to put my focus on how to implement the virtual classroom. I was never so afraid of a virus like the way I was afraid of COVID-19. As a result, I am still not enlightened on how to implement the virtual classroom since the time to learn how to implement it was disturbed by the pandemic".

T 7: "Teaching of Accounting and the implementation of virtual classrooms was disturbed by the arrival of COVID-19. Teaching and learning were disturbed, implementation of new innovative approaches of teaching our learners were all affected. Otherwise, the virtual classroom is the good thing to implement especially in the 4IR".

T 10: To me Corona Virus has deprived us of a chance to learn new pioneering ways of teaching our learners. Remember when you implement new dimensions like virtual learning, you need to prepare both the teachers and the learners so that the online learning can happen smoothly. Now there was not time to do all those things due to the pandemic and everyone was afraid of the pandemic, meaning there was no time to learn about online

learning other than to learn on how to protect yourself from the Virus".

These results align with those of Adu et al. (2020), who found that COVID-19 had caused a paradigm change in teaching and learning. Siemen (2005), who mentions that students and teachers should look beyond the box and regard teaching and learning as no longer being business as usual, also makes this conclusion. The usage of modern tools like v-drive, Blackboard, the internet, computers, smartphones, and other smart tools, has become essential because they now require a platform to build communication with one another through various social media, such as WhatsApp. We must become acclimatised to replacing face-to-face interaction with any technology that might facilitate successful teaching and learning. Our residences have changed into learning spaces, and our neighbours have changed into consultants (Skhephe, 2020). The results, however, go against Siemn's (2005) assertion that connectivity in classrooms gave students the chance to experiment, generate new learning possibilities, and share information via the Internet because of the fear and restrictions caused by Covid-19. Additionally, Connectivism combines constructivism and cognitivism's elements to provide a larger perspective.

Theme 3: Advantages of simulated accounting classrooms during and after the COVID-19 pandemic

The following statements are the responses from the participants. Members suggested that the virtual classroom comprises new and charming ways of teaching especially now that we are in the 4IR. However, for these benefits to be gained it needs to be implemented in the correct way, rather than the sudden way it was introduced due to COVID-19 and teachers are required to keep on supporting it even after the COVID-19.

T1: "I can say one of the benefits of the virtual classroom is that teaching, and learning is happening anytime and anywhere and what was something we were not aware of before".

T5: "Through virtual classrooms teaching sessions can be recorded and the recordings can be played later by both the teacher and the learners. That always make the job of learners to be easier since they do not need to take notes instead, they can be sent the recordings and they can learn independently from the recordings".

T8: Virtual classroom is good in the sense that you don't need to be in in front of the learners all the time to teach, you can teach them while you are not at school or record your session and just send them recordings.

T9:" Learners can have a direct access to schoolwork even if they are absent, since wherever they are they can remain online and, in that way, they access everything that was happening in the classroom. Lastly both learners and teachers from other schools can share the teaching slides.

These results unequivocally support Santos (2020) assertion that a virtual classroom has many advantages, including the ability to reach a large audience from the comfort of one's home, effectively communicate with students through chat groups, video meetings, voting, and document sharing, and to compete with developed nations. However, Siemns (2005) makes clear that students are also encouraged to independently research topics online before discussing their findings with their classmates. The results support Beetham and Sharpe's (2007) assertion that virtual classrooms offer learning environments with a chatroom, an online discussion forum, daily reminders, and online exams with clear directions outlining what students need to do while

completing (and afterwards submitting) assignments. Teachers (not just those who teach Accounting as a subject) can access and display syllabus-related data through multiple platforms, as well as track their students' activity in the VLE (Beetham & Sharpe, 2007). These results support Siemens' (2005) claim that connectivity grants users the chance to exchange information via the World Wide Web and gives learners the chance to discover and develop new learning opportunities. Properly executed online connectivity also transfers the responsibility of learning from the teacher to the students.

CONCLUSION

The limitations of using a virtual classroom for Accounting in South Africa's Eastern Cape high schools during the COVID-19 outbreak were discussed in the article. Given that some teach in impoverished locations, teachers in the selected high schools, evident from the samples, are still particularly far behind when it comes to incorporating technology in the teaching of Accounting. There is a great deal of work still to be done, particularly in the towns, townships, and semi-urban schools. Since most learners in these schools come from low-income backgrounds and lack access to technology and the internet, the arrival of the COVID-19 pandemic undoubtedly negatively affected their teaching and learning.

RECOMMENDATION

The article recommends that accounting teachers should stop viewing their jobs as routine business and take individual obligation for their own technological advancement. To ensure that teachers are ready for technology education, Information Technology officials in all the education districts should support online teaching even after the COVID-19 pandemic. Network companies should be urged to work together with the Department of Education to resolve data, connectivity, and accessibility challenges so that virtual classrooms can be supported. Just as essential to the success of online teaching and learning, it should be made compulsory that all teachers should be required to attend a variety of continuous online seminars, as online teaching tools develop, to deepen their understanding of online education. The Eastern Cape Department of Basic Education needs to set up the essential infrastructure as soon as possible to support online learning and the practical application thereof. Virtual classroom instruction should be demanded by students and parents since it is consistent with the 4IR's objectives and is now the present, not the future, of education worldwide.

CONTRIBUTION OF THE STUDY

The article has revealed how the COVID-19 pandemic has affected the teaching of Accounting as a subject being taught in South Africa. The article contributes significantly by revealing useful information related to the teaching of Accounting under the COVID-19 pandemic. The Accounting classroom has changed dramatically, highlighted by the pandemic which suddenly descended on the world. This change in pedagogy is permanent and continuous, and teachers themselves must be re-educated in the ongoing technology revolution. Teachers are obliged to become life-long learners, constantly adapting to new online techniques to blend with physical classrooms where possible and appropriate.

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University Students' Perceptions in Using Social Media for Teaching and Learning in the Midst of the COVID-19 Pandemic and Beyond

Nhlayisi Cedrick Baloyi, & Edgar Julius Malatji
University of Limpopo
Faculty of Humanities
School of Languages and Communication Studies
Department of Communication, Media and Information Studies
Corresponding Author: cedrick.baloyi@ul.ac.za

ABSTRACT

The paper focuses on the investigation of the use of social media for academic purposes by students at institutions of higher learning. This qualitative study seeks to explore university students' perceptions in using social media for academic purposes in the midst of the Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic and beyond. Convenience sampling technique under a non-probability sampling method was employed to select students from one of the rural universities in Limpopo Province of South Africa. Focus groups were employed as a data collection tool, and thematic analysis has been used as a method to analyse the data. Couldry's Practice theory and Uses and gratifications theory have been used as lenses for this study. The study revealed that few students are using social media platforms for educational purposes. Some postgraduate students use YouTube to access academic-related content. There are several challenges that students encounter regarding the use of social media for academic purposes. Such challenges include the struggle to integrate social media into the academic field. Students also highlighted the lack of support and encouragement from academics in using social media for academic purposes; poor internet connection; lack of internet data; and lack of training on how to use these platforms as academic tools.

Keywords*: Internet, social media, students, learning platform, COVID-19*

INTRODUCTION

Since the inception of post-matric education, almost all South African institutions of higher learning have been using traditional methods (contact mode) in delivering teaching and learning (Mgqwashu, 2017; Mpungose, 2020a). According to Waghid (2018, p. 4), "face-to-face learning is considered traditional and ignores students' experiences because it occurs in the presence of a lecturer presenting knowledge in a classroom, using traditional methods (lecturer-centred) and traditional resources such as textbooks, chalkboards, and others." Nevertheless, in the event of a challenge, such as student protests or pandemic outbreaks, these physical classrooms are inaccessible. It goes without a doubt that, on one hand, face-to-face learning affords real-time interaction amongst students and academics; it takes place within a specifically allocated time, and it also affords quick feedback to students (Mpungose, 2020b). On the other hand, electronic-learning is education that takes place over the internet, also known as online learning. This is a concept that encapsulates any learning that takes place through technology (Anderson, 2016).

Moreover, Choudhury and Pattnaik (2020) emphasise that the description of e-learning develops with the advancement of the Web from Web 0 to 4.0. Accordingly, "the world was introduced to Internet-based learning with Web 0, which was a read-only site. Thereon, the Web (2.0) and Web (3.0) allowed real-time interaction and connected intelligence, respectively. We now witness Web 4.0 where machines and the human brain can directly interact" (Choudhury & Pattnaik, 2020, p. 2). The models of online learning, open distance education, and web-based education are all linked with learning

using technology. Rodrigues, Almeida, Figueiredo, and Lopes (2019) assert that these models share the mutual feature that they are a procedure of teaching which takes place between a student and an instructor and that they take place at different times and places, through numerous forms of material. Arkorful and Abaidoo (2015) describe e-learning as the use of educational technologies to provide online access to learning and teaching materials. As a result, the importance of e-learning via the internet in 21st-century university education is undeniable, particularly for today's students who are digital natives (Bennett, Maton & Kervin, 2008). Likewise, Khoza (2019b) submits that online learning is proficient in making academic material available online through the extensive use of hardware technologies including computers, laptops, and smartphones, among others, and software resources including learning management systems and social media sites, among others. Teo (2019) describes social media as a conformation of activities that comprise socialising using texts, pictures, and videos. It is a mode of digital communication that allows users to interact, share, and arrange virtual rooms to circulate content through the internet (Pan, 2019). Thus, students are at liberty to access academic materials anywhere in the comfort of their own time, regardless of difficulties brought on by the pandemic outbreak.

Some scholars (Liu & Long, 2014; Nikoubakht & Kiamanesh, 2019) claim that contact learning is nonpareil and is the foundation of all institutions of higher learning, even if the present dialogue and technological insurgence propel the use of online learning. The latter scholars submit that there exists a challenge between face-to-face and e-learning. Other scholars (Anderson, 2016; Bates, 2018) submit that multimodal learning, which integrates online and traditional learning, is the way forward to permit students to learn and access academic material according to their strengths and limitations. Nonetheless, there are compelling situations that can push students and academics alike to opt for online over traditional learning; this includes the Coronavirus pandemic in the context of this study. Accordingly, the World Health Organization (2020) indicated that Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) is a new virus discovered in the year 2019, which results in illnesses ranging from cold to more extreme sicknesses which could lead to death. The virus is transferred between people and animals. Some of the easy symptoms to identify include cough, fever, respiratory symptoms, and shortness of breath. The 2021 worldwide statistics by the World Health Organization (WHO) show that more than four million people died from COVID-19 complications. In other words, the pandemic has brought a serious threat to contact methods of learning globally, and South Africa is no exception.

After careful consideration and advice from health experts, WHO affirmed COVID-19 as a pandemic, and subsequently, everybody was advised to evade close contact with somebody displaying the symptoms (WHO, 2020). Consequently, the education sector across the world was forced to close. In the South African perspective, the president of the republic called on all schools to shut down and establish other modes to render teaching and learning online from March 2020 as a protective way to avoid infection (Department of Higher Education and Training, 2020). This measure triggered many questions regarding the practicality of e-learning, particularly in many former disadvantaged universities in the country, including the selected university, because of the magnitude of disparities in the South African setting.

Institutions of higher learning were forced to halt physical academic activities. Thus, students and academics alike were required to stay away from lecture halls,

and administrators, together with academics, faced difficulties in converting teaching materials into an online format within a few days or weeks (McMurtrie, 2020). Even though many institutions were not prepared, online teaching and learning were adopted. To effectively provide the online content, universities enhanced the adoption of learning management systems like Blackboard, Moodle, and other established websites and other methods of continuing with teaching and learning.

Khan, Ashraf, Seinen, Khan, and Laar (2021) submit that during a COVID-19 pandemic, people tend to spend much time on social networking sites as a way of avoiding being in contact with other people. Social media has become dominant and impacted the whole world in every facet, particularly students. Accessibility of the internet and social media is crucial to students at present. Since students are continuing with their studies under the new normal, through online methods, it is undoubtedly that social networking sites affect their academic life in one way or the other. Khan, et al. (2021) also note that the use of social media assists students in their academic performance through enhancing their skills in socialising, accessing, and sharing knowledge and information.

Social media as a medium of communication affords academics and students a platform to communicate and share study materials while observing the COVID-19 social distancing regulations as announced by the government (Vordos, Gkika, Maliaris, Tilkeridis, Antoniou & Bandekas, 2020). Likewise, the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic have spurred the rise in the use of Information Communication Technologies (ICTs), the internet, and social media platforms for educational purposes, since it improves connectivity and affords collaborative opportunities amongst students and academics who have started to take advantage of these platforms (Islam, Laato, Talukder & Sutinen, 2020). With the evolution of social networks and the ever-increasing online existence of many universities, students take advantage of live streaming services through social media where they attend classes and also keep in touch with their classmates and lecturers via online platforms (Abi-Rafeh & Azzi, 2020). As a result, it is important to investigate students' perceptions in using social media for teaching and learning at a rural university in Limpopo Province.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

The COVID-19 pandemic has forced several sectors, ranging from social, government, and business institutions, to change the way they operate, and education sector was no exception. This propelled institutions of higher learning to adopt new ways of delivering teaching and learning to students. The use of ICT for teaching and learning started to receive more attention as multimodal learning was adopted. With adoption of Learning Management Systems (LMS) for teaching and learning being expensive and moving at a slow pace for the higher education sector, and with poor ICT infrastructure especially in rural universities, social media platforms as an alternative platform could be appreciated. This prompted the researchers to explore the students' perceptions in using social media for academic purposes. The study seeks to respond to the following questions:

- What are the university students' perceptions in using social media for academic purposes?
- Do social media provide an alternative as a platform for teaching and learning purposes?
- What are the opportunities and challenges in using social media for academic purposes?

REVIEW OF EXISTING LITERATURE

The literature focuses on the integration of social media into education

and the use of YouTube and Facebook for educational purposes.

Integrating social media in higher education

The adoption of social media platforms into teaching and learning has attracted various scholars recently. In the new normal learning environment, social media has been regarded as the dominant platform for enhancing students' learning, facilitating communication between academics and students, and among students themselves (Castro-Romero, 2015; Sobaih & Moustafa, 2016; Manca, 2020). Literature shows that academics also use social media for socialising and teaching purposes (Awidi, Paynter & Vujosevic, 2019). Moreover, Klein, Junior, Barbosa, and Baldasso (2018) reported that YouTube, WhatsApp, and Facebook are the most used social networking sites for academic communication amongst academics and students. Manca (2020) has also revealed that Facebook and WhatsApp are the most used tools for various academic-related purposes in a higher education setting. Numerous scholars (Durak, 2020; Manca, 2020) have paid much attention to the extensive benefits of using social media at institutions of higher learning. Sobaih, Hasanein and Elnasr (2020) submit that these studies have appreciated the significance of social media platforms for academic-related purposes, including communication, virtual meetings, sharing of information, and platform for discussions among students and academics. Thus, Makafane and Chere-Masopha (2021) have highlighted several advantages of online learning, which include, amongst others, inspiring students and improving their self-esteem; improving the efficiency of teaching and learning; improving students' academic performance; assisting in creating virtual communities among students, enabling them to participate in group meetings and projects.

Sobaih, Hasanein and Elnasr (2020) also expose that social networking sites such as Facebook and WhatsApp have been effectively used to sustain formal teaching and learning at institutions of higher learning with a lack of ICT platforms and formal online learning management systems during the COVID-19 shutdown. The study reveals that some academics employed Facebook and/or WhatsApp as the main tools for academic interaction with students since online forums including Google meet, Google classroom, and Zoom were unacquainted to students since there was no proper training provided. According to Alalwan (2017), social media improves students' reading skills and subsequently enhances their general knowledge of a specific subject through their online group discussions. Moreover, Voorveld (2018) discovers that students who tend to participate in social media-based academic activities often perform better educationally than those with limited exposure.

Use of YouTube for academic purposes

YouTube is the most popular platform for user-generated content, with over a billion users (Camm, Russell, Xu & Rajappan, 2018). It is considered as a source of online material which can prove to be significant for teaching and learning. It has become more popular, especially amongst youth. The website can afford students access to daily videos that may help them improve their learning. The use of YouTube for academic purposes benefits both students and academics (Alkhudaydi, 2018). Some of these advantages range from enticing students' attention, focusing students' attentiveness, generating interest in the subject, improving content assertiveness; establishing connection amongst students; nurturing creativity; reducing anxiety in students about the so-called difficult subjects; and lastly, increasing understanding amongst others.

YouTube is considered the best platform for digital students and the Net

Generation (students raised since the introduction of the World Wide Web) and is an effective method to get into their aptitudes and learning styles (Buzzetto-More, 2015). The use of online platforms for teaching and learning has been considered to improve dialogue, cooperation, and engagement. YouTube videos should be incorporated into learning management systems and integrated into lectures and tutorials (Maziriri, Gapa & Chuchu, 2020). Also, they can be used to encourage self-learning and tutoring. Although some scholars have discovered that YouTube is effective in improving full online courses (Jordaan & Jordaan, 2017). Some have submitted that this platform is most effective when used to supplement instead of replacing the hybrid or traditional ways of delivering lectures (Maziriri, Gapa & Chuchu, 2020). As observed by Almurashi (2016), students can positively gain from watching authentic academic-related videos when studying (Almurashi, 2016). Using YouTube videos as complementary material affords students with a good understanding and knowledge of their studies. Furthermore, YouTube academic videos have the potential to bring enjoyment to the learning process.

Use of Facebook for academic purposes

Several scholars have investigated the efficiency of social media platforms for enhancing students' learning in higher education (Cuesta, Eklund, Rydin & Witt, 2016; Awidi, Paynter & Vujosevic, 2019). Literature indicates that Facebook is considered an essential platform for enhancing students' performance (Lambic, 2016; Bowman & Akcaoglu, 2016), improving students' engagement, and enhancing students' awareness of their learning experience. Likewise, Lambic (2016) submits that there is a notable connection between the students' performance and the utilisation proportion of Facebook for academic purposes. Nonetheless, Klein et al. (2018) exposed that Facebook has for a long time been linked with students' poor academic performance. Students' excessive use of Facebook has negative consequences for their academic performance (Junco, 2015). However, with careful and deep exploration, the use of Facebook mainly for academic purposes has produced positive student learning practices.

Studies have exposed that Facebook contains features to support academic activities by enabling collaboration, interaction, vigorous participation, and material sharing in the virtual environment (Bowman & Akcaoglu, 2016). Students have started to enjoy more independence, self-learning, connectivity, and socio-practical learning prospects within their learning environments. Facebook also promotes communication and actively involves students in their own learning process through sharing comments, asking questions of their peers, and academics, among others (Sarapin, & Morris, 2015).

Integrating Facebook into academia permits content to be easily available for students, which improves the quality of learning. It is significant for academics to harness students' engagement in academic activities that work in concurrence with their educational philosophies and learning objectives. It is undoubtedly that online learning permits flexibility and variation to students; but, these elements can be achieved when courses are constructed in asynchronous manner (Giannikas, 2020). The study also shows that Facebook is progressively being considered as an academic tool, as it is assumed to critically increase communication and improve collaborative learning within a virtual learning environment.

It is worth noting that Daher and Shahbari (2020) acknowledged that to improve the use of social media for academic purposes, academics and policymakers at institutions of higher learning should include instructional support, ICT support and students to help in

integrating various social media platforms into teaching since they are considered to be effective in creating cooperative learning settings and experience among students to improve their academic performance (Manickam, Selvam, & Ahrumugam, 2020). Academics should deliberate on technologies and platforms that are best for their students since it has been established that employing diverse ICT tools, including social media, is appreciated by many scholars. Avila and Lavadia (2019) revealed that Facebook, Twitter, Messenger, and Instagram are amongst the most used social networking sites by students.

Theoretical framework

For this study, two theories are used as lenses, namely Practice theory and uses and gratifications theory.

Practice theory

Nick Couldry's practice theory aims to eschew previous debates over the political economy, the philosophical nature of the media, and active versus inactive viewers (Couldry, 2004; Fourie, 2010). Instead, the theory aims to focus on the media as it is used in daily life and how this practice serves to organize and anchor other human practices (Couldry, 2004). According to practice theory, media research should start with what people are doing with media and what the media are essentially doing with people across a variety of institutions and viewpoints rather than with media texts or institutions (Fourie, 2010). Some of the key questions tried to be answered by this theory are as follows:

- What does it mean to be a part of a media-saturated world?
- What exactly does the term mediation imply?
- How does the spread and infiltration of media affect traditional life and culture in Africa and other developing regions?

Practice theory is relevant to this study because it explains the use of media, which in this study relates to the students' use of social media for academic purposes. The answers to the above-mentioned questions fulfil the purpose of this study, which is to explore university students' perceptions in using social media for academic purposes during the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond. Answering these questions may help with the purpose of this study, which is to explore students' perceptions in using social media for academic purposes at a selected rural university in Limpopo Province of South Africa.

Uses and gratifications theory

The use of the internet and social media has been studied using the uses and gratifications theory (Musa, Azmi, & Ismail, 2015, and Malatji, 2019). The primary functions of the media are, among other things, to inform, entertain, and educate (Khalid & Ahmed, 2014). The Uses and gratifications theory (UGT) explains the concept of media consumption, which describes why people use certain media and the gratifications that result from usage and access. According to this theory, media consumption is purposeful, and users actively seek to meet their needs through a variety of uses. Personal identity is explored, challenged, adjusted, or confirmed using media content. The media meets the need for information about the near and far worlds and circumstances. Students, as media users, learn about issues that may affect them directly or indirectly (Fourie, 2007). Furthermore, Fourie (2007) emphasises that the central questions of this theory are: what do people do with media and how do they use media? The answers to these questions are relevant to the study's purpose, which was to discover how students use social media for academic purposes, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Data were gathered to obtain answers to the questions, and the results were presented in the results and discussions section.

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODS

Design

An exploratory research design within qualitative research methodology was adopted for this study. The study explores the students' use of social media for academic purposes during the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond. The focus was to investigate their perceptions and attitudes towards using social media for teaching and learning. The exploratory design is associated with phenomenology that focuses on qualitative investigations addressing a phenomenon particularly in the field of social sciences (Goddard & Melville, 2012). The study is qualitative since (rich) data from the students' perceptions and knowledge on the use of social media for academic purposes was collected through the focus group discussions.

Population and Sampling

Students from a selected rural university in Limpopo Province participated in this study. The convenience sampling technique, also known as accidental sampling, was used under the non-probability sampling method to sample 48 students who participated in focus group interviews.

The convenience sampling technique is defined by Remler and Van Ryzin (2015, p. 12) as "a situation in which a researcher takes advantage of a natural gathering or easy access to people who can be recruited into a study". Because the nature of the study affects all students at institutions of higher learning, this sampling technique is appropriate for this study. The study was open to any student, regardless of age, gender, or field of study.

There were 26 (54%) males and 22 (46%) females, indicating that the number of males was marginally higher than that of females. Nineteen participants (40%) were between 21 and 25 years of age, followed by 17 (35%) who were between 26 and 30 years of age, and 12 (25%) were between 31 and 35 years of age. The respondents were comprised of 23 students (48%) who were doing their third level of study, 17(35%) were doing their second year, and 8(17%) were postgraduate students.

Data Collection

Focus group interviews were employed as a data collection instrument to explore university students' perceptions in using social media for academic purposes. A focus group interview is a data collection instrument for understanding people's behaviour and attitudes (Wimmer & Dominick, 2014; Creswell, 2013). Six focus groups were administered for this study. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the lockdown regulations, the data were collected virtually through Google meet to avoid contact and the risk of contracting the virus. With the permission of the participants, sessions were recorded to ensure precise data collection. Sessions lasted between 45 and 60 minutes.

Data Analysis

Thematic analysis was adopted to analyse the data. Six steps of thematic analysis were employed to analyse the data (Braun & Clarke, 2013; Maguire & Delahunt, 2017). These steps include familiarisation with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining themes, and writing up.

Ethical Considerations

This study is part of the bigger study, which was approved by Turfloop Research Ethical Committee (TREC) and the clearance certificate number was allocated as TREC/57/2019: PG. Researchers ensured that the confidentiality and privacy of the

participants were protected through the use of codes instead of their names.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The analysed data below has been divided into themes based on the thematic analysis conducted for the study.

#Theme 1: Use of social media for teaching and learning purposes

Students expressed their support for the use of social networking sites for academic purposes. YouTube is a popular social media platform for academic purposes. This is user-generated content, in which people create audio and video content and share it with others. Students stated that they occasionally watched academic-related videos on YouTube to supplement what they had learned during their lecture sessions. Some participants stated that YouTube videos were extremely helpful, particularly when it came to calculations and formulae.

This is how some of the participants expressed themselves:

> *"I think YouTube is very helpful. Normally I collaborate the information I access from Google, together with the one I watch from YouTube, especially when I'm studying Mathematics" (Respondent C3).*
>
> *"Yeah, watching videos in the internet helps a lot, for me most of the things need calculations, so demonstrations from YouTube help a lot" (Respondent D6).*
>
> *"Sometimes I don't understand what the lecturer was saying, so I get the clarity by watching related videos on YouTube. Facebook can work because friends can exchange information which they have accessed from different sources" (Respondent E2).*

#Theme 2: Enhancement of dialogue and sharing of information and knowledge

Participants also acknowledged that social media helped them to share academic content amongst themselves. Social media help students to create virtual communities, sharing the same values and having the same goals to achieve academically. Students also indicated that since the university adopted remote learning due to the COVID-19 pandemic, some of the lecturers have adopted the use of WhatsApp to conduct their lectures. Students, together with lecturers, have created the WhatsApp groups to communicate any academic-related information, share lecture notes and other notices with students. This enables students to join sessions in the comfort of their own time and place. Students can also revisit and listen to what has been covered at a later stage. One of the participants demonstrated his/her view in this way:

> *"In our class, we have created a WhatsApp group chats, sometimes our lecturer would upload voice notes for us and we would just listen and also use them for revision" (Respondent E2).*

These results are supported by (Van Den Beemt, Thurlings & Willems, 2020) who described social media as user-friendly platforms, particularly when equated with some learning management systems such as Blackboard and Moodle. Social Networking Sites were described as collaborative and easy to use for interactions and discussion amongst students.

However, participants have also indicated that they have not yet adopted the use of Facebook for academic purposes. According to one of the participants, it is difficult for them to adopt Facebook for academic purposes because the strength of Facebook is based on the number 'friends' one has on the platform.

Some studies (Gupta & Irwin, 2016) took students' different behaviours into consideration. Students who spend more time on Facebook achieve lower grades compared with those who spend less time on this platform (Junco, 2015). Thus, it is worth mentioning that proper self-regulation in using social media is needed, and it can lead to less distraction, which ultimately contributes positively to students' academic performance.

#Theme 3: Challenges of using social media for teaching and learning

Participants have highlighted integrating social media into education as one of the challenges they face when adopting these platforms for educational purposes. Some of the participants indicated that it is difficult for them to trust the information they get from YouTube and other online platforms because the materials are not prescribed by their lecturers. They also indicate that most of their lecturers have not adopted the use of social media platforms for educational purposes.

> *"It's minimal, because we use books and PowerPoint slides, and we interact with our lecturers, and again, the material on YouTube is not prescribed materials for reading and teaching and learning within your school" (Respondent B4).*
>
> *"With YouTube, it's very difficult because someone is reading or interpreting for you, for instance, I can give an example, yesterday I wanted to number my assignment, so I went to YouTube and then I wanted the tutorials which took so long" (Respondent A5)*

Manca and Ranieri (2016) reported that some of the academics at institutions of higher learning are worried about the effects of social media on education. Users should strike a balance between private use and professional duties when using social media for academic purposes. In addition to the lack of experience and of acquaintance with social media, students are worried about the lack of integration regarding social media and academia (Goktalay, 2013). Students feel that academics lack experience in integrating social networking sites into the existing online learning environments.

#Theme 4: Recommendations on using social media for teaching and learning

Participants came up with a handful recommendations on how to maximise the use of social media for educational purposes. Some of the students highlighted that academics should familiarise themselves with social media platforms to easily integrate them into education. Students also indicate that the university should prioritise this by creating YouTube channels for all the courses and training academics on how to use them. This will enhance the sharing of information in different formats, including YouTube videos. Some of the respondents expressed their views in this manner:

> *"I would suggest that our lecturers should familiarise themselves with these platforms like your Facebook, Twitter and other social media networks, and start taking them seriously, then it will be easy to use them for educational purposes (Responded D5)*
>
> *"I think our lecturers should record videos and create maybe YouTube channels for different courses, then upload videos for us. These videos would be there forever and would just visit the channel whenever we want to revise or maybe something we didn't understand during the session" (Responded C3)*
>
> *"The university should be this serious, I mean most of us are always on WhatsApp, Facebook,*

and YouTube, meaning we can easily attend classes without excuses" (Responded F6)

It is worth noting that students appreciate the use of social media for academic purposes. Some of the highlighted factors include the sharing of information, easy discussions amongst students and academics. They acknowledge that the presence of social media could be useful provided the university takes a firm position on introducing these platforms as official learning platforms. Thus, students also highlight that it is difficult to trust information from social media platforms if academics have not issued a directive or adopted these platforms for educational purposes. Makki and Bali (2021) submit that institutions of higher learning should provide training courses for both academics and students in using social media for academic purposes and improve the infrastructure of the universities' agenda.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study has found that students acknowledge and appreciate the presence of social media for educational purposes. Students seem to be acquainted with using certain social media platforms like YouTube and WhatsApp for academic purposes. The study discovered a lack of proper integration of social media and academia. Many students have pages on various social networking sites, but few have used them for academic purposes. The study did discover, however, that the few students who used social media for academic purposes benefited from their use. Few participants viewed academic-related content on YouTube. These students benefited from additional lessons made available through social media. Students also stated that they enjoyed watching academic-related content on YouTube because they were not limited by time, space, or the volume of content available online. Those students also stated that they perform better academically since beginning to supplement the content they received during lecture sessions with content from social media, as opposed to when they relied solely on the content received in class. Nonetheless, the study also discovered that the university has not taken advantage of social media availability to close the gap that has been created by the COVID-19 pandemic. Students highlight that most lecturers are not well conversant with using social media for academic purposes. Thus, there is a need for proper integration of these platforms into education. With the world already grappling to cope with the 4th Industrial Revolution (4IR), the use of advanced technology and media platforms for academic purposes should be taken into consideration if academia is to continue playing a significant part in the national and global economy.

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Importance of Decolonising Western Languages in South African Opera Schools in Higher Education: A Content Analysis

Sakhiseni Joseph Yende & Rostislava Pashkevitch
Tshwane University of Technology, Department of Performing Arts
Corresponding author: YendeSJ@tut.ac.za

ABSTRACT

Concepts such as decolonisation, Africanisation, indigenisation, and internationalisation of curricula have become a centre of discourse in South African institutions of higher education. Even though the debate on decolonisation of Western curricula has become an epicentre, South African opera schools continue to be dominated by Western orthodoxy. In South African opera schools, the decolonisation of the Western language agenda has not been successfully addressed as many South African opera schools continued to prioritise Western languages, such as German, Italian, and French. In contrast, African languages continue to be neglected. This neglect is attributed to the problem that South African higher education institutions are dominated by Western orthodoxy. A clear need exists for the decolonisation of the curricula from Western Eurocentric languages to African languages. Therefore, this article aims to critically discuss and raise awareness of the importance of decolonising Western orthodoxy in South African opera schools in higher education. A qualitative research method was adopted with content analysis as the primary methodology. This article also used a combination of a myth of decolonisation theory and decolonialwashing theory to urge that decolonisation is a buzzword in South African opera schools. The findings of this article were presented in the following three significant themes: 1. Relevance of African languages; 2. Advantages of using African languages; 3. Challenges faced by South African opera schools. The findings of this article revealed that it is important for South African opera schools to have musical arts programmes that promote and cultivate the marginalised values of the African people. This article concludes by recommending that there is a collective effort that must take place to ensure that decolonisation becomes a reality rather than a myth in South African higher education.

***Keywords**: African languages, curricula, decolonisation, higher education, opera schools*

INTRODUCTION

In 2015 and 2016, South African higher education experienced a severe wave of change sparked by the #FeesMustFall movement (Cini, 2019; Larbig et al., 2019; Mavunga, 2019; Yende, 2020; Yende & Yende, 2022). Apart from the student protests about fee increases, the students also demanded decolonisation of the curricula, financial sustainability in the face of shrinking government funding, and transformation of universities to address inequalities such as gender and race (Mavunga, 2019; Meda, 2020; Mutekwe, 2017; Du Preez, Simmonds & Chetty, 2017; Sayed et al., 2017). During apartheid, higher education was forcibly segregated at the establishment of universities in South Africa to serve particular racial groups, and the legacies of the segregation still linger. Therefore, studentled protests are essential for decolonising curricula and balancing the language portion.

In this article, an indepth understanding of the experiences and challenges encountered by opera schools in embracing African languages is critically explored. Furthermore, this exploration assists in mapping the way forward for opera schools regarding how to include African

languages in their programmes and adopt appropriate methods of ensuring that course content is delivered effectively. This research also recommends further promoting the development and growth of African languages in opera schools.

Even though significant historical milestones were achieved through the student protest movement, Western languages in South African opera schools remain largely colonised. This lingering form of colonisation was substantiated by Mugovhani (2012) and Yende and Yende (2022), who agree that since the demise of the apartheid regime, South African music schools continue to overemphasise Western arts music such as classical music, jazz, and opera. As a result, Western music culture is valued more than African indigenous culture and music (Yende & Yende, 2022). This stasis is a significant concern and raises questions about the authenticity of the decolonisation of Western curricula in South African higher education, and particularly opera schools. This concern was echoed by Ebewo and Sirayi (2018, p. 83), who assert that "the word 'transformation' has become a buzzword in postapartheid South African vocabulary". South African universities continue to promote Westernised curricula characterised by racism and ethnic exclusion (Adonis & Silinda, 2021; Du Plessis, 2021; Mugovhani, 2012). Yende and Yende (2022) acknowledge that music schools at universities have attempted to revise their curricula to be more Africanised and homogenous. However, opera schools continue to use a monocultural approach with a bias toward Western values and outcomes. Even though decolonisation of curricula has been at the heart of South African universities, European elites have recolonised opera schools and continue to prioritise Western languages such as German, Italian, and French (Mugovhani, 2012; Yende & Yende, 2022).

An article by Mugovhani (2012, p. 916) asserts that African languages are actively excluded in opera programmes:

"Performing arts in South African institutions had therefore been primarily focused on Western art forms to the exclusion of other types of arts existing in the country. Black performing arts students had therefore not been connected to their African history, performing arts and beliefs for centuries. This has undoubtedly been depriving South African Black performing arts students of their connection to their culture and inhibiting their chances of true musical expression, growth and experience. To a considerable extent, this has alienated them from their immediate communities and the society at large."

Opera schools at South African universities have not yet embraced indigenous languages as part of curricula decolonisation. The colonisation using Western languages in opera schools remains largely uninterrupted. This continuing colonisation deprives South African Black performing arts students of their connection to their culture (Heleta, 2016; Makoelle, 2014; Mugovhani, 2012; Yende & Yende, 2022).

The awareness that South African opera schools remain uninterruptedly colonised propels studies among scholars. Recently, an article by Yende and Yende (2022) shows that since the inception of curricula decolonisation in South African higher education, little effort has been made to discuss the challenges critically that South African opera schools face. Therefore, the question is: What impedes decolonisation in South African opera schools?

Scholars point to rising challenges requiring special attention concerning the decolonisation of curricula in South African opera schools (Devroop, 2011; Ebewo &

Sirayi, 2018; Mugovhani, 2012). Mugovhani (2012) found that "in South Africa, Western performing arts, which were the performing arts of the politically and economically dominant language groups (South African Whites) were regarded as esoteric and elitist, and that of the other indigenous South African people (South African Black people) had been viewed as primitive, ungodly and devoid of artistic excellence". It is from this viewpoint that there is a necessity for the redress of the past imbalances in opera schools through the decolonisation of curricula. The current curricula must be transformed to attain the objective of decolonisation of the apartheid educational system of teaching and learning in South African opera schools (Mugovhani, 2012; Yende & Yende, 2022).

Many commendable universities in South Africa produce wellrenowned opera, namely the University of Cape Town's College of Music, the University of KwaZuluNatal's Department of Music, the University of South Africa's Music Examinations Directorate, the North West University's Potchefstroom Campus, the University of Pretoria's Musaion, and Tshwane University of Technology's Vocal Arts section. However, these institutions have not fully embraced African languages and are still replete with Eurocentric languages (Mugovhani, 2012; Yende & Yende, 2022). South African arts institutions have demonstrated few signs of transformation and few signs of Africanisation of arts programmes, thereby continuing to marginalise African languages (Devroop, 2011; Ebewo & Sirayi, 2018; Mugovhani, 2012).

There is extensive literature on themes such as decolonisation, Africanisation, indigenisation, and internationalisation of curricula worldwide (Cini, 2019; Ebewo & Sirayi, 2018; Mavunga, 2019; Mugovhani, 2012). However, limited attention is given to carefully discussing the importance and the potential implications of embracing African languages in South African opera schools. The current article was motivated by Mugovhani's (2012: 908) article that highlights that "music departments at South African institutions of higher learning have not yet fully transformed their programmes away from European models to programmes that affirm and embrace all the musical styles and genres practised in [South Africa]". In this context, the inclusion of African languages in opera schools was considered fundamental for curricula decolonisation.

The 2015 to 2017 student protests resulted in the call for decolonisation of the Western educational system to Africanised educational system. However, the present curricula still do not serve and advance South African interests in terms of history, arts, culture, and music, among others. This gap is manifested in the priority given to Western languages more than the African languages in the institutions of higher learning. Opera schools do not put the uniqueness of South Africa's performing arts epistemologies at the centre of teaching and learning. Hence, Africans must be included in opera schools to balance curricula (Mugovhani, 2012; Yende & Yende, 2022). Against this background, this article seeks to discuss and raise awareness of the importance of decolonising Western orthodoxy in South African higher education opera schools.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

In this article, the researchers developed specific primary questions that sought answers that would critically discuss the ongoing crisis in opera schools:

a) What relevance do African languages have in opera schools?

b) What are the advantages of using African languages in opera schools?

c) What challenges do South African opera schools face in embracing African languages?

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In this article, the researchers deploy a combination of the myth of decolonisation and the decolonialwashing theories to provide a comprehensive argument about the quest to decolonise Western orthodoxy in South African opera schools. According to NdlovuGatsheni's (2014) myth of decolonisation theory, decolonisation is a theoretical concept that has not been made practical in South African higher education. The researchers perceived the myth of decolonisation theory as a necessary and crucial theory to discuss key themes that prove decolonisation to be a myth rather than a reality (NdlovuGatsheni, 2014). The myth of decolonisation theory was combined with the decolonialwashing theory by Le Grange et al. (2020) to prove that decolonisation has become a metaphor in South African opera schools. Le Grange et al. (2020) highlights that the concept of "decolonialwashing, is a borrowed concept from the word greenwashing used in environmental and sustainability studies to denote processes whereby a company provides a false impression or misleading information about the environmental soundness of its products". Le Grange et al. (2020) points out that in South African higher education, "decolonisation has been equated with concepts such as curriculum renewal and curriculum transformation". NdlovuGatsheni (2014) and Le Grange et al. (2020) are concerned about false decolonisation or decolonisation that has not really happened in higher education. In decolonialwashing universities give the impression that their curricula are decolonised.

In essence, the myth of decolonisation and decolonialwashing theories were adopted as these theories make three comprehensive claims about decolonisation:

- Decolonisation is a buzzword
- Decolonisation South African higher education has not been made a practical reality
- Decolonisation is not promoted in South African universities.

With reference to the three claims, this article argues that decolonisation should be implemented and embraced in a practical form.

Understanding the myth of decolonisation and decolonialwashing theories is key to implementing the decolonisation of curricula and a vital approach that South African universities can apply to shed Western traits and embrace indigenisation and Africanisation in their curricula.

METHODOLOGY

A qualitative research approach was adopted in this article, with content analysis as the principal methodology. The researchers used existing scholarly writings to answer these questions. The researchers chose content analysis as the principal methodology because it is based on analysing content guided by the research question: Why is it important to decolonise Western languages in South African higher education opera schools?

A qualitative content analysis was employed in this article as it enables the researchers to recognise textual information and categorise it systematically based on its properties (Nowell et al., 2017). This article used a qualitative approach to content analysis to identify significant themes and patterns and describe the existing literature.

Content analysis ensures that the data logic matches the argument, making the argument persuasive. The goal is to identify important aspects of the content and present the aspects clearly and effectively (Vaismoradi et al., 2013). In this article, the qualitative content analysis focused on the content of curricula decolonisation using existing academic documents such as articles, book chapters and theses. The researchers chose to use qualitative content analysis and thematic analysis because of their key characteristic, which is a systematic process of coding data, evaluating the meaning, and providing a description of the social reality through the formation of a theme.

The researchers employed five significant steps in a narrative, thematic analysis (Vaismoradi et al., 2013):

1) Gathering data
2) Attaining a general logic of the data
3) Coding data
4) Yielding themes
5) Interpreting and describing data.

The narrative, thematic analysis method was deemed important in this article because it supported the researchers in obtaining precise, pertinent, and detailed information, which was interpreted and presented thematically in the findings. The researchers consider these five research processes to be widely recognised, transparent, and systematic. This article categorised these steps under qualitative descriptive design for critically analysing textual data and elucidating the theme.

FINDINGS

The findings of this article revealed the following three themes that emerged from the three basic research questions established to guide the research of this article:

1. Relevance of African languages in opera schools

2. Advantages of using African languages in opera schools

3. Challenges faced by South African opera schools in embracing African languages.

Relevance of African languages in opera schools

African languages are strongly relevant in opera schools in South African universities. South African universities must have musical arts programmes that embrace African languages (Devroop, 2011; Mbembe, 2016; Mugovhani, 2012). In the quest for decolonisation, South African universities encourage African languages in their opera schools, as the languages are a relevant cultural heritage for the previously marginalised populace of South Africa (Devroop, 2011; Mugovhani, 2012). Mugovhani (2012, p. 916) agrees that "as a matter of principle and urgency, South African institutions should start promoting African content in their syllabi and training predominantly South African students". Given that most students who enrol for opera studies in South African universities are Black opera students, there is a need for opera schools to deliver curricula effectively that will embrace African languages.

At the time when universities embraced the decolonisation of curricula, a strong emphasis was placed on African languages being taught in African universities (Mbembe, 2016; Mugovhani, 2012; Yende & Yende, 2022). Mbembe (2016, p. 17) points out that universities should be a repository of concepts carried on global languages:

"A decolonised university in Africa should put African languages at the centre of its teaching and learning project [...] The African university of tomorrow will be multilingual. It will teach (in) Swahili, isiZulu, isiXhosa, Shona, Yoruba, Hausa,

Lingala, Gikuyu, and it will teach all those other African languages French, Portuguese or Arabic have become while making a space for Chinese, Hindu, etc. It will turn these languages into a creative repository of concepts originating from the four corners of the Earth."

Efforts are ongoing, as opera schools have not shed Western languages and have not adopted African languages into the practical language module despite the student protests that called for the decolonisation of curricula. Before the call for decolonisation, opera schools offered three Western languages to opera students, namely German, Italian, and French. For example, Vocal Art students at the Tshwane University of Technology pursue Italian in their first year, German in their second year, and French in their third year. Students learn grammar, phonetics, phonology, creative writing, translation, and interpretation in each language.

Advantages of using African languages in opera schools

It is important to highlight that African languages in South African opera schools have been neglected and that Western languages are prioritised (Devroop, 2011; Mapaya, 2011; Mugovhani, 2012). Mugovhani (2012, p. 916) admits that:

"Black performing arts students had therefore not been connected to their African history, performing arts and beliefs for centuries. This has undoubtedly been depriving South African Black performing arts students of their connection to their culture, and inhibiting their chances of true musical expression, growth and experience."

In this quest to decolonise the curricula, African languages are crucial for students to learn in opera programmes. This endeavour will enrich African indigenous languages that have been marginalised over the years. There are many advantages to using African languages in opera schools. Black students will benefit by performing in their native language and connecting with their culture through performance (Cupido & van Zyl, 2021; Mugovhani, 2012; Yende & Yende, 2022). Also, the advantage of using African languages in opera schools is that it will contribute to cultural and social cohesion.

Challenges faced by South African higher education in embracing African languages

Over the last two decades, curriculum studies have attempted to understand the many core challenges faced by South African higher education in embracing African languages (Beukes, 2010; Du Plessis, 2021; Mahabeer, 2018). A fundamental challenge South African universities face is eliminating curricula that perpetuate Western bias and the lack of alternative content (Meda, 2020). Another challenge is that "South Africa's [higher] educational system, in general, still endorses Western knowledge and rationality at the expense of nonWestern methods of knowing" (Kaya & Seleti, 2013). These challenges have also contributed to the challenges faced by South African opera schools. A challenge faced by South African higher education in embracing African languages is the failure of South African universities to separate themselves from the apartheid education system that has been at the forefront of higher education for decades (Devroop, 2011; Ebewo & Sirayi, 2018; Mapaya, 2011; Mugovhani, 2012). Yende and Yende (2022) point out that the inclusion of African indigenous music in opera schools will affirm Africanisation:

"A Western monogenic music education curriculum was therefore adopted and promulgated. This problem is partly attributable to the apartheid government that encouraged classical Western music to the exclusion of other types of music that exist

for most of the South African people, such as African indigenous music. The curricularisation of African indigenous music will confirm the legitimacy of decolonisation and Africanisation."

The above statement reveals that these challenges have also contributed to the failure of opera schools in implementing opera schools' failure to implement African curricula. Hence, the present opera schools' curricula remain grounded and rooted in Western music.

DISCUSSION

The article sought to discuss critically and raise awareness of the importance of decolonising Western orthodoxy in South African higher education opera schools. This article argued that there is a necessity for South African universities, especially opera schools, to rethink their curricula and centre on Africanisation and embrace African languages in their practices. This article highlighted that practical decolonisation of Western orthodoxy is a key debate in South Africa, and therefore demand is increasing for the decolonisation of opera schools. However, South African institutions of higher learning have witnessed scenarios in which lecturers transmit and train students with Eurocentric content, especially in opera schools.

In this article, the researchers argue the concept of decolonisation of Western curricula has become a serious concern in many universities which continue to wrestle with Western traits, especially opera schools. In this article, the researchers are concerned about the decolonialwashing, whereby universities give the impression that their curricula are decolonised while curriculum reformed. This is the problem that these theories seek to address and at this moment decolonialisation of Western languages in opera schools is just a palatable concept rather than a reality.

This article's findings show a need for universities to gain extensive knowledge and understanding concerning the African languages and cultures that must be included in their curricula. South African Black opera students are deprived of cultural connections and musical expressions in their native languages. The findings of this article demonstrated that African languages in opera schools are relevant. The decolonisation of Western curricula is strongly emphasised and is debated in South African universities. However, no meaningful curricula transformations have taken place, especially in opera schools. The findings of this article revealed that it is important for South African opera schools to have musical arts programmes that promote and cultivate the marginalised values of the African people.

This article raised some strong concerns about South African opera schools' failure to implement African languages in their curricula. These concerns include the ongoing priority given to Western languages in opera schools instead of African languages. The findings of this article affirm that the decolonisation of curricula in South African higher education remains a myth rather than a reality. The findings of this article are consistent with studies that reveal decolonisation of curricula has not been put into practice (Mahabeer, 2018; NdlovuGatsheni, 2014; Yende & Yende, 2022).

The findings concerning the decolonisation of curricula continue to be a myth rather than a reality in South African universities and is in line with the theory of the myth of decolonisation that argues and advocates for visible and practical decolonisation (NdlovuGatsheni, 2014). Le Grange et al. (2020) echo that "decolonialwashing also includes all

instances in which decolonisation is used as a metaphor, whether deliberately or in ignorance". Evidence from the findings illustrates that the notion of decolonisation has become a metaphor in South African opera schools. This metaphor is partly influenced by opera being a Western art form. The premise presented by writers such as NdlovuGatsheni (2014), Yende (2020), and Le Grange et al. (2020) indicate that decolonisation is not practically applied in South African higher education. This lack of practice is evident in South African opera schools that continue to prioritise Western languages over African languages.

This article used a framework of analysis informed by the central tenets of the myth of decolonisation and decolonialwashing in South African higher education (NdlovuGatsheni, 2014; Le Grange et al., 2020). This article critically examined the importance of understanding the decolonisation of Western orthodoxy in South African opera schools as part of valuing African languages and culture. By so doing, this article contends and argues that South African opera schools have not yet managed to shed the Western traits of teaching and learning. This argument supports NdlovuGatsheni's (2014) concern that decolonisation has become a myth, while Le Grange et al. (2020) refers to this as decolonialwashing. So far, scholars and universities are still struggling with the practical form of decolonisation. Le Grange et al. (2020:44) explain that "decolonisation becomes a metaphor for more palatable concepts such as curriculum renewal and curriculum transformation".

Therefore, at this final stage of this article, the researchers assert that decolonisation efforts in South African opera schools are faced with the myth of decolonisation and decolonialwashing, which are palatable concepts with no reality. Hence, this article concurs with the theories that assert that decolonisation is a buzzword in South African opera schools.

This article establishes that South African opera schools must revise their curricula to establish relevant African curricula. There is a visible need to redress Western orthodoxy in South African opera schools to create more favourable performing environments for students. This article is in line with Mugovhani's (2012) findings that established that it is essential for South African performing arts institutions to promote and prioritise African content in their curricula. This article also pointed out that embracing African languages in opera schools has many advantages, including allowing students to perform in their native languages and learn from the richness of their culture. The findings of this article highlight the importance for South African opera schools to place their primary focus on the decolonisation of Western languages and include African languages.

IMPLICATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

Understanding the importance of promoting African languages in South African opera schools, as presented in this article, implies issues of curriculum development in higher education directly. The findings presented in this article indicate a need for South African higher education to embrace Africanisation in its curricula. Considering these implications, the findings of this article addressed the following questions: How do South African universities, especially opera schools, respond to Africanisation? In what way can Africanised curricula improve opera schools in South Africa?

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the analysis and findings of this article, the researchers make the

following recommendations: Firstly, extensive research is required, whereby curricula developers, policymakers, and other stakeholders at the forefront of decolonisation and Africanisation should be studied. Secondly, opera schools should set a benchmark in curricula that promotes the practice of African languages. This promotion of African languages will cater for both Western and African languages. Thirdly, opera school leaders in South African higher education should embrace the diversity and use of African languages in opera. Fourthly, South African opera schools, largely informed by Western art forms, must include African languages in their curricula and promote African centrality. The researchers also recommended that since Western languages are also necessary for opera singers who aspire to perform in European countries, the curricula must be blended with African languages. Lastly, it is recommended that policymakers and decisionmakers must develop materials and content that accommodate African languages in opera.

This article argues for acknowledging the importance of promoting the practice of African languages in South African opera schools. A further crucial point this article highlights is that decolonisation in South African opera schools is still a farfetched concept rather than a substantive one. Both the myth of decolonisation and decolonialwashing theories have consistently highlighted that decolonisation has gradually lost its revolutionary impulse. The finding of this article supports NdlovuGatsheni's (2014) and Le Grange et al.'s (2020) concern that decolonisation in South African higher education slightly becomes a metaphor and myth that will soon lose its revolutionary instinct. Thus, this article makes a significant contribution by reasserting decolonisation and providing an indepth understanding of the importance of transforming Western orthodoxy in South African opera schools.

CONCLUSION

This article concludes that the decolonisation of South African higher education curricula remains a myth rather than a reality, especially in opera schools. Adopting African languages in South African opera schools will afford students an opportunity to connect to their African identity, music, and culture and truly express their musical style in the language they understand. A collective effort must take place to ensure that decolonisation becomes a reality rather than a myth in South African higher education. South African opera schools must address Western orthodoxy in their curricula.

Despite the call for decolonisation of Western orthodoxy at the centre of South African higher education, opera schools have not yet fully transformed their programmes and continue to rely on European models that promote and embrace a limited number of languages. Opera schools are not promoting the African languages of previously marginalised South African people. The curriculum transformation in South African higher education stems from policy restructuring and epistemological change that attempts to redress the Western orthodoxy in the curricula. The researchers argue that the restructuring and change must be more rigorous to underpin decolonisation in practice.

In line with the theoretical framework, the researchers acknowledge the value of decolonisation of Western orthodoxy at the centre of South African higher education as a means of initiating transformation in Africa. However, the researchers argue that since there is a lack of critical transformation in South African opera schools, the institutional effort of

decolonisation has become an exercise of decolonialwashing as decolonisation has become a metaphor and myth. These are palatable concepts that lack practicality. Inevitably, decolonisation will soon become a myth and lose its revolutionary instinct in South African higher education.

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Postgraduate Students in an Open Distance Learning Institution: Student Support Services' Awareness and Utilisation

Shabani Omari and Maboe Kefiloe A
Department of Health Studies, University of South Africa, Pretoria, South Africa
Corresponding author: omarishabani@hotmail.com

ABSTRACT

This paper reports on the findings from the qualitative data (gathered by means of open-ended questions) of a quantitative, explorative, descriptive, cross-sectional, and contextual research study conducted to generate measures to increase awareness and enhance utilisation of student support services amongst postgraduate students in an ODL institution. Out of the 261 postgraduate students registered in the academic year 2020 in the specific Department at the selected institution, only 71 participated in the study. A census was used to select the participants. Data were collected utilising an Online LimeSurvey that used a self-completion questionnaire with closed and open-ended questions. The quantitative data (demographics) were analysed using the SPSS (version 26.0) and the qualitative data were analysed using Tesch's method. The results indicate that, the majority of the participants were employed (84.1%), married (82.6%), female (63.8%), computer literate (32.4%), PhD students (72.1%), older than 46 years (47.8%), living outside South Africa (52.2%) and in South Africa (47.8%); who have regular access to the internet (98.6%). However, they use the library only sometimes (47.8%). While only 2.9% of the participants lived in Asia. These participants registered with the specific Department for the first time in 2016 and with ODL institution for the time, some in 2013 and 2016 and some other in 2019. From the qualitative data, six themes emerged, namely: (1) awareness of the services; (2) provision of information regarding the services; (3) accessibility and availability of the services; (4) support and communication between students and the university; (5) the involvement of the library; and (6) marketing and advertisement of the services. Based on the findings from the qualitative data, the following measures were generated: increase awareness and enhance the utilisation of these services amongst the participants through information provision about these services; make the services available and accessible to all students irrespective of their levels; encouragement, motivation, enhance support and communication between students, and between students and their lecturers; involve the librarian; market and advertise the services utilising mass media and social networks. The effective and efficient implementation of these measures could increase awareness and enhance utilisation of these services amongst the participants and other students. Thus, students will be able to deal with academic challenges and improve their academic performance.

***Keywords*:** Awareness; Distance Learning; Postgraduate Students; Open Distance eLearning; Student Support Service

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

Open distance learning (ODL) is a learning model that endeavours to bridge the time, geographical, economic, social, educational, and communication gap between the institution, the students, academics, and the learning materials (UNISA, 2008). ODL continues to play a critical role in the educational development of African people, most of whom were previously denied opportunities to access higher education. Today, various ODL institutions on the African continent, specifically in South Africa, use a wide variety of modern and/or affordable technologies to facilitate the sharing of learning content with geographically distant students (Ngubane-Mokiwa & Letseka, 2015).

At its conception, ODL institutions were meant to provide educational

opportunities to mature, non-traditional and working students. But nowadays, this is no longer the case. Even young school leavers are joining ODL institutions. This shift has compeled ODL institutions to review its policies and programmes to accommodate all its students. These students are often unable to access higher education at traditional, full-time, contact and campus-based institutions.

In 2013, the selected South African university shifted from ODL to open distance electronic learning (ODeL). This shift presumes the existence of an established culture and the use of modern electronic technologies and reliance on such technologies (Ngubane-Mokiwa & Letseka, 2015). Shifting to ODeL warrants the consideration of student support services (SSS).

According to Maboe (2019), in ODeL situations, there is no value if there is no online interaction between students and the lecturer, between them and other support structures and between them and other students. For that reason, ODeL institutions should make available technological tools to enhance the online interaction between students and their lectures, other support services and between students themselves. Thus, ODeL institutions commit themselves to support distance students in all aspects being academically, cognitively, administratively, institutionally, and affectively. This led many distance education institutions to establish SSS to deal with and address the deficit (lower graduation rates experienced by many of these institutions including eLearning institutions) (Simpson (2015).

Awareness and use of SSS are of importance in enabling students to succeed academically. The researchers noted that SSS are available in the studied ODeL institution in South Africa, including services such as online connection and online counselling support services, which are available via email, letters, academic literary services (Acalit Digital), and Hotline. There is no value in the existence of support systems if students are unaware of them, and the utilisation of these services is thus compromised. ODeL institutions must commit themselves to support distance education students in all aspects, such as cognitively, administratively, institutionally, and affectively. This study was conducted to generate measures to increase awareness and enhance the utilisation of SSS by postgraduate students in the specific department at the selected ODeL institution in South Africa. The researchers intend to recommend to management, of the researched ODeL institution, measures to increase awareness and utilisation of SSS. Based on the context of this study, the researchers refer to SSS as services that support postgraduate students academically, administratively, technologically, institutionally, and affectively (Maboe, 2019). Postgraduate students are operationally defined as master's and doctoral students at the selected ODeL institution in South Africa.

The researchers further noted that many distance education institutions have established SSS to deal with the deficit (lower graduation rates experienced by many ODL institutions, including e-learning institutions) and to cater for students' cognitive, emotional, social, and learning needs. These services act as the interface between the institutions and the students. They compensate for the isolated "individual" by making the necessary basic facilities available in the absence of "live support" from the teacher (Nsamba & Makoe, 2017). Therefore, these services should be a major component of a distance education system (Farajollahi & Moenika, 2010).

Kelly-Hall (2010) found that SSS are designed to give students the academic skills and confidence necessary for academic success, and to encourage them to

become integrated into the system. Ciobanu (2013) states that SSS contribute to the quality of students' learning experience and their academic success.

Ciobanu (2013) further argues that SSS are enhanced by relations between higher education institutions and students. The composition of the student group and the knowledge and beliefs of academic and administrative staff influence the manner in which student "programmes" and "services" are delivered, as well as their responsibility towards it. It is imperative that higher education institutions provide services and programmes that promote the quality of student life, meet students' needs, and improve learning and academic success (Ciobanu, 2013).

For Herman, Puspitasari and Padamo (2015), these higher education institutions have a duty to reinforce student support as a vital component of their institution. This is to ensure that students who are studying at open distance learning institutions have an enduring learning experience. The success of these institutions is reflected in the satisfaction of students with support services. Thus, it is crucial for these institutions to maintain the quality of SSS available and ensure that they are easily accessible (Herman et al., 2015). SSS are as important as providing students with excellent academic content. Without effective SSS, students will not have any academic, emotional or social connection with the institution, and they are more likely to drop out (Ciobanu, 2013).

Letseka and Pitsoe (2014) indicate that ODeL institutions need to organise their systems and resources to support teaching and learning without necessarily requiring educators and students to be in the same space at the same time. ODeL students are supposed to have access to modern electronic technology to enable them to make optimal use of such resources. Well-organised student support systems are essential for distance education (DE) students to engage in the process of learning (Rangar, 2015).

The selected ODL institution in South Africa has established electronic and online facilities where students can get in touch with their lecturers, as well as other support services that cater for the needs of a diverse student base. These facilities, or services, are as follows: Connection online: this is the most important tool. It comprises an online student portal email address; Access to lecturer(s) by way of its website discussion forum and e-tutor programme; Academic literacy services; Counselling service support online, by email or by letter and Acalit Digital and Hotline. he previously mentioned SSS were established to cater for students at all levels. Hence, the researchers view these services as services which are meant and designed to support not only postgraduate students in particular, but all the students, in general academically, administratively, technologically, institutionally, and affectively.

Despite the existing literature on student support services, its importance, contribution, and benefits in ODeL, there is death of literature on the extent of utilisation of existing support services at this institution. No scientific evidence has been produced about postgraduate students' awareness and utilisation of these services at this institution.

In conceptualising and reflecting upon the rationale for conducting this study, the researchers have deemed it necessary to look at some indicators of students' academic performance such as qualification graduates and dropout (attrition) rates in the specific Department of the selected institution. The researchers are of the view that, effective and efficient utilisation of the available SSS may directly or indirectly have led to students' performance and attrition rates. For this reason, with reference to the qualified graduates and dropout rates in the specific Department of the selected institution from the years 2013

to 2019 as reflected in the cohort statistics (Data from the Institutional Research & Business Intelligence (stats from the selected institution), June 2019) for this specific academic Department are shown in the tables below.

Table 1: Qualifications enrolments, qualifications graduates and qualifications graduate rates of Postgraduate (M&D) students in the selected Department of the selected South African University.

	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
Qualifications enrolments	440	360	337	349	370	335
Qualifications graduates	92	118	70	56	85	47
Qualifications graduate rates	**20,9%**	**32,8%**	**20,8%**	**15,9%**	**23,0%**	**14,0%**

Data from the Institutional Research & Business Intelligence (stats-from the selected institution), June 2019

This table shows that, the qualifications graduate rates are very low from 2013-2018.

In addition, the cohort statistics per qualifications (M&D) in the selected Department indicates the following [(Data from the Institutional Research & Business Intelligence (stats-from the selected institution), June 2019)] show the following:

1. Cohort statistics for qualification **0779X (MPH)** starting from:

I. 2013: shows a high drop-out rate (50%) and a very low graduate rate (0%) based on cohort statistics starting from 2013-2018.

II. 2014: shows a higher drop-out rates (25% in 2017 & 50% in 2018) and an average graduate rate of 50% based on cohort statistics starting from 2014-2018.

III. 2015: shows a higher drop-out rate (67%) and very low graduate rate (17%) in 2018 based on cohort statistics starting from 2015-2018.

2. Cohort statistics for qualification code: **90010 (MPH)** starting from:

I. 2016: shows a higher drop-out rates (27% in 2017 & 36% in 2018) and low graduate rates (19% in 2017 & 32%) in 2018 based on cohort statistics starting from 2016-2020.

II. 2017: shows a higher drop-out rate (38%) and very low graduate rate (10%) in 2018 based on cohort statistics starting from 2017-2021.

3. Cohort statistics for qualification code: **90029: PhD (Nursing)** starting from:

I. 2016: shows a higher drop-out rates (15% in 2017 & 26% in

2918) and very low graduate rate (4% in both years 2017 & 2018) based on cohort statistics starting from 2016-2020.

II. 2017: shows a higher drop-out rate (46%) and very low graduate rate (0%) in 2018 based on cohort statistics starting from 2017-2021.

4. Cohort statistics for qualification code: **98422 (DLiTT et Phil in Health Studies)** starting:

I. 2013: shows a higher drop-out rates (27% in 2014; 30% in 2015; 36% in 2016; 42% in 2017 & 42% in 2018) and very low graduate rates (3% in 2014; 20% in 2015) and low graduate rates (36% in 2016; 48% in 2017 & 48% in 2018) **based** on cohort statistics starting from 2013-2018.

II. 2014: shows a higher drop-out rates (9% in 2015; 23% in 2016; 29% in 2017 & 34% in 2018) and very low graduate rates (3% in 2015; 14% in 2016) and low graduate rates (31% in 2017 & 40% in 2018) based on cohort statistics starting from 2014-2018.

III. 2015: shows a higher drop-out rates (34% in 2016; 36% in 2017 & 46% in 2018) and very low graduate rates (4% in 2016; 18% in 2017 & 21% in 2018) based on cohort statistics starting from 2015-2019.

IV. 2016: shows higher drop-out rates (27% in 2017 & 49% in 2018) and very low graduate rates (4% in 2017 & 11% in 2018) based on cohort statistics starting from 2016-2020.

V. 2017: shows a higher drop-out rate (38% in 2018) a very low graduate rate (5% in 2018) based on cohort statistics starting from 2017-2021.

5. Cohort statistics for qualification code: **99502:MA (Nursing)** starting from;

I. 2013: shows a higher drop-out rates (25% in 2014; 32% in 2015; 36% in 2016; 41% in 2017 & 41% in 2018) and very low graduate rates (20% in 2014; 34% in 2015 & 39% in 2016) and above average graduate rates (52% in 2017 & 52% in 2018) based on cohort statistics starting from 2013-2018.

II. 2014: shows higher drop-out rates (16% in 2015; 24% in 2016; 32% in 2017 & 36% in 2018) and very low graduate rates (24% in 2015 & 36% in 2016). However, the graduate rates in 2017 and 2018 are higher (60%) based on cohort statistics starting from 2014-2018.

III. 2015: shows a higher drop-out rates (20% in 2016; 24% in 2017 & 37% in 2018) and low graduate rates (32% in 2016; 41% in 2017 & 49% in 2018) based on cohort statistics starting from 2015-2019.

IV. 2016: shows higher drop-out rates (25% in 2017 & 28% in 2018) and low graduate rates (25% in 2017 & 44% in 2018) based on cohort statistics starting from 2016-2020.

V. 2017: shows a higher drop-out rate (29%) and a low graduate rate (18%) in 2018 based on cohort statistics starting from 2017-2021.

In summary, the above statistics indicate a low qualifications graduate rate and a higher drop-out rates for the specific academic Department of the selected institution from the years 2013 to till the 21st February 2019. These numbers are from the different qualifications which are offered by this academic Department under study.

The above picture of the selected institution concurs with Khumalo (2018)'s findings that, credible research statistics on the students' success rates constantly paint a shocking and uncomfortable picture in the

Higher Education (HE) sector throughout the world. This happens despite the sectors' efforts of providing opportunities of success to all students. There is an abundance of empirical evidence on the factors that contribute toward low students' success rates. The challenges and the complexities that face HE institutions, especially those that are related to the graduation rates are huge. Higher Education environment continues to be complex, with increasing expectations about performance.

Khumalo (2018) argues further that, the pass percentage rate at HE, particularly in ODL, is alarming. Although access to higher education has increased substantially over the past years, student success as measured by persistence and degree attainment, has not improved at all. Despite substantial government funding incentives, numerous policy initiatives and well-intentioned institutional efforts, retention and success rates remain extremely poor." Leadership in ODL settings have a huge responsibility and are under pressure to ensure that constructively aligned instruction opportunities are created and technologically mediated to boost the academic achievements of students.

It is important to note that, students at this university come from the four corners of the world, whereby some of them have had some exposure to ODeL, whilst others have no experience of this kind of learning. Considering this situation and to enable the students' learning experience and achieve the expected results, these students would therefore, need some form of support. This kind of support can only be offered through the provision of SSS with the aim to give students the academic skills and confidence necessary for academic success and encourage them to get involved and integrated into the system (Kelly-Hall, 2010). Nsamba and Makoe (2017) state that the purpose of student support services in open and distance eLearning institutions is to cater for students' cognitive, emotional, social needs and to help them with their learning. However, the extent of awareness and utilisation of these services amongst the targeted students in the specific Department at the selected institution are unknown. This is what has led the researchers to conduct this study with the intention to generate measures to increase awareness and enhance utilisation of SSS among postgraduate students in the selected institution.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

This study sought to generate measures to increase awareness and enhance utilisation of SSS among postgraduate students at the selected ODL institution in South Africa. The main concern in this study was to involve postgraduate students by encouraging them to suggest ways and strategies, which, if implemented effectively and efficiently, can help increase awareness and enhance utilisation of the services amongst them. The research question was therefore, "What measures would increase awareness and enhance the utilisation of SSS among postgraduate students?"

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study was underpinned by the Alexander Astin's 1984 Student Involvement Theory. This theory was found to be relevant for the study because it proved to be effective in guiding the researchers' investigation of student development by university administrators and faculty members to design more effective learning environments (Astin, 1999). "It provides an explanation of the way desirable outcomes for institutions of higher education are viewed regarding the way students change and develop because of being involved in the institution's activities. This theory is based on the facts that, a student's "inputs" such as their demographics, their background, and any previous experiences; a student's "environment and the outcomes

such as a student's characteristics, knowledge, attitudes, beliefs, and values that exist after a student has graduated college account for all the experiences a student would have had during college (Astin, 1999)".

Awareness and utilisation of SSS services should be linked to theoretical frameworks addressing concerns of involvement, attrition, and success (Kelly-Hall, 2010). This theory furthermore reveals that, the effectiveness of an educational practice is directly related to the capacity of that practice to increase student involvement which in this case translates into awareness and utilisation of SSS. This implies that, student involvement has a positive impact on development and learning. This theory further argues that the student plays an integral role in determining his/ her own degree of involvement in the institution's activities including extracurricular and social activities (Kelly-Hall, 2020).

Awareness and utilisation of SSS also implies students' involvement in the teaching and learning activities leading to their achievement in their academic journey. This involvement has quantitative and qualitative features; where quantitative is the amount of time devoted to studying and qualitative is the seriousness of the approach to reviewing and comprehending assignments (Kelly-Hall, 2010).

Drawing from this theory, awareness, and utilisation of SSS is directly proportional to the quality and quantity of student involvement. For students to optimally utilise the available SSS at their disposal, they to be actively engaged in their academic environment (Kelly-Hall, 2010). This theory brings in the attention towards the notion of students' motivation and behaviour based on the premises that, students' time and energy are considered as institutional resources. This implies that, the institution's policies, and practices, especially those that relate to academic and non-academic activities such as SSS can be determined in reverence to the degree to which students' involvement in the academic activities can be increased or decreased (Astin, 1984).

To provide a better understand of this theory, it is of utmost importance to look at the five principles as proposed (Astin, 1999):

1. Involvement which refers to the investment of physical and psychological energy in various objects such as the student's academic experience (where objects are generalised) and preparing for a specific subject/module examination (where objects are highly specific).
2. Regardless of its object, student involvement, which occurs along a continuum, differs in terms of interest and time.
3. Student involvement has quantitative and qualitative features. The extent of a student's involvement in academic work can, for instance, be measured quantitatively (how many hours the student spends on studying) and qualitatively (whether the student reviews and comprehends reading assignments or simply stares at the textbook and daydreams).
4. The amount of student learning and personal development associated with any educational programme is directly proportional to the quality and quantity of student involvement in the programme.
5. The effectiveness of any educational policy or practice is directly related to the capacity of the specific policy or practice to increase student involvement.

Based on these principles, it was revealed that, students who interact frequently with the institutional structures

are more likely than other students to express satisfaction with all aspects of their institutional experience, including student friendships, variety of courses, intellectual environment, and even the administration of the institution. Thus, finding ways to encourage greater student involvement with faculty (and vice versa) could be a highly productive activity on most college campuses; and this is one of the purposes of student support services.

Conversely, awareness and utilisation of SSS should translate into student involvement and vice-versa. In line with Astin (1984) Kelly-Hall (2010), states that, the development of the student should be the central aim of all education considering that, the purpose of higher education is to facilitate the development of humans by means of a variety of programmes and resources. To achieve this aim, SSS were established to attend to students' various academic needs and experiences. Regardless of the programme, and academic needs of the participant, one key to their success is involvement in all university activities (academic and non-academic activities).

This theory of student involvement provides a link between subject matters, resources, individualised approaches and the learning the students' desired outcomes and the lecturer. The focus of the theory is more on active participation of the students in the teaching and learning process which can only be possible through awareness and utilisation of SSS. This therefore implies that, for a particular curriculum, to achieve the intended effects, it must elicit sufficient student effort and investment of energy to bring about the desired learning and development. Simply exposing the student to a particular set of courses may or may not work (Astin, 1984).

Student support services programmes at most universities should support and encourage students to get involved and be integrated into campus life, because the programme is meant to provide them with a variety of educational services and place emphasis on academic achievement. All services are designed to provide students with the academic skills and confidence that are necessary for success at the university. The programme is committed to help the students learn subject matter through activities such as supplemental instruction, course instruction, computer-assisted instructional laboratories, study groups and tutoring, since the more students are academically integrated into the life of the institution, the greater the likelihood that they will persist and succeed academically. The most influential types of involvement are academic involvement; involvement with faculty/academics and involvement in student peer groups. These constitute the three main areas of focus for SSS programmes, the establishment of which should be in line with the university's mandate (Astin, 1999).

From the educator's perspective, the effectiveness of any educational policy or practice is directly related to the capacity of that policy or practice to increase student involvement. Thus, this theory is more advantageous in the sense that all institutional policies and practices relating to non-academic and academic activities can be evaluated in terms of the extent to which they increase or reduce student involvement. Similarly, academic staff and other university personnel, such as counsellors, student personnel workers, and faculty and administrators, can assess their own activities in terms of their success in supporting and encouraging students to become more involved in the academic experience (Astin, 1999).

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This paper reports on the findings from the qualitative data (gathered by means of open-ended questions) of a quantitative, explorative, descriptive, cross-sectional, and contextual research study that was conducted to generate measures to

increase awareness and enhance utilisation of student support services amongst postgraduate students. Boswell and Cannon (2017) postulate that a quantitative research design is often identified with the traditional scientific method that gathers data objectively in an organised, systematic, and controlled manner. In this way, the results can be generalised and applied to other situations or populations. It is a process that is systematic and objective in its ways by using numerical data from only a selected subgroup of a population, at a specific point in time.

Given the purpose of the study, an explorative approach was found to be the best option for this study. Babbie (2016) states that exploratory studies are, most typically, done for three purposes: firstly, to satisfy the researcher's curiosity and desire for better understanding; secondly, to test the feasibility of undertaking a more extensive study; and, lastly, to develop the methods to be employed in any subsequent study. The researchers described the respondents in terms of different variables, and for that purpose, the study adopted a descriptive approach. This was done in line with Babbie (2016) who states that the major purpose of many social scientific studies is to describe situations and events. Thus, a descriptive study is the precise measurement and reporting of the characteristics of some population or phenomenon under study. This means that the researchers observe and then describe what was observed. The study was conducted between 14 May 2020 and 6 July 2020, and because it was conducted in a single point in time, it qualifies to be a cross-sectional design study. A cross-sectional design is often called a survey design because data are collected on a sample of cases, at a single point in time for the purpose of collecting a body of quantitative or qualitative data in connection with two or more variables that are often examined to detect patterns of association (Bryman, 2016).

This study was also contextual in nature. A context is the circumstances that form the setting for an event, statement, or idea in terms of which it can be fully understood and assessed. In this study, the context is the specific department at the selected ODL institution in South Africa where postgraduate students are currently registered.

The study took place online at the selected ODL institution in South Africa. Out of the 261 postgraduate students registered in the academic year 2020 in the specific Department at the selected institution, only 71 participated in the study. A census was used to select the participants. Data were collected utilising an Online LimeSurvey that used a self-completion questionnaire with closed and open-ended questions. The quantitative data (demographics) were analysed using the SPSS (version 26.0) and the qualitative data were analysed using Tesch's method.

Participants

The population of the study consisted of 261 postgraduate (master's and doctoral) students registered in the academic year 2020 in the specific Department at the selected ODL institution in South Africa. A census was used to select and sample the respondents. A census is the enumeration of an entire population (Bryman, 2016). It is also a study of every unit, every person and everything in a population. The census was chosen for the study because the researchers were interested in collecting data from all 261 postgraduate students registered in the specific department in the academic year 2020, and the sample was manageable. Hence, no sampling technique was used.

According to the data (report) of the Institutional Research and Business Intelligence, of the selected ODL institution in South Africa, June 2019, 261 postgraduate students were registered for the academic year 2020 in the specific department. Since census was adopted for the study, the sample size was estimated to

be equal to the total population of interest – 261 students in this instance. However, only 27.2% (n=71) responded to the survey, therefore, the sample size was 71 respondents.

The recruitment of the participants, the signing of the informed consent form and the completion of the questionnaire were done simultaneously online from 14 May 2020 to 6 July 2020. An e-mail in the form of an invitation/recruitment, containing an informed consent form with the title and the aim of the study and a summarised version of the ethical considerations pertaining to the study, was sent to all 261 potential participants using a link created for that purpose. The participants were instructed to click on the link to indicate their willingness to participate in the study. Once they clicked the acceptance option, the first page of the questionnaire immediately opened up and the completion of questionnaire started. At the end of the questionnaire, participants were requested to click the 'submit questionnaire' option and the questionnaire was immediately submitted to the questionnaire database, which was created by the statistician for that purpose.

Data collection and analysis

Data were collected by means of an online LimeSurvey using a self-completion questionnaire. The questionnaire comprised close and open-ended (to generate measures) questions. This type of survey was chosen because of its availability and accessibility at the selected ODL institution. This type of survey is not costly and is fast and efficient. According to Creswell (2014), the survey provides a study with a quantitative, or numeric, description of variables of a population. Furthermore, the contingency questions, which are effective, have direct data entries and have a wide geographic reach. Data collection started on 14 May 2020 and ended on 6 July 2020. The researchers requested the services of a statistician to manage the survey processes. A link to the survey was created by the statistician and sent to the respondents using the respondents' university (portal) e-mail addresses. The survey was sent to all 261 postgraduate students that were registered during the time of data collection. All completed questionnaires were returned electronically (by clicking on, or selecting, the "submit questionnaire" option, which was provided at the end of the questionnaire) to the database (questionnaire file created by the statistician for this purpose). This database was created by the statistician, who had access by means of a secret password and who cleared and analysed the data using SPSS 26.0. Weekly reminders to complete the survey were sent to the respondents.

Data analysis is about data reduction. It is concerned with reducing a large body of information to enable the researcher to make sense of it. It deals with the management, analysis, and interpretation of data (Bryman, 2016). In analysing the data gathered, the two basic approaches of quantitative data analysis, descriptive statistics for summarising information and comparative statistics for examining differences between groups or the correlation between variables were considered.

Data collected from closed-ended questions, being biographical information, was analysed using the latest version of the SPSS 26.0 to generate descriptive statistics. On the other hand, data from open-ended questions were analysed qualitatively by using Tesch's method of data analysis (Creswell, 2013). Data were listed and grouped into preliminary groupings of themes. The analysis was done in three steps:

1. Organising the data
2. Reading the data and coding the data
3. Grouping data into themes so that it could be interpreted

Ethical clearance (HSHDC/936/2019) -(REC-012714-039 (NHREC) to conduct the study was granted by the Ethics Committee of the specific department. Permission (Ref #: 2020_RPSC_004) to involve students in the study was also granted by the selected South African University Research Permission Subcommittee (RPCS). These permissions allowed the researchers to obtain the students' university e-mail addresses, in line with the South Africa's comprehensive privacy law known as the Protection of Personal Information Act, 2013 (POPIA) which became effective on 1 July 2020.

Other ethical considerations pertaining to the study included the following:

1. Benefits of taking part in the study (there were no direct benefits from participating in the study)
2. Risks (there were no foreseeable risks involved in participating in this study other than those encountered in day-to-day life)
3. Confidentiality (confidentiality of data and personal details were assured)
4. Anonymity (no personal details identifying the respondents were requested)

Validity and reliability of the measurement instrument

The validity of an instrument is the extent to which it measures what it is supposed to measure (Creswell, 2013). It is also a test that truthfully measures what it purports to measure (Boswell & Cannon, 2017). The researcher ensured content validity of the questionnaire by consulting the statistician, the mentor, an expert in the field and an ICT specialist to review the questionnaire and make sure it covered all the content of the specific construct it was supposed to measure for standardisation and attended to the specific components of the selected theoretical framework by ensuring that the constructs were well covered by the questionnaire when measured by different groups of related items. Furthermore, the questionnaire was pre-tested before the main data collection and ethical clearance was granted.

The reliability of a research instrument is the extent to which a measurement instrument is repeatable and consistent (Creswell, 2013): the consistency and repeatability of the test results (Boswell & Cannon, 2017). The researcher ensured the reliability of the questionnaire, especially internal consistency, by calculating (establishing) the Cronbach's alpha coefficient because it was based on inter-item correlations. If the items are strongly correlated with one another, their internal consistency is high, and the alpha coefficient will be close to one. However, if the items are poorly formulated and do not correlate strongly, the alpha coefficient will be close to zero (Nieswiadomy, 2008). The internal consistency of the responses (validity) was tested by calculating the Cronbach's Alpha coefficients. Cronbach's alpha is the most common measure of internal consistency (reliability). It is most commonly used when one has multiple Likert questions in a survey/questionnaire that form a scale and one wishes to determine if the scale is reliable. The alpha coefficient for three scaled sets of questions ranged from 0.681 to 0.904, suggesting that the items have a relatively high internal consistency. Note that a reliability coefficient of 0.70 or higher is considered acceptable in most social science research situations and 0.681 is very close to this value.

ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

This article followed all ethical standards for carrying out research. Ethical clearance (HSHDC/936/2019) -(REC-012714-039 (NHREC) was sought and granted from the Ethics Committee of the specific academic department and permission (Ref #: 2020_RPSC_004) to

conduct the study and to involve the students in the study from the selected institution RPCS. These permissions allowed the researchers to obtain the students' university e-mail addresses, in line with the South Africa's comprehensive privacy law known as the POPIA as mentioned above.

RESULTS

A total of 261 surveys were distributed on 14 May 2020, with weekly reminder e-mails sent until the survey link closed on 6 July 2020. Only 71 (27.2%) respondents completed the survey; therefore, the response rate of the survey was 27.2%.

Demographical characteristics of the sample (quantitative data)

The demographic characteristics of the participants were the following: gender, age, marital status, employment status, country of residence and continent of residence, degree level registered for, time of first registration with the selected ODL institution, time of first registration with the specific department, computer skills, access to the internet and frequency of visits to the library of the selected ODL institution.

The results of the demographic characteristics are shown in the tables 2, 3 and 4 below.

Table 2

The distribution of the sample in terms of gender, age, marital status, employment status, country of residence and continent of residence

Variables	characteristics	No.	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	25	36.2%
	Female	44	63.8%
Age	26-32 yrs.	3	4.3%
	33-39 yrs.	17	24.6%
	40-46 yrs.	16	23.2%
	47 and above	33	47.8%
Marital status	Single	7	10%
	Married	57	82.6%
	Divorced	3	4.3%
	Widowed	2	2.9%
Employment status	Unemployed	6	8.7%
	Employed	58	84.1%
	Self-employed	3	4.3%
Country of residence	South Africa	33	47.8%
	Outside South Africa	36	52.2%
Continent of residence	Africa	66	95.7%
	Asia	2	2.9%

Table 2 indicates the following about the sample:

- The majority of the respondents were female (63.8%)
- The majority of the respondents were older than 46 years (47.8%)
- Most of the respondents were married (82.6%)
- Most of the respondents were employed (84.1%)
- The location distribution of respondents was almost equal between in South Africa (47.8%) and outside South Africa (52.2%), with only two respondents (2.9%) indicating that they were from the Asian continent.

Table 3 indicates the following of the sample:

- Most of the respondents were PhD students (72.1%)
- The majority of the respondents registered for the first time with the selected ODeL South African University either in 2013 (19.0%), 2016 (19.0%) or 2019 (19.0%)
- The majority of the respondents (22.6%) registered for the first time with the specific department in 2016

Table 3

- The distribution of the sample, in terms of the current degree level registered for, time of first registration with the selected ODL institution in South Africa and time of first registration with the specific department.

Variables	Characteristics	No.	Percentage (%)
Level of degree registered for	Masters	19	27.9%
	PhD	49	72.1%
1ST time registration with ODL Institution	2013	12	19.0%
	2014	4	6.3%
	2015	11	17.5%
	2016	12	19.0%
	2017	8	12.7
	2018	4	6.3%
	2019	12	19.0%
1st registration with specific department	2013	13	21.0%
	2014	4	6.5%
	2015	8	12.9%
	2016	14	22.6%
	2017	8	12.9%
	2018	4	6.5%
	2019	11	17.7%

Table 4

The distribution of the sample in terms of computer skills, access to the internet and frequency of visits to the library of the selected ODL institution in South Africa

Variables	Characteristics	No.	Percentage (%)
Computer skills	Average	1	16.2%
	Good	12	32.4%
	Very good	2	30.9%
	Excellent	21	20.6%
Access to Internet		2	
		1	
		1	
		4	
	Yes	6	98.6%
	No	8	1.4%

Frequency of visits to the university library	Never	18	11.6%
	Rarely	16	15.9%
	Sometimes	1	47.8%
	More often	13	23.2%
	Always	3	1.4%
		161	

Table 4 indicates that:

- A total of 32.4% of the respondents had good computer skills, while 30.9% had very good computer skills
- Most of the respondents have regular access to the internet (98.6%)
- The majority of the respondents indicated that they sometimes visit the university library (47.8%)

In summary, the tables 2, 3 and 4 show that, the majority of the participants were employed (84.1%), married (82.6%), female (63.8%), computer literate (32.4%), PhD students (72.1%), older than 46 years (47.8%), living outside South Africa (52.2%) and in South Africa (47.8%); who have regular access to the internet (98.6%). However, they use the library only sometimes (47.8%). While only 2.9% of the participants lived in Asia. These participants registered with the specific Department for the first time in 2016 and with ODL institution for the time, some in 2013 and 2016 and some other in 2019.

Measures to increase awareness and enhance utilisation of student support services by postgraduate students

The results are presented in line with the purpose of the study. The participants were asked to generate measures to increase awareness and enhance utilisation of SSS amongst them. The question asked was, "What are the measures to increase awareness and enhance the utilisation of student SSS amongst postgraduate students? (Please suggest, at least five ways, ideas, techniques, or strategies to be used to increase awareness of SSS and enhance its utilisation amongst students)". From the analysis of data utilising Tesch's method, six themes emerged from the open-ended question (word cloud generated from all respondents' responses): awareness of SSS, provision of information regarding SSS, accessibility and availability of SSS, support and communication between students and the university, involvement of the library and marketing and advertisement of SSS. The emerged themes and sub-themes are summarized in table 5 below.

Table 5

Themes and sub-themes that emerged from the analysis of data from the open-ended question (word cloud generated from all respondents' responses)

Emerged themes	Sub-themes
1. Awareness of SSS	
2. Provision of information regarding SSS	
3. Accessible and availability of SSS	1. Support and communication between students themselves

4. Support and communication between students and the university 5. Involvement of the librarian 6. Marketing and advertisement of SSS	2. Support and communication between students and lecturers

The emerged themes and generated measures

Awareness of SSS

In response to the question asked: "What are the measures to increase awareness and enhance the utilisation of SSS among postgraduate students?" Participants suggested the following (word cloud generated from all respondents' responses):

"… also include other services/support in the university guidelines for reference … also send via personal emails … and circulate once a month as a reminder to the students' university email addresses...awareness by librarians...awareness programme … awareness to students by students affairs … awareness by supervisors … be included in the study material as a separate topic … Briefing students during orientation … clearly avail guidance on how to utilise the services … compulsory workshops … create awareness … create awareness for local university … have contact sessions to orientate students on available services and how to use them … I suggested to give us opportunity to visit the university …"

Provision of information regarding SSS

In response to the question asked: "What are the measures to increase awareness and enhance the utilisation of SSS among postgraduate students?" Participants suggested the following:

"… avail clear information about the services … Brochures … direct emailing to inform about services … Education of students … Giving information about all learning platforms on the medium used by a specific student so that it reaches them … Include this information in a separate tutorial letter regarding student support services … Included in study packages … Information sharing prior and upon commencement of studies … Personal information regarding available services should be mailed individually to every student … Please include all the student support services in the general tutorial letter sent annually to students … Providing of information about services."

Accessibility and Availability of SSS

In response to the question asked: "What are the measures to increase awareness and enhance the utilisation of SSS among postgraduate students?" Participants suggested the following:

"… Accessibility of those people should be within reach … Assignments/research … submission link to remain accessible for 24 hours a day including weekends … Assistance with data to access the services … Availability /accessibility of university reception desks even in the small towns … Availability of data … Availability of free data so that students can access the necessary support … Ensure availability of user-friendly services … Ensure free data availability for the learners to access the service … if possible, learners who are unable to buy laptops should be provided by the University for easy access to the services … include the availability of services during orientation … Increase Internet services and access free of charge for the students … it should be easily accessible… Reduce more steps that should be followed before accessing the information required … The support services could be available in most digital platforms … Update the services."

Support and communication between students and the university

Two subthemes emerged: support and communication between students themselves and communication between students and lecturers.

Support and communication between students (themselves)

In response to the question asked: "What are the measures to increase awareness and enhance the utilisation of SSS among postgraduate students?" Participants suggested the following:

"… Also, students in the same department to be encouraged to support each other … at least even be introduced to classmates for learning and sharing … form forums and groups … Group channel for discussion and information exchange … Have a notification … Organise networks among postgraduate students with different disciplines … The role of the students' affair unit needs to be reviewed … WhatsApp groups."

Support and communication between students and their lecturers

In response to the question asked: "What are the measures to increase awareness and enhance the utilisation of SSS among postgraduate students?" Participants suggested the following:

"… Appreciation emails or text messages … Attitudes of some staff employees need to be addressed, especially when one inquires by telephone … Collaboration of regional office with local government and university … Communicate timely … Contacting individual students with slow progress … Continuous monitoring and quarterly feedback on login … Counselling … discussion forum … Do frequent survey on satisfaction of students towards utilisation of the university services/support … Announcements … E-mails … empower regional centres to provide support for postgraduate students, especially master's such as at our regional centre. When I went there asking for a certain service, they said they are not equipped to help doctoral students … Encouragement by supervisors will help … Engaging communication with students through the university and personal e-mail …Group channel for discussion and information exchange."

The involvement of the librarian

In response to the question asked: "What are the measures to increase awareness and enhance the utilisation of SSS among postgraduate students?" Participants suggested the following:

"… Easy access to the librarian to ask or make requests … Librarian allocated to students can send a mail monthly to ensure students are aware of their assistance availability … The librarian can also give information of library services, the ones available are enough."

Marketing and advertisement of SSS

In response to the question asked: "What are the measures to increase awareness and enhance the utilisation of SSS among postgraduate students?" Participants suggested the following:

"… Advertise with local government mass media … Advertisement of the services in the university home page … Adverts on television … advise by lecturers and regional offices … Advisor ratio to students should be controlled based on the standard … All services can also be advertised on the university website … All services to be advertise during orientation to new students … Also advertise in radio stations around South Africa in particular before going globally … Career exhibition to be done in all regions including marketing whose duty will be to market the available services … Workshops via online … Exhibition shows … Facebook … In regions, these services should be advertised and be pasted on the wall … Increase visibility of the university support in all social media."

DISCUSSIONS

Enhancing utilisation of SSS among students requires students to be aware of the services. The necessary information pertaining to the available services, accessibility, support and communication between students and their lecturers, different services and the involvement of the library should be readily available to students. These services should also be marketed and advertised.

Krause and Coates (2008) postulate that academic learning should involve a continuous and iterative dialogue between

lecturers and students, and the critical role academic staff play in helping first-year students to engage with their studies and the learning community. Lecturers must be fully committed to their lectures and communication. Communication must comprise verbal and non-verbal communication. Non-verbal communication attracts the attention of the students towards the learning process. Lecturers' behaviour in a class can increase or decrease the students' motivation. Lecturers can use the following techniques to facilitate students' learning: formal lesson planning, discussions, group work, lesson elaboration and team participation (Ullah, Sagheer, Sattar & Khan, 2013).

Lecturers can promote academic motivation and restructure the teaching and learning environment by providing different learning strategies to students and finding ways to motivate students to engage in active learning. Lecturers, administrators, and counsellors contribute to a positive teaching and learning environment for students by putting structures in place that help them to provide an optimal learning environment for students (Rugutt & Chemosit, 2009).

Vygotsky (1978) states that lecturers are very important in the learning process. They play multiple roles: lecturers create and design a learning environment which maximises students' opportunities to interact with one another and with other experts; they act as experts, models, guides and facilitators of students' social interactions; they are there to design tasks, develop resources and establish the classroom culture and norms for interactions, which include identifying roles and appropriate behaviour for students as they interact with one another, fostering discussion between and among themselves, and managing the complexities of multiple ongoing tasks and activities. In this way, individual development takes place in the context of activities modelled or assisted by the more skilled person.

Lecturers also have the duty of assessing the students' understanding to locate the point in the "zone of proximal development" where they require assistance to build on ways, they can learn among themselves, by creating a conducive learning environment for students. Lecturers are agents that influence student motivation, encourage students in their pursuit of excellence in learning by providing them with positive feedback, are involved in positive interactions, remain enthusiastic about students' educational growth, cultivate a positive classroom environment, and have a strong influence on their academic motivation (Rugutt & Chemosit, 2009).

Krause and Coates (2008) allude to the idea that academic learning involves a continuous and iterative dialogue between lecturers and students and the critical role that academic staff play in helping first-year students to engage with their studies and the learning community.

Zuhairi (2019) postulates that the role of instructional design is critical in open and distance education, as distance learners are physically (geographically) separated from their teachers. The instructional design process involves the identification of the learners' needs, the definition of instructional objectives, the design of assessment, and the design of teaching and learning activities to ensure quality instruction. Furthermore, open and distance education institutions are challenged to transform themselves into digital platforms for learning and teaching by taking into account not only the learning needs of the students, but also the technological support required for learning. It is the task of these educators to support distance learning and to make the distance learning experience enjoyable for students.

According to Mensah and Afful-Arthur (2019), providing library services to students who pursue distance education in tertiary institutions is indisputably one of

the greatest thought-provoking and demanding expansions that has transpired in present-day librarianship. This service became relevant because of the increased demand for distance education to satisfy personal and national educational goals. Services offered by an academic library system should support students and faculty by explicatively addressing the needs of instruction, scholarship, and research. The library's support for the distance learners must respond to the mission of the parent institution, as well as the information needs of the students and lecturers.

Mensah and Afful-Arthur (2019) further state that academic libraries acquire and disseminate resources to support research, teaching and learning, but users need to be aware of the existence of the support services offered by libraries in their institutions before they can utilise them.

Shaheen, Mahmood, and Shah (2020) state that the library is the most important SSS because it constitutes a source of self-education, a supply of knowledge and realistic information, intellectual entertainment and a source of light that provides the knowledge of civilisation and enriches one's mental vision. A library is an institution equipped with the responsibility of educating students and providing them with the ability to solve their informational issues. This is possible through utilising the right source as well as the ability to use the information tools provided to get the right information from the right place at the right time. Librarians and other support specialists work as peers in the enterprise to support self-directed student learning, to facilitate the development of students' potential, to advance students' development of knowledge and to serve as a locus of community for students.

Library support is an essential part of quality education and a central service that should be accessible to all students, whether on or off campus. Libraries have a long history of delivering information services to patrons within their locations and beyond. Traditionally, librarians and libraries have been responsible for providing for the informational needs of students, faculty, and other staff on campus. They also guide people to find appropriate learning materials to complement notes, they build library collections to support syllabi for degree programmes, they act as curators of archival materials, they enhance access to information through inter-library loans and they increase information literacy by training students in the effective use of libraries through bibliographical instruction (Mensah & Afful-Arthur, 2019).

The purpose of the library at any institution of higher learning is the identification, development, coordination, provision and assessment of the value and effectiveness of relevant resources, as well as services to meet the standard and the unique informational and developmental needs of the distance learning community (Gor, 2012). For Zemcova, Manzuch, Baltrnus and Rudzioniene (2010), the library provides information and communication to users, more specifically to students, and functions in an environment where the information is intense, where the time and efficiency of communication is of paramount importance, and where these impact either negatively or positively on the provision of the information services necessary for ensuring the creative decision-making process and effective teamwork. University libraries draw from the information management principles to provide adequate and appropriate services to the hierarchy. Libraries provide essential support services to open and distance education (ODE) students, which are crucial for the development and expansion of educational programmes. Access to these services and resources is essential, irrespective of the student's geographical location, school/college/faculty or programme of study (Bhatti & Jumani, 2012). Thus, libraries are considered to substitute the face-to-face interaction

between students and the institution, just like in the case of traditional and conventional universities. ODL students require access to the full range of library services, which includes reference assistance and bibliographic instruction for interlibrary loans, course reserves, and circulation and information network connections. However, library research and information literacy remain the essential components of the academic learning experience. These services are unique in kind and nature because they are important parts of any teaching and learning journey, hence, they should form an integral part of the teaching and learning journey. Library staff should seriously consider and acknowledge this situation (Fahad, 2012).

First and Altinpulluk (2016) postulate that by providing learners with opportunities to participate in both learning and course groups, social networks are established and are widely used in education environments and have also become the subject of various studies. The use of social media sites in educational activities increases academic performance, satisfaction, engagement, collaboration, and interaction with instructors. Benefitting from social network sites in educational environments provide learners with opportunities to share their opinions, show their creativity and receive feedback from their friends. Providing learners with a wide array of opportunities, social media use in learning environments continues to increase both in traditional classes (inside the classroom) and in ODL environments (outside the classroom). Social media provide instructors with an opportunity not only to support the development of learners' skills and competencies, but also to include them in online classes as part of either open or distance learning systems. Social media can be used to increase interaction between learners and instructors in open and distance learning environments.

Social media strengthen the communication and interaction in ODL environments. Social media can be used as an effective technological tool to strengthen online communication in ODL environments within the scope of higher education and, when compared to face-to-face learning, the use of social media in open and distance learning environments provides a better communication environment among learners. In the transactional distance approach, open distance learners are those learners who most frequently deal and cope with the "sense of distance". Therefore, due to its heavy use of interaction and communication, it is important for open and distance learners to use social media in an ODL environment, as it allows them the opportunity to interact socially, which decreases their "sense of distance." One of the most widely known applications is the Web 2.0 applications which are used effectively in open and distance learning environments, as well as the social media network Facebook (First & Altinpulluk, 2016).

First and Altinpulluk (2016) further reveal that by providing opportunities for communication, knowledge sharing, making friends, sending private messages, chatting, tagging, creating photograph albums, joining social groups, experiencing different online applications, and playing games, Facebook presents its users with the possibility to create personalised profiles. In addition, Facebook provides a venue for commercial promotions and advertisement applications. With these features, it has not only become popular among learners and instructors but is also an almost integral part of social life. It is the social media network used by most of the students worldwide. When used for learning purposes, Facebook increases communication, interaction, collaboration, and the sharing of resources, which contribute to the development of learning processes. By also providing informal and unstructured learning environments, Facebook provides avenues for learners to achieve their academic

purposes and to work in a collaborative manner.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In conclusion, the results indicate that, the majority of the participants were employed (84.1%), married (82.6%), female (63.8%), computer literate (32.4%), PhD students (72.1%), older than 46 years (47.8%), living outside South Africa (52.2%) and in South Africa (47.8%); who have regular access to the internet (98.6%). However, they use the library only sometimes (47.8%). While only 2.9% of the participants lived in Asia. These participants registered with the specific Department for the first time in 2016 and with ODL institution for the time, some in 2013 and 2016 and some other in 2019. From the qualitative data, six themes emerged, namely: (1) awareness of the services; (2) provision of information regarding the services; (3) accessibility and availability of the services; (4) support and communication between students and the university; (5) the involvement of the library; and (6) marketing and advertisement of the services.

Based on the findings from the qualitative data, the following measures were generated: increase awareness and enhance the utilisation of these services amongst the participants through information provision about these services; make the services available and accessible to all students irrespective of their levels; encouragement, motivation, enhance support and communication between students, and between students and their lecturers; involve the librarian; market and advertise the services utilising mass media and social networks. The effective and efficient implementation of these measures could increase awareness and enhance utilisation of these services amongst the participants and other students. Thus, students will be able to deal with academic challenges and improve their academic performance.

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COMPETING INTEREST

No conflict of interest to be reported.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTION

The first author (the corresponding author) conducted the study as part of his responsibilities as a Post-Doctoral Research Fellow and has written the manuscript(s) of the article. The co-author (mentor) supervised the entire project. Both authors contributed to the final version of the manuscript.

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DATA AVAILABILITY

Data supporting this study's findings are openly available in the repository of the selected institution in South Africa where the study took place and can be released on special request.

DISCLAIMER

The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of any affiliated agency of the authors

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An Investigation into Factors Militating Against Effective and Efficient Implementation of Successful Continuous Professional Development Programmes in South African Schools

Hasha R and Wadesango N
University of Limpopo, South Africa.
Corresponding author: newman.wadesango@ul.ac.za

ABSTRACT

Continuous Professional Development (CPD) basically refers to continuing education and career training after a teacher has entered the workforce, in order to help the teacher to develop new skills and knowledge and stay up to date on career trends (Bernadine, 2019; Saleem, Guy & Dogar, 2021). Essentially CPD ensures that teachers continue to be proficient and competent in their profession while in turn furnishing students with skills and knowledge that would enhance learner progress and success. This study endeavours to contribute to developing knowledge in the field of CPD studies with a particular view on monitoring the impediments on effective implementation of CPD. The desktop research method was engaged. Basically, the desktop research involved collecting data from existing credible published resources. The authors sourced and reviewed literature on the topic from journal articles, published theses, books, magazines and newspapers. On the basis of the findings of this study, some recommendations were made. The primary recommendation of this study is to create CPD opportunities that promote teacher collaboration to inculcate a culture of colleagueship, trust and knowledge sharing.

Keywords: *Continuous professional development, desktop research, impediments, effective, efficient, student success, collaboration, colleagueship*

BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

"It is universally accepted that teachers are major facilitators of educational activities. Teaching being an interactive activity based on learner and teacher means that the teaching/learning and school curriculum revolves and evolves around the educators" (Steyn, 2008; Steyn, 2010; Johns and Sosibo, 2019; Saleem et al, 2021). "That puts teacher quality as a powerful factor that matters significantly for student learning and success".

"The role of the educator in the success of every student is of paramount importance in all educational situations". "A part of the success of every educator is highly dependent upon his or her knowledge and skill" (Collin et al., 2012; Saleem et al, 2021). CPD is "the cornerstone for quality education to be realised in every school and the teaching fraternity is not an exception to the rule" (Steyn, 2008; Bernadine, 2019; Tyagi and Misra, 2021). Furthermore, a part of every educator's knowledge and skill is dependent upon his or her training. "However, schools can no longer sorely rely on educators having undergone some teacher education training; educators need to continually update their knowledge and skills throughout their careers" (Haslam, 2010; Steyn, 2010; Cooper, 2016).

In order to avoid possible misconceptions by the readers, the term professional development is contextually defined below so that it is understood as used in this research. Professional development may mean different things to different people. Definitions would ideally add clarity and reduce confusion by establishing shared meanings. Kennedy (2009:41) defines continuous professional development as:

> *"… the conscious updating of professional knowledge and the improvement of professional competence throughout a person's working life. It is a commitment to being professional, keeping up to date and consciously seeking to improve. Continuous professional development is the key to optimising a person's career opportunities for today and for the future. It focuses on what you learn and how you develop throughout your career"*.

Guskey (2000:16) agrees, adding that professional development is, *"…those processes and activities designed to enhance the professional knowledge, skills and attitudes of educators so that they might, in turn, improve students' learning"*.

As may be observed, the above definitions interpret "professional teaching development as a 'process,' meaning to say it is systematic, deliberate as well as organised" (Whitehouse, 2010; Collin et al., 2012; Shaha et al., 2015). The common denominator is that the staff skills and competencies are improved upon in order to produce outstanding educational results for students. Additionally, CPD is lifelong in one's working life. "Therefore, professional development of educators is the cornerstone for the provision of quality teaching and learning" (Bernadine, 2019). "It also implies that educators never cease to learn, CPD therefore, puts emphasis on lifelong learning zeroing-in on student achievement." "In education, the term professional development may be used in reference to a wide variety of specialised training, formal/informal education or advanced professional learning intended to help educators, principals and other educational personnel improve their professional knowledge, competence, skill and general effectiveness" (Evans, 2002; McDonough et al., 2010; Darling-Hammond et al., 2017)).

"Educational technology and curricula, for instance, are constantly changing, making it challenging, for educators to keep with trends and practices in the field" (Mizell, 2010). "Continuous professional development comes handy in transforming educators into better and more apt educators by enabling them to create relevant and tailored course instructions for today's students" (Tsotetsi & Mahlomaholo, 2013; Huish, 2014). "The assumption with professional development is that when educators discover new teaching strategies, they are able to go back to the classroom and make changes to suit the needs of their learners. In fact, research shows that an inspiring and informed educator is the most important school-related factor influencing student achievement, so it is critical to pay close attention to how both new and experienced educators are supported" (Steyn, 2008; Mestry, Hendricks & Bisschoff, 2009, Bernadine, 2019, Johns & Sosibo, 2019).

"There are many forms of CPD programmes or activities available. These include workshops, consultation, expert coaching, peer coaching and courses that may enhance existing teacher professional qualifications" (Bernadine, 2019; Johns and Sosibo, 2019; Tyagi and Misra, 2021). "CPD activities further consist of demonstrations and peer observation, mentoring, inductions for beginner teachers, job rotation, teamwork, clustering of schools and school visits as well as designing and executing school improvements projects, lesson studies, reflective supervision and technical assistance" (Bernadine, 2019). "CPD programmes prevailing in schools may be summarized into three broad approaches namely, school-initiated, educator-initiated and externally-initiated".

This research originates from the calls for more emphasis on educator professional development to support student achievement. "The notion of educator CPD is part of a wider debate on educator professionalism. The South African education system is in dire need of competent educators with relevant knowledge, skills and abilities to manage and develop their learners" (Steyn, 2008; Boaduo, 2010; Steyn, 2010). "Teachers in present day South Africa are expected to be reflective and change oriented thereby to meet the government and public demand for quality education" (Steyn, 2010). "This situation signifies the importance of CPD aimed at improving the quality of the teaching/learning process in particular, and improving the quality of education in general".

"During the apartheid era, the South African education was organised into racially and ethnically divided sub-systems" (Bernadine, 2019). Since 1994, the education system was rationalised into one single education system. The introduction of a revised curriculum required teachers to have new knowledge and applied competence. It was on the basis of this that it was found to be critical that all teachers needed to enhance their skills for the delivery of the new curriculum. It was also emphasised in the National Policy Framework for Education and Development in South Africa that a large majority of teachers needed to strengthen their subject base, pedagogical content knowledge and teaching skills (Bernadine, 2019). "In South Africa, Continuing Professional Teacher Development (CPTD) is a system that encourages teachers to grow professionally". According to SACE (2013), "CPTD is managed by the South African Council for Educators (SACE). The purpose of this study is therefore to identify the possible challenges that educators face in the implementation of CPTD and suggest improvement measures to the system".

"When discussing CPD it is imperative that we are aware of the pros and cons of the system in limiting effective and efficient CPD programmes". "While participants spoke passionately about CPD in research conducted in Limpopo Pietersburg Circuit secondary schools, they also heightened the difficulty at implementation due to time constraints, scarce resources and meagre funding amongst others" (Hasha, 2020). Many researchers have reported different hampering factors for CPD like time constraints, inaccessibility to programmes, lack of teacher motivation, as well as lacking in financial support (Steyn, 2008; Bernadine, 2019; John and Sosibo, 2019; Saleem et al, 2021; Tyagi and Misra, 2021). "Also identified as hindrances include unsupportive mangers/officials, negative staff attitude, unavailability of programmes, family commitments and unsafe work environments" (Tyagi and Misra, 2021). "The intensity of these constraints increases where there is no systematic educational policy provisions".

RESEARCH OBJECTIVE

To establish the factors that inhibit the implementation of CPD in South African schools.

RESEARCH PROBLEM

"Professional development of educators is a focal point of school improvement initiatives" (Steyn, 2010; Vracar, 2014; Huish, 2014). "The National Framework for Teacher Education and Development (2007) attempted to address the need for suitably qualified educators in South Africa. Hence, it is on record that the Department of Basic Education (DBE) in the Republic of South Africa challenges schools to accelerate progress in student achievement to meet stakeholder expectations". The DBE (2017) analysis of the 2016 matric results for the Pietersburg Circuit in Polokwane indicates an average circuit pass rate of 78.4%; however, further

analysis shows "a worrisome low pass rate with some schools. For instance, Mango High School had 36%; Guava School 42.9%; Lemon 36.4%; Orange 57.2%; Apple 59.2%; and Grape Fruit Secondary School with 39.7% pass rate. Hence, this study was conducted to explore the influence of CPD programmes in enhancing student achievement."

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This is a desktop research method that involved collecting and examining information that already exists on the internet, libraries, published journals and periodicals, magazines, published government reports and theses. It also draws on recent academic papers, books and reports from international organizations. Desktop research is secondary research where the researchers reviewed what other researchers had established. The data was found to be pertinent in providing baseline information in understanding CPD.

REVIEW AND DISCUSSION OF RELATED LITERATURE

In order to have more insight into the problem under investigation, a review of the related literature that focuses on the key concepts used in the current studies is necessary. The literature is based on what has been said by other authors about professional development. The purpose of the literature review is to acquire insight into the various literature based on professional development of the teaching personnel. "The assumption being that the body of evidence accumulated over decades would ideally provide research-based conclusions that can guide the development of effective continuous professional development programmes" (McDonough et al., 2010; Salo & Ronnerman, 2013; Cooper, 2016).

IMPEDIMENTS ON SUCCESS OF PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Guskey and Yoon (2009) assert "research syntheses confirm the difficulty of translating professional development into student achievement gains despite the intuitive and logical connection". "The complaints about professional development have been well documented and most often cite several shortcomings, barriers or impediments that tend to militate against effective and efficient implementation of educator continuous professional development programmes".

"Insufficient time leading to hurriedly put-up professional development programmes tend to compromise on the effectiveness of the programmes" (Guskey & Yoon, 2009; Gates & Gates, 2014). "Time is essential to effective professional development, and obviously, educators need time to deepen their understanding, analyse students' work and develop new approaches to instruction" (Guskey, 2003; Cole, 2004; Macheng, 2016; Moonasar & Underwood, 2018). However, significant contrary evidence exists on abundant supply of time in implementing professional development. "For instance, a research analysis showed that differences in time spent in professional development activities were unrelated to improvements in student outcomes" (Guskey, 2003). In other words, "the amount of time spent in professional development was unrelated to achievement. While effective professional development surely requires time, it is clear that the time must be well organised, carefully structured and purposefully directed" (Guskey, 2003).

Research on educators, according to Guskey (2003), shows that "individual educators can collaborate to block change or inhibit progress just as easily as they can to enhance efficient process of professional development". Mainly, educators value opportunities to work together, reflecting on their practices by sharing strategies and

exchanging ideas in promoting collegiality and collaboration. "For collaboration to bring its intended benefits, it too needs to be structured and purposeful, with efforts guided by clear goals for improving student learning" (Guskey, 2003; Berry et al., 2010; Burns; 2015).

Educators in undeveloped to developing countries or nations referred to as Third World, tend to face enormous barriers to quality professional development. Burns (2015:2) referred to such environments as, *"…fragile and crisis contexts…*" Burns (2015) "identified four barriers to educators' professional development in fragile contexts as listed and expounded below".

Difficult working conditions

Low, delayed or irregular remuneration, overcrowded classrooms and lack of teaching and learning materials may all contribute to difficult working conditions. Such conditions (both discretely and cumulatively) are often highly demotivating for educators and tend to affect educator characteristics, which are critical to effective teaching performance. Some educators become educators by necessity, and not by design. "Such educators may lack a strong professional identity or the desire to strengthen that identity, even in environments where respect for educators is high and even where education is seen as important or restorative" (Guskey, 2003; 2005; Burns, 2015; Bernadine, 2019).

Furthermore, if educators are poorly prepared for their profession and receive little or inadequate professional support, they may lack confidence particularly so if they teach students with acute emotional and academic needs. Burns (2015) asserts that such calibre of educators may doubt their own efficacy or ability to produce an intended result. As a result, student-educator relationships and the quality of teaching and learning may be undermined thereby compromising on student learning.

Burns (2015) put forward a claim that "difficult working conditions, low status, gender bias, amongst others, often prompt educators to look for alternative work or resist any attempts to enhance increased professionalism". Educators may view professional development as not resulting in their improvement in their own practice or leading to promotion

Systematic challenges

Fragile education systems are often characterised by poor leadership, limited administrative capacity or inadequate budgets. "Any attempts at professionally developing educators may render the effects nullified by problems associated with low quality and a limited variety of the tools used to observe and supervise educators and provide them with feedback about their teaching" (Caena, 2011; Burns, 2015; Johns and Sosibo, 2019).

Conflict

"Not every country is in literal conflict. However, professional development, for instance, offered to one social group at the exclusion of another may actually contribute to the exacerbation of some form of tension" (Burns, 2015). Racially segregated communities or inherited racially discriminatory tendencies (as is in almost all post-colonial states in Africa) are a potential for conflict.

Poorly designed professional development

"Poorly designed professional development programmes often are characterised by budget constraints, the lack of qualified facilitators, volatility and a host of other logistical challenges" (Burns (2015). Policy makers and donors may often have a misunderstanding about the best practices around educator learning. "Continuous professional development

programmes disconnected from policies around educator recruitment, assessment, retention and support may be futile" (Guskey & Yoon, 2009; DeMonte, 2013). Such programmes may be viewed by educators as low quality or irrelevant.

DeMonte (2013:4) put forward "shortcomings in effecting professional development programmes that tend to impede against efficient implementation;

- When it is usually disconnected from the everyday practice of teaching. Such kinds of training programmes are unlikely to positively influence teaching and improve student learning. Professional learning should honour the expertise of educators by taking into consideration educator prior knowledge and skills.
- When it is too generic and unrelated to the curriculum or to the specific instructional challenges that educators face. Ideally professional development programmes need to be aligned to the curriculum, school goals, assessment and other professional learning activities.
- When it is infrequent and implemented as a one-time event or led by an outside consultant who drops in to conduct a workshop and never returns to the school. Continuous professional development activities should include follow-up and continuous feedback."

Based upon research conducted by Gates and Gates (2014), both educators and school administrators identified a number of barriers to moving closer to their ideal professional learning experiences. For educators, the most often-cited barriers are insufficient time, lack of financial resources to pay for the professional development they needed, learning that is not customised enough to the content they teach. "Together with, the skills they need to develop, and a lack of continuity between professional development sessions" (Guskey &Yoon, 2009; Gates and Gates, 2014; Macheng, 2016). School administrators mostly cited a lack of time, training and resources as key barriers.

Below is a list of research responses established by Gates and Gates (2014:12), "indicating barriers to effective professional development of educators. The top three were the most cited, with the bottom three being the least cited.

- There is not enough time built into educators' schedules for professional development.
- School administrative tasks make it difficult for school leaders to spend enough time on instruction.
- School leaders do not have enough time to support educator professional development effectively.
- School leaders do not receive enough training and support on how to develop the professional development at schools.
- School leaders have not received enough training on how to provide coaching and feedback to educators.
- School leaders do not have a clear understanding of the development needs of specific educators.
- The district (Department) does not allocate sufficient financial resources to professional development.
- The district's (Department) professional development priorities change too often.
- Finding the right external professional development resources for schools is very challenging.
- District leadership does not make professional development a priority.
- External professional development providers are of poor quality"

A study conducted by Macheng (2016) on barriers of continuing professional development of educators in junior secondary schools in Botswana established the following as major barriers.

Time constraints

"It emerged that time is a constraint with regard to professional development of educators" (Guskey, 2000; Guskey, 2003; Darling-Hammond & Richardson, 2009; Burns, 2015; Bernadine, 2019; Johns and Sosibo, 2019). Sufficient time should be availed for educators to engage in professional development programmes. In addition, educators need abundant time to make professional development an on-going part of their work on a daily basis. "Nevertheless, educators in countries such as Germany, Japan and China have significant amount of time to engage in professional development activities" Macheng, 2016). In these countries, educators have smaller classes enabling them to spend part of the day conferring with students and colleagues on professional development matters.

Financial constraints

"Inadequate funding of educator development activities was also identified by research studies as one of the barriers to professional development of educators" (Steyn, 2008; Bernadine, 2019; Johns & Sosibo, 2019; Saleem et al2019; Tyagi & Misra, 2021). The situation is made worse in situations where the government through the Department of Education may be the sole funder of professional development of educators.

Lack of support by school leadership

"Unsupportive school leadership emerged as one of the barriers of the professional development of educators". One of the key roles of instructional leaders is to avail opportunities for educators to grow professionally. "Support by school management is critical in promoting educator development and high-quality education" (Macheng, 2016). "When the school leadership is weak, it also tends to weaken the educators' morale and services" (Berry et al., 2010; Bernadine, 2019; Tyagi & Misra, 2021).

Lack of expertise

Lack of trained personnel to manage professional development programmes is another issue of concern. According to Macheng (2016), "education managers are essential in capacitating school management. Their responsibility is to interpret and supervise the implementation of educational policy at their level of administration". "They are expected to guide, direct and advise educators on professional development matters" (Guskey, 2003; Cole, 2004; DeMonte, 2013). However, for the principals or other school managers to deliver on their mandate, they need themselves to be knowledgeable and skilled for the job

Lack of ownership by educators

"Another barrier to professional development established by research studies is lack of educator ownership of professional development initiatives" (Steyn; 2008; Bernadine, 2019; Johns & Sosibo, 2019; Tyagi & Misra, 2021). "Educators were of the view that they had minimal to no input in the decisions about "what?" and "how?" of the professional development activities they had to participate in" (Guskey & Yoon, 2009; Berry et al., 2010; Caena, 2011). "One of the critical assumptions of the adult learning theory is that adults have a deep need to be self-directing as active participants in the learning process" (Trotter, 2006; Malik, 2016). Put in another way, adult learners (educators) dislike circumstances in which they feel that other people are imposing their will on them.

Unstructured in-service programmes

"Unstructured in-service programmes also surfaces as a barrier of professional development of educators" (Steyn, 2008; Bernadine, 2019). "Currently there is no policy framework at national level in Botswana, which directs continuing professional development of teachers" (Macheng, 2016). However, South Africa has such policy frameworks.

RECOMMENDATIONS

"Promoting a positive school climate is likely to have a significant benefit to both educators and students. Harmony amongst the teaching staff and management is ideal for effective implementation of CPD in schools (Bernadine, 2019; Johns & Sosibo, 2019). Educators are more likely to take part in CPD when they work in user-friendly school environments.

The researchers' advice to the DBE is to establish and operate provincial CPD committees to advise on policy priorities, resource allocation, funding and budget matters and to monitor progress of CPD implementation plans. In addition, the committees must undertake training needs analysis, monitor, and evaluate the effectiveness of CPD. The annual budget plan should include clear fund allocations for educator scholarships/bursaries/grants and loans at provincial level. Focus must shift onto teachers in low-income and crisis-affected contexts for sponsorship (Burns, 2015).

Time constraints was highlighted in literature as prohibitive to effective implementation of CPD. Providing a variety of opportunities for professional development could make the much-desired difference. Internet studies and providing study-leave to attend full-time college and university courses could be another option. A link should be established with teacher centres for teachers to access technological resources wth ease" (Bernadine, 2019).

CONCLUSION

In seeking to meet teachers' professional development requirements, policy makers and other CPD office bearers and practitioners need to consider both how to support and encourage participation, and how to ensure that CPD programmes match teachers' perceived needs (Steyn, 2008; Bernadine, 2019; Saleem et al, 2021). This must be balanced with the cost in terms of both finance and time. The challenge is to encourage a collaborative and participative culture where teachers are actively involved in joint activities and discussions in sharing knowledge and skills so as to improve the competence of teachers to enhance student achievement (Steyn, 2008). CPD can be a vehicle for teaching improvement and student success if it is prepared and given in an expert manner on a regular basis.

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Internal Teacher Support in a Special School for Learners with Hearing Impairment in Gauteng

Ntsoaki Teresa Mokala and Maximus Monaheng Sefotho
Department of Educational Psychology, University of Johannesburg, South Africa
Corrresponding author: ntsoaki.mokala@wits.ac.za

ABSTRACT

The current paper discusses teachers' understanding of the level of internal support they receive from the school for learners with hearing impairment in Gauteng. The study employed interpretivist paradigm to illustrate how the teachers experience support from different specialists in the school. The study purposely selected nine teachers to hear their stories of the level of support they receive from the school. Semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions were employed as instruments of data collection, and the data were analysed thematically. Analysis denotes support in the form of supportive heads, specialists and their roles, in-service training, collaboration, the use of team approach and a need for psychosocial services. The conclusion provides strategies that teachers in special schools for learners with hearing impairment could employ to support one another and effectively collaborate with other specialists in the school.

Keywords*: special education, hearing impairment, collaboration, in-service training, pedagogy*

INTRODUCTION

The South African education system has a history of discrimination, segregation and marginalisation (Lenta, 2016). Deaf education is no exception to this as the schools that were initially set up depended on the skin colour as well as the ethnic groups (Magongwa, 2020). As such, schools for the white learners with hearing impairment had more resources than schools for the learners with hearing impairment of colour. As a result, schools for the Black learners with hearing impairment have been neglected over a long period (Donohue & Bornman, 2014). As time progressed, the issues of education for the Deaf were revised; hence, the Constitution and the White Paper articulate that the use of sign language must be utilized in schools as a medium of instruction for the learners with hearing impairment (Magongwa, 2020; Makoelle, 2012; United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, 2006). As a result, services for the learners with hearing impairment improved and the legislation on the education of learners with hearing impairment was introduced. This opened equal access for such learners with the aim to empower and accommodate them accordingly (Bell, Carl & Swart, 2016).

With so many debates surrounding the best method of teaching learners with hearing impairment, the democratically elected government revised different policies to respond to use and recognises South African Sign Language (SASL) as the language that should be used in teaching learners with hearing impairment (Magongwa, 2020). It is important to note that South African special school for learners with hearing impairment use different approaches to teaching learners with hearing impairment. Some schools make use of sign language as a medium of instruction, while others, like the one the current was carried out, make use of spoken language. This approach therefore calls for the use of different assistive devices to amplify learners' hearing abilities (Farooq, 2015). According to Nair (2015), learners with hearing impairment use different methods of communication and assistive

devices, which include hearing aids, cochlear implants, speech, speech/lip reading, bone anchored hearing aid and other applicable assistive listening devices, or a combination of these.

The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (1996) is the starting point in support of equality, democratic values of human dignity and freedom through the Bill of Rights. Reference to education, the constitution aims to redress the inequalities of the past within one education system through inclusive education measurers. The principle of education for all is further encrypted within the South African Schools Act of 1997. Education White Paper 6 (DoE, 2001) is a founding document for inclusive education is South Africa. Mokala (2017, p. 6) supports that "…the White Paper 6: Special Needs Education: Building an Inclusive Education and Training System (DoE, 2001) is the first official document that introduced inclusive education as a discourse and policy in South Africa." Mapepa and Magano (2018) observe that since 1994, the democratic South African government has faced the challenge of providing quality education for its multicultural population. Consequently, one of the mandates pursued include the aim to address the right to education for all. The DoE (2001) echoes the same sentiments by stipulating that all children with disabilities have rights to education and training.

As such, all children have the right to enjoy a full service of education and maintain a high level of self-dependence and social participation. This is further encrypted in the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (1996) to ensure equity for all citizens as Section 29(1) states: "Everyone has the right to basic education including adult basic education; and to further education, which the state through reasonable measures must make progressively available and accessible." Unfortunately, some learners do not have equal access to education due to their impairments as they face challenges such as marginalisation, exclusion and oppression within the education system. The Education White Paper indicates that inclusive education is established to address such issues as it is about maximising the participation of all learners in the curriculum of education institutions and uncovering and minimising the barriers to learning (DoE, 2001, p.16).

BACKGROUND

The Deaf community in South Africa emerged from a charity case view of disability, where churches opened many schools; and this community has been evolving. Deaf education has been embedded within the segregationist and marginalising practices dominated by racial discrimination, because the South African education system has a history of racial discrimination and marginalising practices (Bell et al, 2016). The schools that were initially set up depended on the skin colour as well as ethnic groups. As such, schools for the white learners with hearing impairment were more resourced than schools for the learners with hearing impairment of colour. As a result, schools for the Black learners with hearing impairment have been neglected over a long period. As time progressed, the issues of education for the Deaf were revised. Engelbrecht, Savolainen, Nel, Koskela and Okkolin (2017) explain that equity and redress are the cornerstone principles of South African education policies. The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (RSA, 1996) and the White Paper 6 (DoE, 2001) articulate that the use of sign language must be utilized in schools as a medium of instruction for the learners with hearing impairment. As a result, services for the learners with hearing impairment were improved and the legislation on the education of learners with hearing impairment was introduced. This opened equal access for such learners, thus empowering and accommodating them

accordingly (Engelbrecht, 2020; Engelbrecht et al., 2017).

There are controversial debates surrounding the best method of teaching learners with hearing impairment. The democratically elected government revised different policies to respond to the recognition of SASL as the language that should be used in teaching learners with hearing impairment. The change of the language policy in South Africa include emanated from the new Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (RSA, 1996). It is worth noting that the language policy in South Africa is a never-ending dilemma, and SASL is no exception to this (Reagan, 2019). Educational issues in the South African context are entangled in a debate on which language must be used as a medium of instruction. SASL is surrounded by several controversies because it is viewed as a minority language. On a more practical level, Reagan (2019) articulates that The Constitution of the Republic South Africa recognises a total number of eleven official languages and SASL is excluded from this list. However, Chapter 1(6) 5 of the Constitution makes provision through the Pan South African Language Board (PanSALB) to promote and create conditions for the development and use of;

i. All official languages;

ii. The Khoi, Nama, and San languages; and

iii. Sign language

Reagan (2019) further notes that under PanSALB, the National Language Board was created specifically for SASL to pursue two objectives: (I) initiating and implementing strategic projects aimed at creating awareness, identifying needs and promoting SASL, (ii) identifying and funding projects aimed at developing SASL.

The education sector too acknowledges the use of SASL for learners with hearing impairment. The South African Schools Act no. 84 of 1996 mentions the use of SASL as an important consideration for language policy in public schools. Chapter 2, the Constitution further asserts, “Everyone has a right to receive education in the official language or languages of their choice in public educational institutions where the education is reasonably practicable” (29(2)). The South African Schools Act further elaborates, “A recognised Sign Language has the status of an official language for purposes of learning at a public school” (chapter 2. 6(4). Against this background, it is the aim of this study therefore, to determine the extent to which the use of SASL is a medium of instruction for learners with hearing impairment.

Previous research conducted both nationally and internationally, show that teachers are supportive of inclusive practices (Makoelle, 2012). However, there are some findings which indicate that teachers experience difficulties in implementing inclusive practices in their teaching due to factors such as inexperience, limited resources, lack of training, inadequate knowledge of legislation and low confidence towards inclusion (Makoelle, 2012; Walton & Rusznyak; Mosia, 2014). Contrary to this, the findings of the current study indicate that teachers are able to include all learners in their teaching due to the support they get from the school at all levels. Walton (2017) opines that for successful implementation of inclusive education, the systems leaders and the school must be supportive to the teachers. This calls for a policy that is supportive of inclusive education structures and practices. Therefore, there must be a good relationship between policy, law and the school leadership. Supportive environment fosters a culture of inclusion. Engelbrecht, Nel, Nel & Tlale (2015) echo the same sentiments by indicating that the South African education system needs to be supportive of teachers for successful implementation of inclusive education.

Ntinda, Thwala and Tfusi (2019) conducted a study on the experiences of the teachers of Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing students in a special needs school in Eswatini. This qualitative research study used interviews, focus group discussion and document analysis to generate data. The study purposely selected eighteen teachers who teach Deaf or Hard-of-hearing learners. The study revealed that teachers experienced gaps in their competency to teach in mainstream classes as they felt that their training did not adequately equip them. Additionally, "variation in sign language impacting learner engagement hindered teacher's communication with the deaf and hard-of hearing students and their parents" (Ntinda et al., 2019, p. 79). Furthermore, the teachers indicated that they need support in the form of collaboration with specialists, have assessment instruments, consultation and language needs. Like the current study, Ntinda et al.'s (2019) study was conducted in a special school for learners with hearing impairment.

Another study was conducted by Kelly, McKinney and Swift (2020) entitled "Strengthening teacher education to support deaf learners". The focus of the study was on the needs of learners with hearing impairment "and use the findings as a basis from which to strengthen their education" (Kelly et al., 2020, p. 1). The findings of the study revealed that teachers did not receive sufficient training to teach learners with hearing impairment. Therefore, they were did not have necessary skills to address unique language and needs of deaf learners. In the study, the researchers have strengthened the view that teachers of learners with hearing impairment do not have SASL skills as a prerequisite to teach in special schools for learners with hearing impairment. For this reason, it seems they lack necessary language skills and pedagogic practices which are needed to address the needs of learners with hearing impairment (Kelly, et al., 2020). Teachers acknowledged that the Department of Education provides short training workshops to close this gap, but they find the training insufficient to equip them with the necessary skills (Kelly, et al., 2020; Magongwa, 2020; Mcilroy, 2017).

Teaching learners with hearing impairment can be very challenging for teachers, more especially when dealing with learners with unique language needs. Therefore, there is a need for support for teachers. Support entails getting on-going in-service training, collaboration and availability of resources. Working in a collaborative supporting environment helps teachers to do better. Against this backdrop, the article discussed teachers' experiences of internal support they receive from the school. It further investigated how teachers collaborate with the specialists and the role-played by the entire specialist in to support teaching programs that help to address all learners' need. Furthermore, the aim of the study was to investigate the role of specialists such as audiologists and therapist, and the impact of the support they offer to the teachers in their effective pedagogical teaching practices. The study used interviews and focus group discussions for data collection. In this paper, data was obtained from telephonic and face-to-face interviews as well as online focus group discussions with the teachers. The impetus of this study arose from a PhD study conducted in a special school for learners with hearing impairment on understating teachers' narratives of their teaching experiences in a special school. The following section features the theoretical framework.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

We approached the current study through Florian's framework of inclusive pedagogy (Florian, 2012; 2014; 2015) which recognises the need for teachers to see difference in learning as a strength rather than a dilemma in teaching. This frame of reference was used in reasoning,

reflecting and exploring how teachers narrate their experiences of support in a special school for learners with hearing impairment. The framework affirms that teachers should be committed to continuing professional development as a way of developing more inclusive practices (Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011). This is an important tenet for the current study as it focused on teachers' narratives about the level of support they receive from the school, which is a basis for their development.

Florian and Black-Hawkins (2011) are of the view that inclusive pedagogies are the provision of rich learning opportunities for all at the same time, rejecting the notion of marking some learners as different. In line with the focus of the current study, it is imperative that teachers should strive to accommodate all learners regardless of their difference. These concepts enabled this study to explore the teachers' experiences of internal support from the school as they teach learners with hearing impairment. Florian and Black-Hawkins (2011, p. 815) have proposed for a new way of viewing inclusion as understanding, 'how teachers enrich and extend what is ordinarily available in a classroom lesson or activity…' This view deals away with the traditional believe that certain learners can perform better than others can, as this old view restricts the ability of those who have been labelled as needing intervention. This is relevant for the current study as the support they receive helps to enrich learning environments and assisting learners with hearing impairment to reach their full potential. The concept of proving rich learning environments was consequently used in this study to examine the impact of the internal support teachers receive on the teaching and learning processes. In this study, considering this theoretical lens, teachers are expected to develop rich learning environments, which are available to everyone, which becomes more visible when they receive internal support. It is this understanding of Florian's inclusive pedagogy that was used in this study. Therefore, in the case of this study, providing conducive learning environments for all learners becomes possible through the support that the teachers receive in the form of collaboration, in-service training and availability of resources. The succeeding section outlines the research questions.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS:

The study sought to explore teachers' narratives of the level of support they receive in teaching learners with hearing impairment in a special school in Gauteng.

The following research questions guided the study:

(i) What kind of support do teachers receive from the school?

(ii) How does the internal support teachers affect teaching and learning?

(iii) How do specialists in the school support teachers in their effective pedagogical teaching practices?

RESEARCH BACKGROUND AND METHODOLOGY

The current paper was framed qualitatively from an interpretivist paradigm. Researchers working with people mostly use qualitative inquiry. Macmillan and Schumacher's (2010) believe that making use of qualitative research methodology can provide a detailed description and analysis of a practice, process or event. As a methodology, qualitative research accepts people's perceptions of the world while they collect, analyse and interpret data. It seems relevant to adhere to this methodology in this study because our interest was on arguing for the understanding of a supportive environment for educating learners with hearing

impairment in South Africa, thus creating our own interpretations (Maree, 2016). Qualitative research was deemed fit for the study as it is mostly used by researchers pursuing case study research (Macmillan & Schumacher; 2010; Sefotho, 2013). Data triangulation was acquired with different data collection techniques. Furthermore, the use these two methods of data collection ensured trustworthiness of qualitative research. The use of interviews and focus group discussions further increased data triangulation for the study as different opinions were revealed about teachers' experiences. Khetoa and Motsei (2021) argue that making use of two research techniques to investigating a phenomenon maximises both accuracy and reliability of findings. The study employed purposive sampling technique because the teachers identified were 'likely to be knowledgeable and informative about the phenomena the researcher is investigating" (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010, p. 326). It is called purposive sampling because the researcher has a choice on whom to include as the sample of the study. The teachers who participated in the current study were selected because they were willing to take part in the study and had experience and knowledge needed for the purpose of the study

In the sections that follow, we present the design and the methods used to collect data from one school.

Research design

This is a qualitative research study, which used a single case study research design. A case study research is a type of design in which the researcher is interested in what can be learned from a particular casein case study research design, researchers "immerse themselves in the activities of a single person or a small number of people in order obtain an intimate familiarity with their social world…" (De Vos, De Hauw, Van der Heijden, 2011, p. 320). The it is important to note that qualitative research aims to make sense of people's lived experiences by making sense of the events they experience (Yin, 2014).We adopted an interpretive lens of a case study since it granted us a chance to understand the subjective view of the teachers in a special school setting. A case study approach also afforded us a chance to get involved personally with the participating teachers by listening to their stories about the level of support they receive from the school. In what follows, we discuss the procedures followed in the study.

Procedures

The first step towards this research study was to apply for ethics clearance from the University of Johannesburg. Permission to conduct the research was granted with protocol number **SEM 1-2021-04.** The Gauteng Department of Education also granted permission to conduct the research study in the chosen school. Consent to participate in the study was also granted by the participants by signing. According to Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2018) consent to conduct with the potential participants mainly protects and respects the rights of the participants. Hammersley (2013) explains that consent informed consent is all about access to documents, information, people and the research site. Kumar (2011) is of the opinion that signing consent to participate in a study implies that the participants understand their role in the study. Prior to signing the forms, the participants received information letter that outlined clearly the objectives of the study as well what participating in the study entailed. Most of the interviews were conducted telephonically and those that were conducted face to face followed all COVID-19 health protocol, using semi-structured interviews. Data was recorded digitally and later transcribed verbatim. In collecting data, I followed an interview schedule that guided me to ask the same questions to all the participants. This included a list of primary questions on

which I made follow up on depending on each participant's response. The first author collected all data and transcribed it. Both interviews and focus group questions were open-ended and sought to gain information about teachers' narratives of their teaching experiences in a special school for learners with hearing impairment in Gauteng. At the beginning of each interview, teachers were thanked for agreeing to be part of the study completing and the format of the interview was explained (this includes information on the anticipated length of the interview and permission to audio record the conversations), and the interviewer informed teachers that they could end the interview at any time. The interviewer then confirmed that the study has followed all necessary protocol and their safety is a priority.

In an effort to maintain anonymity and confidentiality of the participants, the identity of the participating teachers was kept anonymous and pseudonyms were used. According to Maree (2016) to keep the anonymity of the participants, the researcher must promise not to share the information about the participants.

Participants and the research site

The participants of this study comprised nine teachers from a school for children with hearing impairment. The Children's Communication Centre (the Centre) is a therapy centre and clinically driven pre-school, specialising in the development of listening, speech, language and communication skills for children with significant hearing, speech, language and communication challenges. The focus of the school is to provide a facility with small group, clinically driven pre-school; intensive therapy; and early intervention programmes for children with significant speech, language, hearing and communication challenges. The school focuses on teaching learners to acquire speech with the use of hearing aids to enhance their hearing ability.

Data collection

Data was collected through two methods; telephonic interviews and online focus group discussions. Palaiologou, Needham and Male (2016) define an interviews as qualitative data collection instruments that seek to generate knowledge in relation to a topic of interest and situate data in participants' social settings through the process of interchanging viewpoints among people of interest. People of interest in the current study were teachers of learners with hearing impairment in a special school in Gauteng. Interviews were deemed necessary for the current study as they attempted to understand the world from the teachers' point of view, to unfold the meaning of their experiences, and to uncover their lived world prior to scientific explanations (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). Willing (2013) defines focus group discussion as a qualitative data collection instrument in which researchers have group discussions with the participants who are the source of data for the study. The purpose of conducting focus group interviews was to bring the teachers together in one group, to discuss and share ideas about their teaching practices, and the level of support they receive from the school as they teach learners with hearing impairment (Hennink, 2013).

Data analysis

Analysis of data for this study followed Creswell's (2013) six-step process of qualitative data analysis. Data analyses were based on procedures outlined by Berg (2007). The first step was to manage data through sorting and organising it for data analysis. Secondly, we read the transcription. The next step was to classify data through codes, manually. Following this, described the themes to make sense of data and finally interpreted the meaning of each theme identified. The researchers transcribed data from the interviews and focus group discussions. The results if the

study were first coded and inductive thematic analysis was used to analyse the codes. This process was guided by Charmaz (2011) advises that coding must be thorough Following this, inductive themes were developed and the interpretation was guided by the research questions.

Ethical considerations

The University of Johannesburg granted ethical clearance for this study with protocol number **SEM 1-2021-041.**The Gauteng Department of Education granted permission to the principal researcher to conduct the study at the chosen special school for learners with hearing impairment. Teachers signed consent forms to indicate their willingness to take part in the study. The participants' anonymity was guaranteed and no participants were coerced in taking part in the study. Furthermore, the participants were reassured that their participation in the study was voluntary and they could withdraw anytime without being penalised.

RESULTS

The following themes emerged from data analysis: supportive heads, specialists and their roles, in-service training, collaboration, whole team approach and availability of resources.

Supportive heads

Majority of the teachers indicated that they get a lot of support from the heads. They argued that the support they receive is very helpful. This is captured in the following verbatim extracts.

We have phenomenal heads-The head of school is a speech therapist, she is very helpful (Participant A, Lines 96-97)

*I get support in that our heads are involved in each and every case…they give suppor*t (Participant B, Lines 335-336)

Specialists and their roles

The findings the study indicate that the school has different specialists ranging from the audiologists, speech therapists, physiotherapists and occupational therapist. Different specialists have a range or roles they play in supporting the teachers and carrying out support for all learners. Learners receive individualised support according to their needs. The following summaries summarise the collective views on the roles of specialists:

We have occupational therapists, and physios who gives us a lot of training (Participant A, Lines 107-108).

Audiologist train us, whoever is on expert in their field will come and train us and if we need help, we shout (Participant A, Lines 111-112).

Therefore, when a child comes to the school, they are assigned a therapist; speech therapist. If they need an OT or physio or any additional therapist, we then usually refer. We do have different therapists in the school, or they can go to outside therapist. It is either they get a physiotherapist, or an occupational therapist and or physiotherapist. It is necessary they go for an eye test, or they go for hearing, whatever needs to be done. And we also have the Centre head who oversees everything so the speech therapists are the team leaders, team managers, so if there is anything or problem with the child behaviour or anything so the first person you will talk to, or who would be contacting other people would be the team leader, speech therapist (Participant E, Lines 973-982).

In-service training

It appears that in-service training plays a significant role in helping teachers to effectively teach and address all learner's needs. Data from the individual interviews revealed that teachers receive training on topics specific to the needs of the learners with hearing impairment. The following are

some of the teachers' comments on in-service training:

We have in-service or onsite training very often (Participant B, Line 337).

Our head gives us many language-training sessions (Participant A, Lines 105-106).

Audiologist train us, whoever is on expert in their field will come and train us and if we need help, we shout (Participant A, Lines 110-112).

We have in-service training for both the teachers and therapists so we do get some people to come in to do some in-service training, but other therapists do on their speciality – speech, language, OT , physio etc. , example Auditory verbal speech therapist will do presentation to enhance their understanding how they do-teachers and therapist (Participant E, Lines 1076-1080).

Collaboration

The data from individual interviews revealed that collaboration is one the strength in a school for learners with hearing impairment. The teachers mentioned that working collaboratively helps them to have different views, which would not be possible when working alone. Again, collaboration helps one to be open to criticism and try new ways of teaching. This is evident from verbatim excerpts captured below:

I think we all support each other (Participant A, Line77).

You know we lean on each other so yah, we are very professional (Participant A, lines, 98-99).

We work together; there is a lot of collaboration (Participant A, Lines 210-211).

Collaboration helps because sometimes you find that you have your own way of dealing with things and it may be different with what another person does. Therefore, when you sit down and listen, what other people are saying, it also helps you to grow and improve from what they are saying. You learn, in a way to deal with kids, how you communicate, how you warm to you, how you get things done dealing with difficult kids, how to calm them, all that so allow yourself that space to learn and grow as a person (Participant F, Lines 1318-1323).

I like the inter-disciplinary work, which is a lot of fun. I find it very interesting, you know working with children with complex developmental disorders and working with other therapists, like the Occupational therapists, and the Physiotherapists and the other professionals like teachers and doctors. I find that very interesting and incredibly rewarding and exceptionally rewarding because we can look at the child holistically and treat them holistically. I think working with children is exceptionally rewarding and because of the far-reaching effects, you can have on the child (Participant H, Lines 1531-1538).

Whole team approach

The teachers share the conviction that to survive in this context, there is a need for a whole team approach. This means that on a regular basis, they meet and discuss all children's progress and any challenges that they may encounter. The teaching approach calls for teachers to work hand in hand with the audiologists, the speech therapists, physiotherapist, and class assistants. The comments made by the teacher sample suggest that working hand in hand helps them to holistically address learners' needs. This is captured in the verbatim excerpts below:

We pretty much get on with the whole group and they are all ready to help with anything (Participant A, Lines 100-101).

That is the strength we have in our school. It is a whole team approach- we have meetings once a week- involving all the kinds, we even have a WhatsApp group, so the kids have something with the or she will put it on the or audiologist or anybody. We always have constant communication with each other and we have a problem we solve it together. The OT will come sit in classroom with the physiotherapist and get some guidance. We also have speech therapists doing language once a week (Participant C, Lines 666-669).

When you are at a place like the Centre, where there is a real whole team approach between the teacher, the therapist, the doctors and the parents that you know when you have a system like that in place. The system is very well oiled and people respect each other and people really work for the benefit of the children (Participant H, Lines 1508-1512).

Need for socio-psychological services

Some of the teachers indicated that they are in need of socio-psychological support in the form of counselling. The conviction is that, dealing with learners with hearing impairment can be very demanding and stressful on their part. Therefore, they feel that the school should support them by proving counselling services to help them cope better and effectively teach and avoid burn out. This conviction is provided by the reasons provided below:

...so it is very overwhelming for the parents as well as teachers and I wish we could have at least one session of counselling. We all need that kind of support (Participant C, Lines 632-635).

I would like counselling for the teachers. Because you work very difficult cases, very difficult parents and you must need to get some things off chest. You do try to have some distance from the children but you do get attached to some of them and some of them have underlying problems and you know that this child might not even make it up to the age of 6 or so (FG, Participant C, Lines 1904-1909).*It is very much needed. We used to have one on site. We used to have a psychologist on site just to help it used to be very helpful because you could refer parents and children together and it was onsite and it was interconnected to the Centre* (FG, Participant B, Lines 1929-1932).

DISCUSSION

Results from the current study need a careful interpretation as the participants of the study were relatively a small sample and the findings may not be generalised. It is important to note that the experiences of the participants of the current study may not be a reflection of the experiences of teachers in special schools for learners in Gauteng or South Africa in general. Therefore, there is a need for a similar study with a larger population.

From the current study, teachers' narratives of the internal support they received from the school revealed that they did not experience any major challenges, which hinder the teaching and learning processes. This is because they got enough support, collaborate with different specialist and receive on-going in-service training. This is contrary to what many researchers found in their studies conducted with different teachers who teach learners with hearing impairment (Chake, 2018; Lehloa 2019; Majoro, 2021, Ntinda et al., 2019).

The findings indicate that teachers are in need of socio-psychological services such as counselling. This is contrary to what Chake's (2018) study found in his study where the teachers revealed that they had the support of a social worker who supported them to deal with their emotional challenges. Chake (2018, p. 47) adds further "Teachers also get help on how to deal with issues like breakdown when they are overwhelmed with work and personal problems."

The study further revealed that teachers collaborate with different specialists in the school. According to Mambo (2011, p. 34) "collaboration involves a partnership among many people to facilitate the implementation of inclusion." For instance, the collaboration of teachers, school administrators, parents, special education teachers, teacher aids, health workers, school board members, vocational teachers, and community resources is important". The results of this study contradict what Lehloa (2019) found. Lehloa's (2019) study revealed that there is lack of collaboration between the teachers and sign language interpreters working with them. "Teachers seem indifferent to learners' diversity, showing deficiencies in how the school organises itself for diversity. This means that teachers are unable to engage learners and follow their lead in their teaching" (Lehloa, 2019, p. 56). Equally, Majoro (2021) found that teachers do not have enough time to collaborate with sign language interpreters. The findings of the current study revealed that teachers also collaborate with the parents in an effort to allow for a close relationship between the school and the teachers. This according to the participants allows for a carry-over between the school and the home environment.

Another factor that came up from the findings of the currents study is the issue of whole-team approach. The teachers expressed that their approach to teaching and design of teaching and therapy programmes is whole team.

In-service training is another finding that emerged from the study. The teachers indicated that they receive on-going training sessions on different issues that are context specific. This allows them to respond accordingly to the needs of the learners and provide supportive teaching programmes. Contrary to the findings of the current study, a study by Ntinda et al (2019) revealed that the teachers experienced gaps in their competency to teach in mainstream classes as they felt that their training did not adequately equip them. A study by Eloff and Kgwete (2017) revealed that when teachers did not have the necessary skills to support learners with hearing impairment since they perceive themselves as incompetent and find it difficult to address the unique needs of the learner population. According to Walton and (2017), in-service training empowers teachers as it equips them with necessary skills that will help them to address the diverse needs of learner population. Lehloa (2019, p. 57) is of the opinion that when teaching programmes are appropriate and respond to learners needs, "learning can take place without which learners can be emotionally disturbed with no access to education". According Lehloa (2019, p. 46) "Today teachers are able to live and treat deaf learners like their own because of the training received."

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Teachers' perceptions of support are very crucial towards their commitment and satisfaction, as they lead to developments in teaching and learning processes. The main goal of this study was to explore teachers' experiences of the internal support they receive in teaching learners with hearing impairment in a special school setting. The current study identified a gap in research on teachers' narratives of the level of internal support they receive in special schools for learners with hearing impairment. The findings of the study point to strong internal support teachers receive in the form of collaboration with the specialists in the school, ongoing in-service training, whole team approach and supportive heads. The teachers lamented that there is a need for psychological support in the form of counselling and this poses a challenge as it hinders successful teaching to take place. The recommendation is that the school should organise psychological support to the teachers in the form of counsellors or psychologists to help them cope with occupational challenges, which are even

more in a special school setting. The study could possibly fill the gap by adding to the existing body of scientific knowledge. In the light of this, the study concludes that teachers' experiences about their teaching experiences are crucial as they help to improve educational policies in the strive for equality in education.

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Teaching Sexuality Education in the HIV and AIDS Education Curriculum: The Voices of High School Guidance and Counselling Teachers

*Ephias Gudyanga, *Anna Gudyanga and **Newman Wadesango
*Midlands State University, Faculty of Education
**University of Limpopo, South Africa

ABSTRACT

The study focused on teaching sexuality education in the HIV and AIDS education curriculum in high schools. In spite of the importance of HIV and AIDS education in preventing HIV infections, Guidance and Counseling (G&C) teachers are not engaging optimally with the current curriculum, and hence, they are not serving the needs of the learners in the context of the HIV and AIDS pandemic. Situated within a qualitative research design, and informed by a critical paradigm, we used participatory visual methodology, with drawing and focus group discussion as methods for data generation. Eight female G&C urban secondary school teachers, purposively selected, comprised the sample of participants. Thematic analysis was used to analyse the data. The findings revealed that the G&C teachers have an understanding of the curriculum and made their voices heard on how it is to be taught. Even though they were enthusiastic to teach sexuality education - in the age of HIV and AIDS they became aware that their system of education did not appear to optimally support their work. They understood that the participatory visual methodology could enable them to teach their current G&C curriculum. They, furthermore, could reflect on themselves, the context in which they taught their sexuality education, work and learn from each other. In this way, their agency seemed to have been enabled to address the challenges and consider how they could teach sexuality education in their schools. Drawing on Cultural Historical Activity Theory, we conclude that the G&C teachers could be enabled to teach sexuality education if the three Activity Systems, namely the G&C teachers, the school system, and the community, work together as one Activity System, engaging with each other in a generative way focused on the same outcome.

Key Words: Cultural Historical Activity Theory; Guidance and Counseling; HIV and AIDS; Participatory visual methodology; sexuality education, critical theory

INTRODUCTION

The voices of teachers, who are at the coalface of preventing HIV and AIDS through teaching sexuality education, are seldom heard. Hearing their voices, the voices of Zimbabwean Guidance and Counseling teachers (hereafter called G&C), and drawing on their lived experiences, might act as an intervention, enabling them to see how they might strengthen their teaching of sexuality education in cultural contexts where talking about sexuality is often a challenge.

BACKGROUND

After the report of the first case of human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) and immune deficiency syndrome (AIDS) in Zimbabwe in 1985, the government introduced policies aiming at mitigating the rate of infection (Secretariat, 2011). In responding to the call by the government to design programs to reduce infection rate, the Ministry of Education, in collaboration with UNICEF, designed a program meant to be taught in both primary and secondary schools (UNAIDS, 2008). Guided by the Chief Education Officer's circular No. 16 of 1993, Guidance and Counselling was to be taught in all secondary schools in Zimbabwe (MoESC, 1993).

The heads of secondary schools were tasked by the Education Ministry to select teachers from their schools to participate in professional development for

the teaching of G&C (MoESC, 1993). The choice of those eligible for in-service training remained the privilege of the school heads. Some heads selected senior teachers to participate in the in-service training for G&C teaching. The assumption was that the more experienced senior teachers would probably approach the teaching of G&C with greater insight and could share their learning with other teachers. Other heads selected teachers on the strength of their Christian faith background, possibly assuming that they would be willing to teach HIV and AIDS education in G&C where some concepts, such as abstinence or faithfulness in relationships, resonate with the ideals of the Christian faith (Mufuka & Tauya, 2013).

The professional development courses for G&C teachers lasted for about a week (Mufuka & Tauya, 2013). Funding of this in-service training was a joint venture between the Ministry of Education and some Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs). However, education officials in conjunction with officials from the Zimbabwe National AIDS Council comprised a cohort of workshop facilitators (Secretariat, 2011). Although the main goal of these in-service training workshops was to equip the teachers with both the content and pedagogics of G&C subject, it was noted that a five to seven days in-service training workshop per teacher was not enough for such a mammoth task (Mufuka & Tauya, 2013). By 1993, about 6000 teachers of G&C had been identified (Mufuka & Tauya, 2013). About 2000 of the 6000 G&C teachers were trained between 1993 and 1995 to teach G&C (Mufuka & Tauya, 2013). Although the balance (4000) of the teachers originally earmarked for in-service training was available in the schools and ready for training, no further in-service training took place after the NGOs who were funding the project withdrew their services (Mufuka & Tauya, 2013).

The 2000 trained in-service teachers became the G&C teachers in their respective secondary schools, however, they also taught other subjects in which they had initially specialized in during their pre-service teacher education. Attending the five to seven days of G&C training, which was to be followed with extra in-service training for teaching and assessing G&C work, was an additional workload on the teachers (Muguwe & Gwirayi, 2011). During that period, since we were also teachers in the secondary school system, we noted that teachers were reluctant to take up this additional workload of teaching G&C; however, they had no option since it was an obligation from the heads of schools. Confirming our observations, a study shows that there was very little enthusiasm from the teachers to go for that in-service training (Mugweni, Hartell, & Phatudi, 2013).

Subsequently, any new G&C teacher, who joined the secondary school sector after the initial period of in-service training had ended, along with other untrained teachers, received in-house school in-service training from the trained teachers, as there was at least one in every secondary school. Gudyanga, Wadesango, Manzira and Gudyanga (2015a), in their study of current state of G&C in secondary schools in Zimbabwe, confirm that teachers were not keen to be trained, were not keen to teach G&C. Teachers had a negative view of both HIV and AIDS education and the syllabus which seemed to concentrate on issues they did not believe in, such as condom use. According to Gudyanga, et al., (2015a), the teachers taught the subject just to satisfy the head of the school. Earlier on, Mangwaya and Ndlovu (2012) had noted the same negative attitude of the G&C teachers and their struggling with the teaching. However, Gudyanga, Gore and Wadesango (2013) contended that this was a result of the inadequate in-service training received in the 1993 and 1994 workshops. The inadequate training, according to

Gudyanga et al., (2013), is linked to the little time devoted to the in-service training of the teachers. The in-service training did not seem to have helped teachers acquire an adequate knowledge base, skills, values and positive attitudes towards G&C.

The teaching of G&C was further impacted negatively by several factors like the status of G&C in a school. It is not offered as an examinable subject. It is the only subject taught once a week for about 35 minutes. The teachers and learners also seemed not to be paying much attention to it (Chifunyise, Benoy, & Mukubi, 1999). The lack of textbooks and other resources did not help matters either (Gudyanga et al. 2015b), Muguwe & Gwirayi, 2011). Some trained teachers were not aware of how to teach the G&C subject (World Bank, 2002), while others reported that they were shy to teach some topics, for instance sexuality education. They argued that such topics clashed with their cultural values and beliefs, that sex was taboo to talk about, for instance, the vernacular for human reproductive organs is taboo (Mugweni, Hartel, & Phatudi, 2013). All these issues compounded teachers' failing to teach G&C and sexuality education within HIV and AIDS education.

It is apparent from the preceding discussion that the teaching of G&C in secondary schools and also in the Professional Development of HIV and AIDS Education and Life Skills in Colleges of Education, evoked negative responses from both the teachers and learners in secondary schools and also from both lecturers and student teachers in Colleges of Education. The discussion just advanced indicate that many secondary school teachers in Zimbabwe have very little commitment to the teaching of G&C where sexuality education within HIV and AIDS education is located. Since the epidemic is experienced in Zimbabwean communities, one would have expected teachers to be keen to teach G&C, thus enabling learners to engage with sexuality education within HIV and AIDS education in the hope of facilitating HIV prevention practices among learners.

It is clear that education is seen as a useful and valuable tool against HIV and AIDS, and that it plays a critical role in HIV prevention (Wood & Hillman, 2008). Education is also considered the main device which according to researchers can be employed to implement changes and stop the spread of the virus (Bhana, Morrell, Epstein, & Moletsane, 2006; Coombe, 2000). A significant factor in this study is the fact that the Zimbabwean Education Ministry made the teaching of G&C curriculum compulsory in the secondary education sector. However, they did not consult with the teachers who are the implementers of the program as to what should go into the syllabus and how it should be taught (Manzira, 2014; Mufuka & Tauya, 2013; Muguwe & Gwirayi, 2011; Mugweni et al., 2013; Mupa, 2012). Although the Ministry of Education trained some G&C teachers, the in-service training seemed inadequate. The views of teachers as implementers of the curriculum are critical in understanding why they have challenges in implementing the HIV and AIDS education curriculum in schools. It is against this background that we explored the G&C teachers' understandings of the current HIV and AIDS education curriculum in Zimbabwe secondary schools and how they can be enabled to teach it?

To interrogate and facilitate a deep exploration of this study, we formulated the following research question:

What are the G&C teachers' understandings of the current HIV and AIDS education curriculum in Zimbabwe secondary schools and how can they be enabled to teach it?

For further illumination on the research question, we had to review literature on the following subheading.

The current sexuality education in the HIV and AIDS education curriculum for secondary schools in Zimbabwe

The Zimbabwe Curriculum Development Unit (ZCDU), a unit in the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education, planned the HIV and AIDS education curriculum for secondary schools for form one to form six in 1992. The implementation was guided by the Chief Education Officer's Circular Minute No. 16 of 1993, which in part stipulated that HIV and AIDS education is to be taught once a week in 35-minute lessons from forms one to six. In each province, there ought to be an Education Officer for quality assurance and quality control for the teaching and learning of the subject as well as for administering workshops and seminars at provincial level. There are no summative public examinations in the subject, however, schools are mandated to provide formative assessments (MoESC, 1993). In the secondary school, this is taught as Guidance and Counseling, HIV&AIDS and Life Skills Education from forms one to six (MoESC, 1993). The curriculum is presented as one composite document from Zimbabwe Junior Certificate (ZJC) to Advanced Level (Form 6) and adopts a thematic approach from form one to form six. The implication of the Chief Education Officer's circular 16 of 1993 is that the subject is treated as a stand-alone.

The whole G&C curriculum is divided into 6 themes. These are (1) relationships (2) human growth and development (3) health (4) values and beliefs (5) care, management and mitigation, and (6) child protection (MoESC, 2003, p. 3).

The curriculum aims to develop some of the following life skills "communication / assertiveness, interpersonal and empathy skills, decision-making/problem-solving, critical thinking, and creative thinking skills" (MoESC, 2003, p. 3). One of the strengths of this curriculum is that its structure is clear and coherent, but the content relating to major risk and protective dynamics are inadequate or missing at lower forms (UNESCO, 2012). The major risk and protective issues are STI's, contraceptives, condoms and HIV prevention (UNESCO, 2012). Teaching approaches are noted to be learner centred, with some approaches amongst others, being role-play, participatory, song composition and singing, games, drama and many others. However, it is argued that for learners to acquire some life skills, more time is needed unlike the 35-minute lesson per week, which the Ministry stipulated (UNESCO, 2012).

The theoretical perspectives on teaching sexuality education in the HIV and AIDS education curriculum, discussed, informs our choice of Cultural Historical Activity Theory (CHAT). The fundamentals of CHAT that is the subject, the tools/artefacts and the object and how they interplay together to form an Activity System, are all noted and visualized in our theoretical perspectives. Therefore, I now turn to discuss the theoretical framework.

Theoretical frameworks: Cultural Historical Activity theory

We draw on the Cultural Historical Activity Theory (CHAT) to frame this study. CHAT originated from Lev Vygotsky, in the mid-1920s to mid-1930s (Yamagata-Lynch, 2010). Engeström

(2001) pointed out that Vygotsky produced first generation Activity Theory. Vygotsky's associate Alexei Leont'ev produced the second generation Activity Theory (Leont'ev, 1978; Leont'ev, 1981). Third generation is attributed to Engeström (Engeström, 2001). Fundamental to CHAT as a theoretical framework is that when human beings work in association with others, their "skills to analyse organisations as networks of Activity Systems develops" (Blacker, Crump, & McDonald, 2000, p. 277). In harmony with this fundamental thought, Edwards asserted that individuals and their society interact dialectically (Edwards, 2007). With reference to this study, the Activity System comprise the group of people focusing on achieving some goal (Yamagata-Lynch, 2010). In this case, the Activity System is a group of eight G&C teachers (participants). Their main goal is to interact producing data on their understandings of the current HIV and AIDS education curriculum in Zimbabwe secondary schools and how they can be enabled to teach it*?*

Context and participants

The focus of this study is on purposively selected eight female G&C teachers teaching sexuality education within HIV and AIDS education as part of the G&C curriculum in Zimbabwe. We conveniently drew participants, from Gweru district urban secondary schools because of easy accessibility. The Gweru district rural schools are far away from our home and difficult to access, as all roads are gravel, and schools are far apart from one another. The study, therefore, is not intending to generalize the findings to the whole population of G&C teachers, but provides insight, Creswell (2014), into the teaching of G&C.

METHODOLOGY

We selected qualitative research approach since it situates us in the participants' world of lived experiences (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008). Furthermore, we expect to hear multiple realities of issues of which, with a qualitative approach, it takes the centre stage (Creswell, 2007; Mertens, 2005). Additionally, we draw on the critical paradigm to guide me, since it seeks to understand and interpret the world in terms of unjust practices, unjust policies, unjust social structures or beliefs and values, with the view of empowering participants as critical thinkers who are capable of transforming such practices (Brink, van der Walt, & van Rensburg, 2012; Taylor & Medina, 2013). The other tenet of a critical world view is that the research study, like this one, contains an action agenda for reform which may change the lives of participants, the institutions in which the participants live and work in or even the researchers' lives (Taylor, 2014; Willis, 2007). The critical paradigm is suitable for this research study since it focuses on exploring on the G&C teachers' understandings of the current HIV and AIDS education curriculum in Zimbabwe secondary schools and how they can be enabled to teach it.

Working within the critical paradigm, we facilitated the engagement of the G&C teachers in thinking about teaching sexuality education within the HIV and AIDS education curriculum and from their own socio-cultural contexts. The critical paradigm enabled us to deepen our understanding of the real-world practical experiences of the G&C teachers engaging with the teaching of sexuality education in the HIV and AIDS education curriculum.

Such a paradigm guided us to look for a suitable research methodology. The critical paradigm deals with empowering the marginalized, like people with disabilities, women, children, or teachers who face challenges in their teaching profession. Furthermore, it deals with empowering participants as critical thinkers, we therefore chose participatory

visual methodology, which could enable participants make their voices heard (Gudyanga, De Lange and Khau, 2019).

Participatory visual methodology uses methods such as photography, digital storytelling, collage, drawing, videography and so on (Banks, 2007; De Lange & Stuart, 2008; Mitchell, 2011; Mitchell, De Lange, Moletsane, Stuart, & Buthelezi, 2005; Mitchell, Milne, & De Lange, 2012; Pink, 2001; Pithouse-Morgan et al., 2013; Rose, 2001). De Lange (2008) acknowledges that there is a rapid increase of interest in using participatory visual methodology because it has a built in research as intervention orientation. Participatory visual methodology enabled us to work with G&C teachers as co-researchers, enabling themselves to make their voices heard in the teaching of sexuality education within the HIV and AIDS education curriculum. The teacher participants were involved in using visual methods, whereas the researcher was involved with the facilitation or moderation thereof (Greeff, 2011). Among other visual methods, we selected drawing, demanding participants to portray their thoughts by way of producing drawings with captions (Guillemin, 2004), ensued by robust discussion. Additionally, I used focus group discussion as an instrument for data generation (Greeff, 2011).

Drawing

As an instrument for data generation, participants make drawings, thus are actively representing their ideas, hence, enabling them to express, reflect and arouse emotions as well as pay thoughtfulness to things in unique aspects (Mitchell, Theron, Smith, & Stuart, 2011). Additionally, Guillemin (2004) asserts that drawing is a forceful and insightful research instrument to explore how people make sense of their world. Only pencil and paper are needed, making it a simple method. Participants draw and write a brief explanation of the drawing below or next to the drawing During the discussion of the drawings one can elicit participant attitudes and beliefs about the issue under study (Stuart, 2007). Furthermore, drawing can be used as a transformative research method that has the power to bring about social change (Mitchell, De Lange, & Moletsane, 2011). Drawings offer a formidable fashion of message which words on their own often cannot (UNICEF, 2012).

Focus Group Discussion

In conjunction with drawing, we used focus group discussions. It is a method enabling participants to express their thinking and feelings concerning a subject in a non-threatening environment (Greeff, 2011). As a way of data generation, usually, a small group of participants, who have something in common in relation to the topic, is selected and meet to discuss a topic or an issue (Wong, 2008). Therefore, the group tends to have deep and contextual topic interpretations (Greeff, 2011). Additionally, so large amounts of data are generated within a short period of time. Furthermore, the researcher also understands the participants' lived experiences better (Greeff, 2011).

The research process

The process took place at some hired conference centre. We drew on the assistance of the female co-author during the field work, in order to minimize the potential power imbalance between principal male African author and the African female G&C teachers. We started by getting to know one another and developing operational rules for the sessions and activities. In this first session, the participants also chose their own pseudonyms to be used in representing their work in the study. We also did a "lead in" activity in which we introduced the focus of this study, namely sexuality education.

We then addressed the research question, which asks: *What are the G&C teachers' understandings of the current HIV and AIDS education curriculum in Zimbabwe secondary schools and how can they be enabled to teach it?*

I provided the following prompt to the G&C teachers:

> *"Using the pen and paper provided, make a drawing that shows your understandings of the current HIV and AIDS education curriculum in Zimbabwe secondary school context and how you can be enabled to teach it."*

I gave them pen, paper, and encouraged them not to be concerned about the artistic beauty of their drawing, as I was interested in the content of the drawing and what they were thinking. I also asked them to write a caption for their drawing, explaining what the drawing was depicting. I allowed them 15 minutes to make their drawings and write the captions.

The drawings offered an entry point for discussing the existing HIV and AIDS education curriculum in order to reveal their understandings of the curriculum. This session included asking each participant in turn to explain the meaning of her drawing to the other seven participants and the two facilitators. Participants reflected on and offered a critique of the meanings suggested by each participant. The eight drawings were displayed on the walls of the room.

I then led a focus group discussion, (fgd) directing the participants to the first prompt, I asked them to consider the following questions: *What do the drawings say to you? What issues are presented in the drawings? What is missing? Are there any emerging themes? If there are challenges depicted, what are the possible solutions?* The questions elicited a deeper discussion and understanding of the phenomenon from participants. The discussions and explanation of the drawings were video and audio recorded and kept in our laptops and later transcribed for analysis.

Data analysis

The writing of the captions after drawing and the explanations proffered by each participant helped as first level of participatory analysis. The second level of participatory analysis was when we did thematic analysis of drawings and captions during fgd. This was followed by re-contextualising data in existing literature and making meaning of the findings in terms of our theoretical framework (Schurink, W., Fouché, C. B., & De Vos, A. S. (2011).

In carrying out thematic analysis, we drew on Braun and Clarke's (2006) six steps, which are immersion in the data, generating initial codes and categories, searching for sub-themes, reviewing sub-themes, defining and naming themes, and lastly, presentation of themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Trustworthiness and ethics

For qualitative research studies to be of any repute, they are to withstand the rigor of trustworthiness (Burke & Christensen, 2012). Four major constructs, which we drew on, are credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Deep engagement with data was achieved through many hours of its generation and analysis with participants (Creswell, 2014). Ethical clearance for data generation was granted by NMU (number H16-EDU-ERE-005). From the outset, we devoted ourselves to work ethically with participants. We gained written and signed informed consent. Additionally, for the purposes of anonymity and confidentiality, we used pseudonyms.

Findings

We present and discuss the findings of the following research question: What are the G&C teachers' understandings of the current HIV and AIDS education curriculum in Zimbabwe secondary schools and how they can be enabled to teach it?

We present the findings in themes, sub-themes and categories supported by drawings and verbatim quotes from the participants in explaining their drawings and when discussing the drawings within the whole group. Where direct quotes of participants were in vernacular language, a colleague translated the vernacular into English to ensure unbiased translation.

All participants had drawings with captions. We captured one shown here as an example, Esther's drawing.

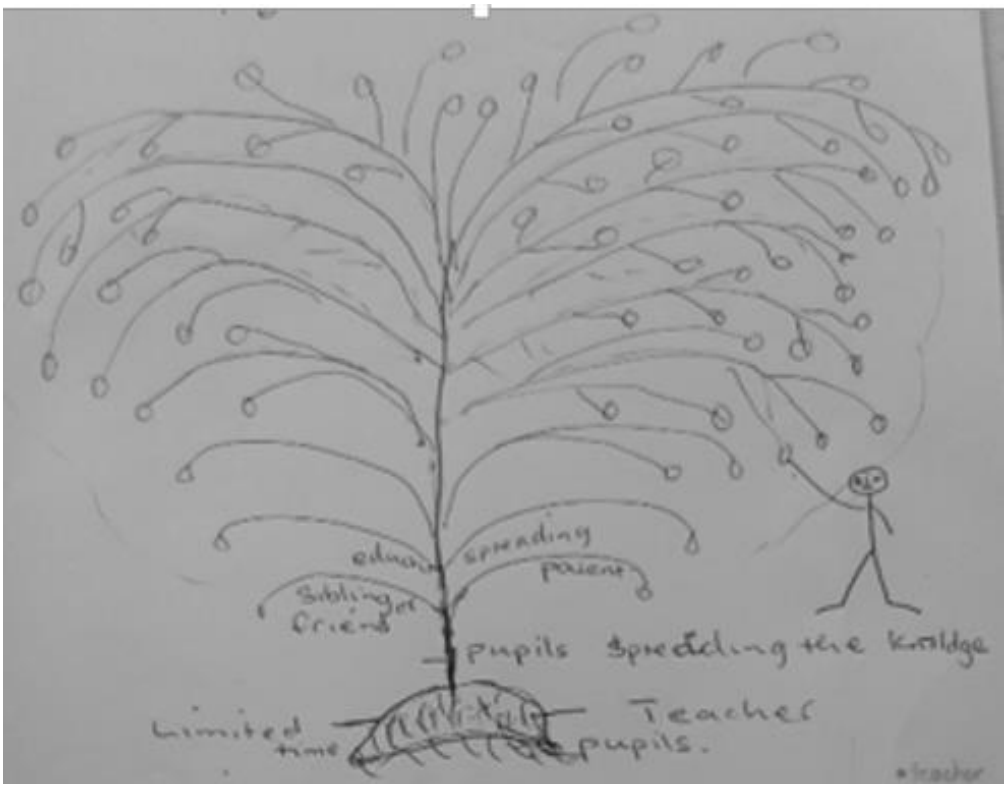

Figure 1 A tree

Esther explained her drawing in the following way:

> *The current curriculum is like a tree. My drawing here represents a school with teachers and pupils. The teacher teaches G&C.. . . . . I have put the pupils as the roots. The tree survives on roots taking in water. Likewise the pupils take in knowledge and disseminate it to the community. The whole community has been saved from HIV and AIDS.*

All the eight participants made drawings with captions.

Guidance and Counseling teachers' understandings of the current HIV and AIDS education curriculum in Zimbabwe secondary schools and how they can be enabled to teach it

This theme consists of two sub-themes and their categories as shown in Table 1.

Table 1.

Sub-Themes	Categories
6.1.1 Teachers recognize principles of curriculum design and implementation	6.1.1.1.Curriculum is hierarchical
	6.1.1.2. Curriculum is based on societal values
	6.1.1.3.Curriculum implementation is learner-centred
	6.1.1.4. NGOs support the teaching of the curriculum
6.1.2 Teachers view curriculum as an educational tool for mediating sexuality education knowledge in the community to prevent HIV and AIDS	6.1.2.1.Curriculum is a tool for awareness and prevention of HIV and AIDS
	6.1.2.2.Parental involvement in curriculum change and innovation is critical

Curriculum is hierarchical

Participants were aware that the G&C curriculum is designed in a hierarchical fashion, from form one to form six.

Esinia stated that *"the curriculum is both age related and academic level related".* She explained her drawing which depicted a learner climbing up a staircase. The first stair represented form one level, the second stair represented form two level and so forth up to the sixth form. She went on to say, *"that is why when you look at my drawing, there is a step like, whereby a child is moving from this lower level to a higher level, the curriculum is adding more to it"*.

There was yet another drawing that showed the hierarchical nature of the curriculum. Rose had a drawing in which the teacher sat on top of three stacked rocks. The first rock was called Zimbabwe Junior Certificate, the second was called "O" Level, and the third was called "A" Level. Furthermore, Rose stated, "*the teacher is the highest point of information, and we have the syllabus [curriculum] that grows spirally and hierarchically. In other words, the information is more complex as we go up the ladder up to Advanced Level".* Additionally, Rose emphasized her point by saying, *"the curriculum cater[s] for all students at different stages with hierarchical growth, the higher the level, the more complex the information becomes.*

Sarah also highlighted the same principle of a hierarchical curriculum in the discussion, when she pronounced,

> *The curriculum is hierarchical in demand, when you look at the content of the syllabus, they add something more to the form 2, 3s, form 4s, form 5 and form 6. They will be adding more information, but they are covering the same topic*.

By "they", the participant was referring to curriculum designers in the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education.

The participants seemed to recognize the principle that there are concepts which are taught at a particular age and or academic level. Sarah was also aware of the hierarchical nature of the curriculum. In addition, Sarah said, "*They are basing their content on the fact that the children are [have] not yet developed and they don't have the capacity to grasp certain things you might talk about".* In agreement with other participants, Shuvai referred to physical development instead of academic level. Shuvai indicated that *"the curriculum should be developed basing on the physical development of the child, for example, a form one girl is developing breasts and the like"*. Shuvai, in a way revealed that at form one level, they had learners who are at the puberty stage, and others at an early adolescent stage. Shuvai's understanding of the curriculum was that the G&C curriculum has to be designed in accordance to the physical developmental stage of the learner.

Additionally, Esinia, for example exclaimed; *"there is need ... to also consider the emotional aspect"*. As a result of hormonal changes in the body, as learners grow, their emotional and sexual needs also change with time. To concur, Rose indicated that the *"curriculum is developmental and incremental. Some of the concepts are postponed until a particular age"*. She went on to say, *"for instance, looking at the curriculum, the concept of contraceptives is introduced at form four. It is assumed that for form 1s, they are not yet sexually active, hence, the curriculum for form 1s is centred on abstinence".* In agreement with other participants, Edith said, *"during teaching G&C, there are certain aspects which you want to say, this is for form 1s and this is for form 6"*. As we continued discussing the drawings, Vongai concurred with other participants as she held that, *"there are aspects which you shelve for a certain form".* Therefore, participants concurred in principle that, in designing the curriculum, the curriculum has to be hierarchically structured.

The participants' references to the hierarchical nature of the curriculum corresponds to Bruner's work of a spiral curriculum, where he states that a "spiral curriculum is not simply the repetition of a topic taught. It requires also the deepening of it, with each successive encounter building on the previous work" (Bruner, 2009 p. 16). The aspect of building concepts on previous ones is what Bruner (2009) calls mental spiral learning. In curriculum design, it is imperative to organize curriculum meaningfully by laying the foundation of the basics followed by complex issues, in a hierarchical fashion. Bruner (2009) is well known for emphasizing teaching from the known to the unknown. Ausubel, a famous psychologist who worked alongside Bruner, in his theory of meaningful learning, argues that the latter knowledge is built on the former knowledge (Rourke & Kanuka, 2009). Through that process, new cognitive structures are formed. He maintains that teachers are to make a deliberate effort of linking new knowledge to that which learners already know. This theory concurs with Bruner's spiral curriculum model.

Giobbi (2015) advocated for parents and educators to teach appropriate concepts when the learner is mature enough and ready to learn. Therefore, intellectually, there are some concepts which are difficult to comprehend if the mind is not yet mature enough and ready to learn. Piaget's theory refers to the fact that there is a time when a child cannot carry out some mental operations because of the mind which is not yet ready to carry out such operations (Kendra, 2016). Participants are also aware

of the learners' physical development. As the physical body grows and matures, genetics and hormones trigger chemical processes at some stage, for instance, the sexual drive for reproduction (Bhana, 2009). As a result of such sexual development, the curriculum must "catch them" at the appropriate age (Bhana, 2007). Therefore, curricula are designed in a hierarchical fashion to cater for learners' needs at different developmental stages. Bruner's (2009) conceptual analysis of spiral learning where concepts are built one onto another is a good example of the hierarchical structure of the curriculum.

Participants also stated that the G&C curriculum is designed based on fundamental societal values.

Curriculum is based on societal values

The participants suggested that when the curriculum is designed, the stakeholders, who are the community and other civic groups, are consulted such that their societal values, like respect and self-discipline, are taken into cognizance during curriculum design.

In the discussion Esinia said that although curriculum is hierarchical in nature, it is also "*built upon societal values".* The group members in agreement said "ehe" (meaning *"*yes*"* or "we agree with you"). Sarah also argued that as teachers, they must teach values which are acceptable in the society. She continued, *"let us involve churches, they have some good values. If what is taught in churches is what is wanted by society, so let's teach it"*. Therefore, it is critical for an HIV and AIDS education curriculum, to always take cognizance of the societal values and norms in order to satisfy the society in which learners live.

The current G&C HIV and AIDS education curriculum contains a theme which focuses on values and beliefs. In the Zimbabwean society, respect for others is important. There is need for respect through how people talk and interact with the view of avoiding to harm others emotionally (Wood & Rens, 2014). In consideration of sexuality education within HIV and AIDS education curriculum, teachers are to respect their learners and colleagues in the sense that, amongst all of them, some are affected and some are infected (FOSE, 2015). Teachers cannot change societal culture and values, but have to teach sexuality education within the boundaries of those societal values.

Curriculum implementation is learner-centred

Participants understood that one of the key approaches to implementing HIV and AIDS education curriculum is to teach the HIV and AIDS education curriculum using a learner-centred approach.

Rose stated that this curriculum helps learners *"for present and future skills is covered and it allows for more interaction amongst learners".* Rose continued during the discussion that "*teacher-learner interaction is good but learner to learner interaction is more critical because children may be shy to speak openly to the teacher but not to his / her friend"*.

The participants understood the demands of the current curriculum, which requires the following:

> Teachers are expected to use participatory methodologies when conducting HIV and AIDS education lessons. Participatory methodology is the process in which various groups are involved in identifying their own problems, discussing solutions, planning and carrying out effective action programmes. Participatory methods are used to validate the learners'

> experience, give them confidence, information and skills to question themselves and others, and take action with regard to their own lives and that of others. Suggested methods include role play, poetry, drama, song, group discussion, debate, devil's advocate, brainstorming (MoESC, 2003, p. 7).

From the citation from MoESC (2003) the major methodology emphasized by the curriculum designers leads to participatory learning. Using participatory methods with learners are important in that they can contribute to social transformation (Fouché, & Schurink, 2011). Learners who learn through participatory methods, may have more power to do their work in class, in a better way (Bowd, Ozerdem, & Kassa, 2010). Furthermore, participatory class activities, with learner to learner interaction, enables learners to share knowledge and construct knowledge, together as a team of learners (Chilisa, 2012), in the same way the G&C teachers did in this study. A participatory approach to teaching enables learner empowerment and social transformation (Greeff, 2011). Inasmuch as the curriculum design may be good, curriculum implementation must be equally good. Thus teaching through a participatory, learner-centred methodology, among many other advantages, increases learner engagement with the content and long term retention (Greeff, 2011).

In his study at Masvingo College of Education, in Zimbabwe, on teaching sex and AIDS education, Pattman (2006) too, emphasized the need for learner-centredness and concluded that drama is effective in transforming academic contexts and raising sensitive issues related to AIDS. This is consistent with what Nyasha suggested when she emphasized the need for learners and community members to occasionally gather together and watch dramas produced by learners. In her presentation, she said,

> *I think we can also have joint campaigning, awareness campaigning whereby schools in Mkoba, can converge at Mkoba Stadium whilst pupils will be dramatizing what they have learnt in G&C, so that parents can also come to witness these activities and can learn from what the pupils are doing acting on what is happening in their everyday lives. This is because if you give those children platform to dramatize and to do some poems, they can reveal a lot of things which you currently may not know.*

In the UNESCO report (2014a, p. 6), it is noted that "effective HIV education requires participatory methods and other learner centred approaches". It becomes clear that an approach that engages learner-centredness within sexuality education within the HIV and AIDS education curriculum is necessary. Such an approach could enable learners to have a space for the generation of new knowledge as they address the realities of their sexuality (Weiler & Weiler, 2012).

Furthermore, as a result of the social media which the learners are so often engaged in, it is necessary to draw on the participatory nature thereof to teach sexuality education (Wenli, L., Dennis, J. M., & Pope-Edwards, C. (2015). Learners reflect a great deal on their lived experiences both in and outside the classroom through social media (Wenli et al., 2015). Conversely, if sexuality education fails to engage the learners with what they experience daily, disengagement between teachers and learners becomes a reality (Preston, 2013). The learners might then develop a negative attitude towards the sexuality education curriculum (Morawska, Walsh, Grabski, & Fletcher, 2015; Musengi

& Shumba, 2013; Preston, 2013). With a learner-centred approach, it is possible to address the experiences which are of real importance to the learners (De Jong, 2014).

The next category of curriculum design and implementation is the support given by NGOs.

NGOs support the teaching of the curriculum

To facilitate the implementation of the curriculum, participants were aware of the critical role played by Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs). Vongai said that she attended a workshop in Harare organized by NGOs and, "*from this workshop, I brought some work sheets, where we are supposed to arrange [write down] the name of the child and the date that topic was taught and the chapters for every child, for all levels".*

In further discussion, it became clear that there are NGOs that were promoting the implementation of G&C. Some participants reported of such workshops although others were not aware of such workshops having taken place for the G&C teachers. Esinia echoed that *"I never heard of that workshop and in our school we do not have such materials you are talking about".* Through further discussion, it was realized that although some of the NGOs do support the implementation of the G&C curriculum, the communication to schools via the provincial authorities was not effective. Esther verbalized the following,

> *actually, what happens is, there was a workshop in Harare last holiday, and all schools were invited, the Gweru district schools, because they are saying according to their statistics, Midlands, we are one of the provinces which have [has] a high prevalence of HIV and AIDS, so schools were invited. Unfortunately, because it was during the holidays, some schools failed to send their teachers, which is why some schools were left out.*

The NGO was responding to the high HIV prevalence in Gweru district. Esther went on to say that "*I heard that they are going to have another workshop, another one was already held at Chaplin high school and there is going to be another one until all the teachers have been trained*". Apparently, Esther appeared to be well informed about the operations of these NGOs in furthering the implementation of the G&C curriculum. However, other participants were not aware of it. Esinia exclaimed, "*the other challenge, which is there, is that only a few or one person is invited. I think that's where a challenge is. Only this one person gets the materials and fails to distribute to other teachers".* Esther clarified the issue saying, "*they invited three teachers per school, the deputy head, the head of department and the G&C teachers, and they were supposed to come to the workshop, the three of them*". Esther stated,

> *They [the workshop participants from Harare] were given a flash stick full of material and then the district office is the one now which was working with these people, going around the schools distributing the materials. At our school, Ms Puna [a pseudonym] came with these people, with these sheets of papers. Now they were doing an evaluation, evaluating from what you have learnt since you came from the workshop. They wanted to see what you have done in your* school.

Edith went on to say that *"we never heard anything. We were not even invited".* The workshops by NGOs were organized to complement the work done by the Ministry

of Education, in the implementation of the G&C curriculum, but the communication channels to the teachers were not good, and so they missed out on these opportunities.

NGOs have generally played a pivotal role alongside government efforts, in the development of basic education in developing countries (Dar, 2014). In some countries, NGOs have come in to provide quality basic education where governments had failed (Doftori, 2005). Therefore, in a way, NGOs are an alternative provider of relevant basic education in some disadvantaged geographical districts of Zimbabwe. In a study on the influence of NGOs' initiatives on curriculum implementation in public primary schools in Kenya, it was noted that the role played by NGOs in curriculum implementation resulted in greater attention to curriculum implementation by the teachers (Asewe, 2013). Nevertheless, it is important that all schools be included in the capacity building exercise. The failure to effectively monitor and appreciate the activities of NGOs in schools, robs the education system from benefitting from such initiatives and hence schools lose the opportunity to improve the implementation of G&C curriculum.

Sub-theme 2 Curriculum is an educational tool for mediating sexuality education knowledge in the community to prevent HIV and AIDS

This sub-theme consists of two categories which are: (1) curriculum is a tool for awareness and prevention of HIV and AIDS and (2) parental involvement in curriculum changes and innovation is critical

Curriculum is a tool for awareness and prevention of HIV and AIDS

The participants viewed the G&C HIV and AIDS education curriculum as a tool for mediating sexuality education knowledge to the community for the prevention of HIV and AIDS. Participants believed that it was the responsibility of the school to link with communities and make them aware of challenges associated with HIV and AIDS and how to achieve an AIDS free generation.

Esther explained her drawing of a tree with roots, branches and fruits. To Esther, "*the students [learners] are the roots"* which absorb nutrients from the soil. The soil represents the G&C teacher who has information. She said that,

> *learners become aware of the G&C, and HIV and AIDS issues. When they go home, they go and disseminate the information to their siblings, to their friends, or to their parents, and in turn their parents and friends, they go and tell others.*

Esther believed in the propagation of knowledge about HIV, starting with the learner and spreading into the community, to prevent the spread of HIV. Esther's explanation of the tree also involved fruits, as she says,

> *now, the fruits are being produced by the trees, again the friends go and tell somebody else until the whole community has benefitted from the information which was brought by the school children to their parents and siblings, and everybody benefits.*

Therefore, according to Esther, the teacher engages the children in learning and sharing knowledge about HIV and AIDS prevention, which will be used beyond the school. In the focus group discussion, Vongai said that, *"curriculum is also our hope for an AIDS free generation to come".* During fgd participants reiterated that if everybody was to change his / her behaviour and maintain the ABC (abstain, being faithful and condomize) behaviour, it is possible to have an AIDS free generation

by year 2030. It has however come to light that while the ABC is based on sound values, abstaining is not the reality for youths, and so comprehensive sexuality education should replace ABC.

School HIV and AIDS education curricula is a well proven facility and intervention tool for the provision of information about HIV and AIDS for youth who are still in school (Sarma & Oliveras, 2013). Therefore, school curricula, in particular G&C and HIV and AIDS education curriculum is viewed by participants as a critical tool in responding to the needs of communities (Mangwaya & Ndlovu, 2012), as the knowledge spread from the school into the communities plays a critical role in HIV prevention (Bhana, Morrell, Epstein, & Moletsane, 2006; Coombe, 2000).

World over, young people appear to be at the centre of any discussion involving HIV and AIDS issues as they are still most infected (Sarma & Oliveras, 2013). The young people are normally of school-going age and at school and hence, by offering G&C, HIV and AIDS education curriculum, schools are offering a "vaccine" to curtail the spread of HIV, since knowledge is power (Kelly, 2009). This is consistent with what UNESCO argues when it says that sexuality education has to be taught to learners in order to empower them to make their own decisions about sexuality, relationships, and health issues (UNESCO, 2009). Furthermore, the knowledge gained and spread to the community, equips both learners and community members to avoid becoming infected, and avoid stigmatization and discrimination of people living with HIV (UNAIDS, 2014).

The following section explores parental involvement in curriculum change and innovation.

Parental involvement in curriculum changes and innovation is critical

Parental involvement was viewed by participants as an important issue in the G&C curriculum, change and innovation. Curriculum change and innovation is a deliberate action to improve the existing curriculum. Since the curriculum is not static, it may need re-adjustments from time to time to meet changing ideologies. To innovate is to introduce new things or to make changes. Sarah revealed that, *"teachers are to dialogue with parents as far as the HIV and AIDS education curriculum is concerned. G&C teachers are expected to teach the learners what parents would have already approved".* In her explanation Sarah said,

> *but at one point in life, when I took the form 1s, [and taught them] about their physical development, one of the children went on to report to the father, who was a teacher. The teacher went and reported to the head, saying the G&C ma'am teaches about this and that. It was a conflict.*

She summed up her contribution by saying, *"therefore, this knowledge [curriculum] should first go to the parent, then they will be able to accommodate whatever knowledge you are going to teach their children".* Shuvai, during the discussion had this to say, *"There is a conflict between the school and the parent. In our culture, you can't talk about sex, so to talk about that, parents will complain".* Edith was of the view that

> *Sometimes there is the need for parents to come in [to the school] such that we talk so that we operate at the same level. Naturally, it is very difficult for a parent to talk about sexual issues with your [his / her] own biological child, right? But once the school has a workshop,*

> *it will be a forum where everybody is empowered, you know, it can be made lighter, where (when) someone can talk freely.*

Esinia raised the issue of organizing workshops for teachers and parents, where sexuality in the HIV and AIDS education curriculum could be discussed. Esinia said, *"children [learners] are saying, [asking] why their parents cannot be invited for a workshop and talk to them. Learners, during G&C lessons "cry out" to their teachers that their parents do not understand them in terms of dating and courtships".* Esinia stated that one of her learners said she did not know how to reply if her parent asked whether she has a boyfriend or not. She cited a child saying, "*so we do not know how to talk to our parents about having boyfriends, so in this case, parents should be invited, and maybe workshops should be carried out to inform parents*".

Participants also argued that parental involved in curriculum change and innovation was important because some parents *"go to the extent of getting strangers so that they come and abuse the child so that they can get some money"*, uttered Nyasha. She also went on to say, "*so I think parents should be involved [in workshops] for them to be aware of the risks they are putting their children into".*

The teachers also felt that parents should break the culture of silence on sexuality education. Sarah said, *"I feel it is high time the parents get involved in such issues [sexuality education] of their children"*. They should really assist the teachers because the teachers try to teach the children. *"I think parents should be informed maybe during meetings, that they should also talk about sexualities, and life skills to their own children,"* exclaimed Rose in the discussion. Rose furthermore said, "*even if our culture forbids us from talking about sex to our children, it is high time we break that silence".*

Participants also suggested that *"School Development Committees (SDCs) could be used as another fora for parents and teachers to meet and dialogue. Consultation days can also be used".* In her discussion Rose went on to say, *"when a parent comes to see me, we [I] try to enlighten them about their child, of which some of the parents won't even be knowing that their children are up to mischief, they will get to learn about it [from the teacher]"*.

Along the same issue of parental involvement in curriculum innovation and change Nyasha answered during the discussion, "*I think we can also have joint campaigning---- and gather in stadiums where children will be dramatizing what they have learnt in G&C, so that parents can also come to witness these activities"*. Nyasha said, *"if you give those children a platform to dramatize and to do some poems, they can reveal a lot of things which you currently may not know (be aware of)".*

There was consensus about the need for parents to understand the innovation in the curriculum, that is the introduction of sexuality education, and interact with schoolteachers and for teachers to create an atmosphere where teachers and parents could exchange notes on sexuality education within HIV and AIDS education curriculum. In a study of some British families, the findings "highlighted the importance of communication and showed a tendency of children and adolescents wanting to learn about sexuality matters from their parents" (Turnbull, van Wersch, & van Schaik, 2008, p. 182). However, where parents were involved in communicating with their children in relation to issues of sexuality, it was found mainly to be the mother who would do so, with greater emphasis on the girl child. The boys tended to learn about sexuality more

from their peers, media and internet than from their fathers (Turnbull et al., 2008). For those adolescents who would manage to initiate dialogue with their parents, it was found that the parents lacked the knowledge and skill to communicate with their children. The children would feel uncomfortable and embarrassed (Dickinson & Bennett, 2010). Such findings are consistent with what Esinia said in this study. She said that one of her schoolgirls said that she did not know how to talk to her parents about having boyfriends. The sentiments by Esinia's learner, are however, consistent with the findings in a study on student-parent rapport and parent involvement in sex, birth control, and venereal disease education in the United States, as it was noted that frank discussion on sexuality education between parents and children was rare (Dickinson & Bennett, 2010).

Turnbull et al., (2008) assert that one way to involve parents in sexuality education issues is for the school to design a programme together with parents. The programme would be designed in such a way that the teacher would teach some sexuality education during the day, and at home, the parent would reinforce the same issues. An example of such a programme, called Student Relationship Education (SRE), was found to be effective in the USA (Dickinson & Bennett, 2010). One of the major contributory factors to risky sexual behaviour of the youth is lack of parent-child communication (Ballard & Gross, 2009). Turnbull et al., (2008), therefore, recommend open discussions within cultural boundaries between parents and children in respect to sexuality. However, Turnbull et al., (2008), also argue that in South Africa, most parents find it difficult to initiate discussion on sex with their children because of the cultural taboos. This is equally so in Zimbabwe (Musengi & Shumba, 2013).

Discussion

This study contributes towards the body of knowledge in Educational Psychology, particularly in G&C, and the teaching of sexuality education in the HIV and AIDS education curriculum. In making meaning of the findings in response to the research question, namely, what are the G&C teachers' understandings of the current HIV and AIDS education curriculum in Zimbabwe secondary schools and how they can be enabled to teach it? I draw on the Cultural-Historical Activity Theory (CHAT) as theoretical framework. Applying CHAT, in particular the third generation attributed to Engeström (2001), I argue that there are several Activity Systems which effect the shared goal of teachers' understandings of the current HIV and AIDS education curriculum in Zimbabwe secondary schools and how they can be abled to teach it. There are three Activity Systems (See Figure 2) which are interacting with each other to enable G&C teachers to teach sexuality education within the HIV and AIDS education curriculum suitable for Zimbabwe secondary school context. These are the collective of G&C teachers, an Activity System of the school, and the Activity System of the community.

Each Activity System include subject, for instance, the G&C female teachers. The school community has other teachers, heads of school, education officers, school development committees, non-teaching staff, learners and other actors. The broader community has parents, learners, and local community leadership. If the G&C teachers (the participants) are to achieve their outcome, they have to draw on mediating artefacts or tools (O'Brien, Varga-Atkins, Umoquit, & Tso, 2012). In this study, they are the conceptual and material resources needed to teach sexuality education. They have to draw on rules which inform their activity, for example, the class regulations, Ministry's Circulars, school regulations, and the community values and beliefs. The activity

happens within a community in which members realize their object (ive) via the division of labour. In this study the division of labour insinuates the G&C teachers who teach, the school heads who supervise the G&C teachers and who also generate the timetables, and the Education Officers who supervise G&C teaching. In CHAT, culture and history are important. In an Activity System, each participant has a history or lived experiences because of her specific cultural background. Therefore, the Activity System consists of many voices (Engeström, 2006). Each participant has own, traditions, viewpoints, and practices. With reference to CHAT, if all the Activity Systems act together, the G&C teachers could be enabled to teach the sexuality education within the HIV and AIDS education curriculum, which is the object and or outcome of the study (See figure 2.

The participants claimed some social transformation. For instance, Rose, a 51-year-old BSc graduate with 4 years of G&C teaching experience also said, *"my view of teaching the subject has improved having gained information from other teachers"*. Additionally, Sarah commented saying, "*I learnt that there are some challenges in teaching sexuality education in G&C, however, there are some possible solutions to all these challenges".* Likewise, Edith, a 56-year-old teacher with a Diploma in Education, and two-years-experience of teaching G&C said, *"I learnt a lot about challenges to teaching sexuality education, and some solutions"*. Again, Shuvai said, "*we looked at how to overcome the challenge that teachers are meeting, now we are overcomers, and I am going to use drawing in my teaching".*

The robust debate amongst participants, created ambiguities and dialectics which acted as conceptual tools which enabled reflexivity amongst G&C teachers. Such reflexivity acted as sources of knowledge on how they can enable themselves to teach sexuality education within HIV and AIDS education curriculum within the Zimbabwe secondary school situation.

Conclusion

We presented findings to the research question of the study, namely, what are the G&C teachers' understandings of the current HIV and AIDS education curriculum in Zimbabwe secondary schools and how they can be enabled to teach it? We, therefore, conclude that G&C teachers identified some of the principles of curriculum design in the G&C curriculum; that they viewed the current HIV and AIDS curriculum as an educational tool for mediating sexuality education knowledge to the community; that they needed support in teaching the G&C curriculum, and that the curriculum is not necessarily addressing the needs of the learners. The G&C teachers understood that the HIV and AIDS education curriculum in Zimbabwe secondary schools was developed in accordance with curriculum design principles, although with little teacher input. The G&C teachers viewed it as an educational tool for mediating sexuality education knowledge to the whole community to prevent HIV and AIDS. For favourable mediation of the knowledge of the curriculum to take place, the teachers were of the opinion that the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education did not optimally support the teaching and learning of the curriculum, for instance, through its operational personnel like G&C Education Officers, heads of schools and other appropriately trained teachers. It is the mandate of the Ministry to supply teaching resources, train all its teachers in subjects of specialization such as G&C which is currently excluded as a specialisation subject, and is not examinable, making it look less important than other subjects.

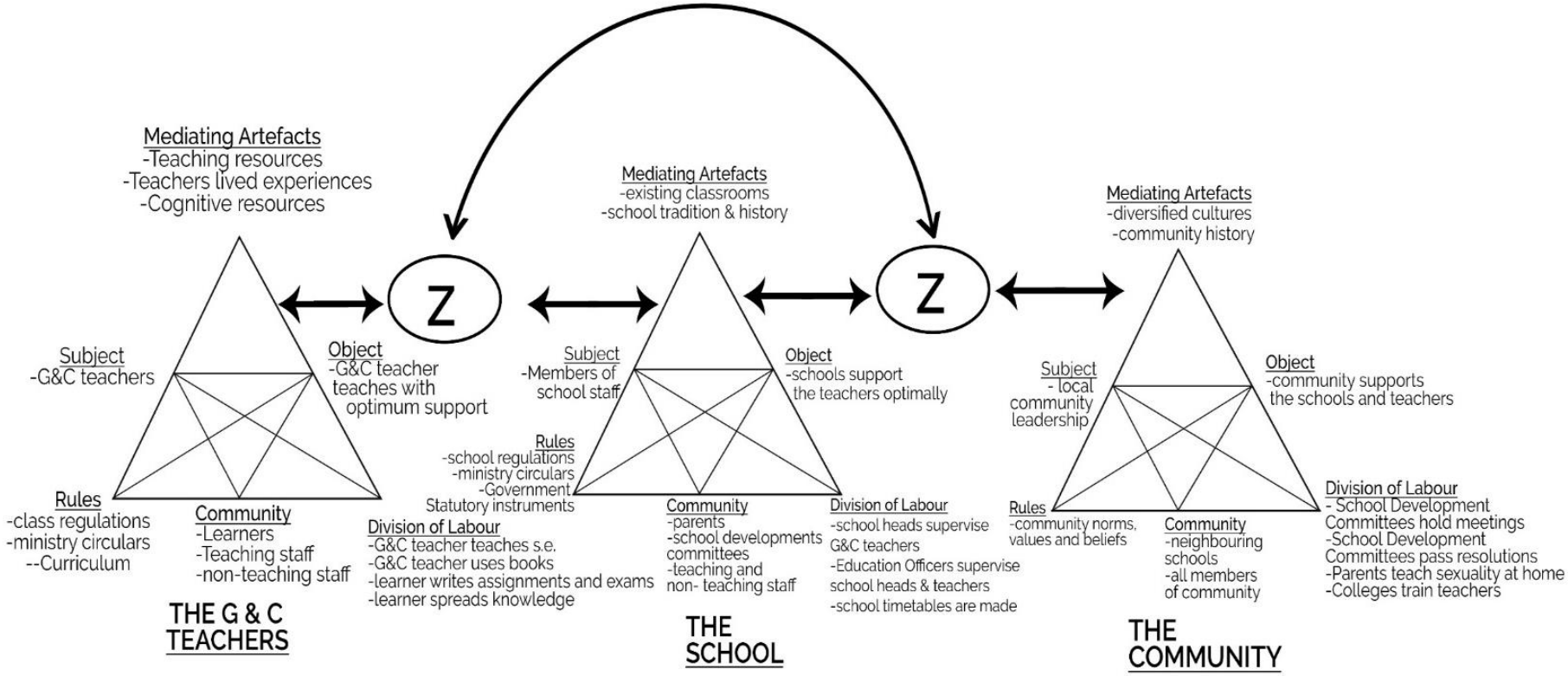

Figure 2 An interaction of three major Activity Systems (G&C teachers, the School, and the Community): Z is the outcome of G&C teacher enabled to teach sexuality education

In engaging critically with the content of the curriculum, the G&C teachers realised that the curriculum did not necessarily address learners' age-appropriate needs within the context in which they find themselves.

We further conclude that the G&C teachers understand the G&C curriculum and made their voices heard on how it should be designed, with whose input, how teachers should be supported in implementing it and ensuring that it is appropriate to the context in which they teach.

We draw implications based on the conclusions that the findings show that the G&C curriculum was designed with little or no consultation with teachers, Mufuka and Tauya, (2013) concur. The same sexuality education curriculum was cascaded down by designers from their distant offices to teachers for implementation. Time allocation depicted a lesson of about 35 minutes per week. It was also noted that the subject is not examined further rendering it unimportant, in the eyes of participants. So the findings imply that G&C has to be a subject which has an examination if it is to be viewed with considerable credence. The curriculum content which does not serve all the needs of the learners effectively, requires reviewing, by all stakeholders. Such review will be in line with the Mali Call to Action Declaration at ICASA conference (2011) where growing demand from the youth themselves for quality comprehensive sexuality education was reported (UNESCO, 2015). The Curriculum Development Unit (CDU) office in Harare, Zimbabwe, G&C Education Officers, teachers, and the learners should be included in the review and produce an updated and relevant G&C curriculum.

Based on findings of this study, participants indicated the importance of schools to engage parents in talking about (teaching) sexuality education. This implies that school heads are to engage parents, workers in the health sector, social workers, civic organizations and other stakeholders who work with the same youth, to collaborate around sexuality education. They can do so through their school development committees (SDCs). If all talk about sexuality education, it enhances the value of the subject, which in turn could make learners value G&C.

The crucial task of teaching sexuality education in Zimbabwe secondary schools to ensure that learners remain healthy in the context of HIV and AIDS is in the hands of G&C teachers. I pointed out that teaching sexuality education in school seemed not to get its rightful cohort of qualified teaching staff, nor the best support from the head of school nor ministries of education, and that the teachers seemed to struggle to teach sexuality education for several reasons. I close this article by reiterating that G&C secondary school teachers could be enabled to teach sexuality education within the HIV and AIDS education curriculum suitable for Zimbabwe secondary school context, through using a participatory methodology, such as participatory visual methodology. The research process enabled a process of reflexivity, reflecting on themselves and their teaching, the school context in which the teaching takes place, as well as the community in which the teaching occurs, and seemed to deepen their understanding of the curriculum and of the complexities of teaching sexuality education in the context in which they find themselves but also enabled them to take up their agency to change how they have approached the task and make their voices heard.

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Cultivating a Sense of Splace in the Hybrid and Virtual Classroom at Universities

Krystle Ontong
Department of Construction Economics and Management (CEM)
Faculty of Engineering and the Built Environment
University of Cape town
South Africa
Corresponding author: krystle.ontong@uct.ac.za

ABSTRACT

The COVID-19 pandemic impacted higher education globally that required new and contingency ways of teaching. Emergency Remote Teaching (ERT) propelled university educators to adopt a pedagogy of flexibility while still maintaining a sense of connectedness. In South Africa, the implementation of ERT was challenging, given the country's stark socio-economic inequalities. The South African government, therefore, adopted a more flexible version of ERT, remote multimodal teaching and learning (RMTL), to ensure that no student would be left behind. The success of multimodal models requires flexible pedagogical approaches that embrace understanding, compassion, and inclusivity because students in a remote space may experience feelings of disconnection. I argue that educators develop a strong sense of place and space (splace) in the hybrid classroom. Prior to the pandemic, a strong sense of place created in students a deeper connection to learning than that experienced in a remote learning context. The pandemic introduced new hybrid splaces that suggest a shift in both students' and educators' connections to an unfamiliar learning context. Students therefore need to feel a strong sense of connection to these new learning splaces. This paper discusses how a sense of splace could foster a deeper sense of connection in the hybrid and virtual classroom.

***Keywords**: flexible learning; hybrid classroom; sense of splace; universal design for learning*

INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 global pandemic brought significant disruptions to higher education institutions (HEIs) across the world. Not only did it serve as a catalyst for HEIs to find innovative solutions for the continuation of the academic year, it also highlighted the pivotal role that place and space play in an uninterrupted and successful delivery of the curriculum. In a South African context, under the theme, 'Save The Academic Year Save Lives', the Minister of Higher Education made what he considered a practical suggestion that universities adopt the notion of 'remote multimodal teaching and learning' (RMTL) as a desensitised (less threatening/intimidating) approach to learning. He proposed this approach to ensure that no student would be left behind during online teaching. Chen and Fu (2003), Moreno and Mayer (2007), and Zywno (2003) describe how remote multimodal teaching and learning environments allow instructional elements to be presented in more than one sensory mode (visual, aural, written) to meet the needs of all students. They consider this approach to include distance education. The RMTL guidelines circulated by the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) offered universities the flexibility to determine the most applicable pedagogies and resources for their specific contexts. However, the abrupt translation of approximately 600 courses (in the case of the University of Cape Town) to an online platform in the early part of 2020 signalled an emergency.

This abrupt shift to the dominant mode of instruction is what many refer to as emergency remote teaching (ERT) (Hodges et al., 2020).

Bozkurt and Shama (2020) flagged the various risks linked to allowing universities unlimited flexibility in selecting what they considered the most appropriate RMTL strategies. For example, although some university educators might have incorporated technology (in varying degrees) in their teaching prior to the pandemic, in most instances, an in-depth understanding of the conceptual and theoretical frameworks underpinning online education and ERT was lacking or absent. This 'unawareness' resulted in many university educators operating from the assumption that the curriculum, course material, and pedagogy implemented in the face-to-face classroom could simply be translated directly to the virtual one. This flawed and uninformed conception and application may be one of the reasons why disengaged learning escalated and students became disconnected from the learning experience. Under ERT, more options for engaging in the flexible learning experience became available to HEIs and students were presented with these options in the process of selecting their preferred mode of learning based on their individual circumstances. Over time, the nature of the educational transaction also changed. However, it is fair to say that university educators and students were largely underprepared for this new educational transaction and did not necessarily know how to navigate this new mode of teaching. I argue that e-learning should be transactional instead of instructional for it to be effective (Author & Waghid, 2021). The former is based on the social constructivist theory, where knowledge is generated through social interaction and engagement, whereas the latter concerns one-directional, instrumental teaching.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

As with any abrupt change, the implementation of an RMTL approach did not come without its challenges. For example, students' access and connectivity to the digital world remained a challenge. Although synchronous instructional delivery was adopted by most universities, using various IT tools (e.g., MS Teams, Zoom, Google classroom), many students and advocates for democratic and just education challenged this mode of delivery, arguing that remote teaching was only benefiting those who had reliable internet connectivity and were equipped with a digital device. As a result of this call, some universities allocated loan laptops to students, based on financial need, and with access to data. In addition to this initiative, South Africa shifted to asynchronous delivery, low-tech options, and off-line activities to minimise the online presence of students and limit data usage. These were some of the attempts made to accommodate students and to respond to the issues of social inequality and access (Author & Waghid, 2020).

The above challenges, I argue, resulted in most students disengaging and disconnecting from the learning process. In fact, core to these challenges is the issue of disconnection due to students not necessarily knowing how to manage or to navigate their learning in this unfamiliar setting (splace). Notwithstanding these unavoidable issues, university educators were overly focused on the deliverance of content and on mitigating the risks of e-cheating while, at the same time, forgetting or failing to address the idea that the successful continuation and completion of the academic year largely depends on creating enabling places and spaces (splaces) for students.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this paper is thus to introduce university educators to an important yet overlooked concept in hybrid and online education, namely, a sense of splace. The latter I argue is imperative in fostering a stronger connection to the teaching and learning experience in both hybrid and virtual educational settings. Understanding and fostering a sense of splace, requires that educators not only adjust their approach and adopt a more holistic, inclusive and flexible methodology, but maintain a sense of connection amongst students. Establishing this connection, I argue, can materialise through: a) thoroughly understanding these new splaces of teaching in terms of students' responses and the shift in teaching strategies; and b) both students and educators learning to navigate them in the best possible way. Therefore, I suggest that a renewed focus be placed not only on our sense of place or space in the teaching and learning domain but on the development of a more holistic and integrated relationship between these two: a sense of splace. My argument being that the latter has the potential to strengthen teaching and learning connections in the hybrid and virtual classroom. I divide the paper into four sections. First, I discuss the methodology; secondly, I introduce the theoretical framework underpinning this paper; thirdly, I elaborate on the concept of a sense of splace, and how the development and fostering of this could promote a general connectedness in students, and ultimately, inclusivity. Lastly, I deliberate on a few concluding thoughts for higher education, currently and into the future.

METHODOLOGY

The paper is primarily conceptual. According to Shepard (2017) empirical and conceptual papers have one goal in common: to generate new knowledge by drawing on selected sources of information combined according to a set of norms. As opposed to empirical papers, arguments in conceptual papers, are not derived from data in the conventional way but involve the assimilation and combination of evidence in the form of previously developed concepts and theories (McInns, 2011 & Shepard, 2017). Conceptual papers typically draw on multiple concepts, literature streams, and theories that serve different purposes. As opposed to empirical research, there is no consensus of basic types of research design in respect to conceptual papers. However, to address this issue, MacInnis (2011) considers four such types: theory synthesis, theory adaptation, typology, and model. These types assist the researcher to differentiate methodological approaches from one another in terms of the structure and development of the argument. In this paper theory synthesis was applied.

Corley and Gioia (2011) allude that theory synthesis can integrate an extensive set of theories and phenomena which is aimed at unravelling the components of a concept or phenomenon. Central to theory synthesis is summarisation and integration. According to MacInnis (2011), summarizing assists researchers by encapsulating, digesting, and reducing what is known to a manageable whole. On the other hand, integration enables them to see a concept or phenomenon in a new way by transforming previous findings and theory into a novel higher-order perspective that links phenomena previously considered distinct (MacInnis, 2011). In this paper two macro concepts namely, place and space are critically explored and conceptually integrated and transformed into a new higher-order perspective namely sense of splace. Underpinning this novice concept social constructivism, universal design for learning and flexible learning theory have been explored. The argument has therefore been structured around these multiple concepts and theories to arrive at

substantive conclusions.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: SOCIALCONSTRUCTIVISM, UNIVERSAL DESIGN FOR LEARNING AND FLEXIBLE LEARNING

Social Constructivism

The theory of social constructivism was developed by Soviet psychologist Lev Vygotsky (1896-1934) (Ageyev, 2004). Social constructivism assumes that learning occurs through social interaction and collaboration, often in a group. It further posits that individual's understanding develops and is shaped through the social interaction along with a personal critical thinking process. At the foundation of this theory is the belief that knowledge is not a copy of an objective reality but is rather the result of the mind selecting and making sense of and recreating experiences (Vygotsky, 1962). This means that knowledge is the result of interactions between both subjective and environmental factors. All of Vygotsky's research and theories are collectively involved in social constructivism and language development such as, cognitive dialogue, the zone of proximal development (ZPD), social interaction, culture and inner speech (Vygotsky, 1962). Cooperative learning and a sense of connectedness is paramount to this theory. Although this theory might seem quite simple to employ in a face-to-face setting, it could be more challenging in the hybrid and virtual classroom. However, to effectively apply social constructivism as an educational theory in the hybrid or virtual classroom, I argue that educators could find the universal design for learning (UDL) framework useful.

Universal Design for Learning (UDL)

The Universal Design for Learning (UDL) is a theoretical and/or conceptual framework in education that addresses the accessibility of learning content whilst embracing diversity amongst students. The concept of UDL was elaborated and popularized by the Center for Applied Special Technology (CAST) in the 1990s and has subsequently become widely disseminated (Sanger, 2020). The notion of UDL, is to maximize the learning of students with a wide range of characteristics by applying universal design principles to all aspects of instruction, for example: delivery methods, physical spaces, information resources, technology, personal interactions and assessments (Burgstahler, 2020). UDL theory further assumes that the multimodality of a learning environment is created by multiple forms of representation, processing, and motivational or motivation-maintaining elements in the learning environment. UDL encourages educators to provide: a) multiple means of engagement—the 'Why' of learning; b) multiple means of representation—the 'What' of learning; and c) multiple means of action and expression—the 'How' of learning (Sanger, 2020). Accessibility is key to UDL theory and aims to minimize barriers for implementing inclusive pedagogy in order to achieve student engagement, collaboration and connection. Educators could therefore implement UDL principles to create flexible learning pathways for learners to achieve their learning goals. This pathway allows all learners to be addressed by choosing different methods, materials, and assessments based on their individual needs. It also includes cooperative learning styles to generate new knowledge.

Flexible learning

Although flexible learning is currently defined in terms of distance and hybrid learning in South African higher education policy documents (DHET, 2014),

it appears that there is no commonly accepted meaning globally. Jones and Walters (2015, p. 66) claim that, in the context of teaching and learning, 'flexibility is a wide range of responses to different situations [and] needs, underpinned by different discourses. Naidu (2017) conceives of flexible learning as a state of being in which the limitations of the time, place and pace of study have been gradually relaxed for teaching and learning. She suggests that flexibility in learning for students could range from choices in relation to entry and exit points, to the selection of learning activities, assessment tasks, and educational resources. At the same time, for the educators, the choices could vary from the allocation of their time to the mode and methods of communication with their students and between students. Naidu (2017) notes that flexible learning is not a mode of study. She refers to it as a 'value principle', just as diversity and equality are in education and society. She further argues that flexibility in teaching and learning is pertinent in any mode of study, including campus-based face-to-face education. Thus, it is imperative that HEIs continue critical discourses on the meaning of flexible learning and how it can be optimally applied in various programmes.

Despite its theoretical complexity, there is agreement among scholars in the field that flexible learning is about *when, where, how* and at what *pace* learning occurs, and that it provides a selection of choices for a diverse cohort of students (Naidu, 2016, 2017; Outram, 2011). These choices can be classified under three main categories which form the foundation of flexible learning, namely, *place, pace* and *mode*. Although this paper focuses primarily on *place*, the other concepts, *pace* and *mode* also relate to the delivery of learning. According to Tallantyre (2012) and Gordon (2014), *place* in flexible learning relates to work-based learning, which could entail learning at home, on campus, while travelling, or in any other place, and is often made possible through technology. Technology enables flexible learning across geographical boundaries and at convenient times (learning anywhere, anytime). *Pace* concerns the 'speed' at which teaching occurs and could include accelerated and decelerated programmes and degrees, learning part-time, and systems for recognition of prior learning and for credit accumulation and transfer. Lastly, *mode* involves the use of learning technologies to enhance flexibility and enrich the quality of the learning experiences, in hybrid or distance learning, and in synchronous and asynchronous modes of learning.

While flexible learning is paramount to the successful continuation of the academic project during and even post the pandemic, the student learning experience is about a lot more than the educator getting the design of assessment tasks right and providing students with useful feedback. Learning is a complex process in which different students and learning groups adopt a variety of motivational and cognitive regulation strategies as part of their learning. And, in the context of distance, online and distributed educational settings, which are characterised by the separation of students from educators in time and space, these variables take on new meanings, and a new level of importance. However, the tremendous pressure on university educators during the abrupt shift to ERT between late 2019 and early 2020 diverted their attention from the pivotal role that place, and space (splace) play in the teaching and learning process. In the following section I discuss a sense of splace and its role in the higher education context.

The importance of developing a sense of splace in teaching and learning settings

Conceptualising Place and Space

In order to understand the concept of splace, it is important to acquire some key insights into its two constituent parts – space and place. Often the two terms are used interchangeably by those who are not aware of their rich theoretical underpinnings. Various schools of thought exist around the conceptualisation of these two notions and their interrelatedness. In the hard sciences, space is often conceived of from a Newtonian perspective – as an empty, independent infinite container for matter (Lefebvre, 1974). However, space and place are intrinsically related concepts: they constitute each other. A place takes meaning from the spaces outside it, and spaces are relevant in relation to the places they surround (McKenzie, 2008).

The global pandemic proved that place is far more than just a bounded space, location or site, and that people do not live in a placeless world of geometric relationships, but in one of meaning (Buttimer & Seamon, 1980; Ley, 1983; Relph, 1976; Tuan, 1977). This concept indicates a world where neither place nor scale is a fixed or given category, but where they are characterised by their fluidity and contingency (Marston, 2000). I concur with Basso (1996) that place is an inescapable aspect of daily life and is intimately linked to our life experiences. Places provide the context in which humans learn about themselves and others, and make sense of, and connect to, their natural and cultural surroundings. Places shape our identities, our relationships with others, and our world views (Basso, 1996; Gruenewald, 2003).

As a macro concept in education, place remains theoretically complex due to its wide range of interpretations in different contexts and disciplines (Creswell, 2004). The word, according to its simplest meaning and use, refers to either a specific location somewhere, or to the occupation of that location. In the first instance, it is about having an address and, secondly, about living at that address. Agnew (2011) describes how this distinction is often pushed further to distinguish the physical place from the phenomenal space in which the place is located. Hence, place becomes a particular or lived space. As Tuan (1977, p. 101) has shown, the concepts of space and place can be correlated with movement and stability: a space can become a place when we stand still and observe, while place is ‘essentially a static concept’ and can, in that sense, also be defined as ‘whatever stable object catches our attention’.

A review of the literature shows that the concept of place has been studied extensively in various disciplines, including Geography, Cultural Studies, and Psychology, to mention a few. In the field of Environmental Education, Gruenewald (2003) introduces a multidisciplinary analysis of the term, comprising the perceptual, ideological, sociological, ecological, and political dimensions. Such views invite a renewed conceptualisation of the term beyond its technical meaning in terms of location on a map (for a more detailed discussion on this, see Author & Le Grange, 2015, 2016 and Le Grange & Author, 2018). Furthermore, Creswell (2004) provides three fundamental aspects of place to distinguish between the term’s technical meaning and daily usage, namely, *place as area*, *locality*, and *sense of place*. He further asserts that place, at a basic level, is ‘space invested with meaning in the context of power’ (Creswell, 2004, p. 12). This relates to Mbembe’s (2016) argument that place has been, and will always be deeply imbricated in power and is paramount in knowledge production.

Albeit various geographers claim that place represents a type of bounded space, Malpas (2016) argues that its bounds do not take the form of dividing lines in space. According to him, place is neither spatial nor temporal, but encompasses both while refusing identification with either. Malpas (2016, p. 384) writes: 'to suppose otherwise would be to suppose that place somehow came after space, as a modification of it, whereas the reality is that it is place that comes first, and it is space that is the dependent phenomenon'.

Friedman (2005) defines space as conquering place – as something that is obsolete and empty. He claims that new technologies – the container, the internet, the cell phone and so forth – are making places themselves obsolete. This notion can, however, be challenged under the current conditions in which we live and work. In fact, the Coronavirus has shown just the opposite – that the world is, in reality, neither placeless nor obsolete; instead humans' connections to, and actions in, places are 'intra-actional' – i.e., bound up in places and spaces (Barad, 2007, p. 33).

The emergence of new splaces during a pandemic

The pandemic propelled humans (consciously or unconsciously) into creating new places and spaces of work. The past two years have introduced a renewed focus on place and space and redefined the socially constructed boundaries in which humans go about their daily lives. If ever there was a time when humans were oblivious to the fundamental role that places fulfil in our lives prior to the pandemic, COVID-19 lockdowns illuminated the importance of place and space. Unsurprisingly space and place came under the microscope as lockdowns and social distancing measures were implemented across the world. The environmental studies and politics scholar, David Orr (1992), argues that our unconsciousness or lack of awareness of place is not an unfamiliar phenomenon due to our embeddedness in it. He alludes to the idea that, as humans, we often miss that which is closest to us (Orr, 1992).

However, over the past two years, the distinctive spatial barriers between physical places, digital spaces, and biophysical spheres have become blurred, and somewhat collapsed, as people have begun to 'make' new places (*placemaking*) by means of digital technology. The pandemic outbreak, for instance, served as a powerful agent in transforming a place of living (home) into an instant working 'space' by means of technology. Yet, these new hybrid contexts in which people currently find themselves, while gaining prominence, lack a specific designation. A review of the literature shows that these contexts do not meet the definitions of space or place or even 'non-places' as defined by Auge (1995) more than 25 years ago. For these reasons, I prefer using the term 'splace' to capture our current contexts of work. According to the Urban Dictionary (2020), *splace* is a term that can, according to recent and increasingly popular/colloquial usage, be used when describing 'a space within a place or a place within a space'. I argue that it is at the intersections of place, space and technology within the biophysical sphere where splace emerged. I perceive it as unsurprising that it has, or is understood to have, become the dominant setting in which humans operate currently. The diagram below illustrates the notion of splace.

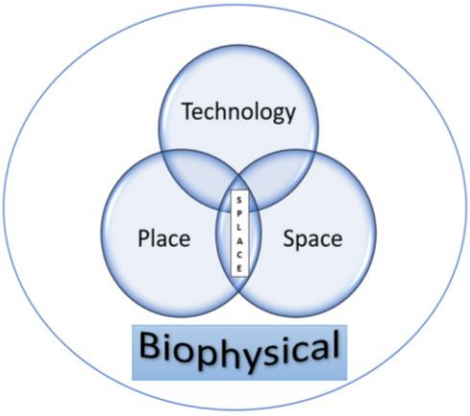

Figure 1: The Splace framework

Sense of Splace in Education

In the field of education, ERT abruptly and simultaneously introduced new e-learning places and spaces (*splaces*). According to Ardoin (2006), in an interdisciplinary context, 'sense of place' is a holistic concept comprising psychological, social, cultural, biophysical, political and economic systems. Stedman (2003), Farnum, Hall, and Kruger (2005) and Smaldone, Harris, and Sanyal (2005) see a sense of place as broadly describing the human connection to places, including place attachment and place meaning. Thus, while the concept of place is more focused on the physical place, a sense of splace captures both the physical and the digital.

The centrality of place in shaping our life experiences is also evident in the ways in which place influences education and teaching. Tate (2008, p. 401) asserts that place shapes the broader 'geography of opportunity' in which universities are situated and includes the experiences of diverse stakeholders. These stakeholders include students, parents, and educators: all those in and around universities. I argue that the past two years have demonstrated that it is no longer place, but instead splace that shapes the 'geography of opportunity' and experiences in education. Palloff and Pratt (2011) see the development of a sense of community in the virtual classroom as contributing to the successful implementation of remote teaching and learning. I contend that this sense of community is a direct result of the creation of successful remote teaching and learning safe e-splaces in which students can share their perceptions and experiences. I see such splaces alleviating the fears and anxieties that students might experience during these unprecedented times.

Adams (2013) predicts that a sense of splace may conjure contradictory emotions in both students and teachers – the warmth of community and home juxtaposed with the stress of dense urban living. Burnett (2014) found that classroom context shapes how students make meaning of what they learn through digital literacy practices. She specifically investigated the 'classroom-ness' of digital learning which, she argues, is shaped not only by the physical boundaries of the classroom but also by external environments. This implies that students can learn and understand as much from digital teaching and learning practices as from their lives outside of class. For Burnett (2014), the concept of 'classroom-ness' reveals the fluidity of place for student learning.

I argue that, where the teaching environment is 'fixed' and familiar (for example, the lecture hall or classroom), a sense of place relates more to contact or face-to-face education while a sense of splace applies to the hybrid context in which much teaching and learning currently occurs in universities (see, for example, Author & Waghid, 2020, 2021). In this context, unfamiliar at the start of the pandemic and lockdown, students found themselves entrenched in the integrated social-ecological-political-psychological and virtual dimensions of their learning

sites. In this situation, educators need to acknowledge that place and identity are closely intertwined in a process of co-production. Thus, the lockdown and current splaces of teaching and learning can be seen as the raw material for the creative production of identity, rather than as an a priori label of identity (Author & Waghid, 2020, 2021). In our globalised and connected world, the narratives that students create and use to understand themselves in the world are constitutive of their identities and associated with multiple splaces and movements. These narratives influence the success of flexible teaching and learning processes and should not be overlooked in the classroom. Based on the discussion thus far, I concur with Stedman (2003) who argues that a student's sense of splace is formed based on the nature of the educational setting, the kind/amount of experience s/he has with that setting, and the socio-cultural, psychological, cognitive and emotional characteristics of the individual or the student.

Considering the above influences on virtual learning, in the process of developing a sense of splace, the role of power in classroom settings and pedagogy must be revisited, and concerted efforts must be made to ensure the decentring thereof. In the face-to-face classroom, the power dynamics and systemic inequalities of society are easily observed and reproduced. Such spaces have the potential to be intimidating by making the privileged students in the room comfortable at the expense of the marginalised students (Sykes & Gachago, 2018). Places can therefore be powerful in enabling and reproducing inequality, hegemony, ideology, racism, and other forms of oppression. They can also be sites of resistance: they have the potential to function as settings in which students from marginalised backgrounds are able to escape and resist oppression while building group consciousness and solidarity (Delaney, 2002; Haymes, 1995; hooks, 1990; Lefebvre, 1974). The integral connection between place, power, and resistance underscores another important feature of place: the link between place and social justice. Justice and injustice both have a spatial expression. However, in a virtual or hybrid classroom, justice and inclusivity result from the emergence and development of a strong sense of splace between student and educator and between student and student. This process fosters meaningful engagements between student and educator, student and student, and between a student and his/her learning splace (Iiskala et al., 2011).

I argue that, should a flat ontology be adopted, there is the likelihood of the dynamics and politics of place changing in the hybrid and/or virtual classroom (Author & Waghid, 2020). A flat ontology assumes that all entities are on an equal ontological footing and that no entity, whether artificial or natural, symbolic or physical, possesses greater ontological dignity than other objects (Bryant, 2010). In other words, in an e-learning splace, neither the educator, the student, nor the educational tool and technology are at the centre of the pedagogical encounter, but each (entity) exists in its own right. The notion of intentional correlation is critical in a flat ontology: all counterparts intend one another, and all interactions between them are based on an intentional transaction. For example, while the tool or technology is used to facilitate the task of the human agent, it is also performing its task. Thus, a flat ontology enables the educator and student to adhere to principles of fairness and inclusivity (Author & Waghid, 2020).

I also argue that, once a sense of splace has been established, a flexible learning approach could be more willingly and effectively adopted by students. It is important for university educators to

understand that the creation of safe e-splaces is necessary for empowering students to act upon their situation and positionality (Gruenewald, 2008). Freire (1995) believes that human beings are because they are in a particular situation. Reflecting on one's situation corresponds to reflecting on the space(s) one inhabits; acting upon one's situation often corresponds to changing one's relationship to a place or, in this case, splace. If students are to feel empowered in a hybrid or virtual teaching and learning setting, then such students, with the help of their educators, need to develop a sense of trust in the learning process that may ensue. It is therefore imperative that educators and students become aware in a particularly conscious and informed way of these new emerging splaces and search for new ways to foster connections to them.

Greenwood (2013) argues that place-consciousness depends in equal measure on knowledge of, and experience with, ecological and cultural systems as well as the interactions between them. I argue that this consciousness also takes into consideration that places themselves are not predetermined but are social and/or cultural products with intended and unintended consequences (Author & Le Grange, 2015). Greenwood (2013) further claims that place-consciousness involves reflecting on the multicultural traditions that shape places and advocates the idea of not only learning *about* (s)places but also *from* them in direct ways. He further asserts that a strong informed place-consciousness aims to discover/recover/reconstruct self in relation to (s)place.

Concluding thoughts for Higher Education

The above arguments imply the need for university educators to become aware of place, space and splace, together with the embedded politics heralded by them. Gruenewald (2003) suggests that educational reform policies and practices that disregard places be challenged. I argue that using splace as a starting point in course design would enable students to understand the localness of environmental and social problems, including those that transcend national boundaries. This would guide and encourage them to realise that solutions to global environmental and social problems often require local action (as in the case of the COVID-19 pandemic). Moreover, in rural areas, where students, or the families/communities from which they come, live close to the land, a renewed focus on (s)place might help these particular students to better understand the specific ways in which the livelihoods of their families and communities depend on the land. This renewed focus could also serve as a basis for integrating indigenous cultural practices and philosophies, such as Ubuntu (humanness), into education processes. With a conscious awareness of connecting with places, students in urban areas could, in turn, develop a keener awareness of the ways in which the local and global are intertwined and how global-local connections manifest in environmental and social problems. As in the case of ERT, where some students experience connectivity and internet problems, while continuing to be guided by a restrictive curriculum that does not address such concerns, I recommend that educators practice a *critical pedagogy of splace* framed within UDL principles. Such a pedagogy deals with, and would enable, both educators and students to reflect on how power works through the places they inhabit and the splaces in which they teach and learn. Eventually, by acting on this knowledge of these powers, they may change their relationship with such splaces, as Freire (1995) suggests. This process could be applied, should educators integrate

actual 'glocalised' (global and local) issues within their pedagogies. As a means to respond to the glocalised agenda it is therefore imperative that educators draw on universal design for learning guidelines, acknowledge flexible learning styles and ground their philosophical and pedagogical orientations in social constructivism.

I further argue and advocate for universities to realise that they are message-sending-institutions and, in this way, are silent teachers of the ethos and scholarship they wish to promote. Iconic and internationally top-rated universities, such as the one where I work, have cultural currency and, with a more flexible pedagogy, each student would be empowered to set his/her own exchange rate for this currency. I advocate for this idea to be acknowledged and embraced by academics at all universities. The dominant epistemologies, ontologies and narratives (the silent teachers) are embodied in the ways in which the university creates and orders space. The outbreak of COVID-19 presented opportunities for HEIs to create conducive and just e-learning splaces which operate from the premise of a flat ontology and take students' sense of splace into consideration during recurriculation and assessment processes. In this transformative process, the principles of fairness, inclusivity and Ubuntu would become more apparent as students feel seen, heard, and connected, and this might result in motivated and conscious student engagement during lectures. The time is also ripe for revisiting examination and assessment processes that remain deeply rooted in Eurocentric practices, and for exploring and revaluating the pass/fail system post the pandemic.

I advocate for sufficient intellectual space and time to be provided for rethinking how traditional practices and structures of teaching, learning and assessment can be sustainably transformed in a post-pandemic era. This would, in turn, imply that universities continuously challenge the spatial divisions among themselves, students, communities and their taken-for-granted, traditional legitimacy. This would be embarked upon not only in contextual ways, but also through examining those spatial divisions centred on identity and cultural politics.

There has never been a more conducive time for exploring the possibility of a different and more mindful metaphysical basis for higher education, for reformulating outdated, reductive teaching philosophies, and for acknowledging that students are holistic beings, not simply intellectual beings. This would require the 'humanisation' of the education process, and university rules and regulations being designed and implemented with compassion and discretion. In this post pandemic context, I argue that university educators must not lose sight of the cosmopolitan, interconnected human, and more-than-human world in which we live, work and play.

More than 40 years ago, Anita Rui Olds (1979, p. 41) argued that 'the motivation to interact with the environment exists in all [students] as an intrinsic property of life, but the quality of the interactions is dependent upon the possibilities for engagement that the (physical/learning) environment provides'. Based on this, I argue that, in the context of hybrid and remote multimodal teaching and learning, splaces should act as the foundations for students' resilience and adaptation to cognitive, social, psychological, emotional, economic and political challenges. To begin the process of achieving this holistic education goal,

universities should consider the promotion and nurture of a sense of splace among their students, as well as their educators. This is based on the assumption that academic programmes are able to directly influence what I call the 'learning splace identity' of students. Once such an identity, in both the educator and student, has been developed, flexible learning, including RMTL, might be more effective in ensuring that no student is left behind.

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Leadership practices that support effective teaching and learning: Learning from the Eastern Cape rural schools

*Desmond Monde Gogo, **Bongani Nhlanhla Mkhize and *Thamsanqa Thulani Bhengu
*University of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa
**University of Johannesburg, South Africa
Corresponding Author: bhengutt@ukzn.ac.za

ABSTRACT

The study was conducted in four purposively selected secondary schools in O.R. Tambo District in the Eastern Cape. Selected schools had demonstrated exponential improvement in their exit classes in the past five years. Since rural based schools had attracted negative attention for poor academic achievement, we became interested in understanding what these schools, that received recognition for good performance, were doing right. In view of improved academic performance achieved, we sought to elicit insights about what had worked well for these schools. We adopted a qualitative case study approach, within an interpretive paradigm to generate data. We adopted Weber's Instructional Leadership model to analyse the findings from the participants. Utilising semi-structured interviews and documents' reviews, within a qualitative design, we generated data from principals, deputy principals and two departmental heads per school. Our analysis generated four themes that characterised their leadership practices. Some of the practices had some characteristics that are uniquely rural. We recommend that these unique leadership practices be explored further on a large-scale study for generalisability about how other School Management Team members can support effective teaching and learning in some adverse and turbulent rural contexts.

Keywords: *Leadership, Rurality, Traditional leadership, Successful leadership*

INTRODUCTION

In this paper we present the findings of a small-scale qualitative study about successful leadership practices used by School Management Team members in supporting effective teaching and learning in the context of rural secondary schools in the O.R. Tambo District in the Eastern Cape. Rural communities have fairly or unfairly, received negative publicity for poor academic achievement when it comes to the National Senior Certificate examination results. Even the education department in the province has, for many years occupied bottom places when the results are announced at the beginning of the new year. Scholars have highlighted some of the deprivations suffered by schools in rural areas, and these include long distances, travelled by learners, inadequate supply of water and sanitation, poor support from parents and dearth of other important facilities and equipment that support curriculum delivery (Mkhize & Bhengu, 2018; Spaull, 2015; Bhengu & Mkhize, 2013; Maringe & Moletsane, 2015).

Two crucial points need to be raised at the outset. First, some pockets of excellence have been noted in the rural schools (Chikoko, 2018; Chikoko, 2019). Second, scholarship has highlighted the role that school leadership has played in turning around the fortunes of schools and produce high levels of academic performance of learners (Chikoko, 2018; Leithwood, Harris & Hopkins, 2020; Bhengu, 2019; Marimandi, 2015; Mukeshimana, 2016). Therefore, this paper adds to the debates about the importance of leadership for supporting teaching and learning on one hand, and power of leadership in overcoming the barriers of the environment in the teaching and learning situation. While leadership has been credited for schools' success, not enough is known about how school how SMT

members overcome environmental challenges that rural schools endure and how they have turned them into one of the successful schools in this rural district. In presenting our story, we begin by outlining the background of the problem, and this is followed by the discussion of the two critical concepts of successful leadership practices and rurality and rural schools. This is followed by the presentation of a theoretical framework, the methods, the presentation of findings, and discussion. Conclusions and recommendations bring the paper to a close.

BACKGROUND TO THE PROBLEM

South Africa has had a bad reputation of poor learner academic achievement (Spaull, 2015), particularly among learners in schools located in rural areas (Bhengu & Mkhize, 2013). Literature has persistently revealed that poor learner academic achievement is directly associated with the environmental conditions in which schools are positioned (Maringe & Moletsane, 2015; Mkhize & Bhengu, 2018). These environmental conditions include those factors exerting negative effects on the accomplishment of schools' organisational goals. Consequently, such challenges are linked to learner enrolment decline and learner migration prevalent in rural schools (Aldana, 2016; Mafora, 2013). However, despite the challenges that rural schools endure, there are some pockets of excellence amongst them (Chikoko, 2018; Bhengu, 2019). This study aimed at understanding leadership practices of SMTs in these particular schools. The idea of collective leadership in the form of School Management Teams (SMTs) has become dominant in the South African context since the country became a democracy in 1994.

RESEARCH QUESTION

How do the School Management Teams in the selected schools provide leadership that supports effective teaching and learning in the context of rurality?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Our review section assumes a conceptual dimension by focusing on effective leadership practices and the conception of rurality and rural schools.

Effective leadership practices

It is important at this point to conceptualise leadership, especially effective leadership that impacts effective teaching and learning. In the context of schools, effective leadership is generally associated with a direct impact of teaching and learning in the classroom (Leithwood, Harris & Hopkins, 2020). Successful or effective leadership practices are usually associated with various models of instructional leadership, due to their focus on promoting effective curriculum delivery. Many scholars such as Blose and Naicker (2018), Cheung, Keung, Kwan and Cheung (2019), Leithwood, Day, Sammons, Harris and Hopkins (2006) share a similar view that effective leadership practices refer to leadership activities such as setting the direction, developing people, managing teaching and learning, and redesigning the organisation.

In setting the direction, successful leaders tend to establish a determination for the organisation by setting clear goals and direction, that improve the functioning of the organisation system (Cheung, Keung, Kwan & Cheung, 2019; Leithwood, Day, Sammons, Harris & Hopkins, 2008). In managing teaching and learning, successful leaders supervise teaching and learning in various ways, including, walking around the school, and seeing to it that all classrooms are occupied. These leaders nurture and sustain a healthy relationship within their schools and in the external environment by devising means of working with the community (Maringe & Sing, 2019). In developing people, successful

leaders, develop staff and learners continuously (Ramdhany, 2018; Šeďová, Sedláček, Švaříček, 2016).

Rurality and rural school

The term rural and rurality has many definitions as there is no one conception about what constitutes it. Because of this, rurality is a multifaceted and complex concept to define. For instance, according to Hlalele (2014), rurality implies a lifestyle, a perspective and culture which rotate around land and animals. Balfour, Mitchell and Moletsane (2008) provide a broader conception of rurality which includes space, land, and socio-economic condition of the area. These scholars further state that rurality has to do with "… space, confinement, group, destitution, illness, disregard, backwardness, minimisation, elimination, conservatism, tribalism, prejudice, resettlement, defilement, entropy, and prohibition" (Balfour et al., 2008, p.101). It is not the intention to provide an exhaustive definition of rural, save to say that there are conceptions that have stood the test time. For instance, for many decades now, the notion of a rural area as characterised by low density population (Franks & Goswami, 2010), small absolute size, and relative isolation, where the major economic base is agricultural production and where the way of life of the people (Bealer, Willits, & Kuvlesky, 1965), persists (Christiaens, 2015).

In the context of this paper, we use the term rurality in a more simplistic way as referring to those areas under the authority of traditional leaders, as contemplated in the Traditional Leadership and Governance Framework Act, No. 41 of 2003 (Republic of South Africa, 2003). This does not mean that these areas do not share features described by scholars we have cited above. In line with our definition, all schools that are located in the land, which is under the authority of traditional leaders, are regarded as rural schools for purposes of this paper.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

To frame the analysing of the data, we utilised Weber's (1996) Model of Instructional Leadership. Weber (1996) identified five domains of instructional leadership. The first is defining the school mission. The second domain is managing the curriculum and instruction, and the third is about promoting a positive learning climate. The fourth domain is observing and improving instruction, and the fifth and the last domain is assessing instructional programme. *Defining the school's mission* can be regarded as a dynamic of collaboration and cooperation amongst key stakeholders and constantly reflecting and thinking about how to create a mission of the school that is owned by all stakeholders. This is important for all stakeholders working within the framework of common purpose. *Managing the curriculum and instruction* is about principals' instructional practices, as well as the supervision of classroom activities. This is linked directly to understanding that for teachers to succeed, they require the requisite resources. Promoting a positive learning climate entails the principals and their deputies creating a climate for effective teaching and learning. This includes communicating clear instructional goals, and establishing high expectations for performance (Weber, 1996). Observing and improving instruction focuses on the principal creating a trusting and respectful relationship with staff in the school. Assessing the instructional programme is predicated on the notion of the principal as a leader, initiating and contributing to the planning, design and analysing and assessing the effectiveness of the curriculum (Weber, 1996). All these five domains combined, enable us to analyse the practices of the participating SMT members.

METHODS

We adopted a qualitative case study approach, within an interpretive paradigm

to enable us to get an in-depth, textual and holistic data from a naturalistic setting (Aspers & Corte, 2019; Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2018; Creswell, 2009). This paradigm acknowledges that each research participant within the four schools may have a different interpretation of their world of work. Therefore, this would provide a nuanced and contextual perspective of the SMT members' successful leadership practices. Both purposive and convenience selection were used to identify those schools that had been successful in terms of Grade 12 final examination results (Bertram & Christiansen, 2014). It was purposive in the sense that we were interested only in those schools that had shown remarkable improvement in the past five years. It was convenience in the sense that out of many schools within the district that met these criteria, only those that were easily accessible, in terms of distance were chosen. Content analysis was used to analyse the data.

Throughout the research process, all ethical protocols were observed. For instance, participants understood their rights as these were explained before data generation commenced. Ethical clearance was sought and obtained from the University's Human and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee. The Department of Education in the Eastern Cape, as the main gatekeeper, granted us permission to conduct the study in its schools. Principles of non-maleficence, confidentiality and anonymity were observed. That is why Table 1 below shows fictitious names of the schools and the participants.

We developed *pseudonyms* as shown in Table 1 below to conceal the identity of schools and participants.

Name of the school	Lunga Secondary	Patoni Secondary	Siwo Secondary	Toliza Secondary	Total
Principals	Mr Langa	Mr Patyo	Mr Siwele	Mrs Tolo	4
Deputy Principals	Mr La	Mr Pato	Mr Siwole	Mr Toliwe	4
DHs	Mr Lala	Mrs Patonela	Mr Sisa	Miss Toleka	4
DH	Mr Lalyz	Mrs Patoniza	Mr Siwa	Mr Toliza	4
Total	**4**	**4**	**4**	**4**	**16**

Table 1. Fictitious names of schools and participants

Lunga Secondary school

Lunga Secondary School is a No-Fee, Quintile 1, Section 21 school that was built in the middle of the 1980s by the community members. The school starts from Grade 10 up to Grade 12 and has an enrolment of 1300 learners. Staff establishment comprises 39 educators and 8 non-teaching staff. This category of workers includes 1 Administration clerk, 1 security guard, 1 cleaner and 5 cooks attached to school's nutrition programme.

Patoni Secondary School

Patoni Secondary School is a No-Fee, Quintile 1, Section 21 school that was built in 1930s by the community members. The school starts from Grade 10 up to Grade 12 and has an enrolment of I065 learners. Staff establishment comprises 30 educators and 8 non-teaching staff. These consist of 1 administration clerk, 1 security guard, 2 cleaners, 4 women who assist in the school's nutrition programme. There is a river close by, and when in flood, learners are unable to cross it, thus rendering the school inaccessible.

Siwo Secondary School

Siwo Secondary School is a No-Fee, Quintile 1, and Section 21 school that was built in 1970s by the members of the

community. It starts from Grade 10 up to Grade 12 and has an enrolment of I060. Staffing comprises 35 educators and 9 non-teaching staff. These consist of 2 Administration Clerks, 1 security guard, 2 cleaners and 4 cooks attached to the nutrition programme.

Toliza Secondary School

Toliza Secondary School is No-Fee, Quintile 1, and Section 21 school, which starts from Grade 10 to Grade 12, and it was built by the community. It has an enrolment of 1700 learners. Staff establishment comprises 40 educators and 11 non-teaching staff. This category of workers includes 2 Administration clerks, 2 security guards, 3 leaners and 4 cooks working the school's nutrition programme.

FINDINGS

Our content analysis generated four themes, and the first theme is bringing the school to the community and the community to the school. The second theme is about ensuring that the basics of teaching and learning are adhered to. Developing positive relationships towards the well-being of colleagues, parents and learners is the third theme. The fourth theme relates to demonstrating exemplary leadership through what we call walking the talk. These findings are discussed next.

DISCUSSION

Bringing the school to the community and the community to the school

School management team members were asked about how they have managed to bring success in their schools in terms of learner academic achievement. Their responses invariably suggested that they had successfully brought the schools to their community and vice versa. Realising how the community revered their traditional leaders, the SMT members, particularly the principals initiated a process of consultations with them, and also enticing traditional leaders to the schools. The school principals visited traditional leaders after experiencing rural challenges in order to curb them. Previously, there was poor relationship between the schools and the community at large, and also with traditional leadership as a structure. By engaging with traditional leaders, numerous challenges such as burglary and theft of school property were addressed with the intervention of traditional leaders. Other challenges included parents who were usually reluctant to get involved in the school activities. Mr Langa had this to say:

> *Leaders gave vivacity to the communities to work hand in hand with the participating schools. Therefore, the school-community partnership improved drastically. The communities where these participants were located, ended up positively deeply involved in school activities such as school donations, assisting the schools in sports activities, traditional dancing to mention a few*.

Some of the challenges previously experienced by the schools was a lack of parental involvement in the schools' affairs, as evidenced by their poor attendance at parents' meetings. The lack of parental involvement contributed to the schools experiencing a host of problems such as learner absenteeism, poor learner attendance in curricular and extra-classes. Such realities undermine effective curriculum delivery. However, through engagements with traditional leaders (Chiefs), there was a dramatic improvement in parental attendance in parents' meetings. This is highlighted by Mr Tolo, Principal of Toliza Secondary, when he said:

> *In showing positive attitude and respect towards traditional leaders made the school to be able to promote parental involvement. As a result, learner academic performance improved drastically. Furthermore, challenges like burglary and theft were mitigated optimally.*

In a similar vein, burglary and theft of school property was resolved with the intervention of traditional leaders.

> *The prevalence of crime which is theft and burglary was a daily occurrence. Cellular phones easily grabbed from learners when come from school; culprits used knives to intimidate the learners. This was curbed through the consultation with Chiefs and Lunga, Secondary* (Mr Langa, Principal of Lunga Secondary).

The other issue that posed a threat to the schools' functionality was the problem of learner discipline. Working alone, schools battled with this scourge. Parents too, as we have indicated, were aloof, and resolving learner discipline in the schools remained a menace. However, with the involvement of traditional leaders, most of the challenges facing the schools and parents were confronted. The next few excerpts from different schools, and different categories of participants, paint a clear picture about how, through the collaboration between the schools on one hand, and traditional leaders as community on the other, addressed the challenges:

> *The involvement of traditional leaders in learner discipline minimised the acts of ill-discipline. This is highly featured in Patoni Secondary School. The involvement of Traditional Leaders in the school activities made learners to be discipline in school. As a result, the attendance of extra-classes improved drastically* (Mr Pato, Deputy Principal from Patoni Secondary).

The challenges expressed above were also experienced in other schools such as Toliza Secondary, and this is how the principals explains the situation:

> *They were coming late to school. Learner absenteeism, bullying, drug abuse and fights among learners were daily occurrences in the four participating schools. To curb this bad behaviour, the schools together with the representatives from Traditional Leadership enhanced school disciplinary committees. Therefore, the involvement of Traditional Leaders in the maintenance of learners' discipline in schools led to the alleviation of challenges such as learner absenteeism, bullying, drug abuse and fights* (Tolo, Principal of Toliza Secondary).

Mr Lala, a Deputy Principal of Lunga Secondary provided details about how they organised themselves and the community to ensure that the environment was crime-free, and thus conducive to effective teaching and learning. He said:

> *Schools working together with traditional leaders formed committees that include members from parents, community members delegated by traditional leaders, community policing forums (CPFs) to go around to get the culprits when theft and burglary have been committed. When the culprits have been caught, they would be brought to the court of law.*

Views and experiences of the participants resonate with current scholarship in the area of school-community partnership. For instance, Myende (2018) and Ncwane (2019) contend that school-community is one of the means to address challenges that schools cannot address alone. In the same vein, there is evidence in South African rural communities that traditional leaders play a prominent role in managing learner discipline (Logan & Katenda, 2021; Mngomezulu, 2020). The benefits of active parental involvement in the schools' activities, particularly, in relation to enhancing learner academic achievement has been widely written about (see, Akter, 2020; Berkowitz, Astor, Pineda, DePedro, Weiss & Benbenishty, 2021; Tan, Lyu & Pen, 2020).

Another feature that characterises schooling and leading schools in rural communities such as the ones where this study was conducted, is the manner in which school leadership responds to the hardships confronting the learners. Socio-economic ills become a burden to the schools, and by addressing such, has had beneficial effects in terms of bringing the schools closer to the communities and communities to the schools. For instance, participating school did not distance themselves from the learners' struggle for survival. This is how Toleka, one of the two Departmental Heads from Toliza Secondary put it:

> *Some of our learners are under the care of their grandparents. Some parents are employed in far cities. Others learners are orphans. This situation makes learners not to perform in a good way. In mitigating these family factors, the school initiated a caring committee that looked after those learners by providing them with psychological and emotional support. As a result, their school performance improved gradually.*

Most of the participants shared similar views in responding to family factors. This is how Mrs Tolo, the Principal of Toliza Secondary School put it:

> *In mitigating that family factor, the caring committee was also involved in visiting the bereaved families in the community. That was the way of galvanising support from the parents and community at large. Consequently, that promoted working together among the parents and the community at large. Parents among themselves developed some groups that assisted each other. Groups with educated parents assisted illiterate parents. As a result, the community at large ended up assisting child headed families. Therefore, that improved learner academic performance. As a school, we developed a motto that says, "My child is your child and your child is my child. Similarly, as school leaders, we involved sister departments such Department of Social Development, Department of Police, Department of Justice and Correctional Service to give assistance where necessary* (Mrs Tolo, the Principal from Toliza Secondary School).

Stories narrated by these participants suggest that being a school principal or a member of the SMT in such communities requires more compared to what other colleagues in different contexts do, and also more than the job description provides.

Ensuring the basics of teaching and learning

Our data indicates that the SMTs were clear about their core function of ensuring that effective teaching and learning occurs. In the four schools they had clearly articulated, organisationally shared vision and were working tirelessly to ensure the basics of school functionality, that learners are in class and effective teaching and learning was taking place. The SMT members prioritised supervision of teaching and learning through close monitoring by checking if their work was in line with what is stated in their Annual Teaching Plans (ATPs). They also used period registers. One participant said:

> *There are period registers in different classes. These period registers are given to class representatives. Each teacher signs this register to ensure that she/he has attended his/her periods. It further indicates how much time he/she spent in that particular class for that period. Furthermore, I and my Deputy Principal adhere to close monitoring where we do*

> *random class visits to verify what was written on the paper by DHs were consistent to what they were doing practically in monitoring teaching and learning in class (*Mrs Tolo, Principal of Toliza Secondary).

Besides using period register and checking adherence to the ATP, SMTs also conducted class visits. This is one of the oldest techniques that was used decades ago. All four schools did this. What also emerged from the interviews is that class visits served multiples purposes such as observing teachers teaching and the reaction of learners, checking curriculum coverage and also assessing the extent to which what the DHs will have recorded in their monitoring tools was real. Mr Siwele, Principal of Siwo Secondary made these remarks in that regard:

> *During class visits, I check both teacher and learner attendance by using attendance registers for both teachers and learners. In addition, I also check period registers to ensure that teachers do go to classes and attend to their periods.*

This view was also supported by Mrs Patoniza, one of the DHs from Patoni Secondary when he said:

> *Both the principal and DP checked the following aspects from the files of the departmental heads and teachers' files: subject policy, ATP of each subject, list the people being supervised and their subjects, the programme of assessment, duty loads, feedback from the monitoring and evaluation processes comments and follow up if they have been attended, minutes of the subject meetings to check if relevant things were discussed in their meetings and the list of learners whose work was checked.*

The excerpts above suggest that teaching time was protected and that curriculum coverage occurred. This aspect is generic, and is not a feature of rural schools, but all schools that are effective (Bhengu, 2019; Gwala, 2021; Ramatseba, 2012; Robinson, 2011; Uleanya, Khumalo, Momah & Ndlovu, 2019). Stressing the role of the principal in monitoring teaching and learning reflects the contention by Shava, Maradze and Ncube (2021) that principals are indispensable for developing and maintaining effective teaching and learning. Ensuring the basics of teaching and learning is closely associated with the second domain of Weber's Model of instructional leadership, which is about managing curriculum and instruction.

Developing positive relationships towards well-being of colleagues, parents and that of the learners

The third category of leadership practices that the SMT engaged in was developing positive relationships towards the well-being of colleagues, and other stakeholders. Mr. Langa the Principal of Lunga Secondary captures the essence of the need for being accommodative, sympathetic, supportive and kind hearted. This was how he put it:

> *As a principal you should be accommodative, sympathetic, supportive and kind hearted towards your subordinates, staff members, leaners and the community at large as to galvanise their support. As the Principal, I try by all means to be approachable. That makes it easy for the people to air out their views.*

The notion of being sympathetic and kind-hearted was further expressed by Miss Toleka, a Departmental Head from Toliza Secondary who added that these had a positive impact on teaching and learning. This is how she put it:

> *My school changed my behaviour of being greedy. Now I am sympathetic and kind-hearted. I*

encourage that to my colleagues. The rural environment that we are in calls for us to balance teaching and learning and focus on building relationships. It is vital to see the school as your own, the parents as your own and the children as your own. In that way, you find joy to support the school. Teachers find joy to teach. As a result, learners feel comfortable and happy to learn.

Echoing similar sentiments, Mr Sisa, the Departmental Head from Siwo Secondary, indicated the responsibilities of the caring committee. Among the responsibilities of this committee was to organise birth certificates for learners who happened not to have the birth certificates, to visit bereaved families within the community, to give psychological support to the depressed teachers and learners. That was how he put it:

This caring committee plays a vital role in giving support on behalf of the school. It provides psychological support to all those who need psychological support. It also organises birth certificates to those learners who are not able to get them due to varied reasons. Furthermore, this committee visits bereaved families as to give emotional support. As a result, this has made the school to develop positive relations with parents, learners, stakeholders and community at large.

Furthermore, data emphasised the importance of creating a supportive environment particularly in rural schools where poverty persisted. More so, the need to be accommodating, sympathetic, supportive and kind-hearted is emphasised. Also, in the data, the participants stressed the importance of creating a supportive environment particularly in the contexts of poverty and other socio-economic challenges. The theme discussed her speaks directly to Weber's (1996) third domain of promoting a positive learning climate.

Exemplary leadership by Walking the talk

Leading by example and showing the way helps in instilling confidence in the teaching staff. Data analysis indicates that the participants believed that if one is a leader s/he must show direction through own actions. That is why it was important that when new initiatives were introduced, school principals had to show the way by walking the talk. One example was when extra classes were introduced; principals also worked during that time. This is how Mrs Tolo, Principal of Toliza Secondary, put it:

On my arrival, I introduced extra classes to improve learner academic performance. As a result, I was the first person to attend extra-classes in order to improve school performance. Therefore, all teachers follow the direction of attending extra-classes without being told. Therefore, if you are a leader you must show your people direction with your actions.

SMTs walked the talk by becoming the first people to come to school to attend extra classes, which is a sign of good leadership as argued by scholars like By James, Conolly and Hawkins (2019), as well as Leithwood, Harris and Hopkins, (2020). Echoing similar views, Mr Langa, Principal of Lunga Secondary went a step further to emphasise that leading by example, included the notion of multiple accountability and transparency. The principal did not just encourage SMT members to collaborate and account to all stakeholders, but ensured that he set up quarterly meetings with Chiefs to brief them about what was happening in the school and plans for the year. He believed that improvement in Grade 12 results was attributed to his exemplary leadership. He said:

> *My school achieve not less than 85% for a period of 6 years. Furthermore, I decided to account quarterly to traditional leaders in terms learner academic performance. To further enhance inclusion, and transparency, the school involved traditional representatives in both SGB and school management structure, as to make them acquainted with school governance and school management.*

Walking the talk went beyond words of encouragement and motivation to actually, consulting widely and providing direction about where the school is going. Directing the work of the educators and creating an environment of care and support, motivates staff for effectiveness (Akinola & Bhengu, 2019; Mhlanga, (2019). Walking the talk through exemplary leadership is consistent with the fourth domain of Weber's Model of instructional leadership "Observing and improving instruction".

CONTRIBUTION OF THE PAPER TO KNOWLEDGE

The study reported in this paper provides insights about effective leadership in some rural contexts. Besides the focus on teaching and learning, this research suggests that the creation of a climate for effective curriculum delivery requires clear understanding of rural communities and local leadership influence on such communities. This resonates with the findings of other studies (see for example, Mkhize & Bhengu, 2018; Chikoko, 2018; Maringe & Singh, 2019) that successful leadership should be seen in relation to the contextual and social conditions as well as values underpinning the schools. The literature (Bhengu & Mkhize, 2018; Hallinger, 2018; Leithwood et al., 2020) is unequivocal on the view that instructional leadership is at the core of effective leadership that results in improved learner outcomes. However, such leadership foregrounds traditional leadership which serves as the bond that holds together the school, the community and the vision. The literature supports working hand in hand with traditional leadership especially in rural areas (Bhuda, Marumo & Motswaledi, 2021; Logan & Katenda, 2021; Carlson & Seim, 2018; Mngomezulu, 2020). In short, where the school wants to go is influenced by the interplay between the kind of leadership that is adopted and its ability to bring together all these key stakeholders to own the schools, and thus confront all other factors that negatively affect effective schooling. Figure 1 below, summarises this factor, and graphically illustrates how SMTs in this study managed to keep the schools where they are.

Fig. 1: Characteristics of leadership that supports teaching and learning in some rural contexts

This figure indicates the integration of leadership adopted and key stakeholders; parents, community members and traditional leadership structures that hold rural stakeholders together for the good of all.

CONCLUSION

The discussion has focused more on how a supportive environment was established for improved curriculum delivery. The review of documents assisted in providing a comprehensive picture about the schools, both in terms of the size, and biographical information, but also in terms of showing improved learner academic achievement. The profiles we have given in the first part of the findings were derived from the documents kept in the schools. The evidence of improvement in learner achievement was also obtained from the records. For instance, a summary of the Grade 12 result for the four schools ranged between 87.41% to 96% in 2020. Table 2 below shows a complete picture about these schools.

Year	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Lunga	30	45	69. 8	75. 8	85. 40	98. 66	91. 70	87. 41
Patoni	15	45	68.7	70.6	80.40	95.55	90	85.50
Siwo	40	42	69. 7	80. 46	97. 40	100	100	98. 50
Toliza	99	100	100	98	100	97	100	96.50

Table 2: Grade 12 results for the past 8 years

The SMTs' leadership practices in this study supported effective teaching and learning, and these were consistent with the second, the third and the fourth domains of Weber's Model of Instructional Leadership. Secondly, these school leaders demonstrated acute awareness of their operational environment and used their understanding of rural life to the benefit of the schools and learners. Issues of learner indiscipline behaviours and burglary in the schools were addressed and thus, protected the equipment of the schools, and preserved the learning environment at a level that supported effective teaching and learning. An environment of care for those learners impacted by social ills falls outside the mandate of the schools; nevertheless, the kind of leadership adopted, assimilated these issues in their normal school lives.

This study focused on four rural secondary schools in the O. R. Tambo Coastal District in the Eastern Cape Province. We acknowledge that this is obviously a limited target population of the School Management Team members, which does not represent all the rural secondary schools in the O.R. Tambo Coastal District wherein School Management Team members had managed to turnaround their schools' performances despite rural contexts. Nonetheless, we argue that the study has generated new insights about how School Management Team members can manage to change the school's fortunes despite the challenges posed by the internal and external environments. It has also explored the strategies used by the principals in adverse and turbulent conditions to turn around their schools' performances from underperforming to successful ones. We recommend that these unique leadership practices be explored further on a large-scale study for generalisability about how other School Management Team members can support effective teaching and learning in some adverse and turbulent rural contexts. The importance of traditional leadership in rural contexts requires further consideration, both in terms of SMT members in this study and also in terms of further research in similar contexts.

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